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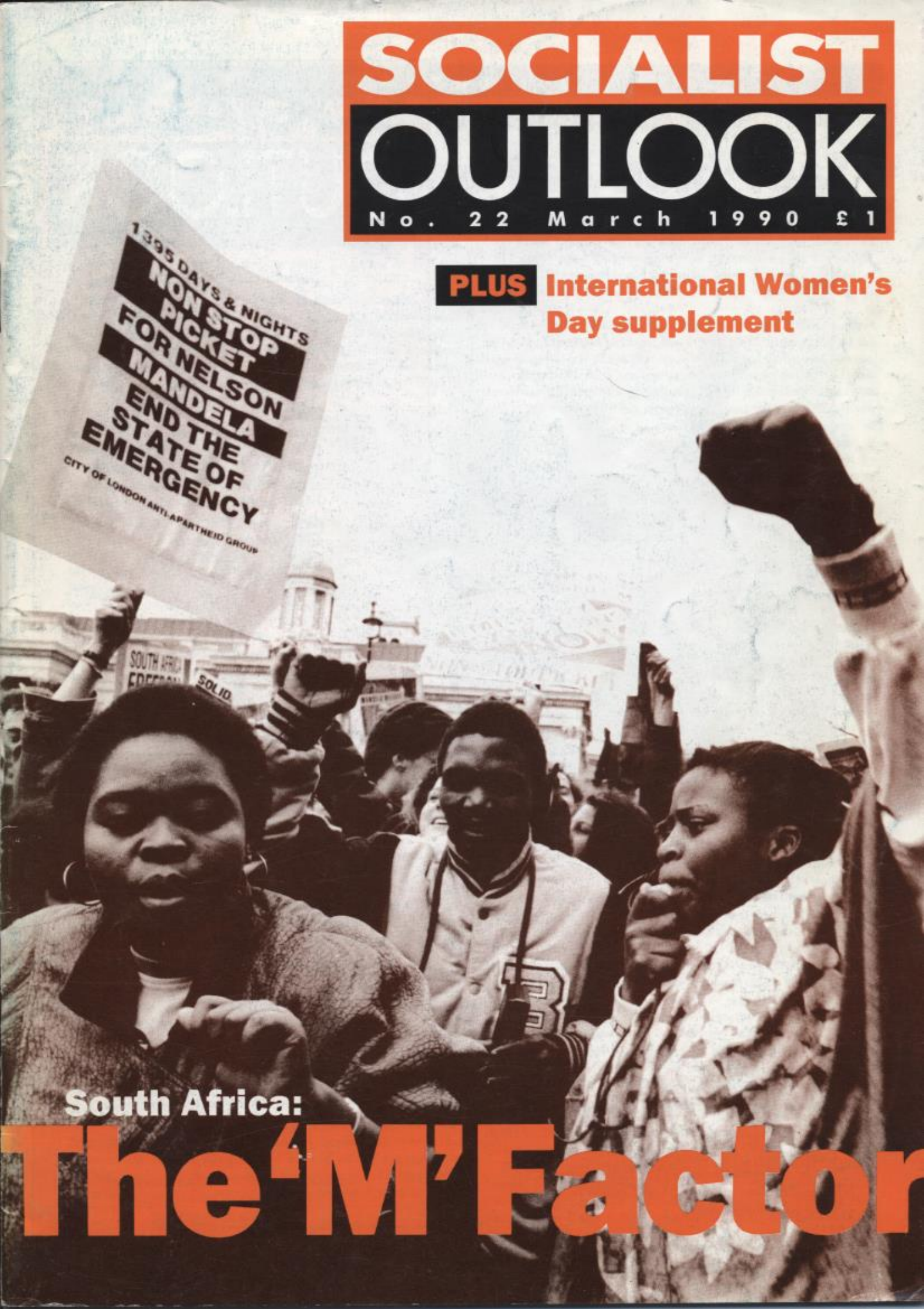

South Africa:

The 'M' Factor

Jubilation over Mandela's release

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Mandela faces the acid test

NO SOCIALIST anywhere in the world could have failed to be moved by the scenes of Nelson Mandela's release from the Victor Verster Prison after 27 years in jail for fighting apartheid.

Mandela's immediate reaffirmation of loyalty to the newly-legalised African National Congress (ANC), his declaration of commitment to the armed struggle and to the call for nationalisation of the major industries of the South African economy redoubled the respect for his courageous and consistent stance since he was convicted in the now notorious 1964 show- trial of plotting to overthrow white rule.

His release is a victory and a massive boost for the black masses of South Africa. Their unbroken struggles created the conditions in which President de Klerk found himself forced to break from the traditional single-track repressive tactics of his predecessors and concede legality to the ANC. It is a victory for the solidarity movement and anti-apartheid campaigners around the world who have battled away on the issue for decades, and who have forced most European governments and the US Congress into imposing limited sanctions against the South African regime.

Youth atop a statue of Smuts

It seems clear that for de Klerk the gamble of ordering Mandela's release - triggering an even bigger backlash among the ultra- right and fascist elements of whites than even the unbanning of the ANC - represents more than a token exercise: it is a key part of a serious shift of policy, in which some kind of negotiated settlement will be sought to take the place of the costly, unstable and internationally isolated policy of brute repression.

But the new policy is contentious within the white population, not least the influential ultra-right within the armed forces of the state, who may not be able openly to challenge de Klerk but are nevertheless opposed to any concessions, and determined to minimise the leeway that the present concessions can open up for the emergence of mass struggle by the black population. Hence the bizarre contradiction between the final steps towards Mandela's release and the simultaneous brutal violence of police against anti-cricket tour protestors, police tactics of encouraging scabs to launch vicious attacks on striking rail workers, and the heavy-handed baton-charges against the first legal ANC rallies.

Mandela's release has been accompanied by a massive hype by the world's press, designed to promote him as the one black leader with the authority to represent the repressed majority in negotiations with the ruling whites. This clearly suits de Klerk's plans. It is now revealed that talks had been going on behind the scenes for three years between the jailed Mandela and the regime, beginning under Botha, represented by Justice Minister Kobie Coetsee: Mandela for his part had insisted on the unbanning of the ANC and had refused to back down from his commitment to the armed struggle. Eventually de Klerk conceded what he asked for.

The same period has seen Mandela make significant political overtures to Chief Buthelezi, leader of the rightward-leaning Zulu-based Inkatha movement, a notorious thorn in the side of ANC and United Democratic Front militants in the townships. Buthelezi is imperialism's favourite black leader, the kind of 'anti- apartheid' figure Margaret Thatcher would like best to do business with.

Now he is free from prison, Mandela's stance is shaped above all by the restricted political line of the ANC. Indeed, for all the hard-line rhetoric of his first speeches in Cape Town and Soweto, he seems set to strengthen the 'moderate' wing of the ANC. Questioned on the issue of negotiations, he told journalists "Once you say a particular issue is not negotiable you are destroying the whole process of negotiation". This is more significant if taken in the context of the statement by acting ANC president Alfred Nzo, who declared that the ANC would be 'flexible' even on its fundamental demand for a constitution based on 'one person, one vote': "The day we are able to sit down and discuss things we may be able to compromise on point A, B or C".

On the issue of nationalisation, too, while Mandela himself sent South Africa's financial markets reeling with his talk of nationalisation based on the traditional ANC programme, the Freedom Charter, the dominant political influence in the ANC, the South African Communist Party, headed by Joe Slovo, is now backing away from such a policy. The ANC is slotting itself more and more into the frame of reference of those sections of the 'liberal' white capitalists who want to convince key sections of blacks that apartheid and capitalism are not necessarily related. The government's concessions to the ANC are designed to back up this view.

Yet the reality is that even if de Klerk could ride out the increasingly stormy protests of the mobilising far-right and fascist white groupings, and successfully force through even more radical relaxations of apartheid (such as the repeal of the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act), the very fabric of South African capitalism rests on the vast inequality between black and white - the super-exploitation of black workers.

Formal legal equality would be no more than a sham so long as the average income of whites remained more than ten times that of blacks. But there is no way that even the most 'liberal' white capitalist is going to forego the prospect of profitability in order to make such huge concessions to the black working class. That is why the political concessions to the ANC have run alongside a crackdown on the trade unions - as shown by the protracted, violent rail strike, and the heavy tactics of the government's Industrial Relations Act. And it is why the struggle for democratic rights in South Africa must run hand in hand with the struggle for socialist revolution and a workers' republic.

De Klerk may cherish dreams of turning the ANC into just another pro-capitalist party, ready, like Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe, to engage in or support the repression of working class struggle. But if this is the case he is basing his assessment on the

attitudes of the exiled ANC leaders in Lusaka, and seriously underestimating the scale and strength of the ANC's activist base in the working class, which does not necessarily share the same limited objectives. The South African working class is much larger and stronger with much greater political culture and record of struggle than the Zimbabwe proletariat before Mugabe took power. And ANC activists know they would be severely weakened if they lost their foothold in the growing Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and in the proletarian elements of the townships. It is questionable whether the ANC could continue to control its activists on the ground if it attempted to deliver any compromise deal which cut across the struggles of the black working class.

Mandela, who has suffered the full brunt of the regime's repression, now faces the toughest test of his political career. His release has rekindled the imagination and enthusiasm of a generation of youth and workers in the townships who have come into the struggle while he was in jail. His early statements echoed their determination to make no compromise with the regime. He must decide whether his loyalty will be shaped by their demands and struggles, or by the search for some kind of compromise with the regime that will leave capitalism intact, the black masses exploited, and imperialism exultant.

In the meantime our responsibility is clear: as socialists in this country the battle for solidarity with the South African struggle in the British and international labour movement, and the fight to defeat Thatcher's single-handed efforts to rehabilitate apartheid must be stepped up. This means opposing every move by the imperialist governments to slacken their timid sanctions against South Africa, and building practical solidarity – including direct links – with the South African trade unions, and with the various political elements of the liberation movement.

For a united, socialist Germany!

It would not be a vast overestimate to say that European politics is now dominated by one question: the reunification of Germany. The question is no longer whether it will happen, but how. Despite pretensions to grand schemas for European unity, the imminence of a unified Germany has thrown both NATO and the EC into disarray.

NATO troops with Lance missile launcher

There can be no question as to who is leading the way at present – Helmut Kohl, with the Bundesbank behind him, faces no serious opponents. Now that the Bundesbank president Karl Otto Pöhl's misgivings have been swept aside, IMF-style plans for the devaluation of the East German Ostmark and an economic austerity plan plan for the GDR are well advanced.

Citizens of the GDR may well be horrified to find that once these schemes move into action, far from achieving easy access to stores stocked with consumer goods, they wind up on the dole, with their life savings reduced to a fraction of their former value.

Unfortunately there is little alternative on offer. Though the West German social democrats of the SPD may also be the most popular party in the GDR, (as well as experiencing Oskar Lafontaine's recent regional election victory in the West), their ideas for reunification differ little from those of the Christian Democrats.

Those in the East (such as New Forum) who have tried to defend the social gains of the working class have – despite starting from a seemingly promising position, in the leadership of the mobilisations that ousted the Honecker bureaucracy – found themselves marginalised as a result of eschewing unification.

However, the failure of the left to date does not mean that all is lost. The capitalists, too, are divided and confused: it is difficult to find two NATO leaders that agree with each other. On a number of questions they are distinctly vulnerable. The demand put at one stage by Gorbachev (though later dropped) struck at the heart of these issues: the call for a united neutral Germany.

With 90% in favour of this in the East, and a clear majority in the West, a popular movement around such a demand would, at a stroke, serve to put NATO on the defensive. In addition, the expectations of the working class in the East are very high: if they were to unite with workers in the West around issues such as pay and social security, the Bundesbank would really have problems.

There is thus a clear conflict – as in so many of the countries of Eastern Europe – between the expectations of the masses from capitalism, and what it actually has on offer. There is a crying need for the left to move onto the offensive on a pan-European scale, putting forward an alternative that can answer those aspirations and offer a real prospect of a united Europe – rather than EC rhetoric. In the case of East Germany, this could be summed up as "No to the Kohl Plan – For a United Socialist Germany!"

Mass murders by Sri Lankan regime

Why are the British media silent?

In stark contrast to the media hype that has accompanied the Romanian events, with grossly exaggerated casualty figures, there has been a conspiracy of silence to cover up systematic violence in Sri Lanka.

There have been summary executions, and dismembered bodies have been exhibited in public places by the Sri Lankan govermnent. In the past four months over 80,000 Sri Lankans have been executed: an unknown number of detainees are being held incommunicado. Every day piles of headless bodies or charred limbs are dumped by the security forces, becoming a common sight in many parts of the country.

Lawyers who dared to file habeas corpus applications regarding the 'disappearance' of persons who have been abducted and killed by the security forces have been persecuted; thousands of people have fled the country.

The British media did not report even the urgent appeal made by Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike, the leader of the opposition, tol religious and political leaders of the world, requesting them to intervene in order to stop this carnage. She disclosed that under the guise of suppressing 'terrorists' 5,000 members and supporters of her own party had been abducted and killed by death squads of the ruling party. She also disclosed that she had received information about 1,500 ruling party members who are receiving military training at an army camp near Colombo, and that special squads are being formed in order to eliminate the cadres of opposition parties.

The self-censorship of the British press is not due to any shortage of information or legal restrictions on reporting. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the British media are none too keen to criticise a pro-western goverjnment which is more than willing to implement the diktats of the IMF and western 'donor countries'.

Last September the Sri Lankan govemment made an agreement with the IMF in order to secure 'economic aid from westem countries. In order to fulfil the terms of this agreement the government devalued the rupee by 20 percent, closed down a number of government concems and abolished the remaining subsidies on essential commodities.

As a result the prices of essential food and other goods have risen by 50-60 percent. Other measures include the sacking olf 94,000 civil servants over the next three years, and this will adversely affect at least 600,000 dependents. The government has also agreed to a drastic reduction in tariffs on foreign imports, which will ruin local industries, and increase the already swollen ranks of the unemployed. Also coming is privatisation of all government-owned corporations. In a country where 40 percent of the urban population suffer from malnutrition, these measures must increase the suffering of workers and poor peasants.

It is to implement these policies that the govemment has unleashed its systematic reign of terror. The latest diktat prohibits any meetings or gatherings for any purpose in schools, factories or hostels. This is effectively a ban on all trade union and student union activities. The government is determined to hold down wages and to stifle any protest as it slashes the living standards of the masses.

The vast majority of western 'aid donor' countries are willing to give economic assistance to third world countries only if they carry out this type of IMF-style 'economic adjustment'. They also demand political stability and a 'disciplined' labour force before they will encourage investment.

Most western governments would prefer it if the Sri Lankan rulers could curb the 'excesses' of their more sadistic goons; but they are no doubt satisfied by the government's efforts to meet the IMF proposals.

In order to placate any mild criticism that may come from the more liberal of the western governments, the Sri Lankan rulers make ritual gestures, usually just before the annual meeting of the UN sub-committee on Human Rights. Often this amounts to convening some form of 'all-party conference' to seek solutions to youth unrest. But since the dominant powers on the UN sub-committee are largely the same ones that dominate the Sri Lanka 'aid consortium', everybody knows that this is just a cosmetic PR exercise, and that nothing will change other than the printing of more verbiage in UN documents.

It is not surprising therefore that the British media which so tamely take their line from its masters have chosen to give so little coverage to the activities of the Pol Pot-style regime in Sri Lanka.

For the moment things are relatively quiet in Sri Lanka because the government has made common cause with the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), one of the Tamil nationalist groups, against the more progressive Tamil groups. However this situation is not likely to last long. The Indian government is due to withdraw its troops (the 'Peacekeeping Force' IPKF) from the north and east of the island at the end of March and it is unlikely that the opportunist alliance with the Tigers will hold for long after that: armed conflict between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan army will erupt once more.

Contrary to the hopes and expectations of the western powers it is unlikely that the Sri Lankan government can establish political stability: the 'aid' it receives from Britain and other countries will be squandered on armaments and the extension of the repressive forces.

Neither state terror nor the opportunist policies of the Tamil Tigers or the Sinhalese nationalists of the JVP can provide any lasting solution to the economic and social crisis in Sri Lanka. Nor can any meaningful discussion of alternative social and economic policies take place ikn the present climate of repression and terror. That is why it is urgent for socialists to campaign for an immediate moratorium on all British and European aid to the Sri Lankan government as part of the fight for the restoration of democratic rights.

Sunil Fernando

Soviets fight for unions

Soviet miners striking last summer in Norilsk

The tour of Britain by SOTSPROF, a unique new independent trade union in the Soviet Union has been a huge success.

The SOTSPROF representative, Oleg Volonin is an experienced trade union organiser from Irkutz in Siberia, where he has been in recruiting coal miners and workers on the Trans-Siberian railway to the union.

SOTSPROF is a small but real and substantial trade union organisation with 60,000 affiliated members in various regions of the USSR. The membership ranges from miners, railworkers, Moscow truck drivers to women in footwear and clothing factories.

SOTSPROF is growing fast. A year ago it was only 10,000 members and within another year – if expected mass strikes break out in the spring – Volonin expects it to grow to several hundred thousand.

The most important part of the tour has been visits to workplaces, shop stewards organisations and trade union organisations, visiting Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham and London and meeting national unions including the NUR, NALGO and NUJ.

Nor does Volonin stick to 'trade union' issues. He opposes perestroika, supports the right of self-determination for the oppressed nationalities within the Soviet Union, and calls for the withdrawal of troops from Azerbaijan. He is against radical marketisation of the economy – calling instead for planning under workers' self-management.

It is clear that British socialists have a duty to support a new trade union federation in the USSR being built on such a basis. This tour will be followed by a more extensive one at the end of March. Readers should be on the lookout for details and help to build the tour as well as raising the appeal in their workplaces and union branches.

Alan Thornett

Tory NHS opt-outs hit by ballot broadside

AS THE TORIES congratulate themselves on forcing the NHS Bill in double quick time through the Commons (under cover of the ambulance dispute) they face more serious problems in implementing its provsions.

Labour MPs and union leaders may have given the government little or no cause for alarm with their half-baked or non-existent campaign against the White Paper and the Bill, but even the £3m propaganda blitz from Kenneth Clarke's department has failed to swing opinion in favour of the kernel of the Bill – the internal market and the 'opting out' of major hospitals as self-contained 'NHS Trusts'.

Wherever they get the chance to express their views, hospital workers are registering 9-1 opposition to the opt-out proposals. The most recent proof of this (and politically the most damaging to the government) was the ballot conducted by the Hands Off Guys! campaign in the flagship of a prospective fleet of opting out hospitals.

Despite extensive management harassment of campaigners, a union-organised ballot of staff produced a 30%-plus participation and a huge 93% vote to reject opting out. The result is consistent with other unofficial ballots of staff at the Central Middlesex and North Middlesex Hospitals and St George's in London and at St George's in Mid Staffordshire. It should also be echoed on a larger turnout by the official ballot which West Lambeth health authority has ordered management to conduct under the auspices of the Electoral Reform Society at St Thomas's Hospital, right opposite parliament.

Nor is it only health workers who reject Clarke's plans: a BMA survey of consultants in the 74 hospitals on Clarke's hit list for opting out showed that a majority in less than ten hospitals were in favour, while in no less than 50 hospitals most consultants were against opting out or undecided. In 19 hospitals the opt-out bid is proceeding against the express opposition of most consultants.

There could be an even bigger problem for Clarke: behind the press focus on the ambulance dispute, the financial plight of health authorities, brought about by deliberate government underfunding of pay awards and inflation, has been lurching (as predicted by campaigners) from disastrous to catastrophic. A BBC national survey has shown over a third of health authorities overspent, with many already closing wards and cutting services this year. But with cash limits for 1990-91 already fixed, and the allowance for pay and inflation pegged at an absurdly low 5%, every health authority faces a major squeeze in the next 12 months. This is intensified by the changes embodied in the Bill, which call for the elimination of all accumulated deficits – often amounting to millions of pounds – to create a "level playing field" for the internal market from April 1991.

Among the heaviest losers in all this will be the districts with opting out hospitals which – at least in London – are among the heaviest overspenders. Worst of all is St Thomas's, hit by the worst-ever deficit in the history of the NHS – and some £8.9 million in the red.

With his flagships holed and much of the fleet severely damaged, Captain Clarke may yet decide to sail on towards opting out: but it is clear that some traditional Tory supporters will be among those keen to make him walk the plank. There will be plenty of chances yet for the trade union and labour movement (and even the left if it ever wakes up to the issue!) to play a role in leading the mutineers.

Harry Sloan

Poll Tax: Labour's missing answers

So Labour won't tell anyone precisely what its alternative to the poll tax is. Seems strange at first glance, with the Tories in chaos over 'poll tax capping' of up to 110 local authorities, and certain to lose electoral support over the whole issue both in the Tory heartlands and the inner cities. Estimates predict poll tax bills of an average of £380, more than £100 above the government's target.

Berkshire County Council is mounting a legal challenge to the grant system which determines poll tax levels – the standard spending assessment (SSA) – on the basis that it doesn't take adequate account of inflation, of population or of the county's infrastructure needs.

The council estimates that its SSA is £70 million short, and that this will lead to poll tax bills of between £380-£480. It has been advised that it has a legal duty to poll tax payers to attempt to recover the missing government grant through the courts. Derbyshire council is discussing similar action.

In Devon, plans by the Tory-controlled county council for a budget which is £38 million above government-agreed levels have angered local Tory MPs. Councillors point out that the spending is necessitated by manifesto commitments and by legislation which gives new responsibilities to councils.

Few, if any of the councils likely to be capped are those that have even in the past, let alone today, been considered high spenders. And for the Tories to have to go down this road rather undercuts the initial motivation for the poll tax, which Kenneth Baker told us four years ago was a way of controlling local government finance through the ballot box rather than through government legislation. Capping was envisaged, but as a temporary measure during the first four years, and surely not one which would be aimed at Tory councils!

Behind the mess lies the fact that yet again (it seems always to be the same old story with government calculations on local spending) SSAs have been set at a ridiculously low level that is difficult for the most penny-pinching council to attain.

So in this situation of Tory disarray, what lies behind Brian Gould's unusual reticence? Is it just a case of Labour missing yet another chance of electoral success, while the Tories breathe a sigh of relief?

The first Labour suggestion of two taxes was easy for the Tories to revile, and not that popular with Labour voters either. And a two tier system would require enormous administration to carry through. So the current suggestion came forward. At first glance a property tax, based on up to date assessment of property value, seems fair enough. But actually, the Labour front bench are in a real trap.

The real problem is that local government finance is in complete chaos. In order to capitalise on the Tories' disarray, Labour would have to demand back from central government the money leeched through cuts in central financing and by rate-capping. And to do that would require an overall economic plan which could show where the money would come from – a feature which is totally absent from Labour's economic 'strategy'.

The only alternative is to do what both the present and previous alternative to the poll tax do – to make ordinary people finance the deficit. Not a popular proposal, particularly in the context of rising rents and mortgages.

So Labour is yet again hoist by the petard of its inadequate polices, as the English courts begin fining people for refusal to register, and warrant sales are issued to well over 30% of Glaswegians.

And as councils come up to this year's budget making, it is clear that jobs and services will become counterposed to high poll tax levels. The Poll Tax movement needs not only to organise those facing harassment by the courts, to deepen the movement in the communities, but at the same time to demand of councils that they neither implement the poll tax, nor cut jobs and services, and of the Labour party nationally that it demands back the money that has been stolen from local government.

Terry Conway

Behind the Wallace revelations

Clearing the decks for a change of government?

The media and the parliamentary parties are belatedly paying attention to former army (dis)information officer Colin Wallace's accounts of dirty tricks and defamation in Ireland and Britain in the 1970s.

But (with the exception of Paul Foot and Ken Livingstone)this scandal hasn't surfaced due to the investigative zeal of either MPs or the press. Information, awaiting exposure, has been available for years; not just Colin Wallace's accounts, but also those of ex-intelligence officer Fred Holroyd, Kenneth Lindsay's book *'The British Secret Services in Action'* published in 1981 and two decades of allegations by civil libertarians and the Republican Movement.

Livingstone has long sought to bring this matter out in the open

This material has included evidence of security force collaboration with loyalist paramilitaries in the Miami Showband Massacre; the involvement of Captain Robert Nairac and other SAS officers in shoot-to-kill operations in Ireland from at least 1974 onwards; bank robberies by the Littlejohn brothers under MI6 tutelage; and bombings and kidnappings South of the border by British-controlled agents. Similarly senior Labour politicians have for long been alleging destabilisation and smear campaigns against the Wilson government.

Far from being a relentless assault from outsiders on Britain's Irish Watergate, the new interest stems from crisis and division within the system. Coming so soon after the Stalker affair, the Guildford revelations and the wrangles over Gibraltar, what has caused this and why now?

Thatcher has continued and escalated the drive towards centralisation and secrecy that has been a feature of the British state since at least the First World War. Some of the more public manifestations of this have been linked to the government's Irish policy – the dismantling of democratic rights and institutions, establishing greater political control of the media, and the development of armed and political policing.

One consequence has been that far more loyalty and discipline has been required from the military, civil service and intelligence officials – but in a context of declining social and political consensus. Thus, in particular, the 1989 Official Secrets Act has forced the pace on whistleblowing by threatening an imminent and absolute clampdown on the disclosure even of 'illegal' activities.

At the same time there has been a certain amount of disarray within the agencies that act as core guardians of the state's interests. There has been MI5/MI6 rivalry since the 1970s. And there have been a string of public scandals and exposures around Cathy Massiter, Clive Ponting, *Spycatcher* and Colin Wallace.

Underlying all this, these agencies have been undergoing an 'identity' crisis, reflecting a broader debate in ruling class circles about changes in Britain's role in the world, its relations with its allies (particularly the US and Europe) and the nature of the British state. The 'Irish question' is a recurrent feature in each aspect of this debate.

New factors exacerbating this disarray have emerged in the last year or so. Firstly developments in Eastern Europe have accelerated this identity crisis by depriving the state of a mythology that justified the existence of these agencies and this process towards centralisation. The ransacking of Stasi and Securitate HQs must have led at least a few British spooks to put stronger locks on their filing cabinets.

Secondly, Thatcher's popularity has dramatically declined, suggesting a new era may be underfoot possibly leading to a Labour government. Some officials may be anticipating a clean sweep as a result. As Livingstone points out, Thatcher is the chief beneficiary of the 'treason' Wallace has exposed. there may therefore be reason to fear the consequences of a changing of the guard.

But such revolutions are unusual in British politics. More significantly Thatcherism effectively cemented over these long-term cracks and divisions by providing a degree of authority and continuity. With the ruling class rethinking which kind of government it really needs, this is bound to shake up some of the weaker props on which the secret state rests.

The key turning-point was the Euro-elections last summer – coincidentally around the same time as it is now claimed the documents exposing both the Guildford and Wallace affairs were first 'discovered'.

Piers Mostyn

The 'M' factor: South Africa with Mandela

By Gerry Nicholls

Nelson Mandela's release has injected the 'M' factor into South African politics – a crisis of authority for the white government, where the vast majority of blacks regard Mandela, not de Klerk as the legitimate head of state. Are we seeing the beginning of the end of apartheid? What sort of society do Mandela and his allies see replacing racial capitalism?

The events of the last month have been uplifting and inspiring for all those committed to the struggle against apartheid. Mandela's presence and actions since his release have been a tremendous vindication of principled politics in the struggle against the racist regime.

Politically, Mandela's voice has been one of an intransigent reformist leader speaking for the whole nation. In his Soweto speech he held forth the prospect of jobs and homes. He has insisted on his disciplined membership of the ANC, reliance on mass action, and refusal to drop the armed struggle. He has also invoked the spectre of nationalisation of the monopolies envisaged in the Freedom Charter.

The continued commitment to the armed struggle is emblematic but vital. Even at its height Umkhonto we Sizwe's campaign was one of 'propaganda actions'. In 1987 there were 230 actions of this type, mainly aimed at members of the security forces and collaborators. By 1988 this had declined by 30% and in 1989, a Soviet spokesperson was able to cynically remark, in reply to accusations that the USSR was abandoning the armed struggle, "What armed struggle?".

A pall bearer gasps through tear gas during a funeral in Crossroads, Cape Town, 1986

However, the armed struggle has been a vital part of the organisation's ability to win the youth of the black townships to its banner. Its reaffirmation is both a reflection of that pressure and a commitment to that mass base.

Likewise was Mandela's insistence in his Capetown speech that apartheid will be ended by decisive mass action. These were not the words of an organisation or a leader which places primary reliance on a negotiated settlement.

Mandela's continuous stress on his membership of the ANC and his adherence to its discipline is also a pledge that he had not and would not act on a separate agenda to that of his organisation.

However this is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the ANC clearly wishes to benefit from the prestige associated with his name. On the other, the organisation may be faced with making political concessions which may be very difficult to justify to their base.

It is perhaps for this reason that Mandela has continued to stress that clause of the Freedom Charter which commits the ANC to the expropriation of big capital. Partly for this reason the predicted boom in the South African stock exchange did not take place. Instead share prices tumbled by 7.5 per cent, despite leading industrialists like Zac de Beer pooh-poohing fears of widespread nationalisation. International reaction to Mandela's release, too, has been confused and contradictory.

After his Capetown speech, Thatcher's press office withdrew a prepared statement, and her speechwriters worked overtime to try and square the circle of her condemnation of the ANC as a 'typical terrorist organisation', Mandela's reaffirmation of the armed struggle, and her invitation for him to visit Downing Street on his release.

Thatcher is determined to use Mandela's release as a pretext to relax sanctions (which she never supported). But she also wishes to continue her government's role as go-between for de Klerk, Buthelezei and Mandela.

George Bush too has his problems. The President is at odds with legislation of his Congress. He remains committed to sanctions much more wide-ranging than Britain's. Legally, however, he cannot relax those sanctions unless de Klerk repeals the state of emergency, the Group Area Act and the Population Registration Act, and allows people of all races to participate in the political process.

It is fear that de Klerk will do just that which is fuelling the mass mobilisation of the far right. They have considerable parliamentary support, and their contention that they would win an election of the white electorate today may not be wide of the mark.

More sinister, particularly in the long term, is their base of support within the police and the army. De Klerk's strategy is supposed to command the support of the army leadership, but how far that has filtered down is debateable.

It has been estimated that at least 70 per

cent of the police belong to the Conservative Party or the neo-Nazis. However the Conservatives' problem remains the lack of credibility of their political programme of separation of the races, in particular where the white 'homeland' should be.

Without such a 'solution' in practice, their policy amounts to maintenance of aparthied through repression. Their means for achieving power is 'extra-parliamentary' action from their supporters inside and out of the state apparatus. However de Klerk is confident that he speaks for big capital in South Africa, and that, given the changing economic structure of the country, this will be decisive in the long run.

The extreme right wing feels threatened by De Klerk's limited steps

It is this change in the social base of the National Party which accounts for its "liberalisation". The change from the party representing primarily Afrikaner capital has not been an overnight phenomenon, of course. It is merely that in de Klerk they have found a spokesperson capable of articulating those interests. P.W. Botha, his predecessor, was too closely linked with the Party's past.

This is why de Klerk's reforms reflect a real change in the South African political situation and not a mere cosmetic ploy to lift sanctions. This is not to say that the reforms themselves are radical. As Jesse Jackson pointed out, Mandela is free, but he still does not have the vote, cannot see his grandchildren go to the school of their choice, and is not free to reside where he wishes. As such the reforms fall far short even of the modest requirements of the international diplomatic community, let alone the aspirations of the black masses.

It is evidently the unleashing of these aspirations which has all along been the fear holding back Mandela's release. It is not merely the government that has been fearful. Mandela and the ANC leadership have consistently stressed that the political process that will now ensue would be a protracted one. This is in part due to the remaining divisions with the black camp, demonstrated by the carnage in Natal where over 2000 people have died as a result of clashes between supporters of the ANC and local warlords who claim affiliation to Buthelezi.

Mandela's tremendous moral authority may permit a temporary resolution to the crisis, but the root of the problem lies in the mass base which Buthelezi commands, particularly among uprooted Zulu rural workers.

Buthelezi has long been regarded by Thatcher as a trump card to play in the unfolding political process. Representatives from the St John's Wood offices of his Inkatha movement have always been in close contact with Conservative Central Office, and Buthelezi has been a frequent and welcome visitor to Downing Street.

Divisions exist too within the ANC. There is a world of differenc between the multi-millionaire Richard Maponya in whose BMW Mandela was escorted to his homecoming rally, and the youths who waited to greet the released leader. Maponya is one of the five richest men in South Africa, white or black.

These social divisions are reflected in the interplay between factions and tendencies within the ANC, divisions that will become more pronounced as the political process deepens. Mandela's role in holding together this coalition will be crucial. Probably his greatest allies in this will be the South African Communist Party.

Its vision of a future South Africa corresponds to the schema of the national democratic stage, followed by socialist transformation. The ANC both organisationally and politically represents the vehicle for the introduction of the national democratic stage. Ironically while Mandela has been stressing the question of nationalisation, SACP leader Joe Slovo has been playing the reassuring theme of a 'mixed economy' in which national capital would be respected and foreign investment welcomed.

This poses no problem for the SACP, which is able to emphasise the maximum or minimum parts of its programme to suit the occasion and the audience. What is more intractable however has been the party's attempts to come to grips with perestroika and

Crossroads, linoleum relief print, Sydney Holo, 1986

apply it to South African realities.

Implicit in the recent agenda of the ANC has been the idea that it would represent the whole nation, overcoming tribal and ethnic divisions within its ranks. It also has had the strong implication that the new political system would evolve towards a one-party state, Zimbabwe-style.

This undercurrent has been clear, not only in the ANC's rough treatment of other trends within the liberation movement, but also in its attempts to annex the trade union movement to its own programme.

In a recent SACP pamphlet, *Has Socialism Failed?*, Joe Slovo strongly endorses Gorbachev and perestroika. He addresses the question of democratic socialism, concluding that in both national democratic and socialist phases a multi-party democracy is essential. For what this would look like in a post apartheid-South Africa one need only look at the constitution adopted by post-independence Namibia.

But the more immediate implications are for the political map of the liberation movement in the next period. Mandela's presence on the political stage enhances the already overwhelming preponderance of the ANC.

Other organisations within the liberation movement like the Pan-African Congress, Azanian Peoples' Organisation and the Cape Action League face the problem of marginalisation both through the ANC and government excluding them form the political process.

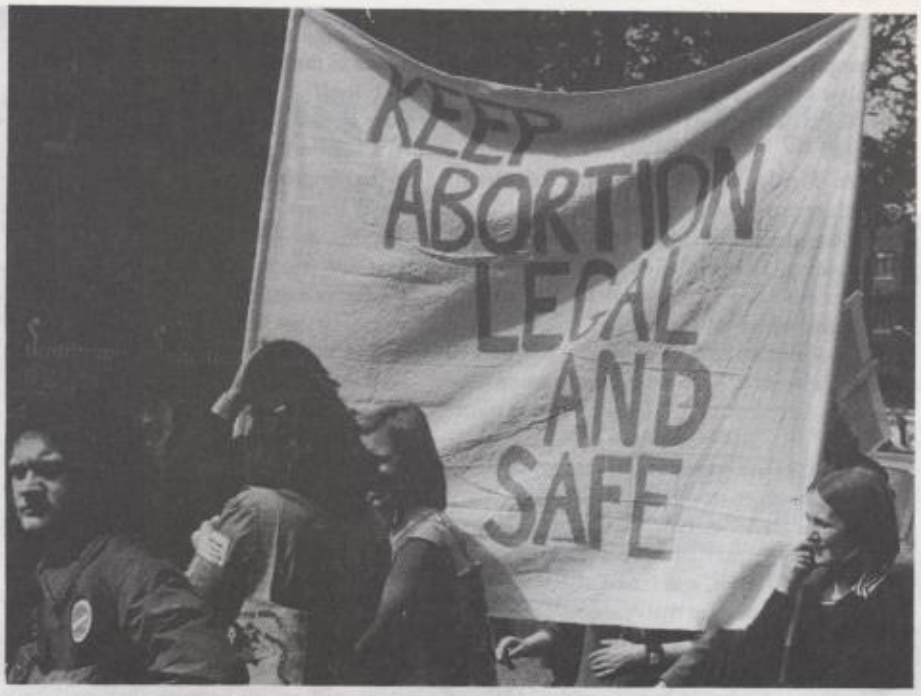
However the question of pluralism arises both from the ANC's necessity to unite with currents to their right, the necessity of a continued alliance with the unions and their own internal divisions.

Under these conditions Slovo's musings have more than a theoretical significance. Campaigns for united action with ANC and Mass Democratic Movement forces (MDM), particularly around continuing government repression, are finding an echo with forces at the base.

The basis for participation in the various manifestations of the MDM, and debate with currents within it has never been greater. Neither is it 'too late' for a fighting unity to be established. While Mandela has predicted the end of apartheid within his lifetime, we are not witnessing the sudden collapse of a regime.

This applies to the solidarity movement internationally. The road to the smashing of the apartheid state is not a short one. Maintenance of international sanctions remains an essential part of the armoury of the liberation movement and maintenance of pressure on our government, a vital component of the fight for sanctions.

The positive turn towards pluralistic debate now argued by Joe Slovo should also be the approach of the solidarity movement, drawing in all the political elements who have been stirred and motivated into taking action by the momentous events of February.



Embryo Bill
Campaigning against the amendment

Now that the Embryology and Fertilisation Bill has reached the closing stages of discussion in the House of Lords, campaigners are preparing for its entrance to the Commons. *Socialist Outlook* asked Leonora Lloyd, a leading member of Stop the Amendment Campaign (STAC) and the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) for her views on the issues and debates now coming up and what activists should be doing.

Q. What is the current situation in parliament?

A. The third reading will be on March 6th and 12th in the House of Lords. Then it is two weeks before the Bill can go the Commons, which will be further delayed by the Easter recess. I think that the major amendments will come up in the House of Commons.

Q. What do you think is the most likely outcome?

A. Well, there are three areas really.

Firstly, possibility that all embryo research will be banned or in the context of the Bill, permitted up to 14 days. I think the pro-lifers could lose on this. MPs have had lots of letters expressing support for research and against a total ban (nought days). Tony Benn's office certainly has.

The amendment to prevent access by single women was defeated in the Lords by one vote: this is a very open issue and MPs haven't made up their minds yet, so there's a lot of work to be done and I'm not convinced that the Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination (CADI) is doing it all.

On the abortion time limits issue, Anne Widdicombe says she's confident of winning on 22, or 20 weeks even, but I think she's over-confident. The consensus is for 24 weeks and I think we'll find that hard to stop. It's going to be a tactical question for MPs, we can't just sling slogans around.

It all depends in which order the vote is taken. If they start the vote at 18 weeks and then go up, the lower limits might get defeated. Then the anti-abortionists might vote against the 24 weeks on the grounds that it doesn't go far enough. But if they start the other way 'round, many MPs will feel the need to vote tactically for 24 weeks to stop lower time limits getting through. There are very few Labour MPs who are prepared to stick to the present 28 weeks limit.

The problem is that unlike with previous attempts, they haven' got the option of voting against the whole Bill at the end of it.

Q. What are the next steps for the campaign?

A. Firstly, there's the week of action, which seems to be going well.

Then there's the issue of writing to MPs, petitioning. This will have an impact because a lot of MPs don't know what to think as yet.

Then we've discussed the question of a national demonstration when the bill gets to committee stage – we're aiming at some time in May I think – though I wasn't at that meeting.

Q. What is the state of the local groups?

There are groups in most areas now. They are either STAC or NAC or CADI. Only two groups that I know of have a position on the Embryo Bill itself, and I think that's right because it's divisive at this stage to take a position on the whole Bill, like they have in North London and Leicester. But I think STAC groups should link up with CADI and if there isn't a CADI group then they should take up the other amendments.

Q. What about the national demonstration – do you think that should be on the issue of DI and abortion rights?

A. Yes, I think the demonstration should be joint – on reproductive rights – and I think we could get backing on that basis.

Q. What is your own personal view on the Embryo Bill itself?

I think people have made a mistake in conflating the amendments to the bill with the Bill itself – as if they were already through.

I believe that the Bill is an improvement on the Warnock Committee report: it specifically uses the words "if the woman is married" – not assuming that she is. We should put our energies into improving the Bill rather than opposing it. But it does give the secretary of state too much power to appoint the statutory licensing authority – it is too bureaucratic and they are not accountable enough to parliament.

American women demonstrate for Choice

Also the licensing authority has to be self-financing which means that the cost of treatment will go up because they will have to charge for licensing.

But having said all that I think it has a good definition of what a parent is, it has good rights for children, and the correct type of restrictions on research. It avoids wrangles over stored embryos like they have had in Australia over inheritance etc.

The Bill also provides for counselling. I think non-directive counselling is very important in such a new field.

In the US they have found that not having a licensing authority does not necessarily benefit women, it lays them open to exploitation and individual clinics can and do discriminate. The problem with the Bill is that it has no positive rights for women, for the consumer.

To a certain extent this will be dealt with by the amendments. If you have an amendment saying that treatment will be restricted to married women and it fails, then this will affect practice after the Bill if passed and women will be able to go to the courts if they suffer discrimination. But this is not adequate – we need positive rights. The only grounds for restricting access should be medical.

Tory thinking behind the Embryology Bill

Superficially the Embryo Bill may appear to cover an ill-assorted collection of subjects, from embryo research to surrogacy, from highly scientific In Vitro fertilisation (IVF) to low-technology Donor Insemination (DI). However, it is a coherent legal and political project for the Tories.

It represents an attempt to group together all forms of reproduction other than heterosexual intercourse, and place them under government control. It even attempts to plan for future, as it brings the forms of research most likely to develop new reproductive techniques under similar regulation.

Within this range of reproductive methods, it is DI that has excited most attention so far. Ann Winterton MP tabled an Early Day Motion at the end of October last year, asking the government to ban provision of DI to lesbians and single women. Lady Saltoun proposed an amendment to the Embryology Bill to prohibit access to DI for all unmarried women, which was defeated 61:60 in the House of Lords Committee stage last month. Further discriminating amendments are promised for the House of Commons.

The debate in the House of Lords made it quite clear why DI has been the main target for these attacks – because DI is seen as being furthest outside the framework of the nuclear family, particularly given the actual or social fatherlessness of children born as a result of DI. As the Earl of Lauderdale so bluntly put it 'AID (Artificial Insemination by Donor) is the farmyard, like it or not, but AIH (Artificial Insemination by Husband) is the house'.

Lord Ashbourne underlined this in a very explicit speech about the 'family as the fundamental unit of society' which must be 'buttressed, supported and built up'. Lord Gisborough found it 'bizarre that artificial means should be suggested to encourage lesbian couples or have children ... It takes me back to the 1960's, when licence was given which, in my view, has done immense damage to this country'.

It is important to stress given these attacks and the reasons and forces behind them, that access to DI is an issue for *all* women, not just those who want or need it. For at the heart of Lady Saltoun's and Ann Winterton's amendments, and indeed underlying sections of the Bill itself, is the wish to control who can and cannot have children. Some groups of women — single women, lesbians are to be categorised in law as unfit mothers; a measure that can only encourage further prejudice and discrimination in wider society.

This is a fundamental denial of women's rights to control our bodies, just as restrictions on abortion rights are, and must be opposed by all women on this basis. We need to ensure that campaigning over Access to Donor Insemination is supported by feminists and socialists and taken into the labour movement as part of the fight for a Woman's Right to Choose.

Rebecca Fleming

USSR: All Power to the President?

Gorbachev plays Bonaparte

By David Shepherd and Patrick Baker

"In moving along the path of perestroika, we saw the crisis battering the country was immeasurably deeper and more serious than expected. Problems and contradictions, piling up within the social system for decades, have burst into the open ... We hoped to mount the peak of the crisis in 1989, but recent events have shown that there has been no change for the better."

(Mikhail Gorbachev, speaking to the central committee, February 5, 1990.)

IT WAS enshrined in Article 6 of the Soviet constitution. It was imposed through a mixture of patronage, corruption and brute force; it was the theoretical justification for the existence of a parallel government at all levels of the state which makes all the decisions and controls all appointments; it has been the central political mechanism through which the Soviet Union's bureaucratic rulers have kept power since the days of Stalin; and it was formally abandoned by the central committee in February. What is the significance of the end of the Communist Party's "leading role"?

Of course the Communist Party's monopoly of politics has been de facto undermined by the endemic growth of political opposition over a period of years. In that sense the decision to abandon it de jure is simply a recognition of the existing situation. It was taken in the run-up to local elections in which (at the time of writing) all indications are that the Communist Party's candidates in many areas are in for a real trouncing. It was nevertheless the most dramatic yet of the reforms carried out under the rubric of glasnost.

The decision came in the context of a deepening economic crisis and the failure of perestroika to even begin to resolve it – a fact recognised by Gorbachev in February (see quote above).

It also came in the wake of the continuing rise of mass movements of the oppressed nationalities in the republics (most recently in the central Asian republic of Tajikistan) and the continuing mobilisations for change in the heart of the Russian federation itself (most dramatically expressed in the 2 – 300,000-strong demonstration outside the Kremlin on the eve of February's central committee plenum).

But in order to understand it one must look at the further proposals for changes in the Soviet political system with which it was combined. These include increased representation for the republican communist parties at the highest level of the party. But, most importantly, the centrepiece of the proposals is the allocation of enormously increased powers to a new super-presidency.

Ironically enough for the standard bearer of glasnost, President Gorbachev's latest political reforms could lead – at least in theory – to a concentration of political power in the hands of a single individual (himself) not seen since the days of Stalin.

The difference of course is that whereas Stalin's accumulation of political power occured during the period of the establishment of the political rule of the bureaucracy, Gorbachev's attempts at the creation of a powerful executive presidency are occurring in the period of its collapse.

His aim is for much of the power that has been taken from the Party to go to himself. This would include powers to appoint ministers, to dissolve the Congress of People's Deputies, to impose states of emergency and so on. The refusal of the Supreme Soviet to call an early session of the Congress to elect

the new super-president reflects doubts not only within the bureaucracy but also in society at large as to whether Gorbachev has democracy in mind or personal dictatorship.

What *does* Gorbachev have in mind? In a sense this is a question which has progressively been reduced in importance in recent months. He is certainly not the master of events – either in eastern Europe or in the Soviet Union itself. The current many-sided crisis has objective dynamics which Gorbachev is powerless to control.

He is forced to play a balancing act: between the exigencies of market-oriented economic reforms (which require austerity) and the working class; between the conservative wing of the bureaucracy (which is increasingly organised and public in its activities) and the radical reformers.

It is this which explains both the "U-turn factor" (for example on the abolition of Article 6, a proposal of the radical reformers which he ruled out one day and adopted the next) and the attempts at the creation of a super-presidency: a position from which it will be easier to play a bonapartist role, balancing between contending forces and factions.

Despite pretensions to the contrary, no faction of the bureaucracy has any real alternative – and Ligachev, Gadaspov et al know it. A representative of the army union "Shield" recently warned (on Channel 4) of the possibility of a coup, emanating from the upper echelons of the military; but veteran Czech oppositionist Jan Urban, now a collaborator of Vaclav Havel, expressed doubts, making the telling point that there would be little point, since no other force had an alternative programme.

In a general sense, what Gorbachev has in mind, first and foremost, is the interests of the bureaucratic caste of which he is the current leader. However, the question as to what course best satisfies this general criterion is not an easy one to answer. As Trotsky said long ago, in an historic sense the bureaucracy is "a caste without a future"; this statement now appears much less a long-term prognosis.

Though there are important similarities, in the Soviet Union we are not on the verge of seeing a collapse of the Stalinist regime similar to recent examples in its satellites. Quite apart from the historic role of the Communist Party – a not insignificant factor – Gorbachev retains more room for manoeuvre than a Honecker or a Jaruzelski. However, Gorbachev – and the bureaucracy in general – are faced with objective threats of truly historic proportions to their existence as a social formation. Among these are: the explosion of the powder-keg of the 'prison-house of nations'; the failure, thus far, of perestroika; and the growth of the radical opposition.

The answer to the first of these problems – the national question – has been, despite the rhetoric, traditional: brute force. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan were clear signals to the insurgent nationalist movements: secession is beyond the pale. Yet in the context of the mass support that the Popular Fronts command – in the Baltic states, the Ukraine, and the Eastern republics – this poses a problem: glasnost or brute force? Gorbachev cannot have his cake and eat it. On another level, one could judge that Gorbachev's actions are an irrelevance – that in Lithuania, for example, secession is now inevitable.

Second: the crisis of the Soviet economy. Glasnost has not provided the desired technological revolution; limited adjustments to the functioning of the economy have, on the whole, produced the reverse of Gorbachev's early promises: a decline in the availability of goods (particularly foodstuffs), and increased social differentiation, particularly through the relative self-enrichment of "co-operatives" (or legal private sector). Any significant turn in the economy would require infinitely greater austerity measures, producing further poverty (as the working class in Poland is beginning to discover).

Third: the mushrooming opposition. Most significantly, this involves the Popular Fronts, now organised from one end of the Union to the other; but also the Inter-Regional group of Deputies, including figures such as Boris Yeltsin; and finally, an embryonic independent socialist opposition (in the form of the Socialist Party and the trades union federation SOTSPROF). Clearly Gorbachev believes that his best chance lies in attempting to give himself the greatest flexibility possible – hence the super-presidency. But this is no answer. Gorbachev – or indeed some other representative of the bureaucracy – may be able to cobble together a solution to the crisis.

However it is difficult to imagine how this could be anything other than a short-term, temporary postponement of the demise of the bureaucracy – either through the overthrow of the socio-economic system upon which it is based, or through a political revolution of the Soviet working class..

Women demonstrate outside Armagh prison, International Womens Day 1983

Something cooking in the Common European Kitchen?

March 8 is International Women's Day, and in 1990 unites new struggles of women in Eastern Euope with their sisters in the west and in the 'third world'. Socialist Outlook presents a special supplement with articles on women in Ireland, on the fight for an internationalist, socialist feminism, and women's struggle for rights as the EC debates its 'Social Charter'

IRENE BRUEGEL reports on the fifth European Socialist Feminist Conference

Socialist feminists across Europe have been meeting over the last five years in an effort to build an *internationalist* socialist feminism, to develop theoretical understanding and practical, supportive links.

One common starting point for West European socialist feminists has been that state ownership of the means of production does not ensure liberation; that the statist economies of the Soviet bloc rest full square on the super-exploitation of women; and that a totally different model of socialism is needed.

It is puzzling then that neither perestroika nor the turmoil in Eastern Europe appears to have generated any such feminist opposition: the voices of women have been absent. Indeed 'leftists' like Boris Kagarlitsky assert that women's oppression is not an issue, and that feminism is a bourgeois deviation.

Fortunately a different picture emerged from the handful of feminists from the Soviet Union, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Poland who were able come to the conference of the European Socialist Feminist Forum in Gothenburg, Sweden in November. While feminism is nowhere a strong and vibrant movement, a feminist challenge both to stalinism and to the reform movement is developing, fragmented, full of contradictions and difficulties and with limited links to working class women. Nevertheless it is there, ireespective of the silence in the western media and the left press.

It is clear that economic reforms are, at best , double edged; that an autonomous feminist movement will have to build an alternative conception of women's liberation from that forced down on women through the state and party. These raise central questions for western socialist feminists, in particular in the analysis of the state, civil society and the family. What was striking in the European conference was how this implicit questioning of a socialist feminist 'orthodoxy' paralleled some of the issues raised by black women in their critique of 'white' feminism in the West.

The theme of this year's Conference was 'Global Restructuring and Women's Labour'. One single framework can't adequately encompass what is happening to women workers in the East and West, or the North and South. But certain common themes are clear. Across Europe feminisation of the labour force has not altered the sexual division of labour; it appeared to be developing alongside increasing income disparities *between* women and between the level of women's unemployment and men's.

In the USSR, where female sectors of the economy are being targetted for market reform, it seems that given the chance, enterprises would try to avoid flexible/ unstable labour, that is women's labour. Although it is in the mines and the steel industry in the USSR and Hungary that the first wave of closures are due, the high level of bureaucratisation put women's work particularly under threat. In one Hungarian uranium

"Of all European countries, from Ireland to the Urals, it is *Hungarian* women who are most likely to say that a mother's place is in the home. Years of low status, poorly paid jobs, of high levels of shift work and night work have taken their toll"

mine for example, half the workers were women office staff, and it is they who face unemployment. The situation is contradictory; it is progressive to get rid of the bureaucrats in the ministries – and yet these were women's jobs; and the safer types of women's jobs at that. These cuts need to be put in context- 40% of women factory workers in Poland, for example, are working in unsafe and unhygienic circumstances.

Although an ideological offensive against the employment of women (especially mothers) is underway across Eastern Europe, it is meeting a mixed, if not positive response from women themselves. Of all European countries, from Ireland to the Urals, it is *Hungarian* women who are most likely to say that a mother's place is in the home. Years of low status, poorly paid jobs, of high levels of shift work and night work have taken their toll.

It should not really be surprising that women want time for themselves, for their children and indeed for meaningful personal relationships. Queueing, the lack of household appliances, and men's attitudes, make women's working hours long and hard: whereas the average US married woman spends 8.5 hours on work, household chores and childcare a day, in the USSR it is 11.5 hours, and in Czechoslovakia 13.2. At the same time,of course, women need their own incomes more than ever.

The issue of working hours is seen to affect women across Europe. It is worth noting however that in East Germany, the slogan was forward to the 40 hour week, while in Sweden the debate is around the 6 hour day. Women lost that struggle; the trade unions went for longer holidays instead; in Norway, parliament is considering a 6 hour day for working mothers alone, but as the Soviet women pointed out at the conference, that type of demand could easily backfire. They were taking issue with a new proposal giving women the right to part time work. They were adamant that if formulated in this way, it would only serve to bolster industrial patriarchy; they wanted each family to choose how many hours each partner should work outside the home. They acknowledged that it might not affect the outcome since the family is a patriarchal institution, but above all they wanted the state off their backs.

They also opposed the way the state's new interest in the women question was formulated within the traditional 'protective' ideology; underlying it was the view that *women* were the problem (even though rape is known to be on the increase) because they didn't care adequately for their children. In contrast the Soviet feminists are looking for a double-sided emancipation; for men, as they put it, to become as multi-functional as women. A similar refusal to accept male definitions of the issue is evident in Norway: a royal commission is looking at *men's* role in society!

When the Soviet and Polish women talked of the dire state of the health service; of women preferring back street abortions to those in the public sector; of a lack of tampons or even sanitary towels, the need for economic reform – on women's terms – seems unquestionable. In a situation where there is no choice of doctor, nor accountability or redress, it is perhaps not so surprising that the East European feminists felt that privatisation of the health service or at least the development of medical co-ops, which charge for services offered a chance of improving standards.

Soviet health service reforms are providing some 'consumer choice' and from now on doctors will be paid according to how many patients they attract. Such 'choices' are of course tendentious, as the Swedish women made clear. In Sweden there are moves to break the state's virtual monopoly of childcare. Under the banner of 'choice' individual subsidies are being mooted which will foster private childminding in place of the almost universal public system.

In Poland and Hungary childcare has been privatised largely under the cover of paid maternity leave. Childcare provision at the enterprise elsewhere in Eastern Europe is unlikely to survive local self management, unless women achieve a great deal more say in economic policy.

In Poland only three percent of children under 3 are in childcare; the proportion has been falling since 1981 when paid maternity leave was introduced. However, its value has been systematically eroded and it is means-tested. As a result only single parents are effectively eligible; childcare has been privatised not to mothers, who can't afford to give up work, nor necessarily to grandmothers, who also need employment but to retired and redundant or low waged men, or to informal childcare at ratios not even acceptable in Britain today. In East Germany, however, the municipality provides a comprehensive system of local child-care, which seems relatively secure.

While the right to abortion has been one of the first gains from the Romanian revolution, in Poland the church is actively pushing for restrictions on abortion provision. Women in factories argue that any referendum on abortion should be for women of childbearing age alone. Solidarnosc is equivocal. But the Polish women told us how they had organised a demonstration in support of the US women's abortion struggle; the Solidarnosc paper would not touch it, and the only support they had from

men was from Troskyists. At the same time, it is clearly appalling that abortion is the only effective means of contraception available; otherwise for those without hard currency, there is only one pharmacy in Warsaw providing contraceptives.

At the previous year's conference, the Forum had discussed the problems of women attempting to enter and transform the structures of power, specifically whether the experience of quotas was helpful. The problem became clearer as the East European women made us aware of the incorporation of women's organisation by the state and the distortion of idea of women's liberation by statist ideology.

The dead weight of the official women's movement was still taking its toll on feminism in the USSR. It still has a virtual monopoly on contacts with the West, so that it isn't just male chauvinism in the media that have kept us in the dark about the development of feminist thinking. So far, the space for feminists in the East to contact each other has been severely limited. They knew through their limited contacts in the West that there were feminists elsewhere in the USSR and in the Eastern bloc, but they don't yet have any organisational form of their own. The official movement and its definition of 'women's liberation' is a distinct barrier.

Yet even in Norway, where 30% of the cabinet are women and where every part of the political system, even conservative parties has a 40% quota and where women are said to be 40% of of board members of private firms, male domination is still rife.

Though the small Worker's Communist Party has 50% quotas for all groups, and a woman leader, she insists that the party still has to work on unconscious male domination within the party,

to enable it to lead the struggle of the working class as a whole, rather than simply half of it. Struggles of class and sex need to be brought together, but on women's terms.

The limitation of quotas as a substitute for politics is clear from recent Soviet experience. As a result of the abolition of quotas for organisations (of which Soviet Women's Committee is one), the proportion of women elected to the Congress of Deputies *fell* last year from 30% to 15%. In practice this is no retreat for women, since there was never any effective articulation of women's demands. At the same time obstacles are being placed on feminists attempting to involve working class women. One women's factory council, who were in contact with the feminists in Moscow, sought to nominate a feminist journalist as their representative and were barred from doing so. In Moscow 6% of the *candidates* for the Congress of Deputies were women, but not one was elected.

Wayne Edginton

The Gothenburg Conference began an important dialogue. The Soviet sisters began to understand that the 'socialism' they had experienced and rejected bore no resemblance to the socialism we were after. They began by wanting to replace a class analysis with a humanistic analysis, but in the end we were all much clearer about the need for both a class analysis and a feminist analysis: for a socialism 'with a female face' that could in their words 'emancipate socialism from hierarchy, uniformity and inhuman personal relationships'.

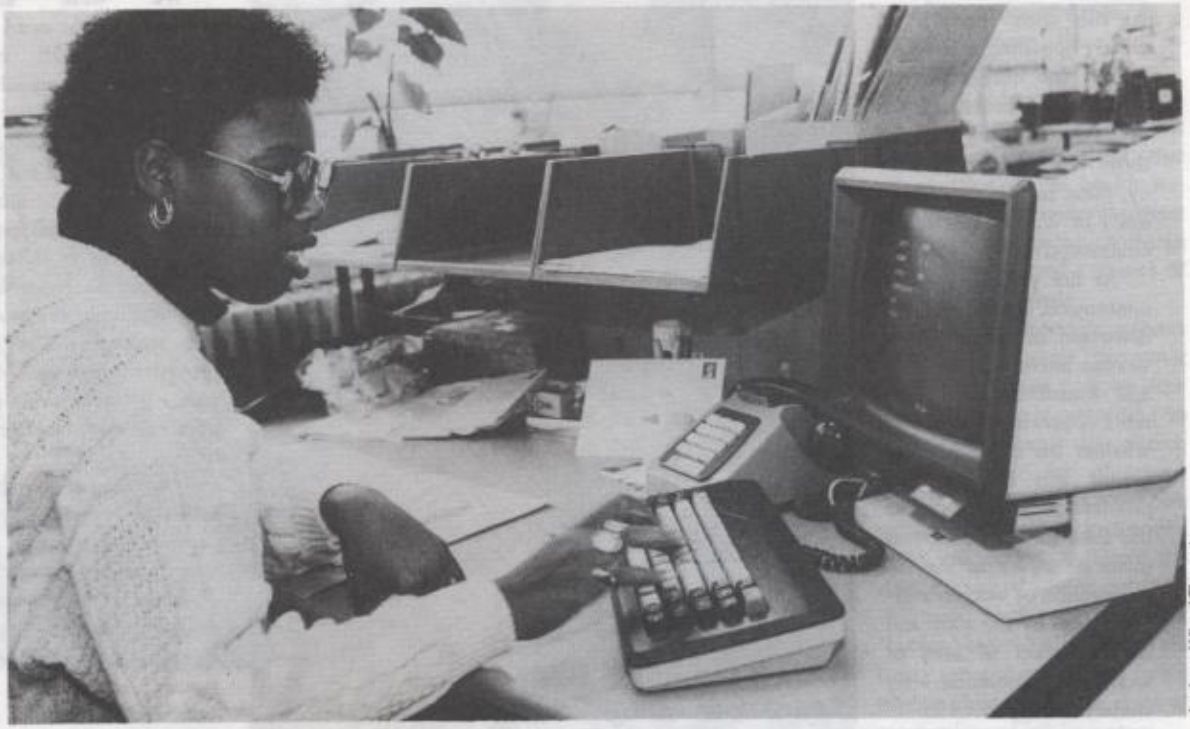
We were also reminded of the need to take care with our western socialist feminist orthodoxy – to recognise for example that paid work is not of itself liberating, rather that it is our best possible *means* to liberation. And to recognise that although the state can support collective provision, and can ensure greater equality than voluntary/co-operative systems of reproduction, it can also make collective provision part of an overall oppression.

Across Europe we came to understand that on top of the class divergences, and linked to them, are differences of race and ethnicity between women. This raised the question for the conference of how we react to fundamentalism, whether of the catholic church, the Russian orthodox church or the Mosque. It is clear that the level of debate on the situation of black and migrant women varied enormously with the different experiences and cultures of the feminist movement across Europe. As a step to developing a truly internationalist socialist feminism, the Conference decided to hold the next Forum on 'Feminism and Citizenship'. It is likely that this will be in Ljubliana in November 1990.

Inevitably a socialist feminist movement that is independent of any political party and yet is explicitly political lacks the funding for a mass conference of women from across Europe. Women were able to come, in twos and threes, from 22 different countries to the Gothenberg conference. And though the range of representation was necessarily limited, we were able to move towards defining at least the ingredients for an internationalist feminist socialism and understanding better the tasks we face.

For further information on the European Forum of Socialist Feminists contact: Claire Crocker, Garden Flat 7, Acol Road London NW6. The Forum publication *Entering the Structures: Changing the Structures* is available from her, price £1.50

"the proportion of women elected to the Congress of Deputies *fell* last year from 30% to 15%. In practice this is no retreat for women, since there was never any effective articulation of women's demands"



Andrew Wiard/Report

Whose Social Charter?

The fight for women's rights in capitalist Europe

Jane Connor

"In Britain, women today account for 44 percent of the workforce, with that figure predicted to be over 50 percent by the end of the century. There is similar picture across Europe"

There has been a recent revival of interest in Mary Wolstoncroft, an early feminist and author of the *Rights of Women* – a feminist response to Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man.*

This interest is in part due to French Revolution bi-centenial celebrations which engendered a wide ranging discussion in both liberal and socialist circles about rights, reform and revolution. In France there has been a specific feminist form that this discussion has taken – termed a "discourse on equality" – in which bourgeois and reformist feminists have debated the extent to which equality between the sexes has been achieved, and, more concretely, the impact of 1992, the Social Charter and quotas on women's employment.

It is important to look at the Single European Act and the Social Charter through the perspective their impact on working women. The general trend, despite recession and slow growth rates in the European Community (EC), has been an ongoing increase in the number of women workers as a percentage of the workforce as a whole.

In Britain, women today account for 44 percent of the workforce, with that figure predicted to be over 50 percent by the end of the century. There is similar picture accross Europe. But it is clear that women's jobs are concentrated in the service sectors, traditionally low-paid sectors. Despite 15 years of equal pay legislation, women in Britain on average earn 28 percent less than men, and this figure is worsening.

So what prospect does 1992 hold for women workers in Europe? The Single European Act will sharpen competition between producers – this intensification represents a big threat to many of the social gains of European workers.

Increased competition will inevitably lead to redundancies, and in the volatile service industries women will bear the brunt. The "harmonisation" of conditions for workers across Europe in each sector will inevitably – unless there is a co-ordinated fightback – be a downward harmonisation. And production will be re-located to where costs are lowest: already we have seen attempts to break down the ban on nightworking for women. Downward harmonisation and relocation can roll back many gains women have made, not least in terms of health and safety and workplace nurseries.

1992 represents a central contradiction between the neo-liberal free market and the pan-European social legislation that the social democrats would have us believe is implicit in the Social Charter. The 13 fundamental rights of the Social Charter are ambiguous and general. The document calls for "equality of treatment for men and women".

■ There is no commitment to any form of positive action to ensure that women workers benefit from any new jobs created.

■ There is nothing in the Social Charter defending the most fundamental of women's rights – the right to control her own body, the right to choose.

■ And there is no framework for setting up systems of supervision to ensure that what fundamental rights are included in the Social Charter are adhered to.

Whilst the social democrats ponder this contradiction between the free market and the "social market", and the reformists have their "discourse on equality" and make demands to improve the Social Charter, women (and all workers) need to get organised and develop cross-European co-ordination to defend our interests.

But women are not only facing an economic offensive: there is also an ideological offensive against the gains of the women's movement. This ideological offensive is coalescing across Europe, both east and west, around the issue of reproductive rights.

Socialists in general, and the revolutionary left in particular, have to understand that this is a key component of the ruling class and bureaucratic offensive. But we should also recognise that the defence of reproductive rights has mobilised and will mobilise women across Europe. Any attacks have met with fierce opposition.

For women in the Spanish state and Italy, reproductive rights are a relatively recent and limited gain. The French government, despite a concerted campaign led by the Church, has, under pressure from women, declared the early abortion drug RU486 to be the moral property of women. The British government seems unlikely to follow suit, and even if the government and the drug's manufacturers resist pressure from the anti-abortionists, medical trials lasting several years will have to be conducted before women in Britain can gain access to this relatively safe method of abortion.

In Britain the attack on reproductive rights is particularly intense. "Opting out" proposals for hospitals in the new NHS Bill, together with the closure of many family planning clinics, will further limit the NHS resources available for abortion, contraception and gynaecological research.

John Harris (IFL)

Elsewhere, too the offensive is hotting up:

■ The urban terrorists of "Operation Rescue", who have been campaigning in the USA, have now begun using their 'pavement counselling' tactics to terrorise women attending abortion clinics in Britain.

■ Not only "Operation Rescue" but a highly developed concept of foetal rights and father's rights is being developed in the USA. In the USA the number of cases against women for "foetal abuse" (in other words not caring properly for the foetus *in utero*) is growing. The Webster vs Reproductive Health Services defeat is a major threat to American women's "right to choose".

The codification of 'foetal rights', and the ruling class's attempt to enforce the norm of heterosexual nuclear family is also expressed in the British Embryo Research Bill. The unamended Bill seeks to limit embryo research and ban it on any foetus over 14 days after conception. Amendments range from reducing the time limit for abortion to 24 weeks, to denying lesbian and single women access to artificial insemination.

In fact a Bill that should have increased women's access to new reproductive technologies is being used to restrict them. In response, the "Stop The Amendment Campaign – fight for choice" and the "Campaign for Donor Insemination" have been launched to fight on the issues raised. It will be crucial to challenge the growing consensus *within* the labour movement around a 24 week time limit on abortion.

In Britain we can take inspiration from our sisters in the USA, France, Belgium, the Spanish state, Italy, Ireland and now Poland, where women have mobilised in their millions to defend and extend reproductive rights.

If the same determination and tenacity shown by women east and west to defend reproductive rights is shown by the European labour movement to defend itself against the Single European Act, the outlook for workers' in Europe will be so much brighter.

"Whilst the social democrats ... have their "discourse on equality" and make demands to improve the Social Charter, women (and all workers) need to get organised and develop cross-European co-ordination to defend our interests"

"we should also recognise that the defence of reproductive rights has mobilised and will mobilise women across Europe. Any attacks have met with fierce opposition"

Beth Ridgell

Contraceptive Action Programme (CAP) protesters demonstrate aginst restrictive family planning

"Irish women have suffered qualitively more setbacks than any other section of Irish society"

Irish women – up against the power of the church

Ann Conway
(People's Democracy, Ireland)

Irish women have suffered qualitively more setbacks than any other section of Irish society.

There has been a vicious attack on women's rights in the 26 Counties, while in the North the nationalist population has been confronted with attack after attack on their basic rights. Women's rights in Ireland are in any case quite limited in comparison with the rights in mainland Europe.

The sustained attack against women has given rise to an uneven response. What I want to concentrate on is the question of abortion. In 1979 Family Planning was legalised. Obviously people were using contraceptives before then, but it was not actual legal. After the right wing had lost the battle to keep out contraception, they moved on to abortion. The Irish Pregnancy Counselling Service and other centres were at that stage giving information so that women could come to England to get a safe and legal abortion.

What the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) attempted to do then was to bring in a constitutional prohibition which would allow them to legally challenge abortion in the courts. Abortion itself was already illegal in Ireland, but their fear was that this would be changed. They succeeded after one meeting with government ministers in getting a constitutional referendum. That was in 1981, and there was a period of political instability around that time since a number of hunger strike and H-Block candidates had taken seats in Dail, taking a substantial number of votes away from the main bourgeois parties.

The idea for the referendum actually came from an international conference of doctors in Dublin where some American doctors met with some of our leading obstetricians and decided they needed to take up the amendment campaign. They decided that rather than leave SPUC to front the campaign it should be headed by professionals and 'experts' – people who would appear removed from the issues of sexuality and morality involved.

So the campaign was run essentially by them – trying to give it some kind of human face, pretending that they were really interested in women's rights. The other side of the campaign was weak. The women's movement was involved, but it was mainly taken over by quite reformist sections who didn't want to raise any issues that could be regarded as too feminist or radical. So they never attempted to take on the Church who were backstage using the pulpits as a political platform and encouraging people to vote no.

They didn't have it all their own way. Only 45% of the people turned

out to vote on what was a hotly debated issue – which had school children and youth talking about it. The question of abortion was actually discussed widely, making their victory a rather shallow one since the matter would have had less attention if they had not gone on the offensive.

There was a 3 to 1 vote in favour of the amendment, so we now have a constitutional amendment copper-fastened to the constitution, and we will have to remove that if there is ever to be new legislation to permit abortion. Now personally I don't believe that we shall ever see abortion in Ireland until partition has been removed: and it is possible that we will not see *divorce* in Ireland until the removal of British imperialism and the partition settlement, because the partition is based on the power of the Catholic church. It's based on the political establishment, and the possibility of removing those things can only really arise in the situation where there's a real change to build from. That's not to say that it's not an issue on the agenda for feminists. It certainly is.

During the Amendment Campaign, SPUC spokespeople said they weren't going to touch the women's clinics; they weren't interested in preventing women having abortion information; that they were really only interested in the rights of the unborn; that the situation as it presently existed would not be interfered with. They waited two years before they actually took a legal case against the women's clinics, and I think the fact that they had to wait so long showed that things weren't really going all their way. The courts ruled in favour of SPUC – declaring that clinics were actually helping women to procure abortions in Britain.

Unfortunately, the court judgement was given against a background of defeat in the divorce referendum, and I mention that because, if it had actually been in an earlier stage, the result might have been quite different. Garret Fitzgerald had actually called for a referendum on the divorce issue. Before the referendum there was something like 70% of the Irish people who were actually in favour of divorce. The government that called the referendum refused to campaign on the issue, completely absented itself from any debate, and let the right wing take over.

The forces who were organising to demand the right to divorce were thoroughly divided, and were not prepared to take on the power of the church. The argument, the defence, was left, as it was in the anti-amendment campaign, to legal experts – to lawyers, doctors, to that particular group. Though it was a debate about women's rights in both instances, but it had very little relationship to the reality of our lives.

I think it's just worthwhile reading what was a pretty vicious judgement: page after page reiterated the right to life of the unborn. Abortion was seen as wrong and evil in all circumstances. It was said to be contrary to national policy, contrary to morality, contrary to common law, statute law and the constitution. It went on to state that consequently the right to life of the foetus, the unborn, is afforded statutory protection from the date of its conception. I think Ireland is the only country in Europe in which we actually have that sort of situation.

Soviet anti-abortion poster; Children are the flowers of our lives

Now that was a real victory for SPUC. The women's movement did respond immediately, but it wasn't a sustained response, principally because the clinics that were involved, against whom the judgement was made, didn't really want any public protest campaign. In fact they weren't too sure if they even wanted to appeal immediately after the judgement: it was a very weak response.

That really tended to take the steam out of the women's movement and create some sort of confusion as to where we would go. And of course there wasn't that much support coming from the traditional organisations on the left. The trade union movement were opposed to the judgement from the point of view of civil rights, and that was very good. And so was the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Workers Party, the Labour Party, and the Republican movement: but there wasn't any real concrete support coming through from any of those organisations. The political forces weren't there, in any sense other than much very paper support, so it was left up to the women's movement. With the refusal of the clinics to confront the issue themselves, they backed off.

So it was mainly a small group of feminists who consistently campaigned on the issue, both in Dublin and in Belfast. There were quite good relationships made between women in the North and South in relation to the issue. The students were the main force who actually took up the campaign. They started campaigning on the issue in the colleges, at conferences and and meetings. What we've seen in the last

"the right to life of the foetus, the unborn, is afforded statutory protection from the date of its conception. I think Ireland is the only country in Europe in which we actually have that sort of situation"

Beth Fidgell

Roisin Conroy (front left) won a High Court action that seperated childless women were entitled to state benefit

couple of weeks is that the students' unions who have actually been giving out abortion information to women have been taken to court, and threatened with jail sentences. They actually stated that they were prepared to go to jail, and that they had lists of hundreds of people who were prepared to fill jails behind them.

The problem that we've been confronted with each time is that the fight has always been around court battles: this is the third battle we've had in relation to the courts. It confuses people to have to wait for a judgement before we can decide where to go next. A month ago the High Court decided not to convict the students. Previous to the court hearing they had been saying that people can't go around breaking the law, they can't be giving out information, the rights of the unborn must be protected – and then they saw the mobilisations – that a lot of people were actually coming out supporting the students.

Some Dail deputies, particularly from the Labour Party, some from Fine Gael in an individual capacity gave support; some union bodies passed resolutions and put out a statement. But it was the militancy of the students that pushed it all on. They decided that the judgement was basically in their favour, and that they would continue to give out information until the matter went to the European Court. SPUC were devastated, and appealed again. Last week it was debated in the Supreme Court, and the background to the hearing was not as positive as it had been six weeks before.

The students made the mistake of trying to deal with the matter simply inside the student movement, not calling on other political forces to give out the information. This is extremely important: I myself have been involved in the defend the clinics campaign, and I work at the Dublin Well Women centre, so I know the reality of what the law means in terms of women not being able to get proper information about abortion.

There was a short debate among the students on whether other organisations should give out the information, and ikt was said that if the Labour Party (or for that matter the Republican movement or the trade unions) wanted to give out the information it was up to them: the students would not urge them to do so. But it was not possible for the students alone to maintain their position: they began to become isolated. Some students in the colleges started callimng for a referendum, so we now have a situation where in three of the main colleges the students have been voting against giving out abortion information, so the situation has slipped back and ths students are now on the defensive.

The judgement was a another setback for the campaign, and the fight goes on. But it is difficult to organise around court judgements because the initiative can always be taken awy from you. It would be especially foolish for us to rely on the European Court because absolutely nothing positive has come from the European Court to Ireland. In terms of EEC directives, the only one that has actually been implemented in Ireland turned out to be negative: in changing its policy on social welfare payments for married and cohabiting couples the Irish government reduced its payments downwards, rather than levelling up!

So we haven't gained social parity with any of the European countries. Progressive legislation that has been implemented on the continent has meant little to Ireland. But for women there is a positive influence from the European dimension, from our relationship with other countries, especially Britain where women have the right to abortion under the 1967 Act.

Irish people's attitudes are changing: they are looking to the future, breaking with the church on many issues. Obviously the next few months are going to be hard. We hear that *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which publishes an Irish edition, will no longer carry information on abortion for sale in Ireland.

On the other hand there are positive developments – the organisation of a fightback against cuts and attacks on public serfvices. It has been women who have been the backbone of this response, women working in the health service as nurses, radiographers and domestics; women teachers defending education; and mothers in the community.

Community women have played a very big part in the demonstrations of up to 50,000 strong against the cuts. We need to make some kind of link between the right to abortion information – the right to women's reproductive rights – and the fight on these other social and economic issues. If we can build this alliance there is the basis for us to win.

(Speech given at *Socialist Outlook* Rally, London, December 1989)

"Obviously the next few months are going to be hard. We hear that *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which publishes an Irish edition, will no longer carry information on abortion for sale in Ireland"

Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: facing the abyss?

Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe is on the verge of total collapse. The Soviet Union is facing a desperate economic and political crisis, and maybe even disintegration. What will come out of the crisis? Can anything be salvaged for socialism? Phil Hearse talked to OLIVER MACDONALD, founding editor of Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, and a member of the *New Left Review* editorial board.

*** After what we now know about the living standards of the masses in Eastern Europe, and even the decay of their social welfare system, why would the restoration of capitalism be such a big defeat? What is there in these states to defend?**

* Socialised property. It is a fundamental position for socialists that the economic resources of society should be under democratic political control and organised to break down class divisions and promote egalitarianism. In the market economies of the West the entire economic resources of society are taken out of the hands of the political control of the masses, and fundamental decisions are taken outside of any political control by private capital. In the Eastern bloc of course there was not democracy, or direct control of economic resources by the working class.

But those people who say there is nothing progressive in the socio-economic character of these states presumably say it doesn't make any difference if Siemans and ICI and Fords take over or not. We say, we want that basic ownership structure to be maintained and be under democratic control - that is a possibility and a tremendous opportunity.

Kohl and the other German leaders are driven not just by a desire for German reunification but by a great fear of the Eastern economies coming under democratic control - with all the consequences that it would have, especially in West Germany.

*** Perestroika isn't working. Can Gorbachev overcome the economic crisis?**

* The Soviet economy has not simply been in stagnation but in decay - we can talk about the decay of the productive forces. At every level there has been a complete loss of confidence in the old system. But the only alternative been posed to replace it, by the Communist intelligensia, is thorough marketisation. This 'Hayek-type' marketisation has made enormous inroads into the living standards of the working masses, who were heavily subsidised under the old system. This led to an enormous battle, which the marketisers lost inside the CPSU leadership. Far from going forward it has produced a sort of economic 'duai power' or 'dual chaos' situation.

On the political side, the attempt by the bureaucracy to maintain single-party rule, and the suppression of genuine federalism in the Union, has resulted in only one strong political challenge coming forward - that of nationalism in the republics. This has created enormous problems for Gorbachev, and become inter-twined with the economic crisis. For example one of the consequences is that the CP leaderships in the republics have tried to keep hold of power, and utilised the market system to corner as many economic resources as possible, leading to a complete breakdown of what division of labour between the republics there was. It's an enormous crisis.

*** Is a return to Brezhnevism possible? What would be the consequences of attempting?**

* No - if you mean the re-establishment of unity in the bureaucracy at an all-union level and the squeezing back of the masses into the corset of monopoly Communist Party rule.

What we are seeing could have three possible outcomes. There could be an eventual consolidation of the Gorbachev regime: but that supposes a relatively rapid turnaround in the economic situation which

is unlikely. It supposes also that there is an agreed formula on the national question, and that the Gorbachevites maintain a dominant base inside Russia.

The second variant is a break-up of the Soviet Union, followed almost certainly by the rise to dominance of an authoritarian chauvinist-nationalist populist trend in Russia. This would be a 'wild beast' in the region.

The third variant would be a regime of order, of the military type. This could be a Jaruzelski-type regime prepared to do business with anyone, and engaged in the same type of operations as the Polish government.

A fourth variant, a victory of the socialist left, is not on the cards, at least in the short and medium term. The forces are not there. It could only happen after this whole phase is over.

*** Can Gorbachev survive the secession of any of the nationalities? Could he be overthrown, either by a section of the bureaucracy or by a mass movement?**

* In the next 18 months, I would say that it doesn't look as if a Russian nationalist force would have sufficient strength to topple Gorbachev. As far as the military and the KGB are concerned it appears that so long as Gorbachev maintains the real integrity of the Soviet state, they will stick with him. By that I mean that if, for example, one of the Baltic states won de jure independence, but de facto stayed within the whole Soviet military and diplomatic setup, then I think the military and the KGB would accept it.

How popular is Gorbachev in Armenia?

"In the next 18 months, I would say that it doesn't look as if a Russian nationalist force would have sufficient strength to topple Gorbachev. As far as the military and the KGB are concerned it appears that so long as Gorbachev maintains the real integrity of the Soviet state, they will stick with him"

Of course, de jure independence for one or more Baltic republics would fuel Russian nationalist movements, but that's another matter.

But of course the crunch issue is the economic one. While the figures for last year are not appalling, the experience of the masses is that things go from bad to worse, and there's no prospect of any short term turnround. Gorbachev desperately needs, if not economic success, then at least a strong signal to the masses that the economy has turned the corner. And there's no sign of that yet.

***Could bureaucratic rule survive the end of the monopoly of the CPSU?**

* Well it depends what you mean by bureaucratic rule. Fundamentally, the rule of the bureaucratic caste relies on the exclusion of the masses from active politics and, over time, that cannot survive any form of democracy. On the other hand the bureaucrats, or some of them, can survive. Look at what's happening in Poland: the army is asking to be 'de-politicised'. That is in preparation for surviving the political transition, so that the officer corps survives. The same is true for other sections of the bureaucratic apparatus. In all countries you have a bureaucracy, who take key administrative decisions, but they don't necessarily rule in the social sense.

Now in Eastern Europe we have a paradoxical situation. In many countries you have a bureaucracy running the country, which is not fundamentally linked into or controlled by any social class: they are free-floating. So that means we are still in a transitional phase, and its not at all clear how its going to work itself out.

In Romania, with the destruction of Ceausescuism, you have a political system without a centre. But its clear that in the National Salvation Front has strong tendencies to try to re-establish a bureaucratic order. That's not to say of course that we could in any way support the National Peasants Party, which seems to be the main opposition. But that takes us to a wider question, a rather painful one for the left, that we had always assumed that political revolutions would be led by the Left. But in fact political revolutions have been led by forces that are not for socialism at all.

*** That depends what you mean by political revolution. If you take it to be the destruction of bureaucratic rule, then the movement towards that, in general, hasn't been led by socialists. But then political revolution telescopes two concepts - the overthrow of bureaucratic rule, and the establishment of direct working class rule ...**

* Yes it telescopes the destruction of bureaucratic rule and the establishment of socialist democracy. But political revolution as a concept developed by Marxism was developed not in the east, but in *bourgeois* society, and it has a general applicability - to mean changes in the political form of the state bringing the masses into politics.

In France in 1848 there was a political revolution; in Spain there was something which amounted to a political revolution - with the overthrow of the monarchy and establishment of the republic at the beginning of the thirties. You could say there was a political revolution in Spain in the mid-1970s with the transition from Francoism to bourgeois democracy - a political revolution which didn't, in the methods used, take a revolutionary form.

The one exception to what we've been saying is the GDR, where the left played an extremely important role. But whether that can be consolidated into socialist democracy looks extremely unlikely, because it looks as if the GDR is not going to survive as a separate state.

*** Is a capitalist reunification of Germany on the cards in the short or medium term? Isn't that what the masses on the streets of Leipzig and Dresden are now calling for?**

* Socialists are in favour of the people of the GDR deciding for themselves. That's quite different from socialists advocating reunification of Germany on a capitalist basis; and it's obvious that in the present conjuncture that's the only kind of reunification we would get. The movement in East Germany was in the first place largely led by the left. Those people were fighting against the Honecker regime, but *for* the maintenance of the GDR. And they are still for the maintenance of the GDR. It's interesting to note that many of the oppositionists in the 'round table' are much more for the maintenance of the GDR than the Communist Party itself, not to mention people like the economics minister Christa Luft.

It would have been perfectly possible for Bonn to stabilise the GDR. Why didn't they do it? This is vital for understanding the future of Europe ...

*** Yes because the other imperialist states seemed in favour of an ordered transitions. For example US secretary of state Baker's visit to Modrow seemed to give blessing to the Modrow project.**

* Absolutely, people from the foreign ministries of the USA, Britain and France have been in and out of Berlin frequently, hardly giving Modrow time to think. But the reason that Bonn had to destabilise the GDR was because of the appalling prospect for them if there had been a successful socialist and democratic resolution of the crisis in the GDR. That would have created ferment in the SPD and in the West German trade unions. The leader of the German BDI, (the equivalent of the CBI), said the other day that the problem was destabilise the SED without destabilising the GDR. But that is less than the truth, because the BDI has found it can do business with the SED, especially with its economics minister, Frau Luft. Bonn has chosen to destabilise, while pretending to do the opposite - and pretending that the thing which most concerns them is the mass emigration from the GDR.

There is another question which is driving the West German Christian Democrats; they know perfectly well that if they were to prop up the GDR, with the objective of going for reunification in the longer term, the British, French and Americans would try to turn it into a permanent stabilisation. So Kohl has tried to keep it on the boil, and they've done it very well.

Now the working population of the GDR faces a choice. Do they go for a quantitative improvement in their living standards, which they know would be the result of reunification, or fight for a qualitatively better, in social and cultural terms, state in the GDR? How do they make that choice? They make it on the basis of whether they think the GDR is going to survive. If they feel it's not, then to hell with it. That seems to be the mood now very strongly, and once it takes hold it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once you lose faith in that state you cease to work for its survival.

So I think that the de facto reunification of Germany will take place very quickly, but the de jure reunification will probably come some time after. Whoever is elected will be totally under the thumb of West Germany in terms of all major public decision making. But formal reunification will take longer, because Bonn will not want to provoke the spasm of outrage which would come from the US, USSR, France and Britain if Germany was formally reunified quickly.

All of them are afraid of the enormous increase in power that would result for the West Germans, which to some extent has already taken place. It's not simply German reunification that's increased the power of the Federal Republic, but the collapse and power vacuum in the east.

*** But won't reunification be a mixed blessing to the West German ruling class? It would bring in masses of people who are, to a greater or lesser extent, imbued with some sort of socialist and collectivist values.**

* I don't think this would be a major problem for Bonn. If the GDR is destroyed you will get an enormous effort to restabilise economic life in the area of the GDR, and a more powerful SPD. In the transition period there will be very great problems, that's true; for example, the issues of unemployment and social security policy. The other problem will be that it will be under very suspicious surveillance from its allies in the West; and not only from the West, because as long as the CDU - not to speak of the CSU and the Republicans - refuse to underwrite the 1945 borders with Poland, this will provoke tremendous hostility in Poland and USSR.

What has been going on is a very devious game with Thatcher and others insisting that a reunified Germany has to be totally within NATO. West German foreign minister Genscher points out that by saying that she is really saying there should be no German reunification at all - because for a united Germany to remain in NATO would be totally unacceptable to the USSR.

*** Are you saying that the West German ruling class would be prepared to come out of NATO to achieve a united Germany?**

* This is an issue which very much divides the West German political elite. But it's not a question just of totally in or totally out; it's also a question of whether the area of the GDR comes under NATO command. Genscher's position has been to stabilise the GDR; he's not been in favour of Kohl's policy of destabilisation, and this came to a head in the cabinet two weeks ago. Genscher believes that there must be '1992' and the Delors plan, and the Franco-German axis; and there must be the Bonn-Washington axis in NATO. His line is that they can increase their influence in the East on the basis of these things.

Then you have the line of the CSU: German national unity first, totally opposed to monetary union in the EC, a robust stand on NATO and so on.

Now Kohl and Staldtenberg and the leadership of the CDU are offering a formula which is not exactly 'out of NATO', but offering to agree certain special rules on the territory of the GDR, and other rules which will modify their relationship with NATO. So you have the paradoxical situation of an enormous increase in West German power, but the possibility of a massive backlash from the USA, USSR and so on.

*** After the East European elections this year - in Czechoslovakia, GDR, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria - it may well be that basically liberal democratic governments come to power. Can socialised economies survive that for any period of time? In the absence of socialist democracy, isn't capitalist restoration the inevitable long-term consequence?**

* I think it is dangerous to discuss these questions abstractly: it will be decided by socio-political forces on the ground. You need to look each country in turn, they have very different dynamics. Look at Poland; this country is much more advanced in terms of the drive towards marketisation, change in form of political rule, and so on.

Now in Poland there is very deep working class hostility to the austerity plan - the Balcerowicz plan - a classic project for austerity and privatisation. The other side of the situation is that the West has not come up with the goods! This is a fundamental aspect of the equation. Will the West put its money where its mouth has been for forty years? The West is *not* underwriting the Maziowiecki government.

The true face of Lech Walesa?

The USA would love to underwrite this government, but it hasn't got the money. Senator Dole suggested cutting 5 per cent from the money that goes to the Israelis, to provide a few dollars for Eastern Europe, and that's caused the most God-almighty storm. The Americans are broke; they don't have the cash. So when we talk about what's going to happen in Czechoslovakia and Hungary we have to bear these things in mind.

Now Czechoslovakia is very different. It is a real juicy prize for international capitalism. It is far from bankrupt, it has some advanced industry, some high quality managers, an educated workforce - but cheap labour, in Western terms. And in geographical terms it's near the 'golden triangle' - the dynamic heart of European capitalism which goes from the Benelux countries to West Germany and northern Italy. So it's no accident that Vaclav Havel (who I've discussed with several times and is, no doubt about it, a real right-winger) chose to make his first trip to Munich!

This means that, unlike in Poland, you can be sure that there will be investment in Czechoslovakia from West Germany - particularly from the private sector, but I suspect from the West German state as well. After the GDR, it's their number one priority. On the other hand, the working class in Czechoslovakia has not experienced economic collapse and desperation that has been experienced in Poland, especially the working class in Bohemia – whose living standards rival those in Britain. So the question is, are they prepared to accept the unemployment and attacks on all family-consumption subsidies (rents, public transport, food) which will come with capitalism? It is true that the Czech intelligentsia is utterly hostile to socialism because of all the repression it has suffered - and longing for the life of Western professionals. But the real question comes down to a political struggle on the ground, the outcome of which is far from determined in advance.

Overall, Western capital is in general very ill-prepared for opening up ties with the East, particularly because of the existence of the European Community. From an historical point of view, you would have thought it was ABC to say to a country like Czechoslovakia 'in you come' to the EC. But they can't do that because of the whole EC system of balances and trade-offs which involve powerful capitalist interests.

If you allow Czechoslovakia in, then you have to allow the rest in, too. And then, where is your Common Agricultural Policy? Where is your 1992? Your social fund and your regional fund? And you can say goodbye to the Delors plan for monetary union. And then you have the problem of the whole political system organised around NATO. It's not so easy to change all these things in one fell swoop.

*** A 'united socialist Europe' is a nice slogan. But what steps can we take to bring it about?**

* Before we talk about European unity, it's very important to talk about European socialism. We have to get to grips with not only the collapse of the eastern bloc, but the collapse of Communist Parties. This is a major historical turning point. Communism, by which I mean 'official' communism with a capital 'C' has dominated the imaginations of millions upon millions of Europeans - let us not forget that - it's a reality sometimes obscured to us by the relative weakness of the British Communist party.

For hundreds of millions of people in Europe, this is not simply a defeat for communism with a capital 'C', let alone a defeat for Stalinism, but a defeat for communism with a capital 'M' - for Marxism itself. Serious Marxists will not just brush all this aside and say 'this is not our defeat, we are advancing' and all that. This is a serious practical and theoretical problem for *us*.

One solution is to say that the 1917 Revolution should never have taken place, and we should have gone with the Eberts and Schiedemanns and McDonalds and so forth. And that communism had nothing to do with socialism at all - this is the good old Labourite, social democratic response. In this view, what has happened in eastern Europe is not a defeat for the Left but a victory for the Left - what you might call the 'Common Market' Left.

A second position, more serious, is that of Martov-type Menshevism. Martov, of course, was not a counter-revolutionary but the leader of the internationalist minority of the Mensheviks. This says that there should have been the Russian February revolution, and maybe even the October revolution, but what should have followed was 'double New Economic Policy' - a sustained capitalist development with a powerful state sector. This a serious argument and I don't think we should just brush it aside.

But the argument which is not being seriously discussed is that put forward by Trotsky. Namely, that while what existed in the Soviet Union was not socialism, and the only way forward for the workers' states was their participation in the international division of labour - via their political strength on a world scale, including crucially their bases of support in the world labour movement, which the Stalinist leaders have of course woefully neglected. Let nobody believe that Trotsky was in favour of what Stalin did with his crash programme of industrialisation and collectivisation in 1929. Trotsky wanted to move beyond the New Economic Policy, but was not in favour of moving beyond market relations at that time. Neither was he in favour of using military-bureaucratic force for collectivisation.

The whole way that Stalinism moved, right through to the Brezhnev period, through autarky, was a massive struggle for a pre-capitalist economic existence, together with the terrible drain of resources to build up military forces to put them in a position to have an historic reconciliation with Washington. This was coupled with an utter disregard for ideological support in the world labour movement, which was the only place you could get the support for undermining cold war ideology and the economic embargo.

Let's not kid ourselves; the events in Eastern Europe don't automatically bring socialism across the continent closer. Why not? Because the forces which led the political revolutions in Eastern Europe were not led by socialists, but by people who saw the only viable alternative as being Western capitalism. Having said that, of course, we are very much in favour of the establishment of democratic liberties, because without freedom of expression for the working class you've got nothing, it's all built on sand.

Now in some of the countries of eastern Europe there are democratic

liberties plus socialised economies. But the West is trying to deny the people of eastern Europe the right to democratically decide the future of these societies, how they want economic resources to be managed. They are using the usual mechanisms that they often use with third world countries - look at the IMF deal with Poland - a scandal and an outrage.

Here are millions of people who would like to determine their own future. And if you were to get significant numbers of people in eastern Europe choosing democratically their social system, this would open up untold possibilities. I think we have to campaign for that, against things like the IMF Poland deal. These countries must be able to sell their products in Western Europe to advance economically. And what is the barrier to this? Something called 'Europe'; the Common Market with all its quotas and tariffs against east European goods. We have to campaign against that.

A worried Kohl?

On top of this all the institutions of Europe are in crisis or decay - East and West - because they are all premised on the cold war. What we should argue for is a democratic decision on the future of Europe - and autarky for the 35 nations of Europe is not the answer, it has to be a pan-European solution. I think we should argue for a democratic congress of the peoples of Europe to decide the future, from the Atlantic to the Urals. The future should be decided by the peoples, not by secret diplomacy. A democratic assembly should be tackling the issues of militarism, social rights, economic co-operation, ecology.

*** A European Constituent Assembly?**

* Absolutely. Why not? We should aim for a platform of the left, which is not calling for a united socialist Europe immediately, but for the democratic organisation of the peoples - towards a Europe-wide congress of the peoples.

*** Finally, just to take you up on your observation that the 'political revolutions' have not been led by democratic socialist forces, revolutionary marxist forces if you like. This was not, after all, what Trotsky expected. Why do you think it turned out like this? Is this primarily a function of objective factors, how the historical process unfolded, or was it primarily a function of subjective factors. I suppose I mean sectarianism by the main historical marxist tendencies.**

* Very much a matter of objective factors. Sectarianism is not simply a subjective factor: it is the product of a whole array of objective factors historically.

We should remember that certain historical turning points went against us, which could have gone the other way. One of the crucial ones was the Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia. That invasion was not a foregone conclusion: the Soviet leadership was deeply divided over that, as we now know. If that experiment had been allowed to proceed, things could have turned out very differently. There is a tendency on the part of Trotskyists to predestine those events after the event. Objective factors, after all, clash with each other and produce unexpected results.

Where I do think Marxists can be criticised, especially in the 1960s and after, is in not realising sufficiently that we are part of the mass labour movement and cannot put ourselves above it. You can see that in eastern Europe, because a left alternative has not emerged to official communism, the judgement of the masses is completely ruthless: because communism has brought us to this pass, then communism is worthless.

Having said that, it is not unimportant that with the exception of Romania the communist parties have ceded power, belatedly. They may get only 2 per cent in elections, but they will be able to operate politically, and that is important for the future, because many of their rank and file will be part of the left in the years to come, even if those parties do not survive.

So we have to go back to the 1848 Communist Manifesto: the communists have no interests separate from the working class movement itself. Is there a real working class movement in Western and Eastern Europe? If not, then what has happened is disaster for us. Happily there is.

Salman Rushdie one year on:

Much more than artistic freedom at stake

By Terry Conway

As Salman Rushdie begins his second year in hiding, the sentence of death pronounced against him, the *fatwah*, is renewed.

It is clearly outrageous that his life should be endangered and his freedom curtailed. Rushdie is right that artists must be allowed the freedom to criticise societies and religions. The paperback should be published – indeed the delay in doing so has only fuelled both the fundamentalists and the racist backlash.

But what is at stake is more than one man and one book. And the issues cannot be analysed, or the problems confronted, by dealing with this as a debate about art.

Iranian women, wearing the chador, demand Rushdie's death

The renewal of the fatwah demonstrates the continuity between the present Iranian regime and that of Khomeini. It is true that President Rafsanjani, looking over his shoulder in terms of attempting to increase Western investment in Iran, sought to temper the impact of Khomeini's original pronouncement by stating,on February 16th, that this was only the view of 'one expert'.

But this was swiftly followed by a pronouncement from Ayatollah Yazdi, head of the Iranian judiciary that Khomeini's original pronouncement was 'unchangeable and irrevocable', and that indeed is was sinful for Muslims who had the opportunity to carry out the command not to do so.

The power of clericalism is still a key factor within the Iranian state, and its relationship with the masses. The state has been responsible for doing rather more than issuing death threats – they have been responsible for the murder, torture and imprisonment of countless Iranian dissidents: artists, women activists, trade unionists and socialists of all hues. Behind such actions, and behind the fatwah lies the need to continually reinforce the legitimacy of the regime and crush any form of opposition.

The fact that most leaders of the Muslim community in Britain have endorsed the fatwah is a consequence of their ambitions for Britain. They wish to construct a 'Muslim identity', and so undermine more political identities such as 'black' or even Indian, or Iranian.

Their task is made easier both because of the racism of the British state and British society, but also because the state is in no sense a secular one. The role of religion in education is key, but other factors such as the presence of bishops in the House of Lords (which should anyway be abolished) are also important.

Thus they are able to play on the real anger of practitioners of Islam both against racism as such and against the privileged position of christianity. The fatwah is a useful tool in this, but the divisive ambition of the Muslim leaders predates this, and will continue beyond it.

The question of policing dissent and dissidents is key for the British fundamentalists as for the Iranian. So, for example, we have seen the increased demands for state funding for separate schools for Muslims (paralleled of course, as many of these processes are, by demands for funding for other religious schools by other religious communities). While the proliferation of racist attacks within schools is used as one of the arguments in favour of such schools, for the fundamentalist leaders this is a cover.

This is demonstrated quite clearly by the fact that the leaders are much more concemed about separate schools for girls than for boys. This is despite the fact that the reality of all women's lives – but particularly the lives of women from Muslim communities – is that they are less likely to become influenced by 'western culture' than men. Even within many 'progressive' schools, where children learn English as a second language, far more attention is likely to be paid to the need for young men to become fluent than young women, since they are more likely to be destined for employment outside the home. This is compounded by the fact that boys get more general attention from teachers than girls anyway!

The fundamentalists focus on girls' education because they understand that young women may well rebel against the role that fundamentalists would like to set out for them. It is really a dead end debate – and one which gives fuel to racism – as to whether women are more oppressed in Islamic or Christian society. Feminist ideas and women's self organisation have been important features of political mobilisation in countries where Islam

Carl Taylor

Fascists are ready to take up Rushdies cause - for the wrong reasons

is powerful.

However the fundamentalists' understanding of feminism as a challenge which must be crushed is shown not only by their programme for education, but also by the hatred and violence shown towards the *Women against Fundamentalism* picket of last year's anti-Rushdie demonstration.

When the Asian women's movement in this country began to campaign for Asian women's refuges, the first response of the religious leaders was that these were not necessary as violence did not occur in Muslim families. When it became clear that such arguments were being bypassed and that a number of councils were beginning to fund such refuges, the leaders changed tack. Instead they put forward proposals that refuges should be set up on a religious basis and run by religious leaders. In doing so, they sought to undercut the feminist principles on which refuges are run, posing instead the need for them to be a 'conciliation' service.

The response of many Labour authorities to these debates, as to the debate on separate schools, demonstrates the paucity of understanding of either feminism or anti-racism. If changes have occurred over the last ten years or so, in general it has been in terms of the notion of multi-culturalism and women's rights rather than more profound changes.

Multi-culturalism is dangerous because it ignores the power relations which exists between cultures, is opposed to anti-imperialism and secularism and, enhances the power of self-appointed 'community leaders' rather than fighting for self-organisation for black people and women. The recently published *Burnage Report* indicates the profound dangers of playing politics without a clear anti-racist and feminist strategy for education.

The response of the Inner London Education Authority, probably the authority in which there had been the most coherent moves towards anti-racist practice, to the Highbury Quadrant 'Mandela Assembly' is yet another chilling indication of the state of the problem. While it is true that there were problems in the school, not least because of the absence of a permanent head for several years, the staff were carrying out Education Authority policy to the best of their ability considering the limits of resources. The fact that committed teachers were redeployed from the school against the wishes of parents and governors for daring to mention the nature of the apartheid regime to school children is a gross indictment of Labour's policy and practice.

Incidents such as the situation at Altrincham Grammar school, where two young Muslim women were excluded for a period for wearing headscarves to school, demonstrate the way in which even multi-culturalism has failed to penetrate the whole of the education system. The young women were seen as defying school rules, even though they were prepared to remove their headscarves in situations where there might have been health and safety implications. Eventually the governors decided to support the girls, but the fact that such a situation could arise in the first place shows the depth of the problem.

This liberal framework not only gives succour to the fundamentalists, but also to racism. The fascists have used the Rushdie affair to claim that Britain is no longer a christian country – an assertion that unfortunately is far from true. In doing so they are appealing to the right wing of the Tory party, the forces that support the Education Reform Act which further entrenches the place of christianity in schools, as well as attacking other limited moves that have been made towards progressive education. It is clear too from the debate over the Embryology Bill in the House of Lords, as it was with Section 28, that the 'moral majority' is on the offensive.

While the fundamentalists are seeking the creation of a Muslim constituency, the extreme right are happy to conflate 'Muslim' and black together, and to use the pronouncements of the fundamentalists to further whip up racism. The popular press have taken up Rushdie's case, conveniently omitting to mention that the key focus of the novel is a damning indictment of British racism, rather than of Islam or of individual muslims.

The fight to defend Salman Rushdie is a key task for socialists. This can only be carried through on the basis of an understanding of the role of fundamentalism, fighting for secularism and combatting racism wherever it appears.

Employers turn the screws as unions fight back

ALAN THORNETT weighs up the scene in the current trade union battles

The upsurge of trade union struggle which emerged last year is continuing into the new wage round. Ignoring the government's de facto wage control policy, wages are still increasing at around 2 per cent above the rate of inflation, despite an actual reduction in overtime brought about by the economic squeeze, reflecting the pressure on wages still coming from the base of the trade union movement.

The disputed Ford "settlement" at 10.2 per cent, followed by Nissan and others has introduced a double figure 'norm' in the private sector, even while the Government is still confronting the ambulance crews in an attempt to keep the public sector 'going rate' at 6 or 7 per cent. The unpopularity of the Tory government as a result of policies such as the poll tax, and its policies on education and the NHS, plus high interest rates, helps ensure that industrial militancy will continue into 1990.

The six-month old ambulance dispute remains deadlocked with no sign that the Government will cave in and offer concessions. The Tory view is that with the general election is two years away their priority is to hold the line on public sector pay, and the ambulance workers can do what they like. Under these conditions, with no new initiatives from the unions to escalate and widen the fight, a sell-out by the national union officials remains on the cards.

The key to the dispute is solidarity action. The TUC action on January 30 was a major success, with up to a million taking part, showing the massive potential which is there to be tapped. It is clear, however, that any future action has to build on that – which means another official initiative preferably via the TUC. The initiative taken by the London support groups, and discussed though the Solidarity Network, of a lobby of the General Council of the TUC calling for a one day national strike is therefore very important.

The Ford strike, which has closed Halewood, Bridgend and Genk is a major battle which is getting little or no publicity. The offer by Ford management of 10.2 per cent, accepted most of the workforce, still led to a strike of skilled workers, since it eroded the differentials of skilled sections and brought in degrees of flexibility which involve, for example, electricians working on tracks when they don't have electrical work to do. There is now an all-out strike by skilled sections – both electricians and mechanical maintenence. Eric Hammond's EETPU has supported the action which has overwhelming support and would be hard to stop; he also feels safe supporting a fight for skilled differentials, and it is a handy way to increase EETPU credibility in the plants.

A massive scabbing operation has been organised against this strike, led by CP member Jack Adams, national officer of the TGWU. He has written to every individual member of the union at Fords telling them to cross the picket line and keep production going.

The breakaway electricians' union the EPIU, to their great shame, have not only supported the deal, but are crossing picket lines with the full support of their leadership, who are arguing that it is right to do so, since the EETPU is outside of the TUC! They are even recruiting members of the EETPU who are prepared to defy the strike and go into work.

Although these strikes are sectional, they are legitimate action against harsh management conditions being imposed on the sections concerned. The EPIU have created a situation which they will probably find it difficult to survive – the result will be a strengthening of Hammond in an area where he had lost the majority of his membership.

35/37 hour week campaign

The 35 hour week dispute in the engineering industry rumbles on. In the course of the dispute, the Engineering Employers Federation has terminated national negotiations with the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU) – a move which will open the door to the worsening of basic conditions throughout the industry. There has been no challenge to this move, and the unions are now proceeding on the basis of local agreements.

The campaign has not been without success, with several dozen local employers of varying sizes agreeing to various reductions in hours, mostly with strings attached. The near unanimous vote at British Aerospace at Preston to reject a deal offering two hours reduction in hours – in return for complete flexibility of working hours and shifts plus the abolition of tea breaks – shows the type of deals which are being offered, and the level of militancy in the industry. Despite this militancy, the Confed leadership – which is in com-

John Harris (IFL)

plete control – refuses to significantly extend the action.

Only a tiny proportion of the two million workers previously affected by Confed negotiations have been called upon to take any action at all.

Meanwhile, an employers' offensive is pressing ahead on most fronts. In the car industry, the pressure remains on for flexibility and for participatory techniques such as team leaders.

In the media, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) faces a massive onslaught. In practically every national newspaper management are forcing in individual contracts, while resistance has been collapsing following bribes and intimidation by management. The same process is taking place in provincial newspapers. One of the major groups – United Newspapers – has told its journalists in six of its papers to sign individual contracts. Here the fightback is stronger, and the NUJ has become embroiled in a series of long-running disputes. The Union as a whole is on the rack: last year it paid out only £30,000 in strike pay: now it is paying almost that much every week. One such long-running strike is at Robert Maxwell's Pergamon Press, where 23 union members have been sacked for supporting an official 24-hour strike. The NUJ is to hold a special conference on fighting derecognition in March.

Behind the employers' offensive is the battery of anti-union laws. The outcome of the industrial struggles last summer was a degree of breakthrough on the wages front, but also the successfull use of the law against the dockers, which put the government in a position to introduce a further package of legislation – *Unofficial Action and the Law* – designed to tackle the kind of unofficial action, and self organisation, which emerged in the rail unions last summer.

It contains in many ways the most drastic proposals yet, and is essentially an employers' 'victimisation charter'. It is aimed against shop stewards and work place reps. The new measures would legally require trade union leaders to take action against unofficial strikers, and disqualifies those sacked for taking part in an unoficial strike from going to a tribunal. This may not seem serious given the lack of powers of the tribunals; but in reality it will encourage employers to victimise militants. It would also become illegal to take any kind of action in support of someone sacked for taking part in an unofficial dispute.

There is not a word from the TUC on these develpments let alone any kind of campaign against them. We have to demand that the TUC campaigns against these laws and we have to challenge the Labour leadership to pledge their repeal by a future Labour Government.

'Grim truth about Morning Star'

Desperately seeking readers

The troubles afflicting the ruling Communict Parties in Eastern Europe have found a faint echo in Britain. While *Marxism Today* has embraced marketisation and pulled the Communist Party of Great Britain with it, the sickly *Morning Star* looks closer to death than ever.

The *Morning Star* has announced plans to sack 25 workers and reduce the number of pages by one third in an attempt to survive. The irony is that it is a 50% cut in the paper's 'sales' in the USSR which has dealt the latest blow when, in the divisions in the party, a key issue was its commitment to supporting the 'socialist countries' uncritically.

It was in the Popular Front period (after 1935) and during the second world war – periods of extremes of class collaborationist policy in which the CP advocated alliances with the 'progressive', 'anti-fascist' bourgeoisie, and then lent their support to Churchill's National Government in its war drive after 1941 – that the CP and its daily paper, established in 1930, saw their greatest growth. Since 1945 both have been locked into a long decline, membership of the party falling to less than a seventh of its peak level. The paper had less than a fifth of its peak sales even before the cut in the Moscow order.

There was only the occasional hiccup in the downward trend, and the apparently triumphant adoption of the latest *British Road To Socialism* was associated with a deepening of the crisis. The BRS mixed rhetoric about class struggle and socialism with a stress on democracy, reliance on parliament and the election of a left Labour government.

Both sides in the subsequent dispute have claimed to be the inheritors of the tradition of this programme. In reality the BRS passed in 1977 was a compromise, and was eventually supported by 'democrats' like *Marxism Today* editor Martin Jacques and party bureaucrats like Mick Costello so as not allow the party to fall into each other's hands. Only a small minority remained in outright opposition.

It was significant that the CP Executive Committee was defeated at Congress for the first time ever in the same year, and the issue was the *Morning Star*. It was attacked for insufficient sharpness politically in its coverage of events in the labour movement. It was also insufficiently critical in its approach to the 'socialist countries' and, increasingly importantly, failed to give sufficient attention to

women and 'new social forces' who were important to the party's strategy. To cap this, it was badly presented.

Tony Chater, the paper's editor, remained unresponsive to criticism, but, after the EC had been defeated twice at successive party congresses over the paper, other elements of the leadership including Gordon McLennan were persuaded that it must change.

In fact it was the *Morning Star* which provoked the public dispute between the CP's warring factions, by promoting an attack on *Marxism Today* for publishing an article that was mildly critical of 'traditional' trade unionism. Later the *Morning Star* challenged the right of the CP to put forward a different policy for the Management Committee of the People's Press Printing Society, the nominally independent body which owned the paper.

The paper has claimed to promote 'class politics' as against those presented by *Marxism Today*. Yet its columns at the time the conflict broke out showed that this was not reflected every day in its news or even in features. It attacked the British ruling class far more often as bad stewards of the economy than as defenders of their own class interests. Thus Bert Ramelson, a defender of the paper, condemned the Tory economic strategy as:

"... bound to pull us further in the economic mire, to keep us at the bottom of the 3rd division of industrial countries"

It also supported campaigns for import controls even when they were simply nationalist or led by Tories.

Official organisations of the labour movement, the Labour Party and the trades unions, and, above all, their leaders, have been the paper's central preoccupation. Labour MPs and union general secretaries could frequently be found writing in its pages and their public comments were a major part of its news coverage. Even Sid Weighell, then right wing rail union leader was allowed the use of its columns in the year in which his members got rid of him.

Typical was the concern with the split in the Tribune group of MPs which led to the formation of the Campaign group. The *Morning Star* echoed the line of those who wished that the split could be undone, and therefore, implicitly, that the differences of the Labour left were less. This was part of a wider interest in labour movement 'unity' on some unspecified basis.

The implication was that the party and the TUC, with their existing leaderships, could be won to a new programme. 'Labour' must build the mass movement 'for radically different policies':

Such an objective calls for clear policies free of all traces of class collaboration. It means mounting a major challenge over a wide front to big business. It means fighting to shift the balance of wealth and power in favour of the working-class.

The *Morning Star's* approach was close to *Militant's* in its abstraction from the actual conflicts of the moment, but lacked the ambition to put forward a specific programme.

A further key element in the paper's politics has been its commitment to the idea that conflicts can be resolved by negotiation, and many of its attacks on employers and governments were for unwillingness to negotiate honestly. This attitude covered eveything from trade union struggles to, for example, coverage of the Falklands / Malvinas war, in which the United Nations was to play honest broker. A series was carried by Dave Priscott suggesting that if Poland had a proper parliamentary forum and the leaders of Solidarnosc had learnt negotiating skills like those in the British unions, the unpleasantness of martial law could have been avoided.

Finally it is clear that the *Morning Star* and the leading figures associated with it have not been honest. Not only did it seek to avoid the real conflicts over strategy and tactics in the working class movement but bureaucratic methods were used to keep control of the paper. The arguments used to prevent the CPGB taking back control through the PPPS in the first part of the 1980s were stood upon their head in 1988, when Tony Chater delivered it into the hands of the newly formed Communist Party of Britain and tried to suppress the dissenting views of the outgoing Management Committee.

The rescue plans of the early 1980s depended upon sales and print contracts in the union movement. That the paper still has friends was shown by the statement issued at the time of the last Socialist Conference by Campaign Group MPs, including Tony Benn, urging sales and support for the paper.

Yet with the recent collapse of the old-guard Stalinist regimes and the traditional 'tankie' politics on which the *Star* has always been based, it is difficult to see any labour movement or Stalinist cavalry with the energy, resources or political confidence to ride to the rescue: much of the appparatus and the (largely opportunist) goodwill it once had have been lost. What remains is a group of desperate bureaucrats and a desperately boring reformist newspaper with a miserable political past and no political future.

Paul Hubert

Soviet tanks and troops crush the Prague spring in 1968

Gorbachev's USSR: is stalinism dead?

Edited by Carl Finamore, Walnut Publishing 1989. Available from Socialist Outlook, £6.75 inc p&p.

This unique collection, published by the US marxist organisation *Socialist Action*, provides an interesting insight into the history of, and prospects for, political revolution in the Soviet Union.

The book is divided into four sections: an analysis of Gorbachev's reforms, authored by *Socialist Action* itself; two sections on the relevance of Trotsky's ideas and the recent return of Trotskyists to the USSR, including sections by Esteban Volkov, Trotsky's grandson, and Pierre Brou, Trotsky's biographer; and a concluding section on the significance and rise of nationalism in the the soviet republics.

The political mainstay of this collection appears in the form of a resolution 'The Crisis of Stalinism in the post-Stalin Era'. Here *Socialist Action* attempt an analysis of the historic significance of Gorbachev's reforms. As the title suggests, this analysis locates the root of these reforms in the crisis of the command economy, the legacy of decades of Stalinist rule.

The conclusions that are reached as to the purpose of these reforms are unequivocal: not just a new 'historic compromise' or a partial marketisation, but the restoration of capitalism.

Volkov's short contribution consists of a forthright defence of the Trotsky's role in the leadership of the infant Soviet state, and his later leadership of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International, reasserting the relevance of his ideas to the rapidly evolving situation in the USSR today.

Pierre Brou, author of a recent, and much acclaimed, biography of Trotsky, recounts the remarkable experience of speaking to a meeting of hundreds in Moscow, demanding the rehabilitation of Trotsky. He was joined by relatives of Trotsky's companions, such as Nadezdha Joffe, 82 year old daughter of Adolf Joffe, a leader of the Left Opposition.

Finally, a number of contributions explain the relevance of the national question, looking at state repression in Armenia under Gorbachev and at the historic tradition of revolutionary nationalism in the Ukraine, among others.

This is a useful book, that looks at the relevance of Trotskyism and the ideas of political revolution to the Soviet Union from a number of viewpoints. Though the variety of contributions perhaps detracts from the cohesion of the collection, the numerous contributions from leaders of *Socialist Action* provide a political framework that runs through the different sections of the book.

Though some of their conclusions may be controversial among marxists, it is increasingly clear that the historic alternatives for the Soviet Union – of capitalist restoration or political revolution are no longer a long-term prognosis.

Patrick Baker

All that melts into air is solid: the hokum of New Times

In Race and Class, Volume 31, Number 3 January-March 1990
By A Sivanandan

Review by David Grant

"New Times is a mirror image of Thatcherism passing for socialism. New Times is Thatcherism in drag."

Challenging the pernicious influence of *Marxism Today*, and its New Times agenda, is one of the most pressing of contemporary tasks facing the marxist left. To take on the self-appointed saviours of Labour's electoral fortunes, to confront them directly on their own terrain, may well be an onerous and difficult task. But it is nonetheless necessary and increasingly urgent.

In this light, Sivanandan's withering critique is timely. With the media crowing triumphantly about the "historic failure" of Marxism-Leninism, crumbling along with the Berlin Wall, Sivanandan reminds us that it is not just East European stalinist marxism that has failed to stand up to the onslaught of capitalist ideology.

Our home grown variety, itself of course a not-so-distant relative of that in the east, has been struggling for years to accomodate itself to the right-wing libertarianism of Thatcherism. In this dubious task it has been entirely successful.

Of course, every form of refuge has its price. Theorising the drift to the New Realist right, giving it a left cover, sticking marxist labels it, seems fine when Thatcherism is rampant. But with the decline of the Tories' standing in the polls, the forward march of Labour no longer seems quite as stalled.

Not surprisingly, the tune has changed. Indeed, there seems to be an element of former fellow travellers falling out as Sivanandan dedicates his article to "those friends with whom, out of a different loyalty, I must now openly disagree."

Sivanandan doesn't mince his words. The theoretical practitioners of New Times and their forays into philosophy, linguistics, semiotics, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and deconstruction, are slammed. They have given us, he says, merely, "the consummate and conclusive finding that reality itself (is) a matter of interpretation, construction, presentation – of words, ideas, images. 'Philosophers', they might have said with a nod to Marx, 'have interpreted the world; our task is to change the interpretation.'"

Sivanandan's savaging of the preposterous "marxism" that New Times offers, would no doubt be applauded by many on the left. But then there is more to political criticism that making a rather small number of people smile.

For despite re-asserting that 'the economic' does determine 'the political' in the last instance, a welcome and well argued point, he accepts one of the fundamentals of the New Times agenda. That is the view that capital has somehow emancipated itself from labour. He seems to accept the validity of the post-Fordist industrial/social model but baulks at the conclusions that the proponents of New Times wish to draw from it.

For if it is true that the industrial working class has been nullified as the agent of historical change through the effects of the technological revolution, that capital has indeed freed itself from labour, what will take its place? Where are the social forces with nothing to lose but their chains, the social weight and objective interest in revolutionising society?

The theoreticians of New Times put forward the 'new' (what else?!) political movements based on race, sex, gender, and more recently peace and ecology. Sivanadan begs to differ. But what would he put in the gap that remains, once the proletariat disappears from the scene ?

This question is never entirely answered. He seems to prefer an alliance of the dispossessed, the have-nots, those outside of the systems of choice and consumerism so beloved of *Marxism Today*. But, alas, just as there is no reason why an amalgam of the oppressed should necessarily be objectively anti-capitalist, outside of an alliance with the working class, neither is there any reason put forward by Sivanandan as to why an alliance of the dispossessed should or could be. At the end of his article, it seems to come down (in the last instance?), despite his insistence, not to the economic, but to a question of – wait for it – choice.

Sivanandan prefers the integrity of the poor and dispossessed to the new social movements, which, he suggests, may be 'corrupting of socialism', so self-obsessed and pre-occupied are they with their own oppression. In making this latter point, he ascribes to these social movements the narrow motives and interests assumed by the New Timers. This one-sided interpretation downplays the positive impact of these movements and the insights they have brought to the wider struggle for socialist change.

But we never find out the how and why of the role of the poor and dispossessed as a replacement for the organised working class as the agent of historical change within the Marxist system. In this, Sivanandan has more in common with the thinking of the New Timers than he might imagine.

Indeed, much in common also with catholic liberation theology, an organising force among the third world's poor and dispossessed, who, like Sivanandan, make a moral choice to be 'for' the poor and disspossesed. Not that there is anything wrong with this in itself. But it hardly solves the theoretical problems of dispensing with the historic role of the proletariat in negating capitalism.

Has capital really emancipated itself from labour? The last ten years in Britain might lead you to imagine so. But marxism has, since the beginning of this century, been arguing for a *global* starting point for any analysis of trends within capitalist society. Part of Sivanandan's critique of the inward looking, self-obsessed theoretical meanderings of Marxism Today is precisely that they ignore much of what is actually happening in the world.

How does the development of the Brazilian labour movement, which last year organised the largest ever industrial general strike in history, fit into the post-Fordist model which Sivanandan accepts? Where does the development of the South African trade union movement, the power behind so much of the recent change in South Africa, find a place, *after Henry*?

These are issues that the left needs to continue to debate. Sivanandan's contribution, witty and concise as it is, tends to indicate that we have some way to go yet.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Wrong on Azerbaijan

We agree with the title and much of the contents of the editorial on Azerbaijan in SO 21, but it is ambiguous and inaccurate on three important questions.

First, it is quite wrong to state that the invasion was "certainly intended to stop the brutal ... ethnic slaughter..." It is absolutely clear from the Kremlin's statements, and from those of the military commander of the invasion, that it had only one purpose: to crush the Azeri nationalist movement. Frankly, any claim to the contrary is an excuse – and has the unfortunate effect of prettifying Moscow's brutal and criminal recourse to repression in Azerbaijan.

Second, to assert that "a more enlightened policy towards the nationalities issue" has been an "essential comerstone of glasnost" is factually untrue. Gorbachev's new thinking on relations between the republics did not see the light of day until eighteen months into his leadership – and then only as a response to the development of the mass movements. One must look not only at the Soviet leadership's rhetoric but also at its practice, which has not exactly been "enlightened" (remember Tbilisi, the repression in the aftermath of the Armenian earthquake and so on).

Finally, we cannot agree that socialists should call for "maintaining sufficient state forces to prevent further pogroms". Available evidence suggests that the initial pogroms were orchestrated and carried out by forces linked to the Azeri Communist party (see *The Guardian*, 15.2.90). Before the invasion it was forces within the Azeri Popular Front which organised workers' patrols to defend Armenians against the pogroms, at a time when the state forces were doing nothing at all to defend them. After the invasion, it was precisely the role of the troops to back up the bureaucratic leaders in Azerbaijan and smash the Popular Front! Defence of Armenians doesn't come into it.

It is therefore wrong to give any concession to the notion that the presence of the troops is in any way progressive of justified. On the contrary, it serves to exacerbate the tensions that could lead to further inter-ethnic conflict. The editorial is right to argue that a precondition for the resolution of such conflicts is the establishment of genuine national-democratic rights in the various republics. But this means that socialists should make absolutely no concessions to the type of brutal repression which is the legacy of the Stalinist policy on the national question.

Patrick Baker David Shepherd
Hackney

History repeating itself?

Despite being six feet under, that old renegade Gerry Healy laughed to himself when he read SOCIALIST OUTLOOK no.21. But it wasn't because Alan Thornett failed to nail down the coffin lid in his obituary.

And Healy didn't chuckle at Ernest Mandel's speech: Pablo was right, except that he was 37 years ahead of his time in announcing the historic defeat of Stalinism.

No, Healy found the real ghost of Pablo in the editorial: 'Azerbaijan: End the military occupation'. Good enough title but you can't have your cake and eat it! Since when have the armed forces of the Soviet state played a progressive role in relation to the national question?

You call for an end to the military occupation 'while maintaining sufficiewnt state forces to prevent further pogroms'. You consider this minimum presence justified because 'The Armenians ... called on Moscow to intervene': but didn't this also happen in Afghanistan?

You fail to understand that Moscow *created* the situation which then 'demanded' their intervention. The question is not: is this an isolated mistake by Gorbachev? but 'should the masses of Transcaucasia determine their own future?' We must answer this by demanding:

NO SOVIET TROOPS IN AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA WHATSOEVER!

comradely,

Roy Wall London NW2

We welcome letters on any subject: but please keep them brief! Letters over 400 words will be cut. Send to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU