

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

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- **USSR and Eastern Europe**

War, Crisis, Recession

Who pays the price?



SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

No 28, November, 1990

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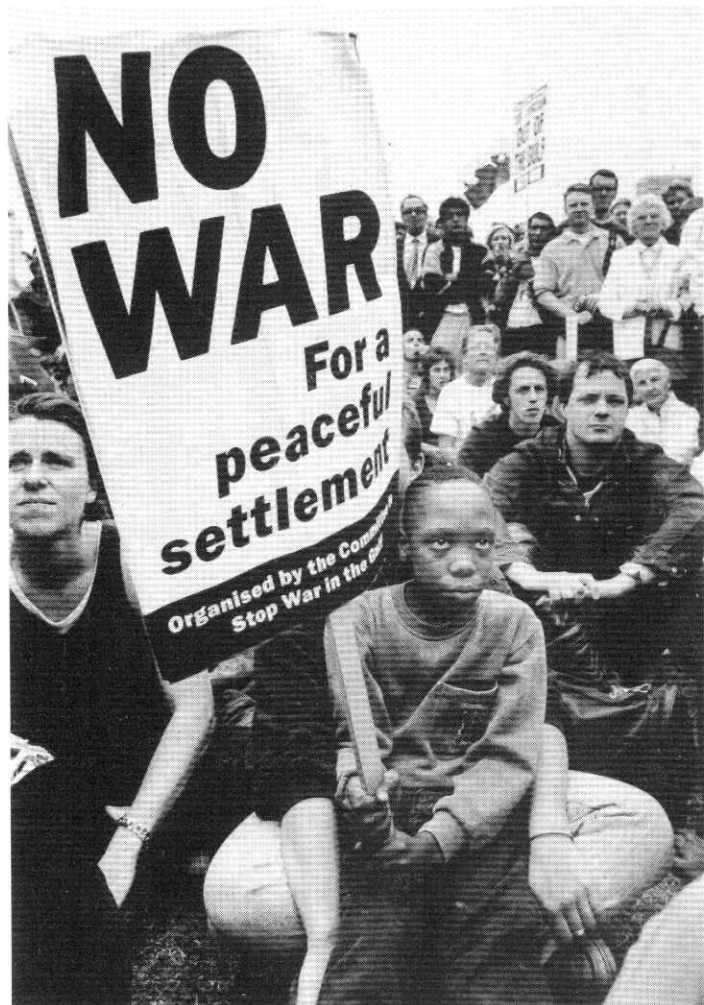
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War and socialist internationalism

THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD are under attack – on at least two fronts. They will be the ones to bear the costs – physical, financial, social and political – of any war in the Gulf. And they are simultaneously at the receiving end of austerity policies, speed-up and redundancies as governments East and West, North and South struggle to solve intersecting economic crises.

The military front

The threat of war in the Gulf is ever-present, and increased by the unparalleled global coalition of forces ranged behind the aggressive stance of US imperialism as it prepares to do battle for its oil supplies and military-political dominance over the Gulf.

While President Gorbachev washes his hands of any commitment to defend former allies or support any struggles that disturb the 'status quo' internationally – picking up the Nobel peace Prize for his grovelling capitulation to the US Cold War offensive – we see the grim spectacle of Soviet and Chinese bureaucrats raising their hands in unison with feudal sheikhs, third world despots and imperialist leaders at the United Nations.

The focal point of this most unholy of alliances and most warlike form of 'peaceful coexistence' is agreement on the need for military action and sanctions to topple Saddam Hussein, restore feudalism in Kuwait, and instal a regime in Baghdad acceptable to the White House and the Arab ruling cliques.

As this magazine goes to press, the military build-up in the Gulf continues unabated – the biggest logistical exercise of its kind since D-Day. Within weeks, the US forces will be fully equipped and poised for aggressive action – an invasion of Kuwait or an attack on Iraq. Thatcher and Bush, encouraged by the lack of political opposition, have stepped up their blood-curdling threats against Saddam Hussein as part of their preparation for a shooting war.

As British 'desert rat' troops took delivery of their armoured vehicles in Saudi Arabia, a US marines general welcomed their involvement, looking forward to recreating the camaraderie of their last joint exploits – in the Korean War. This should serve as a useful warning of what could be in store. The Korean War brought three years of mass slaughter, misery and barbarism as the USA – using the UN as a flag of convenience – tried to wipe out a regime it found unacceptable and prop up a stooge regime in the South. Almost 40 years later, thousands of US troops are still stationed in South Korea.

We can tell how seriously the imperialists are preparing for war from the sudden, uncharacteristic willingness of the USA to side with those condemning the latest massacre by Israel's

Zionist regime – the killing of 21 Palestinian protestors at the Temple Mount. The changed US response, after decades of sponsoring Zionist terror tactics and repression, has been coloured not by any concern for the Palestinians, but by the State Department's objective of using Saudi Arabia as a base and 60,000 troops from Egypt, Syria and Morocco as "Arab cover" for their own armed forces in the Gulf.

The latest brutal actions of the USA's maverick protégé regime in Jerusalem have been a severe embarrassment to Washington – allowing Saddam to reinforce his spurious credentials as an 'anti-Zionist' champion of the Palestinian people and an 'anti-imperialist'. The Zionists, in turn, are obviously enraged to discover themselves regarded as a liability in Bush's Gulf exploits, and so publicly by-passed in the US handling of the crisis.

Different elements within the imperialist camp continue to debate their tactical view on how and when to attack Saddam. But whatever they decide, one alarming fact stands out above all others: the social democratic parties (and governments) affiliated to the so-called 'Socialist International' are fully complicit in the imperialist offensive in the Gulf as well as the sanctions designed to starve the Iraqi people into submission to the USA. Once more this inglorious 'international' has collapsed in the face of a war drive, with each of its national parties tail ending Washington and their 'own' capitalist class.

Any internationalist fight to stem the war drive and press for withdrawal of imperialist troops from the Gulf has first to combat these reformist leaders in the labour movement, who are riding on the tide of anti-Saddam hysteria in the capitalist media, and basking in their reactionary 'respectability'.

The economic front

No better is the social democratic line on the capitalist economy. In Australia, New Zealand and Spain social democratic governments have pioneered Thatcherite policies: in opposition – as we know all too well in Britain – their policies are becoming ever less distinguishable from those of the main capitalist parties.

The old 'Communist' parties, in a state of ideological confusion and organisational decline as a result of Gorbachevism, glasnost and the collapse of Stalinism, offer nothing better for the working class.

Yet even now the sharpening economic crisis is bringing a new wave in the capitalist offensive. The crisis of the imperialist



economies has spilled over into the 'third world' in the form of a huge debt burden, a fall in demand for 'third world' exports, and the imposition of savage austerity measures on the toiling classes of the less developed economies by imperialist agencies such as the IMF.

The capitalist crisis is now making itself felt in the agony of the economies of Eastern Europe. With the near-collapse of most of the bureaucratised state-owned industries, the new regimes have been urged by Western ideologues such as Thatcher to privatise, capitalise and marketise. Yet even as they attempt to do so, they run into a serious shortage of Western investment capital, a slump in Western markets, finding even big corporate firms mortgaged to the hilt and far from keen to set up new plants in countries with such poor and outdated infrastructure.

Yet whether it be the latest Gorbachev or Yeltsin plans for reforming the Soviet economy, the grinding austerity being suffered in Poland and Hungary, or the prospect of mass unemployment and poverty for workers in what was East Germany, the moves towards 'marketisation' all involve attacking workers' living standards for the benefit of private profit.

The story is similar in imperialist countries such as the USA, where a recession and rampant budget deficit can only be worsened by the Gulf war effort, and Britain, where the much-hailed 'discipline' of the Exchange Rate Mechanism on the economy relies upon the simple threat that if employers put up their prices too high, their workers could wind up redundant.

Whether they are attacked by privatising 'communists', patriotic flag-waving social democrat defenders of the 'mixed economy', rationalising transnational corporations, or simply by capitalist governments seeking to slash welfare spending and boost profits, workers face a formidable line-up of forces. All seem agreed that the crisis of capitalism must be 'solved' (albeit temporarily) at workers' expense.

No period has more clearly underlined the need for an international movement to link socialists in their struggles against exploitation and oppression in the various countries of the world. An international voice is needed for the independent demands and interests of the working class, to fight for solidarity, and to offer political guidance in the confrontations that will occur with layers of the old leaderships of the labour movement.

In Eastern Europe, workers in struggle must be offered a marxist alternative to the reactionary cocktails of restorationism, obscurantism and monarchism served up by the imperialist media, and the crass capitulations to capitalism reflected in the 'reform' programmes of communist and social democratic parties.

In the third world, as workers are confronted by insufferable levels of exploitation and poverty, it is vital that marxists join forces to draw the positive and negative lessons of the struggles that have gone before, and offer support to the marxist groupings that are emerging from the mass movement.

And in the imperialist countries, it is crucial that socialists recognise their obligations to counter the aggression of their 'own' ruling class, build solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles, and wage the class war at home against the employers' offensive.

For over 50 years the Trotskyist Fourth International has been struggling for its existence, defending the perspective and programme of revolutionary politics against Stalinism, social democracy and fake 'anti-imperialist' demagogues. Its sections are prominent in the fight against the Gulf war and solidarity with every anti-imperialist struggle. It is a leading voice defending a socialist perspective in Eastern Europe as the stalinist edifice crumbles; and it is campaigning on the issue of the Third World debt crisis. Its forces are to be found in the struggles of the oppressed in every country where it has supporters. If it did not already exist, now would be the time to invent it.

Left swing in SNP leadership Salmond puts Labour on the hook

The Scottish National Party elected Alex Salmond, a declared socialist, as their new leader at their September conference.

Salmond's strategy is to portray the SNP as a left alternative to Labour, as well as a nationalist party.

He will seek to expose the scandalous actions of Labour over the Poll Tax, their about turn on Trident and their vacuous platitudes over Ravenscraig and the future of the Scottish steel industry. At the same time he will try to transform public perception of the SNP by associating it with Labour movement struggles and rejoining the mainstream of Scot-

tish politics.

These tasks show prospects of being achieved. Latest opinion polls show the SNP up 4% at 24% and Labour down from a height of 55% last year. The Tories remain in third place in Scotland, with 19%.

Senior Labour figures whilst publicly discounting the SNP, privately admit the new Salmond leadership to be a serious threat.

Although we can expect a radical change in style from the SNP leadership, the change from traditionalist to left nationalist leadership has not been unexpected.

During the referendum of 1979, the SNP took an equivocal attitude to the proposed Scottish

Assembly, which they saw as an attempt to block independence. When Labour failed to deliver an Assembly despite majority support in the referendum, the SNP withdrew from any further co-operation with Labour. Many felt the then SNP leadership had disastrously cut themselves off from political realities. The '79 group was formed consisting of most of the youth and the ex-Labour members who had joined the SNP. The '79 group became the Left SNP and quickly gathered support from around a third of SNP members. SNP conferences be-



Wayne Edgington

Labour : threatened by new SNP leadership?

came increasingly divided. Leading members of the group were Jim Sillars and Alex Salmond.

The '79 group attempted to get involved in industrial struggles, much to the distrust of many Labour Party members. SNP councillors, who were largely traditionalist, invariably voted with the Conservatives.

The '79 group showed the potential of a left nationalist programme. SNP votes were highest in the highlands but also in the housing schemes with monolithic Labour Councils. The SNP was effectively a left protest vote in the cities and radical policies tended to increase that vote.

The traditionalist leadership became concerned that the '79 group was diluting their policy of pure nationalism, so they disbanded the group for factional activities and suspended its leadership.

Time however, was not on the traditionalists' side. New members supported the left, and by 1987 a clear majority supported Sillars as senior vice convenor.

Poll Tax

The Poll Tax changed the SNP's prospects. Sillars was elected MP for Govan in a huge swing immediately after labour voted to implement the Poll Tax. The SNP vote surged nationally to around 30%, having been 14% at the election. Everyone anticipated a major turnaround with the SNP threatening to overtake Labour in the polls.

But although the SNP gained from clear opposition to the Poll Tax (and their opposition has undoubtedly boosted the campaign), their policies lacked coherence. They refused to participate in the STUC's campaign against the Poll Tax, and instead set up their own purely propagandist campaign for non-payment.

Thus at a time when non-registration was the key and the unions had not voted on implementation, the SNP proclaimed 'a million non-payers'. Although they subsequently modified their position and now collaborate with the anti-Poll Tax Federation, this permitted Labour to downplay the non-payment campaign by ridiculing SNP claims. The SNP responded with vituperative attacks on Labour.

When the Claim of Right for Scotland was published in 1988, it was expected the SNP would



The Poll Tax changed the SNP's prospects

John Harris/NUJ

back the proposed Scottish Constitutional Convention. It was equally felt Labour would not support it, particularly as the Claim was in many ways revolutionary, asserting that 'sovereignty resides in the people not parliament.'

Labour did participate however, and quickly wrong footed the SNP. The SNP withdrew from the Convention claiming amongst other matters that the Convention had rejected independence as an option. In fact, although the consensual proposals of the remaining members of the Convention is for a federal relationship with Westminster, the proposed powers of the Assembly are greatly increased over proposals of even three years ago – the Assembly would have tax raising powers and possibly powers to nationalise. However even these powers would prove unable to solve the structural crisis of the Scottish economy and would be seen as inadequate. Clearly the Assembly if established would be a major stepping stone towards independence.

For withdrawing, the SNP were portrayed in the media as sectarian and acting against Scottish interests. Labour had a major boost. Sillars compounded matters by silly predictions and unfounded claims. SNP support collapsed to pre-Govan levels.

Stalking horse

As the SNP convenor Gordon Wilson was retiring, it had been

thought by many that Sillars would take over. Instead he put up a stalking horse by backing Margaret Ewing, an arch traditionalist. Salmond stood to challenge the perceived continuation of the old failed leadership.

Salmond gained the support of the left, those concerned with the policy errors, and a considerable anti-Sillars group including many traditionalists. His victory was substantial. More surprisingly, the main Poll Tax spokesman, Kenny MacAskill, a Sillars supporter, was defeated narrowly by a Salmond supporter.

These personality and tactical differences are not too deep however, and Salmond is by far the best spokesperson the SNP has.

The SNP conference meanwhile reaffirmed its opposition to payment of the Poll Tax, maintained its denunciation of the proposed assembly and remains opposed to nuclear weapons. On the Poll Tax, a very few delegates wished to end support for mass non payment – they were roundly denounced. Non payment was reaffirmed by acclamation.

On the Assembly, the SNP overwhelmingly voted to participate in elections and argue within for independence. This, mind you was only if an Assembly was set up – which in turn assumed Labour were elected to government in Westminster. Both these were thought unlikely. Nevertheless this was a major step forward in policy.

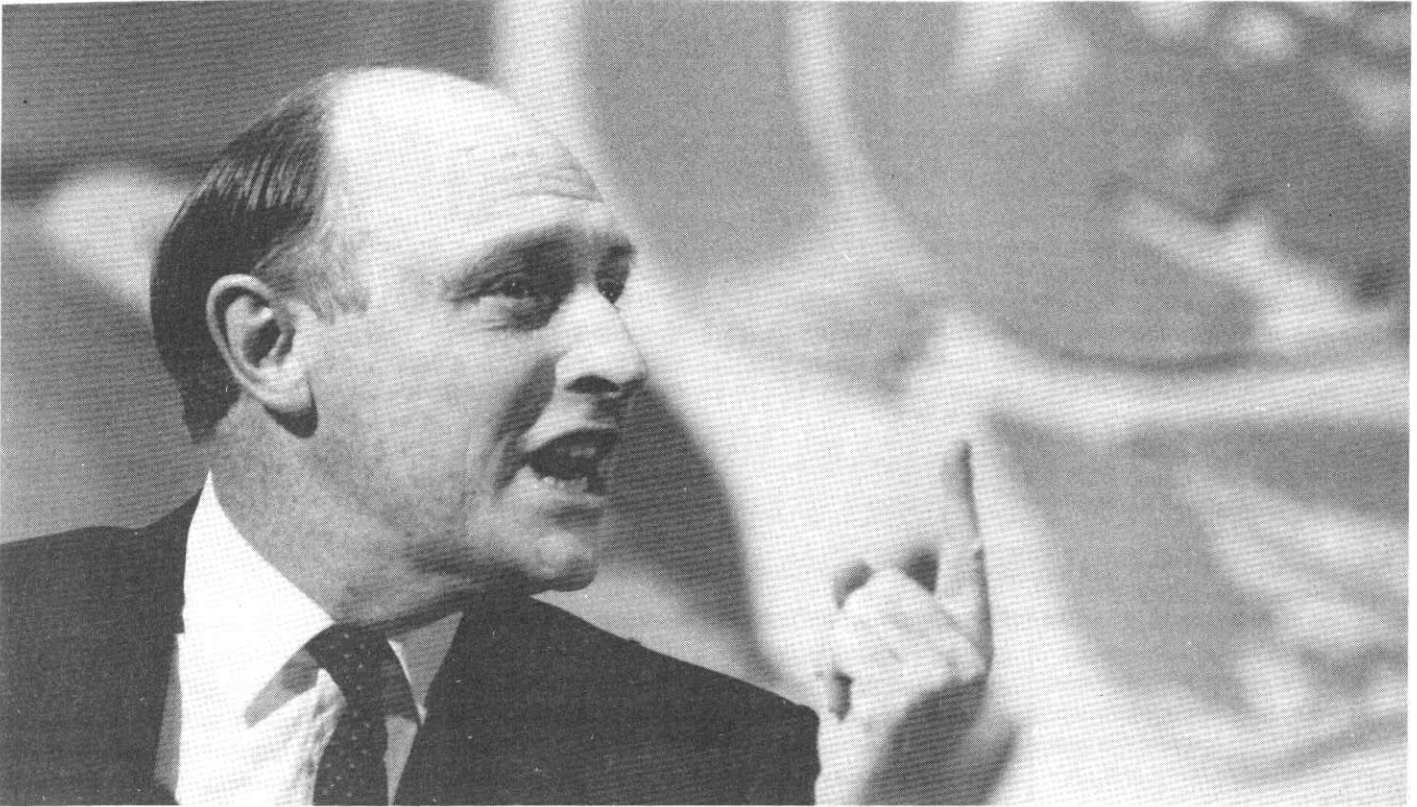
Three way choice

Conference also voted to push for the independence option to be included in any referendum. This would make the referendum a three way choice – status quo, Assembly or independence.

With this change the SNP and Salmond put Labour on the spot. The last thing Labour wish is an Assembly – and particularly not one which could vote for independence. Yet senior Labour figures such as Bob Gray, the leader of Strathclyde region, have suggested local authorities should organise exactly such a referendum. Under Salmond, the SNP executive has now unanimously backed Gray's call for the local authorities to organise the referendum. Under the old leadership a similar suggestion was defeated. Clearly changes have occurred.

Salmond's approach will be to try to establish the SNP as the main opposition party to Labour in Scotland. This will mean developing and presenting their policies on a wider range of issues than to date. Their policies are generally to the left of Labour although still nationalist. But then again 40% of voters favour independence although only half of these support SNP – most of the remainder vote Labour. Salmond can only increase SNP support. If Labour loses the next election, the SNP could quickly become the largest party in Scotland.

Gordon Morgan



John Harris/FL

Image is more important than policies in the new 'Improved' Labour Party

Blackpool Conference 1990

Kinnock creates a Party fit for capitalism

As the strains of 'Jerusalem' faded, were Neil and company satisfied with their week? What, exactly, had they achieved? THERESA CONWAY sums up this year's events at Labour conference.

The leadership looked smug. Moments of glory had been carefully executed, like the encore to upstage Maggie. And the few occasions on which conference asserted itself against the platform were no more than troublesome ripples on the pre-election pond.

Thatcher's well timed announcement on the ERM successfully cut off debate in the press on the outcome of conference. The images of the week were undoubtedly of a cheery platform, with

seemingly little trouble at home – but at the same time little to offer the electorate. This year's conference did nothing to change recent opinion poll findings that 61% think Labour's policies are vague.

The whole tone of *Looking to the Future* – offering no more than tactical changes within the framework of the capitalist free market – the atmosphere of conference, and Kinnock's vacuous speech were all attempts to convince us all that we would march together, but they gave little idea of what, beyond the election, was supposed to be our purpose.

Dual aim

The leadership had a dual aim in Blackpool; to continue the process of sanitisation - creating a party 'fit for government', a party of 'the nation', not of the working class - and at the same time make it clear how little could be expected by the labour movement

from such a government once in office.

There were three crucial victories for them on this road: the acceptance of Tory anti-union laws; the insidious economic policy of John "only spend what you can afford" Smith, and the package of measures that mean that Party Conference will become even more of a rubber stamp for the leadership.

The NEC proposals on 'Democracy and Policy Making' will create a new series of hoops through which party activists will have to jump to have any impact on decision making at all.

Key changes include; holding conference only every two years, and then based on a rolling policy programme; abolition of the amendment stage; and the deadline for resolutions brought forward to April – before they go through a 4-stage vetting process on Standing Committees, Policy

Forum, the NEC and Conference Arrangements Committee before finally getting to conference.

European model

All of this has been sold in the guise of making the party more accessible(!) as well as more like her sister parties in Europe. At the same time the NEC will only be elected every two years, and the CLP section will be elected by one-member one vote, further reducing accountability at the top and collective decision making at the bottom.

Its true that these changes have only been approved in principle; the leadership still has to come back with rule changes to enact them. However the fight to turn them back will be difficult; and it is also clear that the NEC would wish to make further attacks, particularly on local functioning.

On the anti-union laws, Tony Blair wants to keep most of the

Tory's chains, especially the ban on solidarity action, on picket lines of more than 6, and on strikes not sanctioned by court-approved ballots and on the closed shop. The TGWU-backed Composite 39 was a small step forward from the platform's position, but it was a disgrace that only the NGA's Tony Dubbins from among the trade union leaders supported Composite 40, which called for the repeal of all anti-union laws.

The NEC did an about turn this year by supporting a Black Socialist Society, hoping that this will derail the more troublesome demand for Black Sections within the party, and at the same time enable them to sell the party more effectively to the black electorate. On women, the situation was even more tokenistic, with support for quotas (and anyway too little too late) being played off against the long-argued demands that the women's organisation have collective power within the party.

Despite a well organised and vocal campaign from 'End the Ban', fully supported by Labour Party Socialists (LPS), conference voted to support the ban on *Socialist Organiser*. There is little knowledge at the base of the party of the number of local parties now suspended and the plethora of witch hunts now taking place. The latest, just days before conference, was the suspension of Brighton Labour Party for its stand on the poll tax.

No alternative?

Conference, like the majority of party members in the CLPs and the unions, saw no clear alternative to the overall perspective held out by the platform. New realism has not only been absorbed, but was regurgitated wholesale by many bright besuited young men at the rostrum. On the majority of issues, conference voted for right wing policies, believing that this was the only way to get rid of the hated Thatcher government.

There were some things that it would not swallow. Mandatory reselection must be retained, though when the majority of the NEC report was sneaked through without discussion on Friday morning, while virtually no-one

noticed. On the question of pensions, delegates felt that the NEC's junking of the commitment to restore index-linking at 1979 levels was really too much to bear. Last year's conference policy on cuts in defence spending was re-iterated, but so was the platform's intention to again



WITH TORY AND LABOUR POLICIES GETTING SO SIMILAR WE COULD HAVE GOT AWAY WITH FILING THE SAME COPY FOR BOTH CONFERENCES.

ignore it. Again, conference reasserted its commitment to the Pergamon strikers, but despite a large picket, was unable to prevent people such as Donald Dewar defying delegates' wishes and attending union-buster Robert Maxwell's reception.

These victories for the left did show a groping towards a different economic policy, a different vision of what a labour government could and should be, but they were more an indication of a slow time bomb ticking away in the belly of the movement than any imminent threat of explosion that could rock the leadership now.

Ireland

Many key issues did not appear on the agenda at all; there was no discussion on British withdrawal from Ireland, or on Lesbian and Gay Rights. And other crucial debates were given little time. During the abysmally short discussion on the poll tax, the Liverpool delegation were surrounded by stewards and prevented from leaving their seats, and one delegate was pushed and verbally threatened.

Jo Richardson's chairing was appalling - it was clear that she was working for pre-prepared

lists, calling delegates by name and on one occasion calling someone who wasn't in the hall. A number of speeches appeared in the Press office before the relevant discussions had even started.

The debate on the Gulf had perhaps more of an air of unreality than even the rest of the stage managed show. It was impossible to grasp that what was at issue in this discussion was Labour's complicity in the possible murder of millions in the Middle East. Kinnock's speech, which had talked of 'extending the international community' (more than shades of imperialism) and of the permanent monitoring of Iraq for chemical and nuclear weapons - surely only possible through permanent occupation - had set the tone for the discussion, but aroused

little comment, even on the left.

Confusion on Gulf

Confusion on the left was rife on this issue. We were told that the way to defeat Kinnock's bipartisanship was to rally behind the resolution from the FBU. This not only agreed with sanctions against Iraq, but would even support 'offensive military action' - as long as it was sanctioned by the United Nations.

The majority of delegates with emergency resolutions in opposition to the line of the leadership accepted this position, and dissenting voices were effectively silenced: the result was that conference had no opportunity to debate a position which called for the withdrawal of troops. Many accepted Benn's sincerely held (but in our view mistaken) belief that the UN can and should be an instrument of peace; others given way to the notion fed by the new realists that debate can only be divisive.

Positive work was done by Labour Party Socialists (LPS), at its first conference since its launch. LPS led the fight for a debate on troops out of the Gulf, gaining support from over 50 delegates, and put out extensive material in its daily bulletin ar-

guing this position. It was unfortunate however that LPS also decided to call for support for the FBU resolution; this was a sign of the amount of pressure exerted on even the principled left.

Unions

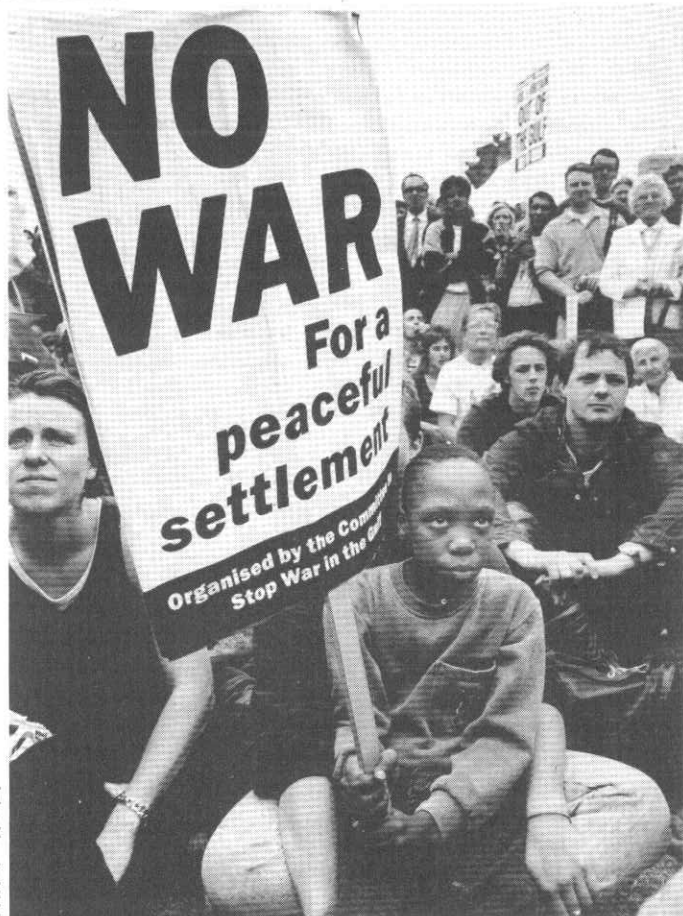
Useful contacts were also built up amongst anti-poll tax activists and councillors. LPS, together with the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee organised a successful lobby of conference demanding that 'Labour Unshackle the Unions', led the debate on this issue on conference floor, and held a major fringe meeting on this theme.

Conference confirmed that it is unlikely that the overall situation in the party will change before the general election, so great is the feeling that our eyes must be kept on this prize. In this context, the importance of LPS, a force on the left prepared to hold its ground, cannot be underestimated.

While other organisations such as the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy have played an important role particularly on constitutional issues, this year more than ever their overall position left much to be desired. Not only did they participate in the stifling of debate on the Gulf, they also failed (because of a typing error!) to support the one resolution that called for power to Women's conference, and completely ignored the fight on the anti-union laws.

Between now and the general election, it will be important to continue to consolidate LPS by linking up with activists inside and outside the party, working particularly on the poll tax, the Gulf and the witch hunt.

We need a profile, particularly during the election, for socialists fighting for a Labour victory, campaigning in the interests of working people. And we need a strong organisation of the left in place for the period after the election. Then, whatever the result, the situation in the party will begin to unravel again as the tightrope Kinnock has so far successfully trodden finally frays.



John Harris/NUJ

Building the anti-war movement A fight for unity and democracy!

Few socialists doubt that an imperialist war in the Middle East will result in a massacre of apocalyptic proportions. That we have seen open talk in the bourgeois press of using nuclear weapons means that alarm bells should be ringing in the minds of all socialist, democratic and anti-war forces, both in this country and throughout the world.

Building an effective mass opposition to both the prospect of war and to the war itself, if and when it breaks out, is an urgent task facing every one of us.

Ever since the announcement came of the massive deployment of troops by Bush and Thatcher to the Gulf, *Socialist Outlook* supporters have sought to build an opposition to the imperialist warmongering. Along with other forces on the far-left, in the peace

movement, and in particular with Women for Socialism, we supported and built for the first picket of the US Embassy, called by WfS, on the 22 August.

A public meeting immediately followed the picket and the Campaign Against War in the Gulf was set in motion. It was agreed that the political basis of CAWG should be around the two slogans of 'No to War in the Gulf' and 'US and British Troops out of the Gulf'. Quite correctly, CAWG agreed to support all initiatives in opposition to the war.

Only a few days later came the announcement of the formation of the similarly-named 'Committee to Stop War in the Gulf'. It was clear that this new development involved much broader forces than CAWG – bringing in CND, the Green Party, Plaid Cymru, Campaign for Non-Alignment, the Fire

Brigades Union and officials from other unions: FTAT, NUR, MSF, SOGAT, BETA, NUM, USDAW and ACTT. CAWG's response was that the two campaigns should co-operate in the fullest way possible. In practice this meant withdrawing its own demonstration on the 15 September in favour of that called by CND/CSWG on the same day.

It was during the mobilisation for this demonstration that relations between the two campaigns began to sour. A leaflet issued by CAWG to build the demonstration was objected to by supporters of CND and the Committee on the grounds that it implied that they endorsed the 'Troops Out' slogan.

Sectarianism

The disagreement was clearly unfortunate, but certainly should not have proved an obstacle to future co-operation. However the experience of the last two months has shown us some of the worst examples of bureaucratic manoeuvring, rampant sectarianism, undemocratic practice, sexist behaviour and out and out stupidity that the left has seen in a long while.

Fortunately this experience is not universal. Outside of central London the indications are that all anti-war forces are co-operating in a responsible and comradely fashion. The danger is that the problems which exist at a national level will spill over into the regions as we have seen all too often before.

The existing situation – comprising of a Committee in which participation is by invitation only (a complete negation of any norms of democracy) and a Campaign which, by and large, is dominated by the (very) far left – is not a healthy situation to be in. It is quite simply absurd that we can see incidents like that at Labour Party Conference where the two campaigns held fringe meetings on the same night, at the same time and with the same speakers! This sort of caricature of the left only serves to demoralise activists, divide the movement and consequently in the last analysis only serves the interests of the imperialists.

Clearly socialists should be leading the fight to build a united and democratic anti-war move-

ment. If this is going to be successful though, we have to understand both the objective and subjective factors that lie behind the present situation.

Weakened Labour left

This is not the place to go into the detail of the reasons behind the current problems. That would require a lengthy text of the history of the post-war socialist movement. It is clear though that the Gulf crisis has come at a time where much of the left has been thrown into confusion with the crisis of Stalinism. The decline of the Labour left over the last period has meant a much weaker challenge to Kinnock's predictable policy of tail-ending the warmongering of the Tories.

The Labour leadership's betrayal over the question of unilateralism was symptomatic of the decline of the peace movement over the last few years. Also we have seen the marginalisation of international solidarity work, particularly in this respect, solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada and the struggle for Kurdish liberation. Related to this is the marginalisation of anti-racist struggles in this country.

At Blackpool the only challenge to Kinnock on the Labour conference floor came from an FBU motion (which in effect accepted war – only within a U.N. framework!). There is also widespread support for anti-Iraq sanctions, even among the left. This is a reflection of a total lack of understanding of the role and class nature of the United Nations and an indication of the fact that a wide section of the left is politically blinkered by the influence of labourism.

When we see that, despite the fact that the majority of women in this country are opposed to the prospect of war, women are finding it very difficult to participate within the existing anti-war movement, we see reflected both the decline of the women's movement and the fact that a large proportion of men on the left have not put the theory of women's liberation into practice.

How then are we going to build a united and democratic anti-war movement?

It has to be built on the reality of the situation we are facing. At the present time the numbers of



John Harris/NUJ

Political disagreement over the role of the UN must not become a barrier to unity in action

people actively opposed to the war are very small. We do not have the luxury of picking and choosing who we shall struggle side by side with. We have to realise where our strengths are.

It was the left that built the campaign of mass non-payment of the Poll Tax. We have 14 million non-payers in Britain who have to be brought into political activity. With the threats from the Tories around pay-restraint we could see this winter a new round of wage battles and strikes. We have to be there to draw out the reasons why it is in the interests of working people to oppose the Gulf war. Reaching out to working-class women will be particularly important in this respect. We cannot rely on a moralistic and abstract appeal like that emanating from leading sections of CND.

Unity in action

Socialists must also understand that at the present time we will have to work with people who do have illusions in the UN and who even support sanctions. Political disagreement on these questions must not become a barrier to unity in action against the war drive.

We should be supporting all initiatives against the war, particularly those that are seeking to unite anti-war forces like the initiative of London National Union of Students on 31 October. We should be building the national demonstration called by CND on 24 November and we should support the building of a women's contingent on that march being organised by Women Against War in the Gulf.

We have to put pressure on both the Committee and the Campaign arguing for a united and democratic anti-war movement. Local campaigns, unions and other labour movement bodies should affiliate to *both*, and put their names to the statement issued by CAWG that calls for such a movement.

The prospect of war in the Gulf has come at a time when we are being told that socialism is dead. Nothing could be further from the truth. The historic mobilisations of

workers in the Stalinist states have shown us that the working class is very much alive. That we have seen the mass campaign of defiance against the Poll Tax here is further testament to that.

The fight against imperialist warmongering and for peace can only be won by an interna-

tional movement for socialism. The task of socialists is to provide the bridge towards that end. The campaign against war is very much part of that bridge.

Sam Inman

Israeli socialists denounce Gulf war drive

Declaration of the Revolutionary Communist League (Matzpen) on 23/8/90

After half a year of fanning the flames of war against Iraq, the government of the capitalists, the government of the factory managers, the generals, settlers and the leaders of the Histadrut is now trying to calm the people.

They explain that the threat of Saddam Hussein is an empty one, to prove with its 'experts' that the Iraqi masses are not effective, and to avoid the distribution of gas masks and equipment for defence against gas to the population which it itself has brought to a state of anxiety and confusion.

What is hidden behind this two-faced policy? When this government frightened the Israeli masses with horror stories about Saddam Hussein's ability and desire to annihilate them, it had a number of goals in mind:

- To solve through a terrible war the serious crisis in Israeli society, since this war could decrease the number of unemployed and solve the housing problem with permanent neighbourhoods of graves.

- To distract the thoughts of the masses from their real distress – the worsening unemployment, salaried employees who are thrown out of their homes onto the street because of the rise in mortgages and the price of

housing, and the impoverishment of the many in the face of the enrichment of those whom it represents.

- The strengthening of the consensus which has crumbled because of the intifada, and the unification of the people around its political programme, while silencing the voice of those individuals who refuse to oppress a civilian population and refuse to enact its murderous policies.

Behind the smokescreen of the war to come, the capitalist government intends to 'solve' the Palestinian problem, whose existence makes it more and more difficult for Israel to appear as a stable state always ready to serve the United States. Therefore this government plans to move the Palestinian question eastward to Jordan by means of *mass transfer*.

This is the plan of the government of the bourgeoisie. But its effects will not bring about any improvement in the situation of the Jewish masses, whom it pretends to represent.

The transfer plans of the government, which are hidden behind its warlike statements, are specifically intended to *lower the standard of living of the Jewish and Arab masses* to the level of a Taiwanese, Mexican, Brazilian or Korean worker. To tum the



Wounded Palestinian youth is rushed to hospital after being shot by Israeli border patrol

workers, the working people, into slaves who serve both as cannon-fodder and as a cheap work force which foreign capital can exploit.

In the face of these war plans, a war which is not a war of defence, but a war for the sake of transfer, annexation and cuts in our standards of living we declare;

We will not take part in this dirty war! We demand Bread, Work, Life and Security for the whole population.

The warlike politics of the Israeli government was never 'defence of our existence'. It was always used as a tool of the ruling power in the region, both against the Arab masses and against the Jewish masses.

● In the 'Sinai' war of 1956, there was a plot with Britain and France to attempt to return their control over the Suez Canal.

● The 1967 'Six Days war' was primarily intended to overthrow the government of Nasser and to stop the attempt of the workers and farmers of Syria to change their social situation.

● The October war broke out because of the refusal of the Israeli government to compromise with Egypt and Syria and to sacrifice its conquests;

● The 1982 Lebanese war was an abortive attempt to play the role of a local power that makes kings and appoints presidents in an Arab country – for the sake of US interests.

If we understand these things we can also understand the change in the propoganda line of the government on the issue of a future war. At the present stage of the regional crisis, the United states has told Israel not to mix in and keep its mouth shut. If yesterday it seemed that the US needed Israel as a whip against Saddam Hussein, today the 'strategic asset' has become a burden and an obstacle: any Israeli intervention could only destroy the alliance between the Arab States and the US.

The Israeli and western newspapers have presented the ruler of Iraq as a Satan, a mur-

derer, a crazy monster. *There is truth in these descriptions.* The regime in Iraq is a murderous and violent dictatorship which systematically wipes out all democratic rights. But this is not new.

When Saddam Hussein hanged the heads of the trade unions, The United States smiled quietly. When he tortured and killed thousands of Iraqi oppositionists and revolutionists, it was treated by the US as an internal Iraqi matter, and when Saddam Hussein exterminated tens of thousands of Kurds by famine, gas and gunfire, the United States supplied him with military aid.

When was the United States called upon to 'protect the free world'. When the Iraqi despot put forth his hand on the oil of Kuwait. When he tried to do what the US did in Grenada. The United States is not fighting for the sake of democracy and defence of the free world, but *for the profit of the American oil companies.*

The hypocrisy of the Israeli government knows no bounds. It spouts off about the invasion of Kuwait at the same time it holds portions of Syrian territory, has in fact annexed Southern Lebanon, imposes a cruel occupation regime on the Palestinian people, and plans to take over Jordan and 'solve' the Palestinian question.

Worst of all, in order to prepare public opinion for mass expulsion and transfer, it administers a horrible system of propoganda and false incitement by representing the entire Palestinian people as an enthusiastic agent of Saddam Hussein.

All the parties of the Zionist left have happily accepted this government incitement in both its aspects, and hide under the fig leaf of 'patriotism'. They have ignored the fact that the United Leadership in the territories condemned the invasion of Kuwait, and supports Iraq only in opposition to the attempts of the US to create a new order in the Middle East

which will also ignore the rights of the Palestinians. All those who have joined forces in a so-called front against Iraq must realise that in that way *they are supporting plans for transfer and annexation.*

We do not agree with the occupation of Kuwait. We do not glorify the murderous regime of Saddam Hussein and we even warn the Palestinians against illusions of his support in their struggle. But, in the face of the arrogance and the aggressiveness of American imperialism, which in its defence of the the price of oil pretends to protect the free world, we call for opposition. We are doing this openly and with no reservations.

In the face of the United States attempt to create a new order in the area in a way which would continue to allow her to exploit it, in the face of a predatory American imperialism which brings death, starvation and poverty to half of the human race; we are ready to take a stand for the defence of Iraq, even when it is controlled by the disgusting despot, Saddam Hussein.

The Iraqi masses – the workers and farmers – are the ones who must get rid of Saddam Hussein and all he represents. It is not up to Bush, the ambassador of the oil companies to determine who will rule in Iraq. Only the Iraqi masses themselves. The allies of the masses within Israel can only be the exploited masses of the region and the whole world. *Not Bush, not Shamir, not Mubarak, not Saddam Hussein.*

From within the darkness which is falling on the region, before the danger of the barbaric rule of the imperialists and their servants, we are sounding the true cry of progressive humanity; ***Workers of the World Unite!***

(This statement has been slightly abridged by *Socialist Outlook* for reasons of space)

Playing for high stakes in the Gulf

For US president George Bush and his military advisors, the confrontation with Saddam Hussein is about re-establishing its right to intervene wherever it likes in the world to protect and further its own economic and political interests, reports GILL LEE.

While war is not yet inevitable, it is increasingly hard to believe that the U.S. will leave the Gulf region without ensuring a direct strengthening of its forces there, overthrowing the Saddam regime, and decisively weakening the Iraqi military apparatus. And it is hard to see how this can be done without war.

Global policemen

The US is out to prove it can play the role of global policeman for the imperialist countries, ensuring that no colonial or semi colonial country feels free to break out of the purely subordinate role assigned it by the wealthy western powers. The outcome of the current struggle will determine the extent of US dominance over the world, especially the 'Third World', over the next period.

The complicity of the USSR and China has only strengthened the resolve of the imperialists to take decisive action and has allowed them to use the smokescreen of the United Nations and sanctions to hide their blatantly war mongering intentions. In taking on one of the best-armed 'Third World' countries, the U.S. is sending an unambiguous message to all other colonial and semi-colonial countries: stay in your place and don't get greedy.

For a whole period after its defeat in the Vietnam War, US imperialism was not able to intervene where it wanted, as it wanted. When Cuba sent troops to fight on the side of Angola against South Africa in 1976, the US could do nothing. The 1978 overthrow of the Shah of Iran was a further blow to the Americans, who watched helplessly as their main ally in the region was overthrown. Then the US Government had to endure the humiliating spectacle of the Iranian hostages affair and the debacle of Carter's helicopters exploding in a farcical attempt to rescue them. In Nicaragua the 1979 overthrow of another old ally of the U.S., the bloody dictator

Somoza and the left wing coup that ousted imperialist stooge Gairy in Grenada marked the nadir of U.S. fortunes.

Since 1982 the United States has been working hard to overturn the 'Vietnam syndrome' at home, and to re-establish its capacity to militarily intervene abroad. The US invasion of Grenada encountered little resistance either at home in the US or on the island itself. This was largely due to the demobilising effect of the Coard faction which took over the New Jewel Movement, confused solidarity forces abroad and disarmed the Grenadan masses politically in the face of U.S. aggression. This easy victory laid the ground for a turnaround in the ability of the U.S. to intervene militarily abroad.

Capacity to intervene

The creation by Carter and then Reagan of a new Rapid Deployment Force and then its deployment in the Gulf to protect Western oil supplies during the Iran/Iraq War encountered little political resistance, and accustomed the U.S. public to seeing American forces employed in the Gulf region. Then in 1989 the U.S. was able to invade Panama, at a cost of some 7000 civilian lives, to arrest dictator Noriega and defend the American hold on the Panama Canal zone, arousing hardly a flicker of international or domestic opposition. With these successes under their belts, US warmongers know a successful intervention in the Gulf would deal a decisive blow to the vestiges of the anti-war movement in the West and to any blossoming nationalist movements in the colonial or semi-colonial world.

The Gulf crisis is also about the reorganisation of the imperialist military system after the Cold War and the role of the US vis-a-vis other major imperialist powers. At a



American troops fighting for profit not democracy

time when the US is heading into recession and the American industrial empire is in sharp decline against the Japanese economy and German competition, the Gulf crisis gives the US the opportunity to send out a simple message to the world: America may not be the economic powerhouse, but it is still the world's policeman, and other countries which benefit from its policing role should pay America for its protection, in trade advantages if not in hard currency.

Through its role in the Gulf crisis, the US hopes to display to other imperialist countries its continuing pre-eminence as a world power. Margaret Thatcher expressed it like this:

'The EC has the foreign policy cooperation, but when it comes to taking the practical steps, then you rely on the few countries which have been used to acting in this way'. (*Newsweek* October 8)

America's intervention in the Gulf is linked to the future of NATO and of possible 'European' military policy, and also the role of Japan as a major imperialist power. The decision to send Japanese support troops to the Gulf, and the discussions in Japan and in Germany on changing their constitutions to enable them to intervene militarily outside their own borders have to be seen in the context of this debate on the emerging new world order.

Excuse for cuts

War in the Gulf would also provide an

ideal excuse for the cuts in social spending the U.S. Government will need in the impending recession. What better scapegoat for cuts in welfare than the need to defend the West against a 'Hitler-like' figure intent on hiking up the world price of oil?

Blaming Iraq for the looming Western recession is of course like blaming fifteenth century witches for the high price of stakes. Between 1980 and 1988 the West sucked some \$200 billion out of the Third World. The Western imperialist powers, together with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia among others, backed Iraq in its war with

Iran because of their fear of the subversive behaviour of Khomeini's regime. However, it was still Iraq which paid the heaviest price: 300,000 dead and \$300 billion in war costs, \$60 billion of which is still outstanding in debts. It was partly in response to this debt and to the cost of retaining a standing army of 1 million that Iraq invaded Kuwait in the first place.

\$1 billion dollars a month

The US attempt to impose its rule the Gulf will of course cost it dear. Even without a war, the cost of maintaining 200,000 US troops in the Gulf is estimated at \$1 billion a month. This will certainly add to a recessionary dynamic, but it is clear that cut-backs were on the way even before the Gulf crisis.

Given the looming recession, there is now one area of government spending which is guaranteed free of cuts: arms expenditure. For all the western powers who were facing the problem of how to explain to their populations that they wanted to hold onto their weapons despite the end of the Cold War, the Gulf crisis is a golden opportunity. Huge military establishments and the economic sacrifice necessary to retain them, can now be easily justified. As the editor of one glossy arms magazine expressed it: 'Well done, Saddam!'

The US alone already has a trillion dollars worth of equipment in the region, including 11,910 aircraft and 300 helicopters with its aircraft alone outnumbering Iraqi airpower by three to one. The four US carrier fleets operating in the Gulf are equipped with nuclear weapons. The US A7 and F18 strike bombers are armed with free-fall nuclear bombs, and the battleships are also equipped with Tomahawk and Cruise missiles, both of which



American bomber armed with free-fall nuclear bombs

carry nuclear warheads.

Britain's 7th Armoured Brigade, the so-called 'Desert Rats', are equipped with three nuclear weapons systems and one of their senior officers recently claimed, in the *Observer* that if British forces are attacked with chemical weapons, they will respond with nuclear force.

The revelation that US Air Command had to ground all its planes for a day because too many pilots were unable to tell the sky from the ground using their billion-dollar night sights should not blind us to the enormous military might that is waiting to flatten Iraq should the decision be taken.

Ousting Saddam

Although discussion continues within the US Government about the relative political and financial costs of invasion versus negotiation, it is clear that the Americans will not leave the region as they found it. Even the most 'dove-like' of the U.S. establishment want to see Iraq withdraw from Kuwait, Saddam Hussein replaced, and a permanent force of US soldiers stationed in the Gulf. For example *Time* magazine suggests a 'trip-wire' force of 25,000 troops stationed in Saudi Arabia and paid for by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Europe and Japan.

Another section of the US establishment clearly wants to see the destruction of the whole of the Iraqi military machine, believing it to represent a rival power to Israel in the region, especially if, as seems likely, Iraq could go nuclear within two years. For this section of the American establishment, there is no alternative to war with Iraq.

'Linkage' of the invasion of Kuwait with the Palestinian question in Israel may, despite initial impressions, even push the Gulf closer

to war. Muslim ground troops, 60-70,000 strong and with 200 to 300 tanks form the allied front-line against Iraq. For these troops, as for the Arab masses generally, Israel is a more familiar enemy than Iraq.

One of the fears of the imperialists in pursuing their war plans in the Gulf is the possibility of a generalised 'Intifada' in the region, the chance that imperialist intervention may result in a rise of the Arab masses against the U.S. and their own rulers, who have permitted foreigners to use Arab countries as a base to fight an anti-Iraq war.

Fear of withdrawal

However, the United States is also afraid that Saddam Hussein may be able to withdraw from Kuwait with his military strength intact, an undiminished appetite for conquest, and his prestige in the Arab World heightened by successfully forcing the Americans to the negotiating table over the Palestinian question. This fear may force the Americans into considering war the only available option.

War in the Gulf, whether begun through imperialist invasion of Kuwait, or aerial bombardment of the major cities and strategic locations within Iraq itself, will certainly involve the deaths of thousands of Americans, and possibly hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. It may also involve the horrendous destruction through chemical and nuclear weapons of the environment affecting the whole of the Gulf region and generations to come.

It will reinforce a reactionary world order, and set back the struggle of the workers movement internationally and the struggles of all oppressed nationalities for self determination. That's why the struggle must be stepped up for the withdrawal of all imperialist troops (and their stooge 'allies') from the Gulf.

Washington's Angola War: an oil-laden route to Havana?

With the South African townships torn apart by Inkatha and confused by the ANC and SACP leadership's absence of a mass campaign for a constituent assembly, the lessons of Angola and the other Front Line States lie buried. The British Anti-Apartheid Movement has successfully prevented the labour movement from making any real appraisal of what has happened in the sub-continent.

As this article by BEN CAMPBELL explains, a specific campaign on Angola and Mozambique was nipped in the bud – closed down by the southern Africa committee of the CPGB to be exact – just as Washington launched a devastating proxy war there.

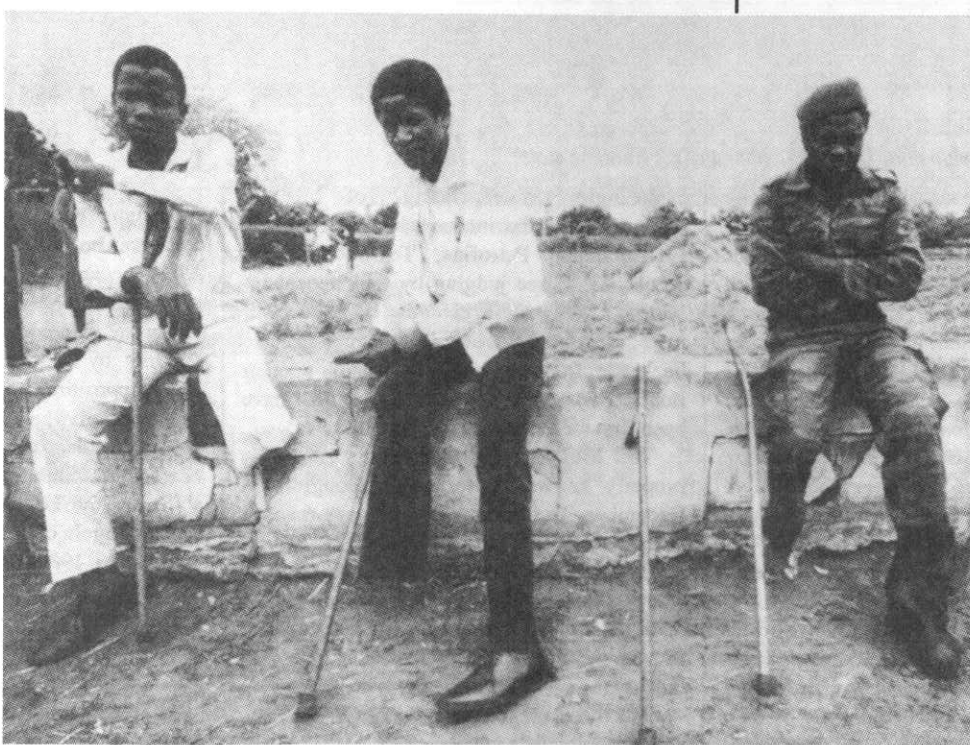
It is up to the socialist movement to revive these internationalist lessons and to make the experiences of the working class worldwide the bedrock of its political development.

While the left and the anti-apartheid movement continue their benign neglect of Washington's 15-year proxy war in Angola, US Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze put it high on their agenda in Siberia during the early days of the Gulf crisis.

Both superpowers have now agreed to police a potential ceasefire and multi-party elections in Angola. What are the politics of Washington's final onslaught on Luanda?

Over two thirds of the 50,000 Cuban reinforcement troops have withdrawn from the oil-rich African state as part of the deal with Pretoria for Namibia's independence. In addition, about a million Angolans are now threatened by famine. The UNITA 'contras' are spreading their attacks – most of which are terrorist killing and maiming of non-Ovimbundu civilians – from the south east to the north near Luanda.

In desperation, the Soviet-backed MPLA government has been forced to abandon its moribund one-party rule principle and is turn-



The British labour movement has ignored the lessons of Mozambique and Angola

ing to capitalist economics. Despite South Africa's withdrawal from Namibia, which the MPLA hoped would help it defeat UNITA militarily, the US has continued to increase its covert military aid to UNITA through Zaire, while the USSR has dramatically cut its arms supplies to the MPLA from the 1987 level.

The fourth round of peace talks will resume in Portugal on October 22, and a ceasefire between the Soviet-backed MPLA government and the UNITA contras looks set to emerge soon. With the remaining 12,000 Cuban troops scheduled to leave by June 1991, Luanda is hoping for an early truce and a rapid integration of the armies, but hopes to delay the schedule for elections as it tries to rebuild support amongst an alienated peasantry, rural petty bourgeoisie and urban unemployed.

Peasants have been milked of their

surpluses under a two-tier exchange rate weighted to urban consumers, while their fields, riverbanks and footpaths are seeded with land mines.

Angola is now the amputee capital of the world with over 50,000 victims, mostly non-combatant women and children. One and a half million rural people out of the 9.2 million population have fled to the towns in the last few years. They face destitution while Western aid is denied or kept at a trickle.

Even the MPLA's traditional base amongst

urban workers is now threatened by new austerity measures designed to please the IMF and World Bank. The financial crisis begun by the mid-1980s fall in the world oil price and Gorbachev's unwillingness make further high level loans, sent Luanda scurrying to the Paris Club while the US blocked its application to join the IMF. The government's war effort has consumed 60% of oil revenues. Oil is the source of 96% of Angola's export earnings since production of coffee, sisal, cotton and

sugar, as well as diamond and iron mining, have all slumped. Even more than in Stalinist Eastern Europe, market values have become absurdly distorted, with a crate of beer, for example, worth a return air ticket to Rio.

Caught in a trap, the MPLA introduced the Saneamento Economic e Financiero (SEF) in 1988. This aims to increase the role of private capital and ownership in all markets of the economy through massive sell-offs of public property. It offers tax incentives to foreign investors, massive currency devaluation, removal of price controls and an end to subsidies on subsistence goods. The parallel markets, or 'kandonga', have been virtually legalised.

Local 'entrepreneurs' are to be given easy credit, and for this a peasant union has been set up while the trade unions have been told to keep their members' belts tightened. Workers



The ANC leadership must learn the lessons of the frontline states

have been jailed for simply criticising party bureaucrats or police, and stories of torture are rife for those labelled as 'UNITA supporters'.

The MPLA's revolutionary nationalist past has become entangled with bureaucratic privilege and corruption. President dos Santos recently admitted that 70,000 of the state's 120,000 employees were unnecessary. Stalinist conceptions of one-party 'democracy' and socialism in one country have depoliticised the war-weary population. In truth, the nationalisation of thousands of farms and factories on independence in 1975-6 was a result of their abandonment by fleeing Portuguese settlers rather than a conscious socialist programme. Lack of skilled workers and international isolation merely compounded the effects of contra war and South African invasions.

Now, the sudden jump in world oil prices has brought some relief to Luanda, but the Gulf crisis has simply fuelled Washington's predatory eye on its oilfields and led to an upping of covert CIA military aid to UNITA.

Admittedly, Angola is no Saudi Arabia, but leaving aside the Gulf states, it now surpasses the production of some of the other 13 OPEC states, and it is not tied to the cartel. Angola also remains one of the most active oil and gas exploration and development areas for Western capital because, as the major oil companies have increasingly had to compete with the largest OPEC state oil companies, they are less willing to invest vast sums into exploration there.

The US already imports about 75% of Angolan crude, over half of which is pumped out by the Cabinda Gulf Oil Company, a subsidiary of the Chevron Corporation. Protected by Cuban troops from UNITA sabotage, Chevron says it finds the MPLA government

"amazingly understanding of private enterprise and the incentives it must have." Elf-Aquitaine, Petrofina, Texaco and BP would also agree judging by their recent investment. They are irritated by US state funding of UNITA, but recognise the huge gains to be made from opening up Angola's other riches. Portuguese and Brazilian capital have been first off the mark.

The MPLA - 'Workers Party', as it is properly known, is to hold a congress in December. The leadership will stage-manage acceptance of its austerity measures and try to retain morale for the final battle with UNITA. The 30,000 members have been told to recruit "religious followers and property owners" and to win the allegiance of traditional chiefs or 'sobas'.

But there are many Angolan socialists who will be tempted to put an economic alternative once a ceasefire is established and multi-party elections are held. For Washington, whether or not UNITA achieves more than a blocking vote is secondary to the isolation and defeat of any socialist pretensions in Angola. Like Nicaragua, that will be another practice run for the ultimate US aim to reconquer Havana.

Such important developments have been lost on Britain's established labour

movement. The coalition of Labour Party Kinnockites, liberals, Stalinists and 'New Times' Communist Party hacks who make up the leadership of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) actually closed down an independent campaign called Stop the War Against Angola and Mozambique (SWAM) in the early 1980s just as it was attracting union and student support.

Furthermore, the methods of international solidarity developed over Vietnam, transferred in part to the early Angola campaigning in the 1970s by supporters of the Trotskyist Fourth International and other socialist opponents of Stalinism, were squeezed to the margins by the 1980s. Mass medical aid campaigns, women's campaigns, direct action and civil disobedience

campaigns were thwarted in favour of ANC conservatism and respectability. Instead, AAM became the politics of the church, epitomised by the Bishop Huddleston and the cult of the Mandelas.

Only by constantly breaking down sectarian opposition from the AAM bureaucrats, and especially the Stalinists in the leadership, did independent campaigns develop and survive around Zimbabwe and, later, Namibia.

So, as the US and South African-backed war in Angola claimed another 100,000 lives in the late 1980s, with Thatcher lending a quiet hand, AAM's promise to campaign itself to stop the war became a sick joke. It is up to a real socialist movement to change that.

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70 years of Stalinist rule did not solve the National Question but exacerbated it

The challenge of nationalism in the USSR

The rise of mass nationalist movements in the USSR has surprised most socialists and dismayed many others. In this article DAFYDD RHYS examines the period of the Russian revolution and early Soviet power and finds it rich in debates and experiences on the National Question. He argues that Marxists must reclaim this heritage and learn from it if we are not to be totally disorientated by recent events.

The pre 1917 Bolshevik position on the question, developed largely by Lenin, consisted of two key elements. Firstly, recognition of the right of oppressed nations to

self-determination up to and including complete independence; secondly, a struggle against all forms of nationalism – and above all Great Russian nationalism. These were advanced with the aim of establishing the complete equality of all nations within the Tsarist empire, thus facilitating a free and voluntary union between them. This Holy Russian empire, declared, “one and indivisible” by the Tsars, was to Lenin a ‘prisonhouse of nations’ and its revolutionary overthrow could not but have a national as well as a social content.

The February 1917 revolution aroused great expectations amongst the imprisoned nations, awakening many to conscious national life for the very first time. Yet in the national

sphere the Provisional government did little more than annul some of the more archaic Tsarist laws. The voices of the oppressed nationalities grew louder as the months passed and these national movements contributed to the increasing instability of the regime. In this context the Bolsheviks’ defence of the right of nations to self-determination contributed in no small degree to their victory in October.

Yet the national question presented a number of problems to the new government. The national movements might have hastened the downfall of the February regime, and in many cases actively opposed it; but this did not inevitably mean that they all supported the government of October. Social contradictions within the oppressed nationalities were generally less developed than in the centre. In addition the ‘national

“The February 1917 revolution aroused great expectations amongst the imprisoned nations, awakening many to conscious national life for the very first time.”

"Great Russian tendencies were further exacerbated by the national divide between town and country in the oppressed nations. The towns, including the working class, were largely Russified and nationalist consciousness was generally low. Thus the national question was easily downgraded or ignored due to chauvinism or impatience"

bond' between the bourgeoisie and peasantry also tended to blur these social contradictions.

The class differentiation of the national movements in Latvia, Estonia, Belorussia and to a lesser extent the Ukraine was well developed by October. In other areas this was far from the case. Thus in many areas the Bolsheviks found themselves very weak outside the urban centres. The bourgeois nationalist Dashnaks were strong in Armenia, the Mussavat Party in Azerbaijan. After October the Georgian Mensheviks, staunch defenders of unity under Kerensky, declared themselves for independence.

Such nationalist developments were hardly surprising. The masses of the oppressed nationalities, awakening for the first time to political life, were doing so in their own languages. Predominantly peasant, they were overwhelmingly concerned with solutions to their national and agrarian plight. In such circumstances the new government had to show that not only 'formal' but also practical, material equality with the former ruling nationality was possible under the Soviet system. An attentive and serious attitude to their national demands was necessary to overcome suspicions and resentments arising from long years of oppression.

Another problem presented itself almost immediately – the civil war. A war launched by the counter-revolution aided by international imperialism with scant regard for any principles of self-determination. Waging such a war demanded the most ruthless methods for the new state to survive. These were not without their consequences in the national sphere. As Trotsky pointed out in a 1923 article for Pravda:

"A harsh military regime cannot but bear heavily on cultural life in general and national culture in particular. Contributing to this was the fact that in particular cases the backwardness of a Red Army unit, the ill will of certain elements in the Communist organisation in such a unit, and the inadequate efforts of the political commissars concerned gave rise to ignoring and even rough trampling upon national feelings and moods."(1)

He describes these problems as "isolated and passing" but the passage also illustrates a deeper problem within the Bolshevik ranks which existed before the rise of Stalinism. It can best be illustrated by the follow-

ing examples:

"Russian Communist Party members on Ukrainian territory must put into practice the right of the working people to study in the Ukrainian language and to speak their native language in all Soviet institutions; they must in every way counteract attempts at Russification that push the Ukrainian language into the background, and must convert the language into an instrument for the Communist education of the working people"(2)

"In Ukraine urban culture is Russian; Ukrainian culture is rural. The proletariat has an urban, Russian culture. The future belongs to the proletarian culture, ie. to the urban culture, ie. to Russian culture. Life itself will effect an assimilation of the Ukrainian language to Russian...though at present the Communist Party helps the peasant to develop his rural Ukrainian culture, it...must...work towards the inevitable victory of Russian culture..."(3)

Both statements are by Bolsheviks; both were written in 1919; the first is by Lenin, the second by Dmitrii Lebed, secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party.

Such a "struggle of two cultures" had been the unofficial policy of the Bolshevik administration in the Ukraine before 1919. It found an active expression in sometimes the most extreme forms. The communist Zatonsky recounted how red guards had at times shot people for speaking Ukrainian, or professing Ukrainian nationality, considering this to be counter-revolutionary!

How could such positions arise? They clearly echo Plekhanov, the founder of Russian marxism and a formative influence on many of the Bolsheviks:

"The abolition of serfdom, universal conscription, the development of



Ukrainian peasants: their demands were often ignored

David King

commerce and industry, the steady growth of the homeless agrarian proletariat, the influence of the administration, railroads and schools...have definitively merged the rural population of the Ukraine, even linguistically,...into a sphere of influences shared with Russia."(4)

Looking deeper they reflect the influence of Great Russian nationalism even within the revolutionary movement. Such positions were far less prevalent amongst the Bolsheviks than the Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries or Bourgeois Cadets, whose chauvinism was multiplied a thousandfold; but they nevertheless existed. Great Russian tendencies were further exacerbated by the national divide between town and country in the oppressed nations. The towns, including the working class, were largely Russified and nationalist consciousness was generally low. Thus the national question was easily downgraded or ignored due to chauvinism or impatience. Such national nihilism often cloaked its chauvinism in fine, fake-internationalist phrases.

Mistakes on the national question raised the possibility of losing the civil war in the Ukraine and a wrenching re-assessment had to be made. Trotsky's statement to the Red Army on the eve of their Ukrainian offensive against Denikin is resoundingly and genuinely internationalist:

"The Ukraine is the land of the Ukrainian workers and working

peasants. They alone have the right to rule in the Ukraine, to govern it and to build a new life in it... Keep this firmly in mind: your task is not to conquer the Ukraine but to liberate it. When Denikin's bands have finally been smashed, the working people of the liberated Ukraine will themselves decide on what terms they are to live with Soviet Russia... Long live the free and independent Soviet Ukraine!"(5)

This position contributed not only to the victory against Denikin but also facilitated the fusion of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks with the Borotbist organisation. The Borotbists were the extreme left wing of the Ukrainian Social Revolutionaries who had moved towards communism but favoured a completely independent Ukraine.

The nationalities 'problem' took a more sinister turn in the Caucasus where the growing influence of the central bureaucracy became evident. Georgia was formally independent from 1918 to 1921 and served as a base for both the Germans and the British. It was invaded by the Red Army in 1921, a move authorised by the Politburo based on information from Stalin, Commissar of Nationalities, and Ordzhonikidze, military commander on the Caucasian front.

The Red Army was meant to assist a Bolshevik uprising, which according to Stalin and Ordzhonikidze would receive widespread support. The reality was very different and was seen as an act of aggression by much of the peasantry and even sections of the working class. Both Lenin and the Georgian Communists were very concerned about the status of the new republic and anxious to respect the rights of the Georgians as a formerly oppressed nationality. Lenin proposed a block with Jordanian, whose Menshevik government had been overthrown, and cautioned the Georgian Communists:

"I really want you to keep in mind that both the internal and international conditions in Georgia require that Georgian communists do not implement Russian formulas but develop skilfully and flexibly an original tactic based on a more conciliatory attitude towards petty-bourgeois elements of all sorts"(6)

Ordzhonikidze, Stalin's man in the area, paid little attention to these words or the pleas of the Georgian Communists, and continued to act in



Ordzhonikidze (right) and Dzerzhinsky: Stalin's men in Georgia

David King

a heavy handed manner.

When in 1922 Stalin put forward his "autonomisation" plan proposing "entry" of the non-Russian republics into the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), opposition was centred in Georgia. At first Lenin sided with Stalin and Ordzhonikidze in the face of the Georgians' complaints, proposing at the same time that "entry" should be amended to "Formal union with the RSFSR in the Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia". He explained that:

"The spirit of this concession is, I hope, clear: we see ourselves as equals in law with the Ukrainian SSR and the others and enter with them into a new union, a new federation..."(7)

Lenin was obviously worried and soon afterwards he sent a note to Kamenev declaring, "war to the death on Great Russian Chauvinism". His final article on the question, and the last of his life, was suppressed until 1956 by the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is a textbook of revolutionary method on the national question. It shows how Lenin's position developed and changed through the experience of the Russian revolution.

He clearly sets the Great Russian chauvinist campaign of Stalin and Dzerzhinsky (who investigated the matter) in the context of the rising Soviet bureaucracy:

"It is said that a united apparatus was needed. Where did that as-

urance come from? Did it not come from that same Russian apparatus which... we took over from Tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil?"(8)

International isolation, civil war and famine had prevented the young Soviet state from developing an apparatus that was anything more than a bourgeois and Tsarist hotch-potch" and in such a situation:

"...the 'freedom to secede from the union' by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is."(9)

How the non-Russian nationalities were to suffer in later years at the hands of such rascals and tyrants, Lenin could never have imagined.

Lenin also addressed the question of how revolutionaries should approach nationalism:

"...an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation."(10)

He also modified his previous position which favoured a formal equality between nations in the union:

"...internationalism on the part of

"Lenin's position developed and changed through the experience of the Russian revolution."

"A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation"

the oppressors or "great" nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice."(11)

Trotsky expanded on this theme in his *Pravda* article, by drawing a powerful parallel with women's oppression:

"A feeling of national resentment has been accumulated in the formerly oppressed nations over decades and centuries. And this heritage, as with the oppressed position of women it should be said, cannot be disposed of merely by declarations, however sincere they may be and even if they are given legislative character. It is necessary that a woman should feel, in ordinary life, in everyday experience, that there are no external restrictions upon her and no contemptuous or condescending attitude is being taken towards her... It is necessary that a small nation should feel that a radical and irreversible change has taken place in the consciousness of the former 'ruling' nation."(12)

This is much more than an accommodation or appeasement to nationalism: it goes to the root of what is really meant by international working class solidarity. Lenin and Trotsky did not propose separatism, they remained in favour of strengthening the union: but only through winning the voluntary agreement of the other republics. The question also had an international, strategic importance, given the Bolsheviks' perspective of developing national, anti-colonial revolutions in the East. As Lenin explained:

"It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of the debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermine our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities."(13)

These positions won the day at the 12th Congress of the Communist Party, but the ascendent bureaucracy had little intention of carrying them out. The petty bourgeois outlook of this social stratum naturally drew it to the culture of the old bourgeoisie and Tsarist Bureaucracy. Great Russian Chauvinism rose like a scum on the tide of the Stalinist counter-revolution and came naturally to the bureaucracy's social base of ex-Tsarist bureaucrats and professional functionaries in the non-Russian

republics.

It fell to the Left Opposition to continue the struggle for a revolutionary policy on the national question. The Platform of the Left Opposition argued that the key task was not to suppress national awakening, but to direct it along socialist channels. This meant promoting the development of local languages and schools and 'nationalising' the state machinery ('Nationalising' was an official policy of transforming the local party, state, trade union and co-operative structures to use the local language and staff). This Ukrainisation, Turcification, etc, could not succeed by bureaucratically relying on experts, but by relying on the working class and the lower stratum in the countryside, in a struggle against Kulak and chauvinist elements. The Left Opposition also proposed a special 15 year plan to address the economic needs of the non-Russian republics.(14)

The consolidation of the bureaucracy brought dire consequences for the national minorities. Whilst it is true that the "regime of the guardhouse" weighed heavily on the whole of the USSR, it weighed disproportionately on the non-Russian nationalities, just as it did on Soviet women. Imposition of Russian methods, particularly forced collectivisation, caused massive devastation and widespread famine, with millions dying in the Ukraine alone.

Resistance was met with mass deportations and the elimination of virtually all the local communist leaderships. In the Ukraine for example, ex-Borotbists won the leadership of the party and carried out Ukrainianisation policies until the late 1920s. They were driven from the party and most were killed in the purges. The scale of repression in the Ukraine reflected the scale of opposition to it; leading Trotsky to call for an independent Soviet Ukraine in a series of articles in the late 1930s. Anti-religious persecution was also particularly brutal amongst non-Russian nationalities, in an effort to prevent the Churches or Mosques from acting as national unifiers. The USSR extended its borders in 1939 by occupying Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland and parts of Poland.

The Great Russian chauvinism of the Soviet bureaucracy reached new heights during the Second World War. This war portrayed as a "Great Patriotic War" to defend the "socialist motherland" against the Germans,

who were condemned *as a people*, as reactionary and fascist. This chauvinism was no mere rhetoric, however, and during and after the war the bureaucracy punished those peoples whom it considered had betrayed the USSR with mass executions and deportations. The Crimean Tartars are still campaigning to this day for the right to return to their homeland in the Ukraine - a demand supported, to its credit, by the Ukrainian Popular Front, since its implementation would mean at least a partial evacuation of the present population.

Since the war the non-Russian nationalities have to varying degrees faced a policy of cultural and linguistic assimilation, along with discrimination in the allocation of jobs, housing and land. Assimilation was openly advocated by Khrushchev and adopted as a goal by the 22nd Party Congress in 1961. The consequences of this policy for the Ukraine were well documented by the communist dissident Ivan Dzuba in his book *Internationalism or Russification?*, for which he was jailed and later forced to recant. A similar fate faced others who raised their voices against the cult of the "Soviet nation", a term adopted by the 24th Party Congress. It is significant that the largest single group of political prisoners in the pre-Gorbachev USSR were Ukrainians jailed for the 'crime' of nationalism.

The present situation in the USSR must be analysed in the light of this long and sorry history of national oppression under Stalinism. It is little wonder that mass nationalist movements have emerged in the space provided by Glasnost, expressing extreme dissatisfaction on the part of these oppressed nations with their national fate.

How then should revolutionary socialists respond? The first thing to appreciate is that in the oppressed nations all questions, those of democracy, the environment, anti-militarism and the economy, have a national colouring. In Moscow the demands are for greater democratic rights, in Vilnius they are for greater national democracy - the right to decide their own national future. Thus the struggle of the oppressed nations must be seen as an important, and advanced, component of the inevitable struggles around democratic demands that can pave the way for political revolution. We must be careful to avoid the idea that the political revolution is something that will be centred in Moscow or Leningrad and

"A feeling of national resentment has been accumulated in the formerly oppressed nations over decades and centuries... It is necessary that a small nation should feel that a radical and irreversible change has taken place in the consciousness of the former 'ruling' nation."

be fought around purely 'class' demands. The revolutionary struggle of the oppressed nationalities against their oppression will be a key component of any political revolution in the USSR.

The declaration of independence by Lithuania, followed by Latvia and Estonia, has placed their national struggle firmly at the centre of the world stage and demands a response. The key question for socialists must be: have the Stalinist bureaucracy and the present Gorbachev leadership convinced the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian masses of the superiority of Stalinist centralism over Baltic independence? The answer is clearly no.

This must be our point of departure, and socialists have to not only support but advocate independence for these countries. Any other position will leave us by-passed by events and completely isolated from a dialogue with the masses. We must avoid any worthless, abstract schemas of defending self-determination whilst arguing for the Baltic states to remain within the USSR on the basis of some common anti-bureaucratic fight. The Baltic peoples do not *want* an improved form of union – they want independence! To offer them self-determination on paper whilst arguing that they should not secede is to do nothing more than parrot the positions of the bureaucracy for the last 60 years. As Trotsky pointed out when dealing with the Ukraine in the 1930s:

"We must proceed from facts and not ideal norms. The Thermidorean reaction in the USSR... must be paid for in genuine currency in all spheres, including that of the Ukrainian question." (15)

We must admit to the fact that the national dignity of the oppressed peoples has been fundamentally and systematically trampled upon by the bureaucracy, and develop our positions accordingly. Of course our task as socialists is not merely to comment on or analyse a situation but to develop a strategy to take it forward. To move from the power of the bureaucracy to the power of the elected Soviet – that is our goal. The key to such developments in the oppressed nations will be the struggle around national rights and self-determination. The revolutionary left, both internationally and within the USSR, should actively advocate an independent soviet Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine. It is only through an un-



David King

Trotsky struggled for a revolutionary position on the national question

ambiguous commitment to such positions that socialists can hope to gain a hearing within the national movements.

Such a position is not a sop to nationalists, or a 'trick' to get them to support socialism, but an honest recognition of their national rights. We have to show by our actions that the aim of *our* socialism is not to 'abolish' the oppressed nations but to give them the fullest space for their national development. Our failure to champion these demands leaves the field open to fundamentalist, clerical and pro-bourgeois forces whose voices are growing louder by the day.

Some will argue that to advocate independence is in effect to advocate independent capitalist states, given the nature of the Popular Fronts. Such positions reveal both a profound pessimism and a lack of clarity on how socialists should support national movements. Of course we have something to say on the nature of post-independence states; we are for nationalised property relations and the rule of democratic workers' councils (not least because genuine independence under capitalism is a fiction). But we can only win the masses to such a position if we adopt a correct attitude to the question that justifiably preoccupies them – the national question. It should also be emphasised that none of the Popular Fronts that exist have a finished, finalised pro-capitalist programme. Only the Azeri front has succumbed to chauvinism, and there the demand

for independence has even greater potency since it points the finger at the real enemy; the Moscow bureaucracy and its local allies, not the Armenian people.

Many socialists, including an editorial in *Socialist Outlook*, have pointed to the illusions of the Baltic fronts that Western imperialists will defend them. The last months have shown the imperialists themselves going out of their way to destroy any such illusions. It should be increasingly clear to the Baltic peoples that the USA is no more concerned with self-determination in the USSR than it is in its Central American 'back yard'. The capitalist press has been full of warnings to the hasty Balts that they are endangering Gorbachev's rule. Such an unholy alliance gives revolutionary socialists a clear space to advance a different position – that of a common struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy and imperialism – through building active solidarity with the struggle for independence. It is only in this way that we can show in practice who the best allies of the Baltic republic are.

Events are also clarifying the positions of the Soviet Left, many of whom were initially extremely sectarian and antagonistic to the national movements. The Lithuanian declaration of independence has forced them to take a clear stand; either for Gorbachev and blockade, or for independence. At the 1990 May Day demonstration they overwhelmingly chose the correct position. This

"We must avoid any worthless, abstract schemas of defending self-determination whilst arguing for the Baltic states to remain within the USSR"

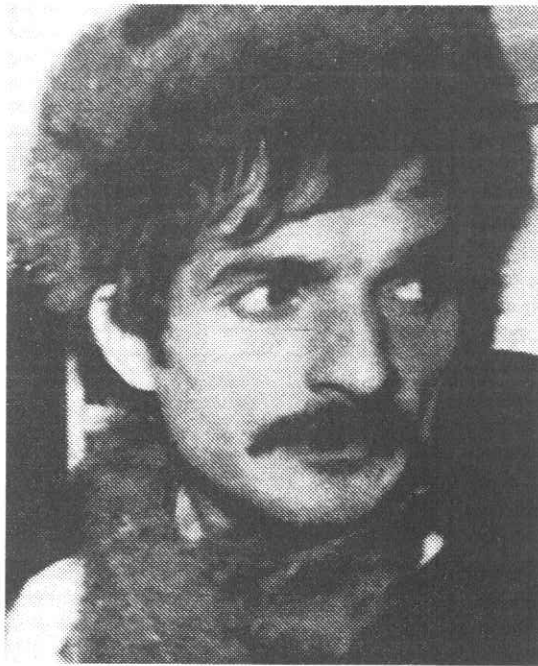
"The attitude of revolutionary socialists, both internationally and within the USSR, will be decisive in deciding whether the national current flows towards reaction or revolution."

shows most clearly how the different struggles within the USSR run parallel to each other and exert influence upon each other, in this case in a positive direction. Important links have been established between radical deputies in Moscow and Leningrad and the Front leaderships. A recent conference of independent workers' movements and organisations held in Novkuznetsk adopted a resolution of support for independent Lithuania and called on workers' collectives to break the blockade. The Supreme Soviets of Moldavia, Georgia and the Russian republic have also begun to make encouraging overtures to the Baltic republics.

In this context it is not helpful to suggest that the Fronts should tactically curb or moderate their demands. Such a move would be disastrous, giving breathing space and new confidence to Stalinist organisations in the Baltic and demoralising those who look to the Baltic for a lead. Revolutionary socialists would never give such 'moderating' advice to oppressed nationalities in difficult or minority positions under imperialism, such as the Palestinians within the Israeli state, the six county Irish republicans or the Kanaks of New Caledonia. Rather we would advocate a strategy to build solidarity and spread and deepen the struggle. The same should be true of the national question in the USSR and we should be careful not to apply a double standard.

A defeat for Baltic independence would be a defeat for the whole multi-form, multi-national process of radicalisation and struggle within the USSR. The Baltic peoples may be numerically small but they have an important influence. This is particularly true of the developing national movement in the Ukraine, a national question with decisive significance for the whole USSR. It is inconceivable that a mass national movement will not develop here given the history of repression and the high level of resistance to it, right through to the dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s.

The national question is of strategic importance within the USSR. Seventy years of Stalinist rule have not solved the national question but exacerbated it. In addition the remnants of the early Leninist policy



Socialists must win nationalists to side of revolution

and subsequent industrialisation have created significant, nationally conscious, working classes in most oppressed nations. This reality has to be addressed by any international revolutionary left which seriously wishes to see an anti-bureaucratic political revolution in the USSR. Our starting point in this must be to learn from and popularise the revolutionary heritage of the Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition on the question. It is a heritage of which we can be proud.

We must guard against ignoring these movements for the bright lights of the simpler more obviously 'socialist' anti-bureaucratic fight in Moscow and Leningrad. The struggle of the oppressed nationalities for self-determination will be a key element of the unfolding political revolution. The attitude of revolutionary socialists, both internationally and within the USSR, will be decisive in deciding whether the national current flows towards reaction or revolution. An immediate international campaign of solidarity with the Baltic states is needed, through existing solidarity structures or by creating new ones, around the demands of: 'Self-determination for the Baltic states!', 'All Union troops out' and 'Workers' organisations - break the blockade!'

The question also has domestic relevance. The British labour movement is heavily influenced by Stalinist and Great British chauvinist ideas. The Mid Glamorgan Labour councillor who recently declared the Welsh language; "a nauseating irrelevance to an international socialist like me", stands in a long line of 'socialists' who cloak chauvinism in

internationalist rhetoric. Our attitude to the national movements in the USSR and the lessons we learn from them can help to show that nothing could be further from genuine revolutionary internationalism. Trotsky summarised this internationalism with the following analogy when advocating an independent Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s:

"The Kremlin bureaucracy tells the Soviet woman: Inasmuch as there is socialism in our country, you must be happy and give up abortions (or suffer the penalty). To the Ukrainian they say: Inasmuch as the socialist revolution has solved the national question, it is your duty to be happy in the USSR and to renounce all thoughts of separation (or face the firing squad).

What does the revolutionary say to the woman? 'You will decide yourself whether you want a child; I will defend your right to abortion against the Kremlin police'. To the Ukrainian people he (sic) says: 'Of importance to me is your attitude toward your national destiny and not the "socialist" sophistries of the Kremlin police; I will support your struggle for independence with all my might!'"(16)

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Gorbachev retreats on '500-day' marketisation

by Ian McLarty

Mikhail Gorbachev's project continues to crumble. The reforms introduced to give dynamism to the economy – and protect the Kremlin elite – fail to provide the consumer goods promised; the nationalist question runs ahead of the bureaucracy's attempts to head off the movement; and the proposed market reforms – most notably food price increases – are consistently delayed by those in power, who are fearful of the possible backlash as the working class try to defend their standard of living.

The work of vice-premier Abalkin's team of experts drawing up new legislation on market reform which included proposals for setting up soup kitchens was kept secret 'in order to avoid untimely confrontation in society'.

The crisis has been entirely the creation of the bureaucratic caste, constructing a plan not for the working class of the USSR as a whole but to maximise consumption for themselves. Perestroika simply represents a new bureaucratically-imposed answer to a problem that cannot be solved without the removal of the bureaucracy.

The stagnation (typified by the Brezhnev period) was largely caused by the discouragement of technological experimentation. This was not only because such advances did not materially benefit the bureaucracy, but also because – as can clearly be seen with the lack of computers in schools and industry – the advances could be used for purposes outside the control of the authorities (such as Samizdat communication).

Consigned to the dustbin of history are Khrushchev's claims that the 'socialist countries' would overtake the West by the end of the twentieth century. However, what has not been



military commander, General Mikhail Moiseyev, speaking to the *New York Times* did not in any way rule out war; he only argued that it should not be through the unilateral action of the US, but conducted through the UN.

At home the 28th Congress of the CPSU resolved nothing as far as the direction forward is concerned – and with the CP in such a state of paralysis the only possibility for change has to come from outside. In spite of workers and peasants making up 35.2% of the CP these groups made up only 10% of Congress.

It is also the case that workers are the majority of those leaving the conservative Russian Communist Party at this time.

The fact that the CP is the major political force in the Soviet Union cannot be ignored, but as a political force the Stalinist bureaucracies can quickly evaporate. In Romania, a party with 20% of the country as members almost disappeared overnight. This is clearly not about to happen in this way in the USSR but the leakage of members from a monolithic party structure that currently includes 10% of the Soviet population must be a thorn in the side of the Gorbachev project.

In addition for the first time since the 1920's we have seen the emergence of platforms. The Democratic Platform – apart from agreement on reduction of bureaucratic privileges – has no unified political line. As well as incorporating some Socialist elements it includes forces such as Yeltsin (who left the CP at Congress) supporting rapid marketisation. The Democratic Platform will therefore have to split into, at least, two parts.

The Democratic Platform also has severe limitations in outlook and, whilst correctly demanding the repeal of Article 6 and campaigning against 'dogmatic' marxism, they also see the eventual solution in the political sphere as creating what amounts to a bourgeois type par-

destroyed in the Soviet Union despite the actions of Stalin and the interventions of the imperialists past and present are the gains of the October Revolution embodied in nationalised property, health care, education and full employment.

The fact that the economy in the USSR is determined by the plan means that the working class can easily see who is introducing price hikes or taking away social benefits – there is none of the mystification of a 'free' market.

Gorbachev's project relies on more than voluntaristic actions from within the USSR. He has adopted a stance of 'ultra' peaceful coexistence both in terms of arms cuts and potential areas of conflict.

When for example foreign minister Shevardnadze after reaching agreement on all major issues concerning land based troops in Europe quips 'and the Russians made all the concessions' he could equally be talking about any of the liberation movements his regime has recently betrayed. And as Trotsky commented, the international policy of the USSR is a reflection of the domestic regime.

Not only did the USSR cut oil supplies to Nicaragua at a critical stage for the Sandinistas but more recently it has made moves to set up a consulate general in Israel in spite of the Palestinian Intifada. During the Gulf crisis the USSR's senior

liamentary democracy.

The Marxist Platform states it wishes to return to the "best traditions of the 1920s", and has slightly more workers among its ranks than the Democratic Platform. It only had a handful of delegates at the 28th Congress but one of its members, Buzhgalin, was elected to the Central Committee.

At the Congress he stated 'It is necessary to give real power to every working person. How is that possible? There is a way... the power of the soviets.' Marxist Platform do not however have any project to leave the CP as yet - nor do they seem to expect to take it over.

With the economy we have seen the emergence of two plans for marketisation; the more cautious approach of Prime Minister Ryzhkov and the '500 days' plan of Shatalin/Petrakov, supported by Yeltsin.

The latter plan represents in many ways the more parasitic layer of the elite, those who are attempting to convert themselves into a new bourgeoisie largely through the privatisation of party property by transferring it into their own hands.

Shatalin's plan did hold one key advantage for the bureaucracy. It envisaged no rise in official prices, but a straight introduction of the market into phased sectors of the economy. This could mean it would be 'the market' that was blamed for the increases, avoiding action against the government.

Furthermore subsidies on essential goods and services were to be kept until the final part of the project when the market would be brought into these areas.

The hardest attack on the working class would therefore come at a time when marketisation had become a *fait accompli* throughout the rest of the economy.

The 'Gorbachev - Yeltsin pact' which has now effectively been abandoned - was a watered down version of Shatalin's blueprint. However Gorbachev appears to have again shifted his position to that of Ryzhkov's plan running into a headlong struggle with the free-marketiers of the Russian Federation. Both schemes attempt to integrate the USSR back into the world economy.

Leading left-wing intellectual, Boris Kagarlitsky has said of the scheme that "it is absolutely clear that such a programme cannot be realised without mass repression and probably starvation". Estimates for unemployment if the marketisation is introduced into the USSR run from 10 million (out of a workforce of 125 million) if it is slowly introduced rising to 40 million if it is introduced quickly.

However amongst the Soviet people supporters of rationing (associated with the plan) compared to those who favour price increases (more typically market) have risen by 50 million in one year. It would appear there is the beginning of awareness amongst an increasing layer of what the market would mean.



Homelessness in Moscow: result of the start of marketisation

In addition to the problems with the economy that the bureaucracy faces there is the continuing question of the nationalities.

Almost all of the soviet Republics have declared some form of autonomy. The nationalists often attract a vote far larger than the nation they represent, for example, in Latvia the popular Front obtained two thirds of the vote when only 50% of the population is Latvian.

However in areas where the Kremlin has interfered - most noticeably by sending the tanks into Azerbaijan - independent expression has been trampled. In the recent elections there, official claims recorded a vote of 40% in Baku where there were observers and well over 80% in the countryside where there were no observers.

On top of this the pernicious role of the Azerbaijani CP continues as it tries to protect its position in a rapidly moving situation. Its leader, Ayaz Mutalibov, has condemned Moscow for not cracking down sooner on what he claims were Armenian provoca-

tions over the disputed territory of Nagomo-Karabakh.

In terms of the working class the most outstanding struggle so far is clearly the miners' strike of last year. The miners went on a one day strike at the time of this year's CP Congress demanding the depoliticisation of the army, KGB and legal system, the resignation of the Ryzhkov government, the reconstruction of the trades unions and the nationalisation of CPSU property. (The nationalisation demand shows the correct class attitude to the CPSU; some reactionary elements have tried to demand it should be made a 'criminal organisation', with the attendant problems this would have for anybody who has ever been a member of the CPs, including numbers of the working class, who would automatically become criminalised.)

Many miners and trade unionists from other industries and 'left' intellectuals (both social-democratic and socialist) attended the Kusbass Conference this summer - in an attempt to strengthen the movement. One delegate from the Urals spoke of the historic step of the October revolution but the need now for a new political revolution against the bureaucracy.

However developments in the union federation SOTSPROF recently mean that the right wing appear to have captured the leadership and may be attempting to purge the left wing - those connected with the Socialist Party - from its ranks.

At the same time, according to Kagarlitsky, other previously right wing trade unions such as SMOT (Free Inter-Professional Association of Workers) are moving left.

The situation currently in the Soviet Union calls for a new leadership to be built, a step which is now possible in the openings that have been wrung from the bureaucracy.

The Bonapartist super-presidency of Gorbachev shows the desperate position the Soviet elite is in, with new powers being bestowed upon Gorbachev almost daily. However, without a resolute fight by the working class the same space that opened the possibility of political revolution could be utilised by those who represent the counter-revolution.



Melanie Friend/Format

Bulgaria – the workers' patience wears thin

By Kathy Lowe

Bulgaria seemed to have managed the transition to a multi-party system without the chaos engulfing Romania and Yugoslavia. Then on August 26 the Sofia headquarters of the Bulgarian Socialist Party was set ablaze by angry demonstrators. Suddenly the world glimpsed the real turmoil beneath the surface.

After the country's veteran Stalinist ruler of 35 years, Todor Zhivkov, was overthrown last November in a central committee coup, the new democracy movement and workers' organisations flourished. The Communists, now relaunched as the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), began to test the waters of the free market. Against an inexperienced opposition, they were also able to hold their own in the June general elections.

Yet only a year after democracy dawned in Bulgaria, raising people's expectations, the country faces economic and social collapse. Hopes have been dashed by rocketing inflation, unemployment and rationing. Demoralised queues of shoppers clutching food coupons are now a common sight on the streets of Sofia. Few believe the government's promises that things will get better now that Bulgaria has joined the IMF.

The legacy of corruption and mismanagement bequeathed by the Zhivkov regime presented enough problems in itself. Now

world events have made the situation worse still. The break-up of Comecon and the reduction of Soviet oil supplies were tremendous set-backs. The Gulf crisis has pushed up energy costs even further and left Bulgaria with \$1.3 billion in unpaid trade bills from Iraq.

Earlier this year, Bulgaria took the initiative, unique in Eastern Europe, of declaring a moratorium on the interest payments on its \$12.5 billion foreign debt. However, industrial production has slumped as enterprises remain starved of investment because of the moratorium and the high budget deficit.

Meanwhile, the political tug of war between the two giant power blocs of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the opposition coalition, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), has paralysed parliament and the already sluggish process of reform.

The BSP includes free marketeers, reformers in the Gorbachev mould, and hard-line bureaucrats from the 216,000-strong nomenklatura (apparatus). The party's leaders are trying to fend off internal splits while keeping the UDF at bay. They are still recovering from a disaster in July when the BSP's Petar Mladenov (who led the coup against Zhivkov) was publicly discredited and forced to resign as the country's President.

The opposition coalition, which includes the highest concentration of pro-capitalist forces, is scarcely more stable than the BSP. Its

16 organisations (among them the revived Social Democratic party, the Green Party and the Podkrepa union confederation) have little in common politically except their hatred of the BSP. Says UDF leader Petar Beron: "All the parties are well aware that if they leave our coalition they can't count on any success against the Communists on their own – they have to stay together."

Petar Beron accuses the BSP of failing to dismantle the massive nomenklatura – "red capitalists are now putting money they have grabbed into private enterprise and private property".

The UDF accepted the olive branch offered by the BSP that the two should jointly put forward the then-leader of the UDF, Zhelyu Zhelev, for election as President to succeed Petar Mladenov. But after Zhelev was elected, the opposition rejected his proposal that it should join a government of national consensus to tackle the deepening crisis.

Its 36 per cent of the vote in the June elections gave the UDF enough seats in the National Assembly to block all major decisions which, under the Bulgarian system, require a two-thirds majority. It has therefore opted for this course of action in the hope that the BSP-led government will be blamed for the economic mess and leave the UDF well placed for victory in the November municipal

elections. Petar Beron makes the strategy clear: "If we win the local elections, maybe the next parliamentary elections will not be very far off."

All this has not prevented the most dynamic sections of the democracy movement – the trade unions, the Turkish workers and the Ecoglasnost environmentalists from continuing to press their demands.

Struggles in factories – often spontaneous, pushing for better pay, safety measures and the sacking of corrupt managers – have kept the leaders of the two union federations on their toes. At the Radomir steel plant near Sofia, for example, the women who drive the cranes went on strike earlier this year, insisting on a long list of safety improvements and the removal of the director responsible for their dangerous working conditions.

Some 300 strikes swept the country between December 1989 and March 1990 alone. On the strength of its support for a number of these disputes and of its opposition credentials as part of the UDF, the new independent labour confederation, Podkrepa (Support) recruited rapidly. Podkrepa currently has some 150,000 members – remarkable growth for an organisation founded less than two years ago.

In a bold attempt by reformers to transform the decaying, official trade unions, the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) was launched in February this year. Led by Krustyo Petkov, the Confederation has broken all links with the BSP and dismantled the old union structures (see interview) It represents 3 million members – over 80 per cent of waged workers in Bulgaria.

Collective bargaining agreements and increases in minimum wages and pensions have been won for the first time. And CITUB and

Podkrepa have set aside differences at leadership level to jointly negotiate index-linked pay, pensions and unemployment benefits. It remains to be seen whether the agreements won will be honoured, given the tottering economy.

Workers from the Turkish minority, many of whom joined the Bulgarian trade unions, have proved a particularly militant force. The country's one million Bulgarian Turks lost all their cultural and religious rights after a brutal 'assimilation' campaign waged by Zhivkov. The nationalist hysteria and persecution came to a head in 1985 forcing 300,000 Turkish Bulgarians to flee to Turkey.

Following Zhivkov's demise the Turkish workers who stayed behind intensified their protests. Although in March this year a new law allowed them to re-adopt their original Turkish names, they have yet to regain the most important rights they lost such as their schools and university faculty. They have now formed a political party, the Movement for Rights and Freedom, and won 23 seats in the National Assembly in the June elections

18 members of the popular Ecoglasnost environmental movement also won seats. With their demonstrations, lobbies and human chains, Ecoglasnost supporters have regularly put the government on the spot. They have highlighted, nationally and internationally, Bulgaria's catastrophic environmental destruction and its consequences for communities across the country. (see box)

Workers and opposition movements looking for a political lead are presented with a false line of divide by the BSP-UDF power struggle.

Both the BSP and the opposition coalition see full-blown free enterprise as the only remedy for the ailing Bulgarian economy, albeit with different emphases, modifications

and attitudes to social safeguards. Both include right-wingers who would be happy with a piece of the free market action, and who are hostile to the self-organisation of workers. The leaders of both, for fear of risking their political support from the nationalists, have failed to press publicly for the full restoration of the rights of the Turkish minority.

The UDF believes the BSP is on borrowed time. Certainly the BSP Congress in September dealt a blow to the hopes of reformers when it re-elected as leader Alexander Lilov, who had failed to break with the right wing. The party is now more divided than ever.

However the UDF has no clear overall policies to offer in this crisis either from inside or outside an emergency coalition government. Its decision to rely on wrecking tactics is now simply demoralising and demobilising the mass of the workers.

It is very significant that moves are afoot, involving CITUB president Krustyo Petkov, to fill the political vacuum with some kind of new, social democratic 'Labour' party. It is an initiative which at such a time could have wide appeal.

In some ways, the situation is wide open for socialists to organise and argue the case for a centrally planned economy under the democratic control of workers themselves. But although small groups of socialists exist in both the BSP and UDF there is no sign of this happening so far.

All this leaves Bulgaria facing the ravages of the free market and the prospect of disastrous austerity and unemployment whoever is in government. In the longer term, even military intervention to put an end to 'chaos' cannot be ruled out. Then the strength of the most militant workers and dissidents and of their organisations will really be put to the test.

An ecological nightmare

People still react with outrage at the mention of a particular day it rained in Bulgaria. It was the day after the Chernobyl disaster, and fallout from the stricken plant had drifted across the country from the Soviet Union.

"We weren't warned to stay indoors – nobody told us anything", explained a member of the Green Party. "Afterwards we discovered that the army had been issued with pills and the top officials with special foods."

Bulgaria suffered the highest level of health damage from Chernobyl of any country outside the Soviet Union. Its ecological nightmare, however, dates back well before this disaster.

Under the Zhivkov regime, precious funds were poured into heavy,

inefficient and outdated industry and grandiose construction schemes. Giant petro-chemical plants and uranium mining were developed with no thought for their potential effect on the environment. Todor Zhivkov was determined to turn Bulgaria into a super-industrialised state at any cost.

Today uranium mining has scarred the landscape and polluted the water table. Petro-chemical factories are poisoning the atmosphere and contaminating farm produce. 24 million square metres of forest have been cut down. The Black Sea's marine life is dead below 50 metres. 71 per cent of the main rivers are heavily polluted.

The popular environmental movement Ecoglasnost has condemned



"The country will become one big chemical factory" Petar Slabakov of Ecoglasnost

When 'independent' is a loaded word

Krustyo Petkov, sociology professor and President of the Confederation of Independent Trade unions in Bulgaria, is probably the only labour movement leader in Eastern Europe who has managed to create an independent workers' organisation out of the ashes of the old state-controlled unions. Petkov talked to SOCIALIST OUTLOOK about the independent unions' first ventures into collective bargaining, their Alternative Economic Programme and the prospects for holding on to their 3 million members.

Why did you break with the communists and set up an independent trade union confederation?

A small group of reformers decided to do it, some of us from academic backgrounds, some from the grassroots.

We are not revolutionaries, but we believe that organisations like the trade unions can be changed if you remove the top leadership, cut the links with the dictatorship of the Communist Party (now the BSP) and if you get support from the base. All these conditions existed at the beginning of this year.

So we were successful in organising our founding congress in February, in agreeing a new constitution and, very important, in launching a new platform.

Is this just a change of image, or do you support the independent organisation of workers?

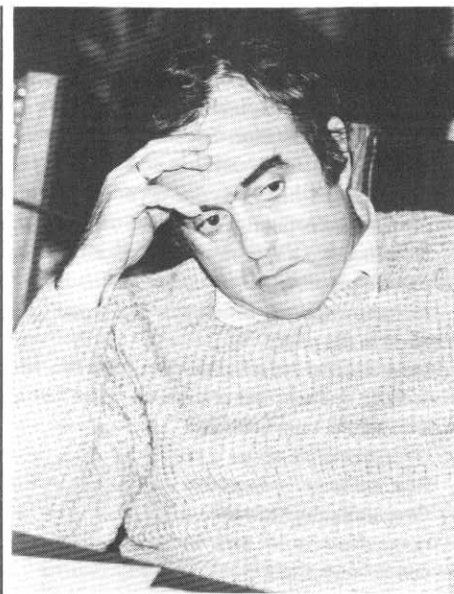
if we didn't, there would be no point in going on with the confederation. I don't want to be pessimistic but I believe Bulgaria will continue to be in crisis for the coming decade. So people need strong, independent trade unions, especially now.

What do these changes you have made mean in practice?

Firstly we had to set up a system of social partnership and to educate our members that the best instrument for defending their interests is collective bargaining. Strikes may be necessary too, but rarely, I would say, in the future.

So we signed a national agreement in March with the government and the Union of Economic Managers and immediately afterwards opened negotiations in the factories and enterprises. Now we have collective bargaining agreements in some 20 per cent of them.

We also pressed the government to do several things which had never been done – to increase minimum pensions and minimum wages, and finally, to index-link wages, unemployment benefits and pensions. The indexation agreement, signed in August, in-



Georgy Kazakov

Petkov, leader of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions

cludes different coefficients so that those on higher incomes receive lower benefits.

Did you lose the support of many old Party members?

We lost the support of some traditional party cadres who had infiltrated the trade unions because we removed the old union structures. Most of these people were old cadres from the (party-dominated) councils which we abolished so when you touch their interests they begin to act against you.

the system under which higher wages are paid to workers doing the most hazardous jobs while the hazards themselves go unaddressed. Says the leader of Ecoglasnost, actor Petar Slabakov, "People know their jobs are dangerous. If they accept higher pay as compensation it's only because they don't see any alternative."

The issue of redeployment is, in fact, one of the most explosive facing the government and the trade unions. More than 150,000 skilled workers and engineers are employed by heavy industry. So any attempts to shut down hazardous production without calamitous social costs would involve wholesale restructuring of the economy and creation of new jobs.

Petar Slabakov fears that any pos-

sible changes in this direction could be nipped in the bud by the arrival of foreign petro-chemical firms. "Now Bulgaria has opened its borders we may be forced to make concessions to (these companies). The country will become one big chemical factory!"

Ecoglasnost has brought Bulgaria's ecological plight to the world's attention with a number of bold actions. Petar Slabakov gives some examples:

"Every day for five months we have been making a human chain to stop a dam being constructed at Cherni Ossam.

"We stopped a nuclear power plant they wanted to build in Pervomay. Not only was it going to cost 44 billion levas, but the site was also an earthquake zone.

"When supplies of baby milk ran out we told the Ministry of Health that if they did not get hold of the baby food we were going to call a national strike. Suddenly they managed to find the hard currency to buy it!"

With 10,000 activists in Sofia, a country-wide network of local groups, 18 members in parliament and the support (according to a recent poll) of 67 per cent of the population, Ecoglasnost wields real influence. The movement has negotiated with government, local industry managers and the unions over plant closures.

For the future, says Petar Slabakov, "We have declared our programme and we will fight for it whoever is in government."

We heard that some of them from the BSP are now suggesting that the party needs its own trade unions in order to have an influence at the workplace. If the BSP *does* try to split off some of our union branches; we shall counter-attack straight away. And I believe we would take at least half of them back with us.

Do you welcome privatisation and a free market economy?

Yes of course. In our Alternative Economic Programme we explain our positions. We shall support privatisation because 98 per cent of state-controlled property is now working inefficiently and has been for decades. We argue for a mixed economy with state-owned property reduced to a minimum and priority given to private property, to co-operatives and to communal ownership which was important in Bulgaria in the past.

How would this be different from the way in which, for example, the Polish economy has moved?

In principle, I can't see any difference. But first we have to be more careful not to allow the hierarchy of the party and the state *nomenklatura* to turn their information and contacts to their political and economic advantage – something which is already happening. Second, we must not allow the people from the black market to become rich. These are the most dangerous things.

We fear the economic colonisation of the economy. Foreign investment will be welcome. But if, for example, multinationals and rich citizens start to buy their way in it will be a very wrong step and against the interests of the country. So I want privatisation controlled by a special agency accountable to the National Assembly.

Finally, we believe that privatisation must be carried out with the participation of the workers by giving them shares within certain industries. In the modern industrial world you see many such examples.

Can't you also see a lot of unemployment and inequality where privatisation has been introduced?

Frankly, unemployment is inevitable. But I believe it is our role in the trade unions to push for new job opportunities for people. This happened, for instance, in the Western World during the deep economic crisis in the Thirties and after the Second World War. It is not just a question of economics but a very important political question. If unemployed people in Bulgaria are not given support, this will provide fertile ground for populist and extremist movements.

What is your attitude to the Independent Confederation of Labour, Podkrepa? Do you co-operate?

We co-operate almost every day and act together in most industrial disputes at factory level. However, I have to say that at national level we have a lot of difficulties because of the volatile positions of Podkrepa's leaders.

The other very important problem is that Podkrepa combines political and trade union activity. The leadership is on the far right wing of the UDF. Their monarchist sympathies and close links with religious movements here worry us.

What structures are you trying to build at local level?

All our 70 federations and individual unions are based on the trades and branch principle. Instead of the old councils we now have people whose job is simply to co-ordinate the work of the different branches. At the same time, in 30 towns, we have introduced Centres for Trade Union protection which we regard as something of an innovation. Different experts work together there – lawyers, sociologists, economists, labour safety specialists – some 10-12 people. Members can go and see them for advice and the Centres help the branches in their negotiations with the employers.

How do you see your future role, given the crisis of the economy and the political paralysis?

I would say we are in for a very difficult period. The unions will probably lose several thousand people in the future because of the economic crisis: then we shall have to build up again. I expect a lot of spontaneous strikes in which we will have to play a role. It will be even an educational role – showing people how conflicts can be avoided and problems tackled first of all through legal channels.

As far as the political situation is concerned, I think this strange confrontation between the two giants, the BSP and UDF, is the main reason for the stagnation. We have to think about creating a centre force.

One way of doing this would be if the Social Democratic Party, the Alternative Socialist Party and the so-called radicals from the BSP and other smaller organisations came together in the political centre.

The second option would be if we in the Confederation set up a political organisation along the lines of the British Labour Party or took elements of the Israeli experience. The idea would not be to convert the trade unions



People's hopes have been dashed by rocketing inflation, unemployment and rationing.

Melanie Friend/Format

into political parties but to have a party as our main political partner.

Does the Confederation support the restoration of the rights taken away from the Turkish Bulgarians in 1985?

The leadership does, yes. But in some of our local organisation there is antagonism towards ethnic groups which creates a lot of tensions. Some of our Bulgarian conveners don't support the Turkish workers and vice versa. We understand that people from the Turkish movement in some localities are thinking about setting up separate trade unions. If we start to have unions only for Bulgarians, for Turkish people, for Jewish people or for gypsies this will undermine the whole trade union movement.

But if the Confederation can demonstrate real support for the Turkish workers, they won't need to set up unions of their own.

Even then, even if we become more successful in defending their rights, the behaviour of the Turkish population is very strange. If their leaders decide to leave the Bulgarian unions, all of them will leave. This is where trade union, social and political factors converge.

Western economies in crisis

The crunch for the workers' movement

The speculative bubble of the 1980s world capitalist economy is bursting. In Britain, the entry into the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System will further tighten the squeeze. A severe recession is coming. The workers' movement needs to politically prepare itself to resist the coming onslaught, argues JAMIE GOUGH.

A world recession is now a certainty; the only question is how severe it will be. The most obvious forms of capital's problems are not in production as such but in that mystifying thing, money. This is not surprising: the 'boom' of the 1980s was built on a pyramid of fictitious money (debt), and the 'boom' itself encouraged the creation of more fictitious values in the inflated values of stocks, bonds and property.

During the 1980s the world rate of productive investment, though very variable by country, was low by historical standards, due above all to historically low rates of profit. In consequence, there was a great excess of money capital which could not find profitable, *productive* investment outlets. These were loaned for a variety of purposes: to corporations to tide them over low profits; to individuals to spend; to speculators for 'leveraged buyouts' of corporations; to property developers for their apparently 'safe as houses' operations; to the US economy to finance its enormous balance of payments deficit with the rest of the world; and to the US government to finance its greatly expanded military spending and huge budget deficit. The ratio of world debt to world annual production is now probably larger than it has ever been. This was responsible for the 'successes' of the capitalist economy, such as they were, in the 1980s.

This growth mechanism is now grinding to

a halt. Worse, there may be a major financial collapse. The basic reason for this is that the 1980s 'boom' failed to radically raise the rate of profit and stimulate productive investment. The average rate of profit of industry and commerce in the US is now *lower* than at any time since the Second World War – lower than at the start of the period of stagnation in the late 1960s, and lower than when the Reagan boom began.

This failure was first signalled in the 1987 stock market collapse, and by the sharp downturn in autumn 1989. It has been con-

halt. There have been two reasons for this.

Firstly, inflation has been increasing worldwide, reflecting the fact that debt-propelled demand has exceeded stagnating productive capacity. This inflation is all the more remarkable when you realise that the prices of most raw materials have decline, in many cases by large amounts, during the 1980s. This lies behind the catastrophic economic situation in most of the Third World. The 'boom' in the imperialist countries was on the back, not only of many workers in those countries, but especially of the poorest two-thirds of the people in the capitalist world.

The imperialist governments have also tightened their monetary policies *competitively*. The US and the UK, with large deficits to finance, have raised interest rates to finance them and to stop their currencies from slipping. The non-deficit countries, especially Japan and W.Germany, raised their interest rates in retaliation, so as to prevent their currencies slipping and inflation being 'exported' to them. The result has been a spiral of rising interest rates.

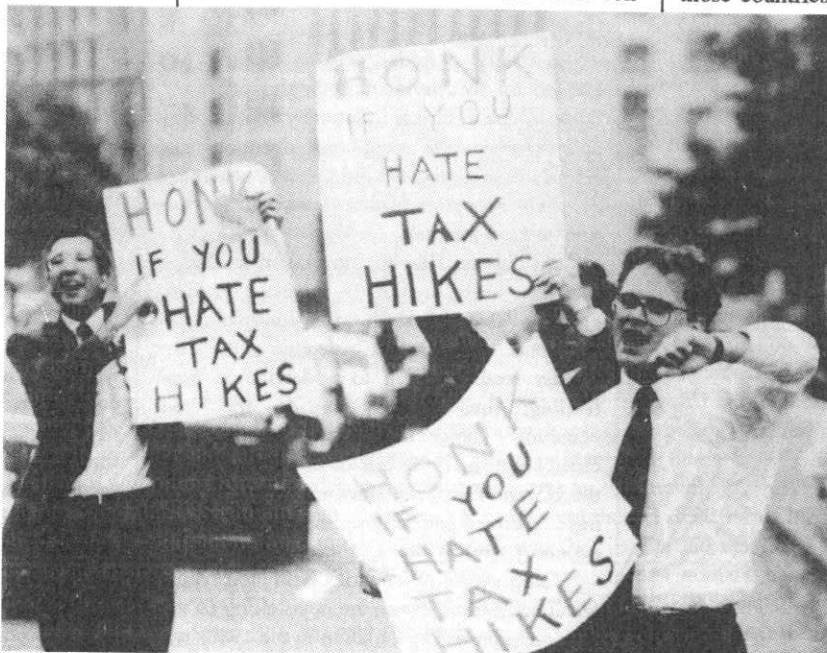
Debt creation

All these mechanisms, however, represent one fundamental problem: that debt creation, the claim on future

profit, had run far ahead of the production of profit. And this problem in turn rests on the central generator of capitalist crises: productive investment depends on the rate of profit, and the rate of profit depends on productive investment.

The rise in interest rates has crucified the neo-colonial countries strapped with high debt incurred in the early 1980s. It has also contributed to a slow down in the imperialist countries. US and British output are now not growing at all, and Japanese growth in output is at the low level of 4 per cent.

Meanwhile, a central problem, the US budget deficit, has gone from bad to worse. The deficit reduction agreed on 30 September, in spite of requiring Bush to junk his pledge of no tax rises, does nothing substantial. It knocks \$50bn off the deficit for the coming year (which is the only part of the agreement



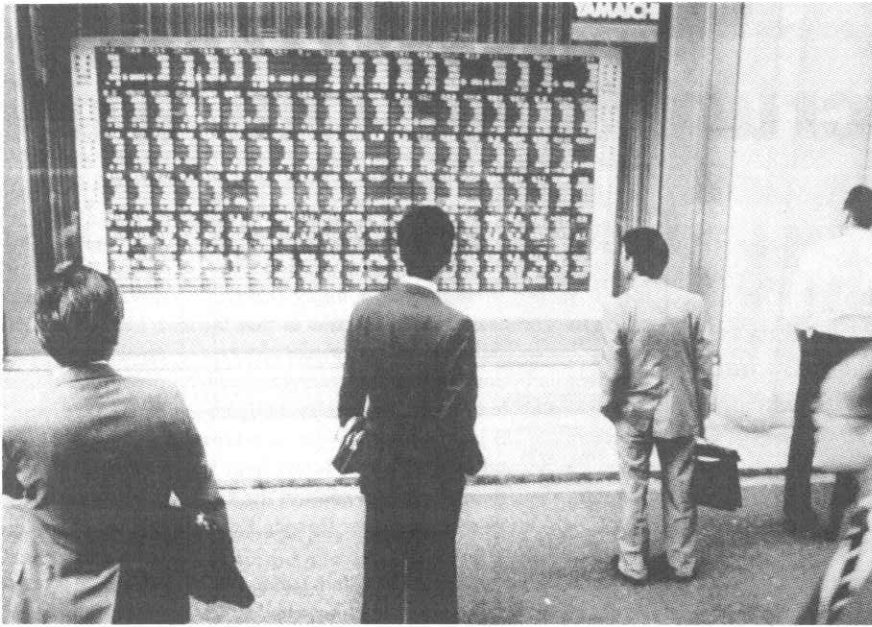
Bush reneges on his promise and loses popularity

firmed by the collapse of the Tokyo stock exchange since the beginning of 1990; it fell 35% before the Gulf crisis started (and has fallen a further 25% since then). These falls were due to a recognition that the performance of the productive economy was not living up to the value of stocks and shares, which are based on the speculative estimate of future productive profits.

1987 crash

The first reaction of the imperialist governments to the 1987 crash was to cushion it: they eased monetary policy, in effect allowing more debt creation, in order to prevent a big impact on the productive economy. In Britain this was the move which, in his recent confession, Nigel Lawson said that he regretted. But since 1988 monetary policy has been progressively tightened, interest rates have increased, and the debt-propelled economy has ground to a

that means anything); but the expected deficit has risen by \$75 billion in the last two months alone, and currently stands at \$250. With the coming recession is likely to rise to \$300bn. The Federal Reserve, the US central bank, has said that it will lower interest rates as a 'reward' for the agreement. If it does so, it will not be a statement of confidence but rather the reverse: an attempt to moderate the recession, and a move which would certainly lead to a further increase in US inflation.



Japanese investors watch numbers plummet on streetside quote board

But it is not only stagnating output that signals the recession: speculative values and debt are contracting sharply. Many corporations which took on huge debts, especially but not only through high return - high risk 'junk bonds', are unable to meet interest repayments as their real profits decline. There have been some major bankruptcies in the US.

The Australian buccaneer capitalists like Bond, Elliot and now Murdoch, with their vast debts, are coming unstuck. As commercial rents and property prices collapse, many property companies are in big trouble. The Savings and Loan Associations in the US, the rough equivalent of British building societies, are in massive crisis mainly as a result of property loans going sour. The US government cannot politically afford to let them go bankrupt, and is having to bail them out at a cost now estimated as between \$600bn and \$1,000bn (roughly the size of Britain's GNP!). Not only many small US banks, but even majors like Chase Manhattan, are in severe difficulties, as a result of Third World loans, the collapse in property prices (itself a product of the S&L crisis), junk bonds and corporate defaults; the bankruptcy of one or more major US banks, and the merger of others, is now thought likely.

But the most worrying contraction is in Japan. In the 1980s Tokyo was the major source of loan finance to the world. Now this source is being choked off not only by a steep rise interest rates but also by a contraction of the banks' capital base. In order to ensure a minimal degree of security, capitalist governments allow banks to create debt only up to a certain multiple of their real assets.

Collapse in value

In Japan, banks are, fairly reasonably, allowed to count stocks, shares and property in their real assets. As these have collapsed in value, so the banks' allowed lending has contracted. This is not some technical quirk, but a

mechanism typical of capitalist recessions. In expansionary periods, debt is *cumulatively* created on the basis of collateral of assets, whose value in turn is inflated by debt creation and expansion. In recessions, this goes into *cumulative* reverse: declining asset values cut debt which creates further decline in production and asset values.

In 1929, the US banking system worked in much the same way that the Japanese one does now, and this was responsible for severity of that crash. Now, as then, a decline of the *stock market* feeds through to a decline in *bank lending*, thus directly hitting the 'real economy'. The decline of the Tokyo stock exchange during 1990, unlike the 1987 crash of the US and European stock markets, will thus have a *direct* and *severe* impact on the real economy worldwide.

Bourgeois commentators, with their typical wisdom after the event, are now telling us that debt creation and speculation in the 1980s was 'excessive'. The banks are berated for having undertaken 'unwise' lending, having ploughed into dodgy 'fashions' like junk bonds and property. The soaring stock markets, which a little while ago were cited as indices of capitalism's newly-found health, are now criticised for their 'unreality'. This capitalist 'self-criticism' underlies the 'new moral tone of the 1990s'. But as we have seen, the speculation and debt arose inevitably out of the excess of money capital and the underlying weakness of the productive economy.

Burst bubble

It is ironic, but to some extent logical, that the bursting of the 1980s capitalist bubble should coincide with the breakthrough in capitalist encroachment in Eastern Europe. In the very long term, if capitalism is restored not only in East Germany but more widely in Eastern Europe, this may offer a 'fix' to the long crisis of world capitalism, by absorbing excess money capital into profitable, produc-

tive investment. But in the next few years, as in the last few, Eastern Europe is likely to be a problem more than a solution.

The US and the other imperialist powers have had to spend massively on armaments in order to bankrupt the Soviet Union and propel it towards Gorbachevism. They would have to invest massively, with no prospect of substantial returns, in order to further the push towards capitalist restoration. In the short term, this is contributing further to the upward pressure on interest rates, as loan capital is used to finance German reunification, and Germany is becoming a big-time borrower on

the international markets.

The Gulf crisis has merely put the icing on this recessionary cake. The size and duration of the oil price rise will affect the severity of the world recession, in a way which is presently unpredictable. But the Gulf crisis is emphatically not to blame for the recession.

Thatcher's failure

Whatever government policy is adopted, the coming world recession will hit Britain particularly hard. This is because Britain remains the weakest of the imperialist economies. It is this that constitutes the failure of Thatcherism. Contrary to what is often thought on the left, Thatcher could not have recreated long term sustained accumulation and high profitability in Britain; such was and is impossible without a renewed long boom of the *world* economy. What Thatcher might have done would have been to have raised Britain's competitiveness relative to its major rivals. In this she has failed.

The indices of the failure are well-known. Output, taken over the whole period since 1979, has risen much slower than the OECD average. There have been large and ever-widening trade and balance of payments deficits. Investment in fixed capacity only reached its 1979 level in 1989. Research and Development (R&D) expenditure has been stagnant here while it has been rising rapidly in other imperialist countries. Costs of labour power per unit of output are rising faster than the OECD average. And now we see the highest inflation rate of the major countries.

Many on the left thought that British capitalism would improve its competitive position through the Tories' and employers' successive defeats of the labour movement. The capitalist class seemed to have had big economic successes particularly in the intensification of work, in an increase in the rate of labour productivity, in wage stagnation or

wage cuts for a large part of the manual working class, and (since the mid-1980s) in a big reduction in the ratio of state spending to GNP.

But capitalist economies, especially modern ones, are not revived as simply as that. Intensification of work by itself can only raise productivity within the limits set by human capacities and endurance. *In itself* it is not the solution to capitalist competitiveness; if it were, India would be the world's leading capitalist economy.

Exploitation

Intensification of labour is useful if it enables management's ability to rule and hence a dynamic of fast changes in production organisation and technology. But this requires *also* a high rate of investment, and this has not been forthcoming. The intensification of work, and the scrapping of backward capacity, have enabled a substantial rise in average productivity and the average rate of profit. But these have been insufficient to tempt capital into investing in new production processes, expansion in expanding markets, or R&D. Rather, it has retreated into its most profitable *existing* 'niche markets'. Yet to be competitive with, for example, France and Germany, let alone Japan, British industry needs to be constantly advancing into new product areas.

This conservatism is also partly responsible for Thatcher's failure to build the kind of actively cooperative industrial relations that underpin German and Japanese competitiveness. Moreover, the success in cutting public expenditure and in privatising has caused an ever-worsening shortage of infrastructure and skilled labour power which is now severely damaging profits. Capitalist economies cannot revive themselves *merely* by attacking the working class, though that this certainly necessary; capitalism is much more contradictory than that.

Thatcher's entry into the ERM is a desperate attempt to deal with short term problems. Even if it succeeded in its aims, it would do nothing the address the underlying failure. A minor aim is to enable a small cut in interest rates, as sterling receives extra support from other ERM governments, and thus both mollify some voters and moderate the sharpness of the coming recession. The major aim is to replace monetary targets with the exchange rate of sterling as the 'disciplining'

force on the British economy – in itself an admission of the failure of 'monetarism', according to which the money supply was seen as the crucial lever. In the next few years entry into the ERM is thus essentially a mechanism for deflation. We should recall that this is not only Thatcher's policy but Kinnock's.

The ERM will maintain sterling at more-or-less its current value against the Deutschmark. This halts the softening of 'discipline' which has occurred in the last year with the 10 per cent devaluation of sterling. Given that British inflation is currently three times the ERM average, and will remain

policy as such. It has effectively handed this over to the EC, and the EC's policy is largely to try to cut down national governments' industrial policies.

Labour's economic policy now amounts to: don't cut taxes any more; spend more on training, tax concessions for R&D, and transport infrastructure. At the best of times this programme would be extremely limited. British investment in these areas is *vastly* behind the OECD average. Moreover, it is not enough to have a change in government policy in these areas; private firms would have to radically change their strategies in order to use skilled labour power, to undertake R&D themselves and to use it profitably. Just as Harold Wilson failed in 1964-6 to inject 'the white hot heat of technology' into an uninterested British industry, Kinnock would fail to inject the white hot heat of 'knowledge' into the economy.

However, Kinnock, if elected, would not get the opportunity to even try this programme. The recession will cut government tax revenue and raise its spending on unemployment benefit. In spite of a total government debt lower than at any time since 1914, Kinnock will not borrow for fear of further raising interest rates and also in order not to undermine City confidence (as he puts it "not spending what we don't have"). As long as the recession lasts, probably 3-4 years, there will therefore be no money for him to spend on 'knowledge infrastructures'. His 'big idea' will not even get off the ground.

Renewed assault

The effect of all this is that a Kinnock government, just as much as another Thatcher government, would preside over a sharp recession and the renewed assault on the working class that this involves. Even before the entry into the ERM, and before the international debt crisis has yet taken its major casualties, City pundits were predicting an increase of unemployment by up to 1.5 million in the next two years. Really savage wage cuts in major parts of the economy are on the cards, in the style of the huge wage reductions enforced in the US during the 1980s. The welfare state will be subjected to another slashing, despite Kinnock's 'big idea' of education.

The labour movement needs to prepare itself for this onslaught. But resistance cannot be just national in scope. A *world* recession will mean attacks on the working class *worldwide*. Each country's capitalists encourage workers to compete with other countries to further these attacks. We must build an international workers' response to an international crisis.



Darman: American budget director. A Bush 'yes' man

higher for the foreseeable future, this is strongly deflationary. It puts much greater cost and profit pressures on British producers. Either they succumb to these pressures by cut-backs in output and capacity; or they cut their costs, which under present conditions they are only willing to do by cutting wages. For workers this means rising unemployment or wage cuts, but probably both.

Interest rates

The scenario is made worse by the interest rate cut, which will tend to worsen the balance of payments. In fact, it is quite likely that the interest rate will have to rise again, in order to deal with the balance of payments and to stop sterling from falling below its minimum allowed rate in the ERM.

Thatcher and Major's calculation appears to be that the current reduction in the interest rate will pave the way for an early election before the British and world recessions really get nasty. They are also going to worsen the recession. But the effects of the recession, cutting capacity and cutting wages, will do nothing for what we have seen are the real weaknesses of British capitalism.

Kinnock prepares for war

Now that Britain is in the ERM and Major has lowered interest rates a little, Labour's economic policy looks even thinner than before. Labour has no substantial *industrial*

East Europe's winter of crisis

Stalled on the road to the capitalist market

By Peter Thompson

With the whole of the world economy apparently standing at the edge of a serious recession, it is time to look at how things stand for Eastern Europe. The peoples of those countries made their revolutions in the hope that things would generally get better for them once they had a greater degree of political 'freedom' and an end to the dead hand of bureaucratized planning.

They were encouraged in this belief by the West, whose bankers held out the carrot of massive investment and regeneration. As Helmut Kohl put it, 'no-one will be worse off and many will be better off'. It has very quickly become apparent that these promises were less than honest and that most people in Eastern Europe are already considerably worse off. There are several points to be made about this.

Oil prices

Firstly the economic shake down now going on in the East was always likely to happen, and predates the Gulf crisis. There is no doubt that the rise in oil prices will hit Eastern Europe hard. The marketisers will be hoist by their own petard, in that the Soviet Union is now demanding hard currency rather than bartered raw materials for its oil. But the winter economic crisis facing Eastern Europe is one engendered by the nature of the transition of those economies and the terms and conditions being imposed by the West on that transition.

Secondly it is important to remember that the Western economies themselves were not in such great shape before the Gulf crisis. The US budget and trade deficits and the banking and Savings and Loan crises were already imposing severe strains on finance capital leading to historically high interest rates and recessionary tendencies.

Little real cash

Indications of these trends have been around since the stock market crash and capital was already being rationed before the oil price rises. This capital rationing meant that while Western businesspeople made frequent trips to Eastern Europe to make encouraging noises about buying up everything in sight and regenerating the economy, precious little real money has been forthcoming.

Any investment which is being made is undertaken by the imperialist financial institu-

tions such as the World Bank, The EC, The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the OECD. All of the money which they are sending, whether in the form of direct investment or 'aid' has severe anti-working class conditions attached to it. It is designed not to improve the lot of the workers but to pave the way for profitable recapitalization and safe investment for private capital.

The consequences of this conjuncture of economic conditions is that

- austerity programmes are being introduced, most noticeably in Poland where the Balcerowicz plan has cut living standards by 40%;

- factories are being closed (it is forecast that up to 70% of GDR enterprises will not survive reunification and that unemployment in the GDR will reach at least 50% by the end of the year);

- and the cohesion of the states themselves is under threat, Yugoslavia is well on the way to complete disintegration.

On top of all this the Gulf crisis has now dealt a severe blow to any slim hopes that may have existed of riding the storm. As the Czech foreign minister recently pointed out 'This crisis will cost us \$6 billion in the course of one year, which is more than our earnings in hard currency exports. The new democracies of Eastern Europe are just being born, but the baby can be killed before the birth.' (*Guardian* 29.9.90)

Desperate plea

His desperate plea to the US that they lend another \$60 billion to the Soviet Union so that they in turn may buy Czech industrial goods – and the fact that the Czech government has now sent a contingent of troops to the Gulf in order to show how willing it is to submit itself to imperialism – are eloquent testimonies to the depth of the impending crisis. However it ignores three huge problems:

- the US hasn't got a spare \$60 billion sitting around – if it did it would use it to fill up its own budget deficit,

- it wouldn't lend it anyway until the Soviet Union guaranteed to privatize everything in sight;

- why should the Soviet Union only spend the money in Czechoslovakia when what it really wants is Western goods?

Stranglehold

What does all of this mean for the workers

of Eastern Europe? Isn't it a fact that imperialism has a stranglehold over developments there, making it less likely that any of the social gains of nationalised property relations in the deformed workers' states will be salvaged?

Well, yes and no. Yes, objectively imperialism is strengthened by these trends; but at the same time it has been hit as hard by economic crisis as the East. The financial restraints imposed by the combination of the existing economic crisis, the looming Third World debt crisis and the Gulf mean that the carrot it has to offer the East is getting ever smaller and the stick it can threaten with ever weaker.

In addition we shouldn't overlook the fact that the revolutions in Eastern Europe were all about destroying repressive Stalinist political rule. They were not massive uprisings for unemployment and capitalist austerity. If the West pushes the workers too hard, then it will end up having to reimpose repressive rule in order to hold down the very forces which it encouraged last year.

Workers' rule

The greatest thing to have happened to the workers' movement since 1945 is the collapse of Stalinism. The opportunities that gives for workers' self organization and real 'social and economic democracy' is enormous. If political self-determination can be grafted on to the commonly owned means of production which continue to predominate in the East, then a system of workers' rule could be built which, if it were to link up and encourage a regeneration of the Soviet Union and a return to the proletarian democracy of the October revolution, would be a beacon of hope to workers everywhere.

In order for this to happen though, there must be greater coordination between revolutionary socialists in East and West. We must step up our offensive against imperialism and prevent it imposing its economic, social and military plans on Eastern Europe.

A revolutionary movement must be built in the East which can convince workers that their interests lie with self-management and economic democracy rather than with subordination to imperialist profit motives. As the economic crisis deepens in the East this opportunity will increase, but its success is far from inevitable. It could still just as easily end in barbarism as socialism. It is still up to us.

Cancel the third world debt!

By Louise Holloway

“The problem of the Debt is fundamentally political, more than financial, and should be confronted as such. What is at stake is not the accounts of international creditors but the lives of millions of people who cannot endure the the permanent threat of repressive measures and unemployment that bring poverty and death.”

(From a letter from the Archbishop of San Paulo to Fidel Castro)

The historic date of the debt crisis is August 13 1982, the day when Mexico refused to pay. However, the crisis had been coming to a head throughout 1981-82 with many countries running into problems meeting their extortionate interest payments.

The origins of the crisis lie in the oil price rises of 1973, when some of the countries of the Middle East were able to gain a fairer price for their oil. Much of this money was invested in the western banks – which then loaned the money out at low interest rates and without caution to countries aiming to industrialise.

Yet the interest rates were floating, and dependent on the economic situation in the western industrialised nations. When the US pushed up interest rates to pay off its own deficit, debt servicing payments went through the roof.

As a result of this action Washington plunged the world into recession. This had a disastrous effect on the terms of trade for dependent developing countries – inequality grew between the the price of raw materials, exported to gain foreign currency to pay off the debt, and the price of goods imported. There was an overall *decline* in international trade, and 1981-2 saw raw material prices on the world market drop by 15%.

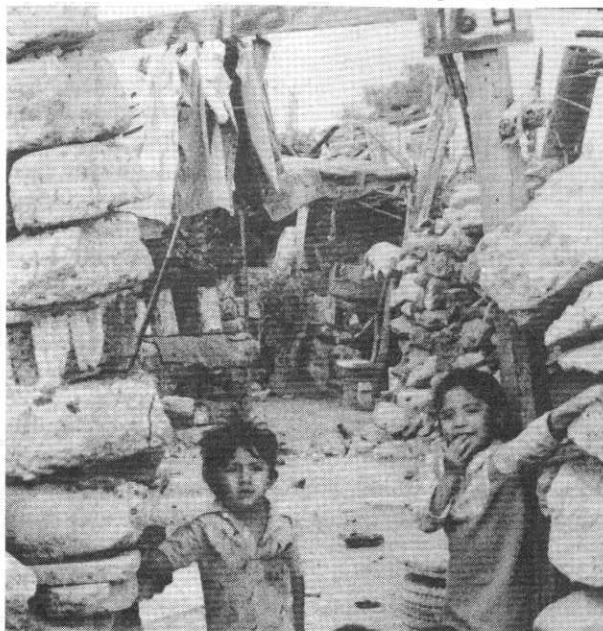
A legacy of colonialism is that most Third World countries are dependent on one or two primary products for their export income and this fall in prices left them without the foreign currency to service their debts.

Our concern must be for the workers and peasants of the dependent developing countries, their plight is one which has sig-

nificantly worsened since the stagnation of the capitalist system worldwide.

The problem of the Third World debt cannot be isolated from the problem of world debt as a whole. While total Third World debt is US \$1,190 billion, the US debt is over 8 times that amount, if we include private debt, standing at over \$9,000 billion.

The US debt is politely termed a budget deficit. It is true that a straight comparison of



While Mexican children live in shanty towns, their government pays millions in interest payments

the debts cannot be made. The US largely owes itself while the poorest countries are dependent on external – foreign – financial institutions from the High Street banks to the IMF.

Without any solution in sight for the Third World, a new problem facing capitalism is the growing debt of Eastern Europe. We should already be calling for its cancellation.

When Mexico refused to pay in 1982 Regan took immediate action through the IMF and the International Debt Fund. They arranged supplementary loans for Mexico and Argentina in order that they could ensure American private banks did not go to the wall.

This involved imposing brutal austerity measures. It was not until 1989 with the Brady plan that the USA actually began to discuss the possibility of some reduction of the total debt.

\$180 billion has already been paid back by cutting back on vital imports of technology and machinery – with disastrous long

term consequences for economic development. On the human front, cutbacks in health provision, irrigation, and education have caused increased misery and death for millions for workers and peasants.

In sub Saharan Africa, 110 million people are unnecessarily ill; in Asia the figure is 500 million. At least 750 million children across the Third World are suffering and dying unnecessarily as a direct result of money being cut from primary health care. This could be largely eradicated for a mere \$2 extra per child, per year.

In Bolivia where the infant mortality rate is 16.9%, a tiny 1.94% of the budget is spent on health care. The priority is the repayment of its \$3.7 billion debt which consumes over 50% of Bolivia's income.

In Zaire 26% of teachers were sacked. 2,500 lost their jobs in Jamaica.

Through rescheduling the debt and preparing reserves many of the Western banks have succeeded in minimising the risk to themselves; but this route has led the dependent developing countries to a dead end. The only solution to end the dependence and poverty is the cancellation of the whole debt and the complete restructuring of the world economy.

What can be done to bring this about?

The Group of Seven (G7), representatives of the most powerful capitalist countries, are meeting in London next July. We should work with broad forces such as Third World First and the international solidarity campaigns to build the biggest possible action in London in July.

The demand for the cancellation of the debt is one which the whole labour movement should take up; yet its lack of internationalism is notorious. For all its dire faults, *Live Aid* demonstrated that concern exists for international suffering amongst the working class in Britain. We must raise this concern again and crucially provide the political explanation for that suffering.

The Socialist Movement provides us with opportunities to bring international issues into the labour movement. In addition, we should raise the issue of the debt in all the arenas in which we work.

It is vital that we build a broad based campaign to demand an end to the misery and death that economic exploitation and dependence brings, mobilising around the call for the total cancellation of the debt.

Flashbacks, timewarps and hype



David Lynch: writer and director

Wild at Heart

by David Lynch
Starring Nicolas Page

Reviewed by Beverly
Byrne

Sailor and Lula are a modern couple with an antique problem; Lula's mother doesn't approve of her boyfriend.

This is no surprise as the opening scene shows him smashing his friend's skull open. However, there are indications that Lula's mum is implicated in this gory action and it is this which provides the mystery in *Wild at Heart*.

Lula's manic mother sets out to put a spoke in the young lovers' relationship by having Sailor killed. The young lovers drive hither and thither to avoid apron strings and assassination.

Littered around this lightweight plot are several disparate characters who are lukewarm lookalikes from previous Lynch films. They don't contribute much to the plot, which is not surprising as its barely there anyway.

Their sole purpose is to illustrate a repertoire of themes

and qualities which David Lynch finds fascinating and/or attractive. So just why is it that this film *Wild at Heart* won the Palm D'Or at this year's Cannes festival?

This accolade immediately raises a number of questions about the film. Is it a 'wild at heart and weird on top' art movie, is it hype for the self acknowledged cogniscenti, or is it merely a Lynch formula? Certainly it could qualify as an 'art house' movie on the ground of

generic and temporal confusion.

It is at once an old fashioned Hollywood thriller, a so-called road movie and a bit of a thriller with black magic and wizardry (of Oz) thrown in for good measure.

Lynch likes to play around with Hollywood styles, and he manipulated them beautifully in *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet* to produce two profoundly disturbing and visually arresting movies. *Wild at Heart*

looks attractive, but is unmemorable, and ultimately seems as vacuous as its two protagonists, who smoke, fuck, dance and talk in banal cliches, amusing at first and irritating later.

Lynch also tampers with time. He uses contrasting sounds and images to

create an ahistorical vacuum for the action; this works well in a scene where the gyrating lovers frug out to a live band who look like Motorhead. On cue the heavy metal freaks metamorphose into a gentle backing band for Sailor's Elvis impersonation complete with screaming 50's fans. The music acts as a temporal red herring but Lynch fails to link this to any narrative cause.

There is of course the now ritual disregard for narrative continuity. Flashbacks fill in the missing pieces of the flimsy story. Sometimes the flashbacks are no more than a one shot insert, a lighted match for example, is of layered significance; the post-coital fag, the reason Sailor is being hunted, the cause of Lula's exaggerated bimboesque behaviour.

By throwing in the flashbacks, the timewarps and a few designer peculiar characters who stand in for Lynch's thematic passions; the mad mother, the seedy, inept private detective, the morally and physically repulsive hit man, the erotic and sensuous woman, two sexually perverse cripples and so on he manages to concoct just about enough enigma to keep you in your seat.

However, the ultimate failure

of this film is Lynch's inability to provide a coherent unity in the form of the plot. As a result Sailor and Lula have no real reason to exist cinematically: they are just not 'real' enough to care about.

So it might be said that on the grounds of style, narrative and time, Lynch is playing the old game of bugging around with the Hollywood classic movie. This will certainly satisfy those aesthetes who find Lynch films original, artistic and deeply meaningful.

One thing is for certain; David Lynch will be pleased. He has found a style which can make some of the people think that the film is intellectually stimulating whilst others believe it is a politically sound statement relating to mid-American society, the remainder will think its art and one or two of course will love it for the repetitive sex and the promise of violence.

All in all that's quite a lot of people. However, despite a couple of flashy ideas, Lynch has made a film which is like a piece of formica, smooth and slick on top with the promise of real wood underneath, but when you peel back the veneer all you find is compressed pulp.



Lula (Laura Dern) enjoys a symbolic post-coital fag with Sailor (Nicolas Cage)

Adios, Tariq Ali!

Redemption

Tariq Ali
Chatto & Windus
13.99

Reviewed by Charlie van Gelderen

This is a book which should never have been written. It is so out of character of the Tariq Ali the world has known up till now, as to be almost unbelievable. The question, to which we shall return, is why did he write it?

Tariq is riding very high right now. He has become a media personality. The TV series, *Bandung File* which he co-edited was an excellent introduction for Western audiences to the problems of the 'Third World'. His current production *Rear Window* is well worth watching. He is joint author of the play *Moscow Gold* currently staged by the RSC at the Barbican. These are prestige productions which could only enhance his reputation.

But now we have *Redemption*. This is supposed to be a satire on Western Trotskyist 'groupuscles' and the strange behaviour of their eccentric leaders – and there is not one of them who is not eccentric or worse.

The art of satire is a difficult one. It is best when applied with a touch of understatement. Tariq is gifted with many talents, but satire is not one of them. There is no subtlety in this book. Nearly every character is a gross caricature of the original. Some of the women are portrayed sympathetically, and Tariq appears to have a soft spot for Renard, who tried to raise finance to support Trotsky by co-operating with a prostitutes' collective.

Only the *cognoscenti* will recognise most of the characters in the book. Who, but an old-timer will know who the description 'the twin evils, war and fascism' was applied to in the thirties, and the 'four-lines-only-per-page-of-foolscap'?

Tariq has spared no one in this book: not his old friends from *Black Dwarf* and *Red Mole* days; nor the members of the editorial committee of the thinly disguised *New Life Journal*. Despite the change of sex, most people on the left will recognise the prematurely white-haired editor. Even the editorial collective of *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* is not spared.

Apart from the politicians who will read this book to see if they have been included in the *dramatis personae*, the sexual antics described might attract a more dubious type of reader.

Even the chief character in the book, Ezra, with whom the author seems to have a love hate relationship, is 'obsessed with sex'.

Of course, the book contains some bitter home truths. As Ezra, the leader of the World Party surveys what is happening in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. He refuses to believe that the 'reel car run backward', and that a counter-revolutionary restoration is taking place without violent resistance from the proletariat. Ezra's optimism remains undimmed as is illustrated by his letter to his daughter, with the quotation from Goethe, the last verse of which reads:

*Build it again,
Great child of the Earth
Build it again,
With a finer worth
In thine own bosom build it
on high
Take up thy life once more:
Run the race again!
High and clear
Let a lovelier stream*



Tariq Ali addressing Socialist Outlook rally in happier days

Ring out than ever before.

This is the sort of message which an Engels or a Trotsky would have given the working class in these days of retreat and defeat.

Apart from the undue attention to sexual activities (even on his death bed, Ezra had a 'partially erect member'), there is an unnecessary emphasis on the Jewishness of many of the comrades. Tariq knows very well that the accidental fact of their Jewish births played little or no part in the political or social life of the leaders of the movement.

So now we have to try to answer the question we pose above. Why did Tariq Ali risk his reputation and the goodwill

of his friends by writing this rubbish?

Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the profile in the *Independent* of 29th September. Until his media debut with the *Bandung File* and *Rear Window* he 'seemed to have passed into the shadows of British life...expanding into his new age of yuppie-dom, Tariq Ali prospered and grew stouter...'

But perhaps there is another explanation. With his new-found prosperity, and acceptance by a wider circle than in his street fighting years, he probably wants to make a complete break with his past. What a pity that he has chosen such an undignified way to do it. Adios, Tariq Ali!



Vladimir Derer of CLPD: like many on the Labour left, he opposes PR

Terry Conway

Hands up for PR

Electing for Democracy: Proportional Representation and the Left.

By Richard Kuper Published by Socialist Society, £3.95.

Reviewed by Davy Jones

Defence of the indefensible 'First past the post' electoral system is a strange priority for many left wing Labour Party members. This relic from our imperialist past, which we also foisted on the USA, India, New Zealand, and Canada, is somehow sacrosanct to socialists who will happily condemn 'bourgeois democracy'.

Yet the whole electoral system is rotten. There are no national assemblies for Scotland and Wales. There is no regional democracy. The Crown, the Church and the unelected Lords all have unjustified political powers. The proportions of women and Black MPs are a disgrace. Thatcher has shown how a government can manipulate its prerogative in calling elections, which can be up to five years apart. (The Chartists called over 100 years ago for annual parliaments.) This is a long way from direct workers democracy, which Marxists have traditionally claimed to be a higher form of democracy.

According to Labour left mythology, proportional representation means weak governments, coalitions, no accountability of MPs and no more Labour Governments! All of this is superficial rubbish.

In Europe, social democratic parties, sometimes with Communist Party support, have won an absolute majority of votes under proportional representation more than a dozen times across seven different countries.

In Britain Labour, because of the votes of a number of small left parties, would almost certainly have won an absolute majority of seats not just in 1945, but also in 1951 when

the Tories came to office with less votes than Labour.

The irony is that Labour would gain an enormous number of votes under PR which are currently lost due to tactical voting in seats where Labour comes third, and complacency where its victory is assured.

As the Tories have gerrymandered the constituency boundaries still further, the days of Labour winning general elections on under 40% of the vote are gone. It could now never win an election without a massive 45% of the vote. Its extra votes under PR would push it up to the magic 50% barrier.

'Strong government', Richard Kuper reminds us, 'depends first and foremost on the degree of mobilisation of popular forces in support of radical change.'

The type of wholesale transformation of society which socialists seek is not going to be sneaked in unnoticed past the electorate.

Our critique of the new realists is that they can neither introduce socialism nor win elections. To do both now requires the mobilisation of a real popular majority. PR would help, not hinder that goal.

Kuper's book is the best available short critique of the existing electoral system and a handy guide to the numerous different types of proportional representation on offer - some of which are as bad as 'First past the post'.

Richard Kuper opts for a variant of the West German system, combining a vote for an individual in a constituency, with a second vote for a party in a regional constituency, with Parliament topped up proportionally from these regional lists with quotas for women and Black candidates.

Labour conference has shown that the PR issue will not go away. Given the legacy of Stalinism the left cannot afford to concede the ground of democracy to the liberal centre.

The left has nothing to gain by clinging on to an outdated, undemocratic and corrupt electoral system.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

What power to the workers?

Phil Hearse, writing in *Socialist Outlook* 27, sets out to refute the state-capitalist analysis as "a theory that lacks something". There is however, something essential lacking from his own argument, namely Marx's concept of alienated labour. East and West, workers are alienated not only from the products of their labour but from the activity of labour itself; work is drained of interest and creativity, considerations of health and safety are overridden by the drive for productivity, and a hierarchy of supervisors and managers exists to discipline them.

If the workers have no control over production or the state, by what logic can societies like Russia or China be regarded as degenerate or deformed workers' states? Only by making a fetish of state ownership and planning, as if these were enough to transcend capitalism, irrespective of the real relations of production as experienced by the workers in the factories and farms.

Hearse's denial that the Stalinist bureaucracy is driven, by its position in the global system, to accumulate capital, offers no explanation for the enormous suffering inflicted by the forced collectivisation of agriculture and the Stakhanovite speed-up under Stalin, or the corresponding policies in Mao's China, the 'People's Communes' and the 'Great Leap Forward'. All of this was an attempt to catch up with and overtake the West (or in Mao's case, both the West and Russia), by exploiting the labour power of the masses to the utmost. The failure to catch up with the more advanced capitalist countries, together with the popular rebellion against dictatorship and poverty, lies behind the recent downfall of the 'Communist' regimes of Eastern Europe.

The concept of state-capitalism is by no means exclusive to the SWP, nor did it originate with Tony Cliff. It seems that a number of marxists, seeking to understand the transformation of the Russian revolution into its opposite, arrived at the category independently. Natalia Sedova Trotsky employed the term with regard to both Russia and China just before her death in 1962. However the first analysis based on an actual study of the Russian economy in the Stalin years was *Russia as State-Capitalist Society*, written by Raya Dunayevskaya (under the pen name of Freddie Forest) in 1942.

Richard Abernethy, Oxford

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

Iraqi Troops out?

It appears that Socialist Outlook now supports a 'pull-out' of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. All socialists ought to recognise that this is completely misguided and particularly dangerous at a time when this is the *central demand* of US imperialism and its cohorts. The reasons are simple.

First, it ignores the real, *current*, situation by posing things in an abstract even-handed manner. By arguing for withdrawal, this means accepting US domination. *There is no other choice realistically available at the moment*, therefore, socialists should oppose such calls.

Second, it *implies* (even if it is rejected elsewhere in the article), that US imperialism and the Iraqi invasion are of the same significance. This is nonsense. Imperialism is a system of monopoly capitalist domination, and in that sense the US and Iraq are totally different. Undoubtedly, Hussein would *like* to be the Middle East's main imperialist power, but this is far removed from any reality with respect to imperialism's financial function.

Third, the worse scenario (along with a war) is the re-establishment of the USA's domination of the region. Those who would be detrimentally affected would be the wider Arab working class. A US victory would undoubtedly give people like Mubarak a lifeline (not to mention the al-Sabah family).

Additionally, it would not assist the Iraqi working class at all who would then have a *financially powerful* nation dominating them; another reason for opposing any concessions over the Kuwaiti situation.

Fourth, I would guess that the majority of Arab workers throughout the Middle East don't so much love Hussein, but certainly hate the Americans, and would not like to see a US victory. It is the duty of socialists to stand alongside those workers who are genuinely opposed to imperialism, even if some are taken in by Hussein's propaganda. I suggest you try pushing the 'withdrawal' notion in Amman, or Cairo (not to mention Baghdad) and see how far you get with workers who know what the US is about!

Fifth, for socialists to accept withdrawal gives credence to Thatcher and Bush's position. *That* is the argument that is dominant among workers in Britain and America; the other political qualifications would not get a

hearing. We are not a supporting act for those two murderers.

Therefore, we ought to be clear. Without making any concessions to the brutality of Hussein's regime, if it comes to a war, we should be on the side of Iraq. *Socialist Outlook* accepts this, but then totally undermines itself on a badly thought-out position over Kuwait.

Ged Peck, Luton

Counter-Revolutionary party?

I read with interest Phil Hearse's article on the SWP's theory of state capitalism (*Socialist Outlook* 27). I hope your readers will dip into the articles under review and make up their own minds on the subject.

However, I would like to comment on the absence of any mention of the opposing theory normally associated with this journal and its predecessors.

Phil writes, '...capitalism can only be restored [in Eastern Europe] through a massive attack on the working class...' But capitalism in the West has to constantly restore itself through massive attacks on the working class. Any miner or steelworker in Britain will be able to tell you that.

The position always associated with this journal, as I understand it, is the capitalism can only be restored in Eastern Europe through a counter-revolution.

As I write this letter, I am watching a counter-revolution live on my television screen, and a very strange counter-revolution it is too. Not the sound of gunfire but the sound of popping champagne corks as workers in East (and West) Germany celebrate re-unification.

If capitalism has been restored through the ballot box in East Germany, perhaps capitalism can be got rid of in this country in the same way - via the Labour Party perhaps?

Clive Hopkins, Islington SWP

Mention the Mention!

Pete Fimin's article 'Labour's Witch-hunt escalates', in the last issue of *Socialist Outlook* was timely. It correctly argued that 'Fighting all aspects of the witch-hunt is an act of basic solidarity', and took up those tendencies on the left who have placed conditions on the defence of those victimised or have failed to respond adequately to the attack on *Socialist Organiser*.

Unfortunately the valid political criticism of *Militant*, in particular, is coupled with the factually incorrect statement that '*Militant*...has not even mentioned the witch-hunt against SO'. *Militant* did in fact carry a brief five paragraph article in its 31 August issue opposing the witch-hunt of SO. Too little, too late, certainly; but it was published ten days before your final copy date of September 10. *Socialist Outlook* should publish a correction and/or explanation.

Keith Sinclair, Hull

CLPD misrepresented

The article by Pete Firmin (*Outlook* 27) contained several misrepresentations of CLPD's position. The main one concerns our response to the Register in the early '80s.

Contrary to what Pete says, CLPD always recognised that registration was a device to attack *Militant* and said so on many occasions. We rejected the NEC's proposal for a register and fought against it, but were unable to stop it being carried by Conference (1982).

CLPD has based its effective work over many years on the sovereignty of the Party's Conference; campaigning within the Party, through constitutional channels, to reverse those decisions with which we disagree. I would have expected Pete to have agreed with this disciplined form of political practice! Instead Pete infers that CLPD should have behaved in an adventurist way, totally destroying its credibility in the process. And for what? Although it is very flattering, it is complete nonsense to suggest that the NEC's determination to get rid of *Militant* would have been affected in any way by what CLPD did over registration.

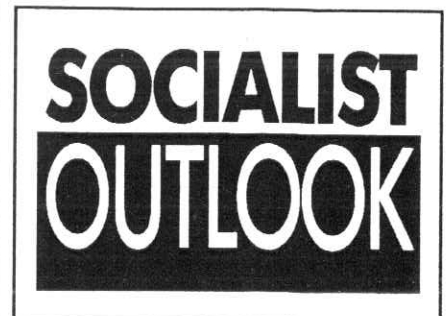
By 1983 (when CLPD registered) the Left were already on the retreat. CLPD had a strategy for minimising this retreat that would also have defended *Militant*. This involved campaigning for the constitutional recognition of groups within the Party, subject to conditions acceptable to the majority of Party members. Unfortunately a section of the Left, particularly the sectarian left, were not interested; preferring the usual, mindless, 'all or nothing' approach. Predictably they turned what should have been an orderly retreat into a rout.

Pete Willsman, CLPD

Help on History

We are researching material for a book on the history of post-War British Trotskyism. If anyone has any information about any part of this period, written or verbal, please get in touch with us on 081 802 2643 or send material c/o *Socialist Outlook*. We are particularly keen to interview comrades who were active in the Trotskyist movement in the early part of this period. Many thanks

Sam Inman and Kate Ahrens Haringey



Fund for Revolutionaries in Eastern Europe

Due to the generous donations of *Socialist Outlook* supporters, following the appeal in our July issue, we have been able to send £100 cash and office equipment to the Socialist Political Centre in Wroclav and to the Current of the Revolutionary Left in Warsaw.

Further donations and standing orders are needed to continue this work. Cheques should be made payable to 'Outlook International' or fill in the form below

Your bank.....

Your bank Address.....

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Bank sorting code..... Your Account number.....

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Please pay to the Midland Bank plc, 20 Wimbledon Hill Rd, London SW19 7NX (Sort -ing Code 40-07-30) the sum of.....(in .words).....(in figures)

on theday of.....1990 and hereafter every month until counter -manded by me.

Signed..... Date.....

Bambathas Children

... in Solidarity with the BTR Sarmcol Struggle

In 1985, 1000 workers at British Tyre and Rubber factory were sacked after a two day strike for union recognition. This is the longest running strike in South African history. Not only have the workers suffered deprivation caused by the strike but they have been attacked by Inkatha vigilantes with over 150 workers murdered.

In response to the hardship they have suffered they established a workers co-operative, which has been involved in agricultural and health projects, a T-shirt making workshop and producing plays of which this is the third.

Bambatha's Children started touring Britain in October and will be here till December

Nov 1 Slaithwaite Civic Hall, Huddersfield
Nov 3 Leeds Trades Club, Leeds
Nov 6 Winding Wheel, Chesterfield,
Nov 7 Victoria Hotel, Lowestoft
Nov 8 Peterborough Sports and Social Club
Nov 9 Corn Exchange, Cambridge,
Nov 10 Ipswich Caribbean Association
Nov 11 Norwich Labour Club
Nov 13 Doncaster (venue to be confirmed)
Nov 15 Buddle Arts Centre, Wallsend
Nov 16 Durham (venue to be confirmed)
Nov 17 Live Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne

Nov 20 Link Community Centre, Cumbernauld,
Nov 22 Golden Lion Hotel, Stirling
Nov 23 George Sq Theatre, Edinburgh
Nov 24 (12.30-1.30) STUC Marquee, George Sq,
Glasgow (7.30 - late) Club Mandela, Maryhill,
Glasgow
Nov 26 Greenwich Town Hall
Nov 27 Hammersmith Town Hall
Nov 28 Camden Town Hall
Nov 29 Lambeth Town Hall
The tour will then be visiting Nottingham,
Birmingham and Sheffield, but venues are still to be
confirmed

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