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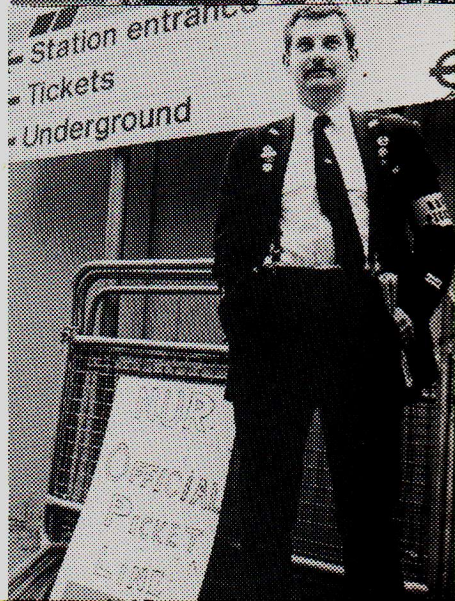
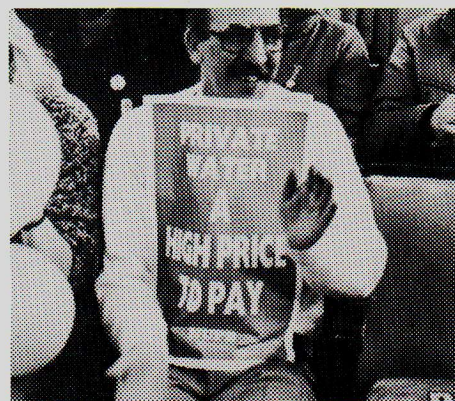
Militant

International Review

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Autumn 1989

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Labour's Defence U-turn/Poll Tax/China
France 1793/Japan/Nigeria/Greens...

Militant

International Review

Autumn 1989

Issue 41

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Thatcher and the government are now under pressure. In the cover article, John Pickard analyses why the fortunes of the Tories have slumped.



Peter Taaffe argues that the political revolution against Stalinism in Eastern Europe is well underway.

Cover Design: Richard Evans

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Thatcher on the slide



Industrial disputes, a deteriorating economy, growing opposition to privatisation and the poll tax — the Tories are under pressure. John Pickard explains why a new period in British politics is opening up.

In a matter of only a few weeks there has been a decisive turn in the position of Thatcherism. From having appeared almost invincible, the government suddenly seems to be under assault from all sides: from the trade unions, in the opinion polls and elections, and in terms of a deepening economic crisis. This represents a fundamental break with the last ten years that will usher in a qualitatively new stage in British politics.

At the Tory Party conference last October,

Thatcher was accorded a ten-minute standing ovation, interspersed with chants of 'ten more years, ten more years!'. Joe Rogaly, echoing the mood, wrote (*Financial Times*, 14.10.88) 'the Tories are suddenly imbued with the sense that they really can look forward to at least one and probably two further election victories. Such predictions are no longer mere rhetoric.'

As a direct reflection of the Tories' overweening confidence, the spokesmen of the right wing of the labour movement, led by the misnamed 'Communist' Party, were beside themselves with grief. It was no longer possible, we were informed, for the Labour Party — at least in the foreseeable future — to win a general election on its own. It was therefore necessary for Labour to seek constitutional change to bring in proportional representation, and then to forge alliances with the Liberals and SDP to get Thatcher out.

In further justification of this gloom, the soft left (in reality the new right) of the labour movement repeated the myth put out by the Tory press that trade unions were unpopular, that the rank and file did not want to go on strike, and that the left union leaders were out of touch.

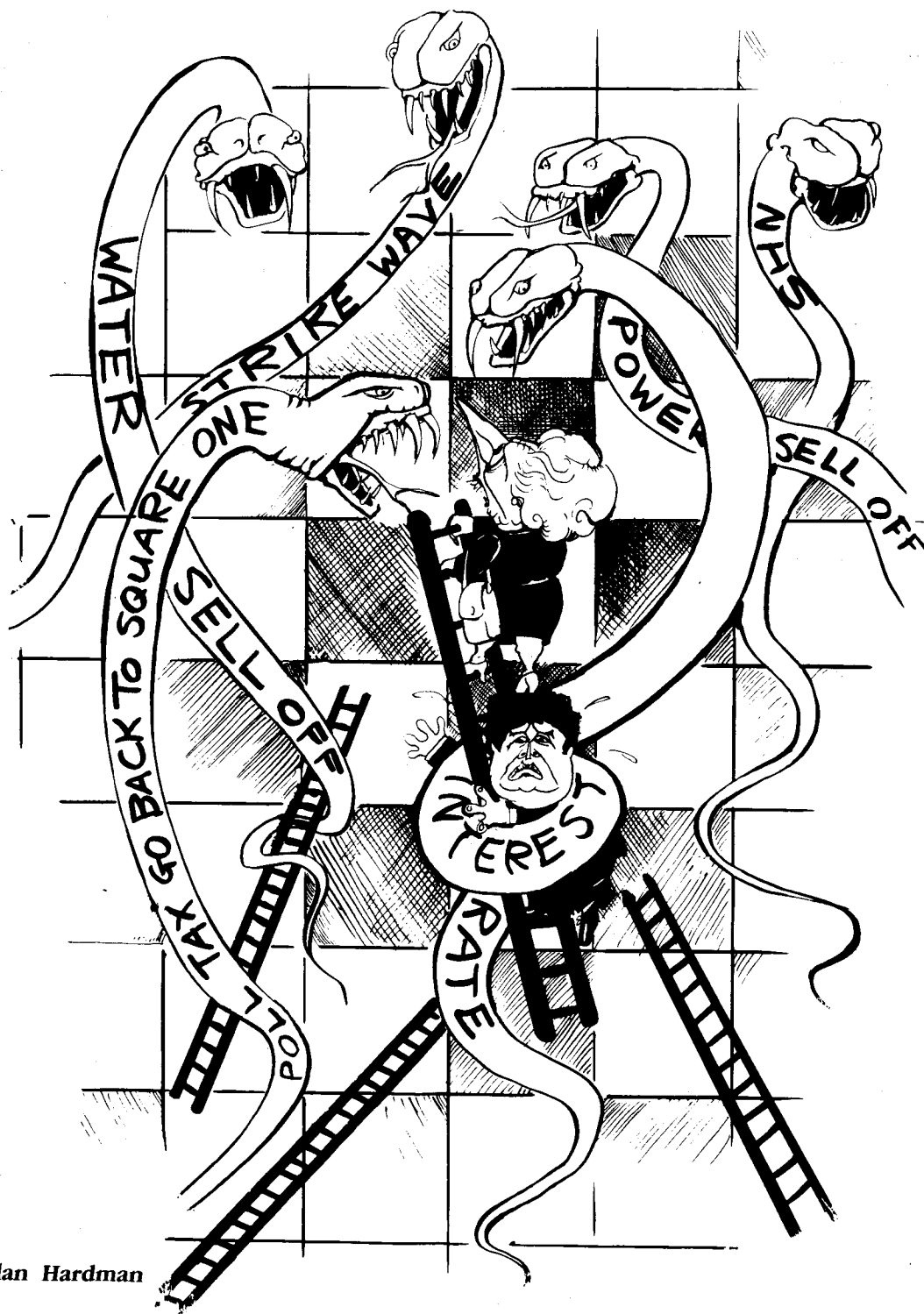
The Labour Party Policy Reviews are probably the most right-wing Labour documents since the war. They typify the leadership's pessimism. On all fundamental policy questions the new right have abandoned the basic tenets of the socialist movement. It was not for nothing that Thatcher goaded Kinnock with having adopted as his theme tune the song 'I did it her way.'

Only the supporters of the Marxist paper *Militant* argued that the apparent electoral acceptance of the Tories hid a groundswell of bitterness that existed just below the surface of society. It was only a matter of time, *Militant* argued, before this opposition exploded into the open.

Through unending cuts in the public sector, the government have antagonised wide layers of workers in the health service, in education and the local authorities. Even in the private sector, where wage levels have kept pace with or even exceeded the inflation rate, workers kept their 'heads above water' only through accepting a punishing increase in the pace of work, with added overtime and vicious cost-cutting of health and safety standards.

But in less than a year, the gloom merchants have been confounded. Opinion polls show that the Tories' popularity has sunk to its lowest level since 1982. The miserable result obtained in the June Euro-election was the lowest percentage share of the popular vote that the Tories have recorded in a national election for a hundred years! Small wonder that there are now public splits developing within the Tories, and especially within the Cabinet.

The fundamental reason for this turn in the



Alan Hardman

political situation has been the growing economic crisis. In his speech to last year's Tory Conference, Nigel Lawson waxed lyrical about the bountiful state of the economy under his chancellorship. 'People understandably feel more confident about their future than they had for decades.' The balance of payments deficit was a minor 'scare' that would be overcome and the increased rate of inflation, he reassured worried delegates, was a 'blip' that would dis-

appear. 'Everywhere a new spirit is alive,' he enthused, 'and a new confidence; with factories humming, new businesses starting up, busy cranes dotting the skyline and unemployment falling month after month.' Earning his own standing ovation, led by Thatcher, he added that growth would 'go on and on.'

But now the real, underlying picture, which was masked for a time by the short-lived boomlet has now begun to reveal itself. It is a picture



A disaster ahead for British capitalism

of chronic decay and decline, made worse in the years of Tory stewardship, and it shows that there is a disaster looming for British capitalism.

Despite the Tories' claims of an economic miracle, the real position of the manufacturing sector is bleak. A recent article in *Political Quarterly* pointed out that net manufacturing investment in new buildings, plant and machinery in 1980-1988 was fully 63 per cent down on 1971-79. The government, it pointed out, has been fooling itself by counting as 'positive fixed investment by the private sector' all sales by the public sector of land and houses.

In the last two years, the Tory tax cuts promoted a marked consumer boom, but the weakness of British industry meant that this resulted in a sharp increase in imports and a ballooning balance of payments deficit. The current account deficit in trade is expected this year to be near £16bn and all the indications are that it will get much worse in the next few years. *Political Quarterly* describes the position in front of Lawson as 'a strategic predicament of staggering proportions', with the only real alternative to having the trade deficit exploding to £40bn or £50bn, 'a virtual stop to growth or even an absolute decline in total demand and output.'

This underlying weakness in the economy has seen the pound slide on international currency markets, thus importing inflation. Lawson has already spent large sums from the currency reserves in the recent period, to maintain the value of the pound. In an attempt to stem inflation and squeeze out the consumer boom, he has been forced to increase interest rates to 14 per cent.

Now the government is faced with a dilemma, with an unpalatable choice in front of them. Either they must allow sterling to fall with world money market forces which would help exports, but make imports more expensive, with the result that inflation will take off. Such a policy would ultimately lead to recession. Or alternatively, they can keep raising interest rates to protect the pound and minimise inflation, with the result that the economy could be forced into an even earlier recession.

Lawson is gambling on being able to pull off a 'soft landing' i.e. a reduction in the rate of economic growth (and inflation) by the upward revision of interest rates, but without bringing the economy to a dead stop. The unpredictable factor that Lawson can do little about is the world economy which is looking increasingly precarious.

The US economy is by far the biggest of all the capitalist countries, as big as the next six all added together. The long boom in the US economy, caused among other factors by the huge increase in arms spending during the Reagan years, has been the main locomotive force behind the boom in the West as a whole. But now, due to high interest rates in America, most leading US economists believe that their economy will begin to move into recession towards the end of this year or the beginning of next.

When the US and world economy catches cold, British capitalism gets pneumonia. A new recession will provoke a collapse in sterling, reflecting the basic weakness and international lack of confidence in the economy. Already, the latest six-monthly forecasts of the OECD anticipate that for the next two years, at least, the British economy will show a lower rate of growth and an 'unacceptably high' level of inflation, above that of the other seven biggest capitalist countries. Unemployment, according to the forecast, will begin to increase towards the end of 1989. Already, although official unemployment figures show a fall, the reduction is slowing down. In manufacturing there is still an on-going process of redundancies and closures.

This underlying economic crisis of Thatcherism will inevitably be translated into political crisis. The rises in interest rates, with the effect this has had on the level of mortgage payments, and the doubling of inflation to a level of over 8 per cent (although many workers dispute whether this accurately reflects price rises) have begun to have their effect. Workers who were briefly better off after the 1988 tax cuts have found that the benefits have been eaten away by price rises and higher mortgage payments.

These factors have been the catalyst triggering the present wave of industrial struggle. To an extent the trade unions have turned the tables on the bosses by taking advantage of the

* A fate worse than debt.
Penguin 1988, £4.99

boom conditions in the labour market to fight for better conditions. Beginning in the south and in those sectors where there has been a shortage of labour, and then spreading throughout the whole of industry, there has been a regeneration of the trade unions and a renewed willingness to take the bosses on.

The workers have seen the colossal rises being forked out for the bosses. Last year, the average director got a rise of 28 per cent, three times the rate of inflation. So workers are demanding their 'share' of the boom. In the last few months, the wage rises gained by many sections of workers have been much higher than the Tories would have preferred.

Workers at ICI have got 9.6 per cent; BBC staff and railworkers 8.8 per cent; electricity supply workers 9.2 per cent; and Nalco 8.8 per cent (with 9.5 per cent for the lower paid). British Rail workers could have won far more with a determined leadership, but their victory was described by a government minister as 'game, set and match to Jimmy Knapp.' Similarly, government ministers appeared shocked by the NALGO settlement which covers half a million workers in local government.

Recent battles have also contained a defensive element. The Thatcher government has promoted the introduction of dictatorial methods of management in many areas of industry and workplaces. Even in service sectors like education and the health service, where such 'management-worker' relationships were not so sharply polarised in the past, these methods have been introduced.

Now, in a political and economic climate more advantageous to their struggle, workers are insisting that 'enough is enough.' The strikes in the railways, on the tubes, and on the docks have been attempts to defend established conditions of employment and negotiation procedures.

By the first week of July, the government, according to *The Times*, was 'digging in for the worst week of industrial chaos in ten years.' Almost as many days were lost in industrial struggle in a single week than in the whole of 1986! In recognition of the seriousness of the situation, Thatcher formed a special Cabinet committee to oversee the government's policy on the industrial disputes.

In that one week there were strikes by half a million local authority workers, a one-day strike on the London Underground and the British Rail network, the beginning of a crippling overtime ban by Aslef and the start of the national dock strike. In addition, the engineers began to ballot their members about a campaign of industrial action for a 35-hour week. When the underground, railways and the London buses were all out on strike together, it was the most complete transport strike in the capital since the general strike of 1926.

In addition, in a development that may have

profound consequences for the future, unofficial committees sprung up, best typified by the quasi-secret group that initiated the London Tube strikes over pay. These unofficial formations have put pressure on the official union machinery, acting as a 'shadow' on the leadership and at the same time forcing them to organise official action. Unofficial strikes broke out in the building industry and, for the first time, on the North Sea oil rigs, over safety and union recognition.

But while the workers instinctively dismissed the Tory union-busting laws, unfortunately, the union leadership continue to be intimidated by them. The TGWU leaders failed to conduct a serious struggle on behalf of the dockers — a stark reminder of the gap that exists between the willingness of the workers to fight and the readiness of their 'leaders' to respond.

The Tories had prepared for the abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme for over two years. After the announcement that abolition legislation would be enacted, for a further period of three months the bosses made their plans. Yet in all this time, when they should have been preparing the whole of the TGWU for an all-out fight, the dockers leaders did nothing.

When the Tories announced abolition, the dockers instinctively took action. The union leaders could have used that momentum to galvanise the whole union to back the dockers, bringing in the non-scheme ports in a fight for a national ports agreement to replace the old scheme.

Organised appeals could also have been made into the trade union movement as a whole. If necessary the fight could have been taken up against the Tory anti-union laws, rendering them impotent as the dockers' strike of 1972 had done. A magnificent victory would have been possible.

Instead, under the pretext of supposed 'tactics' Ron Todd led the dockers through a confusing legal dance, the only result of which was the demoralisation and demobilisation of the dockers. The bosses were able to pick off the dockers by brute intimidation, one port at a time, leaving the national strike in tatters.

As if to turn tragedy into farce, a week after leading the 1989 dock strike into a shambles, the TGWU leaders were at the head of a celebration of the magnificent 1889 'dockers' tanner' strike. If only the leaders of today showed a fraction of the grit and determination of their forebears of a hundred years ago!

Nevertheless, the dispiriting effect of the dockers' defeat will not be long-lasting. It will not affect the generalised turn in the mood in the unions and in industry. The growing industrial struggles are but a mild anticipation of future titanic battles.

They are only the surface reflection of a profound swing of political opinion against the Tor-

There has been a regeneration of the trade unions



**At the next
election a
Labour
victory is
now likely**

ies, a swing clearly manifested in the Euro-elections, the recent parliamentary by-elections and in the opinion polls.

According to opinion polls, on every major political issue the government are now in a minority, in some cases even among the dwindling band of Tory voters. There is mass opposition to the privatisation of water, inextricably linked in the public mind with the government's kid-gloved attitude to water pollution and the general deterioration in the standards of the supply.

Then there is the question of the National Health Service. According to the British Medical Association, a normally conservative body which the government have managed to alienate and which is conducting a bitter campaign against Clarke's White Paper, as many as 75 per cent of the population are opposed to the proposed changes.

Even on questions like rail accidents, food hygiene and the environment — not major issues in the past — the Tories have been indicted and found guilty by public opinion. The huge vote for the Greens in the Euro-election reflected the generalised unease at Thatcher's indifference to food contamination, the water poisoning and a general neglect of environmental questions.

Last but not least, the Tories have created a time-bomb for themselves with the poll tax, a grossly unfair tax, even by the admission of many Tories themselves. The opposition to the tax in Scotland, in which supporters of *Militant*, have played a leading part, has reached the point where as many as a million are refusing to

pay. (See *Tories' Poll Tax Dilemma* in this issue).

The accumulation of all these factors has generated a profound class polarisation and a decisive move against the Tories. Quantity has been transformed into quality.

In every region there has been a swing away from the Tories, including in the south of England. In the Euro-poll, the Tories received a drubbing. It was their first defeat in any national poll since 1979, and the lowest share of a national vote since 1859, just after the Crimean War! If the same result was to be repeated in a general election, it would mean a landslide victory, giving Labour an overall majority. Labour now has a majority of Euro-members, reversing the proportion that existed previously. There is not a single Tory Euro-MP from either Scotland or Wales.

But these Tory defeats do not reflect a pro-Labour sentiment. The Labour leadership will claim that their increased electoral support is due to the publication of their new Policy Review, with the rightward shift in policy that it incorporates. But the election results and polls show a different story. There was no great enthusiasm shown for Labour in the Vauxhall by-election, where the turnout was only 45 per cent. In the Glasgow Central by-election Labour held onto the seat, but only against a swing of 15 per cent to the SNP.

Both the Euro-elections and the by-elections confirmed the tendency for the two minor parties of capitalism, the SDP and the SLD, to be squeezed. The SLD is now fighting over their name, as if that would make any fundamental difference to their fortunes.

In the south-west the Greens got up to a quarter of the votes, pushing the Tories into third place in many instances and undermining their historic constituency of support. Appalled by the government's neglect of the environment, water standards, transport and on similar issues, thousands of former Conservatives broke from a lifetime's habit.

Although based on an anti-Tory rather than a pro-Labour mood, the change in the political climate now increases the possibility of a Labour victory in the next general election. It is doubtful whether the Greens would get such a large vote, when there will be an even more pronounced polarisation along class lines. They, together with the SDP and the SLD, will be squeezed between the two big parties. But many of those who deserted to the Greens from the Tories will not necessarily go back to the Tories, raising the possibility of the government party losing a large number of seats in the south.

The class polarisation that will characterise the run-up to the next general election will cut across the growth of the SNP, as it did in the Glasgow Central by-election, compared to their

earlier result in Glasgow Govan. For the moment everything seems to be running in the Labour Party's favour. The whole psychology has changed, with industrial struggles and political successes inter-reacting and reinforcing one another, and at each step increasing the general feeling that the Tories and Thatcher can be beaten.

Because of these ominous trends in the votes and opinion polls, there are now open splits developing in the Tory Party. Much Tory criticism is now directed at Thatcher herself. Where she was once regarded as a huge asset for the Tories, she is now perceived as a net liability, an albatross around the neck of the party. Where so many Tory MPs are in danger of losing their seats, in the south and the west midlands, their former loyalty to the 'great leader' will soon be jettisoned.

Even extreme right-wing commentators like Peregrine Worsthorne, writing in *The Sunday Express* after the Euro-election results, echo the fearful mood now developing in the Tories' ranks. 'What is most worrying about Mrs Thatcher,' he wrote, 'is the impression she increasingly gives of believing herself to be infallible. 'She has become', he added, 'impervious to ideas that fall outside her fairly limited range of vision.'

Thatcher's autumn Cabinet reshuffle was a bungled attempt to head off criticism of herself by removing or demoting potential rivals within the government. At the same time it shows a panicky reaction to the Tories' unpopularity, and a crude 'refurbishing' of the party's image. But with policies unchanged, the pressure for the 'iron lady' herself to go will only intensify.

Within days, if not hours of the reshuffle, there was general skepticism even within Tory ranks over the changes. Thatcher managed, in one move, to alienate the three most senior members of the Cabinet. Tory MP Patrick Cormack commented (*Independent*, 8.8.89) that 'almost no-one, from left or right, including those of us who consider ourselves true (if you like 'old-fashioned') Tories, like the events surrounding the reshuffle...'

If there is no improvement in the electoral fortunes of the party, its more astute strategists will try to engineer an early retirement for Thatcher, possibly on health grounds. The hope would then be to wheel on a new leader, probably a 'wet' like Walker or Heseltine, with a mandate to popularise the image of the party in time for the next general election.

A change in the leadership could be accompanied by retreats on various policy questions, including the hated poll tax. But even that manoeuvre can have only a limited effect. The Tories ditched Harold Macmillan and brought in Alec Douglas Home just before the 1964 election. But that did not prevent Labour from winning a small overall majority.

If the political pendulum swung to the right in the ten years of Thatcherism, society is now preparing a mighty sweep to the left. All the pent-up hatred of Thatcherism will be released; there will be a furious reaction, especially when there is a return to economic recession.

The previous decade was one of mild political reaction. Now it will be followed by the 'red nineties' when old anti-Tory traditions will be renewed in areas like the north, Wales and Scotland and new anti-Tory traditions will be created in the formerly prosperous south.

A Labour government is likely to be elected. Immediately, it will come under relentless pressure from the state, the capitalist class and the Treasury to carry out policies in the interests of capital. But at the same time, an incoming Labour government will feel the pressure of the mass of the working class, through the trade union and party membership. Whatever may be written into the election manifesto, there will be high expectations that 12 or 13 years of Tory wrongs will be put right by Labour.

The Labour government would be faced with the choice of either bowing the knee to the capitalist class — and in the economic conditions that would mean a programme of counter-reforms — or of mobilising the mass support of the working class to take over the running of the big monopolies.

The next Labour government will be a government of crisis from the very beginning. It will not be like the Labour governments of 1964-70 and 1974-79, although these carried out counter-reforms in the interests of capitalism. It will be far more like the governments of 1924 and 1929-31. On the latter occasion, the economic crisis was so great that it led to a sharp move to the left within the rank and file of the party leading to the leadership splitting off to form a National Government with the Tories.

Already with their Policy Review the present Labour leadership have 'trimmed the sails' in preparation for counter-reforms in the future. If Labour imposes capitalist policies, then there will be a heavy price to pay in disillusionment, increased support for the SNP in Scotland and the possible danger of political reaction. But the living experiences of the working class, conditioned by the crushing economic crisis of capitalism, will also push the workers in the direction of Marxist ideas.

In an interview not long after the last election, Thatcher expressed a wish to go 'on and on', with the clear implication that she would still be there into the 1990s. In the last analysis, the subjective wishes of politicians are outweighed by objective social and economic conditions. Neither Thatcher nor her government are likely to outlast the next two or three years. □

**Society is
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Tory poll tax dilemma

Clive Heemskerk explains the difficulties for the Tories in imposing the poll tax when faced with a mass non-payment campaign.



**They have
misjudged
the Scottish
working
class**

The struggle against the poll tax has entered a decisive phase. The contending forces are assembled, the battle lines prepared.

Yet, just at this moment, the 'general staff' of the ruling class — the parliamentary representatives, civil servants and media editors — are gripped with fear and trepidation. This is in marked contrast to the confidence displayed just 18 months ago.

Thatcher and her cabinet consciously prepared for this battle. Local government employs over a million and a half workers, white-collar and manual. It expends over £30bn annually. It is an important bridgehead of public sector trade unionism, as the NALGO dispute demonstrates.

Local councils, particularly the urban areas under Labour domination, are an alternative source of power to central government. To realise the strategic aim of the British capitalists, to restore their profits at the expense of workers' living standards, they had to be 'dealt with.'

The poll tax culminates an assault on local government which included cuts in central government grants, the abolition of the GLC and ILEA, and ratecapping. Not accidentally, the Tories only announced the poll tax when the magnificent struggle of the *Militant*-influenced Liverpool Council, left isolated by the Labour leaders, was defeated.

Even then they proceeded with caution, moving in Scotland first. Imagine what the situation would have been today if the poll tax had been introduced in April throughout the whole of the UK!

But imagine also what would have been the situation now if the leaders of the official organisations of the labour movement had led the non-payment struggle in Scotland.

But the strategists of the ruling class had the measure of their labour movement counterparts. This explained their supreme confidence as they surveyed the field ahead. But this was also their fundamental miscalculation.

Looking at the leaders, they misjudged the temper of the Scottish working class. They underestimated the determination, particularly of working class women on the estates, to organise an effective struggle. The Scottish supporters of *Militant*, with an understanding of strategy and tactics, played a significant role, pulling together the community based Anti-Poll Tax Unions into Federations, shaping the angry protests into a conscious movement.

Just twenty months ago Scottish Secretary Malcolm Rifkind dismissed opposition with his now infamous quote from Hilaire Belloc:

*"Whatever happens, we have got
The Gatling gun, and they have not."*

Opponents of non-payment in the labour movement, for their own reasons, did not dispute the effectiveness of the Tories' legal 'Gatling gun.' John Maxton, MP, argued that "the law has been so devised that non-payment is extremely hard to organise. If someone in employment refuses to pay, *after three months the local authority will obtain a court order arresting their wages and the tax will be paid.*"

And yet, by early September, this 'fearsomely devised' law had yet to be deployed! In Scotland, nearly a million are still not paying the poll tax.

The Finance Director of Lothians Regional Council announced in June that the whole procedure for collecting the tax was to be delayed by one month. Strathclyde Regional Council blamed strike action by poll tax staff in the Nalgo pay dispute for their failure to pursue non-payers. This hardly augers well for when these same workers are asked to implement warrant sales or wage or benefit arrestments!

But fundamentally what are involved here are not technical or administrative factors but political ones, a realisation of the real balance of forces.

This was demonstrated in July when Strathclyde Regional Council attempted to value the possessions of Janette McGinn. This was to begin recovery of a £50 fine for refusing to register for the poll tax.

The council were forced to abandon the valuation and call off the Sheriff's Officers. Yet 300 still turned out to blockade the street! This is just a glimpse of what would happen if moves were made at this stage against non-payers.

It also illustrates that the *social weight* of the non-payers is as decisive as their total numbers. One in five (750,000) individuals, scattered throughout Scotland, is not necessarily a decisive force. But even 500,000 *organised* non-payers, concentrated in the giant housing schemes, would be a force that could not be easily dislodged.

Certainly, if the non-payment campaign was in retreat, the ruling class would proclaim it everywhere, to once again crush the idea of militant struggle.

Yet there was only one item in the national press in the whole of July! And this, despite its bold title, 'Most Scots have paid the poll tax', (*Independent*, 26 July 1989) suggested that 20-23% had not paid, according with the *Scotland on Sunday* estimate of 800,000 non-payers.

An impossible dilemma now faces the regional councils and behind them the Tory government. If they do not act the non-payment movement will grow. But it will also grow if, at this stage, they do act!

Faced with a mass movement the nerves of the Tory strategists fray and divisions surface. This explains the open clashes on the Tory benches over the so-called 'safety-net' money for England and Wales.

The 'safety-net' was itself a partial retreat, introduced to cushion the initial impact in the deprived inner-city areas by charging a higher poll tax elsewhere. But this merely aggravated the opposition to the poll tax of workers and layers of the middle class in the Tory shires! Having retreated once, Ridley was obliged to re-retreat, putting in £100m and adjusting the

safety-net arrangements in July.

More significantly, the 8.5% increase announced then in central government funding, because this money accounts for 75% of total council income, leaves open the *possibility* for further concessions in the Autumn. This has been picked up by Labour's front bench with Neil Kinnock speaking of the Tories "pork-barrel" politics.

But what the Labour leaders don't explain is that far more could be won than just extra money for some councils. If they declared in favour of non-payment, organised a series of rallies and demonstrations in Scotland and prepared now for industrial action to back up the movement, the poll tax would be withdrawn.

This would spell the beginning of the end of the Tory government itself. For it is not clear how the Tories could effect an orderly retreat. It will not be enough, for example, to fund the entire £625m 'safety-net' from central government.

An attempt was made this year to buy off the opposition in Strathclyde, where the movement developed earlier than elsewhere in Scotland. Through a combination of revenue support grant, a deferred 'clawback' of funds and 'safety-net' money, Strathclyde received over £100m to keep down the first year poll tax — more than Bush gave to Poland on his recent trip!

Nonetheless, this 'largesse' did not fatally undermine the non-payment campaign and will not do so, particularly in the urban conurbations of England and Wales.

The other schema of the Tories' local government backbench committee — to remove education spending from local authority budgets and fund it from Whitehall — would cut poll tax bills in April 1990 by 40% or so. But this would cost the government seven billion pounds!

In the poll tax battle to date, the ruling class have backed Thatcher at the head of the Conservative Party, although with growing apprehension and misgiving. As *The Guardian* (20 July), commented, "for a time the post-1987 balloon of popularity cushioned fears about the tax. The balloon is burst." A rout on such a scale — and it could not be disguised as anything else — would see the end of Thatcher.

Moreover, it would not end the movement actually underway in Scotland! As Dave Nellist MP taunted the Tories in parliament, "those 800,000 people in Scotland have crossed the Rubicon; they have decided on the illegal non-payment of the poll tax."

By the same token, because the stakes for Thatcher are so high, and without a decisive lead from the Labour leaders, the struggle will be a protracted one. The 'phoney war' will end and the government will be forced to confront Scotland. But despite all the obstacles a mighty movement has been built and the ground for a famous victory laid. □

MIR □9
Autumn 1989
Poll Tax



'Gatling gun'
Rifkind.

It is not
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Labour's U-turn on defence

Michael Roberts analyses Labour's Policy Review on defence.



Kinnock has discarded his CND badge, (right).

Britain's puny armed forces are no credible defence

In their Policy Review documents to be presented to this year's party conference, the Labour leaders have adopted the policies of capitalism. They have embraced the 'market economy', completely dispensing with socialism, public ownership and workers' democracy. This rejection of socialism is also mirrored in foreign policy, with the acceptance of British nuclear weapons, an expanded conventional armed forces contribution to NATO and the maintenance of a private arms industry.

The Labour leaders clearly understand nothing about how to achieve world peace and disarmament.

Whether Britain maintains a large or small army, more or less stockpiles of weapons, nuclear or non-nuclear armaments, they would all be useless in defending the country in the event of war with either superpower, the USSR or the USA. Just a single megaton nuclear bomb landing on the UK would annihilate most of the population. The conventional arms superiority of the Russians is so formidable that experts agree that they could occupy Europe, including Britain, within six to eight weeks.

Faced with such overwhelming odds, Britain's puny armed forces are no credible defence. The only real defence is one where a socialist government appeals to the workers of the superpowers to stop any attack on Britain and overthrow any government that threatens to do so. Socialist internationalism, not multilateral arms

control or even nuclear unilateralism in isolation, is the only real guarantee of world peace.

Labour's right-wing leaders try to dress up their new policy of 'keeping the bomb' as the product of new opportunities and a changed situation brought about by Glasnost and Perestroika in the Soviet Union and President Reagan's 'vision' in recognising these changes. This new 'political compulsion for peace', they say, justifies a changed policy which will include elements of unilateralism, bilateralism and multilateralism.

But what is this unilateralist part of the Labour leaders' new policy? The next Labour government will unilaterally 'cancel the order as soon as we come into office' of one of the four Trident submarine nuclear weapon systems that the Tories are purchasing from the USA to replace Polaris in the 1990s! In addition, the Labour leaders plan a further courageous unilateralist action. They 'will cancel Tory plans to increase the number of warheads on each Trident compared with the existing number of Polaris warheads'!

This is all that is left of Labour's unilateralism in its new 'multi-faceted' strategy for peace. The Labour leaders justify their unwillingness to decommission the other three Trident subs on the grounds that they will already have been built and there are no financial savings from halting their completion.

But that should not stop Labour decom-

missioning these submarines. As the Policy Review admits, Britain's independent nuclear deterrent is neither 'independent' nor a 'deterrent'. All the servicing of the Tridents will take place in King's Bay in Georgia by the US who hold all the spare parts, while the missiles themselves would still be under US control, being periodically returned to the US stockpile in King's Bay.

The Policy Review recognises that: 'it is inaccurate to describe Britain's tiny nuclear capability as a deterrent. If the Soviet Union were not deterred by the immense missile arsenal of the USA it would certainly not be deterred by Britain's capability, constituting four per cent of the American total'.

The Labour leaders are advocating a policy which ties the defence of Britain entirely to the foreign policy and interests of the American ruling-class. That may be entirely acceptable to the British ruling-class and the Tories, but it should be rejected outright by a socialist government.

And what of the savings from the cancellation of the one Trident submarine? Will they be used for badly needed public and social services? Unfortunately not. Instead the Labour leaders plan to find 'alternative work at the Barrow shipyard, most likely for a hunter-killer submarine which would enhance our capability within NATO'.

The Policy Review makes no commitment to reducing conventional weaponry. On the contrary it wastes no time in railing against 'reckless' Tory cuts in arms spending and recommends 'maximum cost-effectiveness' in order to get 'value for money' from the defence budget.

Surely any socialist Labour policy document should be committed to drastic cuts in conventional arms, while providing means to convert arms industry into civil use so that the jobs and conditions of workers employed in the military sector are protected. But conversion to civilian employment could only succeed if a Labour government renationalised those sectors of arms industry privatised by the Tories, and brought into public ownership under workers' control and management other sectors, as part of an overall socialist plan for the economy to expand civil production.

The Labour leaders say nothing of this. Instead, they insist on promoting conventional arms spending. The Policy Review notes that



state contracts for arms spending provide an important source of profits for several multinational companies. Indeed, says the Review, the defence sector is one of the 'few coherent segments of British manufacturing industry'. This apparently justifies leaving the arms manufacturers untouched by a Labour government.

Behind the Labour leaders' policy lies a complete lack of a class approach to foreign policy and world peace. The British army cannot protect the British people from attack from any superpower — the only conceivable aggressors. It is too small and anyway that is not its real purpose. Under the British capitalist system, the army is there to protect the British ruling class, if necessary, against what Thatcher has called the 'enemy within' i.e an aroused labour movement which could threaten the profit system. It also exists to promote the interests of British big business, its markets and spheres of influence (such as they are) worldwide.

The Labour leaders claim that the new policy is based on the new opportunities that have opened up for bilateral and multilateral negotiations which would bring about the end of British nuclear weapons through what Kinnock has called 'something for something' instead for 'nothing'.

But is it true that such opportunities exist? The widely praised and publicised INF treaty between Reagan and Gorbachev which removed Cruise missiles reduced the world stock of nuclear weapons by 'only four per cent of the total' (Policy Review). Everything apparently now depends on the success of the Strategic Arms Talks (START), the first phase of which aims to cut by half the number of intercontinental missiles held by the superpowers. In the

Labour's new strategy cannot bring peace.

NATO has no intention of eliminating nuclear weapons



**Spending
on
conventional,
chemical
and
biological
weapons is
accelerating**

second phase, the idea is that Britain will enter the negotiations, along with all the other nuclear powers, to negotiate away their weaponry.

Thus a future Labour government would have no plans to dispense with weaponry which it admits offers no defence against attack and is not even under the independent control of any British government, unless and until START phase 1 and START phase 2 talks are completed successfully.

But START 1 will take some time to complete as Bush is insisting on heavy cuts in Soviet conventional forces over and above the unilateral cut of 200,000 already planned by Gorbachev before discussing further nuclear arms reductions.

Also, NATO has agreed to oppose any discussions on short-range nuclear missiles until after the implementation of Soviet conventional cuts (that could be as late as 1993 or even 1997). They are insisting that the Soviet Union cut unilaterally its short-range missiles to NATO levels before discussions can begin.

There is no date even set for the commencement of START 2 or who will be involved and what will be up for discussion. Even under the most optimistic timetable it could be well into the mid-1990s before Britain's nuclear capability was even discussed. As Bruce Kent, Chairman of CND, has correctly pointed out, despite the fine language about peace in the Policy Review, 'a Labour government could run a full term of office, spend not a penny less than the Conservatives on the military, destroy not a single nuclear or conventional weapon, remove not a single foreign base and still claim to be working within a strict interpretation of this "new" policy' (*The Guardian* 14 July 1989).

While the Labour leaders prevaricate over keeping Britain's non-independent, non-deterrent nuclear weaponry, the superpowers are continuing with an expanded programme of modernisation and substitution that was agreed by NATO at Montebello in 1983. Cruise missiles may be leaving Greenham but new nuclear armed F-111s will soon be arriving at Upper Heyford. At the same time President Bush is pushing ahead with plans to develop new MX and Minuteman missiles. As the Policy Review document admits, these 'nuclear capable aircraft and nuclear sea-launched missiles... would be far more lethal' than those presently deployed.

The Labour leaders claim that they can 'persuade' the US government not to deploy these weapons. But the US ruling-class will not be swayed by any 'moral' appeal from a British government.

The Policy Review sets an objective of 'securing the elimination of all nuclear weapons by the year 2000'. At the same time as Labour's new policy was published, NATO officially announced that nuclear and conventional weapons would be needed 'for the foreseeable

future'.

NATO is an armed alliance of national capitalist ruling-classes under the leadership of American imperialism. Such a group has no intention of disarming, nuclear or non-nuclear weaponry, while the planned economies of Eastern Europe continue to exist, whatever 'compromises' and 'initiatives' Gorbachev may propose.

The Labour leaders place full reliance on what they call 'collective security' to achieve world peace. By accepting the idea of collective security, the Labour leaders swallow wholesale the argument of the Tories and the cold war theorists about the 'aggressive' intentions of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet build-up of arms and nuclear weapons was entirely a response to a justifiable fear of intervention by the imperialist powers after the last world war. But Stalin, Krushchev or Brezhnev never planned to invade Western Europe. They had enough on their hands in Eastern Europe. Clearly the Soviet army could have occupied Britain within weeks if they had wanted to. Yet the Labour leaders continue to hint at the Soviet threat and the need for collective security ie NATO.

The NATO powers have already publicly stated that their objective in any negotiations with the Soviet Union is only a partial reduction in nuclear weapons. They will never agree to a nuclear-free Europe.

Moreover, whatever temporary agreements are made, they do not remove the causes that created the need to make nuclear or other weaponry, and they do not remove the knowledge. As one commentator pointed out: 'it is a delusion, because even if we got rid of nuclear weapons, there are plenty of other means by which human beings can do terrible things to one another on a mass scale — chemical warfare is one obvious candidate. It is at any rate impractical: the secret is out and is widely dispersed. Nuclear status could be recovered during the course of a war and this possibility, along with the anxieties that someone somewhere would have kept a few devices for safe keeping' (Lawrence Freedman, Professor of War Studies, London University).

Nuclear weapons are just one part of the arsenal of mass destruction in the hands of the governments of the major powers. The Policy Review states 'it must be obvious to everybody that conventional war is more lethal and destructive today than it has ever been' and yet the Labour leaders plan to expand conventional arms spending in Britain.

There has been some sort of war somewhere in the world ever since the last world war. Far from plans to reduce or to disband conventional, chemical and biological arms, spending on these terrible weapons is on the increase worldwide. Ninety per cent of US spending on

arms is for conventional weaponry. The superpowers now account for only 63 per cent of conventional arms exports. Increasingly their power to control arms supply is weakening as conventional arms proliferate. World arms spending is now \$1000bn a year or five per cent of world output.

Even if a Labour government disbanded all nuclear, chemical or biological weapons what is to stop a new Tory government reversing that policy? And there is nothing in Labour's proposals to stop the capitalist state machine (army chiefs, secret service etc) working with armaments manufacturers to maintain nuclear capability behind the scenes. It must not be forgotten that in 1973 Labour's conference adopted a unilateralist policy but within a year Wilson and Callaghan, behind the backs of the party and most of the Cabinet, secretly decided to modernise ageing Polaris missiles at a cost of £1bn to the taxpayer, while Callaghan agreed to double Britain's contribution to NATO.

Without a fundamental change in the control of the state and the military industrial complex, there can be no guarantee that any policy of nuclear unilateralism would be implemented. While the capitalist class remains in control of the state machine they will continue to develop the arsenals of war to defend the profit system.

Marxists support unilateralism, not because it is a 'moral issue' as former CND chair Joan Ruddock MP has argued. Marxists see the question in class terms and call for public ownership under workers' control and management of the arms industries and for democratisation of the armed forces, including trade union membership and election of officers. Only in this way can the labour movement really exercise control over the military and the armaments industry to ensure that they act for the interests of working people and not for the capitalist state.

The anarchic and competitive nature of capitalism, particularly in its imperialist era, breeds conflict among the various capitalist powers over markets, profits and resources. There is intense rivalry between the USA, the European powers, and Japan as each tries to carve out its sphere of influence. This is increasingly exhibited in battles over trade restrictions and even within NATO over arms modernisation.

These conflicts will not disappear because they are in the nature of capitalism. In the past they have led to two world wars. The capitalist class is opposed to nuclear war because it would destroy the profit system, as well themselves physically! But if the labour movement was to suffer a series of defeats in the major imperialist nations leading to the establishment of military dictators, there would no longer be any guarantee that some such unstable regime would not launch a 'first strike' against a perceived enemy.

That is why world peace is only possible when state power passes into the hands of the working-class in the major imperialist and Stalinist countries on the basis of socialist democracy. And it is why the main foreign policy plank of a genuinely socialist Labour government would be an international appeal to working-classes of the USA and USSR to overthrow the big business class and Stalinist bureaucracy which rule over them and end the arms race. Only when socialist democracy is established in the superpower states can peace be really assured. Any other policy is utopian and false.

Neither the unilateralists nor the Labour leaders understand the causes of war and the nature of the arms race, and therefore how to achieve world peace. The authors of the Policy Review happily quote Clausewitz who said that 'war is nothing more than the continuation of politics by other means' and add "so too is peace." But they do not understand what Clausewitz meant.

He explained that whatever causes conflict between nations or classes may require settlement by force. But what does cause conflict? A doctor may be able to cure a patient temporarily by suppressing symptoms of illness; but unless the causes are known, a permanent cure or even better, preventive action, cannot be taken successfully and the disease is likely to reoccur. Unless we know the causes of war and the reasons for the arms race, we cannot stop or prevent it indefinitely.

The Policy Review authors imagine that the arms race and the 'cold war' were products of 'suspicion and tension' or 'mutual distrust and hostility'. That is like arguing that the only reason that there was a rail strike in Britain in the summer was because the management and unions were suspicious of each other, and it had nothing to do with low wages, management attacks on working conditions, and under-investment in railways that created the 'hostility'.

The world remains dominated by governments in the West which represent the interests of international bankers and multinationals. The governments of the East represent the narrow nationalist interests of a privileged and corrupt bureaucratic elite. They both prop up equally venal and reactionary regimes in the Third World. So there can be no permanent peace.

Rather than faith in 'fully' verifiable international agreements achieved by negotiation with and between the nuclear-armed powers' as the authors of the Policy Review believe will bring a nuclear-free and peaceful world, socialists will look to the revolutionary struggles of the working-class of the West and East and the masses in the Third World to establish workers democracy as the only guarantee of real and lasting peace. □



**Unilateralism
is not a
'moral'
issue**

Northern Ireland Twenty years since the troops went in

Clare Short, Labour MP and leader of the 'Time To Go' Campaign debates the issues with Peter Hadden of the Northern Ireland Labour and Trade Union Group.



'There was no alternative to sending in the troops in 1969'.

Clare Short

MIR: Why did the troops go in in 1969?

Clare Short (CS): The civil rights movement had very mild demands: one person one vote; equal access to housing and jobs etc. They marched. But it evoked an incredibly crude response from the Northern Ireland state. People were beaten and attacked and the police looked on or joined in. It got horrendously worse when it got to Derry, with burnings etc. The troops went in to protect the nationalists from the forces of the Northern Ireland state. They were initially welcomed and given their famous cups of tea.

MIR: Do you think they should have gone in?

CS: I think there was no alternative in those circumstances. That is why this slogan 'Troops Out' is totally confusing, as it suggests that the troops are only the problem rather than the need for a political settlement. You cannot just pull the troops out and leave the present political settlement.

Peter Hadden (PH): I do not think that the British troops were sent in to protect the minority community in the North. In the past, British imperialism partitioned Ireland partly to hold onto the North where there was the bulk of industry. But it was primarily to divide the working-class and prevent the struggle for soc-

ialism. The economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s changed the strategic interests of the British imperialists. The development of industry in the South, and trade with the South produced a relative stabilisation on the border. The border became an anachronism which the British would have liked to get rid of. That is why in the 1960s they put pressure on the Unionist government to introduce reforms and meet and discuss with the South, such as the Lemass-O'Neill talks. They hoped that this would lead to dismantling the Northern state and perhaps the reunification of Ireland by a federal solution.

The civil rights movement demanded basic democratic rights, but at the bottom it was a movement motivated by social and economic discontent among both Catholics and Protestants. The Protestants were sympathetic to the civil rights demands. It was a myth that it was just a Catholic movement. The first civil rights marches in Dungannon in August 1968 and in Derry in October 1968 had many Protestants supporting them and on the platform.

But the experience of the civil rights movement proved that the Unionist state could not be dismantled. Because it was a repressive institution, attempts to introduce reforms on the basis of that state and on the basis of capitalism would lead only to a backlash. In August 1969, the situation reached boiling point. There was the possibility of civil war. The British were forced to send in the troops, as they said at the time, as a 'temporary expedient'.



John Arthur (Reflex)

They sent them in not to protect the Catholics. The record of British imperialism over 700 years in Ireland and for that matter internationally shows scant regard for the rights or the lives of its subject peoples. A civil war would have disrupted Ireland economically North and South and led to re-partition and destabilised that corner of Europe. Also it would have spread into Britain: It would have affected Britain's international standing. So they sent in the troops to hold the situation, hoping for a solution later.

MIR: Clare, do you agree with Peter's analysis?

CS: I agree with a lot of it. But it attributes greater clarity to the thinking of the ruling class than they have. They stumble towards these objectives rather than have such a clear-minded analysis. That is the way history develops. By 1969 partition had become an historical trap. Britain no longer had any economic, military or political reason for remaining in Ireland. No doubt Foreign Office thinking was that it was an embarrassment and it was time to find a way out. The civil rights movement had revealed the bigotry and discrimination that Britain had allowed to continue and never intervened against. I am sure that Britain now thinks that partition is not essential to its interests but it is not enough of an embarrassment or a problem for the establishment to deal with.

PH: But we must not forget that it was a Labour government that sent in the troops. In doing so, they represented the interests not of the working class in Britain or Ireland, but of British capitalism. The lesson for socialists is that on a capitalist basis no matter which government is in power, there is no solution. A government basing itself on a capitalist solution will end up falling back on military expediency.

CS: That is too crude. You talk about capitalism as though it is instantly replaceable and can be abolished by the best possible Labour government, which we most certainly did not have then. There was no longer any objective interest for British capitalism to retain partition, so in that sense it is just a hangover of history. So the troops did not go in to prop up capitalist interests. Ireland was partitioned for that reason, creating this potential chaos and conflict. But the nationalists did welcome the troops initially. They had been barricaded into their areas and were under threat of burnings.

PH: But the situation in 1968-9 has been completely forgotten. History is written by the victors, and the people who emerged victorious from this situation were the various sectarian forces who have rewritten the history of that period and distorted it. This was an historic opportunity for building in the North a movement of Catholics and Protestants united against the Unionist state. The leaders of the

Since British troops went in in 1969 3,000 people have died

'By sending in the troops Labour backed capitalism'.

Peter Hadden

'Time To Go' stands for withdrawal but with a new political settlement'.

Clare Short

Labour Party and trade unions had tens of thousands of workers behind them but simply failed to intervene. They could have channeled the energies of the civil rights movement into a class movement against the very foundations of the state. The whole course of subsequent history could have been changed.

What has been forgotten is that it was not the soldiers that prevented a civil war at that time. There also existed joint committees of Catholics and Protestants in most of Belfast who patrolled the areas and prevented sectarian upheaval, protecting Catholic and Protestant. The army went into a few areas in Derry and West Belfast. But the night after in Belfast soldiers looked on when Catholics were burnt out because they did not know what streets were Catholic or Protestant. If there had been burnings all over the city, the army would not have been able to contain it. There were not because of the joint committees.

Instead of the Labour leaders relying on the army as the only instrument to keep peace, they should have developed this unity of workers on the ground into a peacekeeping force based on the trade unions and local communities. That would have united the communities and would have prevented the sectarianism. Linked to socialist demands the movement could have gone forward to unite people to solve their basic problems. But the Labour leaders rejected this as utopian. History shows who was really utopian. After 20 years using the troops we have had 3,000 people killed.

MIR: Why are the troops still there 20 years later?

CS: They are still there because Northern Ireland is irreformable. Discrimination and bigotry are built into that political settlement and attempts to reform it, like the Housing Executive designed to allocate housing fairly, have failed. The state was formed on the basis of a sectarian headcount to create a false majority and prevent a democratic settlement, and bigotry followed inevitably from that — the fear of a nationalist majority — to keep them in their place. The 20 years have proved that if we don't deal with the question of the border all the mess and sadness will continue into the indefinite future.

MIR: So what you are saying is that it is not just a question now of trying to get the troops out but it is also getting a settlement that deals with the question of the border first and foremost?

CS: Yes, 'Time To Go' is not 'Troops Out'. It is saying it is time for Britain to withdraw from Ireland but that does not mean you can just pull up sticks and walk away tomorrow. The effect

of the partition means that you need a new constitutional settlement and new arrangements for the continuation, from education to benefits. The spending on repression is massive and jobs in that industry go to Protestants. So you will need new economic and investment programmes in order generate job opportunities.

Britain needs to say this rotten settlement that we are propping up is doing no good for anyone. We intend to withdraw from Ireland but we intend to negotiate a new political settlement engaging all the people of Ireland in doing that. We have obligations to Ireland because of the damage we've done, so we must give economic support to provide decent opportunities. We cannot have some fantasy instant withdrawal of troops and the pretence that that alone would lead to a new and better Ireland.

PH: But why then does not the British ruling-class dismantle the state, do a deal with the Dublin government and reunify the country? The answer is because going down that road will worsen the destabilisation and lead ultimately to civil war. The Dublin government has no interest in a united Ireland because they have problems enough in the South without having to handle another poverty-ridden state in the North. But more fundamentally, the Protestants in the North would never accept being pushed into a capitalist united Ireland because it has no attraction whatsoever for them. If there was an attempt made to coerce them in that direction, they would resist arms in hand and the result would be a bloodbath. Then possibly the British troops would withdraw leaving a re-partitioned state with Catholic refugees over the border, a Palestine-like population on the doorstep.

CS: Peter said that it would be wrong to push the Protestants into a capitalist Ireland. But nowhere else do we impose the precondition of a socialist settlement for a solution to national problems. We support the right of the people of South Africa to democracy without preconditions about establishing socialism. We believe that the right of democracy will give them the right to work for socialist solutions. So I don't think we are entitled in Ireland to say you can only solve your national question if you do it in a socialist way. Solving the national question is a precondition to building the labour movement in Ireland that would be capable of developing a socialist Ireland.

The threat of a bloodbath is partly blackmail. Part of the Protestant rhetoric is to say 'you dare to move and we will cause a bloodbath. We threaten to slaughter people to keep things as they are'. We must acknowledge this as blackmail and then ask whether there are ways of minimising any such threat. And I think there are. I don't believe that if Britain dares to

change things that they will all reach for a gun and start to cause mayhem on every street corner. Secondly, who would take up weapons? At the moment there are masses of arms in the hands of the Protestants, but mostly licensed by the UDR. Thousands of legal weapons with licences have been issued to the Unionist community and recorded at the Northern Ireland Office. So Britain, as part of a serious process of getting a new settlement, could call in these arms.

If there is a proper new settlement that guarantees the rights of the Protestants, it will be in the interests of large numbers to be part of any negotiations to secure their stake in the future. So if done correctly the risks of a bloodbath, which are there (we already have Loyalist sectarian slaughter of Catholics) can be minimised and managed as part of any process of political settlement. The majority of Protestants have an interest in a long-term stable settlement.

Also the response of the Protestants to the Anglo-Irish Agreement points in my direction. The Protestant leaders said they would fight the Agreement, there were huge demonstrations, they all resigned their seats and fought a mini-general election, they threatened and blustered, and there was lots of talk of bloodshed, but here we are now and the Anglo-Irish Agreement is still there. It did not lead to a bloodbath and it is the first time since partition that Protestant bluster was taken on by the British state. The lesson of that to me is a hopeful one. I don't want to minimise the risk of a bloodbath but the lesson of the Agreement is that much of the bluster is exaggerated.

PH: That is not what the military chiefs of staff concluded when they analysed the situation. They advised the government to back off. The Anglo-Irish Agreement still exists but in framework only. Nothing has been implemented. In reality the British government backed down and what exists now is only an agreement on repression and security. Concessions to the Catholics were implied at the beginning of the Agreement but now nobody in the Catholic areas considers they have gained anything from the Agreement.

CS: I did not vote for it.

PH: It is your analysis of the reaction to it I am criticising. The resistance was switched down because the Agreement was never implemented.

CS: No, the element the Protestants objected to was Dublin having a say in the government of the North and that has been carried through. They meet regularly and they discuss the future government of the North. They lost on that.



PH: Nothing came from these meetings. There is still the same opposition to the Agreement by the Protestants but not the same need or motivation to get out on the streets to fight it. If they attempt to implement the Agreement further then a new reaction will develop.

As for your general analysis, I would put it the other way round. We won't solve the problem of the troops being there until we develop the unity of the working-class in the north and south, because it is only the labour movement which can remove the troops. We socialists surely hold that the problems of the working class can only be solved by the working class itself, through the trade unions and the Labour Party. The solutions to economic, national problems and the repression can only be achieved through the development of a movement of the working class not by some outside agency, as you suggest.

It is not a myth that the Protestants would resist arms in hand. This 'blackmail' you refer to is a real threat. So assuming that the Protestants resist any new settlement based on a capitalist united Ireland, who is going to enforce this new settlement, or even if you argue that it is mostly a bluff, who is going to test this bluff? It is certainly not the army of the South which is not equipped to do it even they wanted to, which

RUC clear the streets.

'Protestants will never accept being pushed into a capitalist Ireland'.

Peter Hadden

**'You will
only get
workers'
unity when
you have
solved the
border
question'.**

Clare Short

they don't. It is not the Catholics and even less the IRA who don't have the 100,000 privately held arms of the UDR or the RUC or the potential to make arms in factories like Shorts, with even missiles at their disposal. The only people who can attempt to coerce the Protestants into a new settlement is the British army.

British imperialism should not be in Ireland, but more than that the labour movement in Britain should assist and help the labour movement in Ireland to bring about a socialist solution. Should the British army under a Labour government be used to coerce a million people into a state that they do not want? Certainly not. So as socialists we must put to the side these so-called solutions which are ideas from the bosses. There is no solution on a capitalist basis.

The way to solve the national problem is to help the labour movement to unite workers in both communities, north and south, around a programme to change society, to resolve the problems of unemployment and poverty, and in the course of that movement, create the conditions for a society that both Protestants and Catholics could accept. That would allow reunification of the country.

CS: This is extremely interesting. You say that Britain should not be in Ireland but because Protestants would fight, Britain must stay. The danger of calling their bluff is so great that we have to rule out doing the right thing. The British labour movement has a duty to put right an historical wrong.

Some people already engage in sectarian targetless violence now, shooting Catholic kids on the way from school. This threat is always there. The whites of Zimbabwe said that they would fight to the last drop of their blood; the whites of South Africa say the same and even threaten using nuclear weapons rather than accept a democratic settlement. Despite the incredible war in Algeria, when De Gaulle acted the colonists backed down. Whatever the reaction, we have to stand up for what is right and look for a responsible settlement that minimises the risks of bloodshed. The status quo has bloodshed anyway.

MIR: Does that mean using British troops if necessary?

CS: Yes, as part of the process of settlement. In the case of Zimbabwe, in the end, after UDI by the whites and the guerrilla struggle, there was a negotiated settlement with the British army going in to help train and assist in the new settlement. So I do not think that using troops is as extraordinary as it sounds. The UDR is massively armed by the British state. If we have a new political settlement we must take back some of those weapons and the licensed ones

too. We must try to contain the violence but remind the Protestants that their real interests lie in a stable and fairer settlement.

MIR: Are there terms in any new political settlement that could convince the Protestants to accept it?

CS: Absolutely. If a Labour government is elected with a clear majority on a policy that it will withdraw from Northern Ireland in the kind of responsible way that I have talked about. The Protestant people are not stupid and understand history and they would grasp the meaning of such an election result. Of course, there would be fundamentalist ultra elements calling for bloodshed and mayhem but the majority would see that this was an historical turning point for a new political settlement and would negotiate their terms.

History shows us that, not just in Ireland, the bigotry that flows from partition prevents the building of the socialist movement. So it is the duty of the British labour movement to bring the old distorted settlement to an end, bringing in a new democratic settlement that will create the conditions, done responsibly and taking a bit of time, where Ireland will be able to develop a much more powerful socialist movement uniting both communities. You will only get that unity when you have solved the question of the border.

PH: I am against the presence of British troops in the North. I am in favour of the withdrawal of the troops unconditionally. Unlike yourself, Clare, when you admitted that it was correct for the army to go in 1969, I don't think it was. I was opposed to the entry of the troops at that time. And that position has been vindicated by the last 20 years.

But we must deal with what would be the consequences of the withdrawal of the troops. If a withdrawal was not coupled with a development of the workers' movement in the North to provide an alternative means of defence against sectarianism, it would be one factor pushing things towards confrontation. The alternative means of defence could be based on the organisations of the labour movement uniting Catholic and Protestant workers. That can be achieved.

MIR: Will the Protestant backlash be confined to the 'ultra-extreme elements' as Clare has suggested?

PH: No, in the event of Clare's policies being introduced ie a British withdrawal on a capitalist basis, or to be more accurate, of a timetable for withdrawal to be announced and then a movement to push the Protestants into what you call 'a reasonable settlement', whatever that

means....

CS: It means a democratic settlement with civil and religious liberties with a programme of economic development, and conversion of all security jobs.

PH: That means a capitalist settlement, which is impossible because there cannot be a development of the economy as you suggest on that basis either in the North or South. That is why we fight for socialism in Ireland or for that matter internationally — to solve these problems of capitalist failure to develop. If a Labour government was to attempt to implement Clare's policies, the mass of Protestants would resist and the outcome would be the re-partition of the country. That is why the British ruling class will not accept the withdrawal of troops.

Let me paint another scenario of what will happen under a Labour government. If we have a right-wing Labour government like that of 1974-9, which retreated on socialist policies in Britain, then inevitably such a government will end up adopting repressive means to contain the situation. Remember it was the 1974-9 Labour government, particularly under Roy Mason as Northern Ireland Secretary, which is remembered for its repressive methods. It was his policies which created the hunger strikes and H block troubles of the early 1980s.

If there was a Labour government which adopted Clare's programme, similar to that of some of the lefts like Tony Benn, of a withdrawal on a capitalist basis, then the upheaval that would develop in the North would force the government to drop withdrawal and ironically it would be forced to commit extra troops to try and hold the situation, let alone force through any political settlement.

So what you said about the 'Time To Go' Campaign alarms me because it does not really mean that Britain should withdraw its military presence and stop the repression. To put it in a nutshell 'Time to Go' is really 'Time to Stay and Coerce the Protestants'. That is all you are advocating.

CS: I think that a Labour government can provide the conditions that can give the people of Ireland a modern democratic state that the people of western Europe have, ending bloodshed and create the political possibility for transforming their society and controlling capitalism and building towards socialism.

Already there is a massive subsidy given to the North which is used mainly on repression. That money may need to continue for a time with perhaps more assistance available to bring to an end the conflict. The EEC could assist with economic investment and job opportunities. We need a security jobs conversion prog-

ramme. There is nothing unusual in this although Ireland is more complex than a straight de-colonising situation. But look at the settlement in Zimbabwe where Britain gave aid in order for the government to buy up farmland and re-distribute it to Africans who had no land, as part of a new settlement. And we now have a stable political situation in Zimbabwe, relatively good economic progress and the battle for socialism in Zimbabwe will continue in future years.

PH: What you are saying is that class unity and socialism cannot be developed through a mass movement under the present state. That is incorrect. Trade unions exist as mass organisations even after 20 years of sectarian violence. A Labour Party did exist which was the second party in the state and even up to 1970 gained 100,000 votes from both Catholics and Protestants. It disintegrated because of the rotten right-wing policies of its leaders. At rank-and-file level workers do stand together in strikes at Harland and Wolff and in Shorts, along with the health and local government workers.

We cannot say to these workers in struggle, nothing can be done until we solve the problem of the border. We should say: you are united economically, so you need political unity as well. That means you need a political party which can challenge the other parties which are all sectarian in composition. And you need a programme which will answer the social and economic issues like housing, unemployment and low wages, and will deal with the question of sectarian attack around protection against the paramilitaries, the repression and the national question. That means we need a transformation of society north and south which will allow a socialist solution to the national question.

Labour leaders in Britain, like yourself, could play a vital role in assisting that struggle of workers in Ireland. In 1981 the British Labour Party took a step forward in its policy document at conference which supported the idea of a Labour Party in Northern Ireland and a socialist solution to the national question. That is the way that the Labour leaders could help now.

CS: I am not saying the only position we must address is the question of the border and freeze politics on all other issues. Neither is the only issue for the British labour movement the question of Ireland. Your programme for a mass movement based on the unions clearly has not materialised after 20 years. You will not be able to build it under present conditions, but every bit of it you manage is welcome and precious. You are unlikely to succeed in building such a mass movement, but if I am wrong I would be delighted to be wrong. □

MIR □19
Autumn 1989
Ireland

'Time To Go' really means 'Time to stay and coerce the Protestants'.

Peter Hadden

Bureaucrats tremble before workers' movement

Peter Taaffe explains how the political revolution against Stalinism in Eastern Europe has begun.



Gorbachev.

The miners demands are an indictment of the bureaucracy

20 □ MIR

The *MIR* has long predicted that Gorbachev's attempts at 'reforms from the top' would provoke revolution, political revolution, from below. The mighty strike wave of the Soviet miners in July confirms that analysis. Like a prairie fire it swept from Siberia to central Asia, to Estonia and to the Ukraine.

The Ukraine is the bread-basket and industrial powerhouse of the USSR. 300,000 miners out on strike was bad enough but the prospect of the strike spreading to the railwaymen on 1 August, with the movement threatening to trigger off strikes in the Russian federation itself, introduced the greatest panic in the ranks of the ruling bureaucratic elite.

All factions of the bureaucracy drew together in common terror at the re-emergence of the powerful proletariat of the USSR. The conservatives, led by Ligachev predictably, pinned the blame on Gorbachev for these upheavals. Gorbachev sought to lean on the movement as a

whip against the bureaucracy, particularly the middle layers. At the same time he threatened the strikers with dire consequences as it looked as though the movement was likely to get out of hand. Yeltsin, spokesman for the liberals, also urged strikers to return to work.

The economic, social and ecological demands of the miners shook the Kremlin, representing as they did a searing indictment of the bureaucracy. But the elite must have reached for the panic button at the directly political slogans and demands of the miners, which struck at the very foundations of bureaucratic rule.

They called for 'a new constitution'. Taking up Gorbachev's slogan 'All power to the Soviets' (which are still firmly controlled by the bureaucracy), the Siberian miners issued a call: "For the Communist Party to abandon its leading role under the Soviet Union's constitution; for a transfer of real power to the elected Soviets; for the cancellation of elections to the Supreme Soviet from public organisations (such as the party and the official trade unions); and direct elections of the President and the heads of local government bodies by secret ballot." *Financial Times*, 25 July 1989.

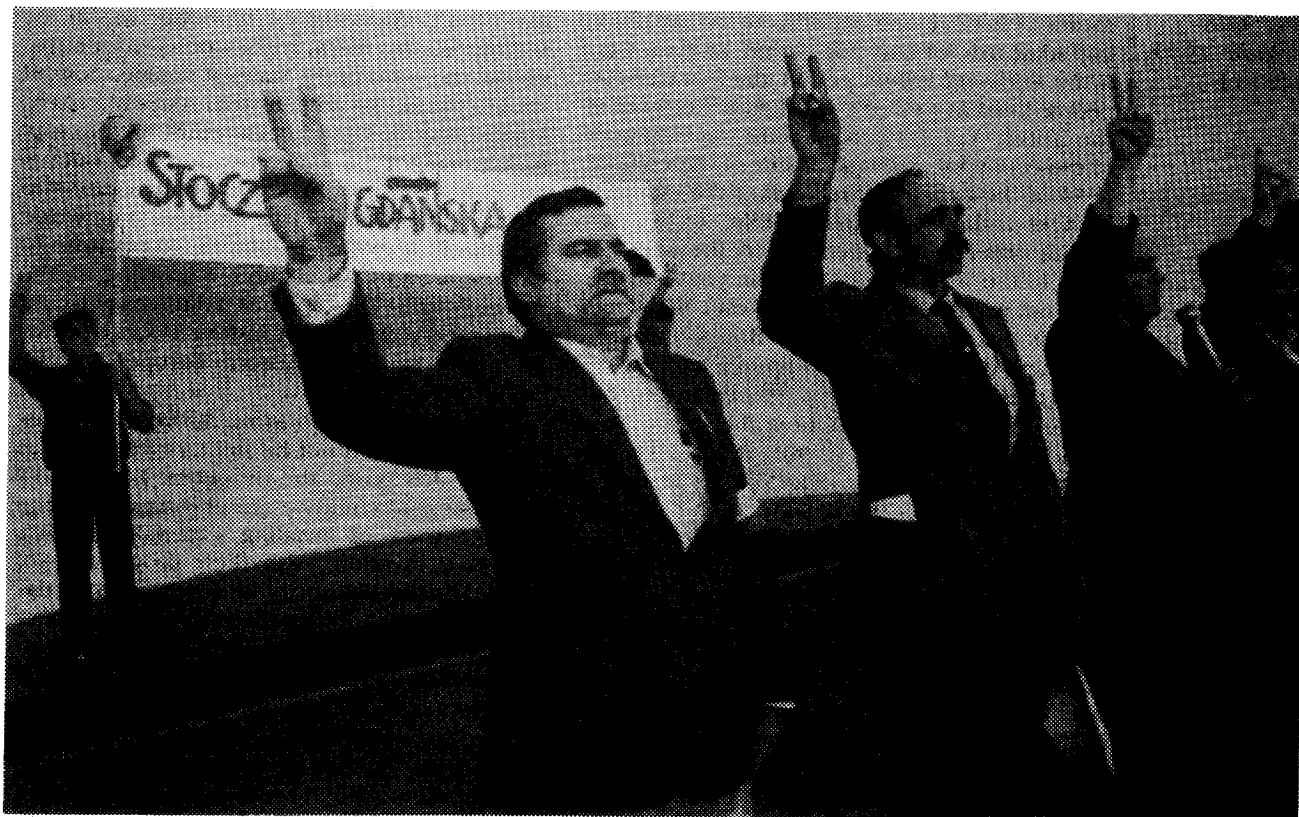
A deputy to the Supreme Soviet from the Ukraine declared "people have been pushed onto the streets not by a shortage of soap but by a shortage of justice. The miners of Donetsk trust nobody and nothing". The *Financial Times* ruefully commented: "deputies listened often in almost funeral silence (as) the miners' deputies attacked the party and trade union bureaucracy which had stifled the demands of their electors for so many years".

The tendency of the miners to bypass the official 'trade unions' to establish their own fighting organisations, in effect embryonic Soviets, was intolerable to the bureaucracy, including its most liberal wing.

Gorbachev reacted like the bourgeois in the West when faced with an insurgent proletariat. He threatened to introduce anti-strike legislation prohibiting stoppages in 'vital services'. In vain! No amount of legislation will be able to hold in chains the proletariat of the USSR which has now tested its strength in action and has completely lost its fear of Stalinist mass bureaucratic terror.

These events signify the beginning of the political revolution in the USSR which will not be one act but a protracted process. They also underlined the contagious effects of the movement of the proletariat in the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Not accidentally the miners adopted the name 'Solidarity' for the 'independent trade unions' that some sought to set up. No doubt in 1980-1 the Russian bureaucracy thought that their cordon sanitaire around Poland had successfully inoculated the proletariat of the USSR from the Solidarity 'virus'. But the account of those



tumultuous events, particularly in the neighbouring Ukraine, obviously found a powerful echo among the proletariat of the USSR.

Poland is the flashpoint for a possible social and political conflagration throughout the region, but not one of the Stalinist states is now stable. Any further real development of the productive forces is strangled by the obsolete bureaucracy, on the one side, and the perpetuation of the nation state on the other. Poland and Hungary express this in the most vivid fashion.

But Bulgaria and Romania, seemingly among the most stable of the Stalinist regimes and with certain social reserves in the agricultural population, have resorted to the most hooligan persecution of the Turkish and Hungarian minorities in their respective countries.

The spectacle of 150,000 refugees expelled to Turkey in May and June of this year has been a gift to the veiled military dictatorship of Ozal in Turkey. Yet this insane policy is a manifestation of the crisis of the regime.

The attempted 'assimilation' (destruction) of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria is revenge for the Ottoman empire's 'assimilation' and virtual obliteration of Bulgaria for over 500 years. A more important explanation, however, is the search for a scapegoat to divert attention from the chronic shortages, the grey mediocrities who dominate Bulgarian society and, above all, the slowing down of the economy.

In Czechoslovakia, where the slightest protest has been met with ruthless repression in the past, last January saw the biggest demonstration

since 1968. This is merely a foretaste of the social explosion that looms in Czechoslovakia once the regime moves to implement its 'reformist' policy of closing down 'obsolete' plant and evicting one quarter of the workforce (2.25m) from the factories.

East Germany, once the 'industrial high-tech' showcase of Eastern Europe, is grinding to a halt, with a growth rate of less than 1%. Moreover, the 'technology gap' between East and West Germany has widened, as it has with all the Stalinist states in relation to Western capitalism. The unreconstructed Stalinists, led by Honecker, who rule East Germany with an iron fist, react with hysteria to the slightest disturbances in any of the Stalinist states.

Thus the 'gang of four' (Bulgaria, Romania, East Germany, Czechoslovakia) denounce the 'anti-socialist' events in Poland and Hungary. The Stalinist gangs that rule these states joined with Castro in Cuba in applauding the massacre of the heroic students and workers in Tiananmen Square.

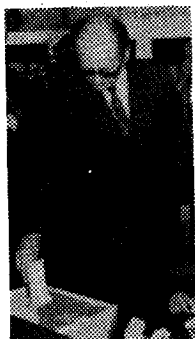
The attempt of a group of East German youth to present a petition at the Chinese Embassy in protest at the slaughter in Beijing was met by police repression on two occasions. There is massive discontent at the electoral fraud perpetuated by the regime in May's 'single candidate' municipal elections. Demonstrations in protest against this fraud in East Berlin and Leipzig were dispersed by the police and army.

The advantages of a planned economy have

Solidarity's election victory has paralysed the Polish bureaucracy.

Not one of the Stalinist states is now stable

**Poland and
Hungary
are the
weakest
links**



Jaruzelski.

meant a big development of industry and of living standards of the population of East Germany. Up to the recent period, the East German people lived as well or even slightly better than the British. Yet it is precisely the development of the economy, with the raising of the cultural level of the people, which makes the stranglehold of Stalinism so insufferable.

One observer commenting on the effect of visits to the West by East German youth wrote: "It is not just the shops (in the West). What gets them is that they can drive to Brussels or Luxembourg, or they can stand up in a bar and say what they think without a policeman coming round to their home the next day. Then they come back here (East Germany) and realise what a claustrophobic place they live in."

Twenty per cent of the population have fled from East to West Germany since the establishment of the state in 1949. A new exodus is now taking place, which the East German Stalinists turn a blind eye to because it rids them of potential 'dissidents'. Yet so terrified are they of the Polish and Hungarian plague spreading to their state that they are now considering, as they did in 1980, a ban on all travel to these countries.

The stagnation of the productive forces, and even regression in some fields, together with ruthless repression of the slightest dissent, are the ingredients for a colossal upheaval. East Germany could very well be the first to trigger upheavals throughout the Stalinist states.

So could Yugoslavia, where inflation rose by 313% in the first half of 1989. This led for the first time in history to the National Bank running out of banknotes! The Yugoslav media, instead of giving a cash figure for the amount of money exchanged at the main border crossing with Austria, reported in early August that 14 cubic metres of dinars had changed hands!

Yet, it is probably Poland, and only a little behind, Hungary, which are the weakest links in the chain of Stalinism. The impasse and demoralisation of the bureaucracy is expressed most sharply in Poland.

Jaruzelski's attempt to lean on the Solidarity leadership to carry through his 'austerity programme' is an exercise fraught with enormous difficulty. At the same time, it has allowed some bourgeois commentators to conjure up the vision of a future Poland with completely 'free' elections, the 'Communist Party' evicted from office which, in turn, leads to the liquidation of the planned economy and the restoration of capitalism.

The crisis of the Polish regime results from two factors. Firstly, there is the economic and social catastrophe created by Stalinist mismanagement and waste. Then, there is the seeming success of capitalism in the West.

Despite the widening gap between the rich and poor, capitalism appears to be an attractive proposition for a section of the bureaucracy

and even to layers of the working class in the Stalinist states. Marxism has pointed out that such is the crisis of the Stalinist regimes now, at least in the advanced industrial states of eastern Europe and the USSR, that a return back to capitalism cannot be theoretically ruled out.

But it would not be the internal situation in Poland alone that will be decisive, but world factors. If it was possible for capitalism to experience a world economic upswing on the scale of 1950-75, capitalist restoration would be a real possibility, not just for Poland but for the other states of Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* emphasised that it would not be military intervention alone which posed the danger of a bourgeois restoration. It would be 'the cheap goods in the baggage train' of invading imperialist armies. The Nazi invasion, with their programme of insane racial superiority and genocide of the 'inferior Slavs', only repelled the populations of the USSR. An intervention of US imperialism, on the other hand, with its 'cheap goods', may have brought a different outcome, with the possibility of a return to capitalism.

However, Trotsky stressed that a bourgeois counter-revolution, no more than a revolution, could not be carried through by piecemeal 'reformist' methods. It would be impossible to 'run the film of reformism backwards'. It would be necessary to carry through a social counter-revolution, the restoration of bourgeois rule, which would inevitably meet the resistance of the proletariat as it became clear what colossal price they would pay for the re-establishment of capitalism.

The scenario today is entirely different to that envisaged by Trotsky. Rather than a long period of economic upswing, capitalism faces in the next few years a slowing down in growth of production, a recession or even a slump. Even if a slump on the scale of 1929-33 is not the most likely perspective immediately, such a development is entirely possible in the 1990s. This would cut across the tendencies toward bourgeois restoration which are now evident in the Stalinist states, including China as the recent events have shown.

Trotsky envisaged that a bourgeois restoration would begin by breaking the monopoly of foreign trade. Former bureaucrats would separate out as a new bourgeois, first of all in light industry. There would be the development of a kulak class in the countryside, beginning from the richer co-operatives and agro-enterprises. Some of these features, in some cases all of them, have recently been present in the Stalinist states.

In China, the establishment of 7,000 'joint ventures' that directly traded on the world market, represented a breach in the state monopoly of foreign trade. The 'reforms' of Deng

also created a powerful kulak class in the countryside which threatened grain and other food supplies. These tendencies towards bourgeois restoration have now, however, been cut across. This will also be the case in the other Stalinist states.

Bush's recent visit to Poland has dashed the illusions widespread at the top of Solidarity that US imperialism would launch a 'new Marshall Aid' to help restore capitalism. The economic 'aid' Bush promised amounted to \$3 per head for every Pole and just over \$2 per head for every Hungarian. Hardly the economic bait to tempt Poland to restore capitalism!

US imperialism was able to launch a Marshall Aid programme after the Second World War when it possessed 50% of industrial production in the capitalist world and 75% of the world's gold reserves. Even then it was able to undertake its rescue operation only after the Social Democratic and Stalinist leaders had saved capitalism by entering coalition governments as a means of politically beheading the revolutionary wave of 1944-47.

The bourgeois are quite content to use the difficulties of the Stalinist regimes as a means of reinforcing the 'advantages of capitalism'. The capitalists have traditionally used the totalitarian one-party Stalinist regimes as a scarecrow against socialism.

After the massacre in China and the colossal crisis in Poland and Hungary the *Wall Street Journal* was prompted to declare: 'We've won!' The bourgeois ideologists now claim that capitalism has demonstrated its 'superiority' over decaying Stalinism. In reality, the serious spokesmen of capitalism entertain no such illusions that the regimes of Eastern Europe are likely to fall so easily into their embrace.

Bush went out of his way to endorse Jaruzelski as President of Poland and, it is believed, was partly responsible for convincing Walesa to do likewise. The Polish bureaucracy had concluded by the beginning of this year that they could not rule in the old way.

The military repression imposed in December 1981 had failed to check the Polish proletariat. Its immense power, the collapse in support for the regime, combined with economic embargoes applied by the West and the explosive social situation, compelled Jaruzelski to retreat and concede '35 per cent democracy'. A majority was guaranteed for 'Communist' Party nominees in the new parliament. More crucially, the levers of state power remained firmly in the hands of the ruling elite.

Jaruzelski sought to establish a Gorbachev-model regime. Bonapartist powers have been invested in the President who is responsible for foreign policy, police, defence and the appointment of the government. Engels pointed out that in the final analysis the state could be reduced to 'armed bodies of men and their mat-

erial appendages, prisons, etc'. The bureaucracy has no intention of allowing the levers of power to fall from its hands. Jaruzelski was quite clear that the Solidarity of 1989 was an entirely different animal to that of 1980-1.

Like the Social Democratic and Communist Party leaders in the West, Walesa and other Solidarity leaders have demonstrated their 'fitness to govern' — by distancing themselves from the demands of the Polish workers and sometimes actively breaking strikes.

In 1980-1 Solidarity had 10 million members in the urban areas and three million in 'Rural Solidarity'. Because of its support for Jaruzelski's 'democratic opening', millions of workers have become disillusioned with Solidarity. Walesa urged support for the 'reformists' in the party bureaucracy in the first round of the recent elections. Consequently, all but two of them were defeated! The 40% who abstained obviously included a big section outraged at the Solidarity leadership's decision to allow the Stalinists back into power by the 'sidedoor'.

The trade union base of Solidarity has contracted since the heyday of 1980. Before it was legalised in early 1989, Solidarity's leadership were claiming five to six million would enter its trade union wing. But only 120,000-140,000 workers joined in the Mazosze region which includes Warsaw, less than one seventh of Solidarity's membership in that region in 1980. The union had 4,000 branches in the region in 1980, now it has only 1,200.

Walesa, Geremek and even former 'ultra-lefts' like Jacek Kuron now form a rival Solidarity bureaucracy to the Stalinist party elite. One of the Solidarity leaders, seeking to justify participation in the 'elections', declared "both Solidarity and the authorities saw that we were never going to be able to destroy one another, so we decided to try and work together."

Thus a revolutionary threat to the regime no longer emanates from the Solidarity organisation, at least from its leading layer. In this situation the entry of Solidarity ministers into the government to assume full responsibility for the savage price increases imposed on 3 August and the wholesale closure of factories could not be opposed but indeed positively welcomed by the more far-sighted representatives of the regime — both in Warsaw and the Kremlin.

With the authority of the Polish Communist Party completely used up, the only faint hope for securing the implementation of the austerity programme lay in the involvement of the incipient Solidarity bureaucracy in some form of power sharing arrangement.

Faced with extreme social crisis and upheaval, Solidarity has finally decided to form a government in alliance with the small Peasants and Democratic Parties (former puppets of the CP). But they also have agreed that the CP should continue to hold the key ministries of defence



Honecker.

A capitalist counter revolution cannot be carried out by piecemeal methods



Pozsgay.

**The
bureaucracy
cannot
tolerate
indefinitely
independent
working
class
organisations**

and the interior (ie army and police). The ministries of finance and media remain to be decided.

Control of the state machine, the civil service and the media, is critical to maintaining bureaucratic rule. So long as these remain in the hands of reliable representatives of the bureaucracy all kinds of 'coalitions' or 'power-sharing arrangements' can be resorted to. This would not be the first time that the bureaucracy has used sham coalitions.

The establishment of the Polish and Czech Stalinist states involved 'coalitions' between the Communist party and the former representatives of the bourgeois gathered together into small parties which were in reality mere appendages of the Stalinists. In the long protracted decay of Stalinism the bureaucracy will be forced to use all kinds of elaborate manoeuvres, ensuring at all stages that state power remains firmly in its hands.

Is it possible then for completely free elections to take place in four years time as the Solidarity leaders envisage? Is it possible in Hungary that free elections can take place next year as some Hungarian Communist leaders have promised?

A form of elections, all kinds of peculiar arrangements along the Polish pattern, are possible as a means of safeguarding the rule of the bureaucracy. The *MIR* has argued that it is impossible in the Stalinist states for the bureaucracy to tolerate for any length of time independent mass organisations of the working-class, with the unfettered right to strike, and other democratic rights. The bureaucracy is a complete excrescence whose very existence would be called into question once the masses possessed the right to criticise freely and to organise independently.

Thus any 'democracy' in the Stalinist states can only assume a mangled form with all kinds of 'qualifications' involving the banning of parties which seriously threaten the rule of the bureaucracy. Solidarity may be legalised but the Solidarity Student Union, the NZS, with the natural inclination of youth to go further in criticising the Stalinist regime and organising to replace it, is banned. Independent trade unions which inevitably seek to organise politically will probably meet with repression — similar to Gorbachev's measures in Russia.

In Hungary the move to 'free elections' and untrammelled democracy appears on the surface to have gone much further than in Poland. The inflation rate has reached 17%, the foreign debt is \$12bn with the servicing of the debt swallowing up \$1.6bn annually. The slump in the authority of the Communist Party (called the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party), is reflected in the fall in its *People's Daily* newspaper circulation from 1.5 million to 400,000. Opinion polls indicate that in completely 'free' elections only

36% would support the HSWP. Yet the Hungarian working-class have not yet moved into struggle as in Poland.

Their conditions are every bit as desperate as in Poland, in some respects worse. They have suffered a drop in living standards every year for the last decade. One factor which stays the hand of the working-class is undoubtedly the memory of the 1956 uprising. However, such are the desperate conditions of the masses that they will not for long continue to tolerate this situation.

It is this which has prompted the frantic attempts at reform from the top by sections of the bureaucracy. Its most prominent representative, Imre Pozsgay, recently declared that "the anonymous masses have not spoken" but "when people cannot tolerate anymore they will burst in rebellion". The bureaucracy are terrified of the slightest provocation which could bring the workers out onto the streets.

Feeling the developing opposition from below, the reformist wing led by Pozsgay has looked for agreements with the 'opposition'. These later are a motley bunch of at least nine parties with the Democratic Forum the most prominent. They pose no serious threat to the continuation of bureaucratic rule. One of the opposition pointed to one rotund figure of the ruling party on TV and commented "to the woman who buys chicken-feed for the Sunday dinner all of us look and sound alike".

Therefore it is likely that a form of 'elections' which carefully circumscribe the power of any real socialist or workers' opposition will take place. However, despite all the clever constitutional dickerings of the bureaucracy, they will not be able to avoid provoking social explosions.

'Reforms' from the Polish national Stalinist Gomulka failed. His successor, Gierek, tried to mollify the Polish workers by going to the world market. This led to the accumulation of the colossal foreign debt which now cripples the Polish economy. Since 1980-1, Jaruzelski has attempted first repression then a combination of repression and concessions. This has also failed. The attempt to lean on the Solidarity leaders will also prove them to be a very weak reed.

Solidarity will split. The existence of 'Fighting Solidarity', despite its ideological heterogeneity, indicates the class polarisation that will develop with the best of the working-class, particularly the youth, finding a road to the genuine ideas of socialism and Marxism.

Eastern Europe is on the brink. It is only a matter of time before one or other of these states erupts. In the course of this movement will be created the forces, rooted in the working-class, which will forge the weapons to overthrow the obsolete Stalinist bureaucracy and establish workers democracy. □

After May the atmosphere in Poland changed completely. The workers began to recover their daring. The repression generated by martial law fizzled out. Now everyone talks openly. Solidarity has its own legal press. Even the official media are forced to give quite honest reports of strikes and demonstrations.

The economic mess has stirred people up. A kilo of ham went up from 3000z to 6700z in one week. Parowka, one of the staple types of sausage, rose 10 times since July. Bus fares increased from 4z to 60z in two weeks. Jaruzelski talked about 'more freedom for the private sector' as a trick to disguise the government's responsibility for these price rises. But the increases will soon evaporate any illusions that some have about capitalism being a better system.

At the same time Stalinist rule has left three-quarters of houses outside the major towns still without sewage systems. Many people in the country still draw their water from wells. Roads end in the middle of nowhere because of the lack of materials to finish them. Parkland, building sites and residential areas are all jumbled up together. Where I live, a burst sewage pipe spills out over a path where people go for walks.

Women on average spend about four hours a day queueing. It wears you down. You see someone selling toilet paper. You know there may be no more in the shops for months so you buy him out. You go home to your family. Someone else has got a pair of shoes your size. There were only four pairs in the shop so they quickly bought a pair for you. A woman is going home with a dozen packets of washing powder. People go up to her and ask 'where did you get it?' She tells them. They hurry off, hoping the shop hasn't run out and the queue isn't too long.

For some things you need to queue from three in the morning to make sure you are in the front when the shop opens at seven. That's no joke in winter when it goes down to -30°C.

The leadership of Solidarity don't have a clue what they are doing. They say they stand for a 'mixed economy' with some elements of workers' control. It is a disguised way of calling for a return to capitalism, which the worst 'intellectuals' at the top surrounding and advising Walesa undoubtedly want, but do not dare say so in front of the workers.

They hope to 'use the next four years to erode the state monopoly of the economy, the media, the state apparatus and parliament' (where still only 35% of the seats are freely elected) in the hope that by the time of the next election there can be a nice constitutional victory for Solidarity.

There will be storms inside Solidarity, now the leaders have decided to go into a coalition government. They have already burnt up a lot of their authority. The consciousness of the

Poland workers' anger mounts

In an exclusive, on-the-spot account from Gdansk, Jan Rokoczy, describes the growing anger of Polish workers over the actions of Solidarity leaders





**Gdansk
shipyard
workers strike
(above and
overleaf).**

**The old
woman
said: "What
Poland
needs is a
revolution"**

masses is developing so quickly. Many workers, especially in the Gdansk region, not just the activists, see Walesa as selling out.

One old lady in her seventies with only one leg, on her way to Czestochowa (a holy shrine) 'to ask the mother of God to kick out the communists' (read bureaucracy) and 'for her son-in-law to be cured of lung cancer' says 'Walesa has sold out the masses. What Poland needs is a revolution. But we may have to wait a little bit. Warsaw is not hot enough yet.'

The active workers have no illusions about the road Walesa is taking. They say 'we have a chance now to bring the masses out and overthrow the regime. But if we don't make use of the current opening in the political situation we will pay for it in prison or the graveyard.'

The Solidarity leaders dissipated the instinctive mood there was to strike in unison against the price rises. The Gdansk tube workers struck and got an 80.000z increase on their monthly wage (about 80%). Other factories struck and were occupied all over the country. But each strike is settled separately, in a rush, by a desperate bureaucracy.

The one hour strike in the Gdansk region on Friday 11 August was an attempt by the Solidarity leadership to release a little pressure because of the mood building up from below. But Walesa insisted that the famous Lenin shipyard did not join the strike, because it has just been bought by an American entrepreneur 'Mrs Johnson' who, he says, 'the workers should not offend'!

Nevertheless, there was massive support for

the strike with factories, hospitals, all the other shipyards and workplaces coming out. If there had been a call from the leadership for an all-out national general strike the response would have been overwhelming.

Strikes are still technically illegal. Fighting Solidarity and all the militant factions within the workers movement are illegal. The secret police are watching and waiting. This is not a road to democracy. It is a road to a new showdown like 1981.

Meanwhile the activists try and gauge the mood and test the possibility of calling a general offensive from below. Fighting Solidarity reflects the frustration of the activists with Walesa's politics. 'How can we have talks, never mind form a government, with a regime whose hands are dripping with blood?' is a typical remark.

In Gdansk outside St Brigitte's Church after mass on Sunday the priest, Jankowski, calls for a Poland without strikes, 'because strikes should not be necessary.' Walesa calls on the workers to go 'peacefully to their homes to reflect because we have a trying time ahead of us.'

Some activists from the shipyard strike committee, from 'Opposition 88', an illegal fraction within Solidarity, from Fighting Solidarity and from the RSA (Movement for a Socialist Alternative) unfurl a banner on a raised patch of ground. With a megaphone they address the congregation as it pours out of the church. 'The price rises are unacceptable. We propose a march to the town centre in protest against the regime.' Teenagers, young workers, the old, and families all stop to listen. They cheer the call for a general strike.

Within minutes the church congregation has transformed itself into a political demonstration calling for the overthrow of the bureaucracy. A couple of policemen, who look as powerless as little boys, look down at the pavement, anxiously pretending not to notice this sea of 2000 angry workers shouting slogans at the top of their voices!

Witty leaflets denouncing Walesa's 'marriage' to Jaruzelski are thrown high into the air so that the distributors cannot be identified. As they flutter to the ground people scuffle to get hold of them and read them avidly.

It is not just in Gdansk either. In most of the major towns there are churches where the service can transform into a demonstration at a moment's notice.

Something like this happens every Sunday. But the demonstrations are getting bigger as the mood builds up. Anger is in the air. Over the last year several demonstrations like this were brutally attacked by the police. Now any spark could ignite a riot.

The authorities are powerless. Only Walesa and the Pope are keeping them in their places. □

China

The first act

The bloody massacre in Tiananmen Square has provoked worldwide horror and anger. Lynn Walsh analyses the magnificent uprising against the bureaucracy, which marks the opening of China's political revolution.



The upsurge against the bureaucracy arose from a period of rapid economic growth. The political crisis came as the wave of economic success broke, exposing the problems beneath the surface. This opened up a new split within the leadership. The struggle at the top opened the door to the mass protest from below, triggered off by the student movement.

The reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping after 1978 produced ten years of rapid growth, based mainly on the policies applied to the rural sector. Decollectivisation of farming, with higher state procurement prices for crops, led to a big increase in output, incomes and consumption in the countryside. Richer farmers, and a layer of the bureaucracy, turned to rural industries and services, the main area of growth.

Growth produced economic imbalances and social tensions. The state industries, under the rigid and inefficient control of the bureaucracy, could not meet demand from the rural sector. Shortages and inflation undermined farmers'

incomes, leading to a drop in food output and a switch to cash crops. Inflation especially hit urban workers' living standards, reflected in a growing number of strikes in 1987 and 1988.

Deng's policies also brought about a sharpening polarisation within society. Inland regions did not share the prosperity of favoured coastal areas. In the countryside, a minority of wealthy peasants, entrepreneurs and bureaucrats benefited from the reforms. Millions of young workers, without land or capital, were forced from their villages to search for work in the cities. Education, health care, and other social services have all deteriorated, aggravating the social problems.

Corruption mushroomed — infesting the bureaucracy from the top down, through every layer of the party and state machine. Added to the already enormous legal privileges of the bureaucracy, this is one of the most explosive grievances of the students and workers.

The leaders themselves recoiled in alarm at

**For a
critical
period the
bureaucratic
regime was
paralysed**

the corrosive effects of corruption. The hard-line stalinists blamed it on 'bourgeois liberalism' encouraged by the reformers. They blamed it on the 'feudal' practices of the old-guard bureaucrats, clinging to their traditional patronage and privileges.

In struggling to replace the radical Maoists around the 'gang of four', Deng had the support of the old-guard within the leadership. As his reforms progressed, however, they increasingly opposed them. In the summer of 1986, Hu Yaobang, with the apparent approval of Deng, appealed to the students to take action to defend the reform policies. This produced a wave of student demonstrations.

As workers began to join the movement, however, Deng withdrew his approval. He wanted continued economic reforms but not political reform. Deng clamped down on the student movement and abandoned his protege to the hardliners, standing aside when Hu resigned as general secretary in January 1987.

Nevertheless, in 1987 the reform wing of the bureaucracy, still committed to extending the market element in the economy, appeared to consolidate its position again. They took most of the key positions at the 13th CP Congress in October.

But Zhao Ziyang, Hu's successor, found his position increasingly undermined by worsening shortages of raw materials, energy, and food accompanied by accelerating inflation. In the autumn the leadership abandoned the next proposed stage of its economic reforms, indefinitely postponing the abolition of all price controls and cuts in food subsidies. They also cut back on government investment, as well as tightening the money supply and credit. This squeezed living standards, particularly for workers in the cities.

Against this background, the death of Hu Yaobang on 15 April triggered a resurgence of student protest. Hu's sudden death appeared to tip the balance ominously towards the hardliners. Deng was distancing himself from Zhao. In any case, the students were preparing anniversary demonstrations for 4 May 1919, when students marching under the banner of 'Democracy and Science' set off the movement which led to the revolution of 1925-27. The visit of Gorbachev, due in May, also had an influence. The students and sections of workers were undoubtedly following events in the USSR and Poland with great interest.

From 15 April to June the movement was one of mass protest rather than revolutionary challenge to the regime. Nevertheless, the ruling bureaucracy was shaken to its foundations. For a critical period the regime was suspended in mid air. All the elements of the political revolution (apart from one decisive element) were there.

A profound mood of revolt had been fomen-

ted by the worsening economic crisis and rampant corruption. April 15 saw the biggest student marches since 1986. On 27 April, despite Deng's threat to suppress their 'conspiracy', 100,000 marched in Beijing — breaking through the police cordons around Tiananmen Square. During Gorbachev's visit, on 16-17 May, Beijing was brought to a standstill by over a million demonstrators.

The student leaders began the action with a hunger strike. But their determined action, combined with the regime's wavering response, drew in wider and wider layers of the people.

On May, 300 journalists demonstrated against press censorship. Some policemen joined the students. Airforce officers and soldiers were seen in the Square. Under the pressure of the movement, the lower ranks of the bureaucracy began to crumble, with party 'cadres' (functionaries) and government officials coming onto the streets.

Initially, workers expressed sympathy with the students, supplying them with money and food. Soon they joined the marches. The students' demands — for democratisation, opposition to bureaucracy, and an end to corruption — evoked a strong response from almost every strata of society, crystallising a mood of widespread hatred of the bureaucracy. Their bold action, together with the effect of events in the Soviet Union and Poland, set off a tidal wave of protest which temporarily marooned the bureaucracy.

Throughout the events, the students sang the *Internationale* — belying Deng's claim that they were 'counter-revolutionary'. The majority stood for the reform of the Communist Party and the state. Because of the enormous gains of the revolution of 1949 — which swept away landlordism and capitalism, and freed China from the grip of foreign imperialism — the Communist Party retained great authority with the students and young workers. They believed that Zhao and the reformers could root out corruption and democratise the party. Until June, they still believed that mass protest would persuade the leadership to change.

Through a *People's Daily* editorial on 26 April, Deng Xiaopeng threatened to crush the students. But Deng and Li Peng were unable to stop the next day's mass demonstration or prevent the mass occupation of central Beijing during Gorbachev's visit. On 20 May, Li Peng declared martial law. But the ultimatum expired on 22 May with students and workers still occupying the Square.

The reformist wing of the leadership around Zhao Ziyang favoured concessions to the students and attempted to convene a special meeting of the National People's Congress, to revoke martial law and oust the hardliners.

The army bureaucracy was also divided. The commanders of the 38th Army based in Beijing

appeared to have opposed repression. Many of their soldiers sympathised with the students, some joining the demonstrators. Faced with martial law and the deployment of army units around Beijing, mass pickets established cordons around the city — ready to block the path of the army, but meanwhile correctly fraternising with the rank and file troops. This had a big effect on the soldiers, and the commanders withdrew most of them to the barracks for the time being.

Deng and Li Peng, who had deserted the reformist camp and coalesced with the hardline stalinists, were determined to crush the mass movement. But at that stage they had not consolidated their grip on the party and state apparatus. Drawing on the considerable power of the old guard of retired or semi-retired elders, and by-passing the official leading bodies of the party and the state, Deng fought to concentrate the decisive levers of power into his own hands. Yang Shangkun, state president and vice-president of the armed forces committee, strove for control of the army, utilising his powerful network of patronage within the army bureaucracy.

The hardliners regained complete control only through an intense struggle within the leadership. Divided, and with many sections of the bureaucracy wavering under the impact of the mass movement, it required several weeks for the hardline stalinist faction to recover its balance and prepare a bloody reaction. The outcome of this struggle was not a foregone conclusion.

For a critical period the bureaucratic regime was paralysed. All the objective conditions existed for the overthrow of the ruling bureaucracy, which could have been carried through peacefully or relatively peacefully. But one decisive ingredient was missing: a leadership with a clear programme, strategy and tactics.

If the student leaders had appealed to the mass of workers with worked-out demands for workers' democracy (the election of all officials with the right of recall, the limitation of salaries and an end to privileges), they could have transformed the situation. The workers moving into struggle against the regime would have been given conscious aims, based on the need to overthrow the ruling bureaucracy. They could have drawn much wider layers of workers and peasants into action behind them. The bureaucracy's social reserves of support among less conscious strata, especially in the countryside, could have been rapidly undermined.

As the movement gathered momentum, the student leaders had rightly appealed to workers for support. To have had a decisive effect, however, these appeals needed to be linked to the call for the setting up of committees of workers, students, and soldiers. Such committees are vital organs of mass struggle in a movement to overthrow the bureaucracy and take control of

society into the hands of the working class and poor peasantry.

Similarly, students and workers fraternised with the soldiers, winning some of them over. Had committees of workers and students existed — with a clear programme — decisive sections of the army could have been won over to the political revolution.

By the weekend of 13/14 May, Deng and the hardliners had gained decisive control of the state and military apparatus. Zhao Ziyang and the reformers were neutralised. Wavering elements in the bureaucracy, like Qin Jiwei, the defence minister, fell into line. In fact, by then the majority of the student leaders had called off their hunger strike. After the tense confrontations between troops and demonstrators of the previous week, the mass movement had subsided.

The main strength of the bureaucracy was the political weakness of the mass movement, which lacked both conscious strategy and mass organisations capable of giving a lead. Had Deng made concessions, conceivably the bureaucracy could have defused the mass movement — clamping down on the students' and workers' leaders once they had ridden out the immediate crisis.

By abandoning Zhao and the reformers, however, Deng had made common cause with veteran Stalinists of the long march generation (who had opposed his reform policies). To the old guard, both the reformers and the mass movement represented a threat to their power and privileges. They were determined, therefore, to ruthlessly crush the movement — to settle accounts with their reformist opponents within the leadership and, above all, to smash the threat of political revolution from below.

In the early hours of 3/4 June tanks and heavily armed assault troops swept into Tiananmen Square. Students and workers from the autonomous trade union organisation were crushed in their tents. Scores of those fleeing were mown down with heavy machine gun fire. Amnesty International believes that at least 1,300 were killed in the military terror. Student leaders say (probably more accurately) that over 3,000 were slaughtered.

Despite the overwhelming might of the army, there was a heroic resistance to the repression. Thousands of students and workers fought. Tanks were destroyed and the army was forced to retreat from many quarters of the city.

The whip of bureaucratic reaction transformed the movement from a mass protest into a revolutionary upsurge against the regime. The slaughter in Beijing triggered massive movements in other cities. In Canton, Shanghai, Wuhan, Nanking, Changsa and other industrial centres, hundreds of thousands of workers and other sections of the population joined mass demonstrations, occupying railway stations and

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key bridges to bring transport to a halt. In effect, there were general work stoppages which paralysed many sectors of the economy for several days.

The Tiananmen Square massacre detonated a far deeper response from the workers than even the demonstrations prior to 4 June. Events gave rise to a second opportunity for the political revolution to be carried through. All the objective conditions were there: only the necessary leadership was lacking.

Deng relied on the army to carry through reaction. But with the correct policies and tactics, the army could have been broken from the regime. The first unarmed troops sent in to clear Tiananmen Square, early on 3 June, were met by tens of thousands of people. Many fraternised with the demonstrators. These units had to be withdrawn. The armed units sent in the next day were drawn from the provinces, and had been isolated in the barracks for several weeks. Even then, some went over. There were also reports of a few units turning their arms against the troops carrying out the massacre.

The mass movement, particularly after 4 June, undoubtedly provoked enormous tensions within the ranks of the army. But events posed the need for committees of workers, peasants, and soldiers to control the army, to ensure that it could not be used against the people. In a predominantly peasant country, a workers' state requires a standing army — but it should be under the democratic control of the proletariat. At the same time, the bloody repression also posed the need for workers' militias to defend the workers and other exploited strata against the bureaucracy. Had such committees existed in the weeks before 4 June, organised around a programme for the overthrow of the bureaucracy, decisive sections of the army could have been brought over to the side of the workers.

Recognition of the need to overthrow the bureaucracy, even for the advanced layers, came only with the whip of reaction. "It was not a revolutionary movement at all," commented the poet Duoduo, but "...it became a revolutionary movement."

In many cities, after 4 June, students marched from factory to factory urging workers to join a general strike. Any illusions that they may have had in the leadership of the party and the army were cruelly shattered, and they were now drawing far-reaching conclusions. A leader from a Canton teachers' college said: "There must be a total strike — no more hunger strikes — they are useless. Only if the workers stop steel production and the power stations and the railways can we bring these people down. There are not enough soldiers in all of China to keep the vital industries running. The workers have the power, let the workers have their say. It is the only way."

The bloody reaction was followed by mass arrests, tortures, show trials, and executions — some of them shown on television to strike fear into the people. According to the student leader Wuer Kaixi, now in the USA, more than 120,000 have been arrested or executed. A significant proportion of these have been young workers who were to the fore in the uprising provoked by the regime's action in Beijing. The arrests and executions are still continuing.

Bloody repression is accompanied by a purge of party and government posts, with an intense propaganda campaign to hammer home the bureaucracy's version of events. Iron control has been re-imposed on newspapers and television, all unofficial meetings and demonstrations are banned — suppressing, for the time being, the anger of the people and their hatred for the bureaucracy.

There is a heavy clampdown on the students, who will now have to do a year's military service and take menial jobs in remote areas before being allowed to take postgraduate courses. Political activity on the campuses has been suppressed — for the time being.

Deng has consolidated his grip on the leadership, now based almost entirely on the old-guard of hard-liners, together with younger henchmen like Li Peng. At the Central Committee meeting on 24 June, Zhao Ziyang was removed from his posts, together with three supporters. Unlike Hu in 1987, Zhao refused to step down voluntarily, and there was evidently a struggle. The changes were carried through only three weeks after the events, with Zhao under house arrest and in an atmosphere of military repression.

Since then, the leadership has attempted to lay the basis for a show trial of Zhao on charges of organising counter-revolution. Their delay may indicate continuing opposition from within the bureaucracy. Yang Shangkun, who organised the military reaction, strengthened his position, but it is Jiang Zemin, the colourless Shanghai bureaucrat, who has taken over as general secretary.

The new hardline leadership has also launched a drive against tax-evasion, economic crimes, and corruption partly to discredit the reform wing of the bureaucracy, but also to assuage the profound anger among the people. They are also deliberately trying to confuse leaders of the mass movement with corrupt officials and criminals. The purge appears to be quite far reaching, but is no doubt highly selective, as in past campaigns, and will probably peter out quite soon.

The hardliners may have tightened their political grip, but they still face a worsening economic crisis. The reformers were undermined by the chaos. But the hardliners have no ready sol-

Japan

Liberal election defeat

by Carl Simmons

A political earthquake has shaken Japan. In July's upper house elections the Japan Socialist Party made spectacular gains. Their share of the vote rose from 20% to 38%, winning 46 seats to 36 for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

For the first time since its formation 35 years ago, the LDP has lost its majority in the upper house, raising the possibility of an early general election and an opposition victory.

The LDP owed its domination of Japanese politics to the unprecedented development of the economy in the post-war period, plus a rigged electoral system that gave the farmers (now only 5% of the population) 25% of electoral representation.

But an increase in general discontent, coinciding with a number of unpopular government measures like the sales tax and the liberalisation of agricultural imports, as well as corruption scandals, damaged its electoral base.

Paradoxically, in the last two years, the economy has recovered strongly from the stagnation of 1986-7. That temporary lull was caused by a

strong yen dampening export growth. But in response companies cut costs, and reaped huge profits from investments in land and on the stock exchange. Toyota actually made more money from Zaiteku (financial engineering on the stock-market), than by making cars.

Unemployment fell to 2.4%. The economy is now growing at a staggering 9.1%. Capital investment is now higher than in the USA, even though Japan's economy is only 60% its size. Japan's GNP per capita is higher than the USA.

However, only a relatively small section of society have benefited from this boom in the economy. While company profits increased by 24% last year, wages increased only by 5-6%. With the 3% sales tax taken into account, wages have barely kept pace with inflation.

Workers have borne the brunt of the cost cutting in industry with speedups and the deterioration of conditions: 60% of salaried employees and lower management grades suffer from stress-related stomach problems. Overtime working is now back to the level of 1970, and despite pious sermons from the government on the need to increase leisure time, the average working week, including overtime, stands at around 55 hours.

The increases in land and stock prices have put home ownership beyond the reach of most of the middle class, let alone workers. As one salaried employee with a big company stated on BBC's *Newsnight*, "If you are honest and work hard you won't even earn enough to own your own house."

So the economic boom deepened resentment over inequalities, particularly the flaunting of wealth by the 'tochi-richi' or landed rich. The Recruit scandal had the effect of petrol poured onto a bonfire. Corruption has been endemic to LDP rule, but the spectacle of the party's leading lights making small fortunes from 'gifts' of pre-listed shares in a property company, at a time when most were suffering from the high land prices, produced outrage.

Also, the LDP recently removed restrictions on some agricultural imports to appease the US capitalists and avoid the imposition of retaliat-



Above, disgraced ex-premier Takeshita and below left, Sosure Uno. His seedy private life contributed to his defeat.



Economic boom deepened resentment over inequalities and corruption



**Socialist
leader Doi.**

Elections show that LDP is not invincible

ory duties on Japanese industrial products. Consequently, many farmers' organisations called for a vote against the LDP. In one, where the leadership recommended a vote for the LDP, young farmers stormed the stage and started to beat them up! In the elections they lost many previously safe seats in rural constituencies.

Probably an even more significant factor in the Socialists' victory was the government's introduction, despite election promises to the contrary, of the sales tax. Coupled with the abolition of a previous tax, this meant that people would pay less for whisky and BMW cars, but more on food and the necessities of life. With food prices accounting for 26% of the income of an average family, this provoked a wave of discontent, particularly among women.

The revelations surrounding Premier Uno's seedy private life added to the discontent of women voters, as did the statement of the agricultural minister that women had no place in politics and should be looking after their families! Women voted almost two to one against the LDP, with the Socialists picking up most of their votes.

The other capitalist opposition parties, the inappropriately named Buddhist Komeito ('Clean Government Party') and the Democratic Socialist Party (a right wing split from the Socialists in the 1960s) were deeply implicated in the Recruit and other scandals and lost seats. They do however provide the Socialist leadership with an excuse for abandoning the party's former policies on defence and embracing pro-market economic policies.

For Doi: "The issue today is not building up a socialist state...it is whether we can construct a democratic country." Doi went on: "It would not be correct to think there would be an immediate or very radical change in policy" under a Socialist-led government. As the *Financial Times* commented: "There is nothing socialist about Miss Doi's pledges to abolish the hated consumption tax, clean up politics and to protect farmers. It is unashamedly populist." (22/7/89).

Had the Socialist Party leaders not thrown them a lifeline in the form of an electoral bloc, they would probably have sunk without trace.

The only other gainer from the elections was the Rengo, a trade union federation formed from the merger of the Socialist unions with the company unions supporting the Democratic Socialist Party. The new federation is formally linked to neither party. But it advocates an alliance between the Socialists and the capitalist opposition to exclude the Communists. Politically, it is close to the right-wing of the Socialist Party.

It stood 12 candidates, mainly in single-seat constituencies, to avoid disputes between the parties over who should stand. Eleven were elected.

The DSP and the Komeito are unreliable allies

for the Socialists. In many cities they formed blocs with the ruling LDP against the Socialists. It is possible that even if an early election were held for the lower house and the LDP lost its majority, it could succeed in hanging on to power by splitting the opposition, by forming a coalition with the DSP. The DSP, with its calls for increased defence spending and only lukewarm opposition to the sales tax, has far more in common with the LDP than with the Socialist Party.

The LDP could struggle on despite the loss of its upper house majority until next summer. The wealth of Japanese capitalism gives it a certain room for manoeuvre. It has already attempted to buy farmers' votes by halting this year's reduction in the rice subsidy. There have even been suggestions of abolishing the sales tax. They could carry through some political reforms, making the pretence of rooting out corruption.

But every previous attempt at 'reform' has come up against the barrier of the factional interests that dominate the party. The information about Uno's liaisons with prostitutes is now believed to have been leaked to the press by members of opposing factions.

The factions do not represent any real policy differences but the almost feudal networks of personal patronage and in some cases commercial interest. The interests of the factions and the business groups that support them frequently conflict with the interests of the capitalist class as a whole.

This is confirmed by the selection of Toshiki Taifu as the new premier after Uno's post-election resignation. Taifu was the candidate backed by the largest party faction led by disgraced former premier Takeshita who was forced to resign for taking favours from Recruit. Taifu also took £70,000 from Recruit.

The election results are a signpost to future developments. They show that the LDP is not invincible. The Japanese economic miracle will not last for ever. There are already fears of over-production and increased trade frictions resulting from the investment boom.

Sooner or later the Socialist Party will be pushed into power. Apart from a brief period in coalition in 1947-8 the workers' parties have never been in government. Workers will learn from the experience of the Socialists in office. Demands will grow inside both the Socialist and Communist Parties for a break with the capitalist parties, and socialist change.

If blocked on the political front, workers will move on the industrial plane. The Japanese bosses' reign of terror in the factories will be challenged, previously tame company unions transformed or pushed to the side, as the 'social peace' and 'class harmony' of the last 40 years evaporates. □

Nigerian regime faces mass protest

Ibrahim Yusuf writes from Lagos

In Nigeria, where the major sectors of the economy are dominated by multi-national companies, conditions for workers, students, unemployed and even the middle-class have taken a dive. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced by General Babangida's military government in 1986 has cut living standards. Inflation is running officially at 50% and the costs of education, health and transport have risen sharply.

Urban workers' real wages fell by 50% between 1985 and 1988, while unemployment has reached four million. Death of women at child birth is 50,000 a year. The Psychiatric Association of Nigeria claim that millions suffer from mental disorder, that 33% of absence from work and 30% of all illnesses are due to psychiatric complaints.

The local *Sunday Times* commented (12 February 1989): 'The SAP which was to be the economy's saviour and which entailed deregulation of the economy, liberalisation of trade, the trimming of government expenditure and the removal of subsidies especially on oil, brought in its wake massive retrenchment in public corporations and the civil service. Many private sector companies were also forced to reduce workers while others closed completely.' In education the result was that 'students often tear pages out of books in libraries because they cannot afford to photocopy them. They can't buy books, they can't eat well, they can't do assignments. It all leads to psychological stress.'

It was inevitable that students would act against the SAP. In May 1989 they led mass action against the Babangida government. Earlier in April 1988 they had sparked off a nation-



wide strike action by the trade unions against petrol price increases. Now they were on the move again.

The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), officially banned by the military regime in 1986 put a ten point ultimatum to Babangida, demanding the termination of the SAP. When the ultimatum expired there was a wave of protests. The Lagos College of Education and the State University started the movement which quickly spread to all parts of the country and to secondary and even primary school students as young as nine years old, many of whom were the most active.

Anger was fuelled by growing evidence of corruption in high places. Nigerian businessman, Alhaji Mohammed Bashir, who is being detained by the secret police, told a Lagos judge that he paid \$500,000 into the private accounts of Vice Admiral Aikhomu in a deal concerning the Pan Ocean Oil Company. Aikhomu is Chief of the General Staff and the most important member of the government after Babangida.

The government was paralysed by the protests. Babangida's visit to France was hurriedly cancelled. Soldiers' movements in and out of barracks were curtailed amid rumours of a coup attempt by lower ranked officers.

If the leaders of the Nigerian Labour Congress had called then for a 24-hour general strike of the 42 industrial unions, linked to the demand for an end to the SAP and the introduction of a living minimum wage tied to the cost of living and socialist measures, they could have shifted the balance of forces decisively against the government.

Instead the NLC leaders stood by and watched as the nation boiled. Only a few unions,

Babangida on his state visit to Britain.

Students led mass action against Babangida

**The
military
pledges
transition
to
democracy
but violates
rights**

including the Lagos state council of Public Corporation Employees whose leadership support Marxist ideas, backed the protests.

Consequently, the demonstrations began to drift into arson and looting, although the word on the lips of many demonstrators including disarmed soldiers and even policemen was 'Babangida must go.' But the rioting gave the regime the excuse to unleash mass repression. Tanks, helicopters and troops were deployed to crush the protests and hundreds were shot dead and thousands wounded.

All political activity was suspended. Under government pressure, the NLC leaders stopped a symposium on 'The Alternative to the SAP' from being held on NLC premises. The host of the seminar, radical lawyer, Gani Fawehinmi, was detained. Six universities who spearheaded the protests have now been closed for a year.

The key factor in the economic crisis is the dependence of the Nigerian economy on the advanced capitalist nations. The Nigerian economy is tied to the world market. The best period for the economy was between 1974-80 when there was a boom in the world capitalist economy and oil prices were high. Nigeria depends on oil for 90% of foreign exchange earnings. But from a peak of \$26bn sales in 1980, oil revenue collapsed to \$6.2bn in 1988. Much of this now goes to finance the \$30bn foreign debt accumulated which sucks up 40% of Nigeria's export earnings. This debt rose by 130% between 1980-8.

This burden has made intended objectives of SAP to increase non-oil manufacturing capacity and export earnings and reduce the foreign debt just a dream. While manufacturing capacity utilisation rose from 38% of GDP to 41%, that was well short of the SAP target of 56%.

Faced with economic crisis and under the pressure of the working-class and all sections of the people, Babangida is trying to prevent the humiliation of the military. So he is pushed into a programme for civil rule and the return of the army to barracks, at least temporarily.

But while Babangida pledges a transition to 'democracy', his government has violated human rights to maintain power, in response to protests against the failure to satisfy the needs of the mass of people.

Last October strike action by the Electricity Staff Union was ruthlessly suppressed and 11 leaders were jailed for life by a military tribunal. Strikes, in effect, are now illegal. Organisations have been banned or dissolved and many individuals imprisoned, including Femi Aborisade, editor of the Marxist paper, *Labour Militant*.

But the repression has not deterred the working-class and youth from struggle. In 1988 over 230,000 man-days were lost in industrial disputes, a 143% increase over the previous year. Even the Nigerian Bar Association organised a

three day strike of 15,000 lawyers. while the trade union leaders have moved to the right to make an accommodation with the regime, the rank and file have taken action against it.

In May 1989 the setting-up of a Labour Party was officially proclaimed at a meeting of 10,000 workers. This is an historic step taken by the Nigerian working-class and presents a great opportunity to move in the direction of socialism, despite the refusal of the NLC leaders to adopt any mention of socialist measures.

Nearly all the other political parties are backing the government's SAP and the Labour Party could seize the initiative if it came out boldly against government austerity measures.

The government has organised the election rules to try and exclude any working-class based party. Only the armed forces can register any party which must pay a N50,000 deposit and register not less than 50,000 members with passport photos attached! Rallies and meetings cannot be held without police permits and successful candidates must obey the decisions of the armed forces until 1992 when there will be Presidential elections!

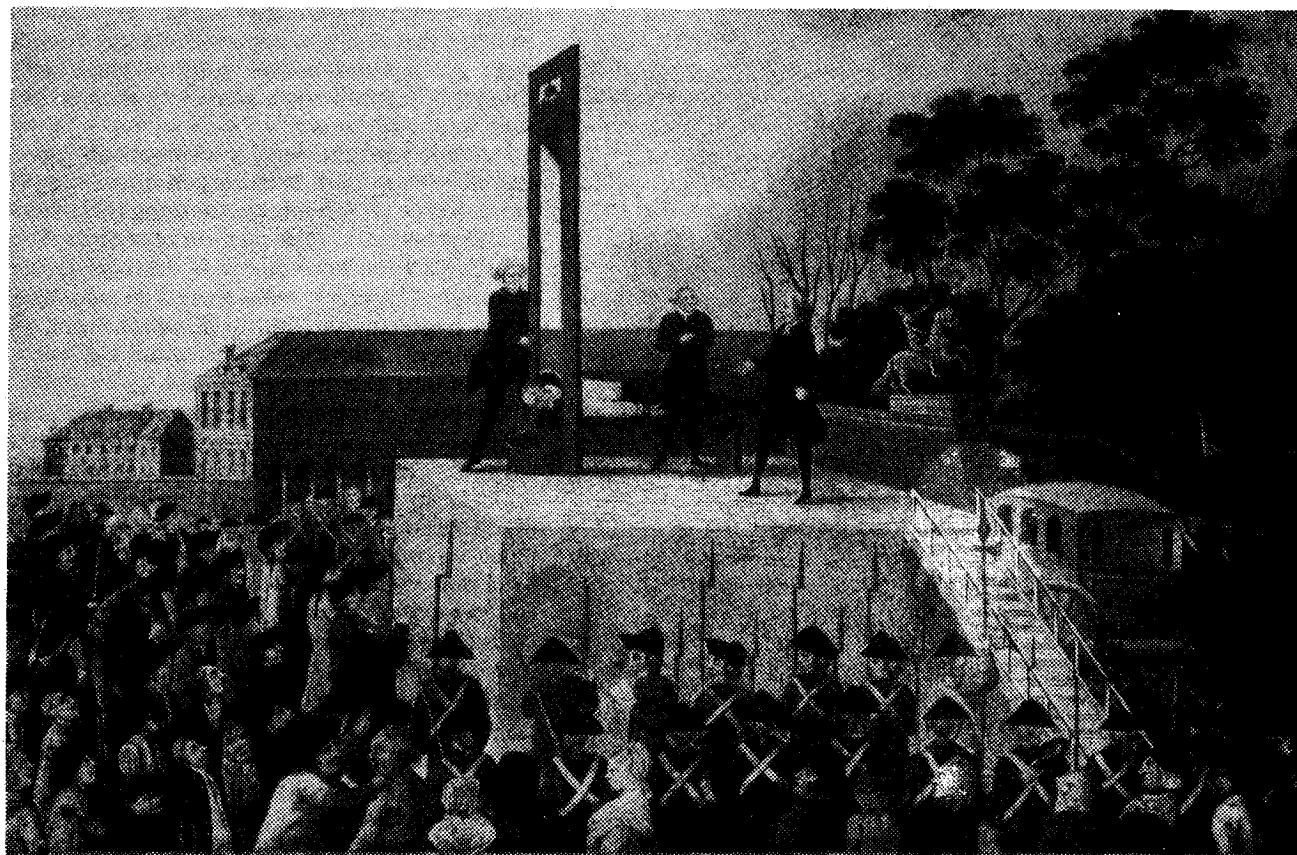
There is still the possibility that junior officers, disgusted with the regime, may carry out a coup and take measures against big business. But without the working-class coming to power what would be established would not be workers' democracy but a proletarian bonapartist dictatorship that rests on a nationalised economy. Coup or no coup the third republic is doomed. The approaching world recession and Nigeria's need to pay rescheduled foreign debts will have a catastrophic effect on the economy.

The experience that the workers will go through then will help them to draw the lesson that only the overthrow of capitalism and landlordism in Nigeria and its replacement by a workers' democracy and a planned socialist economy within a socialist federation of Africa can free the 100 million Nigerian people from poverty and need. □

Femi Aborisade, former Education Officer of the Nigerian Labour Congress, and previously Editor of the Nigerian Marxist newspaper *Labour Militant*, has been held in detention by the Babangida government since 6 February 1989. He is being held under military decree No 2, which allows the military to hold for up to six months anyone they deem to be a 'threat to national security.' The authorities have refused to state the nature of this so-called threat.

Femi is really being held because he published in *Labour Militant* articles critical of the government's arrest of the leaders of the bank workers union, and of government attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of other unions.

Protests should be sent urgently to the Nigerian High Commission, Nigeria House, 9 Northumberland Avenue, London WC2N 5BX. Copies to NLDC, 42 Hemberton Rd, London SW9.



The dialectic of revolution is a book sealed with seven seals for modern-day bourgeois historians who seek to distort the real processes by which their class came to power.

The counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie in the bourgeois democratic revolution was already analysed by Marx and Engels after the revolutions of 1848-9. In the 20th century nowhere has the bourgeoisie in the colonial and ex-colonial countries played anything but a reactionary role. In Russia, tsarism was overthrown not by the so-called bourgeois liberals but by the working-class in the February revolution and then decisively in October.

But even in the classical period of the bourgeois revolution, the overthrow of the feudal-absolutist regimes was accomplished, not directly by the bourgeoisie, but by the most revolutionary sections of the petit-bourgeoisie which temporarily succeeded in mobilising behind them the most oppressed layers of society, the semi-proletarian masses of town and countryside. That was as true in 17th century England as in France over 100 years later.

From the outset, the French bourgeoisie and its political representatives strove for a deal with reaction. They feared that the masses would not stop at the abolition of the aristocracy's feudal privileges but mount an assault on property itself.

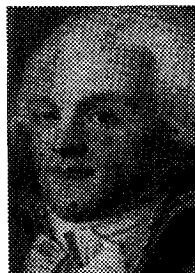
Brissot, leader of the Girondins, railed against 'disorganisers' who would "level everything —

1793

*The execution
of King Louis
XVI.*

*In the concluding part of
his account of the French
Revolution which began
200 years ago, Alan
Woods describes the*

Rise and Fall of the Jacobins



Robespierre.

**The August
insurrection
of 1792
was a
major
turning
point**

properties, wealth, the price of stables, the various services owed to society." He reflected the panic of his wealthy patrons. However, in the moment of supreme danger the revolution's salvation depended upon the mobilisation of the most oppressed masses of society.

The Jacobins and Girondins originally belonged to the same party. But whereas the latter recoiled at stirring up the 'lower depths' of society, the Jacobins saw that this was the only alternative if the revolution was to be secured.

In reply to Brissot, Robespierre, the leader of the Jacobins, attacked the "false patriots... who want to set up the Republic only for themselves, who need to govern only for the advantage of the rich".

While the Assembly delayed, the masses were again galvanised into action by the threat of counter-revolution. The Duke of Brunswick, heading the invading armies, issued a manifesto threatening 'signal vengeance' if any harm was done to the King and Queen.

This was no idle threat. All over France royalist groups, well supplied with money and arms, were awaiting the signal to wreak havoc in the rear. Already in 1791 and 1792 there had been royalist uprisings in Perpignan, Arles, Lozere, the Vivarias, Yssingeaux and the Vendee.

Confident of success, the King finally staged what amounted to a parliamentary coup d'etat, dismissing the Girondin Ministry on 13 June 1792. All the conditions for a monarchist coup were prepared. With the Austrians and Prussians at the door, Lafayette was only concerned with 'the enemy within', offering the King his troops 'to crush the Jacobins'.

Undoubtedly the entry of the Austrian and Prussian armies into Paris, accompanied by roy-

alist emigres, would have presaged butchery on a scale to make the subsequent revolutionary 'Terror' look like a vicarage tea party.

But again the 'sans culottes' saved the day. Danton, Marat, Chaumette and Hebert formed a new revolutionary Commune, providing an organised expression for the masses who elected delegates from their 'sections'. They carried out yet another insurrection on 10 August 1792. The Tuileries Palace was stormed and Louis forced to flee for protection to the very Assembly against which he was conspiring!

Under the masses' pressure, the Assembly suspended the King and carried out

a series of progressive laws. Universal manhood suffrage was finally conquered. Emigres' lands were confiscated to be sold in small lots; though in practice most were sold in large estates to the wealthy.

Nevertheless, the August insurrection was a major turning point. By their action the masses showed they would tolerate nothing less than a root and branch transformation of society. The old basis for compromise was destroyed. The moderate Girondins were forced to break off secret negotiations with the King. All forms of government, parties and institutions were thrown into the melting pot.

The political centre of gravity shifted within the Assembly with the growth of the Jacobin left at the expense of the Girondin centre. More importantly, the axis of power passed from the debating chamber to the street, from the National Assembly to the revolutionary organs of local power and the clubs which inspired them and armed them with ideas and slogans.

The revolutionary communes began to occupy centre stage, particularly the Paris Commune dominated by the 'men of 10 August' — Danton, Marat, Hebert and Chaumette.

The Jacobins, the radical wing of the petit-bourgeois democracy, succeeded because they, unlike the Girondins, were prepared to lean upon the masses to deal with reaction. They did not hold up their hands in horror at the 'September massacres' when the Paris sans culottes broke into the prisons to stage a plebeian settling of accounts with aristocratic counter-revolution.

Grim as these events were, they can only be understood in the light of the terrible danger which hung over revolutionary Paris. The later experience of counter-revolutionary Thermidor in 1794 and the White Terror which followed the defeated revolution of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871 shows what kind of bloodbath could have been expected had reaction triumphed.

Unlike the countless victims of the Thermidorian Terror, murdered without the slightest pretence at a trial, at least the sans culottes improvised tribunals before which the imprisoned aristocrats were given a chance to defend themselves. Nor was this a complete formality, as has been alleged. While 1,465 prisoners were killed, 1,335 were acquitted — a fact hardly mentioned by writers anxious to portray the Paris 'mob' as bloodthirsty monsters.

The September massacres represented a desperate act of self-defence by revolutionary Paris, a spontaneous action meant to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy.

On 20 September 1792 the newly elected Convention which replaced the Assembly met in the Tuileries. The Girondins now represented the right wing. The left, sat on the highest benches, were known as the 'Mountain'.



Sans-culotte.

Under the impact of the August insurrection and the September massacres, the Girondins, who in any case were formal republicans, voted with the Jacobins for the abolition of the monarchy. From this moment on, the revolution was characterised by the struggle between the Mountain and the Gironde within the Convention and the growing hostility of the Paris Commune to the Convention as a whole.

The trial of the King, or Louis Capet (his family name) as he was then called, brought out the tensions between those who wished a halt to the revolution and those under the pressure of the masses who were prepared to go to the end. It was impossible to seriously struggle against reaction without dealing with the 'first link in the chain of counter-revolution'. But the Girondins balked at executing Louis which they rightly understood would mark the point of no return for the revolution.

Overruling the Girondins' delaying tactics, the Convention voted by a small majority for execution. The revolution had burnt its bridges. In the words of Danton: "The coalised Kings threaten us; so we hurl at their feet as a gauge of battle, the head of a King."

The defeat of the aristocracy and the overthrow of the monarchy by the second French revolution, the August insurrection of 1792, crystallised the class contradictions within the revolutionary camp. As the revolution advanced, the more vacillating element in the Convention moved sharply to the right while the Jacobins, under pressure of the masses, moved left. An open split became inevitable.

This reflected the intensification of the class war. The big bourgeoisie had made fortunes out of military contracts, financial speculation and the purchase of church lands. The mass of the people suffered from shortages, soaring prices and the rapid depreciation of the currency. The washerwomen of Paris demonstrated with the slogan: 'Du pain et du savon' (bread and soap). Grocers' shops were sacked in food riots.

The horrified Girondins slandered the rioters as 'agents of Pitt' — the British Prime Minister. Under the guise of 'federalism', the Girondists reflected the panic of the wealthy merchants of Bordeaux, Nantes, Lyons and Toulon at the events in Paris. In reply, the semi-proletarian masses demanded more centralism, increased powers for the Convention, revolutionary terror to crush reaction and the purging of the Convention of the right.

The movement reached its peak with the 'Journées' of 31 May to 2 June 1793. The Convention's debating hall was invaded by a mass of sansculottes demanding the expulsion of the Girondin deputies. This insurrection marked the decisive victory of the revolution: the triumph of the most revolutionary wing based on the plebeian masses in Paris against the reactionary bourgeoisie and its Girondin



agents.

The eruption of the masses onto the scene was caused by the desperate situation for the revolution which can only be likened to the darkest years of the civil war in Russia after 1917 when the Soviet government was attacked by 21 foreign armies and when at one stage the Bolsheviks controlled only an area around Petrograd and Moscow.

A Spanish army had crossed the Pyrenees. The Prussians had invaded from the East. Toulon was treacherously surrendered to the English. In the Vendee region a bloody revolt began, threatening Nantes. The Girondists staged uprisings in the provinces on the side of counter-revolution. Paris was shaken as the news came in of the defection of Marseille and Lyon.

The French revolution, particularly at its high point of 1793-4, was a great war of social liberation waged by the French people against incredible odds. They confronted powerful and numerous enemies both within and without. Against them were ranged the great powers of Europe. Yet, against all odds, they succeeded.

Such a victory would have been inconceivable except for the concentration of power into the hands of the most determined and audacious elements of the revolutionary democracy. The Committee of Public Safety set up by the Convention acted as the cutting edge of the war against internal reaction, while the 'levée en masse' provided the mass forces needed to smash external intervention.

So long as it was directed against the agents of the old regime and enemies of the revolution,

Storming of the Tuileries, 10 August 1792.

The second revolution of 1793 was a great war of social liberation

**The Terror
played a
necessary
role
against the
internal
counter
revolution**

the Terror played a necessary and progressive role in the context of the extremely dangerous situation on the internal front. In any case, the scope of the Terror has been exaggerated, especially in Paris. Only 15 per cent of the death sentences were pronounced in Paris: 19 per cent in the South East and 52 per cent in the West where the civil war was raging.

Without doubt excesses were committed, for example in Nantes and in Lyons, under the notorious Joseph Fouché who later became an agent of Thermidorian, Bonapartist and even royalist reaction and ended up a millionaire with the title of the Duke of Otranto. But excesses occur in every war, particularly a civil war. Not even the fiercest critic of the Terror has explained how the revolution could have survived without it in this hour of mortal peril.

In any event, the Terror was only one feature of the implacable war waged by the revolution. Far more important was the incredible and unprecedented mobilisation of the entire nation which was the secret of a success which seemed impossible.

To persuade the people to fight, the Jacobins made concessions to the demands of the masses. The constitution of 1793 was the first truly democratic constitution — a direct conquest of the masses in struggle. No matter that this constitution under prevailing conditions was never really put into effect. In practice, the masses had already imposed their own direct revolutionary democracy through their 'sections' where mass meetings of the poorest citizens were in almost permanent touch with their trusted representatives.

The Paris sans culottes kept control over the

Convention by continuous vigilance. The public galleries were always crowded, cheering the most radical wing of the Mountain and keeping the vacillating elements in line.

The common tendency to characterise the Jacobins as a kind of 'socialist' party is however entirely out of place. Despite the ceaseless rise and fall of parties and programmes which invariably brought the radical trend to the fore, the class content of the French revolution never ceased to be bourgeois in character. Robespierre's faction was merely the most consistently revolutionary of the petit bourgeois trends that dominated the Convention.

Pressurised by the masses,

the Jacobins carried the bourgeois revolution to its limits and, to some extent, beyond, making inroads into private property. This in no sense represented a socialist tendency in Jacobinism which stood firmly on the ground of bourgeois property, but only the desire to conciliate the semi-proletarian sans culottes, a section of which undoubtedly wished to go further.

In September 1793 new mass demonstrations forced a reluctant Jacobin dominated Convention to grant the law of the 'general maximum' or ceiling on prices. The new war effort required a strict control of the economy which imposed restrictions on capitalism. The Committee of Public Safety waged a ruthless war against speculation and profiteering. The property of exiles and rebels was seized. There was even an element of nationalization, for example of the arms industry and army supplies. Limits were placed on wealth and inheritance. The confiscated wealth of the aristocrats and counter-revolutionaries financed relief for the old, sick, widows and orphans.

These measures received the enthusiastic endorsement of the masses, providing the key to military victory. And what a victory! The world had never before witnessed the spectacle of a people risen in arms. Apprentices, ploughboys, blacksmiths, labourers rushed to answer the appeal and an astonished Europe looked on as this ragged army of untrained volunteers proceeded to inflict defeat after defeat on the well-drilled regiments of England, Prussia, Austria and Spain.

What turned the scales, apart from skillful generalship, was above all the morale of the revolutionary soldier and the ability to pour in a mass of men and material by levies and requisitions.

By the end of 1793, the enemy had been virtually driven from French territory. The revolution was triumphant on all fronts. Feudal dues were finally abolished without compensation. In June 1793 the Convention passed a vital law which effected a genuine agrarian revolution, handing back to the peasants all the land taken from the village communes. The triumph of the peasant was complete. The power of the aristocracy was broken.

But precisely as the revolution reached its flood tide it began to ebb. With the revolutionary dictatorship of the Jacobins, the bourgeois revolution had reached and gone beyond its limits. To proceed further would threaten bourgeois property. This was not the agenda of Robespierre and the other Jacobin leaders.

The bourgeois revolution differs from the socialist revolution just as the capitalist system differs from socialism. The laws of motion governing capitalism do not depend upon the conscious will of the ruling class. Capitalism 'regulates itself' through the blind play of the market. Consequently, it does not require a conscious and scientific programme to bring it into being.



On the contrary the fierce passions and revolutionary energy required to overthrow the old regime could never have been called forth by an appeal to the values of the market place, the morals of the money grabber and the sordid reality of wage slavery for the many.

The 'socialist revolution can only be brought about by the conscious activity of the masses fighting for their self-emancipation. By contrast, the bourgeois revolution, essentially the transfer of power from one privileged minority to another, must always be based upon illusions. The 17th century English bourgeois regarded themselves as the elect of God, fighting to establish the rule of the saints upon earth. Their French equivalents, nearly 150 years later, appealed to 'Reason' and spoke of 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. But given the concrete development of the productive forces, these ideal forms could only be filled, in the last analysis, with a capitalist content.

The 'victory of Jacobinism, the most consistent and revolutionary wing of the petit bourgeoisie, brought the revolution's leaders before the contradictions between the aspirations of the aroused urban masses and the objective limits of the bourgeois revolution. Jacobinism itself was destroyed by this contradiction.

A section of Jacobins around Danton and Desmoulins wanted to call a halt, concentrating their fire on the continuing terror.

Another faction grouped around Hebert and Roux represented the extreme plebeian left wing of Jacobinism, based on the Paris Commune and the Paris sans culottes. This so-called 'faction d'enrages' had the upper hand in the 'sections' and supported the terror and the requisitions which they saw as a weapon against the rich. The growing power of the enragés since the fall of the Girondins began to frighten the Jacobin leaders, pushing Robespierre and Danton into a temporary and unstable alliance.

At the other extreme, with the threat of counter-revolution removed, the propertied classes, including now a big section of the peasantry, reacted against the years of 'storm and stress'. The wealthy demanded 'order' and protection against the Paris sansculottes. The middle-class longed for peace and quiet, to get on with the job of enriching themselves. Inside the Convention, the 'crapuds du Marais' (frogs of the Marsh), former Girondin sympathisers, the vacillating centre, cowed and silent in the previous period, became restive.

Robespierre attempted to balance between the factions and classes. But inevitably he came down in favour of the propertied classes against the 'excesses' of the sans culottes.

By the beginning of 1794 the masses were worn out by four long years of fighting. The continuing collapse of the paper currency, long queues, bread shortages and general poverty contrasted sharply with corruption in high

places. True, Robespierre still lived in a joiner's house in the Rue St Honore and Saint Just would dine off a hunk of bread and a few slices of sausages still seated at his desk. But the Convention was riddled with speculators and swindlers who had made their fortune out of the public purse.

Discontent was rife among the Paris poor and the rank and file Jacobins. The Hebertists now controlled the Cordeliers Club, Danton's old base, and talked openly about the 'sacred right of insurrection'. But the class balance of forces had already decisively shifted against them.

The Jacobins had leaned on the popular masses to strike blows against the Girondins. Once these had been eliminated, Robespierre's first priority was to direct his fire against the left. The Jacobin Jeanbon Saint Andre gave the game away: "Our greatest enemies are not without; we see them; they are among us; they wish to carry the revolutionary measures further than we do."

With power concentrated in the hands of the Committee of Public Safety, the independently functioning sections represented a potential threat to Jacobin power. Therefore they took steps to subordinate the 40,000 revolutionary committees to the Committee of Public Safety which began a purge against the left, so undermining the Hebertists' base of support.

In March 1794, Hebert and 19 followers were suddenly arrested and executed. The masses, exhausted and disoriented, for once failed to react. This event was generally seen as the end of the revolution. Though Robespierre attempted to balance this with a blow against the right-wing Jacobins, executing Danton and his supporters, the pendulum began to swing irreversibly to the right.

Once the fear of the sansculottes had been removed, the balance of forces within the Convention was swiftly transformed. A section of the Jacobins moved over to the Marsh, leaving Robespierre and his group isolated. The split was reflected in the Committee of Public Safety itself.

The coup d'etat of the Ninth of Thermidor (27 July) 1794 was the inevitable result. Feeling the groundswell of discontent which now affected all classes, a faction of disaffected Jacobins revolted against Robespierre.

They were immediately joined by the 'frogs of the Marsh' who had previously fawned on Robespierre. They now turned like a pack of baying hounds. A year earlier such a parliamentary coup would have stood no chance of success. The masses would have rushed to arms and the reaction would have been instantly crushed.

In fact, on the night of the 10th Thermidor, the issue was in the balance. Robespierre was rescued and taken to the Paris Commune. But this time the masses did not respond and the



Marat.

**The
revolutionary
dictatorship
of the
Jacobins
took the
revolution
to its
limits and
beyond**

**Despite the
later
restoration
of
monarchy
the social
conquests
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The ancien
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could not
be restored**

relatively small forces commanded by the Convention were able to retake Robespierre and the others who were immediately executed without even the pretext of a trial.

The victory of the Thermidorian reaction allegedly ended the 'terror'. But those historians who dwell upon and exaggerate the revolutionary terror draw a discrete veil of silence over the bloody White Terror which followed.

The exact number of victims will never be known because most were murdered by night with no trial, no defence and no records. In the following three days alone there were 103 executions of prominent Jacobins. Revolutionaries were hunted down and butchered, especially in the South. In the prisons of Lyons, Aix and Marseilles, reactionary gangs like the 'compagnies du Jesus' killed all who had taken part in the previous government.

Meanwhile, most of the social conquests of the urban poor were liquidated. The Law of the Maximum was the first to go. The cost of living rocketed. The winter of Year III (1794-5) was a period of extreme poverty and wretchedness. With 1790 as a base of 100, price inflation reached 580 by January 1795, 720 by March and 900 by April. In May there was an uprising in the working-class suburbs of Paris, St Antoine and St Marcel, demanding 'bread and the consti-

itution of 1793'. But with no clear programme, perspective or leadership, the revolt collapsed, a pathetic after-echo of the great 'journées' of 1789-93.

The new constitution of the Thermidor was the banner of inequality. The right to property, not present in the 1789 constitution and first included as a safeguard by the Jacobins in 1793, was now clearly spelt out: "Property is the right to enjoy and dispose of one's possessions, one's revenues and the fruit of one's labour and industry... the maintenance of property is the foundation upon which the cultivation of the soil, all production and every means of labour and the whole social order rests." Once more the suffrage was restricted to exclude both the aristocrats and the poorer citizens.

In a few years France had passed from absolute monarchy through a constitutional monarchy to a bourgeois republic. After July 1794 it swung back to a directory, bonapartism, and finally, after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, to an absolute monarchy. On the basis of this, the revisionist school of historians ask: was it all worthwhile? Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose (the more things change, the more they stay the same), as the French saying goes.

But the French revolution marked a decisive social and political transformation: the smashing of the power of the aristocracy; the radical clearing out of the Augean stables of feudalism; and the distribution of land to millions of small peasant proprietors. Despite all the vicissitudes of the political superstructure, the fundamental social conquests of the revolution remained.

This constituted the fundamental power of the revolution, even in the period of Bonapartist reaction, enabling the regime to take on the combined forces of reactionary Europe and carry Napoleon's victorious army to the gates of Moscow. Even the restoration of the Bourbons after 1815 did not touch the peasants' lands. The 'ancien regime' could not be reestablished, even on the bayonets of Wellington and Blücher.

The repercussions of the revolution cannot be overstated, giving a powerful impulse to the revolutionary-democratic movements in Spain, Germany, Italy, to the national liberation movements in Poland and Ireland, and even kindling the spark of the colonial revolution in the Caribbean.

The earliest manifestation of the Russian Revolution, the Decembrist uprising of 1825, was directly inspired by the example of the French revolution. As late as 1905, the workers of Moscow and St Petersburg sang the workers 'Marseillaise' on their demonstrations. Not least in France itself every revolutionary movement right up to the Paris Commune of 1870-71 took as its starting point the revolution of 1793.



**The capture
and wounding
of
Robespierre.**

A hard or soft landing?



The stock crash of October 1987 alarmed the governments and bankers of the seven top capitalist (G7) countries. They feared a recession in the real economy would follow. So banks and governments pumped money into the world economy through West German and Japanese funding of the US trade deficit which propped up the US dollar and allowed interest rates to fall. Japan and West Germany ran up budget deficits to boost demand. This led to a sharp rise in investment, production, employment and trade during 1988.

However, this expansion of fictitious capital ie credit has far outstretched any resulting rise in production and investment. Consequently, it has led to an inflation of prices which threatens to return the capitalist economies to the sharp fluctuations and instability of the 1970s. Inflation is 5.2% in the USA, 8.3% in the UK, 3.6% in France, 3% in Japan, and is still accelerating.

That is why Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board, the equivalent of the governor of the Bank of England, has been trying to use his control of interest rates in US money markets to bring about what he calls a 'soft landing' for the US economy where 'unstable inflationary pressures are contained without simultaneously throwing the economy into recession.'

Greenspan's restrictive monetary policies have met opposition from the Bush administration who fear that the US economy may tumble into a slump or 'hard landing'. There are some indications that this is happening. US GNP growth has declined from 3.5% in 1988 to an annual rate as of July 1989 of only 1.7%. The automobile industry — a key indicator in the USA — has suffered a seven

per cent fall in sales, despite bargain offers. There has been a sharp drop in demand for nickel which is a key ingredient in manufacturing industry's main raw material, stainless steel, whose production is also falling.

In the last two months, Greenspan allowed interest rates to fall a little. Even more importantly, despite some 'cosmetic' cuts, the US government has failed to cut significantly the huge budget deficit (\$146bn in 1989 plus \$20bn to be added to bail the bankrupt US savings banks). Consequently, continued government spending, particularly on arms, has buoyed up consumer demand. So it may be that the US economy will maintain growth for the rest of 1989 and even into 1990, but accompanied by continued inflation.

The same contradictory picture exists for the world economy as a whole. In the last 12 months Italy, Japan and West Germany have been growing at around or over 4%, and growth is accelerating in West Germany, France and Italy. Similarly smaller economies like Sweden and Australia are still growing fast. On the other hand, growth is slowing down in the USA, Japan and particularly in the UK. In addition, industrial production, the motor force of any advanced capitalist economy, is falling back fast in West Germany, Italy, Japan and the UK.

So it is not clear whether the present long boom of the 1980s, extended after the shock of the

stock crash two years ago, is finally coming to an end. There are several factors which suggest that recession or even a slump may be just around the corner.

Firstly, there has been no fundamental change in the underlying factors which created the conditions for a recession in late 1987 and which prompted panic in capitalist stock markets. In many ways the situation is now worse: inflation has accelerated and corporate debt has spiralled, with the expansion of mergers and leveraged buy-outs which makes stock markets even more unstable and vulnerable. Economic management using interest rates is that much more difficult.

Profit rates have clearly reached their peak in all the major capitalist economies. According to the latest OECD report (*Economic Outlook* June 1989), gross profitability (ie before tax and interest deductions) for the top seven G7 economies has peaked (at an average 21 per cent of investment) and is expected to taper off from now on.

Also, the utilisation of existing plant and equipment capacity for the G7 countries has peaked at just over 84 per cent and is moving downwards, particularly in the

Alan Greenspan

Economic Notes

USA.

Secondly, none of the imbalances between the major economies in the world, a product of the uneven development of a profit oriented market economy, have been corrected in the last two years.

To finance their budget deficit the US Treasury borrowed heavily from abroad. In order to attract Japanese and German investors interest rates have been kept high. This has meant that the US dollar in relation to other currencies was high, making US exports expensive and imports into the USA cheap. The result was an unprecedented trade deficit. Despite a 40 per cent dollar devaluation from 1985-7, the trade deficit was still over \$130bn in 1988, and during the last year as interest rates have risen again, the dollar has climbed back in value, threatening to raise the deficit again.

In a recent study*, a leading expert on international trade argues that the US dollar must be devalued by an average of 10-15 per cent, and by an even larger extent against Japanese and West German currencies, in order to correct the huge imbalances of trade and payments. Otherwise there could be a world recession induced by high interest rates choking off growth.

On the other hand there are some indicators which suggest that the boom may continue for some time yet. World trade continues to expand at a faster rate than the overall growth of production in the major capitalist economies. The post-war integration of the major capitalist economies allows them to stimulate each other's economies. Also it appears that world raw material prices are falling back again, at the expense of the Third World. This will help to moderate inflation for the industrialised economies and hold up profit levels. Finally, while the West German and Japanese economies perform well, they may continue to pay for US prosperity, by financing their budget and trade deficits and propping up the dollar.

But there will be a limit to the willingness of the West German and Japanese capitalists to finance US imperialism. Eventually, the expansion of world trade will give way to the pressures of protectionism as each capitalist nation state tries to protect its own inter-

A weak boom

Whatever the timing of the end of the present boom, it is also clear that the world capitalist economy has entered a new epoch. The long world economic upswing of 1949-73, where the business cycle was characterised by strong upturns in production and trade and short and relatively imperceptible downturns, gave way to the instability and fluctuations of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some capitalist economists have tried to claim that the latest boom demonstrates a new found resurgence in the health of capitalism. But the figures do not justify that claim.

GNP growth in the OECD countries for the business cycle 1968-73 was 4.6 per cent yearly. For the 1974-9 cycle it was 4 per cent annually. But during the relatively longer cycle of 1980-88, it was only 2.6 per cent each year, including the post-crash boom of last year.

Productivity in this boom has been much weaker than in previous upswings. The OECD report finds that for all the advanced capitalist countries production rose per unit of input of raw materials, machinery and labour power by an average of 2.8 per cent per year before 1973. It grew by only 0.7 per cent per annum from 1974-9. From 1980-6 it remained pitiful at 0.6 per year and only in the last two years has it picked up to 1.2 per cent yearly – still only 40 per cent of the productivity increases achieved in the long post-war boom.

The peak of profitability in 1988 was similar to that of 1978 (20 per cent) but lower than the peak of 1973 (22.5 per cent) and considerably lower than the

peaks of the mid-1960s. (OECD Report p45).

Another feature of this present business cycle is the much higher rate of interest that manufacturing capitalists must pay to borrow money to invest. This eats into the profitability of industry and so further reduces the level of new investments. After deduction for interest rates, the G7 economies averaged 10.1 per cent gross profitability on investment from 1971-80; only 4.7 per cent between 1981-5, rising slightly to 6.7 per cent for the last few years.

Capacity utilisation fluctuates from boom to slump. It fell as low as 70 per cent in the two world recessions of 1974-5 and 1980-1. But even now it is still below the 88 per cent utilisation achieved at the peak of the boom in 1973 and at the same level as that achieved in 1979. (OECD Report p43)

The lower profit rates in this last business cycle have led to a much lower rate of capital investment. From 1968-73 the investment in fixed capital rose by an average 6.6 per cent per year for all the capitalist economies; by only 1.5 per cent per year between 1974-9; while the present cycle from 1980-7 has seen just a 2.1 per cent growth rate.

Unemployment rates remain much higher than in earlier business cycles. From 1968-73 the rate for all OECD countries was 3.3 per cent on average; from 1974-9 it rose to a 4.9 per cent average; and during the latest cycle from 1980-8 it has averaged 7.5 per cent and there are now 30 million unemployed in the OECD area as this present boom peaks. □

erests. Protectionism is already intensifying: the USA has introduced new 'super' trade restrictions; the EEC nations are preparing a "Fortress Europe" against Japanese and US imports for 1992; and Japan shows no sign of loosening its trade controls.

Once the effects of declining profits, higher interest rates and

tighter world markets begin to bite, then there will be a new recession even more severe than that of 1974-5 or 1979-81 – precisely because of the artificial extension of the boom of the 1980s.

* William Cline – *Managing the trade adjustment* Institute of International Economics Paper March 1989. □

The environment Do the Greens have the answer?

by Christine Morris

In the last few years working people have become increasingly aware of the wanton destruction of our environment. The Green Party and particularly Greenpeace have played a role in this heightened awareness. Forty-five per cent of those polled by *The Independent* (7 July 1989) said they would consider voting for the Green Party. But can the Green Party's policies resolve the problems now facing us?

Jonathan Porritt, Director of Friends of the Earth, sees the problem as rooted in 'industrialism.' Most of his analysis is based on 'minimising exploitation and domination by breaking down hierarchies', glossing over the fact that hierarchies exist to protect class interests.

For Marxists, the destruction of our environment is one of the greatest indictments not of 'industrialism' but of capitalism and its relentless search for profits at all costs. It is the anarchic nature of capitalism and the one-sided approach of production for profit, ignoring the needs of the majority of the population and the necessity of safeguarding the environment which makes it impossible for capitalists to deal effectively with pollution. One problem is replaced by another.

For example, the Clean Air Acts reduced the smog in industrial areas and especially in London in the 1960s. Yet, the decline of the infrastructure, especially the public transport system, combined with the concentration of development in the South East, have led to people breathing in toxic gases such as carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide which regularly exceed safety levels.

These pollution problems cannot be dealt with piecemeal. *The Observer* unwittingly identified the same obstacles as Marxists when it commented (3 July 88): 'Humanity will find it hard to adapt, particularly in a world fragmented by national boundaries and competing interests.'

It is the particular degeneration of British cap-

italism which leaves it at the top of every league in Europe for pollution and at the bottom of any league for doing anything about it. When a future recession hits the major capitalist countries and competition is sharper, corners will be cut and long term considerations forgotten in the search for immediate profits. It will not be a case of Britain coming up to the standards of the rest of Europe but workers in other EEC countries fighting not to be forced down to conditions in Britain.

The Tory government is determined to protect big business and safeguard profits. They have been prepared to lie and cover up scandals. They respond to pressure from public opinion and environmental groups by devising schemes which have simply lined the pockets of their rich friends.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act is completely based on the obscene policy of private ownership of land. The £1 million compensation given to a North Kent farmer not to drain salt marshes for cereal production encouraged other landowners to threaten to destroy parts of their land, including national nature reserves. This pot of gold for landowners is costing taxpayers £42.8 million.

Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act and Section 28 of the Health and Safety at Work Act are used to conceal information about the content of food, asbestos shipping, nuclear waste, pesticide spraying and the location of factories storing dangerous, flammable or explosive chemicals. Often any information supplied is not independent but supplied by the vested interests of big business.

When Sir Douglas Black, President of the Royal College of Physicians and former DHSS chief scientist, confirmed that there was evidence of more cases of cancer around the Sellafield nuclear plant than the average, he failed to draw any link between this and the level of

**The
destruction
of our
environment
is an
indictment
of
capitalism
not
'industrialism'**

**An effective
policy on
the
environment
means a
struggle for
ownership
of industry**

radiation emissions he was told existed in the area.

Why? Because he had to rely on information provided by British Nuclear Fuels. They told Black that between 1952-1955 only 400 grams of uranium had been released, whereas the company now admits to 20 kilograms being discharged (*Guardian* 17 February 1986). In 1988 the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the environment reported that 'some features' of Sellafield contributed to an increase in childhood cancers, improving the prospects of relatives seeking compensation but not preventing the deaths of the children.

It is no wonder that in *The Independent* poll, 53% did not trust industrial companies at all and 39% did not trust them very much. Such secrecy is not in the interests of working class, either in the public or the private sector. We need the immediate repeal by the next Labour government of this legislation.

Capitalist bosses understand that a labour movement campaign on pollution would run up against their interests. The TGWU campaigned for the banning of 2,4,5-T, a pesticide containing dioxin. Dr. David Hessayon, retiring as chair of the British Agrochemicals Association responded: 'If we give way on 2,4,5-T, the unions will then go on to campaign against another chemical and then another. We are engaged in a power struggle for control over the industry which we can't afford to lose.'

Chris Rose, an environmentalist who works with the TGWU on this campaign replied: 'Wrong. We are engaged in a power struggle to protect the health and safety of those in work on the land in whatever guise or who are in any way affected by the unregulated flow of dangerous chemicals into our environment, wild animals, local people, amateur gardeners, city dwellers using public parks or school playing fields.'

But it is David Hessayon who is right. To achieve a policy which protects all of those mentioned by Chris Rose requires a struggle for the control of industry. As long as industry remains in private hands, victories for workers in one country which result in the banning of some chemicals will lead only to the bosses stepping up exports to the Third World.

When DDT was officially banned in 1984 (although there are suspicions that it is still being used) exports jumped from 1,840 kilograms in 1980 to 125,503 kilograms in 1984. In the Third World at least 10,000 people die every year from occupational pesticide poisoning and 400,000 fall sick. The callousness of the bosses is expressed by an asbestos producer. When queried about the health of asbestos workers in India and Africa, he retorted: 'Our workers don't live long enough to get cancer.'

But it is not just through dumping of dangerous chemicals that the Third World is drawn into en-

vironmental disaster. The current boom has been fuelled by increased exploitation and transfer of resources from the Third World to the advanced industrialised countries. While individual capitalists might adjust to the new mood on the environment by slight improvements in their processes or products in order to cash in, the debt crisis and the policies pursued by the IMF and World Bank sets up a chain reaction of destruction on a massive scale.

Third World governments are encouraged to borrow money for prestige projects such as the Tucuri dam in Brazil costing \$8bn and part of a massive project to tap the mineral resources of the area. The dam itself is a disaster. According to Susan George in her recent book* it has caused, 'the loss of silt and fertile soil downstream, the flooding of agricultural land and 540,000 acres of forest, the destruction of wild life and salinisation of soil.'

Between 1979 and 1983 it is estimated that 400,000 to 450,000 people have been 'resettled' as a result of World Bank approved hydro-electric projects. Electronorte, the government company in charge in Brazil, did not even clear the forest but left hardwood to rot, having first sprayed the forest cover with agent orange (a dioxin). A number of full drums were left on the forest floor when it was submerged. These drums could burst under pressure from water. The reservoir is the main water supply to Belem, the state capital of 1.2 million people.

The destruction of the environment, the suppression of the rights of workers, peasants, ethnic and tribal minorities, the pollution of our food and water and the extreme poverty of the masses of the Third World can all be traced back to one source — the capitalist system itself.

Yet Dr Robin Russell Jones, Chair of the Pollution Advisory Committee of Friends of the Earth, argues that in a letter to *The Independent*: 'We do not seek the overthrow of capitalism. We merely ask that all nations recognise the consequence of uncontrolled industrial activity.'

But it is not 'nations' who take decisions and own industry, it is capitalists. Even if they were to recognise the consequences, their system is incapable of taking the necessary systematic planned action to eradicate the problem. A planned economy under workers' control and management would allow us to assess information, do research and marshal the resources of society.

It may be that we would decide to discontinue certain products, find replacements for others, end built-in obsolescence and completely reorganise the energy system with an emphasis on safety, efficient use and conservation. Only the development of a socialist system can bring back into harmony the need to develop human society and the need to preserve the world's rich resources of plant and animal life for the enjoyment of future generations. □

Book Reviews

Wired: the short life and fast times of John Belushi

by **Bob Woodward**

Published by Faber &

Faber £5.99

Reviewed by

Mike Waddington

A kind of underlying sympathy exists for famous personalities who destroy themselves, despite their lavish and luxurious incomes. For ordinary people their names can retain the aura of the victim.

Marilyn Monroe best epitomises this category, as does Brendan Behan or Dylan Thomas. Many people feel, even if they do not subscribe to the conspiracy theory, that such people were exploited to the point of exhaustion and pressurized, if not driven, to their deaths.

John Belushi was a cult figure, a star of *Animal House*, *The Blues Brothers* and Spielberg's *1941*. He died from a heroin overdose in 1982. Woodward's book follows

the same investigative approach of his more famous expose of Nixon and Watergate in the *Washington Post*. He reconstructs a harrowing account of Belushi's self destruction. It is compelling reading and will soon be made into a film. When published in the USA it caused a sensation, revealing as it does the number of Hollywood stars who 'do drugs', especially cocaine.

Belushi (his family originated from Albania) was a talented comedian who gained fame on the New York TV show *Saturday Night Live* which captured the attention of American youth for its irreverence. Belushi and his partner, Dan Ackroyd, were singled out for their skit on Nixon and Kissinger. The TV audience reached 28 million — the advertising rates were hiked up from \$9,500 per 30 second slot to \$22,000 and Belushi meant megabucks.

Belushi starred in *Animal House*, which cost \$2.7 million to make and grossed over \$60 million. More demands were made on him as his income rocketed (from \$35,000

for *Animal House* to \$350,000 for his next film). But with his success came drug addiction.

His next films lost money for their makers (*1941* lost \$27 million and *The Blues Brothers* \$16 million). The question was: could he deliver for the investors? To keep him going, his drug taking was unofficially sanctioned as a way of keeping up his spirits and his performance his 'friends' were always on hand to supply because nobody wanted to be responsible for a Belushi performance being below par. His wife said later: 'I wish someone had ruined John's career by writing about his cocaine use. That would have saved his life but ruined business'.

Nobody ever forced Belushi, so the story goes. But talent is a marketable commodity even if the packaging can sometimes be too frail. As his brother James said: 'you always have to compete again no matter what you've done... it was really the American tragedy. Making it big and f**** by success. There is a message in his death as much as in his life'.

Women workers and the trade unions

by **Sarah Boston**

published by Lawrence

and Wishart

price £8.95

Reviewed by

Yvonne Harrison

Sarah Boston's book is one of just a few which deal in detail with the role of women in building the labour movement. She gives an inspiring account of the willingness of women to struggle, both independently and alongside male workers, to improve their wages and conditions, often in the most adverse circumstances.

The Sander confectionary girls strike in 1892 is one example of that tenacity exhibited in the early part of this century and which still exists today. They walked out after 30 of them were sacked and organised a prolonged strike in

their own union, as well as joint action with Bristol dockers. In a march through the streets of Bristol on Christmas Eve they were met by a squadron of hussars and dragoons who had been ordered to smash them. Many were injured, the dockers leaders arrested and the march speakers charged with 'inciting a riot'. But this did not cow the girls, who stuck out for six months before winning improved wages, although not their main aim of union recognition. As Sarah Boston comments, 'like the match girls, they left their mark on the labour movement.'

More recently, Boston rightly lays emphasis on the struggle of the Ford women machinists for equal pay in 1968. They brought Fords to a standstill and won a partial victory. Their action was instrumental in bringing in the 1970 Equal Pay Act, although they did not win equal pay and skilled status until 1985 when they won a

case under the 'equal pay for work of equal value' clause. As Boston points out, legislation can be slow and laborious and is no substitute for organised union action which is the key to winning real gains for women workers.

Boston's book is more of a chronicle of women's development in the workplace. It does not discuss the causes of women's oppression in society. She does not explain why 'women from wealthier families were relegated to idleness while in poor families they became low-paid wage labourers.' That women are exploited at work alongside male workers; and at home by bearing overwhelmingly the burden of domestic work is ignored. Boston describes but does not explain.

She catalogues the growth of women's organisations in the early 1900s. These were necessary for women to organise, but it was by no means a golden age for

women and eventually these early organisations were incorporated into the general labour unions.

Boston suggests that women will achieve real equality only when they are able to go to work and receive equal pay; and when

'their concerns are listened to, at the TUC by a full and silent hall; when the number of women delegates to the TUC is proportional to their membership'.

But she fails to show what forces in society block the progress to

such achievements or how they can be overcome; and specifically how women's oppression is rooted in capitalist society and only the end of the class system can change fundamentally women's position in society.

William Lovett
by Joel Weiner &
Arthur Henderson
by FM Leventhal,
published by Manchester
University Press. Price
£7.95 and £8.95

respectively.

Reviewed by
Ian Hunter

Lovett, from the earliest days of the labour movement in the 1830s and Henderson from the formative period of the Labour party early this century are separated in time. But they are united as stalwarts of 'moderation' — Lovett, the defender of 'moral force' against the 'wild' advocates of revolution in the Chartist movement; and 'Uncle Arthur' Henderson, the dogged promoter of Lib-lab trade unionism and 'constitutional' Labourism and compromise.

The Chartists were for class power through universal suffrage. It was the first genuine working-class political movement in Britain. But Chartism was not only associated with Lovett but also with militants like Feargus O'Connor, Bronterre O'Brien and with Marx and Engels' friends George

Harney and Ernest Jones. Chartist history, however, has been coloured and distorted by Fabians and reformists who have tried to obscure the relationship between Marx and the Chartist leaders in order to separate British Labour history from any connection with Marxism.

Lovett claimed that the Chartist movement had been hijacked by hot-heads. Weiner shows that this was not the case. On the contrary, even Lovett was not averse to challenging repressive laws with violent rhetoric.

Weiner reveals the fundamental weakness of Chartism — that it was promoted through a series of gigantic bluffs: a combination of great displays of activity, coupled with fierce threats unless workers' demands were met. It was naively hoped that the government would cave in under this pressure. The crisis for Chartism came when the government stood firm and the bluff was called.

Some, like Lovett, failed the test. Lovett balked and turned his attentions away from class action towards 'moral re-education'. Increasingly isolated from the Chartist mainstream, he blamed workers for their own problems and finally supported a capitalist economy and alliances with the middle-

class, both of which he had originally so resolutely opposed.

Unfortunately, Weiner provides not even a glimpse of the dynamic of the class struggle which continued to drive the **mainstream** of the Chartists towards Marxism, unlike Lovett.

Similarly, in Leventhal's biography of Henderson there is no understanding of how the logic of class conflict drove 'moderates' like him to break with Liberalism and found the Labour party. Leventhal tells us that in the early days of Newcastle city council, Henderson "learnt the values of political conciliation and compromise". On the contrary, what Henderson did learn, the hard way, was that that even Liberal workers, as he was then, immediately engendered the hostility of the middle-class Liberal caucus as soon as they tried to pursue specifically working-class issues. That is why he eventually left the Liberals.

Lacking a Marxist analysis of events, Weiner and Leventhal can tell us the story of Lovett and Henderson, but they cannot explain why things happened the way they did. So there are worthwhile gleanings to be found from both books, as long as they approached with a sufficiently critical eye.

The Soul of Man
under Socialism
by Oscar Wilde

New edition by
Journeyman press price
£2.95

Reviewed by
Marc Vallee

Wilde's vision of how people should live in an ideal world of 'beauty, pleasure and perfect harmony' brought about by socialism was first published in the Edinburgh Review in 1891.

From as early as 1881 when he was in his late twenties to the middle of 1895, literary London was put out of countenance by this outrageous Irishman from

Dublin (via Oxford) declared that he was a socialist and hinted that he was a homosexual. His literary output has lasted to this day, with many of his plays like 'The Importance of Being Earnest' still performed now. He was a man of 'society' who nevertheless gave generously to the dockers' strike exactly 100 years ago.

In his unique style, in the book, Wilde protests against the degrading and demoralising effects of poverty, authoritarianism and inertia of a society unwilling to change. He argues that the artist's role is to challenge moral hypocrisy and to create change.

For him, socialism, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting coopera-

tion for competition, would restore society to its proper condition — a thoroughly healthy organism which ensured the well being of every member of the community.

Wilde argued that the abolition of private property far from stifling individualism, would allow it to flower. Nobody would waste his life accumulating things and the symbols for things ie money. 'One will live to live. That is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist — that is all'.

Wilde's class background sometimes shows through when he seems to adopt an elitist view of the artist who looks down on the working people, but Wilde's vision of a socialist future is a refreshing and welcome change. □



Letters

Dear Comrade,

As a regular reader, I must write to you about Harriet Gill's article on child abuse (*MIR* 40 Summer 1989). For Harriet Gill the immediate question is why child abuse occurs and how it can be prevented. I agree, child abuse cannot be separated from capitalism, it is one of its products. As a symptom of the capitalist disease, the relationship between capitalism and child abuse is central to any Marxist analysis.

The debate between the Tories, Higgs and Bell, interesting as it is, was conducted behind the walls of bourgeois professionalism. While we may feel that Higgs has been victimised, we must also point out that there are many working-class victims of bureaucratic professionalism. The complete state abuse of the working-class through Tory cuts and bureaucratisation of the NHS and the social services is used to keep the working-classes in the dark.

The unaccountability which this professionalism breeds, keeping doctor from patient, social workers from client, is no accident. It is part of the working practices used by capitalism. The autonomy of the professional is difficult for the individual to challenge. It is therefore essential that we call for the democratisation of services.

While we argue for more training, we should condemn the training which excludes working people, both in the way that training perceives problems such as child abuse, and job applications.

Harriet Gill points out that we should demand more resources, training and democratisation with elected and accountable administrators. But we should also call for training for unemployed workers at union rates, aimed at the prevention of child abuse not just containment. We need a labour movement inquiry into these events.

The problem of abuse is greater than the Tories admit. Current estimates say it has doubled since 1983 and even bourgeois commentators admit the connection between unemployment and child abuse. This exposes the hypocrisy of capitalism. We must expose

their crocodile tears and say only socialism can solve the problems of child abuse.

Stephen Booton
Islington, London



Dear Comrade,

Congratulations on the new look *MIR*. It has made a big impact and created a lot of discussion. The new layout is a great improvement although it is a pity that the number of pages have been reduced.

I liked the article on fusion although the explanation was sometimes hard to follow, unless you have a scientific training. The comments on the rivalry between the scientists really showed the lack of neutrality in science.

Is the journal too book oriented? It seems many of the articles were based on books, many of which may be too expensive or not worth reading or both.

I cheered the reply to that hypocrite Stuart Bell on the Cleveland Child Abuse cases, but the article does not answer the question it poses, i.e. what causes child abuse?

Alan Woods' piece on the French revolution was enjoyable and useful but perhaps it fell between two stools: it was not an introduction to the French revolution as it only covered half of it, although that was the only the first part, I know. On the other hand it was not a debate on the different views and analysis of the revolution.

I hope these comments are not seen as super critical. They are

intended to boost your efforts to improve this vital journal.

Bill Hopwood
Newcastle

Dear Comrade,

As a non-*Militant* supporter but now a regular reader of the *MIR*, I am almost ashamed to say that I was surprised by the verve, clarity and honesty of the analysis found within your journal's pages. The clearing of the Rushdie ground (Blasphemy: A Burning Issue? *MIR* 40 Summer 1989) revealed the need for socialist policies in the Labour Party, not vote-grasping confusion.

I look forward to further issues and, if possible, a more regular *MIR*. When compared to other 'socialist' journals, the *MIR* is relevant and most important, up to the minute.

Stuart Cooper
Burton-on-Trent,
Staffordshire

Dear Comrade,

I was disappointed with your discussion of the politics of pop (*MIR* Book Reviews, Summer 1989 No 40). Ken Smith focussed far too much on Red Wedge and YTURC without looking at the background to these campaigns which lies not in the 1980s but in the 1970s.

'Rock Against Racism' and other similar movements raised the whole question of political pop in the context of a right-wing Labour government. It produced political pop music from the mostly commercial, such as the Clash, to the overtly committed like the Redskins. Times are much harder now but individuals like Elvis Costello have survived.

Surely the point which Ken Smith tries to make but doesn't is that for a really political pop, involvement with the official structures of the Labour Party is best avoided? Or if taken on, control must be from below. After all, Neil Kinnock was a supporter of RAR and unlike Red Wedge its slogan was for 'Militant Entertainment'!

Keith Flett
Tottenham, London

Have you a comment about this issue of the *MIR*? Let's hear from you.

China (from page 30).

utions. They have begun to recentralise, imposing price controls to curb inflation. There are already signs, however, that this will slow down economic growth, which will also bring serious problems.

Growth in the first half of 1989 fell to 11% compared with 17% last year, and is still slowing. Inflation is about 30%. Both the state deficit and the trade deficit is growing, while the drop in tourist income and the withholding of loans by western banks will undermine China's ability to service its \$40bn foreign debt. Switching the emphasis back to the state industries, subsidies for which already absorb about a third of state revenues, will not overcome the problems of technical backwardness and inefficiency under bureaucratic management. Cuts in state spending, the credit squeeze, and consequent cuts in living standards, moreover, may well undermine the prosperity of the rural sector, the locomotive of growth under Deng.

Neither wing of the bureaucracy has a way

out of the impasse of bonapartist rule, which is squandering the gains of the planned economy. For a period, Deng and his cohorts will follow a line of recentralisation, tightened bureaucratic control and repression. New contradictions will appear, once again forcing the leadership to lurch in the opposite direction at a later stage.

The working class, the students and other sections involved in the movement have suffered a brutal defeat and face a period of repression. But the experience of these mighty events, the first act of the political revolution, cannot be wiped out. The advanced workers and youth will be drawing far-reaching conclusions, striving to find the genuine ideas and programme of Marxism.

The processes within society will prepare the ground for new, even more momentous struggles in the future. Inevitably, the unfolding of China's political revolution will be inter-linked with the unfolding revolutionary processes in Eastern Europe and throughout the capitalist lands. Once again the proletariat of China will shake the world. □

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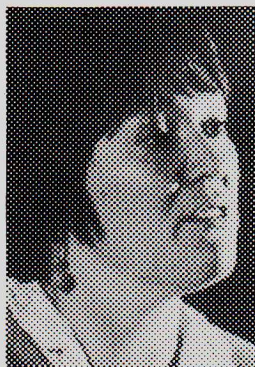
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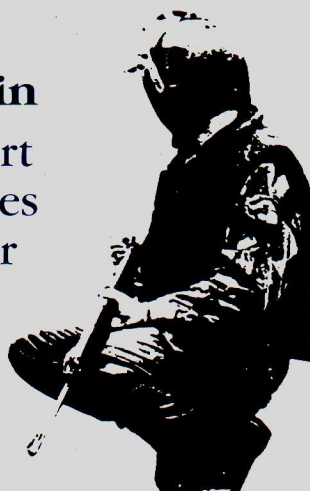
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