

Militant

International Review

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Rich man
C in his
Castle

Poor Woman
E on the
Estate

Said
Thatcher
I'll make
you equal
you'll both
pay a

Standard
Rate!



The Battle Against Poll Tax

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Now the tide is turning

The last three months have seen the beginnings of a sea change in British politics. The measures taken by the Thatcher government have opened up an irreparable chasm between the classes, into which the Tories will fall.

Thatcher has thrown all caution to the winds by introducing the most outrageous pro-rich budget since the war, combined with a crushing attack on the poor through the social security measures. And she is ploughing on with the iniquitous poll tax to replace the rates. As a result she has created real worries among the more far sighted representatives of the ruling class that this time she really has 'gone too far'.

Only recently, in a written answer to a parliamentary question, the government was forced to reveal that the budget handout to the top one per cent of taxpayers was, in total, greater than the reductions given to the 'bottom' 70%! And almost with the same breath the Tories introduced their new social security measures, which, it is no exaggeration to say, represent a return to the age of Dickens, the poor laws and all the other evils of capitalism that existed prior to the introduction of

Editorial

the welfare state. Despite the huffing and puffing of Thatcher and her lap dog John Moore, the Social Security Minister, all the experts agree that over 60% of those presently receiving the already inadequate benefits will be worse off under the new regime—that means the unemployed, the sick, the old, the young and disabled.

Pre-Victorian values

Thatcher remains obsessed with the mad idea that the best way forward for British capitalism is to return to Victorian (or to be more exact pre-Victorian) values where only 'the market rules' in an environment of 'competition' between individuals 'freed' from the obstructions of government 'interference'. As she recently put it, quoting her guru, Friedrich Hayek: "There is no such thing as 'society', there are only individuals—men, women and their families". In other words collective action and support as represented by the welfare state, the

public sector, trade unions etc are dangerous evils to the welfare of capitalism and must be liquidated.

Thatcher's nostalgic desire to return to a capitalism that never really existed anyway is preparing the way for a massive response from working people against the Thatcher government. And the fear of what is ahead is opening up visible splits within the Tory government and within the ruling class itself. The reaction by commentators to the budget showed the signs of unease. Hugo Young in *The Guardian* lamented the final demise of the "last vestiges of the post-war consensus". The reaction of Tory backbenchers to the social security measures which attacked many of their own voters (particularly older ones with some savings who would lose housing benefit under the changes) was one of horror and even anger.

Of course, what has prompted these first stirrings of revolt in the Tory party is not concern for the victims of Thatcher's measures. Rather it is a profound unease at the prospect of the social upheavals their policies are helping to fuel. The first tremors of this subterranean mood of bitterness surfaced in the movement that developed

in defence of the health service earlier this year. Whole new layers never previously involved in struggle took part in the days of action, protest meetings and demonstrations, including the 100,000 strong demonstration on 5 March, the biggest labour movement turn-out in London for over a decade.

Actions speak louder than words. That old proverb holds especially well when dealing with Thatcher and the Tories. The nurses and health workers demonstrated that with their tremendous struggle—and at the same time answered those sceptics at the top of the labour movement who argued that once the Tories had won the election in 1987, nothing could be done to stop their untrammelled rule. The nurses took national industrial action for the first time in their history and they would have gained even more than the eventual government funded pay rise if the labour and trade union leaders had not derailed the movement by refusing to organise national solidarity action. The nurses were not alone in successfully taking on the Tories and big business—the Ford workers went onto the offensive and their partial victory led to similar if shortlived action by other car workers to match the Ford deal. Teachers, civil servants and the seafarers, in a particularly heroic and painful struggle, also moved into action.

Election win

This journal has argued for some time that the Tories were steadily undermining the social base of their support by their measures. The budget, the social security changes and soon the poll tax, are opening up a class divide that threatens to destroy support for the Tories. The May local government elections gave a glimpse of future developments. Denied and hushed up by the Tory press and media, the evidence cannot be refuted. On the basis of those results, if there had been a general election, Labour would be the largest party in parliament now.

Labour improved substantially on its corresponding 1984 vote, which was regarded as a Labour 'high' then. It took eight more key councils including Aberdeen, Clydesdale and Kyle and Carrick in Scotland, where the Tories were humiliated. Labour also made inroads into the Tory heartland in the 'soft' South. Southampton, Cambridge and Brighton were brought under Labour control. In the Midlands, Labour held Birmingham comfortably and took back Wolverhampton and Walsall. The most remarkable result

there was the victory of Marxist Richard Evans in the previously rock-solid Tory ward of Bournville, the area named after the village for workers built there by the paternalist Quaker chocolate manufacturers, Cadbury. The right-wing Labour leader Dick Knowles was unsure if Labour would hold the council, let alone win any new seats. The result in Bournville was an earthquake not just for the Tories!

Again the best results nationally were achieved in Liverpool. For the first time in the local elections, Labour won a majority of votes—54%. And the most outstanding results were gained by those who supported the ideas of *Militant* and the 47 surcharged councillors. The Tories lost two seats and just hung on to two others. But for that Liverpool would have been the first city in Britain without any representation from the Tories. The Tories-in-disguise in Liverpool, the Liberals, also did so badly that Sir Trevor Jones (no longer 'Jones the vote') resigned shortly afterwards as party leader.

Wiped out in Scotland, massacred in the North, and wounded in the South—the seeds of the future disintegration of the Tories are being sown. To date the ruling class have rallied round the Thatcher clique at the head of the Conservative Party because of her apparent success, even luck, in meeting the opposition of the working class. They did not expect to get away with as much as they have without provoking a social explosion. But that is precisely what looms ahead in the struggle over the poll tax. This is already reaching fever pitch in Scotland as the article in this issue of the *MIR* explains. Yet Thatcher ploughs on regardless of the consequences for the Tories and her class.

Potentially the struggle around the poll tax could be the most serious since the miners strike, with greater repercussions than even the movement in Liverpool. That was confined to one city whereas this will be an all-Scottish struggle, with the possible involvement of millions. Thatcher's stooge in Scotland, Malcolm Rifkind, has referred to the powers of the Secretary of State for Scotland as being "not unlike those of a colonial governor." But if Thatcher and her clique hoped that a colonial policy of divide and rule would work by imposing the poll tax in Scotland first, they have severely miscalculated. Once the mass movement really develops, and fundamentally it is the **class struggle** that frays the nerves of Tory leaders and undermines the confidence of the strategists of capital, the splits in the Tory party will deepen. She is conjuring up forces that she cannot control and

which threaten to shatter the Tory party.

This crisis in the party of the ruling class is not confined just to Britain. In fact, it has gone a lot further already in France and Spain. The right in France is in confusion and disarray following Mitterand's victory; in Spain they have been in that condition for some years. Now the first signs of division and weakness have surfaced in West Germany with the loss of a formerly 'safe' Christian Democrat state, Schleswig-Holstein, to the SPD by a landslide. There is a new mood of opposition and action against capitalism across Europe.

Behind this growing class polarisation and the unease among sections of the ruling class about the strategy of Thatcher, there is the economy—the key to future perspectives. Since the general election the Tories have ridden along on a production and spending boom. The stock crash in October seemed to have been 'shrugged off' to use Lawson's complacent words. But this 'boom' is based on an avalanche of credit and consumer borrowing surpassing even the 'Barber boom' of the early 1970s—the terrible experience of which originally converted Thatcher and Lawson to monetarism.

Fissures

This situation has opened up a new and deeply damaging fissure between Thatcher and her most senior ministers. Ranged on one side are Thatcher, her most sycophantic supporters like Lord Young, 'pure monetarists' like Tory dissident Biffen, and the Bank of England, representing the interests of finance capital. They wanted firm controls over this money spree because they fear renewed inflation caused by uncontrolled consumer demand, exploding house prices and easy credit. To this end they wanted interest rates to rise to choke off borrowing even if it meant a rise in the value of sterling against other currencies. In fact a 'strong' pound, they argued, will make imports cheaper and keep down costs.

On the other side are Lawson and his new ally Sir Geoffrey Howe, with the CBI and the industrial wing of the ruling class. Rising interest rates increase the cost of borrowing for investment and production, and as the value of sterling rises inexorably against the dollar and the mark, British goods become too expensive in world markets while imports become cheaper in home markets. The result is an ever greater balance of trade deficit threatening the very foundations of growth. So Lawson wanted lower in-



terest rates and a lower value of sterling.

This battle over economic policy reached an open conflict in the press. Eventually, Thatcher was forced to retreat, partly because of the very market forces she praises so highly. Interest rates were reduced to the Chancellor's satisfaction. But this is only a temporary ceasefire. Over-shadowing this internecine battle between sections of the British ruling class is the spectre of world slump which is drawing ever closer, possibly towards the end of 1988 or next year. World slump, or even just a recession, would have a devastating effect on the feeble British economy. The uncertainty, hesitations and recriminations this will create, will make the present divisions seem like minor irritations.

But incredibly, just as British and world capitalism is on the eve of a terrible crisis which will expose the rottenness of the system of private profit and the market, the Labour leaders produce a series of policy 'reviews' which laud and praise the workings of the market as 'modern socialism'! Only the Marxists still defend the planned economy and workers' control and management. The so-called socialist states, the Stalinist totalitarian regimes of Russia, China and Eastern Europe, under 'perestroika' have also turned to 'markets' as another article in this issue describes.

Now every Socialist leader from Gonzalez, Hawke, Lange, to Rocard and Kinnock ignore or attack socialism.

Neil Kinnock revealed his true intentions when interviewed on LWT's *Weekend World* by Matthew Parris. Parris asked him: "Gonzalez in Spain told his party that what they had understood as socialism was effectively dead, that they had to bury it. He risked a great crisis by doing so, he lost his closest advisor, but he won in the end. Are you prepared to tell some people in your party the same thing?"

Socialism

Kinnock had no hesitation in his reply: "Well, I do continually... I've said when we launched the *Aims and Values* document... don't rely on half remembered selected versions of history, ancient or modern, to give yourself a sense of definition; look around you to the realities of the society that you're in now and the challenge that you face tomorrow." This means that socialism is dead and 'new realism' has replaced it. And new realism means precisely: support capitalism and the market and do not organise effective resistance to the Tories and capitalism because to do so is both useless and unnecessary.

This is the approach not just of Neil Kinnock and the Labour leaders, but also of their trade union counterparts. Everywhere in the unions former lefts

have gone over lock stock and barrel to new realism and in many cases have aligned themselves with the old right wing. This mainly explains the temporary defeat for the Marxists in the CPSA where the 'soft left' and 'communist' wing of the leadership have thrown in their lot with the openly pro-capitalist right-wing. But it is a pyrrhic victory, as the CPSA deputy general secretary John Macreadie pointed out. For now these former lefts will have to deliver for the membership in a future period of intense class struggle and battles.

The tide is turning against Thatcher and the ruling class in Britain. The economic and social situation is fragile, even volatile. The stock markets remain nervous, plunging hundreds of points on the idle words of an incautious Chancellor. The leaders of finance squabble openly about which set of policies to adopt; and each week a new problem for Thatcher springs up. Ahead lies world recession or slump and renewed industrial and political confrontations. The whole process will unfold in a protracted way, with ebbs and flows in the tempo of events. But the events opening up before the labour movement in Britain and internationally over the next few months and years are immensely favourable for the growth of Marxism—the only ideas capable of guiding the working class to success in the struggle to transform society.

Business Managers Report

Bi-monthly *MIR* within reach: if sales increase

The *Militant International Review* is poised to make a decisive advance. The Editors are currently discussing plans to move to bi-monthly publication at the earliest opportunity. This would be an historic step forward—and an important landmark in the development of Marxism in Britain and internationally.

The *MIR* first appeared in the autumn of 1969, in the wake of the mighty events of 1968. The revolutionary general strike of the French workers, the crisis of Stalinism in Czechoslovakia, the turmoil in the ex-colonial world—all had confirmed the perspectives worked out by the *Militant*, shattered the post-war illusions in 'social peace' and opened up new opportunities to expand the influence of Marxism. A four page monthly *Militant*, however, was inadequate on its own to reach, in the words of the *MIR*'s introductory editorial, the "whole new generation of workers, youth and students... awakening once again to the ideas of Marxism... demanding an explanation of these events, the role of the leaders of the mass organisations, and the programme and policies which can lead the working class to take power and establish a socialist democracy." And so the *MIR* was launched.

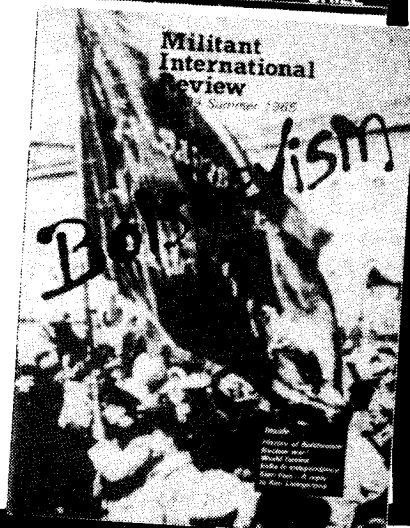
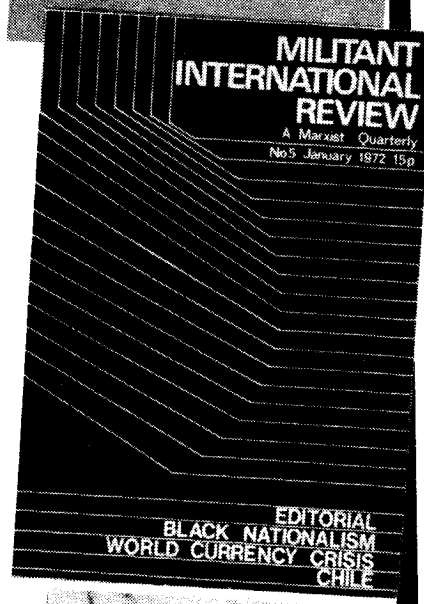
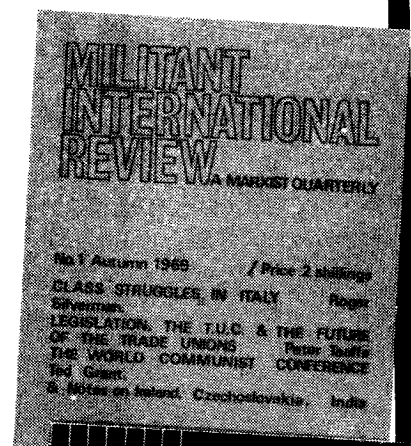
The very first issue was duplicated—the technical level of production was such that no photos could be included until No.5, printed in January 1972. But from these early beginnings, the *MIR* continued to develop as an indispensable auxiliary to the *Militant*, with the task of drawing out the general processes behind current events, to prepare the movement for future struggles.

As support for the *Militant* grew, so did the need to develop the *MIR*. At the end of 1983, resources were pledged to produce a 32 pager, with coloured card covers, three times a year. In 1985 it expanded to 48 pages, its present format. Now, as world recession looms and society stands on the eve of 'new 68s', we are determined to move to a 32 page *MIR* printed regularly every eight weeks.

A number of options for the bi-monthly are being discussed: a return to separately printed card covers and different printing techniques with more scope for design and better quality photos. But the decisions on these questions do not, in fact, rest in our hands. Of course, the Editors will produce the best possible quality journal within our means—but our means are YOUR sales!

The opportunities to sell the *MIR* at labour movement meetings and demonstrations have never been greater. Mike Pullin from Leicester told us how he, having picked up a handful for an NHS demonstration in hope rather than anticipation, sold out—12 in total by one seller on one demonstration. Sales are also there to be made amongst students: 28 were sold at the recent National Union of Students conference, 11 at FELS. What is needed, however, is for every reader to become a seller.

With a determination to see the newly launched *MIR* succeed, despite the weakness of the forces of Marxism at that time, one thousand copies of the first ever issue were sold. A similar commitment today—with every reader ensuring that wherever the *Militant* is sold, the *MIR* is sold as well—and the bi-monthly is within our reach!



The Battle Against the Poll Tax

To introduce legislation even more biased in favour of the rich, and even more damaging financially to millions of ordinary workers than anything gone before, would be hard going given the record of the present Tory government. With the introduction of the poll tax however, Thatcher's government has surpassed anything that has gone before.

The Tories have selected Scotland as the first area of the country to suffer the consequences of the poll tax. It is a testimony to the terrible effects of the tax that even a year before its introduction it has become the most topical political issue in Scotland for decades. Literally hundreds of thousands of workers are dreading its consequences, but, very significantly, are prepared to fight to stop its implementation. Already public meetings of hundreds have taken place in housing schemes and bonfire nights organised where registration forms have been collectively burned. In some schemes registration officers have been 'separated' from their forms which have then been disposed of in the nearest river!

The poll tax will replace domestic rates when it becomes law in Scotland in 1989 and in England and Wales in 1990. A flat rate charge will be set by each local authority at the beginning of each financial year. Unlike rates it is a tax on the individual, not on property. The requirement to pay the tax does not relate to financial ability to pay. People on low incomes will pay exactly the same amount as those on high incomes in the same area. This will mean a massive increase in local taxation on working class people—many living in damp, squalid housing—and a decrease for the rich living in luxury homes.

At the time of the general election the Tories claimed that the average poll tax would be around £200 per person. The revised estimate, however, calculated by officials in local government, is that the average poll tax will be between £400-£450 per person. This will have devastating effects for thousands of working class families. A family of four, for example, in one of Glasgow's housing schemes, who at present pay £450 a year in rates, would face a poll tax bill of £1,764, an increase of £1,314 a year.

Contrast this with the rich who will benefit financially like Tory MP and

By Eddie Donaghy

Junior Minister, Michael Forsyth. At present Forsyth pays £1,727 rates for his luxury home in Stirling. Under the poll tax he will pay £498, a saving of £1,299 each year! The Tories attitude that the poor do not pay enough in taxes and the rich pay too much can be summed up in Nicholas Ridley's recent statement, "why should a Duke pay more than a dustman?"

While Scotland will be the first to bear the brunt of the tax a similar situation will occur in England and Wales. Sheffield City Council have estimated that 91% of 2-adult households



Ridley: to pay the same as a dustman.

and 93% of 3-adult households will lose out financially when the poll tax is introduced in 1990, while every household with 4 or more adults will lose out. In inner cities generally the average 2-adult family will be £589 a year worse off while the average 3-adult family will be £1,147 a year worse off.

Every section of the working class will be forced to pay the tax. Even the poorest sections will have to pay at least 20%, added to water rates which people will now have to pay. However, in its pamphlet, *You and the Community Charge* the government re-assuringly states that water rates will have to be paid "only if your home is connected to a public water supply"! This will be

marvellous news for the crofters in the remote Highlands but not so good for a family living in a high rise tenement in Glasgow or Edinburgh. The only people exempt will be the severely mentally handicapped, a serving prisoner, a long term hospital patient and those mainly resident in residential homes.

As with all Tory legislation the tax discriminates against the low paid, women, pensioners and youth. Young people have been at the sharp end of Tory policy. Thatcher's Britain has seen record levels of youth unemployment, poverty and homelessness. Because the poll tax is a flat rate charge it will hit the low paid hardest. Since 1979 the government has institutionalised low pay for young people. In 1979, 18-20 year olds earned an average 60.8% of the wages of those aged 21 and over. By 1987 this proportion had declined to 53.9%. As a result 80% of 18-20 year olds earn below the Council of Europe's 'Decency Threshold' of £135 a week. Young people will therefore be doubly exploited by the Tories: forced onto cheap labour schemes and forced to pay the same poll tax as their employer who could be earning 20 times a young workers' salary. Young people are two and a half times more likely than others to be living in households with 3 or more adults—where poll tax bills will be highest. With massive poll tax bills this will increase family tensions, forcing many young people to leave home.

There is no doubt that many young people will go 'on the run' to avoid being financially crippled by the poll tax. In the mistaken belief that by not registering to vote they can avoid paying the tax, literally thousands of youth will be taken off the electoral register thus losing one of the few democratic rights they have under this Tory regime.

The poll tax will be a nightmare for millions of working class women. Many women work part time in poorly paid jobs—finding an extra £200-£300 a year will cause considerable stress. Women's gross hourly earnings in 1986 were only 75% that of men's. In getting the same poll tax bills, women will be paying more than men proportionate to their incomes. In addition, today there are an estimated 5 million women caring for their sick or elderly parents whose ability to go out to work is severely restricted. Under the old system carers

have been eligible for rate rebates. Under the poll tax this will be scrapped.

Black and Asian families will be crippled under the poll tax, with 11% of West Indian households and 29% of Asian households containing 6 or more adults. These families could face poll tax bills in some of the inner cities in excess of £3,000 a year. Finally, according to Age Concern, one third of pensioners will be £5 a week worse off.

The poll tax will therefore be a financial nightmare for millions of families affecting the most deprived and downtrodden sections of British society. It will increase the yawning gulf that exists between Britain's rich and poor. According to a recent study by the Low Pay Unit, the poorest 20% of workers earned only 64% of the average income in 1987, compared with 69% in 1886! The highest paid now earn more relative to the average than at any time since 1906. Thatcher's vision of going back to Victorian values has become a reality for Britain's low paid. While some in the labour movement speak of the 'old fashioned', 'out of date' idea of class politics, the reality is that a class divide runs through Britain like a Berlin Wall. The need for the labour movement, armed with a socialist programme, to smash these class barriers and eradicate the gulf between rich and poor has never been greater.

Identity cards

Inevitably millions of workers will attempt to avoid registration for the poll tax. The Tories however will go to every length to collect the tax. A massive and costly apparatus is being set up to track people down to collect payment. Nicholas Ridley, the Tory Environment Minister, has already admitted that there will have to be an army of snooters to check that everyone will pay.

The government has stated that it will use its powers to gain access to personal records or any other records to track people down. This could lead to the demand to see name and address lists maintained by trade unions, labour movement organisations, or pressure groups. The government intends to enforce registration of the poll tax amongst students by instructing university authorities to issue identification certificates. This will mean students having to carry poll tax identification cards.

Since 1979 the Tories have introduced 20 different pieces of legislation on local government finance designed to reduce the power of Labour authorities. Poll tax will mean local

authorities controlling only 20% of their income since business rates will be legally tied to the rate of inflation. With the government certain to carry out further cuts in rate support grant (the level has been cut from 36.2% in 1983-84 to 30.3% in 1986-87) then it is likely, given an inflation rate of 5%, that in Scotland's big cities the poll tax will rise to around £1,000 per person within 2-3 years.

Labour local authorities face catastrophe under the poll tax. There can be no doubt that behind the current proposals is the Tories' long term aim to privatise much of local government and charge directly for services provided. Thatcher's model for local government is the American local authorities where services are provided on a private basis with councillors meeting once or twice a year to select contractors. Consequently, services in America are out of reach to the poorest section of society.

The concept of a poll tax was first introduced as far back as 1974. In 1981 the Tories drew up a green paper on the poll tax which was subsequently dropped. There is no doubt that this was due to the massive unpopularity of the Tories at this time, with Thatcher's standing in the polls the lowest of any prime minister on record. Their weak position then was highlighted by the miners when they forced the government to retreat over proposed pit closures.

However, following their victory in the 1983 general election—achieved as a consequence of the Falklands war—it became clear that Labour authorities and local government would be the focus of Tory attacks. These attacks were prepared for consciously, like the miners strike, to weaken local authorities and pave the way for the poll tax. As a result Labour local authorities face a battle to defend local democracy. The lesson of Liverpool taking on the Tories and forcing concessions from them in 1984 should be taken on board. Indeed if Labour councils had stood and fought like Liverpool in a united campaign against the government in 1984-85, which undoubtedly would have forced the Tories to retreat, poll tax would not be introduced today. That 'weakness invites aggression' is all too apparent now with the biggest attack on local government in British history. The 'dented shield' policy of Neil Kinnock and the ex-lefts of the Labour Coordinating Committee has been totally exposed and discredited. The future of local government is at stake. There is now no option; the labour movement must organise a mass campaign to defeat the poll tax.

The battle against the poll tax in Scotland will be a dress rehearsal for the

wider battle in England and Wales. In the last general election the Tories were reduced to a rump with only 10 out of 72 Scottish MPs compared with Labour's 50. The Tories have therefore picked a difficult terrain on which to launch the 'flagship' of Thatcher's third term.

Scotland has a far higher proportion of council house tenants than any part of Britain with 50% of houses being council stock. In Glasgow the figure is even higher at 62%. Already, before a mass campaign has got underway, and without any serious lead from the Scottish TUC (STUC) or Labour Party, anti-poll tax organisations have sprouted up in towns and cities all over Scotland. Community organisations previously defunct have burst into life. Meetings against the poll tax are attracting hundreds in the housing schemes. Pensioners, youth, students, parents, are making their voice heard—many speaking up politically for the first time. Their message is coming out loud and clear—**stop the poll tax!**

This is borne out in the opinion polls. Over 70% oppose the poll tax and, according to a recent poll for STV, 56%, including 71% of Labour voters, support a non-payment campaign. If translated into action that would mean 2 million people refusing to pay the poll tax, resulting in the biggest campaign of civil disobedience ever seen in Britain. The effect of 100,000 striking miners transformed the political and social climate in Britain—a poll tax strike involving upwards of 2 million people would dwarf even the great miners' strike.

Don't collect, don't pay

The mythical aura of invincibility that surrounded the Tories was shattered within three weeks of 1988 with the magnificent strike of 38 Manchester nurses. By going on strike the nurses forced the government to abandon their plans to scrap the unsociable hours payment. This action gave enormous encouragement to workers everywhere and was followed by a series of regional strikes involving other groups of workers striking in solidarity with NHS workers. In Scotland on 24 February 100,000 took to the streets in a brilliant demonstration against privatisation of NHS services. The STUC lifted their little finger and were overwhelmed by the response. Given that 70% of Scots oppose the poll tax the potential for a mass movement is staggering.

In order to translate the mass opposition to the poll tax into effective action a united campaign with a worked out strategy and tactics must be developed. Because of its spontaneous character

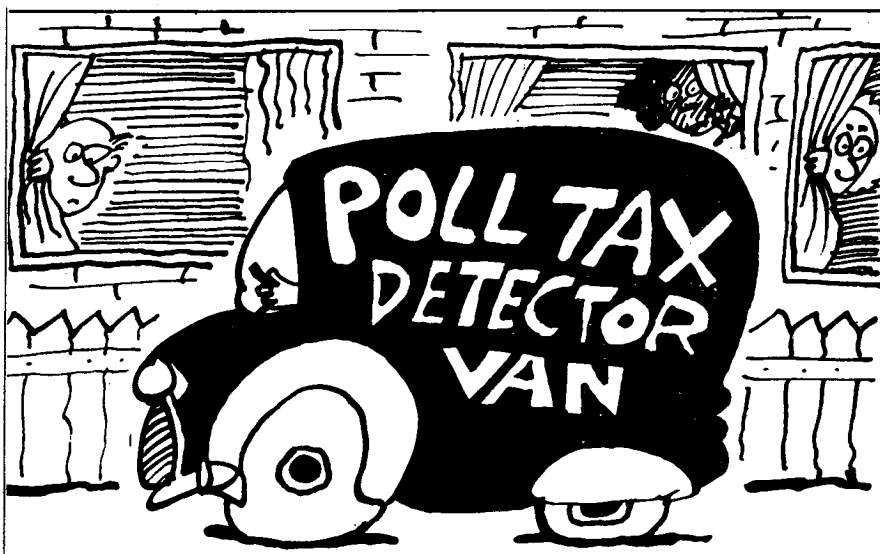
the movement against the tax has tended to be fragmented, with various groups pursuing different tactics. In many areas anti-poll tax groups have called for a refusal to register. This carries the penalty of a £50 fine followed by subsequent fines of £200 for further refusals. Full support must be given for anyone who decides not to register, with mass action to defend them against any fines imposed or victimisation. It would be necessary to point out to people the financial penalties involved in this tactic.

Other groups have argued for disrupting the registration through a 'return to sender' campaign in order to delay and complicate registration. To be effective, the campaign of non-registration or obstruction must be co-ordinated. Instead of individuals sending back registration forms, meetings should be organised on a street by street basis where the forms would be filled in and sent away en masse. This would break down the feeling of isolation and generate an atmosphere of solidarity.

With both of these tactics the question must be posed: what next? Both non-registration or obstruction will not stop the poll tax since the government can compile registers from other sources. The principal element to defeat the poll tax lies in the strategy of mass non-payment. The campaign of obstruction or non-registration should be used to build support for a mass poll tax strike beginning in April 1989 and continuing until the tax is withdrawn.

Labour councils, in representing the workers who elect them, must refuse to implement the poll tax. The decisions of the Labour controlled Strathclyde and Lothian regional councils, representing 3 million people, to accept the inevitability of the poll tax must be condemned. Anti-poll tax organisations, Labour Parties and trade union branches must apply the maximum pressure to reverse this cowardly policy of retreat and surrender. These councils should follow the examples of Poplar in the 1920s, Clay Cross in the 1970s and, most recently, Liverpool, who drew tens of thousands of families behind their respective battles against the Tories.

The foundations of a mass non-payment campaign must be laid with public meetings in every housing scheme to explain the issues and set up anti-poll tax unions. The role of these unions is to rally support for non-payment around the doors. Pledge rallies have been successfully organised by many unions where people attend the meeting and sign a form pledging not to pay the tax. The displaying of 'No Poll Tax' posters in the housing schemes



One of the posters against the poll tax produced by the Labour Party.

generates a feeling of solidarity, power and confidence. Spreading support into the workplaces is essential in strengthening the campaign.

Scotland has a rich history of struggle involving rent strikes, most notably in Glasgow in 1915 when women in particular, with the support of industrial workers, forced the government to cut rents. The lessons of 1915 are particularly relevant to today's battle. Whilst support for the rent strike was solid, it was the movement of the industrial workers that forced the Lloyd George government to back down. Today, given that the local authority trade unions stand to be devastated by the attacks on local government, these unions could play the leading industrial role in the fight against the poll tax. Industrial action by the local authority unions would be a springboard for wider strike action involving not just workers in the public sector but unions in the private sector whose members will be hit by the effects of the tax. The rent strikes all over Britain against the then Tory government's Housing Finance Act in 1972 serves as a more recent example. A mass poll tax strike backed up by industrial action would gain another great victory for the working class.

Out of touch

Unfortunately the Labour leadership is lagging way behind the mood of millions of workers. Neil Kinnock believes the campaign against the poll tax can be won within the confines of parliament with clever debating skills and relying on Tory backbench rebellions.

Much has been made of the Tory rebellions in April against the Local Government Finance Bill. However, the Tory backbench revolt has nothing to do with compassion or fairness but

everything to do with fear of the mass opposition towards the tax that is growing in England and Wales. Where was the Tory rebellion over the recent budget which gave tax handouts to the super rich and nothing to the NHS? Michael Mates, leader of the Tory backbench revolt, admitted on *Newsnight* that the two reasons for the rebellion were "fear of losing Tory supporters and the bill's unfairness". There was no rebellion, however, when the bill was passed through parliament and became law in Scotland in December 1987. Given their battering in the last election, the Tories have obviously given up Scotland as a lost cause. To rely on Tory backbench rebellions is entirely false. Every conscious worker knows that action is required to stop the Tories as the last 8 years have demonstrated.

Despite the attempts of the Labour leaders to sidetrack the debate on the poll tax into safe parliamentary boundaries, the pressure from without from ordinary workers to fight the tax will be reflected inside the Labour Party. This process has already begun with even some MPs on the right wing of the Labour Party being moved by the anger of the Scottish workers. Dick Douglas, the right wing MP for Dunfermline West, resigned as chairman of the Scottish group of Labour MPs in protest at Neil Kinnock's speech at the Labour Party local government conference in February which criticised those prepared to break the law to stop the poll tax. Douglas argued that "anyone who thinks this lady is going to be held up by legislative foibles is kidding themselves on." Then, at the Scottish Labour Party Conference in March, Douglas attacked Neil Kinnock from the rostrum for "leading an army into battle carrying a white flag."

Labour Euro MP Alec Falconer captured the real mood of activists and

workers in Scotland when he referred to the traditions of the Chartists, the suffragettes and workers' leader John MacLean in their preparedness to go all the way, even if it meant breaking the law. On the other hand, the leader of the 'Stop It' campaign in Scotland, Brian Wilson MP, has openly attacked the proponents of non-payment, calling their position 'futile' as it would mean going down the road of financial ruin, which people would not be prepared to do. What Brian Wilson totally misunderstands is not only the scale of support for non-payment that already exists but also that hundreds of thousands of poor families simply will not be able to pay the poll tax.

If the Labour Party leaders were really listening to people's views as their 'Labour Listens' campaign claims they would fully support a mass campaign of non-payment to stop the poll tax. If this did happen there would be colossal support for the Labour Party in Scotland which would spread around the rest of Britain.

Tories divided

The support for Liverpool Labour council's heroic struggle against the Tory government received mass support from the workers of that city. The council's stand was the reason for the tremendous support for Labour in the general election of June 1987, when 57% voted Labour in the city. The slogan of the Liverpool labour movement in their heroic battle with the Tories was 'Better to break the Law than to break the Poor'. Such a slogan adopted by the Scottish labour movement would gain a massive echo with a population ten times that of Liverpool. A mighty movement of the Scottish working class would be an extremely daunting prospect for the Tories.

The Labour Party leadership argue that non-payment is illegal and therefore unacceptable. However, when a law like the poll tax is opposed by the overwhelming majority, workers do not view defiance as 'lawbreaking' but as a justifiable, indeed necessary, act to prevent such a law being implemented. It did not matter to thousands of Scottish workers on 24 February that in striking with their NHS colleagues, they were breaking the employment act in organising secondary picketing. They saw it as justifiable, necessary action to defend their NHS. Similarly it did not matter to the tens of thousands of workers in Scotland who supported the Caterpillar occupation that these workers' act of defiance was illegal.

Two years before its implementation opinion polls in England and Wales are

showing 60% opposition to the poll tax. There is open concern amongst Tory MPs that the combined effect of the poll tax and cuts in social security benefits will be a massive ebbing away of support from their party. Had it not been for the intense pressure exerted by the Tory whips in Parliament, many more Tory MPs would have voted against the poll tax, fearing a similar fate to that which afflicted their colleagues in Scotland at the last election and in the May district elections. In the later elections the Tories were pushed into third place, behind the Scottish National Party (SNP), with only 19% of the votes cast. In Strathclyde they achieved only 15%. Of the 53 councils in Scotland the Tories now have majority control in only three.

There is now an open desperation about the Tories future in Scotland amongst many of their leading representatives. The leader of the Conservative group on the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) has stated that the Tories in Scotland were in a "downward spiral which would continue into oblivion unless something was done to alter their policies." However, Michael Forsyth, Tory MP for Stirling, recently stated that the problem for the Conservatives in Scotland was that "Thatcherism has not gone far enough". This indicates the divisions amongst the Conservatives in Scotland that will be repeated in England and Wales.

The Tories' 'flagship' is set on a course that will bring it into confrontation with millions of working class families. It is lingering like a black cloud over the heads of Tory MPs and councillors who fear the consequences of mass opposition to the poll tax. On the horizon, moreover, looms the storm clouds of world economic crisis which passed over briefly in October in the form of the stock exchange crash. A world slump or a recession would have serious consequences for the weak British economy and for the position of the Tories. It would shatter the Tory myth of Britain's 'sound economy', particularly in the south of England where the feeble economic 'boom' had most effect.

Such a scenario combined with mass opposition to the poll tax in the rest of the country would result in open conflict within the Tory Party which would put into the shade the 'skirmishes' between 'wets' and 'drys' that have broken out previously. The fact that less than a year after Thatcher's election victory there is open speculation about the next Tory leader indicates the unease in the Tory Party. The declaration of Thatcher that she intends to continue as leader beyond the next

election, with her open contempt for Tory 'wets' like Heseltine and Biffen while wooing the reactionary David Owen to come over to the Tories, will widen these cracks even further, reflecting the divisions in British society.

The Tories would therefore be delighted if the Labour leaders hold back the campaign to the confines of parliament. The Tories will only be moved on the poll tax if they see the organised power of the working class. This was admitted by Malcolm Rifkind, Secretary of State for Scotland, in an interview in *The Independent* last year. Asked how he would cope with the "sheer weight of numbers (of Scottish Labour MPs) stacked against him in the Commons... Mr Rifkind smiled and said he comforted himself with Hilaire Belloc's couplet: 'Whatever happens, we have got, The Gatling gun, and they have not,'"*The Independent*, 23 December 1987. In other words, with an overwhelming majority, the Tories are openly dismissive of purely parliamentary opposition.

Mass action

However, in the same interview, he made the very telling comment that "Politicians always know when something has become essential." Referring to the Scottish Labour Party/STUC organised Festival of Scottish Democracy held last autumn, he pointed out that "fifty years ago, the Clydesiders could have produced 50,000 people on Glasgow Green to protest at some policy of the wicked Conservatives. Despite the weather, there were still only 3,000 or 4,000 people at the festival." These words are a lesson to those in the labour movement who place more emphasis on organising pressure on the Tories through the churches than mobilising the massed ranks of Scottish workers presently crying out for a lead on the poll tax. The potential to mobilise 500,000 on the streets of Scotland already exists. Such a movement would shake the government to its foundations. **The Labour Party and STUC have a responsibility to show to the Tories this massive opposition by naming the date for an all Scotland demonstration.**

If the Labour leaders fail to do this, they will be deserting the cause of millions of Scottish workers. If the labour movement does not show a way forward there could be an ebbing away of support from Labour to the opportunism of the SNP and their programme of nationalism, particularly given the fact that they have at least in words a more militant position on the poll tax than the Labour leadership. The first indications of this were demonstrated in

the May council elections. While the SNP still only control one council, Angus, in the north of Scotland, their vote increased dramatically from 11.7% in the 1984 elections to 21% in May, a result which gained them 51 seats and saw them overtake the Tories who only polled 19%.

The SNP made gains from Labour in some working class areas like West Lothian where Labour lost 4 seats to the SNP. One of these was in Robin Cook's constituency of Livingston where the Labour Party has been consumed in trying to expel *Militant* supporters. Similarly in Cumbernauld, where Labour also lost ground to the SNP. That many middle class voters and some workers were attracted to the SNP's 'radical' position on the poll tax is a clear warning that if the Labour Party leaders continue to ignore the mood in the housing schemes for a fight, the SNP will continue to make headway in Scotland.

As well as the dangers of nationalism, there lurks in the background the possibility of another equally serious development in the absence of a labour movement fightback. The anger towards the poll tax is also mixed with a mood of desperation, particularly after the social security changes which will cripple thousands financially. The *Glasgow Evening Times* in an article last year entitled 'Tensions that could erupt in Revolution', warned of the anger that was smouldering in the West of Scotland that could explode into open fury. It is not ruled out that given this despair, some sections, particularly the youth—some of whom will be 'on the run' to avoid paying the poll tax—could resort to terroristic methods to vent their anger against the state and the Thatcher government. These methods of despair would not, however, force the Tories to back down and could cut across the building of a mass movement against the tax. The only effective way to stop the poll tax is a movement drawing in all sections of the working class and channelling their anger in a collective fight against the Tories.

If the poll tax is implemented, literally tens of thousands of local authority jobs will be under threat. The involvement of local authority unions in the battle against the poll tax is therefore essential. If the local authority union leaders abandon the struggle they will be cutting their own throats and thousands of their members in the GMBATU, TGWU, NALGO and NUPE will lose their jobs. Further, given that local authority workers are in the main low paid they will be amongst the hardest hit by the tax. From all sides the local authority trade unions have a crucial role to play in the fight to stop



Glasgow flat dwellers will be hardest hit by the tax.

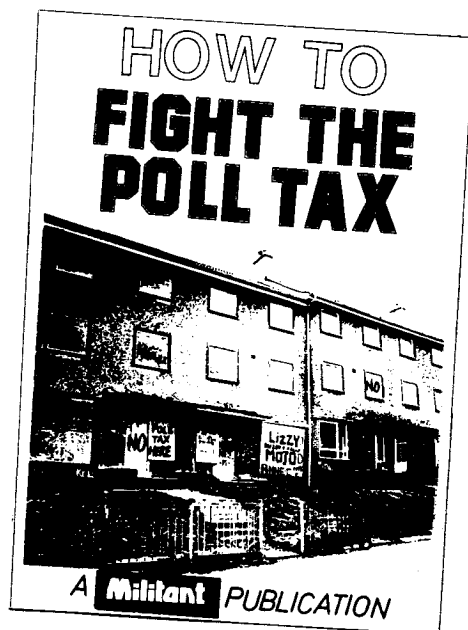
the poll tax. As yet, however, there has been a wall of silence from the trade union leaders on the poll tax, particularly those representing local authority workers. It is likely that fierce arguments will rage about whether or not a non-payment campaign would threaten jobs. Already the threat of financial crisis inflicting councils is used by opponents of non-payment to limit the struggle to verbal opposition. Under the new financing for local government, however, with the poll tax only accounting for 20% of total local authority income, wages could continue to be paid even if a mass non-payment campaign was underway.

Fight to the finish

Fundamentally, it is a question of fight now or be smashed later. The local authority unions should prepare the ground for a one day strike against the poll tax by linking in with other groups of workers and local anti-poll tax unions. The STUC have the responsibility to call and lead a one day strike in Scotland against the poll tax.

The poll tax is one of the worst attacks the Tories have launched on the working class. The experience of the miners strike and Liverpool council's fight has shown that any battle with this government is a fight to the finish. These struggles have also shown the need for correct tactics and strategy: determination is not enough. With correct tactics and strategy, and a preparedness to see the struggle

through to the end, through mass action the poll tax can be stopped. A victory for the Scottish working class would have massive repercussions throughout Britain, giving enormous confidence to all workers, and would represent the beginning of the end of Thatcher's brutal regime.



Written and produced by Scottish Militant supporters, this new pamphlet is available from: 041 221 1443.

Northern Ireland: Tories reach an impasse

The signing of the Anglo Irish Agreement two and half years ago was trumpeted as an 'historic breakthrough' by the capitalist press. Tory Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Tom King, accepting that it would not solve all (!) the problems, claimed it would "offer a unique opportunity to make progress towards their solution and to promote peace, stability and reconciliation." (Letter to MPs, 15 November 1985)

All that the Labour leaderships in Britain and Ireland could manage to do was to echo these sentiments. Neil Kinnock pronounced that "today's agreement is a step on the long road towards ending the violence, waste and fear which have plagued the people of Northern Ireland for so long." (Labour Party press release, 15 November 1985) Irish Labour Party leader, Dick Spring, hoped that "the Agreement, whatever difficulties there may be in the early stages, will gradually lead to the phasing out of violence, to peace and stability in all Ireland and to even better relations between Britain and Ireland." (Party Newsletter, 16 November 1985)

Agreement stillborn

By contrast this journal opposed the Agreement, explaining that "it will produce instability, upheaval and violence. Because it will have solved nothing its final net effect will, at best, be to increase sectarianism," *Militant International Review*, Spring 1986. Events have confirmed our analysis and silenced those within the labour movement who welcomed this worthless bosses' accord. The 'troubles' claimed 54 lives in 1985, the year of the signing of this 'step to peace'. In 1986, 61 died. Last year the death toll was 93. There were 385 shooting incidents in 1986, 600 in 1987. The 173 bombings carried out in 1986 rose to 226 in 1987. 1988 has begun with, if anything, an intensification of the violence.

These bald statistics understate the scale of the sectarian reaction which the agreement unleashed. Its first year brought a furious Protestant backlash with demonstrations, a one-day sectarian stoppage, massive intimidation of Catholics from their workplaces and their homes. Among the victims were many *Militant* supporters, some of whom suffered beatings while others were forced with their families to flee their homes. One, Colum McCallan, was assassinated by a loyalist

By Peter Hadden

paramilitary gang in July 1986.

For the ruling class the Agreement has proved a gross miscalculation. It is not the first such error made by the Thatcher government since 1979. Because the problem of Northern Ireland is insoluble on a capitalist basis, all capitalist answers are, in the end, only various roads to ruin. What distinguishes this particularly short sighted and stupid government is that it has repeatedly chosen to go down the shortest road!

The arrogant intransigence of Thatcher in refusing any concessions to hunger striking Republican prisoners in 1981 directly led to the growth of political support for Sinn Féin, which has since threatened to overtake the middle class Catholic party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). The government was forced to about face and offer apparent concessions to the Catholics.

This was the meaning of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. By offering the Dublin government a say in the affairs of the North it held out the hope of reforms, albeit purely cosmetic in character, to the Catholics. In return the real substance of the Agreement was to be in the form of increased North-South security co-operation.

In the event, the Protestant backlash paralysed the Agreement from the outset. Even the paltry concessions initially implied could not be introduced. Instead the Tories have been forced to spend the last two years trying to pacify the Protestants and to coax the Unionist politicians to the negotiating table. All that remains of the Agreement are its security aspects. Its only tangible effect in Catholic working class areas has been to increase repression.

The end result is that the Protestants remain diametrically opposed while Catholics are increasingly alienated from the Accord. A recent opinion poll carried out for UTV/*Fortnight* magazine found that 81% of Catholics thought that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had failed to benefit them.

Thatcher has reacted to the failure of this, her major political initiative, by turning to military means for an answer. The government's present policy of ever more vicious and more naked repres-

sion is already succeeding in bitterly antagonising the Catholic working class. The wheel has come full circle since 1981, except now the Tories have succeeded in alienating both sections of the community.

Because of the role of the British capitalist media which has, conspiratorial style, either distorted or hidden the facts of the government's repressive policies, it is worth documenting some of the more recent incidents. This is also necessary because the British Labour leaders, with a few honourable exceptions such as Eric Heffer over the Gibraltar killings, have either kept silent or else disgracefully backed the Tories' methods. To oppose the flagrant breaches of democratic rights which take place daily in Northern Ireland is not to give or even imply support for the methods of the Provisional IRA. On the contrary, the labour movement, by its silence, actually benefits the Provos, giving them a monopoly to tap the genuine opposition which these outrages invoke. The methods used in Northern Ireland today, if not successfully resisted, will be there for future use against the labour movement both in Britain and Ireland.

Aidan McAnespie

Firstly, there has been the Stalker affair. As Deputy Chief Constable in Manchester, Stalker was a loyal police officer with right wing views. In 1983 he spent a year on a Royal College Defence Studies course during which he studied 'policing' in Columbia, Brazil and Chile. "The small group of which I was a part," he reports, "was hosted at Presidential level," *Stalker*, p20. As for Latin America, he "enjoyed and benefited from it greatly". Not so Northern Ireland where he was sent in 1984 to investigate three incidents of the RUC shoot-to-kill policy in which six unarmed civilians were killed. Stalker was obstructed, threatened and refused access to evidence. When it became clear he was not going to produce a whitewash, his character was smeared and he was removed from the case.

The eventual report of Stalker and his successor Sampson indicted the RUC, exposing their deliberate cover up policy which involved police officers being ordered to tell lies. Yet in January the British Attorney General decided that no RUC officer should be prosecuted and that the matter should be



No justice for the Birmingham Six, while RUC officers escape prosecution.

dropped.

Then there is the case of the Birmingham Six: six Irishmen wrongly convicted of the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings on the basis of the now discredited forensic evidence and confessions beaten out of them in police cells. Despite fresh evidence, both of the beatings and of police perjury in the original trial, three appeal judges recently upheld their convictions. One of these men is now seriously ill and likely to die in prison.

Aidan McAnespie was a young Catholic from Aughnacloy, a County Tyrone border town. He worked across the border in Monaghan where he was a shop steward. On 21 February he was walking towards the army border checkpoint, coming from a Gaelic football match, when a shot fired from an army observation post killed him. This incident has highlighted the day to day harassment of many Catholic workers meted out by the army and police and the lengths to which the establishment will go to cover up their methods.

Crossing the border every day, Aidan McAnespie was regularly detained. On many occasions he was told by soldiers that he was on their death list. The day before he was shot he and his mother were held for 90 minutes. The army version of the killing was that a ricocheting bullet, accidentally fired, had

killed him. A report from the Northern Ireland pathologist hurriedly confirmed this. Those on the spot who witnessed the bullet wound thought differently. When the body was exhumed to allow a Southern pathologist to examine it, it was found that a piece of his chest, important to reveal the trajectory of the bullet, was missing. The Southern report has not contradicted that of the North but there are grounds for suspicion that a huge cover up has been effected.

Gibraltar killings

While the 'security forces' can issue death threats to people like Aidan McAnespie with apparent impunity, not so the other way round. In March 1987 a 19 year old Catholic was sentenced to four years in prison for shouting 'we will get you' at a UDR army officer!

The soldier who killed Aidan McAnespie need lose no sleep worrying about his fate. During the years since 1969, the army have shot dead over 120 civilians, and killed a further 16 with rubber or plastic bullets. Only one soldier has been convicted of murder. With immaculate timing, the government released him on 23 February, only two days after the McAnespie killing. Private Thain had served just three years. He was allowed to rejoin his

regiment, from which he had never been discharged. His age, only 18 at the time of the killing, was given as the reason.

Compare this with the treatment of young people from Northern Ireland serving sentences for crimes committed during the troubles, often carried out when they were in their teens. Currently there are 45 Secretary of State's Plesure (SOSP) prisoners, people given indeterminate sentences, many of whom have already served over 10 years and have no release date. In Long Kesh (the Maze), there are 500 prisoners serving life. Two hundred, among them both Republicans and Loyalists, have served over 10 years. Thirty five were jailed when they were under 18. Examples include Sammy Dines from Belfast's Short Strand, convicted when he was 17 of planting two bombs on a train and who has already served 12 years, and Sean Dornan from Belfast who has already served 11 years for hijacking a car.

Only weeks after the government closed the book on the 1982 examples of the RUC shoot-to-kill policy, this policy was again put into force, this time by the SAS in Gibraltar. On 6 March three members of an IRA bomb unit were gunned down mercilessly and without warning, bullets pumped into their bodies at point blank range. All were

unarmed. The bomb had not yet been planted.

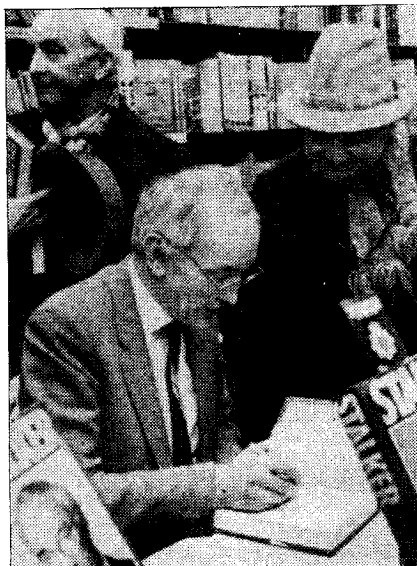
As with the McAnespie killing this case highlighted the disinformation role of the propaganda machine of the ruling class. Initial claims spread over all the media and announced by Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe in Parliament, that a bomb had been planted, and that a challenge had been given, have been contradicted by the facts. The reason for the hasty cover up is clear. The case is even more serious than the Stalker inquiry because the facts now coming to light point more clearly and directly to these killings having been sanctioned at British Cabinet level, possibly by Thatcher herself. This makes certain that if an enquiry is set up, the result will be to exonerate the SAS. It also explains Thatcher's furious condemnation of an ITV programme which presented evidence damning to the government's version of events.

Daily harassment

Following this programme Thatcher indignantly stated: "Trial by television or guilt by association is the day that freedom dies. The freedom of people depends on the rule of law and a fair legal system. The place to have trials is in a court of law." By that reckoning there is not much freedom in Northern Ireland! Trial by television may not be justice but at least it is less final than what was offered to the three killed in Gibraltar—trial by bullet!

These killings drew world attention. But as with Aidan McAnespie's death, the events surrounding this incident revealed the other, more mundane, side of repression, the day to day harassment of civilians, which generally remains hidden outside the Catholic working class areas. As the coffins of the Gibraltar victims were brought back into the North, police vehicles repeatedly drove into the hearses, and the cortege was slowed down near Protestant areas, inviting attack. Near Belfast the hearse containing the body of Sean Savage was 'stolen': a soldier removed the driver and drove the vehicle at speed through West Belfast, finally abandoning it outside the family home.

The Loyalist gun and grenade attack on the Gibraltar funerals which left three dead and dozens injured has also raised questions about the role of the security forces. That the attacker, Michael Stone, a self-styled Loyalist mercenary, was able to take advantage of the unusually low-key policing of the funerals suggests complicity from at least some level of the RUC. Furthermore, when in court, Stone confessed to



Stalker exposed RUC cover-up.

three other sectarian killings, describing the victims as 'legitimate targets' stating that he had "seen their files".

Even the killing of the two out-of-uniform soldiers at an IRA funeral in Andersonstown a few days later raises questions about the role of the state forces, and will most likely end in the state further antagonising the Catholic working class. The facts of this case have been buried under hysterical condemnation in the capitalist press. Ignored is the fact that the soldiers were challenged by stewards a number of times and asked to drive away. Instead they drove at speed at the funeral scattering people as they went. Army claims that they were on the scene 'by accident' are a little incredulous, although what their purpose was is far from clear.

Everybody, journalists, soldiers in helicopters overhead and the crowd alike, assumed this was another Loyalist attack. The initial reaction of the crowd in surrounding and disarming them was understandable and justified. What was not justified was the fact that once overpowered, identified and no longer a threat, they were taken by the IRA and killed. As with all IRA actions, this was totally counter-productive, clouding the whole issue and giving the government a powerful propaganda weapon.

Now widespread arrests of those involved in the initial attack are taking place. Thatcher will probably seek her pound of flesh in convictions and long sentences. The result will be to put the propaganda boot on the other foot as the issue could become a Northern Ireland version of South Africa's Sharpeville Six case.

Even from a capitalist point of view this policy of repression, of a solution by military means, becomes counter-

productive after a certain stage. In a recent poll 7% of Catholics in the North said their sympathies for Sinn Féin had disappeared after the IRA atrocity at Enniskillen. But 9% said that they were more sympathetic to the IRA after the Stalker affair and the Birmingham Six judgement. So, on the one hand, the bosses cannot impose a military solution. On the other, their every effort to find a political answer has at best fallen around their ears or, as with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, only made matters worse.

Marxists have long explained that with all avenues to a solution blocked, instability and violence are permanent features of capitalism in Ireland. Recently we have been joined in our analysis by one leading capitalist journal, *The Economist*. With the euphoria of November 1985 now only a faint memory, the March 26 1988 issue soberly states: "Most political problems have solutions. A few do not. Northern Ireland is one of them, certainly now and perhaps for decades." To take any initiative the ruling class must court disaster. But to do nothing is no less dangerous. Answering this dilemma, *The Economist* continues: "That does not mean that politicians should stop seeking solutions to its problems, on the contrary their search is the best way to prevent things getting even worse. Northern Ireland needs plenty of politics—concords, initiatives, communiqués, commissions of enquiry and much more so that the arguments are conducted politically and not by the gun."

Devolved government?

This statement explains the recent efforts by government ministers to find some formula for devolved government in the North—not in any real hope that it will solve anything but to keep the politicians in business and to provide a smokescreen to hide the repression. Sadly for Thatcher two factors of her own creation make devolution much more difficult to achieve than in the 1970s, even on a short term basis. The first is the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Unionists will agree to a devolved government, possibly even power sharing—but only if the Agreement is scrapped. For the SDLP participation in a new assembly in return for abandoning the Agreement would be tantamount to political suicide at this stage. Even if the Tories were to come up with some formula to get round this difficulty, the second factor, the growth of Sinn Féin, presents an impassable barrier to the stabilisation of any new assembly.

It is the political presence of Sinn

Fein which narrows the SDLP's options. Sinn Fein poll around 12% of the vote. They have 61 council seats and one Westminster seat. In some working class Catholic areas they outvote the SDLP. Since Sinn Fein won their council seats the work of the councils has been virtually paralysed. If Sinn Fein entered a new assembly their presence would disrupt it. If they refused to take their seats and as it became clear that the assembly could solve nothing, that poverty and repression were to remain, so they would undermine the SDLP's position within it, forcing the latter to either withdraw or risk being overtaken as the largest Catholic party. Lasting and effective democratic institutions are now impossible in Northern Ireland. Thatcher's policy of errors has left her government with less room to manoeuvre than any previous.

The inability of the capitalist class and their representatives to overcome the national problem is no accident. It stems from the economic impasse of capitalism in Ireland. The south of Ireland is the poorest country in North West Europe. In the last four years its National Debt has doubled. Total debt is now equal to 150% of GNP. Unemployment at 19% is the second highest in Europe after Spain. It would be much higher but for emigration. Over the last five years 100,000 people have voted with their passports and left the country.

The relative upswing in world capitalism since 1982 has largely bypassed the North. For example, whereas industrial output in Britain rose by 2% between the third quarter of 1985 and that of 1986, in Northern Ireland it fell by 4.4%. Ground lost in the 1979-82 recession has not been recovered. In fact, in January 1987 manufacturing output was at the same level as in 1968! 40% of manufacturing jobs have been lost since 1979. Of the 97,000 which remain, 90,000 are in part subsidised by the state, by an average of £39 per week for every worker.

Only public spending keeps the economy afloat. 45% of total employment is in the public sector. Maintaining this situation requires a massive annual subvention from the British exchequer, now equal to one third of all government spending in the North. Poverty is widespread and severe. This is the second poorest region in the EEC, after Calabria in southern Italy. More than 19% of the workforce are unemployed, plus some 20,000 on various 'training' schemes. Social security benefits account for just over 23% of household income, 14% in Britain. 23% of households have an income of less than £50 per week.

Neither the British nor the Irish



A lobby of the Antrim Health Board, April 1988.

capitalist classes can offer a future which would improve the lot of the people of the North, either Catholic or Protestant. Whatever option they come up with will be unacceptable to one, the other or to both communities.

The Catholic population, particularly the working class, cannot be permanently reconciled to the existence of the present state which they see offers them only poverty. On the other hand, capitalist reunification of Ireland, the preferred solution of the British ruling class—although the prospect is viewed with dread and in practice would be opposed by the southern capitalists—is ruled out. Those who dismissed the idea of a Protestant backlash as a bluff have had their answer in the reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. That was mild compared to what would happen if any real steps to reunification were taken. There would be armed resistance and civil war. The outcome would be repatriation, the creation of two reactionary police states, with the Protestants most likely holding most of the existing northern state.

No capitalist solution

The resolution of the national problem is a democratic, not really a socialist task. Because they cannot offer economic security, the capitalists cannot promote a democratic settlement. So this task falls to the only class which can take society forward—the working class. Only on a socialist basis can Ireland be reunited and a formula advanced which could permanently resolve the conflict—a socialist Ireland as a free and equal part of a voluntary socialist federation of Britain and Ireland.

With much of what has been said in

this article the leaders of Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA might agree. On this issue we must part company. Because they also advocate a capitalist solution, the ideas of Sinn Fein are no less worthless than those of Thatcher and the other representatives of British imperialism. The present Sinn Fein and IRA leadership advance a variant of the Stalinist theory of stages—in this case that British withdrawal and independence must be achieved before a struggle for socialism can be begun.

Given that readers in Britain and internationally, outside the USA, are generally presented with the 'left', 'socialist' face of Sinn Fein, it is worth quoting the Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams at length on this point: "Real national independence is the prerequisite of socialism... socialism includes and is a stage in the advance of republicanism," p128, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*. "This classical (republican-PH) view of the matter contrasts with the ultra left view which counterposes republicanism and socialism and which breaks up the unity of the national independence movement by putting forward 'socialist' demands that have no possibility of being achieved until real independence is won, the result is that one gets neither independence nor socialism," p138.

Adams here stands reality on its head. As Connolly many times explained, only socialism can bring 'real' independence. And socialism can only be achieved by the working class, united in struggle. Adams' "unity of the national independence movement" means all stand together for a capitalist Ireland. Protestant workers could never be won to such a slogan. This 'nationalist' or 'anti-imperialist' unity as in an abuse of language it is sometimes termed, is the antithesis of class unity. The result of

this strategy is that the only force which could defeat imperialism, the working class, is left divided and confused and, to borrow a phrase from Gerry Adams, "the result is that one gets neither independence nor socialism."

Sinn Fein's incorrect ideas are compounded by the false methods of the IRA. The proudest boast of the Provos is that they cannot be defeated. It is true that the ruling class cannot entirely eradicate them. But after nearly two decades of their military campaign this is hardly the issue. The real question is, can they win? The answer, resoundingly, is no.

Individual terrorism can never succeed in defeating the might of the British or any other capitalist state. There is not a case in history where such methods have succeeded. Half acknowledging this, some IRA leaders argue that their intention is to 'wear down the will' of the British to stay in Ireland, thereby forcing them to the conference table. The gaping hole in this argument is the fact that the British have no longer any interest in retaining their direct control over the North. Their economic interests, not least the £1.5 billion annual subvention plus the cost of the troops, dictate that they should leave. They need no encouragement from the armalites and explosives of the IRA.

That they stay has nothing to do with 'political will' and is all to do with the fact that they have no choice. Withdrawal would mean civil war leading to a Palestine situation on Britain's doorstep. The status quo, however difficult, is preferable for them. The only effect of the Provos campaign is to make civil war a more certain outcome of withdrawal and to give the British ruling class even less option but to remain.

By and large, success for the Provos' terrorist tactics in reality becomes failure, whereas it is when they fail that they gain most success. This is the cul-de-sac into which individual terrorism has led them.

For example, the Gibraltar bombing failed and the Provos scored a huge propaganda success. Had the bombing been successful, the result would likely have been a carnage akin to the Enniskillen Remembrance Day bomb, except this time the majority of victims would probably have been tourists, not Protestant civilians. Fortunately for the Provos they failed, just as unfortunately for them the Enniskillen bomb went off.

At the time of the Enniskillen bomb and again when the two soldiers were shot dead in Andersontown, the Anglo-Irish Agreement had all but collapsed over the issues of extradition and of

Gibraltar. These two 'successful' IRA actions provided the Dublin government with the excuse to resume the Anglo-Irish meetings and, in the first case, allowed them to ratify the Single European Act which would not have gone through the Dail as it facilitates extradition. At the time of writing, the 'successful' killing of three soldiers in Holland has again allowed 'security' to be top of the agenda at an Anglo-Irish ministerial meeting.

Individual terrorism strengthens the state giving the excuse for repression. In Northern Ireland it has greatly deepened the division between the working class. Mass action, not the deeds of individuals no matter how well armed, organised or dedicated, is the only way to change society. No matter what the intent, and in the last analysis intent is of no importance, the effect of the Provos activities has been completely reactionary. Their best contribution to the genuine 'anti imperialist' struggle, the class struggle for socialism, would be to call a ceasefire.

Working class unity is the only answer. The basis for this unity lies in the conditions faced by both Catholic and Protestant workers. Catholics have suffered decades of discrimination and today face higher rates of unemployment. In the Lower Falls area of West Belfast more than 50% of heads of households are unemployed. Some estates have much higher figures: Twinbrook, 82%, Divis, 95%. 82% of Lower Falls households survive on a weekly income of less than £100. (Falls Community Council Figures).

DHSS strikes

Yet contrary to some nationalist mythology, working class Protestants are no pampered elite. Alongside the Lower Falls and separated from it by a huge barrier, the 'peace line', is the Protestant Lower Shankill. Here unemployment is lower—at 34%! But the poverty is no different. 93% of households depend to some degree, and 56% are entirely dependent, upon state benefits. 50% of households have a weekly income of less than £60, two thirds live on less than £90 per week. (Belfast Unemployed Centre Survey).

Protestant and Catholic workers face the same Tory attacks, the same cuts in services and benefits. On these issues unity in struggle has already been magnificently achieved. On March 14th, the day the bodies of the Gibraltar victims were returned, there was a partial general strike in defence of the health service. Over 12,000 demonstrated in Belfast in the biggest labour movement demonstration for decades. 2,000 mar-

ched in Derry. A few days later, 10,000 turned out to protest against the closure of local hospital services in Downpatrick, undoubtedly the biggest class demonstration ever held in this town. Similarly, 2,000 turned up to a public meeting in the small town of Ballycastle in April on the same issue. But for the indecisive role of the trade union leaders, who issued no clear strike call on March 14 and who have failed to organise follow up action, this movement would have been far more extensive.

Recent strikes have been solid and militant and, in each case, have involved Catholic and Protestant workers standing shoulder to shoulder. 1987 began with the NCU dispute, the North being one of the most militant regions. In the summer, Abbey meat workers stayed out for 16 weeks and won an important victory. More recently Ford workers and seafarers have displayed the same militancy. Despite a deeper recession than in Britain the fall in trade union membership has not been as sharp. Between 1979 and 1987 trade union membership fell from 238,000 to 224,000, a tiny drop and proportionately less than the fall in TUC numbers from 12.7 million to something over 9 million today.

Over the past two and a half years the unity of the workforce and of the unions has come under attack from both Loyalists and Republicans. These attacks have been repulsed. Workers have moved into struggle not just on economic issues but also against sectarianism. The furious sectarian reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement came to a head in the summer of 1986. Alongside a massive campaign by the UDA to drive Catholics from the workplaces, there came a threat from the IRA to anyone working for or supplying the security forces. Tens of thousands of workers, cleaners, telephone engineers and civil servants, became 'legitimate targets'.

In mid-August a telephoned threat was made to Catholic staff working in the DHSS office in Lisburn. All the workers walked out. With *Militant* supporters playing a leading role, the action was spread to every DHSS office. As office after office closed and 4,000 workers, Catholic and Protestant, came out, the UDA, who had issued the threat, backed down. Even though DHSS workers had shown concretely how the movement could begin a fightback, the trade union leaders, both the right wing and the Stalinist 'left', were at a complete loss. Not one leader attempted to organise similar action. Shortly after the DHSS victory, but apparently oblivious of its significance, Terry Carlin, the Northern Ireland Of-

ficer of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), spoke in despairing tones to *The Irish Times*, 23 August, 1986: "Right now there's not much hope knocking about on this side. It's very frustrating. Some branches have spent the last fortnight dealing solely with intimidation complaints and often there is not a great deal the unions can do."

The DHSS action, along with threats by other trade unionists to take similar action, cut across the mounting sectarianism. Eventually under pressure from below the ICTU leaders did launch an anti-sectarian campaign, the 'Peace, Jobs and Progress' campaign. Conducted in conjunction with the church leaders and employers and appealing also to the politicians, this campaign never went beyond the drawing boards.

When the killings were stepped up early this year, the trade union leaders and their campaign were nowhere to be seen. In particular, when a young shop steward, Charles McGrillen, was gunned down outside the supermarket in Belfast where he worked, neither the ICTU nor his 'Communist' Party led union, the ATGWU, took any action. In this situation *Militant* supporters proposed a resolution, through Derry Trades Council, for the Northern Ireland Committee Conference of ICTU, held in April, that the movement should prepare its members to take strike action in the event of further intimidation or physical attacks on trade unionists. The bureaucracy prevented this motion from being discussed.

Once again it has been the DHSS workers, with *Militant* supporters again giving the lead, who have shown the way. They have implemented the Derry resolution which the trade union bureaucracy refused even to discuss. At the end of April a threat from the INLA against DHSS fraud officers in Derry was answered by the entire Derry DHSS office coming out on strike. By the next morning the strike had spread to every DHSS office and within hours the INLA publicly withdrew the threat.

Throughout the troubles the trade union and Labour leaderships in Britain and Ireland, North and South, have relied upon and supported Tory measures. The Labour government of 1974-79 carried on and even intensified the repressive methods of its predecessor. By and large the union leaders have turned a blind eye to repression. The end result of their reliance on the state forces has been to leave the working class defenceless in face of sectarian attacks.

Only the working class, acting independently, has the power to break the sectarian impasse. This is what the



The Enniskillen bombing allowed the Tories to put 'security' at the top of the agenda.

DHSS strikes have clearly demonstrated. What is now needed is the mobilisation of the entire movement against the bigots. The best way to begin such a mobilisation would be through the convening of a rank and file conference of the unions and of genuine community organisations to discuss concretely what action to take against sectarianism and how the working class can be organised in its own defence.

Defensive action alone will not be enough. So long as workers remain divided politically the Tories and bigots will always retain an influence. A political offensive must also be launched. Such a conference should also discuss the formation and building of a mass socialist Labour Party. If this party adopted and vigorously campaigned against all Tory attacks on living standards and democratic rights, and put forward a clear socialist alternative, the majority of both Catholic and Protestant workers could be won to its banner.

Change course

Sceptics will scorn that this is 'too difficult' and there are no greater sceptics than the right wing and Stalinist trade union leadership. But this was the same argument these gentlemen advanced 20 years ago to excuse their refusal to mount a struggle for socialist class unity when the troubles began. They preferred the 'less difficult', more 'realistic' course of abandoning an independent class position and supporting the ruling class. This 'easier' course has led through internment, Bloody Sunday, the UWC stoppage, the hunger strikes, the Anglo-Irish Agreement to two decades of violent upheaval in

which the class movement has been thrown back and close to 3,000 people have lost their lives.

Militant has never said that the struggle for class unity and socialism in Northern Ireland would be simple or straight forward -because of the policy of the Labour and trade union leaderships it is far less so today than it was 20 years ago. But it is far less arduous than the alternative—more failed Tory initiatives, more repression, more poverty, more and eventually much worse sectarian violence. The choice is stark—either fight for class unity and socialism or face vicious sectarian reaction. Since 1968, the year which marked the beginning of the troubles, the leaders of the workers organisations have made the wrong choice. Twenty years on a complete change of course is demanded.



Read *Militant Irish Monthly*, the Marxist paper for workers' unity and socialism. To subscribe for 6 issues, send £3 to *Militant*, 4 Waring Street Belfast.

It is only a matter of time

It is now just eight months since the stock market crash of October 1987. In referring to that collapse in the last issue of the *MIR*, we predicted that "the Great Crash of 1987 is making way for the most serious decline in capitalism since the early 1930s... (which) will surpass anything experienced in the post-war period, with significant absolute falls in production and investment."

And yet this dire warning for the future of the world capitalist economy, echoed also by many supporters of the capitalist system, has not yet been confirmed. The major capitalist nations continue to experience growth in output, particularly in the USA and the UK. On the surface it seems that the governments and banks of the leading economic powers have achieved a degree of stability in currency rates, especially for the dollar, through their agreements to cooperate in monetary and fiscal policies.

So complacent have some financial leaders become that British Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, when meeting with his opposite numbers at G7 (the meeting of the top seven capitalist economies) was prompted to say: "It now appears that we have shrugged off the stock market crash". In September 1987 Lawson had been equally confident about the world economy. Then in a speech to the IMF, he boldly remarked that the Louvre Accord (the agreement made in February 1987 to support the dollar) was a 'great success'. Within a month, the dollar slumped another 10% against other currencies and the consequent threat of rising interest rates triggered off the stock market crash in Wall Street and worldwide.

With 'perfect timing', Lawson's comments at the April G7 meeting coincided with

the news that the US trade deficit for February 1988 was \$13.8bn, only slightly less than the terrible figures which contributed to the stock crash last October. It meant that the US deficit for the previous three months was \$38.4bn, the worst quarterly figures since the Louvre Accord. No wonder that Wall Street promptly plunged 100 points and the central banks of the G7 countries were forced to buy billions of dollars to shore up its rate against other currencies.

The reality is that nothing has really changed for the better for world capitalism since the October crash and the basic problems that provoked that fall remain. That is why, with the exception of Tokyo, the stock markets of the world have failed to recover even a major part of the losses suffered in the crash.

Imbalances

The small cut in the US budget spending made by Reagan for the last financial year was supposed to restore 'confidence'. But it has hardly dented the overall deficit, because Reagan has refused to raise taxes. And despite a nearly 50% devaluation of the dollar against other currencies since 1986, the US trade deficit remains stubbornly high at an annual rate of \$150bn, because the US budget deficit continues to fuel a consumer boom. At the same time the \$1000bn foreign debt of the Third World nations has not been reduced or resolved, so the danger of widespread default on repayments and a consequent world financial crisis remains on the agenda.

Ironically, because these imbalances have not been corrected, the world boom in production and trade has staggered on. A recession or slump may now be postponed until after the US elections in November—

Reagan wants to leave the painful decisions about spending cuts and tax rises to his successor. But 'market forces' will eventually exert themselves.

If the US dollar is to be supported at present levels, without cutting the US budget drastically, then world interest rates will have to rise, driving manufacturing production and investment (already relatively weak) down.

Alternatively, if the US budget shortfall is reduced by spending cuts or tax rises, this will lower consumer spending and business profits in the USA and push the economy downwards.

It is not possible for Japan and Europe to compensate for a slump in the US market as some capitalist commentators hope. Even if Japan and Europe were to try and stimulate their economies through Keynesian deficit budgets, as the Americans have been demanding, it would not be enough to hold up world markets. Any decline in the US market would damage profitability and production for the other capitalist economies, so increased domestic government spending would only fuel inflation rather than production. As Clayton Yeutter, the US trade representative, recently warned: "countries that depend heavily on the US market to fuel their economic growth (that means everybody else -RM) will be hardest hit when that adjustment occurs".

A decline in the US market would also spell disaster for the Third World economies. Again Yeutter has provided evidence: the USA imports 65% of all Third World manufacturing exports, while Europe only takes 22% and Japan just 7%. If the USA cuts back on the purchase of these goods, then Europe and Japan will not be able to take up the slack.



US Trade Secretary Baker.

Alternatively, if the US government decides not to cut the budget deficit significantly, or allow interest rates to rise, then the US dollar will fall sharply in order to make US goods more competitive. This will reduce Europe and Japan's share of world markets, provoking competitive devaluations or protectionist measures, rising interest rates, or all three—driving the world economy into recession. This is the great fear of US Trade Secretary Baker, and it is what he threatens the other G7 nations with unless they bow to American policies.

Slump

In 1929 the US economy was already heading into recession when the October Crash came. But Europe did not descend into slump until the summer of 1930. In the case of some countries even later. This time the stock crash has come before a production downturn in the USA, although it affected all economies simultaneously. All the ingredients for a significant absolute fall in production and trade—the definition of a slump—have not disappeared since last October. It is only a matter of time—probably by the end of this year, or into next year—but it is coming.

Abel Aganbegyan is Gorbachev's chief economic advisor. The recent publication in the West of his book, *The Challenge: Economics of Perestroika* (Hutchinson £8.95), is itself an indication of the profound crisis now facing the ruling bureaucracy of the Soviet Union.

The economics of Perestroika

Until recently official Soviet economists denied that there were any fundamental problems: it was merely a question of 'perfecting' socialism. Such complacency is swept aside by Aganbegyan. His main aim is of course to explain the economic policies for which Gorbachev is now pushing. But in justifying the new line Aganbegyan, who clearly has access to all the necessary information, has produced a devastating diagnosis of the deep-rooted sickness afflicting the Soviet economy.

By Lynn Walsh

The truth is that the Soviet economy has been slowing down for over 15 years. Over the five years of the Eleventh Plan, 1981-85, the national income grew by only 16.5%. This contrasts with a 41% increase during the Eighth Plan, 1966-70, 28% growth during 1971-75 and 21% during 1976-80.

These growth rates, however, are based on official figures, which Aganbegyan admits are 'inadequate' and in fact overestimate the actual growth. According to his calculations "in the period 1981-85 there was practically no economic growth."

Considerable detail and some very illuminating examples of the symptoms of stagnation are given in the book, though it is not possible to relate them all here. Aganbegyan summarises it in this way: "Unprecedented stagnation and crisis occurred, during the period 1979-82, when production of 40% of all industrial goods actually fell. Agriculture declined (throughout this period it failed to reach the 1978 output levels). The use of productive resources sharply declined and the rate of growth of all indicators of efficiency in social production slowed down: in effect the productivity of labour did not increase and return on capital investment fell, aggravating the fall in capital-output ratio..."

Towards the end of the 1981-85 period, he says, the situation improved slightly. "But overall, the 1981-85 plan appeared not to be fulfilled and the country fell into a serious economic situation."

This is when Gorbachev became general secretary. He represented the wing of the bureaucracy which recognised the threat of an economic catastrophe and had concluded that only radical reforms could avert disaster.

Aganbegyan attempts to analyse the reasons for the economic malaise, though he goes only so far. He does not write off the gains of the planned economy. In a chapter on *The Lessons of History* he outlines the gigantic scale of the achievements. The cost, in terms of human blood and sweat, was enormous. But on the eve of the first world war tsarist Russia accounted for a mere 4% of the world's industrial output. Today the USSR produces about 20%.

But the drive, directed from above, to transform a backward, mainly rural society into a modern industrial power led to what Gorbachev describes as the 'gross output drive'. The command structure—or 'bureaucracy', as Aganbegyan admits (page 194) at one point—concentrated on building up heavy industry, drawing on the country's vast natural resources and mobilising the massive reserves of labour. This is described as the 'extensive' development of production. This continued even after the heavy industrial foundations were laid down. In the last 15-year period there was still a "predominance of extensive over intensive factors of growth: two thirds economic growth occurring through growth of resources and only one third through increased efficiency."

Productivity

The reformers in the leadership around Gorbachev recognise that this has now reached its limits. Easily exploitable reserves of coal, oil and other minerals have been used up, and the cost of extraction, particularly of energy, is now much greater. The Soviet Union produces more steel than the USA, but it can no longer afford to squander resources in the extravagant use of metal products.

Even more critical is the supply of labour. In the period of post-war growth the labour force grew by about 10 million every year. In the next period, because of the demographic impact of the war (in which about 20 million died), the labour force will grow by only about 2.5 million annually. At the same time, improvements in living standards will require more workers in health, education and services. More labour could undoubtedly be drawn from the countryside, but only by improving the efficiency of agriculture.

Economic growth, from now on, can come only through raising the produc-



Abel Aganbegyan, Gorbachev's chief economic adviser.

tivity of labour, through intensive rather than extensive factors, through quality rather than quantity.

The old system of economic management is incapable of directing such a radical change. Aganbegyan's criticisms of what he calls the "command administrative style of management" are very sharp. Plans were based on targets, targets are expressed in terms of volumes and physical aggregates of products. Everything has been geared to fulfilling the plan in quantitative terms, or even to over-fulfillment. Prices of capital equipment or consumer goods, have long ceased to be a reliable yardstick of efficiency. A wide range of prices bear little or no relationship to the real costs of production. They do not reflect supply and demand, but neither are they a reliable tool for planning.

Far from encouraging innovation and efficiency, the command system tends to penalise managers (and therefore workers) who 'disrupted' the plan by introducing new technology or re-organising processes of production. Aganbegyan gives several examples of technically advanced machines or processes developed in the USSR but applied to production in Japan or the USA much more rapidly and extensively than in the Soviet Union.

He also gives devastating examples of economic blunders (costing the equivalent of years of production in many cases) made by the highly centralised management structure, inevitably out of touch with the many limbs of the USSR's continental economy. Aganbegyan also refers to waste and corruption, but only in pass-

ing. He stops far short of revealing its true extent. It is really an organic disease, which is a big factor in the country's stagnation. He limits himself (page 194) to saying "the administrative network itself increasingly deteriorated into a self aggrandising system." This is similar to Gorbachev's own vague references to a 'braking system' which is holding back social development. Aganbegyan says: "An inevitable corollary of this administrative system of management was bureaucracy—at the opposite pole to democracy."

Aganbegyan's analysis, however, is purely 'economic'. From his critique of the old system he concludes that it is necessary to change over to "a fundamentally different system of management based on the use of economic levers and incentives." But for Marxists economics are not enough. Marx himself considered his theory to be a theory of political-economy. Economics are inseparable from social relationships. Economic developments are always bound up with class relations and political developments. This must be applied to the Soviet Union and the East European states as well as to capitalist societies.

Bureaucracy

But Aganbegyan makes no attempt to examine the social basis of the 'economic management system' he rejects. Apparently, it is simply the product of the economic policies pursued under different conditions in the past. New economic conditions demand new economic policies. He acknowledges the conservative outlook of the old managers, but appears to believe that this can be overcome by a vigorous campaign for the new policies, together with "the development of democracy." In fact, the old 'economic management system' has a distinct social basis, which is now a powerful element in society. The isolation of the revolution in a relatively underdeveloped country did not merely lead to a 'gross output drive'.

Under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, the working class, a minority of the population at that time, were able to take power. But cut off from the proletariat of the advanced countries of capitalism with a much more developed economic basis, the working class of the Soviet Union was not strong enough to maintain political control of society. Their power was usurped by the bureaucracy, a privileged social layer, which through bloody purges under Stalin, established a monopoly of political power, and

economic administration. The bureaucracy preserved the main social gains of the revolution, the nationalised economy and planned production, but regarded them as the basis of its own privileges, power and prestige.

Under conditions of backwardness the bureaucracy, through developing the industrial basis of society, played a relatively progressive role. But its social character determined the methods of management it employed: coercion, direction from above, rigid centralisation, inflexible targets expressed as physical aggregates, and incentive schemes geared to output volumes. The bureaucracy inevitably relied on totalitarian methods. The one thing the ruling caste could not tolerate was the involvement of the working class in the running of the economy and the state.

When the overriding task was laying the foundations of heavy industry the bureaucracy, given the USSR's abundant resources, could achieve staggering successes. But its strength, as Aganbegyan himself has shown, has turned into its fatal weakness. Bureaucratic methods, always crude and clumsy, are totally obsolete in a sophisticated modern economy.

Aganbegyan puts the crisis down to outmoded methods of management. He never faces up to the fundamental reason: the bureaucracy has outlived even the relatively progressive role it played during the phase of basic industrialisation. Now the ruling caste is a complete fetter on development.

The present crisis in the USSR—and in the other Stalinist states of Eastern Europe—is no longer due to historic backwardness. The foundations of modern industry have been established. There is no real shortage of resources. The working class is now the dominant class in Soviet society, and it is the best educated and technically trained proletariat in the world. The current economic crisis is the product of the bureaucratic distortion of Soviet society.

The policies proposed by Aganbegyan must be evaluated in this light. While he repeatedly refers to the need for more democracy, the need to consult the workers, and the increased involvement of the working class, he nevertheless implicitly rejects the only real solution to the crisis: the restoration of workers' democracy. This is the oxygen required by an atrophied system. Successful planning requires the conscious involvement of the working class at every level of political control and economic planning. This would mean the establishment of workers' control and management, with the implementation of the condi-

tions set out by Lenin at the time of the revolution. All officials would be elected and subject to recall, with strict limitations on differentials and safeguards against privileges.

On the economic basis now established in the Soviet Union it would be easily possible to reduce the working day and the working year dramatically, allowing workers the time to participate in running society. Communications technology based on computers and systems of control based on microprocessors offer all the means of establishing conscious control over a complex modern economy. One priority would be the planned integration of the USSR, the East European States, and China.

This, of course, would entail the overthrow of the bureaucracy. It is hardly surprising, then, that Aganbegyan steers clear of any such course. Gorbachev may or may not endorse all the policies outlined in *The Challenge*, and whether he will be able to push through his proposals against opposition within the bureaucracy remains to be seen. But Aganbegyan is undoubtedly outlining the viewpoint of the wing of the bureaucracy which sees the need for reform from above in order to prevent revolution from below. Nothing in Aganbegyan's proposals, therefore, threatens the existence of the bureaucracy. On the contrary, through attacking the outmoded policies of the conservative wing he hopes to ensure the successful adaptation and survival of the bureaucracy.

Market

What are the policies being proposed by Aganbegyan as a solution, and what are their prospects of success in the next period? They are based on a move from 'administrative' to 'economic' methods of planning. Enterprises in some sectors, it is intended, will become self-financing and allowed to make their own plans. There will be a wholesale market for both production equipment and materials and consumer goods. This is intended to force enterprises to economise with materials and labour and to give consumers more choice. An incentive system will be introduced to reward efficiency and encourage the application of new technology. In other words, a much bigger element of the market mechanism will be introduced into the economy.

Although Aganbegyan argues that 'economic' methods must be applied throughout the whole system—total 'perestroika'—he seems quite cautious about the extent to which market rela-

tions should be given scope. Whether this is diplomatic caution in the face of bureaucratic opposition, or he has learned the lessons of the disastrous free market experiments in Eastern Europe, especially in Yugoslavia, is not clear. The commanding heights of the economy will remain under centralised state control, and autonomous 'collective' enterprises will have to give priority to fulfilling contracts with state industries and organisations. Despite the detailed proposals and arguments put forward by Aganbegyan, the relationship he envisages between the plan and the market remains unclear. This points to the flaw in his proposals.

Initially market methods can undoubtedly improve efficiency and raise production in some sectors. If applied widely, as proposed by Gorbachev, they may well have a significant effect on the economy for a period. But the clear lesson of previous attempts in both Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself is that market pressures, which are by definition unplanned, produce new imbalances. This is particularly so in the case of production goods, where demand and specifications depend decisively on the overall development of industry.

Gains in some sectors lead to shortages in others. The central planning authorities then have to step in once again with 'administrative' measures to try to overcome dislocation and crisis. This is particularly the case when the functionaries of the central planning bodies have a vested interest in preserving the bureaucratic basis of their power and privileges.

The resort to market methods represents a step backwards from the point of view of social development. The problems of the efficient use of resources, the application of science and technology, the assessment of social needs, and the real preferences of consumers could all be solved through the development of **democratic planning**. Market methods, on the other hand, will inevitably compound the problems of bureaucratic waste and inefficiency with anarchic economic relations.

But will Aganbegyan's policies improve the conditions of the Soviet workers? In order to overcome resistance within the bureaucracy, Gorbachev has appealed over their heads to the workers to exert pressure on his opponents. But workers are clearly sceptical about the benefits of 'perestroika', which have not been forthcoming so far. All the indications are, moreover, that it is the workers who will bear the real cost of 'accelerating socio-economic development.'

The introduction of realistic, economic prices, for instance, will mean a big increase in the cost of living. Food prices in particular will go up if this policy is carried through. Food is subsidised to the extent of 40% of the cost of production, so economic prices would mean massive rises. The workers' explosive response to such increases in Poland and elsewhere may lead Gorbachev to hesitate.

Higher prices, argues Aganbegyan, will be compensated for by higher wages. But wage rises will have to be paid for by improvements in productivity and output. This will take time. In the recent period, workers' pay has in some cases been reduced through relating bonuses to quality of output—before the workers are equipped with the necessary plant and machinery to achieve improvements. Enterprises will also be expected to use labour much more efficiently. This will mean shedding hundreds of thousands of workers. But again, the creation of new jobs will undoubtedly take time, even if things develop according to Aganbegyan's plans. He says himself that in the next few years (when most investment will be on the replacement of obsolete equipment) additional growth will have to be achieved primarily through squeezing out the unused or under-utilised reserves of the economy. Only in the following period will massive new investment in social provision and service industries become possible.

Incentives

Meanwhile, the enhanced incentives he proposes will go predominantly to the managers, engineers, and technical-white collar workers in industry. Manual workers will be offered very little in the next few years—simply the promise of improvements later, a story they have heard many times before. The strike last October in Moscow's massive Likino bus factory and other strikes indicate the response that will be provoked from the workers if Gorbachev attempts to carry through reform at their expense.

Throughout his book, Aganbegyan repeatedly asserts the need for democracy, and one chapter is devoted to Glasnost, *Democracy, Self-management as the Dynamic of Perestroika*. Despite his sharp criticisms of bureaucracy, however, his proposals for workers' self-management are extremely limited. Workers in enterprises should be able to elect their managers, he argues. The experience of Yugoslavia, however, where quite extensive measures of self-management were

introduced at one time, has demonstrated the limitations of such reforms. Unless the working class, through trade unions and genuine soviet-type organisations, controls the central planning bodies of the state, limited rights of participation in individual enterprises amount to very little. In fact, when the enterprise is constrained by a combination of the state plan and market forces outside its control, such participation can ensnare the workers in decision-making processes from which they cannot benefit. A precondition of genuine self-management would be independent, democratic trade unions through which the workers could defend their interests. Aganbegyan talks only of consulting with the official trade unions, which are just another instrument of the bureaucracy.

Even with the election of managers, the bureaucracy, through its privileged managerial strata and its political apparatus, the Communist Party, will retain decisive control. A choice between party candidates, advocated by Gorbachev and Aganbegyan, will not undermine the power of the party leadership.

At the same time, the economic policies advocated by Aganbegyan, if carried through, will produce a widening of the differentials between workers and the ruling elite. Sections of the bureaucrats in obsolete arms of the apparatus may be undermined. But the functionaries, managers, technical experts, and the burgeoning business elements will gain even bigger material privileges, a growth that will inevitably be accompanied by new forms of profiteering and corruption.

If the policies outlined by Aganbegyan are energetically implemented, as Gorbachev is clearly attempting to do, they may well give a boost to the Soviet economy for a period. But they will not, despite Aganbegyan's forcefully argued claims, advance the socialisation of economic relations and provide a way out of the crisis. Nor will perestroika lead to a progressive democratisation of Soviet society. The ruling bureaucracy, with its material basis in privilege and its vested interest in power, remains an insuperable obstacle. For the Soviet Union to go forward and realise the enormous economic, scientific and cultural potential of the planned economy the successors of Stalin must be overthrown by the true heirs of October, the working class. All the conditions for this political revolution are now being prepared. At best Gorbachev, who is undoubtedly an astute leader, may buy the bureaucracy some time.

Jesse Jackson and the black struggle

Twenty years ago Martin Luther King, America's foremost black civil rights activist, was assassinated. Two decades later the successes of Jesse Jackson's campaign for the Democratic nomination in the 1988 US Presidential elections has once again raised the question, which way forward for blacks in the USA?

King's death on April 4th 1968 led to violent protests in over 100 cities. 146 people were killed in riots which shook the ruling class. In response to the increasingly bitter racial battles which had already crossed the US in the 1960s, the Kerner Commission had been set up by President Johnson to investigate the causes. It concluded that "our nation is moving towards two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal," with the likelihood of more and more blacks "extending support to now isolated extremists who advocate civil disruption." In other words the USA would face revolutionary upheavals unless major reforms were carried out.

Discrimination persists

Twenty years on the social position of blacks has not improved and for many living standards have deteriorated. Between 1970 and 1986 the proportion of blacks living below the poverty line of \$10,000 pa earnings rose from 26.8% to 30.2%. Those on less than half the poverty wage rose by 45%! A former member of the Kerner Commission commented in March 1988, "It would have been a nightmare to have thought things wouldn't change (but) we haven't made much more than token advances." Half of black children are born into poverty. Half are still illiterate by the time they are 17 years old. They have a shorter life expectancy than whites. Many live—in the world's most advanced nation—in houses without electricity, sewerage or water.

Instead of blacks' position improving vis-a-vis whites, there has been a deterioration. Black unemployment remains twice as high as the national average. In 1950, before Martin Luther King began his civil rights crusade, median black incomes were 60% of those of whites. The figure is 56% today. Black infant mortality, from

By Phil Frampton

being 58% higher than white infants in 1968, has risen to being 65% higher.

Blacks continue to face widespread repression and discrimination. Recently an 81 year old black man was shot dead by police in Dallas. The same police shot dead a 76 year old black woman at her back door. A Chicago survey showed blacks in the city were six times more likely to be killed by the police. Police repression is such that blacks, 12% of the population, fill half the country's prison cells.

Many advances were made in the civil rights battle against apartheid laws in the South. But while South Africa lifted its ban on mixed marriages in 1986, it was not until last year that the Mississippi state finally amended the law banning mixed marriages there. The Bob Jones University in South Carolina recently faced legal action over its continued ban on students' mixed marriages or even mixed dating! When Reagan's office, under pressure, conducted an investigation into education in 10 states, six were found to be still not complying with the 1964 Education Segregation Act.

These conditions are the root cause of the almost unanimous black support for Jackson in the primary elections, indicating the deep sense of injustice felt by blacks.

The most advanced and powerful nation capitalism has known cannot alleviate the poverty and oppression of its national and racial minorities. What sharper indication could there be of the rottenness of capitalism? Last year an extra \$41 billion was produced by the US economy. If this wealth, the most modern technology and science, and a democratic constitution guaranteeing the rights of all, cannot be harnessed by capitalism to eliminate national and racial oppression, then capitalism can rule out any solution to the national questions facing South Africa, the Middle East or Ireland.

The whole history of black people in the US vividly confirms the position outlined in Leon Trotsky's theory of the Permanent Revolution. Trotsky in 1906 posed that the epoch of imperialism and world economy meant that those

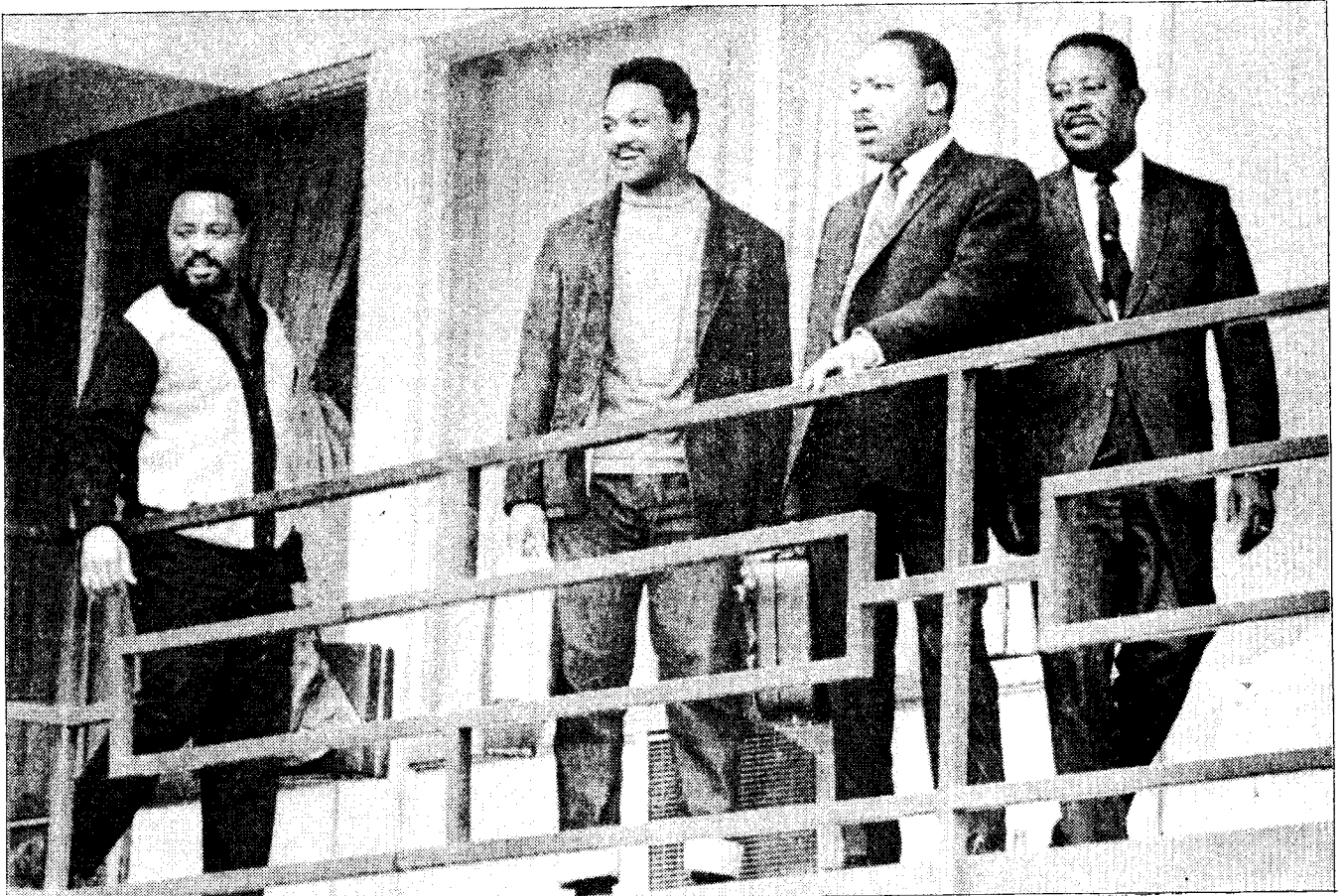
societies which had not carried out the basic tasks to establish a viable capitalist state—land reform, a unified nation state and democratic rule—would find these tasks impossible to successfully complete. Only the working class in our era, through implementing a socialist plan of production internationally, could take society out of this impasse.

For the US capitalist class their revolutionary mission ended with the mopping up of slave-owning society in the aftermath of the Civil War of 1861-1865. By 1871 they had finally established the domination of industrial capital over the key parts of the continent. But capitalism could not even then afford to give equality to blacks. The capitalists feared the unity of the radical propertyless Southern blacks with the Northern industrial workers as potentially revolutionary. These two trends run through the struggles of blacks in the USA: on the one hand, the remorseless attempts by capitalism to drive a racist wedge between workers, on the other, the continued attempts of black and white workers in struggle to achieve unity.

History of struggle

Prior to the Paris Commune, Marx referred to Lincoln's 1863 Proclamation of Slave Emancipation as the greatest event of the 19th century. Lincoln had been elected as President in 1860. His aim was the long-term elimination of slavery. But the secession and declaration of the Southern states pre-empted him. For the slave-owners, the election of a Republican representing Northern industrial capitalism signalled the end of their domination of the army and judiciary.

Only through clinging onto control of the state machine, had the slave-owners been able to protect their system from the more powerful Northern capitalists. The plantation system's rapacious exhausting of fertile land dictated its expansion northwards. Without control of the state this was impossible. "War is the continuation of politics by another means". The Confederacy declared war to crush the Northern capitalists. The North was faced with revolution or counter-revolution. Either Lincoln would have to carry out the revolutionary destruction of the slave system



Jesse Jackson with Martin Luther King, 2nd from right, on the hotel balcony where King was later to be assassinated.

or the North would face counter-revolution.

The organised white workers in the North understood what was at stake. "There is one truth which should be clearly understood by every working man in the Union. The slavery of the black man leads to slavery of the white man... If the doctrine of treason is true, that 'capital should own labour', then all labourers, white or black, are and ought to be slaves," wrote *The Iron Platform*, a New York labour paper in 1862. Sixty per cent of trade unionists signed up for the Northern armies.

Confronted with the rottenness of the federal state machine which was riddled with Southern sympathisers—for the fortunes of commercial capital in shipping and banking were tied to slavery—Lincoln initially hesitated to declare war against slavery itself, trying to avoid a revolutionary war.

Despite its advantages of wealth and population, the North suffered some heavy defeats. But, as Marx had predicted, the defeats finally forced Lincoln to engage in war to the death by declaring for the freedom of the slaves.

The declaration itself hastened the undermining of the Southern economy as hundreds of thousands fled the plantations. From this point on, 200,000 blacks formed the vanguard of the Union drive on the South. The freed slaves marched forward to seize the

land from the retreating plantation owners.

While the final capitulation of the South in 1865 was followed by a pause in the revolution, in which reaction attempted to regain a hold and restore the old society, this only triggered a new lurch forward of the revolution—the period known as the 'Radical Reconstruction'. Jesse Jackson and a section of black Democrats have called on the party for a 'Second Reconstruction' programme. This indicates the confusion in their outlook and their mistaken illusions in big business.

'Reconstruction'

Reconstruction was a continuation of the revolutionary civil war. It was a social revolution. Arms in hand black ex-slaves and poor whites fought to win the right to vote, education and land, summed up in the slogan, '40 acres and a mule'. The Northern capitalists backed the movement in so much as it erased completely any threat of restoration and consolidated the domination of Northern capital. But the threat to capitalism was also apparent. For example, the blacks of South Carolina won a majority in the convention to draw up the new state constitution. Illiterate and mostly too poor to pay taxes, they established a thoroughly democratic constitution including the election of all

state officials, rights for women, the breaking up of the large estates and free education for all children. In addition the movement of Southern blacks was paralleled by the industrial working class of the North. Consequently, once established in the South, the capitalists unleashed the Ku Klux Klan to wage a white terror against poor blacks and whites alike. Their aim was to divide and rule to prevent 'an American Commune'.

Reconstruction represented a revolutionary democratic struggle in which the interests of industrial capital and those of the black slaves temporarily coincided. Today there is no basis for a coincidence of interests of the big business controlled Democratic Party and American blacks who are 90% working class. No matter how much capitalism may regret rearing the racial beast in its basement, emancipation today, rather than consolidating US capitalism, would challenge its very basis.

All the civil rights legislation has made but a dent in blacks oppression. Trotsky explained in *The History of the Russian Revolution* that the effect of the elimination of 'de jure' legal discrimination against the Jews—who in Russia faced 650 laws limiting their rights—only served to expose more sharply the 'de facto' reality of their oppression. In the US, blacks, confined to the ghettos with

half the incomes and a third of the wealth of whites, can only achieve emancipation through massive wage increases, benefit increases, the replacement of six million slum dwellings and free health care—which would come to a bill equalling 10% of the national income! Marxists fight for such a programme of reforms. But while the ex-slaves' struggle for the land of the plantocracy did not fundamentally challenge the profit system, a 'second reconstruction', because it locks blacks in a struggle with the capitalists for their share of production, can only be carried out by the working class in the revolutionary struggle to establish a socialist United States of America.

The Democrats committed to reforms would play the same treacherous role as the Republicans of the 1870s. Once the capitalist-led Republicans were consolidated these 'progressives' smashed every democratic right the blacks had won and propagated racialism at new unprecedented levels. By the end of the century most Southern blacks were unable to vote, to organise or to speak out. Every day a black would be strung up as the terror of the lynch law ran through the South. By 1890 only 20% of Mississippi blacks were voting. Electoral gerrymandering limited black representation even further.

Separatism

Only the organised movements of the working class and the small farmers cut across the racial divide. Big business tried to rule the workers via racial divisions. These they fostered especially in the workers organisations. The social divisions of segregation were perpetuated in the workplaces and even in the trade unions. Racism, as with other backward prejudices, was nurtured by the bosses. They deliberately used unemployed blacks as strikebreakers and sent provocateurs into unions to create racial splits.

Today's united non-racial trade union organisations in the USA represent a colossal gain for the working class after a century of struggle. They are a product of the continual pressure of black trade unionists in particular for united organisations. Unity as opposed to separatism has been the central feature of blacks' struggles. Blacks only set up separate unions when firmly blocked by those who insisted on whites only trade unions. The Colored Labor Union, for example, was only established in the 1860s after many rebuffs from the National Labor Union.

The American working class has tremendous qualities of courage, audacity, innovation and determina-

le from the Civil War through the Wobblies to the CIO. Only through rapid expansion abroad facilitating concessions at home, has US capitalism been able to pacify its workers. In particular the employers granted concessions to the middle classes and the skilled workers, the labour aristocracy. Leaning on the best-organised, better paid workers capitalism was able to maintain the subjugation of the great majority of the rest of the working class. To this labour aristocracy it gave the illusion of a stake in the development of capitalism and invited the workers and their families to ape bourgeois ways and prejudices. This particularly applied in relation to racialism. Long periods of relative class stability left the skilled unions' leadership rotten with prejudice. Through the first half of this century, the leadership of the American Federation of Labour (AFL), the skilled workers' unions, showed virulent racial prejudice. Gompers, the AFL leader, argued against a campaign to restore black voting rights on the grounds that blacks were too stupid to understand the US constitution. The AFL leaders accommodation to big business barred the way to class unity. Only in these conditions did black nationalism or black separatism develop.

In 1920 only 60,000 of 1.3 million black workers were in trade unions. Barred by the union leaders, blacks made repeated calls to open up the unions but eventually they had no alternative but to develop their own unions such as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters which once set up in 1925 quickly grew to 50,000 strong. The AFL remained passive while blacks, drawn to the cities after America's entry into the First World War, found themselves living in terrible conditions, often unemployed and facing race riots and pogroms. The disillusion with the promised land of the North drew millions of Northern blacks to the ideas of Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). From 1918 to 1920 the UNIA recruited 3 million members in 900 branches. Garvey raised the question of black unity and self-determination and the idea of blacks going 'Back to Africa'. Under similar conditions, Malcolm X's Black Muslims grew to 2 million members in the early 1960s, raising again the question of black identity and nationalism. Nor was it coincidental that in the 1980s at the height of the Reagan reaction, the right-wing black nationalist, Louis Farrakhan, drew tens of thousands to his rallies with the call for 'Black Self-help' and his 'Blacks—the chosen people' notion.

Nationalism is a blind alley for the

working class. It obscures the real problem facing society—the need for a democratically run socialist plan of production—and at the same time provides a cover for reactionaries such as Farrakhan who praises Hitler, the butcher of the German workers' movement.

It is the duty of every socialist to support the right of all peoples to live without oppression, whether on the grounds of sex, colour, nationality or religion. Lenin thrashed out and clarified the issue of the national question⁴ with Rosa Luxemburg prior to the 1917 revolution.

She argued that the international nature of capitalism meant a struggle for nationhood would not relieve the oppressed of the yoke of their own capitalists and therefore would divert from the struggle against imperialism, and in particular the tsar's empire.

Refusal to support the right of self-determination if the oppressed nation demanded it would only place the Marxists in apparent sympathy with tsarist rule. Lenin consistently argued for the unity of nations, and for the superiority of a united proletariat against the empire, but he recognised that if the Bolsheviks wished to lead the workers and peasants in struggle, then the Bolsheviks would have to champion all the basic democratic demands of the masses, including an end to national oppression. At the same time he was for an iron unity of the working class movement. He totally opposed division of the movement on the grounds of nationality, religion or colour. Only in this way could the bourgeois nationalist poison be combatted and the maximum trust be created in the workers organisations. The victory of the Russian revolution which united 200 nationalities confirmed the correctness of Lenin's approach.

Martin Luther King

The struggle against racial and national oppression is an inevitable stage that a nationally oppressed working class will pass through on the road to revolutionary struggle. Black movements in the US have always been a harbinger of the movement of the proletariat as a whole in which national and racial demands have merged with class demands. Thus Garvey's movement heralded the great battles of the trade unions in the 1930s and the Civil Rights movement was followed by the huge struggles of the 1970s. These movements of the class as a whole served to undermine one of the causes of black separatism, the colour bar in the trade unions. The upturn which followed the Great Depression of 1929-33 drew millions of unskilled workers

back into industry ready to fight to win concessions off the employers while industry was relatively 'booming'. But the corrupt AFL leaders were as unwilling to organise this layer as they were the black workers. The leaders of the unskilled workers formed the Committee of Industrial Organisations (CIO) and split from the AFL, opening their doors to blacks who were a key part of the unskilled workforce. In 1934 there were still just 100,000 blacks in the trade unions, the same as 40 years previously. By 1946 there were 2 million. The militant struggles led by the CIO began to sear racism out of the unions. The post war boom and the relative passivity of the trade union movement could not restore the racial divisions in the trade unions.

Every major period of black struggle in the US has begun against racial oppression but has been forced to draw the conclusion of unity against class oppression. The anti-slavery movement, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Huey Newton, George Jackson—all travelled down the road of nationalism to conclude the need for revolution and class unity. Jesse Jackson's platform of 'a little class warfare' marks a decisive step forward. It owes its origin to the experience of the civil rights movement. One notable feature of Jackson's campaign is the inspiration US blacks have drawn from the struggle in South Africa. Similarly the civil rights movement drew its sense of mission from the colonial revolution. The victory of national and social revolts in Africa and Asia brought black people to power forcing US and British imperialism to recognise the rights of nationhood for blacks. American blacks saw impoverished African blacks fighting and winning a dignity denied to them by segregation, discrimination and the lynch law.

Unfortunately Martin Luther King took part of his inspiration from the pacifist Gandhi to whom he mistakenly credited the liberation of India from the British. But in 13 years, from his pacifism at Montgomery in 1955, he was talking of revolution. In 1967 King commented: "For the last 12 years we have been in a reform movement... But after Selma and the Voting Rights Bill (1965) we moved into a new era which must be an era of revolution." "What good," he asked, "does it do a man to have integrated lunch counters if he can't buy a hamburger?" Just after King's death, his wife Coretta outlined the path she and King had trodden: "12 years ago in Montgomery, Alabama, we started out with a bus boycott, trying to get the right to sit down on the bus in any seat that was available. We moved through that period on to the period of



Jackson with Dukakis.

desegregating public accommodation and on to voting rights so that we can have political power. Now we are at the point where we must have economic power... We are concerned about not only the Negro poor but the poor all over America and all over the world... The key to battling poverty," had become "winning jobs for workers with decent pay through unionism."

This vague confused groping for socialism was too much for the ruling class. King started to support marches of striking workers and was gunned down as he prepared to march with the refuse workers of Memphis. It was precisely the fear of a black explosion spilling over to the white working class and especially the disaffected youth that persuaded big business to make concessions in the field of voting rights, desegregation etc.

NALC

Faced with beatings, imprisonment and assassination, King's pacifism had been rejected by many blacks. Foremost of these groups were the 1,000 strong Black Panther Party. The Panthers organised around the issue of armed self-defence and, while a black nationalist grouping, embraced the ideas of socialist revolution. The Panthers were met by vicious police repression and many were killed. The ruling class feared that the Panthers would find a road to the black workers. But tragically, with the international weakness of the forces of genuine Marxism at that time, and influenced by the writings of Mao and Castro, the Panthers did not see the processes taking place in the working class and confined themselves to organising the lumpen youth.

Twenty five per cent of the black population took part in the civil rights marches. What is not widely known is that many of these were organised by black trade unionists—at 2 million strong the most cohesive force in the black population. Job discrimination, as the central issue of civil rights, gave the unions a crucial role. Attempts by black trade unionists to get the right wing leaders of the AFL-CIO to take up the issues were rebuffed. The collaboration of the AFL-CIO executive with big business rendered them a prop to the continuation of widespread racial discrimination. Only in these conditions did Philip Randolph, the black leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, in 1959 set up the Negro American Labour Council. The NALC within a year grew to 10,000 trade union activists. It opposed black nationalism and sought unity with white workers.

In 1963 it was the NALC which called the 250,000 strong march on Washington in which 40,000 trade unionists took part. It was the biggest union march in US history. The United Auto Workers leaders came under such pressure from black stewards that they too were forced to participate in the movement. In 1964, when the NALC called for a one-day general strike if the Civil Rights Bill was not enacted by August 28th, the Act was passed with unprecedented haste. But Randolph hesitated—even looking to President Kennedy for salvation. In the absence of a clear leadership black workers, trapped in the ghettos, went down the blind alley of rioting. One study showed that 70% of the rioters were workers. Only through repression and concessions did the ruling class buy a temporary peace in the 1960s.

Jesse Jackson's successes are a pro-

duct of the bitter struggles of the 1960s. That is why the movement of blacks in the 1980s expresses itself in a new way, with several new features in today's developments. Principal in these are the growth of the black middle class and developments among the white working class.

The 1968 report of the Kerner Commission into the black movement concluded that it was unrealistic to abolish the ghettos, in other words, poverty. They recommended instead a strategy to take "substantial numbers of Negroes into the society outside the ghetto," gathering together a group of blacks with a stake in the system to police the ghettos. Only in this policy has capitalism had a certain success. The number of black businesses rose 50% in the 6 years after 1970. Between 1970 and 1986 the proportion of blacks earning over \$35,000 pa, in 1986 prices, rose from 15.7% to 21.2%.

Reagan

Blacks have especially been drawn into politics to take the steam off the protests against urban misery. Today there are twenty-one members of the House of Representatives, 300 mayors and in all 5,500 black elected officials—compared to 5 members of the House of Representatives and 1,000 officials 20 years ago. There are black Mayors in most of the major cities—Washington, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Atlanta, even Los Angeles with a relatively small black minority. But black elected officials still only account for 1% of the total. And while black mayors control a certain largesse, for example 30,000 city jobs in Chicago, little else has changed. A new movement of blacks will now be confronted with the fact that it is not enough to have a black politician to exploit the system. What is required is politicians to replace the system. In future blacks will have to fight the pro-big business policies of the black Democrats. The limited experience of 'black power' will lead to the question of workers' power.

Of decisive consequence for the future of the black workers has been the last 20 years experience of the white working class. For the white workers and youth 'the American dream' collapsed in Vietnam. The horrors of that war against a tiny peasant nation have to this day had a crippling effect on the ability of US imperialism to wage colonial wars. 58,000 Americans were killed and hundreds of thousands scarred with the lessons of capitalist brutality. Defeat in Vietnam was quickly followed by further defeats in South East Asia

put an end to the dreams of unending improvements in the US economy. The ruling class was shaken. The US workers began to unleash some of the power accumulated in the boom. Waves of strikes of miners, carworkers, lorrydrivers, steelworkers etc made the US working class one of the most combative in the advanced capitalist world. In the 1970's, the US strike rate was 50% higher than that of Britain. By 1975 union membership had reached an all-time high of 22 million.

All sections were drawn in: actors, musicians, writers, baseball players, even the police. Reflecting this movement, the leader of the UAW, Doug Fraser in 1978, called for an independent party of labour, and for a remake of the 'Coalition of Selma'. Union activists began to squeeze out the old reactionaries and workers unity was forged in struggle.

Reagan was elected President in 1980 with the backing of big business to restore the military position of the US abroad and to shift the balance back in favour of the employers at home. Aided by recession, Reagan unleashed reaction against the trade unions. His first act was to smash PATCO, the air traffic controllers union. The drive against trade unionism resulted in long bitter struggles even in the upswing that followed the 1980-81 recession. After the initial gains of the early 1970's, the years 1977 to 1988 have seen the average pre-tax real earnings of 80% of Americans fall. The top 1% have had a 50% increase, while the share of the bottom 40% has fallen by 15%. This compares to Britain, where the power of the labour movement even in Thatcher's era has forced a 20% increase in earnings of skilled workers in the last 7 years. US imperialism, threatened by its capitalist rivals and the demands placed on it of policing the world, has been forced to lean heavily on increasing the exploitation of its own workers. Under similar conditions, the Labour Party was created in Britain.

The measure of the 65 month long Reagan 'boom' is that 47% of those polled recently by the *Wall Street Journal* said they would be more likely to vote for a Presidential candidate who blames big business for the country's economic problems. Unemployment may have been reduced to 5.6% of the workforce but this has been achieved by driving workers into low paid jobs. Now economists, fearful of a recession, are equally terrified of any further fall in unemployment, in case it starts a new round of struggles for concessions by organised labour—which could even make pale the struggles of 1933 to 1938. Support for Jackson by up to 40% of white workers voting in the Democrat

primaries is for his support of workers in struggle. It is a fanfare for the turn towards the creation of an independent party of labour which the workers will be ready to make in the next few years.

For blacks the Reagan administration has just served to clarify that the battles of the 1960s are not over. Reagan's cabinet has attempted to roll back the social concessions of the previous decade. Reagan has tried to place a host of reactionaries in the Supreme Court. While he failed with the former segregationist Robert Bork, he succeeded in placing Justice William Rehnquist, who actively harassed black voters in the 1950s and 1960s, as the Chief Justice of the Court. The Civil Rights Commission set up by Eisenhower 30 years ago and the vehicle for many equal rights laws has been so turned round in its policies that most blacks now see it as hostile to their interests or, to quote Jesse Jackson, as the 'Civil Wrongs Commission'. The administration has given the green light to racism.

Jackson's campaign

Overt racist acts are now on the increase. In Chicago, the number of racial incidents has increased every year since 1983. National complaints of housing discrimination have risen 60% since 1980. And in Washington, a majority black city, over 50% of blacks can expect to face discrimination when trying to rent a flat. Racial disputes have become common even in the Ivy League Colleges such as Harvard. In 1986 only 18 of the 50 states recognised the annual Martin Luther King day national holiday and 80% of the private sector contemptuously ignored it!

Jesse Jackson's vote represents the reaction to this onslaught. However, the support is mainly due to the programme he advances being more radical than the Democrats have seen for 60 years. It is much more radical than the platform of Edward Kennedy, the 'left' Democrat who Jackson opposed to support Carter in 1980. Jackson has campaigned for a 40% increase in the national minimum wage, a national health care system, doubling education expenditure, jobs and public works.

To pay for these reforms, he proposes that taxes for the rich be increased by 15%, increased corporation tax, and massive defence cuts including an end to Trident, MX, Cruise and Minutemen missiles. He condemns the invasion of Grenada and the bombing of Libya. His speeches are well to the left of Kinnock and the British Communist Party. He talks of the Democrats needing "a little class warfare" and rallies the workers saying,

"two decades ago the people were divided on racial battle grounds, now they are divided on economic battle-grounds." His slogans ring of class anger: 'From the Outhouse to the Whitehouse', 'Peace, Jobs and Justice'. In Detroit 10,000 mainly white construction workers stood in the cold to hear him. Even in white rural areas he has got packed audiences in his campaign against "the barracudas".

The tactics of the Democratic leaders have backfired. Jackson was tolerated in the 1984 election campaign on the basis that he would get the black vote registered for the presidential campaign. But to get the black vote out Jackson had to put forward a radical programme in the primaries which in turn received an enthusiastic response. Black registration rose to 71%, compared to 77% of eligible whites. But the presidential campaign of 1984 was a disaster for the Democrats. Mondale put forward a programme of tax increases and little else. The Democratic leaders kept blacks off the platform, fearing them as a liability. Mondale got his just reward when the number of Southern blacks voting fell from 48% in 1980 to 41%. In UAW carworkers' households, 52% voted for Reagan. For the first time in 60 years more skilled workers voted for the Republicans than the Democrats.

After the 1984 election, a coterie of rich Democrats around Richard Gephardt tried to pull the Democrats away from concentrating on the votes of workers and blacks. But noticeably in the 1988 campaign both Gephardt and Dukakis had to give themselves a thin veneer of radicalism to avoid losing support to Jackson. Jackson, on the other hand, successfully widened his audience from 1984, finding that white workers responded equally to his demands.

The Economist noted that Jackson was the only candidate able to make a decent speech. But this is a matter of content not style. In reality the other candidates had nothing to offer but Reaganism—the programme of big business. Their speeches were mainly designed to cover up that fact. There was no enthusiasm for any other candidate. Just the faint hint of Jackson in the White House scared *The Economist*: "The worry for the rest of the world is that by accident of economic recession or otherwise, the Republicans will stumble and a Democrat running on foolish policies (vis Jackson-PF) might gain the White House," 2nd April 1988.

A black as US President would represent a powerful symbol of success to blacks. One of Jackson's quips when posed with the 'impossibility' of getting

a black into the White House was to reply, "We're already there, but as cooks and servants. Aren't we qualified to sleep in the beds we make up?" The world over it would be seen as a blow against racism and imperialism. But a black radical in the White House would terrify the ruling families even further. While Jackson has said that he is "trying to restore faith in capitalism", the costs are too high for the ruling class. His very election would be a sign, bringing black and white workers to their feet. All the embitterment of a century would spill out in a titanic wave of struggle and force the government at least temporarily to concede massive reforms. Imperialism would be shaken both domestically and internationally on a greater scale than in the aftermath of Vietnam.

But Jackson's programme is totally inadequate to resolve the crisis facing US capitalism which is an international crisis. Reforms would turn to counter-reforms or Jackson would be removed from office to prepare a new period of reaction. The US ruling class would only tolerate even this scenario if they felt their whole system threatened. At present they would strive might and main to prevent a Jackson victory. If Jackson won the presidential nomination, which is extremely unlikely, the big business controllers of the Democratic Party would sabotage his campaign against the Republicans. While not abandoning the Democrats, temporarily they would withdraw their funds and backing, preferring to see a Bush victory.

'While Jackson has said that he is "trying to restore faith in capitalism", the costs are too high for the ruling class. His very election would bring black and white workers to their feet.'

The only vehicle for Jackson's radicalism is a workers' party based on the organised labour movement. Its all right to push 'a little class warfare' to rally support for the Democrats, providing that no one takes it too seriously. The last thing the rich Democrats want is to rally class warfare against themselves!

Some unions such as the AFCSME, the civil servants union, are already committed to support for an independent party of labour. They should call on the AFL-CIO to expose the Democ-

rats' long history of racism, anti-working class measures and war-mongering, and the crisis big business has prepared for the US economy. They should point out the \$2 trillion debts built up by the rich in government over the last 8 years and the waste of defence expenditure. They should point the AFL-CIO to the massive increase in support for the New Democratic Party, the labour party of Canada, and the need to break from the Democrats, and build a genuinely radical party based on organised labour. This would get an enormous response. The Democrats get 25% of their support from blacks, amounting to 90% of the black vote. But 60% of blacks do not even bother to vote given the lack of any real alternative. In the 1984 election only half the whole electorate voted and amongst the 12 million newly registered mainly young voters two thirds stayed at home. The prostitution of the black and white workers' vote to big business could easily be brought to an end. In 1984 black Democrats at the Chicago Democratic Convention raised that Jackson should stand as an independent for senator in South Carolina. In 1988 the strains in the Democrats will be even greater. The only brake now on the creation of a mass labour party is the leadership of the trade unions. But they will not be able to resist the explosions of the next few years which will push many unions to the left and force on them the role of midwife to the labour party.

Once a labour party is created it will quickly move towards socialist ideas. It will not take decades to move to Marxism. It would rapidly conquer the cities of the US. An American mass party of labour would be a powerful voice not only for blacks but for all those oppressed by imperialism. America's mighty working class, once armed with the goal of the socialist transformation of society, would eliminate racism from the workers movement and ensure that the future Martin Luther Kings, George Jacksons and Malcolm Xs will find a full role in leading a united workers struggle.

The creation of a democratic workers socialist state in North America would mean the end of capitalism internationally. It would bring the prospect of harnessing the power and technology of the most advanced nation to solving international poverty and disease; the creation of wealth in abundance through a plan of production; the elimination through bountiful education of all prejudice and mysticism and hence the unity of all the peoples of the world in a World Federation of Socialist Republics.

West Bank revolt— The masses intervene

The Palestinian uprising in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip has led to scores of deaths, overwhelmingly of young Palestinians, with hundreds of injuries and thousands detained without trial. It represents the most serious upheaval since the capture of these areas in 1967, and possibly since the Palestinian rebellion against British imperialism in 1936.

Almost every Arab town and village has seen burning tyres, barricades, stone-throwing, pitched battles between youth and the Israeli military, tear gas, rubber bullets and curfews. Television newscasts of the repression by the army have rekindled memories of the brutality shown by the South African state to black township youth, two or three years earlier.

The uprising has involved the overwhelming majority of the population. But at its core have been the Palestinian workers and youth. Two decades of occupation have drawn the majority of Palestinians into the Israeli economy, effectively proletarianising the majority of the population. A series of general strikes, with many workers staying away from work for many weeks, have taken place, and solidarity strikes have extended across the 'Green Line', to involve Arab workers in Israel.

Repression

The response of the Israeli Government has been to intensify repression to an unprecedented degree, doubling its forces in the West Bank and tripling them in Gaza. There are now more troops holding down the population of Gaza than there were in all the occupied areas after their initial conquest. Many soldiers have adopted an almost indiscriminate policy of 'shoot to kill', firing at Palestinian youth "like rabbits", as one UN official in Gaza noted. Only marginally less appalling is the policy of deliberate beatings and the breaking of limbs of those youth and workers unfortunate enough to be caught by soldiers.

The explosion of discontent and the resilience of the Palestinians has come as an unpleasant surprise to the Israeli ruling class. It will only be by the saturation deployment of troops, the imposition of generalised curfews, and by naked brutality, that Israel can restore the occupied areas, as a British Minister once said of Northern Ireland.

by Peter Jackson

to "an acceptable level of violence". But, as the overwhelming majority of Palestinians believe, their uprising will prove in the long run to have been a decisive turning point in their struggle for a homeland.

The scale of the uprising is a marvelous vindication of the Marxist view that the struggle of the Palestinians for a homeland will be successful only as a mass movement, based on the programme of socialist revolution. It is a refutation of all the theories of guerrillaism—by which it was alleged that serious struggle was not possible under the occupation and that 'military' struggle had to be launched from outside.

The uprising has developed the political consciousness and self-confidence of the Palestinian people, and at the same time it has had profound effects inside Israel, undermining the political basis of Zionism. In that sense, more has been achieved in a few months of mass struggle than in decades of futile 'military' actions conducted from the outside in the name of the Palestinian struggle.

The underlying causes of the uprising, acknowledged even by Israeli politicians as a spontaneous outburst, are the years of repression and the social and economic hardships faced by the Palestinians. Alongside the modern state of Israel the occupied areas have an economy that more closely resembles the Third World. Gaza and the West Bank are a captive market and a reservoir of cheap labour for Israeli

'more has been achieved in a few months of mass struggle than in decades of futile 'military' actions conducted from the outside in the name of the Palestinian struggle.'

capitalism, while the population are denied basic democratic and national rights. In the twenty year occupation 30% of the available land of the Gaza strip has been confiscated for the benefit of 2,500 Jewish settlers, while the remaining 600,000 Arabs are compressed into 365 square kilometres, making them one of the most densely-populated peoples on the planet.

On the West Bank, more than half of the agricultural land—often the most fertile—has been taken over for military use and for about 65,000 Jewish settlers. Arab-owned orchards are bulldozed, trees are uprooted and cultivated land is ploughed over, while literally billions of dollars are poured into providing a modern infrastructure of communications, roads, dwellings, irrigation and development for Jewish settlers, outnumbered fifteen to one by Arabs.

Arab farmers and villages have been denied the necessary permission to sink new wells, provide irrigation or erect new buildings. "Settlers come here from the Soviet Union and build homes with American dollars", one Arab villager commented, "but a villager cannot get permission to build two more rooms on his ancestral land. If you build without a licence they will demolish your house. If you apply for a licence, you don't get it."

Hell-hole

The Arab economies of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, always weak, have been consciously stifled by Israel. Thousands of young Palestinians have been forced to seek employment abroad, particularly during the oil boom in the Gulf. Tens of thousands have been forced to find employment as day-labourers in Israel, crossing the 'Green Line' every day to take up the worst-paid, most menial jobs. These Arab commuters are not allowed to stay overnight in Israel and have little protection in relation to health and safety. Nor are they allowed to join the Israeli trade union federation, the Histadruth. To add insult to injury, Palestinians pay income tax and VAT to the Israeli state, which is not returned to the territories, except as clubs and bullets. Since 1967, it has been estimated, Palestinians in the occupied areas have paid \$800m, two and a half times more than the total public investment in their area during that period.



The houses of Palestinians accused of demonstrating against Israeli occupation are regularly demolished.

The Israeli government's austerity measures, especially in the last few years, with their effects on the occupied territories, and, in addition, the decline in the oil industry, have meant increased economic burdens on the Palestinians. Their discontent over occupation has been fuelled by increasing poverty, overcrowding and unemployment. Every year 3,000 Palestinian students graduate and many of them can only find menial jobs in the territories or in Israel. Gaza, perhaps the worse of the two areas, was described by the *Jerusalem Post*, as "a hell-hole made to order for terrorism... a hopeless mass of nearly 600,000 Palestinians, most of them refugees and their descendants, cooped up in a tiny south-western corner of the land and cut off from the main body of their compatriots... the population density equals Hong Kong's but its economy is a model of backwardness."

Any political activity that in the remotest way seeks to articulate Palestinian rights is effectively banned, as are newspapers and writers, invariably on the pretext that they 'support terrorism'. On the same spurious grounds the activities of Palestinian trade unions are disrupted or banned outright. Arrested activists are liable to detention without trial, beating or expulsion from their homeland to a foreign country. Collective punishment—blowing up or

demolishing the houses of anyone suspected of 'terrorist' activity, irrespective of who lives in the house or their connection with the suspect—is carried on as a matter of policy.

The policies used by the Israeli ruling class to crush the recent uprising have only added to the mountain of anger, hatred and frustration. Beatings and shootings are such a common part of everyday life in the occupied territories, and the culprits are so well protected by Israeli 'law', that Palestinians have little confidence in grievances being redressed through the courts. While Palestinian suspects are treated with the utmost harshness—usually with the Israeli 'Justice' Minister joining in the frenzied, lynch-mob hysteria—the authorities have treated convicted Jewish murderers and terrorists with an astonishing leniency, letting one, for example, take a 'holiday' in America during his (brief) spell of imprisonment.

Uprising

The brutal, arbitrary and repressive military regime in the occupied areas, combined with the economic backwardness, constitute a finished recipe for social explosions. Even before the uprising, researchers noted the increasing frequency and the tendency of opposition movements to be spontaneous ac-

tions by the local population, rather than acts of individual terrorism sponsored or planned on the 'outside'.

This process reached its logical development in the uprising. The youth, in particular, have been prepared to face heavily armed soldiers with rocks, iron bars and Molotov cocktails, even in the knowledge that some of them could be shot and killed. It is no accident that Gaza is known as 'the Soweto of the Middle East'. The mean age of the population is 14 years. Tiny children have been involved in demonstrations, stone-throwing or building barricades. Of the 4,000 or so detained, the overwhelming majority are under 20 and some arrested have been as young as ten.

For Israel, the occupation is becoming a growing nightmare. In demographic terms alone it is a time-bomb: within about 25 years, the Arabs of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza will outnumber the Jews. Even before these upheavals, the *Jerusalem Post* was moved to comment that the status quo is a "prescription for war and disaster".

Increasingly, Israeli youth are becoming disillusioned with the official message of Zionism, which was to offer a safe homeland for Jews from around the world. Instead, Israel seems to offer only unending war and occupation, and steadily worsening economic sacrifice to pay for them. The net tax burden on the

shoulders of Israeli workers, subtracting allowances and subsidies, is equivalent to 36 per cent of Gross National Product, more than it was after the 1967 war, the Yom Kippur War or the Lebanon War of 1982.

The Israeli economy, weak on a global scale, will be severely affected by the coming world slump. Workers are already suffering cuts in living standards. The last budget, for example, cut state expenditure on health, education, and a whole range of other services. Increasingly, Israeli workers will be forced to struggle to defend their jobs from economic retrenchments and closures. Yet enormous resources are wasted on war and the repression of the Arab population. 22 per cent of GNP goes on defence. All Israeli youth have three years military service (two for women), followed by six weeks in the reserves every year until they are 55. After five major wars there still seems to be no final peace in sight. Defence Minister Rabin, in a speech last year, raised the possibility of yet another Arab-Israeli war after the Iran-Iraq war comes to an end.

Alienation

Many Israelis, gloomy about their future in the 'promised land', have voted with their feet. In 1987, there were 3,000 more emigrating from Israel than immigrating. A pall of doubt and disillusion hangs over the youth in particular. A former secretary of the Histadruth, Yitzhak Ben-Aharon, lamented the younger generation "alienated from the vision, the classic ideals, of the labour movement..."

"They face an entirely different reality", he complains, "... one in which every 18-year-old becomes part of an occupying army, a prison warder, an oppressor of women, children, and students... we have created a murky incomprehensible system in which nothing grows—no new leadership, no charisma in the younger generation, no clarity of vision. There is only a deep cynicism and alienation."

Typical of the alienated youth were the Tel-Aviv school students who, last October, wrote an open letter to Rabin, declaring that they were not prepared to serve in the occupied territories. This is only a small indication of the growing doubt in the minds of many young people. For every one who would sign such a letter at present, there are probably hundreds who serve in the occupation forces grudgingly wishing there was a way out of the cycle of beatings, demonstrations and death.

In this increasingly intolerable situation, understanding that things cannot simply go on as before, a section of the

Israeli ruling class has supported the idea of a 'peace conference', not as a means of granting Palestinians a homeland, but as a device to defuse the explosive situation on which they are sitting. Illusions in the possibility of a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian question have taken root among sections of the peace movement and the left of the labour movement in Israel. If only it were possible, the argument goes, for the Israeli government and the PLO to agree to peace talks, then there could be a settlement and the end of the occupation.

But these ideas overlook the fundamental obstacles to a Palestinian homeland, arising from the class interests of any likely participants in such a conference, principally the USA, Israel and Jordan. Their overriding concern is not and **never can be** the interests of the Palestinian workers. They are worried only about the interests of their own ruling classes. Their main pre-occupation is the political stability of the region and the maintenance of the system that guarantees their rent, interest and profit.

The economic costs of repression and the political effects in Israel and internationally, mean that in the long run Palestinian resistance threatens the stability of Israel itself. King Hussein of Jordan is no less concerned about the possible fall-out from the uprising. About 60 per cent of the Kingdom's population, on the East bank of the River Jordan, are Palestinian, with family, cultural and religious ties with the population on the West Bank. Moreover, Jordan is also facing economic crisis. There are currently 40,000 officially unemployed, according to the Jordanian Labour Minister, "not less than 75% of them graduates of secondary schools, community colleges and universities."

King Hussein's touching 'concern' for the Palestinians has never extended beyond his own security and the continuation of the Hashemite dynasty. In the revolutionary events of 1970-71, he

did not hesitate to massacre thousands of Palestinian fighters and civilians—assisted by the political weakness and hesitations of the PLO leadership—when he thought his throne was under threat. Since December Jordan has done everything possible to tone down news coverage of the uprising and to clamp down on solidarity movements on the East Bank. The regime has expelled three times more Palestinian 'troublemakers' than Israel. It is out of concern for his own skin that Hussein is now frantic for an agreement with Israel that would rescue him from the threat of social revolution.

The USA, likewise, is concerned only for its own prestige, profits and influence in the Middle East. Because of the strategic significance of this area of the world, especially its oil reserves, it is in the interests of imperialism to maintain political stability at all costs. If the US administration, through George Shultz, is prepared to consult with leading members of the Palestine National Council (notwithstanding the attempts to close the PLO mission in New York, on the grounds of it being a 'terrorist' organisation), it is in no way a recognition of the 'legitimate rights' of the Palestinians. Imperialism does not recognise the 'legitimate rights' of peoples anywhere in the world, or, for that matter, the rights of its own workers at home. The 'Shultz Initiative' is a reflection of the need of imperialism to defuse a crisis that threatens Middle East stability.

Palestine state

It is a fundamental mistake to imagine that a peace conference representing capitalist states and sponsored by the most powerful imperialist power of all could ever bring about a solution in the interests of the working masses of Palestine. That would apply whether such a conference was based on bilateral talks or a multi-national conference under UN auspices.

The only agreement that would be satisfactory to the mass of the Palestinians would be one giving a cast-iron guarantee of self-determination. Palestinian workers would be satisfied with nothing less than the complete removal of the apparatus of military repression and the full establishment of democratic rights, to vote, strike, take part in political activities, and so on. Yet a Palestinian state, roughly corresponding to the area of the West Bank and Gaza, would be completely unviable on the basis of capitalism because the economy could not provide the basic necessities of life for the population of approaching two million.

In 1984, those employed in industry

'It is no accident that Gaza is known as the Soweto of the Middle East.'

in the Gaza Strip numbered only 6,383 and over 90% of the establishments in all branches of industry employed seven or less, mainly in sweat-shops producing shoes, textiles, furniture or carpets. Subcontracting between Israeli industrial firms and Gazan businessmen has been Israel's major form of investment in Gaza's economy.

The West Bank economy is little better off. As Meron Benvenisti, former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, points out in his *West Bank Report, 1987*, "industry is the most backward part of the economy... almost one third of the people employed in West Bank industry are self-employed in 1,200 establishments. 350 establishments employed 6,600 people... West Bank industry remains underdeveloped, small scale and traditional. With the exception of a few larger plants, there is no evidence of an emerging modern industrial sector."

In the occupied territories as a whole, productive investment (machinery, transport and other equipment) is only 14% of the total as compared to 58% in Israel. In 1985, the total GDP in the occupied areas was \$944m, dwarfed by Israel's GDP of \$22,050m.

These facts emphasise the way in which the Israeli ruling class has sought to use the West Bank and Gaza as a source of cheap labour: like undeveloped 'Bantustans' where small scale labour-intensive work can be farmed out and from where thousands of workers can be drawn into Israeli factories and building sites without the inconvenience of having to give them democratic rights.

But the social and economic weakness of the Palestinian economy has enormous political implications because in a genuinely free Palestinian homeland the whole economic basis of the state would be unstable. Capitalism is incapable of satisfying the elementary needs of the Palestinian population. Neither could there be any possibility of such an economy absorbing large numbers of refugees who may wish to return from Lebanon, Syria or Jordan.

Palestine would be born, not with flags and bunting, but in a condition of economic crisis and political convulsions as workers sought to translate their new-found freedoms into land, jobs, homes, schools, hospitals, welfare facilities and living standards. Because of the economic impasse, there would be enormous pressure from the masses for radical or revolutionary policies in their interests, putting a question mark against the continued existence of landlordism and capitalism.

It is not the fear of a PLO government that haunts Israeli capitalists and



The last thing Jordan's King Hussein wants is an independent revolutionary Palestine on his doorstep.

King Hussein, but the possibility of a Palestinian homeland becoming a focus for a revolutionary movement and political instability that would sweep across the Arab world and undermine Israel to an extent far worse than even the present uprising.

This explains why the capitalist class of Israel would never accept a genuine Palestinian homeland. Furthermore, whatever may be the public position of the various Arab governments, claiming to represent the interests of the Palestinians, they would oppose a Palestinian state with no less determination. The last thing King Hussein wants is a revolutionary state on his doorstep, and while he needs to defuse the movement in the occupied territories, he will do everything in his power to stop a West Bank/Gaza state.

Peace

The proposals currently favoured by George Shultz, and the subject of so many illusions among 'peace-niks' in Israel, are designed to retain Israeli control—for 'security' reasons—of the greater part of the occupied land, while allowing the big population centres in the territories to be administered in some way by Jordan. It is far removed from the concept of an independent state, and, not surprisingly, has found no support among Palestinians.

Unfortunately, even many of the best lefts in the Israeli labour movement, because they do not tear themselves away from the limitations of a capitalist perspective, end up demanding the same 'security guarantees' as the

variably alienating themselves from Palestinian aspirations. On a capitalist basis, a 'peace agreement' could be no more than a joint Jordanian-Israeli policing agreement, with a measure of very limited local autonomy to dress it up. It could never get the support of the Palestinians themselves who are bitterly opposed to any form of Jordanian rule.

Yet even this suggested agreement, leading to a very weak and partial 'autonomy'—and therefore opposed by the Palestinians—would be furiously fought by the extreme right wing in Israel and the militant settlers movements. When the Camp David agreements were signed and Israel agreed to hand back the Sinai Desert to Egypt, there were violent protests against the dismantling of Jewish settlements in Northern Sinai. Thousands of settlers converged on the settlement of Yamit, and its evacuation by the Israeli army was fought over for a month, against a background of fierce debate in Israel itself. Any peace agreement involving the dismantling of West Bank settlements, or even a threat to their security, would unleash a storm of opposition that would put the Yamit protest in the shade. One right wing Knesset member warned the government of 'civil war' if there were any attempts to give up the West Bank.

For all these reasons it is a dangerous illusion to see a solution to the questions of peace and a Palestinian homeland in negotiations among the representatives of capitalism.

Israel-Palestine is a special illustration and a confirmation of the theory of

Leon Trotsky over 80 years ago. Trotsky, writing of the perspective for the approaching Russian revolution, explained that in the modern imperialist epoch, the capitalist class was incapable of solving the remaining tasks of the democratic revolution, including the question of national liberation. These could only be resolved, as the October Revolution of 1917 demonstrated, on the basis of the struggle of the working class mobilised behind a socialist programme.

The capitalist class in the Arab countries, including the Palestinian, is organically incapable of a serious struggle for democratic rights and for the historic union of the Arab nation. Every Arab state is a bonapartist regime of one sort or another, denying basic democratic rights to its workers. Arab landlordism and capitalism is incapable of a serious struggle for the national emancipation of the Palestinian people precisely because their horizons and class interests are bounded by the diseased and crisis-ridden system itself. Israeli capitalism, and its patron American imperialism, are no less capable of granting freedom and democratic rights to Palestinians.

Zionism

The struggle for the rights of the Arabs in Israel and the occupied areas is inseparable from the struggle of the working class for the revolutionary transformation of society. It will not be the Palestinian 'notables', 'progressives', 'friends of Palestine' or any other vague and ill-defined social grouping that will achieve a Palestinian homeland and peace in the Middle East. It will be the working class, both in Israel and Palestine, mobilised around Marxist ideas.

A fundamental barrier to the Palestinian struggle is the consciousness of Jewish workers in Israel, whose traditions of insecurity and 'siege' mentality is eagerly exploited by capitalism. Time

after time, the right wing exploit the terrible memories of the Nazi holocaust, to raise the spectre of the Jews being pushed into the sea by Arab armies. Israeli capitalism may be an increasingly insecure fortress, but unless Jewish workers can be offered an alternative that unambiguously accepts their right to a state in the Middle East, they will not come out from behind its walls and they will remain in the grip of Zionism.

Unfortunately, such an alternative has not been offered by the leadership of the PLO. On the contrary, its adoption of a so-called 'military' struggle, which has meant a programme of individual terrorism conducted against Jews, has completely repelled the vast majority of Jewish workers. The strategy of the Palestinian leadership, including the main guerrilla groups which make up the PLO, has been based on the idea that the national emancipation of the Palestinian people could be achieved within existing social relations, that is, on the basis of capitalism. The policy is based, explicitly or implicitly, on **national** rather than **class** struggle.

This strategy corresponds to the needs of the Arab regimes who have backed the PLO. The substantial financial and diplomatic support given has been always subject to the shifting political situation and whatever is in the interests of each Arab government at any one time. But when given, it has in every case been dependent on the PLO leadership not 'rocking the boat' in the Arab countries. The PLO leadership has gone along with this, refusing to challenge state power when revolutionary events were unfolding in Jordan (1970) and later in Lebanon (1975), on the grounds that they were 'guests' in these countries.

Different components of the PLO describe themselves as 'socialist' or even 'Marxist', but they have made no impact on guiding the policy of the PLO leadership as a whole towards the prog-



ramme of socialist revolution. Rather than use the tremendous political authority of the Palestinian movement, not to mention the military capability, as levers for social change, they have always done their best to avoid the question, leading, in both Jordan and Lebanon, to betrayal and disaster. The failure of the PLO to provide a revolutionary leadership to mobilise the Arab masses on a **class** basis against the reactionary Arab regimes, has left the Palestinian masses politically disarmed, so that one Arab regime after another has been able to betray them. More Palestinian fighters have been massacred by the PLO's 'allies', the Syrians and the Jordanians, than by the Israeli army.

Spontaneous

Yet, because it is seen as the embodiment of the struggle for national emancipation, the PLO retains the support of the overwhelming majority of Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza. This is despite the fact that the leadership has 'led' the movement from one disaster to another in thirty years.

Although the PLO may claim the credit for the recent unrest in the occupied areas, in fact the uprisings have been largely spontaneous. The Palestinian leadership has never had a policy of genuine **mass** mobilisation, the left wing lacking confidence in the workers, and the right wing fearing that the **class** questions would threaten the PLO's financial backers. The growth of Islamic fundamentalism, particularly in Gaza, is to an extent a reaction to the **inactivity** and the failure of the PLO to mobilise any struggle against Israeli rule.

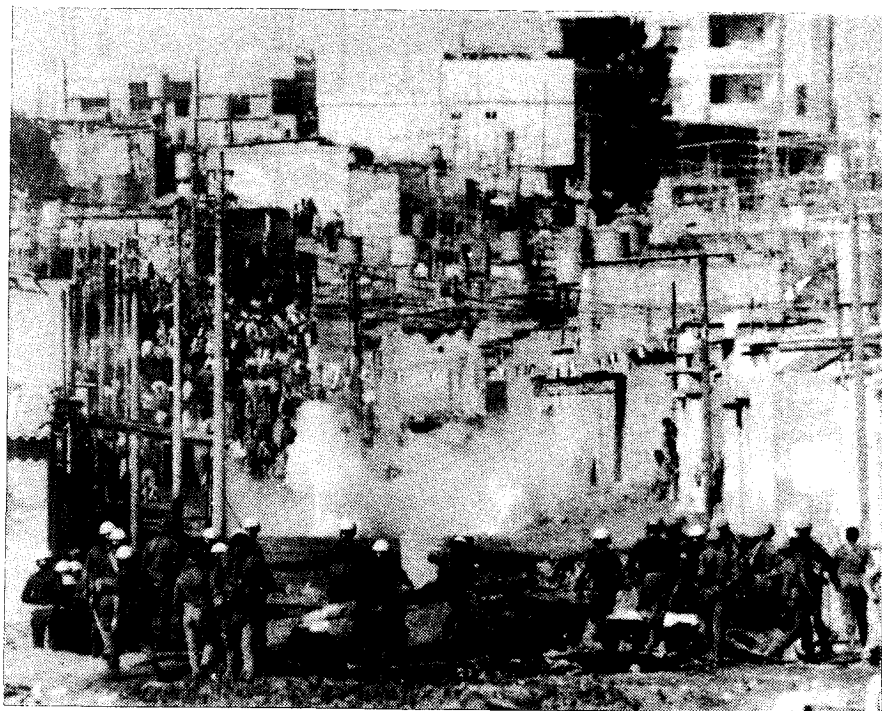
'The national emancipation of the Palestinian people cannot be separated from their social emancipation. That means as much a struggle against Arab landlordism, capitalism and reaction, as against Israeli capitalism and imperialism.'

Instead of mass struggle, raising social and class questions, the PLO have historically gone along with a strategy of the armed **minority**, either for individual terrorism or as militias in Jordan or Lebanon, always directed against the 'main enemy' Israel. Yet Arab reaction, the very regimes that claim to fight for Palestine and give money to the PLO, are as much an obstacle to Palestinian self-determination, as is the Israeli capitalist class. The **national** emancipation of the Palestinian people cannot be separated from their **social** emancipation. That means as much a struggle against Arab landlordism, capitalism and reaction, as against Israeli capitalism and imperialism.

Now, in the wake of the mass movements in the occupied territories, and in tandem with the shift of opinion in Europe, America and to an extent within Israel, the PLO leaders have adopted the policy of negotiations to achieve a homeland of Palestine. The significance of the Algiers Palestine National Council, in unifying the PLO, lay precisely in the fact that it empowered Arafat to move in that direction. The original policy of the PLO, for the establishment of a 'secular democratic' state in a unitary Palestine, has been quietly dropped as a result of the failure of the PLO and the Arab regimes to destroy Israel militarily. However, even this position, implying recognition of the state of Israel, is ambiguous, leaving the right wing Zionists able to argue that **any** independent Palestinian state, however small, would be a temporary stage in a long-term strategy to destroy Israel altogether.

Whenever there have been acts of individual terrorism in the past, for example hi-jackings or the murder of Israeli civilians, it has strengthened the Israeli right, and has provided the excuse for the unleashing of state terrorism against Arabs. But, in contrast, the effect of having to suppress a mass movement including men, women and school-children, together with the combined general strike of Arab workers, have brought only demoralisation and division to Israel.

There has been the biggest-ever demonstrations against the occupation, with over 50,000 in Tel-Aviv and, on the same day, 20,000 in Nazareth. The *Yesh Gvul* (There is a Limit) movement, which originated in the unrest among Israeli solidiers during the Lebanon War, published a list of 1,600 reserve soldiers, including two generals, who have called for an end to the occupation. There is a possibility of a swing to the right within Israeli politics in the short term, as an immediate



Israeli troops move into the Gaza.

reaction to the upheavals in the territories and the 'threat' to Israel perceived by many Jewish workers. But in the longer run, the uprising will have driven home the fact that the 20-year occupation cannot continue in the old way. The success of the uprising, however limited, in undermining support for the Israeli occupation, has been achieved **despite** and not **because** of the historic strategy of the PLO leaders. Moreover, this success can be built upon, if a movement is developed among Palestinians which is based upon continued mass resistance, combined with a programme of **class** demands that would have an effect on Israeli troops and workers.

Federation

A bridge can be built between Jewish and Arab workers by a movement which fought under the banner of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East. Such a movement would fight for democratic rights and a national homeland for Palestinians, while directing class appeals to Jewish workers and troops. It would defend the class interests of Israeli workers, and support the right of the Israeli nation to its own self-determination, within a socialist federation.

Capitalism cannot maintain even the present living standards of the population of Israel-Palestine, let alone its democratic or national rights. The greatly intensified social and political divisions within Israel could even raise the possibility in the future of some form of military government, as the capitalist class wrestles to maintain 'stability'. An Israeli 'Bonaparte' would

pose a serious threat to the democratic rights cherished by Jewish workers for 40 years and would be the greatest ever challenge to the labour movement.

It can only be in the overthrow of the system, through the joint struggle of Arab and Jewish workers, that there can be a way out of the present terrible impasse. The only alternatives to Marxist ideas will in the long run be bloody wars and possibly more mass expulsions on an even greater scale than in 1948-50. It is capitalism and the imperialist domination of the Middle East in the past which have created the conditions for the national wars and antagonisms. Capitalism, especially in the modern epoch, is intrinsically incapable of resolving the acute problems it has created. The labour movement can only rely upon its own struggles and its own organisations, guided by the internationalist traditions of socialism.

Israel and the occupied areas will face enormous convulsions in the future, as economic and national crises develop in parallel with each other. No section of the working class will be left untouched by these events. The key factor that is missing from the Middle East equation is the **subjective** one: a Marxist movement that can provide the necessary leadership and programme to point the way forward.

Marxists take as their starting point the fact that the fortunes of Arab and Jewish workers are inextricably bound together and the key task, therefore, is to provide an alternative programme to all those dragging the region into the swamp. All the political parties, including those linked to the labour movement, will undergo unprecedented splits and upheavals in the future. Despite the

right wing character of the leadership of the Labour Party and the Histadruth trade union federation, organically tied to the Zionist state, there will be many movements of Israeli workers in the future that will shake up these organisations from top to bottom.

The Histadruth is a monstrously bureaucratic machine, owning Israel's biggest bank as well as industries, and governing a large part of Israel's health and welfare system. Almost 30 per cent of its members actually work directly or indirectly for it. Despite regular elections—like mini general elections in themselves—the big majority of trade union members feel remote from the leadership and in periods of real struggle, it is to the factory and workplace shop-stewards committees that the workers turn. Nevertheless, in the period of economic and industrial storms opening up in Israel, unofficial and official workers' struggles will produce big upheavals within the trade union's structures. Among the demands that workers will raise will be for the democratisation of the Histadruth, for the regular election of officials, and for the officials to receive the same wages as the workers they represent.

Integration

A product of the increased discussion and debate within the Histadruth will be the growth of left wing and Marxist ideas among the rank and file. The Marxists will be in the forefront of the struggle for a fighting trade union leadership to protect the jobs and wages of workers, to democratise the unions and to end discrimination against Sephardic Jews and Arabs. Marxists will also fight for the greatest possible solidarity between workers and for the right of Palestinian workers, including day-labourers, to be able to join the trade union federation and fight for better rights and conditions through it.

The break from Labour in 1984 has resulted in a shift to the left within Mapam, a left Zionist party. Many of its rank and file are genuinely searching for policies and a political programme that can point a way out of the present impasse. Mapam members and especially the Mapam Youth have a serious responsibility to examine the ideas of the movement, including their own party's policies. Many will come to the conclusion that it is only the programme and perspectives of Marxism that can offer a way out.

It will be the Marxists in the labour movement who will be the most consistent in raising the need for joint struggle by Arab and Jewish workers, first and foremost in defence of living



The US government has made no headway persuading the Shamir government in Israel to support their 'Initiatives'.

standards and the rights that workers already possess. There must be an uncompromising struggle to defend jobs, wages and conditions, as well as the social wage in the form of educational, health, public transport, welfare and other services. But Marxists must also raise the right of the Palestinian people, as with all other nations, to self-determination. That is not to advocate the division of the region into small states, which would be a reactionary step. The weakness of the Palestinian economy and, on a world scale, the Israeli economy, should be used by Marxists to explain the need for a Socialist Federation of States, with the right of self-determination of all nations and guarantees for national minorities, and a harmonious interlinking of the different economies of the Middle East. That would mean the **further** integration of the Israeli and Palestinian economies—but on the basis of national equality, with a balanced development and investment programme.

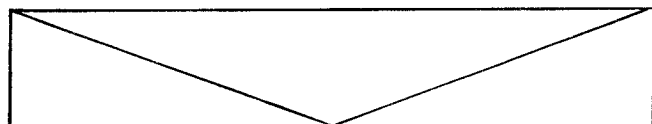
Freed of the constraints of the profit system and the shackles of the big imperialist economies, a state-owned economy in Israel-Palestine would be run democratically and openly through elected committees of workers, consumers and technicians. In this way a Socialist Federation could offer the right of return to both the Palestinian and Jewish diaspora, without any threat to the lives and living standards of the peoples of the area. The socialist organisation of society, within a Socialist Federation of Middle East States, would release enormous reservoirs of skill, resources and wealth

that could make it possible for both Israel and Palestine to successfully absorb refugees and immigrants. Where at present billions of dollars are spent every year on weapons of destruction, the same monies invested in industry and agriculture could develop the lives of the entire population to undreamt-of heights.

Sweep of events

In few of the conflicts around the world do the issues seem as complex and as intractable as those in the Middle East. But the ideas and methods of Marxism, approaching the question from the point of view of a **class** analysis, can cut through the tangle of complexities and difficulties.

Marxists can be encouraged by the fact that Israeli and Palestinian workers will be shaken out of their own ways, as much as anything by the sweep of events that will affect the world around them. Titanic upheavals impend around the whole of the world: in the advanced capitalist countries, in the underdeveloped world and in the Stalinist states. There is not one part of the world that is not in the throes of economic and political crisis in one form or another at the present time. In a decade or two, the entire political landscape of the planet will have changed, not once, but many times over. Like the colossal geological catastrophes that in prehistoric times shaped oceans, mountains and continents, so the political cataclysms in the future will shape a new world, not least in the Middle East.



LETTERS

Send letters to *MIR*, 3 - 13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the ideas of the Editorial Board. We reserve the right to shorten excessively long letters.

Polluted beaches

Dear Comrades,

The review article in the last *MIR* on acid rain only touched on the pollution of the waterways and beaches. In fact a whole article could have been written just on the situation here in Southend.

During the summer months Southend seafront is still packed with day-trippers, in spite of the competition from cheap package holidays to the Costa Brava. However a report published last year would probably deter anyone from coming to Southend ever again. The report was compiled by microbiologists at Surrey University and sponsored by the environmental pressure group, Greenpeace. It documented 74 British beaches that failed to reach EEC standards—Southend was one of them.

The immediate reason for this is the millions of tonnes of raw untreated sewage that is pumped out into the Thames Estuary. Some of this has found its way back onto our golden sands. Who wants to see their children building sandcastles amidst used tampons, surgical swabs and slurry? Yet that is what often stained our shore last summer. In fact the situation got so bad that local doctors were warning their patients to avoid the beach which they viewed as a serious health hazard. This is a far cry from the pre-war years when Southend's seawater was noted for its health giving properties.

Protests to the local Ang-

lian Water Authority were futile. The Authority claimed to be acting on the recommendations of the government which has continually put pressure on it to reduce costs, even at the expense of ordinary people. Consequently it has been unable to 'waste' money treating sewage and has simply pumped it out to sea and hoped for the best. The only concession they have offered is a new extended outflow pipe to take the sewage further out to sea—there is no mention of making it safe first as there is obviously no money to be made from that.

But the foul state of the beaches is only the most obvious sign of the polluted sea. Less visible but even more frightening is the radioactive liquid waste spewed into the Thames from the UK Atomic Energy Authority at Horwell and the Ministry of Defence at Aldermaston. This and the harmful chemicals that flood into the sewers from factories and homes all make for a deadly cocktail that is killing the sea.

Large amounts of this untreated effluent causes deoxygenation of the water which kills off fish and other marine life by the thousands. This in turn affects the local fishing industry and also the feeding habits of the 150,000 wading birds who winter on the nearby marshes.

Last Autumn Tory councillors organised an oyster festival at the picturesque village of Paglesham to celebrate

Equal opportunity?

Dear Comrades,

The collapse of the London Labour councils, putting through cuts to 'balance the books', is part of a process over the last five years of ducking and diving from the legal measures imposed by the Tory government. And yet the London working class placed their trust in these councils to shield them from the worst excesses of Tory economic policy.

The left reformists, particularly in London, have an analysis of society which has no role for the working class as a whole but only for some sections. As Ken Livingstone put it in *Marxism Today*, 'We believe in winning a majority for socialism through work on the minorities—all the minorities added up, make a majority'. Marxists fight harder than anyone for every reform possible to lessen the burden of capitalist society for every section of society. Yet without clearly identifying the class enemy, the plethora of committees set up under these councils lurched into a position of dismissing all white workers as being racist, sexist, and anti-gay.

In Haringey, the Lesbian and Gay Working Party put forward a whole number of demands which went into the council manifesto. They started not from explaining in a calm and sober manner why lesbians and gay men face real problems, the origins of anti-gay prejudice etc. They embarked without proper consultation among the local community or within the council workforce on a policy for 'positive images' of lesbians and gays.

There is a desperate need to

stem anti-gay prejudice whipped up by the Tory controlled media. There has been an escalation of physical attacks by far right groups and the beginnings of dismissals from workplaces on the pretence of AIDS. A recent survey of lesbian and gay youth in London showed that 16% had considered suicide because of the pressures exerted on them in school.

The tragedy is that mishandling equal opportunities by these councils will make it more difficult to defend lesbian and gay workers in the workplace, and from attacks by roaming gangs or the police. Any illusions that lesbians and gays had that these councils have a strategy that can defend them are being destroyed.

The labour and trade union movement should counterpose to these paper tigers calling themselves 'equal opportunity' units, the real equality achievable by councils which fight to eradicate the appalling conditions the majority of workers have to endure. We must demand the resources to serve the needs of all the community, which will include proper campaigns to take up discrimination in the workplace; for democratic control of the police to curtail the escalation of attacks on clubs and bars, and for education which provides the best possible teaching, where parents, students and the best advisors are fully involved in the drawing up of the school curricula. We also need democratic control of the media which sows the seeds of prejudice.

Jon Johnson, Newham

this venerable local industry. Then the ugly truth leaked out—that Paglesham no longer has a single oysterman! The local beds had been destroyed years earlier by the polluted water and also by the barnacle-killing paint used on the yachts of the super-rich moored at

nearby marinas.

If immediate action is not taken, the beaches and seas could be beyond saving. If we can no longer safely bathe in the sea how long will it be before we are unable to drink the water in our taps?

Paul Barratt, Southend.

AIDS: Scramble for profits hampers research

The World Health Organisation estimated that by the end of 1987 between 5 and 10 million people had been infected with the AIDS virus. The WHO expects a ten fold increase in the number of cases in the next five years. Modern means of mass transportation have turned AIDS into the worst ever world epidemic, or pandemic.

While the virus was confined to Africa and to homosexuals in the capitalist countries, governments were complacent. But by 1987 AIDS was the biggest killer of women between 25 and 34 in New York City.

Mortality rate

Reagan acted when figures showed that the virus presented a threat to the profits of big business. The US General Accounting Office estimated that AIDS will cost the American economy \$55 billion a year by 1991 due to the premature death of tens of thousands of young people. However, these figures are based on an assumed mortality rate of 30%. Many experts think the true figure could be 70% or 80%.

The delay in taking effective measures to prevent the spread of the disease, or more correctly syndrome, has cost thousands of lives.

A recently published book by two New Scientist reporters, *The Search for the Virus*, provides a good example of the way scientific research works

in capitalist society. There was cut-throat competition in what became a race to isolate the AIDS viruses between the Pasteur Institute in Paris and the US National Cancer Institute. What was at stake was not only the prestige of being the first past the post, and a possible Nobel Prize, but also the financial benefits.

Scientific and medical laboratories have links with the drug corporations. Marketing a kit to test for the virus could be a billion dollar business. The Pasteur scientists were in the lead and they patented a test for the virus in July 1983. Meanwhile the rival National Cancer Institute claimed to have isolated a different virus.

When the Pasteur virus was discovered they passed it over to the rival laboratory for evaluation as is common practice. The NCI subsequently claimed that the virus was damaged in transit and was not examined. Then in April 1984 Margaret Heckler, US Health Secretary, triumphantly announced that the NCI had discovered the AIDS virus. Shortly after, the test for the NCI virus, called HTLV-3, was granted a US patent. The application by the Pasteur Institute for a US patent was refused.

It subsequently emerged that the Pasteur virus, called LAV, was indistinguishable from HTLV-3. Coincidences like this are not unknown in research but evidence

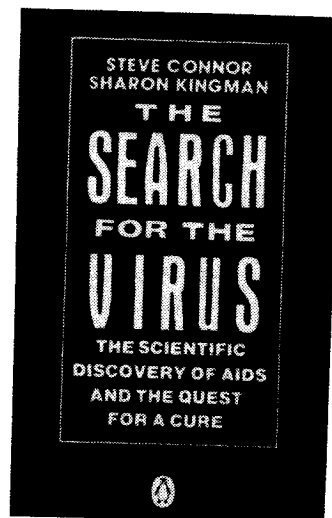
which emerged the following year cast doubt on the role of the head of the NCI laboratory, Robert Gallo.

The AIDS virus is of fiendish complexity. Its ability to mutate into a slightly different form is five times greater than the 'flu virus. It changes its form within an individual over time. Different neighbourhoods in New York are associated with different types of AIDS virus. This makes the search for a cure very difficult since there is a constantly moving target. It also means that the chances of finding two identical viruses separated by thousands of miles and a year in time are very small. The Pasteur Institute hired an American lawyer to prepare a case to sue the US government.

Dirty dealings

As the evidence mounted it was clear that a long drawn out legal battle was in prospect, involving the two leading institutes in the battle against AIDS. The wrangle was having a serious effect on the progress of research. Eventually a deal was cobbled together which swept all the dirty dealings under the carpet. It was announced by Reagan at a meeting with Chirac in March 1987.

When the test for AIDS was developed in America the British government refused to implement it here. There was a six months delay at



The Search for the Virus, by Steve Connor and Sharon Kingman. Penguin, 1988, £3.95

a crucial time in monitoring the syndrome. The DHSS denied that this was due to the time it took the British drug company Wellcome to develop their own test. But the *Financial Times* commented: "The delay in introducing screening in Britain has given Wellcome the chance to leap into the business of producing diagnostic kits for AIDS, a market that could be worth 100-200 million pounds worldwide by the late 1980s and which is now dominated by US companies..."

Cynical political manoeuvring and financial trickery have marked the history of the campaign against AIDS. Drug corporations with the help of their national governments are all trying to cash in. Readers of this book will be more than ever open to the need for a socialist programme to eliminate private profit from all aspects of health care and research.

1905—The Third Congress

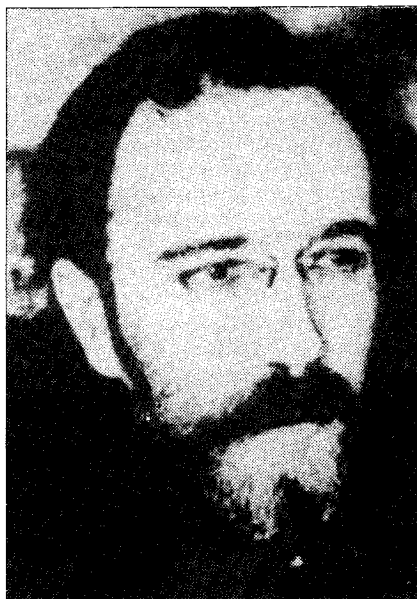
On the twenty fifth of April 1905, the first genuinely Bolshevik party congress opened its doors in London. On the agenda were the following questions: 1) the armed uprising; 2) the attitude to the government's policy, including the slogan of the provisional revolutionary government; 3) the attitude to the peasant movement; 4) relations between workers and intellectuals within the party; 5) party rules; 6) the attitude to other parties (including the Mensheviks); 7) the attitude to the non-Russian Social Democratic organisations; 8) the attitude to the Liberals; 9) practical agreements with the Social Revolutionaries, and organisational questions. Present at the Congress were 24 delegates with full voting rights representing 21 committees, as well as a number of other party groups, including the *Vperyod* editorial board and the Bolshevik Organisation Abroad, which had a consultative vote. Lenin was present, nominally as a delegate from Odessa.

Insurrection

The Congress took place in the white heat of revolutionary upswing. The party was faced with a whole series of pressing political and tactical questions: the attitude to the government's 'concessions' (the Shidlovsky Commission), the slogan of a parliament ('zemsky sobor'), the constituent assembly, armed uprising and the provisional revolutionary government, legal and semi-legal work, the national and agrarian questions, and so on. But the question which dominated all others was the armed insurrection. Lenin was particularly emphatic about this: "The entire history of the past year," he argued, "proved that we underestimated the significance and inevitability of the uprising. Attention must be paid to the practical aspect of the matter." 1.

Lunacharsky ('Voinov') opened the debate. The revolution in Russia **had already begun** in the sense that the masses had decisively entered the arena of struggle. What was now needed, he argued, was to give an organised form to this semi-spontaneous movement. Otherwise, all the heroism and energies of the workers could be dissipated in disorganised and aimless local uprisings.

In the previous period, when the objective conditions for revolution were absent, the Russian Marxists, Plekhanov in the first instance, had laid heavy stress on attacking the **voluntarist** theories of the Narodniks, those



Kamenev.

'romantic revolutionaries' who imagined that all that was needed was a decisive push by small terrorist groups to 'detonate' the masses into action. For this subjective idealism, the problem of armed insurrection was something independent of time and space. For the Marxists, for whom the revolution must be the work of the workers themselves, it arises inevitably at a certain point in the development of the class struggle. Where the necessary objective conditions were absent, to put forward constantly the idea of insurrection and armed struggle is mere Blanquism.* They correctly concentrated on the slow work of developing Marxist cadres, emphasising theory and organisation, carefully husbanding resources and building links with the masses. But now, the entire situation had been transformed by the social earthquakes of war and revolution. After January 9, Martov's argument that you cannot 'organise' the revolution and his accusation of 'Blanquism' directed at the Bolsheviks smacked of sophistry. In reality, the Mensheviks' attitude flowed from their entire conception of the revolution as a bourgeois-democratic revolution in

which the working class must subordinate itself to the Liberal bourgeoisie. The question of organising the workers for an armed uprising did not enter into their scheme of things, because they saw the workers' role as merely backing up the Liberals, and forcing the autocracy to retreat under the pressure of strikes and demonstrations directed towards placing the Liberals in power.

The Bolsheviks, while not denying the bourgeois-democratic character of the revolution, saw things quite differently. They saw the working class as the main motor-force of the revolution, which would triumph, in spite of the cowardice and treachery of the 'progressive' bourgeoisie, only to the degree that the proletariat fought for and won its rightful place at the head of the nation, uniting behind its banner all the oppressed classes of society, in particular the peasantry. The role of the Social Democrats was no longer merely that of 'propagandist-enlighteners' but revolutionary organisers, not merely 'committee-men' but leaders of masses, whose duty it was to prepare for an all-out general strike, culminating in an all-Russia uprising against tsarism.

Strikes

Given the numerical weakness of the forces of Marxism, this may seem to have been an excessively ambitious aim. But it is necessary to bear firmly in mind the concrete conditions of the time. The Russian working class was politically virgin, consisting overwhelmingly of new layers freshly awakened to political life, with no fixed traditions of reformist or Stalinist mass organisations, and no deeply-rooted political prejudices. The lava of the revolution had not yet had time to harden into a solid crust of bureaucratic conservatism. This enabled the forces of Marxism in Russia very quickly to overcome their weakness and rise to the head of millions of leftward moving workers who had nowhere else to go.

After the shock of Bloody Sunday the consciousness of the masses was transformed. There was a wave of local

* This term, which was commonly used by the Russian Marxists to denote revolutionary adventurism, takes its name from the famous French revolutionary and utopian communist, Luis Auguste Blanqui (1805-81) who based himself on an ultra-left, conspiratorial conception of the revolution, as the work, not of the masses but as a 'coup de main of a small revolutionary minority'. Despite his undoubted sincerity and personal courage, Blanqui's lack of theoretical understanding

doomed him to play a negative role. "Blanqui," wrote Engels, "is essentially a political revolutionary, a socialist only by sentiment, because of his sympathy for the sufferings of the people, but he has neither socialist theory nor definite practical proposals for social reforms. In his political activities he was essentially a 'man of action'." 2. The modern ultralefts have faithfully preserved all of Blanqui's faults without possessing any of his virtues.

strikes and demonstrations, often of a stormy character. One of the delegates recalled the electric mood in the factories: "After the January revolutionary week in Petersburg there was such a spate of anarchistic strikes that in many factories it was enough for only one of the workers to shout: 'Down tools, lads!' for a strike to break out, and anyone who spoke out against it, received from the others the tag of 'provocateur'." 3.

The danger was that the energies of the workers would be dissipated in this way. What was required was to try to unify the movement so as to be able to concentrate 'full strength at the point of attack'. The same delegate stressed the need to combat ultraleft adventurism and individual terrorism: "on the one hand, needless acts of petty terrorism, on the other, acts of senseless provocation, or clashes with the police and soldiers, when individual armed persons, by bringing their weapons into play, give the enemy reason and opportunity to fire upon and slaughter unarmed crowds." 4.

The delegates discussed in a business-like manner all the technical details: the drawing up of 'strategic maps' of towns, the training of competent officers, the raising of funds, but above all the need for every branch to possess detailed knowledge of local conditions and the mood of the workers. Side by side with the technical and organisational preparation, there was to be a stepping up of the ideological, agitational and propaganda work, as an integral part of preparing for the overthrow of tsarism. Agitation was to be carried on, not only among the workers, but also among the intellectuals, students, youth, women, the non-Russian nationalities, and, as much as possible, among the peasants, beginning with the village poor. Special attention was devoted to work in the army, with the aim of winning over the soldiers to the side of the workers. The troops were to be leafleted, and a commission of experienced specialists was set up, under the control of the Central Committee, to work out a programme of transitional demands for soldiers.

Nevertheless, even at a time when the question of armed insurrection had been pushed to the fore by events, the fundamental task of the party was still that of winning over the masses. Without that, all the talk about overthrowing tsarism would have been so much empty chatter. The Congress, however, confirmed many of Lenin's fears that the Bolshevik activists inside Russia had been slow to react to changing conditions. Accustomed to functioning over a long period in small, closed circles in the underground, the 'commit-



Nadezhda Krupskaya.

teemen' were ill at ease in the mass movement and used every excuse to avoid getting too closely involved with it. A formalistic conception of organisation, discipline and centralism, together with certain ultraleft tendencies, served to cover up for an innate conservatism and cliquishness, inherited from the past. Lenin used the Congress as an arena to wage an implacable struggle against these tendencies.

On the question of participating in legal organisations such as trade unions, co-ops, insurance and benefit schemes, where the prevailing mood of the 'committeemen' was for a boycott, Lenin warned that: "The Congress cannot lay down a hard and fast rule on this point. All methods should be used for agitation. The experience of the Shidlovsky Commission gives no ground whatever for a downright negative attitude," and went on to shock the advocates of boycott by asserting that it would be correct, under certain circumstances, to participate even in a rigged tsarist parliament: "It is impossible to reply categorically whether it is advisable to participate in the Zemsky Sobor. Everything will depend on the political situation, on the electoral system, and on other specific factors which cannot be estimated in advance. Some say that the Zemsky Sobor is a fraud. That is true. But there are times when we must take part in elections to expose a fraud." 5. And Lenin moved an addendum to the resolution on this question which stated: "As regards the actual and sham concessions which the weakened autocracy is now making to the democrats in general and to the working class in particular, the Social Democratic party of the working class should take advantage of them in order,

on the one hand, to consolidate for the people every improvement in the economic conditions and every extension of liberties with a view to intensifying the struggle, and, on the other, steadily to expose before the proletariat the reactionary aims of the government, which is trying to disunite and corrupt the working class and draw its attention away from its urgent class needs at the moment of the revolution." 6.

Lenin's flexible and dialectical understanding of revolutionary tactics and strategy clashed with the unyielding dogmatism of the committeemen, whose universe revolved around the axis of their narrow local circle, which they jealously guarded, on the one hand against the leadership 'in exile', on the other hand against the demands of the workers for a greater say in the running of inner-party affairs. The class composition of the Congress itself left a lot to be desired, as one of the delegates, Leshchinsky ('Zharkov') commented: "Looking around me, at the composition of the present Congress, I am astonished that in it there are so few workers, and yet, that workers suitable to be sent to the Congress, without any doubt, could have been found." 7. This is borne out by Krupskaya, who says in her memoirs: "There were no workers at the Third Congress—at least none of any mark... There was no shortage of committeemen though. Unless this make-up of the congress is borne in mind a great deal of what the congress records contain will not be properly understood." 8.

In fact, the atmosphere at the congress became frequently heated, as Lenin tackled the prejudices of the 'practicos' head-on, while the latter did not conceal their resentment at the 'interference' of the 'exiles'. "The 'committeeman'," wrote Krupskaya, "was usually a rather self-assured person. He saw what a tremendous influence the work of the committee had on the masses, and as a rule he recognised no inner-Party democracy. 'Inner-Party democracy only leads to trouble with the police. We are connected with the movement as it is', the 'committeemen' would say. Inwardly they rather despised the Party workers abroad who, in their opinion, had nothing better to do than squabble among themselves—they ought to be made to work under Russian conditions.' The 'committeemen' objected to the overruling influence of the Centre abroad. At the same time they did not want innovations. They were neither desirous nor capable of adjusting themselves to the quickly changing conditions." 9.

Bogdanov moved a resolution, drawn up by Lenin, 'On the Relations between Workers and Intellectuals within the

Social Democratic Organisation,' which, while recognising the difficulties under conditions of illegality, argued in favour of applying the principle of elections more broadly, to open up the party to the workers, to make room for the new, fresh layers on the party's leading committees.

This resolution called forth a storm of protest on the part of the committeemen. Kamenev ('Gradov') was first on his feet: "I must decisively speak against approving this resolution. This question of the relation between the intellectuals and workers in party organisations does not exist. (Lenin: It does exist!) No, it does not: it exists as an issue for demagoguery—and that's all." 10. Others argued that there was no time or forces to train workers, basing themselves on the famous quote from *What is to be Done?* which incorrectly asserts that socialist consciousness must be brought to the workers from without. Thus, Romanov ('Leskov') complained: "It seems to me that here we are overestimating the psychology of the workers (sic!), as if the workers by themselves could become conscious Social Democrats." 11. (My emphasis, AW) Yet now the very author of *What is to be Done?* answered his critics by appealing to the class instinct of the workers, and deliberately shocked his audience by referring approvingly of the participation of the workers in the party organisation during the period of 'Economism':

Intellectuals

"It has been said here that the bearers of Social Democratic ideas are predominantly the intellectuals. That is not true. In the epoch of Economism, the bearers of revolutionary ideas were workers, not intellectuals... It is further asserted that at the head of the splitters are usually situated intellectuals. That observation is very important but does not settle the matter. I long ago advised in my written works that workers should be brought onto the committees in the greatest possible number. The period following the Second Congress was characterised by the insufficient implementation of this obligation—that is the impression I have got from my conversations with the 'practical workers'.... It is necessary to overcome the inertia of the committeemen (applause and hissing)... the workers have a class instinct, and with just a little bit of political experience they very quickly become staunch social-democrats. I

* In the English 'Collected Works', this speech of Lenin's has, for reasons best known to the Stalinist editors, been left out. I quote here from the Congress minutes. AW



Anton Lavinsky's 1926 poster for the film, *The Battleship Potemkin*.

would be very pleased if, in the make-up of our committees, out of every two intellectuals there were eight workers." 12.

It is an interesting point, frequently overlooked, that many of the old worker 'Economists' of the *Rabocheye Dyelo* tendency subsequently joined the Bolsheviks whereas the Economist intellectuals, such as Martynov and Akimov, almost to a man, joined the Mensheviks.

But, despite all the passionate arguments put forward by Lenin and his supporters, the majority remained obdurate. Burning with indignation, Lenin again intervened: "I could hardly keep my seat when it was said that there are no workers fit to sit on the committees. The question is being dragged out: obviously there is something the matter with the Party. Workers must be given places on the committees. Oddly enough, there are only three publicists at the Congress, the others being committee-men: it appears however that the publicists are for placing the workers, whereas the committee-men for some reason are quite wrought up over it." 13.

In the end, Lenin remained in a minority, and the resolution was rejected, on the grounds that there was 'no need' for a special resolution on this subject. Subsequent events were to show just how right Lenin was.

Nevertheless, the Third Congress marked an historic landmark. The basic ideas of Lenin on the leading role of the proletariat in the revolution, the need for absolute class independence and mistrust of the Liberals, was adopted without dissent. The party's policy on the agrarian question (Lenin led off in this debate) was radically changed to include the confiscation of all the big

landlords estates and the setting up of peasant committees. From this point onwards, the revolutionary solution of the agrarian problem lay at the heart of the Bolsheviks' revolutionary strategy. The Party Rules approved at the Second Congress were basically reaffirmed, although Lenin made it abundantly clear that they were not to be interpreted in a narrow sense, but that the party organisation should be quickly opened up to include the best of the workers and the youth. With the bitter experience of the split still fresh in everyone's memory, he also insisted on including in the Rules clear and specific guarantees for the rights of minorities within the party. Minorities were to have the right to express their point of view freely at all levels of the party, subject only to the condition that the raising of differences should not be done in such a way as to disorganise and undermine the practical intervention of the party in the struggle against tsarism and capitalism.

Weekly paper

The Congress launched a new weekly paper, *Proletary*, to replace the *Vperyod*, and elected a new central committee to replace the old conciliationist one. The Congress thus resolved the old unsatisfactory division between the party's central organ, central committee and party council, reducing these to a single centre, the CC, which was later divided into two parts, the exterior and the interior. Lenin, for the time being, remained outside Russia, whilst the 'Russian Bureau' of the CC, based in St Petersburg, was made up of Bogdanov, Krassin and Postolovsky, with Rumyantsev later being co-opted on. Lenin was, in effect, in charge of the

'Foreign Bureau' of the CC which maintained close links with the Russian Bureau, but also had direct links with the local party committees, with whom it carried on a regular correspondence.

The Congress had given a much needed boost to the morale of the Bolsheviks, who began to grow at a considerable pace. New branches and district committees were set up. Factory cells were established, as well as Bolshevik trade union factions, designed to take advantage of the new opportunities for legal trade union work in which, however, the Mensheviks had gained a head-start. Bolshevik agitation and propaganda was carried out by small specialised groups of 10 to 12 people. Each agitator-organiser was responsible for a single district. The opportunities for carrying socialist ideas to the workers were now immense. Millions of leaflets were published by both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the course of the year. "The old forms of propaganda," writes Krupskaya, "were dead and propaganda had turned into agitation. With the colossal growth of the working class movement, verbal propaganda and even agitation as a whole could not meet the needs of the movement. What was needed was popular literature, a popular newspaper, literature for the peasants and for the non-Russian nationalities." 14.

These, and other pressing needs, immediately raised the question of finance. The question of arms, too, required large sums of money. David Lane, on the basis of a study of the Bolshevik and Menshevik press, concludes that, in February, the St Petersburg Bolshevik Committee raised a total of 2,400 roubles (£240), of which 265r was spent on the press and 375r on organisation. There was a separate arms fund of 1,295r, of which 850r had already been spent. If we include a further 981r represented by a separate strike fund, this means that the total income of the St Petersburg Bolsheviks in February 1905 was about £468 (ten roubles equalled one pound). However, in just the first two weeks of July, the expenditure of the Bolsheviks had risen to 800r on arms, 540r on organisation and 156r on literature.

"The Mensheviks' income from 15 February to 15 March," according to Lane, "was larger than the Bolsheviks, being 4,039r (2,000r of which came from one contributor): of this sum, 1,250r were spent on arms, 'organisation' in various regions came to 1,126r and 630r were spent on the printing presses." 15.

"The budget of the revolutionary organisations, consisting in the period 1901-02 of a few hundred roubles, by

mid-1905 had grown to tens of thousands of roubles a year." 16.

Even so, neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks could keep up with the demand for socialist literature. Everywhere there was a thirst for the written word. The workers wanted to know. The old *Iskra* had a print-run of around 10-15,000 (fortnightly, although for a brief period it appeared weekly). Now the audience for a revolutionary socialist newspaper was at least ten or twenty times that figure. The underground printshops could not keep up with the needs of the moment. But the possibility of launching a legal paper did not arise until later in the year when Trotsky and Parvus took over the old liberal *Ruskaya Gazeta* and transformed it into a legal organ of the Marxists. With its low price of one kopeck, and its popular style, circulation shot up from 30,000 to 100,000, reaching a staggering 500,000 by December. By comparison, the Bolshevik legal paper *Novaya Zhizn*, 'New Life', had a circulation of 50,000— which was still five times more than the total print run of the old *Iskra*. But that was not until the Autumn. In the meantime, the local party groups had to make do with whatever leaflets and other material they could duplicate on their humble hand-operated mimeograph machines.

In his history of the Social Democracy, Martov gives a whole series of figures for the financial state of both Menshevik and Bolshevik groups in 1905, which show how far the demands of the situation outstripped the income raised from the members in subs. Thus, the Baku committee, in February, raised a total of 1,382 roubles, of which only 38 (3%) came 'from workers'.

'A typical local committee would consist of not more than a dozen people. Every member of a committee had a direct responsibility for some aspect of the work, either press, finance or agitation, or responsibility for a particular district or factory. These were linked to the workers through party circles.'

Only 14% of the income of the Sebastopol committee came from subs. The situation in Riga was better, but still only amounted to 22%. However, in the Bolshevik stronghold, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, the corresponding figure was 53%. 17. Both factions received large donations from wealthy sympathisers. But the Mensheviks, with their far looser organisation, were always far more dependent upon this source than the Bolsheviks, who strove for, and finally achieved, an organisation built upon the kopecks of the workers—the only real foundation for a workers' party. By contrast, we have already seen how, in early 1905, almost half of the income of the Mensheviks came from a single contributor. On the 15 February, according to the same source, the Petersburg Mensheviks' income totalled 247r "of which 200r were from a sympathiser." 18. The situation with the Jewish Bund was completely different. Despite their opportunistic policy, the Bund had a well-established, centralised working class organisation, about which Lenin spoke enviously more than once. Fifty per cent of their needs were met from the workers donations.

The scope for the work inside Russia was now considerably easier. Although arrests were still made, sentences tended to be more lenient. Sometimes the local police were overruled by liberal provincial governors. The police themselves were losing their nerve. Under these circumstances, the local committees were able to meet almost daily.

A typical local committee would consist of not more than a dozen people. Every member of a committee had a direct responsibility for some aspect of the work, either press, finance or agitation, or responsibility for a particular district or factory. These were linked to the workers through party circles. There were also social democratic student organisations, and beyond these a wider 'periphery' of sympathisers. As soon as even one worker joined in a factory, he or she was expected to begin working under the direction of the local committee. We have already seen some of the negative features of the 'committeemen'. But it would be wrong to lose sight of their positive side. These were professional revolutionaries, dedicated to the party, hard-working and self-sacrificing. Working under difficult conditions, they were almost always on the move. They lived a hand-to-mouth existence, on very low wages, around 25-35 roubles a month, funds permitting, which was not always the case! Some had a private income, others were sometimes forced to do part-time jobs. Some, like Krassin, as we have seen,



The Ivanovo-Voznesensk 'Meeting of Representative Delegates', a soviet in all but name.

worked as a 'cover', which sometimes gave rise to amusing circumstances: "In St Petersburg there was an insurance company, not inaptly named Nadezhda ('Hope') whose directors made it their policy to employ as clerks men known to be active revolutionaries: they found that, although they seldom remained with the firm for long owing to the high incidence of arrests, they were exceptionally honest." 19.

Donations

Like the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks also had some wealthy sympathisers who were systematically tapped for cash. Well-heeled civil servants, Zemstvo liberals, doctors and other professional people provided money through donations, put up full-timers and even hid fugitives. In Odessa, the director of a big printing works "always helped out in a financial crisis." The industrialist Savva Morozov donated 2,000 roubles a month to Krassin from late 1903 onwards. As the amount of money raised from subs, paper and literature sales was nowhere near enough to meet the demands of the new situation, such donations became very important. Maxim Gorky, whose fame as a writer was already established, played a key role in raising this kind of money, enlisting the aid of many other writers and prominent intellectuals, whose enthusiasm had been aroused by the revolution. Students and other middle class people were approached for donations. Even the odd landowner, like A Tsurupa, gave regular contributions.

Throughout the Spring of 1905, the pendulum swung continually to the left. After the massacre of the Ninth of January, the movement in St Petersburg

temporarily ebbed, as the workers of the capital cautiously took stock of the position. The May Day demonstration in St Petersburg was not a success, with only a few hundred turning out. However, the more backward provinces were now being roused to struggle. On the first of May, 200,000 workers struck in nearly 200 towns throughout Russia. The textile workers were well to the fore. On 12 May, a general strike broke out in the Bolshevik stronghold of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, a textile town with 70,000 workers, lasting 72 days. By this time the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Bolsheviks numbered more than 400. Negotiations were conducted by **elected factory delegates** who met in a 'Meeting of Representative Delegates', a soviet in all but name. Out of 128 delegates, of whom 23 were women, about 30 were Bolsheviks.

The Ivanovo-Voznesensk soviet kept order in the town, issued proclamations, set up a militia and controlled the press, thus in practice imposing freedom of the press, speech and assembly. Daily mass meetings enabled the mass of workers to learn and exchange experiences. The peasants in the surrounding districts looked hopefully towards the soviet to which they directed petitions. **The militant unity of the proletariat and peasantry was thus being forged, not in words but in deeds, by the movement of the workers themselves.** From the 23 May the local party got out a regular bulletin on the course of the dispute. By the end of June, the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Bolshevik organisation had grown to 600 members, with 15-20 factory organisations.

In the textile town of Lodz in Poland, the funeral of a worker killed by Cos-

sacks turned into a mass political demonstration on May 15 with slogans such as 'Down with Tsarism!' and 'Long live the Revolution!' A wave of strikes and demonstrations swept through Poland and Lithuania, culminating in the 23 June general strike and uprising in Lodz, and solidarity demonstrations in Warsaw and Odessa.

Soviets

The strike wave which gripped almost all the industrial areas throughout the Spring and Summer assumed an increasingly political character. Whereas in March, less than 30% of strikes were political, between April and August the figure had risen to 50-70%. **Everywhere, the workers' elected representatives in the factory committees and strike committees led the way. And all that a 'soviet' is—at its inception—is an enlarged strike committee, an organ of struggle in the fight of the workers against the employers.** The soviets in Russia, those marvellously effective, flexible and representative organisations of the workers, were not the invention of Lenin or Trotsky. Nowhere do they feature in the writings of Marx and Engels. They were the product of the inventive genius and initiative of ordinary working men and women. The Soviets were destined to play a central role in the whole development of the revolution, particularly during and after the great October strike.

Not only the urban workers but the peasantry was also gradually being drawn into the orbit of the revolution. Throughout the Summer there were peasant disturbances and strikes of agricultural labourers in the Baltic area,

the Ukraine, Don, Kuban and the Caucasus. In some areas, the peasants virtually took over whole areas and ran their own affairs. The Mensheviks tried to use this as backing for their theory of "revolutionary self-government". But the truth was that, unless the working class took power, such local outbreaks could only have an episodic character.

Taking cognisance of the new situation in the villages, the party had already re-drafted its agrarian programme to include the confiscation of all landowners', government, church, monastic and crown lands. The changed atmosphere in the villages opened up for the first time big possibilities for social democratic work among the peasants. Although the party was still weak here, some circles were established in areas like Nizhegorod, Samara, Saratov, Kazan and Tver. Lenin insisted on the establishment of purely social democratic groups in the villages, composed of farm labourers and rural proletarians. Only then would they seek agreements for joint work with other revolutionary-democratic groups. But the prior condition was not to blur over the distinction between workers and peasant small proprietors.

An interesting pen portrait of the work of Bolshevik agitators in the villages is to be found in Sholokhov's famous novel *And Quiet Flows the Don*, which describes how the Bolshevik Stockman organised a group of Cossacks around a poetry and literacy circle: "After long sifting and testing, a little group of the Cossacks began to meet regularly in Stockman's workshop. Stockman was the heart and soul of the group and he worked straight towards a goal that only he fully understood. He ate into the simple understanding and conceptions like a worm into wood, instilling repugnance and hatred towards the existing system. At first he found himself confronted with the cold steel of distrust, but he was not to be repulsed. Even that could be worn away." 20.

This ferment in the villages had important repercussions in the armed forces, which were overwhelmingly of peasant composition. However, as so often happened in the history of revolutions, the revolt flared up first in the fleet, with its more proletarian class make-up.

The party's work among soldiers and sailors was even more difficult than work among the peasants. On the eve of the 1905 revolution, there were only three organised party groups in the armed forces. However, in the course of the revolution, this number increased to a total of 27 groups. 21. Military defeats created an explosive mood of discontent



Workers' strike in Moscow.

in the ranks, making them ever more receptive to social democratic agitation. News of the annihilation of the Russian fleet at Tsushima, (27-28 May, 1905) had an especially electrifying effect on the sailors. As so often happens in naval mutinies, the leading role was played by the petty officers, normally drawn from the most able and intelligent of the sailors, whose close proximity to the officers gives rise to a deep-seated contempt for the latter. The tensions and conflicts aroused by the arrogance and incompetence of the naval officers become increasingly unbearable when they are related to matters of life and death, in time of war. Precisely such a clash between the petty officers and officers led to the outbreak of the famous mutiny on the battleship *Prince Potemkin Tavrishesky* on June 14 1905, immortalised in Eisenstein's classic film *The Battleship Potemkin*.

The immediate issue was the bad food. But the underlying cause was the general discontent with the conduct of the war, and the piling up of unbearable contradictions over decades and generations. The Black Sea fleet had set out for the southern port of Odessa precisely when that city was in the grip of a general strike. No amount of military discipline and police surveillance could prevent the bacilli of revolution from reaching the ships anchored only a few miles away.

The mutineering crew arrested all the officers, except the commander and six others who were killed. The sailors elected a committee from their midst which took the bold initiative of sailing into Odessa to appeal for support from the workers. A great crowd assembled around the corpse of the able seaman Grigory Valulinchuk, killed by an of-

ficer. A massive demonstration took place, and mass meetings were held in which social democratic agitators participated. This showed both the strong and the weak side of the spontaneous, elemental movement of the masses. All the elements were present for a decisive linking-up of the army with the revolutionary people. But in the absence of a conscious leadership, the "floating republic" could only have the character of an episodic development, which nevertheless was an anticipation of the going over of the soldiers and sailors to the side of the Soviets in 1917.

These events left the Odessa authorities thunderstruck. For a time they did not know what to do. In practice, power was in the hands of the workers. But they acted with no clear perspective, no overall policy or plan. This allowed the authorities time to concentrate their forces against Odessa. A naval force was sent against the *Potemkin*, which succeeded in escaping to Rumania, but the revolution in Odessa was brutally suppressed.

The mutiny on the *Potemkin* therefore failed to lead to an insurrection, which was implicit in the situation. But it did not pass off without leaving its imprint. Terrified at the scale of the mass movement and the signs of inner decomposition in the armed forces, the government announced the holding of elections to the State Duma (parliament). Ten days later peace was concluded with Japan under humiliating terms. It is not generally realised that, despite her earlier reverses, from a strictly military point of view, Russia had everything to gain from continuing the war. Japan's reserves of men and money were nearly exhausted. But the rapid termination of the war was essential for the preservation of the autocracy.

The ending of the war and the announcement of elections was greeted with elation by the bourgeois liberals. "The Japanese," proclaimed one of them, "will not enter the Kremlin, but the Russians will!" 22. However, closer acquaintance with the details of Bulygin's proposals soon poured cold water over this precipitate and naive optimism.

Bulygin, the creature of the autocracy, had worked out what Lenin described as "the most reactionary constitution in Europe." It gave the vote to the landowners, bourgeois, property-owning peasants and the urban middle class, while the workers, the village poor, women and servicemen—that is to say, the overwhelming majority of the population—were excluded. To add insult to injury, the Duma would only have consultative powers! The whole elaborate construction was a lie and a

deceit behind which everything would continue as before.

From this moment on, the Duma occupied a central position in the tactical discussions of all social democratic tendencies. The Bolsheviks immediately came out in favour of a policy of "active boycott". The position of the Mensheviks was ambiguous. In the Caucusus, focal point for the most backward and opportunist wing of Menshevism, they openly called for participation. However, in general, the mood of the Menshevik rank and file was against this. The Bolsheviks proposed a united front to the Mensheviks and the Social Democratic organisations of the nationalities for a boycott campaign. At local level, the Bolsheviks and Menshevik workers acted in unison. The petit bourgeois Social Revolutionaries also supported the boycott. Even the Liberals of the 'Union of Unions' were compelled to come out in opposition, at least in words.

Boycott

The government's granting of autonomy to the universities, in itself an apparently secondary measure, represented a major turning-point. The doors of the establishments of higher education were suddenly thrown open and through them poured the masses, thirsting for ideas, and eager to participate in the arena of public debate. Up to this point, the students had been involved in a passive student 'strike', refusing to turn up to classes. This was on the point of being broken when the whole movement took an entirely different direction. Throughout the Autumn, the campuses and lecture theatres were the focal points of heated discussions. Beginning with the students, these debates became known to the workers who soon understood that here, at last, was a place they could meet and discuss unmolested by the police. "Alongside the students' uniforms in the lecture theatres," wrote an eyewitness, "ordinary clothes and, above all, workers overalls were to be seen with ever increasing frequency."²³

The explosion on the campuses showed that the pendulum was still swinging rapidly to the left, with new layers being drawn into the struggle. This was the fundamental consideration which determined the Bolsheviks attitude to the question of a boycott at this stage, although at the Third Congress Lenin was very careful to insist that the party should keep its options open on this question. More than anyone else, Lenin understood the need for extreme flexibility on all tactical and organisational questions and not to get carried away by



Sailors from the *Potemkin*.

ultra-left moods which would only serve to separate the advanced elements from the majority of the class.

The organic opportunism of the Menshevik leaders meant that they were heavily inclined towards parliamentarianism, although the pressure of the radicalised rank and file prevented them from revealing their hand too early. Among the Bolsheviks, however, there was a considerable number of the "committeemen" in particular who advocated the "boycott" tactic as an absolute panacea, outside of time and space. This ultra left tendency, the product of a lack of understanding of theory and the dialectical method of Marxism, led to serious mistakes later on, as Lenin honestly admitted.

In the given situation, the boycott of the "Bulygin Duma" project was absolutely correct. The revolutionary wave was still gathering in strength. The terms of the new constitution fell so far short of the expectations aroused that

even a section of the Liberals were opposed. The democratic aspirations of the masses collided against the solid wall of the bureaucratic-police regime. Only by the revolutionary overthrow of tsarism and a clean break with the past could the ground be cleared for the introduction of a genuine democracy. The exact nature of the transformation and the role of the different classes in the revolution were the subject of heated debate within the ranks of the workers' movement, which will be dealt with later. But to all but the blindest reformist, it was evident that on the order of the day stood, not parliamentarianism but a revolutionary general strike and armed insurrection to overthrow the autocracy. This perspective was amply corroborated by the high tide of the revolution which was ushered in by the October strike in St Petersburg and culminated in the December uprising in Moscow.

Footnotes

1. Lenin, 'Collected Works', volume 8, p370.
2. Marx and Engels, 'Selected Works', volume 2, p381.
3. *Tretiy s'yezd RSDRP (Protokoly)*, p110.
4. *ibid*.
5. Lenin, 'Collected Works', volume 8, p375.
6. *ibid* p376.
7. *Tretiy s'yezd*, p124.
8. Krupskaya, 'Memories of Lenin', p125.
9. *ibid* pp124-125.
10. *Tretiy s'yezd*, p255.
11. *ibid* p265.
12. *ibid* p262.
13. Lenin, 'Collected Works', volume 8, p411.
14. Krupskaya, *op cit*, p127.
15. David Lane, 'The Roots of Russian Communism', p78.
16. Martov, 'Obshehestvennoe Dvizhenie v Rossii', volume 2, p63.
17. *ibid*, volume 3, p569.
18. D.Lane, *op cit*, p78.
19. J.L.H. Keep, 'The Rise of the Social Democracy in Russia', p181.
20. Sholokhov, 'And Quiet Flows the Don', p259.
21. *Istoriya KPSS*, volume 2, p90.
22. Bernard Pares, 'A History of Russia', p485.
23. Martov, *op cit*, volume 1, p73.

Book Reviews

James Maxton

By William Knox.

Published by
Manchester University
Press. Price £4.95
1987.

In the turbulent years that followed the first world war, the industrial conurbation of Clydeside was turned into a revolutionary battleground—"the Petrograd of the British Isles"—in the words of the legendary Scottish Marxist, John MacLean.

Although the movement in Glasgow was eventually defeated with the military occupation of the city by 12,000 troops in February 1919, the labour movement emerged from these events immensely strengthened. In vivid contrast to the general election of 1918, when Labour had won only one of the 15 Glasgow seats, by 1922 the city was a stronghold of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). In 10 Glasgow constituencies the party swept to power and the formidable group of left-wing MPs went on to become infamous in the eyes of the British establishment as 'the Red Clydesiders'.

The most prominent of these was James Maxton (or Jimmy Maxton as he was better known on Clydeside) a powerful and charismatic orator who later went on to become one of the most illustrious figures in the history of the British labour movement. This book is an interesting albeit short and somewhat sketchy introduction to the life of Maxton, tracing his development from his early days as a Tory student at Glasgow University to his ultimate isolation as the solitary remaining ILP MP before his death in 1946 at the age of 62.

Maxton was born into a conservative lower middle class family and only began to grope towards the ideas of socialism as a result of his

experience as a schoolteacher working amidst the poverty and squalor of the slums of the East End of Glasgow. According to his own account, he was finally converted to socialism as a result of attending John MacLean's monster open-air political meetings. Although Maxton never adopted the thoroughgoing revolutionary programme of his mentor, the influence and example of MacLean left its imprint on Maxton's own character. Thus, even after spending almost a quarter of a century in Westminster, Maxton remained an incorruptible individual who shunned the comforts and privileges of parliamentary life. Along with the other 'Red Clydesiders', he continued to live a spartan existence, abstaining from alcohol, lodging in modest accommodation and remaining openly contemptuous of those Labour MPs who had been sucked into the social whirlpool of London high society.

Banned

Maxton and the other Clydeside MPs built up enormous popularity among the Scottish working class as they launched one broadside after another against capitalism and its apologists. In one famous incident in 1923 they were banned en masse from the House of Commons for denouncing the Tories as child murderers, to the acute embarrassment of the respectable Labour leaders.

As Knox demonstrates, throughout the 1920s and especially in the aftermath of the 1926 general strike, Maxton moved steadily further to the left. In the Cook-Maxton Manifesto, drawn up jointly with the miner's leader AJ Cook in 1928, Maxton called for "an unceasing war against capitalism and opposition to compromises with the political philosophy of our capitalist opponents."

At a later stage, following the bitter experience of the Ramsay MacDonald-led

Labour government which collapsed in ignominious disarray in 1931, Maxton for a period even drew close to the ideas of Leon Trotsky. He enraged not only the Labour establishment, but the Stalinist leaders of the British Communist Party by his appraisal of Trotsky, then living in exile on the remote and deserted island of Prinkipo, as "the greatest individual menace to the capitalist order... who is feared also by the rulers of Soviet Russia." However, while recommending Trotsky's masterpiece, *History of the Russian Revolution* for "a wide knowledge of social affairs, a deeper understanding of the real workings of history and a clearer view of the tasks of a working class movement", Maxton himself failed to fully absorb and apply the methods of Trotsky.

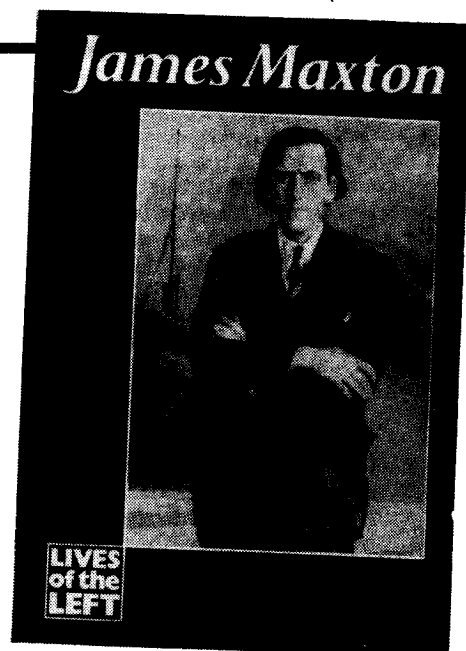
It is a weakness of this biography that Knox does not seriously attempt to analyse Maxton's failure to build a viable mass alternative to reformism and Stalinism. A number of glaring political errors committed by Maxton and his co-leaders of the ILP are glossed over by the author. For instance, albeit in a half-hearted fashion, he attempts to defend the decision of Maxton and the ILP to abandon the Labour Party following the debacle of the 1929-31 Labour government. Yet the author himself provides striking evidence of the grievous

consequences of disaffiliation for the ILP and for the labour movement as a whole. He reveals that within five months of leaving the Labour Party, between July and November 1932, membership of the ILP had plunged by 50% and the number of branches slashed from 653 to 450—the most serious haemorrhage being from the industrial areas of Scotland and the North of England.

Decline

Having cut itself off from the traditional mass political organisation of the British working class, the ILP entered a period of terminal decline while the Labour Party itself gradually recovered from the trauma of 1929-31. Perhaps the most tragic aspect of the decision was that it actually strengthened the stranglehold of the right wing leaders of the official labour movement by drawing away a layer of the most advanced and committed left wing militants in a period when the Labour Party itself was undergoing profound upheaval. Had it remained as an organised force within the official Labour Party, the ILP could have had a decisive impact on the political direction of the labour movement in the tempestuous pre-war years.

Even as an independent organisation the ILP could have played a more influential role within the working class had



it anchored itself firmly with the perspectives and programme of Marxism. Instead, amidst the raging political storms of the 1930s and 1940s the ILP was swept in one direction and then another. At one stage flirting with the ideas of Trotskyism, at another stage accommodating themselves to Stalinism and reformism, Maxton and the other ILP leaders were tortured by confusion and indecision. This led Trotsky to characterise the ILP as a 'centrist' organisation, which in the terminology of Marxism means a political grouping standing midway between reformism and revolution. Lacking precision of programme and unable to distinguish itself clearly from either the Communist Party or the official Labour leadership, like other centrist parties in Western Europe, the ILP dwindled into a sect and eventually

vanished virtually without trace.

The failure of the ILP to go all the way over to the ideas of revolutionary Marxism was partially a result of Maxton's own inadequate theoretical understanding. Knox's biography touches upon the fact that Maxton never showed any sustained appetite for the study of political theory. As the author reveals, in the final years of his life Maxton's literary diet consisted solely of cowboy novels and detective stories.

Theory

This aversion to theory was not a unique characteristic of James Maxton. Trotsky himself had commented on a number of occasions that one of the hallmarks of the leadership of the labour movement in Britain was a disdainful and even contemptuous attitude towards

ideas and theory. This in turn was a consequence of the might of the British empire which had accumulated huge reserves of wealth and had enabled the early labour movement to win substantial reforms through practical activity alone. The necessity for a worked out, comprehensive strategy to overthrow capitalism and institute a new form of society was not dictated by the same sense of urgency as was the case in Russia and other European states.

Lacking a firm grasp of revolutionary theory, Maxton, as the most authoritative leader of the ILP, ultimately proved incapable of working out a clear socialist programme or of developing the strategy and tactics necessary to build a mass movement for socialist change in Britain. He ended up as a harmless rebel, an entertaining parliamentary orator who was patronised

on all sides and whom even Churchill could describe as "the greatest gentleman in the House of Commons."

Nevertheless Maxton will be mainly remembered not for his mistakes but for his burning passionate commitment to fighting the forces of oppression. His courage and loyalty to the working class movement stands in vivid contrast to the cynicism and careerism of so many Labour parliamentarians. However, as any study of his life vividly illustrates, even the greatest individual socialist propagandists are invariably impotent in the face of the powerful forces which control society and that the building of a mighty Marxist movement, rooted in the mass organisations of the working class, remains the central task for socialists today.

By Alan McCombes

Solidarity Forever

The IWW: An oral history of the Wobblies.

Published by Lawrence and Wishart, £6-95, 1987.

This book uniquely captures the fighting spirit of the Industrial Workers of the World, or as they were popularly known, 'The Wobblies'. Based on interviews with ex-IWW members it lays bare the hardship and oppression that millions of American workers suffered at the turn of the century—conditions that were the spur to the founding of the IWW in 1905.

Songs

The IWW stood uncompromisingly for the class war. For them unions were the vehicle for the socialist transformation of society. The general strike, they believed, would be the ultimate weapon to bring the ruling

class to its knees. All workers, irrespective of race, sex or nationality, were welcomed into the 'One Big Union', as they called the IWW. This stood in stark contrast to its rival, the American Federation of Labour which stood for craft conservatism and class collaboration.

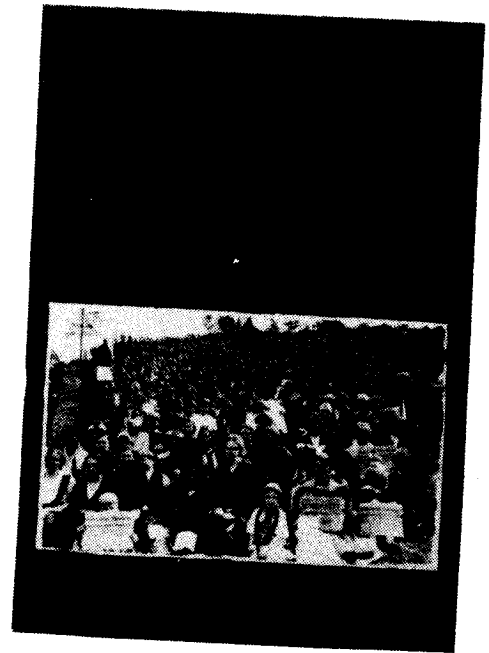
The IWW is often remembered for its songs. Thousands of its red song books, *Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent*, reached out into every mine, lumber camp and construction gang. Its best known writers were Joe Hill, who penned *The Preacher and the Slave*, and Ralph Chaplin, with *Solidarity Forever*. Most of the tunes were 'stolen' from the Salvation Army or the 'Starvation Army' as they were known, and transformed with new words.

The Wobblies used brilliant methods of agitation. Bruce 'Utah' Philip relates how "a man would walk by carrying an umbrella and a briefcase and dressed in a tight suit with a string tie and a bowler hat. He looked just like a banker. He'd yell, 'I've been

robbed! I've been robbed! Help, I've been robbed!' Everyone would rush over to him. When enough had crowded around, he'd shout, 'I've been robbed by the capitalist system!' And then the boys would jump out from the doorway and start singing Joe Hill's song, *The Preacher and the Slave*."

The IWW were industrial

pioneers. They led the first sit down strike in Schenectady, New York, in 1906. They began the organisation of the immigrant workers that the AFL would not touch, scoring their first victory at the US Steel plant, McKee's Rocks, in 1909. The IWW's finest hour came in organising the strike by 20,000 textile workers in Lawrence—nearly



AUTO-WORKERS

30 different nationalities took part.

But the IWW's main success came out West in the lumber camps, mines and harvest fields where class conflict was at its rawest. The Agricultural Workers Organisation was the IWW's outstanding union. Formed in 1915 it launched the mobile job delegate (shop steward) system, by 1917 it had 300 mobile delegates and 20,000 members. They managed to enforce the red card as the passport onto the freight trains. In the lumber camps of the South the IWW organised both black and white workers into a common union, in the Northwest they fought bitter battles against ruthless employers.

Trials

Joseph Murphy relates one strike where "... they started shipping in scabs. We found out that the scabs were being hired in Minneapolis, so a bunch of us beat our way back to the employment agency that was shipping them and signed on. As soon as they put us on the train back to Washington, we started to unload all the first class scabs. So we just let the company take us across the country until we got back to Town Creek, Washington. They took us off the train. As we came up to the site, we started to sing: 'Hold the fort for we are coming, union men be strong. Side by side we battle onward, victory will come.' That really pissed them off. They had fed us, wine and dined us, all the way from Minnesota, thinking we were scabs, and all the time we were a bunch of Wobblies."

The IWW suffered ferocious attacks by the bosses and their hired gangs. In the Everett massacre, five were killed when deputies opened fire on a boat attempting to dock. Joe Hill was judiciously murdered in Salt Lake City. In the Centralia massacre, IWW organiser Wesley Everest was castrated and lynched. In 1917 in Bisbee, Arizona, two thousand armed deputies raided the homes of

striking miners, 1,200 strikers were loaded onto a train and left in the middle of the New Mexico desert. Only the intervention of army officers saved their lives. In 1919 during the Palmer Raids, thousands of IWW members were arrested, hundreds of immigrant workers were deported.

In three major show trials, the IWW leaders were sentenced to long terms in prison—they were charged under the criminal syndicalism law which outlawed union organising.

The state raids broke the back of the IWW and it never recovered. Its aim of organising the mass of unskilled workers was temporarily defeated. The book offers no real reasons for the failure of the IWW. The IWW were limited by their syndicalist ideas, believing that the trade union struggle alone, culminating in the general strike, would defeat the ruling class. This ignored the power of the state machine and its armed bodies of men. The Russian revolution, led by a revolutionary party, became the model for thousands of IWW activists, who joined the fledgling American Communist Party. Tragically, most of the IWW leaders, isolated in prison, failed to follow this path.

The main credit of the IWW was its call for industrial unionism in opposition to the craft unionism of the AFL. When the Committee of Industrial Organisations was formed in 1934 many ex-IWW members helped to storm the bastions of the steel and car plants to build a mighty force of four million union members. The last word must go to ex-IWW member Jack Miller, quoted in the book, summing up the dream that inspired so many young workers: "We fought for material gains like beans, clothing and schooling, but we had a much larger vision. We were not making a new building in the shell of the old, not a new city, not a new country—we were building a new world. What greater task, what greater inspiration could there be than that we



workers were the only ones who could do this? It would be enough just to save this world, but we were going to

build another and better one."

By Richard Knights

The Social Structure of the Early Christian Communities.

By Dimitris J Kyrtatas.

Published by Verso, £24.95, 1987

Kyrtatas argues that Engels and Kautsky have got it all wrong—early Christianity that is. Contrary to what they said, its recruits were not drawn mainly from the lower classes and its message was not a radical revolutionary one. Rather its recruits were 'socially mixed'. 'Educated' people quickly took up leading positions with a concerted effort being made almost from the start to attract members of the ruling class

into the church. Far from having a revolutionary message, we are told that early Christianity was very conservative on issues such as slavery.

Unfortunately for Kyrtatas the evidence that Christians in the first and second centuries AD were generally from the lower classes is very strong: the lists of names and occupations given by Christian and pagan writers; or the frequency of comments like those from St Paul: "not many of you are of noble birth... God has chosen mere nobodies to overthrow the existing order".

This reference to overthrowing the existing order is important. The nature of the message of early Christianity is such as to make it inconceivable that it could have been addressed to anything other than an overwhelmingly lower class

audience. But before examining that message in detail, it is necessary to outline briefly the nature of the lower classes in the Roman Empire.

The economy was based on agriculture and slavery. There had been slave revolts before; eg Spartacus, but by the first century AD the slaves were generally ground down, 'men without hope'. Many of them were employed on the gigantic estates of the ruling class. The small peasantry were weighed down with debt and taxation and frequently squeezed out by the giant estates. In the towns were the artisans and semi-employed labourers. It was there that Christianity had much of its success. But there was no sense of common purpose among these various classes.

Discontent

Christianity originated in Palestine. There the lower classes were sucked dry not only by Roman imperialism but also by a native aristocracy that Rome maintained in power. The hoarding of crops by the landlords to raise prices led to disastrous famines in AD25 and AD46. The most depressed part of Palestine was Galilee where Jesus originated. Among the people there was a seething discontent and a sense of despair at the prospect of improving their conditions. The success of Christianity can be explained by the way it latched onto both of these feelings: discontent and despair. It offered a political saviour for those who had no hope in making their own salvation.

Kyrtatas does not deal with important Christian revolutionary literature when considering the message of early Christianity, or with the subsequent revisionism of the third and fourth century church, which involved massive censorship and rewriting. Our version of the *New Testament* dates to this period.

After that revision, it appears that the message of early Christianity was about 'religious devotion' and the

'promise of an afterlife'. But the neglected evidence indicates that on the contrary, the message was really much concerned with material rather than spiritual matters.

Despite the church's later revisionism the original platform can to some extent be reconstructed. It had three main planks. Firstly, class hatred: landlords are condemned for exploitation (James V); the rich are viciously condemned (Luke VI); great satisfaction is taken in thoughts of future vengeance (Luke XVI).

Secondly, the Christians called for the overthrow of existing society and the creation of a new one: the 'Kingdom of God'. Paul was accused of wanting to turn the world upside down (Acts XVII). He pledged that Christ would "abolish every kind of domination, authority and power". The new order was not going to be for the rich. Jesus said: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God". The kingdom was to be in this world not up in heaven—and in the near future. It was to be an age of superabundance: "a grain of wheat would bear a thousand ears and every ear would have ten thousand grains and every grain would give ten thousand of the finest flour..." (Bishop Papias, early second century). Papias' work was suppressed by the revisionists of the later church until 1575! It was also to be an age of 'communist' production and distribution: "earth the same for all, not divided by walls and fences, will then bear fruit more abundantly... no pauper is there, no rich man, nor any tyrant, no slave... no kings, no rulers but all share in common". (Jewish Christian Syballine poem).

Finally, the kingdom was to be an international one. Kautsky in his famous work, *The Foundations of Christianity*, emphasises the importance of this internationalist aspect. It finally caused Christianity to break with Judaism and become an independent force. Paul and

other internationalists had to conduct a struggle against those who wanted to keep the movement as a Jewish nationalist one. It is this struggle which explains the strange sounding arguments about circumcision and food laws. Paul was saying in effect 'let's scrap these requirements for membership because they hinder recruitment'. His position was a minority for years. Ranged against him was not only Peter but James, brother of Jesus and president of the early church.

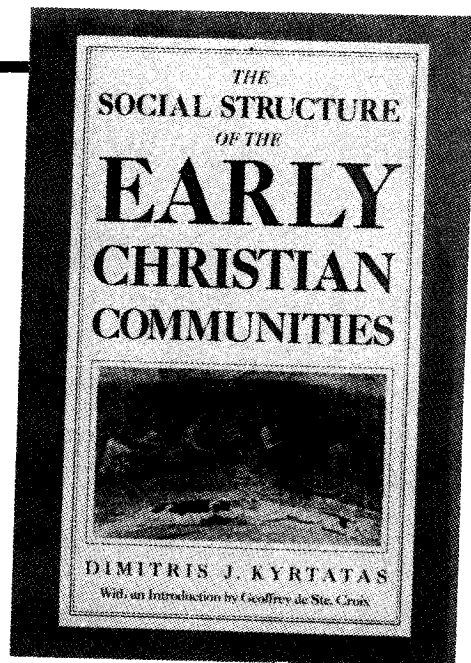
The third part of the early Christian platform was the claim that supernatural help would be forthcoming in establishing the new order. This caught the mood of the lower classes; they wanted revolution but despaired of their capability to achieve it. "Who is like unto the Beast?" asks the Book of Revelation. Christianity offered the prospect of overcoming the 'Beast' ie Rome, through supernatural assistance. The Christians took up the old Jewish idea of a Messiah or Christ, a magical saviour who would come from the stars with an army of angels.

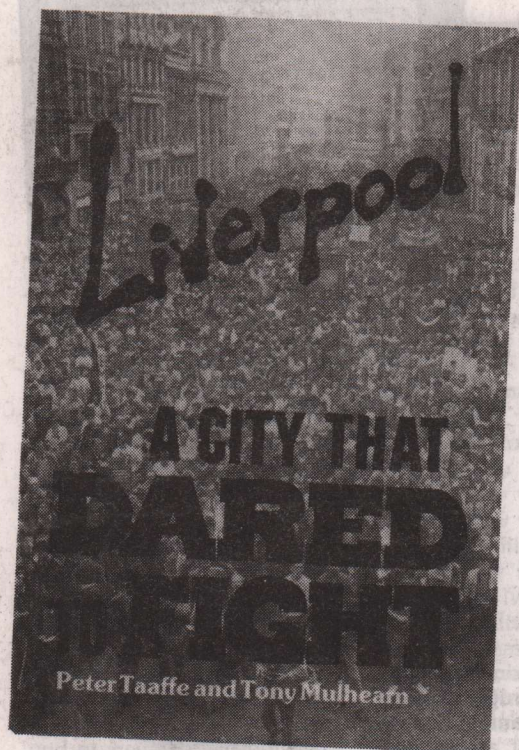
In the early days the idea of supernatural help was a spur to revolutionary action rather than an excuse for inaction. Behind the story of Jesus' death lies clear evidence of an attempt to nudge the supernatural revolution along by force of arms. Jesus was arrested on the Mount of

Olives, a traditional gathering ground for rebels. He had led a riot in the Temple and had ordered his followers to buy swords. The names of these followers indicate that they were revolutionaries eg Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were the main Jewish revolutionaries at the time. Similarly, a few years later during the reign of Emperor Claudius, we read of a serious Christian inspired riot in Rome itself.

Contrary to Kyrtatas' theory, Christianity did start out as a revolutionary organisation but the conditions of the time made its conservative transformation inevitable. Right from the start Christianity had its supernatural crutch, reflecting the simple despairing recognition that the objective conditions for a successful revolution were just not present. The supernatural element became increasingly an excuse for political passivity. Everything could be left to Jesus. He was increasingly deified while the individual Christian was told that salvation lay in abasement before this 'Son of God'. The original revolutionary intent was erased by spiritualisation. The kingdom of God was relocated: no longer would it consist of a new order in this world; rather it would be something that the faithful would only experience after death.

By Roy Davies





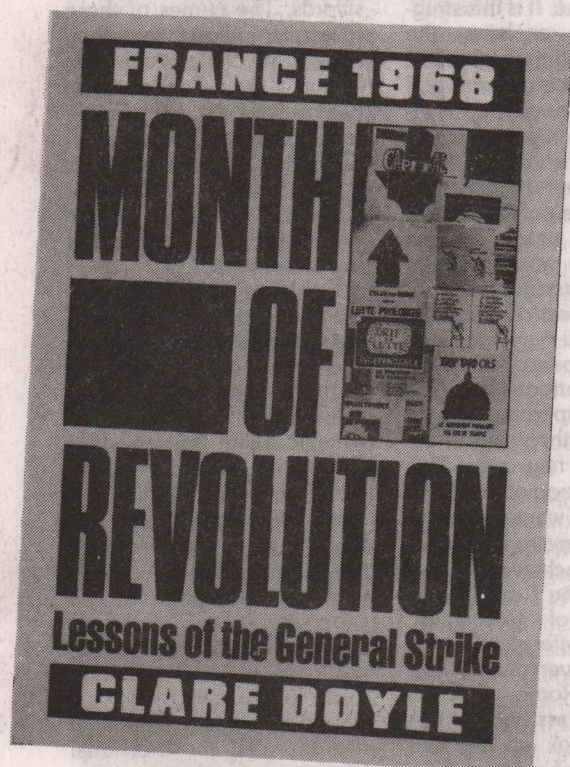
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