

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

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Ricky Tomlinson — Shrewsbury picket: the people's flag reviewed

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Tory hurricane of change

WHILE KINNOCK and Gould set out to widen Labour's horizons by chopping down the traditional shrubbery of Clause IV, Thatcher's demolition squad are using gelignite to reshape the whole political and social landscape.

Already many familiar landmarks have bitten the dust. Anti-union laws and jackboot management have risen in place of the old edifices of class collaboration. A lifetime of low pay and Micky Mouse jobs now threatens youth, in place of apprenticeships and regular wages. Newly privatised firms have taken over the task of ripping off punters needing gas, phones or airline tickets.

The pace of change is accelerating: the Conservative Party has with messianic zeal embraced the mission of wiping socialism from the map — helped by the timid 'revisionist' efforts of the Kinnock team.

Third term Thatcher has since June embarked on a rapid succession of major initiatives which have left Labour and union leaders gasping and dumbfounded.

- By next April, social security as we know it will have been abolished; claimants will be forced to bid against each other for repayable loans from a cash-limited 'social fund' in place of special needs payments; child benefits face the axe, and each month brings fresh cuts in benefit.

- Already the health service has been deliberately plunged into a deep financial crisis to create conditions to slaughter this most sacred of welfare state cows.

- Education faces both an ideological crackdown through the 'national curriculum', and a frontal onslaught on comprehensive schools through Baker's 'opting out' plans.

- Tory minister Waldegrave has admitted that new housing legislation is designed to halt all council house-building. It also aims to sell off existing council houses, either one by one to tenants or in job lots to speculators through 'pick a landlord' schemes.

- Local government faces further devastation through the poll tax and other restrictions; and of course more industries face privatisation.

The aim of this blitzkrieg attack is clear enough: the Tories want to establish a totally new *fait accompli* by

the time of the next election, to exploit to the hilt the appalling weakness of the Labour leadership.

Branded 'sub-Thatcherism' by its opponents in Brighton, and deridingly welcomed by Norman Tebbit in his Tory conference speech, Labour's current line amounts to complete capitulation.

- In place of Thatcher's policy of privatisation, share ownership and sales of council houses, Labour's dynamic leaders propose ... to *accept* privatisation, to *advocate* share ownership, and to *consider* selling the remaining council housing stock.

- In reply to Thatcher's onslaught on local government, Labour has replied by ... launching its own witch-hunts against left-wing councils, pledging to abide by Tory laws, and waging only a half-cock, parliamentary, opposition to the hated poll tax.

- To challenge Thatcher's commitment to the reactionary NATO alliance and a 'British' nuclear deterrent against the myth of a 'Soviet threat', Labour offers ... its own unshakeable commitment to NATO, and a 'rethink' of its unilateralist policy (which has already been watered down even by many on the left to a 'non-nuclear defence policy').

- While Thatcher presses confidently ahead, tearing up cynical election commitments to safeguard the NHS, Labour's front bench team are nowhere to be seen or heard.

- Labour leaders will be even more tongue-tied in defending social security — especially since shadow chancellor John Smith has already announced his conversion to Thatcher's 'low-tax' philosophy.

So the rot goes on. At root the problem is a basic political one — a lack of socialist policies or class commitment from the leadership of the labour movement — leaving the working class defenceless in the face of a ruthless and relentless Tory attack, which will now be compounded by the consequences of the stock market collapse.

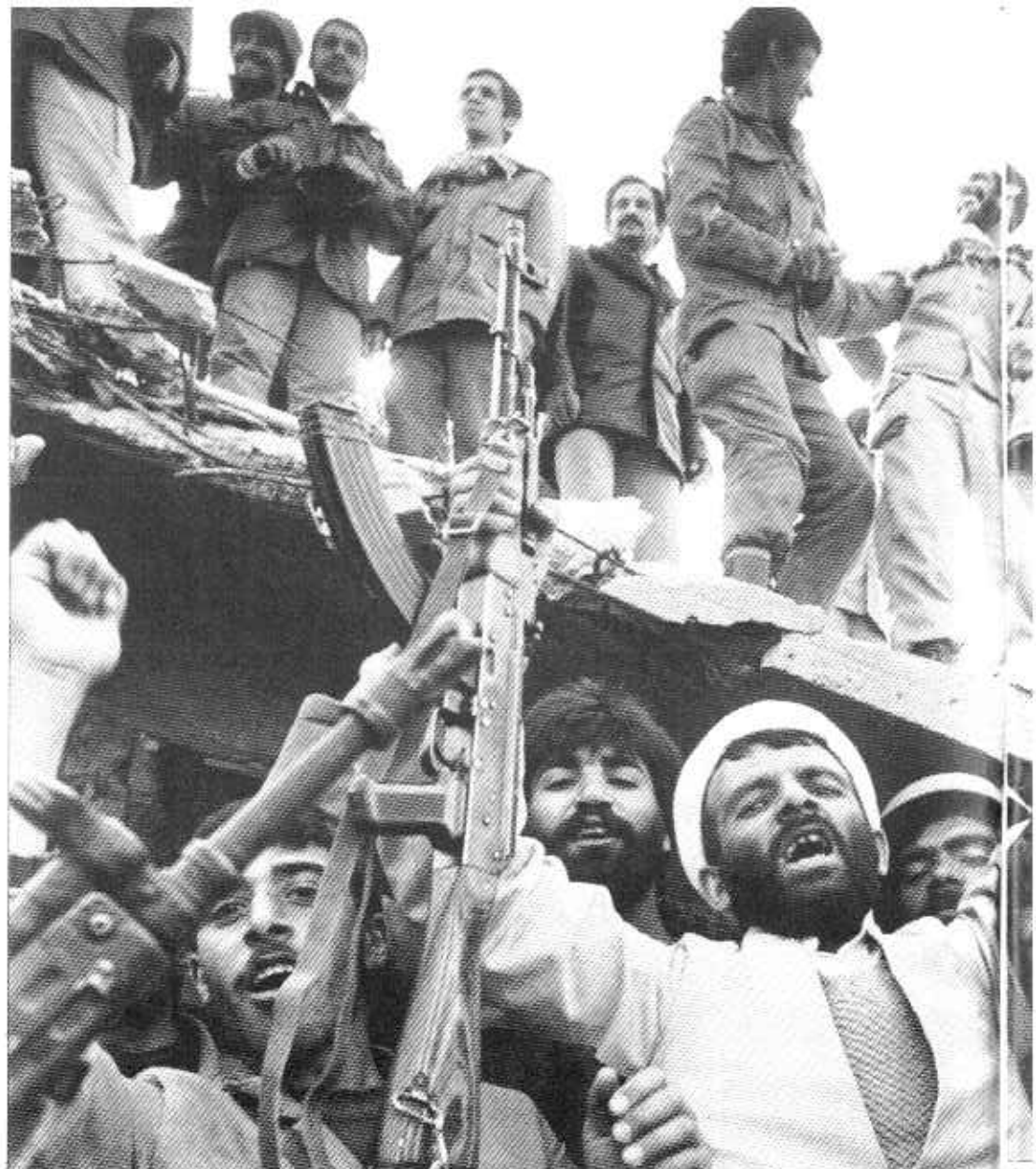
With the crisis of capitalism once more exposed for all to see, the role of *Socialist Outlook* and other currents of the hard left must now be to fight in every arena of the labour movement for a coherent socialist programme that will mobilise the working class to meet the crisis. Why not join us in this task?

SINCE THE middle of the summer tensions in the Gulf have risen dramatically, as the United States and Iran have traded military blows more and more aggressively. The real shooting war was started by the US when they attacked an Iranian mine-laying boat, killing some of its crew. It has now escalated to attacks on oil platforms — by the time this article appears something even more dramatic may have occurred.

Obviously the direct and immediate cause of the stand-off was the decision of the US to send its navy to escort American-flagged tankers through the Gulf to 'defend' them from attack by Iran. But this alleged motivation for sending the American navy is entirely spurious. The 'tanker war' has been going on for three years, with hundreds of vessels of many nations attacked by both Iraq and Iran. For three years the United States did nothing. Moreover, the tanker war was started by the Iraqis, whose powerful airforce has carried out by far the majority of the attacks, including attacks on western ships. And yet the United States acts as if it were only Iran that were attacking the tankers.

Reagan took the decision to send the 'escort' ships as a result of the attack on the USS Stark. This US warship was shot up by an Iraqi fighter using an exact missile — not by the Iranians. But somehow, in US propaganda and the strange mists of Reagan's imagination, Iran got the blame for the Iraqi attack. But the decision to go for confrontation was a conscious and deliberate political choice by the Reagan administration. Just over a year ago the White House, in the form of Ollie North and Admiral Poindexter, were caught with their pants down making diplomatic overtures to and selling arms to the Iranians.

This led to the Irangate scandal. The confrontation with Iran smacks of an attempt to cover the Reagan tracks and show that, no, the White House is not soft on terrorism



Revolutionary guards joined by a mullah in celebration of an Iranian victory in a Gulf war

Towards showdown in the Gulf

and the Iranian mullahs:

There have been many periods of uncertainty in US policy towards Iran and the Gulf war since the early 1980s. While the US has generally seen the Shi'ite fundamentalism of Iran as a threat to its interests in the region, it has been cautious about giving unconditional support to the Iraqis. Iraq is strongly disliked by Israel, the closest US ally in the Middle East, for the simple reason that it is an Arab power. Israel does not want to see the Iraqis victorious and emboldened. Five years ago Israeli planes overflew Saudi Arabia to attack and destroy the French-built nuclear reactor in Iraq. Naturally they feared the outcome of the development of a nuclear capacity by an Arab state. There is no doubt that United States intelligence and operational assistance was

given to this attack. Israel has been selling arms to Iran throughout the course of the war.

The views of Israel and the pro-Israeli lobby in the United States are always an important component of US strategic thinking in the Middle East. But in the vital Gulf region, so important for oil supplies to the advanced capitalist countries, the views and security of the reactionary Arab sheikhdoms which dominate the region have to be taken into account. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain are fiercely pro-western, but also scared stiff of the growing strength of the kind of Islamic fundamentalism promoted by Iran.

Throughout the Gulf in both the majority sunni population and the minority shi'ites there is a strong surge of

fundamentalist sentiment. The new 'growth industries' in the region are mosque construction and new editions of the Koran and learned 'commentaries' on the holy text. More and more women can be seen wearing the veil or the chador.

The semi-feudal rulers of the Gulf may all be muslims but their political concerns are down-to-earth and practical. Their nightmares are those of the overturning of their fiefs by fundamentalist mobs spurred on by Khomeini. You don't have to be a genius to see why Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain are co-operating so closely with the US navy in the Gulf.

The growth of Islamic fundamentalism is becoming a social catastrophe of enormous proportions in the whole of the Middle East and the Arab world. Its causes lie in the disappointment which the

UPFRONT



ar battle

PRESIDENT Arias of Costa Rica has joined a long line of Nobel prize-winning 'peacemakers' that includes Henry Kissinger and Menachem Begin. But what does his plan represent and what attitude should socialists and solidarity activists take towards it?

The Guatemala peace accord, signed by the presidents of the five Central American countries and due to be fully implemented by 7 November, calls for 'external powers' to cease any military support for 'irregular' forces in the region.

Its other provisions include: guerrilla forces being denied the use of neighbouring countries; negotiation of reductions in armaments and troop levels; a full amnesty; national reconciliation committees being set up in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala; freedom of the press; the right to organise politically; the lifting of states of emergency and the holding of free elections.

The US administration attempted to derail the accord, even before it was signed. On 5 August Reagan presented an alternative plan calling on the Sandinistas to negotiate with the contras and for an end to Soviet aid to Nicaragua. The US knew that the Sandinistas would never agree to such a proposal and wanted to use their non-compliance as a way of ensuring aid to the contras.

Since the Arias plan was signed, a bill granting the contras \$3.5 million in 'humanitarian' aid has been passed with strong bipartisan support, and Reagan has asked Congress for a further \$270 million in contra aid — the largest amount so far. The aim is to support the contras while trying to obtain maximum concessions from the Sandinistas.

For their part, the Nicaraguans have welcomed the Arias plan as a victory. It legitimises the government while denying legitimacy to the contras.

Nicaragua's economy is in chaos — inflation is running at more than 700 per cent and rationing has been introduced on basic foodstuffs, toothpaste,



A coffee picker — the Nicaraguan coffee harvest has been damaged by contra killings of coffee pickers

Arias plan: peace in Central America?

petrol and so forth. The coffee harvest has been damaged by contra killings of coffee pickers, outlying areas have been left unfarmed because of the danger of attack and both industry and agriculture have suffered through the drafting of young people into the army. Seventy-five thousand soldiers have to be fed and paid every week.

Internationally, Nicaragua has become increasingly isolated. West Germany, France, Spain and Italy have ended the aid programmes they once had. Nicaragua has lost the option of credit through its inability to repay the interest on loans.

The Soviet Union too had been tightening the screws. *Izvestia* recently wrote of 'parasitism, speculation and swindling' in Nicaragua and the USSR was reluctant to fill the gap left by the suspension of Mexican and Venezuelan oil shipments.

Already, the Arias plan has resulted in economic

assistance: the Soviet Union announced on 7 September that it would supply 100,000 more tons of petroleum this year; Peru has agreed to sell Nicaragua 5,000 tons and Cuba will sell 40,000 tons.

The Nicaraguans hope that the accord will allow the revolution a breathing space: a chance to overcome its economic and political isolation. They are now pursuing a diplomatic war, moving far faster on implementing the accord than either El Salvador or Guatemala.

Nicaragua has lifted the ban on the bourgeois daily *La Prensa*, re-opened 'Radio Catolica' (the voice of the conservative catholic hierarchy), declared a unilateral ceasefire in three zones, declared an amnesty for all contras who turn themselves in, established over 100 local peace commissions, established the national reconciliation commission (headed by arch-reactionary Cardinal Obando y Brava) and repealed decree 760 which allows for the confiscation of property of those outside the country for more than six months.

They have refused some compromises however. The catholic hierarchy has called for the release from prison of the four thousand guardsmen and contras imprisoned since the revolution. In what seems a popular move domestically the Sandinistas have so far refused to release the torturers, murderers and rapists used by Somoza and the US government to terrorise the workers and peasants of Nicaragua.

The accord grants legitimacy to all governments in power in the region. By seeking to cut off outside aid, and to discredit 'irregular' forces, it equates the contras with the FMLN in El Salvador and the URNG in Guatemala.

In Guatemala the civilian president, Cerezo, is attempting to use the accord as a cover for the continuing campaign to wipe out the URNG guerrilla forces. The URNG had previously called four times for negotiations,

masses in these countries experienced with Arab nationalism and other 'progressive' secular movements. But the forces opposed to the Iranian exponents of this fundamentalism in the Gulf region are themselves utterly reactionary.

Socialists, while understanding that the Khomeini regime is reactionary, must understand that what is happening in the Gulf is an exercise in the crudest imperialist intervention, literally gunboat diplomacy aimed at covering up the Frigate affair and defending the emirs and sheiks who rule the Gulf. Despite Khomeini, socialists should defend the self-determination of Iran against US aggression, and demand that that US, British and French navies get out of the gulf ●

and had been refused four times.

More people (one hundred per month) currently 'disappear' in Guatemala under a civilian regime than under the junta in Chile. Despite the election of a civilian government, the military operates as if it was still in power — and has not been held to account for any of the fifteen thousand deaths in the 1980-83 period when it officially ran the country.

In El Salvador the FMLN/FDR have been calling for negotiations with the Duarte regime for some time now. The diplomatic offensive of the FMLN/FDR around the proposal for a 'government of broad participation' (GAP) corresponds to the exhaustion of the masses with a war which has claimed sixty thousand lives. It has been used to help rebuild mass organisation and mass struggle. A wave of labour struggles is now sweeping El Salvador.

Duarte's signing of the accord is both a response to the pressure brought by the diplomatic offensive of the FMLN and the mass mobilisations that have emerged in this context. He will attempt to use the accord to win international recognition of his regime and discredit the FMLN/FDR.

The FMLN/FDR, in response to the accord, have said they will step up the struggle. They welcomed the accord as a means of forcing the Duarte regime to negotiate but have said they will not lay down their arms to do so. On 4 October a meeting took place between the Salvadorean government and the FMLN/FDR. As a result an eight person ceasefire commission — comprising four government and four guerrilla representatives — was established. Over four thousand refugees have since returned to El Salvador from Honduras.

The Guatemalan accord represents an opportunity for the Sandinistas, but, insofar as it equates the contras with the FMLN and URNG, it presents grave risks for the struggles in El Salvador and Guatemala,

and therefore in the long run for Nicaragua itself.

While defending the right of Nicaragua to pursue any measures necessary for its survival, socialists must also defend the FMLN in El

Salvador and the URNG in Guatemala against any attacks — diplomatic, economic, or military — brought about as a result of the accord.

Within the solidarity movement socialists should

argue for a clear line against imperialist intervention in Central America, not allowing the movement to be divided on the question of the Guatemala accord ●

GILL LEE

Aquino on borrowed time

IN LESS THAN two years since President Cory Aquino was swept to power in the Philippines on a wave of popular rebellion that ended the Marcos dictatorship, her government is virtually held hostage by the military.

The scene looks set for a final coup. In August this year Cory Aquino survived the most serious coup attempt of her presidency. But the price she paid for the support of the generals who, belatedly, came to her rescue, was the dismissal of her closest cabinet advisors (the remaining 'progressives') in favour of hard-liners. Now the military officers have tightened their grip on the regime, a move also applauded by many in the business community.

The mass movement that rose up against ex-president Marcos not only wanted to oust him: it had illusions in Aquino. As late as May 1987, her success in the legislative elections showed that she still enjoyed considerable personal popularity with a people on the rebound from the horrors of a 14-year dictatorship. However, the built-in contradictions between her mass base and her bourgeois politics are now coming home to roost.

From the outset Cory Aquino's government has courted the Americans. At the same time it has sought to maintain the loyalty of the 'constitutionalist' wing of the army under chief of staff, Fidel Ramos, in order to counter the growing influence of military leaders of the extreme right.

With US aid she has supplied the generals with new weapons to wage 'total war' on the guerrillas of the communist-led New People's Army (NPA). During her presidency, leaders of the

workers' movement have been arrested, tortured — even assassinated. In many towns and villages government troops collaborate with armed anti-communist vigilante groups. Together they terrorise and murder people who are thought to be NPA sympathisers, who join unions or who simply try to grow food on strips of land fringing the sugar plantations.

The miserable poverty of the mass of the people, as in

August followed a transport strike that paralysed the capital, Manila, and five other regions.

The strike was provoked by an inflationary 18 per cent rise in fuel prices suddenly imposed by the government to appease the International Monetary Fund and help to repay interest on the country's crippling \$26 billion foreign debt. The resulting explosion of popular discontent gave a new boost to the left, uniting



Photo: Communist Party of the Philippines

US troops on manoeuvres in the Philippines

the days of martial law, goes unalleviated by social reforms. A particular bone of contention is the long-promised land reform, a piece of draft legislation currently lost in the labyrinths of Congress: 'Aquino's land reform scheme has been progressively watered-down and deprived of substance', warns the leader of the sugar workers' union, Serge Cherniguin. '...If she yields to the pressure of the big landowners who make up her entourage (and isn't she also one of them?) the peasants themselves will force a redistribution of land.'

Indeed, as Aquino's refusal to break with the old system of privilege and patronage has become increasingly obvious, the working class has started to mobilise on a number of different fronts. Significantly, the failed coup attempt in

in action the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, workers from the KMU radical union federation and the Bayan (New Patriotic Alliance) coalition of mass organisations.

Just as Aquino has failed to maintain her mass base, she has failed to keep the loyalty of the 'military reformists' in the army. Demoralised and divided, the various military factions with no political parties of their own to represent them, felt cheated by Aquino's electoral success in May which heralded the new rise of the big families. Many were deeply dismayed as well by the democratic space opened up by the popular movements, permitting organisations such as the Partido ng Bayan (People's Party, launched in August 1986 by former political prisoners) to run in the

elections.

This year's August rebellion led by Colonel Gregorio Honasan revealed the growing strength of a fascist current in the armed forces. Honasan and the majority of his 4,000 mutineers are still at large. Meanwhile the far right doctrine they stand for — under which Aquino and the 'military reformists' are dismissed as being soft on communism and half-hearted in their war against the guerrillas — continues to win the sympathy of a broad swathe of young officers.

There is now a real danger of a fascist take-over like that of Chile in 1973 which could plummet the country into a nightmare of repression. One important difference, however, is the existence of the tenacious 24,000-strong New People's Army with 17 years' experience of waging armed struggle against the government. Quick to take advantage of the military's disarray following the Honasan coup attempt, the NPA launched a number of unprecedented offensives on economic targets and continues to build up its arsenal. It has offered Aquino negotiations on forging a united front against an army coup.

The Americans, for their part, are worried about the divisions among the various ruling class interest groups in the Philippines — divisions that the guerrillas have been able to exploit. The US therefore keeps its eggs in all baskets — the general staff, the government and business circles. In a situation where the only two options open for the bourgeoisie are to retain Aquino as a figurehead for the army or have the military push her aside, the Americans would probably prefer to see her stay because of her 'democratic' world image. But their priority remains to safeguard their crucial strategic interest in the region through their two Philippines naval bases and to safeguard the vast interests of US capital there, however this can be best achieved. ●

KATHY LOWE

No return to backstreet abortions!

ON 28 OCTOBER, the day after the anniversary of the passing of the 1967 abortion act, the fourteenth attempt to restrict its provisions was introduced to parliament in the form of David Alton's private member's bill.

The bill seeks to amend the 1967 abortion act to reduce time limits for abortions to 18 weeks. At present, there is no time specified in the act and the current limit of 28 weeks, or viability, whichever is the lowest, comes from the 1929 infant life preservation act. This act was intended to deal with the problem of infanticide originally. By amending the 1967 act, the bill would leave the way open for further amendments to be added at committee stage. Pro-choice groups and others have set up a campaign — Fight Alton's Bill (FAB).

There is no logical reason for a time limit of 18 weeks, as even with the most advanced technology, short of an artificial womb, the fetus cannot survive outside the mother until at least 22 weeks, as until then its lungs are solid. A number of 'moderate' MPs will be seeking to persuade Alton to amend his bill to 22 or 23 weeks on those grounds, but given that there are very few abortions after 22 weeks, and that the 1929 act effectively allows for advances in technology covered by the question of viability, this would not achieve what Alton and other hard-liners want — to reduce the total number of abortions done.

Alton says, correctly, that Britain is one of the few countries allowing abortions so late. Most countries in Europe however, and many outside with legal abortion have more

liberal laws than ours, which means that women can get earlier abortions. Moreover, cutbacks in the NHS mean that it is becoming harder for women to get earlier abortions — a significant number of late abortions are due to NHS delays, often due to anti-abortion doctors and others.

FAB opposes any reduction in time limits, on the grounds that it is the most vulnerable who will be hit. Fifty per cent of those having abortions after 20 weeks are 20 or under, young women who find it hardest to acknowledge they are pregnant and to find out what to do. Many come from Ireland and Spain.

Others who will be effected in smaller numbers are menopausal women unaware that they are pregnant, until too late (if Alton gets his way) and those found to be carrying a handicapped fetus, who will be denied the choice of a termination, if that is what they want. This includes a small group who will be forced to carry a still-born child to term, or know that their baby will die immediately after birth.

FAB will be exposing the sort of conditions that create the problems leading to late abortions — lack of sex education and information and help for young women; bad or non-existent NHS facilities that

delay women and mean that they have to find the money for a private abortion (and in the case of those coming for example from Ireland, to find the fare and other expenses as well); the fact that *no* doctor's permission has to be sought, leading to further delays; especially if they come across anti-abortion doctors or agencies, such as '1116-line'. There are all sorts of ways in which women could be helped to get abortions early — this bill is not going to help one little bit.

You can help by becoming a sponsor of FAB and getting any organisations you are in to sponsor too; forming local FAB groups and by helping to raise money — very urgent, especially if we are to get a much-needed FAB office worker.

A mass lobby of parliament is planned for 21 January and we are urging supporters to get trade unions, CPs and women's organisations to support this. The ultimate goal is to get a 100-backed demo around the time of the third reading.

FAB nationally meets at Wesley House on Mondays at 6.30. All supporters welcome.
LEONORA LLOYD

For details, contact FAB at Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2R 5AT, or on 01-405 1801 (NAC), 01 580 9360 (Co-ord) and 01 251 6332 (WRRC).

Support the
**MASS LOBBY OF
PARLIAMENT**
21 January 1988
Fight Alton's Bill meets every Monday
6.30pm, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court,
London WC2

THEY ALWAYS SAID that it couldn't happen. Year after year right wing politicians and economists would claim that the western world had 'learnt the lesson' of 1929, and that another stock market crash on that scale was impossible. Well it *has* happened, and socialists must grasp the sheer scale and enormity of it. In many ways it is going to change both the international and national political context in which we operate. For socialists it will open up both big opportunities but also important dangers. That will still be true even if the stock markets are temporarily rising by the time this is published.

Here we want to give provisional answers to three questions. Why did the crash occur? What will be the consequences for the world and British economy? What will be the political consequences, particularly in Britain?

In order to understand the background to the crash it is necessary to locate it within the framework of the historical development of the world capitalist economy. The long post-war boom began to wind down towards the end of the 1960s. Since then, the world capitalist economy has been caught in a long period of recession, which shows no sign of ending. But within the long recession there have been temporary upswings and downswings: the most dramatic downswing was in the 1974-5 recession.

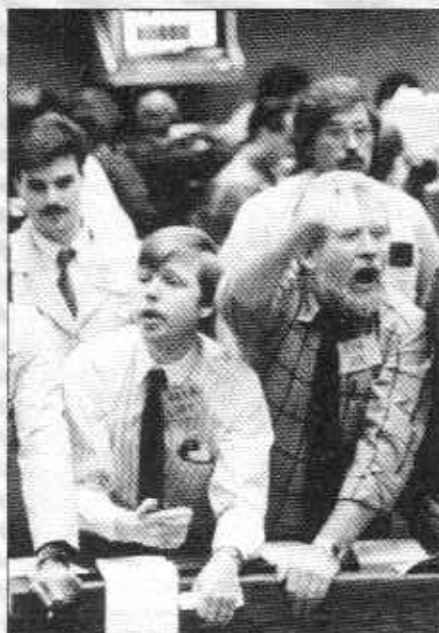
Over the past five years, the US government has abandoned tight financial constraints and boosted its economy by a simple device — running a huge budget deficit. Part of the deficit was used to finance the massive military build up, itself a product of the new period of capitalist crisis and cold war. But the vast levels of government spending all round boosted demand and made the US economy expand rapidly. Hand in hand with the budget deficit, the US began to run a massive balance of trade deficit as the expanding economy sucked in foreign imports, especially from Japan and Europe.

The budget deficit had two important effects: first the United States has had to borrow huge amounts of money, making it the world's biggest debtor nation. Second, it has been under pressure to keep its interest rates high, to ensure that funds flowed into New

Meltdown — the crash of '87

York, rather than going to Germany or elsewhere, where money could be made out of higher interest rates. But herein lies the problem. In order to keep funds flowing into the US, they were under pressure to maintain high interest rates which made it difficult for capitalists in the United States itself to borrow money at cheap rates from the banks to invest, thus threatening a recession in the US.

In other words, the United States



Panic sets in at the New York commodities exchange

economy and military kept expanding by means of deficit financing, building up huge debts. But like all deficit financing, the bill has to be paid some time. It became increasingly clear that to prevent a complete collapse in financial confidence in the dollar, it was going to be necessary to cut government spending, raise taxes, raise interest rates and in general go for economic deflation. A fall in the stock market was only a matter of time.

There is a second major reason for the crash. During the period of relative expansion of the US and world economy, financed by the US budget deficit, share prices have risen rapidly in a massive speculative boom. Now the value of shares on the stock exchange is in the first instance simply determined by the price other people are prepared

to pay for them, and this involves a lot of subjective elements, especially during a wild boom or a big crash. But in the end, the real value of shares must be related to the dividend they are likely to pay — the income that can be received from holding them. Once it becomes clear that a boom in share prices has gotten completely out of hand, and that the price of shares bears no relation to the amount of dividend that can be made from holding them, prices start to go down; and in a period of general economic instability, decline can become panic and 'free fall'.

Simply summed up, the crash is a product of the financial chaos caused by the US trying to get out of the recession by reckless borrowing, thus undermining international confidence in the world's leading capitalist economy; and the closely related phenomenon of the speculative stock market boom, itself fuelled by US economic expansion. *To put it another way, the crash is a typical result of the anarchy of capitalist production and finance. It is typical of the anarchic functioning of capitalism that in finding a short term palliative for recession the US government prepared the ground for an even bigger recession.*

The second question to be answered is the likely economic effect of the stock market crash. There is now no way that the capitalist class in Britain or internationally can avoid a new world slump as a result of the crash. Recently both Reagan and Chancellor Lawson have said that 'nothing has changed in the real economy'. That is nonsense and they know it. The stock market crash will lead to lower investment and hence a slowdown in the growth of the capitalist world economy. To try to bridge the deficit, the US government must deflate the US economy, including trying to claw back money from the US working class. A new recession will lead to heightened competition between firms in the fight for profits; attempts to raise the rate of exploitation of the working class; and increased inter-imperialist competition, including the possibility of a drift towards protectionism and new trade wars.

One thing which cannot be predicted

and the coming world slump

with accuracy of course is the *timescale* and duration of the slump. There may be soon a temporary rise in the stock market — we should remember it took three years after 1929 for Wall Street to reach its eventual low point, and there were several temporary rises. It will take some months for the full effects of the investment downswing to work their way through the system. Equally, we have no way of knowing whether the stock market crash will lead to the kind of banking crisis which occurred in the US after 1929. The evidence we have so far — of central banks pumping money into the financial institutions to shore them up — seems to suggest that we won't see a banking collapse of this sort.

Whatever the timescale and precise form that the slump takes, the fact that it is coming cannot be denied. In the end, slump and recession can only be got out of by making the working class pay — through lower wages and a higher rate of exploitation, and by a smaller 'social wage' — a cutback in the welfare state. In other words, a new and ferocious attack on working class living standards is inevitable.

How is all this going to change *politics*? The political consequences are going to be many-layered and complex, but the outlines can be sketched. The crash is a blow to all the myths of 'popular capitalism' and a 'share-owning democracy'. Thus it is a massive blow to Thatcherism ideologically. Millions of people, including those who bought shares, are going to get a swift, salutary lesson in some of the realities of capitalism. At the same time, Bryan Gould and Neil Kinnock have been made to look pretty stupid in their headlong pursuit of sub-Thatcherite share-owning mythology. Indeed what has happened is going to make millions of people question the rationality of a financial system which puts the world economic order, and the livelihood and well-being of millions of people, in the hands of a tiny handful of immensely rich financiers. It will make *anti-capitalist* propaganda and explanations much more credible and popular; and of course this will have its biggest impact in the labour movement.

Will the left gain from this? There is no automatic rule which says that financial crash means automatic growth and victory of the left. After all, the crash of 1929 led, indirectly, to fascism in Germany and another non-socialist solution — the 'new deal' — in the United States. But in Britain in 1987, the left has a massive opportunity to ensure that it is a major beneficiary of the political fallout of the crash.



Britain — dealing floor at Barclays de Zoete Wedd

The crash politically undermines all those who tend towards 'moderation' and 'business as usual'. It will shake up and recompose politics at every level — both bourgeois and working class politics. It will tend to strengthen those who put forward bold and radical solutions. There are signs that after Thatcher's third electoral victory the left is beginning to reorganise itself, both in the Labour Party and beyond. Far right currents like the National Front could also grow as a result of the slump, especially if the left fails to take advantage of its opportunities. But at the moment the left is much better poised to make the running.

Of course, the scientific theories of marxism which have consistently exposed the contradictions of the capi-

talist economy, and the inevitability of periodic slumps and booms, are the only theories which can provide a framework for understanding what is going on. But now the left must address itself to *political solutions* of the scale necessary to solve the crisis in the interests of the working class. Those can only possibly be *anti-capitalist solutions*: Keynesian 'reflation' of the economy will only prepare the ground for a bigger slump.

Overcoming the anarchy of the capitalist market is absolutely impossible without nationalising the banks and the major financial institutions; nationalising the major firms and monopolies; instituting a national, and hopefully international, socialist economic plan; and fighting for workers' control over production as the only way of ensuring the implementation of a socialist economic plan.

These are the kind of programmatic demands which need to be raised in the labour movement, both in struggles and in the political and ideological debates. Such socialist perspectives are a million miles away from the right wing economic thinking of the Labour leadership. But they are also some way removed from the kind of fashionable and confused ideas on the soft left in recent years — like the notion that 'local plans', small co-operatives, and 'new forms of social ownership' were the answer. To be frank, all such ideas are fiddling around the edges in comparison with the scale of this crisis. You can't have local enterprise initiatives or local co-ops without finance; and in a slump you won't get it. Period.

Nothing could more justify the idea of socialist planning, on a national and international scale, as what has happened over the past few weeks in the world's financial markets. The crisis has shown that those who stand against the irrationality of capitalism are right.

The Chinese written character for the word 'crisis' is a combination of those for 'danger' and 'opportunity'. Socialists now have it in their hands to strengthen the movement in a qualitative way if they seize the opportunity. If not, then the horizon is clouded with dangers for socialism and the working class.

After the TUC and Labour Party conference

Will the left fight back?

The TUC and the Labour Party conference were followed by the 2000-strong Socialist Conference in Chesterfield. While the Labour Party conference



Dave Pocken/Socialist Outlook



Dave Pocken/Socialist Outlook

saw a huge attack by the right wing, Chesterfield shows the basis is there for a new surge of the left. **PETE FIRMIN** reports.

Ken Livingstone and Sharon Atkin address fringe meetings at Labour Party conference — but Ramada Man dominates the proceedings

'SUB-THATCHERISM' — that is the apt phrase used by the left at the Labour Party conference to describe the new policies and principles which Kinnoek and Gould are trying to foist on the party. Bryan Gould's speech extolling the virtues of share ownership, and Neil Kinnoek's gem about the necessity to appeal to the (mythical) £400-a-week dockers, were only the tip of the iceberg of the leadership's operation.

In effect, they plan to roll back all the policy and organisational gains made by the left since 1979. The ferocity of the right wing's attack and the boldness and scope of their proposed policy changes caught some people by surprise. It aims at nothing less than crushing the left and all traces of its influence. A simple list of the leadership's objectives will show what is involved:

* To progressively redefine a 'non-nuclear defence policy' away from anything to do with unilateralism and to make it a simple *multi-lateralism*. In this endeavour, it must be said, they are receiving some assistance from the soft left, from the likes of Joan Ruddock.

8 * To abandon any commitment to ex-

ension of public ownership, and indeed any pledge of even renationalisation of privatised industries; to replace clause *ix* with talk of 'new forms of social ownership'. What the new forms of social ownership are was clearly elaborated by Bryan Gould when he supported wider share ownership as a means of 'spread-

'the key questions of the economy and nationalisation were hardly addressed by the main left leaders'

ing power more widely' — a fatuous notion at the best of times, but looking distinctly sick after the collapse of the stock market.

* To overthrow the democratic reforms made in the party, especially those relating to the reelection of MPs, via the introduction of the electoral college version of 'one member, one vote'.

* To seize control of every aspect of the party structure by attacking the LPYS, Labour Party women's conference, closing down *Labour Weekly* and so on.

This operation will be consummated by the policy review which will be undertaken in the next two years. Its aim, to quote trade and industry spokesperson John Smith, is to 'review the whole stance of the party' — in other words move fundamentally to the right and accept some of the basics of Thatcherite philosophy.

There is no doubt that this is one of the most profound debates inside the party since the attempt by Gaitskell to abandon clause *ix* in the early 1960s. Indeed, the present situation has some interesting parallels with that debate. Kinnoek is saying, as Gaitskell did, that the working class is now, in its majority, an 'affluent' working class, and that we have therefore to shift our appeal away from the poor and the dispossessed, who are a 'minority'.

Kinnoek is using half-baked pop sociology about the 'demise of the working class', which was rubbish when Gaitskell floated it and is still rubbish when much more lightweight figures like Kinnoek and Gould spout it.

The hissing and booing which greeted the now-infamous Gould 'share-owning' speech is indicative of a general



Photo: Corbis/Bettina

mood of resentment and unease among many at the conference at what was being done by the leadership. On the other hand there is also no doubt that sections of the conference, even those generally opposed to the leadership's operation, felt genuine doubt as to whether there might be some truth in it.

The left is going to have to fight hard in an ideological battle to explain how Kinock and Gould are wrong. But the debate is likely to be informed by the effects of the stock market crash. In a period of economic depression and

declining share ownership it is going to be harder to talk about an increasingly affluent working class and the merits of a 'share-owning democracy'. Nonetheless we should not underestimate the determination of the party leadership to push through their policy review, which despite being presented to conference as a single report, will have policy implications right across the board.

While this year's TUC was not nearly so dramatic as the Labour Party conference, it represented a continuation of the drift towards the right. But the union

inremery did not have it all their own way. The continued willingness of the working class to fight back against attacks on jobs and conditions was reflected in the defeats which the conference platform suffered — on their handling of News International, no-strike deals, opposition to the new round of anti-union laws — and indeed in the fight taken onto the floor of congress by Scargill and Macrae.

In looking at the prospects for the left, in the light of the deepening attacks of the Labour leadership, it is necessary to

look at the resistance at the Labour Party conference and at what happened at the subsequent Chesterfield Socialist Conference.

Before the Labour conference some members of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) steering committee and of the Labour Left Liaison put out a joint fourteen-point statement reaffirming left wing policies. Prominent among the signatories were Ken Livingstone, Ann Pettifor, Joan Rud-dock, Vladimir Derer and Peter Hain. This statement was a good initiative, which infuriated the right wing of the LCC and left the editor of *Marxism Today* 'profoundly depressed'. Its main weakness was that it remained simply at the level of demands on a future Labour government, and the consequences here and now for labour movement action were not immediately obvious.

At the Labour Party conference itself the response of the left, and especially the soft left, was very weak. The key questions of the economy and defence of nationalisation were hardly addressed at all by the main left leaders.

Just as in 1986, the sections of the Labour Party least willing to lie down and be crushed by the rightward-moving steamroller were the most oppressed sections of the class — women and black people. Women showed their resilience by refusing to be lobbed off several times during conference and continuing their

protests right up to the singing of the 'Red Flag'. It must be said that there is a developing process of political differentiation within black sections and among women in the party.

The conference of two thousand socialists in Chesterfield in October was a boost for the left. A large proportion of the conference were rank and file trade union and Labour Party members. The conference revealed a deep hostility to the moves of the Labour leadership to

'the Chesterfield conference was a boost for the left'

push the party to the right. As one delegate said: 'this conference has drawn a line across the left' — a line of those who are in the last analysis prepared to fight back against Kinnockism as against those who in the end are prepared to go along with it.

The big turnout at the conference, despite the clash with the national anti-apartheid demonstration, revealed a new mood of wanting to organise for a fightback and to reassert basic socialist principles. One of the reasons for the success of the conference was the fact that the organisers sought to bring together militants from inside the Labour Party, together with those from the trade unions, campaigns — and indeed socialist activists not in the Labour Party.

This was a correct approach; and it is one which needs to be counterposed to any approach on the left which sticks obsessively to internal Labour Party structures and caucuses.

One of the things which dominated the second half of the conference was an understanding that the stock market crash heralded important changes in the political situation in which the left operates and will tend to undermine the credibility of Kinnockism.

Another positive aspect of the conference was the feeling that the co-ordination of socialists which was beginning there ought to be continued. A further conference is to be held in May, and regional and local report-backs and conferences will be held in many areas before then.

One final point about Chesterfield needs mentioning — the major speech by Ken Livingstone. In his speech he rejected the notion, often put forward by Tony Benn and others, that the fight in the labour movement is just about policies, not personalities. 'How can you have socialist policies', asked Livingstone, 'if you are led by someone like Ramsay MacDonald?'

This sounded to many like a declaration of war against Kinnock and Kinnockism. Whether it was or not, such a war clearly needs waging before next year's conference considers the leadership's policy review ●

Ramada Man: fact or fiction?

DECADES AGO, experts and commentators were taken in by a skillful fake. The discovery of the supposed prehistoric remains of 'Piltdown Man' generated all kinds of wild theories on evolution.

Now, years after Piltdown Man was exposed, the Kinnock leadership is attempting to palm off a new myth. We can call this 'Ramada Man', after Brighton's luxurious Ramada Renaissance Hotel, at which Kinnock and his camp followers held court during this year's party conference.

Descriptions of this new species vary. According to Ron Todd, he is a docker on £400 a week, (rumours that Todd was referring to Brian Nicholson have not been denied) and has a holiday home in Marbella.

But by common consent Ramada Man is male, owns a house, a few shares, and feels well-off.

How many Ramada Men are there? We know there are not many dockers left. Latest government figures show that average weekly pay for the top ten per cent of manual workers is only

£261; if Ron Todd is right about the £400 a week figures, there can't be many votes to be won there.

Even the top ten per cent of *all* male workers fall £50 a week short of Todd's docker.

Of course some manual workers are known to earn £400 a week or more: most well-known have been Fleet Street printworkers. But national newspaper jobs have been axed, provincial news barons are booting out unionised printworkers, and thousands of SOGAT and NGA members are learning how flimsy has been their prosperity, which rested on trade union strength.

Ramada Man also owns a house; after Tory policies have stifled council housebuilding he probably has little choice. But do mortgages stop workers challenging capitalism? Thousands of miners with mortgages joined a year-long strike to defend their communities and the industry they depend upon: millions of Labour votes have always come from owner-occupiers appalled by Tory policies.

Ramada Man owns a few shares —

maybe £500 worth. If so, he has gambled a year's equivalent of £10 a week at the bookies: his return on that investment may equal one good win on an outsider. His shareholding is insignificant in relation to the stakes of the banks and trusts — and he gets no voice in company policies. While his share income is welcome spending money, he can't live on it: in no way does it compare with the share income of the capitalist class. If he loses his job he will have to sell the shares to avoid hassle from social security.

Behind the defeatist mythology of Ramada Man lies an uncomfortable fact: there has always been a non-socialist, even Tory-voting section of the working class, particularly its more privileged layers. Old-style union bureaucrats like Eric Hammond have always reflected their prejudices. But now the trendy Labour line is to allow this backward rump to dictate policy.

At least Piltdown Man's creator produced a bag of bones to back up the prank: Ramada Man carries as much conviction as Cinderella's coach at five past midnight ●

Share-owning democracy?

BRYAN GOULD'S Labour Party conference speech calling for a re-evaluation of Labour's attitude to share ownership by workers was rightly met with considerable hostility. But in fact the Labour leadership was touting this idea before the election. John Smith and David Blunkett included worker share ownership as a major part of their official proposals for 'new forms of social ownership' in 1985, and it was an important element of the Greater London Enterprise Board's policy before that.

Lacking any clear economic strategy, even sections of the hard left have fallen for this tune. On the same day as Gould's speech, campaign group MP Brian Sedgemore proposed that a third of public companies' shares should be transferred to a workers' trust, with the supposed result that 'some workers would become millionaires overnight'.

Gould's proposal was characteristically vague, and muddled together two different forms of worker share ownership: ownership of shares in general, and ownership of shares in the worker's own firm. The first of these has been promoted by the government through the marketing of shares in privatised industries on an unprecedentedly wide scale. This way of selling shares has had the aim of making renationalisation more difficult and for this Thatcher (and British capital) have been willing to pay a huge bill: the give-away prices necessary to ensure a wide take-up have been scarcely half the companies' real value. On BT and British Gas alone, the government has forfeited a profit of over £5 billion.

With these lavish handouts, and the low threshold set for minimum share applications, it is only surprising that *more* people have not bought the shares. Only twenty per cent of adults now own shares, compared with seven per cent in 1979.

Clearly most shares have been bought by the middle class and a comparatively small number of better-off workers. As of last year only four per cent of share-owners were unskilled and semi-skilled workers. There is little indication that these completely exceptional share sales have whetted the appetite of many of the new share owners for normal speculation in shares, despite the steadily rising prices on the stock exchange of the last few years.

Moreover, having doubled their money, many people have cashed their

shares in. Of the initial shareholders in British Airways, for example, 65 per cent have sold out. In British Gas a third sold out in the first four months in spite of voucher and share offer incentives to retain shares.

The large number of shareholders in the privatised companies, including among their own workers, does not in any way enhance 'democracy'. The majority of shares are already in the hands of the financial institutions: in the privatised half of BT only 24 per cent of shares are now held by small shareholders, while 64 per cent are held by only 340 owners, mainly institutions and firms. Even if the shares were equally distributed throughout the entire population, there are no mechanisms for debating and determining company policy.



A member of the rank and file?

JAMIE GOUGH

looks at the inconsistencies of Bryan Gould's 'share-owning democracy'.

What effect does share ownership have on the new share owners? Contrary to *Marxism Today's* contention, and contrary to the suggestion in Kinnock's conference speech, buying shares in privatised industries does not necessarily either require or encourage a conversion to 'Thatcherite' values. All that is necessary is £100 of savings and a desire to double it.

Where workers have retained their shares this is essentially an alternative form of saving to the building society. It is a way of keeping the value of money for future use, not the accumulation of capital. Saving has been undertaken by the better-off parts of the British working class for the last 150 years and is hardly an invention of Thatcher. For the average new shareholder, the profit, in the form of dividend income, is small, £25-100 a year.

A potentially much more important form of share ownership from a political point of view, and the one Labour has tended to highlight, is ownership of shares in the workers' own company.

This is often used as a sop to push through damaging restructuring measures against relatively well-organised workers. The shares issued on favourable terms to the workers in privatised industries are one example. Another is the issue of shares 'in exchange for' massive cuts in pay which have been negotiated by loss-making US corporations such as TWA and Chrysler. 'Your pay is cut now, but the corporation will recover its profitability and eventually you'll do well out of it' is the message. In these cases, worker share ownership is a short-term expedient for the employers.

Workers share ownership or profit sharing schemes can also help management in the long term, by flexibly linking wages to profits and by creating an atmosphere of 'cooperation' in the firm. A cooperative policy may seem a far cry from the present government's policy of junking cooperation with trade union leaders and smashing union organisation. But a policy of management-labour cooperation — on management's terms — can have big advantages for capital, lowering labour turnover and absenteeism and increasing the quality of production and productivity.

This can be very attractive to the Labour and trade union leadership since it offers a new excuse for class collaboration: they can appear as representatives of 'enlightened' management and the midwives of new, harmonious industrial relations.

While share-ownership schemes are always a risky option, they may appear attractive to workers in particular firms. But they are a danger for the working class as a whole.

Share ownership tends to increase divisions between workers within industries by weakening the role of national collective bargaining and struggle. It tends to increase divisions within firms, with long standing, often skilled male workers benefiting disproportionately.

The degree of influence on management that may accompany worker share ownership (especially if exercised through a pooled trust) tends to draw workers more strongly into helping their firm to compete, deepening the competitive anarchy of capitalist organisation. It is *not* a weak form of industrial planning. It is the *opposite* of planning. There is no democracy in share ownership.

The 1967 abortion act was a major breakthrough for women. By the twentieth anniversary of its coming into effect, some three million will have had legal abortions. Those twenty years have seen many attempts of the anti-abortion lobby to curb, and of the women's movement to fight for, a woman's right to control her own fertility. The Alton bill and the campaign against it have once more brought the issue to the fore. **LEONORA LLOYD** argues that the struggle for a woman's right of control over her own body involves much more than defending the '67 act. Like other legislative advances of the sixties, such as on homosexuality, it was seriously flawed.

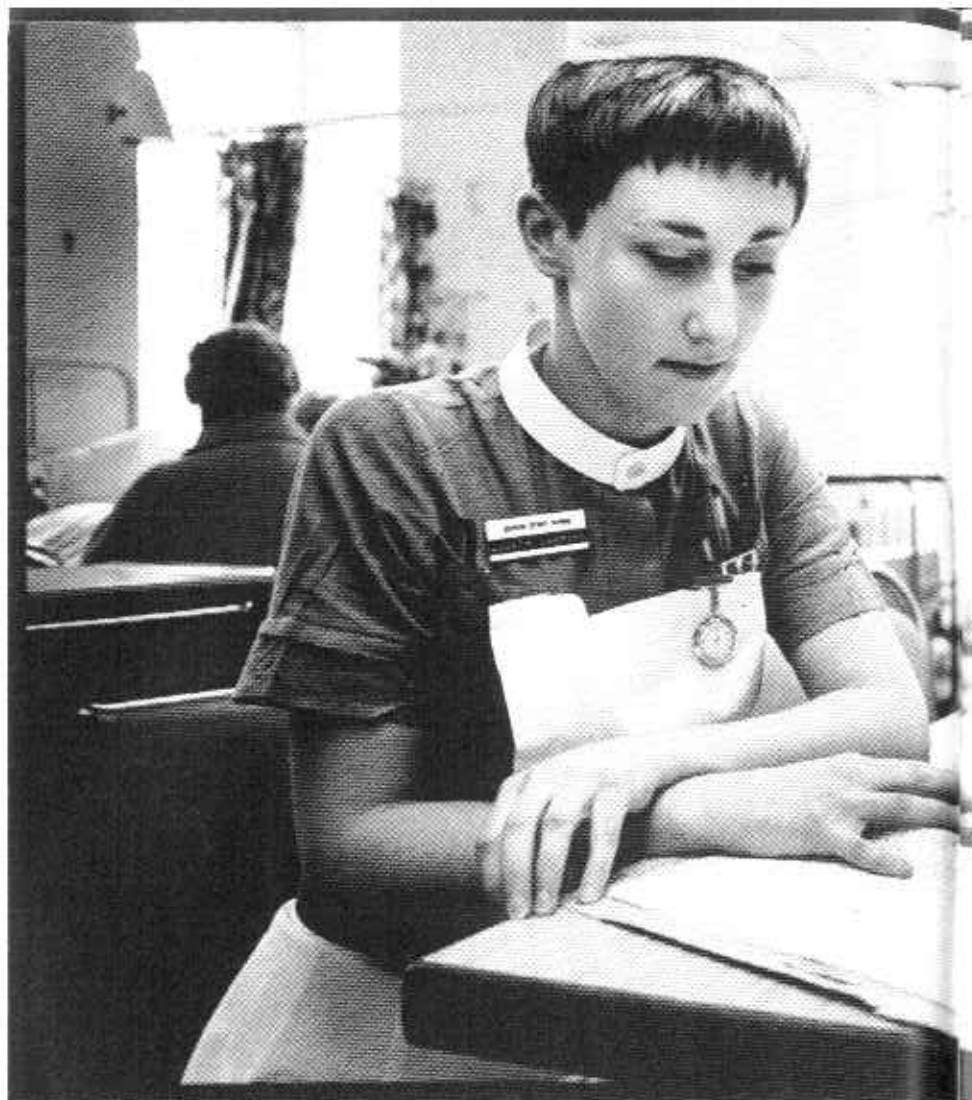
DAVID STEEL'S bill, introduced in 1966, received the royal assent on October 27 1967, coming into effect six months later. The delay was in order to give the NHS more time to gear up for the expected demand for newly legal abortions. This the NHS singularly failed to do.

In April 1966 the Family Planning Association's conference on abortion totally underestimated the demand there would be for legal abortion. It was estimated that there were some 80,000-100,000 illegal abortions, based on surveys, numbers of women who died or suffered other bad effects, and police prosecutions.

In fact, numbers of deaths had been dropping steadily, for a variety of reasons. It had been possible for some time to get legal abortions. A Doctor Bourne performed an abortion in 1938 on a fourteen year old victim of multiple rape and the subsequent court case decided that 'danger to life' included severe mental and physical harm to the woman. This meant that doctors performing abortions in good faith, usually after getting the opinions of two psychiatrists, were safe from prosecution. As the moral climate changed, more abortions were performed in this way.

In addition, 'D and Cs' (scraping the womb, usually to relieve menstrual problems) became a euphemism under which semi-legal abortions were done, often privately. Other women escaped to the more liberal countries, such as Sweden and Switzerland, for abortions, but this was only for the wealthy.

12 For the poor, Friday, pay day, continued



The implementation of the '67 act depended on a medical establishment

Abortion: twenty years

to be the day that gynaecologists cleared the ward of all those who could be sent home in anticipation of the flood of those who did-it-themselves or went around the corner to the neighbourhood abortionist. Improved treatment of sepsis meant that deaths from illegal abortion dropped before 1968, even in these cases. Death rates in countries like Sweden dropped faster still.

'the existence of NAC, born of the women's movement, changed the terms of the debate'

The FPA conference believed that there would still be a considerable number of illegal abortions under any change in the law that they could envisage. One speaker estimated that only 25,000 of the supposed 100,000 would be carried out in hospitals post-legalisation. Chief amongst the reasons for his pessimism was the anti-abortion attitudes of doctors and nurses. He also estimated that the chances of dying from an abortion were twice those of dying from childbirth. Another speaker saw concern about safety as the major reason for 'control of abortion'.

It should be remembered that, until fairly

recently, abortion liberalisation rarely came about as the result of popular agitation — it has been pressure from medical personnel and others concerned about the toll on women's health who have been in the forefront of change. Although working class women's organisations took up the issue in this country, they never succeeded in taking it into the broader labour movement. It was not until already-secured rights were under threat that women became involved in the issue in large numbers.

This explains why the act took the form it did. It did not repeal the section of the 1861 offences against the person act, making abortion illegal. It created exceptions to that act: leaving the decision in the hands of not one, but two, doctors.

The doctors had to give 'grounds' for granting an abortion, and these reflected what were seen as the major problems confronting women seeking them: First came health, and abortion was allowed when it would be more dangerous to continue the pregnancy. What happened, in fact, was that with the tremendous increase in legal abortion, and with the development of new techniques, doctors increased their skills to the point where abortion was almost always going to be safer than continuing a pregnancy to term.

Anti-abortionists manage both to seek to



Andrew Moore/Rethink

ent whose starting point was not always the interests and wishes of women ears since the '67 act

magnify the dangers of legal abortion, and to argue that this clause allows 'abortion on demand', especially when coupled with the requirement in the act for the doctor to take into account the present and foreseeable conditions of the woman — the well-known so-called 'social clause'.

Other grounds for abortion include the current or foreseeable effect on any other children the mother may have now or in the future (for example, where a child is handicapped and another child would overburden the mother); or where there is a risk of the child being born handicapped. The grounds do not, for example, specify abortion after rape, perhaps because it was assumed that pregnancy in that situation would affect the woman's mental health enough to be covered already; but what of the case of the woman who is strong enough to cope with the rape, but still does not want to carry a rapist's child?

Overall, the act turned out to be paternalistic — women who needed abortions were seen as essentially unable to make important decisions in their own interests, proved by the fact that they had managed to 'get themselves' pregnant in the first place. It is perhaps significant that, in practice, the most often cited ground is the mental health of the woman, with 'depression' the single most-used diagnosis. We have not moved

very far from the pre-1967 days when a woman with an unwanted pregnancy was viewed as mentally unable to cope with her situation. Certainly that is enough to make anyone depressed!

As well as these inherent flaws, the act, as history has shown, was wide open for amendment and attacks. There had been a lot of argument during its passage, for example, about how seriously ill the woman had

'wealthy women escaped to more liberal countries for abortions'

to be and how high the risk of malformation of the fetus. These sort of debates were repeated each time an attempt was made to amend the bill. Even more important, there was no provision in the act for health authorities to be obliged to provide facilities.

When the act came into operation on April 27 1968 the hospitals soon became overwhelmed. Charities, run by those who had worked for years to get the act, and private clinics, run by those with rather less pure motives, soon came into being, the latter especially being a target of media abuse.

Until June 1975, when the first National Abortion Campaign (NAC) demonstration was held, public discussion of abortion was very low key. Even so, a poll conducted by

the anti-abortionists as part of their lead-up to the James White bill in February 1975, showed that those supporting abortion on demand (thirteen per cent) were greater than those who opposed it entirely (nine per cent), with the majority supporting abortion in a wide variety of cases (with handicap the highest, as it still remains, alongside rape).

The existence of NAC, born of the women's movement, changed the terms of the debate, because for the first time the issue was taken squarely into the labour movement. Union after union adopted pro-'67 act policy or a woman's right to choose, culminating in the TUC accepting abortion rights in 1977, when they were written into a revised version of its 'aims for women at work'.

The first mass campaign organised by NAC was against a bill proposed by Glasgow Labour MP James White. By the time of the William Benyon bill, in 1976, NAC's aims had gone far beyond the '67 act, as its shortcomings became clear. An umbrella, united front campaign was therefore set up, specifically to fight the Benyon bill, and this tactic was repeated, with even greater success, with the campaign against Corrie. Recently, NAC has been instrumental in setting up the campaign to fight the latest attack — Alton's bill.

What benefits has the act brought women? Why are we working so hard to defend such a flawed act against this latest attack?

By the twentieth anniversary of the act some three million women will have had an abortion. With few deaths and a low rate of illness, this represents a huge gain for women's health.

Women have above all gained from being able to plan their lives. The insistence that we have the right of control over our own bodies has had repercussions for those fighting for freedom to express their own sexuality and for women wanting more control over the process of giving birth.

For young women, the availability of abortion has had most effect. Far fewer 'shotgun' marriages or 'seven month babies' now occur. Women no longer feel compelled to marry because they are pregnant. They can now make a choice between abortion, or keeping the baby or adoption.

Legal abortion is not the same thing as sexual equality or freedom for women. But it is a necessary prerequisite. Women do not use abortion as a form of contraception and the increased use of contraception does not prevent abortion, far from it. Once women accept the idea that they can control their fertility; if their contraception lets them down, they are far readier to turn to abortion as a back up.

It is this feeling of wanting to maintain control that is behind the massive responses from women each time the right to abortion is attacked. What has become taken for granted becomes threatened. Anti-abortionists know that women will not stop having abortions — the question is, will those abortions be safe and legal, or will they be illegal? Women know that legal abortion is worth fighting for.

The massive wave of cutbacks hitting health authorities all over the country are no accident or coincidence. Tory ministers have deliberately engineered a financial crisis designed to undermine confidence in the future of the NHS. **JOHN LISTER** argues that the labour movement must develop a fighting response.

SINCE JUNE, the same health service which Tory ministers insisted was 'safe in our hands' has come under a barrage of cuts. Health authorities have been closing beds, wards, casualty units and clinics, cancelling developments and even cutting nursing staff in a mad scramble to meet cash limits.

As the cash has run out, general managers, politicians and academics have abandoned any pretence of commitment to the old egalitarian ideals of a health service funded from taxation and free to all at time of use.

The financial disasters are the direct outcome of conscious Tory policies since 1979:

- Health authorities' real spending power has each year been held down despite the growing costs of caring for an increasingly elderly population. The cumulative resources gap 1981-85 has been estimated by an all-party commons committee at £1.325 billion.
- Arbitrary demands for 'cost improvements' have cut another 1.5 per cent each year from budgets.
- This year's electioneering 9 per cent pay award to nurses and subsequent pay deals have lumbered health authorities with unpaid bills.
- Health authorities have been allotted only 3.75 per cent extra to cover price inflation, yet NHS prices are expected to rise by 7.5 per cent; underfunding this year is likely to total some £300m.

Every one of these policies has been quite deliberate: in particular the decisions not to fund inflation and pay awards were taken earlier this year in the knowledge that it would create a major crisis by autumn — after the election votes were counted.

Thatcher knows that had she campaigned on her real policies — cutbacks and major inroads by private medicine into NHS hospitals — she would have been trounced at the polls. So she has been forced to adopt a more devious approach.

The key has been creating a major funding crisis. The common assumption of management and most pundits is that the old NHS is finished: it will never again be possible to fund it adequately from taxation. This defeatist assumption is used to justify dragging privatisation plans out of the closet which even Thatcher's 'barmy right' previously hesitated to spell out.

Tories crash dive NHS



Nurses on the morning drugs round in a Sheffield hospital

Within weeks of the election result, the institute of health service management commissioned a study of the various ways in which private health firms or charges for health care could inject extra cash into our ailing hospitals. These managers, together with the floundering academics of the kings fund who are conducting a similar survey, will now be the first to float a whole succession of controversial ideas, such as insurance

schemes; charging patients for admissions, consultations and even GP visits; 'voucher' schemes; and all kinds of link-ups with private health care firms.

Some health authorities (including Oxford, City & Hackney, and Lewisham & North Southwark) are *already* carrying out some of these types of schemes for link-ups with the private sector — which were first proposed in the Thatcherite Adam Smith



Dennis Brown/Solihull

Institute's 'omega report' back in 1984.

Tory health secretary John Moore will be able to stand back and gauge public reaction before he acts. This is surely the 'no-risk' approach to the most emotionally charged attempt yet at privatisation.

So where is the outcry from the Labour leaders? There was no hint from Brighton that Kinnock's team are aware of the pace or scale of the threat.

Worse; the wholesale 'rethink' of Labour's policies has so far centred on querying traditional opposition to privatisation, and retreating from any pledges to spend more 'taxpayers' money'.

Kinnock's front bench has neither the commitment nor the bottle to wage a root and branch defence of this, the most popular public service.

Since June 11 a totally new agenda for the NHS has been set by the Thatcherites.

For instance, it is now commonplace to hear and read assertions that demand for health care is somehow 'insatiable' (John Moore) or 'infinite', whilst the taxpayer's willingness to finance the NHS is 'finite'.

What nonsense! There is a finite — albeit unmeasured — need for acute services. If the waiting lists were cleared tomorrow, few would be back for more of the same treatment the next day. Cheaper preventative medicine might even hope to *reduce* some demand.

The 'rebellious taxpayer' (always presumed young and healthy) is as much a fiction as the 'infinite demand'. All the 'alternative' systems are *more expensive* than the NHS, and more brutal. Labour should be warning that it will *organise* and *lead* a real rebellion — when the first patients arrive for treatment to face a £5 fee for a GP appointment, or a £100-plus weekly 'hotel charge' for a hospital bed.

Indeed, despite all the media hype, private medicine, is still profoundly unpopular. Less than nine per cent of the population are covered by private medical insurance — mostly through company schemes which end at retirement — when health care is most needed. Though Thatcher's strategy to suffocate the NHS may press-gang some patients in chronic pain into an Edna Healey-style compromise, this does not mean the public love private medicine.

The Tories should not be having things all their own way. Millions of people are still loyal to NHS and its original values: they would support a crusading fight for increased funds and democratic control of the NHS, linked to the legislation and enforcement of a basic minimum provision of health care and a right to treatment.

Arguments in defence of a properly funded NHS lead naturally to the need to nationalise the drug monopolies, and other NHS suppliers, and to develop health services as part of a socialist economy planned on the basis of needs rather than profits.

The problem is that neither the Kinnockites nor the health unions are offering such a lead. They appear oblivious to the threats. The ground is being conceded to Thatcherism without even a fight.

Yet local campaigns are emerging once again: in response to the new wave of cuts, confirming the loyalty of health workers and many labour movement activists to the NHS.

Such campaigns are vital for the workers' movement. If the flame of loyalty to the old ideals is allowed to flicker and fade, next year's 40th anniversary of the NHS could combine a two-cheer celebration with the beginnings of a wake.

L E T T E R S

Seriously one-sided

THE ARTICLE by Dani Ahrens and Judith Paton (*SO* no 3) on child abuse was a serious attempt to go behind the headlines and explain the causes of child abuse. But in my view some of its arguments were seriously one-sided, giving the impression that the authors consider doctors and social workers as much a part of the problem as parents who abuse children.

In the limited space available I will just make three basic objections. First, the authors argue that the solution to child abuse is to 'empower children'. They interpret this as meaning that the abused child must have the right to make all the basic decisions — whether to prosecute, whether to go into care, and so on.

This is surely utopian. Many children abused are far too young to have any rational comprehension of what a 'prosecution' is, or what it will entail for them — let's remember that many abuse victims are under ten, and many *much* younger. The inevitable conclusion is that society as a whole has to provide agencies, like social workers, capable of intervening, defending children — and in some cases, together with other agencies, making decisions on their behalf.

Of course, it is quite right for the authors to argue for the maximisation of the autonomy and right to make choices of children, and against the myth of the omnipotence of all-knowing 'experts'. But that autonomy cannot for very young children be absolute, simply because very young children do not possess the capacity for total autonomy; they remain dependent, to a greater or lesser extent, on adults.

So let us by all means argue about the goals and objectives of doctors and social workers, but let us not pretend they can be dispensed with in the name of 'empowering children'.

My second objection is the account which the authors give of the causes of child abuse. They argue that child abuse is about the assertion of power by a father figure, and not about sexual desire; nor is it caused by poverty, bad housing, etc. Again, I think their argument is one-sided. Of course it is right to reject SWP-type arguments which put rape and sexual abuse of children simply down to poverty and 'capitalism'.

But can we say that poverty and the demoralisation which very poor families suffer has *nothing* to do with child abuse? Equally, the 'abuse of power by a father figure' argument is not at all counterposed to saying that child sexual abuse has got a lot to do with sexual desire, and some of the ways that this is manipulated in a society like ours, in which there is a subcurrent of obsession with 'Lolita'-type figures in popular culture going back many years.

Socialist Outlook wants your letters! If you feel moved to write — and we hope you will — please try and keep to a maximum of 300 words. Send to: PO Box 705, London SW2 5UN.

Finally, there are some parts of the article which struck me as sounding really utopian. It talks about 'the inherent danger for children living in families' becoming apparent to more people. Then it says 'empowering children would destroy the power structure of the nuclear family in capitalist society'. So it would, but the chances of it happening before the

destruction of capitalism are zero point zero per cent. The truth of the matter is that the nuclear family is going to be the predominant form of the organisation of personal life in advanced capitalism for a very long time. Children are going to continue to live in families, and they cannot be in any fundamental way 'empowered' within them without a total

change in existing social relations which would mean the destruction of the nuclear family. So, socialists have to support mechanisms for society to intervene and defend children who are the actual or potential victims of abuse. This means specialised agencies, there's no way round it.

Phil Hearse

Economism, functionalism and covert liberalism

Dani Ahren's and Judith Paton's article avoids the errors of most of the left press in that it confronts the problems of analysing the family in terms of both capitalism and patriarchy, which is a precondition of an adequate marxist explanation.

Unfortunately, it suffers from a degree of economism and functionalism on the one hand and a covert liberalism on the other. It also tends to slide into an essentialist and therefore anti-materialist view of the family, and importantly, of sexuality.

It is certainly the case that the family is 'functional' for capital in ways pointed by Dani and Judith. Such an analysis, however, ignores the complexities of power relations within families and the diversity of family forms within which male dominance has historically been exercised.

We are told 'child sexual abuse has existed as long as the family has existed'. What is meant by this? It sounds as if the family has been in existence in some essential form since the beginning of time.

Family forms, as well as the position of children within households and within society at large, have been subject to considerable historical change. Nonetheless historical evidence demonstrates that child sexual abuse did exist prior to the rise of modern bourgeois family forms and the emergence of the modern institution of childhood. Of course, patriarchy in our society cannot be understood without reference to class (and *vice versa*), but Dani and Judith's premise reduces patriarchy to a side-effect of class which fails to account either for its pervasiveness and persistence, or for the changes it has undergone.

It is ironic that Dani and Judith take a ritual sideswipe at radical feminism when their perspective so clearly echoes that of Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex*. Firestone in effect argues for a formally equal status for children, also implied in Dani and Judith's legalistic conception of 'empowerment'. But children, especially

abused children, are singularly ill-equipped to step into the role of sovereign, individual citizens exercising their legally guaranteed 'human rights'.

Of course children should be encouraged to make choices and decisions, but we must appreciate that a statutory right to do so would fail to counter their deep-rooted powerlessness. How can a child who has been subject to adult authority all her life, who has deferred to adults, had decisions made for her be expected to take her life in her own hands at a moment of crisis? Survivors of all forms of child abuse are likely to feel deeply instilled guilt and self-blame, especially in the case of sexual abuse, where the perpetrator will often have invoked emotional ties as one way of quelling the child's resistance. Other fears engendered in survivors include those of breaking up the family and hurring the mother. All these feelings cannot be laid at the door of insensitive or hostile reactions to 'disclosure' by the state, nor can they be blown away by a quick psychological repair job. Tackling them is the work of years.

Moreover, any empowerment of children will always be partial. Of course childhood is socially constructed, but this does not mean there is no inherent difference between the capacities of a five-year-old and a fifteen-year-old to understand the world and make decisions accordingly.

On a wider scale, Dani and Judith say 'empowering children would destroy the power structure of the nuclear family in capitalist society'. If only it were that simple. Are we to believe that, with the 'empowerment' of children the entire material basis for the family and the subordination of women and children will crumble?

A further problem with the article is that it fails to deal with the issue of masculinity and male sexuality. Recognition that sexual abuse, like rape, is an expression of power does not mean that it has nothing to do

with sexuality. We need to ask why sex in particular should be used as weapon of domination. Failure to raise such questions implies that it is taken for granted that this is how men 'naturally' behave sexually given the power to do so.

At another level, reactions to child sexual abuse are shaped by a historically specific configuration of attitudes to childhood and sexuality, so that the sexual abuse of children is treated as qualitatively different from other forms of abuse. The disbelief surrounding it is greater because of such attitudes. Some of the guilt survivors feel may be due to the belief that they have transgressed against the strong social expectation of sexual innocence in children. The secrecy and shame surrounding sexuality as a whole help make possible the pact of silence imposed on the victim.

It is true that the state and the 'caring professions' have not on the whole helped the position of the victims of sexual abuse. But a different analysis leads to different demands. In our view, if, in cases of suspected sexual abuse, perpetrators could be removed from the home as easily as children can be now, it would be a much more significant shift of power towards children than putting the burden of proof onto the man if a prosecution results months later, although this may be worthwhile in itself. The necessary therapy for victims should emphasise work with groups of abused children — surely the first step in any growth of a consciousness of collective oppression.

Finally, the power of men in families will not be broken by granting children an empty autarchy, but by the establishment by adults of democratic, collective responsibility for the care and protection which children require, and by breaking the association in men between power and sex, and constructing new forms of male sexuality.

Stevi Jackson & Julian Wilson



Lenin addressing a demonstration in Sverdlov Square, Moscow, May 1920 —
Kamenev and Trotsky await their turn to speak

The Russian Revolution

Seventy years after the October revolution, the Soviet Union and the international class struggle have evolved very differently from the political programme of Bolshevism and the hopes of Lenin and Trotsky.

The official communist parties may still celebrate the anniversary of the October revolution, but they have turned their backs on every one of the political and theoretical strengths which made that revolution possible.

It falls to trotskysts, today's consistent revolutionary marxists, to uphold the principles and methods of Bolshevism.

To celebrate *our* revolution, **JOHN LISTER** looks at some of the key events and political issues that laid the basis for the great October victory.



Red soldiers on one of the armoured trains that played a decisive role in the civil war which followed the October victory

The Bolshevik Party

THE GREAT October revolution which brought the working class to power in Russia 70 years ago was the product of events and struggles beginning far earlier than 1917 and reaching far wider than Russia itself.

Indispensable to the eventual overthrow of capitalism and consolidation of working class power was the role of the Bolshevik Party, a unique development translating the economic and political analysis of marxism into a practical programme and leadership for the working class.

Bolshevism emerged from the sharp political battles within the framework of social democracy, beginning at the turn of the century.

The Second International, just eleven years old, still officially professed adherence to the theories and politics of marxism. However its larger parties — notably in France and Germany — had developed their own bureaucratic apparatus, and adapted themselves to purely parliamentary and trade union forms of work, seeking only reforms within capitalism.

Emerging comparatively late (1898) and weak (only eight people at its founding congress, which was raided by police) in a climate of brutal repression, the Russian Social Democratic



Lenin

and Labour Party (RSDLP) developed under very different political pressures.

Opportunism certainly had its impact: but Russian opportunists were not so easily dazzled by parliamentary illusions. Given the small size of the industrial working class, the backwardness of the economy, and the

absence of elementary democratic rights, they tended rather to overlook the working class as a revolutionary force, and instead looked to 'liberal' elements of the capitalist class to lead the fight for social democracy against the Tsar.

As the working class began to develop as a significant force in Russia from 1870 onwards, the most radical political current on the scene were the narodniks, who based themselves on the mass peasantry (80 per cent of the population). Though early narodniks had fought courageously against tsarism, they, too, later looked increasingly towards the liberal bourgeoisie to fight for democracy.

Against this trend, Plekhanov in 1889 boldly proclaimed at the first congress of the Second International that:

'The Russian revolution will either triumph as a revolution of the working class, or it will not triumph at all.'

By the mid-1890s a massive strike movement involving over half a million workers gave a big impetus to the organisation of workers' circles. One of these, the St Petersburg League for the Liberation of the Working Class, involved Lenin.

Plekhanov, as well as later Struve, the author in 1898 of the manifesto from the first Russian social democratic congress, and many other early figures of the movement later themselves defected to the camp of the liberal bourgeoisie. Lenin, however, not only remained committed to building a working class leadership and marxist party; he also developed and strengthened the whole political and theoretical foundation for this in polemics against the reformist currents gaining sway within the Second International.

PERHAPS THE most decisive of these polemics was contained in the pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), which is a frontal attack on the opportunist actions of the leadership of the large French party, and the theories elaborated by Eduard Bernstein in Germany.

The terms of this argument appear grimly familiar to us in today's crisis-ridden labour movement. The officially 'marxist' Bernstein and others used the slogan 'freedom of criticism' as their equivalent of today's 'new realism' and 'policy review' — to cover their shift to the right. Lenin summed up:

'What this "new" trend, which adopts a "critical" attitude towards "obsolete dogmatic" marxism, represents has with sufficient precision been stated by Bernstein, and demonstrated by [French leader] Millerand.'

It was denied that there is any counter-distinction in principle be-

tween liberalism and socialism. The theory of the class struggle was rejected on the grounds that it could not be applied to a strictly democratic society, governed according to the will of the majority, etc.

"Thus the demand for a resolute turn from revolutionary social democracy to bourgeois social-reformism was accompanied by a no less resolute turn towards bourgeois criticism of all the fundamental ideas of marxism."

Denouncing Millerand for joining a French bourgeois cabinet which connived in the repression of workers' struggles, Lenin concludes:

"Freedom of criticism" means freedom for an opportunistic trend in social democracy, the freedom to convert social democracy into a democratic party of reform, and freedom to introduce bourgeois elements into socialism."

'Lenin came into conflict with the "economist" wing of the movement, which was preoccupied with trade union struggles and did not build a vanguard party'

In rejecting this approach, Lenin was obliged to develop an alternative model of a genuinely marxist party, ensuring adherence to its programme and imposing a discipline over its members. Freedom of criticism in internal debate had to be matched by centralised discipline in implementing the majority decision.

Lenin insisted on the need to fight for the scientific method of marxism, challenging reformist currents inside the organisations of the working class. Though workers are thrown spontaneously again and again into battle, this does not automatically lead to a revolutionary consciousness.

"The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness (i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.)"

Such consciousness is a form of bourgeois consciousness: the consistent alternative had to be fought for by marxism.

"Were the proletariat as a whole capable of grasping its historical task, it would need neither party nor trade union. Revolution would come simultaneously with the proletariat." (*Marxism and the trade unions*)

It was to the working class party that Lenin devoted himself. He spelled out demands for an all-Russian party and



Leon Trotsky in his early twenties, from the archives of the Tsar's secret police

a political newspaper to unify and organise its ranks; and challenged those who were content to jog along behind spontaneous and localised initiatives, leaving the political field open for the liberal bourgeoisie.

'1907-1910 were years of repression and reaction'

In this, Lenin came into conflict with the 'economist' wing of the workers' movement, which preoccupied itself with trade union struggles and opposed the call for a vanguard political party of the working class. No matter how radical their rhetoric, the economists' approach served only to glorify the limited horizons of trade union consciousness, thus strengthen-

ing reformist, bourgeois ideology in the workers' movement.

However there were also more direct exponents of bourgeois politics still attached to Russian social democracy. The scale of tsarist oppression had created a current within the bourgeoisie which professed adherence to marxism but remained fearful of working class revolution, which would overturn their power and property. These 'legal marxists' sought simply to use workers' struggles to oust the Tsar and establish a sufficient democracy to allow a new 'stage' of capitalist development a free rein.

Lenin's fight for a party based on the working class, and structured and disciplined through the principle of democratic centralism proved anathema to these 'legal marxists'. Like Bernstein and Millerand, they valued their 'freedom' to act as they wished on the political stage.

From 1900 to the second congress of 1903, Lenin organised around the newspaper *Iskra* the campaign for a centralised, disciplined, all-Russian marxist workers' party.

On the other side, Martov spelled out a very different conception of a party which would allow anyone to call themselves a party member.

The Martov conception — which after 1903 was upheld by the Menshevik (minority) tendency — would ensure that the party would be not a vanguard but a *vanguard*, incapable of leading the masses because it was not differentiated from them by ideology or discipline. Lenin ridiculed Martov's argument that 'every striker' could 'proclaim himself a party member':

'Cde Martov carries his mistake to the point of absurdity, by lowering social democracy to the level of mere strike-making ... We could only rejoice if the social democrats succeeded in directing every strike, for it is their plain and unquestionable duty to direct every manifestation of the class struggle ... But we should be tail enders if we were to identify this primary form of struggle which ... is no more than a trade unionist form, with the all-round and conscious social democratic struggle.'

IN THE EVENT Lenin's view won the day at the 1903 congress, and the party divided into two factions reflecting opposing class pressures — factions which were essentially rival parties with counterposed objectives. This conflict would continue right up to the point of the October revolution, when the Mensheviks sided with the capitalists against the workers.

The working class itself had continued to grow in numbers and militancy as foreign investment poured in to exploit cheap labour and materials in

Russia, building large, state-of-the-art production plants from modern industrial economies in the midst of a backward peasant economy.

The new generation of Russian workers were given no decades or centuries of gradual industrialisation, no democratic space to organise sprawling, bureaucratised trade unions, no crumbs from the bosses' table to beguile them with illusions in class collaboration. Savage tsarist repression and a harsh, rapid transition from village to factory confronted workers with a choice of passivity or mass struggle.

The mid-1890s strike wave was followed by massive strikes in 1902 in the city of Rostov, led by *Iskra* comrades. Political meetings attracted crowds of forty thousand, and showed the potential for revolutionary development.

By 1905 more sections of the working class had been radicalised, linking their economic demands and grievances with the political demands for an elected constituent assembly, the removal of the Tsar and a provisional government.

In January 1905 a political strike of one hundred thousand St Petersburg workers brought the city to a standstill. On 9 January, a mass demonstration of workers dressed in their Sunday best and headed by a priest marched to the Winter Palace to present a petition to the Tsar. Dozens were brutally gunned down by tsarist officers: but with the victims perished many illusions of peaceful reforms to the autocratic regime. Barricades were thrown up in the working class districts, and street fighting broke out.

When the first wave of fighting ebbed, towards the end of February 1905, the 'liberal' capitalists and academics held conferences and banquets to politely press their request the Tsar to establish a constituent assembly. They were ignored.

While the Mensheviks were careful not to upset the capitalists, convinced that the democratic revolution in Russia would be led by those dignitaries, Lenin and the Bolsheviks took a very different, more aggressive line.

From exile in Geneva, Lenin insisted that the bourgeoisie could not be entrusted with the tasks of the democratic revolution — and that only a revolutionary provisional government brought to power by the workers and peasants could establish a genuine democratic and functioning constituent assembly. He expressed this in his call for the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.'

In Lenin's view this would still be a *bourgeois* government: but the workers and peasants would be the driving force of the revolution. The workers would need to continue their independent struggles and build their own



Trotsky arrives at the Finland station, Petrograd, 4 May 1917

class leadership *after* the establishment of the 'democratic dictatorship'. The Mensheviks, in contrast, looked forward to collaboration with the capitalist class in a prolonged period of capitalist development.

Trotsky, however, returning from exile, was the first to translate Plekhanov's 1889 insistence on the working class character of the revolution, and Karl Marx's post-mortem of the 1848 revolutions, into a direct claim to working class power in Russia.

He argued for a rejection of dogmatic notions of 'stages' of development and for a recognition of the international character and uneven development of capitalism, as well as the impotence of the Russian bourgeoisie and the vacillations of the peasantry.

Trotsky argued that the only consistently revolutionary class was the proletariat, which had to take the leadership of the democratic revolution, and to carry it through as part of its own, socialist revolution — establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

For this analysis, Trotsky received

Marx's terminology of the 'permanent' (uninterrupted, unbroken) revolution. It was to be the key to the October events of 1917.

THESE DEBATES were far from abstract exchanges. The relative calm of the summer of 1905 broke down with a new wave of strikes in October. Typesetters in St Petersburg came out demanding wage increases, triggering stoppages in other industries. Political demands for constitutional rights were added. On 7 October Moscow Kazan railworkers joined the stoppage and within a week the rail network was paralysed. Postal and telegraph workers walked out, schools and universities closed and commerce collapsed.

As Cossack troops were sent out to repress the strikers, barricades went up and workers raided gun shops.

Most significantly, the events saw on 13 October the birth of the St Petersburg soviet from the printers' strike committee. Though it began with delegates from only one district, soon 500 delegates from across the country were attending, and an executive including three Bolsheviks, three Mensheviks and three Social Revolutionaries was elected. The soviet launched a newspaper *Izvestiya* (Tidings) on 17 October.

At this point the Tsar, in a change of tactics, picked a new prime minister and issued a manifesto promising a constitution, civil liberties, and universal suffrage.

While the liberals took all this at face value and celebrated, Trotsky, speaking at a huge rally at the university, hailed the developments as the first great victory of the working class, but warned:

'Do not hasten to celebrate victory: it is not yet complete. Does the promissory note weigh as much as pure gold? ... Are the gates of our prisons open? ...

'The Tsar's manifesto ... see! It is only a scrap of paper. Today it has been given to us and tomorrow it will be taken away and torn into pieces as I am now tearing it to pieces, this paper-liberty, before your very eyes.'

Though the general strike was called off, the soviet continued to organise, raiding each major print works in turn to force them to print *Izvestiya*, edited by Trotsky. The soviet threw down its challenge to the tsarist state on the censorship issue, deciding that:

'Only those newspapers may be published whose editors ignore the censorship committees, refuse to submit their issues for censorship, and generally act in the same way as the soviet in publishing its own paper ... Newspapers which fail to accept the present resolution will be confiscated from their sellers.'

In this way the soviet had gone far beyond its original task of strike coordination: it was now championing political demands and workers' control in defiance of the central state apparatus. The Tsar could not even find a commercial printer for his manifesto. There was a *dual power* in the land: the power of the soviet challenging the authority of the state machinery.

Two weeks after the general strike ended, another massive general strike showed the power of the movement. The demands were for an end to the Tsar's imposition of martial law on Poland, and against the court-martial and execution of mutineers at the Kronstadt fortress. A five-day strike brought total victory for the workers — on the two issues which not even the most blinkered 'economist' could have claimed were trade union concerns.

This politicisation of the working class alarmed the liberal bourgeoisie as much as the Tsar. They began to swing back behind the government, creating conditions for a new state crackdown.

'in January 1905 a political strike of one hundred thousand workers brought St. Petersburg to a standstill'

At the end of November the president of the Petrograd soviet was arrested; Trotsky was elected in his place. On 23 December he, and the other officers of the soviet were also arrested. Uprisings led by the Moscow soviet and in St Petersburg were left isolated from peasant support and most of the army: they were ruthlessly repressed.

The experiences and political lessons of 1905 proved a vital source of strength to sustain and arm the revolutionary movement as well as a telling confirmation of Trotsky's warning of the limitations of 'paper-liberty'.

In the dark years of reaction from 1907-1910 the Bolsheviks and the workers' movement had to battle against the defeatist and opportunist pressures until a fresh revival of the class struggle began, as described by Nadezhda Krupskaya, a leading Bolshevik and companion to Lenin.

'Every month saw an increase in the strength of the labour movement. But this movement was now growing under conditions entirely different from those in which the labour movement grew before 1905. It was developing on the basis of the experiences of the 1905 revolution.'

The revival by 1912 enabled the Bolsheviks to launch *Pravda* as a daily newspaper, sustained by, and leading, sections of the working class ●



from 1914 to October

WITH THE outbreak of world war in August 1914, the opportunist and reformist evolution of the majority of social democratic parties gave way to the collapse of internationalism in the Second International.

Lenin in September cut through the waffle and spelled out the harsh reality of the war:

'The struggle for markets and for plundering foreign lands; the eagerness to head off the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and to crush democracy within each country; the urge to deceive, divide and crush the proletarians of all countries, to incite the wage slaves of one nation against the wage slaves of another nation for the profits of the bourgeoisie — that is the real content and meaning of the war.'

Under these conditions, where capitalist property relations and national boundaries served only to fetter rather than advance the development of the productive forces, and warring imperialists fought to redivide the markets and colonies, the politics of reformist social democracy, wedded to capitalism, could only play the most reactionary role, reinforcing chauvinism and lining up worker against worker in the service of the bosses.

The Bolshevik line on the war flowed from this internationalist, class analysis. The opportunity of the war should be exploited by the workers — to turn their guns on their 'own' ruling class, and turn the imperialist war into a civil war.

The war was both a disgrace and a catastrophe by any terms. Out of fifteen million Russians mobilised, two and a half million were killed, and another three million taken prisoner or wounded.

Most of those conscripted for the ar-

my were peasants, and the wartime crisis coincided with a new twist in the problem of the agrarian revolution in Russia.

A wave of peasant rebellion took shape alongside the emergence of the numerically small but economically powerful working class. While Russian capitalists sought to exploit the war as a chance to make fabulous profits, the workers quickly rejected the patriotic propaganda and had begun to fight back by the summer of 1915.

The autumn of 1916 saw growing agitation and mobilisation in the factories, increasing Bolshevik propaganda, political strikes and demonstrations, fraternisation between workers and soldiers, and revolutionary activity among the sailors of the Baltic fleet.

Bitter resentment against the Tsar developed at all levels. Even the 'runk and file nobility', the grand dukes, showed their irritation in December by ordering the murder of Rasputin, the mystic who had exercised a hypnotic power over all aspects of royal policy.

By January 1917, 575,000 workers were out on political strikes, and the onset of bread rationing provoked mass resistance on February 19. On 21 February workers at the giant Putilov works in Petrograd (St Petersburg) were locked out after demanding a fifty per cent pay increase.

But it was women textile workers, defying Bolshevik advice and walking out on strike on international women's day (23 February) who triggered the events of the February Revolution. Joined by the vast bread queues who had been told there would be no bread that day, they marched on the Petrograd municipal дума (assembly) demanding food. Next day 240,000 workers were on strike, with

Trotsky addressing a demonstration in Sverdlov Square, Moscow, May 1920

transport halted and school students on the streets.

The women workers — in their actions far ahead of most revolutionary groups — also played a key role in winning over and breaking the resistance of the troops. On 27 February the first company of troops mutinied and shot their commander. They swiftly approached other barracks, and began to disarm police, distribute arms and free jailed political prisoners. The same day saw the Petrograd soviet formed once again, setting up at the Tauride palace, where the duma sat.

The soviet leadership was at this stage firmly in the hands of the Mensheviks and (peasant-based) Social Revolutionaries; but the editorship of the new daily paper *Izvestiya* went to a Bolshevik, Bonch-Bruевич.

Unable to mobilise forces to contain the Petrograd rebellion, and begged by his generals to abdicate, the Tsar did so on 2 March. The Mensheviks and the capitalist Kadet party were still both terrified of a revival of tsarism — and even more fearful of the awakening working class. Though the workers and soldiers called upon them to take power, they would not do so.

The workers and soldiers controlled Petrograd, holding the state bank, the treasury, the mint and the post office: only the soviet was recognised as the authority. Yet the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary leaders of the soviet promptly dropped all of the demands for which workers had been fighting — the eight-hour day, land reform, peace and the republic. Instead they meekly sought freedom for political parties and an elected constituent assembly some time in the future.

It was on this feeble basis that the leaders of the soviet gave their endorsement to a bourgeois provisional government which included the Social Revolutionary Kerensky as minister of justice. The contradictions were glaring: the SR's main base was the peasantry, yet they made a coalition with the landlords; and while the Mensheviks rested on workers' votes, they lined up with the employers, rather than take power in their hands.

Only fifteen out of nine hundred votes at the soviet were cast against the provisional government, but as Trotsky pointed out:

'In voting for such leaders, the proletarians and peasantry erected a partition wall between themselves and their own aims. They could not move forward at all without knocking into this wall erected by themselves, knocking it over.'

This began quickly, when militant soldiers marched to the soviet demanding support for political rights — and

the right of army units to elect their own officers. Under pressure, and against their own wishes, the soviet leaders were obliged to agree and endorse this in general order no. 1, which also asserted soviet control over all troop movements in Petrograd. It was published in *Izvestiya* and distributed far and wide.

The workers were the next to challenge the line of the provisional government, refusing to return to work without pay increases and an eight-hour day. They stayed on strike another twenty days after the soviet had urged them to return to work, forcing the soviet to negotiate with the employers on their behalf, and winning their demands.

The Bolshevik forces, however, were seriously disorientated. Some veered towards a defencist position on the war; some merely tail-ended events; others appeared on the ultra-left, calling for an immediate new uprising. Matters worsened with the return from exile of Stalin and Kamenev, who immediately took over

'Trotsky argued that the proletariat would have to take the leadership of the democratic revolution and carry it through as part of the socialist revolution — his theory of permanent revolution was to be the key to the events of 1917'

control of *Pravda*. The paper promptly dropped the line of opposition to the war. Instead it appealed for the provisional government to 'make an attempt to induce the warring countries to open immediate negotiations,' promising that 'until then every man remains at his fighting post'.

Lenin's telegram response on March 6 was to insist:

'Our tactic: absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; suspect Kerensky especially; immediate elections to the Petrograd duma; no rapprochement with other parties.'

This was ignored: the Bolshevik line became under Stalin less and less distinguishable from the Menshevik line: in many areas the two parties began operating as one.

When Lenin returned on April 3, his first words were of the imminence of socialist revolution. He went on to fight for this line on the central committee, spelling out his views in the pamphlet, the *April Theses*.

The democratic gains of February could only be defended and completed

by socialist revolution with the working class taking the lead in resolving the question of dual power by establishing its own dictatorship, he argued. The rising clamour for an end to the war could only be satisfied if the capitalists and their state were toppled.

'It is impossible to make a democratic peace, one that is not imposed by force, without destroying the power of capitalism... In order to bring a permanent end to the war it is essential that the proletariat take power.'

Scarcely a single leading Bolshevik supported Lenin on any of these questions, though his views echoed the earlier analysis of Trotsky in 1905. Only the day before, led by Stalin and Kamenev, an all-Russian Bolshevik congress had endorsed a quite opposite line!

The party had to be won over at the eleventh hour. This is no historical exception, Trotsky later explained:

'The fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party. On the basis of our experience — even taking only one year, from February 1917 to February 1918 — and on the basis of the supplementary experience in Finland, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria and Germany, we can posit as almost an unalterable law that a party crisis is inevitable in the transition from the preparatory revolutionary activity to the immediate struggle for power.' (*Lessons of October*)

Lenin was able however to rely on support from rank and file Bolshevik workers and soldiers in his campaign to reverse the leadership's policy. By the time of the next all-Russian conference on 24 April, the majority of 150 delegates representing 79,000 members had swung behind most of his positions.

The successful resolution opposed union with the Mensheviks and denounced the provisional government as 'a government of landowners and capitalists'; it called for working class power in the belligerent countries as the way to end the war, and the Bolsheviks began to raise the slogan of 'all power to the soviets'.

Lenin however lost on his demand for a break from the pacifist Zimmerwald grouping of social democrats, and his call for the party to change its name to the Communist Party.

Spontaneous mass anti-war demonstrations in Petrograd in April exposed again the precarious balance of dual power between the soviet and the state. Military commander General Kornilov wanted to mobilise armoured vehicles against the workers: but the soviet asserted its authority under general order no. 1 to stop this.

The provisional government was destabilised — and restructured with

six 'socialist' ministers, including top Menshevik Tseretelli, alongside the capitalists. Against this, the Bolsheviks steadily gained ground throughout May and June, as unionisation, factory committees and strike action continued to grow.

At the first all-Russian congress of soviets, 1,000 delegates represented over 20 million workers and soldiers. Less than twenty per cent of delegates were Bolsheviks, though the party was rapidly winning support.

The reactionary line of the compromisers was exposed to ridicule on 24 June, when the Bolsheviks intervened in a demonstration called by the congress of soviets — and the vast majority of banners carried the bold Bolshevik demands 'down with the ten capitalist ministers!' 'down with the offensive!' 'all power to the soviets!'

But the forces of counter-revolution were also attempting to mobilise. Militant factories were closed down; union members were locked out; divisions at the front were disbanded for disobedience; and top army officers, protected by the capitalist Kadets and funded by bankers and allied embassies, began to prepare for a crackdown.

On 2 July, four Kadet ministers pulled out of the provisional government claiming that the 'socialist' ministers would not act against the workers.

The workers and soldiers for their part, were pushing forward — but at an uneven pace. The end of June and beginning of July saw the Bolsheviks struggling in vain to restrain the spontaneous militancy of the Petrograd masses, who had developed far faster than workers in the provinces or the troops at the front. Bolshevik leaders feared that a premature confrontation could give the government an excuse for a crackdown in which Petrograd could be isolated.

However, when the workers of the Putilov works and soldiers of the machine gun regiment voted solidly for an armed demonstration on 3 July, the Bolsheviks had no choice but to lend support. The march went to the provisional government and the executive of the soviet, both of which sat in the Tauride palace. Their demands were for the removal of the ten capitalist ministers, all power to the soviets, a halt to the offensive, confiscation of bourgeois newspapers and printing plants, nationalisation of the land and state control of production.

While the Mensheviks and SRs prevaricated, hoping that loyal troops would return from the front to rescue them from the workers, the Kronstadt soldiers and sailors just down the river decided to march to Petrograd the next day.

'Loyal' army units called in by the

frightened ministers turned out to be already marching to Petrograd — to join the demonstration!

When the SR minister of agriculture, Chernov, came out to the demonstrators and declared 'good riddance' to the Kadets who had left the government, he was greeted with anger: 'Take the power (...) when they give it to you!' yelled one angry worker.

According to the French ambassador, the government actually resigned that afternoon, only to be forestalled by the soviet executive, who refused to accept their resignation, and gave them a vote of confidence!

'the war was a catastrophe — out of fifteen million Russians mobilised, two and a half million were killed'

The state, meanwhile, still had reserves of repressive strength, and the compromisers were still determined to prevent revolution. The demonstration came to an end, on Bolshevik advice; but early next morning the first reliable troops, hand-picked from the most reactionary guards battalions, arrived in Petrograd and began arresting

'it was women textile workers who walked out on strike on international women's day, triggering the events of the February revolution'

workers — to the delight of the compromisers.

The troops had been fed on a diet of lies alleging Lenin to be a German spy. This was to prove the start of a massive witch-hunt against the Bolsheviks as the counter-revolution hit back.

Lenin was forced into hiding. On 10 July, Trotsky was arrested. Bolshevik newspapers were suppressed. The Mensheviks and SRs peddled the 'German spy' line relentlessly to further their own coalition with capitalist ministers and to back the war effort.

Since these same parties were still leading the soviets, Lenin on July 10 dropped the slogan of 'all power to the soviets', and reemphasised the leading role of the working class and of the Bolshevik Party in completing the revolutionary struggle:

'The slogan all power to the soviets! was a slogan for peaceful development

of the revolution which was possible in April, May, June and up to July 5-9, i.e. up to the time when actual power passed into the hands of the military dictatorship.

'This slogan is no longer correct, for it does not take into account that power has changed hands and that the revolution has in fact been completely betrayed by the SRs and the Mensheviks...

'Let us gather forces, reorganise them, and resolutely prepare for the armed uprising, if the course of the crisis permits it on a really mass, country-wide scale... The aim of the insurrection can only be to transfer power to the proletariat, supported by the poor peasants, with a view to putting our party programme into effect.'

A sign that despite the witch-hunt the Bolsheviks were gathering forces, came early in August when 400,000 Moscow workers responded to Bolshevik calls for a strike on the day of a 'state conference' convened by Kerensky to consolidate his coalition with the capitalists.

But it was the attempts of the extreme right of the officer corps under General Kornilov to carry through a military coup against the soviets and against Kerensky's provisional government which finally enabled the Bolsheviks to break out of their isolation.

Kerensky's fellow ministers resigned en bloc on August 26, leaving him confronted with Kornilov, who demanded that the provisional government should surrender all power to him as commander in chief. The workers, however, moved swiftly to prepare their own armed self-defence.

This was the period of rapid growth of the militia forces of the Red Guards, a rival to the armed forces of the capitalist state — and trained by militant soldiers. The Red Guards announced that they could mobilise 40,000 workers with rifles to combat Kornilov's threats.

Meanwhile rail and telegraph workers developed their own style of workers' control, brilliantly sabotaging Kornilov's troop movements and communications. Workers fraternised with troops from even Kornilov's most feared divisions — who then began arresting their officers, and holding mass meetings.

The episode ended when Kerensky 'arrested' Kornilov to save him from a revolutionary firing squad. These events had brought the Bolsheviks back to the forefront; they had encouraged new layers of workers to arm and organise themselves; and they had totally discredited the compromising leaders of the provisional government, who were seen as having opened the door for Kornilov. ●

October!

ROCKED BY the failed Kornilov revolt, Kerensky's provisional government had collapsed. Worse from his point of view was the new insistence from his own social revolutionary party that he should not lead another government containing capitalist ministers.

He was reduced to a directorate of five. Meantime from his hiding place, Lenin wrote two letters to the Bolshevik central committee urging the leadership to prepare the seizure of power. While the objective conditions had not existed in July, the situation had changed in September:

'The point is to make the task clear to the party. The present task must be an armed uprising in Petrograd and Moscow (with its region), the seizing of power and overthrow of the government.'

The vanguard of the working class had now swung behind the Bolsheviks, as demonstrated by their dominant positions in the main soviets (they had won control in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, and other key cities); a revolutionary upsurge was developing throughout the countryside; the once united 'allies' were now wavering between a war to the victorious finish and a separate peace aimed against Russia; while the petty bourgeoisie, under the pressure of the masses, had begun to move politically.

The Mensheviks and SRs, however, still fought tooth and nail to hold back developments. Through their hold on the executive of the all-Russian soviet they convened a democratic conference, which in turn voted to set up a new talking shop, known as the pre-parliament. Meanwhile, fearing that the Bolsheviks could win a clear majority, they postponed the already overdue recall all-Russian congress of soviets.

Lenin argued for a boycott of the pre-parliament, winning the support of Trotsky, who had now been released from jail and reelected president of the Petrograd soviet — this time as a Bolshevik. He led the Bolshevik faction out of the pre-parliament amid cries from the Mensheviks about 'German gold'. But the Kadet Miliukov commented:

'They (the Bolsheviks) spoke and acted like people feeling a power behind them, knowing that the morrow belonged to them.'

The Baltic fleet in the meantime sent a telegram to the central executive committee calling for the removal of Kerensky, and began holding up the movement of government freight.

A similar state of affairs was also developing within the army, where fraternisation began again after the witch-hunting of July, and more and

more of the most hated officers were arrested or murdered.

The Bolsheviks stepped up their agitation throughout the country; the question was increasingly starkly posed — which class was to rule?

Workers in the armaments factories established a special centre to study methods of transition from munitions manufacture to peaceful production. The Moscow conference of factory and shop committees declared that in future all strikes should be settled by a decree of the local soviet, thus establishing soviet power over the capitalists.



Nadzhada Krupskaya, organiser of contacts between the exiles and the Russian underground

Day by day the rival government of the soviets grew, strengthened as capitalists began themselves to sabotage the war effort in an attempt to discredit the revolution — only to be usurped by factory committees which stepped in and took control of production.

The enormous growth of support for the Bolsheviks, and their success in forcing the executive committee to convene the congress of soviets for October 20 made Lenin even more impatient to begin the insurrection.

Events leapt forward when the government issued an order for the reorganisation of the Petrograd garrison units in preparation for a new offensive.

The response was immediate. Ignoring the capitalist accusations that the Petrograd soldiers had grown far

in idleness, the workers insisted that the garrison remain intact.

The soldiers in return campaigned for the workers to be armed. The compromisers themselves unwittingly helped this process along, when they suggested to the soviet a resolution for setting up a 'committee of revolutionary defence', supposedly to protect the capital against the advancing German army.

To their surprise the Bolsheviks accepted the proposal: they had often discussed setting up an armed organisation of the Soviet to lead the insurrection — now the Mensheviks themselves had proposed to set up a body that could do just that!

The central committee met on October 10, with Lenin secretly in attendance. He moved a resolution calling on party organisations to turn their attention to the practical questions involved in the armed insurrection. Only Kamenev and Zinoviev voted against. Lenin had until this point been isolated on the question of insurrection; now the leadership had swung in his direction.

The same meeting set October 15 as the target date for the insurrection, but this proved impossible. On October 16, at Lenin's insistence, the central committee met again. Kamenev and Zinoviev again opposed fixing any date for the insurrection, while Krylenko argued that it was still too soon to set a date because events were still developing favourably and 'the thing is already begun'.

Lenin pressed a new resolution calling 'all organisations and all workers and soldiers to an all-sided and most vigorous preparation of armed insurrection'. It was carried by twenty votes to the two of Kamenev and Zinoviev, with three abstentions.

The next day, the soviet executive committee — appalled by the massive victory of the Bolsheviks in the Petrograd soviet (the Bolshevik list of candidates won 443 votes, to the left SRs 162 and a mere 44 for the Mensheviks) — again postponed the opening of the congress of soviets, to October 25.

These five extra days were to be usefully employed by the Bolsheviks in preparing the insurrection; but on the same day, Kamenev and Zinoviev broke ranks and denounced the Bolshevik plans in the non-party press. Though Lenin branded them strike-breakers of the revolution and demanded their expulsion, the central committee would not agree.

Meanwhile the committee of revolutionary defence (now renamed the military revolutionary committee) had gone about its work with a will, setting up departments of defence, supplies, communications and intelligence. One regiment after another



A poster by Victor Deni depicts Trotsky as Saint George slaying the counterrevolutionary dragon

Stalin — when he and Kameney returned from exile and took over control of *Pravda* its line became less and less distinguishable from that of the Mensheviks



The satirical magazine *Red Pepper* introduces its readers to the Soviet United football team



A patrol of Red Guards from the Putilov factory, Petrograd 1917

was placing itself under the committee's command, refusing to go to the front unless ordered by the soviet.

The prolonged period of dual power was giving way to the power of the soviets. The provisional government found itself more and more isolated, with ever fewer dependable troops.

On October 21, the Petrograd garrison conference called on the all-Russian congress of soviets to 'take the power in its hands, and guarantee to the people peace, land and bread'. The next day the Petrograd soviet had called a peaceful review of its forces. It was a huge success with every large hall filled with workers and soldiers demanding down with Kerensky! Down with war! All power to the soviets!

The high command asked for talks with the military revolutionary committee: the committee agreed — in order to reconnoitre inside the enemy's headquarters, but warned that 'the commissars, as representatives of the soviet, are inviolable'.

Trotsky pointed out that in this period the military revolutionary committee was 'crowding out the government with the pressure of the masses, with the weight of the garrison. It is taking all that it can without a battle. It is advancing its positions without firing...'

It was the provisional government itself which gave the pretext for launching the insurrection, when it dispatched troops to close down the Bolsheviks' printing press and shut off the phone to the Smolny institute which was headquarters to the soviet as well as the Bolshevik party. The military revolutionary committee responded by fortifying Smolny with machine gunners and armoured

vehicles. The insurrectionary forces were now ready for action.

In the early hours of October 25, Red Guard detachments occupied all of the strategic points in the capital, with hardly a shot fired. At seven am the telephone exchange fell, and communications to the winter palace, where the provisional government was still in permanent session, were cut off.

When the second congress of the all-Russian soviet of workers' and peasants' deputies eventually opened at 10.40pm everything had gone according to plan except that the winter palace had still not fallen — and the Mensheviks and SRs railed against the Bolsheviks for attacking it.

However, the elections for the presiding council saw the Bolsheviks win fourteen seats to the SRs' seven, the Mensheviks three and the Internationalists only one. Seeing that they were a minority, the compromisers denounced the Bolsheviks and marched angrily out of the soviet.

John Reed, the American journalist sympathetic to the Bolsheviks, describes Trotsky:

'... standing up with a pale, cruel face, letting out his rich voice in cool contempt. "All these so-called socialist compromisers, these frightened Mensheviks, social revolutionaries, Bund — let them go! They are just so much refuse which will be swept away into the garbage heap of history..."'

Papers appeared on the streets carrying the proclamation of the military revolutionary committee and the Petrograd soviet:

'To the citizens of Russia!

'The provisional government is deposed. The state power has passed

into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies, the military revolutionary committee, which stands at the head of the Petrograd proletariat and garrison.

'The cause for which the people were fighting; immediate proposal of a democratic peace, abolition of landlord property rights over the land; labour control over production; creation of a soviet government — that cause is securely achieved. *Long live the revolution of workmen, soldiers and peasants!*'

By the early hours of October 26, the winter palace had surrendered and the ministers of the provisional government were placed under arrest. Kerensky was not amongst them: he had fled in order to bring 'loyal' troops to rescue the compromisers.

At 8.40 in the evening of October 26, the praesidium of the congress of soviets, headed by Lenin, came in to the congress, greeted by thunderous applause. Lenin mounted the rostrum, and when the cheering had died down he announced:

'We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order!'

He went on to outline the soviet terms for peace — no annexations, no indemnities, and the right of peoples to self-determination.

He then read out the proclamation to the peoples and governments of all the belligerent nations, which was adopted unanimously by the congress.

Next Lenin read the decree on land. All private ownership of land was abolished, all landowners' estates were transferred to land committees and peasants' soviets. The land decree was debated and passed with only one vote against: the working class vanguard had honoured its commitment to the agrarian revolution, and the peasant delegates were overjoyed.

The Bolsheviks made clear they were prepared to share power with any socialist party which was prepared to accept the legitimate transfer of the power to the soviets. Only the left SRs were prepared to join the government on this basis — and the Bolsheviks welcomed them into the council of people's commissars.

The capital had been conquered. Now it had to be defended against whatever forces Kerensky could muster, and the rest of Russia had to be won over to the revolution. This was the daunting task that confronted the Bolsheviks on the third day of the revolution.

But whatever material and political problems later beset the revolution, the conquest of power by the armed working class and its revolutionary party stands as a turning point in history. This was, and 70 years later still is, *our* revolution ●

Thanks to DAVID KING for the use of photographs from his collection.

There was a time when the bourgeois press would contrast the gerontocracy in the Soviet Union with the apparent dynamism of the West. Now it looks a lot like the other way round. But what is

really going on behind the rhetoric of *glasnost* and *perestroika*? In a challenging article **OLIVER MACDONALD** asks 'should socialists support Gorbachevism against Brezhnevism?'

Gorbachev and the left



Denis Dorman/Salix

Mikhail Gorbachev — should socialists support 'Gorbachevism' against 'Brezhnevism'?

Solidarnosc — 'we cannot expect the rise of a similar movement within the Soviet working class in the present situation'

THE LEFT is still very far from achieving a consensus on the Gorbachev leadership. It would be easy and half-true to say that this is because of deep differences of analysis and programme in relation to the Soviet Union. Yet this cannot be the whole story; tendencies which share the same programmatic tradition on the USSR differ sharply on their appreciation of what is happening there. Indeed, there are differences within this or that tendency on this question.

Such differences must at least partly derive from genuine problems in our thinking about the USSR. The events unfolding there genuinely surprise us, don't fit neatly into our established categories for pigeon-holing the behaviour of the Soviet government. We tend to fall into superficial, descriptive approaches: on the one hand, Gorbachev should be praised for doing X on Monday, but he should be denounced for Y on Tuesday; who knows what he will do on Wednesday! We haven't penetrated

beneath the surface of events to the inner logic of the Gorbachev tendency.

If this is the state of our thinking then there is only one solution: an open, discussion in which we use a clash of opinions to reach a higher understanding, grasping the process in the Soviet Union as a whole and grasping its contradictions. If we look back at the debate which the trotskyst movement had in the late 1940s over what was happening then in Eastern Europe, we will have a model for how we should proceed.

Continuity or discontinuity?

PERHAPS ONE of the main roots of our intellectual anxieties about Soviet events derives from the following puzzle: there seems to be a dramatic break between the policies of the Brezhnev era and the present policies, especially in Soviet domestic politics, yet there has been no political upheaval. Is there a genuine break with the past, or is it all cosmetic?

There is a clear break with the Brezhnev heritage if we define that heritage in terms of three key ideas:

- the idea that the USSR had for the first time in its history achieved a decisive and irreversible degree of security through its strategic arsenal and its relations with the USA.
- the idea that the USSR was an 'advanced socialist society' requiring only minor adjustments and quantitative improvements in order to progress uninterruptedly towards communism.
- the idea that the existing socio-economic mechanism and the corresponding political mechanism was the correct model for any socialist society. It may need reforms, especially economic reforms to generate greater economic dynamism, but such reforms would improve the performance of the existing mechanism, not scrap it.

The first idea crashing down while Brezhnev was still in office. He had presided over the achievement of strategic parity with the USA — Soviet ICBMs could guarantee an overwhelming second strike in the wake of a US attack, and this will continue to give the Soviet Union a measure of military security into the 1990s. But military protection is only one aspect of the political security of a state. The real core of Brezhnevite security policy was the political goal of achieving a stable, co-operative relationship with the USA through arms control, mutual recognition of each others' vital interests, and co-operation in managing regional wars and revolutions.

In this drive, the Brezhnev leadership ignored any serious active policy towards China, Western Europe, Japan or the third world: everything was subordinated to the drive for a strategic political deal with Washington, to a craving for recognition and acceptance by Washington. In 1979, Washington opened its jaws and sank its teeth into Brezhnev's dithering hand of superpower friendship. Suddenly the political impotence of the Brezhnev strategy was exposed: Western Europe, Japan and China all seemed to be swinging into a new anti-Soviet alliance led by the USA and Washington was laying siege to a number of Soviet allies in the third world.

What had been hailed by the Brezhnev leadership as the USSR's irreversible escape from external threat had turned into something like a new encirclement in the 1980s. This was a terrible shock to the Soviet leadership. By 1983 there was a mood close to panic within the Kremlin: a belief that Washington was hell-bent on a course of trying to destroy the Soviet bloc, possibly even by military means, through

the star wars project.

This collapse of Brezhnev's foreign strategy exposed the hollowness of talk about the USSR being an 'advanced socialist society'. The explosive crisis in Poland burst forth in 1980 dramatically exposing the fundamental weakness and backwardness of the USSR: its cultural influence in Poland was non-existent, its ideological influence negative and the attractive pull of the Soviet economy on the Polish economy infinitely weaker than that of the west. In terms of sheer quantitative weight, the productive power of the Soviet economy is less than that of Japan and only about a fifth that of the OECD countries. Technologically the picture is almost as grim, in terms of living standards it is worse still.

Social relations within the USSR are marked by a gap between town and country far greater than in most of Western Europe north of the Mediterranean; by a fierce and in large part illegal struggle for scarce goods and services, by corruption, drunkenness, harsh relations between the sexes with great strains placed upon women.

There are still backward welfare services outside the main cities, an only semi-predictable legal system and a brutally primitive, authoritarian political style in relations between the regime and individual citizens — worse, of course, for critical elements. And all these tensions, scarcely masked by the bland official ideological code, expressed themselves in the luxuriant growth of chauvinistic, mystical, authoritarian and obscurantist ideologies as well as in the crudest fascinations for the latest fads and gadgets of our capitalist culture-industries.

It is possible to view this Soviet world of the 1980s as in many ways a great advance on what had existed before in that vast ocean of Russian rural backwardness. There is no doubt that very many Russians do view Soviet life in this way. It is also the case that this catalogue of problems is not the same as the problems faced in the capitalist world — and it is by no means the case that the life of Soviet workers is, in a qualitative sense, 'worse' than that of workers in the west — we will return to this important issue later. The point is that Soviet society's present form is not only not *advanced* socialism: it is not even a secure basis for the Soviet state's efforts into the 1990s, leave alone the next century; it cannot secure a genuinely organic relationship with Eastern Europe, or exert a pull on the imagination of working people in the advanced capitalist countries. And even in the third world today, the USSR is admired by progressive movements much more for its foreign policy posture than as a model of an advanced social order. It remains in world terms a backward, primitive state in transition to socialism, still isolated within a far stronger capitalist world system. All this led a group within the Soviet leadership to challenge the ideas of the Brezhnev period, an idea to which the Brezhnev generation of leaders had been committed all their adult lives. Perestroika involves a real attempt to remodel the entire system as it was established over the last fifty years since the Stalin period. It is a real break in continuity with the orthodoxy of Stalinism. It is a break which we have not been adequately prepared for.

Stalinism or Trotskyism, bureaucratic rule or working class power?

TROTSKY'S GREAT contribution to the Marxist theory of the transition to socialism was his insistence that it is possible to have a *proletarian state* which is very far from being paradise on earth. *Such is and has been the situation in*

the USSR. Yet many who claim to subscribe to Trotsky's theoretical legacy find it hard to defend or even explain the proletarian character of the Soviet state. Some give an idealist version: it's to do with the continuing ideological roots of the Soviet state in the October revolution; others say it simply means a formal characteristic of the economy — statification of the means of production — which involves no real benefit for the workers except full employment, and even that, they often argue, is more a by-product of chronic labour shortages deriving from over-investment than a consequence of the nature of the state.

Ultra-reactionaries like the late Leonard Schapiro are closer to the mark when they wrote that the working class is the most privileged class in the USSR and that the reason for so few strikes has been less to do with the police than with the sense of security and well-being among key groups of industrial workers. The Shachtmanites also got it right in their polemic with Trotsky when they wrote that they would accept his analysis if events demonstrated two trends: an end to the terror and a reversal of the growing inequalities between managers and workers. In the 1950s, both these trends appeared and developed; they continued to do so up to the last years of Brezhnev.

What about the atrocious behaviour of the KGB in arresting and imprisoning dissidents for no more than perfectly legitimate political activity? And what about the psychiatric hospitals and the appalling conditions in places like Vladimir prison or the Mordovian camps? Absolutely, but all of this demonstrates that the USSR has been a very authoritarian and intolerant state given to treating certain kinds of dissent very brutally. But it doesn't mean the USSR is a terrorist state as it was in large degree under Stalin. As Trotsky argued, you can have brutally authoritarian proletarian states.

But how can one say that the working class is the most privileged class when you look at the privileges of the bureaucracy? But which bureaucrats: the top party and government officials? Their privileges are indeed enormous — one is tempted to say they live in communism, with the complete satisfaction of every need (and want!) without any mediation of money. But what about plant managers, what about the Soviet equivalent of what we would call 'professionals', or what about writers, teachers, academics? These groups in general (leaving aside the political chiefs amongst them) earn very little more than a skilled worker — some of them considerably less.

Furthermore they *own* their living: there is no rentier class, no bourgeoisie of private property owners. Where in the capitalist world could you find plant managers earning only fifty per cent more than skilled workers in the plant? And under Khrushchev and Brezhnev great efforts were made to make the industrial workers in a real sense better off and more secure than surrounding social groups. This does not need to be explained in terms of socialist idealism; it is product of the enormous power of the working class within the Soviet socio-economic system.

Does this mean that Soviet industrial workers were happy and contented, without grievances or problems? No. The Soviet workers are discontented about many aspects of their lives and in many ways deeply frustrated. The indices of alcoholism tell a terrible story of the barrenness and boredom of the lives of many. There is evidence of yearning for a freer society and for much greater democratic control among Soviet workers. The huge and corrupt privileges of the political elite have been

causing great anger. All this is true. But the point we are making is a different one: namely that the Soviet working class has felt itself to be much better off and far more influential in every sphere of life than any other social class in the Soviet Union. Quantitatively they are far worse off than employed industrial workers in Germany or France; qualitatively their lives are far more secure and their influence on public policy is far greater.

A political caste of bureaucrats dominates the Soviet state.

FOR SOME COMRADES, no doubt, what we have said above seems to contradict the idea that the Soviet state is dominated by a bureaucracy. I don't consider that what we have said in the slightest negates the idea that the USSR is government by a political caste of bureaucrats. The problem lies elsewhere: in the replacement of Trotsky's conception of bureaucracy by that of Weber — a reactionary German imperialist theorist whose thought has been a staple diet in the academic system of the advanced capitalist world for decades.

For Weber the bureaucracy is the administrative system for running modern organisations and the bureaucrats are simply the desk workers in the hierarchy. They are concerned only with means, oblivious of ends, they are timid, narrow-minded, obsessed with status, petty privileges, with increasing their own power and consumption resources.

On this view of bureaucracy, everybody in enterprise administration, in local and central government administration, indeed every desk worker in the USSR belongs to the bureaucratic 'class'.

Trotsky's concept of bureaucracy in the USSR was utterly different from Weber's bourgeois sociology. It had nothing to do with work processes or the psychological characteristics of desk workers. It was a *self-selecting caste*, like the officer caste in the Prussian army. And it operated in the sphere of politics: it is a form of political rule whose central meaning is the political expropriation of the working people. In short, the suppression of democracy and its replacement by an authoritarian form of state.

Gorbachev: for liberal bureaucratic rule and against the state bureaucrats

THERE IS NO great mystery about the Gorbachev programme. It involves what might be called 'the Soviet road to Hungarian communism'. In other words a swing to 'Soviet Liberalism'. We can summarise the main elements as follows. As far as the economy is concerned there is a 'NEP' element: ending nationalised property relations in some spheres and replacing them with both petty commodity production and various co-operative forms of property. The actual scope of such changes is extremely narrow in comparison, say, with the GDR, never mind Hungary or Poland. But it is likely to expand considerably, especially in agriculture.

Second there is the development of market relations *within* the state sector of the economy. This will go much further down the road of decentralising economic decision-making to the market and enterprises than the Kosygin reforms of the 1960s and it will be combined with an element of enterprise self-management. But it will not go so far as a capitalist-type of labour market plus significant unemployment; nor will it be allowed to generate anything approaching the social differentiation and inequalities in the capitalist system. But it will be a

qualitative shock to the economic and social system:

In the field of social policy, the intelligentsia and managers will be significant gainers, sections of the working class that were previously privileged will be substantial losers. On the other hand the peasant population, hitherto the poorest section of at any rate the Russian population, will very likely gain.

There is a lot of nonsense being talked in the West about Gorbachev adopting 'Thatcherite' principles; this is partly the result of picking up the writings of radical marketisers within the Soviet intelligentsia whose views are not reflected in the party leadership and partly the result of an inability to distinguish form from content. Thus, if people have to pay a fee for certain grades of social service this is not egalitarian but it is also not Thatcherism for the simple reason that Soviet workers are not, on the whole short of cash: their position is the reverse of that of workers here.

The problem for British workers is that there is a vast array of goods and services in front of their noses but they don't happen to have enough money to buy them. The problem for Soviet workers is that they have plenty of cash but can't use it to acquire goods and services they want. Getting such things has to be via the mediation either of politics, or via the black market and bribes. But there is no doubt about it: Gorbachev, like the Dubcekites in Czechoslovakia, is combatting 'levelling egalitarianism' as it's called.

The profound worry in the leadership concerns hostility from the working class. The lower level bureaucrats you can fire. Gorbachev did it to thousands of them in the agro complex in the autumn of 1985. He suddenly presented them with two weeks notice, and off they had to go! He can be very 'anti-bureaucratic'. But he can't fire the working class!

It is important to realise that perestroika involves very real and not simply cosmetic changes in the political system. The old political system did entail a lot of vertical political communication upwards as well as downwards between the smallest political unit and the Moscow centre. (This is something that bourgeois theorists simply cannot grasp because they cannot conceive of vertical political communication being possible except via competitive elections and the operations of 'autonomous' pressure groups).

This is not to say that such vertical communication was pure — of course there was a lot of noise and static but at both ends people can become very skilled at screening that out. But what the old system absolutely did not allow was horizontal political communications: for example, workers in one plant or intellectuals in one local organisation communicating across society to their colleagues political ideas, via a demonstration, a public petition, an open conflict in the local soviet or party organisation.

Gorbachev would like to reverse this: greatly increase horizontal communication — that's what he means when he says that without democracy we cannot breathe. But he also wants to create some barriers to vertical communication upwards to the Moscow centre. He wants to end the situation where the workers with an economic or social or political problem automatically take that problem upwards first to the plant party executive, then to the regional party executive, then up to oblast and finally to the central committee. That had created an enormous weight of political overload on the central political authorities and one which always presented huge potential



Brezhnev in the Kremlin — Washington's turn to cold war po Brezhnev's international strategy

risks: when things go wrong the party leadership is ultimately always seen as responsible, whether its a shortage of tomatoes or a rise in the price of coffee. Let them turn to enterprise managements, to the local soviets etc., thereby freeing the party leadership from responsibility for people's daily problems.

Along with this there must be the development of the great liberal ideas of freedom and the rights of the individual, equality before the law and so on. Of course *glasnost* is popular in wide circles, especially amongst workers who, unlike intellectuals, can't get the information they want from sources apart from the mass media.

As the rule changes at the 27th party congress made clear, the Communist Party is no longer to be seen as the core of all state institutions with the state itself as simply an appendage of the party. Instead the state is to be understood as a constitutional, legal system to which the party itself is subordinated. It will be a slimmed down party — for the first time since 1953 the post-Stalin trend to greatly enlarge the party and especially to enlarge its working class component was reversed at the 27th party congress.

But the key point is that there is no question of undermining the party's 'leading role'. It will be the representative of the people, but it will be the sole representative: rather like a Lockean oligarchy of a sovereign parliament in 18th century Britain. *In short, Soviet politics will continue to be controlled by a special caste of professional politicians: what Trotsky called a bureaucracy.* These people are very far from the psychological type of Weber's bureaucrats: they are very tough, energetic types with a formidable capacity for political struggle. Nor are they necessarily obsessed with consumption privileges: many of them are rather ascetic types, puritans, in fact. Others of course are rather given to luxury, but in any case, this is



olicies in the late 1970s exposed the political impotence of

neither here nor there as far as the analysis of the Soviet system is concerned. They are committed to a type of authoritarian state, though a very different one from the Brezhnevite ideal.

This brings us finally to the new conception of the relationship between the Soviet state and the world. The new leadership has in one sense thoroughly rejected the idea of socialism in one country. They are completely repudiating the notion that the USSR can develop dynamically and without internal contradictions in isolation from the world capitalist economy. Autarky is out. There is a determination to participate on the world market and let its pressures openly appear within the Soviet system, attempting to develop economic, technological, ideological and cultural muscles strong enough to wrestle as one state among others in a single world, without the enormous shield that has screened the Soviet population from the capitalist world.

But the break from Stalinist autarky does not at all entail a turn towards socialist internationalism. Ultimately, as Trotsky pointed out, the internal contradictions of the Soviet state can be resolved only on the plane of the international class struggle, only through the victory of socialism in some of the advanced capitalist countries. Thus historically, there must be a dialectical resolution: on the one hand the Soviet state must indeed operate within the existing relationships of states and economies in the world; yet on the other hand the socialist workers and intellectuals of the Soviet Union must be politically organising their links with the international socialist forces to overthrow this capitalist domination of the world.

No such dialectical conception seems in the slightest degree to motivate the new Soviet leadership. More than ever in the past their horizons seem to be bounded by their own purely state-diplomatic interests. Their interest in a

revival of the 'international communist movement' seems less even than Brezhnev's, far less than Khrushchev's.

What does the future hold?

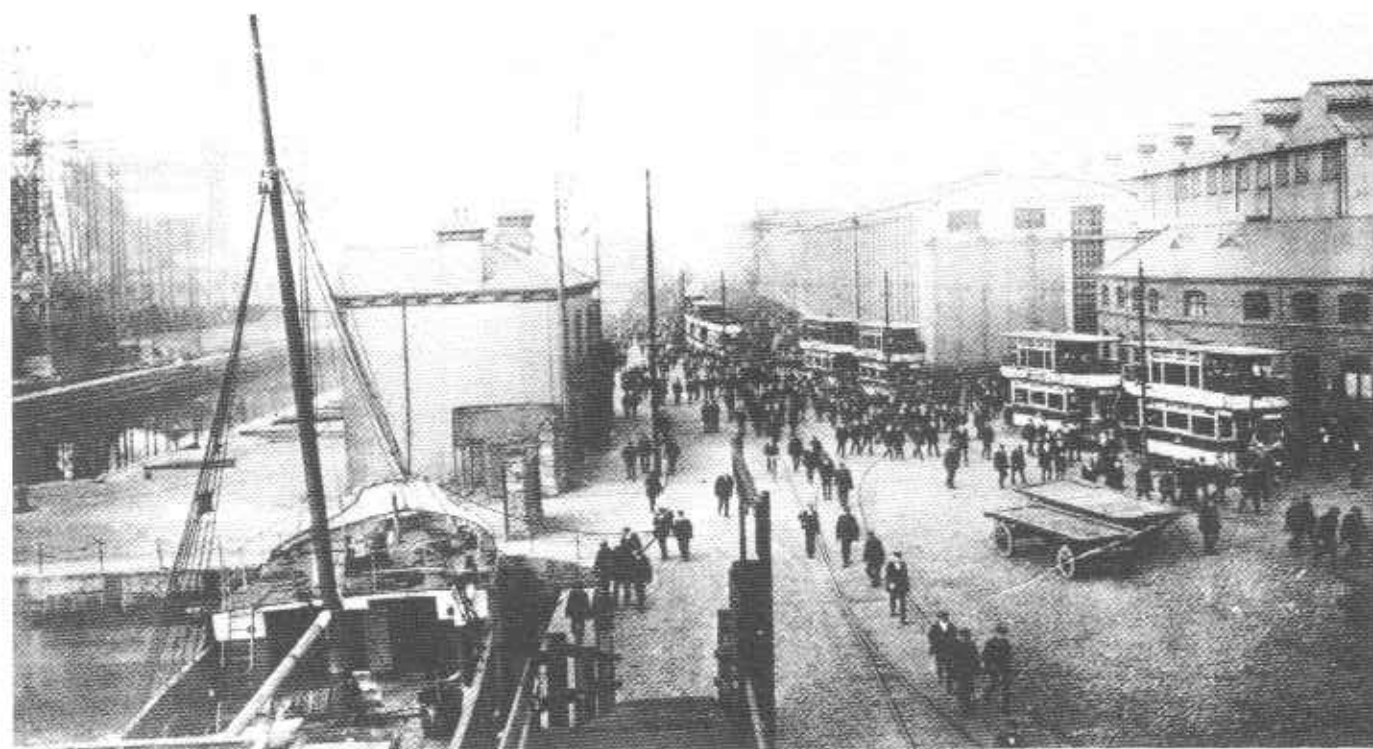
THERE IS VERY great political hostility to the tactics of the Gorbachev leadership within the Soviet political elite and also a degree of hostility to his programmatic aims. Surveys of working class opinion indicate strong support for *glasnost* but deep suspicion of the basic programme of *perestroika*. The reform minded intelligentsia is only half-mobilised behind Gorbachev's drive — there is still a strong wait-and-see-if-he-can-pull-it-off attitude despite the strong sympathy. There is an emerging socialist left-wing of the Gorbachevite reform movement, giving critical support to the Gorbachev group against its enemies within the party elite. And there is the growth of a small, but important and protected Black Hundred or Solzhenitsyn-type of current seeking popular base against the reform and 'the jews'.

It would be a big mistake to expect the rise of a Solidarnosc-type movement within the Soviet working class in the present situation. In the first place, the authority of the CPSU is infinitely greater amongst Soviet workers than that of the PZPR — the Polish CP — has ever been in Poland. Furthermore as a result of this fact, the workers are hardly likely to feel the need to take the enormous risks of creating such an autonomous movement when there are evidently so many potential levers for sabotaging the reform within the CPSU itself.

Thirdly, it is very possible that the bulk of the Soviet working class would be prepared to remain neutral on the economic and social changes or even go along with them in exchange for what they considered a real and substantial measure of political freedom — what happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968, for example. The working class throughout the world has shown itself over and over again to be prepared to pay an astonishingly high economic price for greater political freedom — far more than any bourgeois would dream of doing. The time when a Solidarnosc-type of movement could appear on the agenda would be in the subsequent historical phase: after the working class and their militant leaders in the party have helped their 'Gierek', Gorbachev, to victory, have put their faith in him and then have bitterly learnt through a decade of experience that the hope and the vision has turned to ashes — to a new type of corrupt, *nouveau riche* society awash with dollars and Swiss bank accounts and totally oblivious of the disgusting inequalities and injustices of daily social life.

Against this background, two questions remain: does Gorbachevism represent, in distorted form, the only possible next step for the development of the production forces in the USSR — only via the victory of Gorbachevism over Brezhnevism will the trotskyism of the Soviet future establish itself as a genuine force? If the answer is 'yes' then our comrades in the Moscow socialist clubs are right: we should be the left wing of the Gorbachevites, critically supporting its leaders today, unconditionally opposing its enemies in the bureaucracy and preparing to transcend Gorbachevism tomorrow.

Secondly, is soviet democracy — a formal structure of political pluralism — the only possible key to any advance towards socialism in the USSR and in other words the bottom line when we consider anything to do with critically supporting political currents in the workers' states? ●



Shipyard workers leaving Harland and Wolff's yard at Queen's Island — Loyalist workers established a vigilance committee to keep Catholics out

The 1920 carpenters' dispute in Belfast is one of the most remarkable episodes in Irish labour history: a story of how one British trade union waged a brave struggle against sectarianism and how the leadership of the TUC sabotaged that struggle and, in the end, sided with the sectarians. Here, **GEOFF BELL** gives the first detailed account of these events which we publish to coincide with the conference, *Ireland: the cause of labour*, which sixty-seven years on is trying to raise within the trade union movement the question of employment discrimination in the north of Ireland.

The TUC and Ireland: the story of a betrayal

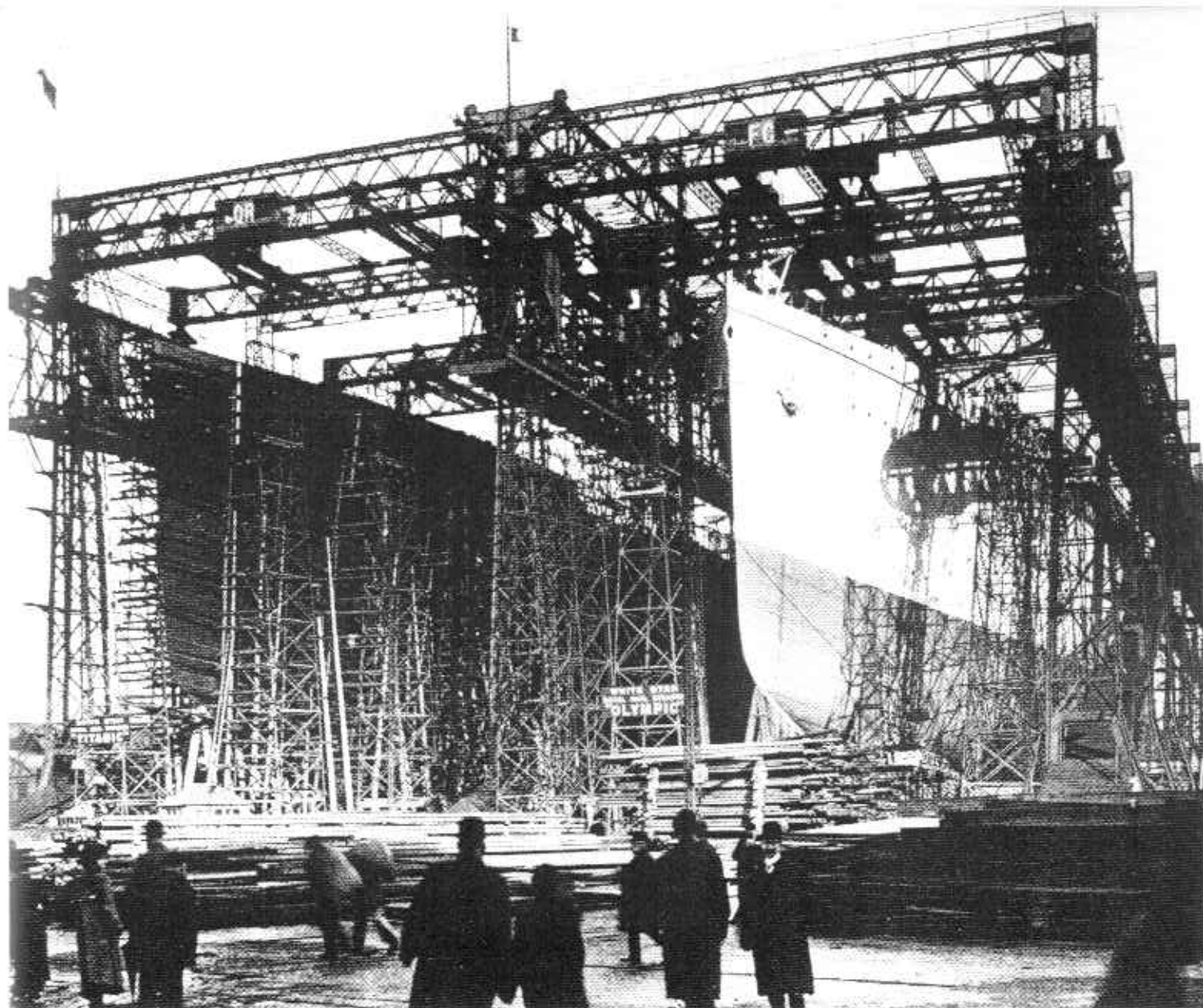
SPEAKING AT the annual July 12 orange rally in 1920, Edward Carson, former cabinet member and by then the undisputed leader of Ireland's loyalists, made a speech which by even his inflammatory standards was extraordinary. Addressing his supporters in Belfast he said, 'We must proclaim today clearly that, come what may, we in Ulster will tolerate no Sinn Féin — no Sinn Féin organisation, no Sinn Féin methods... We tell you (the government) this — that if, having offered you our help, you are yourselves unable to protect us... we tell you that we will take the matter into our own hands... And these are not mere words. I hate words without action'.

The 'action' followed quickly. It was initiated by a group called the Belfast Protestant Association in one of the smaller Belfast shipyards. A few days after Carson's incitement its members produced revolvers at a shipyard meeting and declared their intention of driving from their workplace every 'Sinn Féiner' they could find. 'Sinn Féiner' proved a very elastic term. Those attacked were not just supporters of Sinn Féin but every known Catholic, trade union militants and socialists. The violent sectarianism soon spread to other shipyards and workplaces.

By the end of it the loyalist mobs had driven 10,000 Catholic men and 1,000 Catholic women from their place of work. The vast majority were never allowed to return.

Among those victimised in the shipyards were several hundred members of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, Cabinet-makers and Joiners. The leaders of the carpenters' union, as the ASCJ was known, had only recently been in trouble with some of their Belfast members. Their May executive meeting had passed a resolution on Ireland, then in the throes of the war of independence. That issue had been linked with British intervention against the Russian revolution with the resolution declaring, 'that the British government in refusing to allow Ireland the form of government chosen by the Irish people, and in assisting Poland in her attack on the Russian republic, is betraying all the principles for which our nation fought (in the first world war), and that the most effective way in which protest can be made is for the organised workers to refuse to manufacture or transport munitions of war for Ireland or Poland'.

Two Belfast branches of the carpenters voiced their disapproval of this motion. One voted fourteen to two to 'strongly protest' —



The Harland and Wolff shipyard — scene of sectarian mass expulsions of catholic workers

out of a membership of 105 — the other by twenty two to zero to 'strongly object' — out of a membership of 283. A mass meeting of the carpenters' union membership in one of the smaller shipyards stated that the executive should 'leave politics aside' otherwise it could 'cause dissension in our ranks'.

The person who chaired that meeting was William Barclay, a member of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, a body set up by the Unionist Party to wean away any erring protestants from labour to unionism. Barclay's concern about causing 'dissension in our ranks' was illustrated the following month when he chaired a further meeting in the shipyard which resolved, 'that we, the unionist and protestant workers... declare that we will not work with disloyal workers... Also that in all future applications for employment we respectfully suggest that the first consideration be given to loyal ex-servicemen and protestant unionists'.

Members of the carpenters' union were, then, both being expelled from and expelling in the shipyards, but the union itself was not the only one discussing the events in Ireland. Indeed a special congress of the TUC was held on 13 July 1920 to discuss that very topic. One of the resolutions passed con-

demned 'British military domination of Ireland' and even recommended general strike action to secure British army withdrawal from the country. Although this was a good deal less radical than it sounds — the resolution recommended that unions ballot their members on such a general strike knowing full well that such a course of action would not be followed — the resolution was a fair reflection of where the political sympathy of trade unionists in Britain were: with the 70 per cent who had voted Sinn Fein in the 1918 general election.

FOR THE loyalist working class of Belfast, neither the popular support for Sinn Fein or the decisions of their 'British' TUC cut much ice. The month of August saw the attacks on catholic and catholic owned property reach new depths. A British newspaper described it as 'five weeks of ruthless persecution by boycott, fire, plunder and assault, culminating in a week's wholesale violence'. A loyalist shipyard worker boasted at the start of August that 'they had gained a great victory and they had struck Sinn Fein and red flag socialism the worst blow it had received in Belfast for thirty years', while another claimed that, 'since the Sinn Feiners

were cleared out of the shipyard over five hundred loyalists... had been taken on', and again it can be stressed that 'Sinn Feiner' was a euphemism for catholic.

What this last quotation suggests is that the loyalist workers and the management were now working hand in glove to recruit protestants to the jobs from which the catholics had been chased. The loyalists organised themselves into vigilance committees in the shipyards and elsewhere and it was these who operated a rather twisted form of 'workers control' in terms of who was employed.

Such was the rather difficult situation into which the carpenters' union decided to intervene. On 24 August members of the executive committee went to Belfast and met the management of the largest shipyard, Harland and Wolff. The union made a series of proposals. These included reinstatement of all the expelled workers, the outlawing of religious or political discrimination in employment in the shipyard and protection for all the expelled workers on their return to the yard. In response the employers claimed they 'deplored the troubles' but would promise only to consider the union's proposals at some future date. The union judged this

as prevarication and decided to call a mass meeting of all their members to decide on their next course of action. The meeting was to be private and held indoors. At this point the British army and government intervened. The meeting was banned. According to one major-general, EGT Brainbridge of the British army's 1st division in Ireland, it was done on the grounds that the meeting would 'give rise to grave disorder'.

In the next two weeks further expulsions occurred. Among the victims this time was DA Boal, an executive member of the carpenters' union, a protestant and 'moderate labour man'. The leadership of the one union which had attempted to do something about the expulsions thus themselves became the latest target of the loyalists.

Such was the challenge facing the TUC when it met at the start of September in Portsmouth for its annual congress. Predictably not one union had paid any attention to the motion recommending a ballot on strike action passed at the special congress in July. But the expulsions affected the unions directly and a deputation of the expelled workers met the standing orders committee of the TUC on the eve of the congress. It agreed to table an emergency resolution. This was moved by JH Thomas, the railway workers' leader and president of the TUC. Members of his own union in Ireland had recently taken industrial action over the transportation of British army munitions. This had not pleased Thomas and when he moved the emergency motion there was a suggestion of mixed feelings. 'Men are being prevented from working', he explained, 'because of their religious and political opinions', but he located this victimisation in 'the anxiety to uphold the union jack in Belfast'.

The resolution instructed 'the parliamentary committee to call together the executive of the various trade unions affected by the recent disturbances in Belfast with a view to taking a common line of action for the reinstatement of all the trade unionists expelled from their work in the Belfast area'. Despite the protests of a delegate from the Ship, Construction and Shipwrights Association, Mr Swan from Sunderland, who wanted to 'leave the situation to the workers of Belfast' the motion was easily carried. However, given that the situation had been developing for two months it could be asked why the parliamentary committee had not acted sooner. Or why did the resolution not suggest what sort of action could be taken?

MEANWHILE, IN Belfast, the employers finally replied to the carpenters' union proposals made at the meeting of 24 August. The response came in a letter of 12 September. No specific reference was made to the carpenters' demands. Instead, a further meeting was proposed between Harland and Wolff management and all the unions involved. The vigilance committee was also invited. It made its position clear when it said that any expelled worker who wanted to return to work would have to sign a declara-

tion of loyalty to the British empire and state, 'I do not belong or sympathise with Sinn Fein, and I deplore and abhor all murders and outrages inflicted upon humanity by this dangerous and disloyal movement'.

It was now two months since the expulsions began. In that time the carpenters union had seen hundreds of their members driven out of their jobs, including a member of their executive; they had seen attempts to consult with their Belfast membership banned by the military authorities; they had witnessed prevarication from management, as well as from the TUC. They decided it was time to act. At an EC meeting on 18 September they instructed all their remaining members in the shipyards and other firms affected by the expulsions to come out on strike. They explained:



'the vigilance committee said that any expelled worker who wanted to return to work would have to sign a declaration of loyalty to the British empire'

'We have taken this drastic step to preserve the freedom of our members and the solidarity of our organisation. The victimised men have observed the rules of our society and conformed to the working rules agreed upon between our Belfast members and the employers. It is a gross violation of these rules for employers to allow men to be driven from their employ because they are suspected of not holding certain political or religious opinions... If the employers elect to discriminate between our members, then we have no option but refusing to allow them the use of the labour of any of our members. All or none must in ordinary fairness be our rule. We are convinced that the Belfast employers could, if they had so desired, have prevented this disgraceful and vindictive boycott of sections of their workmen. The test of the value of our society is its ability to keep the avenues of employment open to all our members.' (Original emphasis.)

In taking this action the executive knew the difficulties the union faced, given the divisions with their Belfast rank and file. It

was a courageous move to make, but it was one informed by trade union principles so basic that for anyone who took those principles seriously there was little option.

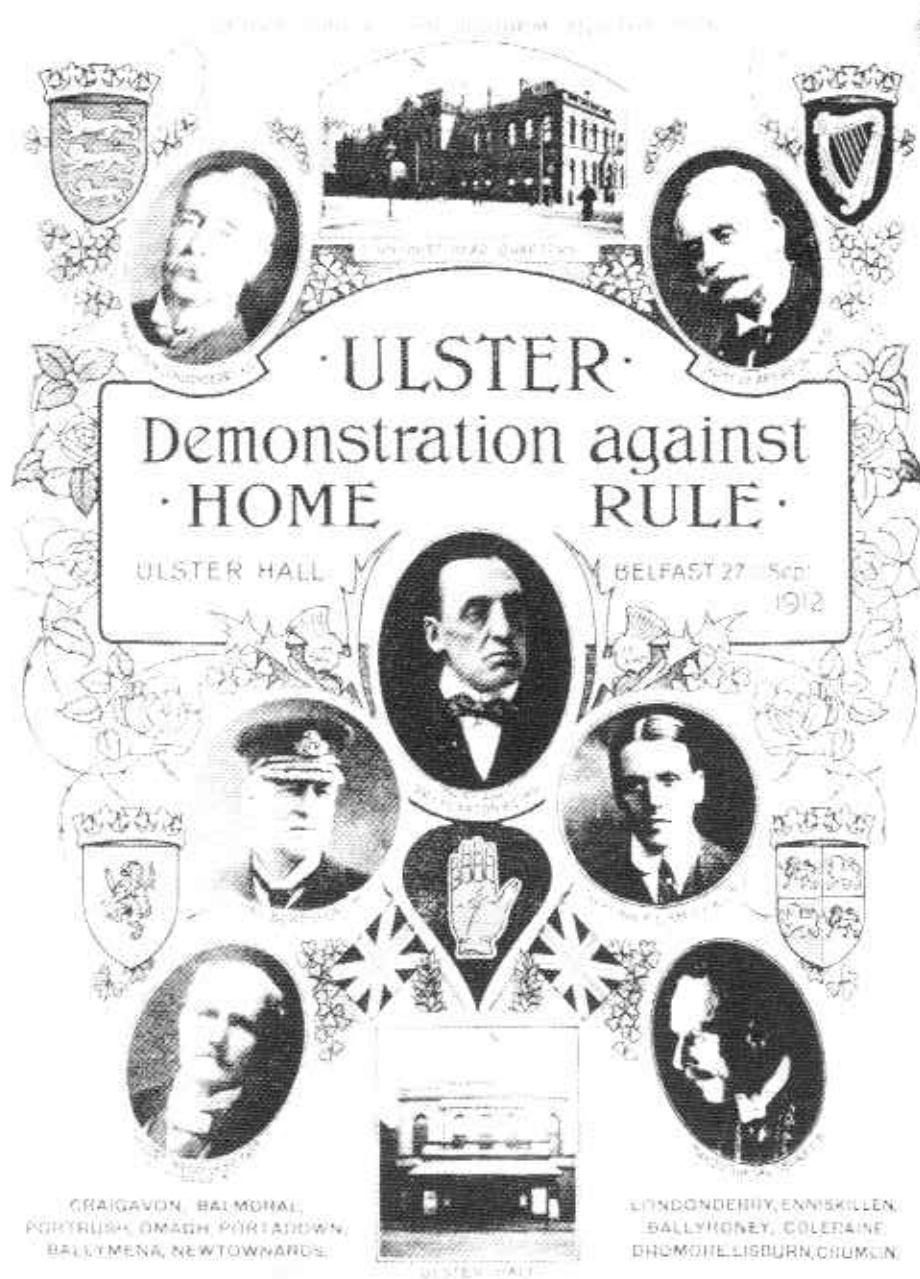
The union could be criticised for condemning management when it was their workers who had offended. But confirmation of the management's involvement in the sectarianism came at the meeting suggested in Harland and Wolff's letter of 12 September. At it the vigilance committee initially agreed to drop their demand that any returning victimised worker should sign a declaration of loyalty to the empire and hatred of Sinn Fein. But they reserved the right to ask for the 'word of honour' of any returning worker that 'they were not connected with Sinn Fein'.

More significantly, Harland and Wolff agreed to the preposterous suggestion that in future the vigilance committee would be given the role of 'defending' any catholic in the yard from assault. The vigilance committee had overseen the assaults in the first place: the transformation from poacher to gamekeeper was rather rapid! The crux of the matter is that by these actions — inviting the vigilance committee to the meeting, negotiating with them on the return to work of those victimised, and giving them a future role at the shipyard — the management had officially recognised this sectarian grouping, endorsing its right to operate in the yard. Henceforth the management permitted the vigilance committee to hold meetings in worktime and even set aside rooms for them where they could conduct their business.

So the strike call did not have the desired effect on Harland and Wolff, although one engineering firm, McLaughlin and Harvey, did agree to ensure that all religious or political tests on employment were withdrawn. For the rest of the companies involved the test for the carpenters' union concerned how many would obey the strike call. It could hardly have surprised the executive that only a minority of their members came out: six hundred obeyed the strike call, two thousand did not. The strike-breakers were promptly expelled from the union.

In taking this action the EC had substantial support among the rank and file in Britain. Even before the executive acted one branch in Eldham had passed a resolution favouring such expulsions. When they did occur only four branches of the union are on record as opposing the action. The contrary view can be summed up in a motion from a branch in Carlisle, passed by 58 to zero: 'That we, in realising the difficult task our EC had to face in tackling the Belfast religious unrest among the members of our organisation, heartily congratulate them in the action they have taken and express our full confidence in their judgement'. The December edition of the union journal records 15 branches passing such a resolution. As for the strike breakers, they went to a solicitor to seek legal advice. He was also the secretary of the Ulster unionist council, the leadership of the unionists in the north of Ireland.

Explaining its action the executive said it



Unionist rogues gallery circa 1914

had 'taken up the only possible position to reserve the union of our organisation'. They added, 'we deeply regret that the other unions whose members have been flung out on the streets have not yet thought fit to stand by us in this important struggle. In our judgement the trade union movement, if it will act boldly, can, by firmly insisting on the observance of its own principles, end the internecine strife in Ireland which is fostered and fanned by unscrupulous employers for their own political and industrial purposes.'

SO WHAT OF the rest of the trade union movement, and the TUC in particular whose congress policy had instructed the parliamentary committee to formulate a common policy on behalf of the victimised workers?

At first the committee seemed to be taking their instructions seriously. At their September meeting three of their members were appointed 'with plenary powers' to go to Belfast with a view of 'bringing about such a change in the situation as would at least be helpful to trade unionists in Belfast involved in the present conflict'. After this initial burst of energy things slowed down. The December meeting of the PC was told that 'it had not yet been found convenient' to go to Belfast, and it was not until 6 December, nearly five months after the first victimisations that the TUC deputation arrived there.

To recap, its brief, given to it by the 1921 congress was to formulate a line of action to win back the jobs of the victimised workers. However, as the three person delegation went about their work that became a very

subsidiary issue. As one of their number, A. Pugh, was later to say, 'we came to the conclusion that there was one problem that had to be overcome in view of the general situation', which was not the winning back of the jobs of the victimised workers, but was rather 'the dispute which existed between the executive of the woodworkers' (carpenters union) and their people in Belfast'. So the major issue the delegation dealt with was not the victimisation of 10,000 trade unionists, the fact that many of them had been physically assaulted, even killed or driven not just from their jobs but homes as well; no, the chief issue was, according to Pugh, to 'clear up the situation' between the carpenters' executive and those they had expelled for strike-breaking.

Some of those the delegation decided to

meet in Belfast reflected this priority. They included the district committee of the carpenters and two committees representing the victimised workers. But the TUC also consulted the management of two shipyards, the unionist lord mayor, a representative of the government, a group representing the strike-breakers, the loyalist-inclined district committee of the engineering and shipbuilding trades, and the 'joint vigilance committee of the shipyards'. The TUC met them twice.

When the delegation submitted their report to the 1921 congress it reflected the fact that the majority they had met were either unsympathetic to the victimised workers, or actively hostile to them. In a section of their report entitled 'causes of the trouble' the delegation mention three reasons. First, that during the war 'there was a large influx of men from the south and west of Ireland' into the shipyards, and that 'of these a number were either active Sinn Feiners or were strongly sympathetic to the Sinn Fein movement'. Just how big this 'number' was, was not estimated. But the delegation did say that 'it was alleged that many of these have openly avowed their intention of obtaining the domination of the Sinn Fein movement in Belfast', although not one specific instance of 'open avowals' was provided. Instead a further allegation is reported 'that a number of Sinn Fein supporters carried arms'.

Thus, the presence of Sinn Fein supporters was the first reason given for the expulsions. The second was 'the murder at Cork, on 17 July, of colonel Smyth, DSO, an Ulsterman who had served in the war', the third was that 'on 22 August district inspector Swanzy was killed in the streets of Lisburn' and the fourth was that 'on 25 September two policemen on duty in Falls Road, Broadway, were shot'.

These were the limits of the TUC's explanation of the expulsions. No mention was made of Carson's incitement speech, no reference was made to the presence of organisations such as the Belfast Protestant Association, and there is no listing of the scale of the pogrom Catholic families suffered. It was almost as if the TUC were justifying the expulsions and that in reporting that 'representative bodies of workmen were emphatic in their declaration against working with adherents of the Sinn Fein', were deciding not to challenge such attitudes.

Similar prejudice features elsewhere in the report. The 'point of view of business management' was relayed without comment that 'the present position under which firms have in fact conceded to the vigilance committee the right of deciding on the question of reinstatement of their workman... is but the least of two evils'.

Those victimised by the expulsions is underestimated by the TUC — 5,000 as opposed to 10,000 — but perhaps most breathtaking of all is the account of the meeting held with the vigilance committee. The delegation recorded that 'we found men with strong prejudices but claiming intense loyalty to the British flag and empire'. The

TUC's overall view of the vigilance committee was that 'the existence of such a body and the methods employed in regard to suspected men, ie those expelled, can hardly be regarded as constitutional machinery of law and order, but in view of the fact that constitutional government has broken down in Ireland generally, its reflex in Belfast need not occasion any surprise'. With such a generosity of tolerance it is hardly surprising that the TUC could further report that its meeting with the vigilance committee 'was conducted in a perfectly friendly spirit'.

Nor was it surprising that the delegation did not see the need to counter the sec-

'the strike-breakers were promptly expelled from the union'

tarianism of the vigilance committee and the managements as their main task but instead concentrated on the carpenters' dispute. Referring to the decision to throw out the strike-breakers from the union the TUC 'expressed no opinion' but a nod was as good as a wink and 'throughout our stay we were continually met with the view that in the circumstances, the course taken was a mistake'.

The TUC delegation offered two concluding pieces of advice. The first concerned the victimised workers and those who had driven them from their workplaces. 'The most broad-minded of the men on both sides should be brought together for the purpose of discussing the difficulty' was the facile recommendation. The advice given to the

'the presence of Sinn Fein supporters was the first reason given for the expulsions'

carpenters' union was much more specific: 'means should be found whereby the relationship between the ASSCJ and their expelled members shall be renewed'. In other words, the scabs should be readmitted.

Such was how the leadership of the TUC fulfilled its mandate from the September congress to secure the re-employment of those victimised in Belfast because of their religious or political beliefs.

For their part, the carpenters' union maintained a firm but flexible approach. Shortly after the TUC delegation returned from Belfast the executive of the union agreed to meet a delegation from their ex-members. The central request from the union was that they should withdraw a circular they had sent out saying they would work only with those who proved to be 'loyal subjects' and 'gave their word of honour that they were not connected with Sinn Fein'. At

a subsequent mass meeting the former members of the union declined to withdraw. They remained expelled from the union, and although the TUC made further attempts to persuade the leadership of the union to take back their ex-members the union stood firm on the principles of 'the freedom of our members and the solidarity of our organisation' first enunciated when the strike call was made.

In September 1921 the TUC again met in congress and the sad history of what had happened in Belfast and of the role of the TUC in those events was recalled. A delegate from Belfast, although not a member of the carpenters, offered a fitting judgement. Referring to those who were victimised he said:

'We thought that the great English trade unions would come to our assistance. We looked with confidence to the action we hoped they would take; but the joiners' union (carpenters) and joiners' union alone, took strong action... Had the other trade unions taken similar action... had they then, if the Belfast trade unionists continued to refuse to obey the union order, prevented goods and raw materials going to Belfast, and coal and steel and other things required for their industries, I fearlessly assert that one fortnight of that action would have settled entirely the trouble in the north of Ireland'.

It is difficult to disagree with this argument. It is hard to imagine, if British trade unionists had organised a blockade of Belfast until those victimised were allowed to return to work, that the sectarianism would not have caved in, or their employers would not have made sure they caved in. And who knows what the consequences would have been of such action. Certainly the apparent intransigence and sectarian 'loyalism' of the Belfast shipyard workers was used to good effect by unionists when they argued for the partition of Ireland the following year. If, in the summer of 1920, the British trade union movement had challenged and defeated such attitudes then that would have been one less powerful argument in favour of the partitionists.

The TUC opted for a different course. Two small incidents sum up what that was. The first was reported in the minutes of the parliamentary committee of the TUC of June 15 1921:

'It was decided to comply with a request from Mr Gorman, secretary of the vigilance committee, that he should be supplied with the report of the delegation to Belfast as a confidential communication'.

And then, a few months later at another meeting of the parliamentary committee, which by then had become the general council, arrangements for a special congress, ironically on unemployment and the international situation, were being discussed when it was reported that a delegate 'had applied for permission to take a collection in the hall in aid of the Catholic workers expelled from Belfast'. The minutes of the general council record: 'resolved: that no collection of any kind be taken in the hall'.

REVIEWS

The people's flag

H. PALA

IT IS NOT often that you come across a documentary series that is both informative and moving. I can promise anyone who takes the time to watch this strong, suggestive history of twentieth century British working class politics a real treat.

Including interviews with rank and file militants, the series does not pull its punches. Indeed it attempts to suggest that the history of the British working class includes not only the struggle against the ruling class but also against the leaderships of the working class organisations; that the class collaborationist policies of the labour and trade union leaderships opened the way for the Tories and that capitalism as an economic system has a logic of its own and that those who attempt to manage it always end up having to abide by its laws.

Such conclusions are nothing new to socialists, of course, but the important thing about this series is that there is sufficient archive material included to substantiate and give depth to such a perspective.

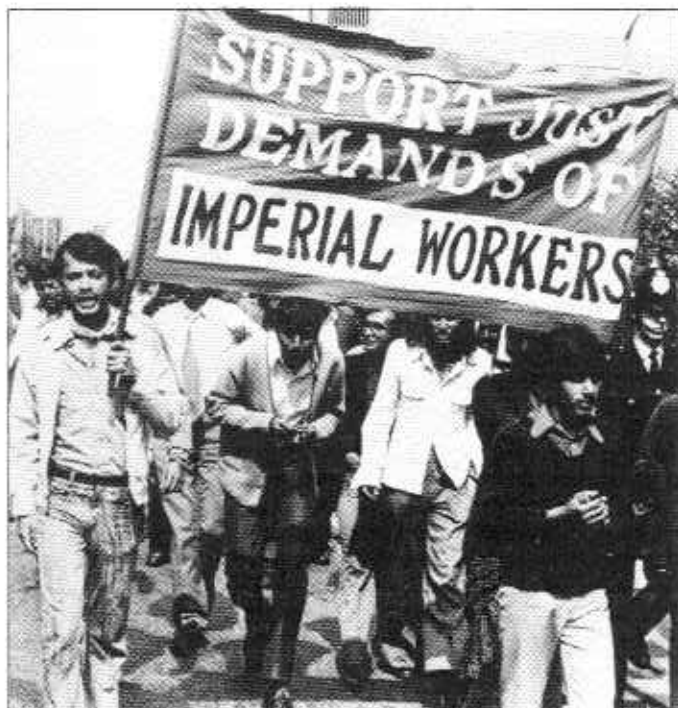
The first programme dealt with the great betrayal of 1914 and the momentous events during and immediately after the Russian revolution. Others have examined the rise of fascism, the sectarian politics of 'third period' stalinism and the effects that having the Soviet Union as a close ally had on the policies pursued by the Communist Party. If you have missed these don't despair! You can always



Top: women munitions workers — sufficient archive material is included in the series to give real depth to its perspectives

contact Channel Four for copies of the video tapes or borrow them from someone wise enough to have ignored the strictures regarding illegal copying.

To come we have the politics of consensus during the post-war boom, the breathing space that led to the establishment of the welfare state, leading us into the



Workers at Imperial Typewriters demonstrate

fourth episode (who runs the country?) and the clashes that accompanied the end of the capitalist boom. Finally, we arrive in the present: mass unemployment, the miners' strike, Thatcher's second term.

The programmes stress that socialist politics should be about changing capitalism, not attempting to run it more efficiently or cover over the

cracks. Whether you agree with every point it makes or not, it is certainly worth making an effort to see and could well be utilised as a starting point for discussion and education about the history of the British working class.

The People's Flag, Channel Four, Mondays, 11.00pm from October 26 for five weeks

UNCOVERING WOMEN'S ROLE IN UNION STRUGGLES

Needs must when the devil drives

One of the highlights of the events to celebrate the centenary of Oxford trades council in October was the premiere of a specially made video *Needs Must When the Devil Drives*, looking at women's role in the fight for trade union rights.

Made by an all-women crew, the thirty-five minute video uses interviews, archive news photos and a previously undiscovered photographic collection to recapture four largely forgotten episodes of women's struggles in Oxfordshire.

Socialist Outlook spoke to the film's director ANNE MARIE SWEENEY.

Tell us about the earliest events the film covers.

AMS: We had heard that a number of women from the village of Ascott had been sent to prison for picketing during the 1873 farm labourers' strike.

We were lucky to obtain a rare copy of a book by Reg Groves, called *Sharpen Your Sickle*, on the history of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union. That told us about the significance of the Ascott case.

There were almost no records or ephemera to work with, so we set out to find women in Ascott who knew anything about the sixteen Ascott martyrs themselves. The last of them died in the 1930s, so anyone remembering them would be very old, and have only childhood memories.

We were fortunate. Mrs Weston not only remembered the Ascott women, but had been a field worker herself. It is hard to convey the incredible burden these women endured. They not only worked in intolerable conditions and all weathers for long hours in the fields, but they had large families — some had fifteen children — and often did gloving work in the evenings.

We also found Reverend Mann, who had researched the national implications of the Ascott case. He told us how the national outcry against the jail sentences helped lose Gladstone the next election — and Disraeli then repealed the criminal law amendment act which had made picketing illegal.

Unions had only become legal in 1872. Joseph Arch then formed the NALL in Warwickshire: within a year one hundred thousand had joined. Ascott is right on the Warwickshire border.

The women had picketed a field in support of the strike. They were not even members of the union and were expecting at worst to be fined. They walked over to

the court with their children, laughing and joking.

There was a NALL representative in the court with fine money in his hand. But when the women were jailed the union did



The strike at Bliss tweed mill — Mrs Cooper is released from Oxford gaol, February 1914

not lodge an appeal.

Instead within a day Joseph Arch had organised a campaign hitting national press headlines. Three days later there was a huge demonstration of three thousand in Chipping Norton: but the demands for repeal of the criminal law amendment act and an end to clerical magistrates — not for the release of the women!

Of course Joseph Arch has a good reputation. But it does seem that there was

a lot of mileage to be made out of the Ascott women going to jail.

The case helped change the law and even change the government: but it had been almost forgotten.

What made you look at the Bliss mill strike?

AMS: We knew that a woman textile worker had been sent to prison for picketing the Bliss tweed mill in Chipping Norton in 1914.

We met David Eddershaw, formerly a history teacher in Chipping Norton, who filled in some details of what was a huge eight-month strike. Then we went on a detective trail to find out about the strike from the elderly people of Chipping Norton. We were ten years too late: most of the strikers were dead.

The strike was predominantly women. We found a huge collection of photographs, all kept as plate glass negatives, in Woodstock museum (the Packer collection). We took pot luck and got forty printed up. They turned out to be a unique collection in trade union and women's history, showing rows of women in Edwardian outfits confronting police on picket lines. They showed Mrs Cooper's release from prison: and we found the speeches from that rally reported in the old *Oxford Chronicle*.

By today's standards it is extraordinary to see such straight reporting: and the speeches themselves were exciting. Without exception they were about the strength and contribution of women in the fight, and really class conscious. They opposed imperialism and patriotism on the eve of the first world war; and the crowd sang the 'Red Flag' when Mrs Cooper was released.

We discovered a link with the suffragette movement. Emily Pankhurst was based in Oxford in that period. We heard recollections of thirty suffragettes on motor bikes riding round and round Chipping Norton police station shouting 'votes for women'.

A key figure was Miss Varley, the first woman full-time official for the Workers Union at a time when officials really did organise and build strikes instead of blocking them. She had just come from organising a strike of Cornish tin miners!

You discovered women's role in unionising Cowley car workers?

AMS: Yes, but again we were handicapped. We knew women were involved in the 1931 strike which first won union recognition in what is today's Austin Rover body plant, but we couldn't find any women still alive who had taken part.

Trowe's book *Engineering Struggles in the Midlands* gives a vivid account of the strike and mentions the role of women in the press shop. We found newspaper articles headlined 'Four women elected to strike committee': I don't think there can ever

STRIKE AT OXFORD WORKS :: TRAIN



have been four women on a Cowley strike committee since then!

The 1931 strike lasted only ten days, but it has parallels with the 1984 miners' strike. There was tremendous class solidarity; printers produced immediate leaflets and posters to counter news stories claiming a drift back to work. Teams of women fly-posted these posters, and chalked and painted on scabs' houses.

There are shots of women on picket lines with placards; and like with the Ascott women, these show the humour of women in struggle, with slogans like 'The girls are game — are you?'

Somebody said that the Ascott women were 'motivated by survival and the need to have a bit of a laugh'. I think this is an important theme of the video. One of the Ascott women, Fanny Honeyborne who was sixteen and sent to prison for ten days as a ringleader was then put on bread and water as an extra punishment — for laughing during exercise!

Humour was a weapon for these women, and it still is for women today, as we saw in the miners' strike.

The final section is on women in the car plants in wartime: why this period?

AMS: The myth is of trim women in overalls happily sacrificing for the war effort in the munitions plants. The reality was the most appallingly oppressive, exploitative conditions. Production levels at Cowley were staggering; we met women who had signed up for the forces rather than work there.

There was no health and safety protection, just the pressure to work harder while the factory owners were raking in profits.

We wanted to remind people that the women then did the same job as men for only two-thirds men's pay: equal pay was not won until the late 1970s.

What is unusual about the video?

AMS: It focuses on women's struggles, and shows how women who do not see themselves as in any way exceptional can do exceptional things. Yet their contribution is not recognised at the time, or even afterwards, by the labour movement.

There are some films about women's union struggles in the USA, but very few about British women. There is *Look Back at Greenwich*, and more recently some on women and the miners' strike; but there is very little compared to the number of women's struggles.

Glynis Evans from Maerdy women's support group, said that she felt 'humbled' by the video. Before it she had believed that what they had done as women in the miners' strike had been extraordinary and new, but they had done nothing new. Women have always struggled with similar determination and against similar odds.

We have found this much in Oxfordshire, which is not seen as a bastion of union power. If you multiply this on a national scale, just think how much working class women's history is hidden or forgotten by the labour movement.

How did the all-women team contribute to the video's success?

AMS: The whole story is told through older women, who are normally regarded as having nothing to say for themselves, and are ignored even by the women's movement. We were able to show that many have a wealth of experience, views and comments. Maureen Eddershaw, the interviewer, was ideal. She is a nurse working with elderly people at Chipping Norton hospital. It was fascinating to watch her interview these older women. She talked to them without patronising, and really wanted to listen to them.

To achieve the impossible, and complete the whole project in just two and a half months for only £800, we had tremendous support from other women's groups in video who gave us help free because they were excited by the project.

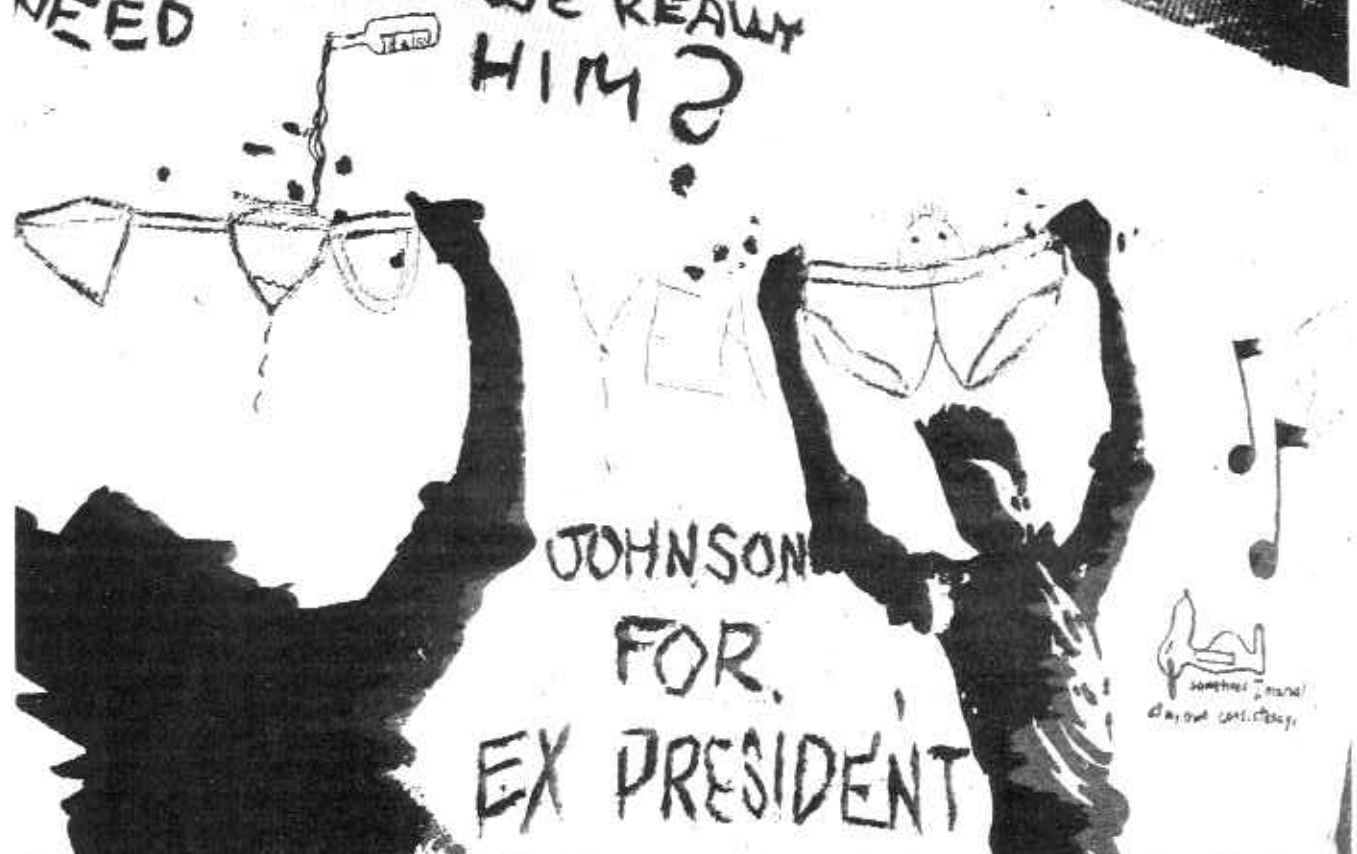
Peggy Seeger did the sound track; but even then we had to write new songs because there were so few about women and unions in Britain.

We hope that the film will help counter pessimism in today's trade union struggles, and expose those union leaders who still suggest that women members are a block to militancy.

And there is much more of this history to be found: Oxfordshire is not unique!

● To obtain a copy of this video, contact:
*Oxford Film & Video Makers,
The Stables,
North Place,
Headington OX3 9HY.
0865-60074*

WHERE
HARVEY'S LEE
OSWALD
NOW THAT WE REALLY
NEED HIM?



Graffiti in the US officers' club in Hanau, West Germany — anti-war protest was widespread and worldwide

Tales of 'Nam

The Vietnamese war has become big box-office business.

Platoon, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Hamburger Hill* are packing local cinemas. Newsagents report high demand for the serialised

story of the war, *Nam*. And all of this is a pale British reflection of the appetite of the US public for tales of the apocalypse.



Here, **STEVE ROBERTS** examines the 'Vietnam syndrome' and its cultural representations.

THE BARE statistics of US costs in the war form the basis of the 'Vietnam syndrome'. Twenty years ago there were 464,000 US troops on combat duty in Indo-China. Of those who fought, 57,000 died and 154,000 were wounded, many with the most appalling disabilities. These brutal figures underlay the political impact of the anti-war movement and the passive support it received from an eventual majority of US people.

But the 'syndrome' also applies to the succession of defeats suffered by US imperialism following the fall of Saigon and the reunification of the country, not on terms dictated by the US, but by the victorious Vietnamese.

Aid provided to UNITA forces in Angola was smashed by the audacious military intervention of Cuba. This breakdown of the idea of 'linkage' — that the USSR would restrain its allies in exchange for detente, was further undermined by the military assistance provided both by Cuba and the USSR to Ethiopia to ward off the invasion of the Ogaden by Somalia in 1978.

Defeat piled on defeat for the Carter administration. In April 1978 and January 1979 there were the overturns in Afghanistan and Iran respectively, transfor-

ming the situation in the Middle East. The year culminated with the Nicaraguan and Grenadan revolutions.

The detente policies initiated by Nixon and Kissinger, and continued by Carter and Brzezinski until 1979, were the casualty not only of a faulty analysis — that the USSR could control its assumed allies — but also of the new relation of forces created by Vietnam.

The new doctrine as the Carter administration moved into the '80s was out-producing the USSR militarily and economically, in an attempt to explode contradictions that were assumed to be ready to ripen within Soviet society.

But the remilitarisation drive launched by Carter was dwarfed by that initiated by the Reagan administration. Arms expenditure was bumped up immediately by thirteen per cent in 1982, with a nearly ten per cent rise projected for the next five years.

Twenty five years after Kennedy sent his 'advisory' teams to beef up the military capacity of the Diem regime, Reagan sent similar missions to provide logistics and training for his Honduran proxies. The ultimate use of direct intervention was witnessed in the first roll-back — against

Grenada.

To be sure the policy has met with internal opposition. The movement against intervention in the Central America is not insignificant. But has Reagan succeeded in eroding the spirit against new Vietnams?

Part of the answer can be found in the way in which the history of the Vietnamese intervention has been treated in recent years. The wave of films about the experience in itself is not a new phenomenon.

During the build up of the American presence the 'light at the end of the tunnel' was kept burning by John Wayne and the *Green Beret*. Defeat was marked by films portraying the bitter and often psychopathic veterans returning home, played by new actors like Dennis Hopper and Jon Voigt.

However, attempts to come to grips with the war itself found themselves taking cover in demonology (the sadistic and twisted NLF soldiers of *The Deerhunter*) or in the magical realism of *Apocalypse Now*.

The mood of interventionism utilised the familiar and emotive totem of US foreign policy - the American captive. Starting from real life campaigns around those missing in action from the Vietnamese war (one of the reasons for denying aid to Vietnam), to the US embassy hostages in Tehran, to the 'possible danger' to the US students at the Grenadan medical school, a new wave of films sprouted with Sylvester Stallone and Chuck Connors haunting the jungles of the Far East in search of those enslaved by communism.

The reaction to these films was swift, foreseen in the debate of what memorial should be erected to the US victims of the war in Washington. As against the Pentagon who pressed for a conventional commemoration to the valour of those who died for a greater good, veterans associations pushed the other way. The compromise was a single monolithic slab engraved simply with the names of the soldiers who died. This is the spirit which informs the current crop of films - the cult of the common soldier.

The theme of the 'poor bloody infantry' has always been contradictory. It simultaneously carries an implicit or explicit condemnation of the motives and strategy of governments and military high commands, while celebrating the bravery of those who fight. It can allow a partisan of either left or right to see a film like *Platoon* and applaud it.

Likewise with Stanley Kubrick's film *Full Metal Jacket*, currently enjoying great popularity on general release, with a record from its sound track riding high in the charts. The film is split into two parts. In the first half you accompany a raw squad of recruits through their training as marines. They are brutalised. You are brutalised. A human conversation does not occur until twenty minutes into the film. Sex becomes something you do with your rifle. Kubrick

prods his audience in the chest asking: 'would you have been able to resist this conditioning?'

The fully-fledged 'grunts' then find themselves hurled into the Tet offensive of 1968. But it is a curiously one-dimensional war. There is no drug-taking among soldiers, no 'fragging' of officers, the rise of the peace movement in the USA and internationally is never mentioned.

Major contradictions are only hinted at with one of the characters wearing a peace button on his lapel and 'Born to Kill' on his helmet. He is asked by a colonel the meaning of his peace badge. 'You know it's the Jungian thing,' he replies, 'the duality of life, love and death'. The colonel does not buy this. But Kubrick clearly does.

His soldiers, schooled to kill, are swept towards their bloody end, with only the strongest surviving. Those who hesitate are lost. It is a bleak and pessimistic view not only of war, but of humanity in general, with its strong implication that we are unable to

resist the pressures which push towards the holocaust.

It would be nice to think that films like Kubrick's marked an anti-war reaction to the glorification of the Rambo-type barbarian warrior. In fact *Platoon*, *Hamburger Hill* and *Full Metal Jacket* mark an impasse. The combination of the stern resistance of the Sandinistas and the remnants of the Vietnam syndrome prevent an invasion of Nicaragua. If that resistance collapses, as it did in Grenada, domestic pressure is not sufficient. Neither is it sufficient to halt US adventures in the Gulf.

The rebuilding of a truly mass anti-war movement not just in the USA but around the world will be signalled by new films which can give both a realistic account of war and at the same time, provide a real examination of its mechanisms.

All Quiet on the Western Front provided such a critique of the first world war, seen through the eyes of a German soldier. A similar account remains to be made of Vietnam.

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£10,000 for a monthly SOCIALIST OUTLOOK!

IN THE first few months of Thatcher's third term an onslaught has been unleashed against the working class and oppressed which makes the efforts of previous Tory administrations pale by comparison.

The response of the official leadership of the labour movement has been utterly bankrupt. The approach of Kinnock and Gould at the Labour Party conference, and from most trade union leaderships at the TUC, has been rightly dubbed 'sub-Thatcherism', because of its acceptance of the economic and social framework set by the Tories for the eighties and nineties.

The crash in the stock markets in the major capitalist centres, coming in the context of a deep and profound crisis of capitalism, points up the complete inadequacy of 'sub-Thatcherism' as a strategy for the labour movement.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK is committed to the development of a real socialist alternative both to the ravages of Thatcherism and to the grey tide of Kinnockism and 'new realism'.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK rejects the view that the fundamentals of socialism are out-dated or irrelevant in the changed conditions of the nineteen eighties. We defend the central role of the working class in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism, the fight for a democratically planned economy, the fight for workers' control, for internationalism and against racial and sexual oppression.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK has in its first four issues provided in-depth analysis and debate on developments in the unions, the struggle in the Labour Party, the recomposition of British politics and many international issues of crucial importance for socialists.

We believe that moving to a *monthly* production schedule is urgent given the development of the political situation and the speed of events. Our aim is now to begin monthly production from March '88. But to do this we need money. Money for full time staff. Money for typesetting and printing equipment. Money to improve the quality of our design and production and the range of our coverage.

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