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CAN LABOUR WIN?

Sri Lanka ☐

Algeria ☐

Scottish Nationalism ☐

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Can Labour win?

The guiding principle of Labour's leadership has been 'NUNGE', (Nothing Until after the Next General Election). Indeed it has at times been their only 'principle'! Any attempt to go outside the prescribed narrow parliamentary boundaries has evoked the wrath of Labour's front bench.

In the looming battle on the poll tax Thatcher does not need to take time out to denounce the idea of mass non-payment. Neil Kinnock, Donald Dewar and John Cunningham are doing the job for them. But the puerile attempt of the labour and trade union leadership to 'out-Thatcher' Thatcher has had exactly the opposite effect to that expected by Labour's right.

Neil Kinnock's assault on the left, beginning with the public attack on the heroic Liverpool City councillors in September 1985, did not result in the enormous electoral bonus which his group of 'advisors' confidently predicted would accrue to Labour. Labour has lagged behind the Tories in opinion polls, when it should have been well ahead. Labour's narrow lead in recent polls entirely reflects the growing anti-Tory mood.

Kinnock's personal popularity is lower than at any time since he was elected leader in 1983. His lamentable performance both in the House of Commons and his general stewardship of the Labour Party has provoked dark mutterings about the possibility of his removal from the leadership of the party itself.

Pessimism

Given the changes in the constitutional mechanism of elections for the leadership, Kinnock himself would have to 'voluntarily' vacate the scene rather than be 'forcibly' removed through an election. However, further disastrous election results in the forthcoming County Council elections and the June Euro-elections could increase the pressure on him both from the PLP and also from the right-wing trade union leaders to go.

The speculation, however, as to Neil Kinnock's state of mind or the prospects of his remaining leader of the Labour Party are entirely secondary to the perspectives for the labour movement and the working class.

Indeed, his preferred replacement (that is by the right-wing dominated Parliamentary Labour Party and right-wing trade union barons) is John Smith. The King is dead, long live the King! Smith, by his own admission, has been entirely at one with Kinnock in his

By Peter Taaffe

assault on the left and in the proposals to swing Labour's policy and internal organisation sharply to the right.

Nor have any of the other candidates who have been floated – from Robin Cook to Gordon Brown – either clearly worked out policies, perspectives or leadership qualities which could represent a decisive advance on Kinnock.

Nevertheless the speculation on this issue does concern the ranks of the labour and trade union movement. The question of Kinnock's leadership is intimately bound up with Labour's standing in the opinion polls which in turn is linked to the question: can Labour win the next general election? The strategists of capital, in the main, have already written off Labour for 1992.

This is mirrored by the almost corrosive pessimism bordering on despair which grips the summits of the labour and trade union movement as to Labour's electoral prospects. In December the *Sunday Times* revealed in a survey of one third of the Parliamentary Labour Party that one in four does not believe that Labour can win an overall majority in the next election.

A full canvass of the PLP would probably reveal that a majority now rule out a Labour victory in 1992. Moreover, one in two, according to this survey, believe that the Labour Party should drop its longstanding opposition to proportional representation and one in five would support an electoral pact with the Social and Liberal Democrats.

According to the *Mail on Sunday* of 19th February, "one in four of Labour MPs are willing to allow David Owen to rejoin the Party." There is little, if any, chance of this happening but it indicates the swing to the right within the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Indeed the lemming-like rush towards proportional representation has left Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley, together with Bryan Gould, as a minority within the Shadow Cabinet on this issue!

Their closest allies have seemingly undergone a Pauline conversion. Robin Cook and 'Plutonium Jack' Cunningham, along with the Kinnockite and former left wing Labour Coordinating Committee, have become recent converts. John Evans, MP for St Helens, has even drawn up a list of 60 seats from Bath and Hereford to Basildon and Battersea where a deal with the 'centre' parties would guarantee the victory of

an 'anti-Tory' candidate.

'There is no gratitude in politics'. Kinnock has gone to great lengths to save Evans' political skin from the irate members of his St Helen's constituency party by suspending it for over two years. The *raison d'être* for Evans' panicky proposals is the analysis of Hugo Young in *The Guardian* that: "The determining fact of current politics is that the Conservatives believe they will be in power until 1995 and probably until 2000". Evans and his growing band of supporters in the Parliamentary Labour Party have swallowed this hook, line and sinker and are proposing that Labour should rush to embrace such 'anti-Tories' as Owen and Ashdown!

Leon Trotsky said that a party is the "memory of the working class". A reformist party, he said, was a party of short memories. But even he could not have anticipated the political amnesia, not to say political short-sightedness, of those like John Evans. Owen, the hammer of the miners, of the Liverpool councillors, an advocate of the 'social market' (read capitalism) as an anti-Tory ally of Labour.

PR

Proportional representation was canvassed by the strategists of capital in the 1970s. With the spectre of Chile before them – the Allende government had come to power as a minority government but had been pushed by mass pressure into taking over 40 per cent of industry – they were terrified at the resurgence of the left within the labour movement and the possibility of the election of a minority left Labour government. They therefore wished to alter the rules of the parliamentary game which had suited them perfectly in the past.

So long as Tory or 'safe' Labour governments were elected, the electoral system in Britain was 'the best in the world'! Indeed the British bourgeois never hesitated to deride their French and Italian counterparts whose electoral systems resulted in ramshackle and very short lived coalition governments. The British system ensured stability, they argued.

The alleged 'unfairness' of governments elected on minority votes were dismissed out of hand. Indeed Churchill's famous declaration that a majority of one was enough to govern was often quoted. It was the inherent 'stability' of the British system for them which was pre-eminent.



The Labour leadership's TV campaign failed in 1987. Now they remain pessimistic about victory next time.

But given the profound social upheavals of the 1970s and their effect on the trade unions and the Labour Party, the strategists of capital seriously pondered switching over to proportional representation. Thatcher, safely ensconced in power for 10 years, now confidently expects to be in the saddle until the next century! Moreover, by their political posture, the leaders of the labour movement incredibly seem to share her view of the future. It is now they who trumpet the idea of proportional representation as the panacea for Labour's ills.

Underpinning this campaign is the idea that Labour cannot possibly win an overall majority in 1992. Jeff Rooker, ex-left MP for Perry Barr, has gone further. He has resigned as a front bench Labour spokesman in order to campaign openly in favour of PR. Armed with the latest computer print-out, he seeks to prove that even if Labour wins the 1992 general election, the changes in the electoral boundaries in 1993 will mean that Labour will lose 20 of the seats it presently holds. To such brave souls the climbing of Mount Everest without ropes or the aid of Sherpas is an easier task than storming Thatcher's electoral citadel, particularly in the South and the West Midlands.

To secure victory for Labour at the next general election would require an eight per cent swing from the Tories to Labour and the capturing of 100 plus seats. The political earthquake which Govan undoubtedly represented cer-

tainly makes a Labour victory in 1992 even more difficult. That by-election, as another article in this issue of the *MIR* illustrates, was a crushing indictment of the philosophy, the tactics and the organisation of the Kinnockite-dominated Parliamentary Labour Party.

The discontent of the Scottish working class at the Labour leadership's stand on the poll tax has now resulted in the situation where Labour is only four per cent ahead of the Scottish National Party in the opinion polls. Labour currently has 36 per cent, the SNP 32 per cent.

Scotland

It is not possible at this stage to forecast accurately the alignment of support or seats in Scotland in the next general election. Events on the economic field together with class polarisation could prevent a massive stampede of Labour voters into the camp of the SNP. Not the least of the factors which could prevent a growth of the SNP is the development of a powerful Marxist tendency around *Militant* which is developing in the labour and trade union movement in Scotland.

It is only the policies of Marxism which in the long run can prevent the Scottish working class from being infected by the poison of bourgeois nationalism. (See article by Eddie Donaghy in this issue).

However, the 49 seats which Labour now holds in Scotland are crucial for

securing an overall Labour majority. Even if the SNP takes a few seats from Labour, which appears to be the minimum damage which Labour will suffer in Scotland, this will affect Labour's national position in a general election. Hence the idea of proportional representation as a step towards what some have called 'a popular electoral front'. Shades of the Stalinist concept of the 'popular front'.

Indeed, it is *Marxism Today*, organ of one wing of the 'Communist' Party, which has coined the phrase. In the past the Communist Party furnished the ideas of the reformist left within the unions and the Labour Party. Bert Ramelson, their Industrial Organiser in the 1960s, once boasted that "what the Communist Party says today, the Labour movement adopts tomorrow." Now, in an incredible historical volte-face, from advisors to the 'reformist' left, one wing of this now shattered party fulfills exactly the same function, only this time to the extreme right of the labour movement.

Peter Riddell, political correspondent of the *Financial Times*, pinpointed the secret of the success of *Marxism Today*, (at least in capitalist circles) when he wrote in that magazine in November 1988: "The very irrelevance politically of the Communist Party in Britain is one of the reasons why the *Marxism Today* writers have such influence."

Influence with whom? Certainly not with the socialist rank and file of the labour and trade union movement. But

this journal and its writers are perfectly suited, covered as they are falsely with the name 'Marxism', to act as a conduit for the ideas of the bourgeois into the labour movement.

Riddell praises "writers like Andrew Gamble and Stuart Hall (who) have been able to use their freedom of manoeuvre to express thoughts still heretical within the Labour left". We would say that their thoughts are heretical to the whole labour movement. Long before the tops of the labour movement embraced proportional representation or 'electoral pacts' the idea is set out in a brutal fashion in the pages of *Marxism Today*.

Eric Hobsbawm considers that Thatcher presides not so much over a government but over a 'regime'. Thatcher uses "the language of an authoritarian one-party government which is systematically setting about creating the conditions for staying that way." Moreover this government is "an experimental model for post-democratic bourgeois society in the 1980s, as fascism (which was a very different species of political animal) was the model for bourgeois regimes in the 1930s which felt they could no longer afford democracy."

Heartlands

Andrew Gamble in the November issue of the same journal has gone a lot further. Like other shallow observers, he has spoken about "the dominant party system". He blithely writes off any prospect of Labour success in 1992: "There is remarkable agreement amongst specialists (amongst whom he includes himself - PT) on voting behaviour that Labour cannot win the next election. There are two main reasons. The social groups from which Labour voters have been most heavily recruited in the past, and the regions where Labour voting and the Labour culture is most strongly established are both shrinking."

He goes on: "Labour and Conservative support has become concentrated in their own heartlands, but whereas the Conservative heartland is larger and growing, the Labour heartland is smaller and shrinking. Labour has a very marginal presence now throughout much of the Conservative heartland, while its own heartland is not enough to bring it a parliamentary majority in Westminster." In other words, support for the Tories, if not set in concrete, is 'larger and growing'. Labour, unless it links up with the Democrats, is forever condemned to a marginal existence and incapable of preventing the progress of the Thatcher juggernaut.

This is the 'optimistic' perspective set out by these 'theoreticians'. They seek to underpin their arguments by the

mobilisation of a galaxy of writers who attempt to vindicate their analysis that deep-going social changes have shattered Labour's 'constituency'.

John Lloyd, former writer on the *Financial Times* and failed editor of the *New Statesman*, has sought to prove that "the unions are on the decline: numerically, socially, industrially, in most advanced countries." Moreover the transformation in the industrial landscape, from what *Marxism Today* calls 'Fordism', that is the era of large scale manufacturing production, to 'post-Fordism', means that the prospects for the unions are dismal.

These observations are entirely superficial. This purely surface view of events - in the language of Marxism, 'impressionism' - is the hallmark of this new breed of 'Marxists'.

It is true that because of the massive de-industrialisation of the British economy, now barely 23 per cent of the labour force is employed directly in manufacturing industry. Together with those employed in extractive industry, transport etc, manual workers are now probably about 45 per cent of the workforce.

Nevertheless their 'specific weight' within the working class is still decisive. Their immanent power is still decisive. They have the capacity both to immobilise industry, to paralyse capitalism, and to draw behind them other sections of the working class and the middle class.

Precisely such a development, at least in embryo, developed during the miners strike. Undoubtedly in the wake of the miners strike the industrial proletariat has adopted a cautious attitude towards struggle. This is due to two factors: the economic boomlet from 1982 which has still not exhausted itself, and the absence of leadership from the top of the unions.

The boomlet has allowed the capitalists, particularly in the last two years, to give concessions to employed workers. The rate of wage increases has sometimes been in excess of the official rate

'the specific weight of manual workers within the working class is still decisive'.

of inflation. The working class does not go on strike for the sake of it but only when all other avenues have been closed off for defending and increasing living standards.

The other side of this process has been the increased pauperisation of the unemployed, the disabled, those on social security etc. At the same time the main reason for the decline in union membership is not because of some alleged 'unpopularity' but is undoubtedly rooted in the drop in manufacturing, the field in which the unions were more firmly entrenched.

At the same time, new layers of the proletariat, formerly standing outside the unions, have been drawn in. Witness the colossal movement of the health workers in the earlier part of last year. Nurses were probably in the main hostile or at best neutral as far as the unions were concerned a couple of decades ago. The bitterness which was engendered in the health service dispute which has continued in a savage battle over 'regrading' has left an indelible mark on the outlook of nurses and health workers in general.

The same process has unfolded amongst local government workers and civil servants. Those in education who are presently feeling the hammer of Baker's onslaught will be radicalised both in union terms and politically.

Discontent

The movement of the students in the latter part of last year is a symptom of the as yet subterranean revolt of the working class in Britain. It was not for nothing that Trotsky described the students as "the light cavalry of the revolution".

We are not faced with a revolution or even a pre-revolutionary situation in Britain at the present time. However, the accumulated discontent which 10 years of Thatcherism has engendered will burst out in a savage explosion of the class struggle at a certain stage.

It is impossible to predict the timing of the character of such a movement. The very factors which the writers in *Marxism Today* argue weaken the unions and thereby Labour in the long run will have the opposite effect. It is undoubtedly true, as John Lloyd argues, that the capitalists are attempting to create a 'core' of highly trained professionals, managers and technicians with the latest word in technique at their elbow and paid relatively high wages.

Services provided in the past by a permanent labour force are 'contracted out' often to firms employing part-time and predominantly female labour on much lower wages than before." This undoubtedly weakens

trade unions in some fields.

At the same time personnel managers are being discarded. They are now seen as a relic of the previous discredited 'consensus' approach to industrial relations. Now vicious industrial relations managers, usually on the line, are employed who look on human labour as "another resource on a par with the energy source, raw and semi-finished materials, capital and so on."

But is it not a fact that precisely these measures have hardened and steeled the proletariat for battles which could break out a lot sooner than the soothing words of *Marxism Today* indicate? The enormous intensification of labour on the production line and the slave wages of part-time workers is a guarantee of an outburst of the class struggle at a certain stage.

John Lloyd argues that the 'new' philosophy of the employers has a 'hard' side, which is true, but it has a 'soft' side also. Their dream is that industrial relations can be transformed into a "co-operative, commitment inducing process." Tell that to the line workers in Fords or Jaguar! They could acquaint the writers of *Marxism Today* with the brutal and hellish realities of 'industrial relations' as management are attempting to screw the last ounce of profit out of the labour of the proletariat. Where the employers are forced to give concessions it is either because they are faced with strike action or the fear of strike action.

At the present time, with profits increased in the last quarter of 1988 by 17 per cent compared to the equivalent quarter of a year earlier, some of the employers can give concessions. Hence the 15 per cent wage rise for Nissan workers, although this still leaves them below the rates and conditions in other car factories. At the same time the Jaguar employers were refusing to give more than six per cent wage increases. At the time of writing this could result in strike action.

On the other hand the leadership of the National Union of Seamen accepted a measly six per cent increase with the rate of inflation at least double that. This in turn was only possible given the disenchantment and lack of confidence that the union leadership would lead a proper struggle on wages in the light of their stand on the P&O strike.

The carefully constructed scheme of John Lloyd, together with other *Marxism Today* writers, of a hopelessly divided working class – both economically and geographically – falls to the ground on closer examination.

Their perceptions of the past are equally rose-coloured. The working class is of course the most homogeneous class in society. But it is divided between



Thatcher's belief that she will rule to the end of the century will be rudely shattered.

different layers, manual workers, white collar workers, male and female, black and white, skilled and unskilled etc. Its heterogeneity is overcome in a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary period and then can only be sustained by a far-sighted leadership and mass party.

These 'Marxists' conveniently forget that in the 1950s and 1960s there were many 'demarcation' disputes between different sections of skilled and unskilled workers.

Moreover the British bourgeois, and their echoes within the labour movement, never expected that they would see the day when white-collar workers would flood into unions. Indeed they jeered at their French counterparts when teachers and civil servants went on strike in the inter-war period. In the post-war period they have precisely seen a 'Francofication' of the British working-class, in the sense of a growing union consciousness of these sections of white collar workers.

White-collar

What is to stop workers employed in high technology industries, part-time workers, and women workers filling out the unions? All that is required is precisely the incapacity of capitalism to satisfy their demands, and confidence that the leadership of the unions were prepared to lead a struggle.

This has already begun to happen with recruitment amongst women workers, in particular, beginning to halt the decline of key unions like NALGO and the CPSA. Moreover, between 1959 and 1987, support for the Tories among non-manual workers fell by 12.5%, while it increased among manual, pre-

dominantly skilled workers. The crude equation that manual equals Labour and non-manual Tory is a completely mechanical method of analysis.

Viewed from the heights of *Marxism Today*, Labour is condemned almost to a permanent minority status by the seemingly impregnable position of Thatcherism in the south. Incredibly, Andrew Gamble argues in the November 1988 issue: "To become a majority party again Labour needs to rebuild itself in the south of England. But there are not the institutions or social networks in place that would promote Labour voting on the scale needed to bring success." From the lofty academic vantage points of this worthy, the denizens of the south are high-earning, high-living 'individuals' without consciousness of class.

Yet the very superficial successes of Thatcherism in this area are ploughing the ground for a colossal swing against the Tories which will be greater in the south than in any other area of the country. It is perhaps the area of the greatest class contradictions, with obscene displays of wealth, mocking the homeless occupants of cardboard boxes in Waterloo and other parts of London.

The concentration of more and more of the population into the south-east means a nightmare in terms of travel to work on the tube or the roads. The average speed of a car in London is now eight miles per hour. The average car owner wastes 111 hours a year at a cost of £1.4bn in wasted fuel and time sitting in traffic jams.

The inhabitants of 'Roseland', the leafy suburbs of London, begin to see their comfortable existence undermined by massive increases in rail travel, col-

ossal increase in demand for houses, not to say the spiralling cost of buying a house.

Twenty per cent of the labour force in the London area is involved in banking. This is one sector, given the trickle of recent redundancies, which, with a serious downturn in the market, could become a flood, in which battles by bank workers could break out on a par with anything in which their Spanish and French counterparts have engaged in the past.

The poll tax, the Housing Act and the general transformation in the overall economic situation will in turn dramatically alter the outlook of millions of workers in the south-east.

Indeed the most striking feature of the present situation in Britain is the profound unease, the insecurity, of millions who have benefited by the boomlet.

Trotsky pointed out that the religion of capitalist progress was perhaps stronger in Britain in the past than in any other advanced capitalist country. The contraction of its world domination and loss of Empire has undermined this. Yes, the world economic upswing of 1950-75 engendered enormous illusions in the ability of capitalism to deliver the goods. This was the material foundation for the 13 years of Tory governments between 1951-64 and the consolidation of right-wing reformism within the labour and trade union movement.

Unpopular

The present boomlet in no way can be compared to this. Its background is mass unemployment, despite the fiddling of the figures since 1979 and mass pauperisation.

The population of the south-east is not composed of predominantly home-owning, middle-class inhabitants of leafy suburbs. The mass of the population is proletarian, whether in council estates or forced to own their own houses – which are increasingly out of reach of millions of workers in Thatcher's 'property-owning democracy'.

Marxism Today and following them, the Labour leadership, have been mesmerised by the present conjuncture. They have failed to recognise the profound and stoked opposition which exists to Thatcherism just below the surface.

On practically every major issue the government is unpopular in opinion poll after opinion poll. One recent poll pointed out that government policies are "unpopular, including the heartland issues of its economic strategy". Seventy-two per cent oppose privatisation of water and electricity; 66 per cent are against the poll tax; 77 per cent want

to spend more on the NHS; 65 per cent oppose the abolition of top tax rates. Moreover more than half believed that the benefits for the unemployed are too low and cause hardship.

Christopher Huhne in *The Guardian* comments: "if part of the problem is a lack of intellectual self-confidence, a more fundamental part is opposition MPs' own inability to believe they can win the next election". The absolute catastrophe which Thatcher's policies have meant for the British economy is hardly commented on by the spokesmen of *Marxism Today*.

To his credit, Gordon Brown, who deputised for John Smith in debates in the House of Commons while the latter was ill, gave a searing indictment of the collapse of British capitalism under the stewardship of Thatcher and Lawson. A total of £120bn resulting from North Sea oil, the alteration in pensions calculations and privatisation has filled out the coffers of the government. This treasure has not been used to refurbish British industry but to pay the unemployed. It has led to massive investments, mostly in property or abroad by the short-sighted British capitalists.

Thatcher has claimed an economic miracle for Britain, underlined by increased investment, productivity etc. And yet Brown pointed out that Portugal and Taiwan now invest a higher proportion of their economy than Britain. The much vaunted economic miracle, when compared to the growth of other economies since 1982, pales by comparison.

Human thought is in general very conservative. Consciousness, particularly in relation to economic processes, in general lags behind the objective development of events. However the decisive feature of the epoch is the collapse of British capitalism revealed in the staggering £14bn deficit on the balance of payments which is approximately three per cent of the gross national product, the same as the deficit of US imperialism.

'On practically every major issue the government is unpopular in opinion poll after opinion poll'.

An economic downswing, still not ruled out despite the temporary upward gyrations on the stock exchange this year, or even a slowdown in the rate of growth of the world economy, will have calamitous effects for British capitalism.

Last year the economy grew at four and a half per cent but even the more favourable predictions of the capitalist experts themselves envisage that the economy will grow at a mere two per cent this year. Hence the gloom of the CBI and the industrial capitalists as opposed to finance capital.

The higher cost of borrowing, as a result of the rise of interest rates to 13 per cent, the contraction of retail trade, as well as the drop in the housing market all point to an economic slowdown, at least of the British economy, in the next period.

In the thousands of words and dozens of pages of *Marxism Today* throughout 1988, one would look in vain for a glimmer of understanding of the real processes at work in British society. Incredibly it is only in an interview with former Tory leader Edward Heath that some light is shed on the real situation.

Heath, now in 'internal exile' from Thatcherism, is a shrewd strategist of capitalism. In answer to the proposition that Thatcher has achieved an 'economic miracle', he condemns Thatcher's dogmatism "which allowed the pound to rise up to \$2.22. We lost 20 per cent of our industry that is not coming back. Not at all. That's a permanent loss. It happened in my own constituency".

Miracle?

He goes on: "when I say to an American 'are you aware that we are going to have a current account deficit of £13bn by the end of this year' (he was writing in November 1988 – PT), he says 'no I did not know that, nobody's told me that'. I say to him 'are you aware that the percentage unemployment is still in double figures?', he says: 'nobody tells me that'. And these are the basic factors that matter. The same applies to interest rates. Why are our interest rates now almost four times those of Japan, the highest of any European country, and much higher than the US? How can you say that this is a strong economy with these facts? It is rather like saying a man is strong if you put him in iron stakes and put a chain round him then declare 'now he is a strong man'."

In an annihilating passage Heath completely explodes the myth, stubbornly defended as we have seen by the authors of *Marxism Today*, that Thatcherism is impregnable. In answer to the question: has Thatcher slayed the



The daily nightmare for commuters on the overloaded and underfunded London transport system.

socialist dragon?, Heath bluntly replies: "No, and what you are really saying is, do I believe there is only going to be one party in this country for the rest of time to come".

He goes on: "what will happen in this country is there will be a rebound...the point will come when people will just revolt...They are not interested in having 20 per cent taxation if they cannot get their lives looked after. Here the fallacies are innumerable. You can't have private medicine for 53 million people". He moreover answers the recent attempts of Clarke to dismantle the NHS: "what they (the government) are doing is to try, by every means, to deny it resources and force people to go into private health. That's what they are trying to do".

Heath is partly motivated by personal hostility to Thatcher. But his prime concern is the inevitable recoil of the working class and the labour movement to Thatcherism at a certain stage. In answer to the question "do you see Thatcherism as an aberration in the history of the Conservative Party?", he simply answers: "yes". In answer to the question: "but if Thatcherism is an aberration, it has certainly got a lot of people who follow it and believe it will be the orthodoxy of the Tory party, at least into the next century", he says: "I think they are mistaken. The trouble is the more this becomes emphasised the bigger the reaction there is going to be against this".

At the same time Heath indicts the labour leadership for their "incomp-

etence and powerlessness...over this decade...they have never been able to make anything out of the unemployment factor. When we were elected in 1970...unemployment mounted to over a million and of course immediately the House of Commons rioted. When I say riot, it literally rioted. An Irish woman MP, Bernadette McAliskey, (Bernadette Devlin at the time - PT) came over and tried to hit Reggie Maudling over the head".

During an economic debate in October Lawson jeered in the direction of Kinnock that he had 18 opportunities in the previous 12 months for a debate and a vote of no confidence on the government's handling of the economy and yet had refused every opportunity!

Tory victory?

If the present boomlet was to continue for a further four years with a rising curve of living standards for those who at least have jobs, combined with a further period of pusillanimity on the part of Labour's leadership, then it is possible to envisage another Tory victory.

Even then Marxists would see this as purely ephemeral based on the temporary economic and social conjuncture which was bound to break down at a certain stage. There is nothing 'messianic' in such an analysis. It is grounded in experience and a sober assessment of the workings out of the laws of capitalism and its effect on the relationship between the classes.

However, all the signs point to the government and the economy heading for the rocks. Moreover, while some employers will attempt to buy off their workers out of their present largesse, the strategists of capital in the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*, and not least the government, are urging them to hold the line against "wage inflation".

The *Financial Times* recently condemned large wage increases as "wage geld" (this was a comparison with the Danegeld which was the tribute paid by the English to Danish kings 900 years ago). Thus the cost of 'industrial peace' is big increases to a section of the working class.

But the rise in mortgage rates, massive increases in rail, gas, electricity and now projected increases in water following privatisation is a guarantee of hefty wage claims in the wage round for the end of this year. It would take just one section to breach the dam and the whole elaborate structure of Thatcherism could come tumbling down.

It is not excluded that such a process could begin in the course of 1989. On top of this is the battle on the poll tax, the Housing Act, and the ferocious resistance to the Tories' measures to bury once and for all the NHS.

For the mass of the workers it is not propaganda or 'ideology' which changes their outlook. It is their experience, it is big events, which loom in Britain, which will shatter the illusions which millions have in capitalism and its political expression, Thatcherism, as well as in the

centre parties. This in turn will mean a mass resurgence of support both for the unions and for Labour.

John Lloyd has urged the unions to become "semi-detached" from Labour because their alleged 'unpopularity' is tarnishing the image of Labour. This nonsense is being regurgitated by Bryan Gould, the Labour Coordinating Committee, and is shared by the tops of the Labour party.

Those who advocate these ideas are in reality themselves intellectually 'semi-detached'. They have one foot in the camp of the labour movement and one in capitalist circles.

It is an historical irony that while the bourgeois and the Labour leadership themselves believe that Labour is doomed to inhabit an historical and political cul-de-sac, it is the Marxists who perceive a massive shift towards Labour at a certain stage. And yet it is we who are being expelled and hounded by the right-wing misleaders of the labour and trade union movement.

Like a First World War general, Kinnock has blamed his troops – "dis-unity", lack of support for the leadership, etc. – rather than the generals for Labour's defeats.

The movement of millions on the industrial plane which Thatcherism will guarantee will transform the labour movement from top to bottom. Millions will move from support of Thatcherism not just to the socialist but a revolutionary position.

Labour win

The more serious strategists of capital are terrified of the long term consequences of Thatcherism. It is not at all accidental that the *Financial Times* correspondent Michael Rutherford, ruminated on the comparisons between Thatcherism and the De Gaulle 'regime'.

For a decade the so-called 'strong state' of De Gaulle rode roughshod over the rights and conditions of the French proletariat. The stoked up anger of the French masses burst out into the streets in the immortal May-June days of 1968 in the greatest general strike in history.

That was the beginning of the end of Gaullism as the dominant capitalist force in French society. The downfall of De Gaulle has left in its wake the break-up and splintering of the bourgeois parties.

Thatcherism has resulted in the virtual extinction of the Tories in Scotland, Wales and the north of England have become virtual 'Tory free-zones'. A massive swing to Labour can take place in the West Midlands and in the south as already described. The Tory party,



If Labour mobilised people on the key issues like the poll tax, they could win the majority.

from being a very successful 'national' party, will be reduced to a rump concentrated mostly in the south-east.

The violent swings of opinion resulting from economic crisis and consequential social upheaval is a concept entirely foreign to the empiricists and sceptics of *Marxism Today* and their co-thinkers in the labour movement.

British capitalism is no longer cushioned by its empire and Thatcher has stripped industry to the bone. Labour can even win the next general election, but on condition that the lessons of the past are absorbed by the ranks of the labour and trade union movement.

The securing of a majority in Parliament is not an end in itself. It is a step to transforming the lives of the working class by realising in action the goals of Labour of a socialist society. This in turn is not determined by a brief election campaign fought primarily on television and aided by a battery of computers. It is only by the labour move-

'It is only by the labour movement mobilising the working class outside parliament as well as within that victory for Labour can be prepared'.

ment mobilising the working class outside parliament as well as within that victory for Labour can be prepared.

The purveyors of pessimism, the architects of the defeats of 1983 and 1987, if allowed to go unchallenged, will once more dash the hopes of millions of working people. It is not by proportional representation, not by courting the 'centre' parties, that success for Labour will be secured.

Action

A bold clear-sighted socialist programme, linking up all the day-to-day issues which face working people with the idea of a democratic socialist plan of production, could mobilise not just the working class but the middle layers of society behind Labour's banner.

The task is not to form a bloc with 'Dr Death' Owen or Paddy 'Backdown' but to convince in action those workers who support these parties to come behind the banner of Labour. This is the way the Labour Party itself was built.

It was a combination of changed economic circumstances, the break of the monopoly of British imperialism in the late 19th century and the active fighting pioneering work of the founders of the unions and the Labour party which tore millions of workers out of the grasp of the Liberals and brought them under Labour's influence.

A similar combination of factors not only can, but will result in Labour achieving victory in the stormy period that is opening up. The Marxists will play a decisive part in this process.

In the aftermath of the the Govan by-election, with the continued growth in support for the SNP, EDDIE DONAGHY, a leading Scottish Militant supporter, examines the prospects now for Scottish nationalism.

A nationalist revival?



At 12.30am on Friday 11 November Jim Sillars emerged from a school in Govan where the result of the Govan by-election had just been declared, and addressed a crowd of jubilant Scottish National Party (SNP) supporters with the following words:

"There is no question that the Scottish people will now start marching towards our destiny which is as an independent country. The long period when Scotland has been treated as a second class nation and humiliated at the hands of an English Tory government is coming to an end." *Glasgow Herald*, November 11, 1988.

Jim Sillars had just secured a dramatic victory for the SNP, turning a seemingly impregnable Labour majority of 19,509 into a 3,554 majority for the SNP, a swing of 30.4 per cent in a working class constituency in the heart of Glasgow.

The rejection of the Labour Party only 17 months after a general election which saw Labour dominate Scottish politics with 50 MPs, was a humiliating defeat. The fact that the Tories and Democrats were reduced to the role of bystanders underlined Labour's failure.

But the nationalism of Jim Sillars in 1988 was of a different hue to that of Margo Macdonald in 1973, when she overturned a Labour majority of 7,000 to win the seat for the SNP. Temporari-

ly put into cold storage was the image of a 'Tartan Tory' party.

Instead Sillars was fitted out in the garb of a radical socialist with demagogic calls for a 'Workers' Parliament in a Workers' Scotland'. Pointing to the as yet unrealised treasure of North Sea oil, the SNP in 1973 fostered the illusion that Scotland could go it alone with the slogan 'Its Scotland's oil'.

In the changed conditions of Scotland – and particularly in predominantly working class Govan – such a call would have had no appeal. The nationalists could only win by a class appeal tinged with nationalist rhetoric. Indeed an exit poll showed that of those who voted for the SNP a majority did so because of the poll tax and because Labour was ineffective in opposing Thatcher.

Govan

Sillars developed three main themes in his campaign. 'We cannot wait until 1992', 'the feeble fifty Labour MPs are incapable of standing up to Thatcher' and 'we are not paying the poll tax.' These messages struck a chord with Govan workers, particularly the youth who have suffered under nine years of Thatcherism, made worse by the failure of the Scottish Labour leaders to lead a fightback, most significantly on the hated poll tax.

In reality, the Govan by-election was

a referendum on the poll tax and the effectiveness of the 50 Scottish Labour MPs in combating Thatcherism. The result was a clear vote of no confidence in the Labour Party which also underlined a growing national consciousness amongst Scottish workers.

The Labour Party's campaign contrasted sharply with that of the nationalists. Whilst Sillars called for non-payment of the poll tax, Labour's campaign controlled by the Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland Donald Dewar and Brian Wilson, chairman of the 'Stop It' campaign, told people that they had to pay the poll tax. Dewar's only advice on what to do about the poll tax was to wait until the next general election three years away and elect a Labour government.

The slogan of Labour's candidate Bob Gillespie, who unfortunately allowed the campaign to be hijacked and controlled by Labour's right wing Scottish leaders, was the meaningless "We're on your side". This was intended to be deliberately vague as it didn't tie down the candidate to fighting for specific policies – most notably on the poll tax. In fact it was the same slogan as that used by the Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis in his failed campaign for the American presidency.

This was more than just a coincidence. The Labour Party campaign was part of Labour's new slick, glossy cam-

paigning image not dissimilar to those in American elections. Govan was a test bed for 'the filofax Labour Party', as described in the *Militant's* analysis of the Govan result:

"The headquarters had more computers than the Starship *Enterprise*. An army of full time organisers were drafted in to operate them, run the campaign and ensure victory. The new moderate image secured the blessing of the *Daily Record* and *The Evening Times*. So everything seemed set fair. Except that no computer or newspaper editor knocked on a door. Kinnock cannot secure victory without enthusiastic activists working for the party at grass roots."

Labour's campaign had no enthusiastic activists. The crisis of morale in Labour's ranks was a critical factor in the defeat. The move to the right, new realism, dictated from the top and expulsions had their reply in Govan where night after night Labour's depleted ranks were swamped by hundreds of crusading SNP supporters.

Only a fighting socialist campaign could have cut across the rise of the SNP in Govan. Only a Labour Party committed to socialism could have stopped the SNP bandwagon.

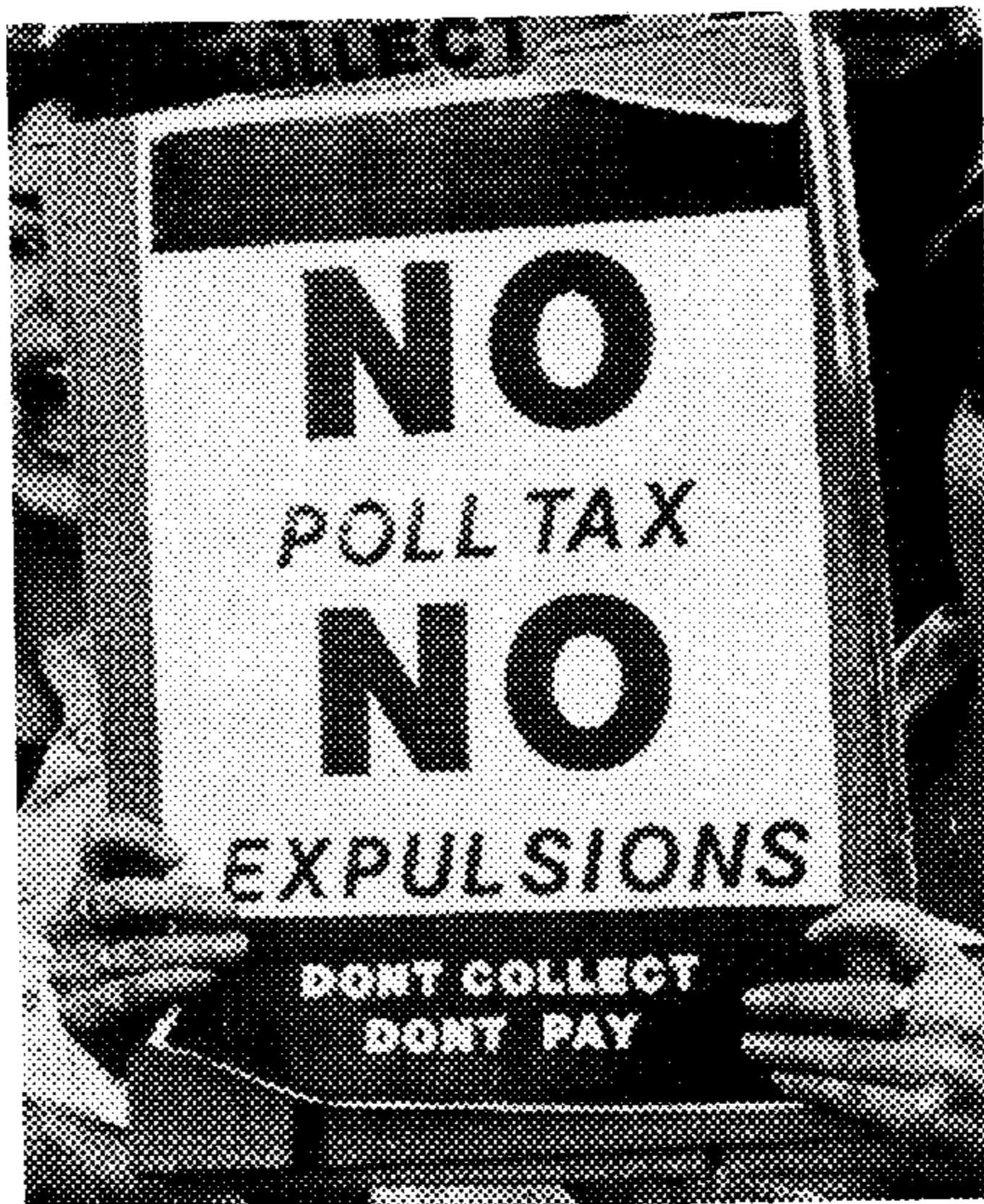
Act of union

The SNP gained a major victory and their success has not stopped at Govan. A *Systems Three* opinion poll in January carried in the *Glasgow Herald* showed support for the SNP at 32 per cent, their highest since 1974. Labour was only 4 per cent ahead of the SNP at 36 per cent, significantly at a lower percentage of the poll than Labour nationally!

The SNP have said that Govan is a watershed in Scottish politics. With 85 per cent in Scotland supporting an assembly and 35 per cent in favour of independence, double the support expressed in the mid 1970s, does this mean a major shift towards nationalism and independence in Scotland? This is the question which must be addressed by Marxists in the British labour movement, particularly in Scotland.

Nationalism, and specifically its Scottish variant, is rooted in history. The mighty development of British capitalism – with the forcible incorporation of Scotland into Britain – opened up broad opportunities, particularly in the development of the 'Empire', for the most energetic Scots.

In this situation the consciousness of Scotland as a separate nation tended to be pushed into the background although never completely disappearing. The labour movement even up to the inter-war period was forced to take account of this with its support for



Scotland says no.

Home Rule for Scotland.

But for the embers of Scottish nationalism to be fanned into life, two factors were required: the collapse of British capitalism and the failure of the right wing reformist leaders of the labour movement.

Marxists stand for the unity of all workers in the struggle against capitalism. We are opposed to the nationalism of the bourgeoisie which attempts to divide workers from one another, lowers their consciousness by attempting to make them feel different from other workers and masks their common international identity of interests.

However, Marxism draws a distinction between the national aspirations of the working class and middle class and the nationalism of the capitalist class. The growth of nationalism amongst Scottish workers is a reflection of their class feelings – in particular their desire to fight the Tories and rid themselves of Thatcherism. As Trotsky pointed out, the nationalism of workers is the "outer shell of an immature Bolshevism".

Scotland existed as an independent nation until the act of union with England was signed in 1707. There was considerable resistance to this political integration with England, based largely on the feudal interests of the clan chiefs of Scotland.

It was not until the 19th Century when land enclosures and highland clearances provided the base for commercial agriculture and the accumulation of capital from agriculture, and thereby the development of industry, that a genuine economic integration of Scotland into the British nation began.

With the signing of the act of union Scotland's emerging capitalist class were prepared to sacrifice Scotland's political independence for a share of the cake from their stronger English counterparts. With the increased development of British capitalism came the

development of the British empire.

This helped to cement the union, opening up a lucrative gravy train for Scotland's capitalist class, as well as providing a whole tier of jobs for Scotland's middle classes, and in some cases upper layers of the working class, as civil servants, commissioners, the imperial police, doctors, engineers, scientists etc. With the collapse of the empire this road to 'improvement' and 'betterment' was now closed. Returning home to a country of limited opportunities was a major factor in the development of nationalism amongst Scotland's middle classes.

However, the historic development of a thriving capitalism, once it unified the British nation, tended to neutralise the development of nationalism. Since capitalist production developed through the battle between the two great classes, broadly speaking Scotland's political allegiances were drawn along these lines. Hence the strength of the labour movement in Scotland. Nevertheless there does exist in Scotland a strong feeling of national consciousness, a national identity of belonging to a Scottish nation.

Devolution

With the unprecedented boom in capitalism that took place after the war the first major stirrings of nationalism did not take place until 1967 when the SNP won the Hamilton by-election with a 46 per cent swing from Labour. This by-election was won against the background of the experience of the first Labour government after 13 years of Tory rule.

The 1964 Labour government had come to power on the promise of reforms but had failed to deliver. This failure of reformism produced the social and political conditions which engendered the rise of nationalism during the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period the outlook of the middle classes had altered to one of disillusionment with the opportunities in Scotland, revealed in the emigration patterns at that time.

Scotland has always had a history of voluntary emigration. However, forced emigration because of inferior social and economic conditions was a factor in the 1960s. In one decade 300,000 left, a yearly average of 30,000. Between 1960 and 1970 Scotland lost 6 per cent of its population.

The support for nationalism and independence was initially amongst a disillusioned and bitter layer of the middle class. But the discovery of North Sea oil in 1970 broadened the appeal of nationalism in Scotland. For many Scottish workers the discovery of North Sea oil



Scottish Labour MPs Dewar and Smith (right).

brought the hope that the revenue would be used to improve their social conditions.

The SNP's slogan of 'Its Scotland's oil' struck a chord with many workers and especially the middle class who saw the door of opportunity opening for them. An independent Scotland, awash with oil wealth, would, they believed, employ a professional middle class layer drawn from Scotland itself.

The general elections that took place in February and October 1974 saw a rise in support for the SNP. The SNP vote increased to 22 per cent in February and to 30 per cent in October. The October election saw them gaining seven seats, four from the Tories and two from Labour to take their total to 11.

Though the question of 'Scotland's oil' was a crucial factor for this increase in SNP support, the prevarication of the Labour leaders on the question of devolution for Scotland and the Scottish assembly played into the hands of the nationalists in allowing them to appear as the real champions of Scotland.

Following their success in the 1974 general election the spectre of nationalism hung over the Labour government. Over a period of time however nationalism was undercut particularly following the measures taken by the Labour government on devolution and the development of class battles that took place between 1978 and 1979.

Labour's devolution bill was passed through parliament in 1978 and a referendum on devolution and a Scottish assembly took place in 1979. The result was 51 per cent voting in favour of a Scottish assembly. But a clause in the devolution bill meant that there had to be a minimum poll of 40 per cent before any decision on granting an assembly could take place. With the poll only 32.7 per cent the assembly was not introduced.

Significantly, support for the assembly was strongest in the industrial central belt of Scotland. If a referendum took

place today there would be a far higher poll and an overwhelming majority voting for an assembly.

The subsequent election of the Tories in 1979 and again in 1983 concentrated the minds of workers in Scotland on the need for a Labour government and for the Labour movement to organise itself in defending workers from Tory attacks. The titanic struggle of the British miners in 1984/85 brought class issues and the need for unity to the surface as never before. This diminished the politics of nationalism, at that stage, to seeming irrelevance.

Employment

However, ten years of brutal Tory rule and the fact that Thatcher has ruled out concessions in the form of an assembly or devolved power, have created conditions in which it is possible for nationalism to be seen as a realistic alternative and therefore become a political force to be reckoned with.

The danger to the labour movement lies in nationalism finding a breeding ground in the poverty conditions created in Scotland under the Tories. Between 1975 and 1985 those people classified as 'living in hardship' rose in Scotland by more than 50 per cent. A survey by the pressure group Shelter shows a staggering 77 per cent increase in homelessness in Scotland in the last four years.

A recent report on Strathclyde, with 46 per cent of Scotland's population, revealed the horrific levels of poverty that exist: "Nearly 30 per cent - 645,500 - are living on or below the poverty line...165,000 pensioners live below the poverty line...one third of houses are designated as 'low income'...45 per cent of the working population are designated as 'low paid'." *Glasgow Herald*, 30 November 1988.

These statistics hide the terrible existence and struggle to survive that is now common in the soon to become

'city of culture' capital of Europe. Even amongst the middle layers of Scottish society a feeling of lack of opportunity exists.

The number of graduates employed in Scotland has fallen by more than 14,000 since 1983 whilst the number of graduates working in Britain as a whole increased by 283,000. A survey of graduates at Strathclyde University, which has the highest number of Scottish students of all Scotland's universities, showed that one third of graduates there secured their first job outside Scotland.

Large regions particularly in the north of England have suffered similarly at the hands of the Tories. The essential difference, however, is that the most downtrodden workers in these regions are most likely to interpret their deprivations as the result of class oppression, however vaguely that is recognised.

However, there undoubtedly exists a feeling in Scotland that the boomlet in the economy that has taken place and the effects, most notably in the south east of England, of improving living standards, has passed Scotland by. This has fuelled the feelings of Scots that they are treated as a second class nation by the Tories, increasing the national sentiments of workers.

At bottom these are class feelings but have taken on a nationalist form because of a number of factors. It is clear that a national consciousness exists amongst Scottish workers. A majority of Scottish workers see themselves as Scottish and belonging to a Scottish nation despite the fact that they are also part of Britain.

It is true that the recent boom in the economy has not had the same effect compared to other regions of the country. The latest government estimate showed a net increase of 2,000 jobs in Scotland over the past year. But most of these jobs were part-time and low paid jobs.

A Fraser of Allander Institute survey

conducted recently showed that the number of full time jobs in Scotland actually fell by 3,000 in the year up to June 1988. Even on the government's figures the rate of job creation in Scotland was just 0.1 per cent compared to 1.3 per cent in the UK as a whole.

Unemployment in Scotland remains at 4.4 per cent above the UK average. One Royal Bank of Scotland economist stated in the *Financial Times*, October 12, 1988, that "the Scottish economy is having a recovery not a boom."

The woefully inadequate role of the Labour movement leaders in Scotland in leading a fightback against the Tories has resulted in widespread disillusionment amongst sections of workers towards the Labour leaders. Of course the lack of leadership and subsequent disillusionment is not unique to Scotland, revealed in the high level of abstentions – and protest votes for the Liberals and the SDP – in by-elections and council elections in England and Wales.

In Scotland however there exists in the form of the SNP an alternative for workers to turn to. The use of socialist rhetoric, an appeal to workers for them to control their interests in a workers' parliament – as put forward by Sillars at Govan – makes this alternative all the more attractive to Scottish workers.

These feelings are being skillfully exploited by the SNP in their criticisms of Labour's failure to represent Scottish workers. The question must be posed however – what do the SNP represent and what is their programme to deal with Scotland's problems?

Poll tax

Despite the socialist rhetoric of Jim Sillars in Govan the SNP has no history of fighting for socialism in Scotland as a political party. When, sensing their impending rout, four prominent Scottish Tories resigned in the months prior to the general election, they chose the SNP as the new vehicle for their political ambitions. One prominent former Tory, Ian Lawson, is now one of the SNP's vice chairmen.

In its Manifesto for the 1987 general election entitled *Playing the Scottish Card* the SNP's economic policies are all worked out to promote a capitalist Scotland. There is no mention of socialist policies to solve the problems of Scottish workers.

This official party policy document also differs somewhat, in relation to the constitution for Scotland, to the position put forward by Jim Sillars in Govan. Whilst Sillars called for 'a Workers' Parliament' the SNP Manifesto states that: "An independent Scotland will be governed by a democratic

parliament...The head of state (will) remain the Queen in a limited constitutional monarchy."

In reality the SNP's policies have never threatened the existence of capitalism in Scotland. Following the discovery of North Sea oil and subsequent rise in support the SNP attracted an array of millionaire industrialists and bankers.

Industrialists like Sir Hugh Fraser and merchant banker Ronald McNeil were some of the dignitaries who graced SNP conferences licking their lips at the thought of the profits they would make in an independent Scotland awash with oil wealth.

It was during this period that saw the SNP parliamentary party reflecting the interests of these industrialists and bankers by lining up alongside the Tories against the 1974-79 Labour government. The 11 SNP MPs voted in favour of anti-trade union laws, against abortion rights and, most infamously, against Labour's Nationalisation of Shipbuilding Bill which, had they succeeded with the Tories in defeating it, would have meant the death then of shipbuilding on the Clyde.

Clearly the SNP support a capitalist Scotland. They do however have a socialist wing that showed itself in Govan. In real terms there are two SNPs: one for the industrial central belt of Scotland where it dresses its nationalism in socialist clothing and one for the north east of Scotland with its right wing, pro-capitalist values.

In the industrial belt the SNP have advocated a form of non-payment in fighting the poll tax. This is in contrast to their actions in the northern parts of Scotland.

On Grampian regional council, for example, the SNP voted along with the Tories and Liberals to directly deduct the poll tax from DHSS benefits thus cutting claimants' benefit and denying them their right to participate in a campaign of mass non-payment. The SNP, seconded by the Tories, moved to

'Clearly the SNP support a capitalist Scotland. They do however have a socialist wing that showed itself in Govan.'

invite tenders from firms of sheriff officers for the right to collect poll tax arrears and civil penalties.

On Tayside regional council the SNP moved that those paying their poll tax in a lump sum should get a 5 per cent discount. This would have led to directly reducing the tax for the rich who could pay at once and take advantage of the discount, while increasing the tax on the poor as the overall tax would rise to ensure the same amount of money was collected. When challenged SNP councillor George Allan retorted that the SNP were 'here to represent the rich as well'.

Even in the industrial belt the SNP's campaign of non-payment differs significantly from those of the Strathclyde and Lothian Federations of Anti-Poll Tax Unions. Whilst the Federations' campaigns are for mass non-payment of the poll tax in the housing schemes and drawing support from the workplaces, involving hundreds of thousands as the only effective way to stop the poll tax, the SNP limit their campaign to 100,000 non-payers.

Their pamphlet, *Non-Payment – The only way to defeat the Poll Tax*, states: "The campaign is designed for those who 'can pay but won't pay'. Although many people are bitterly opposed to the tax because of the personal effect it will have on them, those who are on benefit, pensions or on low wages might find taking part in the campaign an additional strain on their already weakened resources. They are therefore strongly advised **not** to participate unless they can afford to do so. But any person on average earnings or above can take part in the non-payment campaign without undue hardship."

Independence

It appears that the advice from the SNP to the poorest sections of society is to pay the poll tax. The only effective way of stopping the poll tax is mass non-payment, linking up with the power of the organised labour movement, involving precisely those who will be worst hit by the poll tax, which is workers on low wages or benefit. The reality is that many of this group will not pay the poll tax because they cannot afford to pay it.

Their pamphlet goes on to state that non-payment will be a "direct moral challenge to Mrs Thatcher". But the only challenge that Mrs Thatcher and the Tories will recognise is an organised campaign of mass non-payment in the housing schemes, linking up with the trade unions and embracing the strength of the labour movement, not just in Scotland but spreading the campaign to England and Wales.

There have already been splits within the SNP on the question of the poll tax, most notably in Grampian. The contradiction within its ranks is between the two opposing ideologies which will lead to the possibility of further splits within the SNP in the short and long term future.

The SNP will be taken to task on the question of the poll tax. It is noticeable, however, that the central plank of the SNP propaganda in Scotland since the Govan by-election has shifted away from the poll tax to the issue of independence in Europe.

The idea that Scotland's economic and social problems can be solved by the creation of an independent state in Europe is entirely false. In today's modern capitalist economy 500 companies control 90 per cent of world trade. The largest multi-nationals have annual turnovers greater than the budgets of even major countries.

A mere 25 companies account for 35 per cent of total industrial production worldwide. On a capitalist basis, with industry still privately owned by the big monopolies, 'independence' to answer the economic and social problems of Scotland is an illusion.

At the present time, nearly 40 per cent of the top 100 companies in Scotland are foreign owned—a figure which will grow with the control of companies increasingly in the hands of multi-nationals based in Scotland.

This has been the case with the Irish republic which gained independence in 1921 and where to this day the economy is still dominated by British, US and other foreign companies.

Marxists supported the struggle of Irish workers against British imperialism and today stand for the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland and the unity of the workers North and South in the struggle for a 32 county socialist republic. But with its weak economy dominated by foreign capital, capitalist 'independence' has been no solution to Ireland's terrible poverty, unemployment and poor housing.

Unemployment is at 19.2 per cent — the second highest rate in Europe. One-third of the population live below the poverty line (Irish Economic and Social Research Institute). The Irish Congress of Trade Unions reported that the average living standards of members fell by 20 per cent between 1980 and 1987. Over the next five years it is estimated that 50 per cent of 15-29 year-olds will emigrate to escape this grinding poverty.

The SNP's belief in independence in Europe presupposes that Scottish capitalists will serve the interests of Scottish workers. This argument was hinted at

by Jim Sillars on a Scottish TV programme *Left, Right and Centre* when he stated that Scotland could survive independence within Europe because of the quality of Scottish businessmen around.

The reality is that Scottish businessmen will always serve the interest of profit before that of Scottish workers. This was the case during the recent take-over bid by the giant Australian company Elders for Scottish and Newcastle Breweries which will result in job losses. One of Scotland's top companies, the Royal Bank of Scotland was prepared to finance the deal.

The SNP believes that a capitalist Scotland would be strong enough to compete and hold its own with its more powerful European rivals. However, the present state of the Scottish economy shows otherwise.

Since 1970 the fortunes of Scotland's economy relative to the UK has turned to a large extent on the build up in oil related developments. Oil related employment accounts for between 90-100,000 jobs, equal to 5-6 per cent of total employment in Scotland. It would only take a price war to have drastic effects on this sector of employment.

An assembly?

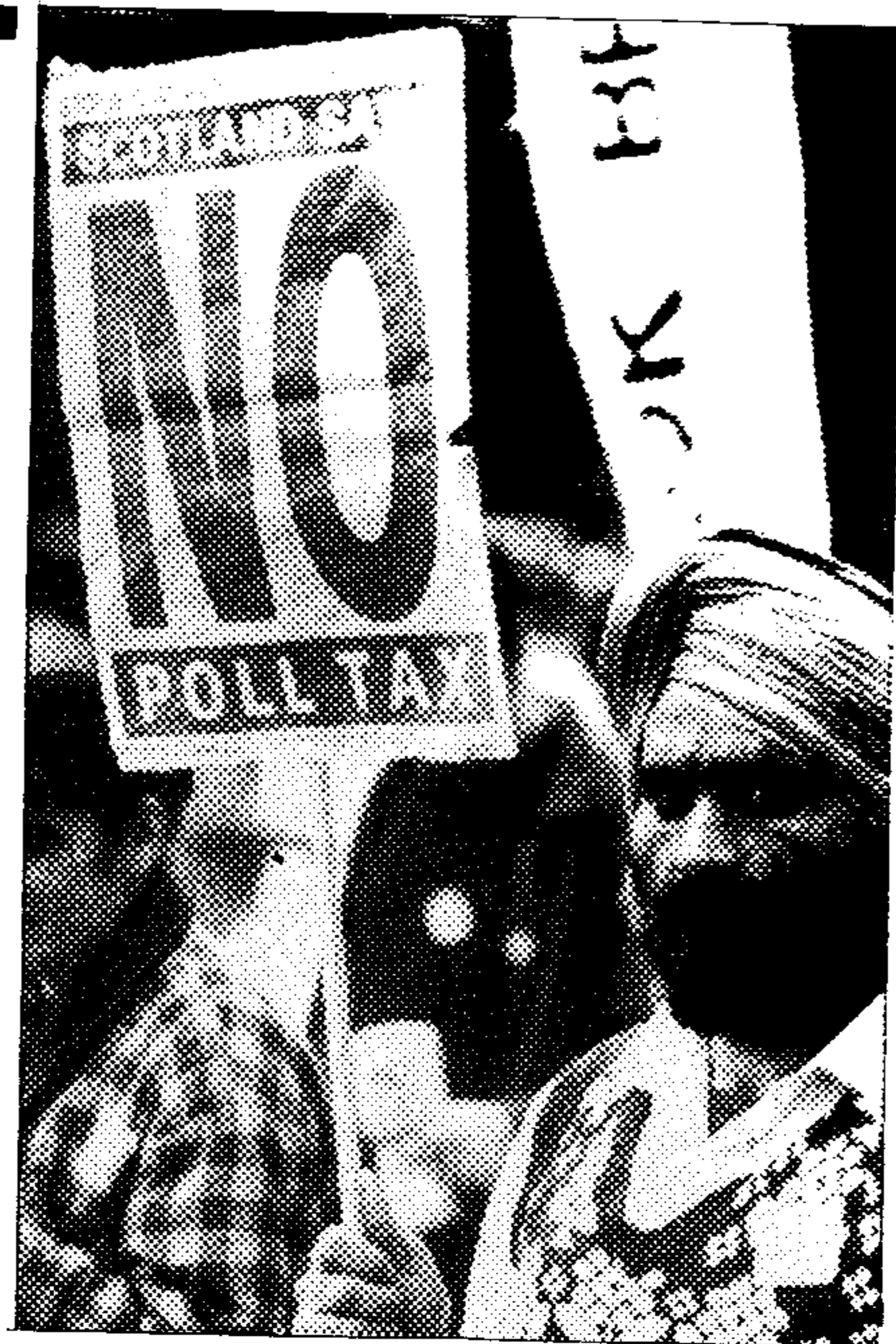
Even at the present time much of the development of the oil industry is in the east of Scotland and has generally not touched Strathclyde which has over 56 per cent of Scotland's unemployed.

A Scottish Information Office publication entitled *The economy of Scotland* states that "the outlook for the Scottish economy depends on the recovery and growth in the UK and the industrialised countries generally." The onset of a worldwide economic recession or even just a slowdown in the world economy would have major consequences for Scotland.

Manufactured exports in Scotland account for nearly 100,000 jobs, with the USA being the main market. An economic recession would squeeze this market, particularly in America, with disastrous consequences on Scotland's economy.

Whilst the SNP maintain that Scotland could hold its own as an independent capitalist nation in Europe, a recent study by the Labour Party revealed that "the creation of a single European market in 1992 initially will destroy more than 14,000 jobs in the Scottish economy and cut output by £237 million." The study was based on figures produced by the European Commission in the Cecchini report last year.

The only way forward for Scottish workers is to link up with their English and Welsh counterparts. Their interests



and their enemies are the same. Whether Scottish workers are exploited by foreign or native capitalists is not the issue. Nationalism divides workers, lowers their consciousness by making them feel separate from other workers and masks their common international identity of interests.

The SNP manifesto declares that "The North-South divide is really a Scotland-England divide" and that "as poverty in England is reduced, Scotland's becomes graver". This is a classic case of splitting the unity of working people.

Scotland has suffered terribly under Thatcher — but Merseyside, Tyneside and South Wales have suffered just as badly, as the league tables of unemployment, poverty and deprivation reveal. Just as in Scotland, in these areas the support for the Tories has crumbled, refuting the nationalist myth that Scotland is unique in opposing Thatcher.

Militant fully supports the right of nations to self-determination and would fight any moves to stand in the way of the democratic right even to separation should a majority so decide. Marxists in Scotland have consistently supported the demand for a Scottish assembly with full political and economic powers, including tax raising.

This is a democratic right of Scottish workers and must be fought for by the labour movement, given the enormous support for an assembly that exists in Scotland.

An assembly would mean greater accountability over Scottish affairs. It would also be a vehicle for mobilising Scottish workers in the defence of their interests against the Tories attacks. An assembly could be used as a platform for socialist policies within Scotland including, for example, the nationalisation of all companies threatening redun-

dancies such as the Caterpillar factory in Uddingston, which was closed despite the struggle of the workers.

Significantly, whilst Marxists in the Scottish and British labour movement have consistently fought for a Scottish assembly, Scottish Labour MPs like Brian Wilson and Robin Cook were in the past venomous opponents of devolution and an assembly. They have now done a complete U-turn on this question.

Also, in a particularly rich irony, Alex Wood, ex-leader of Edinburgh district council, has become the captain of a phantom army in the form of his newly created Scottish Socialist Party. Alex Wood ended his association with *Militant* because he felt that *Militant* was making too many concessions to nationalism!

In 1974 he was a confirmed anti-devolutionist and argued vehemently against *Militant's* programme of support for devolution and a Scottish assembly. Now, in a complete somersault, Wood has opportunistically jumped from his ultra-left dismissal of the relevance of the national question in Scotland to a zealous advocacy of a socialist independent Scotland.

Scottish convention

Socialists have no interest in coercing or subjugating any national minority. The slogan of the right to self-determination means the right of nations to form separate states if a majority should so wish.

But supporting the **right** for a nation to separate is not the same as to campaign for separation. It is entirely consistent to advocate that married couples should have the right to divorce if they wish without insisting that all married couples should do so!

Debate has increased recently on the call for a Constitutional Convention involving all Scotland's political parties as a solution to tackle the problems facing Scotland. The Convention is presently composed of representatives from the different party executives, with the exception of the Tories who refused to take part and now the SNP who have withdrawn.

If the Convention remains an unelected gathering from party executives such an unaccountable body will be incapable of organising any real effective action which would force the Tories into granting concessions on an assembly for Scotland. The Convention could therefore be seen as a mere talking shop which, given the desire for action from Scottish workers, could play into the hands of the SNP.

To be an effective body the Convention must be elected with representat-

ives not just from political parties but from trade unions, tenants associations and community groups in order to genuinely represent and fight for the interests of the Scottish workers.

The lesson of the last nine years of Tory government is that they will not be forced to grant concessions on the basis of public opinion. The Convention must develop a programme of action, most notably against the poll tax, and link this to the demand for a Scottish assembly.

It would be a fatal mistake to underestimate the potential for an increase in nationalist support, particularly among the youth. In Govan the SNP had a 28 per cent lead over Labour's vote among young people. Opinion polls have shown that 50 per cent of 18-24 year olds in Scotland support a socialist independent Scotland. Young people, looking for a fight against the Tories, will only have their disillusionment with Labour re-inforced by the witch-hunting antics of Labour's right wing.

Whether nationalism will grow depends most significantly on whether Labour has the ability to combat it with socialist policies. An outbreak of major class battles could also have the effect of uniting workers throughout Britain and pushing nationalism into the background – as the miners strike did in 1984-5.

And as the boomlet of the last six years comes to an end, this will shatter many illusions in the south of England that the Tories can successfully run the economy. Then, despite rather than because of the Labour leaders, Labour's support could rise significantly. The likelihood of a Labour victory would be a powerful magnet of attraction for Scottish workers.

But if the recession is delayed further, and the Labour leaders fail to offer an alternative to the Tories, this could sustain Tory support. Then a significant section of Scottish workers could be pushed towards the nationalists in the hope of escaping a fourth term of Thatcherism – although given the deep seated traditions of Labour it seems unlikely that support for nationalism would lead to a majority of Scottish MPs being SNP at this stage.

The poll tax remains the most important factor in Scottish politics. It is the most brutal and callous measure for 100 years. In the struggle against this tax neither Labour nor the SNP can escape from being put to the test.

The SNP will have to decide which side of the fence they will sit on. Will they go down the path of the Grampian regional council or Jim Sillars in Govan? How long will the up to now dominant rural wing of the SNP tolerate

moves to the left within the SNP? The possibility of split in their ranks is inherent in this dilemma.

For Marxists the fight against the poll tax and the building of a united socialist labour movement remains the priority. If achieved it will cut across nationalism. The impatience of Scottish workers to beat the Tories is understandable.

Even the great Clydeside Marxist and workers leader, John MacLean, drawing on the tumultuous events in 1919-20, concluded that "the socialist revolution was possible sooner in Scotland than in England" and raised the slogan of a 'Scottish workers republic'. In 1923 he argued that there would be a new world war before the English working class would be ready to struggle.

This prediction was confounded by events. Within three years British capitalism was shaken to its roots by the general strike of 1926, involving workers in all parts of Britain and Northern Ireland. If he had lived longer, MacLean would probably have altered his position in the light of that experience.

Workers' unity

Of course, John MacLean did not argue **against** the unity of the Welsh, English and Scottish workers. In contrast leading SNP figures like Kenny McCaskill and Jim Sillars are opposed to unifying British workers and actually blame English workers for landing Scotland with a Tory government.

John MacLean in fact spent considerable time in England touring different cities and towns speaking at workers' rallies on the need for a socialist labour movement and for the international struggle of workers for the socialist transformation of society. A testimony to his internationalism was his appointment by Lenin as the official consul in Glasgow of the young Russian workers' state.

The continued onslaught of Thatcherism demonstrates the need for workers unity. The attacks on the NHS, housing, mortgage increases and wage levels are the issues that can unite workers against the Tories. The workers of Merseyside, Manchester, the Midlands, Tyneside, South Wales and London will then stand together with Scottish workers in battles that will change the course of British history.

Strathclyde	NO
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Building our journal



Roy Hattersley's 'market socialism' was examined in our last edition. What other debates in the labour movement could be dealt with in the MIR?

1989 will be an important year in the development of the *Militant International Review*.

While – at the time of writing – there is still some way to go before sales of the last edition reach the record sales of number 37, the underlying trend is still encouraging.

A number of regions have shown what can be done if a consistent campaign is conducted. Thus, the average sales for recent editions in Manchester and the West Midlands have increased by 60 per cent compared to 1987.

In the East Midlands they have increased by 40 per cent. And for every one regular reader we had in Merseyside during 1985 there are now two and a half!

However, there can be no room for complacency. Every area must give the *MIR* its due importance as a vital supplement to the *Militant*. Only then will the financial base be secured for the improvements we plan to make to the journal during 1989.

This will only be realised by the increased participation of all our

readers, both financially – through selling the *MIR* – and politically – aiding the Editors to constantly appraise the contents of the journal and the response it receives in the labour movement.

In the last issue we went to the heart of the Labour Party's Policy Review documents, answering the arguments about the alleged superiority of the market over conscious socialist planning. What response did this receive from Labour Party members and trade unionists?

In this edition we deal with the question on the minds of every labour movement activist: can Labour win? But what other debates in the labour movement – on perspectives, programme, strategy or tactics – could be dealt with in the *MIR*?

To win a regular readership amongst the youth we need to know: which articles have provoked the most interest in the YS branches? What has been missing from the *MIR* that our youth and student readers would like to see?

The task we face in 1989 is to make our magazine an indispensable aid to labour movement activists and youth and students in struggle. In this way a consistent readership can be built – and our target for a more frequent *MIR* achieved.

The History of Bolshevism

With the article in *MIR* number 38, 1905: *The October Strike to the December Insurrection*, Alan Woods' series on the history of Bolshevism has come to an end. It is intended that the articles printed since the series began in 1985, revised and continued beyond the 1905 revolution, will be published in due course by Fortress Books.

Debt mountains grow larger

More than a year has passed since the crash on the world's stock exchanges in October 1987. It marked a new conjuncture in the world economy indicating a future worldwide production and trade recession or slump — although as we argued in the *MIR*, the timing would be affected by what action the governments of the major capitalist countries would take to avoid it.

Boom

But over the last 18 months the world boom which began in 1982 and has been one of the longest lasting in the post-war period has continued and even accelerated. The stock markets of the world have recovered in price and, since Christmas 1988, even in volume of business. Production growth in the major capitalist economies averaged 4 per cent in 1988 and unemployment fell from 9 per cent to 7.5 per cent, while the utilisation of industrial capacity returned to the peak level of 1979, although not yet to the previous peak of 1974.

It appears that the prophets of recession and slump have been proved wrong. But that would be a superficial and complacent conclusion. For none of the fundamental contradictions which provoked the stock crash in 1987 have disappeared.

Then the huge deficits on government expenditure and trade run up by US capitalism could only be financed by either rising interest rates which threatened to choke off investment and production; or by a sharp devaluation in the US dollar which could provoke competitive devaluations and a world trade war. The fear of the consequent world recession led to the stock crash.

The world recession was postponed only by an unprecedented injection of credit from the major capitalist powers to shore up the US dollar and finance the US budget and trade deficits. The last period also coincided with the bunching of elections in most of the top seven

economies: Britain and Italy in June 1987, France in June 1988, Canada and the USA in November 1988. In all cases the governments in power made sure that their economies were stimulated for growth.

The credit boom was concentrated mainly in the USA and the UK 'deficit' countries and financed by the 'surplus' trade countries, West German and Japanese capitalism. But this accelerated growth was at a price. Inflation is now on the move in the advanced countries — 4 per cent on average and rising. And the debt mountains are growing even larger, threatening to topple over into an even sharper downward avalanche.

The new Bush admin-

istration faces four debt mountains that it must correct in the next year or so, and in doing so may bring about the world contraction in trade and production that the capitalist powers are desperate to avoid.

The US budget deficit was \$150bn in 1987, rose to \$155bn in 1988, and is estimated to reach \$146bn in 1989 if there is no action. Such a deficit can only be financed by sharply rising interest rates which will choke off growth in the world's largest economy on which other capitalist powers depend for their markets. The US government is committed under Congress legislation to reduce that deficit to \$100bn by the end of this year. Such a cut, whether by tax increases or spending cuts, must further damage the purchasing power of the US market.

Burden

In addition the collapse of the US savings and loan industry — equivalent to the UK's building societies — because of false property deals during the boom, is likely to cost the US government another \$100-\$150bn over a period of years to support. That extra burden can only add to the interest rate spiral which already soaks up 15 per cent of the US government's spending.

Table 1: Overall debt liabilities to national income

	1970	1982	1987
USA	.72	.78	.97
Japan	.60	.82	.90
West Germany	.09	.15	.17
UK	.55	.66	1.04

Table 2: net profit rates (rate of return less long-term real interest rate)

	1971-80	1981-5	1986-90est
Top seven	10.1	4.9	6.7
USA	12.5	6.6	9.9
Japan	6.2	0.2	2.9
West Germany	5.6	4.5	7.3

Table 3: Average annual growth rate of fixed capital in industry in OECD countries

1968-78	1974-5	1976-9	1980-3	1984-7
6-10%	1-7%	3-7%	nil	5-10%

Table 4: Unemployment rates

	pre-1973	1974-9	1980-7
OECD	3.5	5.3	9.2
Top seven	3.0	5.3	4.3

(Source for all tables: OECD Economic Outlook Dec 1988).

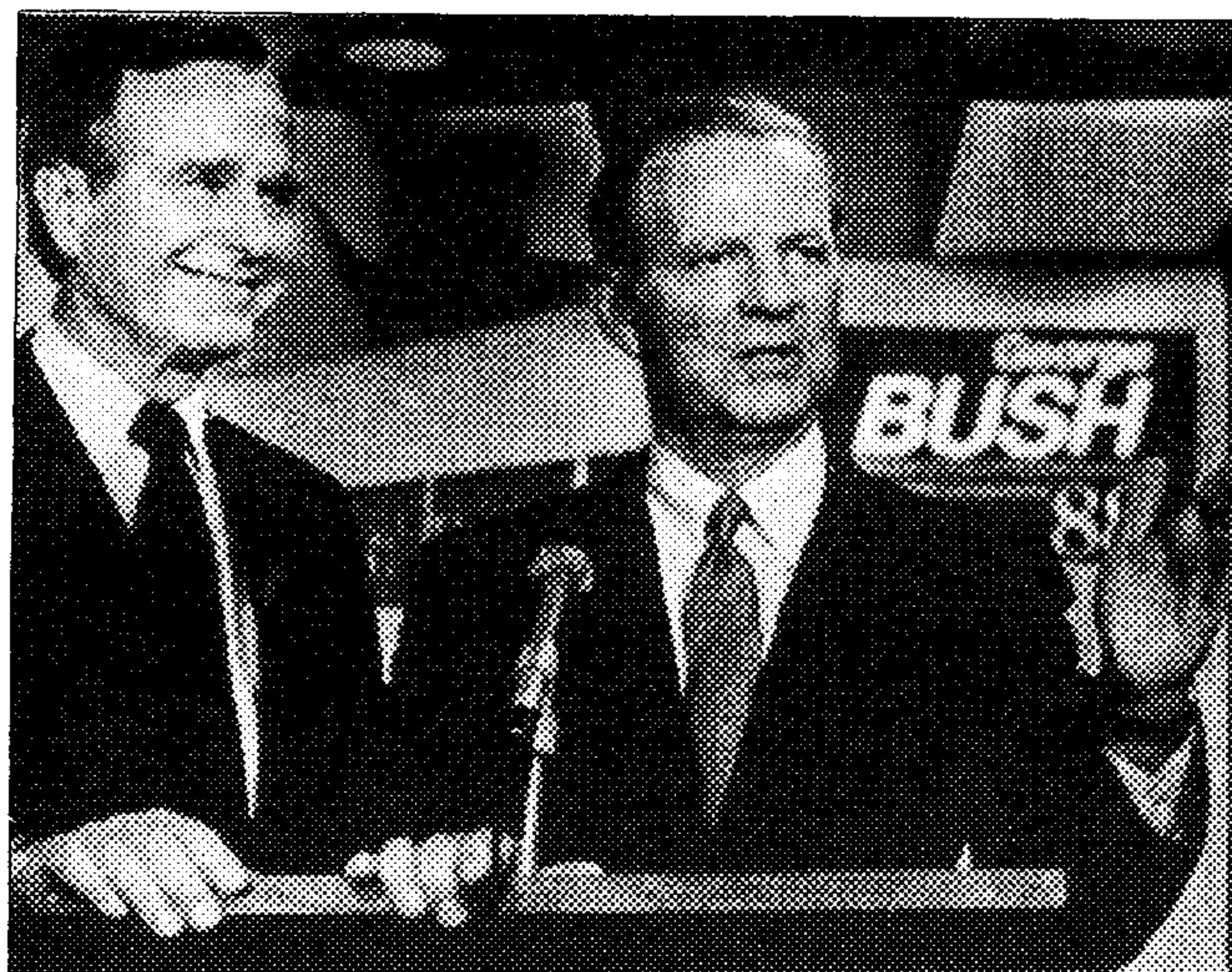
Moreover much of the merger and stock price mania in the USA, and for that matter in the other major capitalist countries, has been financed through huge corporate loans — over \$400bn in the USA alone. Any downturn in corporate profits could trigger off a series of cascading crashes which would further extend already overstretched state finances.

Deficits

Despite a devaluation of the US dollar of over 40 per cent since 1985, the US trade deficit remains stubbornly high — around \$130bn. It has fallen during 1988 only at the expense of creating bigger deficits in other countries like the UK, rather than by reducing the surpluses in Japan and West Germany. The major imbalances in world trade remain, threatening to provoke a new trade war.

The recent tit-for-tat exchanges between the EEC and the USA over semiconductors and agricultural products and the collapse of the GATT talks are signs of such a development. The US deficit cannot be indefinitely financed by high interest rates attracting foreign money. A further devaluation of the US dollar looks inevitable and the recent rise in the dollar because of its high rates of interest can only delay an even sharper reversal in the dollar's fortunes.

The recent credit boom has failed to improve the lot of third world debtor countries.



President Bush faces a hard task in dealing with the Debt mountains.

In 1988 the 15 most heavily indebted countries had to make a net transfer of \$31bn to their creditors and overall the net outflow from the poor to the rich countries in 1988 reached \$46bn, the fifth successive year there has been such a transfer. There remains a real danger that one or more of these debtor nations will default on payments and lead to a crisis in international banking which again will have to be bailed out by further taxation or government spending cuts in the advanced capitalist nations.

Inflation

Interest rates are rising again, inflation is now shooting up. The temporary stimulus to the world economy injected over the last 18 months has nearly exhausted itself. The truth is that the boom of 1982-8 may have been longlasting, but it has been a weak and superficial one based on a huge increase in fictitious capital ie credit not backed up by real production or investment. The growth in debt is

revealed by the OECD (see table 1).

And while total profit levels and the rates of profit have now finally recovered to the levels of the early 1970s in many countries, the industrial rates of profit, after interest rates are deducted, remain well below the rates of the 1970s, with the exception of West Germany. (See table 2)

Profits

Relatively lower profit rates have meant that growth, except perhaps for the last two years, has been not through increased investment in machinery and innovations, but by cutting the workforce and increasing the intensity of work for the smaller labour force employed, as tables 3 and 4 reveal.

This boom is without firm foundations of accumulation in productive capital. It has only been prolonged because of the intensive exploitation of working people both in the advanced countries and in the Third World, and through a colossal influx of fictitious capital spending. That cannot continue.

Sell Militant

"An AEU shop steward who I regularly sell the *Militant* to cut out an article and pinned it on the notice board at his workplace," wrote a *Militant* seller from Rotherham. The boss soon ripped it down, terrified that his employees may learn something to their advantage!

We boast unreservedly that *Militant* provides the clearest analysis of events. Our writers and sellers are

on the shop floor, in the offices, in the schools and colleges, live on the council estates, experiencing first hand the indecencies of living in Thatcher's Britain.

Militant is readily attacked by its enemies from factory managers to the government and the press. But we ask no higher praise than to be denounced by Tory ministers and the likes of Rupert Murdoch. Even the so-called *Independent*

has jibed sarcastically that *Militant's* "circulation totals tens of thousands, but the faction's activists devote much time to selling them."

We accept the compliment! We are competing with a capitalist press backed up by millions of pounds but *Militant's* very strength is its dependence on workers up and down the country selling it to their friends, workmates, and relations.

We especially appeal to readers of the *Militant International Review* to help increase our sales. Start off by taking an order for five copies per week and you'll see how easy it is to sell them.

Write now to Circulation Department, 3/13 Hepscoot Road, London, E9 5HB. Help us build *Militant* into a daily workers' paper!

The Rise and Fall of the GLC Labour Left

In his recent book, *If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It*, the left-wing Labour MP Ken Livingstone describes his time as leader of the Greater London Council (GLC) from 1981 to 1986. In that period the GLC faced major confrontations with the government over cheap fares on public transport, the abolition of the GLC and rate-capping. Through a serious analysis of the campaigns organised by the Labour left led GLC, rank and file activists today can learn valuable lessons and prepare for future battles against the Tories latest assaults on local government – in particular, the struggle against the poll tax.

The first big battle between the government and the GLC was on the issue of cheap fares on public transport. Following their election in May 1981 the new left Labour council immediately moved to carry out their manifesto promise and cut fares by 32%. Although this was extremely popular amongst the millions of workers who use London Transport (LT) everyday, it outraged the Tories. The government attempted to obstruct the 'fares fair' policy by imposing a £119m clawback in government grants and preventing BR from reducing fares in line with LT's.

Judgement

Following this decision, Tory controlled Bromley Council took the GLC to court on the grounds that the fares reductions were unreasonable and that Bromley did not get the same benefit as those boroughs served by the tube. Despite losing their case in the High Court, in October 1981 Bromley's case was upheld by the Court of Appeal, and then by the Law Lords in December 1981.

Ken Livingstone explains what the Law Lords' decision meant: "The five separate judgements spelt out that London Transport should be run on 'ordinary business principles'...The estimate was made that in order to reach this point and comply with the law that we should increase fares by 200%. We would also have to close down those bus routes that made the greatest losses and about 10% of the tube system. A quarter of LT's workforce would lose their jobs in what

would be the greatest retrenchment of any public transport system in history. The officers advised that fares should double immediately with a further 100% increase in August. As the Law Lords had made any social subsidy illegal, free travel for pensioners and the disabled would have to end."

This reactionary decision caused an eruption of anger amongst LT workers and London's working class as a whole. According to Livingstone, "the trade unions decided to start their campaign with a one-day strike and the prospect of an indefinite stoppage if the Government failed to intervene." The GLC launched a 'Keep Fares Fair' propaganda campaign including a series of public meetings across the capital. The flavour of these is captured by Ken Livingstone's description of a meeting in Dagenham. "The meeting of several hundred people was electric and angry; older political activists present claimed it was the largest public meeting in the borough since the Second World War. Whereas in previous months I had been speaking to packed and supportive meetings of party sympathizers and students, this was the first meeting in which the audience was composed mainly of the general public."

As Ken Livingstone himself outlines, the mood existed to build a mass campaign, led by the LT unions. Militant supporters at the time called for all-out strike action by the 40,000 LT workers supported by a 24-hour regional general strike of all London workers. Linked to an appeal for all Londoners to join mass demonstrations in support of cheap fares, a campaign could undoubtedly have been built to compel the courts, and behind them the Tory government, to retreat. Unfortunately this strategy for victory was rejected by the left leaders of the GLC.

Uncertain of the prospects for victory, when it came to the vote on increasing fares by 100% or defying the Law Lords ruling, the Labour Group split. Twenty four Labour councillors voted against a fares increase and 21 voted for. With three Alliance councillors and three Tories joining the 21 Labour renegades the decision to increase fares was passed by 27 to 24.

In the face of this setback, instead of

building a mass campaign led by the LT trade unions to oppose the completely undemocratic decision to increase fares, the left GLC leaders limited themselves to propaganda against the fare increases, even after they had actually carried them out.

At the same time, in protest at the decision of the GLC, a small number of left councillors organised a 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' campaign, urging people not to pay the increased fares when they came into effect on March 21, 1982. Ken Livingstone describes what happened: "The campaign attracted major publicity but little support and only a few hundred people protested on the day...Bus and tube workers feared the campaign would put them in the firing line between protesting passengers and senior management. As 21 March approached, in each of LT's 64 garages the workers voted to call on the organisers to drop the campaign. Bitterness mounted when these calls were ignored, and in a handful of garages the workers passed motions of censure against those councillors who persisted in the campaign."

Protests

'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' was a model of how not to organise a mass campaign. Instead of patiently explaining the issues, involved to the ranks of the trade unions and the need for industrial action to defend cheap LT fares and LT workers' jobs and conditions, a handful of prominent Labour lefts made individual gestures of not paying the increased fares. This approach proved to be totally bankrupt. Now, however, the idea has been raised that a number of left MPs and councillors, in individual protests, will not pay the poll tax in Scotland. But the lesson from the GLC 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' fiasco is clear. Unless it is linked to patiently building a genuine mass campaign, in this case the organised non-payment of the poll tax as the demands arrive in April 1989: the opposition of a few individual 'heroes' will prove to be ineffective and short lived.

An opportunity was lost in 1982 to inflict a major defeat upon the Tories, at a time before the Falklands War when Thatcher was the most unpopular prime minister in history. But the lesson was

not learnt. On the contrary, the failure to mobilise the council workforce was even more starkly revealed as, following their election victory in June 1983, the Tories moved to abolish the GLC.

"After the election I contemplated Mrs Thatcher's majority of 140 and I knew there was no chance of defeating the abolition proposals... There seemed to be no chance of industrial action against the legislation by the trade unions at County Hall. The Staff Association would complain but do nothing. The government would pretend to protect the fire brigade from any real damage, thus avoiding a conflict with the FBU, the only disciplined trade union within the GLC... The only other union of any size was NUPE, which was prepared to fight but did not have the numbers. The GLC staff would reap a bitter harvest from the years of neglect of proper trade union work by the GLC Staff Association."

The pessimism of left reformism, born from the lack of a scientific analysis and perspectives, is revealed in these few lines. The Tory government is all powerful, the trade unions are seen as weak, divided and impotent. In advance responsibility for defeat over the issue of abolition is laid at the door not of the Labour leaders of the GLC but the trade unions who would 'reap a bitter harvest from years of neglect'.

Yet just nine months later the miners struck to defend their jobs and communities. As part of that same tendency to centralise power increasingly in the hands not even of parliament but Thatcher's own trusted cabinet colleagues – revealed in the abolition of the GLC and the Metropolitan County Councils – the government had recently banned trade unions at GCHQ and imprisoned a civil servant, Sarah Tisdall, for leaking details of the Tories' use of the secret services to smear CND. During this period the Tories proposals to 'rate-cap' local authorities were also revealed. Who could doubt the willingness of GLC workers to struggle against abolition if the issues had been explained clearly and a call to battle issued by the Labour leadership in London?

Indeed, at the same time as Ken Livingstone was ruling out the idea of struggle in London, the Liverpool Labour Party, where *Militant* supporters had a dominant influence, had just won control of Liverpool City Council. Within a year they built a mass movement, mobilising in effect a city-wide general strike in March 1984 in support of the council in their demand for more money from the government. The same opportunities to mobilise the working class in defence of the GLC were there at that time. In November 1984 100,000 London workers



Ken Livingstone speaking at 'Fares Fair' rally March 1982.

came out on strike in the boroughs threatened by rate capping and in opposition to the abolition of the GLC. Thirty thousand marched in the capital.

Opinion polls showed over 70% of Londoners were against abolition. But this enormous latent support for the GLC was never effectively mobilised, not because trade unions were not willing to take action but because the left Labour leaders never asked them to take action.

Ruling out the prospect of a mass campaign based on the trade unions, the GLC leadership turned to the idea of a 'broad based' protest 'involving all parties', including a GLC exhibition at all the party conferences. 'The GLC Roadshow', as it came to be known, was particularly well received, according to Ken Livingstone, by the Liberals: "The young Liberals were wearing 'I'm Red Ken' badges and almost the entire conference turned up to our fringe meeting".

This was followed by fun days, festivals, glossy adverts and opinion polls: all demonstrated the enormous potential support for an effective campaign against the government but, having no confidence in the ability of the mass of ordinary Londoners to struggle, the GLC leaders turned for salvation to those historic guardians of British democracy...

the House of Lords!

Ken Livingstone explains in graphic detail the systematic, organised campaign waged by the GLC leaders to persuade the House of Lords to vote against abolition. "Working with the opposition whips we contacted everyone and planned a fleet of cars to get them to and from the Lords. We hired rooms in the Lords in which food and drink would be continually available on the day so none of them had any excuse to slip out of our sight".

The campaign was coordinated by Reg Race (ex-Labour MP), Maurice Stonefrost (author of the infamous 'Stonefrost report' which recommended that Liverpool City Council make draconian cuts and massive rate increases to balance their budget) and Roland Freeman (a staunch Tory who 20 years earlier had led the campaign for the abolition of the London County Council).

The Queen, according to Ken Livingstone, also played an important part in the campaign. She had agreed to open the Thames barrier, one of the biggest projects undertaken by the GLC. Livingstone relates "On the day itself I noticed that although the Queen had pressed the start button, two of the seven barrier gates had stuck in the mud. Fortunately they freed themselves just seconds before what would have been my fatal heart attack."

The GLC anti-abolition campaign was regarded as an extremely successful 'broad based' campaign. It is this type of 'broad based' campaign against the poll tax the STUC has been waging in Scotland and the TUC plans nationally. Unfortunately, however, neither the winning and dining of the octogenarian House of Lords nor appearances by Her Royal Majesty at a GLC gala prevented the abolition of the GLC. The only force capable of doing so was the organised working class led by the GLC trade unions, but the idea of mobilising this force never even entered the heads of the GLC leadership.

The defeat inflicted on the GLC over the issue of abolition prepared the way for what Ken Livingstone himself calls "the ratecapping fiasco". He relates that "during that summer Liverpool council had refused to make a rate because the Tories had withheld much of their rate support grant. This tactic was quite new and had the government worried. In contrast to the action taken against Liverpool and Lambeth the following year, the government's response in the summer of 1984 showed signs of weakness. The fear of collapse of financial confidence in the City followed by bankruptcy and disorder at the same time as the government were trying to defeat the miners caused Patrick Jenkins to make several concessions...it was against this background that the borough leaders hit on the idea of 10 to 20 councils all refusing to set a rate at the same time."

Rate-capping

As Ken Livingstone is well aware, in 1984 Liverpool City Council had not 'refused to make a rate'. They did set a rate at a level that would leave a gap of £30 million between what they planned to spend and the income they would receive, raising the demand that the government make good the deficit by returning the £30 million it had stolen from Liverpool in rate support grant. However, when the leaders of Liverpool Council proposed that the 20 other rate-capped Labour councils should follow their example of setting a deficit budget and mobilise a mass campaign for the return of the money stolen by the government, not a single council leader supported them. Instead the left leaders of the councils, Sheffield's David Blunkett, Islington's Margaret Hodge and Ken Livingstone, proposed the strategy of not setting any rate until the Tories had made concessions.

This disagreement, apparently a secondary dispute over tactics, in fact revealed a more fundamental difference. For Marxists, tactical decisions are determined



Transport workers demonstrate

by which course of action best raises the understanding of the issues involved in the struggle amongst the widest possible layer of workers. The tactic of an illegal deficit budget clearly showed the working class what the Tory government had stolen from them. In Liverpool in 1984 the demand for the return of the £30 million penetrated the consciousness of the whole population, from council workers to school students. The 'no rate' tactic, on the other hand, while apparently a more dramatic gesture of 'defiance', obscured the issues involved and thereby complicated the campaign of explanation. And without the mobilisation of, centrally, the council workforce, supported by workers in the private sector, the campaign against rate-capping would fail.

In fact from the beginning the left leaders of the GLC had no intention of not setting a rate. However, when in February 1985 the Tories on the GLC announced that they would vote against the government's ratecapping limit of 36.5p as too high, it was clear that even with the right wing voting to set a rate the left would have a majority not to set a rate.

"This", explains Ken Livingstone frankly, "presented several problems, not the least of which was that as everyone had assumed that behind all the rhetoric there was no real possibility of this happening, none of us had even begun to explore the question of how to run a bankrupt council. Certainly, no one had given any thought to how staff would react to no pay or how we could continue to provide essential services to the public."

He continues: "There were also personal considerations. I was damned if I was going to allow the money I had saved to be seized by the District Auditor, so I arranged to cash it and give it to Bill Bush for safe keeping. The parliamentary selection procedure was about to

start in Brent East and if bankrupted I would be barred from standing as a candidate."

Here Ken Livingstone confirms the argument put by Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn in *Liverpool: A City That Dared To Fight* that the 'no-rate' tactic was an "an attempt to avoid (or, at best, postpone) giving battle to the Tory government in a clear and unambiguous fashion." In reality, the campaign against ratecapping had been conceived by Ken Livingstone and the other left council leaders as one of verbal, symbolic opposition with no risks, already seen once in 1982 with the GLC's climbdown over the Law Lords ruling against the original Fares Fair policy.

Consequently, the GLC, legally obliged to set a rate by 10 March, became the first council to abandon the field. As *Militant* commented at the time: "Livingstone's misfortune is that he had to be the first Labour council leader to be seen to buckle under the Tories' threats, thereby letting other council leaders indulge in strong rhetoric against the GLC before their own councils caved in". By the middle of June Liverpool City Council was left alone to confront the government. (A full analysis of these issues can be found in the chapter, 'The Battle Against Ratecapping' in *Liverpool: A City That Dared To Fight*, p179-201).

Tittle tattle

Trotsky once commented that it was the fate of left reformism to consider the incidental serious and the serious incidental. The whole of Ken Livingstone's book serves to underline this idea. His method is not Marxist. A critical analysis explaining the processes unfolding in the economy and society is replaced with personal anecdotes and tittle tattle. True, he does write that "personality clashes and the conflict of competing ambitions are a thin mask over the developing economic and social forces to which individual politicians respond." But what those 'economic and social' forces are he never explains. Reflecting on why it would have been "impossible for anything resembling the 1981 GLC administration to gain office at County Hall in the 1950s or 1960s" he misses out the tiny detail of the ending of the post-war boom, the return of mass unemployment and the growing poverty and desperation in the inner cities that underpinned the growth of support for the London left.

In reality, before the late 1970s, the majority of London Labour councils were in the hands of extreme right wing neanderthals. The then Bermondsey MP Bob Mellish was chair of the London Labour Party. When the 1974-79 Labour government slashed the local authority rate support grant from 15.5% to

13.2% of GDP, these cuts were dutifully passed on by the right wing council leaders. The 1973-77 Labour GLC abandoned its manifesto and made large cuts in transport and housing, provoking a split in the Labour Group and paving the way for the Tories' victory at the 1977 GLC elections.

It was in opposition to the cuts and the other counter reforms of the last Labour government that the London left originally crystallised. At that stage supporters of the *Militant* played an important role in organising the left in the GLC and on the London Labour Party executive. The central platform of the left then was the defence of jobs and services, with the main plank of the 1981 GLC manifesto being its commitment to cut fares and improve public transport.

However, *Militant* supporters explained at that time that if the new left councils were to be successful they could not rely just on resolutions and manoeuvres in the council chambers. Instead the council had to be used as a platform to build a mass movement, around clear demands, linking the councillors with the council workers and the wider public to force the Tory government to grant the necessary cash. This idea was expressed in the 1981 GLC election manifesto itself in a section written by *Militant* supporters: "A Labour GLC and ILEA will resist any cuts and demand the Tory government provides the necessary finance to maintain and improve all council services. Understanding that the Tory government does not listen to pleas, but only responds to pressure, a Labour GLC and ILEA will appeal to the labour and trade union movement to take action, including industrial action, to support this stand."

Abolition

Unfortunately the London left paid lip service to these ideas. They displayed a contemptuous attitude to the working class and its ability to struggle. They were also total empiricists.

Ken Livingstone even once declared "I've never been a theoretician. By the time I reached the stage where I wanted to read theoretical works, I was already on the Council and ever since I've been reading council agendas." Their lack of the compass of Marxism meant that, with no worked-out perspective or understanding as to how struggles would develop, they were always cynical about the possibility of building a mass movement against the government.

Not prepared or able to lead a determined mass struggle in defence of jobs and services, at the end of the day the

left Councils, led by the GLC, stepped back from the fray and carried out the Tories' dirty work. In contrast to Liverpool where the mass struggle led by Liverpool City Council has turned the city into a bastion for Labour and for Marxist ideas, the collapse of the London Labour left which led to Labour councils carrying through vicious cuts in jobs and services, has led to dismay and disillusion with the Labour Party amongst many workers in London.

The most recent example is Brent. The present Labour administration was elected in 1986 with a radical left manifesto committed in particular to improving the lot of blacks and women. Nevertheless, faced with the prospect of surcharge and disqualification and not willing or able to mobilise a mass campaign in the borough against the government, like the GLC before them, the Labour group in Brent abandoned their manifesto and passed an austerity budget with £16 million worth of cuts. This meant sacking teachers, savaging nursery provision and a massive increase in rents. In protest thousands of local authority workers struck and, at one stage, Brent town hall was besieged by more than 500 demonstrators chanting 'No cuts, Labour out!'

Ironically Ken Livingstone, now MP for Brent East and no longer facing the threat of surcharge and bankruptcy, attacked the local Labour council in Brent. In reality Brent had merely pursued the failed policies of left reformism first put forward by Ken Livingstone himself when leader of the GLC.

The weakness of the left Labour Councils, of which the GLC was the most important, in the face of Tory aggression, has led to a situation today where local government faces a veritable onslaught: privatisation, sweeping new laws covering housing and education and, last but not least, the poll tax. If a mass movement is to be developed to stop the Tory juggernaut it is necessary to develop a leadership with a correct programme, strategy and tactics.

The *Independent* described the events recounted in *Liverpool: A City That Dared To Fight* as providing "a manual for municipal Marxists throughout the country." The same cannot be said for Ken Livingstone's book. Nonetheless, by making a serious study of the contrasting experiences of the left led GLC and the Marxist influenced Liverpool City Council, activists today can learn valuable lessons and prepare for future battles.

Chronology of the main events, 1981 to 1986

MAY 1981: Labour victory in the GLC elections, 50 Labour, 41 Tories, 1 Liberal.

OCTOBER 1981: Fares Fair policy introduced, cutting London Transport fares by 32%. Tory controlled Bromley council takes the GLC to court.

DECEMBER 1981: Law Lords rule that the GLC fare reductions are illegal.

JANUARY 1982: GLC votes to increase LT fares by 100%.

FEBRUARY 1982: In protest at the GLC's compliance with the Law Lords ruling, 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' campaign established.

JUNE 1983: General Election. Tories include plan to abolish the GLC in their manifesto.

FEBRUARY 1984: Government ban on trade unions at GCHQ announced.

February 28 sees hundreds of thousands strike in support of the GCHQ workers.

MARCH 1984. Miners strike begins. Civil servant Sarah Tisdall gaoled. Tories announce a GLC Paving Bill, abolishing the GLC elections scheduled for May 1985. March 29 one day strike in Liverpool and 50,000 march to the town hall to support a deficit budget.

MAY 1984: Local elections. Labour gains seven seats in Liverpool.

JULY 1984: Liverpool council wins concessions worth up to £60 million from the government. The GLC Paving Bill becomes law.

OCTOBER 1984: Sequestration of NUM assets. **NOVEMBER 1984:** The Abolition Bill is published, the second stage in the abolition of the GLC.

November 17 sees a one day strike against rate-capping and the abolition of the GLC. 100,000 take action and 30,000 demonstrate.

MARCH 1985: March 7 ILEA sets a rate, breaking the 'No rate' front, followed by the GLC on March 10.

JUNE 1985: With the collapse of the 'No rate' front, Liverpool sets a deficit budget. Despite the GLC lobbying campaign, the House of Lords passes the Abolition Bill.

JULY 1985: GLC Abolition Bill becomes law.

MARCH 1986: GLC abolished.

LETTERS

Send letters to *MIR*, 3 – 13 Hepscoot 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.

Rimsky-Korsakov — banned under Tsarism

Dear Comrades,

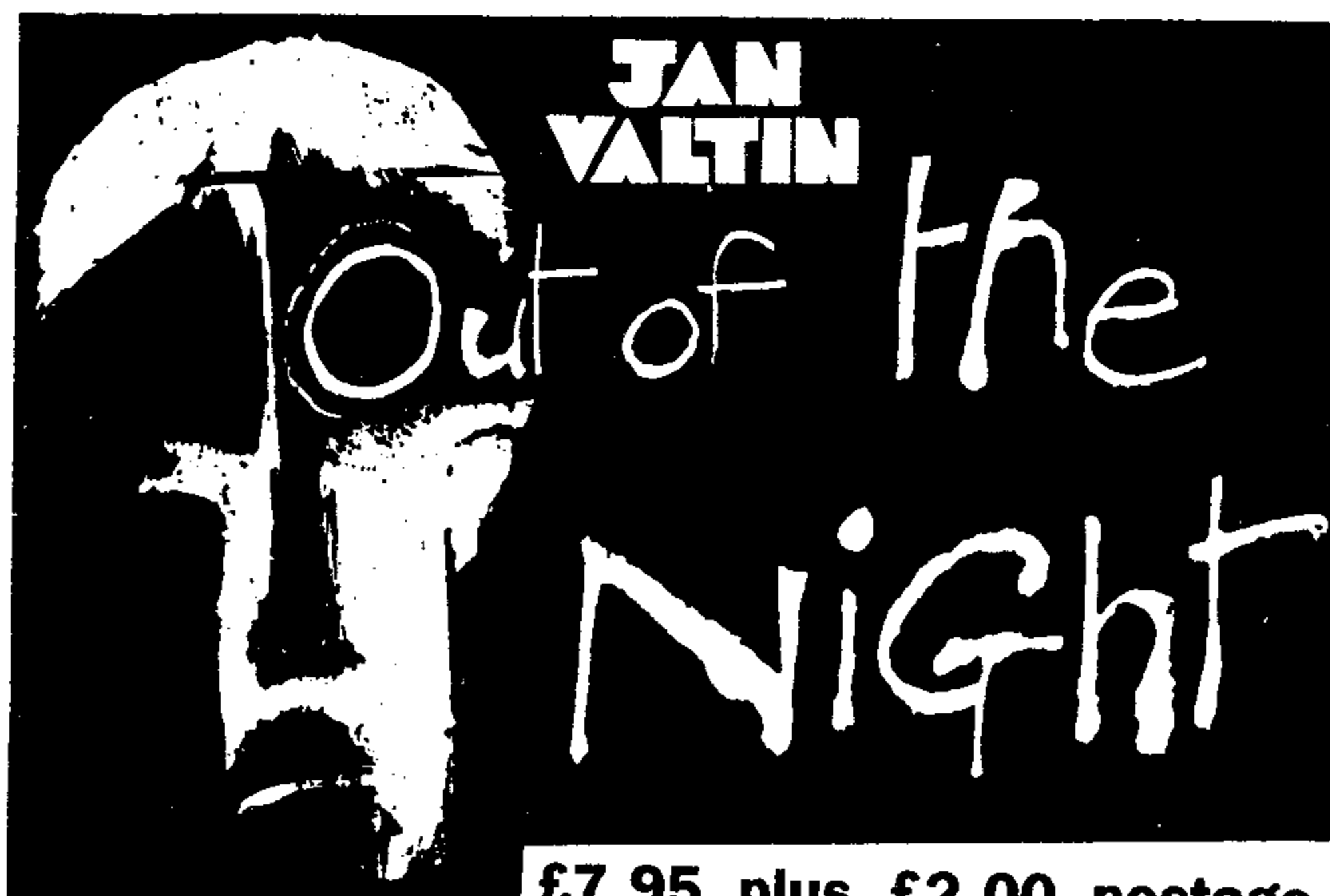
Your series on the 1905 revolution in Russia was brilliant and absorbing. However may I take this opportunity to fill in one gap which I feel was missing, this being the dismissal of Nicolai Andreivich Rimsky-Korsakov as a professor of composition from the St Petersburg Conservatory.

This came about because he was a spokesman for those students who had a revolutionary outlook. Not only was he booted out but all his works were ban-

ned from public performances for a year afterwards throughout Russia!

Towards the end of his life as a form of protest over his treatment he orchestrated a student revolutionary song, Dubinishka. He never again held an official post until his death in 1908. His last full work, *The Golden Cockerel*, was never performed in his life as it was considered too satirical on the Romanov family.

Yours fraternally,
GP Crawford, Rainham



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The *MIR* — immensely rewarding

Dear Comrades,

I have just finished reading *MIR* Number 38 and would like to thank you for producing such an excellent magazine. I have found previous *MIRs* immensely rewarding, but I found this particular edition outstanding. Of particular note was Bob McKee's article on the market economy which cleared up many economic points I had not hitherto understood.

I thoroughly endorse your drive for a more regular *MIR* in order to get the message of socialism across. I firmly believe that wherever the *Militant* is sold the *MIR* should be used as an auxiliary, even if it is only to show workers the quality of our publications.

Contrary to the opinions of the bourgeois, the trends and those on the fringes of the labour movement, workers are not 'uninterested' in theory, but are in many cases the best placed to understand and appreciate what is, after all, nothing more than concentrated practise.

It is the working class which has created and runs the complex capitalist world in which the bosses only count their profits: and they even employ accountants to do that for them today. Engineers,

teachers, doctors, physicists and so on would all be lost without theory. Also, with a full appreciation and understanding of theory, disasters such as the defeat of the German revolution and the situation developing in Sri Lanka could have been avoided.

If I might be allowed to make one or two suggestions, I would like to see more articles in the magazine of a slightly shorter nature and on more diverse subjects. You should, of course, not sacrifice clarity for brevity, and so there should be at least one article of extended length.

I also regret that you have dropped the *Art File* column: the non-appearance of an article on the life and achievements of Sergei Eisenstein on the advent of his 90th birthday anniversary as a reply to the plethora of misrepresentations of his work on the media — as well as considering the importance of culture and mass communications in the struggle for socialism — was a missed opportunity.

In general though I have no disagreements about the format or the content of the magazine, so keep up the good work and I look forward to a more regular *MIR*.

Yours fraternally, Paul Weare, Folkestone

1923: An opportunity missed?

The German revolution of 1918 opened up a five year period of titanic struggle, in which arose several opportunities for the German working class to seize power. The mood and struggles of the period are graphically captured in Jan Valtin's classic book, *Out of the Night*, recently republished by Fortress Books.

Issue 916 of the *Militant* carried a review article by Peter Taaffe of *Out of the Night*. In response one reader, Mick Jones from Chester, wrote a lengthy letter to

the *Militant*. A summary of his criticisms of *Out of the Night* was printed, with a reply, in issue 919.

However, Mick also raised points about the abortive German revolution of 1923 which, for lack of space, could not be discussed in the original reply. The *MIR* is printing below the section of Mick's letter on 1923 with a reply by Rob Sewell, author of a new book from Fortress, *Germany: From Revolution to Counter-Revolution*.



French troops enter Essen to occupy the Ruhr, January 1923.

Dear Comrades...

Peter Taaffe also confuses the 1923 events. Stalin was only a background figure apropos the missed opportunities of that year. Zinoviev and Bukharin bear the main blame. But Trotsky himself points out that nobody, in the leadership of the Comintern, the Russian Communist Party or the KPD, realised the potential existing in Germany until the summer. When Valtin writes that "already in June it became clear that decisive revolutionary events were impending" he is again writing with hindsight. The problem was precisely that nobody had grasped that fact. There is a myth, especial-

ly in would-be Trotskyist circles, that a revolution was missed in October 1923. In reality, a revolutionary situation developed from the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr in January. It peaked in mid-August, when KPD influence was at its height, when trade unions and factory councils were going communist. The inflation, hunger and desperation of the workers impelled them towards the KPD and revolution, in search for a way out.

The fall of the Cuno government, produced by the strike movement, and the formation of the Stresemann coalition, with SPD participation, began a process of stabilisation. Talks

were started with Dawes over US loans, with the French over reparations, the mark was stabilised, wage rises were granted, repression was stepped up, and the crisis passed.

Thus when Brandler, the KPD leader, spoke to the Factory Council Conference in Chemnitz on 21 October, calling for a general strike, he was rebuffed. The SPD workers had given up ideas of revolution as a solution after experiencing the already tangible alternative produced by the Stresemann coalition. As a result, the KPD leadership called off the uprising, a decision fully endorsed by the Russians present (Rad-

ek, Pyatakov et al).

Only later, in the search for scapegoats, did Brandler get blamed. And it emerged that Stalin had advised caution in Germany. In reality, by the time the Comintern had set its conspiratorial plans for an uprising into motion, the opportunity had passed by. For an assessment of the 1923 events by Jakob Walcher, a Spartakist and KPD leader but then leader of the SAP, and Trotsky, consult *Notes on a discussion with Trotsky, 17-20 August 1933*, which is an antidote to the mythology...

Comradely,

Mick Jones

Rob Sewell

Replies:

The revolutionary events of November 1918 resulted in the overthrow of the Hohenzollern monarchy and state power falling into the hands of the workers', sailors' and soldiers' councils that had spontaneously sprung up throughout Germany. Tragically, the labour leaders, who reluctantly found themselves at the head of the revolution, quickly handed power back to the ruling class.

A golden opportunity was lost to establish a German socialist republic. Such a victory would have broken the isolation of the Russian workers' state and quickly prepared the way for a socialist united states of Europe.

Despite the setback following November 1918, the turmoil in Germany was to give the working class further opportunities to carry through the socialist revolution: in particular the attempted coup of Kapp in March 1920 and the occupation by the French of the Ruhr in January 1923.

The major difference between the revolutionary upheavals of 1920 and those that were to unfold in 1923, was the creation of a mass Communist Party. By December 1920 the mass centrist party, the USPD, vacillating between reform and revolution, voted to affiliate to the Communist International. As a result 500,000 of its members fused with the existing Communist Party, to create a mass organisation. The revolution, with hard and patient work, under the guidance of the Communist International, now seemed to be assured. Unfortunately events turned out differently.

In January 1923, the French army occupied the industrial heartland of Germany, the Ruhr. The pretext for this action was the failure of the German government to pay its war reparations promised under the Treaty of Versailles.

National revulsion against the French occupation spread like wildfire throughout the country with 500,000 demonstrating in Berlin alone. Under pressure, the government organised a campaign of 'passive resistance'. There was to be no cooperation with the French forces.

A wave of industrial militancy swept the Ruhr as inflation bit into the workers' living standards. The price of basic foodstuffs and essentials spiralled out of reach. Inflation turned into hyper-inflation. Those living on fixed incomes were devastated. The middle-class were pauperised overnight. Society was thrown into turmoil. A revolutionary crisis was in the making. The four conditions laid down by Lenin for a revolutionary situation were clearly present: splits in the ruling class, the vacillation of the middle class, the determination of the working class to struggle, and the existence of a mass revolutionary party.

Workers defence organisations – 'Hundreds' – sprung up in many areas. Layers of workers deserted their traditional SPD for the Communist Party (KPD). The German bourgeois was terrified and appealed to the French ruling class to help restore order, recalling their past collaboration in crushing the Paris Commune. By August the inflation ac-



Stresemann, Chancellor, August to December 1923.

celerated out of control. Spontaneous strikes, affecting millions, broke out throughout the country, demanding the overthrow of the government. On 12 August the capitalist Cuno government resigned.

Mick Jones states that it was at *this time* the ebb in the movement set in which "began a process of stabilisation." The idea that the revolutionary situation had persisted to October 1923 was "a myth". But this clearly is not the case. Mick himself confuses the timetable of events.

Inflation

Firstly, the fall of the Cuno government did not give way to stabilisation – politically or economically. The new Stresemann government was a government of crisis. Due to the financial losses and the drastic fall in industrial production, Stresemann ended the policy of passive resistance on 26 September, a move which created widespread revulsion. A few weeks later, after tail-ending the movement, the KPD called off a planned insurrection (except in Hamburg where the message didn't get through) and capitulated without a fight. It was the worst possible situation.

In September and October inflation went

through the roof! The cost of a loaf of bread had increased from 1.5 million marks in September to a peak of 201 billion marks in November. Yet Mick talks about the formation of the Stresemann government (mid-August) as beginning "a process of stabilisation". He says "the mark was stabilised...and the crisis passed". In fact the Stresemann government collapsed in December and was followed by the government of Wilhelm Marx who was forced to rule by emergency powers.

Just taking the official exchange rate alone the position is not stable but catastrophic. On August 31, 1923 one pound sterling equalled 47 million marks; September 12, 440 million marks; October 1, 1,100 million; October 5, 2,730 million; October 9, 25,000 million and on October 19, 80,000 million!

The currency was eventually stabilised, through foreign loans and adopting the gold standard, not in August 1923, not in September, or October, or November but by the end of the year and the beginning of 1924 – in other words, after the fall of the Stresemann government.

Mick refers to the Dawes plan, but according to the historian Ramos Oliveira in his *People's History of Germany*: "The allies...

drew up the Dawes plan at the beginning of 1924 and in the summer of that year it was put into effect. The object of this plan was to repair German finances, beginning with the currency...At the end of 1924 Germany began to return to normal. The French had retired from the Ruhr." (p143 – my emphasis) This view is confirmed by Evelyn Anderson who states "strictly speaking, Germany's recovery began only after the London Conference of August 1924 and the acceptance of the Dawes Plan."

This hardly fits Mick Jones's scheme of stabilisation after mid-August 1923. This does not mean that the revolutionary situation had not matured prior to October. It clearly had. But even as late as October it would have been possible, given a correct leadership, to have carried through the German revolution. In Trotsky's view the real political ebb occurred in November as a result of the October debacle. It was a shattering defeat, but had nothing to do with any so-called political or economic stabilisation. The fundamental responsibility for the missed opportunity lay with the prevarication of the Zinoviev Stalin leadership of the Communist International.

For Mick to refer to the testimony of Jakob Walcher, a KPD leader in 1923, as evidence of a non-revolutionary situation in October 1923 is somewhat thin. To then point to Walcher's notes of his discussions with Trotsky as evidence of Trotsky's assessment of 1923 is even thinner. Why not point to Trotsky's writings directly? They are clear enough.



Government troops arrest workers in Freiburg, October 1923.

To begin with, Walcher, along with Brandler the main KPD leader, underestimated the situation in 1923 and both subsequently had a vested interest in attempting to cover up their mistakes in the October fiasco.

Centrism

In April 1935 Trotsky dealt with Walcher, who had become the leader of the small centrist group, the SAP, and his role in Germany in 1923: "The centrist is afraid to act. That is why he hedges in his analysis of the situation... In 1923 Brandler and Walcher missed the revolutionary situation. Later they failed to understand this. From this – the greatest experience of their lives – they learned nothing. Since they were obliged to defend themselves for quite some time, they collected all the arguments for turning a revolutionary situation into a non-revolutionary situation." (Writings Supplement 1934-40, p576 – my emphasis). Mick is using these latter arguments to justify his position.

For Mick to say that the missed revolution in October 1923 is a myth, "especially in would-be Trotskyist circles" is nonsense. Would Mick

count Trotsky as part of these 'circles'? Trotsky was perfectly clear as to the nature of the event: "Here we had a classic example of a missed revolutionary situation...The Communist Party executed the turn very irresolutely and after a very long delay...(they) viewed rather fatalistically the process of revolutionary development up to September/October 1923." Trotsky then wrote a whole book, *Lessons of October*, drawing all the parallels of the actions of Zinoviev and Kamenev in October 1917 and, by implication, the hesitations of the German and Comintern leaders in 1923. For him, it was nothing to do with the lack of a revolutionary situation – far from it – but the failure of leadership.

Prevarication

Mick attempts to justify the calling off of the insurrection by Brandler because "the SPD workers had given up ideas of revolution." He refers to the Chemnitz Trade Union Conference that opposed the general strike call. Unfortunately it was the prevarications amongst the KPD leaders that introduced confusion into the situation. Their skepticism

transmitted itself to the SPD ranks. With a clear bold consistent policy any wavering would have been overcome. Mick should not blame the workers for any hesitations but the temporising of the Brandler leadership which was reinforced by the Comintern. In fact, Trotsky had correctly attacked the leaders of the Comintern and the KPD for underestimating the revolutionary situation and prevaricating. He quotes approvingly the astonishing statement in *Pravda* (25th May, 1924), which contradicted its previous line: "It is clear that in October 1923, during the unprecedented economic crisis, during the complete disintegration of the middle classes, during a frightful confusion in the ranks of the social democracy resulting from the powerful and sharp contradictions within the bourgeoisie itself and an unprecedented militant mood of the proletarian masses in the industrial centers, the Communist Party had the majority of the population on its side; it could and should have fought and had all the chances for success." (My emphasis)

As to Stalin, Mick suggests that undue weight is given to his influence. But to understand Stalin's role,

it is necessary to see the background events developing in Russia. In 1923 with Lenin paralysed by a stroke, Stalin, who had been appointed General Secretary the previous year, created a bloc with Zinoviev and Kamenev to keep Trotsky out of the leadership. This 'troika' organised a secret caucus in the politbureau of the Russian Communist Party which had a majority on all questions.

Zinoviev, who was now President of the Comintern, and Kamenev, had both opposed the insurrection on the eve of the October 1917 revolution. Lenin in his *Testament*, referred to this as no mere 'accident'. Both individuals were prone to vacillation in times of crisis. As became clear later, Stalin's role in the 'troika' was to pour cold water over the revolutionary potential in Germany and urge Zinoviev and Bukharin in writing to 'restrain the KPD. "Should the Communists strive to seize power without the social democrats, are they mature enough for that?" wrote Stalin. "That, in my opinion, is the question.

"When we seized power, we had in Russia such reserves as (a) peace, (b) the land to the peasants, (c) the support of the great majority of the working class, (d) the sympathy of the peasantry. The German Communists at this moment have nothing of the sort. Of course, they have the Soviet nation as their neighbour, which we did not have, but what can we offer them at the present moment? If today in Germany the power, so to speak, falls, and the Communists seize hold of it, they will fall with a crash. That in the 'best' case. And at the worst, they will be smashed to pieces and

thrown back.

"The whole thing is not that Brandler wants to 'educate the masses' but that the bourgeoisie plus the right social democrats will surely transform the lessons – the demonstration – into a general battle (at this moment all the chances are on their side) and exterminate them. Of course, the fascists are not asleep, but it is to our interest that they attack first: that will rally the whole working class around the Communists (Germany is not Bulgaria). Besides, according to all information, the fascists are weak in Germany. In my opinion, the Germans must be curbed and not spurred on."

Comintern

At the same time, Stalin supported and reinforced the skeptics and vacillators within the leadership of the German party. Leaders like August Thalheimer, who wrote in the *British Labour Monthly* in October 1923, at the time of the aborted insurrection, that "politically and organisationally, there is still a good stretch of ground to be covered before the conditions are ripe enough to secure victory for the working class"!! That is why Trotsky concluded that "the Zinoviev-Stalin leadership of the Comintern as a whole was responsible for the German catastrophe." It was not a conscious betrayal – as was Stalin's policy in the 1930s. Stalin, Zinoviev, Bukharin, etc all wanted a successful revolution in Germany, but, without Lenin, they lacked a clear policy and firmness to carry it through.

Stalin's influence in 1923 can only be appreciated by the behind-the-scenes

role he played. To believe that his influence was secondary is to fail to appreciate the real position of power that he was developing at this stage. There is no question that Stalin's attitude played an important role in holding back the German leadership at the crucial time. Along with Zinoviev, Stalin shares the main blame for the defeat in October 1923.

Mick's attempt to call upon the actions of Radek and Pyatakoff to justify Brandlers' decision to call off the insurrection is equally false. Trotsky was sharply critical not only of Brandler's temporising, but also that of Radek and Pyatakoff. In 1931, to clarify his earlier position, Trotsky explained he had "nothing in common with Radek's thesis (on the German revolution). This appraisal, which I arrived at approximately in July 1923, I have upheld unaltered in its essentials to this very day." Trotsky continued that Radek "intended to mitigate Brandler's guilt, and to justify the conduct of Pyatakoff and Radek themselves...". This is hardly an endorsement of their actions in 1923!

All the conditions for a revolutionary situation had developed in 1923, but what was missing for a successful revolution was the most important element: a theoretically and organisationally tested leadership prepared to go to the end. The German and Comintern leaders dithered and allowed the favourable situation to slip through their fingers. This was nothing to do with the objective situation which was ripe for revolution. Mick Jones lets the KPD leaders and those in the International off the hook by portraying a "non-revolutionary situation" in

October.

If the Bolsheviks had not been rearmed and reorientated by Lenin in April 1917 towards the conquest of power, then the October Russian Revolution would have been a debacle. No doubt then all the smart-aleck academics, of the *Deutscher* variety, would have wrote volumes about the non-revolutionary situation of October 1917 and the 'adventurer' Lenin. Both Zinoviev and Kamenev – who opposed the insurrection and put forward a 'non-revolutionary' parliamentary perspective at the time – would have been painted as the 'realists' of the Bolshevik party. This is exactly what Mick Jones is attempting to do in relation to Brandler, Zinoviev and Stalin over the Germany debacle.

Opportunity

The missed opportunity in 1923 was a terrible tragedy. The struggle of the working class cannot remain at a revolutionary fever pitch for ever. If there is no fundamental change in a desperate situation, enthusiasm turns to disillusionment, energy to passivity. The defeat of 1923 laid the political basis for the relative stability of German capitalism between 1924-28. The failure of the labour leaders to overthrow capitalism led to the emergence of fascist reaction that was to destroy the German labour movement by 1933.

For Marxists, the events of 1918-23 demonstrated time and again the willingness of the working class to struggle to change society. But the decisive lesson of the period was the absence of a far-sighted revolutionary leadership able to match up to the events.

Tories green hypocrisy



The Tories have supported major expansion of the nuclear waste and disposal industry – hardly the mantle of the greens.

By Lynn Walsh

Hypocrisy has turned green. Speaking to the Royal Society in September last year, Thatcher appeared in a new guise: scourge of polluters, protector of the environment, and champion of planet earth.

Even the *Financial Times* found this hard to take. Its headline was "Thatcher's green mantle seems an ill fit."

Thatcher sermonised about the 'greenhouse effect'. She called for international action on the ozone layer and acid rain. Yet on vehicle exhausts and power station emissions Britain's Tory government has been obstructing measures since 1983, delaying and diluting EEC directives.

The Tories have also dragged their feet on the control of aerosol propellants which help destroy the ozone layer.

The Natural Environment Research Council is being forced to abandon major environmental monitoring programmes because it is being star-

ved of funds by the Tories. NERC expects to lose 170 staff next year, bringing the total shed over the last five years up to 700.

So why has Thatcher turned green?

One motive is the need to preempt a 'green backlash' which could pose political dangers for the Tories. In West Germany the Greens have damaged the conservative Christian Democrats as well as the Social Democrats, who have failed to put forward socialist policies on the environment.

Green belt

Growing fears about the environment have surfaced even within the Tory Party. There were 73 resolutions on the 1988 Tory conference agenda. One of the biggest Tory gripes, it is true, is from landowners and 'county' people up in arms about plans to relax 'green belt' restrictions on lucrative

housing developments. Thatcher's green man, the Environment Secretary, Nicholas Ridley, is about as friendly to the environment as a dog in a children's sand pit.

The other reason for Thatcher's new concern is that the pollution and environmental problems have become so bad that they are beginning to rebound on big business. Thatcher herself hinted at this. "Stable prosperity," she said, "can be achieved throughout the world provided the environment is nurtured and safeguarded."

Stable conditions for the profit-making activities of the big corporations are under threat. The reaction to deadly hazards, appalling accidents, and environmental catastrophes affecting millions also threatens to provoke explosive upheavals in society.

Just a few recent examples bring this home.

The circular voyage of the *Karin B*, a toxic waste

ship almost as lost at sea as the *Flying Dutchman*, highlighted the chronic failure of big business to provide for the safe disposal of their waste products.

The mass epidemic of dying seals focussed attention on the extensive pollution of the North Sea.

Floods

Then there was the flooding of the Ganges delta. Poets like Dante in the *Divine Comedy* used their imagination to create images of Hell. We have television pictures from Bangladesh. One of the main causes of the flooding is the silting up of the river system because of systematic exploitation of the upland forests.

"Mankind," according to Thatcher, may have "unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of this planet itself." It is not 'mankind', however, but cap-

italism. There is nothing 'unwitting' about it. Nor has it just begun.

From the very beginning, capitalism based itself on the ruthless, wanton drive for profit through the exploitation of human labour, the land, and all the earth's resources. What Karl Marx said about agriculture applies to natural resources in general.

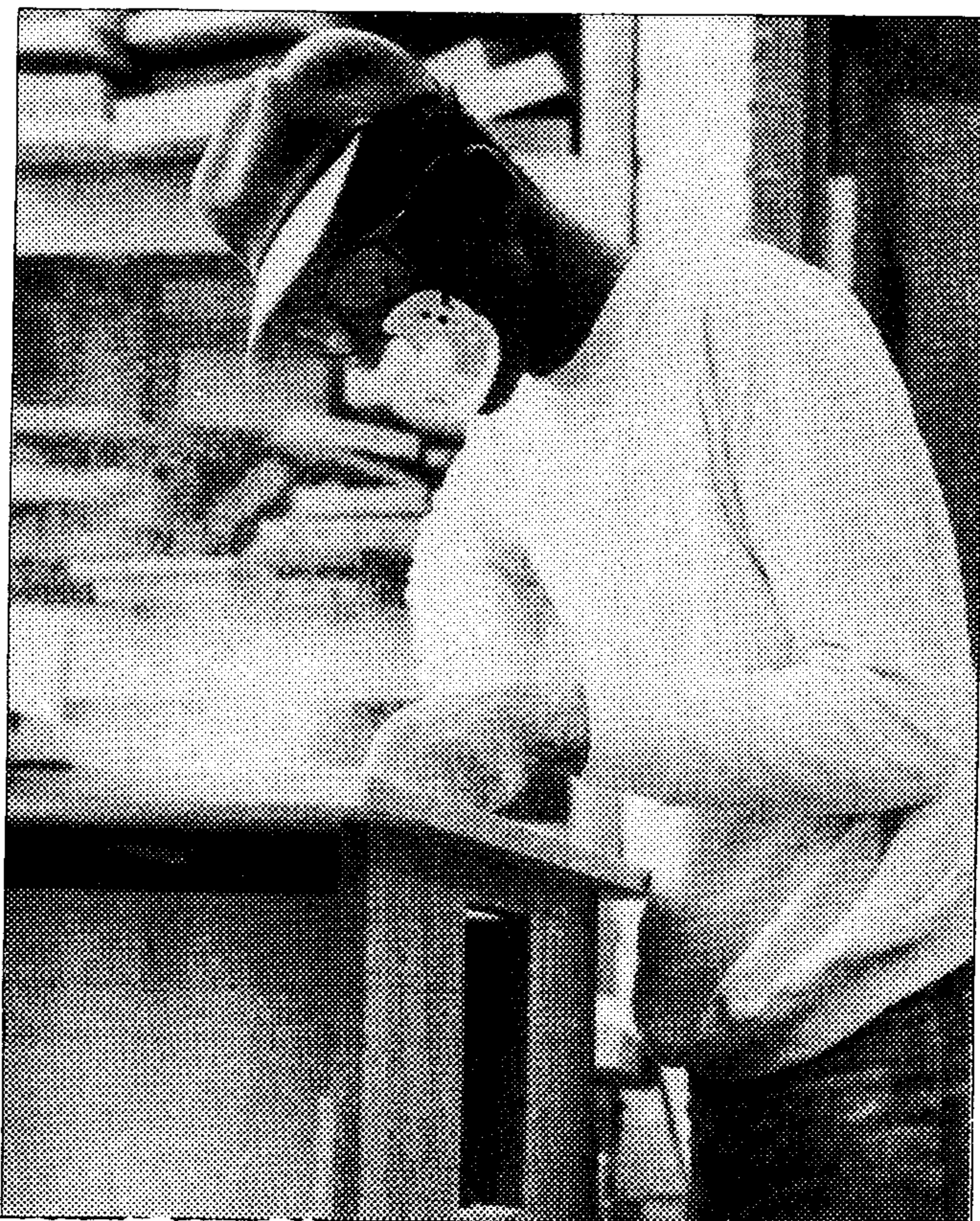
"The whole spirit of capitalist production, which is directed towards the immediate gain of money, contradicts agriculture, which has to minister to the entire range of permanent necessities of life required by a network of human generations." *Capital*, Volume III.

Pollution

Thatcher has called (though not without some escape clauses) for a war against pollution. Big business, of course, would welcome a less polluted, more favourable environment in which to operate. Competition in the global market place, however, means that the overriding concern of each firm is with its own profits. As far as they are concerned, the social costs, the wider effects, and the long-term consequences can all appear on someone else's balance-sheet.

In the period of post-war economic upswing, the state increasingly stepped in to limit some of the excesses of capitalist industry. But Thatcher is now cutting back the role of the state which, apart from its police role, is seen as an expensive overhead.

Most of her Royal Soc-



Asbestos pollution is a product of the drive for profits over safety at work.

iety speech was concerned with "the need to spend science budgets wisely." The government's civilian science spending is being steadily cut back, while funding is increasingly being directed towards 'useful' projects — ie of immediate interest to big business.

Remedies for pollution, says Thatcher, must be "founded on good science to establish cause and effect." But who decides what is 'good science'? The Friends of the Earth? The labour movement? Or the directors of multi-nationals and Tory ministers?

The call for international co-operation from Thatcher appears laudable. Toxic effluent and poisonous gas flow freely across national frontiers. It is impossible to tackle

ecological damage without international planning.

But within days of this clarion call, the Tory leader was denouncing other European governments for their modest proposals for greater harmonisation of the EEC economies. Thatcher's crude assertion of the narrow national interests of an enfeebled British capitalism hardly squares with her call for international action on the environment.

The whole 'spirit of capitalism', which is based on private ownership of production, the drive for profit, the anarchy of the market, and competing nation states, 'contradicts' the balanced, planned development of the planet's resources.

The Friends of the Earth, the Greens, and other groups have played a val-

uable role in arousing and educating public opinion. In some cases, they have helped force companies and governments to take some action. But while one lot of symptoms are tackled, new symptoms appear. They are rooted in the malignant pathology of the system.

The environmental pressure groups are right to warn that unless the destabilisation of our ecological system is halted, the whole basis of earth-bound society will be threatened. But if they believe that by propaganda, pressure on governments, and the enlightenment of political leaders they can bring about fundamental solutions, they are mistaken.

Such solutions cannot be separated from the struggle to abolish capitalism and establish socialist production based on the democratic, planned development of the world-wide economy.

Ownership

From the standpoint of the future socialist society, Marx wrote in *Capital*, individual ownership of land and resources will appear as obscene as the ownership of one human by another. All the present societies put together "are not the owners of the earth."

"They are only its occupants, its beneficiaries, and...have to leave it in an improved condition for succeeding generations."

Judged from this perspective, what credibility can be given to Thatcher's speech to Fellows of the Royal Society?

Food research goes private

By Pete Dickenson



The food industry and the government are responsible for the epidemic caused by the deadly microbes, salmonella and listeria. They have colluded in covering up the extent of the scandal, particularly the policy of handing over responsibility for preventative research to the food companies themselves. Even the House of Lords has condemned the shambles this has produced.

Poisoning

Yet again, however, the Labour leaders have completely failed to expose this crude and criminal attempt to boost still further the massive profits of the agricultural monopolies at the expense of public health. The body in charge of research to prevent food poisoning, the Agricultural and Food Research Council, is gradually being bled to death by cuts.

The only research centre dedicated to examining the safety of meat processing techniques is facing closure. The centre will have half its three million pound budget cut next year following the

recommendations of the Barnes report. This said that the food industry should fund research projects that are commercially exploitable.

The Ministry of Agriculture is withdrawing £150,000 each year from a project at the centre to examine ways of preventing salmonella from entering poultry. This research is being axed from the public sector because it is said to be ready for private exploitation, although it is against the interests of the food monopolies to continue it. Not surprisingly no firms so far have said they will take it over.

The spending on research and development (R&D) by the Ministry of Agriculture is planned to fall by 15 per cent over the period 1987-91. This is part of general cuts in research spending by the Tories. The theory is that the private sector should make up the difference. British capitalism cannot afford state funded basic research, especially when embarrassing findings threaten profits in the short-term.

British capitalism's international rivals, however, can still rely on their

governments subsidising them by doing basic research. Between 1981 and 1986 the West German government increased its spending on civil R&D by £1 billion, France by £1.5 billion, Italy by £1 billion. Over the same period Britain increased spending by only £500m. Britain lags behind all its main rivals in this area in spending on civil R&D, including Italy.

Military

Britain however 'leads' the field in military research and development spending ie producing high-tech scrap metal. A quarter of all scientific and technical effort in society is squandered on arms. The military themselves admit that there is virtually no spin-off into civil applications.

The record of the private sector on research and development shows they will not fill the gap left by the state. Despite some increased spending in the present boom, their position relative to their rivals has probably continued to worsen.

Between 1966 and 1983 industrial R&D outlays in mechanical engineering fell by 36 per cent, electrical engineering by 52 per cent and aerospace by 18 per cent. Between 1981 and 1986 the number of technicians, laboratory assistants and draughtspersons employed in government R&D fell by 20,000.

The desperate rush for profits by the food companies, while the going is good, is behind the food poisoning scandal. The long-term interests of capitalism to maintain basic standards in public health are ignored such is the depth of the underlying economic crisis.

This phenomenon is international and not restricted to the food industry. The potentially lethal faults found on numerous Boeing aircraft are an example of this. These faults were only discovered as a result of the M1 crash.

As the world economy moves into recession the pressure to cut corners further will intensify. The battle over health and safety will assume even greater importance for the Labour movement.

A lost opportunity for Left in Sri Lanka

by **Mukesh Moorthy**

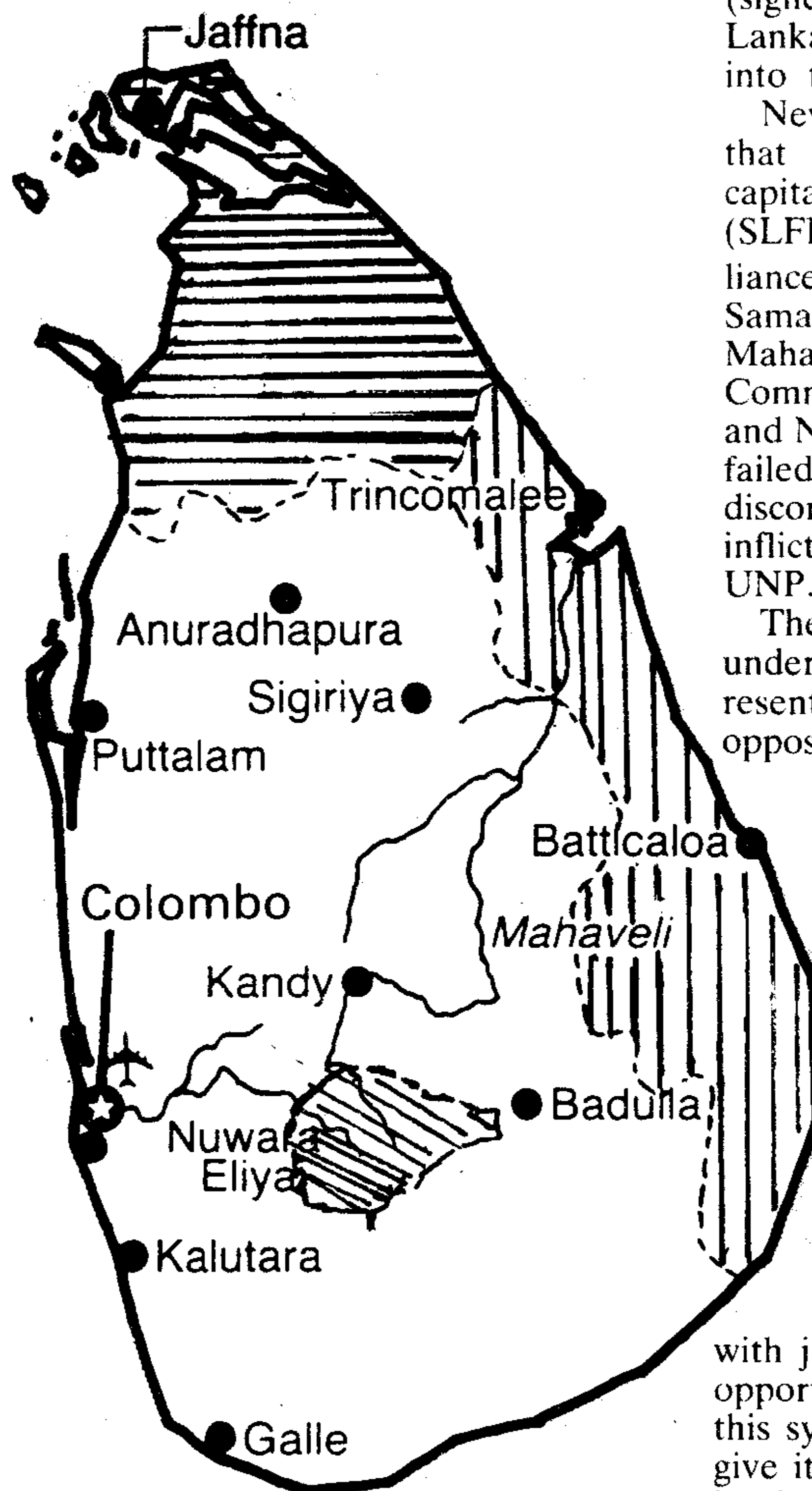
Following the bloodiest election campaign in Sri Lankan history, threatening to outrival even the blood-spattered streets of Beirut for numbers of people killed, President R Premadasa and the right-wing United National Party (UNP) emerged as 'victors' from the December 1988 Presidential and February 1989 general elections.

Today, many of the bodies found on Sri Lanka's idyllic beaches are dead corpses, victims of communal, state and inter-party terror. Such is the level of killings that it is often hard to discern who is killing whom. Most recent killings were carried out by the Sinhala communalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front or JVP) and the Tamil nationalist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) both pursuing their election boycott demand. Killings totalled 1,200 in December 1988, 800 in January 1989 and 400 in the last week before February's general elections.

But how could the right-wing UNP – the most repressive government in Sri Lankan history – win a fourth consecutive election victory in a country which for 30 years previously had rejected every government at elections after only one term of office?

Its victory in the Presidential elections paved the way for the UNP's general election victory. But the word 'victory' must be greatly qualified. Although winning just over 50 per cent of the poll in the Presidential elections, Premadasa actually won the support of only 27 per cent of the total electorate. This increased marginally to 30.2 per cent in the February parliamentary elections.

The narrow Presidential victory was greatly helped by the lower turnout. In 17 traditionally anti-UNP electorates in the Sinhala south the voter turnout (traditionally 80 per cent and higher in Sri Lanka) slumped to between five and 40 per cent. Had there been a higher turnout it is doubtful whether Premadasa would have won the Presidential elections, given the narrow margin of 0.43 per cent in his first ballot victory. The artificially low poll was the product



of the terrorist boycott enforced by the JVP and LTTE. This affected the anti-UNP areas and thus the opposition vote the most. The JVP and LTTE actions assisted the UNP back to power.

Other factors must also be adduced for the UNP's election victories: certain economic benefits accrued by sections of the population under the UNP; the vote-catching promise of a 2,500 rupee (\$85) per month 'poverty alleviation allowance' to the poorest seven million; the UNP's electoral alliance with the half million strong Ceylon Workers Congress (Tamil tea estate workers union); Premadasa's demagogic appeal as a low-caste candidate; and his verbal opposition to the Indo-Lanka Accord

(signed in 1987 between India and Sri Lanka) which brought the Indian army into the island.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that the opposition parties – the capitalist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United Socialist Alliance (USA) composed of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), Sri Lanka Mahajana (Peoples) Party (SLMP), Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL) and Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) – failed to gather the considerable mass discontent generated by UNP rule to inflict electoral defeat over the UNP.

The general elections were contested under a new system of proportional representation intended to fracture the opposition by allowing any small party

KEY:

-  Tamil area
-  Mixed Tamil/Muslim-Sinhala
-  'Indian' Tamil estate workers

with just five per cent of the vote the opportunity of winning a seat. Under this system the UNP won 125 seats to give it an overall majority (although it has lost its two-thirds majority in parliament). The SLFP captured 67 seats and the USA just three.

Among the Tamils and Muslims in the north and east, the Sinhala capitalist parties failed to win a single seat. Instead, the nationalist and anti-Accord Muslim Congress won four seats and the anti-Accord nationalist Tamils (including supporters of the Tamil Tigers) won 13 seats. The pro-Indian government alliance of the guerrillaist Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the bourgeois Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) won 10 seats.

The victory of the UNP represents a grave setback for the Sri Lankan labour movement, and can only strengthen the dictatorial repressive tendencies already manifested by the UNP state machine. The national vote for the four combined

Left parties of the USA collapsed to just 160,000, compared to over 600,000 votes for the LSSP and CP alone in 1970. The only encouraging result for the Left was the election to parliament of militant class fighter and NSSP leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara.

The election defeats are the culmination of a long series, stretching back through the 1983 anti-Tamil holocaust, the victory of the UNP in the 1982 presidential elections and referendum (which abolished for six years the general elections due in 1983), the smashing of the 1980 general strike, and the 1977 general elections which led to the defeat of over 20 sitting Left MPs – the first time since independence the Left had no representation in parliament.

1977 represented a turning point for the country and the Left movement. What were the mistakes that led to this debacle?

The UNP's overwhelming electoral victory in 1977 was the consequence of the disastrous policies of the popular front government between the workers parties (LSSP and CPSL) and the capitalist SLFP between 1970-77. The LSSP leaders labelled this as a 'united front' government when it was in reality a surrender of the class interests of the workers to the capitalist policies of the SLFP – what Marxists term a popular front government, or in the words of Trotsky – 'a strike-breaking conspiracy'.

Popular front

The danger of widespread opposition to the capitalist system focusing behind the LSSP and CP worried the capitalist class and leaders of the alternative capitalist party, the SLFP. Therefore, the workers' leaders were enticed with parliamentary portfolios to join a capitalist government (in 1964 and again in 1970) in order to contain the workers' opposition and discredit the workers' parties in the eyes of the masses. At first workers hoped that the 'socialist ministers' would bring about fundamental improvements. But, because the government did not aim for a socialist transformation of society, it inevitably became, in the words of the 'Trotskyist' finance minister NM Perera, "the instrument not of easing but of heaping additional burdens" on "the poor and the humble" (Budget speech 1971).

After 1973 the popular front government was faced with a world recession and rising world oil prices. These burdens were offloaded onto the poor. It became a government of emergency rule, food shortages, queues and rationing. Strikes (print and bankworkers)



Jayawardene hands over to Premadasa.

were crushed. It was not the kind of 'socialism' people expected.

If the LSSP had kept out of the popular front, it would have gained massively from the mounting unpopularity of the SLFP regime, gathering behind it the discontent of the Sinhala and Tamil youth and been faced with tremendous revolutionary opportunities.

The 1977 electoral defeat for the LSSP generated internal opposition to the LSSP leadership from within the trade unions and party branches. The Left ('Vama') tendency led the opposition.

The LSSP leaders had not held a party conference since 1972 and had imposed mass expulsions, including those of popular mass leaders such as Vasudeva Nanayakkara MP. After the 1977 electoral defeat the demand for a conference became overwhelming. The Left tendency invoked its constitutional right to convene a congress of party members by collecting signatures from one-third of the membership. They invited the leadership to come and defend its position, but they declined. In December 1977 a new leadership of the LSSP was elected (and subsequently changed its name to Nava (New) Sama Samaja Party – NSSP).

From the outset the NSSP forewarned that in order to carry out its pro-big business, pro-multinational 'open-economic' policies, the UNP government would confront the organisations of the working class.

The 1977 UNP government, led by JR Jayawardene, introduced a new constitution which created an all-powerful executive presidency not directly accountable to parliament and began to attack the reforms won by the struggles of the working class.

Sri Lanka can be described as a 'parliamentary bonapartist state'. It is a capitalist regime combining features of a military police state and a parliamentary democracy. A feature of all bon-

apartist regimes is the relatively independent role of the all-powerful 'leader' and the state machine from the rest of society.

The bonapartist UNP regime combined a policy of brutal repression with occasional 'injections' of parliamentary democracy, while at the same time balancing for support between the classes, nationalities, and even factions within parties, including the ruling UNP itself. The UNP rulers also cynically played the racial card – continuing the 'divide and rule' policies of British imperialism – by diverting mass opposition to the regime along racist 'anti-Tamil' or 'anti-Sinhala' lines.

The UNP maintained its rule for 11 years because of its repression and manoeuvring, a certain amount of economic development, and a series of industrial and political defeats inflicted on the working class.

The UNP government concentrated its attack on the traditionally militant and well organised public sector workers. Spiralling inflation and falling real wages pushed the workers into strike activity culminating in the general strike of 1980. Out of two million urban and estate workers, about 150,000 struck in the cities, mainly Colombo.

Defeat

The NSSP played a heroic role in leading this movement. It launched its entire trade union membership (over 60,000 workers) into battle. But the other Left leaders failed to deliver the support they had promised. Consequently, the majority of the working class remained largely passive. The heavy battalions of the working class, such as the railway workers and clerical workers, were severely affected by this defeat. Tens of thousands of workers were sacked and union activity in the public sector effectively banned.

On the economic front the government received a massive influx of foreign aid and loans (10 times higher than that received by the previous popular front government), and it 'exported' hundreds of thousands of labourers to work in the Middle East, thereby gaining foreign exchange remittances. Likewise tourism, service industries and the import-export trade were extensively developed. A Free Trade Zone employing 47,000 workers was set up, house-building and dam construction projects embarked upon.

There was a temporary fall in unemployment and economic growth at five per cent per year between 1977-83 was one of the fastest in the colonial world, providing a safety valve for discontent. This contrasted with the shortages and rationing of the popular front government (when the economy grew by only



Funeral of NSSP member killed by JVP. NSSP leaders, Siritunga, Vickramabahu and Vasudeva MP hold coffin.

2.8 per cent per annum between 1971-76).

However, the fundamental economic malaise of a colonial society remained unresolved. Manufacturing production's share of GDP fell from 23.1 per cent in 1977 to 16 per cent by 1987. Despite their Thatcherite privatisation programmes the UNP rulers, reflecting the weakness of capitalism, were forced to rely on the state sector for 60 per cent of total industrial output and 60 per cent of tea production. Foreign debt reached \$4.7 bn (70 per cent of GDP). Organised workers' wages declined in many sectors, while subsistence and minor crop producers (especially Jaffna Tamil farmers) were particularly badly hit.

Even the limited economic developments under the UNP were reversed by the war in the Tamil areas. Although the middle-class Colombo Tamils initially benefited under the UNP, the Tamil farmers of Jaffna and the east suffered. The Tamil youth were discriminated against in higher education and many of those who gained qualifications were unemployed because of the lack of industrial development in the north and east.

The simmering discontent of the Tamils was bred from a history of discrimination since independence and the failures of the popular front government. It had antagonised the non-Buddhist Tamils by introducing a Sinhala Buddhist constitution which was actually drafted by a 'Trotskyist' minister. So in the 1977 elections the Tamils voted en masse for the TULF which campaigned for a separate Tamil state.

The upper class TULF leaders had no intention of fighting for a separate state and instead hoped for concessions from the UNP. The UNP offered no substantial concessions, preferring to whip up

anti-Tamil and anti-Indian jingoism to divert the Sinhala masses.

The predominantly Sinhala Sri Lankan army engaged in intimidation and brutal torture of the local Tamil population. In response, small groups of Tamil youth began to form guerrilla organisations like the LTTE to fight for a separate Tamil state called 'Eelam'.

When thousands of Tamils in Colombo and the south were burned out of their homes and killed in the July 1983 pogrom, the Tamils exploded into open revolt. The riots had been organised by racist sections within the UNP government as 'revenge' for the killing of Sri Lankan soldiers by the Tamil Tigers. They went completely out of control when impoverished lumpen sections began to loot Tamil homes and shops.

The riots transformed the national problem into the major political issue in the island. The failure of the Sri Lankan security forces or the workers parties to defend them pushed the Tamils into open support for a separate state. Tens of thousands of youth joined the Tamil guerrilla groups.

Jayawardene falsely blamed the riots on the Left parties and banned the NSSP, JVP and briefly the CP. The UNP regime leant heavily on the Sinhala communal sections and even expelled the harmless TULF MPs from parliament – driving the Tamils even further down the path of separatism.

From 1983 to 1987 the UNP government attempted to suppress the Tamils, using the brutal methods of the Israeli Mossad (which had trained the Sri Lankan army). They killed thousands of innocent Tamils. But this policy ended in abject failure.

The young Tamil fighters represented

the flower of the Tamil nation, dedicated to make the supreme sacrifice in order to defeat the oppressive capitalist state. But the guerrilla leaders worked according to the blind methods of individual terror. They never attempted to mobilise a mass movement of the Tamil workers and peasants. Sinhala villagers and workers were hacked to death or bombed in 'revenge' for the Sri Lankan army massacres. Such actions only deepened Sinhala chauvinism in the south. Tamil guerrilla groups used the same methods to settle internal political differences and destroy rival Tamil guerrilla organisations.

They completely neglected the massive Tamil plantation proletariat in the central highlands who on their own possessed the potential to bring down the UNP. These workers had been brought from south India by the British in the 19th century. But they are regarded as a lower caste by the Tamils in the north and east. Furthermore, prior to the Indo-Lanka Accord all the Tamil guerrilla organisations believed that India would help form a Tamil state.

The war had already cost the economy 150 bn rupees (nearly £3 bn). Tourism and foreign investments had collapsed. Annual growth rates fell from 6-8 per cent in the late 1970s to 2-3 per cent by 1987. The drain of increasing war expenditures created rising unemployment and poverty among the Sinhalese, threatening a social explosion in the south.

Separatism

By the end of 1986-87 the guerrillas had effective control in Jaffna and many other Tamil areas. The Sri Lankan army could not launch an all-out military offensive to recapture Jaffna, because mass protest in south India would have been used by the Indian rulers to invade the island under the pretence of coming to 'liberate the Tamils'. The imperialist powers refused to give military help to Jayawardene to crush the Tamil separatist movement and instead threatened to cut off aid if the war continued.

Jayawardene therefore turned to India to achieve what he had failed to do: the disarming and neutralisation of the Tamil guerrilla movement. The Indian government tried hard to reach an agreement with the LTTE but failed. So the Indo-Lanka Accord was signed in July 1987. India acted on behalf of all the Western imperialist powers in forcing acceptance of this Accord on the UNP government. An Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was sent into Sri Lanka to enforce the Accord.

Despite the Sinhala chauvinist background of Jayawardene and the UNP, they had no alternative but to accept the humiliating terms of the Accord. It

offered the promise of some concessions to the Tamil minority but made Sri Lankan foreign policy subservient to the interests of India.

The LTTE made a token surrender of arms but refused to abandon their demand for a separate state. The UNP regime attempted to undermine certain provisions of the Accord – by refusing to resettle Tamil refugees in the east and arresting LTTE fighters. The LTTE's large-scale attacks on Sinhalese civilians in the east was used by the IPKF as the pretext to launch a military offensive against the LTTE, dispelling the guerrillas' illusion that the Indian government which had nourished and nurtured their fighters in Tamil Nadu would not try and crush them.

During the autumn 1987 IPKF offensive, the Indian forces conducted themselves in an even worse manner, if that were possible, than the Sri Lankan army. They brutally suppressed all opposition to their rule in the Tamil areas. At one stage 300-400,000 Tamil civilians were forced into refugee camps in the Jaffna peninsula. The Tamils' illusions in the IPKF as liberators were rudely shattered.

The Tamils rapidly moved into opposition to the IPKF. In the east, the Accord and IPKF were feared as anti-Muslim and pro-Tamil by the Muslims. In the south, the Sinhalese saw the direct entry of the Indian army as a foreign invasion. Nationalist feelings were roused and thereby prevented any partial stabilisation of the UNP regime.

The UNP accepted the Accord partly because they feared the working class opposition in the south which had been mounting since 1984. The UNP had used large-scale rigging, impersonation and intimidation to win the presidential elections and the referendum to postpone elections in 1982.

Left-wing

Although the SLFP is led by landlords and capitalists, its mass following is composed of poor peasants, the city poor and sections of workers. The failure of the parliamentarist SLFP leadership to defeat the UNP led to a radicalisation of their mass base. A left-wing opposition crystallised around popular film star and son-in-law of Mrs Bandaranaike – Vijaya Kumaranatunge and his wife Chandrika. Vijaya and Chandrika, with the support of leftward layers of the SLFP, split away to form the Sri Lanka Mahajana (Peoples) Party (SLMP) in 1984.

The SLMP rejected the increasingly communal leadership of the SLFP. It grew rapidly, representing a striving, albeit confused, for a revolutionary alternative by sections of the middle class, workers, unemployed and radicalised youth. However, it was a confused political formation. Its leaders, while proposing more 'radical' solutions, still retained a firm belief in the capitalist policies – the so-called 'middle path', mixed economy ideas of Mr SWRD Bandaranaike (founder of the SLFP).

Following the formation of the SLMP, the May Day demonstration of the Left parties (when the NSSP was still banned) in 1984 attracted huge crowds of up to 50,000. In the same period the hill country Tamil estate workers, led by Thondaman (a minister in the UNP cabinet) had won a historic strike securing equal wages for women plantation workers. Later struggles of the estate workers helped force the government to promise their right to vote.

Bank workers and nurses, and even middle class layers such as doctors and university lecturers, went on strike between 1984 and 1987. Peasants fought the multinational sugar companies and opposed the onerous water tax. The youth in particular were frustrated with government policies. Constant student protest led to the closure of all the country's universities. In March 1986 a conference of 5,000 workers delegates from all around the country demanded the calling of a national day of protest.

Clearly the situation existed for the leaders of the Left parties to launch broader campaigns against the regime involving the Tamil masses in a joint struggle against the UNP.

The July 1987 signing of the Accord led to the UNP's greatest crisis. Open splits emerged in the government, with MPs and ministers resigning and a haemorrhage of party and trade union members. This was the moment for the workers' movement to seize the offensive. The Left parties should have taken an anti-racist, class position of total opposition to the Accord, the IPKF and the governments of India and Sri Lanka. They should have defended the rights of the Tamils for an autonomous region or homeland in the north and eastern provinces, combined with a programme of mass class action on the main economic issues. Then the Left parties could have challenged and undermined both the Tamil Tigers and the JVP; won over large sections from the SLFP and emerged as the main opposition to the UNP.

Instead, the bonapartist UNP regime now leaned to the Left for support. This

UNP regime which had smashed the 1980 general strike, imprisoned NSSP leader Vasudeva on numerous occasions and banned the Communist Party and NSSP now looked to, and succeeded in finding, 'friends' on the Left. They even distributed hundreds of guns to the Left leaders. Obtaining support from the workers' movement for the Accord and IPKF, the UNP government managed to re-stabilise their regime.

The fatal mistake of the reformist leaders of the SLMP, together with those of the CPSL and LSSP, was to believe that the national question could be 'solved' through negotiations between the capitalist governments of India and Sri Lanka. They argued that the Indian ruling class was 'anti-imperialist' and played a progressive role in the Indian sub-continent – because it had 'liberated' Bangladesh in the 1971 war against Pakistan, and because it campaigned for the Indian Ocean to become a 'Zone of Peace'.

Reactionary

This position cannot be further from reality. The Indian ruling class plays a reactionary role in the sub-continent which it tries to conceal by posturing an anti-imperialist position within the non-aligned movement and cleverly balancing between the USA and USSR in the international arena.

The 'divide and rule' policies of British imperialism were responsible for the bloody partition of India and Pakistan which the Indian landlords and capitalists exploited for their own reactionary ends. They systematically trod upon the rights of the national minorities – from Kashmir and (most-recently) Punjab, to the North-Eastern tribal states and have failed abysmally to unite the nationalities of India.

In the sub-continent, which it regards as its own backyard, the Indian bourgeois acts like an imperialist power – dominating the small countries of the Himalayan region (Bhutan and Nepal), even forcibly annexing the previously independent state of Sikkim in 1974.

The invasion of Bangladesh was carried out for its own 'great power' intentions – to strike a blow at the Pakistani bourgeois and to smash the (Bangladeshi) Mukthi Bahini guerrillas. In doing so it prevented the overthrow of capitalism and landlordism in Bangladesh which would have had repercussions throughout India with its bordering state of West Bengal itself in ferment. The Indian bourgeois has proved incapable of uniting these two halves of

Bengal.

While they are building up a powerful naval fleet and acquiring nuclear-powered submarines, the Indian ruling class hypocritically cries out for a 'Zone of Peace' in the Indian Ocean.

The interests of the Tamils mattered least in the calculations of India. Initially, the Indian secret service (RAW) helped to arm and train the Tamil guerrillas, aiming to use them for their own foreign policy interests. But the Indian rulers did not want a Tamil separatist guerrilla victory which even on a capitalist basis would have destabilised southern India and given encouragement to the many nationalist movements within India.

Although none of the Tamil fighting groups were 'Marxist', the danger existed that if one of them came to power in an independent Tamil 'Eelam' state, they would be pushed by the utter collapse of the war-ravaged economy in the direction of overthrowing capitalism. In any case capitalism was extremely weak in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka — where most industry (cement, salt, pharmaceuticals and paper) was already state-owned.

Accord

Rajiv Gandhi's government also hoped that a quick and easy foreign policy success in Sri Lanka would head off domestic opposition while simultaneously widening India's sphere of influence. These were the cold class interests behind the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka.

But the Left leaders held to the illusion that the Accord could solve the national question and restore peace. They welcomed the Indo-Lanka Accord and in February 1988 launched the United Socialist Alliance (USA) combining the SLMP, LSSP, CPSL and NSSP on a political platform of doing "everything we can to ensure its proper implementation". They supported the IPKF, saying that its presence was required to "facilitate the implementation" of the Accord. They even called for the "neutralisation" of "all forces opposed to the Accord", thereby justifying the military campaigns of the IPKF and Sri Lankan army.

The Accord did contain the promise of 'concessions' for the Tamils. This was the democratic facade used by India to hide its reactionary policy of propping up the UNP government, smashing the Tamil liberation struggle and legitimising the Indian government's sub-continental supremacy. Under conditions of occupation those concessions imple-

mented are merely an instrument of Indian control.

On 12 February 1988, the NSSP majority carried out a turn in policy and announced in a document presented as a "basis for agreement with the other members of the USA" that "we should defend, against chauvinist and reactionary forces, the Accord when put into effect, as a means of arriving at a political solution to the Tamil national question by the formation of the provincial councils, with the Indian Peace Keeping Force to facilitate the implementation." Within the NSSP Siritunge Jayasuriya and a minority of the leaders opposed this position.

Over the last decade, the NSSP has campaigned consistently for a united front of the left parties against the UNP. The Third International under Lenin and Trotsky's leadership emphasised the key role of forging unity in action — the united front tactic — with other workers organisations in order to ensure the maximum mobilisation of the working class against the class enemy. This would show in practice to the rank and file of the reformist parties the inadequacy of their leaders and programmes and the superiority of revolutionary Marxist politics and organisation. In this manner, the revolutionary party, from being a minority of the working class, could be built into a mass party supported by the overwhelming majority of workers and peasantry.

But Trotsky warned of the importance of maintaining the complete political independence of the revolutionary party within the united front — "No common platforms with Social Democracy...March separately but strike together!...Agree only how to strike, whom to strike and when to strike".

But the United Socialist Alliance leaders demanded that the NSSP adopt a joint political platform of support for the Accord and IPKF. What is more, in the last year no serious, extra-parliamentary campaign of action has been organised against the UNP regime.

This was despite the fact that 1988 was a year full of opportunities, as well as dangers, for the Left parties. In February 1988 SLMP leader Vijaya Kumaranatunga was assassinated by the JVP. Up to 500,000 people turned up for the funeral in a massive show of sympathy for Vijaya and the Left. This sympathy continued up to the time of provincial council elections in May-June 1988. Then the USA received 1.3 million votes and in many areas narrowly missed defeating the UNP, although a significant share of these votes were gained by default because the SLFP and JVP organised a racist-terrorist boycott.

This was ignored by thousands of SLFP voters who voted for the USA so as to try and defeat the UNP.

But these favourable openings were not capitalised upon by the Left who refused to organise a sustained programme of mass action against the state. So these votes later returned to the capitalist SLFP.

The reformist and Stalinist workers leaders have forgotten all the lessons of the Sri Lankan independence struggle in which the LSSP built its mass base only because of its uncompromising opposition to British imperialism. Although to their credit the Left leaders have taken an anti-racist stance, their policy of supporting the Accord has now led to their massive electoral defeats in the presidential and general elections.

JVP

A questioning of past policies will inevitably open up among the rank and file in which the Marxists will intervene. The Stalinists and some sections in the LSSP and SLMP will argue that the Left parties should have had a popular front with the SLFP. But it was precisely the class betrayals of the last popular front government which led to the present situation.

As in 1971, because of the mistakes of the workers' movement, the JVP has mushroomed into a mass force among youth. The JVP has opposed the UNP and the Accord, albeit from a poisonous racist viewpoint.

The JVP originated as a left split-off from the pro-Chinese Ceylon Communist Party in the 1960s. Reflecting disillusionment with the LSSP, it was attracted to guerrillaism following the Cuban revolution. It advocated armed insurrection and began to draw in unemployed but educated rural youth. But the JVP insurrection of 1971 took place when the popular front government still had a degree of support. So it was crushed with the murder of 15,000 youth. The LSSP and CP leaders remained in that government despite those brutal massacres.

The JVP and its 'patriotic' front organisations concentrate on rousing Sinhala chauvinist opposition to the merger of the north and eastern provinces and oppose the very idea of a Tamil autonomous 'homeland' — although, to win Tamil votes in the 1982 Presidential elections, the JVP opportunistically promised 'self-determination' to the Tamils. This refusal today to accept in practice even limited aut-

onomous rights for the Tamils, renders their claim of being the only 'true Left party' truly laughable.

The JVP appears to favour the rightist UNP government staying in power in order to portray themselves and their terrorist methods as the only alternative to the UNP and then to engage in a purely military struggle for power. In order to exercise a dictatorship of ideas and methods over the working class, the JVP have tried to destroy rival opposition organisations by killing hundreds of Leftists and SLFP members. Such barbaric methods are completely alien to the democratic traditions of the Sri Lankan labour movement and cannot succeed in intimidating the Left movement to accept the JVP's ideas.

Nevertheless, the JVP has significant support among the peasants and youth. To many young people the JVP has at least campaigned against unemployment, privatisations, for land reform, better education, wage rises etc. It appears more 'revolutionary' than the 'parliamentary' Left, because it offers a short-cut military solution to all their problems. But these 'short-cuts' are actually very very long diversions to a dead-end, as the Tamil youth who took to such short-cut solutions 10 years ago have discovered. They are still far from reaching their goal.

In the south, even more so than in the north, the existence of a strong working class in the cities and the plantations, renders the methods of the JVP completely obsolete and reactionary. The only reason why the working class is not playing the leading role in the opposition to the government is because of the surrender of the Left leaders to the government.

The JVP terror has raised to prime importance the question of the defence of the workers organisations. Certain leaders propose an open or disguised policy of support for the capitalist state machine to smash the JVP. On the other hand, militants within the Left have correctly understood the need for armed defence. But this has led to armed groups being formed which have engaged purely in revenge killings of suspected JVP-ers. This is tantamount to engaging in individual combat with the JVP over the heads of the masses and itself threatens to degenerate into internecine terrorism.

Marxists argue that a sound defence must primarily be based on a correct political programme and by appealing for and building mass workers defence. This would mean arming the workers and peasants organisations against JVP, LTTE and state terror. The JVP killers must be rooted out of the workplaces and villages. But this cannot be done



Tamil Tigers leader Parabakarani, still in hiding (left).

without a struggle against the government and the social conditions which have led to youth joining the JVP. Guns alone are insufficient. Already the Left parties possess hundreds of guns supplied by the government. But in the absence of a mass mobilisation on a programme of struggle against the regime, these arms have proved inadequate to defend the Left.

Although Premadasa released many JVP-ers from prison and appealed to them to come to an agreement, he will ultimately be forced into a military showdown with them. In preparation Premadasa has announced a doubling in police numbers.

The Indian bourgeois are firmly backing Premadasa economically and militarily. In addition Western imperialism will provide aid to prop up the UNP regime and to enable Premadasa to implement part of his reforms.

Through a policy of populist concessions plus brutal military repression Premadasa will try and smash the JVP movement. This will involve a repetition of the 1971 massacres of youth but on a far larger scale.

Tamils

Under the excuse of combatting the JVP the Premadasa government could also take measures to restrict democratic rights and lean more towards a military-police dictatorship, attempting to suppress other opposition organisations and trade unions, including the Left. This would be Premadasa's repayment to the Left for its opportunism.

But such developments are not inevitable. A number of complicating factors can intervene to frustrate Premadasa's plans.

The Tamil question remains far from resolved. The Accord allowed the tem-

porary merger of the north and eastern provinces to be finally decided by a referendum, announced for July 1989, to be held in the eastern province. The merger of the two provinces to create a Tamil homeland has been one of the main Tamil demands for decades.

But many of the Sinhalese in the east were introduced as settlers by successive Sinhalese governments to undermine the original Tamil demographic majority there. Because of the nationalism and terrorism of the Tamil guerrillas in the past and fearing 'Tamil domination', the Sinhala and Muslim masses (now 60 per cent of the east province) have been alienated and may vote against the merger. The JVP and the Sinhala communalists will campaign to break the merger which they regard as a virtual separate Tamil state.

A compromise could be worked out on the basis of re-dividing the eastern province boundaries, creating a far smaller Tamil province or offering autonomy to the minorities within the merged eastern province. But because of the intermixed population, it is not guaranteed that either the merger, the breaking of the merger, or a re-division, would satisfy either the Tamil, Sinhala or Muslim populations in the north and east. The referendum could bring communal passions to the boil once more, with both the LTTE and JVP from opposite poles, opportunistically trying to gain out of the situation.

On the basis of capitalism the national question remains an intractable problem. The Muslim and Sinhala minorities of the east could be won to support a permanent merger of the north and east only by advocating a socialist programme which guaranteed equal rights to all. Ultimately the minorities must be allowed the right to decide their own fate. It would be wrong and impossible to forcibly expel or incorporate these populations into a permanently merged

north-east province against their will. Any attempt to do so would only provoke violent opposition.

The Muslims speak Tamil and are part of the Tamil-speaking nation. But the mistakes of the Tamil nationalist guerrillas and the Indo-Lanka Accord has pushed sections towards the idea of a separate Muslim province.

Just as with the Left parties, the so-called 'Marxist' guerrilla groups in the north and east supported the Accord. The EPRLF guerrilla group which won the elections to the eastern provincial elections in November 1988, adopted the stance of total support for the IPKF. They collaborated with the IPKF in their military campaigns against the LTTE and civilians. In return, the IPKF organised the former EPRLF and other pro-Indian guerrillas into a local police force, which is to be armed by the Sri Lankan state and incorporated into the Sri Lankan police forces.

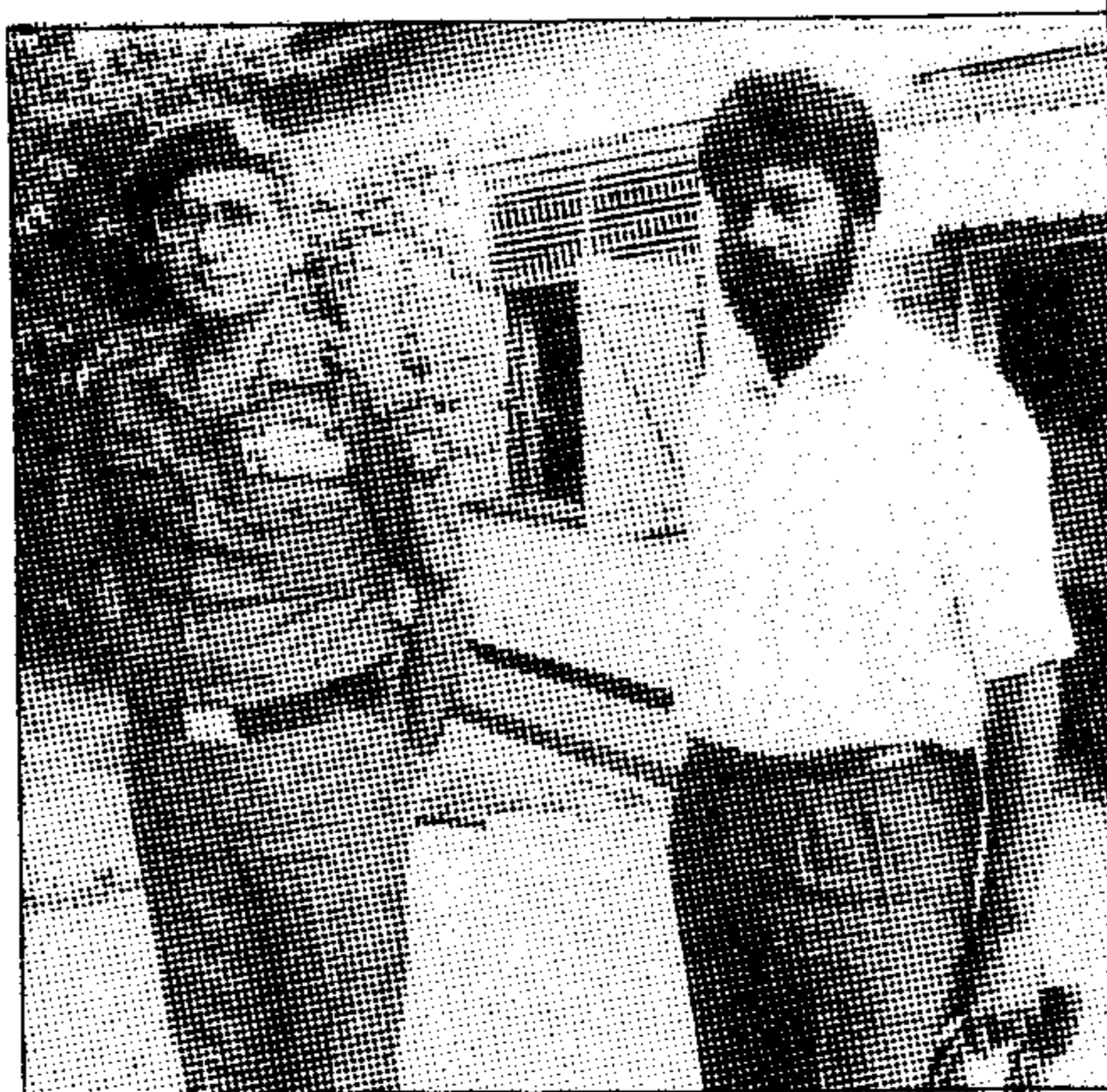
Any regional police force should be fully under the control of elected committees of peasants and farmers in the region. The only guarantee of security from communal or Indian and Sri Lankan state terror is the organisation of united armed defence committees of the trade unions and farmers of all three communities. Otherwise, the Muslims and Sinhalese will view it as a purely Tamil police force, while the EPRLF will be distrusted as stooges of the Indians among the Jaffna Tamils.

Estate workers

Over half the Tamil and Muslim populations live outside the north and east alongside the Sinhala workers and peasants. Only the socialist revolution, guaranteeing the right of complete autonomy and separation, can sweep aside the economic root causes of national antagonisms, and begin to lay the basis for the solution of the national question.

In the south, the future strength of the Premadasa regime depends to a large extent on developments in the economy. In 1988 growth fell to 1.5 per cent and unemployment rose to 20 per cent. Premadasa's vote-catching promise of a monthly Rs2,500 'poverty alleviation allowance' will be eagerly awaited by the seven million poor. This allowance will only be partially implemented and can rapidly be eaten away by the fires of inflation. It is also a double-edged weapon which can be used to meet the IMF demands for abolition of all food subsidies, rises in indirect taxation and massive cuts in public sector wages and jobs – something that even the Jayawardene regime dared not implement.

Sri Lanka is heavily dependent on imperialism for aid and the advanced capitalist countries for 50 per cent of its



IPKF commander with EPRLF leader.

export sales. The coming world recession will also severely affect the economy. If the economic situation worsens, despite their present unpopularity (because of their terrorist methods) Sinhalese youth could once again turn towards the JVP, given no alternative.

In the long-term, capitalism and landlordism can only offer the peoples of Sri Lanka a future of unending misery – a continuation of racial strife which in the last resort could lead to civil war and the intervention of the IPKF in the south, if the UNP regime loses control of the situation. This could possibly lead to the partition of the island, resulting in horrific massacres of the minorities of each community.

The workers movement remains the only obstacle to this nightmare. This movement must be rearmed with a Marxist programme based on the best revolutionary traditions of the old LSSP. Despite the defeats of the past, the election of three Left MPs to parliament provides a platform from which to campaign against the UNP and appeal to the oppressed masses of the crisis-ridden SLFP.

But there can be no truck with either the Indian capitalists, the UNP regime or their false solutions. Likewise there should be no return to the disastrous policy of alliances with the capitalist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

Premadasa's capitalist policies will provoke opposition from the working class which will move into battle on the trade union front following its parliamentary defeats. The workers' leaders must particularly target the huge plantation proletariat of 500,000 hill country workers, who remain the only undefeated section of the class. The estate workers possess thousands of arms and contain the potential to paralyse the economy and halt Premadasa in his tracks. The present capitalist leaders of the estate workers can be undermined by the workers' leaders through a sustained programme of propaganda and agitation.

If the Left Alliance adopted a correct position, mass support for the Left can be rebuilt. The immediate tasks are to

unite the unions to defend democratic and trade union rights from the future onslaught of the Premadasa regime. Premadasa must be forced to implement immediately and fully his promise of the Rs2,500 allowance. There can be no support for the IPKF or the terror of Premadasa's army against the Sinhala and Tamil youth.

A campaign of action on the basic economic issues facing the ordinary masses – against privatisation; defence of free education; decent housing; full citizenship rights for estate workers; for jobs and wage rises, abolition of the water tax and abrogation of the farmers debts, etc – should be mounted to regain mass support.

But the movement must have a clear internationalist perspective. In Tamil Nadu (south India) the Accord has little attraction to the 60 million Tamils there, as the crushing defeat for Rajiv Gandhi's Congress(I) party in the January 1989 state elections and the victory for the pro-LTTE Tamil nationalist DMK party shows.

Internationalism

The mistakes of the Sri Lankan Left are mirrored by those of the Left Front in India (composed of the Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPM), Communist Party of India (CPI), and two smaller parties) which falsely supported all the failed 'Accords' of Rajiv Gandhi's government from Punjab and Assam to Sri Lanka. But despite their mistakes, support for the CPM and Left Front is growing throughout India. Three years ago a Left Front re-captured power in the southern state of Kerala and last month the two Communist parties won 18 seats in the state elections in adjoining Tamil Nadu.

The Indian and Sri Lankan revolutions became inextricably interlinked after the signing of the Accord. The overbearing presence of the Indian army will ultimately be used to smash any revolutionary challenge developing in southern Sri Lanka.

Neither the Sinhala nor Tamil nationalists can force out the Indian army. This can only be done by patiently building up a movement of the working class and peasantry; and by making an internationalist appeal to split and win over the ranks of the Indian army through appealing for support from the workers of India.

Based upon the programme of Marxism, the workers movement could win support from the workers and peasants of all communities and overthrow the Premadasa regime, bringing to power a workers and peasants government. This would spark off a revolutionary conflagration leading to the socialist transformation of the entire sub-continent.

Algeria — lessons of October riots



The early days of the revolution — Ben Bella (centre) and Boumedienne (second right).

For two weeks last October the youth of Algeria took on the forces of the state in the manner of the Palestinian 'Intifada'. Wave upon wave, including 10 and 12-year-olds, faced tanks and machine guns unarmed. Even as the bodies of their comrades were piled up by the soldiers, the youth would form up and move onto the attack once more with nothing but sticks and stones.

Their bravery — their sheer recklessness — stemmed from the feeling that there was nothing to lose. Unofficial reports put the death toll as high as 700.

Every section of society was affected and joined the youth in angry protest — teachers, doctors, civil servants and shopkeepers. In some instances the police were seen to fraternise with the demonstrators. On others, they were humiliated — stripped and ridiculed. And more generally, they participated in horrific and bloody reprisals.

As the movement began to die down in response to the government's promises of change, violence still broke out, and some unusual layers of society demonstrated their defiance. As the *Observer* reported: "In the picturesque Algerian resort of Tizzi Ouzou...pro-Government demonstrators attempted to bully bystanders into joining their procession. The onlookers resisted. A fracas broke out. The police opened fire, and 10 more deaths were added to hundreds in the period of turmoil.

"Next day...the angry owner of a souvenir shop just off Tizzi Ouzou's

main street, said: 'If I want to shout slogans in support of the Government, I will do so of my own free will. But we don't wish to'."

Calm was restored at great cost — first brutal repression, then concessions. Food was rushed into the shops, wages were raised and political reforms were promised. Top members of the government were sacked by the President, Bendjedid Chadli, as scapegoats for the troubles.

All these measures temporarily defused the crisis. But, seeing cracks opening up in the monolithic regime, all layers of society pressed home the advantage. A wave of strikes broke out, including in the big oil and gas terminals. Meetings, marches and petitions were organised in protest at the government's actions and a rash of unprecedentedly outspoken newspaper articles appeared in the hitherto tightly controlled press. There was what a *Financial Times* journalist called an 'untying of tongues'.

Among the demands of the strikers were the sacking of the top managers and the removal of the official union and party cells from the factories. There is a widespread perception of the party — the FLN — as being the party of the privileged elite. During the street clashes in October, the party headquarters were attacked and ransacked, along with police stations, ministries, state-run supermarkets and jewellers' shops.

In Oran, Algeria's second city, people took to the streets to demand that the military governor be sacked for the repressive measures he had employed. If the Interior Minister's career was at an end, then what was sauce for the goose could also be ladled out to the gander!

Brutal reprisals had been taken against the demonstrators, not only on the streets but against those arrested and detained — more than 4,000 in total. The Algerian Human Rights League delivered evidence to Chadli that more than 100 people were shot, tortured, killed or went missing after arrest. The League called for a general amnesty for those prisoners still being held without trial in football grounds, army garrisons and police cells throughout the country. Even doctors marched on the streets in protest at the vicious police repression.

The memory will not be rapidly erased of youths being mown down by machine gun fire and then of thousands being arrested and tortured. Newspapers have carried testimonies from the victims bringing back memories of the atrocities of the Algerian war against French imperialism.

What angers the youth particularly is that those who led that struggle 25 years ago have now usurped their positions and flout their wealth. They strut around in Pierre Cardin suits, drive big, fast cars and help themselves to the lion's share of increasingly scarce

resources.

"People queue all night outside the local state semolina shops" said one man, "and in the morning when the director arrives, he tells them there is not any. Then in full view of everyone, a Mercedes or a BMW draws up and a Tchi-tchi takes a sack away. They do not even try to hide it." The 'Tchi-tchi' are the material beneficiaries of FLN rule.

As the *Observer* comments: "At a time when the purchasing power of ordinary people has been falling sharply, the arrogant display of wealth by the new rich and rapidly spreading and widely visible corruption among senior Algerians will remain an inflammatory issue unless it is tackled."

Youngsters who could not afford the price of a cinema ticket would see the children of the political elite driving in their BMWs to private parties. In Algiers, with a population of 3 million – three quarters of whom are under 25 – there are only 11 cinemas, two swimming pools and one discoteque.

The youth in the teeming slums of a city built to accommodate no more than 800,000 have nothing to look forward to. Families live with up to 15 to a room and spending on public housing has been slashed. Education, traditionally consuming 25 per cent of the state budget, has also now come under attack. There are no jobs for school-leavers.

Mass unemployment is being exacerbated by lay-offs in state-run firms. Working class families are unable to buy meat at £10 a half kilo or even vegetables at £2 a kilo. Clean drinking water has been unavailable in many working class areas for whole periods of time. Life had become intolerable. Enough was enough!

Strikes

The movement of last October welled up from below – without leaders and against the old organisations. Strikes were already taking place in the post office, Air Algerie, the car industry, electronics and among office clerks. A general strike had been called against the new wages freeze for 5 October but was overtaken by the movement of the youth onto the streets. Their slogans included: 'The people are hungry!', 'Down with the crippling cost of living!', 'They have murdered children!' and, most significant of all, the determined cry of 'This time we will go to the end!'.

The present 'stabilisation' in Algeria is a very fragile plant. Nothing will be the same again. Expectations and ambi-



After the riots, food was rushed in.

tions have been fuelled. New demands and new movements will develop. The crisis within the economy will prevent the regime from making anything but token concessions; they will be incapable of satisfying the most basic needs of the Algerian population.

The regime has obviously run into the sand – partly for external reasons and partly internal. The economy of Algeria is extremely vulnerable, even in a period of upswing in the advanced capitalist countries with whom most of its trade is carried out. Ninety eight per cent of its foreign earnings come from the sale of hydrocarbons – oil and gas. The recent fall in prices has wrought havoc with the economy. It has meant a wiping out of £3bn worth of Algeria's foreign earnings – from £8bn to £5bn.

The response of the government to this was to slash food imports by \$2.5bn (60% of Algeria's food comes from abroad) and to intensify the already harsh austerity measures with massive price rises, following on from devaluation and the withdrawal of subsidies on essential goods.

The explosion of anger that these measures provoked rocked the Chadli regime. Divisions had already appeared in the ruling circles on how to deal with the crisis. The President had been trying to 'liberalise' the economy, introducing the cold winds of competition and 'market forces'.

But there had been opposition from the old guard of the ruling FLN, fearing for their own future. There were allegations at the time of the street-fighting that it had been orchestrated by them. The Algerian Communist Party, incidentally, also had its own 'conspiracy theory' to explain the uprising! A few 'manipulators' were behind it, not an elemental movement of workers and youth against the regime!

Reflecting the head of steam building

up in Algerian society, even the hand-picked FLN members of the National Assembly fell out with the newly appointed Prime Minister. If democratic 'openness' was the new policy, why was Kasdi Merbah seeking their approval for a government plan he had neglected to circulate to them? He was howled down. When eventually the debate took place, 150 out of the 261 members spoke against the plan. When it came to the vote, most fell in line but 21 actually voted against!

Reforms put forward by Chadli that might be seen as aiming to end the one-party monopoly will inevitably be resisted by those whose careers depend on the entrenched position of the FLN. But these measures of so-called 'political pluralism' are so hedged around with qualifications that it seems unlikely for the moment that any genuine opposition parties will be allowed to develop. Associations of a political character will be allowed only as long as they are not 'directed against state interests'.

A massive bureaucracy lies like a ton weight on the top of Algerian society. The regime has had decades of experience of ruling in a Bonapartist fashion. It employs the iron rod of the army supposedly 'balanced' by the pseudo-democracy of the referendum. The military in Algeria penetrates every sphere of life. One-fifth of the delegates at the party congress are from the armed forces.

Socialism

The Algerian regime, like so many one-party dictatorships in Africa and elsewhere, claims to be 'socialist'. According to the constitution, "The popular assemblies are the basic institutions of the state. The irreversible option of socialism is the only path to complete national independence."

"The individual ownership of property for personal or family use is guaranteed. Non-exploitative private property is an integral part of the new social system. The cultural, agrarian and industrial revolutions and socialist management of enterprises are the basis for the building of socialism". This 'National Charter' also guarantees freedom of expression and assembly.

Little of the constitution has been operated in practice. But the nature of a regime is not determined by its constitution. It is first of all necessary to establish the direction in which it is moving; and second, the material basis on which the system rests.

In 1962, after eight years of horrific blood-letting in the war against French imperialism, with one million dead – one tenth of the population – and up to three million herded into resettlement camps, it looked as if socialism was on

the order of the day.

One million French 'colons' (settlers) left the country as a result of the war – capitalists, technicians, teachers, skilled workers. No indigenous national bourgeois seemed capable of taking over the task of developing the Algerian economy.

In the colonial and semi-colonial world none of the tasks traditionally carried out by the bourgeois in the advanced capitalist countries can be completed by the feeble national bourgeoisie. Industrialisation, land reform, unification of all nationalities, even basic democratic rights, cannot be guaranteed.

Algeria proved to be no exception to this rule. The leadership of the struggle for national liberation was taken by the radical petit-bourgeois. Leaning on the working class and peasantry, who bore the brunt of the struggle, these leaders gave the FLN a 'socialist' complexion.

If the Algerian war had ended with complete military victory for the FLN, the leadership might have been pushed, under the enormous pressure of the masses, to clear out landlordism and capitalism immediately.

The FLN leadership, however, did not carry the struggle through to the end, merging the tasks of national liberation with steps to rebuild society under the leadership of the working class. This would have required giving the struggle clear socialist aims and linking the Algerian revolution to a perspective of socialist revolution in France and other advanced capitalist countries.

Profit motive

The working class of Algeria was relatively weak, and there was no conscious Marxist leadership, a decisive factor in carrying through a socialist transformation. The state which emerged from the war of independence, therefore, was a bureaucratic bonapartist regime dominated by the petit-bourgeois elite which led the FLN.

Under the Evian agreement of 1962, however, assurances were given to the French firms and government that they could maintain their interests and bases.

But the assets of the French settlers who left the country were frozen and even to this day foreign companies do not relish operating in Algeria. At the end of the Algerian War, the prospects of revenge being taken against anyone associated with the old rulers was very real.



French President Giscard meets Boumedienne in 1975.

The hatred of the French was deep-rooted, not only in the atrocities of the War itself but also in the horrific conditions of virtual slavery in which the Algerian population had been held for more than a century.

The consumption of grain per person in Algeria in the 1950s was less than half that of 1871 – 224lbs per annum. The average earnings of European Algerians was seven times as high as Arab Algerians. Two-thirds of the land (the best land) belonged to big French companies and other landlords.

In 1954 one million Algerians were permanently unemployed and two million partially employed. No less than 82 per cent were illiterate while every European in Algeria was taught to read and write. Infant mortality was one of the highest in the world – 284 per 1,000 – four times the rate of European Algerians.

At the end of the war, factories, farms and shops had closed, leaving 70 per cent of the population unemployed. The new government was able to continue functioning only with the aid of large loans and technical assistance from France and other emergency foreign aid.

Near civil war had broken out over who was to take the biggest share of power. It was averted, however, partly because of mass demonstrations against the fighting organised by the Algerian General Workers' Union (UGTA). After the provisional government handed over to the Political Bureau of the FLN, the new constitution was approved in a plebiscite, and Ben Bella was elected as President in September 1963.

Traditional national rivalries between the Berbers and the Arab peoples flared up and died down again as the measures being introduced by Ben Bella promised to benefit the whole of the population. In summer and autumn 1962 the

remaining foreign-owned estates were nationalised.

In March 1963 decrees legalised the workers' committees which had taken over the operation of many of the deserted European estates. Over half of cultivable land was now state-owned. In 1963, a system known as 'autogestion', under which the workers elected their own management board to work alongside a state-appointed director, became the basis of 'Algerian socialism'.

Through autogestion, a limited form of participation by workers, the state leaned on the working class for support in developing the economy. But without workers' management of the economy as a whole, through a democratic plan of production, factory committees, whatever their formal powers, inevitably have little power to affect vital economic decisions.

But Ben Bella became isolated – snubbed by Moscow during the war and only aided in a half-hearted manner after it. He was thought to be modelling himself on Tito in Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, he was incapable of driving through the necessary measures to recover from the war and adequately provide for the anxious and deprived masses.

In June 1965 Ben Bella's Minister of Defence and close comrade from the war, Boumedienne, ousted him from power and it looked as if the wheel of government would be turned sharply to the right. However, the exigencies of the economic and social situation forced Boumedienne and his 'revolutionary council' of predominantly army officers to proceed with widespread nationalisation.

In 1966 the judiciary was 'algerianised' and tribunals to try economic crimes with powers to impose the death penalty were set up in July. The regime increased state participation in fields left previously to private enterprise. A

state-owned construction company was set up and in May the nationalisation was announced of 11 foreign-owned mines and of the property of absentee owners. All insurance activities were placed under state control. The National Bank of Algeria was inaugurated.

By 1971 the long running dispute between the Algerian government and the major French oil companies and the French government on the price of oil reached a dead end and in February a 51 per cent stake was taken by the government in the two French companies and the gas and pipelines were completely nationalised.

In the same year a programme for the redistribution of land, known as the 'agrarian revolution', was initiated and a form of elected 'workers' councils' was promoted throughout the nationalised industries. Food distribution was nationalised.

The second phase in 1973 tackled the question of absentee landowners, obliging them to cultivate or hand over their land to peasant farmers. A programme for the construction of 'socialist villages' was started. Young people were encouraged to spend their holidays working and teaching in rural areas. In 1976 private education was abolished.

Bonapartism

When in 1977 Boumedienne died, the Central Committee of the FLN took power. In 1979, Colonel Bendjedid Chadli was installed as President, just as a new world recession was beginning to bite.

In the previous period of boom and through the exploitation of oil and gas, phenomenal growth rates had been achieved. A large proportion of GDP had been invested and the third highest GNP per capita in Africa was achieved – \$2,550. Massive progress was made in the sphere of health, education and welfare. Infant mortality was halved from 1962 – from 160 per thousand to 40 per thousand in some areas. Life expectancy as late as 1970 was 52. By 1983 it was 57.

In 1962 there were 1,279 doctors, now there are 29,506. Since 1974 all Algerian citizens have had the right to free medical attention. Education is officially free and compulsory from the age of six to 15 years. Literacy among women has gone from 12 per cent in 1962 to 80 per cent.

But the boom on which this rested came to an end. The Algerian economy was badly hit by the world recession which developed at the end of the 1970s and then by the dramatic fall in oil

prices. This brought into sharp focus the diseased state of the economy and society. A severe sclerosis of the arteries had resulted from a long period of bureaucratic obstruction and mismanagement.

The most phenomenal growth rate was reached in 1980 of 16 per cent. But the very next year it had plummeted to 1.2 per cent.

In 1980 a clean-up campaign had been organised initially to improve the appearance of streets in preparation for the 25th anniversary of the revolution. But it came to include the arrest and imprisonment of hundreds of 'social parasites' and a campaign against inefficiency and corruption. This was extended to the highest level of state organisations, with numerous senior officials being arrested and tried for financial mismanagement.

The attempt to remove the most cumbersome sections of the bureaucracy was accompanied by an 'opening up' of the economy to private investment and foreign involvement. But even today few takers have been found.

The *Third World Encyclopedia* indicated that after 1965 the state had assumed increasing control over the industrial sector and adopted socialisation of the means of production as its official ideology: "The state controls 90 per cent of Algerian industry through 60 corporations which employ about 70 per cent of the labour force. These include heavy industries, textiles, tanning and food stuff industries.

"Banks, mines, transport services and hotels have also been brought under state control. The state sector has also been expanded through nationalisation. Over 100 French companies were taken over between 1962 and 1974.

"All private foreign investments in Algeria were liquidated by 1974. At the United Nations General Assembly 1974, Boumedienne characterised nationalisation as an act of 'positive development for the poorer nations'. Seventy-five per cent of forests belong to the state".

An inflexible application of collectivisation had led to a large-scale collapse of agricultural production in the 1970s. In September 1988 220 state farms were offered on long leases to new cooperatives and individuals. And in December 1988 the government put up all 3,000 state farms occupying the most fertile land in Algeria for rent. There is talk of setting up a stock exchange and Chambers of Commerce have been re-established in the major cities.

However, the *Economist Intelligence*

Unit Report for 1988-9 comments that "although the government's overtures to private enterprise have encouraged small-scale manufacturing, especially in light engineering and food processing industries, the industrial economy is still 90 per cent state controlled." And the state monopoly of trade remains.

Some 5,000 private light industrial firms employ a total of 60,000 people – about half in the textile sectors. The total employed population is around four million. Some of the state corporations have been broken up into smaller units (50 into 400) to be 'autonomous' and responsible for their own profitability. However, such private enterprise that has emerged has been widely attacked for profiteering.

The *Financial Times* comments that "foreign investors have not been easily lured into Algeria, given the weak incentives offered by a leadership which – collectively at least – continues to harbour a strong antipathy towards capitalism".

It also describes the aim of enterprise promotion as being to "use the billions of dinars now tucked into Algerian mattresses for investment in business, but there is strong resistance from the old-timers in the FLN." At the end of 1987 a draft law for employee share schemes was thrown out by the National Assembly.

Recession

There has been no outlet for private capital in the past – apart from building. The *Sunday Telegraph*, October 9 1988, reported on "a thriving new tower with shopping malls, cafes, car parks and duty-free shops, (which) happens to be owned by the Minister of Planning and a local footballer." But it also goes on to comment that, "genuine entrepreneurs try to export their funds by hook or by crook to invest in France, Britain or the USA."

Both the laws of the country and what the *Financial Times* termed as "officials inherently suspicious of the profit motive" make foreign and private investors unenthusiastic. Foreign companies are forbidden to own more than 49 per cent of any joint venture.

There is no doubt that the state sector is highly inefficient. One factory producing steel sheeting, tubes and water pipes, cited by the *Wall Street Journal*, gets its rolled steel from a mill that was built with Soviet equipment 20 years ago. It operates way below capacity.

There is a chronic shortage of spare parts. A new machine was bought to dip steel tubes destined for export. Suddenly, the manager said that 300 huge irrig-

ation derricks had to be produced to increase farm production. These were far too big for the new machine which had to be dismantled and left 'forlornly in a corner'. Instead the derrick tubes had to be laboriously lifted in and out of a bath of molten metal by three young men wielding improvised hooks.

There are supposed to be four year development plans and undoubtedly the investment of large sums of public money has enormously assisted the development of heavy industry. But the *Wall Street Journal* described the situation as that of a "tired closed socialist system".

Markets

The 'tired system' is not socialist. The Algerian economy is in crisis, not because of 'socialist planning', but because the dominant state sector is controlled by an elite which is incapable of developing a modern economy from above by bureaucratic methods. The privileged managers of state enterprises are both inefficient and corrupt.

What it most urgently needs is the oxygen of workers' democracy to plan, develop and control the organisation of production geared to the needs of the whole population and not to a small and prosperous minority. The cold winds of competition are no solution.

As the *Financial Times* reporter asked: "How can agricultural reform aimed at encouraging production of badly needed food succeed if long-leases of hitherto state-owned land are systematically attributed to the friends and ministers of former 'freedom fighters' rather than those who have tilled the land since 1962?"

As the *Economist* put it on 10 December: "The government hesitates to push faster toward an unrigged market, fearing higher consumer prices and more jobless people. Anti-elitist Algerians could put up with austerity better if they thought it more fairly shared."

"The mixture of Cromwellian discipline, Third Republic pride and state planning have failed to put the 'cous-cous' on the table". There are serious doubts as to whether any way forward will be found by the breaking up of the monopolies and by allowing state enterprises and banks to set their own prices and hire and fire at will.

All the bourgeois commentators agree that worse is in store if no solution can be found for the severe economic problems which face Algeria. The author Alistair Horne concludes: "Things may be quietening down temporarily but there remains a great dan-

ger for the West as a whole. Chadli's benevolent Algeria, facing deprivation and possible bankruptcy, could be replaced by something far less stable and much more intractable to Western interests".

With the onset of recession on a world scale even bigger upheavals impend. At present, the direction being taken by Chadli is towards a larger degree of private ownership and enterprise.

There is naturally a resistance to these moves by those whose privileges are at stake. And undoubtedly wide layers of the population would resist change if it meant there was a real prospect of losing the tremendous gains in health and welfare. There are also those who voice a genuine fear of a 'get-rich-quick exploitative class' being established through these so-called reforms.

The Stalinist states of Russia and Eastern Europe can no longer be held up as models of miraculous growth in productive forces and social facilities. Capitalism on a world scale, during the current upturn, has been looking as if it has something to offer.

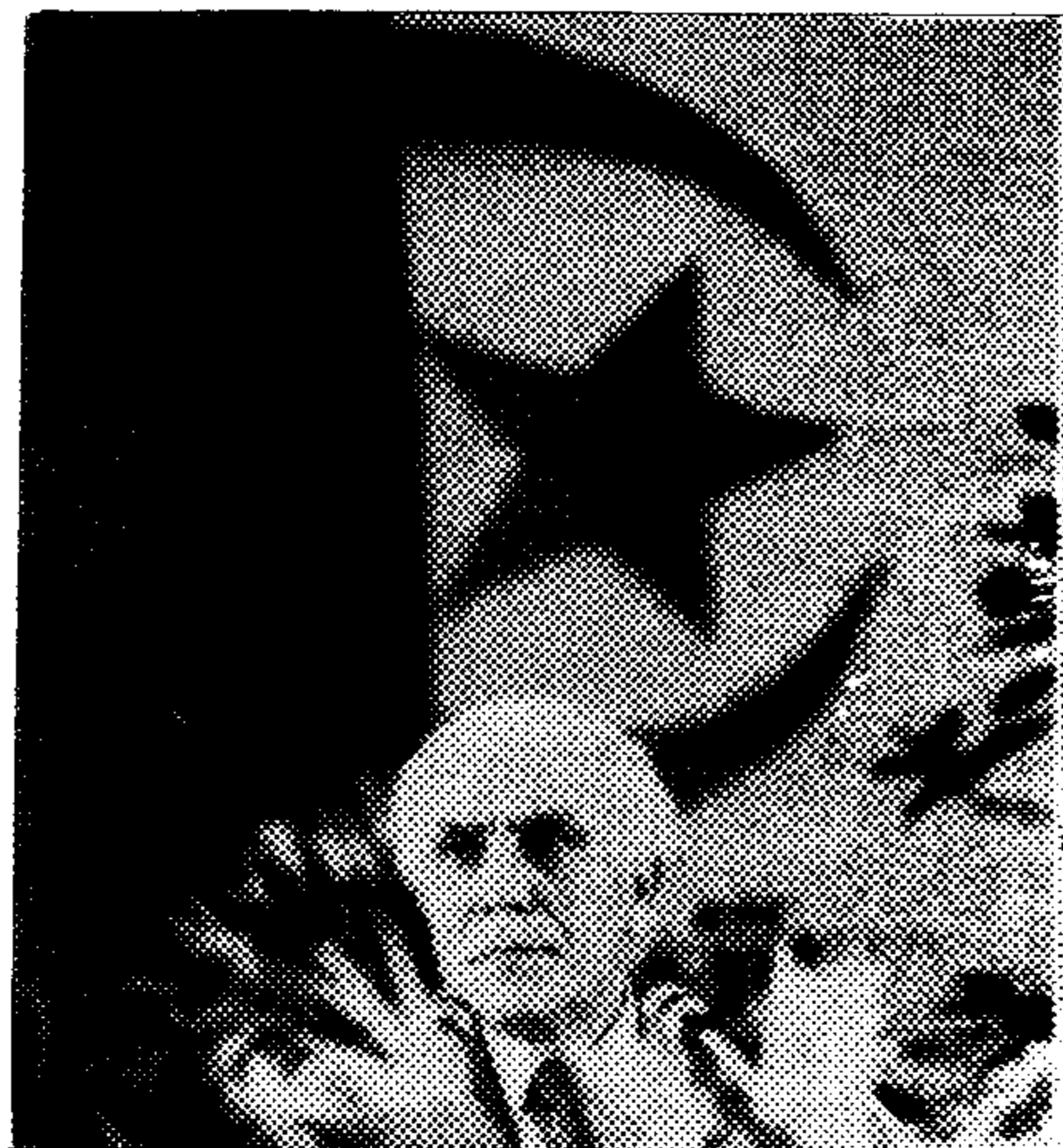
But the scale of problems in the underdeveloped countries are too great to be resolved within the confines and limits of private property and the nation state. However, the delay of socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries and the absence of mass Marxist parties in the crisis-ridden underdeveloped lands, have led to a grotesque aggravation of the contradictions thrown up by capitalism.

In Algeria, Islamic fundamentalism could begin to get a hold. In 1986 an outbreak of protests originally over food shortages took a religious 'holy war' colouring. Unless the working class takes the lead in Algeria, the situation could be complicated by reactionary religious trends.

But the pressure from below, the anger and indignation of the youth and women and the working class as a whole, will be the impetus to the growth of a mass movement of opposition and the rapid growth of Marxism in Algeria. Once more the youth will cry 'this time, we will go to the end'.

The possibility will be posed many times of a victory for the proletariat and the youth, who could, with a clear lead, proceed with the task of constructing the beginnings of a genuine socialist society. An appeal to the workers and peasants of the whole of the Maghreb would fall on fertile ground.

Borders that have been arbitrarily imposed by imperialism still divide North African families. The Libyan leader Gaddafi, in his own eccentric way, tries



President Chadli.

to pretend that his own frontiers do not exist. Not long ago he cancelled a football match between Libya and Tunisia, declaring them to be the same nation! This action in itself caused a minor riot as the supporters of both teams were already in the stadium!

Only on the basis of socialism – with workers' control and management of industry – could a real federation of North African states be built, linking up with a socialist Middle East.

Reverberations

Even the world bourgeois – especially the European banks – are fearful of repercussions. What if Algeria stops servicing its \$23 billion debt? Payments have been at the level of \$5.2bn per annum – 60 per cent of export revenue.

French capitalism in particular, and the 'socialist' government, immediately took fright at the prospect of the more than one million Algerians in France being infected by the mood of revolt. They suddenly showed uncharacteristic leniency on the price they were prepared to pay for Algerian gas.

Algerian immigrants in France do not even have the vote, let alone a fair share of the wealth produced in that country. Every Algerian family has at least one relative in France. The Mitterand government were also forced to voice disapproval of the brutal manner in which the rising had been put down.

The hapless French ruler, Louis Philippe, commented 150 years ago in 1835: "What does it matter if a hundred thousand shots are fired in Africa? Europe does not hear them." Today, it matters!

by Clare Doyle

Book Reviews

Track Record – The Story of the Caterpillar Occupation

By Charles Woolfson
and John Foster.
Published by Verso,
1988, £7-95.

**Reviewed by Colin
Fox, who covered the
Caterpillar occupation
from start to finish
for the *Militant*.**

Woolfson and Foster's book describes an industrial dispute in which 1,200 workers sent their bosses packing and took control of their factory, against a background of anti-trades union legislation designed to prevent precisely this type of situation. This action was to have an immediate effect on the political landscape. One of the factors in the rout of the Tories in Scotland in 1987 was the Caterpillar occupation.

Although the widespread devastation of the Scottish economy was all too evident around them, the men and women of Caterpillar's Uddingston factory decided to take on one of the world's largest companies.

In September 1986 the Caterpillar corporation announced a plan to invest £62.5 million in their 'Glasgow operations'. Malcolm Rifkind, the Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland, heralded this as a great example of the strength of the Scottish economy through its links with successful world corporations like Caterpillar.

But within weeks the world had become a very different place not just for Rifkind but also for the 1,200 employees who had celebrated Christmas 1986 with an illusory sense of security. As Woolfson and Foster show, Caterpillar's US bosses in Peoria, Illinois decided to close their



Glasgow operations at about the same time as Rifkind's illfounded optimism was uttered. The 'Plant with a future', as the Caterpillar management had originally dubbed it, became the plant without a future.

The turnaround was explained by Peoria's mouthpiece in Scotland, Ken Robinson. Uddingston was a "victim of the corporation's worldwide remedy" for overcapacity. Caterpillar was in decline worldwide. From 1978 to 1984 its share of world markets fell from 44 per cent to 35 per cent and cumulative losses had surpassed \$500 million.

Closure

Uddingston, however, was not one of Caterpillar's loss making operations and the closure decision was really politically inspired. Illinois felt that closing another plant in the USA would be much more damaging in business terms than the closure of a plant in Europe. They took what seemed, to them at least, the safest option.

The authors reveal that the original decision to occupy the biggest single factory in Western Europe under one roof, was made on the spur of the moment by the senior stewards. John Brannan, the senior steward and leader of the occupation, announced to a flabbergasted news con-

ference (called in fact not by the unions but by management!) that "on behalf of the hourly paid workers at Uddingston we are now occupying the plant".

Woolfson and Foster capture vividly the details of discussions, meetings and events of the occupation. They recorded all the meetings of the Joint Occupation Committee (JOC) on tape throughout the entire period. They outline very well the day-to-day events of the occupation and even provide a valuable potted history of the struggles of the AEU in the factory. But the book's single biggest weakness is that it lacks any analysis of the objectives, strategy and tactics of the various players in the Caterpillar struggle.

Anyone involved with the occupation would undoubtedly conclude that the strength of the occupation was due in large measure to the calibre of the leaders of the Joint Occupation Committee and to the many rank and file AEU members who sprang into positions of leadership during those 103 days.

Unfortunately, the spirit and feelings of these workers do not feature very strongly in this book. Woolfson and Foster concern themselves almost exclusively with the leaders of the dispute and the recordings contain little material from the rank and file.

The workers at Tannochside would be the first to admit

that they were no different from miners, steelworkers or workers in any other factory up and down the land. Yet while workers at Gartcosh, Cardowan Colliery and Black & White Whisky (all factories in the immediate vicinity of Uddingston which had recently closed) had wearily walked down the road without a fight, those at Caterpillar stood firm.

What was the difference? Firstly, the loyalty of the vast majority of ordinary workers involved in the occupation was immense and indeed all the more remarkable considering the bulk of them had played very little part in union affairs prior to the occupation.

I remember a conversation I had with Kevin O'Shea, a young member of the AEU and a loyal supporter of the occupation, on the way to speak at the LPYS Scottish Conference in Portobello. He had said that before the occupation he had held no strong interest whatsoever in what his union was doing in the plant and even far less outside.

The occupation had changed all that. He had become intensely loyal to the union and the men and women of the union, many of whom he had never met before. For him now the union was everything and he was prepared to do anything for the success of the occupation.

Woolfson and Foster recall when Kevin climbed a 200ft

cooling tower one night at about 3am in the dead of winter to bring down one man who had become suicidal because of the financial and social privations of the struggle. This outstanding feeling of comradeship grew as the occupation went on, particularly as the numbers involved lessened.

But as important was the tremendous leadership and ingenuity of the JOC. With the stocks which the occupation inherited, the workers assembled a D6H tractor which they intended to give to Bob Geldof's Band-Aid. To distinguish it from the 'cowardly yellow' of Caterpillar equipment they painted it in the only other colour available. Thus it became the 'Pink Panther'.

While this was a brilliantly inspired publicity stunt it was also part of a retraining programme which was to allow in the words of John Brannan "a typist to become a welder and a welder to become acquainted with computers." There were finance committees, entertainment committees, DHSS committees etc. playing important supporting roles to the JOC itself.

Woolfson and Foster do not fully evaluate the options open to the JOC to win the dispute. Convincing Caterpillar to change its mind was the first response of the campaign, but this quickly became impossible, even with handsome enticements from the government.

So it was suggested that perhaps a takeover by a competitor of Caterpillar, like Komatsu of Japan, might be viable. But given that the reason for the closure was supposedly through 'over-capacity' on the world market, this option soon collapsed.

Later some academics argued that a workers cooperative would be the answer. Initially this was attractive to the workforce because it kept the existing machinery and technology in the factory. The government even reportedly offered up to £5m to set one up. However more realistic advisors concluded that a

cooperative stood no chance when competing against huge multinationals and it was finally ruled out when Caterpillar refused to donate the necessary equipment.

Finally there was the solution put forward by *Militant* – to bring pressure to bear through the entire labour movement to force the Tories to nationalise Caterpillar. Only with backing of government money could this modern, economic and efficient factory and workforce be saved.

The JOC took this demand up and John Gillen, the deputy convenor, used it in discussions with Rifkind and Tory ministers. He told them "if you can bail your friends out at Johnson Matthey then you can take our plant which is much more profitable into public ownership".

If sufficient pressure had been brought to bear on the Tories by the leaders of the labour movement then the option of nationalisation could have been made a reality. But no such pressure was mounted by the labour and trade union leaders. They bear the responsibility for what happened to the Caterpillar workforce.

Welcher

Entirely in keeping with his performance during the miners' strike, Neil Kinnock decided to keep well clear of the occupation, believing that to be closely associated with an illegal occupation would be 'electorally damaging'.

It was only after the occupation had been going 10 weeks that Kinnock was eventually persuaded to make a brief visit to the plant. He was politely heard but with no great enthusiasm. It was left to Brannan to voice the sentiment of the workers, when he said "thank you for coming Neil. We here in Tannochside know you as a Welshman, we just hope you are not a welcher. We expect your full support."

Woolfson and Foster re-

count the only visit to the occupation of the AEU general secretary, Gavin Laird, who said "...perhaps not all the jobs can be saved". The occupation had barely begun and here he was giving in already. Not surprisingly the JOC never invited him back and Laird himself passed over the mantle of Judas to his Executive councillor, Jimmy Airlie.

Laird however was much more active behind the scenes and Woolfson and Foster imply that he was personally involved in negotiations with Caterpillar management behind the backs of the JOC.

Certainly the AEU right wing circulated a rumour at the union conference that a government takeover was imminent. Right in the middle of the debate it was announced that word had just reached the AEU leaders that the factory and the jobs had been saved. The Scottish Development Agency were to take over the factory.

Amidst euphoric scenes the conference adjourned to congratulate the Caterpillar workers assembled in the visitors gallery. However in the cold light of day and on further enquiry it became clear that no such announcement had been made.

The right wing had slipped off the hook and the issue could not be rediscussed. Shamefully the left at the conference fell for the ploy hook, line and sinker. Woolfson and Foster imply that Airlie was also involved in this manoeuvre.

Airlie's role in events is an obvious problem for Woolfson and Foster. The tapes in their possession recorded the facts and those facts paint a miserable picture of Airlie's misdeeds. Yet as a member of the 'Communist' Party, he shares the same allegiances as the authors. They fail to apportion the blame on Airlie which the record of events clearly shows.

Airlie was and still is the AEU EC member for the Scottish division, with first hand experience of leading a successful occupation. At Up-

per Clyde Shipbuilders in the 1970s, he had been one of the leaders of a successful sit-in and largely on this reputation had been elected to the AEU EC.

Yet his first advice to the JOC was that "any sit-in can have its difficulties, obviously it can have a limited tactical value". From the first, Airlie wanted to abandon the occupation in favour of a picketing campaign.

He also told Brannan and Gillen that under the rules the union could only provide strike pay for 10 weeks. But when AEU head office was contacted, it was revealed that the rules made provision for strike pay to be paid for up to one year! To accept that an EC member was not aware of the rules governing strike pay is just not credible.

Realism

Had the leaders of the STUC, Labour Party and the AEU shown even one hundredth of the will of the workforce then the outcome of the occupation would certainly have been different. Without being conscious of it, Woolfson and Foster prove that the leadership of the labour movement during the Caterpillar occupation acted as tools of big business, as they unfortunately have in other disputes in this era of 'new realism'.

The final words should be left to the men who fought for 103 proud days: "I think we're something that should be looked at by the entire trades union movement. Remember we came in here knowing damn all about Marx, Lenin, Thatcher, right-wing, left-wing or anything. We came in here, raw boys off the street, and we achieved the most advanced knowledge and experience in the trade union movement just by practice – practice taking up the cudgels and not accepting 'no' for an answer."

Timebends – A Life.

By Arthur Miller.
Published by
Methuen, 1987, £5.99.

Reviewed by Mike
Waddington

Watching *Casablanca* over the Christmas holiday, I noticed how the politics of the 1930's intruded; it is revealed that Rick, the principal character, has been gun-running for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. This autobiography by Arthur Miller perhaps explains why.

Miller is most famous for his plays, standing up to the McCarthy witch-hunt in the 1950s, and for marrying Marilyn Monroe, not necessarily in that order.

It is said that on the opening night of *Death of a Salesman*, the owner of the largest department store in New York was so moved that he ordered that from henceforth nobody was to be sacked for being too old. *The Crucible*, about the Salem Trials in the 1690s (in which John Proctor is eventually hanged for refusing to confess to witchcraft) forcefully condemns the activities of the McCarthyites and is Miller's most produced play. A production of the play in 1953 on the same day as the executions of the Rosenbergs (convicted of spying on dubious evidence) brought the audience to their feet at the end for two minutes silence. The play, *All My Sons*, about the death of American airmen in World War II due to corruption amongst the armaments industry, was banned from a showing to American GI's in Germany in the late 1940's. That, with a couple of exceptions, Miller's plays were originally flops, compared to the wide success of today, suggests that the plays are fundamentally a product of – and a comment on – their times.



Arthur Miller.

Miller was the son of successful immigrants. The 1929 Crash "would once again transform their transformed lives". The family business, Miltex, was destroyed. All this had a profound effect on the young Miller as it did on many other American playwrights and authors like Ernest Hemmingway, Clifford Odets, Eugene O'Neil and John Steinbeck. Miller relates how, "The revolution in Russia...made terrific sense; from a distance it seemed a sublime instance of man's intelligence". Like many intellectuals in the 1930s he was attracted to Russia and the Stalin regime, mistakenly believing that the regime and socialism were the same thing. "We enjoyed a certain unity within ourselves by virtue of a higher consciousness bestowed by our expectation of a socialist evolution of the planet". And further: "All that could save us was harsh reason and socialist production not for profit but for use".

However, Miller did not join the Communist Party, despite his sympathies, unlike many other intellectuals who went into the CP believing they were fighting for socialism. In 1937, he was sent by his university newspaper "to report...on the outbreak of sit-down strikes in the General

Motors Fisher Body Plant number one. I identified with the workers in no abstract way; in fact my work experience may account for my amazement at their new solidarity. It was nearly incredible to me that hundreds of ordinary factory workers, a large number of them recruited in the southern states, where hostility to unions was endemic, had one day simply stopped the machines, locked the factory doors from within, and refused to leave until their union was recognised as their bargaining agent". Miller further reports that Henry Ford had his factory sprinkler systems converted to gas should the dreadful disease spread to his factory! These feelings are further confirmed in a recent interview in *Marxism Today*, "You see, the big practical event of that time, after 1937, was the organisation of the unions, and that had aspects of revolutionary emotions, because it swept up all kinds of people". The workers' movement deeply impressed itself on the consciousness of Arthur Miller.

Mafia

Not surprisingly Miller's first play was about a strike at a small factory. Just after the Second World War, Miller got involved in the case of Pete Panto: "a young longshoreman who had attempted to lead a rank and file revolt against the leadership of Joseph Ryan and his colleagues, many of them allegedly mafiosi, who ran the International Longshoreman's Association. Panto, one evening during dinner, had been lured from his home by a phone call from an unknown caller and was never seen again. The movement he had led vanished from the scene".

In the 1950s Miller wrote a screenplay based on this incident. *The Hook* never reached the screen, as the producer and the FBI demanded that all references to the mafia be replaced with references to the Communist Par-

ty! Foreshadowing his imminent call to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the would-be film producer telegraphed Miller: "It's interesting how the minute we try to make the script pro-American you pull out".

HUAC

The HUAC sent people to prison, in some cases for over a year, for refusing to name names. Miller comments "Everywhere teachers were being fired for their associations or ideas, real or alleged as were scientists, diplomats, postmen, actors, directors, writers – as though real America was rising up against all that was not simple to understand". Miller recalls returning to his old university to be told by his old professor that the FBI had asked students and teachers to 'inform' on one another. Whilst on campus Miller met a state policeman whose job it was to go through the newspaper correspondence to dig out would be lefts or radicals. Miller himself lost jobs, in one case when Pontiac threatened to withdraw advertising if Miller's articles appeared!

When finally called before the HUAC, Miller refused to give the names of people who had attended various public meetings. He was held in contempt, fined \$500 and threatened with a month in jail. On appeal the verdict was overturned.

Miller doesn't see that the events of the stirring 1930s that made him what he was, were precisely the events McCarthy wanted to excise. The 1930s had been blighted by capitalism; the system had been fortunate to survive. McCarthy and his committee (including the vice chairman who was later to become President Richard Nixon) were determined to clean up, to remove any echo of those times and hoped to banish the ideas forever. While communists and 'subversives' were in the front-line of attack, the McCarthyites went

much further. Describing the line of the New Deal as 'twenty years of treason', McCarthy wanted to ensure that the liberal capitalist policies of that time were revised or never resurrected. The 1950s were like a counter revolution, cushioned on the enormous padding of the great boom.

As for the CP today, says Miller: "My view of American communists was of a sect that might as well be praying somewhere in the Himalayas for all the relevance they had to any motion in the American world". He thinks that Gorbachev has to be taken seriously as "a remarkable new force" for change but his example of progress is not convincing – "when the Soviets close down a show, it is a committee that makes the decisions, rather than one man – at least since Stalin died".

Time bomb

Death of a Salesman got Miller a Pulitzer prize and tells the story of a man driven to suicide by failure – a failure to live up to the demands of capitalism. "On the play's opening night a woman... was outraged, calling it a 'time bomb under American capitalism'. I hoped it was, or at least under the bullshit of capitalism – this pseudo life that thought to touch the clouds by standing on top of a refrigerator, waving a paid up mortgage at the moon, victorious at last!"

The English theatre critic Ken Tynan said that to understand the effect of Miller's plays you had to appreciate that of the 26 plays in the West End in the 1950s, 22 of them were about the upper or upper middle classes. Tynan went on to say that Miller (and Brecht) had that "passionate desire to improve the human condition". Miller's plays punctured the smug complacency of the Macmillan years, heralding the arrival of the 'angry young men'.

The Robert Tressell Lectures, 1981-88.

Edited by David Alfred.

Published by the Workers Educational Association, £4-50, 1988.

Reviewed by Tony Aitman

Robert Tressell's brilliant novel, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, has a special place in the British labour movement. It is about a group of house painters in Mugsborough – in particular, about the life and ideas of the socialist Owen. Here is a novel about the lives and experiences and ideas of ordinary working people – with which every worker who reads it would instantly identify – written by a working man. Even the manner in which the book was rescued from oblivion and distortion is a testimony to the struggle of working people.

Since 1981, the Workers' Educational Association branch in Hastings, where Tressell worked, and the model for "Mugsborough", has held an annual Robert Tressell Memorial Lecture, and these have now been collected in book form. Some of the lectures throw fascinating light on Tressell and his book, as well as on the Liverpool socialists who rescued his burial place and Fred Ball his biographer, to whom we owe the recovery of the book in its original form. Others, however, tell us more about the lecturer than the book.

Norman Willis, for example, gave the 1983 lecture on 'Tressell and the Unions'. He starts by relating how he went to Liverpool and how he "flew to Manchester from Heathrow and was driven to Heathrow by a rather elderly gentleman in a car...(who) told me that he was a Tory voter". One wonders how Tressell would have treated,

and what name he would have given, a rather portly trade union leader with a Tory-voting chauffeur.

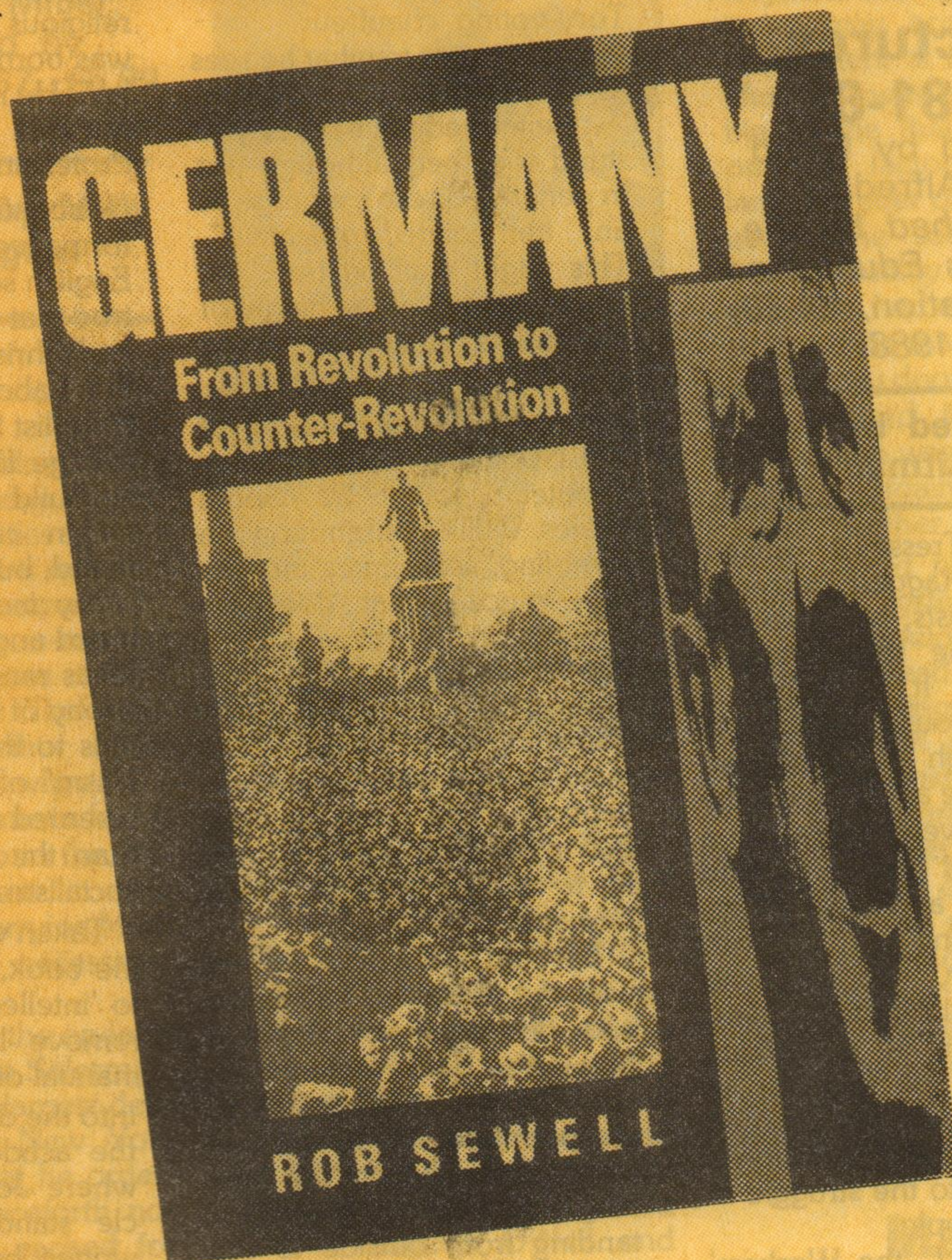
Willis points to what he sees as a weakness in the book: "...the immediate necessity to stand together, although put in general, doesn't emerge as an immediate objective". This might well be true, yet one year later, at the height of the miners' strike, the failure of the TUC 'to stand together' and mobilise full support for the NUM led to Willis being shouted down in South Wales. Willis' contribution is a rambling, sometimes incoherent piece (what does his description of the People's March for Jobs as "not just a protest, but a moving, self-educating force" mean?), but includes one gem of self-perception: "I've been accused that in the class war I was only fit to be a hostage. Well, perhaps".

It would take a book to deal with the mistakes, half-truths and distortions of Raphael Samuel's 1985 lecture. To him, Tressell and all socialists, are people apart, a 'spiritual elect', separate from the working class, "bringing understanding from outside to the people". Workers are ignorant, and the socialist elite must bring them the gospel. This stands Marxism on its head; the socialist is not part of a separate vanguard, but rooted in the working class. Neither are workers 'ignorant' – this is precisely the attitude of those who do stand outside the working class, and blame the workers for their own condition. Marxism is, after all, the generalised experience of the working class, and this is what Tressell attempts to do in the book, to generalise the experience of his fellow workers into a critique of capitalism. It is no accident that the talk of ignorance and divisions comes from those trade union leaders who seek to shift the blame for divisions, defeats and the failure to achieve socialism away from themselves and the rest of the right wing leadership and onto the shoulders of the workers themselves.

Samuel also sees "socialist vanguardism" arising from Christianity, from "a deep religious culture"; "socialism was born as a new Christianity". He repeats the old chestnut that "it was a very deep Protestantism and above all Nonconformity which is the formative culture...on which English socialism grows". It is true that many early socialists had Christian beliefs, and that the Labour Church and the Socialist Sunday Schools had a large following, attempting to build a better moral life within capitalism ('not just bread, but bread and roses'); many more had a variety of weird and wonderful mystical ideas ranging from the theosophy of Besant and the Fabians to the 'Religion of Socialism' of Bax, but this represented the weakness rather than the strength of English socialism.

Taken with other lectures in the book, there is an attempt to 'intellectualise' Tressell, to remove his book from the manual of the socialist activist into the discussion material of the academic circle. This is where John Nettleton's article stands out as the one written by an active worker. This, though, is the other side of the coin; *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* no longer plays the role it did in the labour movement. Tony Benn, in his essay on why we don't have socialism, points out that "one reason why Tressell's dream has never been realised is that the labour movement has given up analysis to explain what is actually happening". The complete lack of theory within the leadership of the Labour Party is reflected throughout the labour movement. It is the task of the Marxists, in building the movement, to raise and discuss the question of theory. This process will also rescue *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* from the hands of the academics and return it, despite its weaknesses, to its place as one of the major novels of the socialist movement.

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