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On to victory!

AFTER FIVE months, with the widest sympathy, the biggest petition ever presented to parliament, tens of thousands attending the Trafalgar Square rally on January 13, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions taking part in the call for 15 minutes of "dignified protest" on January 30, where do ambulance workers go now?

More and more ambulance workers realise that Poole's Saatchi & Saatchi PR campaign for public sympathy is not the way to victory. However, they have not yet been able to put anything in its place.

Poole has successfully argued that any upping of the temperature would lead to loss of "crucial" public support. The resulting frustration among the militant minority has been expressed in dangerous sectionalism. Desperate demands for all out action have gone hand in hand with calls for local deals. Last month South West London convenors proposed that a London deal be concluded if other areas did not escalate the action, but such deals would neatly fit in with Tory plans to privatise the ambulance service.

Frustration is understandable. The thousands who attended the Trafalgar Square rally came looking for a winning strategy. "It's stalemate, we are waiting for the TUC", said more than one ambulance worker I spoke to. Yet instead of leadership all they got was bureaucratic rhetoric, a Norman Willis rendition of 'Jerusalem' and bad jokes. Incidentally, Willis' ability to dominate the proceedings with virtually no heckling contrasts sharply with the way the nurses chased him off the stage at Hyde Park in 1988.

The 15 minutes of protest on January 30 was equally disappointing for militants. Like the Trafalgar Square rally it did nothing to increase the momentum, let alone clarify a strategy to win this dispute. That hundreds of thousands of workers went far beyond what the TUC had called for and struck - breaking the Tories anti-trade union laws - in support of the ambulance workers was, of course, warmly welcomed. But it was used by Poole and Co as a safety valve, not a springboard for taking forward active support.

Clearly, a victory for ambulance workers would give confidence to all workers and open the way to a class-wide offensive after so many sectional defeats. The government is obviously in a very weak position at the moment. It is facing a rash of strikes, a Labour Party riding high in opinion polls, along with grumbling dissatisfaction among its own back benchers, who recognise that the ambulance dispute, the poll



They must not fight alone

The courageous, five month long struggle for better pay by Britain's ambulance workers has reached a deadlock. A very large question mark hangs over it

tax, inflation and high interest rates etc, do nothing to improve their chances come the next election.

So now is the time to turn the screw on the Tories, not by courting their waverers in parliament, nor by relying on the oratory of Kinnock, Cook and other such members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. What is needed is broadening and deepening the struggle, not least by drawing in the 800,000 other NHS workers. If there were generalised joint action the sneering Kenneth Clarke would come rushing to the nego-

tiating table double quick.

Militants must understand that the Labour Party is only supporting the ambulance workers because the dispute has so far been ineffective. As long as solidarity is mainly confined to white noises, faint-ins and human chains, this will continue. On January 30, the Labour Party made much hooah in parliament about the ambulance dispute; a number of its MPs walked out for 15 minutes. But what if rank and file ambulance workers took things into their own hands and won other workers to take solidarity action?

Then the number of Labour MPs openly supporting the ambulance workers would be few indeed. Generalised strike action would undoubtedly be deemed secondary and therefore illegal ... and the parliamentary Labour Party is committed body and soul to keeping within the law - witness the Poll Tax campaign.

The fact of the matter is that Kinnock and his ilk are cynically using the ambulance dispute for their own petty electoral ends. Petty because they have stated unequivocally that their highest ambition is to run capitalism better

then the Tories ... and are doing everything in their power to convince big business that this would be the case. That the rabidly right wing Institute of Directors now speaks positively about the Labour Party's new strategy for industry and 'training' should be answer enough to the question of which side the Labour Party will be on when the going gets hot.

Because of their commitment to the Labour Party and its electoral fortunes, Poole and the TUC are desperately looking for a way out of the impasse. As the *Financial Times* stated on February 8, "both management and unions are seeking a formula to end the dispute without losing face." In other words, a fudge. As soon as Poole and the Nupe bureaucracy sense the frustration of the ambulance workers turning from anger to despair, they will sue for peace.

With the new two stage pay review awards to public sector workers the government has attempted to take the wind out of the ambulance workers' sails and enforce its unofficial 7% pay ceiling. Poole says frustration will increase. But this is a golden opportunity for the ambulance workers to lead the entire public sector against the Tories.

As we have argued, instead of identifying themselves as a special case a united front must be forged with disgruntled nurses and other healthworkers. The resentment which has been boiling away under the surface for years in the NHS must be harnessed into a mighty attack on the Tories.

- Overcome the dead hand of the trade union bureaucracy. Form cross union action committees. Hammer out a joint strategy to take on the Tories.

- Ambulance Support Groups should not only organise street collections and workplace levies, they should also mobilise speaking teams calling for generalised solidarity strike action.

- All ambulance stations must be occupied. Organise emergency cover under workers' control - otherwise the bosses will use their control of this crucial area as a strike breaking weapon.

- Get among the scab troops, police and voluntary organisations. Sow dissent in their ranks. The fact that they know better than anyone that they cannot provide the level of cover necessary is something that must be exploited to the full.

- Join the lobby of the TUC general council on February 28. For generalised solidarity action with or without the TUC.

On to the offensive! On to victory! On to the society where the health care of our class is decided by need, not profit!

Gavin Kyle



Central Organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*)

FOR LENINISTS it was always wrong that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had its "leading" role in society given the status of law through Article Six in the constitution. It was also wrong that it was the only legal party. The banning of other parties was an emergency measure forced upon Lenin during the civil war. It was never intended to be a permanent state of affairs. Certainly Lenin never thought of securing his party's standing through law.

Real communist parties win and re-win their leading role day by day – win it in open struggle against wrong ideas, proving to the working class through practice that the Communist Party, not any other party, is their party. Of course, the CPSU's Central Committee has not suddenly come round to our way of thinking. Its decision to repeal Article Six is not a step in the direction of Leninism. So what is the significance of the February Central Committee plenum?

On one level it is simply a recognition that there already exists a multitude of parties and proto parties: the Democratic Union, Pamyat, the Inter-regional group, a host of nationalistic popular fronts, etc. But there is far more to it than that.

Hand in hand with the decision to drop Article Six, Gorbachev announced that he would be seeking to vastly extend his already considerable powers as Soviet President. To legitimise and facilitate such a move he wants to transform the position from one elected by the Congress of People's Deputies to one directly elected by an atomised population, in the manner of the USA.

Gorbachev does not want to be too closely associated with the CPSU, which he fears will be given a drubbing in free elections. Given the lack of credible alternatives, he has every reason to feel confident that as a presidential candidate he would, at the moment at least, romp home.

Convincing his doubting Central Committee colleagues to agree to his proposals was relatively easy. All he had to do was give the nod to the Inter-regional group to stage a mass demonstration (the time and place were broadcast on Soviet radio and TV) and plant a rumour in the western media to the effect that he was preparing to stand down as general secretary of the CPSU – in effect to junk the party. Naturally he denied it later, but it had the desired effect.

Behind all these constitutional goings on lies the struggle between the old party and state bureaucracy and the forces of capitalist restoration. As things stand today they are evenly balanced. The old bureaucracy is deeply entrenched but lacks any sort of popular mandate and no longer has any real belief in itself. The forces of capitalist restoration exist within the movement for democracy and have only just started to get their act together through the so-called 'radical' Inter-regional group.

As long as neither side is capable of delivering a decisive blow (and the mighty Soviet working class remains passive), conditions are perfect for the emergence of Bonapartism. A 'strong man' who ostensibly appears as a mediator, a force for stable change, seemingly above sectional interests and 'petty' party politics. Gorbachev clearly sees himself tailor made for such a role; and to achieve it he has been busily playing off one force against the other, all the while keeping one foot in each camp.

However the present stalemate between the old bureaucracy and the proto bourgeoisie is a passing phenomenon. In the end either capitalist restoration or proletarian political revolution will triumph. So Gorbachevite Bonapartism has no long term possibilities. In the meantime, though, it is essential that partisans of the working class discard any illusions in Gorbachev which they might have entertained. He is a reactionary who richly deserves our contempt.

The Editor

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LETTERS

Greetings

The editor of *Militant* told his readers last July that the idea of capitalist restoration was a "chimera". How wrong can you be! No serious communist can afford to have illusions about what is happening in Eastern Europe – capitalism is being restored.

The new regimes are not the mere continuation of 'Stalinism' under a different guise, as the RCP claims. Life shows in Hungary, Poland etc, that the bureaucratic socialist state does not need to be smashed in order for capitalism to be restored. The army, police, etc, in those countries are committed to defending proto bourgeois governments and capitalist property relations. As to the GDR, surely its state will be peacefully absorbed by Federal German imperialism.

Nor have we just seen a series of proletarian political revolutions, as the whole Trotskyist spectrum, WRP, *Workers Power*, etc would have us believe. The masses have been out on the streets, yes. But under what programme? Obviously the programme of counterrevolution – evidently the Trotskyites are incapable of seeing that.

Eastern Europe has undergone a process of mainly peaceful, democratic counterrevolutions. The bourgeois media is right to celebrate the triumph of capitalism in Eastern Europe. Of course, the effects will not be confined to Eastern Europe. Counterrevolution in the east will produce a devastating reactionary fall out in the west. Left and revolutionary groups will suffer splits, demoralisation and all sorts of negative results.

In these difficult times for communists, the statements and resolutions of *The Leninist's* Fourth Conference shine out as a beacon to all working class partisans. They show that uniquely we are determined to build the disciplined, ideologically steered and dedicated communist nucleus capable of re-forging the Communist Party the working class in our country needs so badly, if we are to restore and extend the gains of the world revolution.

Our organisation is not only capable of recognising reaction when it stares us in the face. We are confident that it is also capable of withstanding it. We will have problems, but we will emerge from this period of reaction strengthened tenfold.

We Leninists working in the Workers Theatre Movement are determined to do all in our power to ensure that this is the case. Everything we do is designed to overcome reactionary ideas and win workers to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. Culture is a weapon in the class struggle and we will use it to the full. Our Fourth Conference greatly inspires us.

Supporters of the CPGB (*The Leninist*) in the Workers Theatre Movement

Welcome

Members and supporters of *The Leninist* campaigning through the Unemployed Workers Charter for the organisation of unemployed workers into a militant movement, standing on the shoulders of the National Unemployed Workers Movement of the inter-war years, welcome wholeheartedly the decision of our Fourth Conference to form a distinct, Leninist wing, of

the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Marxism-Leninism is strong because it is true, and we are proud to look back through past issues of our paper, and to the founding statement in issue No1, and see that our ideas have stood the test of time. Others have had their certainties shattered by developments, especially the rapid collapse of East European bureaucratic socialism in the autumn of 1989.

The fight for organisational unity of communists in a reformed party is identical with the fight to win the allegiance of advanced workers to the party programme: without a programme there can be no Communist Party. That is why a commission has been set up to produce a draft party programme for discussion in the working class movement. The initial groundwork has been done in the extensive critique of the various versions of the *British Road to Socialism* in our "Which Road" series. The publication of the draft programme will open a new phase in the struggle to reforge the party.

Equally important, however, is the fight for communist practice, the fight to forge ourselves into professional revolutionaries. The National Committee is quite right to anticipate the tide of reaction which the defeat of 'official communism' will bring by fighting for higher levels of commitment, self sacrifice and discipline in our organisation. Without this firm approach to day-to-day work the re-forging of the Party would be postponed to a nebulous 'brighter day'.

The re-forging of the Party will make possible the building of a militant nationwide movement of unemployed workers, the UWC's aim. In our view, the NUWM in its day could not have existed without the CPGB, which gave it leadership and provided its backbone. Today, the re-forging of the CPGB is the key to remaking the unemployed movement, which can play a key role in overcoming the sectionalism which cripples our working class movement at present. At the same time, the fight of the UWC for unemployed organisation is a key component of the fight to reforge the party: by winning militant workers, employed and unemployed, to the fight for unemployed organisation, we can win them to the fight for the overthrow of the capitalist system. For capitalism, as it moves towards general crisis, mass unemployment is endemic.

The fight for unemployed organisation and the fight to reforge the CPGB are complementary. As the UWC expands and extends its influence, it must become a conveyor belt bringing new blood to the Communist Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*), and eventually to the reformed CPGB itself.

Stan Kelsey
Secretary, Unemployed Workers Charter

Communist standard

Raising the standard of communism at a time when the vast majority of 'communists' are tearing it down and substituting it for the anaemic pink of social democracy is not easy. Hardly a day goes by without some section of the bourgeois media – from 'socialist' to more overt reactionaries – earns its crust by penning yet another obituary. Yet this only

goes to prove that we should fight even harder for a genuine Leninist stance.

That is why we welcome the decisions of the Fourth Conference of the Leninists of the CPGB to establish an independent, revolutionary wing; the Communist Party of Great Britain (*The Leninist*).

All aspects of the class struggle in Britain show the lack of a genuine Communist Party providing leadership and organisation. This is nowhere more apparent than on the question of Irish solidarity. The dominant trend accommodates itself to the Labour Party which sent the troops in back in 1969, or in the case of the Troops Out Movement prides itself on its 'non-sectarianism' and 'independence' of any force on the left, which in this instance is equivalent to the lack of any strategy. Then, in the rearguard, we have the Irish Freedom Movement expending all its energies digging itself into a sectarian ditch, boycotting any event not controlled by the RCP.

A clear communist lead can and must cut through all this crap. The decisions of the Fourth Conference help provide that. We must translate it into action on all fronts. Forward to the reformed CPGB!

Supporters of the CPGB (*The Leninist*) in Hands Off Ireland!

For Treachery

The early Communist International demanded that its national sections carry out work in the armed forces. The CPGB (*TL*) may not be at the level to take this up, but sometimes Her Majesty's finest look you out.

At a recent Hands Off Ireland! street meeting in Kilburn I ran into a Royal Marines sergeant who had done three tours in Crossmaglen (tactfully approaching him with the selling point "get British army terrorists off Irish streets").

Surprisingly, after the initial hostility we got into a lengthy and interesting conversation. The self delusion that he was "keeping the warring sides apart" was quickly swept away by the hard facts of British partisanship on this score.

What really caused furrowed brows with this worker in uniform was the implication of the struggle in Ireland for the repression of the class struggle at home – something, though violently anti-republican, he had some empathy with.

I can't claim I sent him home with Lenin's 'turn the imperialist war into civil war' on his lips, but for an initial reception from a 'professional' soldier, I think he went away with plenty to ponder on. In 1920, the Comintern told the communists in Britain that it was about time they, and the British working class, learnt some serious treachery. The war in Ireland and the class struggles here provide the nexus of this for all workers, eventually even the Brit terrorists in Ireland.

David Rhys
London

Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For political security we have changed certain names, addresses and details.

WRITE OR RING

If you would like to reply to any of these letters, raise questions or comment on articles in *The Leninist* please write to The Editor, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Or phone us on 01-431 3135.

Revolution not negotiations

With the release of Nelson Mandela a new stage in the struggle has been ushered in. At the moment the initiative is with the National Party government, but the masses will soon put their stamp on events



With Mandela free, where now for the South African masses?

WHEN FW de Klerk, the state president of South Africa, stepped back from the speaker's podium after his February 2 address to the country's white dominated parliament, he hoped he had done enough to defuse the revolutionary situation which has gripped the apartheid state for well over a decade. He hasn't.

True, he announced the unbanning of the African National Congress and its main ally, the South African Communist Party, the lifting of curbs on 33 anti-apartheid organisations, the ending of press restrictions, the suspension of the death penalty, the release of certain political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela.

But this represents in a real sense a continuation of the 'reform apartheid' line first advocated in the August 1985 'Rubicon' speech of his predecessor, the staidly brutal Botha. He built up tremendous 'reformist' expectations. Five years later, de Klerk promises to deliver where Botha failed.

So what should be our attitude to these developments in South Africa? How should communists and working class partisans respond?

In a word, *cautiously*. Viewed from the point of view of bourgeois liberal opposition to the racist South African state, de Klerk's initiative takes one's "breath away". Revolutionaries must be more clear headed and realistic: his speech ushers in a dangerous, but contradictory period.

De Klerk wants to draw anti-apartheid forces spider-like into a sticky web of negotiations, to constitutionalise them. This is dangerous. In return for giving away a few juicy government and state positions he hopes to preserve white domination of the commanding heights of the economy. Because, in this de Klerk scenario, negotiations will be mind bogglingly detailed and drawn out, talk of the beginning of the end of apartheid is much exaggerated.

So far he has not compromised on anything fundamental. He certainly has made no moves towards recognising the legitimacy of the

demand for majority rule. He did not even talk about dismantling the pillars of apartheid, such as the Group Areas or the Population Registration Acts, nor give a precise date for the lifting of the state of emergency.

By giving the concessions he has, de Klerk thinks he can split the popular movement against apartheid: Pretoria has always sought to fracture the ANC along internal-external lines, between old and young or between what it has seen as communist 'hawks' and nationalist 'doves'. His latest moves are a development of that strategy.

The fracture lines that de Klerk is hoping to exploit have already been pointed to in the bourgeois press. There are, for example, said to be deep differences between the 'diplomats' of the ANC - embodied not only in young exiles like Thabo Mbeki, but also in the released veterans - and the 'no compromise' militants like Chris Hani of the military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

De Klerk's concessions therefore represent a continuation of the apartheid state's ongoing battle against the liberation forces, but using peaceful rather than violent methods.

Because of weakness both sides have been forced to play this game. The diplomatic minuet is perhaps best expressed in speculation over the stance of Mandela himself. There were reports of a growing disquiet in the ranks of the ANC over Mandela's apparent willingness to compromise with apartheid. In a document released last year and reprinted in the *South* newspaper, Mandela frankly states his belief that "the key to the whole situation is a negotiated settlement" (Reprinted in the *Independent*, January 26, 1990).

Yet, in the same statement, Mandela tried to soothe the anxieties of many radicals in his own organisation, who have viewed with alarm his various meetings with senior apartheid officials. And on his release Mandela insisted that dropping the ANC commitment to nationalisation was

"inconceivable".

De Klerk no doubt trusts that such statements are nothing more than a negotiating gambit - to both calm the fears of leftists in the liberation movement today, and be traded at the negotiating table tomorrow.

We must admit that the imposition of the state of emergency in June 1986 did undoubtedly succeed in partially dampening the revolutionary crisis. But it clearly did not succeed in resolving it.

De Klerk's concessions were undoubtedly the result of continued mass pressure: the masses refusal to be ruled in the old way and the National Party's continued inability to rule in the old way. And while de Klerk wants to exacerbate the latent divisions and tensions in the ranks of the liberation movement, there can be no denying that his concessions will deepen the already profound splits in the white camp. Pointing to the future, some whites joined in black celebrations over Mandela's release; others joined the AWB's neo-Nazi anti-Mandela rallies.

Certainly though, whatever any negotiated settlement might come up with it would by definition do nothing to address the real problem of the black masses - apartheid capitalism's structural need for the super-exploitation of the black working masses. This reality means that even minor concessions can allow mass discontent to find new expression.

The divisions within the white camp in fact confirm that the revolutionary situation continues - that the task for the working class and the black masses of South Africa remains the revolutionary smashing of the apartheid state. It is either that or fascism.

Although Botha's crackdown represented a qualitative development in the process of fascisation of the apartheid state, it did not represent fascism.

Fascism moves to crush the organisations and the fighting potential of the revolution through naked, barbaric terror. But crucially, it also resolves through force the splits within the ranks of the ruling class and its popular base, the splits that allowed revolutionary mass discontent to find expression in the first place.

If the masses fail to make revolution, the revolutionary situation can only be resolved through fascism, via the AWB or, say, the apartheid armed forces. So now, perhaps more than any other time in the history of the struggle against apartheid, communist leadership is key.

Gorbachevism, with its commitment to peacefully resolving crises in the world's "hot spots", ie countries with revolutionary situations, in cooperation with US imperialism, has sent the traditionally centrist South African Communist Party into crisis. We are confident, though, that genuine communists in South Africa will organise themselves and carry out their revolutionary duty. The continued revolutionary situation in South Africa demands it.

Ian Mahoney

Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions negotiators claimed a major breakthrough when, after 100 hours of talks, British Aerospace, the largest and most intransigent employer in the Engineering Employers' Federation, offered, in two stages, a 37 hour, four day week at their Preston plant. The rank and file, however, were determined to fight on, and the manual workers' mass meeting on February 13 overwhelmingly rejected the offer by 2,000 votes to 20. Workers objected to upping the rate of exploitation through 'job flexibility' and loss of tea breaks. Another important factor was solidarity with the 600 white collar strikers, for whom the deal offered little. By failing to fight for a national agreement, and now even failing to insist on a company wide settlement, the CSEU leadership has fallen into the bosses' divide and rule trap. The tactic of selective strikes backed by a national levy can be a winning tactic, but only if all engineering workers have a stake in victory. The running of the dispute should be taken from the bureaucrats by the rank and file Shop Stewards Combine Committees (which forced the likes of Bill Jordan to launch the 35 hours campaign), organised into a recallable National Strike Committee. Donations and collections for the strike fund should be sent to: Engineers' Solidarity Fund, Unemployed Workers Charter, BCM Box 928, London, WC1N 3XX. Send SAE for a collecting sheet. *IF*

The Workers Theatre Movement is looking to a significant development of its capabilities with the second night of its cabaret venture, *The Internationale*, on March 8, International Women's Day. The WTM will present a new sketch, 'March 8', highlighting the working class origins of IWD and how it sparked off the February Revolution in Russia. Other sketches will deal with the socialisation of domestic labour - 'The Herstory of the Housewife' - and the role played by women in the 1984-5 miners' Great Strike. The WTM will also give a dramatic presentation of poetry produced by women in struggle, particularly drawing on the wealth of material from Latin America. Individual, or small groups of, WTM members are busy working on songs and monologues for the event, which should also include contributions from Peggy Seeger, North Staffs Miners Wives Choir, the ANC Women's Choir and many others. As well as celebrating International Women's Day, WTM will be highlighting the burning need for a fightback against working class women's oppression, and drawing forces together to forge a cultural weapon to aid that struggle. Workers reclaim International Women's Day! *GK*

The official labour movement has made a great thing about its opposition to the Tories' Poll Tax; and well it might. Recent estimates suggest that average demands will be in excess of £350. No wonder the government wants to cap the tax. In spite of this, though, the TUC has shamefully backed away from calling a national demonstration on April 1, the day the tax is due to be introduced, which was predicted to be a million strong. Kinnock obviously wants to keep the whole anti-Poll Tax movement off the streets and purely within the realm of parliamentary rhetoric. He is also worried that a mass movement from below that defeats the Tory's Poll Tax might do the same to Labour's equally obnoxious alternative just announced by Bryan Gould. In the face of TUC inaction, the *Militant* dominated All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation has called for demonstrations throughout the country on March 31. For all the reformist limitations of the ABAPTF it is essential that these demonstrations are built. Mass action, not individual defiance, nor waiting for the 'next Labour government', is the key to defeating the Poll Tax. *DS*

Good start



Fired in good measure by the decision of the Fourth Conference of the Leninists to form a distinct, revolutionary, wing of the CPGB, February's £600 fighting fund has got off to a splendid start. So far this month you've sent in £490 - brilliant! That puts us in a good position to achieve a much needed surplus, much needed not only because of our plans for the immediate future, but also because of the shortfalls we have suffered in recent months. The biggest contribution came from a group of comrades who donated a round £200. Another large donation came from a comrade in South London who handed over £100. Welcome regular donations also came in from comrades in London, Hertfordshire, Notts, the West Country and Scotland. Even though we do not often refer to them, they are vital and much valued. Other comrades should follow their example and make a monthly pledge.



Workers Theatre agit-prop for women's rights



The road to liberation

In the past, communists like Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai fought a dual struggle: for women's liberation and against feminism, which advocated an alliance of working women with their bourgeois sisters. We must follow their example. As the origins and history of International Women's Day show, the women's world is divided, just like the world of men, into two camps: bourgeois and proletarian

INTERNATIONAL Women's Day is one of the most important dates in the communist calendar. It was a product, not of the musings of petty bourgeois feminists in the editorial offices of *Spare Rib* or some Labour council quango, but of the struggle of working class women. Known initially as International Working Women's Day, it was first celebrated on March 8 1911, at the initiative of Clara Zetkin, head of the International Women's Socialist Organisation. This was to commemorate a demonstration three years earlier in which women machinists of New York's Lower East Side marched demanding better working conditions and the right to vote.

Hence they demonstrated against the bosses, and also against the bourgeois women's suffrage movement, which refused to call for women workers' votes. The fact that this was an independent, explicitly working class, action was the reason the IWSO chose to commemorate it. It resolved that "socialist women must not ally themselves with bourgeois feminists, but lead the battle side by side with socialist men." Zetkin and other revolutionary fighters for women's liberation carried this stance, through a revolutionary defeatist position in World War I into the young Communist International, established in 1919.

This was also the line of march chosen by the Bolsheviks, when International Women's Day was first commemorated in Russia in 1913. Through their women's paper *Rabotnitsa* (*Women Worker*), they argued — in opposition to the Mensheviks — against cross class collaboration with feminism and for a demonstration of both women and men workers to celebrate March 8.

German communists like Zetkin and Russian communists like Alexandra Kollontai fought a dual struggle for women's liberation and against feminism, which advocated an alliance of working women with their 'bourgeois' sisters. Kollontai correctly argued that "the women's world is divided, just like the

world of men, into two camps", bourgeois and proletarian.

Women workers in Petrograd proved this beyond all doubt when they delivered the initial blow which shattered Tsarist autocracy on March 8 (modern calendar): "Hail the women! Hail the International! The women were the first to come out on the streets of Petrograd on their Women's Day. The women in Moscow in many cases determined the need of the military; they went to the barracks, and convinced the soldiers to come over to the side of the Revolution. Hail the women!" (*Pravda* editorial after the February revolution).

International Women's Day is therefore one to which genuine communists can justifiably lay claim. Feminism has only gained any authority here because the 'official communists' first vacated the field to them, only to leap on the feminist bandwagon once under-way.

Having said this, though, we must actually look (albeit briefly) at how and why the petty bourgeois Women's Liberation Movement grew, declined and disappeared. The WLM developed out of the student movement in 1960s, resulting from the dissatisfaction of educated bourgeois women who were denied equality with men in education and job opportunities. It represented the spontaneous struggle of petty bourgeois women for equality. For the WLM it was 'patriarchy' — men — that was the problem, not capitalism.

Within the confines of class society men do benefit from the domestic labour performed gratis by women. This is true. But, in and of itself, this is a static and narrow view. Taken by itself, one would be forced to conclude that this labour is carried out in the interests of all men, irrespective of class. Male capitalists and workers, by this argument, would therefore have a common interest in maintaining the oppression of women. Conversely, all women, irrespective of class, would have an interest in allying themselves against this situation. Therefore, they argue, it is men, not capitalism, that oppress women. The 1970s WLM therefore drew the conclusion that "our priority is not the overthrow of capitalism but the overthrow of male domination of women, the system of patriarchy."

Not only were male workers virtually irrelevant for the WLM — apart from constituting part of the problem — but, in effect, women workers too became dispensable as the heterogeneous petty bourgeois feminist movement began to fragment along sectional lines in the face of the capitalist offensive.

Rosalind Coward, in the February edition of *Marxism Today*, postulates that what has subverted "feminism's appeal" is precisely the consolidation of professional women within the middle classes: "relative affluence has increased, creating a class of wealthy women." According to her these women, who are also oppressed by inadequate childcare, domestic labour, etc, have alienated the working class in their professional battles.

For the petty bourgeois radicals of the WLM of yesteryear it has largely become a question of getting a few more women in parliament, TV and executive jobs. Such as these can largely extricate themselves from their oppression by ascending the ladder within the status quo. This, in essence, is the struggle of feminism: a redivision of the cake in the interests of bourgeois and petty bourgeois women against their male counterparts — or anyone else who presents a threat to their aims, for that matter. As we have argued in *The Leninist*, this can be seen by the way the feminist/suffrage movement splintered along nationalistic lines in times of war. Today, it has become a case of feminists looking to the state to resolve the problems they identify as originating with men.

Roots of repression

Feminism looks on the Marxist position on women's oppression — that it is a product of class society, now capitalism — as being ludicrously simplistic. After all, it is not 'capitalism' which comes home and beats you up. It is not the capitalists who you wash up for, whose shirts you iron, while shut up in a dingy council flat with a screaming two year old for company. It is not the capitalists who stick degrading pictures of women on the walls at work, or who abuse you on the shop floor. The force that oppresses women is, it seems fairly obvious, men.

Women's oppression existed before capitalism. As Engels observed, as society evolved from primitive communism to class society the status of women declined. This was because

the sexual division of labour favoured men, who, as primitive communism disintegrated, were able to accumulate wealth (and power) through cattle, war and slavery.

As a result the equality that had previously reigned between the sexes gave way to a social revolution, a class society, in which male domination was assured through the establishment of patrilineally inherited private property: "The first class antagonism that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between men and women in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male." (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*).

However, the nature of women's oppression under capitalism is historically specific and unique. Under previous societies, domestic labour had been social labour. Feudal production was based on production by the peasantry as a family unit tied to the land. With the development of capitalism, the destruction of previous forms of social production, and thus the separation of the producers from the means of production, a division was driven between domestic labour and social labour. Consequently, the structure and function of the family, and women's role within it, changed as a response to the changing social relations which underpinned it. Henceforth, labour in the home became private, unrewarded labour, isolated from social production.

This development was an inevitable product of the development of a proletariat and of its exploitation. Women's oppression must be viewed in this class framework, within which male workers' benefits from women's domestic slavery are a condition of their own wage slavery.

The family thus constitutes an economic unit of capitalist society external to capitalist production. If we understand it as such we can clearly see the erroneous views of many leftists. Some have economically downplayed the importance of domestic labour, and thus implicitly women's oppression, under capitalism. The flip side of the coin to such economism is the 'Wages for Housework' campaign.

Private domestic labour meets with absolute limits under capitalism. Although the availability of such amenities as creches varies, under capitalism they have always been on the fringes. Women have stayed securely chained to the kitchen sink. This is because the labour they perform in the home is a major contributor to the reproduction of labour power. The working population is maintained, free of charge, for capitalism in this way. For the capitalist class to socialise domestic slavery would be to sacrifice a large portion of its surplus value — something it will not and cannot do. Unpaid domestic slavery underpins accumulation, and capitalism has moulded the modern family to perform this role.

The demand for a domestic wage is, if anything, even more regressive than the complacency of economism. Instead of positing a strategy whereby women can break out of their domestic slavery, it merely puts forward a plan for domestic wage slavery, which, even were it possible, would constitute a further formalisation of women's oppression rather than its abolition.

Domestic labour is central to capitalist production, as a CBI report, written towards the end of the postwar boom in 1967, made clear: "Studies have shown that for married women who go out to work the family and the home are still the main interests, and are regarded ... as the prime responsibility ... Employers accept this attitude as socially right: it should not be changed. The economic value of the mother's work in the home cannot be calculated but the social value is unquestionable." (*Employing Women: the Employers' View*).

We don't put any faith in the CBI and their class to 'help out around the home'. We don't want to be paid for our domestic misery, or redistribute it. We want to abolish it by abolishing the system represented by the smug hypocrites of the CBI.

The reserves

The fact that under capitalism women are tied to the family forces them into the role of a component of the reserve army of labour. This "surplus labouring population", according to Marx, is "the lever of capitalist accumulation, nay, a condition of the existence of the capitalist mode of production ... Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self expansion of capi-

tal, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation." (*Capital*, Vol I, p632).

Women's employment shows such characteristics. In periods of rapid capitalist expansion, such as the postwar boom, women were drawn into full time social production, without in any way having the burden of domestic slavery alleviated. In periods of stagnation or crisis, women are expelled from full time employment back into the home and part time employment. The latter is the *raison d'être* behind Thatcher's 'Victorian values' ideological offensive.

The existence of a reserve army of labour determines the wages of the entire class. As Marx noted, in relation to another of its components, it is not the ninety workers within the factory that determine their wages, but the ten unemployed without. Women workers are used in a similar way. The fact that they are tied to the home is a pretext for drawing them into social production in 'deskilled' areas and at lower rates of pay, which in turn acts as a downward pressure on wages in general.

This has clearly been women's relationship to the labour market throughout the '80s, in the midst of capitalist stagnation and recession. We have seen a tendency, as a consequence of the '80s 'shakeout' of less productive capital and capitalist 'deskilling', for women to be drawn into the labour market as opposed to men, predominantly in part time employment (*The Employment Gazette* of December 1989 reported a growth in the labour market of three million since 1983, 1.9 million of which have been women. During this period women's employment has increased by 17% full time, 22% part time).

Bizarre as it may seem, in the trough of the '80s recession and the height of Bennism, many feminists and socialists saw the growth in male unemployment as a good thing: "Men have been thrown out of the older industries like coal, steel and shipbuilding. Women have been brought into the expanding service sector and the new industries in electronics and computers ... Male dominance has too long a history of easy optimism, but with every new turmoil, new hopes arise ... The old ways are under threat. Instead of rallying to their defence we should set new terms for a better world." (Anne Phillips, *Hidden Hands*, Arguments for Socialism series, 1983, pp109-111).

This middle class feminist is only able to applaud these developments through utter ignorance of the reality of this, not only for working class men but, and especially, for working class women, generally drawn into low paid, dehumanising and insecure employment. Phillips' argument is both divisive and dangerous, somewhat akin to welcoming the increased unemployment of Protestant workers in the Six Counties as it 'evens the score'. It also ignores the effect of the function of the reserve army of labour in this situation.

The basis of the wage is the value of labour power; ie, the value of socially reproducing the working class: "The value of labour power was determined, not only by the labour time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family onto the labour market, spreads the value of the man's labour power over his whole family. It thus depreciates his labour power. To purchase the labour power of a family of four workers may, perhaps, cost more than it formerly did to purchase the labour power of the head of the family, but, in return, four days' labour takes the place of one, and their price falls in proportion to the excess of the surplus labour of four over the surplus labour of one." (K Marx, *Capital* Vol I, p395). Marx here writes of the use of the whole family in nineteenth century production. In the imperialist countries today, child labour has largely fallen out of the equation. Women's labour, however, now performs the same function for capital. It will use it to accelerate the rate of exploitation.

Of course, this does not mean that communists argue against the employment of women. No, we argue for the full incorporation of women into social labour at full rates of pay. Alongside this we argue for the socialisation of domestic labour, which will enable women to play a full role in social labour.

Although Britain's economy has retained a semblance of stability from the mid 1980s, the heightened exploitation of women has still been most apparent. This can be seen by looking at the growth in part time employment for women, traditionally a low paid and insecure sector. The *Employment Gazette* of June 1989 records the growth of female part time employment as a percentage of aggregate female

employment: between 1979 and 1985 it rose from 39% to 45%.

The *Employment Gazette* of December 1989 shows that in manual occupations women workers receive about 61% of the wage of their male counterparts, and in all occupations, 67%. Clearly, this indicates that working class women are subject to greater disadvantage in the labour market relative to their male equivalents than bourgeois and petty bourgeois women. This is due in part to increased child provision, etc, which higher income allows, and to the fact that feminism has, reflecting its class basis, made gains for middle class, not working class women.

In conjunction with this, women workers are being squeezed out of full time employment and into part time. As always, it is the reserve army which feels the worst effects of its function. In periods of recession this is exacerbated, as the *Financial Times* indicated in the mid-1980s: "Women remain in a position of economic disadvantage to men in the industrialised world and the recession is increasing the barriers to equality in the labour market, the Organisation of Economic Development says in a detailed study on the integration of women into the economy." (July 12 1985).

Looming economic stagnation will, without a shadow of a doubt, accelerate these trends, as women are forced out of full time jobs into unemployment and part time work in the interests of profitability. Even with young workers, this is already making itself most apparent: "the UK is distinguished in the sharp decline in employment among women in their 20s" (*Employment Gazette*, June 1989). And, as the OECD indicates, this will of course be achieved to the denigration of women's social position. Due to their role in reproducing the labouring population gratis, women workers suffer far more from capitalism's blind floundering towards crisis than male workers.

Resistance

To enforce this economic attack on women and, through them, on the entire working class, the bourgeoisie must translate these attacks onto the ideological and political level. One of the most offensive examples of this at the moment is the sick parading of the bigots of Spuc, Life and the Christian sickos of Operation Rescue. They and their parliamentary representatives show a touching concern for the preservation of the 'life' of an embryo with about as much conscious interaction with its environment as a pot plant, and utter contempt for the rights of living women. Of course, this too forces women back into the home, both by tying them down with children and by creating a climate of reaction determined that they should 'stay in their place'.

When faced with this, the reformist left, along with many 'revolutionaries', look to defeat these attacks and overcome sexism by fighting it through on the same terrain as their bigoted opponents; ie, to look to the state to defend women's rights. One example which the reformists point to is the 1970 Equal Pay Act. Surely this presents the possibility of remuneration in line with male workers? If we look at the real effects, though, we see that this is bunk.

Few of the cases that are brought up under this legislation actually get anywhere, in fact less than 20 out of about 4,000. Such legislation is designed to be difficult to prove anything under. Women are often forced into low pay areas where it is not possible to make direct comparisons that would be acceptable to the old vultures of the British legal system. Where direct comparison could be made, industry has tended to respond, as we have seen, by cutting this extra cost through using women as part time workers.

The Equal Pay Act was never an attempt to aid women workers, botched or otherwise. Quite the reverse. Would you not think it rather odd to put defence of women's rights into the hands of the likes of Judge Pickles? The Act was passed at a time when these workers were taking the fight into their own hands at a rank and file level, against the bosses and the bureaucrats. Legislation was only passed to head this off before it became a threat, and to appoint judicial bigots to oversee this. We should not be fighting to strengthen the powers of the state, but to smash them. It is this institution — the executive committee of the bourgeoisie — that guarantees women's continual subordination for capital.

The same problems can be seen when we come across the way in which the reformist

left tries to combat sexism — they try to push the state to ban it! This is rather like putting Dennis Nilsen in charge of a homeless men's hostel.

Recently, the most public expression of this trend has been the actions of Labour MP Clare Short, from her attempts to get 'page three' banned to clearing the top shelves of WH Smiths. Where this leads to can be seen by the fact that the 'moral right', like Dame Judith Knight and Mary Whitehouse, have lined up behind it. The 'Off the Shelf' campaign works on the premise that sexism can be banned, and furthermore banned by the very class which engenders it.

Sexist ideology — of which pornography is one expression — exists to legitimise the oppression of women. Sexism is the product, and not the cause, of women's oppression. It must be confronted among male workers at all levels, but never via the institutions maintaining such chauvinism. Men can be broken from sexist ideas by linking it with the fight for their own liberation as workers, by combining it with the struggle against bourgeois ideology as a whole. And that is hardly something of which parliament or its adherents are capable.

To achieve this — to defend women's rights across the board — a break from feminism, of which Short is a classical example, is necessary. It necessitates a break along class lines. The creation of a working class women's movement, politically independent of alien class forces, is needed.

This was recognised by Alexandra Kollontai and the Bolsheviks: "Where, then, is that general 'women question'? Where is that unity of tasks and aspirations about which the feminists have so much to say? A sober glance at reality shows that such unity does not and cannot exist" (Kollontai, *The Social Basis of the Women Question*).

Bourgeois and petty bourgeois women look to the institutions of their state to provide them with equality with the men of their class. Their working class 'sisters', throughout the history of feminism, have been used as foot-soldiers in this fight and abandoned when of no further use.

Working class women have been used by the feminists and insulted by tokenistic exercises in semantics by the trade union bureaucracy and Labour left. Yet the struggles of the 1970s and '80s, from Grunwick to the Great Strike, have shown the militancy and strength of proletarian women. The acceleration of capitalism's attacks on women, whether it be in the form of low pay or prohibitions of embryo research, demand organised resistance. Communists must take the lead in this fight — bringing the organised struggle for women's liberation into the union branches, onto the council estates and the streets, among women and men workers.

Women's emancipation is directly counterposed to the interests of capitalism. That does not mean that we just urge women to 'wait for socialism'. Basic democratic rights must be fought for now: free abortion on demand, 24-hour creches and further demands towards the socialisation of housework can be won.

But they can only be won through an independent working class women's movement under communist leadership. This can and will be built by the fusion of communist agitation and propaganda on these questions with the action of proletarian women. A communist led working women's movement would have the function of organising militant women on this question; of drawing working women, isolated within the home, into struggle and of intervening and drawing in spontaneous movements of women. It would be a powerful transmission belt towards communism.

The international aspect of this celebration is one which militants should take to heart. Capitalism is international, thus so is women's oppression; from the struggle of women for abortion and contraception rights in the Twenty-six Counties to women's enslavement by Islamic reaction. The resistance of working women is also international: women strikers here, women Volunteers of the IRA and other liberation movements worldwide; all have a stake in the overthrow of the system which oppresses them. Like their class brothers, they need a communist programme and organisation to achieve this.

If capitalism cannot afford our demands, capitalism goes. Women's rights are not negotiable. International Working Women's Day was initiated to make this loud and clear. Through the decades of opportunism of 'official communism' and the antics of feminism this has been pushed aside. We aim to bring it back to centre stage.

Alev Ali and Alan Merrick



70 YEARS

Our history

Formation of the CPGB and its early years: articles, documents and manifestos

Ever wonder what happened to Morning Star industrial hack Mick Costello, after he abandoned the rag? No? Well, let's tell you anyway. Mick has resurfaced, writing in Today on February 6 as an "expert on Soviet affairs" (titter ye not). In this he notes that while "most Russians live in poky flats with around six square yards per person, the elite reside in special apartment blocks with spacious rooms and an efficient repair service." Mick waffles on, like any other bourgeois journalist, in a similar vein. Why didn't he notice this during all those carefree days with the falling Star? Has Today given him a road to Damascus flash of inspiration? Or could it just be that the 'elite' no longer pay his wages?

"In Eastern Europe the political revolution against Stalinism began in 1989. It has been stalled at its opening, democratic phase" says the February issue of Workers Power. We presume this democratic phase of the political revolution refers to the ascension of the explicitly pro-capitalist Romanian National Salvation Front and the like. Now, according to these off-beam Trots, such workers' states as Romania were established by "counterrevolutionary social overturns" (read 'revolutions') after World War II. So it seems we started with 'counterrevolutionary revolutions' and are ending with 'revolutionary counterrevolutions'. Pick the bones out of that one.

Positive features resulting from the peaceful counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe are hard to find, but we think there might be one (actually three). The tiny and tired New Communist Party has had to reduce its paid full time staff from 15 to 12 because of "developments" in Czechoslovakia.

The Revolutionary Communist Party's paper, the next step, of February 2 carries a brief report of their supporters' conference. "Many supporters", we are told, "have been involved in the [ambulance] dispute, setting up support groups". Jolly good, we're sure ... But those of you with long memories may recall the dim and distant days of the miners' Great Strike, when the RCP refused to involve itself in the miners' support groups on the grounds that they were dominated by the Labour Party. And the ambulance workers' support groups aren't? Come on RCP, have you changed your line?



February in Petrograd: the opening shots in the world revolution

THE FORMATION congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain took place over the weekend of July 31-August 1 1920. In their 'celebrations' of its 70th anniversary, the collapsing organisations of 'official communism' are doing their best to present themselves as the 'modern' political continuation of those who formed our Party. As the documents from 1916 to 1927, which we will be reprinting over the coming months, will decisively prove, these claims are absurdly false. The opportunists of today are fundamentally no different from the opportunists of yesteryear.

Our intention, however, is not simply to expose the 'official communists', but to more fully acquaint readers of *The Leninist* with the history of our Party: who formed it, how it was formed, what it stood for and what it was capable of doing.

In so doing we can only add weight to the call from the Fourth Conference of the Leninists for all genuine communists to join us in the hard fight to reforge the CPGB on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, the principles on which our Party was founded.

Unlike today's 'official communists', those who came together to form our Party were undoubtedly revolutionaries. Revolutionaries who, even before they became fully aware of the politics of Bolshevism and the Great October Socialist Revolution, conducted an open ideological struggle against social chauvinism and opportunism.

This can be seen with *The Call*. It was launched in the midst of the slaughter of World War I, in February 1916, as an unofficial organ of the British Socialist Party (the main body which went on to form the CPGB) in opposition to the party's official publication, *Justice*, which was dominated by the social chauvinist HM Hyndman.

The first issue of *The Call* presented its internationalist alternative to Hyndman (incidentally throughout this series of reprints we will keep to the original style, spelling etc):

The dominant note of *The Call* will be that the Socialists of all the countries at war, as well as those which still maintain a precarious neutrality, should urge upon the working class the wisdom and claims of peace.

Believing that the present struggle serves no progressive purpose, we shall support and encourage every desire and effort to reestablish international relations between the working class of the countries now at war...

The Call has been founded, and will be controlled by, members of the BSP who as Social Democrats, feel the necessity for acting in agreement with the traditions of the Party. No other course is open since *Justice* though nominally the official organ of the Party has throughout the past twelve months, advocated a policy of jingoism and reaction, in international as well as national questions, which is entirely and utterly opposed to the decisions of the Divisional Conference held in February 1915, a fact which has occasioned grave misunderstanding of the Party's position, at home and abroad...

We shall urge that the Easter Conference adopt an unambiguous position on the war and state with precision the attitude of the Party towards the ruling class in Great Britain. We hold that the exploiter and the exploited are as opposed in war as they are in peace. While the governments of Europe fear the awakening of the people, already increasing numbers of workers in every warring country are calling on their comrades abroad to cooperate in ending the carnage and laceration caused by this mad folly. *The Call* No1, Editorial, February 24 1916.

The Call had a powerful impact on BSP members:

We feel we can say truthfully that the history of the BSP records nothing at all comparable with the enthusiasm awakened by the publication of *The Call*. Energy has taken the place of lethargy; inspiration and a desire to be up and doing have dissipated the pessimism that was sapping the vitality

of the Party. Many branches and a host of members, deceived as to the views of the majority by the attitude of *Justice* and contemplating secession as the only course possible in their imagined isolation, found in *The Call* a common rallying point. Others who had already left have returned, full of new hope and determination.

The success of *The Call* is magnificent evidence that the definite and uncompromising advocacy of International Social Democracy still retains its power to inspire, and we await the decisions of the forthcoming Annual Conference at Manchester full of hope and confidence in the success of the cause for which we stand.

The Call No5, Editorial, April 20 1916.

Supporters of *The Call* did indeed win at the Manchester conference; Hyndman and his social chauvinist followers were expelled. Henceforth *The Call* was to be the organ of the Executive Committee of the BSP and it was in this capacity that it greeted the February Revolution:

Long live the revolution!

A political earthquake has shaken the foundations of the material and moral order of things created by the war ... the patriotic gentlemen in this and other countries, including Germany, have hastened to proclaim that the revolution in Russia has been promoted by an ardent desire of the Russian people to win the war and that - to quote one of the Petrograd correspondents of one of our dailies - "not a single cry against the war has been heard anywhere during the whole course of events" of the historical days. This interpretation and these assurances are about as true as the statement with which the *Times*, that dear old subsidised friend of the Autocracy, began on Friday its account: "After a brief revolution born of the united forces of the Duma and the Army" etc. The real truth of the matter is that the revolution was begun and carried out with the utmost success by the masses of the people themselves against the previous exhortations of the Duma, who had feared nothing so much as a revolution, that it was the masses who, ever since Thursday, had been fraternising with, and gaining over to their side troops, and that it was not until Monday that the Liberals and the Radicals of the Duma appeared on the scene.

So much for the revolution "born of the united forces of the Duma and the Army." As for the sentiments animating the people, it is significant that not a single correspondent has as yet ventured to report any fact of a positive character - a demonstration, a meeting, a manifesto - showing that these sentiments are war-like; that the utmost length to which they have as yet dared proceed in this direction is exemplified by the vague and purely negative phrase quoted above, and that neither the proclamation of the Provisional Government nor any other act of the new regime has as yet contained any reference to the war ...

those whose knowledge of Russian affairs is of an earlier date than March 16, who have had some acquaintance with the frame of mind of the Russian masses in town and country on the eve of the outbreak, know well that the war had lost all hold over the minds of the people at large, that the Red Flag which was planted, to the accompaniment of the revolutionary Labour 'Marseillaise', on all public buildings in Petrograd and Moscow, was not at all the war banner of what people are pleased to call "patriotism", and fully expect to learn that the cry "Down with the Autocracy!" was everywhere coupled with the cry "Down with the War!" ...

The very swiftness and completeness of the Revolution shows how little was the hold of the autocracy and bureaucracy over the mind of the nation, and how profound is the historical guilt of those - the Liberals and Radicals - in Russia who betrayed the Revolution twelve years ago and who since then have never ceased fighting strenuously against its ideas. It is one of the sweetest acts of revenge on the part of Dame History that now these very gentlemen have had to swallow the entire revolutionary programme down to the articles about a Constituent Assembly and the organisation of a national militia in the place of the police, which ever since 1905 had been to them anathema maranatha ...

The Russian Liberals ... have been compelled to agree to the programme of the Revolution, but there can be little doubt that they ... would dearly like to wriggle out of their pledges, to restore some sort of a monarchy with a strong centralised and armed power, and would, if needs be, not hesitate to introduce a military dictatorship under some Grand Duke, like Nicolas Nicolavitch, against the revolutionary people ...

The Russian Revolution announces with mighty clarion call the re-birth of the International - an International bleeding from a thousand wounds, almost expiring, but now redeemed by the daring and victorious proletariat of Russia. For can anyone imagine that its thundering echoes will not set the blood coursing quicker in the veins of the suffering proletariat in other countries, will not recall old, almost forgotten, but still slumbering and glorious memories in the minds of Socialists all the world over, will not reveal to them, as by a flash of vivifying lightning, the way out of the tragic impasse into which they have allowed themselves to be driven by the sinister forces of capitalist society, will not instil in their breasts a new courage, will not break the mesmeric spell in which they have been held by the terrors and by the false ideas of the last two years and half? ...

Mr Henderson and his 'pals' have hastened to telegraph to Petrograd their good wishes in the forthcoming good fight against the "despotism of Germany". They have sent their telegram to the wrong address, and their message is wholly unauthorised. The masses of the people think otherwise, and they, too, will feel ere long the powerful rustling of the wings of the Angel of the Revolution. We, who have fought our battles hitherto as a small minority, will now derive fresh courage from the example set by the Russian people. The first tremendous breach in the walls of the enemy has been made; the hour is close at hand when we, too, in this country, will plant the Red Flag on the grave of Reaction and shout "Long Live the Revolution! Long Live the International!"

The Call No50, March 22 1917.

Gorbachev's Correspondent

Martin Walker, *Martin Walker's Russia: Dispatches from The Guardian's correspondent in Moscow*, Abacus 1989, pp212, £3.99

FOR ANYONE interested in the nitty-gritties of the Soviet economy and Soviet political life, Walker's book is an absolute must. Certainly for Leninists, this book provides ample evidence of the bankruptcy of the old Soviet bureaucracy and the class treachery of the 'new'.

Drawn from a series of articles he wrote for *The Guardian* over the period October 1986 to October 1987, Walker's book details stagnation and corruption at every level of Soviet society. However, taking up the story from the early years of perestroika, the true nature of the book becomes strikingly clear: a "weekly diary of glasnost and perestroika and the Gorbachev revolution". In his opening comments, Walker even goes as far as to say that his column in *The Guardian* "was a child of glasnost".

One could delve into countless stories of corruption and petty bureaucracy, but the nature of Soviet bureaucratic socialism is best revealed by examining the material on the social position of women in Soviet society. As Marx noted, the development of society can be judged by the lot of women within it.

Walker quite rightly states that the Soviet Union formally gave women legal rights earlier and far in advance of those won in Western Europe. Yet Soviet working women were to take the brunt of the backwardness of the young Soviet Republic and the consequent political degeneration of the Soviet party. Today in the realm of work, Soviet working women earn about 70% of the average industrial wage. In the Soviet economy at large there exists a dual labour market in which women are ghettoised into predominantly low paid, low skilled manual labour.

In the realm of reproduction, women have suffered appalling attacks on their rights and have been subjected to insult and humiliation. Contraceptive provisions in the Soviet Union are either difficult to find or are non-existent.

Seventy per cent of urban women and 90% of rural women terminate their first pregnancy with illegal abortions. So common is abortion that for every birth in the Russian republic there are two abortions.

The position of women is made even worse by the grossly inadequate childcare provisions. Although the Soviet bureaucracy has, in the past, crowed about extensive workplace nurseries, etc, the reality is very different. Many women are forced out of employment because they are tied to children. Many others are trapped in low employment for the same reasons.

With the return to the home 'mummy, daddy and me' campaign, Gorbachev seeks not only to overcome the social problems of bureaucratic socialism - alcoholism, delinquency, alienation - but also to constitute women as a hidden reserve army of labour. This is necessary now that there is, as a result of his perestroika 'market socialism', growing unemployment.

Walker represents a strand of liberal bourgeois thinking which puts great hopes in Gorbachev's technocratic strategy to 'liberalise'

the Soviet Union. The book was written in the spring of Gorbachevism, when Gorbachev tee-shirts were *de rigueur* for the more sprightly *Guardian* reader. But now, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, spring has rushed headlong into a winter of discontent.

Those tee-shirts have been bundled into the bottom draw, as the Walkers of this world give up hope of glorious summer appearing. Back in 1987, many saw Gorbachev as representing 'nice' communism as against the 'nasty' communism of the Brezhnev era. Now, virtually everyone recognises him as its (attempted) gravedigger.

Gorbachev is not so much renovating the old place as burning it down to the ground. Only a political revolution can scuttle Gorbachev's anti-working class project. Unsurprisingly, this is not in our *Guardian* journalist's list of options. For the working class, though, its the only one.

Charles Anderson

No Edge

Brian Behan, *Boots for the Footless*, Tricycle Theatre, directed by Mike Bradwell.

IT'S DUBLIN 1950, and the class and national struggle rage. Well, for some, anyway. The play opens with two of the three central characters striding through the audience towards the stage, swapping jibes. On reaching it, they occupy opposite corners, and begin to harangue those sitting out front from one red megaphone, one green, out of which flow colour coded politics. We get a short burst of this until the imminent arrival of the Legion of Saint Mary, at which they decide on "a united front", that discretion is the better part of valour, and leg it.

Lar, a soberly dressed Communist Party of Ireland member, flits around with his red megaphone and volume of *Capital* organising the Dublin proletariat; or at least making a gallant effort. Martin, his mat-ched, eye-patched republican brother, substitutes a revolver for the book.

This two corner tussle between the brothers provides some of the best laughs, as Behan plays on this contradiction. In the second half, Lar and Martin mount the scaffolding on the Festival of Britain site in London, as the king and queen prepare to bless the largely Irish workforce with a visit. Between them, poking over the scaffolding, the arse of the British lion faces out at the audience. Lar shouts out to the unseen picket line to close up and prevent the blue blooded couple getting on the site, as Martin yells for them to "move out of the way and let me get a clear shot at the bastards".

Martin's solution is 'physical force republicanism'; Lar's is 'workers' unity'. The third central character is Pader Sosa - boned, randy, "as cute as a shithouse rat" and their uncle. His solutions, put forward in humanistic discourses and ditties, are personal. All the characters in the play are caricatures, but out of them, Pader comes over as the most real, certainly the most sympathetic.

Lar and Martin are based on Brian and his now dead brother, Brendan, one of Ireland's leading playwrights and drunks of the fifties and sixties, but also an IRA Volunteer in the 1950s Border Campaign. Brian was expelled from the CPI for demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary in 1956. From then on he became a freelance radical, eventually settling down to the se-

rious business of getting letters after his name.

Boots for the Footless has been denounced in some quarters as being, sexist, racist and anti-Irish. True, all its characters are stereotypes. But such caricatures are not created to justify, consciously or unconsciously, any kind of chauvinist picture, but to provide vehicles for differing perspectives in a direct and uncluttered form.

Such an attitude may offend those whose political ideology runs no deeper than becoming outraged when others take their coffee 'white' and not 'with milk', but to the rest of us I fear this hardly rates as serious political or artistic criticism.

Behan's humour is rough, ready and effective. You laugh with, rather than - as the play's oversensitive detractors would have it - at, the characters. When I went to see it - Saturday afternoon, tightly clutching my signing on card, thus getting in for the princely sum of £1.50 - the place was filled out with a mixture of people from the Irish community, predominantly working class and oldish, and English middle class theatre goers. At times the audience was better entertainment than the play, as the former category creased up and were stared at in polite bemusement by the latter.

But *Boots* is certainly not above criticism. Behan takes a rather aloof, paternalistic view of his creations - indeed, his past. The anger and radicalism of Lar and Martin come over as just part of growing up. Their anger never really bites on anything tangible, not even the Windsors, who appear as a couple of jolly, music hall types.

The play guts itself at the end. It is political theatre which completely loses its bottle. Martin leaps at the royal couple, gun in hand. Instead of retribution, the barrel of the gun gives forth a little white rag, just like those things with 'Bang!' written across them. This says nothing so bold, though: "You're on your own from here on in. The playwright", or something like that. The characters stare, disorientated, at the audience for a period. And then... And then everyone gets together. The end. Goody, even the aristocracy has joined the class struggle.

Is this all Behan has to offer as a result of the political to-ing and fro-ing between Lar and Martin, umpired by Pader? Obviously so: the umpire wins. That is, in effect, Behan's conclusion. If the main body of the play is a satire on where the Behans were forty years ago, the end is as honest a statement as you could find as to where the surviving Behan is now.

Yes, Brian's heart is 'still in the right place' (over to the left). But, for him, politics is a spectator sport. In an interview on Greater London Radio before the opening of the play, Brian regaled listeners with stories from 'way back when'. Commenting on contemporary Ireland, the most he could muster was condemnation of 'men of violence' on all sides: worthy of a Workers Party TD. He has nothing to say of any worth on what is happening today, nor even any cutting remark on what was happening 40 years ago. Although the play had me laughing, the humour lacked a sharp edge: 'Carry On up the IRA', if you like.

To bring the play to any resolute ending would have necessitated a firm stand on the questions it raises - even on the limited level that it does. This Brian obviously lacks. It's altogether a shame. Go and see it, but leave five minutes before the end and make up your own ending.

Sean Quinn

The Leninist

London Seminars: 5pm Sundays. Details 01-431 3135

March 4: The revolutionary road to women's liberation.

Series on the formation of the CPGB and its early years:

March 11: The struggle to form the CPGB and the influence of communists in Russia.

March 18: Communists, Labourism and the struggle for mass influence.

March 25: The CPGB and the General Strike.

Hands Off Ireland!

March for Justice and Freedom: Saturday March 17.

Assemble, 12 noon, Whittington Park, Holloway Road, London, N7. Nearest tube, Archway. March with HOI! - Free all political prisoners.

Public Meetings: Women and the Irish war, with speakers from HOI! and video, 'Mother Ireland':

North London: Monday March 12, 7.30pm, Brent Irish Centre, 76 Salusbury Road, Kilburn NW6.

South London: Wednesday March 14, 7.30pm, St Matthew's Meeting Place, Brixton Hill, SW2.

London activists' meetings: Central London, 7.30pm, every Thursday:

March 1: After Britain's out: debunking the 'bloodbath' myth.

March 8: Women and the Irish war.

March 15: Ireland and the British left.

March 22: The importance of Ireland for the British working class. Phone 01-431 3135 for details.

Workers Theatre Movement

International Women's Day celebration: *The Internationale club*, at the Old Piano Warehouse, Hawley Road, Camden Town, NW1. Thursday March 8, 7.30pm and again on Wednesday March 14, 7.30pm, Chat's Palace, Homerton Community Centre, 42-4 Brooksby's Walk, London E9 (see 'In Struggle' column for further details).

Unemployed Workers Charter

Central London Meetings: Every Monday, 8pm at the Diorama Arts Centre, 18 Park Square East, NW1 (tube: Regents Park or Great Portland Street):

February 26: The second Labour government (1929) and the unemployed.

March 5: Trades Councils and the fight to organise the unemployed.

March 12: The unemployed petition to parliament, 1932.

Public Meeting: Stop TUC collaboration with slave labour schemes! 7.30pm Monday March 19, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (tube: Holborn).

Lobby of TUC General Council: Stop TUC collaboration with slave labour schemes! 9am Wednesday March 28, Congress House, Great Russell Street, WC1 (tube: Tottenham Court Road).

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troops out now

Assemble: Saturday April 21, 1pm, Islington Town Hall, Upper Street, London N1

Rally with speakers from Ireland and the workers' movement in Britain

HANDS OFF IRELAND!

Sponsors include: Individuals: Chris Reeves (Director of 'The Cause of Ireland'), Chris Carrol (branch secretary, Westminster DoE CPSA), Janet Clarke (Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign), Dave Douglass (NIJM Hatfield Main, branch delegate), Lilly Hill (Guildford 4 Campaign, mother of Paul Hill), Marion Johnstone (Herts Association of Trades Councils and Sertuc), John Mitchell (ex-general secretary of the Irish Distributive and Allied Trades Union), Tony O'Brien (branch secretary of Borough of Southwark Ucart), Dr Maire O'Shea, Tony Santamaria (Liverpool NUS), John Tymon (convener of housing, Brent Nalgo), Maxine Williams (author of Murder on the Rock). Organisations: Communist Party of Great Britain (The Leninist), Fight Racism Fight Imperialism, Irish in Britain Representation Group, Irish Freedom Movement, Islington Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Action, Lesbian and Gay Freedom Movement, Manchester Martyrs Commemoration Committee, Sheffield Defence Campaign, South London Troops Out Movement, Winchester 3 Campaign.

THE RUN up to Hands Off Ireland's commemoration of the Easter 1916 uprising is gathering pace. Leaflets are available and thousands have already been distributed. Preparations are now in hand for the next issue of *Hands Off Ireland!*, which will carry precise details of the march. Confirmed speakers for the rally so far include Dave Douglass of Yorkshire Area NUM and a representative of the Irish Republican Socialist Party.

In the campaign to build the march, HOI! is emphasising above all the *working class* nature of the event. This makes it unique in the calendar of Irish solidarity. It also informs the nature of the work we do to build this march. Thus, work among rank and file trade unionists is a top priority for HOI!.

We are not telling workers in Britain to support the struggle for Irish liberation out of a liberal impulse. We are underlining the fact that until workers here make common cause with the Irish people, they forge their own ideological chains. Commemorating Easter 1916, therefore, is particularly appropriate. This was the first time the working class in Ireland had appeared as an independent political force in the Irish national struggle.

An important aspect of the Easter uprising that HOI! will bring to the fore is the fact that Easter 1916 was not simply Irish in its content: it was the result of world wide contradictions. The Irish rebellion was the opening shot in the world wide revolutionary conflagration which in Russia

actually established working class state power. As Lenin put it: "**The misfortune of the Irish is that they rose prematurely, when the European revolt of the proletariat had not yet matured.**"

Unity between Irish and British workers cannot just be declared. As the Easter Rising showed, it must be fought for on a revolutionary basis. The HOI! demonstration on April 21 is a major focal point for that fight, and one which we will use to springboard the campaign into greater activity and influence within the workers' movement in Britain.

Trade unions

Systematic work in the organised working class movement is often paid lip service in the field of Irish solidarity, but very rarely undertaken. This aspect of HOI!'s work, therefore, constantly breaks fresh ground. We have supporters working in a number of different unions, but we have probably made most headway so far in the CPSA, the union of lower paid civil servants.

And our progress has not gone unnoticed. In particular, the management of the Department of Employment in Westminster, central London, have viewed HOI!'s growing activity with typical over reaction. So far, it has stepped in twice to ban union meetings with HOI! speakers, one in August 1989 and the latest in February of this year. The only other time this management has felt compelled to

stop its workers having a union meeting was during the 1984-5 miners' Great Strike, when it barred a striking miner entry to the building.

HOI! supporters in the branch were quick to act both times. They rearranged the meeting in a nearby venue. The branch secretary also wrote to John Ellis, the general secretary of the CPSA, requesting that the union leadership discuss the matter and stand up to this attempt to gag the fight for Irish freedom.

John Ellis replied in a letter dated February 1, stating that there was "no point" in the NEC discussing this matter. His letter went on: "**It does not matter if the NEC decides this is a threat to free speech or not ... The owners or those with delegated responsibility for control and use of any premises have the right to refuse them to be used for purposes with which they disagree and in the case of government buildings official permission has always been refused for political meetings of any kind.**"

Militants in the CPSA and HOI! will not let this matter rest. A delegation from HOI! lobbied the National Executive Council of the CPSA on February 6, demanding that the leadership take a firm stand in contrast to Ellis's spineless wheedling.

For us, the issue of Ireland is an absolutely key one for workers in Britain. Until the working class on this side of the water make common cause with the fight of the Irish people for self determination, it fatally undermines its own struggles as well. The fact that Ellis blandly accepts the fact that the *management* can dictate to the *workers* - ie, his members - what they can and cannot discuss is a scandal. We suggest it illustrates the fact that he is as much use to his own rank and file as he is to the Irish people".

HOI! is now planning an ongoing campaign in the CPSA against this censorship, plus a lobby of and fringe meeting at the forthcoming CPSA annual conference. Activists in the CPSA, and many other unions, have a material interest in standing up for the right to campaign for Irish freedom. To ignore this attack is to encourage attacks on workers rights here. In this case, it means handing management the right to censor what workers can or cannot discuss. In other, more overt, instances it has meant direct physical attacks, as the state steamed in against striking miners or black youth in ways learnt in Belfast and Derry.

Activity

The part played by women in the struggle for national liberation and socialism in Ireland is consistently underplayed or ignored. Yet the women's question is a key one for the Irish revolution. Come along and hear why.

HOI! public showing of the video 'Mother Ireland' and discussions:

- Monday, March 12: Brent Irish Centre, 76 Salusbury Road, London NW6, 7.30pm.
- Wednesday, March 14: St Mat-

thew's Church, Brixton Village, Brixton Hill, SW2, 7.30pm.

On April 25, Nick Mullen will become the first Irish person accused of a political offence to fall foul of 'British justice' since the release of the Guildford Four. His trial has been rescheduled twice so far. The result is that yet another framed Irish man has so far spent some 15 months in captivity before even being brought to trial. His ordeal is further compounded by daily strip searches, frequent cell changes and general petty harassment.

Hands Off Ireland! is playing an active part in the Nick Mullen Defence Campaign. We are fighting to make Nick Mullen and all political prisoners, whether 'guilty' or 'innocent', an issue for the workers' movement in Britain.

•Wednesday March 7: Nick Mullen Defence Campaign public meeting and social, Camden Irish Centre. Phone Mark Fischer on (01) 431 3135 for more information on the campaign.

•Winchester Three Campaign. The Winchester Three are three young Irish people (Martina Shanahan, Finbar Cullen and John McCann) who, on the flimsiest of evidence, were sentenced in 1988 to 25 years behind bars for allegedly conspiring to murder Tom King and 'persons unknown'.

HOI! has also been active in this defence campaign. There are public meetings and fundraising socials being planned. Contact HOI! for details.

•Activist meetings. HOI! organises weekly meetings for supporters, which both plan our activities and provide forums for debate and discussion, in doing so equipping comrades with the arguments and strategy to intervene and organise successfully on the streets and in the workplaces.

HOI!'s contacts still tend to be mobilised on an event to event basis rather than being made into HOI! activists. This is a problem that HOI! is trying to overcome in the coming months. However it is not a problem unique to ourselves. In fact, the inability of the Irish solidarity movement to dig roots within the working class has been a major problem for all.

What *differentiates* HOI! is that, though we still have far to go, we combine a principled stand for troops out now with a strong commitment to fighting for this within the workers' movement, unlike the shallow, student based boycottism of the Irish Freedom Movement or the 'flexible' principles and lack of direction of the Troops Out Movement.

IFM

Hands Off Ireland! produced a leaflet regretting the Irish Freedom Movement/Revolutionary Communist Party's decision to boycott this year's Bloody Sunday demonstration (see issue No86 for the text). Fortunately, the organisation has also been facing some internal dissension over its crude sectarianism.

The RCP's paper, *the next step* of February 2, carries a letter from 'Tim' from Nottingham complaining of the boycott. Tim does not just complain about the decision to ignore the Bloody Sunday demo; his criticisms are rather broader than that. He writes that he has been "**worried by the apparent lack of emphasis being placed on the struggle for Irish freedom within the party.**"

In an unusual step for the RCP, Phil Murphy implicitly replies to the criticisms raised by this letter and, of course, by HOI!'s intervention, in a separate article. His arguments do nothing to pull the IFM out of their boycottist ghetto. Far from it.

Murphy presents last year's march as the "last straw" for the IFM. In previous years, they have "put up with" their exclusion from the mobilising committee and the denial of speaking rights to them. After the 1989 march, the IFM felt it could take no more because: there was an unexplained lengthy delay in moving off; it was raining; the march was too long and there were not many people about; the official stewards were crap, and most of the IFM contingent could not get into the indoor rally at the end of the march. Apparently, "**even experienced members of the IFM were demoralised.**" Poor things.

Read these comments carefully. They constitute the reasons for the IFM refusal to mobilise a principled contingent on the annual Bloody Sunday march, probably the most important annual Irish solidarity march in Britain today. Murphy seriously presents the fact that "it was raining" as a reason for walking away from the fight against the opportunism that hampers the building of a mass, principled solidarity movement for Irish freedom.

Murphy is disingenuous when he suggests that in the immediate aftermath of this badly organised demonstration, "**the IFM took a decision not to mobilise for any demonstration unless it was granted speaking rights.**" As we pointed out in our leaflet to IFM supporters, the organisation seems to have taken this decision in the lead up to the Terence MacSwiney march in late October 1989, when their reps on the mobilisation committee started off by promising a "national mobilisation", hedged their bets with talk of pulling out their "London contacts", and finally pulled nothing at all (or rather, a 'contingent' of one, in the form of leading IFMer Fiona Foster, to do a head count).

Murphy ends his miserable apologia with the lame threat that "**if any grouping cannot bring itself to allow us speaking rights then it must be the organisers who take responsibility for events which are smaller than they need to be.**" HOI! will be interested to see whether the IFM sponsors and mobilises for our Easter commemoration march. Naturally, we will be offering this organisation speaking rights: we can make no guarantees about the weather, though.

HOI! will hopefully wheedle the IFM further out of its self imposed sectarian shell with another open letter tackling Murphy's pathetic sectarianism.

Given the current mixture of confusion, sectarianism and outright lack of principle within the solidarity movement in Britain, there is a growing need for a new force: a force that can take a clear anti-imperialist stance into the working class and translate it into strong organisation and *action* in support of Irish freedom. Hands Off Ireland! makes no boasts about the extent of the forces we lead. But one thing we are confident of - we have the principles and the strategy that can have a mass influence. Fight with us, on the streets, the estates and the workplaces to make that a *fact*.

Join the resistance!

Mark Fischer