

Workers power

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British section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

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TORY Homelessness Rents Profits ... UP HOUSING SCANDAL

MORE HOMELESSNESS and higher rents for the poor, bigger profits and second homes for the rich; that sums up the Tory policy on housing.

Over one million homes in England are unfit for human habitation. More people are living in temporary accommodation than ever before, including 11,000 families in bed and breakfast hotels.

One in fourteen people in Britain live in overcrowded conditions. Homelessness amongst youth is rapidly increasing as the Tories have cut off the right of 16-18 year olds to benefits.

Nearly 1.5 million families are on council house waiting lists. Last year less than 15,000 new council houses were built. The laws which the Tories have brought in on housing, plus new ones they are now planning are designed to reduce council housing to an absolute minimum, allowing private landlords and housing associations to take over.

The private landlords will push up rents for profit, whilst housing associations—themselves "non-profit-making"—are being forced to raise money from private investors, at crippling rates of interest.

A new Housing Bill promised in the Queen's Speech will mean a further squeeze. Councils will have to keep their housing accounts in the black without any subsidy from rates or taxes. This could lead to a £20 per week rent rise for council tenants, making the option of choosing a private landlord appear more attractive to many people.

Despite the £20 billion backlog of repairs, local authorities are not

allowed to freely use money from council house sales, or to borrow money, to tackle the repairs or build new homes. But the councils are still legally obliged to meet certain standards. To keep within their budgets, they will have to sell estates. Their only alternative is to set an illegal deficit budget and lead a fight against Whitehall.

But tenants are not accepting the wholesale destruction of their estates. Just as the Tories had thought they were getting safely through the parliamentary hoops with their Housing Bill they were confronted with major demonstrations of opposition by local authority tenants themselves.

The government intended to impose unelected Housing Action Trusts (HATs) on eighteen estates in six local councils. The HATs were to be a showcase for Tory housing policies. Now they are a battlefield with the tenants, council housing workers and some Labour councillors, pitted against the Tories.

Nicholas Ridley, Minister for the Environment, and junior ministers were given a good ear bashing when they toured the designated areas of Leeds, Sandwell, Southwark, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets. Sandwell



Andrew Wiard/Report

tenants carried out an occupation of Price-Waterhouse, the government's housing consultants.

The tenants then descended upon Nicholas Ridley's private country home in sleepy Gloucestershire to serve him with a HAT and to enquire how many council cottages are to be built at the bottom of his garden.

The Tories have been forced to make a significant concession that gives the tenants within HATs the right to vote on accepting the imposition of a HAT. The decision will be by simple majority vote.

But on other estates, the "pick-a-landlord" scheme means that even a majority vote to stay with the

council can be overturned by the numbers of abstentions!

The tenants' mobilisations against the HATs show what can be done. But to scupper the whole of the Tories' Programme for housing needs tenants and workers' joint action.

Workers in local authority Direct Labour Organisations (DLOs) and housing departments will face job losses as estates are sold off. The jobs created in the private sector will have worse pay. So far, NALGO and UCATT branches have given financial backing to tenants' campaigns and turned out on demonstrations. But the mass of members

have still to be convinced that they need to back the tenants with action of their own.

Links between housing workers in the public and private sector can and must be built. Uniting with tenants in councils of action, these groups of workers must demand of Labour councils that they halt the retreat:

- No more transfers to private landlords!
- For a deficit budget!
- For a massive programme of repairs and building!
- Cancel the £20 billion on local authority housing debt!

Occupy to beat Baker!

BY SALADIN MECKLED

Kings College NUS (in a personal capacity)

THE *Daily Telegraph's* autumn "Student Extra" exclaimed in a front page article that "The age of student radicalisation is over." A month later 30,000 students marched through London. Near parliament they were confronted by a massive police cordon. This was the Tories' answer to the demand for the right to a free education for all.

The preceding months had seen many protests around the country, including rent strikes, indefinite occupations and militant demonstrations. These actions were in response to attacks on students as the Education Reform Act is being put into practice.

More ominous though, was a proposal dropped by the Jackson Committee (the government higher education committee) which had been leaked. It was due to be introduced with the white paper on loans. This proposal is to make all students pay for their course fees through a voucher system. It was probably only temporarily dropped. When student anger has calmed, it is bound to resurface.

These proposals add up to one thing only, a class attack by the Tories on the rights and gains of the working class in education.

To pay back a loan, and possibly in the future a fee, which would amount to thousands of pounds for new students (the first batch may be leaving their studies with a £3,000 loan to repay), amounts to the virtual "mortgaging out" of education.

Rich

For working class students to convince their bank managers that they, and their course, are a viable proposition means turning education into a business venture. That is, if you haven't got rich parents. To date the British banks have stayed quiet on the issue. But

banks which pay loans to students in the USA, such as HFC, have already stepped in to take up the offer.

In response to such a class attack students must seek to spark off a class response. They must set as a central task uniting with and mobilising wider layers of education workers into action against the current attacks.

The only way to maintain any gains made by our struggles is to take the control of education out of the hands of the ruling class. Loans were defeated in 1984-5. But now the ruling class is regrouping and

planning to have a go at imposing them once again. Loans are part of the overall Tory strategy to turn academic education into an elite realm for their class and an impossibility for the children of the working class. Already in Welsh polytechnics there have been occupations against the introduction of business aptitude tests. Education must be under the control of students and workers who will maintain the right to a free education for all.

The anger created by the savage attacks of the police on the demo on 24 November must be chan-

nelled into organising the wider layers of students in a concerted fightback. Immediately this means overcoming the apathy of the student unions and their executives and building fighting local unions.

The national union refused to organise mass militant action, as on 24 November when it tried to split the demonstration. They take every opportunity to defuse student militancy. The mass of students in the colleges must transform their unions into fighting bodies by organising democratic action campaigns of militant students. The campaigns must fight for and build the resistance nationally between colleges and in the NUS.

Bridge

The NUS stewards on 24 November refused to lead the students to cross Westminster Bridge and confront the Tory cut-makers and loan-sharks. This cowardice is symbolic of the NUS leadership's refusal to countenance breaking the law in the fight to defend education. The leaders on the national

executive stuck firmly to Kinnock's line that the demonstration was misled by "extreme left wing agitators" into a situation of confronting the police. Like Kinnock they cower before Tory legality, while our livelihoods and education are savaged.

Whatever the cynicism of NUS's leadership, the mass of students in the colleges must seek to reorganise to cross the "forbidden" bridge of the law. These laws will leave us broke. These laws are the property of the state that tried to suppress student anger with cavalry charges and truncheon blows.

Every college must see an occupation, every town a demonstration. We must repulse every attempt to impose laws and make cuts. We must fight for free education as a right for all on a grant set at the average industrial wage.

Kinnock and his cohorts on the NUS Executive would rather see us stay at home so that there is no "bad publicity". But we must fulfil the promise of the students' chants faced with the violence and vicious cuts of the state: "Police scum off our streets!", "We will return!"



Police cavalry attack students

Welsh housing crisis

IT HAS been estimated that there are now over 20,000 English-owned second (holiday) homes in Wales, mainly in the North. The demand for even more has recently led to a sharp rise in house prices, making it virtually impossible for working class people to buy homes in their communities, worsening an already severe housing crisis in Wales.

Against this background there has been an upsurge in activities aimed at stopping the selling of second homes. A great deal of publicity has been given to a secretive organisation known as Meibion Glyndwr (Sons of Glyndwr, named after a fifteenth century Welsh prince Owain Glyndwr, who led an unsuccessful rebellion against King Henry 1V).

They claim responsibility for the burning down of over 100 houses in North and mid-Wales over the last nine years. However, in recent months their campaign has escalated, and targets now include es-

tate agents in Wales and England that sell second homes, together with English shop owners in Wales with tourist business connections. In their biggest operation in England so far they set off firebombs simultaneously in seven towns and cities, from Bristol up to Liverpool.

What are the aims and objectives of Meibion Glyndwr? In a message to the BBC and HTV after these latest firebombs they stated "English immigrants are the targets now. The colonists and the capitalists are the targets", claiming that the "cultural viability" of Wales was under threat.

Support

Certainly the latter view has much support in rural Welsh-speaking areas of Wales—for example a recent HTV survey of these areas found 57% in favour of the aims of Meibion Glyndwr, though most opposed their methods.

Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh Language Society) have also launched a campaign around housing, called "Nid Yw Cymru Ar Werth" (Wales is not for sale) backed by the National Union of Students in Wales.

This campaign, like their others, involves non-violent direct action including protests at estate agents to gain publicity about house prices and the need for more council house building. Several members of the society have been harassed by the police for information on the arson campaign, but there are no links with Meibion Glyndwr.

The secret nature of the organisation allows for many political interpretations. For example, the September issue of National Front News features an article on Meibion Glyndwr. Whilst this ties in with the NF's current attempt to build in Wales, there is no evidence of any direct links. This has not stopped Plaid Cymru President Dafydd Elis Tho-

mas from calling the group right wing extremists with no support in Wales.

This complacent attitude is a reflection of Plaid's inability to tackle the issues at stake, even when they have council control in parts of North Wales. Likewise the Labour Party in Wales is full of condemnation for the arson campaign but short of any answers to the political questions raised.

Anarchy

So, what should be the response of the socialists? Firstly we should be clear that the housing problems caused by second homes is not caused by the "English colonists" but by the anarchy of the capitalist market, which always puts profit before need. What's required is a massive programme of council house building and repair, centrally funded, in all areas of housing shortage.

In the short term, housing priority

must be given to working class people over the rich second-home buyers. This recognises the very real differences in wealth between many parts of mid and North Wales (and other depressed areas of Britain) and the more prosperous areas in England.

Against the utopian "guerrillaist" methods of groups like Meibion Glyndwr we must fight for our demands through the labour movement, mobilising as many workers as possible. If this is to be successful it will need to unite English and Welsh workers against their common enemy, the government and the bosses, as during the miners' strike.

Whilst it is our democratic duty to defend the Welsh language and support campaigns for greater resources towards its teaching etc, and bilingualism, we do not advocate support for a separation of Wales from Britain. Apart from the fact that most Welsh workers, especially in the South where the majority live, do not support separation, we believe that an independent Wales, as argued for by the nationalists, would divide, in a reactionary fashion, the British working class in the face of a common capitalist enemy.

The bosses' battle plan

TIRED OUT after a swinging sixties party the night before, Nigel Lawson nodded off during the Queen's Speech. This may be his way of indicating that he is ready for a transfer to their Lordships House where this is routine behaviour. Or perhaps he was just bored with Her Majesty churning out the same old attacks on the working class whilst ignoring his main concern, the economy.

Yet that economy is an important part of the backdrop to the Queen's Speech. The bosses are once again getting nervous about creeping inflation and high interest rates. They fear, and many even predict, the start of a recession in 1989 or 1990 which the Chancellor will be unable to avoid.

The speech said little directly about the economy, apart from an assertion that "My government will continue to pursue firm financial policies designed to bear down on inflation." But it was based on the idea that the Tories need to get their skates on with this term's legislation before they run into difficulties on the economic front.

Take the two big remaining privatisations—electricity and water. Both of these sell-offs require considerable reorganisation before a bargain basement price is set and the glossy adverts go out. In the case of the water authorities, getting this done by next July is likely to cause chaos.

But the government is determined to carry it through this session, along with the smaller privatisations of Scottish Bus, Girobank, Harland and Wolff and Shorts. Why the hurry? It might just be in order to get the income (£20 billion and £30 billion) from these sales into the Chancellor's purse for a timely hand out before the next General Election.

The 16 Government bills to be introduced over the next few weeks cover two main priorities for the Tories. On the one hand they are continuing to deregulate the economy, letting the market develop as free as possible from state ownership or controls. On the other hand, they are continuing to introduce laws which bind and gag any potential opposition to their rule. They are preparing the next phase of their attack on the working class.

Quiescence

In the last period, the Tories have been able to buy quiescence from many sections of the working class in employment, whose living standards have risen. This, combined with defeats inflicted on strategic groups such as the miners, has meant they could get away with wholesale attacks on welfare and civil liberties. These attacks have directly affected only a minority, and often those least able to fight back—the unemployed, the elderly, youth and the low-waged.

However, the bosses realise better than the leaders of the labour movement, that this is not a permanent situation. Sooner rather than later inflation, higher rents and mortgage payments, dearer credit, higher water and electricity prices will all eat into the wages of the majority of the working class. It is then that the real significance of the Tory anti-union laws will be felt by wider sections when they begin to fight back.

So what plans do the Tories have for us over the next year? Their de-regulation of the economy continues with plans to streamline mergers and takeovers, allowing capital to be concentrated in the hands of ever fewer bosses with less interference from the state. In addition, freedom for greater exploitation will be handed to the capitalists:

"A bill will be introduced to remove unnecessary obstacles to employment, particularly in relation to women and young people . . ."

This will remove any vestiges of protective legislation which made it illegal for the bosses to work



youth and women so intensively that their health is threatened.

These laws, generally introduced over 100 years ago, are a gain won by the working class to force the state to regulate the bosses whose lust for profit drives them to super-exploit these oppressed groups. Now these restrictions are interfering with the Thatcherite free market in labour. Presented by the Tories as allowing women and youth to participate in the fruits of a booming economy, they are in fact a way of allowing low paid young workers to work "flexible shift patterns"—long hours for a pittance—because youth are cheaper for the bosses.

In case anyone fights back against such exploitation, the Tories are also proposing to make it more difficult to go to industrial tribunals (with a charge of £150 in cases they think are "weak"), and only workers with continuous employment for over two years will be entitled to a statement explaining their dismissal.

The privatisation of water and electricity will raise money, but that is not the main motivation. They will be turned into highly profitable enterprises for private capital. These profits are to be guaranteed initially by water rate rises of about 20% just before the sale.

Of course there are some limits on the deregulation by the Tories—in electricity they are ensuring that at least 20% of the power supplied comes from non-fossil sources. This means that private companies will have to buy electricity from nuclear power stations, however expensive this may be compared with coal and oil.

The reason for this restriction on free marketeering is that the massive costs of disposal of nuclear waste have to be found from somewhere—by this method they can be passed on to the consumers of electricity through higher prices. This "nuclear tax" is also an attempt to ensure that workers in the fossil fuel extraction industries can never pull the plugs on electricity.

The other side of the legislative assault is the further restriction of points of opposition. Much of this has been pushed as measures to deal with

terrorism and protect national security. The Prevention of Terrorism Act, including the powers of exclusion and detention without trial, is to be made permanent. Automatic remission is to be reduced for the political prisoners in Northern Ireland. Police are to be given powers to investigate and confiscate any money they think is going to the IRA. People elected to local councils in the six counties will have to sign a declaration denouncing violence before taking office.

The internal spying outfit MI5 is to be put on a "statutory" basis. The Tories say this is to ensure it is regulated and overseen. But what the proposals really do is make the existing activities of MI5—the "bugging and burgling" that Peter Wright revealed in *Spycatcher*—legal. Their monitoring of "subversives" will be agreed by the Cabinet, allowing them to interfere with property, tap phones and spy on left wing, trade union and anti-imperialist activists with full legal backing.

Local councils will have their ability to provide local services even further eroded with the planned Local Government and Housing Bill. By forcing rent rises along with the sell off of council estates, and preventing income being spent on repairs, the Tories intend to turn tenants and in particular Labour voters against their elected councils. Local government workers in "sensitive posts" are to be banned from political activity.

The introduction of compulsory ID cards for anyone wanting to go to a football match is another example of the "big sister is watching the law and order brigade" of the Tories. All it will do is introduce a system of surveillance of hundreds of thousands of working class people in order for the police to harrass them.

Legislation

These proposals and many more define the ground on which the Tories hope to take on and beat the working class this year. More anti-union legislation will attempt to reduce the effectiveness of legal trade union activity still further—this time by making collective bargaining between different plants and sites more difficult, and by only allowing trade union representatives facility time for direct negotiations with their employers.

As their assaults have become more and more generalised against workers' rights and social benefits, so they have tried to atomise and isolate any potential united fight back. Any solidarity action is now outside the law. Strikes, pickets and demonstrations are subject to crippling legal restrictions. Elected local representatives who try to carry out manifesto promises are surcharged or imprisoned.

In the face of the wide ranging attacks of the bosses, the labour movement will have to fight back collectively. This will inevitably mean a conflict with the law and the state. The working class needs a revolutionary programme of action which can show the way to link the struggles and build the forms of organisation which can take on and defeat the bosses and the government.

The existing leaders will not countenance this type of struggle, and when a serious eruption of working class action takes place their cowardly reformism will be shown in all its impotence. This is why the task of the hour, in every struggle and every working class district, is to build an alternative leadership, a revolutionary party.

The "new mood" has joined "the downturn" as one of the stock phrases in every Socialist Workers Party (SWP) member's vocabulary. The new mood is the silver lining to the dark cloud of the downturn.

The SWP's political method consists of tailing the existing level of consciousness and struggle at all times. It is one of the features of what Lenin called "economism". In the period of recession and defeat, when workers' spontaneous militancy had been seriously undermined by unemployment and the anti-union laws, the SWP had nothing much to tail. The "downturn perspective" was the result. It saw the SWP, whose hallmark had been the rank and file movement tactic, become consistent opponents of rank and file organisation. SWP members resigned their stewardships and sang the same funeral hymn over every defeated strike:

"We can only fight for the little things, tea breaks and toilet rolls. At the same time we can make propaganda for socialism". In the last few months, though, the tune has changed.

Willingness

As a new mood of militancy really has gripped sections of workers—in Vickers, Jaguar, the post, the NHS and some sections of local government—the SWP's line became more and more at odds with workers' willingness to fight. SWP members in Lambeth NALGO for example argued strike action was impossible, argued against it, only to find it taking place within days. The fact that the "new mood"

SWP New mood — old mistakes

was discovered in 1988, with 1.86 million strike days in the first seven months compared to 3.18 million in the same period last year, reveals the "turn" for what it is. It is more of a tonic for the troops and a correction of overzealous pessimism than a serious analysis of the situation and the tactics needed.

Further evidence of what the "new mood" means can be gleaned from reports of the SWP's recent conference:

"Our job is to take the struggle as far forward as possible. That means starting from what the rank and file can do because that has an impact on the trade union leaders."

The health dispute is a clear example of what this means. In February and March, when thousands struck on days of action and ancillaries and nurses were in dispute together the "new mood" was not even a twinkle in Tony Cliff's eye. So the SWP opposed the call for an all out strike.

The resurgence of action in the NHS, coinciding with the "new mood" schema at first prompted the SWP to issue a national leaflet calling for an all out strike. With four hospitals on indefinite strike it looked like an all out strike was something "the rank and file can do". By the time the first national rank and file meeting took place the SWP had not only dropped the call for an all out strike but voted against it in their union branches.

As always they had begun from trying to guess the level of workers' consciousness, not by fighting for what was necessary. In the nurses' dispute the suspension of the appeals procedure, the problem this creates for the work to grade and the intransigence of the Tories mean that only an all out strike will win.

But to get an all out strike nurses will have to build it from above and below. As well as trying to spread

and consolidate the action on the ground they will have to mobilise to force the leaders to call an all out strike. For this they need rank and file organisation on a national scale. But even a national strike committee proved "too far ahead of workers" for the SWP.

The SWP's attitude to the new mood of militancy is only a fine tuning of the do-nothing position of the last three years. It also embodies their sterile and one sided view of relations with the union bureaucracy.

Against some of their members who argued against placing any demands on the officials the SWP have argued that workers must place demands on the bureaucracy at the same time as spreading the action from below. But from Frickley to the post and the NHS they have refused to spell out how these demands are to be focused against the leadership.

Replace

Why? Because only an organisation of rank and file militants, the minority whose ideas on the issues of the day are ahead of the mass of workers, can effectively fight against the bureaucrats, to take control of the action and replace leaders who betray with those who will fight.

The bankruptcy of the SWP in the fight against the new realism in general could not be better illustrated than by its recipe to "re-build the strength of union organisation from the bottom up". It calls for shop stewards, regular meetings, solidarity etc. All well and good, but it says nothing about how to wrest control of the unions from the present pack of traitors.

There may be a small but important change in workers' ability and desire to fight. But the SWP's "new mood" perspective holds no answers to the vital question it poses: how to turn the anger into action. ■



Defending the NHS—part of the new mood of militancy John Harris/IFL

Conference missed opportunity

BY NUPE NURSES IN LEICESTER HOSPITALS

THE NATIONAL meeting on re-grading called by Springfield COHSE and Prestwich NUPE nurses on 28 November attracted about 100 nurses from 39 hospitals. Delegates reported mounting anger and a preparedness to take action amongst layers of nurses who had never been in struggle before. Every area reported massive recruitment from the RCN into NUPE and COHSE.

The degree of organisation and action varied markedly between hospitals represented. From indefinite strikes in Springfield and Prestwich to petitions for a workplace meeting in other hospitals. There was widespread work to grade action reported. And in Springfield and the Regional Secure Unit in Birmingham nurses' anger was such that they wanted to come out without emergency cover.

This reflects the unevenness of the implementation of regrading by government and local management alike. The regrading is being used to divide and rule. Psychiatric and mental handicap hospitals have been treated very badly all over the country and have been the most militant in the current dispute.

The first session of the meeting was useful in gauging not only the level of struggle, but the resistance of the union bureaucrats. They have been refusing to organise action, engineering official splits between NUPE and COHSE and refusing to make strikes official. The Springfield strike is still not official.

The meeting revealed the problems of implementing the work to grade. It showed that where nurses have been prepared to make the action stick, refusing to go on duty if not properly supervised, they have been immediately re-

graded higher.

But the meeting was a lost opportunity. It could have been the start of a national struggle to force the union leaders to call an all out strike. It could have launched a national strike committee to link up those in action and help organise and generalise action in other areas.

But the SWP who were the overwhelming majority at the meeting bureaucratically manoeuvred to stop a resolution calling for a national strike committee. It left the meeting as an ad-hoc body with no further plans to meet again.

It pushed through a resolution calling for "No more talks with ACAS, work to grade, escalate the strikes, national one day strike on December 6". But it claimed a call for a national strike committee was in opposition to this and accused those fighting for it of trying to "bypass the bureaucracy". This was despite the fact that our resolution clearly called for the committee to "force the union leaders to call an all out strike". The meeting set up a bulletin to be co-ordinated by local reps.

But so great was the SWP's fear of rank and file co-ordination that these are never to meet!

Despite issuing a bulletin in the first week of the dispute calling for an all out strike, the SWP's effective strategy is now work to grade and wait for the union bureaucrats. It is a strategy that leaves hospitals like Prestwich to retreat back to work, and Springfield promising to "go back singing".

In March the SWP cynically sabotaged the attempt to set up a national NHS strike committee. After claiming in our union branch that this was to be a "working meeting" and that "resolutions were bureaucratic" they presented their own resolution and stifled others from the floor to make sure that this meeting too would finish as another lost opportunity. ■

"Now my ward is 100% COHSE"

Workers Power spoke to a sister and COHSE steward at London's Soho Women's Hospital about the problems of organising against the regrading

Because our unit has been under threat of closure for years we've had a high turnover of staff. Many of the nurses at my hospital have only been there since April and are on short term contracts. Most were either in the RCN or not in anything. Our Health Authority was one of the last to announce the new grades, and by the time we received ours we had already heard stories about other nurses up in arms against the new grades. Even so few of the nurses could believe how low their grades were.

All the senior staff nurses, who regularly take charge of the wards and even sometimes of the whole hospital, were put on E grade. The grade they clearly deserved was at least F. The Enrolled nurses who had virtually run the place before April, and who regularly take charge of wards were put on D. This grade says they must always work "under supervision". Auxiliary nurses in another part of the unit were given A grades when they had eighteen years experience in the post.

Everybody reacted furiously. 85% of nurses immediately appealed against the grades. Senior staff nurses were taking off their belts and spontaneously deciding to work to the grade they have been given. We held a ballot which decided unanimously to work to grade.

The work to grade is hard to keep going, though. There is a lot of pressure on individual nurses to do tasks they're not meant to. At the same time management have brought in agency nurses and paid them higher grades than normal to get the work done. We need to use the anger to launch an all out strike.

As a result of working to grade we got our grades reviewed. Six nurses were quickly regraded from D to E. Management have promised to speed up our appeals to next week if only we will stop the action. This is why Kenneth Clarke stopped nurses from going to appeal if they were working to grade, because it seems that up and down the country managers were start-

ing to give in.

Where I work everybody is in COHSE now. From being mainly RCN members the ward is now 100% COHSE members. We have linked up with nurses at the Elizabeth Garret Anderson hospital, who are mainly in NUPE. When NUPE called a regional day of action for the 28 November we decided to support it, even though COHSE has called for a lobby of Parliament on 6 December. When the COHSE region heard about it they were non-committal about supporting it.

In February and March the London Strike Co-ordinating Committee was very big. It represented about twenty hospitals and had meetings of up to 120 delegates. At present, because of the sporadic nature of the action it is only just getting under way again.

Then there was a national focus, ancillaries and student nurses had something immediate to fight for and the unions were forced into supporting national days of action. Now the action is very widespread but localised. Ancillaries are supporting our day of action but they are more worried about hospital closures and privatisation.

As long as the action is focused around individual grades there is always the potential for it to peter out into local disputes. ■

NUM must take the offensive

A BIG "Yes" vote is needed in the NUM ballot on an overtime ban on 16 and 17 December. It is vital that the union defeats British Coal's tactics of refusing to negotiate with the NUM.

Basic pay has been eroded over the last three years. Wage differences between areas, pits and even shifts are becoming more and more marked. In some areas bonus payments make up more than 50% of the pay packet.

This is a deliberate policy by British Coal (BC) in its preparations for privatisation. It is buying peace in high productivity, high profit pits. And it intends to divide and weaken the NUM.

BC wants miners to lose faith in the NUM. Last year, the bosses negotiated a 4% rise with the scab UDM and imposed it on the NUM majority. BC is insisting that before it talks to the NUM, the union must accept its proposed majority/minority conciliation scheme.

This would mean the NUM recognising the UDM as a permanent partner. It would mean the UDM representing NUM members in the Nottingham area. The NUM leadership is rightly holding out against this plan to promote the scab outfit.

Conciliate

NUM delegates at this year's Annual Conference voted decisively against right wing proposals to conciliate with the UDM. But simply "holding the line" isn't enough. An organised campaign to smash the UDM is vital. More resources should be given to the loyal NUM members in "minority" areas to recruit miners to a fighting union. A central part of that campaign will be to fight vigorously for a decent basic wage and show that NUM organised action can win.

The first step in doing this will be making the overtime ban effective and complete. One weak link is South Wales, where the new realist Area President, Des Dutfield, was successful in per-

suading a South Wales Area Conference to actually canvass for a "No" vote. And this after the national Special Delegate Conference had just voted for the ban!

Rank and file militants in South Wales have a hard task to turn the situation round and win a "Yes" vote. Welsh miners are worried about the new closure plans which threaten at least two and possibly more South Wales pits. But BC will find it all the easier to shut them down if they face a passive union unable to mount serious resistance on any front.

Workers Power's South Wales *Red Miner* bulletin is arguing that militants must group together as they did for the "Re-elect Scargill" campaign and ensure meetings at every shift of every pit to put the case for action. There is still a solid base of resistance to the bosses in South Wales which can be built on. This was demonstrated by the overwhelming rejection earlier in the year of BC's six day working proposal for the new Margam super pit.

And South Wales miners and their fellow workers have given the UDM the cold shoulder. The scab outfit has appeared in South Wales trying to recruit in preparation for Margam. As befits a bosses' union they have rented a shop in Swansea from a Tory councillor! But despite heavy media coverage, they have not been able to sign up any miners or ex-miners. But if Dutfield's do-nothing policy is triumphant the situation could change for the worse.

An overtime ban alone, however, is not going to be enough to force BC to negotiate or win a decent wage. There is simply too much at stake. The corporation has got to keep turning in profits to be ready for Parkinson's promised "historic" privatisation.

The problem for BC is that it is being squeezed by high interest rates, the costs of pit closures and the consequent redundancy payouts and by the need to keep down

coal prices for the electricity supply industry. This means it must keep wage costs down, especially in less profitable pits.

Miners as well as CEEGB workers are having to pay the costs of privatising electricity and getting BC ready for a sell-off. And at the same time as making profits, BC's chair Robert Haslam has to fulfil the new plans for shedding 20,000 jobs in the next year. He has already brought in a short life extra incentive scheme for early retirement.

Redundancies

As the average age in the industry falls—it is now down to 34—it is more and more difficult to find candidates. It may not be long before BC is having to force compulsory redundancies in the run up to Parkinson's sell-off.

If the new overtime ban is as ineffective as the last, over the Code, then British Coal will be able to carry on ignoring it.

Although the NUM National Delegate Conference voted against a North East motion for a tougher overtime ban to include safety, and against Derbyshire's proposals for an all-out strike, rank and file militants must continue and spread the arguments for strike action.

The campaign to make the overtime ban stick should go alongside a call for strike action if the ban doesn't force BC to negotiate within a definite period. Of course miners are hesitant about taking such a step; winning support for a national strike won't be easy.

But if BC is able to ride out another year, increase the weight of the UDM, start the development of Margam and shed another 20,000 jobs, it will be well on the way to selling off the industry and busting the NUM. Taking action that wins a proper basic rate and unites miners across the country is the first step for scuppering those plans. ■

Cars: build united action

THE LAST twelve months have seen increasing militancy by workers in the car industry. At Austin Rover workers have in recent months downed tools over management attempts to increase line speeds without a corresponding increase in manpower.

In November at the Birmingham Longbridge plant, paintshop workers walked out after a fellow worker died. They were incensed because no qualified nurse was on duty at the time. The two day strike resulted in a promise of improved cover in the future.

Rover bosses made a big enough pay offer to get themselves and the union negotiators off the hook. Even then, a third of the company's workers voted to reject the offer. The settlement is reckoned to increase the average earnings of a grade three worker by 10.5% over the next two years.

Jaguar management deliberately prolonged negotiations reckoning

that if Rover workers accepted their deal, Jaguar employees would cave in. But the workforce knows that the company is still making profits—£22.5 million in the first half of the year—despite boss John Egan's insistence that profits are too low, and higher productivity is needed. Jaguar management has been infuriating workers with its high-handedness and speed ups.

The company lost £25 million when all production was stopped for four days in November over the sacking of a shop steward who had used a photocopier to reproduce material connected to a series of stress-related deaths at the company.

Workers at Ford who last year were at the forefront of the struggle for wage increases have been offered 8.6% based on the retail price index. After numerous disputes and with a high turnover of labour, the company are desperate to buy off any possible long term industrial

action.

At Peugeot-Talbot the union side have put in a claim for over 30% on the basis of parity with other workers in the car industry.

The increasing militancy in the car industry can be seen partly as an indication of the economic upturn. Most of the car companies are taking on more labour. But another factor is the increasing percentage of young workers who have not suffered the attacks that workers went through in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But at the moment this militancy is isolated within each factory, not even spread throughout the company.

It is necessary for car workers to defend their interests by building cross-combine links to formulate a united wages and conditions claim. The building of a rank and file movement is a demand that must be taken up at every level in order to stop the bosses' offensive once the upturn in the economy finishes. ■



SPOTLIGHT ON THE ECONOMY

Wages, prices and profits

INFLATION IS almost certain to reach 7% by 1989. For a government which based its whole strategy on crushing inflation the rise in prices is the most worrying of all the current economic figures. But inflation is caused by exactly the same "market forces" which Thatcher has used to justify everything from unemployment to privatisation.

In response the Tories have already stuck a massive spanner in the works of "the market". They are trying to curb spending by raising interest rates (the cost of borrowing) from 7% in May to 13% and rising in December. Now they are preparing an attack on pay.

Fowler, Lawson and Thatcher all made speeches condemning "unjustified pay awards" in the week 6.4% inflation was announced. Leigh-Pemberton, the governor of the Bank of England, said that pay was the "biggest single worry in the City".

Workers who are faced with 6% gas price rises, 9% train fare rises, 12% tube fare rises and mortgages up from 7% to 13% are being told that high pay settlements cause inflation and they must pay the price.

The Tories' argument rests on two figures: 6.4% inflation and 9.25% average pay increases. "Look", they say, "wages are growing faster than inflation, pushing up costs in general". Tory economic pundit Mary Goldring even went on radio to claim that "the basic problem with the British economy is that we have been pouring millions and millions into workers' pay packets".

But all the figures show that the opposite is true. Workers' wages have been rising, but so has productivity and output. Workers are getting more for producing more. Unit labour costs (the proportion of wages in products' prices) have been rising very slowly at 0.2%. With order books full and machinery working to capacity some employers have been willing to meet claims at least halfway to avoid disruption and prevent labour shortages.

Bosses have also been taking advantage of a high level of demand to push prices and profits up in conditions where capacity restraints mean new demand can't be met by increased output. Finally in recent months as profits have peaked and are beginning to fall, individual bosses have responded by putting up prices to keep their profit margins high.

The difference between growth in unit labour costs (0.2%) and wholesale prices (4.7%) is largely down to the bosses protecting their profits, not workers protecting their living standards.

These are the kind of market forces Thatcher doesn't like. Wincing at Ford's 8.9% settlement,

Thatcher has pledged to "set the pace" in the public sector, already offering teachers 4%. She even suggested that the annual pay bargaining round should be abolished altogether.

The capitalists clearly hate inflation. It "debauches the currency", makes investment decisions difficult and eats up savings. They employ all kinds of economists to try to explain it, to no avail. In the words of John Strachey they are like medicine men howling at the moon and the rain to make them disappear. But the capitalists are stuck with inflation: creeping through the 1960s, rampant throughout the 1970s though the economy stagnated, and re-appearing at the first sign of sustained economic upturn.

Capitalism causes inflation. And it is always workers who have to pay the price. For example, under the last Labour government (1974-79) real wages fell by 15% as inflation approached 30% in mid-term. In periods of inflation the normal economic demands of trade union negotiators become inadequate.

The yearly pay settlement can be wiped out by price rises well before twelve months are up. Likewise the "retail price index" never reflects the real cost of living. Lawson is even trying to get mortgages taken off the price register—even though massive mortgage rises have become the main worry for many workers.

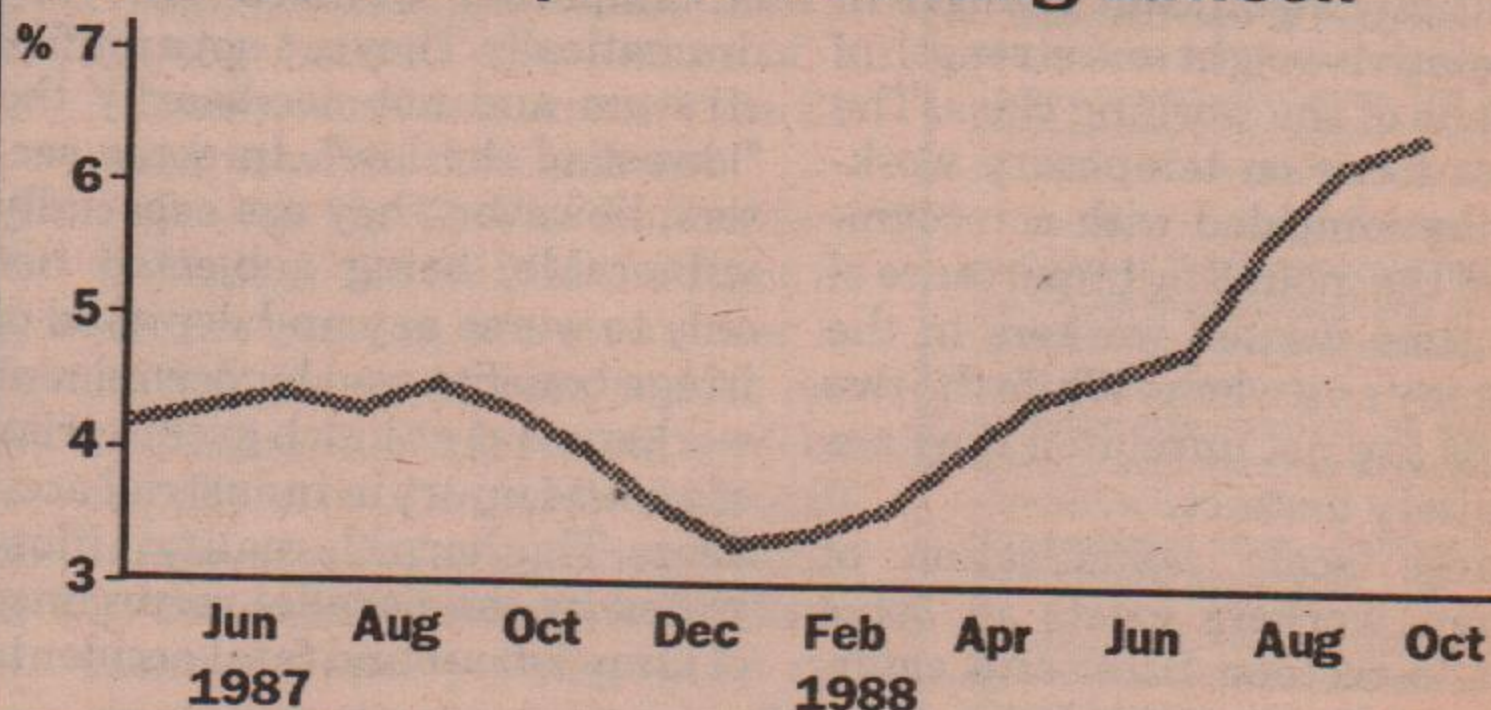
We need a sliding scale of wages. That means a 1% rise in wages for every 1% rise in inflation—as worked out by committees of workers, housewives etc. When Ford stumbled into its 8.9% deal by linking wages to a price index they revealed the potential power of the sliding scale. For that control to be realised workers' control of price indexing is crucial. It cannot be left in the hands of pay review boards and union bureaucrats whose pay is not subject to the same restrictions as the workers they represent.

As the Ford deal showed at present there is no united front of bosses on pay. But the whole of Lawson's strategy—to hammer bosses and consumers through interest rates until the economy cools down—must eventually change this.

By mid-1989 output will slow down. The bosses' compensation and rationale for paying higher wages will disappear. Squeezed by Lawson's "high as necessary" interest rate policy, their exports hit by a high pound, they will be forced into a renewed "productivity drive". There will be an attack on workers' conditions, and a much more determined attack on pay.

If this coincides with a US recession it will mean a full-blown return to the slump policies of 1980-82. This time we must make sure the bosses take the blame and foot the bill. ■

Inflation: the spectre haunting Lawson



Combatting casualisation

G R McCOLL looks at the evidence on the growing exploitation of temporary workers and argues a strategy for winning them to the organised labour movement.

THE CYNICAL attempts by Post Office management to use casual workers as scabs against striking UCW members effectively triggered the September strike. Management's tactics also highlighted the broader question of whether Britain's bosses are seeking to sharpen divisions within the working class by increasing the pool of vulnerable casual workers.

The issue of casualisation, while by no means a new one, has become a strand within a much wider debate about the restructuring of the working class on the British left. At stake in the debate has been the essential question of how far the working class in Britain and other imperialist countries has been irrevocably stratified rendering it incapable of becoming a "class-for-itself" to overthrow capitalism.

For revolutionary Marxists the argument has far more than academic significance. We must define casualisation and assess its importance.

Brutal

For large sections of workers casual labour is an old reality indeed. Historically, a large proportion of agricultural labourers and construction workers would be classified as casual. The brutal competition of the casual labour market characterised life for the majority of dockers until 1947 and the introduction of the Dock Labour Scheme. In some of pre-war Liverpool's inner districts more than 50% of male workers were identified as casual dock labourers.

In the current period casual labour has become subsumed in official statistics under the much broader category of temporary work. Though the evidence is in dispute, the data gathered for the Department of Employment's 1985 *Labour Force Survey* shows that the exploitation of temporary workers has not really grown in significance for the bosses in general as compared to a decade ago. At the same time, employers in some sectors have undoubtedly used a rising proportion of casual and temporary workers in recent years. As industrial relations researcher Anna Pollert notes:

"There has been no 'explosion' of temporary work... although there are grounds for believing that there may have been a shift in the rationales underlying the use of temporary workers."

An analysis published in the *Employment Gazette* showed that the total of temporary workers within the whole of the labour force reached a peak of 1.6 million in "limited duration jobs" in 1975 or 7% of all workers in the economy. The figure slumped considerably in the midst of the deep recession in 1981, rising again to a figure of 1.3 million or 6% of the workforce in 1985.

Changes

Such numbers hardly offer a cast-iron case for *Marxism Today's* much vaunted "New Times" supposedly wrought by Thatcherism. On the other hand, these statistics merit closer examination for what they do reveal about small but potentially significant changes in the relative weight and strength of sections of the working class. The recent focus on temporary workers has coincided with a recognition of the mounting importance of part time women workers in the economy as a whole. While the two trends are not unrelated they are definitely distinct.

Large scale casualisation of women workers exists in some specific sectors: hotel and cater-



John Harris/IFL

ing, banking and insurance and in the NHS and education sectors for ancillary workers. But in manufacturing industries and even in the service sector, a clear majority of women part timers do "permanent" jobs working regular hours each week. On the other hand, many men employed in the construction and North Sea oil industries as well as in factory maintenance are actually casual workers, their hours of work often completely dictated by their bosses.

Other recent studies suggest that the exploitation of casuals may

in the construction industry where 37 workers were killed in London alone last year.

In the *Piper Alpha* disaster the vast majority of the 167 dead were actually temporary workers, employed by firms subcontracted by Occidental Petroleum. While these grim facts are hardly unique to capitalism in the late 1980s there can be no doubt that the combination of recession and the capitulation of trade union leaderships in the face of Thatcherite policies has worsened the situation.

What is the bosses' motive for

large Liverpool plant on a casual basis by agreement with the GMB.

As with so many other attacks on union organisation and class unity in the workplace it has been public sector managers who have most aggressively pursued casualisation at the Tories' behest. The firms who have sought windfall profits from privatisation have introduced increasing numbers of casual and other temporary workers, particularly in clerical jobs and support services such as catering, cleaning and transport.

British Telecom is a prime ex-

out to "casualised" workplaces and agencies, the employers can use this as a threat to drive down the wages of their permanent workforce. And even where temporaries are paid a rate for the job, they are at the bosses' mercy, and therefore are the "weak link" in day to day struggles over conditions, grading etc.

Our response should be clear: resist moves to casualisation but where pools of casual and temporary workers exist—organise!

Union bureaucrats such as the GMB's John Edmonds excuse their unions' own failure to recruit and fight for casual workers by referring to a new "servant class" beyond the reach of the trade unions. But to claim, as Edmonds does, that tens of thousands in the hotel and catering sectors cannot be organised flies in the face of evidence of successful organising drives in such major US cities as Boston. Most of the trade union barons, in their ardent embrace of "new realism", simply refuse to invest the time and money required. This is because they shy away from the Tory anti-union laws. They could block any serious organising drive which would have to rely on industrial action, secondary picketing and boycotts.

Potential

The experience of TGWU region 6 on Merseyside proves the possibility exists of unionising employees of contract cleaning firms. On the basis of four plain, modest demands the TGWU has won nearly 2,500 members through the course of thirty disputes, one of which was won after 18 months. To date the gains of union organisation have not been spectacular for these cleaners, but it shows the potential of a determined, properly resourced campaign.

In unionised workplaces such as the Post Office, where the bosses are pushing casualisation, the demands should be quite simple: equal pay and conditions for casuals and permanent workers, followed by a swift end to casual employment with all temporary workers being awarded permanent contracts tied to fixed minimum staffing levels. To win these demands will inevitably mean confrontations with subcontractors and larger corporations (as in the North Sea oil industry) and ultimately with the anti-union laws.

Class conscious workers have to explain to their workmates that the union must take up the fight on behalf of temporary and casual workers. If management has succeeded in bringing in and retaining temporaries or trainees on YTS and ET programmes, then the next task is to recruit them and fight for permanent status. This will not only win justice for casual workers it will ensure that the bosses don't succeed in creating a permanent pool of strikebreakers who are alienated from trade unionism because of the short-sighted failure of sectionalism and reformism. ■

The issue of casualisation, while by no means a new one, has become a strand within a much wider debate about the restructuring of the working class on the British left. At stake in the debate has been the essential question of how far the working class in Britain and other imperialist countries has been irrevocably stratified rendering it incapable of becoming a "class-for-itself" to overthrow capitalism.

be growing in food and drink processing, in part as the employers' response to seasonal fluctuations in product markets, in part as a means of making maximum use of fixed capital investment. Elsewhere in manufacturing the ranks of casual workers are probably growing in the print sector and in certain areas of engineering.

These trends could be deepened by the Tories' success in withdrawing benefit from 16-18 year olds forcing them on to cheap labour YTS schemes or into whatever casual work is available.

The pay packets and conditions of temporary workers can vary dramatically. They are not a unified stratum and not necessarily the "lowest of the low". In some sectors, however, they are especially vulnerable, being subjected not only to worse pay and deprived of fringe benefits won by permanent workers, but at much greater risk of serious injury in industrial accidents. This horrible reality is illustrated by the parallel resurgence of lump labour and fatal accidents

pursuing casualisation? Certainly they would like an enlarged "expandable" labour force. But in the short term the simple aim of cutting short term labour costs is probably more important. There are few corporate managers who envisage a permanent "Japanese style" dual labour market. Nevertheless, large corporations can cut costs by slimming down their operations and contracting out work to other firms who do rely on casual, subcontract and non-union labour.

The available evidence does not point to a systematic drive by Britain's private sector bosses to casualise new sections of the working class. To date the Ford Motor Company has failed to impose casual working on its production workforce, having been repulsed in its earlier attempt by the February 1988 strike. There are, however, notable successes for the bosses such as Nabisco, the multinational biscuit manufacturer, which in theory can employ up to 30% of its production workers in a

ample among the once nationalised companies with more than 2.5% of its total work force already classified as temporary excluding the thousands of casual workers concentrated in London offices. The civil service has also recruited a growing number of casual workers though it is only in the Post Office to date that the bosses have achieved a gross disparity between the basic pay and conditions of casuals and those of the permanent work force. Not only do casuals in the Post Office receive a wage packet 6% less than that of permanent staff, they have virtually no entitlement to fringe benefits.

While the immediate threat posed by casualisation should not be overstated the recent battle in the Royal Mail revealed the potential danger lurking behind it. A pool of badly paid, often young and unorganised workers can readily constitute a strikebreaking force in the context of mass unemployment.

When work can be contracted

Lesley Day reviews the Communist Party's latest revision of Marxism, Facing Up To the Future

New times - new realism

IN THE early 1970s the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had extensive influence amongst significant sections of the industrial working class. It used that influence to tie rank and file workers to the trade union bureaucracy, in particular the "terrible twins" Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon. In turn, these bureaucrats, in concert with the Labour government, demobilised and derailed the militancy of the early 1970s. They paved the way for the defeats of the 1980s under Thatcher.

The CP reaped a grim reward for its treachery. In viciously attacking a number of key strikes against Labour's Social Contract (Leyland Toolroom strike, Heathrow engineers etc) it seriously undermined its own industrial base. Its membership levels slumped. Incapable of offering a lead to workers in the struggles against the Thatcher onslaught it underwent a series of damaging splits, losing control of the *Morning Star* in the process. In the same period the party came to be dominated by a thoroughly middle class faction around the journal *Marxism Today*, led by characters like Martin Jacques and Beatrix Campbell.

Brazen

These "Euros" peddled an ever more brazen and overt strategy of class collaboration, using what trade union influence they had left (particularly in the Welsh and Scottish NUM) to attack industrial militancy as an outmoded form of struggle. In its place they advanced a variant of the old popular front strategy—the Broad Democratic Alliance.

This alliance seeks to unite the working class with wet Tories, Liberals and church worthies. By subordinating the interests of the working class completely to these bourgeois allies, and to the petit bourgeois "social movements" (feminism, pacifism etc) unity against "Thatcherism" was supposedly to lay the basis for its electoral defeat.

To justify this line the theorists of the CP joined in the chorus of academics who are saying goodbye to the working class. Under "Thatcherism" the working class was being displaced, through the restructuring of industry, as the principal agent for social change. The political language of class was as outmoded as class struggle mili-

tancy itself in these "New Times". As Stuart Hall put it, in October's *Marxism Today*: "Once we accept the collapse of any automatic linkage between economic class position and political consciousness, we have to recognise that all commitments to act in politics have subjective as well as objective roots. All interests, including class ones, are culturally and ideologically defined."

So Edward Heath's cultural alienation from Thatcher earns this sworn enemy of the working class a big interview in *Marxism Today*. Alongside this the trendsetters of the CP now devote their journal to lengthy defences of the filofax (!), praise for the Pope's support for *perestroika*, a regular wine column and a heavy concentration on fashion fads and new styles.

These "New Times—New Realist" ideas of the CP must be de-

struggle.

The document explains the rise of Thatcherism by conceding to her idea that welfare-ism etc., led to stagnation in the 1970s. By the end of that decade, "society and the state seemed adrift and rudderless" allowing Thatcher to take charge.

The world recession, the crisis of US imperialism, the inevitable crisis dynamics of capitalist economy—none of these get a look in. Instead the authors condemn outmoded collectivism and sing the praises of "individualism", "diversity" and "pluralism". Rather than challenging Thatcherite values, the authors accede to them, urging individualism with a human face. The spurious theoretical justification for this is that the new order of "post-Fordism" means that flexibility and individualism will permeate the economy and society.



feated. If they are not then they will lead to further defeats, for the CP remains influential in a number of key areas—not least within Kinnock's coterie of advisers—and contributed, in no small measure, to the Poll Tax campaign setbacks in Scotland.

Their discussion document, *Facing Up To The Future*, provides a useful starting point for exposing the bankruptcy of their ideas, for it spells out their views on Thatcherism and their strategy for the decade ahead.

The document argues that the left should oppose Thatcher's "conservative modernisation" with a new strategy of "democratic modernisation". This is to be achieved by controlling the market, decentralising welfare provision, embracing Europe and developing an "enabling state". Muddled-headed in both analysis and prescription *Facing Up To The Future* leaves the socialist reader gasping at the rapidity with which it dismisses class analysis and class

This leads the CP to conclude that: "work and social life are dissolving the old social blocs which were the symbolic armies of social conflict".

Despite the contraction of the old industries in Britain the falseness of this argument is revealed not merely by the fact that on a world-scale the "social bloc" known as the working class is many millions strong. It is also exposed by the reality of life on the assembly lines of every car factory in Britain, at the coal face of every pit, in the workshops of hundreds of engineering plants and indeed in the profoundly alienating work environment of the computerised office.

Nor are the strikes—major and minor—of the last decade the actions of a "symbolic" army. They were and will continue to be struggles by flesh and blood workers obliged by capitalism to defend their very livelihoods. It is the defeat of these struggles, a direct result of the treachery of the reformist misleaders, not the fact of their occurrence, that has led to the political shift to the right.

The task of Marxists is to explain the reasons for these defeats, learn their lessons and prepare for victorious struggles, not sit mesmerised, like frightened rabbits, before the headlights of Thatcherite New Times "juggernaut".

While rejecting the politics of class and the need for class-wide solidarity *Facing Up To The Future* favours "social solidarity" and an "alliance of diverse social forces". It urges more of the sort of misleadership that has led to defeats: "The conduct of the miners' strike in South Wales and Scotland, the NHS campaigns, the activities of the Scottish TUC, are all examples of how the labour movement must operate at the centre of alliances

in society, rather than as a sectional force".

These were the disastrous "rainbow coalition" campaigns run and defeated by the Eurocommunists and their Labourite allies which relied on appeals to church and "progressives" instead of mobilising working class action.

The justification for this warmed-over version of the old Stalinist popular front is the idea that an increasing number of people are "in contradictory class locations". By this the CP mean workers who are relatively privileged. These privileges supposedly remove them from the working class.

In fact, there is nothing new about the phenomenon of relatively skilled workers enjoying material privileges as compared to the mass of the working class. Marxists term such workers the labour aristocracy. But this aristocracy is still made up of workers, people obliged to sell their labour power and be exploited by capitalism.

As such the effect of capitalist crisis will—as it always has—affect these layers profoundly whether they are skilled blue collar or white collar workers. Their social peace with capitalism will be disrupted. They will turn to the methods of class struggle once again. And doubtless the CP will denounce their return to such "old fashioned" methods.

On the question of the state, the new CP line is, if anything, worse than the old *British Road To Socialism's* reformist schema for using the state to prettify capitalism. The new document argues: "a socialist strategy must aim to establish a new relationship between the central state, decentralised democracy and individuals". This "enabling" state should let people get on with it—providing their own welfare and childcare for instance. The new "socially-guaranteed childcare" will "build upon the informal solutions which abound among networks of women".

Welfare

Now it is one thing to argue against remote bureaucratic welfareism—quite another to give the capitalist state excuses for not providing necessary welfare. In their picture of this new grass roots control, the authors have forgotten that they have left the capitalist state intact. What happens if the bosses will not pay up?

Equally utopian is the strategy for controlling the economy through state intervention and regulating the market. We slide from a recognition of the power of retailers—Marks and Spencer—to "democratic regulation" of companies by local regulatory boards involving "alliances of consumers, workers and the community".

Quite why the multi-nationals should take any notice of this is not explained. Some social ownership, the document admits, is necessary but these days people need shares to feel a "tangible sense of ownership". And so that the big fish will not swallow the little fish, these shares would be traded in "social capital markets".

The October 1987 crash blew a gaping hole in the notion of a "shareholders' democracy". The CP want to patch that hole up!

Facing Up To The Future is a product of the shift to the right in British politics, not an answer to it. It feeds on despair, it does not overcome it. It carves out a niche in politics for the middle class staff of *Marxism Today* and their friends in the social movements. It offers succour to every renegade in retreat from the class struggle. ■



WORKERS POWER is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.

Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need.

Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

The Labour Party is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party and the LPYS, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.

The misnamed Communist Parties are really Stalinist parties—reformist, like the Labour Party, but tied to the bureaucracy that rules in the USSR. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) inflicts terrible defeats on the working class world-wide.

In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, Stalinist bureaucracies rule over the working class. Capitalism has ceased to exist but the workers do not hold political power. To open the road to socialism, a political revolution to smash bureaucratic tyranny is needed. Nevertheless we unconditionally defend these states against the attacks of imperialism and against internal capitalist restoration in order to defend the post-capitalist property relations.

In the trade unions we fight for a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions and councils of action.

We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. We politically oppose the nationalists (bourgeois and petit bourgeois) who lead the struggles of the oppressed nations. To their strategy we counterpose the strategy of permanent revolution, that is the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle by the working class with a programme of socialist revolution and internationalism.

In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

Workers Power is the British Section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary international (Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

The MRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class—fighting for revolutionary leadership.

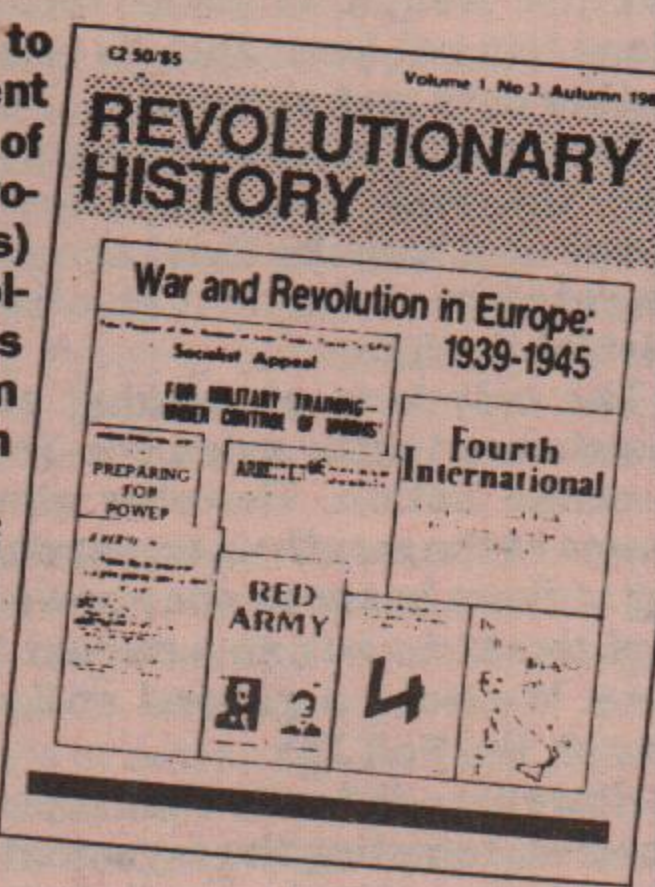
If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!

Trotskyism and war

This is the first of two issues devoted to Trotskyism and World War Two. The present collection of articles deals with issues of principles (how to operate a policy of revolutionary defeatism in imperialist countries) as well as tactics (proletarian military policy). Perhaps the most illuminating piece is Rodolpho Prager's article, translated from French, on the experience of the European Trotskyists in the occupied countries.

On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the last global imperialist slaughter, this issue of the journal is a timely reminder of the courage and self-sacrifice—as well as the inevitable debate and disorientation—that marked the activity of Trotskyists in those dark days.

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Price: £2.85 including postage



The lessons of Scotland

SCOTLAND IS a testing ground for the Poll Tax in every sense. The Tories have singled out the Scottish working class for a symbolic trial of strength at the start of the third term.

Labour is using the opportunity of the Poll Tax to demonstrate to the bosses not only its rejection of "unlawful" protest but its ability to sabotage that protest. Stalinism and the Labour left have proved the bankruptcy of their "alternatives" to Kinnock's strategy.

The lessons of the anti-Poll Tax movement in Scotland so far must be learned by every worker who wants to fight the imposition of the tax. Recent months have shown that the anger and readiness to fight is far from beaten in Scotland. Despite the Scottish TUC's pathetic call for "eleven minutes of strike action" on 11 September thousands of workers stopped work for the day.

Strikes took place in the militant shipyards, pits and engineering plants as well as in local government. At the Scottish Labour Conference the majority of CLPs voted for a strategy of defiance. In November thousands of Labour voters said no, not just to the Poll Tax, but to Kinnock's entire strategy for dealing with it.

The Scottish Labour Party and TUC are intent on squandering this spirit of resistance. Every detail of their strategy of sabotage flows from the logic of Kinnock's master plan for 1992.

Propel

The Labour leaders hope that the class-wide attacks that Thatcher has lined up for her third term will destroy the Tories working class support and propel Labour into Number Ten. But the whole experience of the last eight years shows that, without a *fight* against the Tory attacks, wide layers will continue to support Thatcher. Labour's inaction convinces them that "there is no alternative".

Blind to this, the Labour leaders have ruthlessly manoeuvred to stop the anger of Scottish workers finding any expression in official action or party policy. Their ability to wheel out the block vote at the Scottish Party Conference, to use procedure to silence even the mild mannered Tribunate MPs, is a lesson for every Labour supporter who thought democracy and socialism could be won in Labour's ranks.

To gasps of disbelief Kinnock's henchmen told the conference they had to pay the tax and wait for Labour to repeal it. On over £30,000 a year, Kinnock can afford to pay it. Millions of Scottish workers cannot. And who in their right mind would stake the future of their real wages and their local services on a Kinnock win in 1992?

At the Scottish Party conference the "hard" and "soft" lefts united around the call to defy the Poll Tax. Their unity masked very different strategies for resisting the tax. Events have proved both of their strategies inadequate for stopping the tax. The conference duly passed a resolution which recognised the right of individuals

not to pay and to alleviate the hardship of those forced to pay.

This backdown from a campaign now for mass defiance was backed by the Scottish TUC and the Tribunate MPs. The Tribunites have created the "Committee of 100". They plan to organise 100 prominent Scots "drawn from every walk of Scottish life" to symbolically defy the new law. A cross-class alliance, it would allow 100 MPs, bishops and other assorted "personalities" to suffer the comfortable martyrdom of paying fines whilst the tax savaged the living standards of millions.

Pretending

The "committee of 100" has all the advantages of pretending to fight, pretending to break the law. It has none of the disadvantages— from the soft-left's point of view— of mobilising masses of workers in illegal action to smash the tax.

The left variant of the "Committee of 100" is that of the SNP, George Galloway and the *Morning Star*. The SNP wants 100,000 well off Scots to defy the tax (paying the fines, naturally). Galloway holds out the hope that the example of the "100" will spontaneously draw masses into action: "We will be looking for hundreds of thousand to join us".

The *Morning Star* sees in the "100" the all-class alliance against Thatcherism it has always dreamed about:

"This is an important initiative and will ensure that in each locality there are respected figures, clergy, doctors, electoral representatives who will give a lead to mass organisations."

What each refuses to do is spell out a concrete plan for organising mass defiance of the law.

The real threat to the Poll Tax will come, not from a "Committee of 100", but from action committees of thousands of ratepayers organised on the estates and localities in a mass campaign of non-payment and non-registration, backed by strike action. None of the supporters of the "Committee of 100" fight for this. It would threaten to translate their verbal

opposition to Kinnock, their platform rhetoric about a "workers' Scotland" into action.

But the forces still exist in Scotland to make such action a reality. An opinion poll in November showed that some 400,000 were committed to non-payment. The Strathclyde Anti-Poll tax campaign has sixty affiliated organisations. In this region alone an estimated 80,000 people have refused to register for the tax, despite the passing of the legal deadline.

The problem facing the mass of workers still organised in the anti-Poll Tax unions is how to break out of the stage of passive resistance. Whilst the number of "refuseniks" is large, it could have been ten times bigger if the unions had been won to a plan of non-implementation, and to strike action in defiance of those prosecuted for non-registration.

With the first Poll Tax bills only months away there is every chance that a mass campaign can be rekindled over the issue of non-payment. Lothian NALGO, the FBU, Glasgow District cleaning workers and a number of other local government unions have pledged support for non-payment.

Along with the militant minority in every workplace and union branch they should campaign for strike action in support of non-paying residents.

Strike action

Without massive strike action the non-payment campaign will remain essentially passive. It will crumble as workers' bank accounts and wage packets are drained by fines and other penalties.

Scotland proves that Labour cannot and will not lead a fight. Its commitment to legality condemns millions of workers to be victims of the real crime of poverty and deprivation.

It proves that Stalinism, nationalism and the Labour left will not break fundamentally from passivity. And it is a warning that passive resistance, even though illegal and on a massive scale, is no match for the bosses' laws, courts and determined class leadership. ■

THE POLL Tax will be introduced in Scotland in April 1989. At about the same time workers in England and Wales will be required to register for the tax.

The Poll Tax will have two important effects. Firstly it will shift part of the burden of paying for local government services away from the profits of the bosses and onto the wages, pensions and dole of the working class.

At present, local businesses pay rates determined by the local council. When the Poll Tax is introduced, they will pay a "uniform business rate" set by central government. The Tories will set this at a suitably low level for their paymasters in industry. Workers will have the choice: pay enormous amounts of money or suffer a drastic cut in services.

Women and youth, many of whom did not pay rates directly at all, will be hit hardest. So too will black families, proportionately more of whom live in homes

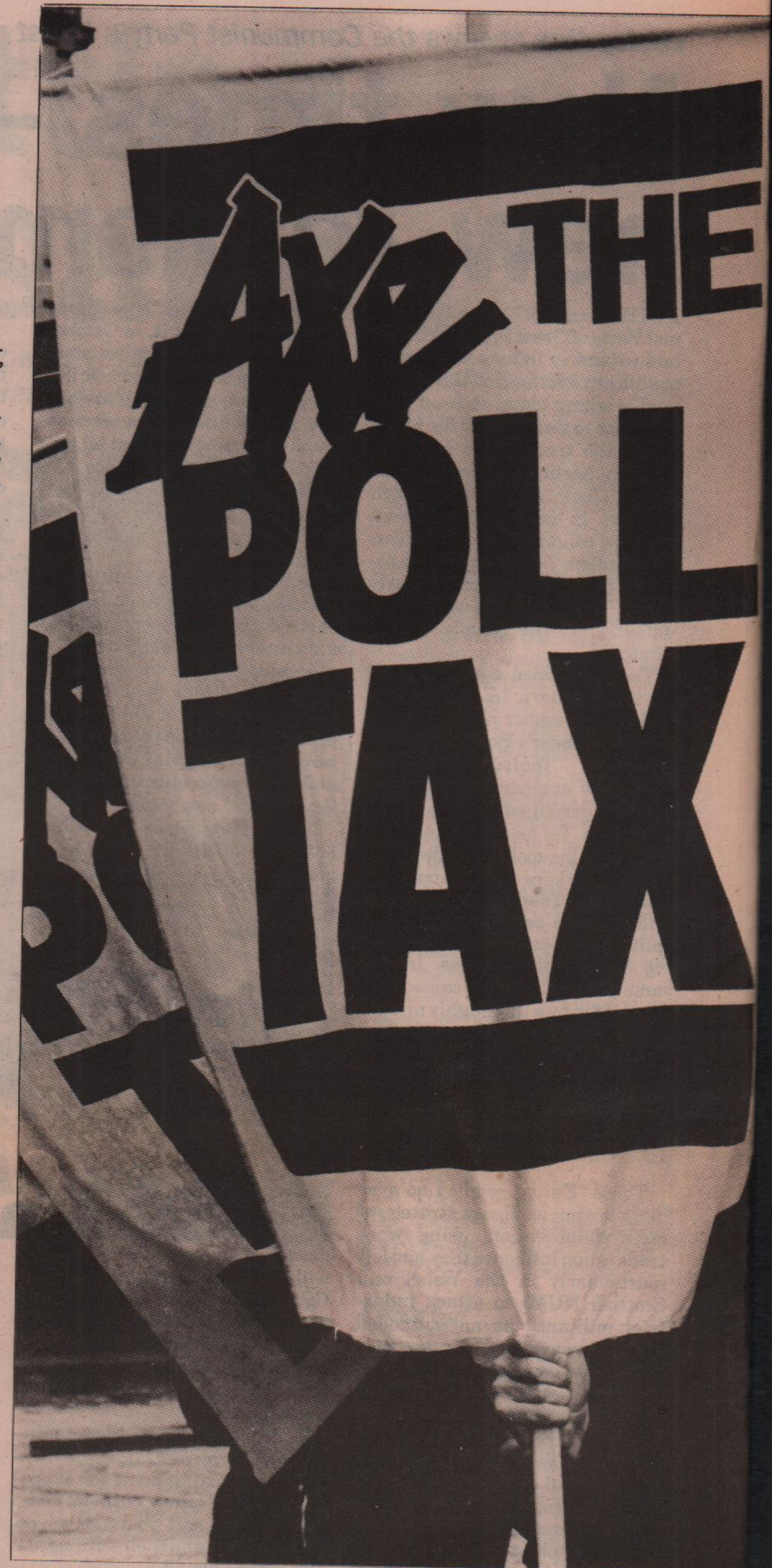
with several generations of the same family, all of whom will now be liable for the tax.

The second effect will be to lever local councils out of Labour control. At present, the worst off workers do not pay rates and so are sheltered from the effects of high rates. They will not be sheltered from large Poll Tax charges as everyone over 18 will have to pay at least 20%, no matter how poor they are.

Labour councils will be forced to lower the tax and make cuts, or else raise the level of the tax and take more money from workers. Either way they will be acting as the Tories' agents in lowering workers' living standards.

The campaign against the Poll Tax must not only convince people that the tax is bad, but show that it can be smashed. We will not defeat the tax simply by influencing public opinion.

In London 70% of voters were against the Tories' abolition of the GLC. But the GLC is long gone, and the Tories have gone on to win



As the fight against the Poll Tax gets under way in Eng
Govan by-election shows there is still mass opposition
Ann Wackett looks at the lessons of the Scottish fight
outlines a programme of action to smash the Poll Tax.

HOW TO FIGHT

another general election. The cuts in the health service are unpopular, but the weight of public opinion alone has not been enough to stop further cuts and charges.

The Labour Party leadership's idea that the Poll Tax will make the Tories so unpopular that Labour will be voted in at the next election is wishful thinking.

The only form of working class resistance that worries the Tories is strike action. Thatcher almost foams at the mouth when condemning strikers because she knows the real threat to her government lies here. We need a general strike to smash the Poll Tax.

However difficult that seems, however tempting the argument "in that case we might as well give up", nothing else will defeat the attack

Thatcher has unleashed. We need a strategy that can overcome today's passivity in England and Wales, sabotage any retreat in Scotland, and mobilise the whole working class for action.

The starting point of a fight against the Poll Tax in England and Wales must be a campaign of mass non-registration. The tax hits the pockets of millions of residents and tenants directly. They can and must be organised through local Labour Parties, tenants' associations etc, into anti-Poll Tax committees in every estate or local area. In particular women, youth and black organisations must be drawn into the fight against implementation of the tax.

Isolated non-payers will either be picked off and made examples of or

Fighting back in Coventry

BY DAVE TRUSSLER

COVENTRY CITY Council is going full steam ahead in preparations to introduce the Poll Tax. The last two weeks have seen advertisements in the local press for upwards of thirty new jobs for people to implement the tax. Money has been allocated to buy the necessary computers.

The most recent council estimate of the amount the residents of Coventry would pay is £248 per person per year. This is based on estimates for the amount the tax would have been for the year 1987-88. A more likely figure when the tax comes into force in April 1990 is at least £350. This is an independent estimate based on the effects on the council's figures for tax evasion, inflation and the cost of implementation.

Two of Coventry's Labour MPs, Dave Nellist and John Hughes, have spoken out against the Poll Tax. They have both signed the statement—together with 17 other Labour MPs—pledging not to pay the tax. The main focus of opposition at estate level has been in the Hillfields area of the city where a public meeting was held on 15 September, organised by the local tenants association. At this, local

MP Nellist outlined his strategy to defeat the Poll Tax. This was based on these three points:

1) Labour councils must refuse to implement the tax; 2) Local authority unions must be won to a position of non-cooperation; 3) (and most importantly to Nellist) there must be a mass refusal to pay.

The tenants association has subsequently taken up the non-payment policy with residents by canvassing around the Hillfields area door to door asking people to sign a petition calling on the city council not to bring in the tax and supporting Nellist in his stand on signing the non-payment pledge.

Lately the canvass has been collecting signatures on a pledge not to pay and to help build an anti-Poll Tax union. The response has been good and resulted in a public meeting on 23 November. This was attended by about fifty people and marked the public launch of the Hillfields Anti-Poll Tax Union (APTU). This is an excellent opportunity to build an effective anti-Poll Tax campaign. The main problems facing activists in this campaign are likely to be keeping the APTU as a fully democratic body and fighting for strike action to back up the policy of non-payment. ■

WHAT WE ARGUE

- ◆ The Poll Tax is a generalised attack on the whole working class and its gains. It must therefore be met with a generalised response from the whole class
- ◆ This means a national anti-Poll Tax campaign with branches in every locality committed to:
 - ◆ a mass campaign of non-registration and non payment
 - ◆ non-compliance by Labour councils, local authority and other workers with the Poll Tax laws and their implementation
- ◆ strike action in defence of any workers or councillors victimised for non-compliance
- ◆ a council of action in every locality bringing together delegates from public and private sector unions, tenants, Labour Parties and oppressed groups
- ◆ a general strike to smash the Poll Tax

organise for non-compliance.

Workers involved in its collection should be called on to refuse to do such work. This means local government workers boycotting anything to do with implementing the tax. It also means postal workers refusing to handle mail and civil servants refusing to deduct the tax from wages and dole money.

The moment a single ratepayer, councillor or council worker is victimised or prosecuted there should be the biggest possible strike action involving private as well as public sector workers. Once there are workers fighting back—on an estate, in a council, in a whole city—it will be easier to widen the action.

Whilst we must fight to commit every Labour Party, trade union and community organisation to this strategy this is not enough. We need councils of action against the Poll Tax. The Labour Party and even the trade unions organise only a fraction of those whose livelihoods will be hit by the Poll Tax.

Councils of action, with delegates directly elected and recallable by workplaces and estates, can draw in and organise the widest layers of workers. They can ensure control of strike action is taken out of the hands of the union bureaucrats. In a general strike they can begin to organise and direct society, posing not just the possibility of overthrowing Thatcher, but of replacing her with working class power.

Every element of this strategy must be directed towards mobilising for a general strike. The working class must seize every opportunity, every face-off between government and the unions, councils and ratepayers, to launch this action.

We must demand the TUC calls a general strike from 3 April 1989, the day the tax comes into force in Scotland. Even though the Poll Tax spearheads her offensive, a strategy of defiance and strike action can turn it into Thatcher's "bridge too far". ■

IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM



Workers and the SNP

THE VICTORY of the SNP in Govan has been hailed as a turning point in British politics by many Scottish nationalists. They see it as an indication of the desire of the Scottish masses to be freed from the repressive chains of English rule. But are the Scots an oppressed nation, and does this nationalism represent a progressive break with the British state?

Marxists recognise that nationalism means different things in different conditions. Where one nation is oppressed by another, such as the occupation of Ireland by British imperialism, the nationalism of the masses is the product of justified hostility to the denial of their national rights.

But all nationalism contains a reactionary kernel in the imperialist epoch. With a world market and world division of labour all strictly national programmes for capitalist development as well as for socialism, are doomed to failure. This reactionary element becomes the predominant feature of nationalism where a nation is not oppressed.

Chauvinism

In Britain for example, the nationalism of the English is thoroughly reactionary, representing a desire to retain barriers to the integration of other nationalities and cultures. It is used by the ruling class to create the atmosphere of chauvinism and racism which helps the bosses to justify their brutal exploitation of other nations and races.

What of Scottish nationalism? The Scottish people are clearly a nation, and revolutionaries defend their right to self determination. If the Scottish masses decide that they wish to separate from an oppressive British state then we would support their right to do so. However, we do not advocate support for this "national" struggle in principle.

Scotland is not a nation oppressed by imperialism. It is a nation which settled its relation to the English centuries ago. The Scottish ruling class decided to throw their lot in with the British bourgeoisie to mutually benefit from the exploitation of their own working class and the colonies.

The Scottish bourgeoisie are as much involved in British imperialism as any other section of the ruling class of England, Scotland and Wales. Unlike Ireland, Scotland is not a nation that was forcibly divided and exploited by the British. It was a voluntary union.

Diversion

But revolutionaries are not neutral on the question of separation. Even if a substantial movement amongst workers were calling for separation, we would argue within the working class against this idea. Whilst recognising and supporting their right to decide to separate it would be false for revolutionaries to abstain from the argument about its virtues. To direct the struggle of the Scottish workers now towards a fight for separation would be a diversion from the key issues of the class struggle which face English, Welsh and Scottish workers alike.

The fact that there are a minority of Tory MPs in Scotland encourages many workers there to think that their future would be better served without the shackles of the Westminster parliament. But it is the unbridled clamour of the bosses for profits that results in

the closure of shipyards, mines and factories, that constantly tries to reduce public expenditure and condemns millions of youth to slave labour schemes or unemployment, not any special oppression of the Scottish people. The problems of Scottish workers are shared by many workers in regions of England, particularly Merseyside and the North East.

A Scottish parliament based on the continued rule of the bosses, as the SNP proposes, offers nothing for the Scottish workers except an unnecessary struggle against a false enemy, and a ruinous alliance with a false ally. The enemy of the Scottish workers is not the English people, but the British ruling class. And their real allies are not the Scottish bourgeois and petit bourgeois nationalists of the SNP, but the English and Welsh workers.

The SNP is a bourgeois nationalist party committed to a cross-class strategy based on the idea that all Scottish people are oppressed by the English state and its Tory government. This form of class collaboration, however militant their tactics may sound in any individual fight, is disastrous for the working class. It means subordinating their independent class interests to those of the Scottish bosses.

Although the Govan by-election result was a defeat for Kinnock's do-nothing approach to the Poll Tax campaign, the SNP is not a progressive alternative.



Jim Sillars, the successful SNP candidate, is no advance on Bob Gillespie, failed Labour party man, despite the more radical noises he made during the campaign. Whilst Sillars is certainly on the left of the SNP, coming originally from Labour and the Scottish Labour Party, he is no friend of the workers. His tactics for fighting the Poll Tax are based on a more populist version of Labour's protest plans.

The SNP are not interested in fighting for the interests of Scottish workers, they just want to use the Poll Tax to raise their own political perspective for separation. They didn't get involved in the NHS campaign in January and February, since there was no specific "Scottish" angle, despite the fact that it was just as much an attack on the interests of the working class in Scotland as elsewhere. Sillars is no different from the rest. In opposition to a united campaign against the Poll tax in the labour movement, he talked of "the unity of the graveyard with the STUC".

Of course it would be a graveyard for Sillars if the Scottish workers united in the unions for an all out struggle against the Tories and their reactionary legal and economic attacks. Nationalists would be pushed aside as the working class discovered their true allies, the workers in the rest of Britain. ■



John Harris/IFL

and Wales the
in Scotland.
and Mike Burton

IGHT

else scared into paying by seeing other non-payers fined or imprisoned. "Community action" alone will not defeat the Poll Tax, but, organised properly, it will be a weapon we can use.

The Tories may well tolerate a number of people dodging the Poll Tax—after all they will be votes lost to Labour. But they will hate the idea of thousands of workers openly defying the law in an organised fashion, because such defiance will be crucial in building workers' confidence to take strike action.

Labour councils must be forced into non-compliance with the Poll Tax. They must refuse to buy the computers, allocate the staff or collect information for the tax. Council workers, and other workers involved in implementation, must



The longest war

The SWP and Ireland: twenty wasted years

OVER 500 people attended the "Time To Go" (TTG) "briefing" conference in London on 19 November. Entitled "Twenty Wasted Years" it was certainly another wasted opportunity to reorient Irish solidarity work in an anti-imperialist direction.

Delegates were treated to platform speakers who reflected the LCI organisers' obsession with a "popular" campaign on Ireland. In other words they reflected the popular prejudices of the wider population in Britain, tired of the cost and the casualties, but seeking a solution that stabilises imperialism's class rule in Northern Ireland without a British troop presence.

Consequently Bob Rowthorn lectured us about how immediate withdrawal would be "irresponsible" and proffering an "orderly negotiated withdrawal" as occurred in Zimbabwe! In place of a serious strategy that centered on how to force the Tories into a retreat from the Six Counties at the hands of the progressive forces, Ken Livingstone reassured everyone that "as with all colonial situations we have been involved in Britain will eventually go".

Such rubbish ought to have been roundly criticised. But the usual fixed churning ensured that the voices of opposition were silenced. Praise was heaped on the campaign from the floor. Few were more fulsome than the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) delegates.

Yes, strange as it may seem, the SWP were well represented and clearly at home with the organisers. The SWP have done nothing in recent years to build the solidarity movement in the trade unions, yet trade union delegates with a record of work were not allowed to speak while leading members of the SWP like Pat Stack (though not delegated from a trade union!) were given plenty of time.

All this may seem churlish since at least they were present. Yet the role of the SWP was to give left cover for the whole business.

They welcomed the initiative, and urged that what we needed was a "campaign like the ANL" on Ireland and TTG should be it. Perhaps the comrades think we should build it around the music of U2 and the Pogues!

Ireland is not a popular issue and despair and bewilderment expressed in opinion polls should not be mistaken for a progressive sentiment towards Irish self-determination. If it were so why has there been no mass indignation expressed at the gag on Sinn Fein or the end of the right to silence?

The SWP's record on Ireland is frankly rotten. In 1969 when the British troops went into Ireland in August they explained to their readers "The contradictory role of British troops gives Catholics time to arm against further Orange attacks" (SW 18.9.69) and failed to raise the demand for troops out now. This, when the whole aim of Labour sending in the troops was to respond to the RUC's call for help in subduing the Bogside, an anti-unionist enclave.

The SWP have carried on that

record: fine principles and correct slogans . . . until they are needed in the face of events. So in 1972 after Bloody Sunday the International Socialists (IS: the SWP before 1977) could proclaim their unconditional support for the IRA. Three weeks later, after the IRA bombed the army barracks at Aldershot, they dropped their unconditional defence and lectured their readers about the problems of "individual terrorism".

For two years after that they refused to do any solidarity work despite the formation and growth of the Troops Out Movement. It was no accident that these were years of heightened bombing campaigns by the IRA.

These were also years of mass trade union struggle against the Heath Tory government and the rapid growth of the IS. But they refused to confront the social democratic prejudices of the large numbers of workers that came into their ranks at this time, refused to educate them in the Leninist doctrines of the distinction between the justified violence of an oppressed people and that of an oppressor. They refused to stand against the stream of popular revulsion when bombs went off and concentrate the bulk of their attack on the British rulers.

This economism bore fruit with the SWP's capitulation to the hysteria surrounding the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974 when *Socialist Worker's* front page blared out "Stop The Bombings" and underneath, "Troops Out Now". When a staunch defence of the IRA's right to fight back was needed above all else, the SWP were found wanting. A similar story was repeated in 1983 after the Harrods bombing.

The SWP have been one of the largest far left groups in Britain and have therefore been in a position to do something consistently and in a principled fashion on Ireland in the British labour movement. But they have a poor record as a group (there are of course individual exceptions) in forcing the issue in the unions.

They rarely attend demonstrations in any numbers (unless like in 1979 the Young Liberals make a big show), often only sending paper sellers to marches such as Bloody Sunday or Internment anniversaries. In recent years these marches have often taken on added importance given they have been preceded by major events such as Enniskillen or the North London Barracks bombing.

The SWP do have a record of providing left cover for liberal or Labourite campaigns, glorifying their willingness to work with such forces but never, or rarely, having an independent revolutionary profile. In 1980 it was the Charter 80, which refused to support the H-block prisoners' demands for political status; in 1982 it was the Committee for Withdrawal from Ireland, now its Time To Go! Like the others the present one is destined to fail the test of events. The SWP are at the centre of this failure. Twenty wasted years indeed. ■



PLO recognises Israel

On 15 November the Palestine National Council formally recognised the right of the State of Israel to exist. This decision, argues David Green, represents a major setback in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination.

"MODERATION, flexibility, realism—that is our policy". So PLO leader Yasser Arafat told a press conference in the aftermath of November's historic meeting of the Palestine National Council (PNC).

And indeed the 338 delegates, drawn from all classes in Palestinian society, had gone further than ever before in abandoning the just claim of the Palestinian people to return to their land. By declaring an "independent Palestinian state" on the West Bank the PNC has settled for a state without a territory for a people without a land.

Much more significant is the price paid for this declaration. On the recommendation of Arafat and his Fatah faction, the PNC accepted United Nations resolution 242, which despite calling on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, acknowledges Israel's right to exist within "secure boundaries".

In place of continuing the struggle to liberate the whole of Palestine, it rejected the use of "force, violence and terrorism" even inside Israel.

Foolish

It would be foolish to interpret the PNC decision as if Arafat had foisted it on the West Bank Palestinians. The mass of West Bank and Gaza Strip Arabs greeted the decision. On the one hand they demanded some political fruit from their year long *intifadah*; on the other, years of Israeli occupation have made many despair of ever realising self-determination in the whole of Palestine, including the part now settled by the state of Israel.

Even so the PNC went further than the representatives of the *intifadah* wished in compromising with Israel. For example, they refused to declare the Palestinian state should exist within the borders of the original 1947 UN partition plan, an area significantly larger than the present West Bank.

Arafat's recognition of Israel's legitimacy is designed to bring pressure to bear on Israel from US and European imperialism by conceding what they have asked for over many years.

The PNC was wrong to recognise the state of Israel's right to exist. Though Israeli Jews

are indeed a nation with a distinct culture and identity, Marxists can never confer legitimacy on this state precisely because it is an oppressor state.

Founded in 1948 its very formation involved a denial of the legitimate national rights of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who occupied those lands. Today over a million and a half Palestinians are living with the consequence of the mass expulsions that took place then.

Betrayal

So long as Israel is an exclusively Jewish state it will continue to be oppressive. To renounce the struggle to smash the Zionist state is simultaneously a betrayal of the Palestinian diaspora and—regardless of the momentary jubilation of the West Bank Palestinians—a stab in the back for those in the Occupied Territories.

The reality is that a semi-autonomous Palestinian entity on the West Bank, subject to the economic, political and military control of Israel and under the leadership of pro-capitalist PLO "moderates" would greatly assist imperialism in stabilising the situation in the Middle East, the better to secure its exploitation of the region. Genuine self-determination for the Palestinians will not find support from Washington, Westminster or Tel Aviv.

Even if imperialism has either the will or power to demand concessions from Israel in return for the PNC decision, the results of the Israeli elections only underline how intransigent the Israeli bourgeoisie will be in the face of such a demand. It is very likely that the next Israeli government will be a coalition of conservative, religious and ultra-rightist fanatic parties.

The new administration's priority has already been made clear: to clamp down hard on the Palestinian *intifadah*. The daily paper *Yediot Aharonot* has reported plans to liquidate a number of Palestinian refugee camps on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

By returning a Likud dominated government on the back of a sharp right-wing shift in the conscious-

ness of Oriental Jews (evidenced by a 50% increase in the representation of the religious parties) the electorate rejected the Israeli Labour Party's policy of negotiating a partial Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Any discord within the Zionist camp as a result of giving the Orthodox Religious parties more say in domestic political life should not blind us to the fact that there is likely to be little comfort in this for the Palestinians.

The far-right parties—Tehiya, Moledet and Tsomet—took a total of 8 seats, making them an important ally for Shamir. Tehiya's leader, Professor Ne'eman, in response to the recent bus bomb attack, has demanded that the Arab city of Jericho be razed to the ground.

Moledet's key policy is for the enforced transfer of Palestinians to the east of the River Jordan. It is a sign of how unlikely it is that the Palestinians can expect concessions from the new government that Likud have offered Moledet's Rehavam Ze'evi the post of Deputy Defence minister in the proposed coalition.

It is with the *intifadah* not the PNC's decision that the best short term hope of the Palestinians lie. To date the *intifadah* has claimed over 400 Palestinian lives but it has been kept within the confine of a heroic protest.

Audacious

Hurling stones and audaciously raising the PLO flag under the nose of the occupying army will not seriously discomfort Israel. Within the Occupied Territories a policy of strikes and boycotts must be stepped up. Within Israel the Arab minority must adopt the same policy.

Both together must build an army of agitators throughout the ranks of the Arab proletariat of the region to force the Arab state to provide active solidarity with the Palestinians.

Only this road—not diplomatic pressure from imperialism—will ensure the most complete expression of the Palestinian peoples' self-determination in the form of a workers' state in Palestine. ■

Brazil's strike wave and the Workers Party

Last month the Sarney regime in Brazil unleashed the army against steel strikers. At the same time the left wing Workers Party won control of a number of key municipal governments. **Stephen Foster and Saladin Meckled** assess the significance of these events.

THE LEADER of Brazil's Workers Party (PT) Luis Inacio Da Silva—Lula as he is popularly known—welcomed the new Brazilian constitution in the following terms: "I think the text is a good one and the constitution's recognition of our right to strike is a big step forward."

His optimism was premature. On 9 November the yawning gap between the constitution and the realities of capitalism was cruelly exposed. That day the army moved against strikers at the Volta Redonda plant of the National Steel Company. Three strikers were killed. Scores were wounded.

Despite the enormous odds stacked against them, many of the 25,000 strikers bravely fought back. Using sticks and stones they tried to defend themselves and their plant from the troops. Workers from nearby districts joined the battle, erecting barricades to fight the armed forces.

The steel strike and the response of President José Sarney's government are testimony to the deep crisis engulfing Brazil today. The struggle in steel was part of a massive strike wave against his austerity programme, which included wage freezes and cuts in the public sector. These attacks are Sarney's way of dealing with the profound problems confronting the Brazilian economy.

The country is suffering from chronic hyper-inflation—700% so far and predicted to be 1000% by the end of the year. A massive drain on the economy is the foreign debt which at \$121.3 billion is second only to the USA's. Repayments this year of \$11 billion mean that the public sector is to be savaged.

Freeze

The regime of capitalist exploitation has disastrous consequences not merely for the livelihoods of the Brazilian workers but also for their lives. Industry has one of the worst records for working conditions in the world. Each year 4,500 workers are killed, 800,000 injured and 30,000 permanently disabled.

To curb the budget deficit and control inflation Sarney introduced a two month wage freeze. Wages had been index-linked with inflation through the "Plano Brasser" (URP) which was established in 1987.

The freeze came after finance minister Mailson Nobrega met with the IMF for talks in mid-February 1988. Along with the wage freeze Sarney announced the "elimination" of 40,000 public sector jobs. The justification for this was that it was the overspending of the public sector that was to blame for inflation and the deficit.

The implementation of the wage freeze by Sarney, facing opposition even from within his own cabinet, provoked a strike in April of 200,000 state employees in Brasilia. A two day national strike of 1.5 million workers followed in May.

Not only did these strikes represent anger at the wage freeze but also defiance of the strike ban in "essential" state industries (not yet removed by the constitution). The military were sent into the power

plants to prevent São Paulo being thrown into darkness.

Early May also saw the strike of Rio de Janeiro state workers for a wage rise of 60%, described by employers as "impossible", and São Paulo metal workers strike for 15%.

The official bankruptcy of Rio in October (Brazil is composed of Federal States) brought more strikes for pay increases in the public sector. More recently the November steel workers' strike, the Petrobras (oil workers) strike and a strike for five weeks by one million civil servants, have all been staged against Sarney's austerity drive. Right wing leaders in the yellow federation, the CGT, have, in the face of opposition from the more militant federation the CUT, tried to derail the militancy by signing a "social pact" with Sarney.

The brutal intervention of the army is a warning to all workers who place their faith in the bourgeois constitution as the means of their salvation. The constitution drawn up by the Constituent Assembly convened in 1986 after 21 years of military rule by successive dictatorships, consists of 246 articles.

But the rights for workers enshrined by the constitution are already being subverted by the bosses. Democracy in imperialised Brazil, clashes with the economic regime of capitalist super-exploitation. For the poor peasants too,

the blocking of the promised land reform signalled that capitalism will not satisfy their basic needs.

Any gains made by the workers will have to be fought for by the workers and will only be consolidated by the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government.

Elections

Clearly winning the forces of the CUT to such an overtly political perspective is vital if it is to be realised. But to achieve this revolutionaries will be obliged to relate to the political party supported by the CUT, the Workers Party (PT) led by Lula. The PT was formed in 1979 out of the mass strikes and workers' struggles during the late 1970s.

It has developed into a genuine mass workers' party (600,000 members), has recently won control of a number of key cities, including São Paulo in municipal elections and comprises several different political tendencies, from the centrist left through to the reformist left.

As such it does not yet have a finished character. The pressure of the masses within the party make it possible to win it to a consistently revolutionary programme. This should be the goal of genuine Brazilian Trotskyists. But the danger of a reformist takeover

of the party, and its transformation into an openly reformist party is increasing.

In the first place it is clear that Lula is aiming to prevent, in a classic economic manner, the direct pressure of the trade unions making itself felt in a political manner. On the question of the CUT having formal links with the PT he argued:

"The debate is between those that want the CUT to function as a trade union body and those that want it to function as a political party. I belong to that part of the CUT which thinks the CUT should be a trade union and not a political party."

The real question is not whether the CUT should be a party. It should not. But it should form the base of the PT, it should affiliate to that party and exercise direct influence over it. In other words it should play a political and not merely an economic role. For Lula to confine it to a purely economic role would signal the triumph of the reformist idea that unions only deal with bread and butter issues in the workplace, while parties get on with the business of politics.

Worse, there are clear signs that Lula is seeking to limit the scope of the PT to purely parliamentary politics. His eyes are set on the presidential elections next year in which he will be a candidate. He has therefore been insisting against militant elements in the

PT, that the municipal elections prove the viability of a reformist perspective:

"... we fought the elections under the rules of the capitalist game. We will govern within capitalist parameters using the constitution".

It would be possible, he said, to: "Change radically people's thinking and even convince capitalists of the need to redistribute profits."

This recycled social-democratic phrasemongering is not what the steelworkers shot at by the army need. That army is poised, as one of its generals recently stated, to model itself on the murderous Chilean army of Pinochet. As in Chile, reformism will lead to bloody defeat.

At the moment the left in the PT—grouped around figures like the new mayor of São Paulo Luiza Erundina da Souza, and deputy leader José Genoino—are militant, but confused as to their strategy. They have supported class struggle and broken with guerrillaism, but their "third way" for Brazil does not embody a consistent revolutionary programme.

Militancy

The task of the day is to win the PT to a revolutionary programme that will enable it to direct the current militancy towards a revolutionary socialist solution to Brazil's crises. In the immediate situation this means fighting for:

- Massive pay increases to compensate for hyper-inflation, and a sliding scale of wages on the basis of a workers' cost of living index.
- Against all cuts in the public sector—repudiate the foreign debt, nationalise the imperialist holdings, the banks and the key sectors of industry with no compensation and under workers' control.
- For workers' defence squads—no reliance on the army.
- Unite the struggles through the building of joint committees of action, resurrect the factory committees movement, build the nucleus of soviets.
- For a thoroughgoing agrarian revolution to ease the misery of the peasants.
- For a general strike to smash Sarney's austerity drive and mobilise the masses for a direct struggle for power.
- Down with Sarney! For a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government.

If the struggle to direct the PT towards these goals fail then Trotskyists in Brazil must not flinch from the tasks of building a revolutionary party that will fight for this programme. ■



IN El Salvador ASTTEL, the telecom workers' union, in common with the rest of the country's trade union movement, is under attack from the US's puppet regime of Duarte. ASTTEL represents over 4,800 employees of ANTEL (the telecom company in El Salvador) 82% of its workforce.

ANTEL itself is completely militarised, being run by the Defence Minister's brother Mauricio Vides Casanova. Employees in the countryside are forced to work up to 96 hours a week for the average wage of \$100 per month. Some work for nothing in the hope of being offered a job, a promise which can be indefinitely delayed.

In a brief visit to Britain, ASTTEL's representative in Europe, Sergio Chavez, spoke to members of the National Communication Union (NCU) in central London and described the difficulties he was having in getting support from the NCU and the Union of Communication Workers (UCW). The PTTI (the international grouping of postal and telecom unions) refuses to recog-

El Salvador's postal workers

BY AN NCU MEMBER

nise ASTTEL and favours ASTA, a stooge yellow union set up by the American Institute for Free Labour Development (AIFLD), which is funded by the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the US labour federation the AFL-CIO. ASTA has only eight members!

Both the NCU and the UCW are affiliated to the PTTI. The UCW bureaucrats refused to even meet Sergio Chavez on the grounds that the PTTI did not recognise ASTTEL. And this despite ASTTEL members being murdered, tortured, imprisoned and subject to death threats.

Moreover, the PTTI General Secretary, Stefan Nedzynski, in his report of a visit to El Salvador in April this year, attacked ASTTEL as "part of the communist trade union and political movement"—the equivalent of the death sentence in El Salvador.

This sinister aspect of ASTA, ANTEL, the PTTI and the AIFLD is reinforced by the fact that the Defence Minister and his brother are known to be active in the death squads, and ASTA gained recognition from the PTTI by means of forged returns supplied by ANTEL.

Recently ASTTEL member Jesus Rosales Vazquez was abducted and the international secretary Jose Mazariago has been subjected to repeated death threats. In November 1985 the two sons of Humberto Centeno (ASTTEL Secretary General) were arrested and tortured and are being used to blackmail him into dropping demands on ANTEL.

Members of the NCU and the UCW must fight for an investigation of why the international federation recognises ASTA and not ASTTEL. What are the links between the US unions, labour institutions, ASTA and US Intelligence

and who is in the conspiracy? Demand that the PTTI recognise ASTTEL to give it access to support from its sister telecom unions around the world. Letters of protest should be sent to:

Ing Jose Napoleon Duarte
Presidente de El Salvador
Casa Presidencial
San Salvador
El Salvador

Cnel Mauricio Vides Casanova
Presidente de ANTEL
San Salvador
El Salvador

Please send copies of your letters to Sergio Chavez who will give you any additional details you need.

Address: Sergio Chavez
Forhabningsholms Alle 13A,
3tv 1904
Frederiksberg C
Denmark.



the MRCI

NEWS FROM THE SECTIONS

IRISH WORKERS GROUP

Successful picket against fascist historian

IN THE small hours of Saturday morning, 26 November, the words of the "Internationale" could be heard ringing out in central Dublin. The reason? Earlier on Friday evening some 600 pickets had gathered at Trinity College to greet the fascist historian David Irving who was in Dublin to whitewash Hitler's role in the Holocaust.

The pickets—drawn from students and campus trade unionists—had been brought together after a joint initiative from the Socialist Students Society and an IWG comrade from a staff union. An initial proposal from the SWM to the Student Assembly to ban Irving was amended to get the students to "no platform" the apologist for Nazism.

A subsequent organising meeting between the students and trade unionists attracted 80 people and they distributed 1,000 leaflets. As a result of the large angry picket very few people got inside to hear the Nazi-lover. Those that did were treated to a non-stop barrage of noise and attempts to get inside by the demonstrators. The college authorities were forced to call off the meeting!

Several hundred stayed on to imprison Irving in the building so that he would miss a scheduled TV interview and press conference.

This was an excellent initiative and one that the left should repeat wherever Irving tries to preach his poisonous propaganda. Fascism is not simply a set of fake ideas to be combatted by debate and counter-propaganda. It is a movement aimed at mobilising the enraged petit bourgeoisie and backward workers to smash the organised labour movement.

It abuses democratic rights in order to gather together its initial forces. It steels them through violent racist attacks on blacks and other ethnic groups. We must mobilise the labour movement to prevent it doing either of these things. David Irving won't go back to Dublin in a hurry!■

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Trotskyist International 2

THE SECOND issue of *Trotskyist International* is published this month. The English language journal of the MRCI reprints the MRCI's Theses on Zionism and Palestine and Theses on Nuclear Power adopted at our last delegate meeting. In addition it carries a major study of the politics and history of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International since its foundation in 1963. Translations of three leaflets given out this summer by our fraternal group Poder Obrero and an archive piece from the FI in 1948 on the French miners' strike complete the issue.

Our French section—Pouvoir Ouvrier—have also just published issue number 13 of their journal with articles on the French class struggle, Kanaky, Gorbachev and much more. If you read French, read this!

To mark the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Fourth International the monthly bulletin of the Austrian section—Arbeiter Standpunkt—included a lengthy theoretical supplement tracing the origins and history of Trotsky's International.

Other articles include an overview of the economic position in Austria and the need to prepare for serious attacks on public sector employment and conditions which recent budgetary measures have only postponed until next year; an analysis of the recent attacks on Iraqi Kurds, and an article on working class resistance to "market socialism" in Eastern Europe.■

TWENTY-TWO THESES

New English and Swedish editions

A NEW, amended, English edition of the MRCI's "Twenty-two Theses in Defence of Trotskyism" has just been completed. It clearly demarcates the boundary between revolutionary communism and the centrist errors of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International.

The Theses also now exist in Swedish to add to the French, Spanish and German translations. To get your copy write to: MRCI c/o Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Fund drive

LAST MONTH we launched a £3,000 fund drive to help prepare for our 1989 Congress. Thanks this month for £282 received from *Workers Power* supporters and readers as well as those who contributed to a collection at the Workers Power central London meeting on Peru. Keep it coming!■

The Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

The MRCI
Arbeiterstandpunkt (Austria)
Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany)
Irish Workers Group
Pouvoir Ouvrier (France)
Workers Power Group (Britain)

Fraternal groups:
Poder Obrero (Peru)
Guia Obrera (Bolivia)
These groups are in the process of discussions with the MRCI with the aim of becoming affiliated sections.

NAMIBIA/ANGOLA

An imperialist peace

THE PEACE settlement in south west Africa holds serious dangers for the peoples of Angola and Namibia. Their long resistance to South African imperialism, combined with the activities of the Cuban troops, has forced a retreat by Pretoria. But the deal carved out between the imperialist powers and the USSR still leaves the South Africans in charge.

Under the terms of the agreement now being ratified by the South African, Cuban and Angolan governments, Namibia will get independence in exchange for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. UN troops will oversee a ceasefire between SWAPO, the Namibian nationalist movement, and the occupying South African force. There is no doubt that SWAPO will win an overwhelming victory if free elections follow as promised.

Occupation

But will this mean real independence for Namibia after its 100 years of colonial rule and occupation? The agreement leaves Pretoria in control of Namibia's main port, the strategic deep-sea harbour of Walvis Bay.

The South African Defence Force (SADF) will still be sitting on the border. The experience of Mozambique, which continues to suffer from the terrorism of the SADF-sponsored Renamo forces, shows that no real peace is on offer while the apartheid regime exists.

If a SWAPO government were to try and take uranium and diamond resources entirely under its control, "de-stabilising" would be easy for imperialism while South African forces lie so close at hand,

and in charge of the main port. As it is, the likelihood is that SWAPO will be forced to make arrangements with De Beers and RTZ which will ensure continued profits for the multi-nationals.

Angola will also remain under the shadow of South African imperialism. There is no definite agreement about the future for Jonas Savimbi's reactionary UNITA forces. UNITA has been acting as an agent for South Africa inside Angola for over a decade, backed up by "covert" US support.

If South African forces do withdraw from Namibia, it will certainly be difficult to continue the existing level of supplies and joint activity with UNITA. But a South African spokesman in Geneva made clear to western reporters that while the spirit of the agreement on "non-interference" would be observed, this would not necessarily mean an end to support for UNITA; "it might not be implemented in quite that way".

The removal of Cuban troops will thus leave both Namibia and Angola dangerously exposed.

Pretoria will be the main beneficiary from the deal. Its occupation of Namibia and war against Angola has cost it dear in financial and human terms. It has paid \$2.4 billion in the past ten years to support Namibia, besides its military expenditure. Now it is asking the "international community" to make up that figure in aid as a price of its withdrawal!

The SADF has been finding it increasingly hard to stem the tide of popular resistance in Namibia. Over the last eighteen months, the struggle has developed significantly in workplaces and amongst the youth. Students sus-

tained long and widespread school boycotts and in June, over a third of Namibian workers took part in a two day national Stay-Away (General Strike). At the core of this resistance has stood the SWAPO-affiliated National Union of Namibian Workers, solidly based in the uranium and diamond mines.

But the SADF had also suffered military setbacks. The numbers of boys coming home in boxes has led to disquiet even in loyal National Party voting South African families. Botha was forced to ban and silence the End Conscription Campaign earlier this year. Cuban and Angolan forces inflicted a strategic defeat on the SADF in March at Cuito Cuanavale.

Since then, Pretoria's diplomats have shown a new urgency in their search for a deal. This should have been the moment for the liberation movements and their backers to press home their advantage and give new heart to the black opposition inside the apartheid state itself. Instead, Botha is being let off the hook. Why has this happened?

Devastated

Of course, the Angolan and Namibian populations are hungry for peace. South African imperialism has devastated their homes and their land. But the resistance in Namibia has shown no sign of waning. The main factor behind the deal is that the USSR is insisting on a Cuban pull-out.

This is part of the Gorbachev strategy of peaceful coexistence at all costs. Specifically it is at the expense of the liberation movements and nationalist governments that the USSR had previously been prepared to underwrite. Moscow has financed the presence of the 60,000 Cuban troops and provided the MIG fighter planes which have helped win the air war in southern Angola.

Although the Geneva agreement is strictly speaking between Angola, South Africa and Cuba, the USA and USSR have been acting as brokers. Deputy Soviet Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin was in Geneva in the run up to the deal, helping US negotiator Chester Crocker keep all sides at the negotiating table.

For some months now, Soviet experts have been propagandising for a withdrawal: "We are not going to go on spending money on armed forces for nothing", argues Yevgeny Tarabin of the Institute of African studies in Moscow. "Angola has cost us billions. What for? We need the money for other purposes."

The Angolan and Namibian people will be the losers out of this diplomatic stitch up. Socialists internationally should be clear: the Cuban troops ought not to leave them exposed to the predatory apartheid state. Their presence in Angola should be determined and controlled by the Angolan masses themselves. And the fight for genuine independence and self determination in Namibia must continue—until South African imperialism is thrown out altogether.■



Angolan troops, left exposed by Kremlin diplomacy

DURING HIS visit to India Gorbachev heard the news that nationalists all over the USSR were demonstrating and rioting. "It is *perestroika*", he announced, in a bid to gloss over the massive problems the protests pose for the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Gorbachev's attempt to carry through a reform programme to try and dynamise the Soviet economy faces enormous obstacles. Many of his reforms are meeting with opposition from the sections of the bureaucracy who stand to lose from them. At the same time Gorbachev knows he has to pacify the bureaucracy as a whole. He is, after all, a true born child of that caste. To this end he is carrying through his reforms within definite limits. None of them challenge the fundamental power of the ruling caste.

The reforms he has promised have aroused the expectations of whole swathes of Soviet society. Those expectations, however, must be realised within the limited framework that maintaining the key bureaucratic power structures demands. The result is that he is unleashing forces that threaten to get out of control. The present crisis over the nationalities illustrates this perfectly.

Under *perestroika* many nationalities hoped to achieve far greater autonomy. Nationalist expectations rose in the Baltic states—Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The Armenians of Nagorny Karabakh, an autonomous district within the Azerbaijan republic, demanded the right to become part of the Armenian republic. In the latter case a massive strike wave last February and bitter fighting between Armenians and Azerbaijanis left forty people dead. Now Georgia has joined in the chorus of appeals for autonomy.

Most recently the Estonian republic demanded the right of veto

As the nationalist upsurge continues to rock the Kremlin Arthur Merton looks at the rights and wrongs of the current struggles

USSR Nationalism on the march

over Moscow policy and riots flared once again in Azerbaijan. When it was announced that an Azerbaijani was to be sentenced to death for his part in the February events pogroms were launched against Armenians in the Azerbaijani cities of Kirovabad and Nickhichevan. Thousands of Armenians had to be evacuated as inter-communal strife began to lead to deaths and injuries. The tension was heightened by the fact that plans to build an aluminium factory in Nagorny Karabakh as a concession to the Armenians, would result in the desecration of an Azerbaijani Muslim shrine.

To contain the outbreak of nationalism earlier this year Gorbachev promised reform. The constitution was to be amended, this month, to allow for greater national autonomy. But, the bureaucratic limits set in advance on re-



form meant that the amendments proposed were actually a step back from the formal constitutional right of secession. They guaranteed greater central control. Having promised much, but delivered nothing in terms of concessions, Gorbachev found himself confronted by the new nationalist

explosion. Such are the perils of *perestroika*.

Not surprisingly he has returned to the more standard methods of the bureaucracy in dealing with the riots and protests. In Armenia and Azerbaijan the troops have been sent in, curfews imposed and martial law declared. Against the

the main opposition party, Bandaranaike's SLFP are actively conniving with the JVP and have the latter's support for Bandaranaike in the presidential election.

In truth, despite the killings of UNP government figures, most of the victims this year have been members of the United Socialist Alliance (USA) a popular front coalition of the main left parties and a bourgeois nationalist party called the SLMP.

They are Sinhalese forces themselves and have done as much in the past as anyone to fan the flames of Sinhala chauvinism; now they are being killed in its name because of their support for provincial councils and the Accord. Nevertheless, the USA remains a reformist critic of the government's pro-imperialist policies and this is why Jayawardene tolerates the JVP's murderous campaign; quite simply, these terror gangs are doing the bourgeoisie's job.

Yet at the same time the JVP has growing influence in sections of the armed forces and any further deterioration in the situation may see the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie resort officially to military Bonapartism or at least to a government with JVP participation.

Why else would the UNP government lift the ban on the JVP in May this year in the middle of assassinations of key government officials? The JVP has all the potential for being the nucleus of Sinhalese fascism.

This is a grim period for the forces of the left and the organised trade union movement. Sinhalese workers must resist the brutal attempts of the JVP to enforce strike action for racist objectives; workers' defence militias are needed now.

The poison of Sinhala chauvinism must be cut out of the trade unions and the attacks of the crazed petit bourgeois gangs of the JVP recognised for what they are: attempts to divide and subdue the exploited masses of Sri Lanka for the Sinhalese bourgeoisie. ■

Estonians a propaganda campaign has begun to use lies, rumours and threats to tame the protests.

There is no doubt at all that, under the regime of Stalinism, the USSR is a prison house of nations. The formal right of republics to secede is an empty one. The bureaucracy's control of the armed forces sees to that. In the Baltic states Russification and immigration by Russians have both been used to destroy the national identities of those countries.

And in the South Gorbachev is refusing any real concessions to the four million Armenians, fearful, as he is, of upsetting the region's fifty million Muslims.

In such circumstances revolutionary Trotskyists, as part of the programme of political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy, demand the real right to national independence for the republics if they want it.

We condition this right only with stipulation that the post-capitalist property relations—the economic gains of the October 1917 revolution—be maintained. In immediate terms we demand that the bureaucracy satisfy the demand that Nagorny Karabakh be allowed to integrate with the Armenian republic.

However, at the present time we do not advocate that any of the nationalities exercise the right to secede. To direct the protests and anger of the workers into such a struggle is a diversion from the tasks of political revolution.

The road of nationalism offers no solution to the Soviet masses. Today nationalism is taking on different forms, but everywhere it threatens to pave the way to a disintegration of the USSR in a manner that will open the way for the restoration of capitalism.

In the Baltic states an assortment of party leaders attempting to gain control of the masses and, especially in Lithuania, the Catholic bishops, are coming together in "popular fronts". Their demands for autonomy are being coupled with demands for a full-scale return of the market, with economies and parliamentary systems modelled on capitalist Finland. For the Baltic states economic dislocation from the USSR will mean economic integration into the West German system.

In the South rival party bosses, also seeking to use the upsurges to enhance their own power within the bureaucracy, are fanning the flames of communal hatred. They are encouraging vicious pogroms by the Azerbaijanis and rabid Armenian chauvinism to serve their own reactionary ends.

These reactionary dangers will, if they are allowed to triumph, result in genocidal struggles, the revival of Islamic fundamentalism and capitalist restoration. The key task of the proletarian political revolution, therefore, is to defeat nationalism and the Stalinist bureaucracy that both provokes it, through its Great Russian chauvinism, and exploits it for its own purposes.

The whole Soviet proletariat must inscribe on its banner a firm opposition to Great Russian chauvinism, and against all national chauvinism it must advance an internationalist perspective. While guaranteeing the real right to secession it must prove in practice the ultimate irrelevance of such a right.

It must fight to overthrow the bureaucracy altogether and institute a democratically planned and integrated socialist economy based on satisfying the needs of the masses, not the privileges of the rulers. Only this way can the dead end of nationalism be avoided. ■

SRI LANKA Sinhala terror unleashed

BY MARK ABRAM

THE PRESIDENTIAL elections on 19 December in Sri Lanka will take place in the midst of a rapidly disintegrating political situation. Some 60,000 Indian troops still occupy the northern and eastern provinces, under the terms of the India-Sri Lanka Accord signed in July last year.

Since then nearly 2,000 civilians, over 800 Tamil guerrillas and 600 or so Indian troops have died in the attempt to pacify the Tamil people's struggle for self-determination against the Sinhalese majority state. In the south of the island the signing of the Accord was taken as the signal for the forces of Sinhalese chauvinism to begin a bloody campaign of political assassination against the UNP government responsible for signing it.

More importantly they have attacked the forces of the reformist and centrist left who have backed proposals for some form of limited autonomy for the northern and eastern provinces where Tamils are a majority. Already nearly 700 have fallen to this terror, the vast majority victims of the DJV, the military arm of the mis-named People's Liberation Front (JVP).

The JVP was formed in 1967 as a youth and student group from the Maoist left. In 1971 it led a failed

insurrection against the SLFP government and 10,000 of their supporters were butchered for the attempt in the pogrom that followed. Since that time however the JVP has degenerated, under its leader Rohana Wijeweera, into a rabid Sinhalese chauvinist party.

To understand this evolution it is necessary to remember what has happened to Sri Lanka in the intervening years. From 1956 until 1977 the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie undertook a path of national development that was common to many semi-colonies at the time; one that preached autarchy and nationalisation of the major economic holdings.

The failure of this strategy to develop Sri Lanka led in the mid-1970s to the Sinhalese ruling class throwing itself on the mercy of international finance capital. In came the multi-nationals with full freedom of profit repatriation and grants to tempt them to super-exploit the cheap labour.

In came the IMF bankers to oversee the privatisation of the state industries and dismantle the state welfare provisions—all done in order to obtain "credit-worthiness" and loans.

To cap it all in order to oversee the introduction of these measures, the 1977 elections of a UNP government and President were to prove

the last until this month. An increasingly Bonapartist regime was the only way the bourgeoisie could suppress the Tamils' developing struggle for national freedom as well as the trade union organised resistance of the Sinhalese working class.

Under President Jayawardene unemployment has reached 25%, welfare provisions have been abandoned. To divert the opposition from these attacks, however, the UNP—aided and abetted by all the forces of Sinhalese nationalism—have encouraged chauvinism and racism within the Sinhalese petit bourgeoisie and sections of the urban workers.

This has served to get popular support for the state terrorism deployed against the fight of the Tamils for self-determination and tie the Sinhala workers to their own bourgeoisie at a time when savage attacks on their wages and jobs have been made.

As the economic plight of Sri Lanka has worsened and the struggle of the Tamils passed into open armed warfare after 1984 so the chauvinism of the Sinhalese petit bourgeoisie has intensified. Now the JVP has the political initiative. Under the slogan "Save the Motherland" the JVP are stirring up communalist hatred. Meanwhile the UNP are refusing to condemn the JVP;

YOU HAVE to hand it to *Socialist Organiser* (SO). For bare-faced cheek they get first prize every time. In their 17 November issue they declare "We consider ourselves to be genuine Trotskyists". Everyone else who makes that claim are the heirs of right-opposition to Stalinism. This came at the end of an article which jettisoned a central plank of Trotsky's politics—his analysis of the Stalinist degeneration of the USSR!

At their AGM in November SO adopted a resolution asserting that Trotsky's degenerated workers' state theory is now "utterly nonsensical". They now call the USSR and Eastern Bloc "bureaucratic state monopoly" societies.

There are two strands to SO's argument that Trotsky's formula has "worn away" over the last forty years: the crimes committed under its name by degenerate fragments of the Fourth International (FI) and the hard "facts" of social developments in the USSR since Trotsky's death. Let's examine them in turn.

Stalinism

The first line of attack is a classic false polemic. During the late 1940s and early 1950s under the leadership of Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel and others, the FI did indeed thoroughly revise Trotsky's revolutionary understanding of Stalinism.

The impact of Stalinism's expansion into Eastern Europe after the Second World War, and its ability to bureaucratically overturn capitalist property relations in those states caused the FI leadership to politically adapt to Stalinist movements and parties.

The Tito-Stalin split in 1948 was the event which proved to be the turning point. Tito, it was argued, was a Stalinist who could on occasion have a "revolutionary orientation".

The partisan civil war in Yugoslavia was retrospectively dubbed a "proletarian revolution". Tito was no longer a counter-revolutionary Stalinist but a "Leninist" friend who needed the FI's advice. Trotsky's understanding that Stalinism was a counter-revolutionary obstacle to working class power was junked by the FI at its 1951 Congress. Dangerous programmatic conclusions naturally followed.

"Progressive wings"

There was no longer any need to build independent revolutionary parties if, under pressure from the masses, Stalinist parties could perform the same function. In degenerate workers' states political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy was no longer necessary if "progressive wings" of those bureaucracies could be pressurised to reform those states.

Hence Mandel and co gave political support to the Stalinist movements led by Mao in China, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam and Castro in Cuba.

But all this was a break with Trotsky's method and in conflict with his analysis of the USSR and Stalinism. *Workers Power* and the *IWG* have explained elsewhere (*Degenerated Revolution* 1983) how Trotsky's own analysis is a powerful explanatory weapon for the subsequent post-war expansion of Stalinism. Needless to say SO, like all shoddy polemicists do not attack Marxism at its strongest arguments but at its weakest.

That is why they choose to attack Mandel and ignore *Workers Power*/IWG. Let us be clear. Stalinism remained counter-revolutionary throughout the period 1947-53 in Eastern Europe and in

Another retreat from Trotskyism

Julian Scholefield examines *Socialist Organiser's* latest attempt to "deepen" Trotskyism

China. Its bureaucratic social overturns were carried out against the prevailing level of consciousness and organisation of the working class; indeed, proletarian political independence and its revolutionary threat to capitalism was derailed and crushed by Stalinism prior to these overturns.

That said, however, the fact of the overthrow of capitalism accomplished in these countries has created property relations that are, compared with capitalism, progressive and must be defended. This takes us into the second set of SO's arguments. To begin SO argue that the Soviet Union and the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe cannot be characterised as workers' states because "Nationalised property alone cannot define a social formation as a workers state". (SO No 380)

This is partly true. Marxists do not count nationalisation simply one point on a check-list for defining a society's class nature. We look further to try to understand concretely the purpose, nature and extent of nationalisation in any given case. In semi-colonial countries like Burma, Egypt, Ethiopia and Syria nationalisation programmes were carried out in order to serve the interests of capitalism and the capitalist class.

The bourgeoisies in those countries were often too weak to carry through industrialisation programmes on their own. So the state took on this task on their behalf. In those instances nationalisation did not mean expropriating capitalism.

Nationalisation was often only partial and the ex-owners were fully compensated. Nationalisation was seen as a "temporary" measure to boost the economy and "protect" it from imperialist interference.

Marxists call this sort of nationalisation state capitalist nationalisation—where the state puts sections of the means of production under its ownership in the collective interests of the whole capitalist class.

In the USSR after 1917 and Eastern Europe after the Second World War nationalisations that were carried out served entirely different purposes. In 1917 the working class itself, organised in soviets, expropriated capitalism. After 1947 in Eastern Europe nationalisation, the introduction of the state monopoly of foreign trade and planning were introduced to prevent imperialism reconstituting itself in East Europe and using a resurgent capitalism there to attack the USSR.

These bureaucratic social overturns were acts of self defence by the Stalinists. They were carried out only after the working class in each case had been politically expropriated. Nevertheless capi-

talism was liquidated.

But SO will clamour, nationalisation has to be judged by results and "the sort of nationalised economy that exists in the Eastern Bloc has no superiority over a market economy". (SO 15 September)

Despite the fact that the USSR is not marching towards socialism we still say it is more progressive than capitalism. "Genuine Trotskyists" defend the USSR from capitalism for several reasons, none of which require us to prettify these states. Firstly, we defend the nationalisations and state

independent trade unions and therefore:

"We keep in mind that the working class—in Poland for example—is more important than the preservation of the existing nationalised property."

In Poland it would be a duty of Trotskyists to argue within *Solidarnosc* for a programme of political revolution. This would include arguing against attempts by the Polish bureaucracy and sections of the *Solidarnosc* leadership to introduce elements of the market into the economy. Profit making

enterprises with wages being related to productivity, if introduced, will lead to a massive attack on the conditions of Polish workers.

To argue as SO does that the break up of the degenerate workers' state will facilitate the march to socialism is criminal folly. We can leave aside the fact that for every semi-colony like South Korea with some form of independent trade unions there are five others which ruthlessly suppress them. It is only necessary to recognise that capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe will not involve the flowering of trade unions. A capitalist Yugoslavia or Hungary in the 1990s will be like Southern Europe of the 1960s. Imperialist dominated Eastern

Europe will have as much time for *Solidarnosc* as the colonels in Greece or Franco in Spain had for "independent trade unions".

SO also dispute the progressive character of workers' states from another angle. They say that market economies have developed themselves more dynamically than the USSR and Eastern Europe. Again, we leave aside the fact that for every South East Asian Tiger of the 1980s there are many more countries in Latin America and Africa left washed up and desperate after a decade or more of "market economy" growth in the 1970s.

Rather, the key point is that countries such as South Korea have grown one-sidedly under the impact of integration into a world division of labour and the world market whose terms and priorities have been set by imperialist capital.

By contrast, for much of the last forty years the USSR and Eastern Europe have made considerable strides whilst hemmed into narrow, self-isolated conditions of production and trade.

It is necessary to judge the performance of capitalism by the results of its combined global performance. While the USSR and Eastern Europe suffer low growth Africa and parts of Asia and Latin America are going backwards. Does this not tell us something about the relative "progressiveness" of "market economies" over the degenerated workers' states?

But perhaps the biggest example of quackery in SO's "genuine Trotskyism" is their view that they now consider the USSR to be an imperialist power! Because of Stalinism's expansion and its repression of national minorities within the borders of the USSR, SO exclaim "It is an abuse of language to deny that the USSR is an imperialist state."

In fact, comrades it is an abuse of Marxism as a scientific theory to define imperialism under capitalism as anything other than the expansion of monopoly capitalism in the quest for new markets and super-profits.

SO attempt to back up this designation by quoting Trotsky from *In Defence of Marxism*:

"The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues. This is the element of 'imperialism' in the widest sense of the word which was the property of all monarchies, oligarchies, ruling castes, medieval estates and classes."

Imperialism

Where SO fall down is on the selectiveness of their quotes. One only needs to read on to fully understand Trotsky's meaning:

"However, in contemporary literature, at least Marxist literature, imperialism is understood to mean the expansionist policy of finance capital which has a very sharply defined economic content.

To employ the term 'imperialism' for the foreign policy of the Kremlin—without elucidating exactly what this signifies—means simply to identify the policy of the Bonapartist bureaucracy with the policy of monopolistic capitalism on the basis that both one and the other utilise military force for expansion. Such an identification, capable of sowing only confusion, is much more proper to petit bourgeois democrats than to Marxists."

Liquidation

The political content of "Soviet expansionism" has been profoundly conservative despite the brutality that has accompanied it. The liquidation of capitalism in Eastern Europe was a defensive measure against an imperialist offensive; the Kremlin's backing of Castro was an act inspired by the need to restore an adverse military-nuclear situation.

In Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Angola Stalinism sought to take advantage of US imperialism's post-Vietnam weakness. But in every case the Kremlin undertook its measures in order to renegotiate the terms of "peaceful co-existence" with world imperialism. The same ethos is at the heart of Gorbachev's wholesale retreat from established sphere of influence in Afghanistan, Angola and South Asia.

As we have seen Trotsky stigmatised SO's views as those of a petit bourgeois "democrat". This excellently characterises that paper's call for Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in the midst of a new cold war offensive as well as their uncritical backing of restorationist trends in *Solidarnosc*.

Just as importantly it expresses perfectly the whole 1980s trajectory of SO, which has junked whole swathes of the Trotskyist programme; on parliamentarism, on Palestine, on Ireland, on the Labour Party.

By adding to this list the adoption of the social democratic prejudice against Stalinism, SO maintain, and indeed enhance, their reputation as the "new realists" of the Trotskyist movement. ■



Irish solidarity

Dear comrades,
At the meeting in Cardiff on 7 November organised by the Troops Out Movement, as part of Bernadette Devlin McAliskey's national tour, a golden opportunity to debate the way forward for Irish Solidarity was squandered. Central Hotel was packed to the rafters with over 250 people. It was by far the largest meeting on Ireland Cardiff had seen for many a year.

Yet no one from the platform made the point that it was not good enough simply to come to a big meeting once a year. Only *Workers Power* supporters from the floor urged everyone to get delegated to the Time To Go conference, and give their name and address and start now organising for the Bloody Sunday demonstration.

But worse was to come. McAliskey had spoken informatively and entertainingly on the oppression of nationalists in the North and the events of 1968, but refused to analyse the lessons of the twenty years' struggle that ensued. In fact she ridiculed any such discussion as "abstract" and praised the spontaneous revolt as "a taste of freedom which if you've never experienced, you can't understand".

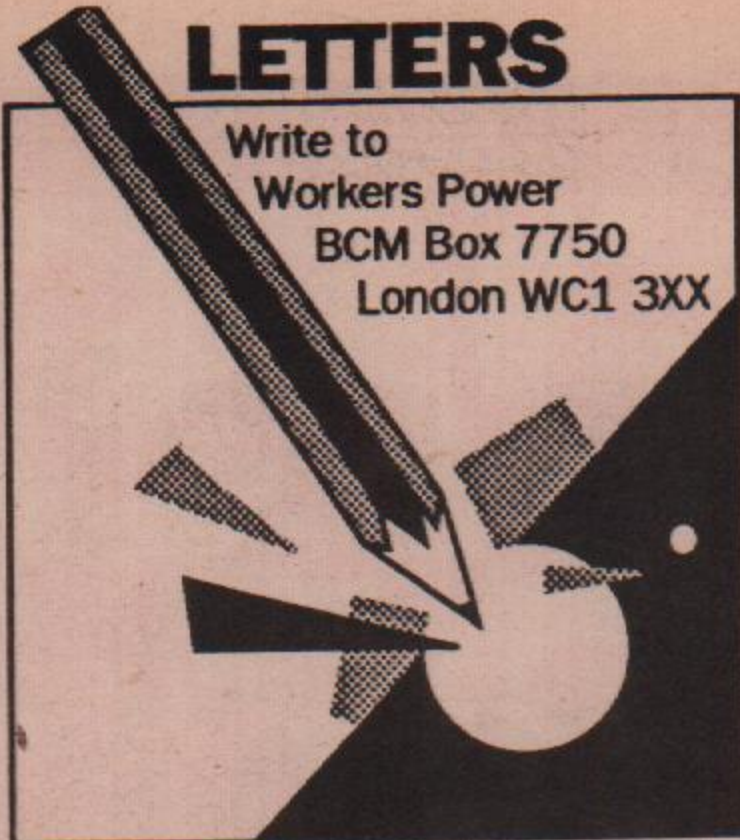
Of course we believe that, within the context of unconditional solidarity with actual struggles

against imperialism, such debate among the international left is not only valid, but a duty. Yet when we, and others, questioned the usefulness of the present republican struggle, we were shouted down and abused.

McAliskey said that when we had done as much work as them, then we could criticise. This comment ignored not only the daily work of the Irish Workers Group (Irish Section of the MRCI), but also the solidarity work of *Workers Power*. Maybe she knew no better. But TOM members present certainly knew that we were instrumental in setting up the Cardiff Bloody Sunday Committee, and initiated the coach to the anti-Orange Order demo in Exeter only in September.

Shamefully, no one from the platform or the floor drew attention to this fact. TOM correctly accuse the LCI of sectarianism and bureaucratic manoeuvring. On this showing, TOM sadly stand no better. Despite this, *Workers Power* supporters will continue to seek out ways of uniting in action with all those forces (including TOM) who want to build support for the Irish struggle.

Jeremy Drinkall



Child benefits

Dear comrades,

I am writing to point out a couple of things about the Tory Government's decision to freeze child benefit once again. Their claim to be directing money to poor families is a downright lie of course. But so is their claim that better off women workers do not need this money.

Of course £7.25 per week per child benefit is pathetic, but I need it and I am a relatively well-paid person compared to say, nurses. To give an example, I went to enquire about a child car safety seat and belt to secure this to the car. The estimated cost is £30 for a seat belt and fixing, and £36 for the car seat, i.e. £66 plus VAT.

I cannot afford this, despite decent wages. Thousands of working

class families own cars, and thousands are worse off than me. How are they expected to pay for such things?

Of course the Tories would no doubt come up with the old argument about people who can afford cars not deserving benefit anyway. What hypocrisy! Given the terrible transport cuts they have inflicted, many workers have to have cars just to get to work on time.

And what a cheek to go on about the family, child abuse etc when loads of kids will be injured, even killed if their parents cannot afford safety restraints on their cars, apart from all the other things £7.25 a week won't pay for!

A Coventry NATHFE member

Nationalism in Yugoslavia

Dear Comrades

The article on the crisis in Yugoslavia in *Workers Power* 101, while being informative as far as it went, was, I felt, a little one-sided. The article was aimed almost wholly at the bellicose chauvinism of the Serbs, stirred up by "Comrade Sloba", against the Albanian majority in Kosovo.

What was neglected was the nationalism of the ethnically Al-

banian Kosovans. Here it would have been necessary to point out the dangers of nationalism as a response to the economic and cultural oppression of Kosovo. But it would also have been crucial to stress the support of revolutionary socialists for Kosovo's right to secede if its people so wished, and provided that they did not intend to restore capitalist property relations. (Here an article on Lenin's writings on the

national question would also be useful.)

The other element that I felt the article lacked was a detailed action programme for the Yugoslavian workers. I look forward, however, to seeing this develop in future coverage alongside the development of the Yugoslavian crisis and *Workers Power's* analysis.

Steve Wride

workers power

JOIN US!

NOT A day goes by without some sickening example of the misery and brutality of life under capitalism. The police cavalry on Westminster Bridge, the management bullies in the NHS, the travesty of justice at the trials and inquests of Irish republicans. All these show what a powerful force the bosses have lined up against us.

Great historical forces are preparing the world for even deeper crisis and instability than in the last twenty years. The crisis of bureaucratic planning in the USSR, the indebtedness of the semi-colonial countries, the growing imbalance between US

imperialism's economic and political role, all indicate what lies ahead.

But history does not make itself. In 1989 imperialism and Stalinism will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the greatest carnage in world history, the Second World War. The war saved both Stalinism and imperialism, not inevitably but because workers and peasants the world over were betrayed by their existing leaderships. Time and again since then workers have been thrown into struggle only to be find their existing leaderships and organisations inadequate or worthless.

Workers Power and the MRCI exist to build an alternative to this: we fight for a revolutionary party which draws into its ranks the most committed fighters amongst workers and youth, linked to an International which organises the struggle in every country from the standpoint of world revolution.

If you are among those sickened by the hypocrisy of the capitalists and the uselessness of the Labour and Trade union leaders, do something

SELL THIS PAPER!

Discuss with us at our public meetings and Marxist discussion groups

Commit yourself to an organised fight against oppression and exploitation:

Join Workers Power and the MRCI!

red pulse

New bulletin out now

WORKERS POWER has been distributing copies of the latest *Red Pulse*, our health workers bulletin, at hospitals, demos and meetings up and down the country. If you would like copies write to our box number below enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.



Meetings this month

Birmingham:

Discussion Circle
Imperialism in the world today
Tuesday 13 December 7-30
The Gothic, Constitution Hill

Caerdydd/Cardiff:

Grwp Siarad Marrot
Y pobl tullaen a Spaen
Am wyth o'r gloch, Dydd Llun, Rhagfyr 12^{ed} *

Marxist Discussion Group
The popular front in Spain
Monday 12 December 8-00 *

Reading:

Public Meeting
Is the law neutral? The case for workers' action
Thursday 8 December 8-00
RISC, London St

Leicester:

Public Meeting
Fighting back?
The labour movement faced with Thatcher's third term
Thursday 8 December 7-30
Unemployed Workers' Centre, Charles Street

East London:

Readers' Group
The black movement in the USA
Thursday 15 December 7-30
Durning Hall, Earham Grove, Forest Gate

South London:

Marxist Discussion Circle
Marxism and religion
Tuesday 13 December 7-30 *

* See seller for venue

FUND DRIVE

Our £3000 fund drive is still in progress but still has a long way to go before we reach the target. Please send what you can immediately. The Christmas season will bring all kinds of appeals for cash for the victims of capitalism. Send the money to us instead to help pay for this paper, the thousands of industrial bulletins we produce each month and our international work.

NOTE: *Workers Power* 113 will appear on 11 Jan 1989. The copy date is 6 Jan.

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.....Trade union

Workers power

INSIDE

- Tory plans for new attacks
- Sinhalese chauvinism in Sri Lanka
- Imperialist peace deal in Southern Africa

British section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

SCRAP REGRADING ALL OUT NOW!

HUNDREDS OF thousands of nurses have been conned by the regrading process.

As their new grades have been announced, many nurses have discovered the promised 17.9% rise amounts to between 4.5% and 7%. With inflation at 6.4% that means a third of sisters and about 100,000 Nursing Auxiliaries have suffered a real pay cut. This is why a wave of strikes and work-to-grades is sweeping the NHS. 50,000 nurses have already appealed against the new grades. Many more are banned from the appeals procedure because they are taking action. But the official estimate is that appeals could take anything from one to five years!

Vindictive

By working to the grades assigned by management nurses are showing up the arbitrary and vindictive nature of regrading. Hospitals have been thrown into chaos simply by nurses sticking to their job descriptions. Now many nurses working to grade face disciplinary action and threats of sacking.

With the appeals procedure blocked and those working-to-grade faced with constant management bullying there is only one way forward. There must be an indefinite national strike until every nurse is put on the highest grade for their qualification and no nurse is left with less than 17.9%.

There has been a spate of one, two and three day strikes organised by rank and file nurses. Four hospitals are on indefinite strike. Nurses must use every isolated action to build the momentum for a national indefinite strike. At the same time they must organise to force the NUPE and COHSE leaders to call indefinite action.

Where strikes have happened management have used the tried and tested tactic of setting high levels of emergency cover.

ing nurse in Leicester. Health workers know full well what is and isn't emergency cover. And they know that the management will use control of emergency cover to break the strike. The answer is to fight for emergency cover only under workers' control.

The stakes are high. The Tories are out to demolish rank and file trade unionism amongst nurses. In a period of rising inflation they have pledged to pioneer low wage settlements in 1989. And they remain unable to strike a killer blow at the NHS whilst there is strong union organisation on the wards. That is why they tried to buy off a layer of nurses with the regrading deal. That is why they are now resorting to strong-arm tactics and disciplinary threats.

If strikes spread then there is a possibility that victimisations will follow. The Tories may even consider using their anti-union laws. Both will have the goal of effectively outlawing strikes in the NHS.

If such attacks are launched then it will be vital that the whole working class is called on to defend the nurses. Solidarity action from every workplace must be won by rank and file nurses addressing mass meetings of workers throughout the country. And if the anti-union laws are used we must go all-out to force the TUC to get off its knees and launch an indefinite general strike to support the nurses and smash the laws once and for all.

Assisted

As usual the Tories are being ably assisted by the RCN. The RCN is not only refusing to support work-to-grades, its members in hospital and district nurse management have been at the forefront of bullying those taking action.

The national leadership of NUPE and COHSE, backed by Labour's Robin Cook, have been worse than useless. They did nothing to organise the action. Then they promised to "call it off" if Clarke agreed to talks at ACAS. They

have swallowed the "new realist" argument that we can't win and shouldn't fight. They are desperate to keep their alliance with the RCN even as it organises scabbing on their own members. All this is in the hope that "public opinion" will force the Tories into a compromise.

There is only one thing the Tories understand: strike action. It was strike action which forced them to add £100 million to the NHS pay bill. The weakness of the union leaders allowed them to tie that money to the unfair and divisive regrading structure.

There will be no justice for nurses or other NHS workers as long as the Pay Review Body exists. It prevents nurses from negotiating their own wage deals and divides them from other health workers. By separating learner nurses from the regrading deal it has taken thousands of them out of action in the current disputes.

Strategy

Health workers need a new pay strategy altogether. It must be one that unites all NHS workers against low pay and gives qualified and experienced nurses a fair deal. That means fighting in the unions and in any national strike to

- Scrap regrading
- Break with the Pay Review Body
- Gain a minimum wage of £200 a week in the NHS
- Win a massive across the board increase and a pay claim worked out by health workers
- A sliding scale of wages linked to the cost of living as worked out by health workers themselves.

To mobilise for all out action there should be a strike committee in every hospital and town. There should be a national strike committee of delegates from each hospital.

This way nurses can not only win, but mobilise the rank and file to turn NUPE and COHSE into fighting, democratic unions and lay the basis for one union for all health workers.■



G Makin

RCN: Scabbing on the nurses

THE RCN is a scab union. The hundreds of nurses who are leaving it now must be followed by thousands. The health trade unions must wage a battle to recruit its members and force it out of every negotiating body.

Faced with his own members' anger at the regrading Trevor Clay has gone further than condemning work to grade and strikes. He has disowned RCN members who resolved to cease "non-nursing" duties in the protest. He has accused nurses of "striking against their patients". The government could not wish for a better ally.

The RCN claims to speak for "the whole profession". They claim their no-strike stance and "Royal" charter gives nurses as much influence as doctors and lawyers. In fact the RCN divides working nurses and separates them from other health workers.

It only recognised State Enrolled Nurses as "real nurses" in 1968. Student nurses have no real vote in the RCN. Nursing auxiliaries (NAs) are refused admission. No wonder the RCN is not interested in fighting for those who have been downgraded. It has always regarded them as second class

citizens.

In contrast the RCN willingly organises and represents the nurse managers; the nursing officers who are at present bullying working nurses into accepting their grades.

What better evidence could there be than the RCN's next General Secretary. In April Janet Snell will replace Clay. She is at present district manager for Waltham Forest. She is a government appointee paid £40,000 per year to implement cuts and closures.

In the current dispute the RCN has clearly gone on the offensive against real trade unionism. It is gearing up to recruit NAs (in a separate section of course). If it can have an effective scab union at every level, the Tories will be given the green light to attack the right to strike in the NHS.

In the face of this the attitude of the NUPE and COHSE leaders to the RCN is criminal. In February and March they were happier to let off balloons with the anti-strike RCN leaders than to support their members on the picket lines. Every time they are

kicked in the teeth by the RCN they grovel for more. They are desperate to stay in the Pay Review Body, desperate to maintain the united front with the RCN. So desperate that they will sabotage their own members' action at the first whiff of "talks" with the Tories.

The RCN represents the "future of trade unionism" for all of Thatcher's friends in the labour movement. It has its own business—the Scutari publishing firm which has managed to squander £2.3 million on a useless magazine and free BMWs for its directors. Clay's latest insults were delivered from South Korea where he is busy organising a conference of scab nurses' outfits.

What Clay's RCN is doing today, Hammond's EETPU will do tomorrow with devastating results for the whole working class. It is up to nurses to lead the fight against scab unionism. NUPE and COHSE organise nearly 200,000 nurses. In a united campaign to break the influence of the RCN, to expose it as a bosses' union, they could turn the steady stream of new recruits from the College into a flood and Edwina Currie's favourite "trade union" into a miserable rump.■

INTERVIEW: SEE PAGE 4