

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

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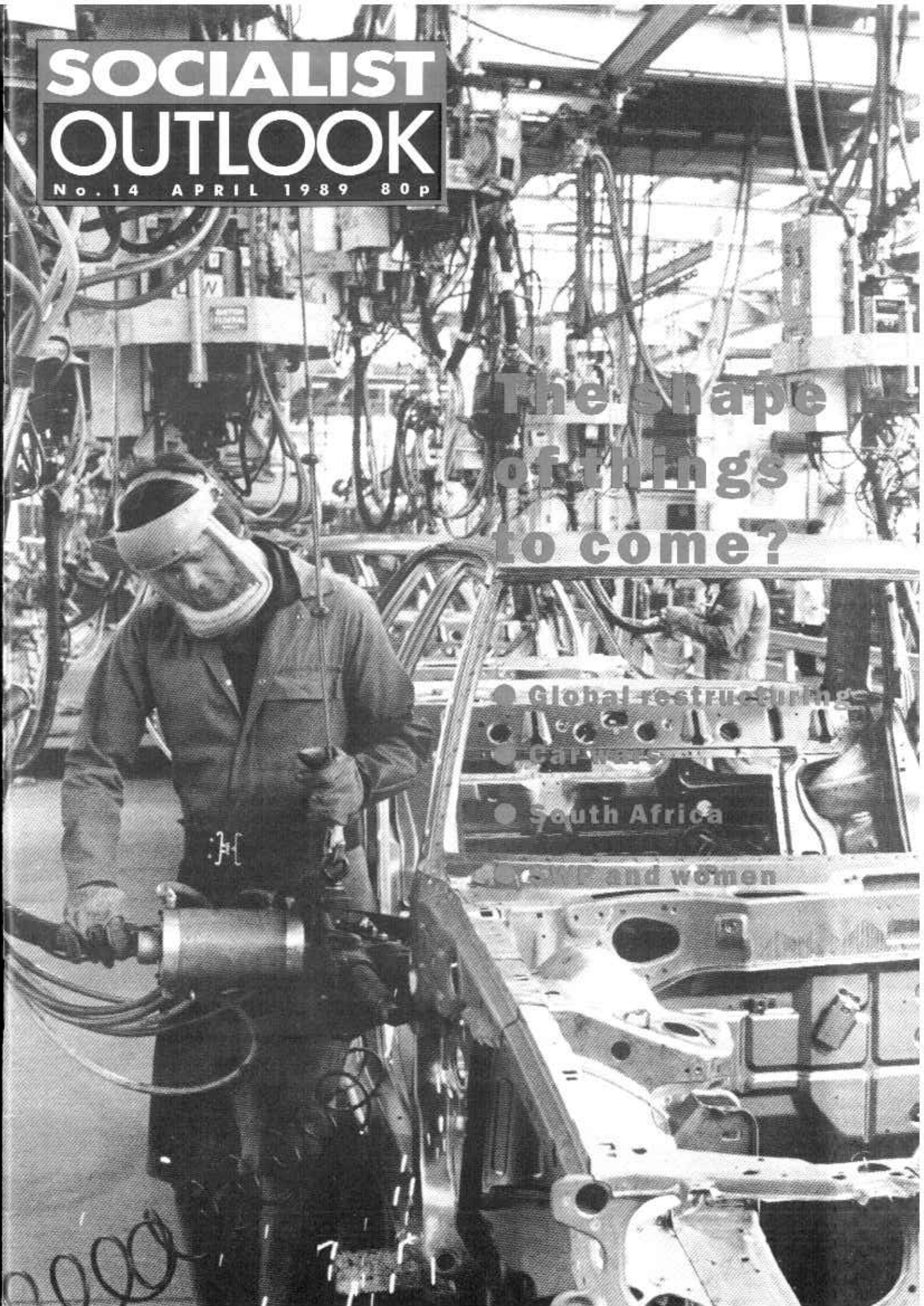
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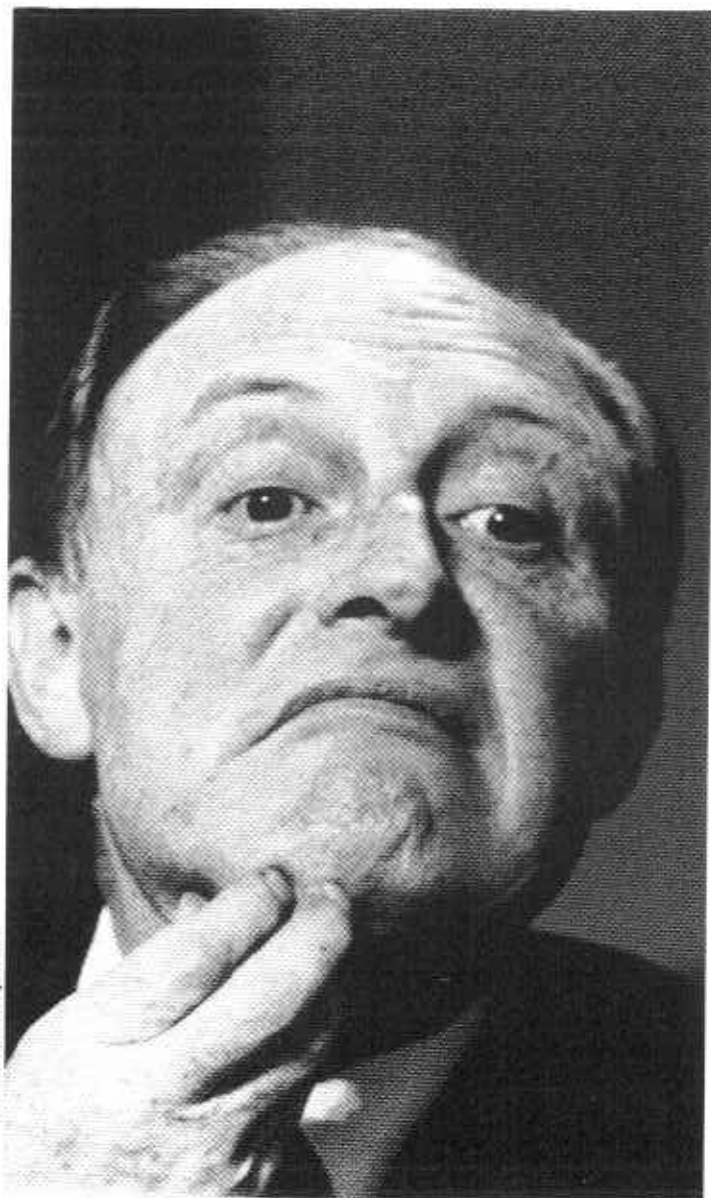
● Global restructuring

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Letting Thatcher off the hook? Neil Kinnock

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LETTERS

Letting Thatcher off the hook?

JUST AT THE POINT where Tory policies have begun to antagonise important sections of their middle class electoral base, Labour's leaders announced their complete capitulation to Thatcherism on economic policy, while the tired old red herring of electoral pacts has again been dragged out of storage.

There could scarcely be a less appropriate time for the labour movement to be making political concessions. Thatcher's cabinet is more isolated than ever in its policies. Ministers are drawing angry, anguished shouts of opposition even from the least likely quarters, as it puts the boot into the 'professions' with far-reaching measures hitting doctors and consultants, lawyers, teachers, lecturers, students and their parents, and even the normally servile press and media. The complacency of millions who have so far profited personally and been bought off by Thatcherism has also been shaken up by their encounters with a barrage of high-handed government attacks.

The underlying weakness of chancellor Nigel Lawson's 'booming' economy (concealed by the credit explosion which has fuelled consumer demand and bloated the service sector) is now making itself felt through inflationary pressure and high interest rates – hitting mortgage payers hard in the wallet while the housing crisis rages on unabated. The looming poll tax will further alienate many owner-occupiers.

Lawson's continuing need for asset-stripping revenues from privatisation as part of his economic 'miracle' serves to reinforce Thatcher's ideological commitment to the ever-less popular sale of the water industry and electricity. These sales come at a time when public concern over ecology and safety and suspicion over the standards of the free market are at a new peak.

Thatcher's equal determination to grasp the nettle of 'reforming' the National Health Service and impose sweeping new marketisation measures has been reflected in Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke's ill-judged confrontation with virtually every professional body in the health field, including the Royal Colleges and the British Medical Association. His attempt to brush aside such opposition would stand more chance of success if opinion polls did not show a massive 70% public opposition to the White Paper.

Meanwhile the government finds itself tainted with more than a whiff of scandal (the Pamela Bordes revelations), incompetence (Paul Channon's catalogue of fiascos and cover-ups at the Transport department), and authoritarianism (repeated efforts to gag the press and media through new Official Secrets laws, censorship and back-room pressure – so strikingly rebuffed over *Death on the Rock*). Thatcher has been forced to intervene in contravention of 'market' pressures to impose a more expensive route on the Channel Tunnel rail link, and the government has lost its aura of invincibility along with its predominant lead in the polls. For the first time in years it is suffering the threat of humiliating by-election defeats.

Under such conditions, a coherent counter-offensive from the labour movement around a frontal challenge to the increasingly discredited notion of the free market, arguing for a planned, socialist answer to the huge social problems and yawning class divide consciously widened by Thatcherite policies, could be making real inroads into sections of the newly shaken middle class.

Instead, the Labour leadership has emerged clutching the meagre fruits of its sweaty labours in 'policy review' workshops: a defeatist economic policy aimed not at a planned – let alone socialist – economy, but at 'making the market work'. Neil Kinnock's keynote speech in Nottingham unveiling the new policies revealed a confused and pathetic package

of half-measures designed to manage capitalism better than the Tories. Abandoning not only nationalisation but even the watered-down concept of social ownership, he advocated moves to shore up nationalist and protectionist prejudices by safeguarding 'our' industries (and employers) against 'foreign' takeovers. He proposed a nationwide network of 'one stop' advice and resource centres for small businesspeople, bringing grim reminders of Harold Wilson's failed National Enterprise Board and the equally useless Greater London Enterprise Board nurturing feeble herds of white elephants.

While Labour adopts a policy little more radical than the old Liberals, David Owen's Social Democrats (SDP) and Paddy Ashdown's Democrats (SLD) have raised the issue of electoral pacts. In the aftermath of the Richmond by-election, where the combined votes for the SDP-SLD candidates outnumbered the Tory vote, the idea of anti-Thatcher parties joining forces to defeat Tory candidates may appear superficially attractive to the non-political.

However we must not forget that what the SDP and SLD have in mind is a specifically *non-socialist* opposition to Thatcher (in view of Kinnock's latest political shift, it might be more accurate to say a *non-Labour* opposition). The failure of Ashdown and Owen to negotiate a deal for a common candidate in the forthcoming Vale of Glamorgan by-election should not blind us to the fact that their common goal was to smash *Labour's* chances of challenging the Tories.

For these second-rate 'centre ground' forces, their flimsy political programmes are largely academic and wholly subordinate to the hunt for votes. But they are not the only advocates of broad 'never mind the politics, feel the width' electoral pacts. The closet liberals of *Marxism Today* and the Communist Party are making the running in renewed proposals for a broad cross-class anti-Thatcher alliance, while reserving their main hostility for class struggle politics in the labour movement.

Bitter experience has shown that the most fatal error is for the workers' movement to set aside or subordinate its own political programme in the hunt for 'unity' with bourgeois parties around a shapeless political programme which aims to be all things to all people.

However it would also be an error to miss out on new opportunities to draw some of the new forces opposing aspects of Thatcherism into the labour movement fightback against the government, which should aim at building the widest possible support. Health workers and campaigners combatting the new NHS White Paper, for example, should be looking on this issue to collaborate with individuals and local branches of the BMA and any other professional body prepared to fight. Trade unions and civil liberties groupings opposing attacks on freedom of the press should enlist wherever possible the support of top journalists and newspaper editors – who have shown they do not like being *publicly* shown to be less than free in what they report and how.

In each case the key issue is that the workers' movement must campaign in its *own right*, in its *own name*, and on its *own demands*, seeking on that basis the maximum collaboration with other forces. The growing pool of actual and potential opposition to the Thatcher government can only be transformed into active mobilisation through leadership from the labour movement. Though national Labour and trade union chiefs continue to duck this responsibility, the chances to build local and national campaigns on a range of issues that can inflict defeats on the Tories have not been so favourable for many years.

Don't let Kinnock let Thatcher off the hook!

450 at Women for Socialism conference

At last a positive answer!

A NETWORK of socialist women must be set up, which will say 'no' to the 'bureaucrats and yellow-bellied men' who are imposing local government cuts upon the very people they claimed not so long ago to be supporting.

So said Haringey councillor and black activist Martha Osamor in a key speech from the platform of the Women for Socialism conference in London. 'We now have to pay for the unholy alliances formed in the past when the women's movement was at its height', she added. 'As a result of good local authority manifestos, women's units, race units and research units were set up: but now the same councils are taking them away again.'

Also from the platform in an opening session chaired by Betty Heathfield, Mairead Keane from Sinn Fein told the conference that

women had gone through too much in the 'laboratory' of the six counties. They have spent much of their energy trying to achieve women's reproductive rights, and in other battles there have been few gains. Women have been trapped at home; and the partition of Ireland has hindered effective trade union organisation and weakened the forces of the left.

The fight for national liberation and equal citizenship includes achieving basic civil liberties and overcoming the stereotypes of women as only wives and mothers. In Sinn Fein they now have a women's policy, and a quota system ensures that at least a quarter of the executive must be women.

From the women's movement in Palestine Jamilha Akmed explained how their committee had been set up in 1978. Women in Palestine faced the occupation every day. The number of women prisoners had increased 50% since

1987; the number of miscarriages was up 200% from exposure to tear-gas. Palestinian women are active on women's and other political issues, fighting both for national liberation and for women's liberation.

The conference was a welcome tonic, a women's organisation in favour of socialism and not simply campaigning *against* something (though of course we are all against violence, pit closures, racism, imperialism, and so on...). Ideas were welcomed, and in sharp contrast to many conferences including the Socialist Conference there were *no* arguments over whether the fight is best fought inside or outside the Labour Party or elsewhere. We seemed unanimous. Here were women wanting to get on now with any and all immediate, practical work against our common oppressors, and willing to work in *all* the organisations we are already in.

We want to make links with all women in struggle, using our skills to build wider support and take the fight forward. There were a number of black women at part of the conference and several disabled women were present - though more needs to be done to ensure they feel welcome, and we had to leave committee positions open for representation of black women and differently-abled women, because there were no candidates available.

However 22 women did volunteer for a whole range of tasks including production of a four-page newspaper and investigating the prospects for an anti-imperialist women's solidarity conference.

Women for Socialism will be organising at national Labour Women's Conference and the next Socialist Conference. Membership is £5 waged, £2.50 unwaged. Look out for us.

Judith Parsons

As 26,000 face deportation...

Migrant workers organise

ON MONDAY February 27, 38 Kurdish and Turkish workers were arrested in raids on factories in Hackney. By the next day seven had been deported and a further fourteen were under threat. This action came in the wake of a wave of raids across North and East London.

The Kurdish and Turkish trade union, community and political groups organised immediate protest action: a mass picket of Dalston police station on March 4, a 3000 strong march the next day and an International Women's Day march through Hackney under the slogans 'No worker is illegal', 'Right to settle, right to work!', 'No more deportations', 'No to police raids', 'Long live our struggle'.

The fierce attacks by the police and immigration authorities take place both in the context of the intensifying racism of the British state, and against a background of a struggle by migrant workers against employers in the factories

themselves.

The 1988 Immigration Act made 'overstaying' a criminal offence (see *Socialist Outlook* 6). The implications of this were heralded in last November's announcement by the Home Office that it was to double the number of officers investigating 'overstayers' and migrants, with the aim of resolving 26,000 cases - that is, deporting 26,000 people.

In the run-up to 1992 the European governments are planning to ensure migrant workers and black people in general do not have 'equal rights' to freedom of travel and citizenship within Europe. They are not to get the benefits from the relaxation of border controls given to European Community (EC) citizens. Non-EC people, including refugees, particularly from the third world, will be unwelcome in 'Fortress Europe'. The British state's violent deportation of Viraj Mendis clearly marks this intention.

Migrant workers in Britain are to face even more severe restrictions and harassment under a comprehensive system of internal

controls. This is likely to include a compulsory identity card for migrant workers as already instituted in some other countries. The state already holds an extensive base of information on black people here, and an undefeated Poll Tax would complete the structural base to enable an identity card system to be implemented.

The state has moved steadily under this government to relinquish responsibility for the social cost of migrant labour. The 1985 definition of 'recourse to public funds' and the 1988 Social Security Act are two among a tightening net of rules and regulations that discriminate against black and migrant workers in access to health, housing, benefits, education and so on. At the same time the monitoring and questioning by public agencies and their linking to the Home Office, alongside direct harassment by police and immigration officials, creates fear and uncertainty. They constitute a concerted attempt to destabilize the lives of black people in Britain.

The factory bosses have used this background to intensify exploitation. They have been met by increasing struggles over the right to organise in trade unions, over wages and conditions and in opposition to the arbitrary deduction of 'tax' from take home pay - a levy that is not surprisingly unknown to tax officers.

These struggles have led to the formation in North and East London of a TGWU textile branch No. 1/1312 by 550 Kurdish and Turkish workers. This represents a real step forward but will require committed support from the TGWU against the attacks it will face, including trade unionists being shopped to immigration authorities by employers, and in the battles that lie ahead over recognition.

The formation of this branch could provide an example to migrant workers across London in demanding that the trade union movement join them in resisting the ever-more vicious attacks of the employers and the state.

Simon Lynn

Andrew Moore/Pirella



Troops out: self determination for the Irish people

Time to Go!

TEN YEARS AGO, on the 10th anniversary of British troops going on to the streets in the north of Ireland, to prop up the tottering Orange State, a demonstration for withdrawal, called by a broad alliance of forces including the Communist Party, the Troops Out Movement, the Socialist Workers Party, the Young Liberals and a few Labour MPs, attracted less than 10,000 people. This August, on the 20th anniversary there is to be a march followed by a carnival.

Called by the Time to Go Campaign around the slogan of: 'For British Withdrawal from Ireland, Time to Go', the organisers hope to attract a much larger turnout for both events than the 'traditional withdrawal movement'. Their belief is that those forces who would not now support troops out and self determination will be mobilised by the slogan 'Time to Go'.

The AGM of the Labour Committee on Ireland (LCI) endorsed the Time To Go initiative by a small majority and after much criticism. The LCI also committed itself to building the largest possible withdrawal contingent on the August demonstration on the basis of 'troops out' and 'self-determination for the Irish People' and to co-ordinate this with the Troops Out Movement and the Irish in Britain Representation Group.

Many of the problems in the relationship between the Time to Go initiative and other elements of the Year of Action flow from the conception of how to extend the influence of the traditional withdrawal movement put forward by the leadership of Time To Go.

There is agreement on the need

to broaden support and the Time To Go could have been the basis for a broad alliance of those in favour of withdrawal, including those who do not support self determination. The main problem has been the insistence by Time To Go that it must, in the words of one of its leaders, 'hegemonise' the Year of Action. In Scotland, support for the much discredited Charter was made the precondition of participation in the Time To Go Committee.

It is this, together with the bureaucratic methods of the Time To Go leadership which has done much to divide and, in some cases hold back, the process of building a movement for British withdrawal.

It is ironic that most of the activities on the ground have been organised by people who, while not giving political support to Time To Go because it puts preconditions on British withdrawal, are prepared to work with any other forces towards that end.

The same problems are emerging in relation to the demonstration on August 12. The first organising committee for the demonstration did not take place until March 9 and then only after an emergency resolution to the LCI AGM and sustained pressure on LCI members of the Time To Go National Council. The late start in setting up an organising committee and the laid-back attitude of Time To Go Council members to such urgent matters as the preparation of publicity material, has fuelled the suspicion in the LCI and elsewhere that the demonstration is very much secondary to the carnival in the minds of the Time To Go organisers. Matters were not helped by the announcement that there was to be no rally at the end of the

Uprising in Kashmir

EVENTS IN INDIA often go unnoticed in the west: however the past few months have brought struggles which are of immense importance for the region. In particular there have been increased calls for an independent Kashmir, the northern state bordering Pakistan and the now troubled Tibet.

Demonstrations and riots have broken out in the Kashmir's two major cities, Jammu and Shrinagar, causing Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi the same problems as those he faces in the neighbouring Punjab.

Jammu-Kashmir and the Punjab are both areas of vital importance to Indian politics and economics. The predominance of sikhs in the Punjab and muslims in Kashmir makes the majority in both states hostile to hindu India. There have been repeated calls for an independent Punjab, resulting in fighting especially around the Punjab capital and sikh holy city of Amritsar. Last year alone thousands of people were killed, forcing the government to declare the area a restricted zone.

Now in Jammu and Kashmir, the two states directly to the north, there has been a resurgence in the struggle for independence which began in 1947 when the British cynically backtracked on their promise of a Kashmir state, and rode roughshod over Kashmiris' distinctive language, culture and religion by making them a part of India.

Kashmir's capital, the picturesque city of Shrinagar, sitting on the shores of Lake Dal at the

foot of the Himalayas, has made the headlines recently for its violent demonstrations. Apart from muslim reaction against Salman Rushdie, there have been far more important clashes between supporters of Pakistan, India, and independence.

Despite its reputation for poverty, India is a strong regional economic power, which acts in an imperialistic manner towards national minorities and dissenting states. India could almost be described as practising 'capitalism in one country', with most of its consumer goods being home made and very little in the way of exports. It is difficult to spot a western car on the roads and refreshingly impossible to buy Coca Cola.

Gandhi's determination to hold on to the Punjab and Kashmir has an economic basis: these two areas include some of the richest and most prosperous farming land on the subcontinent. The loss of such wealth could help put the skids under Gandhi's regime, which is already losing some of its political grip on the rest of India.

Such a blow struck at the centralised authority of the Delhi government would strengthen the hand of the masses elsewhere in India. It is for this reason that socialists should support the right of the Kashmiris and Punjabis to self-determination, while looking for the future not towards a patchwork of isolated capitalist statelets on the sub-continent but a socialist united states of India, based on free association of sovereign peoples.

Jonathan Jones

demonstration and that there would be no political input to the carnival other than the music and what the bands might say.

Worst of all, plans have been laid for the march which make organising a rally impossible. When pressed, they conceded that it was essential to have speakers at the carnival, though who these will be is, at the moment, a matter for speculation.

A combination of a small demonstration and low key speakers at the carnival would be a setback to building a withdrawal movement and it throws away the opportunity to speak to new forces, which was the rationale for

Time to Go in the first place. If, as is likely, the biggest turnout is for the music rather than the march, having no rally and no one calling for Brits Out will make the event indistinguishable from a Christy Moore gig at the National, and surely less political.

While continuing to press for a proper rally and to ensure that there is some political input to the carnival, the LCI must make a big effort to ensure that on August 12 there is a massive demonstration for Troops Out and Self Determination.

Even at this late stage, there is still time to ensure that happens.

David Coen

Beleagured Benazir stands firm

THE MASS mobilisations by fundamentalist muslims in Pakistan over the Salman Rushdie issue are simply the latest aspect of a fightback by supporters of the old regime of General Zia against the government of Benazir Bhutto.

Fundamentalist forces in particular had done well under Zia, and seen their dream of islamisation nearly come true: they now fear a possible reversal of their 'achievements'. Some rushed at once to army chiefs as soon as the election results were declared last November, begging them to take over again.

The somewhat chastened officers refused; they had nothing to gain and everything to lose if they took power at that stage. Even Zia had promised elections in 1988, before the August air crash killed him and most of his top army generals. And the officers also knew as well as Bhutto that whoever came to power in November would not be able to interfere with the interests of the army or its American masters.

A massive 41% of Pakistan's budget is eaten up by the armed forces: all in all the country spends 87% of its money on defence, administration and servicing the \$17 billion foreign debt. In comparison it spends 0.57% on health and 1.7% on education - in a country where 40% of all deaths are caused by water-borne diseases and the literacy rate is only 7%.

True enough, Benazir Bhutto publicly declared on taking office that she cannot cut military expenditure - for the simple reason that the powerful armed forces 'won't allow it'. This point was made brutally obvious to her in the period between winning the election and taking office.

Army chief of staff General Mirza Aslam Beg joined with the figurehead President of Pakistan Ghulam Ishaq Khan (formerly a minister in Bhutto's father's government, but kept on as a close advisor by his murderer General Zia) and 'unexpected' guests - the USA's deputy Secretary of

Defence, the deputy Secretary of State and the US ambassador, to spell out terms. The US representatives came with a strong bargaining hand: as a result of recent decisions by the US Congress, Pakistan has the third highest allocation of US economic aid - after Israel and Egypt - as well as massive military aid.

It was agreed that Benazir would follow Zia's economic, foreign and defence policies - so much so that she has retained Zia's foreign minister Sahabzada Yaqoob Khan. There is to be no nationalisation of any sort, and foreign investment will be encouraged. This has angered not only the left but also many of Bhutto's own supporters, who believe that after eleven years of suffering and torture they have been asked to compromise with the torturers and work with their enemies.

Bhutto has inherited a bankrupt economy. Just before the election the interim regime hastily signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund for a £555 million loan, in exchange for a promise to impose austerity measures.

However most of the left opposition groups realise that any organised campaign against her Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government would now play right into the hands of the right wing cut throats who hate any sort of democracy, and would love to see another fundamentalist dictatorship imposed on the country. Much to the dismay of these forces, Bhutto's first speech as Prime Minister announced some very radical reforms, many of which are (thankfully) 'unislamic' in the eyes of the mullahs and their right wing allies.

Among other proposals, Bhutto:

- ◆ lifted the previous ban on trade union activities;
- ◆ permitted student unions to function;



Bhutto: far-reaching reforms have angered mullahs

◆ commuted thousands of death sentences to life imprisonment;

◆ promised that all laws which specifically discriminate against women will be abolished.

The last two pronouncements in particular were very hurtful to the mullahs who believe in 'eye for an eye' punishments and had worked with Zia to subject Pakistani women to barbaric oppression.

Bhutto has also promised to release all political prisoners, withdraw cases pending against opponents of the previous regime, set aside the sentences passed against oppositionists in their absence, and made immediate arrangements for political exiles to return home. Women will be given equal treatment on wages and working conditions, she says.

These measures, though not yet completely fulfilled, have changed the climate in a country suffocated by social, political and religious oppression. Within months of only the second election in the country's 41-year history, Pakistan is enjoying more freedom than ever before.

This 'breath of fresh air' is quite unacceptable to the mullahs, who believe that liberal, modern, secular ideas lead to godlessness. In the last week of February a united convention of ulamas (religious scholars) was held in Rawalpindi, linking three of the largest muslim sects. It declared that the installation of a woman as head of state is 'unislamic', and decided to start a campaign to get rid of 'woman's rule'.

Socialists should fight this counter-attack by the mullahs and, while preserving their own political independence, side with Bhutto in ridding the country of in-

human, degrading and oppressive laws imposed under Zia's martial law. In doing so they can take advantage themselves of the new democratic rights to organise politically and in the new trade unions that will spring up.

This does not mean uncritical support for anything Bhutto says or does: but socialist demands and tactics should make use of and maximise the present process of democracy and not assist the ultra-right efforts to topple the government.

A strengthened mass movement of workers and peasants will be necessary to combat the threat of a right wing/military comeback. There is much basic reorganisation and political preparation to be done, and no advantage in a premature showdown which will see the workers and oppressed once more the losers.

No existing mass leadership offers any more radical economic, military or foreign policy than Bhutto. While it works to ensure that this alternative is built, the left should continue to fight for even fuller democracy, and raise slogans including:

- ◆ The army back to the barracks; the mullahs back to the mosques!
- ◆ No US bases in Pakistan!
- ◆ No help to the mujahedin in Afghanistan!
- ◆ Full rights to national minorities and minority provinces!
- ◆ No discrimination against women in jobs!

It would not be too surprising if Bhutto herself and the bulk of her PPP supporters were to welcome left campaigns on such demands as a counterweight to right wing and US pressure.

Ahmad Shuja

Wealth tax not Poll tax

THE POLL TAX is one of the most swingeing attacks on the working class and on local government that Thatcher has introduced. The response of the leadership of the labour movement has been pathetic on this issue as on the many other attacks facing the working class. They have refused to countenance any action that goes outside the law; whether it be non-implementation by councils or trade unionists or the building of a mass non-payment campaign.

Nevertheless, the campaign against this iniquitous tax continues to grow apace. In England and Wales new groups are being formed every week. In Scotland the campaign has achieved new strength and direction following the successful 'unity conference' held in Glasgow on March 4.

In response to this groundswell, the Labour Party is making the weekend of April 8 one of 'local activity' against the poll tax and the TUC have agreed to call a national demonstration, but not until July 1 in Manchester.

This hardly matches up to the demands for a national demonstration at the beginning of April (when collection started in Scotland) for which many activists have lobbied consistently. By July registration will be well under way in England and Wales, as will be collection in Scotland, so the moment when local campaigns most need the boost of collective mass action will have passed. However, it is vital that the labour movement responds to both these calls, that we attempt to make them as successful as possible, and give the leadership as little excuse as possible to argue that they have tried to give a lead, but no-one is interested.

The shallow response of 'new realism' is not only apparent through their failure to give direction to the mass movement, but also through their alternative to the tax itself. The document *Local services, local choices, local taxes* produced by the Labour Party for last year's annual conference proposes two local taxes – a local income tax and a new property tax. Apart from the obvious drawback of seeming to propose twice



John Harris/ITL

as many taxes as at present, their arguments do nothing to deal with the fact that taxation under the present system is deliberately designed to shift resources from poor to rich. Their two taxes will merely perpetuate this fact.

It is not possible to deal with the crisis in local government merely by addressing the question of finances at the level of the local state. We need rather to look at taxation in a much more comprehensive sense; to attack the fact that both local and national taxation are regressive, or only slightly progressive, to point out that taxes on profits and unearned income are pathetic, while working class people face unemployment and low wages. Socialists argue for a steeply rising Wealth tax as an alternative to the present system of taxation.

Any comprehensive solution to the issue of local authority funding has to take into account such issues as the proportion of local authority spending that goes to pay debt charges – much of which had been incurred long before the imposition of rate-capping. In terms of property taxes, it is nonsense to claim as the Association of London Authorities document *An Alternative to the Poll Tax* does that rates have proved to be 'a good local tax over hundreds of years'. As a tax on the value of a property, rates do not necessarily

bear the slightest relation to the wealth of the people living in the property.

In the period before the introduction of ratecapping, the fight against rate rises was correctly seen by many socialists as an important part of the battle to protect working class living standards; we fought under the banner of 'No cuts, no rent increases and no rate increases'. Councils which funded improvements to services through massive rate increases such as Walthamstow and Ealing in London did so on the backs of working class people. The issue has not ceased to be relevant. Further, in the last year before the imposition of the poll tax in England and Wales, the debate about going for high rate increases is being used in the Labour Party and trade unions as a supposed alternative to making cuts or confronting the government; a supposed third way which is in fact only another cut in living standards.

Before new taxes can be introduced a first demand must be made that local authority debts are written off so that the financial manoeuvres used by councils do not now impose too high a burden. We are already seeing the effect of this in boroughs such as Brent and Haringey being forced to make cuts and put up rates in order to pay for their refusal to fight in previous years.

A radical overhaul of the way Rate Support Grants are assessed needs to be a key plank of any proposals. The government's move to 'Needs Assessment' supposedly simplifies the current system, but in practice makes it easier to deny support to Labour authorities. The Labour Party opposes this and talks of more accurately reflecting need in Rate Support Grant assessment, but in practice the control that local authorities require is over how they spend their income, not where it comes from, and there is no particular reason why all taxation should not be collected nationally, as long as local people had the ability to determine how local needs were addressed.

Of course there will not be agreement on these issues amongst activists campaigning against the poll tax. The key issues within these campaigns will be fighting for non-cooperation with the tax by councils and trade unions, building opposition to the register and developing mass non-payment campaigns. But socialists should use the debate around the poll tax to develop discussion not only around local government financing but around the whole question of taxation more generally.

Terry Conway

El Salvador Elections ARENA 'wins' while masses stay away

THE QUESTION as to whether the elections in El Salvador represent a qualitative turning point in the political situation is still an open one. However, despite the short period that has elapsed since, it is possible to register a number of important political points.

The first thing to note is the turn out for the election. According to reports from San Salvador, this appears to have been lower (how much lower is open to question) than the 30% for the town council elections in early 1988. There are 2.8 million eligible voters in El Salvador, but only 1.8m are registered to vote. Even if the recent turn out was equal to the council elections, ARENA can only have won 12% of 2.8m potential voters (based on the 55% that ARENA appears to have won) and the figure is more likely to be below 10%. In effect, the party of the oligarchy was voted for by the ARENA government within El Salvador is non-existent.

There were several reasons for such a low turn out. The FMLN proposal for a postponement to enable them to take part received overwhelming support from the people of El Salvador. This offer had the effect winning the leadership of the radical trade union movement, the UNTS, to call a

boycott. The refusal of ARENA and the Christian Democrats to respond to this offer significantly increased support for the FMLN position when the elections went ahead.

In addition, the position of the ballot boxes, within the wealthier areas of San Salvador, for instance, as well as near to army barracks, meant that it was both physically difficult for the poor to vote, and intimidating given the social tension that existed in El Salvador during the election period.

Finally, two other key factors were a product of the FMLN's politico-military strength. Between one third and one quarter of the country is under the control of the guerrillas and the population within it obviously played no part. Secondly, the FMLN's transport strike was a total success and demonstrated yet again that there are two armed powers within El Salvador capable of enforcing policy on a nationwide scale.

But none of these factors will stop ARENA claiming that the elections were legitimate and the US winning international respectability for the new government in the short term. From the moment that ARENA appeared to be the



Pietro Gigli/IFL

'Democracy' under the gun: army in a Salvadoran refugee camp

only party that could win the election outright it became inevitable that the United States would switch horses and begin to present ARENA as an acceptable alternative. In the next period the US has to hold the hardliners back until, at least, international attention is focussed elsewhere. The best possible result for US imperialism would be the construction of a new centre right alliance based on the Christiani wing of ARENA and the fragments of the Christian Democrats which would operate to hold back the 'total war' position on the far right of Salvadorean politics.

Despite all the publicity given to the now president Freddi Christiani, it is common knowledge that the real power still lies with D'Aubuisson and the right wing of ARENA. They are committed to completely destroying the labour movement and popular organisations, and to a reenactment of the 1932 massacre, only this time on a grander scale. This type of scenario, although not on the cards in an immediate sense, is a real possibility if the army leadership feels a life and death struggle is imminent and attempts to strike the first blow. This is not the perspective of a crazed minority but a coherent alternative for the El Salvadorian oligarchy.

How far this perspective comes to appear as the only serious one will depend upon the development of the mass movement and the guerrilla struggle. The discussion around the elections created a popular majority for the FMLN's position and developed a united front between the

labour movement (principally the UNTS) and the guerrilla forces on the immediate tactical question. At the same time the FMLN has been demonstrating a capacity to operate in urban areas which at one point led to a rocket attack on the presidential palace and other buildings representative of state power. There has been the development of the MPTL (The Movement for Peace, Work and Land) which is a movement in working class areas that is laying the basis for insurrection at a street level via both the development of street level organisation and the attempt to respond act for act to the repressive activities of the army and the police.

Thus the elements clearly exist for an insurrection at some point. The issue is whether the FMLN is able to translate its majority on the question of the elections into a majority on the question of how to overthrow the present system i.e. whether or not it can take the political leadership of the whole opposition to the ARENA government, its war against the people, and the US aid to the Salvadorean regime. The FMLN's stated belief is that an insurrection is possible in the next twelve months and that it is a question of binding together the popular organisations for a final offensive and producing the catalyst that will set the process in motion.

Whatever the result of these political developments it is clear that the left must step up its solidarity activity and build links with both the FMLN and the UNTS. A clear task is to build a movement to call for the end of all US Aid to El Salvador. Affiliate to the El Salvador Solidarity Campaign at 20 Compton Terrace, London N1.

Will McMahon

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Are 'we' losing our grip?

There is a 'common sense' saying in politics that parties never win elections, but governments lose them.

That may be so. And given Labour's pathetic performance, even the terminal optimists in the movement are having to admit that Labour's best hope now is probably a Tory disaster.

It's all too tempting then to proclaim every hiccup in the government's performance as heralding a shift in Labour's fortunes. If only it were that easy. But Thatcher's problems are certainly mounting up.

The list of unpopular measures, disasters and scandals is looking as long as an NHS waiting list. But unpopularity and policy problems have come and gone over the last ten years. And frighteningly little lasting damage has been done to Tory standing, as they've steered their course, with only minor changes of tack, into a third term.

But now the government is beginning to look as though it might be sailing a bit too close to the wind. The North Sea oil revenues and sell-off receipts which have kept them in credit are close to running out. And the latest on the list of privatisations don't look such a good deal to potential shareholders who are all also customers faced with bigger bills. But perhaps most importantly,

'Thatcherism' is coming close to hitting those it relies on for its support; the middle class and those sections of the working class who have felt some gains from the last ten years.

Water and electricity privatisations are ringing environmental alarm bells. In the case of water, these are being heard loudest in the Tory heartlands, across rural Britain and into the neat county towns. So much so that at the recent by-election in Richmond, the young Tory hopeful saw his predecessor Leon Brittan's majority cut from over 19,000 to just 2,500.

Rising house prices and mortgage interest rate rises are beginning to hit home. Record levels of homelessness are not just a minor embarrassment to some Tory bleeding hearts, but an ever-growing financial burden to central government and source of frustration to the government's friends in the building trade. Working class opposition to the government's plans for public sector housing is gathering force too, as estate ballots reject Tory sell-offs. Effective campaigning - particularly in London's Tower Hamlets - against Nicholas Ridley's other great housing initiative, 'Housing Action Trusts', has recently resulted in the scrapping of half of the proposed projects.

Transport has recently and dramatically risen to the fore of public concern. Almost every aspect of policy here presents difficulties for the government. A weaker government might have been brought down by the series of safety scandals, injury and even death attributable to their politicians and policies. Only now, on the ropes over Lockerbie after more than three months,

Transport Secretary Paul Channon is looking vulnerable.

Less immediately dramatic or newsworthy, but increasingly recognised as central to transport safety, are the planning problems facing the government. Uncomfortably for the

solid, and though patchily, effective broad opposition to the Tories, is growing.

Industry, if not the City, is increasingly uncomfortable with the government's economic performance. The director general of the CBI made a post-budget public attack on Thatcher, complaining that she was complacently presiding over the 'locust years' - of excessive consumption and under investment. 'I must warn you that the locusts will not easily be kept at bay. Last year the CBI said that the priority should be investment not consumption. This was regarded at the time as politically naive and self interested. Unfortunately it turned out to be right.'

Clearly the government is in some difficulty but is it possible that all this amounts to is just a temporary rocky patch for the government? They have a packed programme of legislation, much of it contentious and unpopular. But this is partly by design: when better to deal with difficult business, but in the middle of a term of office when an administration might naturally be expected to be low in the polls? Especially when they have a stash of money put by for tax cuts later on.

And the rest? Can it be put down just to bad luck (Pamella now included) in the number of unpredictable controversies that have emerged recently?

Well no, not really. Because many of them are more than mere scandals, but are attributable, and increasingly are attributed publicly, to the direct consequences of pursuing Thatcherite policies.

So it could just be that Thatcherism (although, importantly, not conservatism as such), is outliving its usefulness to the British ruling class.

Sections of the media now are at last waking up to the fact that Thatcherism's not all they've cracked it up to be.

A *Sunday Telegraph* columnist recently speculated that the Prime Minister needed a holiday. Peter McKay, writing in the right-wing *London Evening Standard* under the headline 'It's that woman again' concluded that the government is running out of steam - and anyway, he argued, it has already gone too far. Most importantly, he speculated, she might actually be starting to put voters off.

That, of course, is the Tories' bottom line. If I were a government minister who'd given up a place on the City payroll for what looked like a job for life I'd be getting more than twitchy. I might even be getting out.

The challenge, as always, is for Labour's leaders to apply the political commitment and drive necessary to shape and advance the growing tide of opposition in the working class. The present performance of Her Majesty's official opposition makes it less rather than more likely that they will do that.

Jane Wells



Thatcher: outliving her usefulness?

nation's policy makers, these are again being felt first on their own home base. London commuters driving to work now travel more slowly and a lot less pleasantly around the capital than they would have done before the advent of the motor car - at around 11 m.p.h. Underground passengers have been driven to direct action - with impromptu sit-ins and lobbies when yet more rush-hour trains are delayed or cancelled. And perhaps most sensitive of all, the government faces a serious challenge from its own 'natural' supporters in Kent where opposition to Channel Tunnel plans cannot be ignored. Faced with marauding middle class masses taking to the streets, even government ministers who are unfortunate enough to represent constituencies in this danger zone have had to distance themselves from the proposed 'development'. Cheating - by making sure that the track goes underground in Tory areas and only surfaces in nasty inner city Labour strongholds - might just work for the government. But they have had to back-track - by going for the marginally more environmentally acceptable but significantly more expensive option. And pious monetarist homilies - that all this is really a sign of prosperity and we jolly well ought to be grateful - are starting to grate, even with many Tory supporters, whose first instinct is not ideology, but self-interest.

Proposals to 'reform' the NHS are in trouble too, as some professional groups are now joining NHS workers in opposition to the government's plans. The public's basic support of a tax-funded, free health service remains

Stand firm against censorship

JANE KELLY looks at some of the issues raised by the Rushdie affair and censorship in the light of de-regulated TV.

Within the space of a few months we've seen the Government ban on Sinn Fein's right to free speech and support for Salman Rushdie's freedom of expression; the setting up of a new TV watchdog the Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC), under the watchful eye of Lord Rees-Mogg, and much discussion on the likely filling of deregulated TV with soft porn: remember the ad 'Italian housewives do it on TV'? The Tories (and in some cases people who should know better) are supremely pragmatic when it comes to censorship. The left however, cannot afford to be.

Although Howe and Thatcher have since backed down from total support for Rushdie, the Tories' immediate response was to defend him to the hilt, in complete contrast to their imposition of a ban on the right of Gerry Adams and others to express their point of view on the North of Ireland. Perhaps the proximity of Ireland compared to Iran had something to do with it; or maybe the racist attitude of the British Government led them to abhor the Ayatollah's death threat to an (albeit Pakistani) British writer, while conveniently forgetting their own use of censorship.

The Rushdie affair has also produced some unexpected divisions amongst the left intellectuals, resuscitating the debate about the Jim Allen play *Perdition*. Some who favoured censorship (because of accusations of historical inaccuracy!) in that case, now present themselves as being opposed in principle to any form of censorship. Others whose past record might have led one to expect something better, have come down in favour of a kind of self-censorship — John Berger and Dilip Hiro for example.

Religion and race

Some of the confusion arises from a misplaced anti-racism. Feeling, quite rightly, that the Moslem community in Britain suffers racism, such intellectuals respond in an ambivalent way to the Islamic attack on *The Satanic Verses*. There has been similar confusion in response to Moslem demands for religious and single-sex schools. Religion is not the same thing as race. The left has to determine its support or otherwise for demands of black or other oppressed groups on the basis of politics, of which anti-racism is only one component. Thus, for example, we should argue that we are

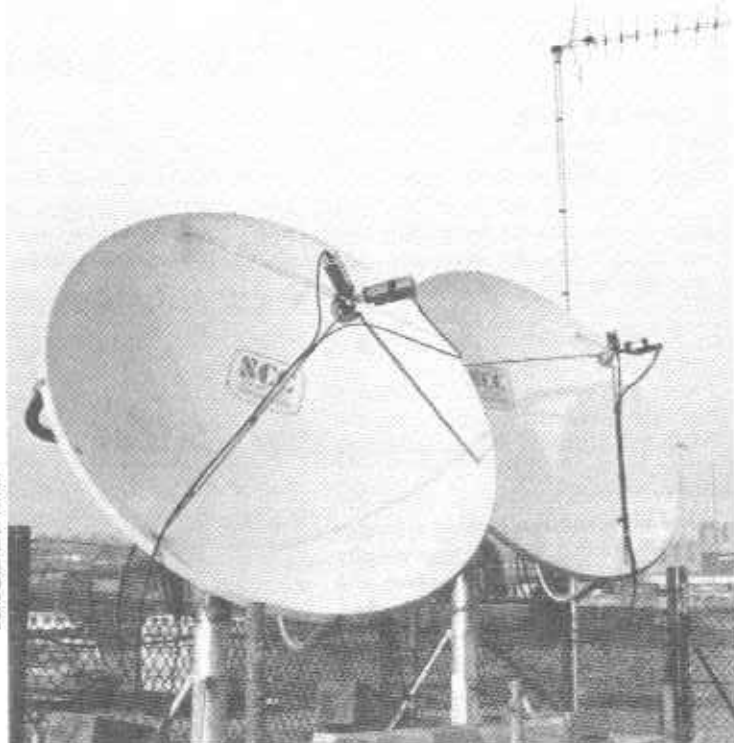
opposed to all religious schools including Moslem ones, and we are also opposed to the oppression of all women, including within the Islamic community.

Amongst Labour politicians too the divisions have been unexpected — and confused. Some, with more than half an eye to their constituency, have echoed the Iranian denunciations of Rushdie's book. Other Labour MPs on the left have called for the Blasphemy Law to be extended to all religions, with only a handful correctly demanding its total abolition. For this law is not just a quaint, anachronistic leftover from feudalism. It was used as recently as the mid 1970s against a homosexual poem about Christ in *Gay News*.

Images of women

The confusion over censorship is not confined to the Rushdie affair. Claire Short's bill against Page 3 nudes, ridiculed for the worst of reasons by most Tory and many other MPs in Parliament, received more than 5000 letters of support from women who favoured censorship. Out of that support, both financial and moral, the Campaign against Pornography was set up. The campaign claims that there are direct links between violence against women, sexual abuse of children and pornography. But it has no clear theoretical framework, and while not directly calling for censorship is ambivalent about what action should be taken.

At the same time we have the new Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC) expressing concern about the stereotyped portrayal of women on TV, using arguments developed by feminists when analysing sexist imagery and preparing to decide for us what we can watch on the new deregulated airwaves. Market forces and individual freedom reign — but not when it comes to sex. Evoking a mythical 'public disgust', sex and violence, irrevocably conjoined by Mary Whitehouse and the censors, are to be banned from our screens for our own good. However, the statistics do not support this view of public opinion. Far from being the first reason for complaint, the representation of sex on TV is rather



Soft porn from the Sky?

low down on the list, with rescheduling at the top and bias, violence, bad language and sex following in that order.¹ And when Channel 4 introduced its infamous red triangle to designate late-night films with a lot of sex in them, viewing figures doubled!

No, it's not a question of public disquiet, but rather what is thought to be good for us. And despite the evocation of feminist concerns: 'The BSC intends to crack down on commercials which reinforce sexual stereotypes and enforce a taste and decency requirement on advertisements',² the truth is that such stereotyping is not the real concern. Material dealing with controversial issues, including sexual issues, but not limited to these, will be banned. We know from the Section 28 debate that open images of lesbians and gay men are liable to be censored.

How should socialists and feminists respond to all this? Although much interesting and important analysis has been undertaken in relation to the representation of women in the media (including film, TV and advertising), the question of what should be done about it is a vexed one. And when it comes to pornography proper then the debate becomes very heated, as the session at the Women for Socialism conference proved, with the question of censorship at the heart of the debate.

Pornography

The parameters of the pornography debate are represented by Andrea Dworkin, an American radical feminist on the one hand and Angela Carter, British novelist and feminist on the other. Dworkin argues that pornography is an 'institution of male supremacy', 'propaganda for and a tool of sexual suppression of women...unbelievably powerful in its effects'.³ It was Andrea Dworkin with Catherine MacKinnon who introduced the anti-pornography ordinance in the US, at present

law only in Bellingham, Washington. The ordinance allows an individual's complaints against the display or use of pornographic material to be taken up as a matter of Civil Rights.

Carter, at the opposite end of the spectrum, argues in her book *The Sadeian Woman*: '... sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described explicitly, will form a critique of those relations'.⁴ Further, the pornographer 'may not think of himself as a friend of women; that may be the last thing on his mind. But he will always be our unconscious ally because he begins to approach some kind of emblematic truth, whereas the lackey pornographer, like the devious fellows who write love stories for women's magazines, that softest of all forms of pomography, can only do harm'.⁵

Carter is explicitly opposed to any form of censorship. She points out that hard porn exposes the ugly reality that underpins sexual relations in a capitalist society and as such is explicitly political. Soft porn on the other hand, is both more pervasive and more dangerous: far from exposing reality, it rests on the myths of our society about male and female sexuality, maintaining and reinforcing the subordinate and oppressed position of women. It is instructive in this context that soft porn will be screened on satellite TV according to Colin Shaw, Director of BSC: 'One should be less worried about that - it is difficult to argue it is corrupting,' he says in a recent interview.⁶

Soaps like *Dallas* and *The Colbys*, adverts like the recent one for Peugeot 205 are far more insidious in their influence than any pomography, the more so because we are off our guard when watching them.

The Peugeot advert is a good example of the



Taking a right of reply

Christie Thurkway

sophisticated workings of contemporary advertising. It uses consciously, over-the-top sexism - blood-red lips and nails, lipstick rising out of its holder, the car being stroked - a take-off of 70s imagery, but combined with locations and sexual references which play on women's fears and fantasies in a subtle and unexpected way. In particular the 'film noir' setting of dark alleyways and arches through which the woman approaches the red car (at this point signifying the man) links together sex/romance with danger/adventure. Our defences are lowered as we laugh at the overt sexist imagery; simultaneously we unconsciously consume the images of our oppression.

Censorship

Adverts like this, programmes like Lord Rees-Mogg's favourite *Allo, Allo*, soaps like 'Dallas' are not the target of Rees-Mogg. Nor should they be. But neither should we accept the right of the BSC to decide what is and isn't 'decent'. For the kind of cuts already undertaken in TV feature films will be the real victims of the moral climate. These cuts include sex scenes, violence (such as the whole opening sequence of *Three Days of the Condor* thus rendering the film's dramatic form incomprehensible!) and even cuts to shorten a film so

that it fits into commercial breaks and half hour slots. Anyone who saw *Under Fire* in the cinema and on TV will have noticed the political decision to cut by several minutes the ecstatic celebrations as the victorious Sandinistas entered Managua. Some films have also suffered censorship in the cinema, for example Mishima's *Ai No Corrida* or Pasolini's *Salo*. These last have suffered from over-zealous Labour councils such as Islington, Hackney and Camden who, responding to demands of their women's committees, refused certification to such films.

We cannot allow the bourgeois state, in whatever form, to decide for us what we can and cannot write, read and view. Equally, oppressed groups have the right to express their opposition to texts, images etc, but not to call for the banning or censorship of materials, (let alone the murder of the author, publisher and booksellers) even when these are offensive to one or another group. The history of censorship is the history of repression. In Nazi Germany the burning of books and the suppression of avant-garde art went hand in hand with the imprisonment and murder of lesbians and gay men, Communists and Jews. We must stand firm against it - all of it.

Notes

- ¹ Figures of complaints from week ending October 2 1988, show scheduling 323, bias 118, violence 21, bad language 16, sex 12. (Figures from 'Sex on TV', Christopher Dunkley, *Time Out*, 26/10/88-2/11/88.)
- ² 'BSC Moves to Curb TV Ad Violence' by Jo Vale, *Campaign* 24/2/89.
- ³ Elizabeth Wilson, 'Interview with Andrea Dworkin', *Feminist Review* 11, June 1982.
- ⁴ Angela Carter *The Sadeian Women* 1979.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Colin Shaw, Director of BSC, *Campaign* 24/2/89.

Why women need collective bargaining

Collective bargaining has been, and still is, a cornerstone of trade union policy. It is correctly seen as a way that working people can exert their strength and power against the bosses. During the high tide of militancy that swept through the early and mid seventies, collective bargaining was central to winning wage increases and better conditions, especially in the manufacturing industries.

However, most of the benefits that were won applied more to some sections of the workforce than to others. In general, women missed out. Neither the union bureaucracies, nor the average trade union militant gave much thought to what they could wring from employers that

would specifically benefit women. But worse, the unions failed to use the collective bargaining process to challenge the manifold discriminatory practices which operate against 44% of the working population.

14 years on from the Equal Pay Act (EPA), women are paid on average 28% less than men. In engineering, before the act, women's wages were 72% of the skilled male rate and 8% below the unskilled male rate. The EPA forced employers to begin to level up women's rates. But before very long this began to slip. In 1976-8, the craft rate rose 36%, while the lowest rate, which needless to say is women's rate, rose by only 28%. As a result, the old differentials were restored.

In the Post Office, where delivery rounds are allocated on the basis of seniority, the



Who is in charge? In the workplace some are more equal than others

John Harris/WFL

employers have persisted with discriminatory practices to dodge the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA). Until the SDA, women postal workers had been on temporary contracts. Once the law changed, they became permanent, but their seniority was only calculated from this time, thus limiting their access to better rounds.

Time and again, job evaluation is loaded against women workers, as a 1985 survey of London local authority manual workers shows. Job segregation was marked, and additional payments much more common in 'male' jobs - ie those where more than 80% of the workforce was male. While full time home helps and care assistants might get £3-8 above the basic rate, ventilation fitters were getting an additional payment of £113.

It is inevitably women who bear the burden of responsibility for children. One survey shows, that in families with children under 4, 46% of women, as against 3.6% of men, were not in the workforce. 69% of these working mothers worked less than 30 hours per week, but 78% of the fathers worked 40 hours or more. This interruption of her working life places a woman at a real disadvantage. She loses out on seniority, in many cases she returns to a lower graded job than before, her promotion prospects are damaged and often she encounters age bar limitations when she re-enters the workforce. Agreements based on 'last in, first out' if redundancies occur, particularly discriminate against women who have had an interrupted working career.

Women make up the majority of part-time workers. In 1987, 4.2 million women were employed part time and the number is growing. Discrimination against part-timers is rife, and re-inforced by legislation. In jobs like retailing, part-timers work unsocial hours - weekends and evenings - but rarely get the extra allowances such work carries for full-time staff. If they work less than 16 hours, they are not covered by employment legislation and therefore can be sacked at any time without recourse, do not qualify for maternity leave. Employers have a vested interest in making sure workers are on less than 16 hours.

The influx of women into the workforce is guaranteed to continue and today's total of 44% women will soon pass 50%. In the next ten years, a shortage of school leavers means that two thirds of the entrants to white collar jobs will be female. This exactly squares with the plans of Thatcherism, which contrary to popular belief does not want to drive women back into the home. Rather they want an ill-paid, unprotected, non-unionised labour force and see women as a vital component of this. The government's announcement that protective legislation for women and young people is to be ended is not intended to open up more jobs for women in hitherto 'male preserves' but to maximise employers' profits at the expense of health and safety.



Women at Fords won equal pay through strike action, not legislation

This 'ideal' is personified in a Bridgewater canning factory, described by Glen Burrows in the *Solidarity Network* magazine. She writes 'A thousand women work there, on four shifts, as casual part-time labour. The work is low paid and repetitive, with little regard for health and safety... The small number of full time factory workers are all male. In my factory, working class experience and exploitation under capitalism, far from disappearing, is being recreated and intensified'.

As the number of women entering the workforce increases, so does the need for child care. The government is trying to shift the responsibility in this field from the public sector back onto the individual. Since 1945 nursery places under the management of local authorities have declined from 63,000 to 28,000 and Tory policies mean that further cuts are on the way. Even on the rare occasions where workplace nurseries have been set up, the Tories have attacked these by treating them as if they were a 'perk' - taxing them higher than company cars. Nursery provision in both public and private sector is available for less than 2% of children under four. This has encouraged the growth of a large unregistered child-minding industry, where women are paid even less than the mothers of those they care for.

Issues facing working women such as equal pay, non-discriminatory job evaluation, equal seniority and training opportunities that take account of childcare, full rights for part-timers and the extension of state and workplace nurseries are, or should be, the concern of the whole trade union movement.

However, while the employers and the Tories have a coherent strategy for women workers, the trade union bureaucracies have either ignored women's needs or considered them of secondary importance. Unfortunately, many militant male trade unionists share this blinkered attitude and have rarely taken up the fight against discriminatory practices.

With the drastic decline of manufacturing industry and the spread of unemployment, the

membership of many unions has taken a dive. As more and more women enter the workforce, recruiting them into unions and encouraging them to become active becomes vital. Some unions have belatedly begun to adopt progressive policies towards women as a result of this pressure.

But the bureaucracy hopes to solve the problems of women workers by negotiation and better legislation; seeing their role as mediators between workers and the employers and state. As sex discrimination boosts profits and divides the workforce, thus weakening trade unionism, neither employers nor the Tories have much enthusiasm about challenging it. Only organised struggle can win women their rights at work and lead to non-discriminatory collective agreements and improved legislation.

Struggle, however, is not high on the agenda for the bureaucrats who staff the unions. They have no stomach for challenging the Tories, and their patronising attitude to their women members means they have no confidence they can organise themselves. But, over the years, women have shown remarkable tenacity fighting for their rights: in the Miners' strike, in defence of the NHS, on the picket line at Grunwick's and in the 15-year long struggle which culminated in strike action at Fords, when the women machinists won their equal pay claim.

If the union bureaucracies had shown the same resoluteness and determination as women workers over the years, we would certainly have had the EPA on the statute book before 1970-82 years after the policy was adopted by the TUC! So whilst we must continuously put pressure on the union leadership, demanding that they take up women's rights at work, and insisting that more women are made full time officers in the unions, we must be aware that, unless we build a strong movement at the base, very little will be achieved.

The main initiative will come from women workers themselves. We need to fight to establish women's caucuses in the workplaces, union branches and on district councils and committees. A network of such bodies in all the unions is desperately needed with regular conferences where women trade unionists can meet and discuss how to campaign for equality at work.

Of course women cannot win the struggle alone. We have to win allies amongst male trade unionists. This means having out the argument that sex discrimination may benefit men in the immediate sense but that its long term effects will be disastrous for the organised labour movement. To recognise that women have special rights and special needs, and to incorporate these into the unions' programmes, is not divisive as some, even on the hard left, claim. In fact it is the only way to unify all the workforce.

Janet Knight

Soviet new thinking on South Africa spells major changes

Thatcher's visit to Southern Africa at the beginning of April marks a new stage in Britain's drive to establish a Zimbabwe-style, Lancaster House agreement in South Africa. The British government's new ally in this project is the Soviet Union, in a further expression of Gorbachev's 'new thinking'. The British left has a special responsibility to understand these new developments and to act accordingly.

Elections in Namibia

The new international developments follow the Cuban, South African and Angolan agreement on Namibia. Cuban troops have withdrawn from Angola, and United Nations forces are superintending the withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia. The South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) have to win 75% of the vote in the forthcoming elections to be recognised as the legitimate government of Namibia.

Not only has this constitutional barrier been placed in front of SWAPO, but the conditions under which the elections are being held are stacked against the liberation forces. Under the terms of the agreement South Africa announced that the notorious Koevoet counter-insurgency unit was being disbanded. In fact all that has happened is that the unit have been told to remove their badges and to continue their operations against SWAPO.

It is precisely for this type of reason that SWAPO protested against the virtual halving of the size of the UN peace-keeping force. The reduction in size of the unit means that the UN can claim it is unaware of such operations.

South Africa is also illegally maintaining its control over Walvis Bay, the chief outlet for Namibian uranium and other important mineral products. SWAPO will clearly be faced with continuing breaches of the Namibian people's sovereignty and destabilisation, whatever the results of the elections.

There are other problems facing a post independence Namibia, which are not reducible to external interference. Multinationals such as Rio Tinto Zinc and De Beers are keen to see a smooth transition without challenge to their interests. To this end they have pursued protracted negotiations with SWAPO.

Lessons of Zimbabwe

The lessons of Zimbabwe's transition to independence are important here. The

Namibian working class are not yet in a situation to expropriate and expel the multinationals. One of the heritages of colonialism is that they lack the administrators, technicians, and skilled workers vital to the success of a post independence economy.

However they have started to develop strong independent worker organisation through the National Union of Namibian Workers and its links with COSATU unions in South Africa. The basis for workers' control of the economy and a drive for the expropriation of the monopolies can be developed from these beginnings. But this is dependent on the continued independence of the unions. In Zimbabwe, one of the first casualties of the Mugabe government was the unions and government suppression of workers' activity.

But in turn the possibility of a progressive development within Namibia rests centrally on regional developments as a whole.

The role of the Soviet Union in the developments has now become crucial. While not directly involved in the Angola-Namibia agreement Soviet diplomacy endorsed both the reduction of the UN peace-keeping force, a move bitterly fought by SWAPO, and the removal of ANC bases from Angola.



COSATU: a force to be reckoned with

Soviet thinking on Southern Africa

Soviet thinking on the question of South Africa has also evolved. Following Oliver Tambo's March visit to Moscow, a statement issued by Tass, the government press agency, called for a tightening of sanctions against South Africa and reaffirmed its support for the ANC. Less publicly, the Soviet defence ministry will continue its supply of military aid to umkhonto we Sizwe.

But at a press conference where Oliver Tambo called for an intensification of the armed struggle, he was directly contradicted by Yuri Yukalov, the head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's South Africa department, who said:

'We would prefer a political settlement and want apartheid to be dealt with by political means. Any solution through military means will be short-lived. We do not want to emphasize the need to enlarge the armed struggle.

South Africa should not be destroyed. There are other means such as trade and economic sanctions. These are very useful tools. It doesn't mean that the South African regime should be talked to using the language of threats and by banging one's fist on the table.'

This statement was backed up by Anatoly Gromyko, the head of the Africa Institute in Moscow. Gromyko has been participating in talks between Soviet and South African representatives in London, chaired by Sir John Killick, a former British envoy to Moscow.

'There would have to be a programme of reforms submitted to nationwide discussion at which all sections of society would be represented. This will mean sitting down at negotiations for two, three or however many years'.

The day before, in a rather more cynical vein, official Soviet Foreign minister, Gennady Gerasimov, was asked about Soviet support for the armed struggle in South Africa. 'What armed struggle?', he



Botha deposed, but little will change

retorted, 'How can you support an armed struggle which doesn't exist?'

In truth the removal of the ANC bases from Angola now means that any military capacity the ANC has is now some hundreds of miles from the borders of South Africa.

The response of the South African Communist Party to Soviet 'new thinking' has been unsympathetic. *African Communist* has carried extracts from speeches by Castro attacking the Soviet leadership's new line and has stayed uncharacteristically silent in its own editorial comment on 'perestroika'

Manoeuvres by apartheid

But the ANC does not only face a weakening on the military front. Politically too there is a challenge to be faced from the apartheid regime. The constitutional crisis over Botha's refusal to relinquish the presidency, has only temporarily interrupted the political manoeuvres being prepared by the National Party.

De Klerk has already conducted discussions with various collaborationist leaders like the Rev. Allan Hendrickse, leader of the Labour Party, and Chief Buthelezi, the Zulu leader.

The negotiations with Buthelezi are of particular importance. The KwaZulu leader wants to see the introduction of the power-sharing elections in Natal, leading to the dramatic extension of his electoral base in the country. De Klerk's price for this is the incorporation of Buthelezi into the governmental National Council, which until now he has boycotted until Mandela and other political prisoners have been released and the ANC legalised.

The legitimisation of the Natal proposal with London and Washington are vital to both the government and Buthelezi, and are part of Thatcher's evidence that her approach is better than that of sanctions.

ANC discusses problems

The problems flowing from the Namibia accords were the subject of an important meeting of the ANC held in Norway at the end of March. The organisation faces a crisis of perspective.

From the uprising of 1984-85 the ANC developed a strategy of 'ungovernability', according to which the ANC would develop a 'dual power' based on the townships. The regime would be forced to the negotiating table and elections held which would lead to the formation of an ANC government within the decade.

This strategy underestimated the formidable political and repressive reserves still enjoyed by



Andrew Moore/Reflex

Solidarity with Namibian struggle requires higher priority from the British left

Botha's government. The weight of repression meant that the broad front formed to execute this strategy, the United Democratic Front, has collapsed.

Trade union unity

The only nationally based organs of resistance still intact are those of the trade unions. The ANC, which was initially hostile to the moves which led to the formation of COSATU, has tried to impose its hegemony on the new trade union confederation. Until the last congress of COSATU this appeared to be successful. Little or no response was forthcoming from the ranks of unions like NUMSA to the challenge of those who wished to impose the programmatic framework of the ANC on the movement.

However the decision of that congress to hold a broad conference of all those against the apartheid regime, as against the position of the 'Charterist' forces which was that the gathering should be limited to those who supported the ANC's Freedom Charter, marked a reversal of the trend.

The conference itself was banned by the regime. But since then the terrain of the debate has shifted onto that of trade union unity and in particular the unity of COSATU with NACTU, the other independent trade union federation.

The unity of the two federations would great-

ly strengthen the development of the workers movement in South Africa. Such unity would have to be a genuine recombination, rather than the simple ultimatum in which such a move has been posed by COSATU leaders up until now. Moves towards unity have already developed apace between individual unions and through rank and file initiatives.

Hunger strike victory

However even if such unity is established the prospect facing the liberation movement at the present time is one of setback. In this context the victory won by the hunger strikers in forcing the promise of release from the government marks a significant victory in an otherwise bleak landscape.

Trials such as the Upington 25 and that of Moses Mayekiso (see box) still consign scores of militants to the gallows or massive jail sentences.

In addition the disgracing of Winnie Mandela through the activities of her bodyguard, has given the regime a breathing space in relation to the massive international campaign for the release of her husband. Ironically the Botha crisis probably blocked the release of Mandela when the government saw an opportunity to release him with the minimum political impact thanks to the Stompie Mokhetse murder.

The period of change in Southern Africa offers the opportunity for the left to start to put forward a constructive alternative within the anti-apartheid movement in Britain. Meetings of left activists in AA have already started to establish a provisional agenda for such an alternative based on: support for all those fighting against the apartheid regime; labour movement action to block collaboration with apartheid; linking up with the black community and fighting for a democratic anti-apartheid movement.

Building such a solidarity movement in this country should be the left's response to the project of our own imperialists in imposing a solution on the people of South Africa.

Steve Roberts

Defend the Alexandra Five

Khola Mayekiso, NUMSA activist and partner of South African trade union leader, Moses Mayekiso, has just finished touring Britain on a TUC sponsored speaking tour to raise support for the *Alexandra Five*.

The five were recently released on bail after spending 2 years in detention as a result of massive international campaigns in the labour movement, but still face possible life sentences if they are found guilty at the end of their trial which has already been going on for over a year. They face charges of treason, sedition

and subversion for supposedly being part of an 'unlawful attempt to coerce, usurp or endanger the authority of the state'.

Khola was accompanied by Bongani Bkhuno, NUMSA member and chair of the national shop stewards council of the BTR Dunlop Group. Bongani was recently unfairly dismissed and his union prohibited by the courts from taking strike action in his support.

It is vital that we redouble all efforts to support these comrades.



Plus Cavendish/Reflex

Global restructuring

The shape of things to come?

In recent years there has been much discussion on the left of the 'new international division of labour', the re-ordering of the world economy as a result of the prolonged capitalist crisis since the 1970s. In particular this discussion has centred on the relative economic decline of the United States, and the growth of 'newly industrialised' countries in the third world. Here PHIL HEARSE argues that third world industrialisation is often overestimated, and the main feature of the coming period will be a vicious triangular battle for economic dominance between the USA, Europe and Japan.

It is now widely recognised by Marxists that capitalism goes through long periods of expansion and recession, as well as conjunctural booms and slumps, and that world capitalism has been in the grip of a long period of recession since the late 1960s/early 1970s.

The notion of 'long waves in capitalism', first systematised by the Russian economist Kondratieff, has been most developed in the last two decades by Ernest Mandel. His argument, put forward as long ago as 1964, that the long post-war capitalist boom would be followed by a long period characterised by 'an undertone of

recession', while highly controversial at the time, is now hardly disputed. Beginning at the end of the 1960s, but most dramatically in the world slump of 1973-5, world capitalism has since been in continual crisis.¹

Quite rightly, Marxists have concentrated their attention on the effects of this crisis on the living standards of the working class (in both the advanced and the dependent countries) and on the drive towards the austerity and militarisation offensive which came in the wake of the crisis, and the political consequences for the workers' anti-capitalist struggle.

But by putting these matters at the forefront of their attention, revolutionary socialists (unlike some Mar-

xist academics) have tended to neglect a further crucial aspect of the crisis: *each capitalist crisis necessarily leads to increased rivalry between the major imperialist powers — and a new international division of labour, a new carving up of economic spheres of influence, between the major capitalist powers.*

Today this expresses itself, within the framework of the increasingly shaky 'Western alliance' in a bitter three-cornered fight for economic and political dominance between the United States, Japan, and the European imperialist countries, of which West Germany (FRG) is easily the most economically powerful.

This economic restructuring inter-

"each capitalist crisis necessarily leads to increased rivalry between the major imperialist powers"

sects with the emergence of a series of semi-industrialised dependent countries in the 'third world' which can no longer be simply described as 'semi-colonial'; the international debt crisis which hits the nations of Latin America particularly cruelly; and the spectacular emergence of some of the countries of the 'Pacific rim' - Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan - as major centres of industrial production. But this three cornered fight between the three major imperialist centres is now 'overdetermined' by a new factor - Gorbachev and perestroika in the Soviet Union and the possibility of a new period of international 'peaceful coexistence' which could open up massive new markets in the post-capitalist states over which the Europe, Japan and the US will bitterly fight.

What is at stake here is the whole configuration of world economic and political reality. Our intention here is simply to try to describe some of the elements of this changing situation, which are crucially important for Marxists in analysing what sort of political approach they should adopt in Britain to phenomena as diverse as the 1992 single European market, Gorbachev and the international debt crisis.

The decline of US hegemony - and its limits

World War 2 devastated much of Europe and Japan, and finally completed the process of Britain's decline as the major imperialist power. With the Soviet Union in economic chaos, the United States emerged in 1945 as the uncontested most powerful economic and political state, leader of the 'free world' in every sense. But the reconstruction of the Japanese and

German economies in the 1950s and '60s, made possible by factors including the Marshall Plan, cheap labour in countries where the labour movement had been destroyed or defeated, and the 'third technological revolution', began to erode American pre-eminence.

The US was hit particularly hard by the inflation caused by the Vietnam war, leading to the decline of the dollar and the end of the US's pre-eminent economic position. By the time of the onset of the world recession in the 1970s the US, by a whole series of economic indicators - particularly that of labour productivity - was losing its economic dominance to West Germany and Japan (see table 1).

But the major contradiction, which conditions much of the triangular conflict between the major imperialist centres, is that while the US has lost much of its economic dominance, it remains overwhelmingly the world's leading military power - which makes it a vital component of most major political/military conflicts worldwide. And the dollar, despite the ending of the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement which included automatic convertibility² is still the world's major trading currency, in which debts between nations and major corporations are settled. Moreover, even if the US economy is not the most productive, measured in labour productivity, it is still by far the largest, with easily the largest internal market.

Corporate Slogan for 1988

TRY

視野を世界に果敢に行動

Think Globally. Act Courageously.

Pensar Globalmente. Actuar con Audacia.

心懷世界 勇於實踐

Philip Gordon/FedEx

Successive Presidents Nixon, Carter and Reagan have all tried to utilise a combination of dollar/financial leadership, and military leadership of the West to retain US dominance against the Japanese and European challenge. 'Star Wars', the aggression against Libya and Nicaragua, and the US financial and trade deficits are all examples of this, as we shall see.

Markets and 'large economic zones'

The term 'multinational corporation' is often confusing when discussing the real economic warfare between the major capitalist states. The term 'transnational corporation' is much more accurate because when we examine any of the major corporations which operate on a world scale, they are nearly all owned by the capitalist class in one imperialist country: IBM and Ford are American; Hoffman-Roche and Nestle are Swiss; ICI is British, and so on. Whereas there may be examples of joint ventures between these corporations, their national sovereignty and ownership is, in general, not in doubt - except in the case of international

"...while the US has lost much of its economic dominance, it remains overwhelmingly the world's leading military power and the dollar is still the world's major trading currency..."

Table 1: The Global Distribution of Industrial Production

Country or Grouping	1870	1896		1926		1938	1948	1966	1973	1979	1984
		-1900	1913	-1929							
United Kingdom	32.0%	20.0	14.0	9.0	10.2	6.7	4.8	3.8	3.4	3.0	
Euro Econ. Community	-	-	-	-	27.5	15.4	18.8	17.2	15.5	14.1	
France	10.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.7	5.4	5.3	5.0	4.8	4.4	
Germany	13.0	17.0	14.0	12.0	12.3	4.6	8.1	7.4	6.4	5.8	
Rest of EEC	-	-	-	-	7.5	5.3	5.4	4.8	4.3	3.9	
United States	23.0	30.0	36.0	42.0	28.1	44.4	35.2	29.5	28.3	28.4	
Japan	-	1.0	1.0	3.0	5.7	1.6	5.3	7.8	7.4	8.2	
Other Advanced Econs	15.0	17.0	20.0	19.0	10.9	9.4	7.1	8.2	7.3	7.3	
Centrally Planned Econs	-	-	-	-	7.2	8.4	16.7	19.5	23.5	25.4	
USSR	4.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.9	6.3	11.1	12.4	14.2	14.7	
Other CPEs	-	-	-	-	2.3	2.2	5.6	7.1	9.3	10.7	
Less Developed Econs	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	10.4	14.0	12.2	14.0	14.6	13.9	
European NICs	-	-	-	-	2.9	1.9	2.1	2.8	3.0	2.9	
Latin America	-	-	-	-	2.2	4.3	4.1	6.7	6.7	6.3	
L Amer. NICs	-	-	-	-	1.3	2.9	3.2	3.6	4.2	4.3	
Other Asia	-	-	-	-	2.7	2.5	3.1	2.8	3.1	2.9	
Other Asia NICs	-	-	-	-	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.7	1.3	1.3	
Other LDCs	-	-	-	-	2.5	5.3	2.9	1.7	1.7	1.8	

Source: *The Global Economy* David M Gordon NLR 168.

Note the decline of US production and stagnation of growth of 'NICs' - Newly Industrialised Countries.

takeover bids, which only proves the point. We are a long way off a situation where the transnational corporations have divided up the world into spheres of uncontested dominance, but there is a real trend in that direction, especially in the countries which are experiencing a limited, dependent, industrialisation.

For example, in Asia Japanese corporations are waging an all-out war against US companies: in Thailand you will hardly see anything but Japanese cars – not a Ford or Chrysler in sight – a reversal of the situation 20 years ago. But if the world economic crisis worsens over a long period, then national economic protectionism, and a fight to construct 'large economic zones' of influence will become an irreversible trend. One of the first signs of this fight over the new international division of labour is the growth of economic protectionism of home markets.

Protectionism in Japan, through a complex system of import licenses and spurious technical specifications, makes it very difficult for European and American companies to compete in the Japanese national market. There is a growing trend to protectionism in the United States, many echoes of which were expressed in the 1988 presidential election campaign, and there is not the slightest doubt that a 'single European market' in 1992, will have a dynamic towards a 'fortress Europe' – on an economic level at least. The three large imperialist centres, guarding their own internal markets, will then fight for dominance over larger economic zones.

The whole project of the 'single European market' is about constructing a political-economic entity which can compete with Japan and the USA. No one doubts that it will be a 'protected' market, which is why Japan especially is so concerned to beef-up its productive capacity within the boundaries of the EEC, which its products produced in Japan and in other Asian nations will have difficulty penetrating. Equally, more and more European corporations are realising that to compete on a world

stage after 1992 they need a bigger financial and productive base than they currently have. The logic is the merging and integration of the bigger European countries into real 'multinational' conglomerates, which is why firms like GEC, Siemens and Phillips are all looking for new European partners.

Ultimately such industrial integration supposes financial and even political integration – a single Western European state, no less. This was acutely recognised by the then US Secretary of State Dean Rusk when he said in 1969: 'The problem with Europe playing an economic role commensurate with its production capacity is that its political units are too small' (!). There lies the problem, which has been obvious for 25 years and more. A single West European state would be either German-dominated, or dominated by a German-French axis. It is this which scares the life out of Mrs Thatcher and Lord Young and why they want to hang on to the 'special relationship' with the USA.

During the 1970s an august international body called the 'Trilateral Commission', consisting mainly of ex-government ministers and liberal academics from the advanced countries, but with some encouragement from the Carter administration, was set up to discuss the possibility of joint management of world economic affairs by Europe, Japan and the US. It was an unofficial body, which hoped that this joint management would then aid the economic development of the third world. World economic reality intervened, and 'trilateralism' collapsed as an influential current in world bourgeois politics. It has been replaced by triangular economic warfare between the three major centres of the advanced capitalist world.

The trend to construct large economic zones, and the move towards European capitalist integration, has been paralleled by an attempt by the Japanese-led ASEAN countries to deepen their co-ordination and co-operation. Interestingly, Australia has expressed a strong desire to become

part of these discussions. A further example of the gearing-up for the triangular inter-imperialist fight is the way the United States has forced Canada to accept a 'free-trade zone', in effect a single market dominated by the US trusts.

The three 'large economic zones' would could thus emerge would be a US-Canada axis with predominant influence on a reluctant Latin America; a West European axis; and a Japanese-led Asian axis, incorporating the four Asian 'newly industrialising countries'. Each would then fight for influence and markets in the rest of the world.

The relocation of production

The new international division of labour in the 1970s involved a restless quest by the large economic corporations to find new markets, and new centres of cheap production. Of course, one of the main elements here was the price of labour (another striking confirmation of the labour theory of value, but leave that aside). Some basic comparisons will show what is involved. While the Japanese economy is at least twice the size of the British – it is a much richer country – labour is often cheaper. Labour in Italy costs three times that in Hong Kong, which in turn is twice as expensive as that in Thailand. The trend therefore to try to relocate production to countries where labour is plentiful and cheap is obvious. The constraint is the lack of fixed plant and capital in those countries. In fact, of course the majority of foreign investment by transnational corporations is in other developed countries, not in the semi-colonial or semi-industrialised countries.

But the quest for cheap sites of production led to a well-known result. In several countries of the third world, transnational corporations have constructed assembly plants for components made in the advanced countries, either for re-export to the imperialist countries or for local sale (The example of all those products with Japanese names like Toshiba and

"...US Secretary of State Dean Rusk said in 1969: 'The problem with Europe playing an economic role commensurate with its production capacity is that its political units are too small.'"

Table 2: The Composition of Global Production

Year(s)	DMEs (-Japan)	Japan & CPEs	LDCs
1870	93.0%	4.0%	3.0%
1896-1900	91.0	6.0	3.0
1913	91.0	6.0	3.0
1926-1929	89.0	7.0	3.0
1938	76.7	12.9	10.4
1948	76.0	10.0	14.0
1966	65.8	22.0	12.2
1973	58.7	27.3	14.0
1979	54.5	30.9	14.6
1984	52.8	33.6	13.9

Based on numbers and sources from Table 1.

Table 3: Developing Countries' Share of Manufacturing Value-Added

Year	Total LDCs		NICs		Other LDCs	
	Share	ann.%	Share	ann.%	Share	ann.%
1938	10.4%		4.4		6.0	
1948	14.0	+3.5	4.9	+1.1	9.1	+5.2
1966	12.2	-0.7	5.9	+1.1	6.3	-1.7
1973	14.0	+2.1	7.1	+2.9	6.9	+1.4
1979	14.6	+0.7	8.5	+3.3	6.1	-1.9
1984	13.9	-1.0	8.4	-0.2	5.5	-2.0

Based on numbers and sources from Table 1.
Tables 2 & 3 show the stagnation of 'third world' production.
LDC = less developed country
CPE = centrally planned economy

"The number of generally-accepted newly industrialising countries comes down to about six – Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Mexico and Brazil."

"...the US middle classes – numerically vast compared with any other nation were the political base of Reaganism, unattracted by even the mildest references by the Democrats to social welfarism."

Saisho made in Singapore and Taiwan is an obvious case in point). In very schematic and simplified terms, this is an important part of the basis of the process of *dependent industrialisation* in a number of countries – a very limited number – which have partially escaped the fate of most semi-colonial countries as suppliers of raw materials and importers of manufactures made in the advanced countries. This is not to deny that there has been a certain 'autonomous' development in some of these countries, a result of the growth of world trade, a rise in the price of oil in the 1970s, and the spillover from the post-war boom. But in manufacturing industry, the role of the transnational corporation investment has been decisive.

Without doubt this phenomenon has led to an increase in the size of the proletariat in these countries, an increase in the urban population and a decline in the peasantry. It has not however freed these countries from *dependence*, economic and political, on the advanced imperialist centres. It will not prevent them from being the targets for incorporation into the zones of influence of the three major imperialist centres. But this limited dependent industrialisation does mean that it is no longer simply possible to describe some of the so-called 'third world' countries as 'semi-colonial'.³

Above all, it is important not to overstate the extent of third world industrialisation. Nigel Harris has been imprudent enough to title a book *The End of the Third World*⁴, as if global industrialisation was at hand. But even Alain Lipietz,⁵ a severe critic of those who underestimate industrialisation of the 'periphery' (see his book *Miracles and Mirages*, Verso) lists a total of only eleven 'newly industrialising countries' – and his eleven include Greece, Portugal, Spain, Israel and Yugoslavia – countries not normally associated with the 'third world'. The number of generally-accepted newly industrialising countries comes down to about six – Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Mexico and Brazil. The latter two, together with Argentina (long a semi-industrialised country⁶) are in the thrall of debt bondage and unlikely to deepen their industrialisation process significantly in the foreseeable future. Korea also has a debt problem and growth is slowing.

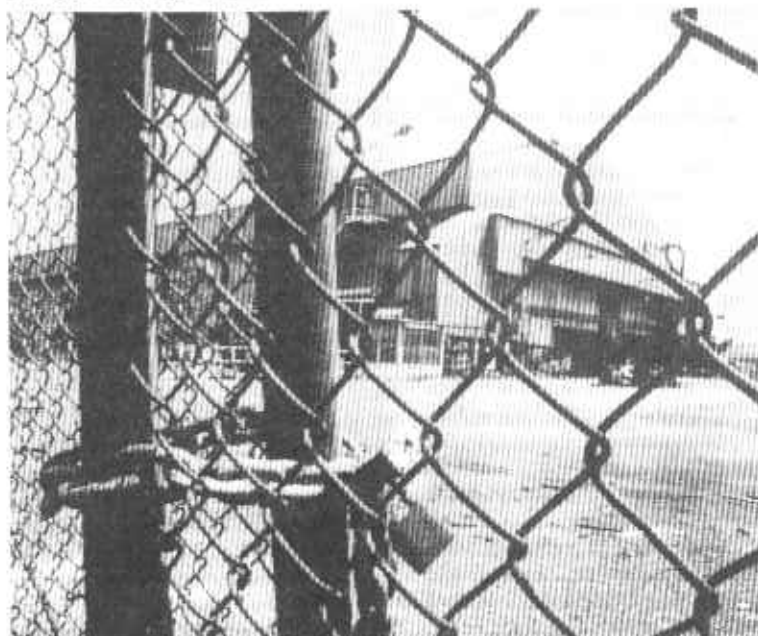
The progress of third world industrialisation will depend primarily on whether the long period of recession in the world economy is replaced by a new expansion such as occurred in the 1950s and 60s. This depends on huge world-historic political and economic developments, including big defeats for the international work-

ing class, which are a long-way off and very far from being certain.

The US fights back

If US economic hegemony has declined, the American ruling class – immensely rich and powerful – is not about to surrender. We have already made the point about the strength of the US internal market, and indeed within the overall process of relative economic decline, there are sectors of the US economy which have ex-

many socialists were still talking about 'Reaganomics' being identical to the deflationary phase of Thatcherism in the early 1980s, in fact in some ways it became the complete reverse. The US launched what has been described as 'military Keynesianism' – a vast increase in defence expenditure – by printing dollars, and sucking in investment capital from overseas. As has been convincingly demonstrated by Mike



Austerity faces workers in the USA - the belly of the beast

panded – especially those in the South West sunbelt (where the labour movement is weaker, and where the bourgeoisie is more concerned about Asian markets than is its east coast counterpart). This sector of the US bourgeoisie tends to be more isolationist and less concerned about the alliance with Western Europe.

On the economic front, the US has ruthlessly used the trade and budget deficit to suck in capital from Japan and Europe, and by effectively devaluing the dollar, has lessened the wealth of all international corporations and financial institutions which hold the bulk of their capital in dollars – still, as we have mentioned, the world's major trading currency. This has had a contradictory effect on the rest of the Western capitalist world in the early and mid-1980s; whereas the budget deficit has reflationed the US and thus world economy and boosted world trade, it has at least temporarily strengthened the position of the US within this reflation – which is, as everyone now agrees, going into reverse.

The precise mechanisms of the US economic revival were spectacularly innovative, and had immense effects inside the United States itself. While

Davis⁸, this had numerous reflationary spin-offs throughout the US economy, and created a more economic space for the US middle classes – numerically vast compared with any other nation. These affluent millions were the political base of Reaganism, unattracted by even the mildest references by the Democrats to social welfarism. But of course increased wealth for the US middle classes was matched by lay-offs, 'give backs' and austerity for sections of the working class, and the massive growth of poverty and a homeless 'underclass'.

Despite the consumptionist buoyancy of the US economy, it was based – in the end – on borrowing or printing money, and the expansion of service industries, especially financial services, rather than any real advances in labour productivity and basic industrialisation vis-a-vis Europe and Japan. Only through the burgeoning defence industry did the US manage to keep its technological edge in computers and electronics, an advantage persistently challenged by Japan.

The most ruthless US lightbulb has been on the political and military front. The early 1980s missiles and Star Wars offensive forced the West

Europeans to concede political and technological superiority to the US, and for good measure disrupted any European political openings towards the USSR, which would have had strong trade spin offs. The anti-Libya offensive, including the bombing of Tripoli, was – among other things – about asserting US political leadership, disrupting European trade and diplomatic links in the Middle East, and dragging the West Europeans behind US political objectives. The same considerations are involved in the ultra hypocritical US furore about the Libyan chemical factory (from the world's leading manufacturer of chemical weapons!), which neatly stole a march at the international conference on chemical warfare and put the West Germans on the defensive about their role in the Libyan factory.

Military clout counts for an immense amount in world politics. The issue of *who* is going to supply countries like Saudi Arabia with the newest military equipment (like F-16 fighters) determines, in part, who is going to be their political ally and where they bank their petro-dollars. Since World War 2 Japan has not counted for much in the military field, an immense handicap in the economic struggle with the USA, and none of the individual European countries can contest the immense US defense industry (which is why there is such pressure for an integrated European defence industry).

Enter perestroika

Gorbachev's new foreign policy – that of detente and peaceful coexistence – is beginning to change the ball game in the triangular conflict between the major imperialist powers.

The response of the Bush government team to the Soviet proposals on joint political management of conflict, and major aid and trade, will be one of the major determining factors in how the US-Europe-Japan battle pans out.

There is as yet no firm evidence that the US intends to lessen its military (and thus economic) pressure on the Soviet Union. Star Wars has not been abandoned; Gorbachev's proposals for a mutual demilitarisation of the Pacific met with a cool response; and if the US is talking about troop reductions in Europe, it is not primarily in response to Soviet unilateral military reductions, but because the US wants to put more of the cost of the military budget in Europe onto its NATO allies, and believes that it can replace troops with its huge new array of ultra-sophisticated and terrifyingly destructive 'smart' conventional weapons.

All that being said, Gorbachev's detente offensive does present the US with a tremendous foreign policy and international trade dilemma. Last autumn a West German government and trade delegation – led by Chancellor Kohl but including dozens of leading business executives – visited Moscow, to howls of protest from the US government (and Margaret Thatcher). The reason is obvious: the USSR



Gorbachev meets the people in Siberia: can he deliver his economic reforms? And what will they cost the workers?

alone is a market of 280 million people. Add in the rest of eastern Europe, and this is an immense potential opening for world capitalism. None of the major imperialist powers want to see a real economic strengthening of the USSR; but of course, business is business, especially if it can be done at the expense of your rivals!

Reagan's summit with Gorbachev in Moscow, which decided nothing of political importance, was an indication of a growing realisation in US government circles that if Europe (and perhaps now Japan) are going for a major programme of aid and trade with the Soviet Union, the US cannot afford to be left out. In a sense, this is the central foreign policy dilemma facing the Bush administration. Will it make a major turn towards detente and trade with the Soviet Union? Has it the military and political clout to prevent the other Western powers from going ahead anyway? And if the US does go for detente and economic co-operation, what more political concessions can it force out of the Soviets?

It is important to realise that there is an important debate inside the United States political elite and foreign policy establishment over Gorbachev and perestroika. The options are not so simple as a divide between those who want to do business with Gorbachev and those who want to keep up the cold war. Before going all-out to become the main imperialist aid-and-trade partner of the USSR, the issue of whether Gorbachev will last, and whether he can deliver economic reforms which will open up major markets has to be settled. It is quite

"...the USSR alone is a market of 280 million people. Add in the rest of eastern Europe, and this is an immense potential opening for world capitalism."



His name in lights in Times Square: but the US wants more concessions from Gorbachev

"The total owed by the third world to the Western banks today is around \$1 trillion..."

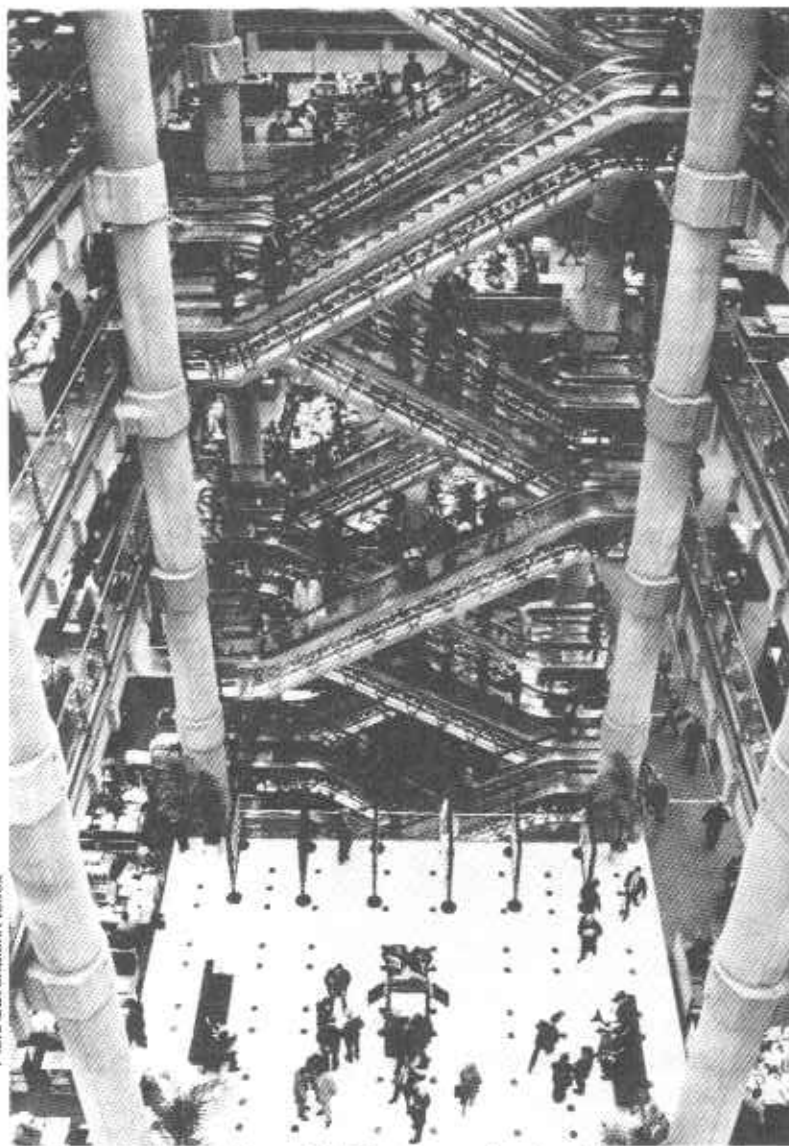
conceivable that the US will adopt a complex package of simultaneously trying to do limited business with the USSR, while keeping up the military pressure – and at the same time trying to stop the Europeans and Japanese getting too close to the USSR. There is already evidence that the Japanese are selling high tech goods to the USSR, which the 'COCOM' agreements prevent Western allies supplying for 'security' reasons. But it will be a difficult balancing act for Bush, as the West Germans and Japanese hungrily eye the immense markets of the USSR-eastern Europe.

Of course, there is a sense in which the United States can try to scupper perestroika altogether. To break the USSR's over-concentration on heavy industry and raw materials, to turn towards more production for the consumer market, Gorbachev desperately needs a reduction in military production and the military budget. If the US simply refuses to play ball on the military front, if detente is a non-starter, then there is a real question mark about the ability of the Soviet Union to generate the economic space to engage in trade with the West which it wants. This of course is the line of the US military establishment and cold-warriors like Richard Perle.

On top of the issue of the triangular Europe-Japan-USA relations with the USSR, there is another huge complicating factor: the political evolution of China, a topic which would require a whole article in itself. It is obvious that for geographical and historical reasons Japan is best placed to take advantage of any major opening to foreign investment in the Chinese economy. On the other hand, George Bush is very conscious of this danger, hence his rapid visit to China after Hirohito's funeral; and the US can count on the distrust of re-emergent Japanese militarism, still strong in China. The battle for Chinese trade will be a fascinating spectacle.

Who pays the price?

Every capitalist crisis involves major restructuring, both inside the major capitalist economies and internationally. The effects of recession are always uneven; not every sector of the world working class suffers equally. In the advanced countries themselves, the example of Britain is a vivid expression of how some industries and areas – particularly those associated



Third world debt makes a fat living for western banks

with old technologies – have declined disproportionately. But, of course, overall there has been a generalised attack, continuous since 1975-6, on the living standards of the masses in the advanced capitalist countries.

But there are many other sections of the world's working class particularly hit by global restructuring. First and foremost are the tens of millions of workers, peasants and urban poor in those countries held in debt bondage. The total owed by the third world to the Western banks today is around \$1 trillion – in fact, in today's world, a small amount. (The total public debt of the US is \$2 trillion, and the annual turnover of the top 200 transnationals is over \$3 trillion).

Despite occasional scares about the over-extension of Western banks' lending capacity, the debt crisis works to the permanent advantage of the Western banks and ruling classes. Numerous countries, particularly in Latin America, now have their national economic policy, universally that of

austerity, decided by the IMF. Millions have been impoverished by the debt crisis. But this crisis is of course directly the result of huge bank lending promoted by the West in the 1970s to facilitate the profitable re-investment of petro-dollars and the partial industrialisation which we discussed earlier.

The policy of the IMF towards the debt-laden countries is simple. Implement austerity against your own masses; export as much as possible, at whatever rock-bottom prices the world market dictates, and don't step out of line politically, with the US in particular. The Western banks themselves are cashing in by 'debt-for-equity' swaps, which retire a small portion of the debt for whole or part ownership of local firms. The way in which the debt is used as a form of political warfare was graphically illustrated when Costa Rica's president Arias announced his central American peace plan. The US government immediately intervened with the US

"Numerous countries, particularly in Latin America, now have their national economic policy, universally that of austerity, decided by the IMF."

banks to prevent further loans to service Costa Rica's \$4.5 billion foreign debt.

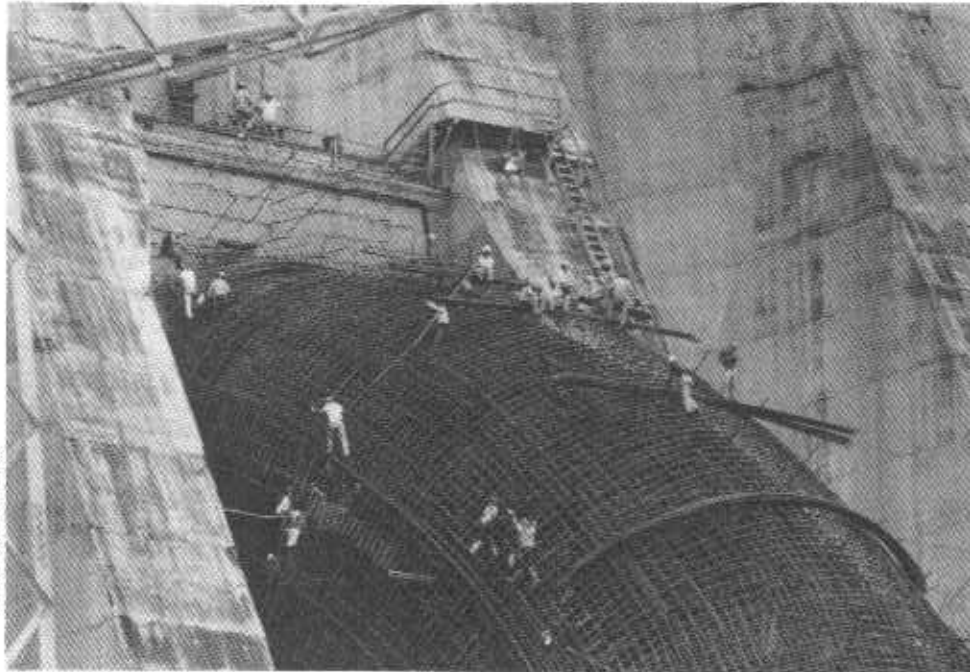
And there is a third set of victims of global restructuring – those who will be the victims of Soviet foreign policy deals which are the trade-off for economic relations with the United States. Nicaraguans an obvious

example. The eviction of the ANC training camps from Angola is another. And we should not forget those millions of Soviet workers who will be the victims of Gorbachev's austerity measures at home.

A socialist political response

Socialists are in principle neither capitalist free traders nor protectionists. We are not the partisans of any imperialist economic bloc. We don't stand with the EEC against the US and Japan. Our job is to defend the interests of the workers wherever they are attacked by the effects of global restructuring. But there are aspects of this approach which have particular relevance to British socialists.

First, the British Thatcher government is in a tremendous quandary about whether to go along with a more unified political and economic Europe, or to try to maintain its special links with the US. It is clear that Chancellor Lawson, Thatcher and Lord Young are at loggerheads on this, and it is becoming a major theme of British bourgeois politics – with Kinnoch and the Labour leadership going for a 'capitalist Europe' solution. Socialists have every reason to oppose cold war Atlanticism, but our alternative has to be a socialist Europe, a united Europe which includes eastern Europe and creates new economic relations on an internationalist basis with the third world. Such an approach implies an internationalist approach of linking up politically and in struggle with working class and socialist forces throughout Europe, east and west. As



Julio Eichardt/Reflex

The political consciousness of the working class is very uneven: rapid industrialisation has created a huge working class movement and the Workers Party in Brazil, but there is no comparable radicalisation in Singapore, Taiwan or Hong Kong.

part of forming links with the masses, and the political vanguard in eastern Europe, we should demand aid and trade with the Soviet Union and eastern Europe on favourable terms, and an end to 'COCOM'-type restrictions against economic co-operation with the post capitalist states.

The demand for a united socialist states of Europe, a Europe of the workers east and west, is in no way counterposed to an internationalist attitude towards the oppressed countries of the third world. We don't want a 'fortress socialist Europe' which puts up barriers against the third world. Obviously, a united socialist Europe would be a tremendous political and economic blow in favour of the oppressed masses in the semi-colonial and dependent countries, a huge geopolitical bloc which would give them internationalist aid in developing their economies. Here and now, we should be fighting for the eminently reasonable, democratic and socialist demand – cancellation of all the debts to the imperialist banks! This is a demand which will be supported not just by Marxists and socialists, but by huge numbers of people with a minimum of humanity, let alone socialist consciousness.

In adopting the policy of a united socialist Europe, incidentally, we should be under no illusions that Gorbachev is a 'pan-European' in the sense that he wants to prioritise links with Europe over those with the USA. In re-inserting itself in the new international division of labour, the USSR wants to play the field. A struggle for a united socialist Europe will be in a

certain sense struggle against Gorbachev.

Our second major conclusion relates to the internationalist approach of socialists to the world struggle for socialism. It is true that the world proletariat, and the urban poor, are not confined to the three major imperialist centres we have been discussing. The size of the world proletariat has expanded enormously over the last 20 years. Major components of the world working class exist, of course, in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe and they are reawakening politically at tremendous speed. A lot depends on the outcome, and the possibility of building a socialist democratic current in these countries. And there are new huge centres of the proletariat and urban poor in some of the 'newly industrialising countries' – like Brazil and Mexico. Given the crisis these countries are in, there will be explosive outbursts of militancy among the workers of these semi-industrialised countries.

But we should be aware of the sociological and political limits of the development of the proletariat in the semi-industrialised countries. It is useless to adopt an 'arithmetical' approach to the balance of class forces, which says there are X million new workers in the third world and thus the working class is X much stronger. For the truth is that the political consciousness, and hence the trade union and political organisation in these nations is very uneven. We have the Workers Party in Brazil, and we have an important new radicalisation in Mexico. But what do we have in Singapore, Taiwan

"Our job is to defend the interests of the workers wherever they are attacked by the effects of global restructuring."

"...we should be fighting for the eminently reasonable, democratic and socialist demand – cancellation of all debts to the imperialist banks!"



Carlos Gaurita/Reflex

As transnational capital organises, workers must hit back with active solidarity, not jingoistic nonsense

and Hong Kong? Very little. For that matter, even in South Korea, the organisation of the working class, despite mass student protests, is very weak. So sweeping generalisations are not much use in drawing up a real balance sheet of the relationship of forces, and the extent of the challenge to imperialism.

Even if the political battles in Central America, South Africa and the Soviet Union have centre stage today, the historical task of building a force for socialist transformation in the imperialist centres, and especially Europe, where the workers' movement is much stronger than in the USA or Japan, remains crucial from the viewpoint of the world transition to socialism. This is not a plea for 'Eurocentrism'; but it is a plea against the somewhat fashionable 'third worldism', which often seems to stake everything on the outcome of battles in the dependent countries.

We can express this in a slightly different way. Today with the crisis in the USSR; the intifadah of the Palestinian masses; the new crisis in Central America; the struggle of the South African masses; the new rebellion against austerity by the Spanish workers – the examples are endless – you have, in the context of global restructuring a joint crisis of Stalinism and imperialism – just as we asserted when the birth of Solidarnosc in Poland coincided with the upsurge of the central American revolution between 1979-81.

The crisis is international, and the solutions are international. The solution of the crisis in Nicaragua is the extension of the revolution in central America. The workers and poor in the indebted countries need the solidarity

of the workers in the imperialist countries against debt-bondage. A socialist answer to '1992' presupposes an effort of linking up struggles between workers on a European level, which will become more and more obvious. Again the examples are endless.

The conclusion is that there is, once again, a growing *interaction* of the different crises and struggles in the different 'sectors' of the world. It needs an internationalist response based on an international programme which supports workers' struggles everywhere; and the building of an international revolutionary movement with that programme. In the epoch of global restructuring a retreat into 'national particularities' will not come up with political answers in any country.

Notes

¹ See, inter alia, *Late Capitalism* (1971; Verso); *The Second Slump* (1975 Verso) and *Long Waves in Capitalism* (CUP 1979). See also Mandel's 'The economics of neo-capitalism' in the *Socialist Register 1964*. Neo-capitalism was an ambiguous and confusing term, since abandoned by Mandel. The first sign of the oncoming slump was the West German 1966 recession.

² Bretton Woods guaranteed that the dollar would be automatically exchanged against gold, thus tying together the dollar with gold prices. While this made the dollar literally 'as good as gold', it also kept its value artificially high. By ending convertibility Nixon devalued the dollar, allowing US corporations to compete better on the world market.

³ See E. Mandel 'Semi-colonial and semi-industrialised dependent countries' in *New internationalist* vol 2 no 2 p149.

⁴ *The End of the Third World* Nigel Harris, Pelican 1986

⁵ Alain Lipietz is a leading proponent of the 'regulation school' whose founding theorist is the French political economist

Michel Aglietta. Aglietta coined the thoroughly confusing term 'Fordism' (misusing Gramsci's notion of Fordism as a particular form of work organisation) to denote mass production/mass consumption capitalism as a particular 'regime of accumulation'. The confusions of this term cannot be elaborated here, but see the excellent article by Simon Clarke in *Capital and Class* no 36 (Winter '88 edition). Since this use of 'Fordism' is confused and unsustainable, *Marxism Today's* discourse on 'post-Fordism' is doubly confusing, verging on the unintelligible. But for an unscrambling and demolition job see the article by Chris Reynolds in *Workers Liberty* no 11, and 'Old Ideas for New Times' by Gemma Forrest and Mike Freeman in *Living Marxism* November 1988. Also useful is the article 'Vanguard of the Vogue' by Ben Fine in the *Morning Star* of 14 September 1988.

⁶ Lenin already in 1916 recognised Argentina as not being simply a 'semi-colonial country' and even talked about the 'Argentinian model'. Argentina also went through a further 'import-substitution' industrialisation between the wars under Peron. Quoted by Mandel (1985). For an account of Argentina's autonomous economic development see *The Malvinas and the End of Military Rule* by Dabat and Lorenzani (Oversvo 1984), where Lenin's definition is also discussed.

⁷ As an example of the immense (and disgusting) wealth and power of the US ruling class see the wonderful book *Greed and Glory on Wall Street* which charts the fall of the Lehman investment bank (Ken Auletta, Penguin Books, 1986). If you think bitter faction fights are confined to the far left, this book shows the bourgeoisie are ten times worse!

⁸ See 'The Political Economy of Late Imperial America' by Mike Davis in his *Prisoners of the American Dream* (Verso 1986).

⁹ On 'smart' weapon technology see *Newsweek* January 23rd 1989.

"The workers and poor in the indebted countries need the solidarity of the workers in the imperialist countries against debt-bondage."

The Socialist Workers Party and women

The class struggles, and then the women get liberated

Tony Cliff's book *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation* opens with the lines: 'Two different movements have sought to achieve women's liberation over the past hundred or more years, Marxism and feminism... However, they explain women's oppression in very different ways, and pursue strategies which are quite opposed to one another.'

He goes on to illustrate this with a series of highly selective historical pastiches. It is this counterposition of feminism and socialism that forms the basic thesis of the book and it is the bedrock of the Socialist Workers' Party's (SWP) political view of women and women's liberation. At the heart of this is the idea that women have no common interests or experiences, even that: 'Women are not a separate group'. The other side of this coin is a flat denial that men as a social group benefit in any way from the institutionalised oppression of women under capitalism. The problem is further confounded by the tendency of SWP analysis to consistently conflate class society with capitalism and to use the words capitalism and class as synonymous.

The internal contradictions of this position make the thread of the argument in the book almost impossible to unravel. If, as even Mr. Cliff agrees, all women are oppressed, as women, under capitalism, then it clearly follows that all women have some common interests in ending that oppression. The common cause of women should not be overstated, as it sometimes is by radical feminists with dreams of universal sisterhood, because women are divided by class, race, sexuality and ability, and the power relations intrinsic to capitalism are reflected in the women's movement. But to deny any commonality is to fly in the face of reality.

The right to choose

Two examples suffice to show the problem. The right of a woman, any woman, to have control over her own body, to determine whether, when and how to have children, the right to contraception and abortion, unites women. It's true that the wealthy bourgeois woman can always pay to get an abortion while working class women have to depend on the vagaries of the NHS, but abortion campaigns have always had support from a wide range of women. Similarly the position of women, all women, in the family is a subordinate one. As Engels pointed out, the role of the bourgeois woman was little different from that of the prostitute and in the working class family: 'the man is the bourgeois and the woman is the proletarian'.

The SWP position seems to be that it is not

in the interests of the bourgeois woman to fight for gender equality because it will necessarily lead to the overthrow of the capitalist system, clearly not in their class interests: in such a conflict, class interests will always prevail. This rather appealingly simple solution masks a number of problems. First of all, are we not in favour of exploiting to the full the contradictions inherent within capitalism? Secondly, it ignores the class position of the petty bourgeoisie, squeezed, as Marx points out, between the two great classes – the working class and the bourgeoisie. People in this class have eventually to decide which side they are on. Are we not in favour of winning them to the side of the working class? People radicalise on all sorts of different issues: the oppression of women is, for women, one of the more likely issues on which to win them over.

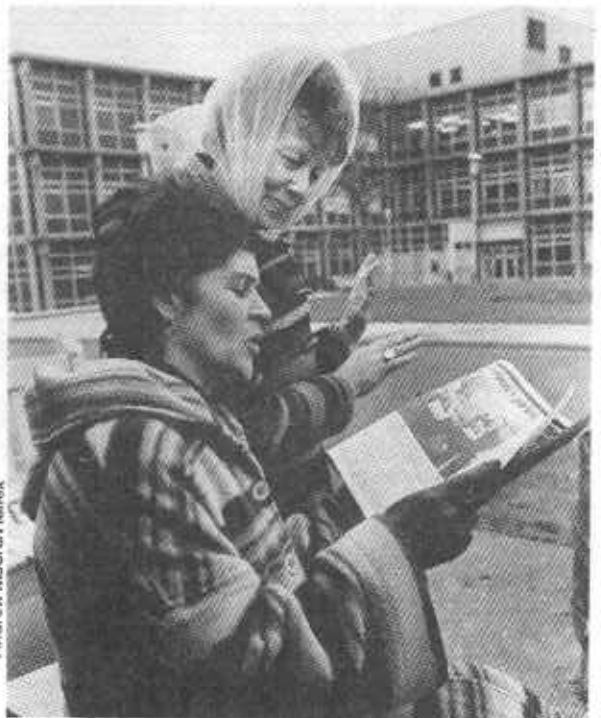
Do men benefit?

Society is divided not only by class but also

KEEP IT SAFE



The women's movement has consistently organised on abortion rights



Women workers: discriminated against because of their gender as well as their class

by sex, race, sexuality and ability. Capitalism has interwoven these divisions into a complex mosaic of domination and subordination. They cannot be unravelled by class reductionism.

Then there is the seemingly endless controversy over whether men benefit from the oppression of women. The SWP's answer to this is: 'an emphatic no!...it is a situation from which only the ruling class benefits.' As Tony Cliff says: 'The working man is as dehumanised as the woman.' Moreover, he denies any importance to the fact that men, not women, even from the ruling class, are: 'rapists, pomographers, wifebeaters, etc,' as 'these are the actions of individuals and are small compared to the way the capitalist system structures and perpetuates women's oppression through its institutions...the blame should be placed squarely on class society, not on its individual agents.' This raises a number of points, not least of which is the inadequacy of blaming 'the system' and leaving it at that. Are we not in favour of organising now against rape, woman-beating and so on? If the SWP had their way the 'rule of thumb' (the nineteenth century right of a husband to beat his wife with a stick not larger than his thumb!) would still be with us.

What is meant exactly by the question 'do men benefit from women's oppression?' Answers to this will differ depending on whether it is being asked in an abstract way or concretely in the here and now. Unfortunately the SWP seem to have confused the two. From the point of view of the struggle for socialism – the only way all forms of oppression will be overcome – men have no interest in the oppression of women. But socialist 'man' does not exist today, 'he' will be created through the struggle itself. As revolutionary socialists we can say that working class men have no inter-

est in the oppression of women; that the benefits of socialism are far greater than the paltry benefits men do get from the oppression of women under capitalism.

However, if we look at the realities of modern capitalism, it is clear that there is an institutionalised power relationship between men and women from which all men, in one way or another, benefit. Ruling class men, whose long term interests are served by capitalism, obviously benefit from the oppression of women; but working class men too, in their day to day lives, benefit from the servicing roles played by women, even if these are ultimately serving capitalism.

Male violence

Next there is the total separation, almost counterposition, of male violence against women and the oppressive structures of capitalism – as if one was totally unconnected to the other. This is a profoundly un-marxist, indeed anti-marxist, analysis to have. Historical materialism is about understanding and explaining the world in terms of the organisation of society around the mode of production. Capitalism and its structures are all-encompassing. Male violence against women is an expression of the institutionalised power relationship between men and women that exists in modern capitalist societies, and existed in different precise forms in pre-capitalist class societies. It is thus an intrinsic part of the structures of capitalism, not outside them. This, after all, is at the centre of the debate with radical feminists.

These errors of theory have led the SWP to play a very destructive role in the women's movement where they argue consistently and forcefully against the self organisation of women in any shape or form. Those who support autonomy are denounced as separatists and self organisation is counterposed to the class struggle. In fact autonomy is not the same as separatism. Autonomy allows those who experience a particular oppression to discuss out together their demands which can then be put to a specific organisation, the wider movement, or the rest of society. This process politically strengthens the oppressed, increasing their confidence and radicalisation and can only strengthen the working class. The example of the self organisation of the women of the mining communities during the great strike of 1984-5 proves the power of autonomy.

Women's Voice

Unfortunately, however reasonable these points are made, constructive dialogue with members of the SWP remains very difficult. They come to women only meetings to argue that the meeting should not take place; a slanging match is usually the only result.

This was not always so. In 1974 the SWP launched an autonomous women's organisation with its own journal – *Women's Voice*. The object was to recruit women from the feminist movement to the SWP. A wide range of women got involved in *Women's Voice* groups which provided a valuable forum for discussion and did much good work on women's issues.



Women's self-organisation has become a powerful factor in major struggles

However, the SWP's theories proved no match for feminism. The groups acted as the wrong sort of channel – of feminist ideas into the SWP and of women out of the Party. *Women's Voice* was closed down by the 1981 SWP National Conference on the basis that it offended against Leninist norms and had failed to recruit effectively. *Black Voice*, an autonomous black organisation was closed down at the same time.

Anti-lesbianism

Another strand that runs through SWP thinking is a dismissal of issues of sexuality as neither political nor important, this includes a distinct anti-lesbianism. Despite a cursory attempt to place the oppression of lesbians and gay men in a materialist framework as: 'a by-product of the oppression of women, for gays and lesbians break the role stereotyping of men and women which is imposed by capitalist society', Tony Cliff and his co-thinkers' views on the subject range in reality from the patronisingly liberal to the downright reactionary. That sexuality is political is explicitly and contradictorily rejected. Some of the most insightful, original and fundamental analyses of the women's movement on the social construction of gender and sexuality and the links between the two, do not even get a mention, let alone a discussion. This ties up with the absence of any materialist or historical analysis of the family, at the very centre of the oppression of women. Instead there is just a sociological description of the fact that the family is not very nice.

Lesbian feminists, along with black feminists, are blamed for the disintegration of the British women's movement. The 1975 National Women's Conference decision to add to the original four demands of the women's movement: 'an end to all discrimination against lesbians and a woman's right to define her own sexuality', is described by Mr Cliff as an indication of: 'how the Women's Movement distanced itself from the working class'!* He appears to think that lesbians are neither women nor working class. Meanwhile Norah Carlin follows the time honoured path, established by Betty Frieden et al, who faced with accusations of 'rampant lesbianism' within the ranks, giving the movement a 'bad name', deny the existence

of lesbians rather than deny the 'bad name'. Carlin says in *Women and the Struggle for Socialism*: 'Most feminists are not in the least like the lesbian separatists pictured by the media.' She generously adds: 'Most lesbians are not like that either, since being attracted to other women and wanting to live together does not necessarily mean lesbians have to be extreme feminists in their political opinions'. Lesbians need neither patronising nor euphemisms.

It all seems so easy!

Perhaps the inadequacies, inconsistencies and unreality of the SWP's line on women's oppression and liberation is best summed up in a passage that appears twice in Tony Cliff's book:

'The contemporary Women's Liberation Movements ... have focussed consistently on areas where men and women are at odds – rape, battered women, wages for housework – while ignoring or playing down the important struggles in which women are likely to win the support of men: strikes, opposition to welfare cuts, equal pay, unionisation, abortion'.

Where has he been over the last twenty years? How on earth can he accuse the Women's Liberation Movement of ignoring the issue of abortion? How can he, as a socialist, not understand that rape and violence against women are some of the manifestations of the oppression of women, the inequalities of power, in contemporary society? It is essential that feminists and socialists take up such issues for it was precisely by doing this that the Women's Liberation Movement involved millions of women who found it painfully relevant to their daily lives. How does he explain that, with a few honourable exceptions, men have historically opposed equal pay and fought to exclude women from trade unions? But it seems it is all very simple if you just believe that the class struggles and the women get liberated.

Rebecca Flemming

* The original four demands of the Women's Liberation Movement were:

- ◆ Equal pay now;
- ◆ Equal education and job opportunities;
- ◆ Free contraception and abortion on demand;
- ◆ Free 24 hour nurseries.

Car Wars

Fighting for a place in the 'Big Six'

BARRY HEATH looks at the cut-throat competition – and unlikely alliances – between car industry giants as they face the battle for survival in the final years of the century.

By 1990 the car industry worldwide could face an excess production capacity of 20% – equivalent to at least nine million cars, vans and lorries per year for which there will be no market. That is the grim picture painted in a New Year's message for 1989 by Harold Poling, Ford's chief operating officer (USA).

Such a huge level of overproduction must mean an increase in cut-throat competition and even more drastic rationalisation on the part of the huge transnational motor companies as they fight for their share of a decreasing market. The *Financial Times* in its review of the motor industry commented: 'There will be manufacturers today that will not be able to survive to the end of the century – if that long – in their present size and structure.'

The talk in the car industry itself is of a 'Big Six' by the year 2000. This refers to the development of the 'Big Six' in Britain in the 1930s, following the elimination of over 150 British car firms during the 1920s. This time the talk is of six worldwide transnationals – not six British firms.

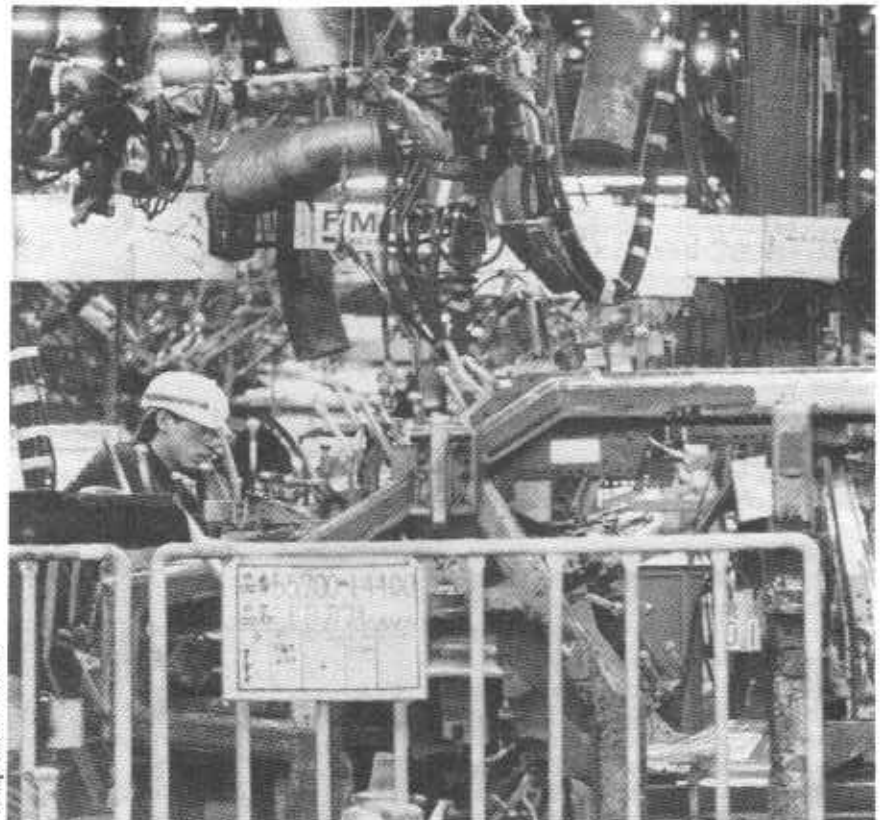
The stock markets' fear of vehicle overproduction arises from two factors. On the one hand the brokers expect consumer demand to level off or fall after four buoyant years, not least because of the problems of the US economy and the implications of the international debt crisis. In Britain, the president of the Motor Agents Association reckons there will be a 200,000 drop in car sales this year due to higher interest rates.

On the other hand, the transnationals have planned to increase their production as part of their aggressive competition. In France, for example, Jacques Calvet of Peugeot-Citroen has stated he expects demand for cars to decline, but he still intends to increase car production in Peugeot-Citroen plants in France, Britain and Spain to 2.5 million a year by 1992 to grab European market leadership from Volkswagen and Fiat. In Spain, General Motors have already put their works on a three shift a day pattern ready for 1992. If other European car firms followed suit there would soon be huge overcapacity.

US market to be worst hit

According to Harold Poling, the worst hit domestic market will be that of the USA, which will have six million more cars and trucks than it can handle. Already the US market is fiercely competitive, with 27 car firms offering over 40 brand names. In spite of the fall in value of the dollar, imports only fell by two percent last year – a fall that mainly hit European car firms and smaller Japanese firms (while the Japanese 'big three' actually increased their market share).

What is likely to happen in the USA is that General Motors will



Philip Gordon/Reflex

Toyota production line: a similar pattern of exploitation world-wide

proceed with a price war to regain its share of the domestic market which has slumped from over 50% in 1980 to 36% last year. They have spent \$50 billion on new plant and equipment, and are now geared up and ready to go. At the same time Ford has announced record profits of \$5.5 billion for 1987, which is more than all the European and Japanese car firms put together. This is the result of drastic rationalisation including a 25% cut in the workforce. General Motors too have cut their workforce – by 40,000 – and declared profits of \$4 billion for 1987 as well as record profits in their Western European operations.

There is a new factor in the US car market, however, and that is the Japanese cars assembled in the USA itself, expected to rise to two million a year by the early 1990s. Toyota for example has a \$1.1 billion complex in Kentucky, and about 300 Japanese component firms are also reckoned to have followed this expansion. With consumer demand expected to stay steady if not decline, something will have to give.

Joint ventures

It costs about \$500 million to design, develop and equip a gearbox factory. One mistake and profit margins tumble. One way of avoiding these hazards is for car firms to enter into joint ventures with each other – to use the same gearboxes or diesel engines, or the same components.

There are a bewildering number of these agreements taking place. Glossy adverts and media hype mask the fact that beneath the bonnet and the brand name many cars are virtually the same. It makes nonsense to say 'Buy British' or 'Buy German' because heaven only knows where the bits came from or where the car was designed. The joint ventures of course may give some indication of the future members of the global 'Big Six'.

As one would expect, the big three US car firms are the most predatory. Ford have close links with Mazda (Japan), with Kia (South Korea) and Lio Ho (Taiwan). It was expected that Mazda would become Ford's base in the Pacific rim, rather like Ford (Western Europe) – having a certain independence, but ultimately answerable to Detroit. However the Japanese banks seem to have manoeuvred against this development, only to throw up rumours of an even bigger merger between Ford, Mazda, and Japan's number two car firm, Nissan. The Japanese banks have apparently been trying for a long time to cut Japan's nine car firms down to three viable ones.

Meanwhile General Motors has large stakes in Isuzu (Japan) and Daewoo (South Korea). At the same time they have joint ventures with

Japan's number one car firm, Toyota in Xiummi (USA) and in Australian plants. Chrysler have close links with Mitsubishi (Japan), which in turn is linked to Hyundai (South Korea and Canada) and Chins Motor (Taiwan).

In Western Europe, too, there are numerous joint ventures. Fiat, for example, shares engine research and development with Peugeot-Citroen, diesel engine production with Renault, and executive car production with Saab. Meanwhile Volkswagen supplies gearboxes to Austin Rover, engines to Volvo, and owns Seat (Spain) and Audi (West Germany). They also have joint production of Hilux pickups with Toyota, overseas cooperation and Santana production with Nissan, and joint production of cars with Ford in Brazil and Argentina. This is just a sample of the complex web of alliances among transnational car firms.

The Global Car

One reason for the dominance of the transnationals is the most obvious development in car design over the last period: the 'global car'. All new cars look and perform more or less the same throughout the world. Because of the oil crisis the large American cars of the 1950s and 1960s had to be scaled down in the 1970s to the 'compacts'. The small cheap Italian cars, made for narrow streets and narrow wallets, became popular in other countries, were upgraded and copied.

The Japanese firms assessed the world market and designed a range of cars to be universally popular. Smaller firms went out of business; transnationals took over, competing in each other's national markets. They swapped their designs and component part manufacturers from country to country. The 'global car' is made up of parts from all over the world. General Motors for example has a car which was designed at Opel in West Germany, is assembled at Daewoo (S. Korea) and is sold in the USA as the Pontiac Le Mans.

The notion of the 'global car' has brought about three main brands of car production aimed at three sections of the market: the cheap end; the middle range; the executive class and specialist models. Transnationals have to assess the markets for each on a world scale, and therefore where to locate their production and what joint ventures to enter into. The cheap end of the market brings the highest levels of demand, especially in the poorer countries, but is the least profitable: therefore the transnationals aim to assemble their cheaper models in areas where labour costs are low, and seek joint ventures wherever possible. Thus for example the Japanese car firms are going up market and leaving the cheaper end to their South Korean or Taiwanese subsidiaries; Volkswagen is moving Polo production to Seat (Spain), where labour costs are half those at Wolfsburg; and Ford (USA) has links with Mazda in Mexico.

Some car firms have direct agreements with nation states to produce cheap small cars. India, for example is building car plants with help from Suzuki. Fiat has a \$1 billion deal with the Polish government to modernise FSO plants, based on production of the Fiat Duna (originally designed for Fiat's Brazilian plant). Poland's FSO plants also have exclusive international rights to produce the small Polski Fiat 126: the idea here is to scoop the market for cheap cars in the stalinist states of Eastern Europe - and also to export them to Western Europe. At the same time however Renault have a deal with the Romanian government, whose Dacia car is based on the Renault 12. Volkswagen have sold East Germany's Wartburg a Polo engine track to power their new model, and also expect to export engines back to VW in West Germany. China, too, has now entered the fray, worried by imports from Japan. They plan three major factories linked with VW and Chrysler, and hope to become a major

exporter of cars and trucks by the year 2000.

At the top end of the market where more profits are to be made, there has been a scramble for the West German brand names. The Japanese have faced an image problem when competing in this sector, and small companies have been taken over. Chrysler have taken over Maserati and Lamborghini of Italy; Ford now owns Aston Martin; General Motors owns Lotus. It is likely that the bigger names will go next - like Porsche, Jaguar and BMW.

The impact of 1992

World economic geography is changing due to crises in the USA and in the USSR, together with the developments around 1992 and the single market in Western Europe. There seems to be a growing regionalisation as Japan, the USA and the European Community (EC) gear up for a probable trade war. Each major country seeks to maintain and increase political and economic power over its own area - Japan over the Pacific rim; the USA over the Americas; the EC over the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) states and Eastern Europe. Clearly 1992 will make a major difference to the balance of forces as an embryo European state emerges - particularly if this sets up a 'Fortress Europe' of trade barriers, as some



Austin Rover cars with Volkswagen gearboxes

analysts believe.

The former boss of ICI claims that two thirds of West European manufacturing industry will be restructured and/or disappear as a result of the 1992 changes. The transnational car firms will obviously be involved in this shake-up, particularly since the six main EC-based car firms are only relatively medium sized on a world scale, and have in some cases had the benefit of state protection.

The Japanese car firms aim to get into the EC on the ground floor, with either new plants of their own based inside the EC, or with links with EC motor firms. Nissan has led the way with its plant in Sunderland. It also has links with Ford, and plans a joint (Sigma) engine to power Fiesta and Micra cars: in Barcelona a plant is already producing Ford/Nissan 4WD utility vehicles. Toyota also plans an assembly plant in Britain costing £610 million, including up to £125 million grant from the British government. With Honda already having established links with Austin-Rover, the Thatcher government has been accused of playing a comprador role for the Japanese because Britain's own manufacturing base is too weak to withstand 1992.



Carlos Guarita/Flexor

Militancy is not enough; a political leadership and a workers' plan are needed to wrest control from management

There are a number of links between Japanese and EC car firms. Toyota's Hilux pickups are produced at the VW plant in Hanover, while Toyota is also interested in Audi as a base for its upmarket cars. It has a 27% stake in Salvadez Caetano (Portugal) which assembles Toyota utility vehicles. Mitsubishi is linked with Daimler-Benz and with MDF (Portugal). The larger component firms are also becoming linked, for example Bosch with Akebono brakes, Lucas with Yuasa batteries. These are just a few of the interconnections.

The workers' response

Carworkers need their own international links to defend themselves against the transnational car firms. Already massive cutbacks have been made in established motor industries throughout the world. The devastation of British manufacturing industry is well known, but in the USA, Ford have cut their workforce by 25%, and General Motors by 40,000. The *Financial Times* recently wrote of Peugeot-Citroen's 'Draconian restructuring of its workforce', with Renault doing the same to keep pace.

These measures have gone ahead, as far as one can see, with very little resistance, certainly with no international working class solidarity. The restructuring of industry in the EC after 1992 is bound to mean more attacks on jobs, wages and working conditions. Workers need to build a whole series of links and networks if they are to defend themselves. At the moment the leadership of the European labour movement seems either locked into making the EC work for capitalism (following the line put by Jacques Delors to last year's TUC Congress) or merely content to sign redundancy forms and single union deals. The links have to be built at factory and rank and file level, where workers are beginning to realise that there is no purely national solution to their problems.

The British miners' strike is very instructive in this regard. Solidarity with the miners meant solidarity with the front line representatives of the working class in struggle. I recall a group of ex-carworkers handing in a collection. They said 'We needed a Scargill. We signed the redundancy papers, and now our kids have got no jobs'. Since then, strikers at Wapping and Dover have understood the meaning of the miners' strike. Wherever miners went abroad to speak, especially in Europe, they received a tremendous welcome. This was not charity or plain hospitality, but *class solidarity* - their struggle was our struggle, internationally.

The fact is however that there had been no preparation of the British working class for the struggle against a quite conscious class enemy. We are now faced with the restructuring of industry on a European-wide scale, and then on an international scale: We are up against an enemy that thinks nothing of phoning or faxing around the world before lunch. The need for preparation and learning lessons from the past has never been greater.

Immediate solidarity with workers defending their jobs is essential; regional, national and international networks need to be built up on this basis. At the same time, militancy is not enough - as the miners' strike showed. Workers in each corporation must fight to *open the books* of the industry, to expose the financial and production links between their supposedly 'rival' employers; their manipulation of pricing and tariff policies; their manoeuvres to maximise government grants while minimising tax bills; and show the knock-on effect of every productivity concession from one firm to others throughout the industry. They must draw up tactics to combat 'quality circles' and every device used by employers to entice collaborationist union leaders into helping to increase levels of exploitation. They should also look at what they are producing, and propose changes based on human need, not profits. In the car industry, all sorts of 'green' issues like pollution, public transport, road building, the needs of the 'third world' would need to be looked at.

These alternative plans are important in order to attack the capitalist system and win more general support. The same could be said about the miners' strike, which underlined the need for a plan for energy and preservation of the earth's resources. These plans could make practical sense of the old slogan 'nationalisation under workers' control'. What would be the role of a car industry under socialism? We need to plan and explain.

A new generation

A whole new generation of carworkers is entering struggle in the newly-established car plants. It is no accident that the mass strikes for union recognition and better conditions last year in South Korea, Brazil and now Spain, are precisely in those areas where car assembly plants have been located for cheap labour. Wage increases in double figures were gained in South Korea - Hyundai moved a good deal of its production to Canada for a quieter life.

The car firms always look to make profits out of paying low wages and speeding up production. The Japanese car firms in their green field sites and 'just in time' production methods are notorious in this respect, and the envy of other employers. Conflict inevitably results, since the production methods are inhuman. There are numerous stories now in car towns of Britain about deaths on the track, breakdowns from stress, new workers leaving after two or three days and so on. The reality needs to be exposed publicly.

In the coming war for markets among the transnational car firms, a systematic link between the established, unionised carworkers and the new generation of their co-workers in new and re-located plants could yet be a powerful force. The task is to build a marxist leadership in the car industry unions that can open up such a development.

Dialectical materialism

Science of the class struggle

At a time when the world seems to be overflowing with religious fundamentalists and bigots, the marxist, materialist world view offers a breath of fresh air. While religious fanatics wax hysterical in opposition to anything more modern than the 13th century, and seek to persecute those who dare to question their prejudices, the marxist view has been strengthened by successive scientific discoveries, by historical experience and by the most decisive test of all – that of practice.

All religions and almost all bourgeois philosophies are based on the idealist world view. This is nothing necessarily to do with 'ideal' values or morality: it simply means that some non-material entity or force ('God', 'spirit', 'morality' or 'thought') is seen as primary, and the material, natural world is somehow secondary – a creation or reflection of God, or somehow an inferior realm in which the 'spirit' is confined. Thus the Bible tells us 'In the beginning was the Word'; and the philosopher Descartes wrote 'I think, therefore I am'.

Materialist philosophy, however, of which Marxism is the most consistent, begins from the opposite point of view. Matter, the material universe, and the natural world which gave rise to mankind, is primary: and thought – including all thoughts of God or gods, and the very idea that there could be such a being – is the product of the human brain, itself a material entity. The materialist believes that 'in the beginning was the world', and 'I am, therefore I can think'. 'Being' precedes thinking. Humanity itself emerged from non-thinking and primitive life-forms, developing in the process a brain capable of consciously assessing and – through labour – deliberately changing the world from which it came.

All of the thoughts generated by the human brain arise from our interaction as material, natural beings with the external material world. Thoughts themselves may appear completely detached from that world, or, like dreams, entirely abstract. Nevertheless they are material things, the product of complex chemical and electrical processes in the millions of cells that make up the brain. They are thus historically determined, reflecting changing economic modes of production, and socially determined

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(reflecting the social class and immediate circumstances of the thinking individual).

For the materialist, the explanation of all changes and developments in the world must be sought not in the supposed intervention of any external God or spiritual force, but through the internal, natural laws of motion of the material world itself, about which science continually learns more. Our world and the universe as a whole consists of nothing more than matter in movement.

Matter – the almost infinite numbers of molecules, atoms and simple and complex sub-particles – is itself in constant movement and change, decay and rebirth. As one sun dies, others are born. Movement is nothing other than the movement of matter. Energy is simply a specialised form of the movement of matter. We may not yet know or understand all of the laws of this movement, but there is no need, no room in such a world view for a God (benevolent or otherwise), a Satan or a super-human 'spirit'. Material laws and material processes drive forward the changes we see – and store up less visible changes beneath the surface that – like volcanoes – may suddenly take us by surprise.

Marx and Engels, developing the historical materialist view of history (see *Socialist Outlook* 6) showed the material driving forces of history, at the core of which are the developing means of production. Each advance in science and technology has also further developed ideology and philosophy, and helped refute the notion that mankind cannot know or understand the real world.

For the scientific establishment, the most primitive elements of a materialist view can be enough to lay the basis for some progress. Empirical methods, based simply on external observation and experiment and not on any more coherent philosophical theory, or pragmatism – 'doing what works' – can be sufficient to guide the day-to-day lives of all those who seek to

work within rather than change the existing social order and structures of society.

For socialists committed to the overthrow of existing social relations, a more sophisticated, accurate and coherent understanding of the world is necessary. To build the basis of a revolutionary movement – beginning in a non-revolutionary situation, but able to give leadership in a revolutionary situation – requires a method of analysis that can not only grasp the origin and development of complex political phenomena but also detect the inner contradictions, the hidden conflicts which are the source of future political and social change. This is where the marxist conception of dialectical materialism is essential.

The term 'dialectical' is used by Marx in a way not explained in most dictionaries. It refers to the movement of matter through internal contradiction and conflict. As Lenin put it: 'The condition for the knowledge of all processes in the world in their "self movement", in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the "struggle" of opposites'. (*On the Question of Dialectics*, CW Vol 38).

This approach is the very opposite of the superficial, empirical view taught to us as bourgeois 'common sense': dialectical materialism understands that things are not simple as they seem, and are in a continual process of change. As Trotsky argued against American marxists who had abandoned dialectical materialism: 'The fundamental flaw of vulgar thought lies in the fact that it wishes to content itself with motionless imprints of a reality which consists of eternal motion. Dialectical thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretisations, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena. Not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development. Not a workers' state in general, but a given workers' state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement, etc.

'Dialectical thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph, but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion'. (*In Defence of Marxism*, pp50-1).

For those who believe that any such discus-

sion of philosophical method is abstract mumbo-jumbo, it is useful to remember that Trotsky was writing to develop his analysis of the degenerated Russian workers' state; and Lenin's turn to philosophical writing laid the basis for the abrupt tactical turn he fought for in the April Theses of 1917. Later, lesser figures may have tried to turn dialectical materialism into a semi-mystical creed or state orthodoxy with which to

John Harris/FT



The miners' strike: in a constant, complex process of change

bludgeon opponents, but for the great revolutionaries it was seen as a practical tool for analysis and a guide to intervention.

What are the key factors in dialectical analysis? The first is the *conflict between form and content*: each phenomenon must be seen as the product of a unity and conflict of opposites – opposites which are themselves in a process of development, change and interconnection.

Thus, for example, the single outward reality of the 1984-5 miners' strike concealed a continual, complex internal process of change in the balance of forces – within the NUM itself in the uneven, fluctuating morale of the rank and file, the divisions within its leadership, and the inter-relation between them; between the NUM as a union in struggle and the TUC (itself divided between the forces of new realism and those still prepared to offer some support to the NUM); between the official labour movement as a whole and the rank and file of the working class; and between the working class and the ruling class (championed and led as it was by coal boss Ian MacGregor and the Thatcher government).

Outwardly, the situation of the strike appeared not to change for weeks on end, then to change from hour to hour. To offer adequate, consistent and principled leadership and solidarity in that situation required a constant process of dialectical analysis capable of detecting and assessing each change.

The contradiction between form and content also appears at the level of the individual. That is why opinion polls are so inadequate as a guide to Labour policy: all they offer is an isolated snapshot of each single punter's view at one moment, in the absence of any political intervention or leadership. In fact each worker is her/himself a conflict of opposites – reflecting not only the existing balance of class forces (including the setbacks under ten years of Thatcherism) but also the objective need and potential of the working class to fight back. This is the element which can be built upon under conditions of mass, participatory democracy – and why Tories and the Labour right wing prefer isolating individual postal ballots to mass meetings.

The recognition of the labour movement as a *unity of opposites* is a starting point for any marxist analysis and programme. The unity also contains *conflict*, and thus the seeds of change. In the unions, in particular there is a clear contradiction between the pressures felt by the rank and file membership in the workplaces – under direct management pressure – and the relatively privileged life-style of their full-time officials. Among the rank and file themselves, however there are also differentiations between the more secure, better-paid sectors and the more downtrodden layers: each is subject to distinct pressures and makes different demands. Analysing this complex dialectical picture can reveal the contradictions that may at times open the door to major struggles.

The unions represent the unity but also the *interpenetration of opposites*. Racism, the cynical exploitation of the family unit to divide, and the use of mass scabbing can all divide worker from worker, turning some into agents of bourgeois ideology or policy. Sections of the union bureaucracy also play this role.

In this regard, dialectical analysis is particularly important in the assessment of the point at which *quantity* is transformed into *quality*: an ever larger number of small, quantitative changes can produce at a given point a qualitative change. This occurs all the time in the natural world – rising temperature in a kettle produces a qualitative leap from water to steam at boiling point; nine months of smaller changes in pregnancy gives rise to a qualitatively new development when the baby is born. The same can be true in politics: years of right wing class collaboration by the Electricians' union (EETPU) led during the Wapping dispute to the *qualitative* change to union-busting, scab-herding, and the eventual break from the TUC to form a US-style 'business union'.

Such transformations may be relatively routine and predictable (as with the kettle), or take the form of an abrupt 'leap' in development (as when a nuclear reactor melts down, or a series of quantitative mass demonstrations and army defections produces the sudden collapse of a repressive regime – as in Iran ten years ago).

The common factor in such developments is

that the new situation or quality that emerges contains elements of the old, but represents a *negation* of the previous stage, and will never return to it. Though the Ayatollah successfully contained any anti-capitalist dynamic in the Iranian revolution, there is no prospect of a restoration of the old regime of the Shah. The miners' strike of 1984-5 was entirely different from that of 1973-74, and will never be

repeated in the same form.

This is a real problem, since we all go forward into the future equipped with ideas and methods learned in the past. The only way to update and develop these ideas is through a *struggle* to change the world, and to learn from it how to fight more effectively. Of course reformists like today's TUC and Labour leadership do not want to change the basic framework of society, so they see the process as one of discarding anything that might lead to conflict.

Marxists, who recognise the need to mobilise the working class to overthrow the capitalists and smash their state machinery, recognise that this cannot be done simply by issuing propaganda for socialism. A programme and policy must be developed on the basis of the material needs and demands of the working class, and popularised as an alternative to the defeatism of the official labour movement.

The kernel of dialectical materialism is that *contradiction* may be uncomfortable for defenders of 'common sense', but it is not accidental or undesirable: it is the very essence of life, of change.

The marxist method demands that analysis should begin from and return to the practical experience of the class struggle, developing a theoretical analysis of the interactions between its component parts in their processes of change. This analysis should lead to elaborating agitational demands, slogans and tactics for the fight, which must then be tested out.

A marxist organisation will check the correctness and effectiveness of its slogans by a democratic process which analyses the experience of carrying them out in the class struggle. This should also deepen its understanding of the overall situation, improve and advance its tactics, and strengthen its links with the forces in struggle.

Dialectical materialism therefore may sound like an academic discussion topic, but it is an active, interventionist method of analysis, flatly counterposed to the idealist methods of sectarian propagandism.

Ignore or ridicule it at your peril!

John Lister

Beyond Perestroika?

Revolution from Above
Tariq Ali, Hutchinson
£3.95

Beyond Perestroika
Ernest Mandel, Verso
£9.95 (published
April 13)

Reviewed by
Paul Lawson

THE near-simultaneous appearance of books on Gorbachev and the Soviet Union by two authors who have for decades been close political collaborators gives us an opportunity to contrast the different approaches from within the Marxist tradition to the upheaval in the USSR.

Mandel starts his book with the opinion that the events in the USSR are the most important in world politics since 1968, and perhaps even the Chinese revolution in 1949 – an opinion clearly shared by Ali. This question is clearly a touchstone for marxist politics.

Tariq Ali's book is the product of several recent visits to the USSR, containing a lot of fascinating first hand material on the debates and changes going on. In particular his account of the 'Yeltsin affair', and Yeltsin's conflict with the corrupt cabal of Moscow bureaucrats around his predecessor in the Moscow party leadership, Victor Grishin, is particularly useful.

But Tariq's book has to be judged by the criterion of its own self-declared objective – as a political intervention into the debate on the left about Gorbachev, on a line with which neither this journal nor the new book by Mandel are in accord.

Tariq declares, in effect, that a full-scale 'political revolution' has started in the Soviet Union – a 'political revolution from above'. He chides the far left in Britain and internationally for being blinded by the fact that this has started from above, and not, as we would have all wished, by a movement from the working class below. For him the success of this revolution means the victory of glasnost and perestroika, and he gives a qualified welcome to the foreign policy initiatives of Gorbachev.

Mandel's book, by contrast, insists on the need to differentiate between glasnost and perestroika. His line can be summed up by the formula: a critical 'yes' to glasnost; 'no' to perestroika; and 'no' to the

overall drift of Soviet foreign policy, although within that we can welcome some moves, in particular the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the INF treaty.

The nub of the difference – one which of course goes through the whole left and does not just divide these two authors – is what attitude to take towards the perestroika 'marketisation' reforms. Mandel's conclusion is unequivocal:

'All the talk about "market socialism" reduces itself to a turning of the screw at the cost of consumption in order to stimulate investments and increase labour productivity. In other words it amounts to a Soviet version of austerity' (p64). And therefore: 'The only conclusion we can draw from all this is that perestroika will not benefit the mass of the Soviet workers, at least not in its initial stages. To sweeten the medicine, therefore, there will be political changes.'

Now I have read Tariq's book twice, and while he is unambiguous in his condemnation of centralised bureaucratic planning as the source of the country's economic stagnation, it is far from clear what his attitude is to perestroika as the basic motor of economic change. He certainly condemns the view that Gorbachev and his advisors want to attack the living standards of the Soviet working class as 'beneath contempt'.

This makes very strange reading. What Gorbachev and his supporters want to do is one thing; the objective effects of the economic reforms which they are pushing through is something else again. And it is a matter of fact that perestroika involves, among other things, the removal of subsidies from a wide range of basic consumer goods like housing, food and transport, and the de facto introduction of mass unemployment as the labour market is 'shaken out' in the name of efficiency. It is for these reasons that the working class response to perestroika is decidedly mixed, and that many Soviet workers – not just bureaucrats – see it as a threat. It is hard to understand why it is 'beneath contempt' to point these things out.

In many analyses of the contemporary conflicts in the Soviet Union, from left and right alike, there is, in my opinion, a basic flaw. This common mistake reflects the ideology of the Gorbachevites: it is to say that glasnost and perestroika are



Gorbachev's foreign policy is also part of perestroika

part and parcel of the same process, a unified project, which we must more or less accept, or more or less reject.

In this, particularly striking are the views of some of the leaders of the socialist clubs which have emerged in the Soviet Union. Some of those who have the most radical views on political reform, who demand 'All Power to the Soviets, but real democratically elected Soviets', are the self-same people who demand a more rapid implementation of the perestroika economic reforms, which would have very negative effects on many Soviet workers.

All approaches to the giant and many-sided upheaval in the USSR which want to put either a 'tick' or a 'cross' against the whole business come unstuck. To put it at its most basic, the attitudes which marxists adopt towards political liberalisation and to economic liberalisation

are different.

Political liberalisation in post-capitalist societies generally opens up opportunities for the masses to re-awaken politically, giving them more freedom for information and organisation and to formulate their own demands. Economic liberalisation, on the contrary, generally ends up attacking working class living standards – and this is something which socialists in Britain in the 1980s should be only too aware of!

Mandel's approach is meticulously to dissect the different components of Gorbachevism – political reform, economic reform and the new foreign policy – examine them individually, and then to reassemble them to make overall sense of what is happening. Tariq's book is much more concerned with approaching the whole business as a unified project, and giving support to the

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most radical wing in the perestroika/glasnost process – Yeltsin in the bureaucracy and the radical wing of the socialist clubs.

Having made our preference between these two approaches clear, a few words in defence of *Revolution from Above*. Having bothered to visit the Soviet Union several times, Tariq's book is packed with information from which anyone on the left can usefully learn. Its author is quite right – there are a lot of bone-headed sectarians who think that Gorbachev is simply 'taking the capitalist road' – but Tariq is too knowledgeable about the far left to think that this is the majority, as he sometimes seems to imply. And this journal can only endorse enthusiastically the pan-European socialist strategy which he outlines in his conclusion.

On one specific point this reviewer sides with Tariq Ali against Ernest Mandel. It seems to me quite wrong to put the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnamese troops to oust Pol Pot on the same level as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and, by inference, wrong to give an equally enthusiastic response to the withdrawal of Vietnamese and Soviet troops from these respective countries, as Mandel seems to do.

Recent information has shown that the Khmer Rouge are still the real force behind the anti-Vietnamese guerrillas camped on the Thai border. A 'political settlement' at the behest of China and the US which puts Pol Pot's forces back in power in Kampuchea would be a real political sell-out, and a disaster for the people of that unfortunate country.

The reality of rape

The Accused
Film, starring
Jodie Foster

Reviewed by
Barbara Green

The Accused is the story of a young working class woman in America. She has a row with her boyfriend, goes to a bar for a drink and ends up being raped on a pin ball machine by three men, watched and encouraged by a number of others.

The film is made by the producers of *Fatal Attraction* which was not renowned for its sensitive portrayal of women's lives. Stanley Jaffe and Sherry Lansing have described their work as 'packaging women's rage'. Despite consistent praise, the fact that much of *The Accused's* fame rests on a rape scene leads you to expect the worst. The film manages to contradict these doubts.

The strongest aspect of the film is no question for the audience but that Sarah has been raped. She is represented by a public prosecutor, a fairly unsympathetic 'post-feminist', who decides that Sarah would make a bad witness because she was young, attractive, drunk and was 'flirting' with one of the rapists just before the rape.



Sarah – seen by her lawyer as a bad witness

Katherine, without any consultation with Sarah, agrees to plea-bargain to a lesser charge – that of reckless endangerment. Legally this meant that the rape never happened, and Sarah was denied her chance to speak.

The relationship between the two women is realistic. Katherine is not very bothered by the case – it is simply another case.

Katherine has all the power in the relationship – she has money, she's articulate, she is the only avenue that Sarah has to get her story known. But it is only after Sarah has been confronted by one of the onlookers of the rape, and ends up critically ill in hospital that she is forced to take her anger seriously.

Whilst other films about rape have taken vengeance as the

main theme, in this film the violence against the woman remains central. Sarah remains determined as to where the guilt lies and so her character is not that of the stereotyped victim.

The Accused avoids all the normal shit that usually makes films like this unbearable. Many women feel unhappy about the film because of the centrality of the rape scene. It is true that this scene is long, brutal and very upsetting – but then rape is. There is one rape reported every six minutes in America. Though *The Accused* does not provide any solutions for women who are raped, or analyse why men rape women it is not a depressing film. As the film ended women cheered and clapped; for once a commercial film shows the reality of rape.

A whiff of sixties Scandal

Scandal
Film directed by
Michael Caton-Jones,
with John Hurt,
Joanne Whalley-Kilmer,
Ian McKellen and
Bridget Fonda

Reviewed by
Felicity Harvest

IN A WAY, it's hard to knock a film that can get a packed audience giggling unanimsously with revulsion at the dark-spectacled figure of Peter Rackman waddling into a nightclub.

Scandal, the film of the story of the 1963 'Profumo Affair', knows, for the most part, who its villains are. They are the men of a hypocritical British establishment who decorate their tables with monster glass phalluses and try to decorate their lives with young women they think they can purchase as easily.

The film tells the story from the meeting of Christine Keeler and Stephen Ward, through to Ward's suicide during his trial for alleged procuring. It has an enjoyable sense of the absurd, and provides everything from a good laugh to a sense of moral superiority. But is there any more behind it than the provision of two hours of

slightly salacious enjoyment?

If it is designed to illuminate 1963, it fails except at a superficial level. It is both skilled and funny in portraying Ward and his world, with little forays into Notting Hill, but it does not provide a framework against which the real significance of its characters' actions can be seen. Without a context, it is hard to see why the effect of the scandal was so profound, and impossible to comprehend some scenes like that of women in plastic macs and rain-hats attacking Christine Keeler on the steps of the courts.

If it is designed to illuminate 1989, it also fails. Yes, there are easy parallels to current politicians and establishment

figures yet surely the point is that nowadays most of them survive scandal, and return, after a decent interval, to public life. There is no need, today, for a Stephen Ward to take the rap. The film would have been more successful, perhaps, at drawing present-day parallels if it had made more of the Rackman connection, for the effects of the unmasking of Rackman led to beneficial legislation which is only today being destroyed.

If it was not designed to illuminate either period, then maybe it was just an odd kind of love story. At that level, it was a good evening out, but a missed opportunity.

CLR

CLR James — the Artist
as Revolutionary
Paul Buhle, Verso
£22.95 Hardback,
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Reviewed by
Charlie Van Gelderen.

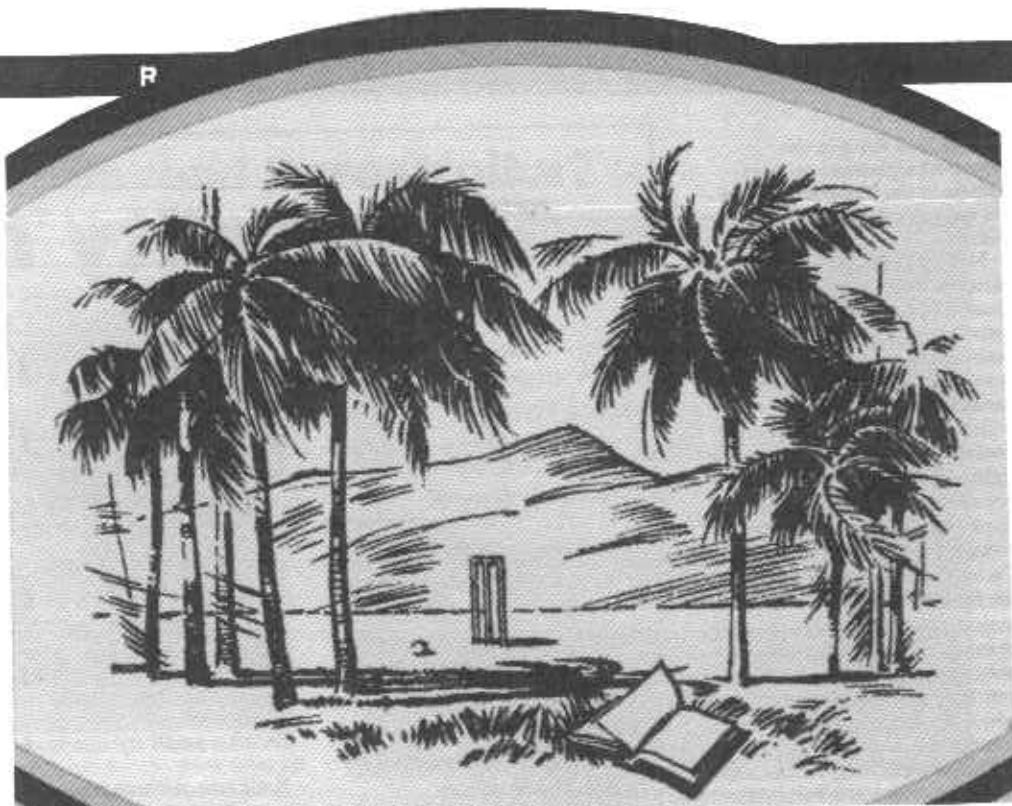
NOW IN HIS 88th year, CLR James has lived to become a legend in his own time. His home in Brixton has become a focus for radicals from all over the world. In his youth in Trinidad, James became known in cricketing circles as a maverick. This term could also be used to describe his impact on Marxism.

It is a pity that James has never completed his memoirs or expanded them into an autobiography. Even given his not undeserved self esteem, his fluent pen could not fail to do better justice to its subject than the book under review, by the author of the unsatisfactory *Marxism in the USA*.

From an early age, CLR developed wide-spread interests — a passion for cricket, Shakespeare, Verdi and Beethoven and a growing involvement in politics. Now an octogenarian, with a world-wide reputation, he is still as interested in these divergent spheres. In the semi-autobiographical *Beyond the Boundary*, he argues that sport, and especially cricket, art and politics are dialectically inter-related.

It was his observations on the cricket field which first awakened him to the injustices of colonial rule in his native Trinidad. Mediocre white players were chosen for the West Indian team simply because they were white. Outstanding players, like Wilton St Hill, were left out because they were black.

But James' political and wider literary life really began



Cricket, art and politics are dialectically inter-related

when he moved to England in 1932, settling in Nelson, Lancashire and earning his living as cricket correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. Swiftly disillusioned with the Labour Party, he joined the ILP in 1933, where he came into contact with the trotskyst Marxist Group. In an interview with AJ Richardson and others, published by *Socialist Platform* in 1987, James states quite frankly 'I joined the Trotskyist movement and I learned marxism in the Trotskyist



CLR James as he is today

movement'. This is not at all apparent from Buhle's account, which gives the impression that James was already a fully-fledged marxist at this point.

James rose to prominence at the time of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia). His articles in the ILP journal *New Leader* were models of marxist pamphleteering, linking the anti-imperialist and class struggles in dialectic unity. He

had been a marxist for only three short years, but quickly grasped its essentials. Thanks to his early contact with trotskysim, James, unlike his old friend George Padmore, avoided falling into the stalinist trap.

Buhle fails completely to mention James' participation in the founding conference of the Fourth International or the 1936 Geneva conference which preceded it. Indeed the Fourth International is not mentioned once in the book.

Further, he ignores what was a formative experience for James — his active role in combatting the vicious stalinist campaign of slander against Trotsky and trotskysts which reached its frenzied peak during the Moscow trials of 1936-8. James was probably the finest orator our movement has produced, at least in the English speaking world — and the movement made full use of his talents. In Britain he was the one person feared by the stalinists as being more than a match for people such as Pollitt and Palme Dutt.

James was to develop serious differences with Trotsky — some of which were already apparent in his *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937). But it was his grasp of the theory of permanent revolution which enabled him to write his magnum opus *The Black Jacobins*, the history of the first successful slave revolt since Spartacus. If he had never produced anything else, socialist literature would be richer for this tour de force.

In the field of theory, James' most notable contribution was

his influence, together with Trotsky himself, in turning the American Socialist Workers Party towards a realisation of the importance of the black proletariat to the revolutionary process in the United States. James and Raya Dunayevskaya (Johnson-Forest) were also amongst the first to see the revolutionary potential of the then still incipient women's movement.

James also played a role in the development of Kwame Nkrumah, to whom he was introduced by Dunayevskaya. Realising Nkrumah's leadership abilities, he sent him to George Padmore for political training. By this time, Padmore had almost completely abandoned marxism for Pan-African nationalism. As a result Nkrumah's radical nationalism ran up against the stone wall of neo-colonialism. When Nkrumah's regime entered the path of bureaucratic degeneration and personality cult, James did not hesitate to break with him and publish his criticism.

This is not the place to debate James' differences with trotskysim. Today James still considers himself a leninist — although he abjures the leninist concept of the vanguard party. Despite our differences with him, he is one of the few people alive today that has enriched marxist theory with original thought. In the opinion of the reviewer, who has continued to value his personal friendship, there was a place for him and his radical thoughts in the Fourth International. We are all the poorer for his departure.

Share sales and cold showers

The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism
Andrew Gamble
 Macmillan, £7.95

Reviewed by
Jane Wells

I FIRST VOTED in 1979. Margaret Thatcher has been Prime Minister for most of my adult life.

Making sense of a political phenomenon as profound as Thatcherism has been difficult for my generation – especially when, at the same time, you're trying to take in the whole range of political life, with little historical experience or perspective to bring to it. Dim memories of cold nights spent listening to the radio by candlelight in the 1973/4 miner's overtime ban (those were the days) and Harold Wilson's resignation in 1976 is about as far back as I go.

But it's not only those who are new to politics who have found it a difficult assessment to make. Debate between commentators on all sides (and the same sides) of the political spectrum about the nature of the beast still rages. Because, inevitably, behind every attempt to assess political reality, lie judgements which are based on more than just the immediate situation and facts. You have to have an analytical framework to work in and a set of analytical tools that are up to the job, too.

Andrew Gamble's book provides a comprehensive account of economic and political developments of the last ten years. He reminds us, refreshingly, that there have been downs as well as ups in the Government's fortunes, which are all too easy to forget when viewed through the the impending triumphalist anniversary celebration of a decade of thumping Tory parliamentary majorities and working class defeats. But rather than just commenting on those events he offers an analysis too.

Looking at the sweeping changes wrought in the British political scene over the decade since Thatcher came to power in the context of post-war political developments, Gamble explores the success of the Thatcher project: the complete domination

of political life allowing for little dissent or opposition (hegemony). His measures for that are the extent to which Thatcher's chosen methods, the free economy and the strong state of the book's title, have been implemented. His conclusion is that in its war on the working class, Thatcherism has so far only really scored a draw, but looks in strong shape and confident for the replay – although its economic prospects are not too good.

The extent to which the 'strong state' has been achieved is the subject of some debate in the labour movement, and has occupied many pages of *Socialist Outlook* over recent months. Left Labour MP Tony Banks pitched in too, suggesting in a recent television interview that once the Government's current legislative programme is exhausted, we can be sure that 'they'll be knocking on our doors on a Sunday morning to make sure we've had our cold showers and aren't interfering with each other'. The debate, no doubt, will continue.

Meanwhile though, Gamble fails to answer the bigger and more urgent question; what do we do about it? Unfortunately



Denis Doran/Reflex

Thatcher: only scored a draw so far?

any serious consideration of the options for the working class is completely missing from his analysis. Even the concluding section of the book, devoted to 'The future of Thatcherism' does not deal with this central issue. Instead he considers only the prospects for Thatcherism at the level of 'high politics' and as a force, vying for power with alternative right-wing doctrines and currents, in the context of the economic outlook.

The working class as an active force with the potential for struggle is almost completely absent from Gamble's account, which leaves it, disappointingly, just short of as good a marxist analysis of the Thatcher

phenomenon as you might hope for. This omission, it is probably fair to say, stems from the set of political judgements underpinning Gamble's approach. His writing is informed by the positions of *Marxism Today*, to which he is a key contributor. Nevertheless, his analysis, as far as it goes, remains a useful starting point. But without that identification of 'the way forward for the working class' (to use a well worn but still meaningful phrase) you're left missing one essential ingredient – the opportunity to use your analytical tools to dig your way out.

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SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

LETTERS

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(letters over 350 words may be edited)

Three-phase Stalinism

The article by Phil Hearse and Dave Packer (*'The way out of a tangle on Stalinism'*) which appeared in SO 12 contains a distortion of my position. I have never asserted that the Chinese, Albanian and Vietnamese states, regimes, or ruling bureaucracies, are less authoritarian and manipulative than Khrushchev's, not to say Gorbachev's Russia. At the most I said that in spite of that authoritarianism, they enjoyed more mass support up to a certain period, because of the role they played in the revolution in their country (this applies to China and Vietnam, probably not to Albania). But that is neither a question of definition nor of theoretical analysis, but just a question of facts.

I could accept Hearse and Packer's position that a stalinist or neo-stalinist party is one which subordinates the interests of revolution (i.e. of the working class) in its country, to those of any state bureaucracy (defined as a hardened bureaucratic caste exercising state power in a workers state) — whether the Russian, Chinese, Yugoslav or Vietnamese one.

But such a definition reveals the contradictions in Hearse and Packer's assessments, not in mine. To what ruling state bureaucracy did the Yugoslav Communist Party subordinate the interests of the Yugoslav revolution in 1942? Or the Chinese CP in the 1948 Chinese revolution? Or the Vietnamese CP in the Vietnamese revolution in 1949? To the Russian bureaucracy? Obviously not. To the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese state bureaucracies? But these did not exist in the years cited!

So the correct definition involves a three-phase approach. The parties were stalinist when they had an orientation of refusing to fight for the overthrow of the bourgeois-oligarchic (in Vietnam, colonial) state following the Moscow line. Then they subordinated the interests of the revolution to those of the Soviet bureaucracy.

They broke with stalinism when they took the conscious decision to change that strategic line and to fight for the overthrow of the bourgeois state. To this end they educated their cadres and mobilized huge masses



November 1988: Ernest Mandel at Socialist Outlook rally on Fourth International

(albeit in a manipulative way) for that revolutionary goal.

They became neo-stalinist parties when, after having destroyed the bourgeois state through their conquest of power, they started to subordinate the interests of the working class and of the revolution to those of their own emerging national bureaucratic caste.

This is a more complex assessment than that of Hearse and Packer. It might even sound awkward. But we don't approach theory from the point of view of whether it is easily expressed or understood. We approach it from the point of view of whether it enables us to understand the moving reality in its totality, without losing theory's inner coherence. This, I believe, is the case with my definition of stalinism. It is not fully the case with Hearse and Packer's definition.

Ernest Mandel

Yugoslavia

Congratulations on Colin Meade's article, *'Yugoslavia: Who Will Take Charge?'*. It did at least get Milosevic's position into perspective, and explained the balances of power that may propel him into the Yugoslav Communist Party leadership; or not. There are few intelligent articles written on Yugoslavia at the moment at a time when, as Colin Meade points out, we need to be entering into serious debate about Yugoslavia.

However, I find the tendency to write off Yugoslav socialism as purely 'bureaucratic' disturbing, and an attempt to cover up a lack of understanding of the Yugoslav system which he admits 'baffles everybody'. Yugoslavia has a long socialist tradition; a strong socialist party was formed in Bosnia in 1908, and the Yugoslav Communist Party (formerly the Socialist Workers Party) is as old as the federation itself. After the second world war, Yugoslavia was the only country to be wholly liberated by its own partisans, or, more accurately, by the Communist Party. Yugoslav socialists refer to the war as the 'socialist revolution', believing it to be a genuinely revolutionary struggle against a capitalist oppressor, albeit a foreign one. And the 'independent road' which Tito established following the war was arguably the most democratic and accountable system of popular socialist representation ever established even if it was also the most incomprehensible; one in seven Yugoslavs holds some kind of elected political office!

Of course, the system has foundered, inevitably perhaps for any socialist country trying to 'go it alone'. But we cannot afford to write off the Yugoslav way as just 'bureaucratic'. It deserves, and must be given, a good deal more serious consideration and debate than that if we are ever to understand the true roots of democratic socialism.

Peter Chowney

Legacy of the WRP?

I was somewhat perplexed by the letter in the SO 12 from Trevor Wongsam, which alleges that Phil Hearse, in his earlier article *'Thatcherism, the coming of the strong state'*, '...falls into the same terminological trap as the former Worker's Revolutionary Party, the legacy of which is continued in the pages of *Socialist Newsletter*'.

This assertion is all the more surprising as Wongsam produces not a shred of evidence to justify it.

Socialist Newsletter has never characterised Thatcherism as Bonapartism; nor does it perpetuate the legacy of the WRP in its pages. *Socialist Newsletter* was one of the few publications which, during the terminal crisis of the WRP, produced a series of analytical articles and leaflets tracing the explosion of the WRP to its sectarian roots. It made a systematic critique of the WRP's leftist and triumphalist line and characterisation of the political period, which had a contemporary expression in the position that the miners' strike did not culminate in a defeat for the working class.

Wongsam's remark that *Socialist Newsletter* continues the WRP's legacy raises a broader problem, however. Are such unsubstantiated assertions consistent with the traditions of political debate among Marxists? You will find little basis in the polemics of Marx or Lenin for such throwaway sideswipes.

If Wongsam — or anyone else — wants to tar *Socialist Newsletter* with a Healeyite brush, can he at least produce some documented evidence, please? Otherwise, he will appear as just one more sectarian substituting the politics of insult and innuendo for honest Marxist discussion.

Communist greetings,

Mike Pearse,
Socialist Newsletter

Marxists and the Labour Party

Jane Kelly's review of Cliff and Gluckstein's *The Labour Party — a Marxist History* (SO 12) identifies the real question today — that is, the way to formulate the relationship between Marxian socialists and the Labour Party in terms of the interests of the working class as a whole vis-a-vis the socialist goal.

What disturbs me is the formulation Kelly seems to share with Cliff and Gluckstein — that the Labour Party is something to 'be removed' (Kelly). Kelly mentions the united front, but it seems to me that for the transformative vision of the Marxist left to gain influence, it is necessary to generate a real dialogue between all socialists committed to removing the Tories from office. In this task the Labour Party is an indispensable vehicle. To progress, the left needs to put its own house in order. This means applying the norms of socialist democracy to the way debates are formulated and conducted within the labour movement itself. The desire to 'remove' other working class parties from the scene is not only against the spirit of socialist democracy but is counter-productive in a society schooled in the benefits of bourgeois democracy.

Chris Madoc

A reply on the Tamils in Sri Lanka

The article 'Riding a tiger into a blind alley' in *Socialist Outlook* 12 did not deal with the most burning questions concerning the situation for the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

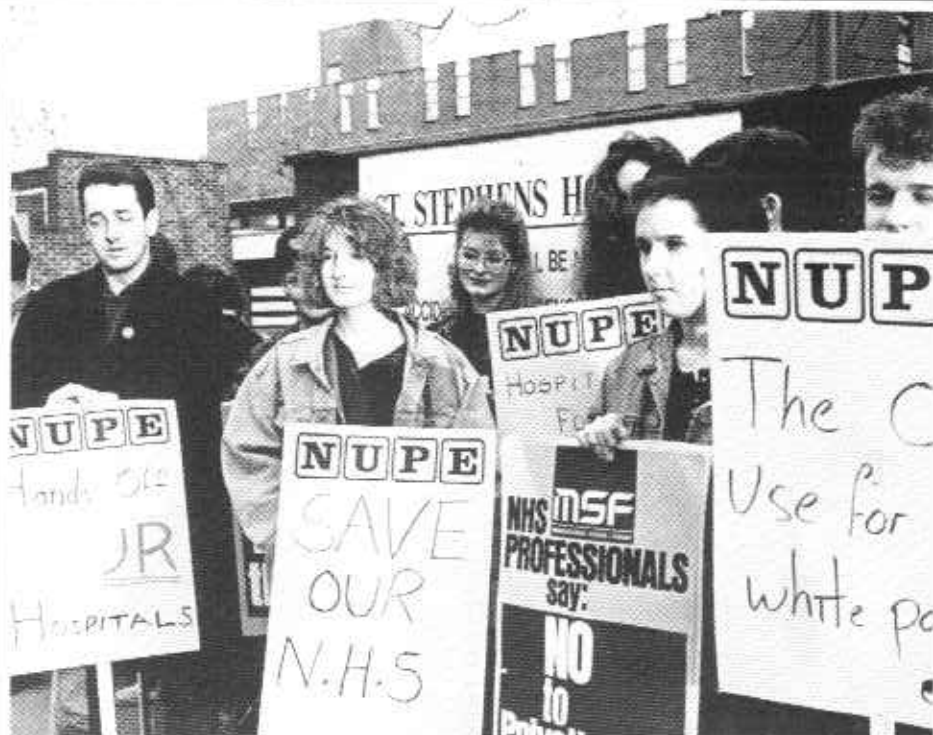
Do we support the demand for an independent Tamil Eelam? Do we support the demand for the withdrawal of the 50,000 Indian troops in Sri Lanka? And if we do, can we then give critical support to those Tamils who are fighting for a Tamil Eelam and who are involved in a war with the Indian occupation force?

Leaving aside for the time being the question of whether the plantation Tamils in the Central and Uva provinces, and the Ceylon Tamils in the Northern and Eastern provinces, are one people or two different peoples, authors M. Manickam and Lal Silva seem to agree with my original article — that both have for decades faced severe repression from the Sinhalese state and community.

Can we then also agree that if the Tamil people in the North and East of Sri Lanka are an oppressed people we must surely support their struggle for self-determination?

We seem to agree that we as socialists should put such a struggle in a class perspective, trying to unite the Tamil and Sinhalese working class as much as possible. But it is far from clear in M. Manickam and Lal Silva's article whether they will support the Tamils' struggle for an independent Tamil Eelam.

They talk about 'intervening in the struggle for full democracy...to create conditions for a unified struggle to overthrow capitalist rule'. Does that mean that the Tamils in the North and East cannot have



WHILE the government forges ahead with its White Paper on the National Health Service, apparently ready to defy doctors' professional bodies as well as public opinion, the fightback is still taking shape. 'Hands Off Our Hospitals' meetings and local campaigns have been developing across London and now into other towns. They can also link up with battles against cuts and closures, like this picket of St Stephen's Hospital in Fulham which, along with four other hospitals, faces the bulldozers. Further details of 'Hands Off Our Hospitals' campaigns and publicity material available from London Health Emergency, 335, Grays Inn Rd, London WC1.

national independence until capitalism is overthrown in Sri Lanka, and that the national struggle is secondary to the class struggle?

The article does not clearly say whether socialists should demand a withdrawal of the 50,000 Indian troops. Their position on the Indian-Sri Lankan accord, which legalised the Indian occupation force in the North and East of Sri Lanka, seems to be: we neither support nor oppose. (This also seems to be the position of the Revolutionary Marxist Party of Sri Lanka). This is not a serious position. What possible progressive role can the Indian troops play? None. They are only doing the dirty job that the Sinhalese state has been unable to do. All independent sources confirm that the Tamil people see the Indian troops as a repressive occupation force. And they are right!

Being unclear about an independent Tamil Eelam and the Indian troops, it is not surprising that M. Manickam and Lal Silva refuse to give critical support to the main Tamil liberation front, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). They describe the LTTE as a petty-bourgeois nationalist terrorist organisation without support from the Tamil masses.

If that was the case, it is difficult to explain why the fourth largest army in the world still have not been able to defeat a few thousand terrorists. We might disagree with some of the tactics of the LTTE, but that should not make us abandon the just struggle for national independence.

There are many liberation movements around the world which do not have perfect programmes or tactics. But that does not make us turn away from doing solidarity work and having discussions with them.

Finn Jensen

Motes and beams

Brian Elkington in SO 12 accuses Phil Hearse of 'mistakes — in fact, history and analysis'. Perhaps. But what comes to my mind is a Biblical proverb about motes and beams.

Ireland an 'advanced capitalist country' — really this will not do — either as fact, history or analysis.

An advanced capitalist country which has a part of its territory occupied, whose government must always look to the approval of the occupying imperialist power, its economy completely dominated by (an) imperialist power(s) forced to make in the longterm extremely disadvantageous 'sweetheart' deals to encourage foreign investment, which has not even begun to approach separation of Church and State and where, after all, the national liberation struggle is still the central political question.

Perhaps SO should step up its Irish coverage?

Penny Duggan

PS 'Women were paid less than men for doing the same job'...Equal pay has suddenly become a reality in Britain?

Defend the Uppington 25

The Uppington 25 are the largest group facing the gallows in South African legal history. They have been convicted on the same basis of 'common purpose' used against the Sharpeville 6. They should be the subject of the same sort of international campaign.

The 25 were convicted of the 1985 murder of a municipal policeman in



coverage in the South African press, little or nothing has yet been done in Britain.

The reasons for this apparent indifference are not difficult to trace. The defendants are supporters of a range of different anti-apartheid organisations. The ANC is not organisationally present in Paballelo. So far it has been the Cape Action League which has made the most efforts to campaign

around the case.

Paballelo township, outside Uppington, a town on the border with Namibia. Most of the accused were convicted on the basis that they were part of a crowd which stoned the home of the municipal policeman before he was killed, also by a crowd of people.

Most of the defendants have been in prison since April 1988 after an 18 month hearing. The accused are aged between 21 and 64. The youngest, Xoliswa Dube, was 17 at the time of her arrest. She has since given birth to a baby girl whom she has called Innocentia.

All of the defendants' dependents are in dire financial need. But little support has come from the usual sources of prisoner aid, such as the South African Council of Churches. And although the trial has received extensive

There is absolutely no doubt that if the case had happened in a stronghold of the ANC, the Uppington 25 would be at the very centre of the international anti-apartheid movement's campaigning efforts.

It is up to the small left in Anti-Apartheid in this country to bring this case forcibly to the attention of the whole movement. Our aim should be to drag the Uppington 25 to the centre of the Anti-Apartheid Movement's campaigning. In the same way as the Sharpeville 6, became a central focus for the movement.

Send letters of support and donations to:
Uppington 25, c/o The Rural Worker, SACHED, 5 Church Street, MOWBRAY 7700 SOUTH AFRICA

Hugo Blanco released – but solidarity still needed

International solidarity action has been successful – Peruvian trotskyst Hugo Blanco (featured in SO 13) has now been released after protests in Sweden, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, France and across Latin America and the United States.

But José Ramón García, kidnapped member of the

Mexican PRT, is still missing. Telegrams of protest and demands that the Mexican state return him alive and unharmed should be sent to:

Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Presidente Constitucional, Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Palacio Nacional Mexico DF, Mexico.

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