

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

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Inside this
forty page issue:
**USSR ● GDR ●
Poland ●
Czechoslovakia**



**No bargains
in market for
East German
workers**



Socialist Outlook

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No bargains for workers in East German market

Amid fanfares from the capitalist media, East Germany fell under the spell of the Deutschmark on July 1. Border restrictions have been scrapped, and Germany is now a single market with one currency and prices set at West German levels.

It is claimed that a typical 'basket' of East German shopping will now be marginally cheaper: but the substantial increases in food prices are likely to outweigh any advantages from relatively cheap consumer goods.

West German bankers, who had printed an extra 25 billion marks for the great day expressed surprise at how little of their available cash East Germans withdrew from their new savings accounts: but the workers' conservatism is grounded in fear for the future. Warning strikes on July 1 by thousands of metal and engineering industry workers demanding a DM400 a month pay increase, a shorter 40-hour week and a 13 month bonus payment underlined the plight of tens of thousands in the months to come, as subsidies are stripped from food, housing and transport. Hundreds of thousands more know they face unemployment as hopelessly uncompetitive East German goods were swept unceremoniously from the shelves of shops, to be replaced with goods from the West.

The country may be united and the market may be free, but the two parts of Germany do not start off as equals. This is the chief attraction of the reunification project as far as West German capital is concerned: they see the East as a large pool of cheap, well-educated and exploitable labour. West German Economics Minister Helmut Haussmann left East Germans no room for doubt what lies in store for them when he appealed to them to drop any idea of reducing the working week, insisting:

"It is essential for investment that over the next three to five years low wages and longer working hours prevail in East Germany".

Haussmann also warned that monetary union will expose the East's "hidden unemployment": indeed the debate seems largely over whether this will quickly reach 2 million in a country of 13 million people, or will be held nearer to one million.

This is not what the workers of East Germany wanted when they first took up the fight to oust the corrupt stalinist regime of Erich Honecker. Nor is it what many thought they were voting for when they plumped for the Christian Democrats in the general election, giving a landslide victory to the party that promised the swiftest reunification, and thus the earliest access to the consumer goods available in the West, and the promise of guaranteed democratic rights. More and more will begin to

realise in painful fashion how false were the illusions that had been fostered by a combination of western propaganda (reinforced by the huge imperialist investment in the 'showcase' of West Berlin), coupled with the chronic frustrations of life under grotesque bureaucratic mismanagement and repression.

The agonies of the jarring re-entry of East Germany into the capitalist market are the bitter effects of 40 years of monolithic stalinist rule. In 1936, Leon Trotsky, analysing the situation in the USSR, pointed to the irony that as a result of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Bolshevik party under Stalin, 19 years after the October Revolution:

"If ... a bourgeois party were to overthrow the ruling Soviet caste, it would find no small number of ready servants among the present bureaucrats, administrators, technicians, directors, party secretaries and privileged upper circles in general. A purgation of the state apparatus would, of course, be necessary ... But a bourgeois restoration would probably have to clean out fewer people than a revolutionary party."

(Leon Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed*)

Now a similar conclusion is inescapable in the case of East Germany - where there never was a proletarian revolution, and where the expropriation of capital was carried through on workers' behalf by an already bureaucratized stalinist party under the protection (and direction) of the Red Army.

Decades of official 'marxism' have succeeded in submerging much of the strong socialist tradition of the working class of East Germany, and rallying many workers - at least during the election - behind the flags of West German capital. But as the consequences of monetary union and capitalist restoration begin to make themselves felt, there is every reason for confidence that



the best socialist traditions can be revived.

The tasks of marxists in this context centre on developing the independent strength and mass organisations of the working class, building an organised revolutionary party that will fight to ensure a complete break from the corrupting ideology of stalinism and the reformist pipedreams of social democracy. The battles to come will centre on defence of social welfare provisions, on defending and improving living standards, defending abortion rights, fighting against the alignment of the new Germany with the imperialist NATO alliance, and reducing the working week.

Demands from the marxist programme will take on a new relevance:

- the fight to defend living standards through wage increases linked to a sliding scale of wages to keep pace with the soaring cost of living;

- the fight against unemployment, raising the demand for the work available in the East to be divided between the whole workforce through a sliding scale of hours, reducing the working week without loss of pay;

- the fight for workers' control and the opening of the books of the nationalised enterprises and the capitalist firms in West Germany as part of the fight against privatisation.

Each of these demands offers a road of struggle and helps expose the incompatibility of workers' aspirations with the capitalist market, leading them to grasp the need for a planned, socialist economy. They can also help forge links with the West German workers' movement.

Just over the border in Poland, East German workers can see a glimpse of their immediate future, as living standards are slashed back and unemployment climbs relentlessly amid the ruins of bankrupt industries. Polish rail workers have been the first to fight back: others could soon follow.

In the experiences and struggles of the East European working class is the raw material of a new wave of revolutionary struggles to come: to find a way to fashion this into revolutionary leadership and programme is the task of marxists not only in Germany but internationally.

Launch of a new witch hunt

THATCHER'S GOVERNMENT enters its fourth year of office troubled by a host of scandals (Rover, nuclear power), failures (the crime wave, inflation), cock-ups (Poll Tax, food scares) and impending catastrophe (the NHS Act): the one problem they don't have is a serious opposition.

Neil Kinnock, already Britain's longest-serving leader of the opposition, seems determined to keep this accolade for all time. As a result his shadow cabinet have made the whole of 1990 a "silly season", in which their main objectives seem to be to squander every opportunity to confront, attack and expose the Tories, and compile a manifesto that galvanises the least possible enthusiasm, thus reducing their own lead in the opinion polls.

In this at least they are succeeding. Opinion poll figures in *The Guardian* as we go to press show the Labour lead almost halved (from 24 percent to 14 percent) since March. Of course this is equivalent to a 110 seat majority, showing a real change in the political climate: but the trajectory is downwards. Meanwhile further moves are afoot to whittle it down, as the NEC – ably abetted by Frank Field, the deselected MP for Birkenhead – lines up a new witch hunt to funnel juicy headlines into the gutter press.

Labour leaders may tread softly, softly when tactfully pleading that they really don't intend to tax the rich; and they may struggle might and main to keep their formulae for an alternative to Poll Tax out of the public eye: but they show no such reserve when it comes to putting the boot into the left and expelling socialists.

In the aftermath of the NEC's attacks on the Anti Poll Tax Federation as simply a 'Militant front', Frank Field's largely baseless dossier on his deselection has become the platform for a renewed NEC offensive against *Militant*. Now there are moves to proscribe *Socialist Organiser* – presumably for fear that *SO* supporter Lol Duffy might go one better than his near miss against the trend in 1987, and actually win Wallasey for Labour against sitting Tory Linda Chalker. The right wing and soft left formed a homogenous 28-vote block on the NEC to steamroller through these new steps towards a witch-hunt.

Unfortunately now we find softer sections of the left, using *Tribune* newspaper and Ken Livingstone as the standard-bearer, mounting their own new offensive against the hard left – notably in denouncing the new Labour Party Socialists campaign launched by the Socialist Movement, along with *Labour Briefing* and also this journal.

We are told that Kinnock is not the main enemy; we should unite against the Tories. Yet whenever class struggle forces have united against the Tories – whether it be behind the miners' strike or currently in the fight against the Poll Tax, they are denounced and attacked by Kinnock, and opposed by his political allies in the trade union bureaucracy!

Nor is it only the revolutionary left who are attacked: even Labour councillors who are implementing the Poll Tax, but who want to campaign to expose how high Poll Tax bills will be next year are being told by David Blunkett and Walworth Road that they should keep quiet – and begin making cuts *now* so that they avoid any danger of Poll Tax capping next year!

Livingstone's call for 'unity' is linked to an almost impossibly rosy view of Labour's latest policy pronouncements, and completely ignores the fact that the Kinnock right wing is busily trying to expel or neutralise any left wing voice whatever.

If the summer of 1990 is not to be a wasted "silly season", the main focus has to be not on a quixotic hunt for Labour Party unity, but on building the kind of campaigns – against Poll Tax, against the new NHS Act and its implications, on housing, education and a host of other issues where the Tories are vulnerable and a fighting lead from the labour movement could help build the struggle.

In this situation, those who do not side with the class struggle forces can wind up siding willy nilly with Kinnock and the new realists, making themselves into an obstacle that must be confronted before battle can commence with the main enemy.

Unity is a wonderful thing: but who you unite with is decisive. Unity in inaction is no use to the working class.

Clarke's Bill heads for fiasco

Whistling 'One wheel on my wagon', and with his eyes and ears firmly covered to keep out the obvious signs of opposition on all sides, Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke is steering his NHS 'reform' bandwagon towards disaster.

As he prepares to follow up the Royal Assent to his NHS and Community Care Bill by unveiling the first batch of hospitals to 'opt out' as self-contained businesses, many of the hospitals on his shortlist are already deep in financial crisis, while NHS managers at every level are confused, divided and demoralised.

Eighteen months of flashy satellite teleconferences, secret briefings at top hotels, indoctrination and arm-twisting by ministers and civil servants desperate to 'sell' the new reforms have failed to get over one basic obstacle: even the most bone-headed managers are becoming

convinced that the new 'internal market' system will not work.

There are good reasons for these managers to be pessimistic:

- The only simulation exercise that has tested out the probable results of the 'internal market', organised by pro-White Paper managers in East Anglia, produced chaos within the first year, worsening as time went on;

- A key element in this 'test-bed' failure was the shortfall in community care services, obstructing the discharge of patients from hospital: the Bill's plans for community care are a complete shambles, with many local authorities unprepared and under-resourced for their new responsibilities from next April.



Clarke's desperate 'mallshot' to every home arises from huge opposition to the Act

- The pricing and billing system for accident and emergency and other cases where patients are treated outside their 'own' district is a bureaucratic nightmare;

- The Commons Public Accounts Committee has been told that the computer systems to function the 'internal market' will not be fully on stream for five years - but the Act will take effect from next April;

- The computer software for budget-holding GPs does not yet exist - and will prove exorbitantly expensive because so few GPs will want to buy it.

- More managers are recognising that London's relatively expensive teaching hospitals - all of which lose at least a third of their funding under the Bill - are likely to prove 'losers' in the internal market, as other health authorities send patients to cheaper alternative hospitals.

- The methods of financing and

payment are likely to leave some hospitals desperately short of cash within months of starting the new system;

- Top NHS managers are getting cold feet, doubting the abilities of their own subordinates, and fearful that the whole scheme could collapse into outright fiasco. Chief executive Duncan Nichol has begun calling not for radical change but a "steady state" after April, reportedly worried that inadequate management skills mean the Bill will be implemented "on a wing and a prayer".

- Nichol's deputy, Peter Griffiths, formerly a gung-ho crusader for the White Paper, now warns health management: "Don't talk about business plans. Don't talk about marketing. Don't talk about market share and segmentation. Don't talk in the kind of commercial language that switches off every member of staff". Few NHS managers have talked of much else in the last 18 months.

- Damaging defections have begun. From the deck of Guy's Hospital, the flagship of opting out, the General Manager of Lewisham and North Southwark DHA, Dr Elaine Murphy, a one-time White Paper enthusiast, resigned last month in demoralisation, complaining to *The Guardian* that: "At a time when waiting lists are growing ... and services are pretty stretched

Paperchase

One reason general managers are becoming more anxious over opting out and the internal market is the publication of a new Department of Health letter spelling out the billing and settlement procedures.

'Buyers' will require not only a bill to be dispatched within a month of the treatment: in the case of accident and emergency patients, they will require an estimate of the costs of treatment within a week of admission, while in every case they will also require what is quaintly termed a "Goods received Note" giving additional information and certifying that treatment was given.

Neither document alone will produce payment. But there is still no fixed procedure for DHAs to check on what treatment is actually given to a particular patient at a distant hospital.

If the 'buyer' authority does not pay up, the worst that can happen to them is that after a two week delay the 'provider' unit can appeal to the 'buyer's' regional health authority and apply for the transfer of an equivalent portion of the 'buyer's' cash limit.

If readers can think of anything more complex or less businesslike, perhaps they could let us know.

and not of a high quality in inner London, we are spending all our time as general managers engaged in implementing the White Paper, in the organisation of contracts and in shifting stuff around". There are rumours that other top general managers in London are considering resignation.

● Fourteen of the front-line contenders for opting out have already withdrawn their bids – including Kings College Hospital in Camberwell and Northwick Park Hospital in Harrow – leaving just 71 on Clarke's list. Others – among them St Thomas's Hospital in West Lambeth – are in such dire financial straits that they may be ruled out. Others, like St Helier Hospital in Merton and Sutton, are discovering they may not be viable and possibly contemplating withdrawal.

● Management are more acutely aware than Clarke of the immense opposition to the opt-out proposals. The BMA has just published results from ballots of consultants showing an overall 60% majority against opting out, and clear 'no' votes in 21 out of 28 opting-out hospitals.

Every ballot of staff – whether 'official' or 'unofficial' – has shown upwards of 75% of health workers against the plans: every opinion poll shows upwards of 70% of the public opposed. No wonder Clarke has had to insist that ballots must not be included in the so-called 'consultation' process, and that Community Health Councils will be denied any right to consultation.

The fact is that the government has spent vast amounts of time, energy and taxpayers' money trying to promote its desperately unpopular measures, and has failed to persuade many managers that it will work, or that they will not take the rap if it fails.

For campaigners and healthworkers fighting against hospitals opting out and other aspects of the Bill, the division and demoralisation of management gives new hope. A renewed offensive now to underline the scale of opposition to the changes could yet tip the balance, and force a retreat.

Step up the fight: build the Hands Off campaigns in each district! It's up to us to defend our NHS!



Health workers in the firing line

The NHS & Community Care Act has now completed its progress through Parliament: it amounts to a root and branch onslaught on the NHS and the health unions that will:

- cut the size of district health authorities and hand half the remaining seats to management;
- encourage major hospitals and units to 'opt out' of local health authority control to become self-contained businesses as 'Self Governing Trusts';
- break up existing arrangements for funding and planning services, replacing them with a complex, untested 'internal market' mechanism that will compel hospitals to compete against each other for patients (and thus for funding), with the 'losers' possibly facing closures;
- smash up national bargaining arrangements with the unions;
- generate a new round of competitive tendering and privatisation of services;
- force management into new moves to impose 'flexibility' of labour and pay scales;
- undermine union recognition and existing agreements on staffing levels and conditions;
- threaten the viability of whole departments and units which are deemed less

'profitable';

- accelerate the closure of long-stay NHS beds for the elderly and the privatisation of community care services under the management of local authorities;
- threaten the jobs of thousands of health workers in long-stay psychiatric hospitals;
- endanger the jobs of thousands more NHS employees in the community sector.

Every branch of every health union will be affected, and needs to be made aware of these sweeping, potentially devastating changes – and other plans by management to undermine or sweep away existing Whitley Council agreements and procedures – if they are to prepare to defend vital services and jobs as well as the hard-won pay and conditions of their members.

Yet there has been little campaigning against it by the labour movement. The early resistance was left up to the 'professionals' of the BMA and the Royal Colleges, whose campaigns faded away as the White Paper became the Bill.

Many NHS union activists and members have yet to discover how great is the threat to services and to their jobs, pay and conditions. Others, building local campaigns on the ground opposing the 'opting out' of local hospitals

or other aspects of the Bill have found themselves battling in isolation against a tide of ignorance.

There is little time left: this autumn, after a brief charade of 'consultation', Kenneth Clarke will announce his initial list of hospitals that will opt out under the new legislation: and District Health Authorities will soon be purged of local authority nominees and trade union reps, and slimmed down to 11-person "business-style" bodies on which half the seats are allocated to management. The full force of the Act will take effect next April.

This is not all: management documents reviewing Whitley Council conditions for NHS staff already make clear that their objective is also to tear up a whole series of agreements, conditions and procedures in the Directly Managed Units.

It's no use health workers in NALGO, NUPE and COHSE waiting for the possibility of a mega-merger in 1993 to solve these problems: by then irreparable damage could have been done. The fightback must begin now!

What must be done?

The new situation will force more staff than ever to think about defending their jobs, pay and conditions – which for decades have been assumed to be more or less 'safe'. The only way to do this is for them to join a trade union and play an active role within it.

Every health union branch should be energetically stressing this point to all sections of staff,

stocking upon recruitment literature, looking for new additional shop stewards and reps, holding more regular meetings, and ensuring that every opportunity is taken to expand and strengthen their organisation.

This is the best possible means of forestalling any management attempts to withhold or limit recognition: the stronger the union base, the less likely is a swift management onslaught or any victimisation of any section that might take action.

As we have seen, every section of staff is affected and in some way threatened by the proposals and reforms that are coming in the wake of the Bill. Nobody is safe.

While some managements, especially in the opted-out hospitals, will try to use differential pay rises and other techniques to divide one section of staff from another, there is a better than ever opportunity for the unions to build a fighting unity in defence of all their members. This should especially be the case in the present period of merger talks between NALGO, NUPE and COHSE: what better way to test out the level of cooperation and agreement - and prove the case for merger to the membership - than in a common fight against the employer and the government's proposals?

At the same time the switch to the 'internal market', with its 'business-style' of funding through contracts and its self-contained businesses (the opted-out hospitals), gives the health unions for the first time the weapon their colleagues in the private sector have always been able to use: an economic lever against management.

Union action can - if management refuse to back down - potentially jeopardise 'contracts', and even threaten the profitability of a Self Governing Trust.

The greater complexity and



Nurses face the loss of their pay review body

bureaucracy introduced to the NHS by the Bill also offers staff more opportunities to disrupt management without necessarily hitting patients at all. The new information systems and the entire mechanism for costing, pricing and billing of treatment for patients from other districts, all require considerable cooperation from many sections of staff. They are severely vulnerable to even the most irregular 'guerrilla'-style action by one section or another refusing to carry out additional duties and working to pre-NHS Bill patterns. Nursing staff in particular have scope to cause internal havoc while still doing their jobs - if they simply insist on treating patients in their care rather than filling in additional forms or keying information into computers to assist the pricing and billing system.

Another advantage for the unions is that many NHS managers are themselves far from convinced or happy with



Clark: given an easy ride by unions

the proposals in the Bill. Of course there are some head-bangers who favour the whole government package; but some general managers have already resigned in demoralisation; others are reputedly discussing doing so, while others are hanging on and just hoping for the best.

It's by no means too late to prepare the fightback. All kinds of things can usefully be done, including:

- meetings of union members to explain the Bill and its implications (wherever possible joint meetings involving as many unions as possible in the unit or

district);

- public meetings to sound the alarm for patients, relatives and other trade unions in the area - especially where the local hospital is likely to 'opt out';

- producing or purchasing leaflets and other material against the Bill, and seeking to involve local Trades Councils, Labour Parties, pensioners' groups, women's and community organisations in campaigning.

- organising ballots of staff, and other means of demonstrating community opposition;

It is still not too late to Kill the Bill - before it kills our NHS!

There is already a campaign that has developed material analysing and explaining the White Paper and the Bill from the standpoint of the health unions and the users of the service.

The Hands Off Our NHS campaign, launched early in 1989, has just published a new detailed 28-page pamphlet for health union activists, *Lumbered with the Bill*, price £1.80 per single copy (inc p&p). *Cheques with order only*, made out to Hands Off Our NHS, and sent to 446, Uxbridge Rd, London W12 0NS (081-749-2525)

Tories caught up in 'law and order' machine

A growing crisis is emerging as public and ruling class confidence in the traditional institutions of bourgeois justice collapses in Britain. PIERS MOSTYN examines the implications of this for socialists.

'Law and Order' has been a Tory priority since 1979; but criminal justice institutions are becoming as much the 'problem' as the society they are supposed to be controlling.

A critique of this set-up as coercive, partisan and corrupt – once confined to the far left, black and Irish victims of injustice or trade unionists – has now become common currency. How deep does this crisis run? What has caused it? With a General Election not far off, are any solutions on offer from the main parties?

The law and order process, in all its component parts, is being swept by scandals, crises of public confidence, crises of morale and angst-ridden debate. At the centre of this are the police (examined in greater detail in *Socialist Outlook* no 24 by Jane Wells).

Legal actions against the police have soared in numbers, and the exposure of malpractice, frame-ups, racism and thuggery has become routine. Police morale is said to be low. The force is disoriented by finding itself the subject of criticism yet unsure of turning to its political friends for help. Once the darlings of the Tory administration, – pampered by booming salaries and recruitment – police officers are now being hit by the poll tax, budgetary restrictions and threats to their pay guarantees. Home Secretary Waddington was greeted by silence at the Police Federation's annual conference.

Relations between the police and the Police Complaints Authority (PCA), have become strained. The PCA has for long been defended by the Tories and the police against widespread calls for an independent investigating authority wholly outside the force. Public confidence that the police can be trusted to investigate themselves is minimal. The PCA is now attempting the impossible manoeuvre of distancing itself from the police whilst remaining a fully-fledged part of it.

The Crown Prosecution Service, established in the mid-1980s to take over from

the police the task of prosecuting defendants, has been wracked by its own crisis. Underfunded and under-staffed, its inefficiency has further undermined confidence in the legal procedures that lead to convictions. Inadequate preparation of cases frequently leads to long delays and numerous court appearances before cases get heard, sometimes resulting in charges being dismissed. This lack of confidence can only be exacerbated by the apparent implication of prosecution lawyers in recently exposed wrongful convictions.

With the discrediting of the forensic scientific establishment that secured the Maguire

convictions, even this pillar of the criminal justice procedure cannot now escape scrutiny and criticism.

The courts have become embroiled in a trauma of their own, particularly since the release of the Guildford Four. Traditionally they have been defended as independent and fair bastions of British democracy. But the exposure of one miscarriage of justice after another – each of them only recognised by the courts in retrospect, very late in the day and under pressure –

has underlined how comprehensive is the crisis of the criminal justice system.

This entire system, reinforced in the court room by procedural rules and the judges, is geared towards the acceptance of police evidence as inherently more reliable than evidence from other sources. The Court of Appeal has shown itself incapable of rooting out even the most obvious miscarriages of justice that result. The argument that to question this, investigate malpractice, or even for judges to be accountable, is to 'undermine the whole system' has been exposed as a cover



John Harris

Giving 'law and order' a bad name



John Harris

Outside the law? Workers picket Jacob's Biscuits, Aintree



Andrew Ward/Report

Black communities suffer police harassment, and complain of inaction against racist violence

for the community of interest between the courts and other law and order institutions.

But a price is now being paid. Confidence in the judiciary has dropped. The Lord Chief Justice has twice recently had to use major public speeches to defend the judiciary and rally morale.

There is disarray over the direction of sentencing policy. The Tories' traditional preference for deterrence and punishment as objectives are having to be reconciled with an urgent need to stem the crisis of overcrowding in the prisons. This particular square peg won't easily be fitted into a round hole.

There are proposals for a major overhaul of the probation service – shifting probation officers further towards enforcing punishment in the community. The seemingly progressive measure of 'electronic tagging' as a way of keeping offenders out of prison has been widely criticised by civil libertarians.

That the prison service is in crisis hardly needs stating. Years of law and order policies based on quasi-Victorian concepts of punishment have left Britain with the highest prison population per capita in Europe. Over-crowding is such that, quite apart from the dense packing of inmates in the ordinary prisons, up to one thousand are being kept in unsanitary, confined and inhuman conditions in police cells.

Although media attention is now focussed on the Woolf Inquiry, set up in the aftermath of the riots at Strangeways and other prisons – the explosive concoction of elements that brought about those riots is continuously provoking smaller scale problems. The combination of this situation with the economic

squeeze has had similar effects on prison officers as the police, though the Prison Officers Association have no qualms about using industrial action as a means of resolving it.

This scenario has developed against the background of a decade of crime and inner-city riots. Law and order policies to secure property, personal safety and 'public order' have been main planks of Tory policy. Yet the crime rate is now at its worst since the Second World War. In recent years it has been rising at 4 per cent a year, with signs this year of a far greater increase (crime reported in the South East in the first quarter of 1990 is up 20 per cent).

The government has exacerbated this by effectively criminalising forms of behaviour engaged in by masses of people – going to

“The problems go deeper than Tory policy. That just acted as a catalyst. The archaic, class-based, racist character of these institutions are rooted in their history. The public debate about how to resolve the situation has therefore been difficult for the establishment.”

parties, attending football matches, hanging around on the street.

Socialists needn't look far to find the causes of this situation and the reasons for its occurrence now. The combination of recession and an austerity offensive that has slashed jobs and services, with the centralisation and massive strengthening of law enforcement institutions speaks for itself. The legitimacy of these institutions rested on a social consensus that

lacks credibility.

The idea that corruption in the police, a crisis of confidence in the courts and mass prison riots can be addressed as discrete issues without an overall strategy won't sell for long. A broader debate is inevitable. Indeed it has begun.

For the Tories to admit failure and the need for a fundamental policy alteration in this area is unthinkable. But their policy of simply announcing 'full steam ahead' (whilst engaging in behind the scenes U-turns, as on the economy) won't boost morale or satisfy the widespread calls for change.

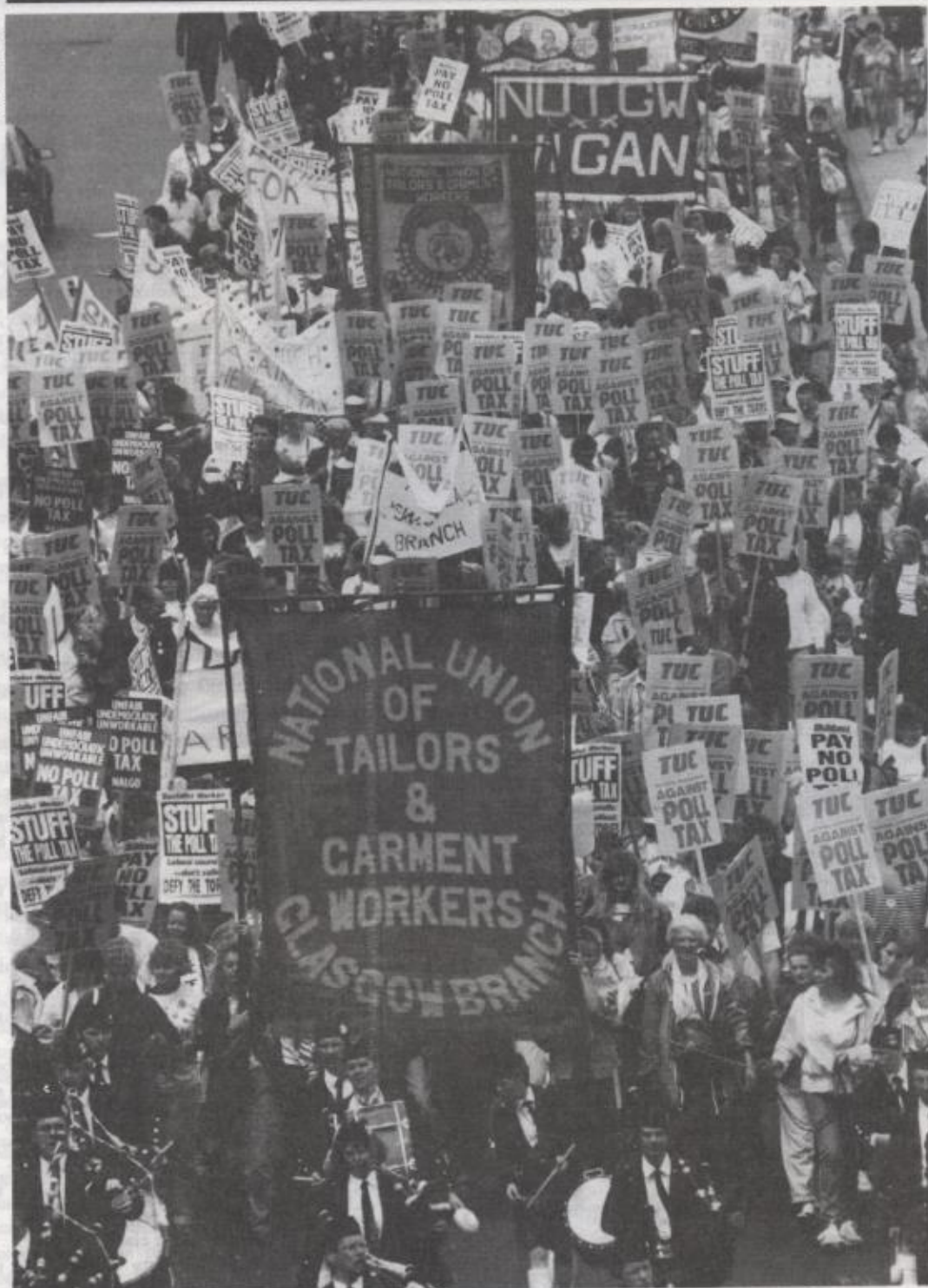
Another option is to strengthen the coercive state to resolve by force problems that are otherwise insoluble without mass support. This option has waited in the wings through the 1980s – to briefly emerge at Gibraltar and during the Stalker affair. Its main effect has been to divide the ruling class.

With the party so rooted in institutions under attack, the Tory focus is therefore on containment and damage limitation. A caravan of slow moving commissions of enquiry has been established to give an impression of movement.

Labour is now trying to outflank the government on the issue, hoping to cement its image as a stable and trustworthy party of government. Unlike Home Secretary Waddington, Roy Hattersley was given a warm reception by the Police Federation conference – to whom he pledged support for all police demands on the government. So far this is restricted to financial issues. But where will such attitudes lead?

Offering very little more than a bipartisan

John Hattersley



Tories have helped bring the law into disrepute with their Poll Tax; but the TUC is helping to uphold it

approach, the Labour Party wants to sell itself on law and order ideology whilst dissociating itself from the aura of sleaze, secrecy and brutishness. Taking advantage of the move towards consumer-style marketing by police forces such as the Met, Labour is trying to develop a trendy image on the issue

Gone are the days when local Labour authorities boycotted police 'consultative' committees, preferring to campaign for accountability and align themselves with those at the receiving end of the strong state. New realism and witch hunting have seen to that.

Labour is now taking the lead in calling for

a new 'community' approach centred on a 'partnership' between the police and local authorities - with local business and voluntary organisations roped in to shore up the coalition. Of course councils are powerless and penniless, and police accountability is disappearing even further over the horizon (given inevitable moves towards centralising the police on a national basis). The approach will therefore be little more than a cosmetic exercise to rebuild public confidence in the system.

So far Labour has had precious little to say on the prison crisis or the loss of confidence in the judiciary. Although Hattersley has finally

brought himself to express concern over the Birmingham Six - the Guildford Four, Winchester Three and Maguire Seven affairs elicited few calls for reform. A Labour committee established to look at legal reforms by an incoming government rejected a call for the halting of convictions based on uncorroborated confessions. And the party hasn't been prominent in defending jury trials or the right to silence.

Thus the next election, occurring in the wake of this crisis of the criminal justice establishment, will feature the two main parties doing their best to avoid saying anything original about it. This vacuum helps to explain the re-emergence of the debate on a bill of rights and the relaunch of Charter 88. Roy Hattersley was accordingly moved to present his own package of constitutional reforms, and Labour has reluctantly jumped on the bandwagon in calling for the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into British law.

The Bill of Rights debate is broader than the scope of this article. Suffice to note that this liberal (small 'l') lobby has so far shown itself totally disinclined to deal with the real problems outlined above. It has been conspicuously absent from campaigns by black and Irish prisoners, and issues of trade union rights; nor has it used their cases to call for significant changes. The police and the courts barely feature on its agenda.

But in the absence of any alternative strategy, this lobby will inevitably be seen as a flagbearer for civil liberties and force the pace on the question just as Paddy Ashdown has on Hong Kong. Given its shortcomings in practice this will leave the central issues untouched, enabling the state to stick on the elastoplast and slowly reform itself out of the glare of public debate.

Commentators in the mass media have been forced to recognise the depth of the problem. But none have been prepared to call for the radical transformation of the whole system that is required. Marxists have historically had much to say on this, because of their understanding of the relationship between class and state.

A socialist intervention into this crisis, even a debate, is thus long overdue. Hopefully this will be initiated with the proposed Socialist Movement-sponsored Democratic Rights Convention early next year. The work needs to start now.

Gorbachev's crisis deepens

By Rick Simon

The Soviet economic and political system is in the grip of a series of interlocking and mutually reinforcing crises. Together they add up to a profound systemic crisis from which there appear to be few crumbs of comfort for Gorbachev.

The economy is increasingly failing to deliver essential goods; centres of power are proliferating; the nationalities question threatens the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself; splits face the CPSU at its forthcoming Congress and Soviet workers are beginning to press their demands for more goods and wage rises that can keep pace with growing inflation.

The economic crisis

The Soviet economic crisis is characterised by chronic underproduction, particularly of basic consumer goods, rather than the overproduction typical of capitalist economic crises. According to CIA estimates, only 50 out of 1200 basic consumer goods are readily available in the shops and this despite an increase of 6.4 per cent in consumer goods production in the first quarter of 1990. Overall production in the same period registered a fall of 1.2 per cent. Soviet indebtedness is also on the increase - up by 10 billion roubles in 1989 to 51 billion, and the budget deficit has increased from 18 billion roubles in 1986 to 92 billion in 1989.

Moreover, the collapse of the bureaucratic East European regimes is a good news/bad news story for the Soviet Union. The good news is that it will relieve an economic burden on the Soviet economy more swiftly into a direct relationship with the capitalist West. The prospect of the latter appears to have accelerated the search for free market solutions to Soviet economic problems.

Previously, the East European states of Comecon acted both as a buffer for the Soviet economy against the world capitalist economy and as a proving-ground for a variety of experiments in modifying the operation of bureaucratic planning. Thus, direct links were primarily established between Soviet enterprises and their Comecon counterparts rather than directly with Western firms.

Debates as to whether the Soviet reform is more akin to the moderate East German or to the more radical Hungarian model appear increasingly irrelevant, however, as the East European states embrace free-market economics and seek ties with the West with ever greater gusto. Soviet trade with Comecon countries declined in the first quarter of 1990.

The seeming inability of the Soviet government to reverse the trend of economic decline, despite adopting a package of emergency measures promoted by Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov at the end of 1989, has led to a palpable shift in the terms of the debate over economic reform. The days of 'perestroika', the restructuring of the economy to accelerate economic growth by giving greater independence to enterprises within the framework of the bureaucratic planned economy, are at an end. Talk is now not so much about 'restructuring' as of 'dismantling' the whole edifice of the nationalised economy.

Prices

Even just a year ago the key to economic reform was seen to be the pricing system. Once prices were freed from the shackles of central control, a market could be established in means of production and enterprises would be free to enter into contractual relations with each other, with Western firms and with the state to produce goods on a supply-and-demand basis.

It is no longer price reform but the development of competition in the Soviet economy and the transformation of property rights which are seen to be the key to economic reform by more radical economists. Concretely, this means denationalisation of state enterprises. Price reform is only a corollary of this process.

The star of formerly prominent reform economists, such as Abel Aganbegyan, the architect of the first phase of perestroika, is on the wane. Much more forthright liberal economists, such as Nikolai Petrakov, now have the ear of President Gorbachev.

In an interview in *Moscow News*, Petrakov argued that a committee should be established to dispose of state property, insisting that:

"Without opening out the economy, no effective reform can be carried out. When people can buy shares, the endless problems which plague joint ventures will be solved instantly. We have to overcome our dogmas: why can't there be enterprises which are wholly owned by foreign companies?"

The appearance of McDonalds in Red



Square is just a sideshow compared to the prospect of wholesale privatisation. But, as the Polish experience has demonstrated, it is one thing to proclaim a market reform, and quite another to carry it out. Nevertheless, the terms of the debate now centres on how such a reform can be implemented rather than over the principle of introducing it.

The price reforms mooted in Ryzhkov's economic programme are opposed by the radical intelligentsia because they simply increase administratively determined prices without changing in any way the basis on which they are set. It is a measure of the opposition such proposals, called by some economists 'shock therapy without the therapy', have encountered from all sectors of Soviet society that their implementation has once again been postponed until the autumn.

Plans are now also being drawn up to turn selected state enterprises into joint-stock companies and to create a stock market. According to Petrakov, "by the end of 1990, it will be possible to transfer 2,200 large enterprises - 70 percent of the fixed assets in industry - to a joint stock basis." There will also be more efforts to press ahead with co-operatives and small businesses.

Such ambitious plans for a market economy assume both the support of the people of the Soviet Union and aid from the West. There is little to suggest that either will be forthcoming. There was a marked liberalisation of Soviet foreign trade in 1989, but this has only led to a hard currency squeeze and widespread defaulting on debt repayments.

Western governments and firms want evidence of the real operation of a market economy. In a hard-nosed editorial, the *Economist* argued:

"The fastest way to tutor East Europeans in the ways of free market is to make them compete against Mexicans and Malaysians for the hard-earned dollars, yen, and D-marks of western savers". (June 16, p 19.)

The crisis of the Soviet State

The loosening of political and economic ties is creating centrifugal tendencies within the Soviet Union. The recasting of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is on the agenda for the first time since its foundation in 1922.

Virtually all of the major Soviet republics now have powerful movements for greater autonomy, if not independence, Uzbekistan and Moldavia being the latest. However, the trouble caused by the Baltic states' unilateral declarations of independence is as nothing compared to the problems that will be created by the Soviet Union's largest and most important republic, the Russian Federation (RSFSR), seeking to develop its own independent relations.

Boris Yeltsin's election as President of the Russian Federation, apart from completing, in Soviet terms, an unheard-of political comeback, creates a massive alternative centre of power to the Soviet state.

Yeltsin's programme for Russia is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has an appeal to the most chauvinistic elements in Russian society (Yeltsin is reported to have met with representatives of the neo-fascist Pamyat organisation when lobbying for the Presidency). On the other, it contains the genuinely progressive demand that the USSR should be based on voluntary relations between constituent republics.

Yeltsin's first action in this regard was to meet with Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis. Russian control of basic energy sources such as oil, coal and gas could easily cut across Moscow's efforts to impose an economic blockade on the Baltic states. This has prompted a renewed search for a compromise solution.

But such a solution to the independence of the Baltic States will only temporarily remove one thorn from the side of the body politic. There are many others to create a festering wound.

The crisis inside the Party

The days of the outwardly monolithic Party have long since departed. Under Brezhnev, the CPSU was a mechanism for the accommodation of the main institutional interests in Soviet society – the military, industrial managers, and so on, and for transmitting the decisions of the Party into the deepest recesses of Soviet society. To this end it required a massive membership: approximately 19 million people – or a tenth of the adult population.

As the crisis deepens, public support for both the CPSU and Gorbachev is declining and the broad spectrum of views within the Party is becoming more apparent. Under considerable pressure, the next Congress of the

Party has been brought forward 6 months to debated the proposed advance to a market economy. This has provoked the appearance of two public factions for the first time since the 1920s.

The first of these, 'Democratic Platform' (DP), is closely associated with the Inter-Regional Group in the Congress of People's Deputies. It has a number of leading individuals in common, including Yeltsin.

DP's programme is broadly social democratic, arguing against the long-term goal of communism and for a multi-party parliamentary system in which the CPSU would cease to play a vanguard role, but it is not a homogeneous tendency. Its membership ranges from extreme marketisers to those who support the Committees of New Socialists associated with Boris Kagarlitsky.

It seems a foregone conclusion that many of DP's supporters will leave the CPSU at the 28th Congress in July. DP claims the support of 40 percent of the Party rank-and-file, but only 2 percent of Congress delegates are DP supporters. A majority at its second conference agreed that, unless radical changes in the CPSU's organisation and functioning were agreed at the Congress, they would leave and form probably more than one new party. According to a recent opinion poll, only two-thirds of Party members said they would remain after the Congress.

A second faction has recently emerged in the shape of the 'Marxist Platform' (MP). MP puts great emphasis on workers' self management and argues that, despite the degenerate and bureaucratic character of the CPSU, there is still a need to regenerate the communist tradition within it.

The battle over the CPSU and the forces which emerge from it are crucial to the development of a socialist alternative in the Soviet Union. The CPSU still plays a pivotal role as the instrument of the bureaucracy's domination of Soviet society and, as the recent experience of the foundation of the Russian Communist Party indicates, the apparatus still retains a firm grip within the CPSU.

The crisis inside the trade unions

Soviet trade unions have traditionally served the function of a 'transmission belt' for instructions from the highest economic organs to the workforce and as instruments of social and cultural policy inside the workplace by providing health and holiday facilities, insurance, housing and so on.

Gorbachev's policies have shifted some of the emphasis away from trade unions as appendages of the state, and verbal emphasis has been placed more on carrying out traditional trade union functions such as defending workers' interests against management. When the crunch has come, however, the attitude of the official unions has been found wanting.

In last year's miners' strike, the official unions were conspicuous by their absence

from the organisation of any action. They were completely by-passed by rank-and-file strike committees which linked up to co-ordinate the strike. The official union leaderships did try to jump on the bandwagon as the breadth and power of the strike became apparent – but this was to derail it and prevent the advancing of political demands.

The failure of the government to honour its promises, embodied in Resolution 608, which brought the strike to an end, has led to the threat of new action. At a congress of the official miners' union in March, the apparatus was so dominant, however, that only 20 percent of delegates were rank-and-file miners. The latter walked out and refused to participate in any of the union's deliberations. The upshot was the calling of a genuinely representative conference which has delayed the founding of an independent union until a second conference in Moscow in August.

That conference also reflected, however, the confusion which reigns among even the most advanced sections of the Soviet working class. A resolution demanding the resignation of the present Ryzhkov government argued that "the main thing... is to form a government which will have enough determination and skill to end state control over the economy and carry out a real transition to a market economy and democracy".

A strike scheduled to go ahead on the anniversary of last year's strike now appears to have been postponed following appeals to the miners' leaders from Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin is anxious to buy time for his programme to be implemented and, at present, he commands sufficient popularity among the workers to be able to do so. Rapid improvements in the supply of consumer goods will be essential if his credibility is not also to suffer.

Since the end of the strike there have been significant developments in the formation of other independent trade unions. SOTSPROF, the first such organisation of any real size and influence has continued to grow, drawing in small emergent groups under its umbrella; and there has been the convening of the Confederation of Labour, of which the miners are again the backbone.

Conclusion

The crisis of Soviet society is reaching explosive proportions, and no section of society appears to have the leadership to impose its solution. It would be folly to predict an outcome to a process with so many variables. As control from the centre disintegrates, however, the possibility of an authoritarian solution, involving sections of the military and security forces, can not be ruled out.

The need for the Soviet working class to develop a programme and organisation to combat the crisis and the threat of reaction is pressing. Socialists in the West should do everything possible to assist this process.

Rebuild the Berlin Wall?

Socialist Action draws wrong lessons from Eastern Europe

By Patrick Baker and Harry Sloan

Few political commentators could honestly claim to have predicted the course of events across Eastern Europe over the last period. The interaction between the mass movements of the working class in the GDR, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR; the manoeuvres of imperialism; combined with the collapse of stalinism have produced a complex picture indeed – from the victory of the National Salvation Front in Romania to the victory of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the survival of significant support for reformed Communist Parties in the GDR and Czechoslovakia, and so on.

However, the magazine *Socialist Action* (1) claims that 'The events in Eastern Europe pose a simple dynamic'(2). From the outset, we are told, the dominant dynamic was nothing other than towards the restoration of capitalism.

Reading the *Socialist Action* version of events certainly gives us a simplistic view: but unfortunately not one that is of much use to socialists in understanding or responding to the developments. We are told, for example as a prelude to *Socialist Action's* analysis that:

'Anything which weakens the working class and strengthens world capitalism, no matter what its immediate appearance, sets

NOTES

1. *Socialist Action* is a quarterly journal which, while claiming revolutionary politics, has played an increasingly rightist role in the labour movement for some years. This began with a refusal to criticise the left of the labour bureaucracy during the 1984-5 British miners' strike. More recently it has been a part of the Labour Left Liaison alliance, frequently leading attacks on forces such as the Socialist Movement, *Labour Briefing* and *Socialist Outlook*. They have particularly opposed the 'twin track' strategy put forward by the Socialist Movement – a strategy of linking forces in the left of the Labour Party to mass movements outside, such as that around the Poll Tax.



Socialist Action 'appalled' as Wall was breached

back internationally the fight for equality, freedom, democracy, human dignity and progress'.

At first sight this reads as a truism; yet the author, Peter Drew (who appears to share many of the views of *Socialist Action* theoretician John Ross) makes no attempt to refine this broad statement to come to grips with the contradictions in East Germany and other East European countries. There a *strengthening* of working class resistance to stalinism served to oust the old regime, and could potentially have represented a major threat to capitalist rule elsewhere in Europe and internationally. However in the absence of serious socialist forces committed to a full programme of political revolution a political vacuum was created that has since been filled in most cases by the emergence of pro-capitalist forces. Is this a simple 'weakening of the working class?' We don't think so.

The confusion is compounded by Drew's insistence upon using the unqualified term 'workers' states' to refer to the stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe (which marxists have customarily referred to as 'deformed' or 'degenerated workers' states to distinguish them from the revolutionary marxist goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat).

To make matters worse, Drew has also used misplaced quotations from Trotsky in 1940, when he was writing of the potential danger of a *military* defeat and reconquest of the Soviet Union at the hands of imperialism in World War 2 – as if this offers a direct analogy to the imperialist economic pressures on Eastern Europe today.

Even more baffling is Drew's assumption that now the old stalinist parties have been ousted from power and the old bureaucratic regimes have been toppled in much of Eastern Europe, capitalism has already been de facto restored, the 'workers' states' destroyed, and 'imperialism' is now already fully in control:

'There is no doubt which view ... has been confirmed by the events leading to the beginning of destruction of workers states in Eastern Europe and by the unfolding of events that has since commenced' (...) 'Within Eastern Europe itself, imperialism is already leading to wide impoverishment. Real wages in Poland have fallen, on the IMF's figures, by 30-40 per cent since the beginning of 1990 under the stabilisation plan. Similar, if less drastic plans will be implemented in the rest of Eastern Europe.'

Drew's account ignores the fact that in



Poland almost identical austerity plans had been drawn up – and unsuccessfully attempted – by the stalinist regime prior to the election of the Solidarnosc government.

More dishonest, and more crucial to his mistaken analysis, is the omission of any reference to the role of the working class of Eastern Europe in ousting the old regimes. Drew clearly discounts any revolutionary potential in these mass mobilisations:

‘The majority of ‘Trotskyist’ organisations totally misunderstood the dynamic in Eastern Europe – believing it to be moving towards political revolution when the dominant dynamic was to the restoration of capitalism.’

From this standpoint of inglorious isolation, Drew rails against any who sided with the workers of Eastern Europe against their stalinist rulers, or who (like Boris Kagarlitsky and others in the USSR itself as well as socialists in Eastern Europe) have recognised the new scope opened up for independent working class action by the glasnost policies of Gorbachev in the USSR:

‘Those engaged in the fight against imperialism were not those praising Gorbachev for his ‘democracy’, and supporting the events in Eastern Europe, but those appalled by the events in Eastern Europe and that Stalinism had so undermined the states of Eastern Europe as to create capitalist restoration.’

From this sour-faced ‘Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells’ line of condemning the biggest and most dynamic working class challenge to stalinism since World War Two, Drew concludes that by supporting the workers – many of whom subsequently voted for right wing parties in the absence of any convincing mass socialist leadership – many Trotskyists backed the wrong side. Without

proof or argument, (and shying away from admitting that marxists should – according to his logic – have supported the old regimes against the mass movements) he asserts that:

‘Another part of Trotskyism supported the capitalist reunification of Germany and the destruction of the East German workers state. This last position has passed over the class line out of the camp of the working class.’

‘Those who support the destruction of workers states and their integration into imperialist powers are outside the revolutionary movement – they support actions dealing historic blows not merely against

“The fact that hundreds of thousands were mobilising on the streets of Leipzig, and that political support for New Forum – who clearly opposed capitalist reunification – was around 40 per cent, warrants not a mention in thousands of angry words in Socialist Action”

the German working class but against the entire international proletariat.

‘Such forces have objectively gone over to imperialism – becoming the left wing of the pro-imperialist workers movement ie left social democrats and social democrat-inclined centrists [sic].’

Though Drew names no names of these supposed Trotskyists who favour the demolition of ‘workers’ states’, one Trotskyist publication is singled out for vilification: *Socialist Outlook* is specifically attacked in a box feature attached to Drew’s article and headed ‘Those who make the bureaucracy the main enemy’.

Condemning our journal for not sharing

Socialist Action’s horror at the uprising of millions of East European workers, and for not siding against the strikes, demonstrations and mass struggles of the proletariat, the box takes a few snippets of our analysis deliberately out of context to finger us as one of the currents that has allegedly ‘gone over to imperialism’. The box concludes:

‘Anyone travelling that road should realise that it has proved completely bankrupt – and should turn round and reverse it.’

In fact *Socialist Outlook* said:

‘While supporting the historic goal of reunification, again as a step towards a socialist Europe, we demand the GDR workers have the right to say ‘no’ to the plans of Western capital.’(4)

We later summed this up in the slogan ‘No to the Kohl Plan – for a United Socialist Germany!’ (5).

The *Socialist Action* analysis stands or falls on its appraisal of events in East Germany. Drew’s comment on the the overthrow of the Berlin Wall is:

‘...many [!] might feel moved by the scenes amid the current downfall of the corrupt and repressive regimes such as those of East Germany, Czechoslovakia. (...) Marxism however has something different to say on the matter’ (7).

The fact that hundreds of thousands were mobilising on the streets of Leipzig, and that political support for New Forum – who clearly opposed capitalist reunification – was around 40 per cent, warrants not a mention in thousands of angry words of ‘analysis’! In the eyes of *Socialist Action*, the mobilisation of the working class on the streets apparently contained no progressive potential.

In their view, from the moment of the ousting of the old Honecker regime, the electoral victory of the CDU 6 months later was inevitable (8); and the collapse of the Berlin Wall signified the victory of imperialism across Eastern Europe.

This is rather easier to say in retrospect than for those commenting at the time. Thus the leading paper of the West German bourgeoisie, *Die Zeit*, said on October 13:

‘What is very noticeable is that there is one demand which is not heard – reunification. These intellectual, religious and political spokespersons of reform don’t want to abolish the GDR, only to change it.... The capitalist FRG is not their model: they are dreaming once again of ‘socialism with a human face’.’

However *Socialist Outlook* warned of the danger: **‘But the question of reunification is indeed posed, and it will be posed all the more if the reforms in the East are not**

implemented'.(9)

But to claim as do *Socialist Action* that no alternative to the CDU victory existed at the time of the mass mobilisations implies that only two strategic possibilities existed in the GDR: the maintenance of one of the most repressive stalinist regimes in post-war Europe, or an imperialist nightmare. Thus the fact that the division of Germany was a humiliating, repressive act imposed on the German working class by imperialism and stalinism is, at best, of little importance to *Socialist Action*: the 'lesser of two evils' becomes apparently the only option – on the basis that stalinist autarchy is preferable to an imperialist rampage.

In this simplistic black and white world, in which the accomplished fact is slavishly worshipped, and workers are allowed to choose only between unacceptable alternatives, support for self-determination is obviously no longer a principle, but a catchphrase to be selectively used when it suits. In fact a similar de facto rejection of the right to self determination played a very important role in the marginalisation of New Forum and other left forces – but it wins them nothing but praise from *Socialist Action!* (10)

It has become increasingly clear that *Socialist Action* has discounted the possibility of the working class as a social force playing any independent role; and ceased to fight in any serious way to encourage or build political currents that reject both stalinism and imperialism. This can be the only rationale for the new line, which is little more than a belated lament for the ousted stalinist regimes, and a tacit call to revert to traditional stalinist repressive tactics of 'Two, three, ... many Berlin Walls'.

For decades revolutionary marxists have recognised that stalinism was a cancer in the labour movement; that it had to be swept away for the workers to be able to develop a political leadership based on democratic self-organisation. It was precisely in this sense that the events in the GDR and Czechoslovakia were to be welcomed – as a necessary precondition for the development of independent working class politics. This remains the case, even if there were no sufficiently developed socialist currents able to take advantage of the openings that were offered, and the outcome was not a direct progression in the direction that socialists desired.



Now leading supporters of *Socialist Action* go one step further, and inform us that 'There are two camps – the camp of the working class and the camp of imperialism.' This is a travesty of marxism. In the 1930s Trotsky explained that things were not quite so simple. He argued that stalinism was a counter-revolutionary political force *within* the 'camp'

compensated for by its destruction of the hold of imperialism in Eastern Europe and the aid given by these states to the struggle against imperialism internationally'

And his own thwarted illusions in Stalinism are clearly demonstrated in a plaintive paragraph that shows him finally reaching the point which most Trotskyists have taken for granted since the late 1930s:

'1989 shows that Stalinism has now [! emphasis added, Ed] degenerated to the point where it is not merely incapable of overturning capitalism, but it cannot even defend the existing countries in which capitalism has been destroyed'.

The logic of *Socialist Action's* simplistic 'two camp' analysis leads to all kinds of bizarre positions. Leading supporters of *Socialist Action* have also claimed that revolutionaries cannot call for increased democracy in Cuba because ... democratic demands are being made by imperialism! Such a line of argument could have been applied to any of the stalinist states over the last four decades (or indeed during the Moscow Trials) – this very argument was used ad nauseam by all the erstwhile apologists of stalinism. It could equally apply to the bloody Beijing bureaucracy today.

The reality is that the transformations we have seen across Eastern Europe have expressed profoundly contradictory elements – and have both positive and negative aspects. Among the gains are the eradication of stalinism and the winning of numerous democratic rights; examples of setbacks include the weakness of independent working class organisation and the outright rejection of what most workers see as 'communism' – both bitter legacies of decades of stalinist repression and bureaucratic mismanagement.

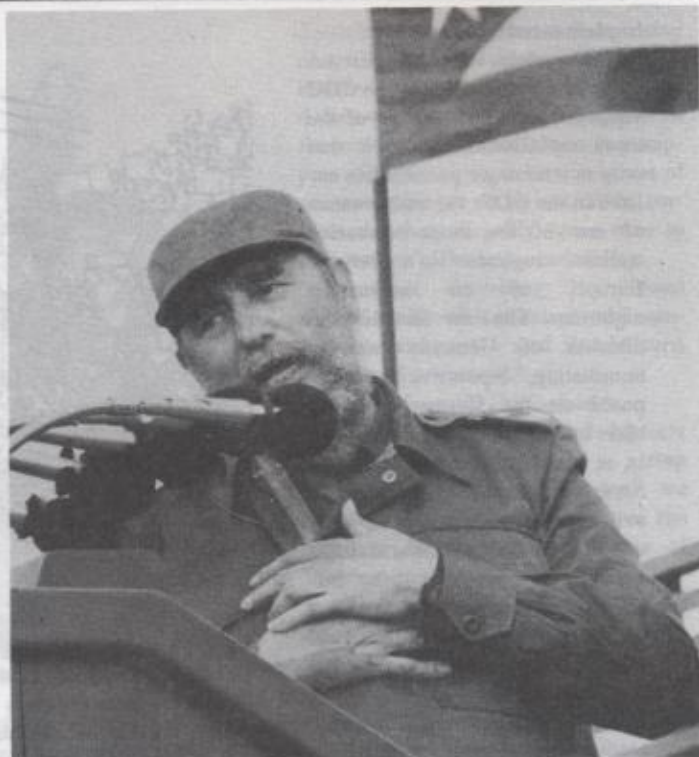
"If ... a bourgeois party were to overthrow the ruling Soviet caste, it would find no small number of ready servants among the present bureaucrats, administrators, technicians, directors, party secretaries and privileged upper circles in general. A purgation of the state apparatus would, of course, be necessary But a bourgeois restoration would probably have to clean out fewer people than a revolutionary party.

**"The chief task of the new power would be to restore private property in the means of production. ...
"Notwithstanding that the Soviet bureaucracy has gone far toward preparing a bourgeois restoration, the new regime would have to introduce in the matter of forms of property and methods of industry not a reform, but a social revolution."
Leon Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed* (1936)**

of the workers' movement. This remains as true today as it was then – and the political defeat of stalinism on a world scale can only be seen as a *victory* for the working class.

Drew appears to have missed this basic thrust of Trotsky's thought: he is surely talking partly of himself and *Socialist Action* when he complains that among those with tough questions to answer are :

'forces that had illusions in the Stalinist bureaucracy and who considered that, whatever its other crimes, they were com-



Gorbachev's dangerous market reforms go nowhere, but glasnost has opened up political space for the left: Castro is applauded by Socialist Action for opposing both

The victory of pro-market, right wing parties in a number of East European countries is largely a consequence of these weaknesses. But does this mean that the inevitable outcome will be capitalist counter-revolution? Such a prognosis underestimates both the political contradictions in the imperialist camp and the practical hurdles in the way of such a sweeping restoration. It is, in addition, a profoundly pessimistic estimate of the possibilities of establishing independent organisations of the working class.

Let us examine these different factors. The restoration of capitalism requires considerably more than the election of right-wing governments. The construction of an indigenous capitalist class, the restructuring of bankrupt economies without major capital investment – these are tasks that the European Community itself has recognised are long term projects. The different factions within international capital are by no means agreed on how it can be best achieved – as a cursory glance at recent discussions within NATO will show. What is clear is that such a projects threaten social explosion, as we read in a recent report from the EC Commissioner for economic affairs:

'There is obviously a risk that this combined government effort at marketisation and stabilisation will be met by massive strikes and fail. In this case the whole economic programme is in ruins.'

Marketisation without capital investment is a clear recipe for pauperisation, as we have seen in Poland over the last six months. This

has brought increasing numbers of strikes and decreasing popularity for the government. That these attacks on the working class will produce defensive struggles is a fairly safe prediction, particularly given the history of struggle in countries such as Poland; what is necessary, and as yet largely absent, is a political leadership capable of turning these mobilisations towards the offensive.

But *Socialist Action* denies the possibility

"Will Socialist Action withhold its support from strikers unless they sign a pledge to vote the right way at the next elections? Will it develop slogans and policies for the actual fight to come, or confine itself to bemoaning the loss of the Berlin Wall and arguing how much better life was under stalinist rule?"

of such a development in advance – effectively claiming that the battle is lost when it has hardly begun. Worse, it gives no clue as to which side it will be on when these struggles do break out. Will *Socialist Action* withhold its support from strikers unless they sign a pledge to vote the right way at the next elections? Will it develop slogans and policies for the actual fight to come, or confine itself to bemoaning the loss of the Berlin Wall and arguing how much better life was under stalinist rule?

On one point *Socialist Action* are right – the stakes in the current situation for the international working class movement are very high. In such a situation, for a journal claiming to be a part of the revolutionary, anti-stalinist

tradition, the *Socialist Action* response 'Rebuild the Berlin Wall' is, to use their own words, '...a confession of political bankruptcy'.

Revolutionaries have a tremendous responsibility in the current situation: both to analyse events as they unfold; and to intervene actively in the interests of the working class, whether or not the political environment is receptive in the short term.

Political and material aid from socialists in the west to the small left groups that have been formed in recent months in the East could well make a decisive difference to the evolution of these countries over the next few years.

Socialist Outlook does not intend to cede the political battleground to either imperialism or stalinism; in our view neither have won the day. The former has

been all but wiped from the slate as a force in international politics; the latter has many problems ahead – first and foremost, the working class itself.

Notes

2. *Socialist Action*, February/April 1990, p.15
3. *Socialist Action*, May/July 1990 p.9
4. *Socialist Outlook*, February 1990 p.15
5. *Socialist Outlook*, March 1990 p.2
6. *Socialist Action* May/July p.11
7. *Socialist Action*, May/July p.7
8. *Socialist Action*, May/July p.9
9. *Socialist Outlook*, October 1989 p.26
10. *Socialist Action* May/July p.9



From women's rights to feminist politics

The developing struggle for women's liberation in Poland

By Brenda S. Bishop

These are times of great promise and great danger for women in Poland. For decades, the second class status of women – in public life, on the labour market, and at home – was an unchallengeable fact of life, firmly rooted in the hypocritical policies of the Communist bureaucracy and in the ideology of the powerful Catholic Church. Now the collapse of one-party rule and the nascent democratic process have created political space for women to begin struggling to change their situation.

A newly formed national feminist organisation is taking the lead in advocating women's rights and challenging the institutions of male dominance that circumscribe every

aspect of women's lives. Women within the trade union Solidarnosc are beginning to draw attention to the special problems of working women and to develop structures that can address them.

But at the same time, women are facing a far-reaching assault on their legal rights and living standards that threatens to set them back decades. As the new government of Solidarnosc-allied intellectuals and politicians rushes to privatise the ailing economy, women are becoming the majority of the new unemployed and have already lost their right to protected long term parental leave. Legislation to legalise abortion has been introduced in the Sejm (the Polish Parliament) for the second year in a row. Women are even less represented in government than

before, while Playboy-style calendars are displayed in most stores and offices.

Never has it been more critical for women to unite to defend their rights. While the potential for such organisation exists, there are many obstacles which must first be overcome.

A twisted history of subordination

The situation of women in Poland is complex and contradictory. Basic legal rights and social benefits, which in the West were won only after protracted struggle, were provided by the ruling Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) after World War II.

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"Women within the trade union Solidarnosc are beginning to draw attention to the special problems of working women and to develop structures that can address them"

"The Polish Constitution guarantees the equality of the sexes. Abortion was legalised in 1956, on certain specified grounds, and has evolved to permit essentially abortion on demand. A system of childcare support was developed..."

specified grounds, and has evolved to permit essentially abortion on demand. A system of childcare support was developed which included, for mothers, the right to three months paid maternity leave and leave to care for sick children (35 days per year per child) and, for either parent, the right to up to three years' parental leave, with an allowance of 40 percent of the former salary paid during the first 18 months. Pornography was legally banned. New opportunities were made available to women who wished to attend university and to study or work in traditionally male-dominated fields.

But in reality, little changed for most women. Male dominance was perpetuated in public life through the party bureaucracy and in private life through the weight of tradition reinforced by the Catholic Church. The PUWP's commitment to equality existed only on paper. There were no women in top party posts and only a token few in government and management in industry. (Only a quota ensured that 20 percent of party members were women.)

Women entered the workforce in record numbers to help rebuild war-devastated Poland, and currently constitute 46 percent of the workforce. (Between 70 and 80 percent of women 20 to 30 and 45 to 50 years old engage in paid labour.) But they have been kept segregated in the lowest paying, and often most monotonous and unsafe jobs, con-

centrated in the textile, food and pottery industries, the clothing trade, and education and health services. Thus, the average woman earns only 65 percent of the average man's wages.

At the same time, women have always been expected to assume full responsibility for children and the home. Recent statistical surveys show that women (i.e. wives, mothers and mothers-in-law) are exclusively responsible for cooking in 94 percent of all households, for washing and ironing in over 90 percent, for mending clothes in 97 percent, and for dishwashing and other housework in 85 percent of all households.

Rather than challenging the sexual division of labour, party policies encouraged it. For instance, rather than investing in daycare centres, the government urged mothers to take extended parental leave, which reinforced traditional sex roles and disadvantaged women on the labour market. Poland's perennial economic problems only increased women's burdens, as many hours had to be spent waiting in food shops lines, and cooking and cleaning had to be performed without the aid of adequate supplies or time-saving consumer appliances.

Despite the hardships of women's lives, the conditions did not exist for mass feminist consciousness to develop. Entering the workforce did not change most women's view of themselves as first and foremost wives and mothers. While work is a

source of self fulfilment for some, for many it is merely an economic necessity which they would happily abandon if given the chance to return home fulltime.

Because of the party's control over information, there was no vehicle for introducing feminist ideas into society. Only one feminist text, an anthology, has been translated into Polish. The one established women's organisation, the Women's League, has been little more than a project to occupy wives of party bosses, publishing a magazine *Women's Life*, and providing some individual services to women, such as help in finding part-time work of child care, to justify their vast array of offices and other privileges. It promoted the party line that equality between the sexes had been achieved, which only served to discredit such ideas in the eyes of most women.

Yet women have not been entirely passive. In 1980-81, they became active in (the trade union) *Solidarnosc* in numbers equal to men, notwithstanding their noticeable absence from the history-making photos. In those days, women saw their interests as identical to men's in the fight for economic democracy and national liberation. But even as *Solidarnosc* broadened into a mass movement of opposition, its critique of the political and social order never extended to the subordination of women. With the Church hierarchy as its strongest ally, the leadership maintained its social conservatism.

Although the social foment of those years made room for the emergence of a feminist group at the University of Warsaw in 1980, it found itself isolated and unable to grow. Nevertheless, it stayed together as a small discussion and support group, while the women associated with it, one by one, tried to raise the special problems of women in their work in *Solidarnosc* underground and in other emerging movements, such as *Freedom and Peace* (an anti-militarist, environmental movement).

One step forward, one step back

As in the west, it was the attempt to take away women's right to control their reproductive capability which created the conditions for women to begin openly struggling around their own agenda. In February 1989, a bill was introduced in the Sejm (the Polish parliament) to protect the rights of the "unborn child" not simply by outlawing abor-



tion, but by subjecting violators – women and doctors alike – to a three year prison term! (The draft was prepared by a group of experts on behalf of the Catholic Episcopate and was presented by the Polish Catholic Social Union, with the support of conservative thinkers from within every party.)

Women all across the country were indignant. In a country where safe reliable birth control is obtainable only by chance, and neglect of the issue constitutes the national policy, many women are forced to resort to abortion as a birth control of last resort. (About 700,000 women have abortions each year, in a population of 19 million women.)

Independent women's action groups sprang up in every major city, often around universities, and undertook petitioning, Parliamentary appeals and even street actions in defence of the existing law, including an impressive demonstration in Warsaw which drew a thousand. After being inundated with letters and phone calls, the Women's League was forced to take a stand against the proposed legislation, while Solidarnosc managed to avoid publicly stating its position. (Walesa vacillated, remarking first that people have to stop "killing each other" while later suggesting that the question is a moral one better decided by the individual conscience, not the state.) The bill died last summer before coming to a vote, but the newly formed action groups did not.

Monumental developments at the national political level were unfolding around the same time that would entirely change the political landscape in Poland. At round-table discussions, Solidarnosc eventually agreed to a compromise with the ruling bureaucrats, leading to new elections in which 35 percent of the Sejm was freely chosen and a second house of Parliament, the Senate, was established in which all of the seats were freely elected. While Solidarnosc, as a trade union, could not run its own candidates, it set up a National Civic Committee (NCC) through which candidates representing a spectrum of political perspectives and backgrounds were selected



(creating an awkward relationship between the workers' organisation and the politicians which continues to this day).

When the PUWP was soundly trounced and unable to rule (none of its uncontested candidates won a plurality), Solidarnosc finally agreed to a power-sharing arrangement, under which the PUWP retained control of the army and security forces, as well as the newly-established post of President (filled by General Jaruzelski, who had declared martial law in 1981).

Sweeping reforms

These concessions leave Poland behind most of its neighbours in terms of establishing political democracy. Long-time Solidarnosc advisor and Catholic intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki was chosen as Prime Minister, and put together a government in September, 1989, which immediately embarked on a program of sweeping reform. For the first time in years, freedom to organise, to demonstrate, to publish and distribute information in the open without fear of repression or control, was possible in Poland.

These changes gave new impetus to feminists. As soon as the law on organisations was liberalised, the core of feminists moved to establish an official national organisation by registering with court as the Polish Feminist Association (PFA). (In Poland, this formality is an absolute prerequisite to securing recognition in the media and public life and concrete benefits from the state.)

At the beginning of November, a

conference in Poznan brought together the activists from the abortion rights campaign (including PFA, independent local groups such as the Women's Club from Poznan, Women's Honor from Torun, Movement for Protecting Women's rights from Bydgoszcz, and the Polish Feminist Movement Club from Krakow, members of the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution (PPS-RD) and Freedom and Peace, and even a progressive from the Women's League) to exchange views on how to continue women's struggle.

The following week, on November 12th feminists organised a picket of the American Embassy in Warsaw, in solidarity with the thousands demonstrating in Washington that day to demand safe, legal and funded abortion. And later that same month, the first national meeting of women in Solidarnosc was convened to lay the groundwork for developing a women's agenda for the union.

Ironically, the very openings that made it possible for women to begin organising to advance their rights also unleashed other forces which threaten to push women even further backward. Far from taking any initiatives to improve the position of women in society, the new government has been, at best, indifferent to women's concerns and at worst, responsible for policies which sacrifice women's interests in pursuit of other aims.

Although the government has a "beautiful spokeswoman" (Malgorzata Niebabitowska), as Prime mini-

"many women are forced to resort to abortion as a birth control of last resort. About 700,000 women have abortions each year, in a population of 19 million women"

"Some 80 percent of those already dismissed are women, who are concentrated in the 'non-essential' office jobs which are being eliminated in all sectors. Other women have been forced to quit their jobs, as the cost of daycare soars to levels exceeding their take-home pay"

ster Mazowiecki once referred to her, there is only one woman in the government – the Minister of Culture. In the Parliament, women are only 6 percent of the representatives elected on the NCC slate, significantly less than the 20 percent the PUWP made room for. But lack of representation is just the tip of the iceberg.

The thrust of the government's sweeping economic reform jeopardises women's interests as workers. The government's solution to the problems of the inefficient, debt-ridden Polish economy is nothing short of the reintroduction of capitalist economic relations in all sectors. As of January 1, 1990, in accordance with the IMF austerity plan, internal convertibility of the zloty was introduced and a classical anti-inflation program was implemented which led to catastrophic overnight price increases.

The goal was to stabilise the economy in order to attract foreign capital and facilitate the return to the market! The effect was to reduce living standards by 40 percent (twice the anticipated drop) and to bring back unemployment, as enterprises go bankrupt, eliminate layers of the bureaucracy, or halt production due to the drop in sales. The IMF estimates that 5 percent of the population will be unemployed by the year end.

It is no coincidence that women are the hardest hit. Some 80 percent of those already dismissed are women, who are concentrated in the 'non-essential' office jobs which are being eliminated in all sectors. With less training and few transferable skills, these women will have great difficulty in finding new work. Other women have been forced to quit their jobs, as the cost of daycare soars to levels exceeding their take-home pay. Many more mothers will lose their jobs as a result of changes on the law which now permit employers to fire women during their three year parental leave. The politicians are clearly counting on women's quiescence and political passivity to help them carry through the most unpopular aspects of their economic reform.

These attacks dovetail with a campaign to limit women to their role as homemakers and mothers, spearheaded by an alliance of conservative



These eggs 'fell off the back of a lorry' in Warsaw

politicians from the NCC and the newly activated right wing parties. In January, the Sejm quietly eliminated the state subsidy to the Family Development Society (formerly the Family Planning Society), a private association which was the only family planning body in the country. Less than one month later, the NCC-dominated Senate sent to the Sejm proposed legislation to legalise abortion, slightly altered from last year's failed bill. The leader of the so-called Liberal Party, Jerry Korwin-Mikke, has even gone so far as to suggest that the right to vote should be taken away from women, while the centre-right Union for Real Politics has urged that women's access to higher education be limited, on the theory that women are less likely to make use of their degrees!

Working women unite

While it is clear that women can only rely on themselves to defeat this array of attacks, there is little chance of building a mass independent women's movement in the near future. Women's advocates must find ways to maximise their impact, seeking to win support for pro-women policies and to mobilise women through existing institutions.

The most important institution in this period is the trade union Solidarnosc. Only a strong workers' organisation can lead the kind of fight in the workplace and in the political arena that will be necessary to defend women's economic interests. But the union cannot be counted on to automatically play this role. Under Lech Walesa's iron hand, the top

leadership currently supports the government's pro-market policies, accepting that mass layoffs, loss of social benefits and the growth of social differentiation are the price that has to be paid to put the Polish economy back on its feet.

The internal opposition within the union lacks a strong base from which to mount a successful challenge to this course, as the majority of Polish workers, who are expressing growing disaffection with the direction of government policy, are no longer organised in the union. (Solidarnosc has only around a tenth of the 10 million members it had in 1980-81.)

Furthermore, there is little reason to hope that a more militant union leadership would be prepared to unite its members against attacks which threaten primarily women workers. The male-dominated union has no history of attention to women's special problems, and top union leaders (including the new head of the Gdansk region and the union's female spokesperson, Barbara Malek) are on record as justifying the mass dismissals of women first.

Nor do women have any decisive influence in the union. Activists estimate that women comprise about 20-50 percent of leadership at the enterprise level, from 10-25 percent at the regional level, and have only a token representation on the National Executive Committee. (No statistics are readily available, itself an indication of the problem.)

However, women are beginning to emerge as a force to be reckoned with in the union. Due to the efforts of a

handful of women activists and feminists, with a little help from the international trade union movement (applied through the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), with which Solidarnosc is affiliated), a week-long seminar addressed exclusively to women's issues was held in Gdansk the last week of January. (It was one of a series of 12 seminars so-sponsored by the union with the ICFTU.)



Even basic chores like shopping are more exhausting with Polish queues

A few dozen unionists, most of whom were leaders in their enterprises, as well as many feminist academics and activists attended the conference, which was part educational and part working session. The full range of material and psychological problems facing working women in Poland was outlined.

Top on the list was the fact that all working women, regardless of age, education or type of work, are saddled with all the housework and childcare after they have put in their eight plus hours on the job. As a result, women are often chronically overtired, with little time or energy to pursue further education or training, which could lead to higher paying or more rewarding work opportunities, or to become active in the union, and they suffer from feelings of inadequacy or failure. (In a survey of metal workers, 71 percent of husbands with working wives said they were satisfied with their domestic situation, while only 8 percent were satisfied.)

On the labour market, the top concern was the 35 percent pay gap separating male and female workers, which was attributed primarily to extreme job segregation and devaluation of women's work, and women's lack of advancement due to discrimination in promotion or lack of skills improvement. Inequality in the job market resulting from discrimination in education, hiring and promotion was also identified, though this point proved controversial, with

primarily university-educated women stressing the problem, while others insisted that there is equal opportunity.

Hazards

In industry, where women constitute 13.2 percent of the workforce, women are exposed to an array of health and safety hazards: 63 percent work in a standing position without interruption, 50 percent are required to lift excessively heavy loads, 48 percent work with high levels of noise, 35 percent are exposed to excess dust levels, 30 percent to excessive temperatures, and 15 percent to intense vibrations. One of the most severe problems is the three shift system, which forces or induces women to work at night, leaving them in a state of utter exhaustion.

The search for realistic and appropriate solutions to these problems proved difficult. As the very first speaker put it, the only real answer lies in reversing the centuries old tradition, passed from grandmother to mother to each new generation, that a woman's place is in the kitchen while a man's is on the shop floor.

But working women of this generation, even those motivated to fight for their rights, are so shaped by those values that they either accept or are resigned to the constraints of that socially-defined role. Thus, in the quest for more immediate solutions, many women sought to carve out special protections for women which

would only perpetuate the sexual division of labour and fuel the forces of discrimination.

Many women favoured the establishment of a maintenance allowance that would enable mothers to remain home to 'educate' their children until the age of ten, expressing concern that daycare deprived children of their "mothers' touch". Wide support was expressed for a ban on nightwork for women (which exists in many European countries) and for the right to retire with a full pension after 30 years of work. A prohibition on women working overtime or working with hazardous substances and a homemaker's allowance were among the other suggestions raised.

All of these proposals were ultimately dismissed on the grounds that they were financially unfeasible, would undermine the fight for equality, and were divisive, distinguishing men from women rather than uniting all workers around the fight to improve the working environment. But the fact that they were raised provides an important indication of the level of consciousness of many women that will have to be confronted in the effort to organise union women.

More appropriate policy recommendations were ultimately formulated. The conference insisted that flexible working hours and part time work should be made available to women at their option, and that more

"all working women, regardless of age, education or type of work, are saddled with all the housework and childcare after they have put in their eight plus hours on the job. As a result, women are often chronically overtired, with little time or energy to pursue further education or training"

daycare centres of higher quality (i.e. lower teacher-child ratio and more flexible opening hours) should be opened, especially for children under 3 years old. It was also stressed that men had an equal responsibility for home and childcare duties, and that medical leave to care for sick children should be extended to fathers as well.

The principle of equal pay for work of equal value was endorsed, and the union was urged to take an active role in the re-evaluations currently underway in many industries and to demand special job skills training for women. In the health and safety field, it was agreed that pregnant women should have the right to a protected job, while the union should prioritise the fight to eliminate or minimise hazardous working conditions for all workers.

These policy recommendations provide a framework for women's struggle to improve their lives. But, in these days of economic crisis and austerity, advances seem unattainable and the pervasive concern is to keep from losing ground. Participants expressed alarm over the potential loss of social benefits (such as parental leave), decline in health and safety standards and weakening of the union that may result from the much sought after foreign capitalist investment.

But the conference stopped short of expressly prioritising the fight to defend women's jobs. On the contrary, many women were prepared to accept on principle that, if workers must be fired for the sake of improving the economy, less harm is done by dismissing women – on the assumption that women earn less money and that their income is supplementary.

Cold hard economics may transform this consciousness in the coming months. Women at the conference were adamant in their insistence that women who are in fact the primary breadwinners in their household, as a growing number of single and divorced women and even wives of alcoholics are, should be absolutely protected against dismissal. Inflation and the wages freeze have already

made it next to impossible to feed a family even on two incomes, and women are not likely to passively accept the loss of their income without a fight. Thus, women are a potentially powerful force of opposition to the policies of wholesale privatisation and mass layoffs within the union.

For women to succeed in implementing their agenda, they must become more active in the union and assume leadership roles. The women



Lithuanian women fight for national independence

at the conference exhibited a disturbing tendency to blame themselves for the appalling lack of women in the union's leadership. Each of the five working groups reported that there were no barriers to women becoming union leaders, explaining that any woman with the interest and competence could serve. Yet problems unique to women such as lack of time and energy due to family responsibilities, lack of self-confidence, lack of experience and leadership skills and health problems were all acknowledged during the discussion. Surprisingly, discrimination was never once identified as an obstacle, although it undeniably exists.

There was virtually unanimous agreement that a Women's Commission should be established to take responsibility for information gathering, education, support and advocacy on behalf of women.

Fortunately, National Executive Committee agreed and okayed a Women's Commission at the national level. This represents only a partial victory, as the commission was sought at the regional and eventually enterprise levels as well, but it proves that the leadership can be pushed to take women's demands seriously.

The real work now lies ahead. If the Commission is to avoid becoming merely a bureaucratic body or ghetto for women, it will have to activate

rank and file women.

Women's development within the union will also be affected by women's struggles on larger social and political issues. A strong independent women's movement will generate social pressure that will indirectly aid unionists in campaigning for pro-women policies. Introduction of feminist ideas into public discourse will help develop the consciousness of working women, as evidenced by

the positive impact feminists had at the conference. This is a two way street. The union can be an invaluable ally, providing direct support to the women's movement, both materially (as in Bydgoszcz, where the new regional head has made printing facilities available to the local women's group) and politically; the mobilisation of working women

will be critical to the defence of women's rights, particularly in the upcoming abortion rights battles.

Moving on to feminism

On the national political front, feminists have placed a high priority on securing a strong women's representative to the government and pushing to make the position a meaningful one. The post was established by Poland several years ago in compliance with accords signed at the International Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. Soon after taking office, the Mazowiecki government fired the PUWP-appointed representative, but did not replace her.

While recognising that the rep has no real power, feminists see the post as an important vehicle for the work of autonomous women's organisations. They appealed directly to the Prime Minister to make the post truly independent, thus not accountable to any government ministry. Without even bothering to reply, Mazowiecki delayed some five months before finally appointing Helen Goralska, the vice-minister of the Ministry for Labour, to be the new representative, on top of her other duties.

At a 'get acquainted' session with women's advocates which she convened shortly after her appointment, Goralska confessed that she had no particular expertise in the area (she is

"in these days of economic crisis and austerity, advances seem unattainable. Participants expressed alarm over the potential loss of social benefits, decline in health and safety standards and weakening of the union that may result from foreign capitalist investment."

an economist by profession) and no particular initiatives in mind, but she expressed a willingness to help. Women intend to keep her to her word. In particular, they will insist that she take an active role in the legislative process, monitoring proposed legislation affecting women and, hopefully, providing drafts to women's groups, who have learned about certain damaging bills only after they have already become law. (PFA is also hoping to win the right to have a representative present at all committee and floor debates on such bills.)

They also expect her to support research and statistical documentation of the status of women, which is now sorely lacking. Toward that end, PFA has proposed that a Women's Roundtable be convened as a forum for publicising such information and developing policy recommendations.

Feminists are also concerned to address the lack of representation of women in government. The number of women selected by the National Civic Committee as candidates for local self-government election in March was no better than in the national elections last summer. Some feminists were exploring the feasibility of running candidates as part of an alternative slate. Zuzanna Dabrowska, a leader of PPS-RD and member of the Polish Feminist Association, was one such potential candidate.

To admit to being a feminist in Poland is tantamount to admitting having the plague. Many of the few women prominent in public life, including writers and academics, go to great lengths to disassociate themselves from feminism. (Ironically, although the sociologist responsible for the one Polish feminist anthology did not consider herself a feminist, and was using the texts to illustrate a completely unrelated theory about human social behaviour, her reputation was ruined by the project.) Such women, like the eye surgeon who is the mother of a leading feminist activist, regret the price they paid for their careers and urge their own daughters to follow a more tradition-

al, family-oriented path. The new women's groups want to tackle that taboo head on, embracing the term feminist and endeavouring to give it new meaning.

In this project, the personal must be made political by subjecting to re-examination all aspects of women's

express dismay at the enforced ignorance and guilt which surrounds sex, will be further alienated as the Madonna-whore duality is strengthened. The sexual violence and harassment which women have always been subjected to, especially women out alone in the evening, is



experience, from the sacred - marriage, motherhood, family - to the taboo - sexuality and lesbianism, rape and incest, violence against women. Ideologically, the cult of motherhood is being nurtured these days, while the sexual objectification of women is becoming more pronounced.

Pornography, which is still officially illegal, arrived several years ago with the market reforms and is now spreading like wildfire, a symbol of Poland's 'modernisation'. In the year that Miss Poland reigns as Miss World, calendars of nude women in degrading poses are produced by state companies, prominently marketed in state-run department stores and bookshops, and found hanging on most office walls, even in tourist bureaus and police departments. Female strippers are becoming commonplace in regular discos and scantily clad women predominate in the new TV advertising.

The Church, which has done its best to suppress any discussion of sex, even forcing a lone school book on sexuality off shelves and out of print, has lost its tongue when it comes to the new porn. Women, including strict Catholics, who already

reportedly getting worse. But guilt and shame still inhibit most women from discussing such 'private' matters.

Despite the much hailed freedom of the press which now exists, many feel that a new form of self-censorship, an 'inner moral control' shaped by Catholic ethics, makes the environment even more hostile to discussion in these matters. Though it is not yet feasible to think of producing their own feminist publication, they are using all other means at their disposal.

In March, in the university town of Krakow, academics and activists from across the country were invited to address the subject 'Motherhood: duty or free choice?' at a public seminar organised by a lone graduate student (who is active in PFA). Other local groups hope to organise similar seminars in the future. PFA is trying to build up its collection of feminist texts and to develop a system of circulation that will provide greater access to the works.

Women occasionally make presentations on books they have read, in part because all are in foreign languages. In Poznan, the Women's Club has just negotiated the right to temporarily house their books in the

"Ideologically, the cult of motherhood is being nurtured these days, while the sexual objectification of women is becoming more pronounced."



American Consulate library, which is open to the public, and has also managed to secure several radio interviews.

Another important goal of the feminist movement is to create space where women can feel comfortable talking about their personal experiences. Given a supportive environment, many women are eager to discuss aspects of their lives about which they have long been silent – whether it be disrespect and harassment on the job, their fear of men, psychological or physical abuse in their intimate relationships, the constraints of married life, or the alienation and frustration experienced by all women who refuses to play by the rules. In the process, women emerge from their isolation and begin to see the commonality in their situations, developing the solidarity which will provide a foundation for united political action. They also begin to understand the extent to which women psychologically adapt to and perpetuate patriarchal institutions. In their own lives, it is often women (mothers, grandmothers and female teachers) who have been most directly responsible for restrictions on their freedom – limiting them to “girl’s” activities, forcing them to assume domestic duties (from which brothers were exempt), underrating their intelligence or dismissing their ambitions, pushing them to get married and preaching to them about conduct appropriate for a wife. From

such exchange women also derive support which is hard to find in everyday life.

Other women have even more ambitious ideas about developing women’s culture. Women who choose to remain single have an especially tough row to hoe. Not only are they often treated as social outcasts, suddenly finding themselves excluded from social gatherings of their married friends, but the chronic shortage of housing and priority system which favours married couples with children forces many to remain uncomfortably in their parent’s home for years. For lesbians, the stigmatisation is even more severe.

One women’s community in Krakow provides an alternative for such women. More than 75 years ago, a group of single career women established a women’s residence which provides living space in a communal environment for several dozen women. While in recent years it has increasingly been occupied by divorced women merely seeking an affordable place to live, a feminist activist, who will soon be moving in, hopes to revive its character as a supportive space for women who consciously embrace single life, and even possibly to develop it into a centre for women in the community.

Feminists are not lacking in creative ideas for the future. Some are already talking about the need to organise self-defence classes for

women. The graduate student from Krakow dreams of seeing a regular seminar series established at the university at which participants could earn credit, as a first step to the development of women’s studies in Poland. (A seminar on feminism offered over the past decade at the University of Warsaw by Renata Sieminska, a sociologist who has served at UNESCO as an expert on women in Poland, has helped to educate and inspire many of those who are now becoming active in the women’s movement.) A lawyer from Warsaw wants to concentrate on developing anti-racist discrimination laws and enforcement procedures, while a teacher has a particular interest in improving health care for women. Some hope eventually to begin a feminist publication, while several are interested in translating into Polish and publishing women’s literature and feminist theory.

Success will depend in part on the ability of the young groups to strengthen themselves organisationally. At present, little more than a handful of activists is assuming responsibility for an overwhelming amount of work, and many are already spread thin by other political activities in PPS-RD, Freedom and Peace or Solidamosc. (All but a few of the feminists who came together in Warsaw in 1980 are now living abroad.) Local groups have largely been functioning independently,

“Women who choose to remain single are often treated as social outcasts ... the chronic shortage of housing forces many to remain in their parent’s home for years”

taking their own initiatives. While this decentralisation may be appropriate to the internal needs of the movement at this early stage, it makes it more difficult for feminists to make a name for themselves and win the media attention that other small parties and movements have begun to capture. It may also weaken their ability to coordinate efforts in order to lead the coming political struggles. In the abortion rights campaign last spring, they found themselves outmanoeuvred by Pro-Femina, a new 'movement' started by a male student with strong links to the bureaucracy, which called and took credit for the Warsaw demonstration after learning that feminists were discussing the idea.

The independent feminist movement faces its greatest challenge from the formerly 'official' organisation, particularly the Women's League. Having lost the backing of the bureaucracy the League is trying to prove itself still to be the leading women's organisation in order to hang on to its extensive offices and privileges. Thus, it is attempting to play a more activist role and to force independent women's groups to follow its initiatives. At a day long conference co-sponsored by the League and the Women's Commission of the OPZZ (the once official trade union), which feminists attended but did not participate in, the organisers sought to present themselves as the Women's round table. The League has also approached PFA about working together on draft legislation. To date, PFA has refused any collaboration, not wanting to be used to legitimise the League or to risk being discredited by too close association with the old guard. But at the same time, feminists cannot simply stand aside and let the League use its established position to set the direction for or take all the credit for the women's movement. Nor can they afford to turn their backs on any who are allies in the fight to defend women's rights.

The new feminist groups are handicapped by their lack of resources and of an established base from which to

operate, problems not easily solved. As soon as PFA was legally recognised, it attempted to arrange a meeting with the cabinet minister responsible for assisting partisan organisations and for doling out precious office space, which is otherwise unobtainable or unaffordable. When Minister Hall finally agreed to a meeting, after months of dodging their requests, he sent in his place a female official who was in her second week with the ministry and had neither the knowledge nor the power



A patronising premier: Mazowiecki

to assist them. If and when they are given office space, they will have to confront the problem of how to pay the rent.

PFA's difficulties may be exacerbated by its reluctance to formalise its organisational structures, not surprising after years of living under the iron hand of a male-dominated, hierarchic bureaucracy. At present, there is no formal membership or affiliation procedure, no clear leadership, no regularly convened meetings or formal mechanism for decision making, and no system of dues or other regular source of funding.

The frenzy of activity of the past months has left little time to devote expressly to outreach, but it has laid an important foundation for incorporating new women into the movement, particularly union activists and university students. Some groups are now turning their attention more to public events, such as seminars, in order to attract such women. Other women may be drawn to discussion and support groups.

The struggles ahead

In the near future, the threat to abortion rights is certain to occupy centre stage in women's struggle. It is

not yet known if and when the anti-abortion bill will be taken up by the Sejm, and opinion is divided on whether it has any chance of passage. Ironically, the fact that the Sejm was not freely elected and is still dominated by members from the now dismantled PUWP (which split into two 'social democratic' parties in February) makes it more likely that the anti-abortion measure will be defeated this time around. (The Speaker of the Sejm was formerly associated with the Family Planning Society.) In the long run, the position adopted by Solidarnosc and its allies in government will be critical. Its leaders are widely thought to be anti-abortion and it is feared that they may support the regressive proposal in order to pay back their loyalty to the Church.

The Church is pulling out all the stops in its anti-abortion campaign, resorting to appeals from the pulpit and propaganda displays set up in chapels. The prospect of Poland becoming another Ireland is many women's greatest fear. But there are also indications that even loyal Catholics are not prepared to follow the Church on this issue. Many are becoming annoyed with the Church's ever more bold intrusions into secular affairs. (The introduction of a chaplain in Parliament and masses on television are but the most obvious examples.) Catholicism has never prevented most women from using birth control or having abortions, as evidenced by the predominance of two child households. Even among those with moral objections to abortion, many believe the question must be resolved by the individual conscience not the political process.

Such sentiments will not automatically translated into public opposition to the proposed bill, as guilt and social pressure often cause many to keep quiet about their differences with the Church. But such reticence may be overcome as the danger posed by the anti-abortion forces becomes more obvious. University women can be expected to

"The Church is pulling out all the stops in its anti-abortion campaign, resorting to appeals from the pulpit and propaganda displays set up in chapels. The prospect of Poland becoming another Ireland is many women's greatest fear"



Breaking free from the stalinist stereotype

“The stakes are high; it is not simply a question of restrictions but of loss of one right which is more protected than in the West. The outcome will also show whether the new era in Poland will awaken women to defend their interests or will pacify them as never before”

be a particularly militant source of opposition, as indicated by the leading role they played in several street actions last spring. Working women may become more vocal as they come to see the connection between attacks on their economic interests and the anti-abortion legislation. While it is unrealistic to think that the union might adopt a pro-choice stance, the pressure applied by union women will be critical in at least preventing the leadership from openly supporting the reactionary legislation. Other allies may be won from among those who are concerned to check the power of the nationalist right wing.

The stakes are high; it is not simply a question of restrictions but of loss of one right which is more protected than in the West. The outcome will also be an important indication of whether the new era in Poland will awaken women to the need to or-

ganise to defend their interests or will pacify them as never before.

The answer to that question will be linked to the larger political developments. In theory, the disintegration of the old order presents his-



toric opportunities for a social transformation aimed at establishing a true political and economic democracy. But in marked contrast to the mass mobilisation of 1980-81, when the majority of working people participated in constructing a new union and workers' councils which were to be the infrastructure of a future self-managed republic, the process is now

in the hands of the politicians and 'experts'. Walesa's Christian democratic wing, which has the upper hand over the social democratic and smaller radical wings of the movement, is not attempting to find a new middle road but is leading the country firmly down a Western-oriented capitalist path. Rather than seeking to organise working people or actively involve them in their union or in grassroots politics, political leaders are preaching restraint and disciplined cooperation their economic program in an effort to attract foreign investors. Many are alarmed at the all-too familiar conservative atmosphere in which criticism is discouraged as irresponsible and unpatriotic. The majority is currently accepting this state of affairs, despite considerable grumbling, in part because of the chronic resignation which set in after martial law was declared a decade ago. In this environment, there is a real risk that women will feel defeated by the attacks against them and passively accept their fate. Mass resistance by women is only likely to develop if and when the growing discontent of all working people is translated into a political struggle to protect their interests.

A general radicalisation would only be the first step for women. Nothing short of a revolution in consciousness will have to occur before the majority of women will be ready to take up the fight to change their position in society. This will not happen overnight. In the meantime, the projects to defend women's rights and change women's thinking being patiently pursued by feminists and women's activists may achieve limited yet significant advances for women while paving the way for development of a broader women's movement. This is just the beginning of a new round in the long uphill struggle for liberation which women in Poland share with women around the world.



IDAF

NUMSA demonstration: their union leaders are central to political debate

The shape of 'post apartheid' South Africa

By Peter Blumer

In his first speech after his release, Nelson Mandela defended the notion of nationalisation as an important tool of economic policy of a post-apartheid government. The response of the South African Stock Exchange was to drop sharply.

Since that time the idea has been knocked back and forth in vague formulations at press conferences or during rallies. No clear line has emerged. Yet, paradoxically, negotiations have begun between the ANC and the government.

However what has surfaced, most notably in a discussion in the *Weekly Mail* newspaper, has been a discussion about the mixed economy. This conception has also been at the centre of discussions between the leadership of the largest trade union, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and the South African Communist Party.

Alec Erwin and some other NUMSA leaders have tried to formulate an economic choice for a 'post apartheid' society or state.

There is a major problem with these terms.

The South African ruling class has decided that it wants to get rid of apartheid (which doesn't mean that it wants to get rid of racial capitalism, or that it can do so). But the state cannot be defined socially solely in terms of the dominant economic policy; it is defined by the social relations of production and thus by the class which rules. This may appear elementary, but this type of conceptual sliding has already led to some European economists of the so-called 'regulation school' to reduce the characterisation of the state to the dominant mode of regulation.

Thus for them the state is no longer a capitalist or bourgeois state, but a Fordian or post-Fordian state. Apartheid is today the specific form of regulating capitalist development in South Africa and consequently terms such as 'apartheid state' and 'post-apartheid state' are used. The problem is that the whole class character of the state is left aside in this type of analysis. So the problem is posed: what is the social nature of a state which could totally eradicate racial discrimination in the country?

The South African Communist Party has specialised for decades in going round this

issue and giving no clear answer. However the problem is that now trade union leaders like Alec Erwin are now passing increasingly over to the method of CP leader Joe Slovo, and saying nothing on the class character of the 'post-apartheid state'. At the same time, NUMSA also maintains – as we do – the idea of workers' control and planning as a general formula. But a number of problems arise from this.

Workers' control is first and foremost an expression of workers' struggles in a phase of revolutionary upturn. Workers can impose their veto over the bosses on a whole series of questions. In certain cases they can run factories under their control and thus begin to demonstrate that the working class can reorganise production. Such a movement can spark off an insurrectional general strike, as part of the first phase of the seizure of power. Unfortunately this is not on the agenda today.

Later, workers' control can take the form of workers' management of production. In this case it is laying the foundations of workers' self-management in a society that has begun its revolution. The capitalist state has been broken and a socially new state has been built on its ruins. Within this framework workers' self-management leads to national democratic planning.

But is this what is going to come out of the negotiations? Obviously not!

This leads to a central confusion, as when Bernie Fanaroff, another NUMSA leader, maintains that because 'the old commandist system of state planning has failed', a new decentralised form of state planning has to be established: 'workers in the factories and businesses, for example, can push their bosses to give subsidies and grants to improve the housing and education system. They can also

push the businessmen to put pressure on the state to spend more resources in this area.' (*Weekly Mail*, 9 March)

Here we can see theoretical confusion. Emptying the marxist theory of the state of its substance leads some comrades to think in terms of the organic mutation of the state rather than in terms of a social rupture.

For Joe Slovo this type of mutation is clear. Thus in *Marxism Today* he states:

'The question is really whether the private sector of international capital is allowed to become the dominating force guiding society towards the future, or whether the dominating force is the state structure and an economy which is moving towards greater egalitarianism.'

But which state? Obviously there are two possible interpretations: a radical interpretation for those in the trade union movement who are still committed to planning and workers' control; and a left social democratic, neo-Keynesian interpretation with state intervention and regulation by ... the capitalist state.

Another error which is made in the discussion is to use the term 'mixed economy' interchangeably when referring to such contexts as different as Nicaragua (where the Sandistas termed their economy as being 'mixed' under state majority control, linked to agrarian reform and a state monopoly of foreign trade in the middle of a full scale revolution) and South Africa, a capitalist country in which the revolutionary seizure of power is not immediately posed.

Some trade union leaders are justifying their rapprochement with the SACP by using the examples of the Soviet economic reforms. In the March 30 *Weekly Mail*, Alec Erwin writes:

'command planning can achieve structural change, but causes stagnation in productivity and living standards; the market imposes an efficiency discipline on producers and increases variety and quality if carefully managed.'



Workers defy state of emergency in Cape Town, September 1989

Erwin does not clarify the notions of 'variety' and 'quality' but again an important difference has to be established between those who foresee the introduction of market laws in an economy such as that of the USSR - where there are presently no capitalists, still less a capital market - and those who, imitating the Soviet discussion, propose to use market laws in a 'post-apartheid society'.

Next it has to be remembered that 'quality' and 'variety' are not abstract values - for an important section of production - once one begins to discuss society's basic social needs. The social function of commodities, their use value, is not determined by the market taking into account the basic needs of human society. The market tests production a posteriori, and therefore market production is organised first of all around exchange values in relation to expected profits.

The very soft intervention proposed by

Alec Erwin will not stop enterprises from making windsurfing boards rather than school desks if the possible profits from the former are bigger than for the latter.

The alternative to this position is not 'socialism tomorrow morning'. What we are talking about is the transition to socialism and about what state will lead this transition: not a state without social content, not a 'democratic' state, but a state dominated by the working class.

All these discussions are at the centre of the political rapprochement between certain members of the traditional trade union left and the SACP. It has been said that the SACP has broken with Stalinism, expressed in particular in Joe Slovo's pamphlet *Has Socialism Failed?* This is not our interpretation.

In the first place the pamphlet (see *Socialist Outlook* No 24) is only a very limited and partial break with the SACP's traditions. But we also have to look at the evolution of the trade union left wing. From the evidence that we have seen, this trade union left is starting to develop a classical 'economistic' perspective, that is cut off from a real analysis of class contradictions: a kind of new utopia based on self-intoxication engendered by the process begun with the negotiations.

So who is moving to who?

The question is important because the movement towards the SACP is also justified in terms of building a mass workers'

party. It is one of the ironies of this situation that when the question of the workers' party was raised by some of the NUMSA leaders in the past, the SACP replied very brutally and arrogantly.

Now the question has arisen again with the public launching of the SACP in South Africa. In order to have a serious discussion it is necessary to be very wary. Will this party be a bureaucratically controlled? Will it have a social democratic type of political orientation? What will its united front policy be with other parties and trade union organisations?

These questions have to be clarified in deeds not words.

For our part, the starting point in all these discussions must be the independence of the working class and its trade unions in the political developments taking place.

Haughey's policies plunge party into crisis Irish politics at the crossroads

By Mary Godfrey

Just a year after its inauguration, the 26 county government – a coalition of Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats – is in a state of political crisis. The not only reflects tensions between the coalition partners, but reveals much more fundamental problems within Fianna Fail.

Since this party has played a central role in the construction and maintenance of the institutions of the southern state, its crisis also indicates elements of instability in that state.

At its last Ard Fheis (conference), the ranks of Fianna Fail expressed their unease at the coalition by giving overwhelming support to a resolution demanding that any future moves towards coalition should only take place the widest consultation with the membership. As one of the delegates put it, the events of the previous year and the manner in which decision were made after the General Election had rocked 'this great party of ours to its foundations' and was 'a traumatic experience for all of us'. Indeed many of the rank and file still have not recovered, as revealed by the fact that some 400 cumann (local branches) have not bothered to register this year.

The conference also voted against the extradition of Irish citizens to Britain and Northern Ireland in 'the present circumstances'. Against the leadership, they demanded the repeal of Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act which bans interviews with Sinn Fein on radio and TV.

It is not surprising that coalition, and specifically coalition with the Progressive Democrats (PDs) should cause such heart-searching within the ranks of Fianna Fail. The PDs were formed as a split from Fianna Fail at the end of 1985. Their programme combined neo-liberal economic policies – massive cuts in public expenditure and the wholesale privatisation of state and semi-state bodies – with more liberal social attitudes – and in particular, a diminution of the role of the church in the state. It was on the national question however that the PDs diverged most clearly from their parent:

'We acknowledge that nationalist Ireland, south of the border, has not yet fully come to terms with the implications of what we have known well for some time. Irish unity as tradi-



Haughey is stealing Fianna Gael's clothes – not least on the Anglo-Irish agreement

tionally conceived in the South is simply not achievable by consent either politically or economically, and all our politics should reflect this reality'

Thus, the PDs have called for the repeal of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution, which express the aspiration for and commitment to a united Ireland. They have also expressed dismay at Supreme Court decisions on extradition made in recent months. Dermot Finucane and James Clarke, escapees from the Maze prison, won their appeals against extradition to Northern Ireland. The judges decided they should not be returned to the Maze because they were probable targets for ill treatment by prison staff at that jail, if returned. A few weeks later, Owen Carron, former MP for Fermanagh/South Tyrone, also won his appeal against extradition.

The PDs' response to these events has been to call for a review of the Extradition Act, to make it easier for extradition to occur. Not only is this diametrically opposed to the view of the Fianna Fail rank and file, it runs counter to the very deep feeling held by the majority of Irish people that they can not achieve justice in a British court and at the hands of the British law and order establishment. The

release of the Guildford Four and the Winchester Three have not allayed such fears. On the contrary, they provide tangible proof of the basis of such gut feelings, born of the historical experience of imperialist oppression.

Fianna Fail and the crisis of the state.

The problems within Fianna Fail are considerably deeper than disagreements between co-habiting partners.

The party's whole history has been tied up with the legitimisation, construction and consolidation of the institutions of the 26 County state. In the aftermath of the Treaty and the formation of the Southern Irish State, the pro-treaty government of Cumann na nGael was viewed with deep suspicion and mistrust by large sections of the population. This was not just the consequence of the repression unleashed on republican sympathisers, but because it relied for support almost exclusively on the most reactionary elements in the state – the cattle ranchers and big business. Dissent against the government was linked with demoralisation with the 'free state' it spawned.

The decision of de Valera and Fianna Fail

forced to form a coalition with the Progressive Democrats. Thus, having gone through a vituperative divorce, the erstwhile partners co-habited again for the 'sake of the nation'.

Significantly however, the election marked a certain haemorrhage of working class support from Fianna Fail, particularly in Dublin. At the same time the outcome created enormous confusion and disillusionment within the ranks of the party. The new government has pursued its policies of retrenchment with a commitment to a major programme of privatisation of state and semi-state companies. Any apparent improvement in the jobless figures is primarily as a result of emigration.

The Labour Party and the Workers Party.

The 1989 election saw a big surge in support for both the Labour Party and the Workers Party. Labour won 9.5 per cent of the vote and increased its representation from 11 to 15 seats. The Workers

Party got 5 per cent of the vote and saw its number of TDs (Members of Parliament) rise from 4 to 7. Together with a number of independent socialists, the 24 seats gained by the 'left' in that election signified a historic high for left representation in terms of seats, although in terms of first preferences Labour and the Workers Party between them did well that Labour alone during its peak in the 1960s.

Labour's support has been steadily eroding over the last two decades. Participation in different coalition governments has chipped away at its base. The 1982-7 coalition with Fianna Gael saw its ministers preside over the most stringent cuts in public expenditure, leading to a crisis in its relations with key trade unions. Three of its biggest affiliates – the IGTWU, AGTWU and the FWUI (the first and the last have now merged) threatened to break with Labour or cease operating the political fund 'to any prospective (Labour) candidate who supports coalition with Fianna Gael'. The 1987 election saw its share of the vote plummet to about 6 per cent and 12 seats.

In terms of its political physiognomy, the right wing dominates within the party: the leader – Dick Spring – took a leaf out of Neil Kinnock's book, and succeeded in ousting the Militant Tendency from the youth section and party branches. They, along with the rest of the left, under the leadership of Emmett Stagg (brother of hunger striker Frank Stagg) had grown with the disillusionment with the coalition. Stagg is a leading campaigner in the fight against extradition, although the party as a



Eamonn O'Duire/Report

Dublin solidarity with Republican struggle in the North, 1980

to enter the Dail, mobilising a wide base of support – small farmers, labourers and urban workers as well as the emerging national bourgeoisie – was a significant factor in securing popular support for the 26-county state. It has successfully maintained this broad level of support through the industrialisation programme of the late 1960s and 1970s and the promotion of welfare. It is only in recent years that its role as an arbiter between different and competing interests has begun to be eroded.

Fianna Fail has always been identified with a particular brand of nationalism – equating national identity with social and economic conservatism, catholicism and acceptance of partition (save for holiday speechifying). However the fight against British imperialism involved a far richer and more radical combination of elements. It included the socialist tradition of Connolly and Larkin formed by the struggles of the emerging working class; those agricultural workers, small farmers and workers who took part in the land seizures and occupations in the tumultuous period of 1919-21; the women organised in Cummann na mBan who strove for independent participation within the nationalist movement.

The defeat of these radical forces by the treaty, and their marginalisation in the subsequent history of the state by de Valera's conservative nationalism, is not irreversible. Whilst it would be premature too much significance to them at this stage, it is noteworthy that the schism within the Fianna Fail consensus and the impact of its Thatcherite policies has led to the development of local, com-

munity-based movements around the health cuts, unemployment, extradition.

As alluded to earlier, the 1987-89 minority Fianna Fail government marked an important shift of direction. Faced with a National Debt of Third World proportions, the Haughey government pursued a policy of austerity, significantly slashing public expenditure, with detrimental effects on the health service in particular. It was able to do this partly because it had taken over the austerity policies of Fianna Gael, who could hardly oppose in opposition what they had proposed in government.

It was also aided by the participation of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in the 'Programme of National Recovery' which disarmed the working class and the poor. Whilst its two years in power saw a decrease of 8 per cent of the National Debt, unemployment and emigration soared.

In the political arena too, Haughey scored another volte face. Having fought against the Anglo-Irish agreement in opposition, he now adopted it as his own. The policy being pursued was one of direct participation with Britain in the policing of the six-county state. He committed himself to upholding the 1987 Extradition Act, brought in to make extradition easier, at the same time as the appeal against the convictions of the Birmingham 6 was taking place, with the British judiciary making it clear that no other verdict than 'guilty' would be tolerated.

The effects of Haughey's policies were revealed in the outcome of the 1989 election he called to achieve a majority government. Not only did he fail in his objective, he was



Workers Party banner in Belfast; stressing 'class line' but ignoring the border and the oppression of Catholics

whole is dominated by support for partition.

In recent years the Workers Party has been drawing on Labour's bedrock of support, particularly in Dublin, although failing to make any significant inroads into Fianna Fail's working class base – until the 1989 elections. These proved to be a new element, and a crucial factor in Fianna Fail's crisis: Haughey's party failed to maintain its support amongst the Dublin working class who voted in large numbers for Labour, the Workers Party, and an independent, Tony Gregory, who represents one of the most deprived inner city constituencies. His combination of radical populism – organised through local community associations – and militant nationalism – has won him wide support amongst the unskilled and unemployed especially the young people.

A deep-going debate has now opened up within the Workers Party. The Labour Party has proved rather more resilient in maintaining a base of support than the Workers Party leaders might have hoped. One plank of its policies has been vituperative opposition to nationalist aspirations, equating the struggle of Sinn Fein and the IRA with loyalist sectarianism. Indeed, the response of one of its TDs – Des O'Hagan to the Supreme Court decision on Owen Carron was to condemn it as a 'step backwards to a situation where acts of sectarian terror are whitewashed with the phrase 'political offence''.

The other strand of its politics has been its concentration on the failure of the Irish bourgeoisie, support for multi-nationals alongside state sponsored economic growth, and job creation and a more equitable system of taxation. Hardly the stuff of revolutionary rhetoric or action!

At the centre of the current Workers Party debate is disagreement over a perspective for the future. Recently, the party's leading theoretician, Eoghan Harris produced a document; 'The Necessity of Social Democracy', which was published prior to its being discussed in the party. It was this fact, not the content of the document which provoked a furore and led to his resignation.

The text argues that the party has to put socialism behind it and 'dump socialist economics' which have become a break on progress. Instead, he proposes a return to social democracy, defined as 'the struggle for socialist values in a democratic society with a market economy'. What this means in practice is abandoning any notion of 'left unity' – namely any alliance with the Labour Party:

'We have nothing in common with the Labour Party's nationalistic policies and green politics, with the collection of clapped out clichés carried around by the 'left'.... We should move up to midfield as a mass party of social democracy and take as much left, liberal left of centre space as possible, recognising that the Labour vote will come to us eventually, and faster if it looks like we can take office. We should remind ourselves that coalition depends and is not a principle'.

So, the prospect of coalition again rears its head. In terms of its political outlook, it is difficult to envisage any form of coalition between elements of the Workers Party and Fianna Fail. Rather, it is more a perspective directed at Fianna Gael and the Progressive Democrats. The Workers Party's virulent pro-partitionist policies have more in common with those of the main bourgeois parties. As Harris expressed it:

'Our party was not born in a conflict about

socialism. Our party was born in a conflict about democracy. About the right of Protestants to their Northern State. ... When we defend the separate Protestant identity we show respect for all identities. When we defend Unionist rights – so difficult to defend down here – we defend all other minority rights from women to the poor in society'.

Where do the rights of the oppressed and discriminated-against nationalist population of the Six Counties enter into the picture? They do not feature in Harris's schema. Perhaps this is part of their strategy to marginalise terrorism, as one of the leading members of the party, Proinsias de Rossa said in the Dail in November 1989:

'No one political party will marginalise terrorism by itself. It is up to each of us, in this House, to develop and promote means of strengthening the democratic culture. The demands for peace and democracy are the primary demands of people in these islands...'

How such a perspective could have an appeal among the working class is difficult to imagine.

The question remains. How to reforge the different radical and socialist nationalism in a way that challenges the conservatism and catholicism of the 26-county state, toward a united Ireland which in the words of the 1916 proclamation 'will treat all its people equally'. The breach within the Fianna Fail consensus opening up, provide a challenge and an opportunity for those who would offer an alternative vision. Neither the Labour Party or the Workers Party as they stand can offer such a vision.

Talks show that the British have no solution

by Liam Mac Uaid

Peter Brooke, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, clearly has a good public relations department.

They have created a public image of an archetypal upper class English bumbler with Irish roots and an intuitive feel for Irish history and society, who by virtue of his limitless capacity for listening can win people with the most diverse opinions round to his way of thinking. The fact that Brooke's Irish credentials rest on the fact that he comes from a family of English landlords who benignly extracted the rent from Irish farmers is a neat counter point to his present role.

There is no doubt that the exploratory talks begun by Brooke's administration are an extremely serious initiative. Much of the obfuscation which surrounds them is certainly being generated by the British government. Nobody will say for certain what exactly is being discussed: is it talks about talks? is it a 'power sharing' administration; or is it a straightforward return to Stormont?

Much of the vagueness is due to the fact that none of the participants is exactly sure of what they can achieve and what they are likely to get. The fact that Ian Paisley and James Molyneux, the two Unionist leaders, emerge from meetings with Brooke smiling and a couple of days later John Hume of the SDLP comes out of his meeting also grinning like a Cheshire cat suggests that they are being told rather different versions of the same story.

The one thing that does unite the SDLP, the Unionists, the British and Irish governments is that they all have an interest in the return of a devolved government, though for different reasons. For the Unionists the Stormont regime gave them positions and power in their own statelet. For British imperialism a local administration run by Unionists allows it to present the situation actually caused by its presence as as nothing but a local conflict between the adherents of two religions, the origins of which are lost in history.

The SDLP is the political expression of the Northern Catholic bourgeoisie's capitulation to loyalism and imperialism, and as such is not capable of leading a struggle against them. But it has to be *seen* to oppose them, and quite apart from careerist reasons, a local administration with some sort of legislative

chamber would be the ideal forum. For Dublin, the thorn in their side is not British imperialism but the part of the population which is struggling against the imperialists. They want to be seen to participate in the establishment of the new arrangements, which can be sold an historic step forward towards peace and eventual unity.

But everything is very unstable. Seamus Mallon raised the flag for the green wing of

more conciliatory to Dublin and the SDLP than is the rest of his party's line. He is, for example, ready to grant the SDLP the face-saver of having Dublin involved in peripheral talks about European matters while the main talks involving the Unionists, the SDLP and British take place. He has also said that a satisfactory relationship with Dublin is a necessary condition for the creation of devolved governmental structures. Paisley



Things here have changed since the 'blanket' protest and hunger strikes

the SDLP and part of Dublin's ruling Fianna Fail when he declared that the Maryfield Secretariat would stay open while the talks are in progress. The Secretariat is an office near Belfast where some Irish civil servants are based, purportedly to deal with complaints from Northern nationalists who feel 'alienated' from the British Army after their house has been wrecked in a search.

For Unionists this sop to the Irish government from the Anglo Irish Agreement is symbolic and irritating and they have demanded that it be closed before they participate in real talks. Mallon's remarks were said by Hume to have been 'misunderstood', but Mallon was clearly making a deliberate point. One blushes to think of the rather plainer speaking that went on inside the SDLP as a result of Mallon's comments. The leader and the deputy leader were publicly disagreeing on one of the Unionists' most important demands.

The problems are not confined to the nationalist camp. Paisley's deputy Peter Robinson has made statements which are

would not say that sort of thing publicly even if a gun were held to his head, but Robinson's comments must reflect what part of the DUP is now thinking.

The loyalist working class is abstaining from politics at the moment. An attempt by the Unionist leadership to mark the last anniversary of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement by emulating the human chains of the Baltic nationalist movements was a fiasco. Only a few hundred people turned out and Molyneux comforted himself with the observation that 'Ulster folk don't like holding hands in public'.

It is true that there has been an increase in activity by loyalist murder gangs recently but this is a consequence of the demoralisation of their population. There have also been riots in loyalist working class areas and attacks on the homes of prison staff in support of the demand for segregation from Republican prisoners. Again this has been organised by terrorist groups. It is not likely that these organisations will profit from the crisis of Unionist leadership in any significant way.



Sinn Féin Ard Fheis: movement faces "appalling crisis of perspective"

They have only been a significant political force when they have been in alliance with the two main Unionist parties and are not politically sophisticated enough to provide an alternative leadership. In any event there are deep economic reasons which explain why the big Loyalist industrial battallions in Shorts and the shipyard have not been roused into action by a threatened settlement.

The Republican movement is faced with an appalling crisis of perspective. It is a marginal force in the South and its support is limited to the Northern ghettos and poorer rural areas. From this distance there seems to be little evidence of a discussion of how to break this isolation. This means that there will be no mass organised resistance to whatever settlement may eventually emerge, since the Republican movement is the natural core of a leadership for such a campaign. As with so many other matters which 'practical revolutionaries' tend to dismiss, this has a pressing practical significance.

While it still remains true that mass support for Republicanism prevents Britain from consolidating its rule in Ireland by relying on its historical alliance with Unionism, this is not the threat of these talks. The direction of British policy since the 1970s has been to criminalise and 'Ulsterise' the national liberation struggle. Arming Loyalists and dressing them in British uniforms, removing political status from Republican POWs and present attempts to exclude Sinn Féin from political life are all parts of this strategy. Ultimately a durable imperialist settlement depends on crushing the Republican movement. Repres-

sion and marginalisation are two means of achieving this. When Republicanism is forced down to its bedrock support it becomes easier for the British to do this and for Dublin and the SDLP to acquiesce to it.

In *Socialist Outlook* 24 Geoff Bell quoted Churchill's famous remark to the effect that whatever happens in the world the Irish situation remains the same. Broadly speaking Churchill was right, so long as Britain stays in Ireland. But even Unionist neanderthals have televisions, and they have seen what has happened in Eastern Europe. They know that 1992 will have an impact on relations within Europe and feel that they may subverted by events beyond their control.

John Hume has theorised that European integration may make Ireland's border irrelevant, one assumes because the whole island will become a peripheral offshore province of a centralised European state. Nevertheless all this adds to the uneasiness of the Unionist leaderships, who for more than twenty years have been living with the constant fear of betrayal by London and a sense of siege at home. Movement frightens them and their fear of British withdrawal, or at least abandonment, as Britain seeks to co-opt the Nationalist bourgeoisie is greater than ever before.

Add to these anxieties the state of the economy. Half the population of the North of Ireland is employed by the British state. The traditional local industries have been destroyed, and with them the traditional ruling class and economic rationale for the Protestant bourgeoisie's own parliament. Recent reports

on the economy have concluded that the solution to the unemployment problem is to train a workforce in the skills needed for the British and European labour markets. Put more bluntly this means that the educational system should be geared towards training for mass emigration. Without its own protected areas of employment the shortage of jobs also affects the Protestant population and contributes to its demoralisation.

The talks mark the collapse of the Anglo-Irish Agreement but were made possible by it. The Irish bourgeoisie is committed to being a partner to whatever form of settlement imperialism can force through, in the absence of any resistance to it. The most likely variant to gain acceptance from all parties is a Unionist administration with the SDLP allowed to participate in some policy-making committees.

Yet it is not certain that an agreement will be reached or that it will not founder on some combination of Loyalist and Republican resistance once it is in place. Despite the economic arguments, consciousness adapts less quickly than the material world.

All that is certain is that Britain can only give the Irish people a lasting peace by withdrawing. Our duty in the British labour movement is to begin to organise to thwart any imperialist solutions and ensure that a struggle is waged in the Labour Party to prevent it from supporting them. This task will become more critical as the possibility of a Labour government becomes more real.

Civic Forum searches for answers and allies 'Don't mention the economy!'



'Gentle revolution' defeated stalinism but left questions unanswered

At first glance the Czechoslovak elections in June followed the pattern of other elections in Eastern Europe, with the ousting of the stalinist party from office and the emergence of a leadership more favourable to western 'democracy'. But as COLIN MEADE shows, the results and the situation are more complex, and the position of the working class includes strengths as well as problems.

Civic Forum (OF) and its Slovak equivalent, Public against Violence (VPN), led by personalities identified with the leadership of the 'gentle revolution' in November last year, gained a crushing victory in the Czechoslovak elections on June 8-9, with 46 per cent of the vote nationwide on a turnout of 96 per cent.

In second place came the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) with 13.6 per cent, followed by the Christian Democrats (KDU/KDH) with 11.6 per cent. This last result was a bitter blow to a party that had seemed at one stage to be fast catching up on the OF/VPN and believed itself certain to push the KSC into third place.

The OF/VPN did better in the urban centres than in the countryside, and while in the Czech Lands the OF got 53 per cent of the vote, the VPN could only manage 29.3 per cent in Slovakia, although even here it was the largest party, beating the Christian Democrats into second place. The OF/VPN victory was due, of course, in the first place

to their identification as the party of the anti-bureaucratic revolution: but it was also a tangible victory over the Christian Democrats.

One factor here was the public revelation on the eve of poll that one of the main Christian Democratic leaders, Josef Bartoncik, had been working for the secret police for 17 years, during which time he had informed against members of the Charter 77 civil rights movement, in which many of the OF/VPN luminaries, as well as President Vaclav Havel, had been centrally involved. Bartoncik had, so the story goes, been offered immunity from exposure by Havel if he stood down from his position in Christian Democracy. Bartoncik accepted the offer but then reneged on it, leading to Havel's decision to authorise public exposure.

However the KDU/KDH's failure has other reasons - they had been slipping in the polls even before the exposure of Bartoncik. Their East German counterparts, whose success they no doubt hoped to emulate, had the decisive argument of West German Chancellor Kohl's deutschmarks at their disposal.

The KDU/KDH however, had to rely on the purely spiritual appeals of Christian morality and the defence of the Czech and Slovak peoples against the horrors of homosexuality, pornography and abortion flooding in from the West. Especially in the Czech Lands, where the KDU got 8-9 per cent, the news fell on stony ground. Even a visit from Pope John Paul III in April failed to help.

The OF/VPN rather than the Christian Democrats was probably the party most identified in the voter's minds with the 'West' not only in the sense of economic reintegration into the world market, but also with an idealised vision of a tolerant, pluralist 'Western' society. This progressive

side of OF/VPN is underlined by the fact that, as the votes for the Greens, and the Social Democratic and Socialist Parties declined, so the OF/VPN vote rose.

The KSC will have been pleased with its result, which makes it 'the party of constructive opposition' in the new parliament. Its voting base is the still really existing bureaucracy, armed forces and police, plus pensioners from all these, and some support in rural areas, where the power structures have been less shaken than in the towns. Its best result was in Central Bohemia where it got 18 per cent.

The KSC will be hoping to pick up further support from sectors immediately threatened by imminent economic liberalisations. It is also hoping to place itself at the centre of a left regroupment, as the only left party to have got above the 5 per cent of the votes needed to be represented in the federal parliament. The Social Democratic Party and the Czech Socialist Party both failed the 5 per cent test, as did the Greens.

Nonetheless the KSC's historic responsibility for the present crisis will mean that other left forces will remain profoundly and rightly suspicious of its motives and objectives.

People with a sense of history will know that much of the KSC's present rhetoric about respecting democratic rights and genuine collaboration with other forces can be matched almost word for word from the party's propaganda from the post-war period, before the takeover of monopoly power (the introduction of 'socialism') in 1948.

The results in Slovakia were strikingly different from those in the Czech Lands, and of central importance for the future. Slovak national claims have traditionally been

treated with dismissive condescension by the Czechs. Professor Masaryk, the first president of independent Czechoslovakia, considered Slovakia 'the natural area for Czech economic expansion' and under Masaryk's First Republic the existence of Slovakia as a separate nation was officially denied.

Things did not improve under the Stalinist regime, with a ferocious campaign against 'Slovak bourgeois nationalism' in the 1950s. Despite federalisation in 1969 – a belated result of the 1968 reforms – the Slovak sense of being treated as an appendage has led to a powerful upsurge of nationalism. In these elections the openly pro-independence Slovak Nationalist Party got 11 per cent of the vote, but all the parties, including the VPN ran on an overtly pro-Slovak ticket.

The Slovak question also entails a Hungarian question. Slovakia formed a part of the Hungarian kingdom until 1918 and some 300,000 Hungarians still live in Slovakia. Anxious about the possible consequences of a rise in Slovak nationalism, within which right wing and clerical currents have historically always dominated, many Hungarians voted for a 'party of the minorities' whose leading figure Miklos Duray is ideologically in tune with the OF/VPN.

The great unspoken issue in the election was the economy. The lack of discussion of this was a product of the unanimity of all the political parties on the need for reintegration of Czechoslovakia into the world market. In early July major price rises will be introduced, with a compensatory rise in wages. State firms are being broken up into 'rational units' which, in the absence of other sources of supply will have to make arrangements with Western – and above all West German – firms to survive.

Groups of workers will be hoping that such arrangements will lead to higher living standards and a secure future. Yet the first step towards making any deal with a Western firm will be significant productivity improvements in the new, smaller, 'rational units'. Often the workers will exercise their current strength in the enterprises to choose capable managers able to ensure the survival of their enterprise.

The government, learning from the experience of surrounding countries, hopes to avoid a catastrophic transition, offering compensatory benefits for social rights that are to be scrapped. For example, women, instead of being legally entitled to a place for their children in (low quality) state nurseries, will be offered a financial benefit to use, either to pay for a nursery or stay at home. This will be a popular measure, at least as long as inflation doesn't catch hold, devastating the value of wages and benefits paid in Czechoslovak crowns.



The danger is that, in the process of providing a 'choice', the currently existing *right* will disappear in the framing of the new constitution that will be the first task of a new parliament. Those wishing to oppose the negative effects of the changes will have to negotiate a narrow course between the Scylla of the world market and the Charybdis of appearing to call for the restoration of the discredited system of bureaucratic planning.

There is also sure to be resistance – for example there are already reports of opposition amongst transport trade unions to planned fare rises.

An issue that the new government will not be able to escape is the problem of what to do about the secret police and their files. The Bartoncik affair shows that there is plenty of dynamite under the chairs of many in responsible positions; and it also shows how a revelation at the right moment can serve electoral ends. Only a firm decision either to destroy or open all the files can clear the air.

Other controversies are certain to explode if the OF/VPN decide to make a coalition or rely on parliamentary collaboration with the Christian Democrats. The KDU/KDH will almost certainly push the idea of a restriction on abortion rights as a price for its collaboration. However Havel's move in reinstating Slovak ex-communist Marian Calfa as prime minister suggests that he continues to believe in an attempt to sustain an implicit 'historic compromise' with the pro-reform wing of the KSC.

The question of the right of 40,000 Vietnamese – already the object of racist attacks by skinheads – to stay in the country will show whether the leaders of the OF/VPN are really serious about humanist principles.

Here also all is not lost. On May 13 Antonin Hrazdira, the Czech regional interior minister was fired for 'passivity in the face of aggression against gypsies and Vietnamese', an example of serious concern over racist at-

tacks which might be usefully studied by some of the Western governments that are now lavishing advice on 'democracy' to Eastern Europe.

It seems certain that the line of divide on these and many other questions will cut directly through the Civic Forum and Public against Violence. Even before the elections there were controversies in the government over economic policy between the finance minister Vaclav Klaus, who wants an immediate transition to a market economy and Vladimir Komarek who shows some concern for the social costs.

This division will become much more profound as the economic changes get under way. In a round about way this controversy reflects the conflict between the democratic potential of the mass mobilisations of November and December, and the undemocratic plans and elitist instincts of the arch-marketisers who control many of the key positions in the OF/VPN movement and the government.

Controversy over the economy will also lead to a sharper questioning of the undemocratic structure of the OF/VPN movement, where ultimate power resides in the hands of an unelected coordinating committee in Prague. Petr Kuzvart from the Czechoslovak Left Alternative – Movement for a Democratic and Self- Managing Socialism writes:

'When we look at the different forces within Civic Forum, it is probable that this imposing political force is going to be torn apart, or, at minimum, that it will be reduced by the split of left-wing elements, as well as by groups from the political centre of right' (*International Viewpoint* no 188, July 3 1990)

In any case these elections open a further stage, and in no way the end of, a profound turbulence in Czechoslovakia; a turbulence that will not fail to send waves through the whole of Europe.

Food for thought?

by Kate Ahrens

It seems as though food is becoming more and more dangerous these days. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or 'Mad Cow Disease' is just the latest in a long line of scares over what we are being sold along with our dinners.

These scares raise a number of issues. The most obvious one is what is the government doing about it, and although many people have asked this question, the answers are never very satisfactory.

The Tory philosophy of the free market when extended to food safety and hygiene doesn't seem to quite work. The salmonella in eggs scare has died down, but the danger still exists and will continue to exist until battery hens are not fed the remains of their relations. What was never taken very seriously was Edwina Currie's declaration that 90 percent of egg production was infected. But what this means is that the chicken sold every day is almost certainly infected with salmonella.

BSE is a prime example of evading the real issue. How can British beef ever be seen to be safe when cattle cake is still made with the remains of sheep in it? And why has nothing been said about Scrapie, the version of BSE found in sheep which has been around in the meat on sale in shops for years. More interesting still is the question of why both scrapie and BSE are almost exclusively British diseases.

There are however other questions to be asked. Why do our farmers feed their livestock food unsuitable for them anyway? A major factor has to be economic. It is cheaper to keep chickens in battery farms and feed them waste from the last generation than to let them roam free and feed them grain, even at the expense of safety. The Thatcher government, in the unconvincing guise of John Gummer, refuses to take responsibility for the problems and instead insists that food is safe even when the evidence is to the contrary.

With green issues high on everyone's agenda at the moment, providing food safety



"Lovely grub" – but what's in it? and what has it been in?

and without damaging the environment is of paramount importance. But if farmers are also expected to provide cheap, plentiful food then who should decide what comes first?

This government has decided on cheapness over safety. First by drastically cutting the number of health checks to monitor farms. Second by not providing sufficient compensation for farmers whose stock is affected by disease, so often the only way for farmers to maintain that livelihood is to sell the diseased stock as healthy produce.

But this problem is more widespread than just chickens and cows. Insecticides and chemical fertilisers for crop growing have also been found to cause some adverse effects when eaten. Intensive farming techniques and not rotating crops drain the soil of nutrients and makes it unusable without fertilisers.

Additives, particularly food colourings found in orange squash have been found to exacerbate hyper-activity in children. And allergies to food additives are very common.

The key to all these different situations is that they affect only a small proportion of the population. Generally healthy adults are not at risk (although this may be different with BSE)

and therefore the government feels no obligation to do anything

Food in this country has always been cosmetically dressed up. Fruit has been waxed for years in order to make it look nice whilst possibly disguising flaws and certainly adding wax to your food. Canned peas have green food colouring in them to make them look more 'natural'.

Because this has been the norm for so long, a great many of the dangers of modern farming and food producing techniques are overlooked, and we merrily munch our way through apples, carrots or tomatoes without giving a thought to the poisons we are swallowing with them.

Organic food has started to become a serious alternative, although it is often prohibitively expensive and needless to say, suffers in looks when compared to the cosmetically doctored food. The market cannot hope to deal with this problem as it is hopelessly ill equipped for changing people's buying habits away

from cheap good-looking food to expensive, smaller produce.

If food scares are to become a thing of the past, then certain requirements must be met.

a) compensation for diseased crop and livestock must be adequate

b) information for the consumer about fresh produce must be displayed in the same way as packaged food

c) comprehensive testing of chemical fertilisers and insecticides must be instituted

d) a higher budget should be allocated for health checks of farm premises

e) governmental measures must be brought in to ensure that organic farming becomes the rule rather than the exception.

In order for these measures to become fully effective the only answer is nationalisation of agribusiness under consumers and producers democratic control. The farming business has for too long been concerned with profits before safety and the ecology.

Without this, food scares can only become more widespread and eating a square meal could soon become more dangerous than crossing the road!

Trades Councils: Arenas for struggle? or a den for the bureaucrats?

By Sam Stacey

A 'consultative paper' on the state of Trades Councils in England and Wales shows a steep decline: the most telling figures are those indicating the average attendance, which fell from 8,430 to 4,136 in 1989! In the ten years from 1979, branches affiliated (in terms of their total membership) fell from 3,461,413 to 2,413,137. This of course, reflects formal affiliation which says nothing about active involvement.

What do these figures – contained in a document produced by the Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee (TCJCC) (involving reps from Trades Councils and members of the TUC General Council) reflect? They are obviously a product of a decade of defeats at the hands of the Thatcher government. The massacre of whole sectors of traditional industries led to the departure of a large layer of activists, including those who were the mainstays of many Trades Councils. At the same time there has been a general decline in the numbers of union activists, and a dearth of younger ones coming forward.

The smashing of the militant shop stewards' movement in industries such as car production also had a deadening impact. The decline in the AUEW and TGWU in terms of organisation and activity has been particularly marked. In the Thames Valley area for instance, these unions now have little involvement in the Trades Councils.

The domination of 'new realism' which has been largely responsible for the defeats has also fed off them, and created an atmosphere in which militant trade unionism has been seen as an anachronism, a thing of the past. The tradition of class solidarity has been denuded by the defeats, producing a decline amongst activists of the consciousness of belonging to a labour movement. Sectoral mentality and a scramble for members has been cultivated by many union bureaucrats, in this situation, and unions have retreated into a deadly parochialism which is concerned purely with direct workplace interests – wages and conditions. Political trade unionism has



1926 general strike: Trades Councils frightened the TUC

declined.

This is the climate that has produced the decline of the Trades Councils. But the steepness of this decline is not simply the product of objective factors. For the experience in different areas has been contrary to this general trend. Results have depended on the political composition of each Trades Council and the view held of what their role is. For many years, the Trades Councils were dominated by a tedious routinism which drove people away through sheer boredom and opposed and initiative.

Occasionally they would be brought to life in support of a particular dispute, though even this was often passive as opposed to active solidarity. But in many areas in the 1980s a vacuum opened up as the old bureaucratic stalwarts began to disappear. The decline of the Communist Party also had a similar impact. In some places the left began to fill this vacuum and turn the Trades Councils into a more active, campaigning force, showing that the decline of the Trades Councils overall is a political question which requires political answers – something which the TCJCC completely ignores.

Trades Councils are an arena of political struggle. Their make up and role at any time is dependent on the political complexion of the local labour movement. There has been enough positive experience in the last few years to show that they can be important centres for organising solidarity. Equally, the

reverse can be the case – as in some areas during the miners' strike, where conservative Trades Councils were able to present major obstacles to political solidarity and impede any struggle against the sabotage of the dispute by the TUC and Labour leaders.

Where solidarity has been a regular, and natural feature of the activity of a Trades Council it has been possible, as in the case of Oxford (where Trades Councils have on-going disputes committees) for instance to achieve a good response to struggles such as the ambulance dispute, and on the right issue, mobilise big demonstrations.

It has been argued by some, notably the Socialist Workers Party, that there is little point in organising to win control of Trades Councils because they "represent so little in the workplace". Certainly there is little point in winning control of a Trades Council to carry out SWP-style politics, and merely push through propagandist left wing resolutions every now and again. If a trades council is to be given political life it has to serve as a focus for the local labour movement. It has to address the concrete problems of the working class in its locality. This will inevitably, to one degree or another, bring it into conflict with the local union bureaucrats and right wing labour councils.

The experience in Reading is interesting in this respect. There the Trades Council was responsible for setting up a town-wide campaign on the Poll Tax which has meant a

public battle with the Labour council. This has led to the local NALGO branch, whose executive committee is full of Labour Party hacks, withdrawing its delegates from the Trades Council. But the left has been able to achieve far more from its position on the trades council than it would otherwise have been able to.

True, the Trades Council would not be able to mobilise strikes by a call to the work places; but this is hardly surprising given the fact that for decades this Trades Council like many others has not 'sold' itself to the working class. Their relationship has been entirely with the union branches, whose attendances have declined.

But what is to stop Trades Councils working to develop a direct relationship with the workplaces? Indeed even the TUC has been forced to think about opening trades councils to workplace reps - from shop stewards' committees - as a means of stemming their decline. They decided to set up a number of trials, where Trades Councils would invite delegates from shop stewards committees and other workplace organisations, though with typical ineptitude this still has not yet been carried out.

Potentially Trades Councils can be organising centres of the local workers' movement, carrying out such work as unionisation drives which cut across sectoral interests and draw together local unions in the service of common interests; fighting to keep out non-union firms, trying to unionise non-union sites and so on.

The TCJCC document offers the chance of a discussion on the role of Trades Councils today. They have asked for views to be expressed on how this decline can be stemmed. It would be useful for the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee (whose conference late last year was supported by 24 Trades Councils) to promote a discussion amongst these trades councils and seek some degree of coordination.

It can be done! Trades Councils can boost solidarity work

If this is done trades councils can become political bastions in the struggle against 'new realism' in the labour movement; not in the sense of passing empty resolutions, but in their practical activity, promoting class solidarity, assisting in rebuilding working class organisation, and drawing together the best and most class conscious trade union activists who want to build a combative move-

ment. Of course, the local full time union bureaucrats will not simply sit back and see a trades council transformed into a centre of political opposition. Where they are able, they will reorganise their forces to restore the Trades Council to a harmless routinist body. But that is an inevitable and constant part of the struggle.

The Trades Councils annual conference is a talking shop which has no powers. It is not taken seriously by a great many Trades Councils who do not bother sending delegates, viewing it as a waste of money. One of the demands that the left should press is that the Trades Councils conference should have powers to organise independently of the TUC, able to elect a committee mandated by the conference to carry out its decisions and organise independent initiatives. Naturally this would be resisted by the TUC, but it would surely be a demand around which it would be possible to organise those Trades Councils in which the left has a strong base, and want to build a live, active Trades Council movement.

Trades Councils originated in the second half of the last century, the period of the craft unions of artisan workers, who were a definite separate social strata from the mass of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. They were the product of the small scale workshop in the period just before the growth of the large-scale mass production factories. They founded the TUC, and lived quite amicably with the Liberals who dominated it. The trades councils were able to send delegates to the TUC Congress until 1895.

But with the rise of 'new unionism' organising the unskilled manual workers, the Trades Councils became far more radical. In the three years at the height of the struggles which gave birth to the new mass unions (1888-91) 60 new Trades Councils were set up. Consequently this led to an influx of socialists and militant unionists into the TUC Congress, When the Liberals recaptured control of Congress in 1895, the trades Council

representatives were booted out. Although the Liberals were finally defeated 4 years later, the Trades Councils were never again allowed to send delegations to the TUC.

The union bureaucracy has always viewed the Trades Councils with a certain ambivalence. This is because in periods of major struggles the Trades Councils have taken charge of those struggles; that is, taken them out of the control of the official union apparatuses. Hence in the 1926 General Strike, the TUC General Council instructed the Trades Councils not to take charge of the strike. They were not to consider themselves as local reps of the General Council. They were to leave the organisation of the strike to the full-time officials of the unions on strike. Many of them, of course, simply ignored these instructions and acted as the organising centres of the strike, either by setting up strike committees, or Councils of Action.



Holiday bestsellers

- The Bridesmaid**
Ruth Rendell, Arrow, £3.99
- Devices and Desires**
P.D. James, Faber and Faber, £6.99
- The Remains of the Day**
Kazuo Ishiguro, Faber and Faber, £3.99

Reviewed by Jane Wells

Armed with a brief (but, needless to say, no budget) from *Socialist Outlook* to find a clutch of books from the bestseller list worth reviewing and even recommending to readers, I decided on a two-pronged strategy.

First, the easy option, Ruth Rendell and P. D. James. I would have read them anyway. They are a guaranteed enjoyable – if not necessarily thought-provoking – read.

Ruth Rendell is a Labour supporter, a feminist and long-time CND member. This rarely makes an obvious impact on her work apart from avoiding some cruder excesses indulged by other writers.

She fits more neatly with the Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers school of women thriller writers than with the new radicals who've been infiltrating the

mainstream publishers' lists in recent years. Some, like the American Sara Paretsky, are real storytellers (in her case, in the tradition of Chandler, but without the blonde double-crossing femme fatale as the root of all evil), working in a thoroughly political framework.

Unfortunately many others are disappointing because they're just not good writers. P.D. James' and Ruth Rendell's popularity can be put down to the fact that they can tell a good story, at the very least.

Their accessibility is due in part to their familiarity. English detective books are known as 'cosies' in the States. The low life is never really that low, characters generally operate within a moral world of received wisdom, if good doesn't win out in the end you at least know who the baddies are, and the bobbies are not just decent, they're even interesting.

Ruth Rendell's more compelling works are those written under the Barbara Vine pen name which detail the psychological build-up to crime, and her thrillers in which the perpetrator's psychology, and not the detection of crime, is the focus.

The Bridesmaid falls into this last category, and is one of the best accounts I can remember reading of a sort of personality and circumstance which has rarely been explored and never makes the headlines in real-life crime reporting. The individual's link with reality is tenuous at best, and their moral frame of reference is not evil or maniacal, but seriously wacky whilst nearly-normal to a superficial glance. Rendell shows how such a fragile grip on life can be nearer than we think to 'normality', and just a short step away from crime – and that it can be catching, too.

P.D. James is even more of an establishment writer, and it shows. A civil servant with a background in the Foreign Office, NHS and police work, she is now a BBC Governor. A less prolific writer than Ruth Rendell, her plots are often more complex, and always engrossing.

Another pleasure reading her is spotting the stereotype or piece of gratuitous reactionary commentary. In earlier books revolutionaries in donkey jackets pronounce their programmes in north London pubs, and arrange coded cloak-and-dagger meetings in the British Museum (to what end was never made clear). I suppose the WRP at its height may have indulged in such nonsense, but in P.D. James' imagination they posed a widespread and serious threat to the fabric of society as we know it.

So too did sixties sociology lecturers with long hair. In *Devices and Desires* there's an anti-nuclear activist who actually receives almost fair treatment. But the reader's main sympathies are directed to a recently redundant head teacher, hounded from her loony left London school for refusing to call a blackboard a chalkboard. And so myths are made, and sustained. For all that I'd still recommend it for some entertaining holiday reading.

My second prong was to branch out and buy some books that I wouldn't normally try. I easily resisted the No. 1 bestseller *Ambition*, a 'shopping and sex' novel by Julie Birchill, on the grounds that I didn't want to add to her profits: by all accounts it's awful, and so is she –

particularly since she claims some left-wing credentials whilst taking up reactionary postures on everything from Ireland to Iran.

I decided to go for something completely new. Ranked about number fifteen on W. H. Smith's bestseller shelves was *Ruling Passions*, by *Sunday Times* columnist (and former wife of famous Labour MP Tony), Susan Crossland. This turned out to be a political saga in the mould of Jeffrey Archer, only it was even worse: I should have known from the cover which features a Tory rosette lying tastefully on some silky lingerie. Sex in novels I don't mind but sex combined with politics is only slightly more interesting than sex and shopping.

A heroine called Daisy, given immortal lines like "The thing about you, Carl, is your arrogance."

You know you're the brilliant intellectual of the new right. You know you're going to get one of the key posts in Washington. You know you're the greatest artist in the sack. You don't need anyone else to tell you so. Sometimes it makes me feel I'm simply a doll' just didn't do anything for me. So I gave up after two chapters, and wouldn't advise you to bother at all.

The Remains of the Day, by Nagasaki-born and now England-based author Kazuo Ishiguro, was much better. The novel won him the Booker Prize last year, so I knew that the story centred on a butler at the end of his career and at the end of an era.

Whilst it's ostensibly not about much at all, the story builds up a portrait of a man coming to terms with some of life's Big Questions – what motivates other people, and himself, and confronting the limitations in his own understanding.

It's also funny, and quite romantic. Inter-war politics provide a subtle backdrop to the novel. Whilst its not the ultimate combination of the dialectics of psychology and politics, individual and society, *The Remains of the Day* is a well written book with plenty of insight to be going on with until a socialist classic makes it into Smith's top ten.

Early battles of South Africa's black workers

Yours for the Union

Baruch Hirson
Zed Press, £32.95
hardback, £9.95
paperback

Reviewed by Charlie
Van Gelderen.

This book by Baruch Hirson could easily have been titled *The Making of the South African Working Class* as it is a panoramic and well-researched survey of the growth of the black working class in South Africa in the period 1930-47.

These were the years which saw the rapid industrialisation of South Africa and its inevitable consequences - a huge increase in the working class and the uncontrolled urbanisation which resulted in the sprawl of vast shanty towns all around the big industrial centres.

The book is particularly valuable because it emphasises the organic link between the struggles in the mine and factory with the parallel conflicts in the urban ghettos and rural reserves. The unity of the struggle in South Africa and the surrounding territories is emphasised.

The indigenous black work force was supplemented by workers drawn from what are now Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland, and from the now independent countries north of the Limpopo - Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi.

Hirson concentrates his study on the Transvaal and particularly the Witwatersrand, the centre of black trade unions during the period, marking the significance of the gold mines in the economy. While white trade unions flourished and enjoyed legal protection, black workers who wanted to organise were faced with enormous difficulties.

Their organisations were not illegal as such, but they had no legal status either. After 1937

they were permitted to give evidence before the newly established Wages Boards, but strike action was forbidden:

"The most elementary matters presented new problems: Africans had no right to occupy premises in the town and subterfuge was needed to rent offices, without which it could not survive. Financing the union was even more daunting, Wages were so low that subscriptions were not always forthcoming and the unions were starved of funds..."

Black miners, domestic and rural workers - two-thirds of the workforce - faced even greater difficulties. They were excluded from the provisions of the wage legislation, and this prevented trade unionists from gaining meaningful improvements for them. This did not stop would-be organisers. There were still campaigns to organise farm labourers as early as 1920 (today, they still remain largely unorganised) and several attempts to organise domestic servants. Most important were the attempts to organise the mineworkers in the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1928, unions led by the South African Communist Party (SACP) combined in the non-European Federation of Trade Unions, and affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions (the Profintern). This was the time of Stalin's 'Third Term' ultra-leftism. In line with Profintern directive, the 'revolutionary' unions rejected all reformism and "paid little heed to the workers' immediate needs."

In the 1930s, it was Trotskyists, expelled from the CPSA who took the lead in unionising the black workers of the Rand. Thibedi and later, Murray Puryd and Ralph Lee, members of the Workers Party of South Africa, took over the

leadership of the African Laundry Workers Union, but the membership had grown to only 300

when Lee and other Trotskyists decided there was little they could do in South Africa and set sail for England where they were later to form the Workers International League (WIL)

By far the most important Trotskyist trade union organiser at that time was Max Gordon. Hirson mistakenly describes him as a member of the Workers Party. At the time he left Cape Town for Johannesburg in 1935, he was a member of the Lenin Club. Max was a member of the first Trotskyist organisation in South Africa, the Marxist Educational League.

Gordon made skilful use of such legal routes as did exist. He transformed the union's offices into a meeting place for the unemployed - a place where employers could contact the union when extra staff was required. He arranged for legal assistance, set up classes in literacy, arithmetic, history etc. The classes were eventually closed by the police because, they said, the history course had a distinctly political flavour.

Some idea of the scope of Max Gordon's activities can be gauged from W.G. Ballinger to the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR): "Mr Max Gordon, whose activities are being subsidised from the grant given me by the Institute of Race Relations, reports that he attended to about 150 complaints of Native workers against employers of labour during the period May to August 1937 covering claims for wrongful dismissal, wages in lieu of notice, underpayment of wages, accord-

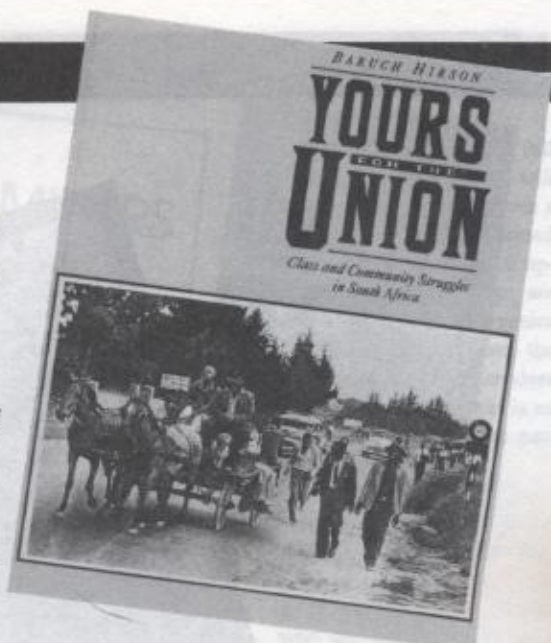
ing to agreement and payment for overtime. (Sums of) £1 to £50 were obtained totalling approximately £260."

Gordon continued his activities until he was interned by the Smuts government in June 1940.

I have concentrated in this review on the activities of the small Trotskyist groups, because this is a period in South African working class history which is not generally known. Hirson's book of course, covers a vastly wider field. It is a rich and well-resourced mine of information about the struggles of the black workers of South Africa fighting employers and the state for the very right to organise, combining the class struggle in mine and factory with the national struggle.

The book ends in 1947. The gains which had been won during the war when the economy was heavily dependent on the black workers, were not substantial enough to guarantee the future advance of black trade unionism. When the white workers returned from the war, there were displacements, a situation made worse by the downturn in the economy.

After 1948, of course, they were to face the further repression of Verwoerdian apartheid. It was not to be until 1972 that the black trade union movement took the giant stride forward which was to lead to the situation today when the organised working class in COSATU and Nactu are pivotal in the struggle for a socialist South Africa.



Ammunition for campaigns

Imagine there's no countries

Steve Cohen

£2.50 (order it by sending a cheque to: GMIAU, 23 New Mount Street, Manchester M4 4DE).

Unequal Migrants: The European Community's unequal treatment of migrants and refugees

£4 (order it from JCWI, 115 Old Street, London EC1V 9JR).

NALGO Immigration and Nationality Conference

Manchester 15 April 1989.

Reviewed by Finn Jensen

Steve Cohen is familiar to readers of *Socialist Outlook* for his articles on immigration issues. In June he published this 88 page booklet *Imagine there's no countries* sub-titled '1992 and international immigration controls against migrants, immigrants and refugees'.

The introduction deals with the pattern of British immigration laws and one chapter with the European Community's plans for common immigration controls. The other five chapters are devoted to the history of immigration controls and the resistance to these laws in the United States – and comparisons with both Britain and Europe. It is a useful exercise to give a detailed account of the immigration issues in the States, a subject about which there is limited knowledge in Britain. But Steve Cohen aims to be more than just informative: he seeks to show that all the imperialist countries are developing similar immigration controls, and that in many respects the United States is showing the lead.

Campaigns against immigration controls have fought to make clear that the purpose of British immigration laws is to limit the influx of black people from third world countries. What



also needs to be understood is that EC countries through the Trevi group and the Schengen group are planning a similar arrangement by 1992 for the whole of the EC. One of the reasons why this is so little known is that the groups are not under the democratic control of any EC institutions. They work in secret!

One of the differences between British and American immigration rules, apart from the explicit anti-communist element in the United States, is that there employers are heavily fined for employing workers without the right to stay. Employers thereby become the extended arm of the state's immigration control. Some European countries have introduced similar employers' sanctions and it is Steve Cohen's guess that Britain will follow this example.

Imagine there's no countries is not a legalistic booklet – although it is written by a lawyer. Some of the immigration laws in Britain, Europe and the US are briefly explained, but the booklet is also full of examples on the consequences of these laws for various individuals and how some of them have organised a fightback.

For more detailed information on the EC's immigration rules in the light of 1992 and the Single European Act the booklet

to read is *Unequal Migrants: The European Community's unequal treatment of migrants and refugees*, a report by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (Policy Papers in Ethnic Relations No 13).

This compares the rights of EC citizens and non-EC citizens to enter an EC country (for work, marriage, to study etc) and looks at what rights they have after entry.

Not surprisingly non-EC citizens have hardly any rights within the EC. About 15 million non-EC citizens already living in an EC country do not have the right to look for work in another EC country and are not even mentioned in the Social Charter. They are only protected by the national laws of the EC country they are living in.

Surprisingly Britain is actually one of the few EC countries that do give some legal protection eg in terms of race discrimination and voting rights. For the majority of the 15 million non-EC citizens living in the EC 1992 'will mean a new regime of greater controls, more restrictions, and the close surveillance of black and ethnic minority communities on the streets and in the workplace.'

The JCWI booklet ends with two chapters: 'A positive migration and refugee policy for the Community' and 'Campaigning

for these reforms', which attempt to give a political direction to the changes needed in the EC before the end of 1992.

These demands should be discussed by the labour movement, which does not have a record of giving migration and refugee issues a high priority. The record of the Labour Party on these issues is abysmal, but the left must fight now for changes.

NALGO is probably the trade union in Britain which has campaigned most consistently on immigration issues. It has successfully defended several of its members against deportation, had a conference last year on immigration and nationality and is planning another this October for all trade unionists.

The report of this first conference *NALGO Immigration and Nationality Conference (Manchester, 15 April 1989)* has just been published. The contribution from Alistair Darling MP (Labour Party spokesperson on immigration) gives no hint of what policies on immigration a future Labour government will introduce.

Whatever government is in power in Britain in 1992 it is extremely unlikely to abolish all immigration laws which are making life impossible for black people in and outside Britain. Campaigns in the black community and in the labour movement are needed to defend black people against the effects of these laws but also to fight for their abolition.

Important steps are already being taken. The JCWI and various local campaigns are planning to launch a national Divided Families Campaign. Apart from NALGO's trade union conference a conference on 1992 is planned in Manchester for 27-28 October.

A national march and rally under the slogan 'Fight racism – smash immigration laws' is also planned to take place in Manchester in October. The three mentioned publications are all ammunition for these and other campaigning activities.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Changing our message to the oppressed

I found your article (Britain's Black voters: the challenge to Labour, *Socialist Outlook*, June 1990) particularly interesting as it is over Black issues that the left has found itself trapped between its traditional support for Blacks and its secularism (e.g. the French left and the 'chador' controversy). There were two issues raised which I would like to comment upon, the Black electorate and the debate over Muslim schools.

Your correspondent is quite right to point out the regressive platform of the Islamic Party of Great Britain, as well as to predict that the Black vote would slip away from Labour unless it 'develops policies that meet [their] needs'. I have for long felt that it breeds arrogance and is in itself a dangerous trend for any bourgeois political party to claim a natural electorate.

This attitude so evidently displayed by the Labour Party has made it in rhetoric alone a friend of Britain's Black population. The token gestures of having a few Black members of parliament and a polite mention in policy documents have not alleviated the political frustration of Black youth, Afro-Caribbean and Asian alike. Meanwhile the older generation in both communities have been loyal supporters of a Party which in spite of racist immigration and no coherent plan of action for the economically and educationally deprived inner-city youth, somehow exuded positive vibes and arguably at local level attempted to address our special needs.

One of the few positive aspects of the *Satanic Verses* controversy for me, was the politicisation of a large segment of Blacks, the Muslim youth. In the past the sheep-like had dutifully voted Labour with little regard to its past performance or promises for the future. However, a book, was the catalyst for lifting of the mental veil of religious dogma. The worldwide Islamic revival and the failure of party political forces to meet their aspirations have led many to view their religion as the panacea for all ills.

It is in this context that the recent gains made by Islamic groups in Algeria's election

must be viewed. The imposition of top-down bureaucratic socialism with a secular agenda in a nation and among a community where religion is intertwined with daily life, is unworkable.

Our response as revolutionary Marxists cannot be to wring our hands in despair and wail 'class consciousness' at

them. We must adapt our ideology – not to backward historical concepts relating to the status of women and so on, but to recognise that by virtue of its christian european background, Marxism-Leninism and Trotskyism have an alien vocabulary to those from vastly different backgrounds.

Since 1979, the growing prosperity of many South Asians have led them to view the Conservative Party as their allies in spite of its ill-concealed racist policies and politicians. It seems that Mrs Thatcher can do no wrong by them, their move to affluent Tory suburbs has spared many of them of the brutality of the Poll Tax. Their preference for private school education imbues their children with notions of individual gain and a rabid fear of socialism, whose image of high taxation and immense social upheaval creates their recurrent nightmares. Labour will lose its moral high ground as the Asians vote along class lines for the Tories or religious parties while Afro-Caribbean youth do not vote at all in defiance of a political system which views them as little more than social malcontents. Thus the left has no option but to rethink its time honoured ideals if we are to build a broad united front of the oppressed.

The most pressing issue today in the Muslim community is state-funded Muslim schools. The argument raised is that while the state funds Anglican, Catholic and Jewish schools it discriminates against their religion. It is increasingly anomalous that England has an established Church linked so closely with the state. The repeal of the blasphemy laws and the total separation of religion from education and the state must be our aim, (along with a national curriculum that is global in dimension, humane in perspective and genuinely non-racist as opposed to 'multicultural'). However in the short term we cannot ignore the force of religion with its positive and negative aspects.

In Latin America, where the left and plural democracy has been demoralised or decimated by imperialist backed regimes, the Church is a movement inspiring social justice and opposition to the ruling hierarchy; in Burma and Sri Lanka the Buddhist clergy have been ranged against the machinery of

the state (albeit in Sri Lanka, the racial chauvinism of many monks is a powerful reactionary tool).

The left can be principled in its stand by advocating an end to all religious schools while supporting (the idea of) Muslim schools which have the advantage of being within the state system – and therefore are bound by a curriculum which aims to be non-sexist, non-homophobic and non-racist, but which is diverse enough to reflect the heritage of all Britain's communities and prepare them for the new Europe. It is apparent already that if support and financial help are not forthcoming from the state sector, Muslims will establish independent schools and thereby entrench those institutions, making them as difficult to counteract and uproot as existing independent schools.

It is not 'historic compromise' that I advocate but adaptability and broad-mindedness while remaining true to our philosophical and political roots. If the left does some soul-searching, we can realise the gains to be made in the 1990s when Thatcherism discredited could lead to exciting developments for the revolutionary left.

B. Skantha Kumar
London

Fighting the poll tax in every area

So Geoff Martin thinks that Merton is "just not that sort of area".

That is, not the sort of area where an anti-poll tax movement, even if relatively small, can be built.

I can only assume from this that if Councillor Martin thinks this cannot be done in Merton, those of us just a little further south in Sutton, who have been built such a movement (even if relatively small) are completely wasting their time.

"...Organisations with campaigning experience" have never been particularly thick on the ground in Sutton either. What some of us in the Labour Party have showed, though, is that it is worth going to the trouble to create them – even in "those sorts of areas".

Roland Wood
Sutton

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

Sloan's Square

Psst! Want to see something special?

I MET HIM in a side corridor, by arrangement. We each looked over our shoulders to see if the coast was clear. Only a few yards away the Greater London Labour Party was holding its conference: but my mind was on much greater things.

He reached into his briefcase and produced it. I gasped out loud, then looked round again to make sure no-one had noticed. It was glossy, in several colours. There might even have been thousands of them – but I knew this could not be the case: someone would have blabbed.

"See: they have produced one," he said, taking it back from me and carefully replacing it in his briefcase. I was now one of the small circle in the know.

He walked back into the conference. I felt a weight of responsibility to keep his secret.

I had just met the man with the leaflet for the TUC's July 7 demonstration on the NHS.

Water bosses tap into pay main

PRIVATISED water company chairmen have not waited long before dipping in to the pool of profits they expect to make. In the first flush of success, the chair of Thames Water has just awarded himself a thumping 200 percent pay increase, from £40,000 a year to £120,000.

Now water workers are piling on the pressure: they are annoyed that their bosses appear not to have heard of the "trickle down" theory, and have offered

them just 7.7 percent – tied to an *extra hour* on each working week!

They appear unconvinced that the responsibility of high office means that top managers should splash out on such big salaries for themselves. Nor are most people. While the chair 'takes the strain', we strain the water!

Newsman's secret obsession

"READING THE *SUN* is like masturbation," says *Sun* columnist Richard Littlejohn, writing in the *UK Press Gazette*. Almost everyone does it, but hardly



anyone will talk about it.

His argument is that most people who confess to having read the *Sun* claim not to have bought it themselves but to have "found it on a train" – as many men do with pornographic magazines. This can't be right, says Littlejohn, because it sells four million copies a day: *somebody* must actually buy it!

The analogy with masturbation is fairly apt: the fact he finds hard to come to terms with is that nobody is proud to admit to their links with the squalid gutter tabloid. It is the kind of self-indulgence many middle class people prefer to indulge in furtively and privately.

If reading the paper is seen this way, can it be any surprise people look askance at the ghastly types who make their living writing the racist, sexist, homophobic drivel that fills its pages?

Littlejohn's article defensively tries to justify his habit of writing a rabidly reactionary column as 'normal' behaviour, and seems at a loss to understand why people's jaws drop open when, in the middle of otherwise (relatively) civilised company, he confesses how he spends his day.

Long before the Wapping dispute proved it beyond doubt, many people were sure that the editorial staff on the *Sun* were a bunch of w**kers!

How dare they?

READING A COPY of the *Sun* I found on a station buffet table the other day, I came across another article in the series slag-

ging off the antics of the ousted Labour council in Ealing.

Marvelling at the variety of terms the writer had found as synonyms for 'barmy' to describe what was no more than a right wing council

in sheep's clothing, I was more amazed still to see how lamentably the article had failed to come up with anything *really* wasteful and stupid.

Indeed several of the items of expenditure seemed not only extremely modest, but perhaps insufficient to meet a real need.

How many *Sun* readers would really wax indignant for example at the fact the council spent just £41,000 on providing courses in typing and self defence for women living on its housing estates?

We know the stereotype *Sun* reader is a lumpen thug who believes all women belong in bed or behind the sink: but how

many would really take offence at the idea of women learning a useful skill, and being able to defend themselves against violent attack – paid for "on the rates"?

Left on the table?

"IT SLIPPED THROUGH on the nod: the right wing press will go wild when they see what it says!" exclaimed a jubilant *Socialist Organiser* supporter, after their *Workers' Rights Charter* slipped through the NALGO conference.

I hope he didn't hold his breath waiting for the furor. The Charter's generalised formulations against sin and for democratic rights (including unionisation of police and armed forces) have not been the cause of much concern among the ruling class or the labour movement bureaucracy.

It was not so much that it went through on the nod: it just had everyone nodding off!

A plonker on the loose

IT WAS A STRANGE sensation, being greeted by NUPE's general secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe at a social during the COHSE conference as if I was a long-lost acquaintance.

It was so unlike the last time I had spoken to him, when he berated me for an article critical of NUPE's line on the NHS pay dispute in 1982. Was this a new shift towards the hard left?

Then I realised everyone else was getting the same treatment, and that for once Rodders had been allowed to wander freely without 'minder' Tom Sawyer standing over his shoulder. He was desperate to seem friendly.

For Bickerstaffe the summer conference season must simply fly by: only then does he have the chance to come out and meet the world. The rest of the time he is put back in the broom cupboard at NUPE's head office, while Sawyer gets on and runs the union.

By Harry Sloan

A New Fund for Revolutionaries in Eastern Europe

Socialist Outlook has recently established a fund for the groups of revolutionaries that have been established in Poland, Czechoslovakia and the GDR. This is a very important initiative - building a revolutionary alternative in E. Europe is a vital counterweight to the current right wing, pro-market offensive; and is obviously key to the future of the revolutionary socialism.

Comrades should attempt to raise funds for this appeal as widely as possible. All of the money raised will go directly to the comrades in the East. Even small sums go a long way in the East - a full-time worker can live on £1 per day in Poland!

Our first target is to raise funds for 2 groups of comrades in Poland - in Warsaw and Wroclaw. In a very adverse political atmosphere, they are putting forward a socialist alternative - participating in the recent railworkers strikes and standing candidates in the local elections, for example.

However, they are hampered by a complete lack of elementary equipment to produce propaganda, communicate with socialists in other countries, and so on.

Cheques can be made out to "Outlook International", or comrades can make a regular donation by using the standing order form below. We will give a regular update on funds raised and what it has been used for.

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