

KICK

THE

TORIES OUT

Militant

International Review

Election Special 1992

&1

End of the
Thatcherite era

The Economic
slide 1979-91

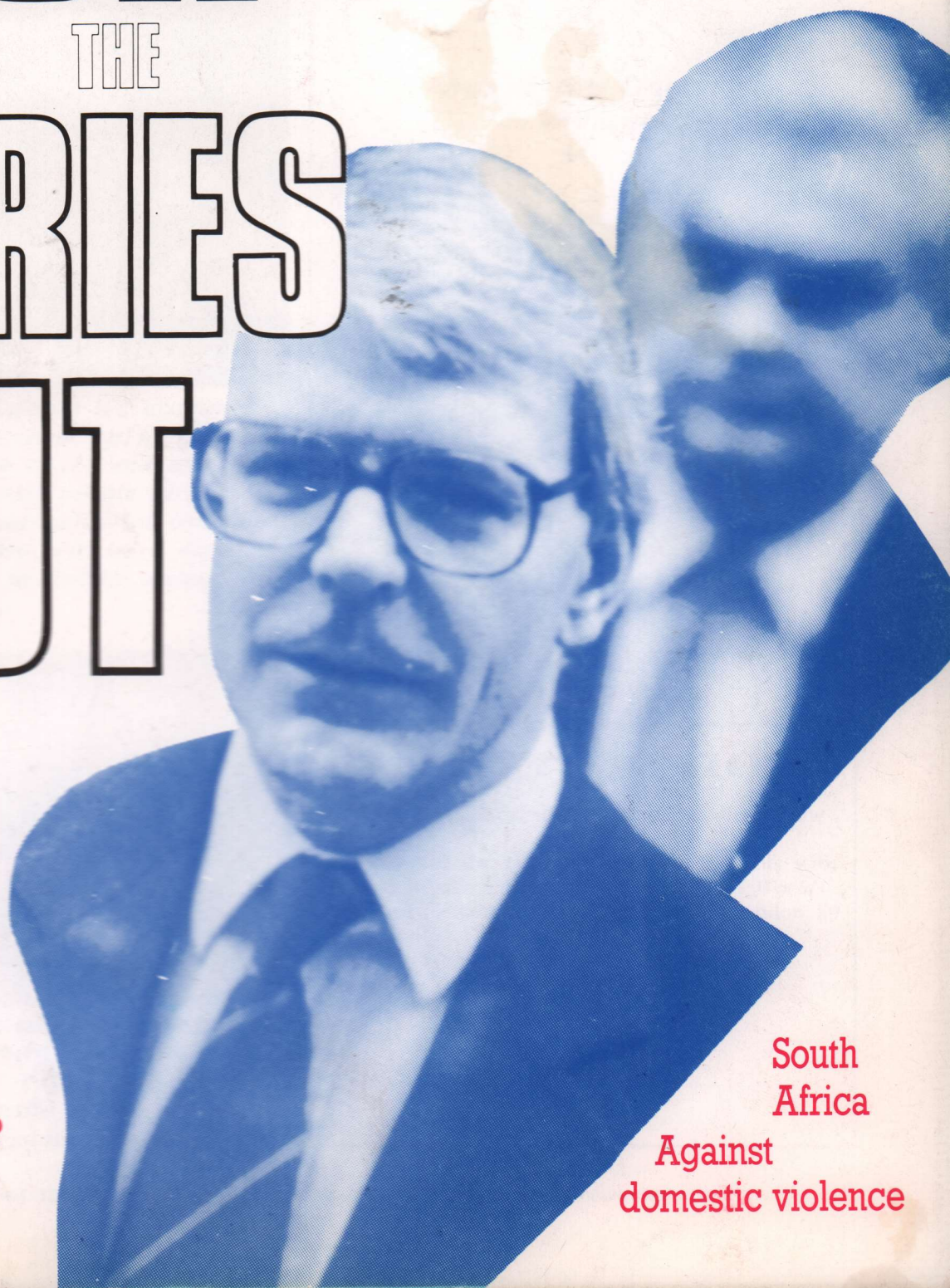
Homes crisis

Major's children?

Fighting fascism

South
Africa

Against
domestic violence



Militant

International Review

Election Special 1992

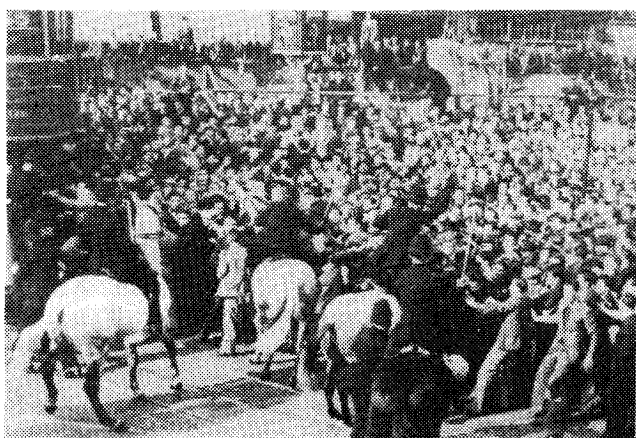
Issue 47

Editor: Lynn Walsh

3/13 Hepscott Road London E9 5HB.



In this special edition we examine Britain's economic crisis, (p11) Labour's housing programme (p22) and what has happened to young people in Tory Britain (p8). And our editorial concludes – the 1992 election will be a decisive turning point in British society.



*In reviewing the recently republished autobiography of Joe Jacobs, a participant in the 1930s battles against fascism, **Peter Taaffe** draws out some important lessons for today.*

Editorial

A new era opens

2

Major's children?

Andrea Enisuo

8

The Tories' economic legacy

Peter Watson

11

Out of the Ghetto

Peter Taaffe

16

**A Welcome Home
Labour's housing programme**

Peter Lush

22

**No immunity
The Law Commission report**

Margaret Crear

26

In Alexandra township

By a recent visitor to South Africa

31

Subscribe now!

Why not guarantee your future copies of the *MIR*?

Just fill in the form below or write to us with a cheque or postal order payable to *World Socialist Books*, 3-13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.

Subscription rates: £5 for four issues, UK/Ireland, £6 overseas.

Name.....

Address.....

A new era opens

The result cannot be predicted. But the 1992 general election will be a decisive turning point in British society.

The longest recession since world war two.

THE RESULT OF the general election hangs in the balance. More than ever in this election, it is not possible to anticipate the precise outcome. Labour emerged after Christmas with a five per cent lead in the polls. A pall of gloom about the economy had settled over the country, with 40,000 jobs being lost each month. Families, already in debt, who struggled to pay for Christmas, looked to the future with anxiety about the economic prospects and what it would mean for their own personal situation. Consumer sales were down in December and only inched ahead in January. The idea set in that there was no economic relief in sight. The Tories were blamed for this, pushing Labour into the lead at the turn of the year.

Economically the picture remains bleak. The latest Confederation of British Industry (CBI) survey confirmed that the economy, in particular manufacturing industry, is not 'bumping along the bottom', in the words of the Governor of the Bank of England last summer: it has continued to fall. Only the speed of decline may have slowed in manufacturing output compared to the early part of last year.

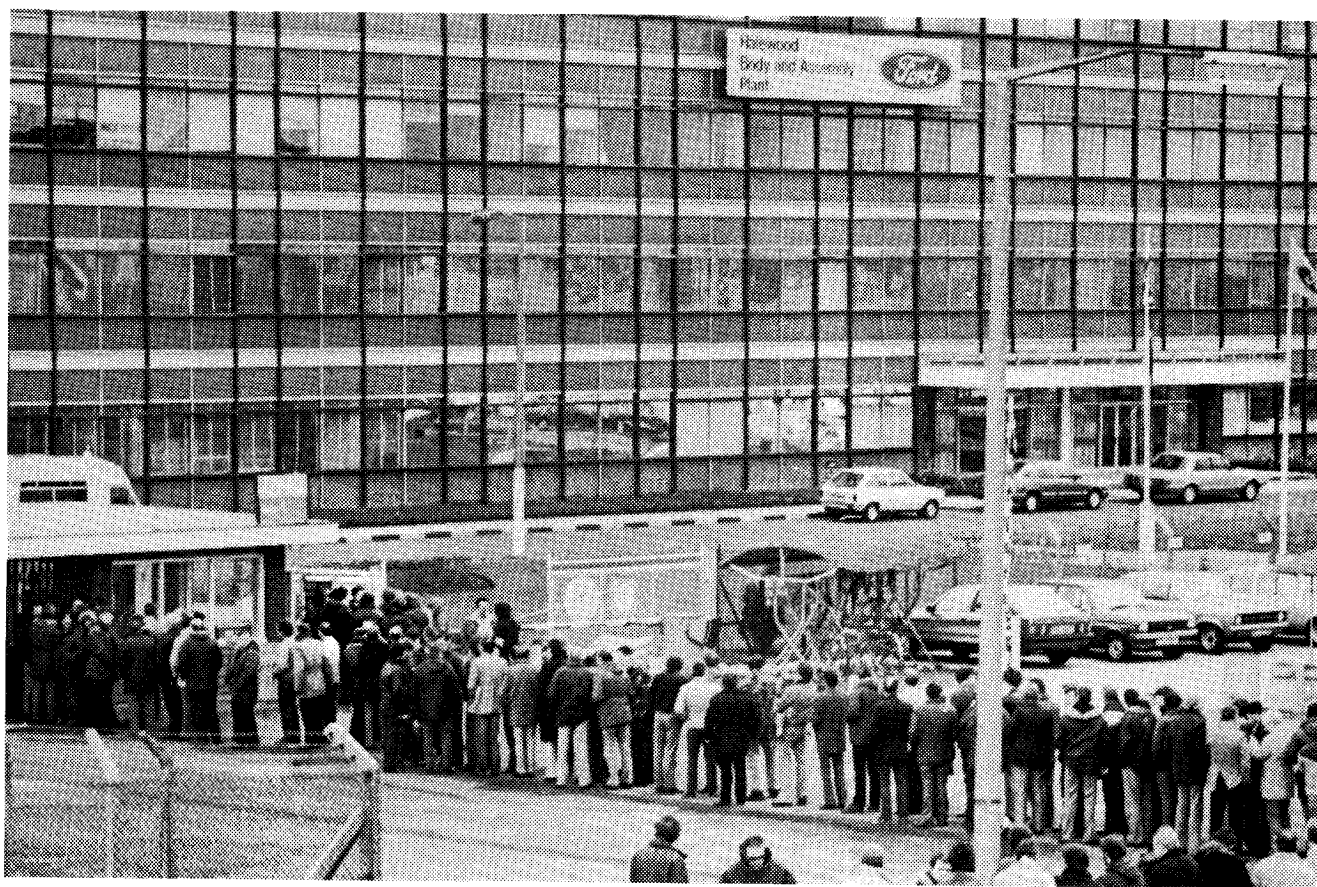
The CBI expects manufacturing output to decline further in the first quarter of this year, causing an overall fall of 13.2% since the start of the recession in 1990. This is only marginally less than the 15.5% fall during the 1979-81 recession. The CBI has scaled down its anticipated economic growth for this year from 1.7% to 1.0%. It expects another 73,000 manufacturing jobs to go in the first quarter of 1992, as opposed to 68,000 in the last quarter of 1991. In fact the rate of monthly job losses in the economy as a whole has started rising again since November last year.

For Britain, this will be the longest recession since the second world war and, by its end, may yet turn out to be the deepest. It has dragged on due to the continuing effect of the record 'debt overhang' — indebted consumers and companies prefer to repay their debts before engaging in any major new expenditure — and due to the continuing recession in the American export market and the worsening picture in Europe.

Serious long-term damage has been done to a number of industries in the course of this recession. For example, 70,000 jobs have been lost in car production, components and in sales and distribution. All that salvaged the situation for the UK car industry last year was the continued upsurge in the German market, where there was a 30% rise in car sales. Car sales in Britain slumped by 20% last year, almost double the fall in Spain and France. Now that Germany has also fallen into recession, that outlet for British car sales is being closed off. That must mean further redundancies, and further question marks over individual car plants such as Cowley, Halewood or Dagenham, which itself would have a further depressing effect on the home market.

In addition to this, the crisis facing British capitalism is being compounded by the crass stupidity of the Tories — a feature of the Thatcher era. Although the faces may have changed, the economic illiteracy of the Tory frontbench is as bad as ever. They are planning, for example, the destruction of the important mining industry, with modern pits in the new Selby coalfield already being earmarked for closure. The Tories are making the British economy dependent on the supply and price of foreign coal. The obsession with privatisation has meant that the electricity companies are able to call the tune and force apace pit closures, choosing, even without new port facilities at Immingham, to import coal when they renegotiate their contracts with British Coal. And they themselves are also shedding labour. National Power will have shed 6,000 jobs, one-third of its workforce, by September, and is now planning to get rid of 2,000 more.

Britain registered minus 2.5% growth during 1991, the steepest decline since the great depression of 60 years ago and the worst figure of all the 'G7' major capitalist countries (the US, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Canada and Britain). In the Tory years since 1979, aggregate growth in Britain has been 4.9%, placing it next to bottom in the league of the 21 major western industrial nations. Only Greece has a worse



record. What is perhaps most serious, from the point of view of the long-term position of British capitalism, is that, at only £2bn a quarter, manufacturing investment is now 32% down on 1990. In the slump of 1979-81, it fell by exactly that figure. That fall inflicted serious damage on the ability of manufacturing industry to compete in the subsequent upturn.

WITH ALL THESE statistics of gloom, Labour should be well ahead in the polls. No government has ever gone to the country with the economy at such a low level, and won. Yet Labour is still not assured of an election victory. In fact the Labour leaders are in danger of repeating the ridiculous taxation blunder of 1987. The Tories have seized on this to hit Labour at every opportunity.

In the mid-January period, in a concerted campaign, all the Tory tabloids led their front pages with attacks on Labour's taxation plans. This was the key element in knocking back Labour's opinion poll lead from the turn of the year. The Tories tried to portray Labour as being committed to increasing public spending by £35bn a year, which they say would amount to an extra £1,000 a year for the average taxpayer.

Rather than forcefully attacking the Tories' record of increasing the overall tax burden on the majority of people while simultaneously cutting public spending, the Labour leaders'

response was defensive. Neil Kinnock replied that the removal of the £20,800 ceiling on National Insurance payments would perhaps be phased in rather than introduced in one go. But by going onto the back foot, the Labour leaders lose both ways. They appear evasive about their own taxation plans but then, by going out of their way to prove that really they are not going to spend such sums, they end up offering nothing in palpable reforms apart from the pensions and child benefit increases.

In fact, most of the £35bn worth of 'Labour commitments' the Tories claim have been made by Labour spokespersons are the minimal reforms needed to reverse the effects of thirteen years of Tory rule: a £3bn increase in NHS spending; restoring education spending as a share of gross domestic product to 1979 levels (£2.6bn); a statutory national minimum wage (£1.5bn); equalisation of pensions at 60 (£3bn); training (£1.83bn); housing construction, repair and maintenance (£3bn); disability benefits (£1.3bn); transport (£2.5bn) and so on. (*Guardian*, 7 January 1992).

The resources to fund these commitments could be easily realised if Labour was to introduce a socialist plan of production, based on the nationalisation under workers' control and management of the top 200 monopolies that dominate the British economy. This would end the waste and inefficiency that is inherent in capitalism: the unnecessary costs of competit-

Will Ford Halewood, or Dagenham, survive the recession?

Labour's tax plans.



Roy Hattersley.

ion in product duplication, advertising spending etc; the speculative activity of the capitalist financial system; the £8,000 a year cost, in lost taxes and social security payments, of keeping somebody unemployed etc. But on the basis of capitalism, the 'market system' which the right-wing Labour leaders' are wedded to, such an increase in public spending could only be financed by government borrowing, which would lead to inflation, or a massive hike in taxes. That is why the Labour leaders are so easily thrown onto the defensive by the Tories' attacks.

Consequently, the taxation issue could be particularly damaging amongst exactly those groups that Labour need to win to be sure of a general election victory — skilled and white-collar workers. In the West Midlands, a key marginal area, Labour's regional officials calculate that 200,000 non-Labour voters need to be won. This region has a substantially higher proportion of its workforce in manufacturing industry — 33% — than the national average of 24%. Skilled workers, perhaps earning £15-20,000 per year, are a key section here. But in 1987, Roy Hattersley's declaration that Labour would reverse the two pence cut in the standard rate of income tax which Thatcher had just engineered in the budget, was a significant factor in Labour failing to win back the skilled working-class vote. Now they stand in danger of repeating exactly the same mistake with the same result.

ALL THE OTHER reforms, the Labour leadership maintain, will be paid for out of the hoped for extra economic growth. So on the issues of health, education, jobs, etc, there is nothing with which they can inspire voters to turn to Labour right now.

A January *Today/ICM* poll of first-time voters indicates the effect of having nothing with which to enthuse working-class people or young voters. Amongst 18-24 year-olds, Labour is ahead by 14% (it was 16% ahead in 1987) but Neil Kinnock stands 11% behind Major. However, amongst 18-20 year-olds, the Tories are 10% ahead. In addition, large numbers of young people simply will not vote when there is nothing to convince them that there will be any meaningful change in the way in which they live under a Labour government.

Recent elections across Europe have demonstrated an alienation from official 'politics' and the established parties. The working-class parties, the Labour and Socialist parties of Europe, are paying the penalty of the domination of right-wing reformism which has little attractive on offer to the disenchanted and dispossessed of capitalism.

On all the recent major class issues, the performance of the right-wing reformist leadership of the Labour Party has been appalling. British Steel deliberately chose September 1992, after

the general election, as the closure date of the Ravenscraig steel mill in Motherwell. The Labour leaders replied that even if they win the general election, they can give no pledge to keep it open. They even held a press conference to pour scorn on the idea of nationalisation and to announce that nothing could be done other than encouraging new jobs to be located in Lanarkshire. The very next day the SNP held their own press conference, with the Dalzell steel works shop stewards, pledging to nationalise Scottish Steel and a future for the Scottish steel industry, including Ravenscraig. The SNP candidate for the Motherwell North seat is a worker from Dalzell.

The recent setbacks the government received in the courts over the collection of the poll tax should have been used by the Labour leaders to finally kill off the tax and end the uncertainty and distress many working class families feel as their unpayable poll tax arrears mount. Yet the only comment of Bryan Gould, Labour's environment spokesperson, was to complain that the Tories had not acted swiftly enough and not clearly retrospectively enough to ensure that computer evidence could now be heard in magistrates' courts!

Helpfully for the government, the Labour frontbench accepted that the cut-off point for prosecuting those who have not paid should be extended from two to six years. And while they called upon the Tories to exempt those liable to pay 20% of the poll tax in this year's budget, they announced that if the Tories did not make this change, they wouldn't either, as it would 'encourage' people not to pay. The Labour-controlled Association of London Authorities bitterly complained that the police were not diligently following up the warrants that have been issued for poll tax non-payment. With seven million liability orders, with up to 18 million people not paying, who do the Labour leaders think they are going to convince to vote for them, by acting as poll tax policemen?

IT IS THE failure of the Labour leaders that has put the result of a general election that should be assured in the balance. And they are already preparing for the prospect of a hung parliament. Labour's national executive (NEC) has endorsed the idea of proportional representation for the proposed Scottish parliament and for a new London-wide authority. An NEC working party is now looking into electoral reform for the UK. Although not expected to complete its report until after the election, Neil Kinnock declared that there is "a very strong case for making clear in the manifesto exactly what we intend."

In the event of a hung parliament, therefore, neither the Liberals, nor the SNP given Labour's commitment to a Scottish parliament, could afford to sustain a minority Tory government. After 13 years of Toryism, it would destroy

their base of support if they were seen to maintain the Tories in office for another term.

The result of the election then could be a '1924 scenario' — where Labour formed a minority government dependent upon Liberal support, even though the Tories were the largest single party; a '1929 scenario' — where Labour was the largest single party, but still a minority government; or even 1964 — where Labour won a small overall majority. An outright Tory victory, with a massively reduced majority, is still possible but, barring the most unlikely electoral arithmetic which gives the Ulster Unionists the balance of power, a minority Tory government is almost ruled out. Even the Unionists would not necessarily turn out to be dependable allies for the Tories.

If the Tories do win, however, the situation that would open up would not be a simple repetition of the last few years. A fourth Tory government, in the economic, social and political situation that has developed, would still herald the beginning of a new era in British society. After a short period of despondency, there could be big movements on the industrial field. Attempts at restraint by the trade union leaders would increasingly be pushed aside. The idea of waiting for a Labour government would no longer hold any validity. The feeling will grow: take action or see your conditions ground into the dirt. If the union leaders try to hold back the tide it will be diverted into unofficial channels.

The Tories are committed to privatising British Rail, and to making further private inroads into local government, the civil service, and the post office. A hint of the future has been given by London Underground's new company plan which entails severe reductions in jobs. Significantly it has been met with a willingness to struggle by the tube workers. Rapidly, a new mood could develop in industry in response to a fresh round of attacks by another Tory government.

In the South of Ireland, apparently from nowhere, a mood for industrial action developed recently. The Irish trade union leaders were forced to call a one-day public-sector general strike for 28 January in opposition to the government's attempts to undermine the national wage agreement. Such was the momentum that developed, the police agreed that they would take their one-day emergency leave on that day. Even army association representatives attended joint meetings with the public sector unions. In the face of this, the government retreated, promising to honour the national wage agreement. Soon after premier Haughey was gone, 'the Great Survivor' as Fianna Fail leader since 1979 ditched, as the Irish ruling class viewed with apprehension the underlying discontent of the Irish workers.

Movements of this speed and scale could



develop in the UK following a fourth Tory victory. With only a small majority they would not seem the impregnable power that Thatcher appeared to many workers, with her iron grip over the Commons. Big protests would still flare up among youth, who would feel they have little left to lose. A renewed campaign against student poverty could be unleashed. Students have been mobilised not just on more general questions such as opposition to the Gulf war, but on their own immediate, material needs — and they won't go away. The potential for a movement to develop against racism would not be cut across by a Tory victory.

On top of this, dramatic developments could break out in Scotland. The Tories would be the government, albeit with a small majority, in the UK, but could be reduced to perhaps three seats in Scotland. Yet, in the face of the uproar of the Scottish working class and youth, the Tories seem to be intent on holding the line against more than token concessions to devolution. There is the possibility that, under pressure from below to take a stand against the ravages of a forth Tory government, the Scottish Constitutional Convention, which includes the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish TUC, could declare itself a parliament-in-waiting and a period of struggle develop in Scotland around the national issue.

Militant would intervene in the social upheaval that would develop in Scotland in this situation, to argue the case for socialism while defending the national rights of the Scottish people. We stand for the right of self-determination for the Scottish people, including, if they so decide, the right to separation. But we do not advocate separation as a solution for the workers of Scotland. The unity of the working-class

High unemployment will continue.

Dramatic events could unfold in Scotland.



**There will be
a feeling that
Labour can
be pushed.**

throughout Britain is vital for a successful struggle against capitalism. We therefore call for autonomy for Scotland, with a Scottish parliament with full economic powers. In the event of a Tory victory and a struggle developing in Scotland around the national issue, we would campaign for the Labour leaders' to defy the Tory government and establish a Scottish parliament with a commitment to carry through socialist measures, including nationalisation, to improve the lives of Scottish workers and youth. This would attract the support of workers in England and Wales and be an inspiring step forward in the battle for socialism throughout Britain.

Some recent polls have recorded that up to 50% of Scots now favour independence. Although the desire to see the back of the Tories still places Labour ahead in Scotland, support has fallen to around 40% — only just above Labour's average poll rating for Britain as a whole. The polls also indicate that, on Scottish voters' list of priorities, the national issue falls behind unemployment, health, poll tax, education and living standards. But particularly under a new Tory government this could be quickly transformed into large-scale, active support for their national rights.

SOME OF THE Labour leaders hope that, having won the election, the worst of the recession would soon be over and Neil Kinnock would then be able to enjoy the fruits of an upswing. But a Labour government under Neil Kinnock will not usher in a period of social peace and tranquility.

Despite their best efforts to offer as little as possible, there will be big expectations in the Labour leadership to deliver meaningful changes. After 13 years out of office they will be given the benefit of the doubt for a time. But then there could be movements, particularly in the public sector, of workers who would feel more confident at challenging cuts, restrictions on spending or demanding the implementation of Labour's minimum wage proposals. There will be a feeling that a Labour government can be pushed into policies benefiting working people.

There will also be the belief, however mistaken, amongst many workers that taking action under a Labour government will not see the full force of the Tory anti-union legislation coming down on the heads of the trade unions or individual strikers. In fact, the Labour leaders are not committed to repealing the Tory anti-union legislation and in the major battles that would at some stage develop under a Labour government, the employers would consider using them against the unions.

Nonetheless, any economic recovery, which is inevitable at some stage as part of the capitalist cycle of boom and slump, would be accom-

panied by a renewed movement in the private sector. This will take place whatever government is elected. Workers would move in an attempt to secure their share of any increase in profits. For example, last year, after a number of lean years for the German steel industry, unification increased demand, which led to a boost in profits. The steel workers staked their claim for a share with a 10.5% wage demand, threatening to strike even though Germany was on the edge of a recession.

However, if Labour does inherit an economy starting to climb out of the recession, it won't in any way be healthy. During the boom years of the late 1980s, up until 1990, the current account deficit hit £20bn a year. Last year, even in the recession, it was still at the level of £6bn. In contrast, during the 1979-81 recession, Britain was running a surplus on its balance of trade. This time, as soon as consumer demand begins to pick up again or industrial investment starts to recover, Britain will suck in manufactured imports — both consumer and capital goods. This will create a fresh balance of payments problem, with pressure on the pound and a return to the memories of 1976. That is the consequence, twice in ten years, of a collapse in manufacturing investment added to the undercapitalisation for a historical period of British industry.

A Labour government basing itself on capitalism will be totally at the mercy of the world economic picture. It is possible that US and Britain could start to inch ahead towards the latter part of the year and Germany and Japan would merely experience a slowdown in their rate of growth. The OECD secretary general, at an unofficial Davos world economic forum in January, argued that: "We do not expect a strong rebound in any country. There will not be a double dip but a mild and progressive acceleration — not, however, towards very high rates of growth."

But this 'most favourable' scenario for the next few years internationally, would not be a return to the artificially stoked-up growth rates of the late 1980s, but a recoil from their inflationary consequences. It would mean a period of high interest rates, especially in Europe, led by Germany. It would mean a period of tight control on the money supply and a number of years of a 'slower growth-recovery'.

On the other hand the immediate prospects for the world economy could turn out to be a lot bleaker. Germany has registered three consecutive quarters of negative growth; it is already in recession. Japan is slowing fast. The OECD expects it to achieve only 2.4% growth this year (it averaged 5% per year from 1987-90). However, financiers Kleinworth Benson expect only 1% Japanese growth. The spectre of a synchronised world recession, which they have managed to avoid over the last two



years of decline, now haunts the capitalist powers internationally. An incoming Labour government could find that the world economy has fallen over the edge into recession, continuing the deep recession in the UK for another twelve months or more. This would seriously restrict the room for manoeuvre of a Labour government.

Moreover, the Labour leaders have constrained themselves by their enthusiasm for the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) and their commitment to defend the over-valued pound within the ERM. At a time when former Tory minister, Nicholas Ridley, Thatcher's former advisor, Sir Alan Walters, and Thatcher herself, raise the idea of a floating pound or a devaluation, it is the Labour leaders who are determined to maintain the value of the pound, even though it continues to put British industry at a trade disadvantage. Of course devaluation, a departure from a policy of deflation, would push up inflation in Britain.

With their commitment to try and 'manage' capitalism, a Labour government would be set on a collision course, over time, with the organised workers. A new generation will start to come forward to take shop steward and union rep positions, a generation less experienced but not disheartened by the difficulties of the late 1980s. All this would lay the basis for a shift to the left inside the trade unions which at some stage would have its reflection inside the Labour Party.

The mid-1990s will be a period of economic instability, uncertainty, and the persistence of relatively high unemployment, even during an upturn — all the ingredients for a radical change in the outlook of the masses. This broad perspective has also entered the consciousness of the ruling class. A year ago, world imperialism emerged from its victory in the Gulf with its confidence buoyed up. Oil prices had not risen.

The bourgeois had stamped their authority on the third world. Gorbachev's Soviet Union had meekly trailed behind US policy in the Gulf and elsewhere. And if Britain and the US still languished in the trough of recession, Germany and Japan were advancing and would hopefully see the world economy through.

Today, however, Britain and the US are still in recession, Germany has just joined them, and in Japan there has been a significant decline in the rate of growth. But their biggest headache is the collapse of the Soviet Union and their fears for the future of the different republics of the new Commonwealth of Independent States. No wonder the former head of ICI, Sir John Harvey-Jones, reflected on TV's *Question Time* that the world is proving a more worrying place than at any other time in his lifetime.

Any increase in capitalist confidence of 12 months ago has rapidly disappeared. At the January meeting of G7 finance ministers, they could only agree on their joint impotence. Whatever they did, it was unlikely to have any major effect on the world economy. And most of all, it is the British capitalist class, with their weakening manufacturing base, whose confidence is dented.

The general election will mark a sharp change in political developments. A Tory government with a much reduced majority could be returned, to face the full force of the accumulated wrath of 13 years. Or Labour could win in a difficult economic environment, unable to realise the hopes placed in it but facing a working-class more confident of taking action. The mid-90s therefore will be very different from the late 1980s. It will be a period of storm and stress, in which the ideas of Marxism defended by the *Militant* will be poised to gain ever increasing support. □

New mass struggles will develop.

Major's children?

Andrea Enisuh (below), chair of the Youth Rights Campaign (YRC), looks at the prospects for building a socialist youth movement.



The Labour leaders' response to the 1991 riots would have done nothing to attract young people. Neil Kinnock's condemnation of them as a "criminal attack on the community" (*Guardian*, 11 September 1991) was no better than the comments of some Tories. It was left to Archbishop George Carey to point out that "wrongdoing" is "inextricably linked to social deprivation." (*Guardian*, 20 September, 1991).

True, some months later Michael Meacher, the shadow social security minister, did concede that social conditions were the root cause of the disturbances. Outlining the growth of poverty under the Tories, he wrote: "what was remarkable about the Meadow Well estate explosion in one of the most deprived areas of Britain is not that it happened but that it took so long to happen... the politics of poverty — not envy but frustration and anger — is finally on the move." (*Guardian*, 21 January 1992).

But Michael Meacher is not some powerless social commentator. He is one of the leaders of a movement that organises millions into trade unions and polls millions more votes. He has the power to change things. If he knew that 'an explosion' was going to happen, why did he not start 'to move the politics of poverty' *before* the disturbances? Or at the time? Why did he not promise action in the future? Instead, defending the Labour leaders from the charge that they aim to 'penalise' the rich, he admitted that under Labour's tax and benefit proposals, "the richest members of society will still be hundreds of pounds a week better off than in 1979, while most pensioners (and other people in poverty — AE) will still be worse off".

In reality the riots were also a condemnation of the Labour leaders! The conditions that sparked riots at the beginning of the Tories' term in office still exist, yet a decade on, the labour movement is not seen by many youth as any sort of vehicle for change.



Brixton 1981.

SUMMER 1981, TWO years into the Tories' first term of office. Britain's inner cities are rocked by large scale riots. Toxteth, St Pauls and Moss Side are scenes of running battles between youth and police. Thatcher calls it the worst period of her premiership. While characterised as a black revolt against racism and police harassment, over half those arrested are white.

Today, how much has changed? Last summer we witnessed riots in five of Britain's cities. This time the confrontations were in Tyneside, Oxford, Bristol, Cardiff and Handsworth, yet the underlying factors that provided the spark were the same. Conditions for young people are worse now than they were ten years ago.

Young homelessness is rapidly increasing, with over 75,000 in London alone. Youth unemployment has grown a quarter-of-a million over the last 12 months — eleven times higher than any other country. There are 60,000 16-17-year-olds without a job, training place or access to benefits.

But there is no obvious vehicle through which young people can fight back. The lack of industrial struggles and the eclipse of the left in the Labour Party and trade unions has left an enormous gap. Many young people now have little or no concept of the labour and trade union movement, or what it could achieve if its latent power was mobilised. Riots erupt to vent the enormous frustrations that exist.

What is the attitude of young people towards the Labour leaders? In a general election they will obviously be thirsting to get the Tories out. The majority of young people who actually vote, will probably vote Labour. A substantial number of those entitled to vote, however, will not vote at all. While Labour may get the passive support of young people looking to get rid of the Tories, this does not mean that there will be an enthusiastic pro-Labour mood. From their policies on the poll tax to disarmament, the Labour leaders have been out of step with the views of most young people.

For many, the Labour leadership are seen as hardly different from the Tories. Neil Kinnock is seen as part of the establishment. The Trustee Savings Bank last year conducted a survey of 600 school leavers' views and aspirations. The resulting report, *Dreams and Reality*, showed that just 30% would support Labour if they could vote. And Neil Kinnock was not as popular a choice for prime minister. All politicians seemed to have a 'credibility problem' amongst youth: "They are very cynical... politicians, the media, the police, the law, a whole strata of the establishment, is tainted with distrust."

But does this mean that youth are 'non-political'? Many capitalist commentators have referred to a new 'hedonistic youth culture', suggesting that young people have been 'bought off'. But cynicism with the Labour leaders does not translate into youth being unprepared to fight. On the contrary, an enormous amount of radicalism exists. During the anti-poll tax battle, while most youth bypassed the campaign's structures, the demonstrations always attracted a high proportion of young people. Many want to do something about their conditions but are rarely given a lead.

During the riots in Tyneside last summer it was reported that some of the youth felled trees and telegraph poles to barricade themselves into the Meadow Well estate. Gangs of youth acted as decoys to divert the police — as in a military style operation! Imagine what could be achieved if that anger, resourcefulness and determination, instead of being channelled into the dead end of rioting, could be harnessed and given a clear lead by the organised forces of the labour movement.

This would be entirely possible if the labour movement went onto the offensive. The 1981 riots in Liverpool were followed two years later by the struggle of the *Militant*-influenced city council demanding more money from central government. This won the enthusiastic support and participation of wide layers of youth.

But without such a lead, a burning anger at their conditions is not always enough to generate an organised movement of youth. The housing crisis, for example, has severely affected young people. The numbers forced to squat has increased. The Advisory Service for Squatters



estimates that there are 30,000 squatters in London alone with another 20,000 around the country. (*Guardian*, 16 October 1991). More than half were aged under 25 — potentially, on purely numerical grounds, the basis for a mass youth movement by themselves.

Moreover, the Tories are proposing that if they win the election, they will criminalise what is now a civil offence, bringing in fines of £5,000 or six months' imprisonment for squatting and giving the police new powers of entry and arrest. This would enrage those youth who have been forced to squat to find a home, and there would probably be localised incidents of resistance as the police move in. If the Tories win the election, YRC branches will have to be alert to this issue, as part of their campaign for homes for youth.

Despite the numbers involved, however, it would be extremely difficult to pull together the 25,000 young squatters into a national movement. About a quarter of squats are in private property with the remainder in council homes; 65% of squats are occupied by two adults and most of the rest by lone single people. (*Guardian*, 16 October 1991). What would propel them into acting together as a unified body? What force on a national scale, at this stage, has the authority to unite the disparate concerns of the squatters themselves, and the interests of the squatters with those of council tenants?

THIS IS NOT to say, however, that there is no scope for national movements of youth to develop in advance of a renewed offensive by the labour movement. Scenes of rioting youth are not just a British phenomena. Over the last year in France there have been several youth and



Oxford 1991.



The LPYS: a proud record of campaigning.

police clashes. One of the biggest riots was provoked when an Arab youth on a scooter was killed in a crash with a police car. But France also shows that there are many issues that could spark a generalised youth movement.

Unemployment in France now stands at a post-war record of three million, with an additional one million people on job schemes. The bottom 25% of the population have not seen an increase in living standards for ten years — the ten years of 'Socialist' government. Youth unemployment stands at 22%.

These results of the right-wing policies of the Socialist Party (PS) government have provided the fuel for the growth of racism in France. In response the PS leaders have reinforced the racist poison by giving credence to the myth that there are too many immigrants in France. Last summer prime minister Cresson introduced new laws against "illegal" immigrants.

But despite the acquiescence of the PS leaders to racist ideas, a mass youth movement has developed over the past period against racism. SOS Rascisme was launched in response to the extreme right-wing Front Nationale (FN) winning 30 seats in the 1985 parliamentary elections. It claims a membership of 18,000, predominantly youth. In the mid-1980s it organised demonstrations of over 100,000, had regular pop concerts of 400,000, and sold one million 'Don't touch my mate' badges. At the end of January this year, with other anti-racist groups, it organised a demonstration, 120,000 to 200,000 strong, against the racist immigration policies of the Socialist government.

The situation in Britain is not the same as that in France. But racist attacks are on the increase. The case of the Tottenham Three, or the shooting of Ian Gordon in Shropshire, are just the most visible examples of continual police harassment of the black and asian community. In the build-up to the election, the Tories used the race card around the issue of removing the right of asylum for refugees. All this provides the basis for the development of a youthful anti-racist campaign in this country.

Such a campaign would also have to win support amongst workers to the task of confronting the tiny but still dangerous fascist grouplets, such as the British National Party, who are standing in a number of seats at the general election. Large numbers of youth in Britain, who have watched with alarm the re-emergence of Nazi groups in Europe, are prepared to be involved in anti-fascist activity.

THE OUTCOME OF the general election will clearly affect how movements of youth will develop in the next period. The defeat of the Tories would raise the hopes and expectations of millions of workers. And it will be young workers who will provide the backbone for a socialist youth movement that will develop and

be organised in the future. Youth membership of trade unions has fallen in the past decade, partially due to the shift of youth employment to the traditionally less unionised service sector. The unattractive policies and lack of action of the trade union leaders has meant that these new layers have not been unionised.

Yet disputes in the NHS, local government, the civil service and the banking sector, and the victory of the left in the building workers' union, UCATT, at a time when young workers were being drawn into that industry, all show the role that youth will play in the future in forcing their way into the unions and compelling them to fight. Through official or unofficial structures they will be prepared to move into action. Trade union youth sections will develop into much more than the shells that exist at present. The young militants will play a decisive part in the democratisation of the trade unions. They will take on the task of transforming the official mass structures into organisations capable of fighting for the working class.

What of Labour's youth section? The *Guardian*, (16 August 1991), reported how the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) has been reduced to 25 branches and 250 members nationally, compared to the early 1980's when, under the leadership of *Militant*, it had over 6,000 members and 552 branches.

In a conscious strategy to drive out *Militant's* socialist ideas — by "all tactics, straight and sharp, but mainly sharp" — the Labour leaders have destroyed the party's youth wing. While a tame "looser organisation... called Young Labour" is planned for after the general election, "in which youngsters will be given training and political education"(!), no matter the name, a right reformist programme, in a period of capitalist crisis, can not sustain a mass youth movement. Even the *Guardian* reporter — no friend of the ideas of *Militant* — recognised this: "After all, hot-blooded youth may not be instantly attracted by the new Kinnockite party slogans, such as 'Stop the Cuts, as resources allow' or 'Ban the Bomb, but only once everyone else does'."

Militant will lead the fight for the re-establishment of a democratic Labour Party youth section, as the class struggles that lie ahead find their reflection in a leftward move in the trade unions and the Labour Party. But at present there is a vacuum of leadership amongst young people. The radicalism that exists has to be channelled. The YRC has the potential to attract to its ranks the best young fighters that exist. It is entirely possible to build a YRC of five to ten thousand over the next period, through a consistent intervention in workplaces, colleges and schools. With these forces the basis would be laid to prepare to fight for a socialist leadership of the mass youth movements that will develop in the future. □

The Tories' economic legacy

Pete Watson examines the Tories' claims to have 'laid the basis for prosperity in the 1990s'.

WORKING CLASS PEOPLE have now had to endure almost thirteen years of Tory government. The Tories have proved to be loyal servants to the wealthiest in society. Since they were elected the average income of the top tenth of the population has gone from £162 a week to £545 a week; the bottom tenth from £42 to £99 a week.* Enormous sacrifices of jobs, housing, and the welfare state have been made by workers in the past decade.

The Tories argue that it was all worth it, that Britain is 'Great' again. Thatcher, for example, in October 1990, answered Labour criticisms with the following words: "Absolute poppycock. Is he (a former Labour minister — PW) not having any regard for the total industrial and commercial transformation that has taken place in this country, the colossal increase of production, the colossal increase in efficiency in our manufacturing industries, the freeing up of the whole financial sector... Is he not considering the far fewer strikes we have now because we got trade union law right? Is he not considering the extra investment we are now getting in industry because... people are no longer afraid of the word 'profit'? Poppycock. Codswall-op. Bunkum and balderdash. They could not have done it... It took someone with real spine to do it." (*Newsweek*).

How true are Thatcher's words? Has the last decade revitalised the British economy and laid the basis for prosperity in the 1990s? To answer that question we must explore what the Tories intended to achieve and whether or not they succeeded in their aims.

Their theory was based on 'supply-side' economics. The job of government and the state was not to help job creation or industry by pumping money into the economy. These 'demand-side' 'Keynesian' methods (after the economist, Keynes) were seen to be the evils that had caused inflation and the economic problems of the 1970s. The role of the state was to be dramat-



ically reduced. Spending was to be cut back, and state-owned companies, land and housing were to be sold off.

The tax system was to be reformed. There was to be a shift from income tax to VAT. High rates of taxes for the rich were seen as holding back 'wealth creation' and investment. With lower rates of taxation there would be more money to invest in jobs; with more jobs would come more tax revenue. Neither should the state interfere in the transfer of capital abroad. While the frontiers of the state were to be rolled back in these areas, government had to inter-

* Much of the information in this article is from the recently published book by Christopher Johnson, *The Economy Under Mrs Thatcher, 1979-1990*. As a specialist adviser to the Commons Treasury Select Committee, Johnson provides a host of authoritative statistics about the Thatcher years. He is, however, no socialist. He debunks monetarism but can provide no coherent programme to solve the economic problems of British capitalism. He overplays the possible successes of a government working under capitalism while underplaying the role of the world economy in the events of the 1980s. With these limitations, a good reference book. *The Economy Under Mrs Thatcher, 1979-1990*, by Christopher Johnson. Published by Penguin, 1991 at £5.99.



Geoffrey Howe.

vene in two crucial fields: prices and trade union 'reform'.

The Tories in 1979 were supporters of the ideas of 'monetarism'. This theory holds that it is the quantity of money that is the most important factor in the overall level of spending and economic activity in an economy. Price stability is a key question for capitalists: 'too much money chasing too few goods' may lead to inflation. Through stable prices they hope to predict the costs of production and can therefore lay long-term investment plans.

For monetarists the only action required by government to ensure prosperity and price stability is for the central bank, the Bank of England, to stabilise the rate of growth of the money supply at a rate equalling the rate of growth of the economy. In its purest form monetarism opposed any 'interference' in the workings of the market by government except for central bank control of the money supply.

This theory is incapable of solving the problems of the British or any other economy. The roots of economic crises under capitalism do not lie in the money supply but in the production process itself. Targets for monetary growth cannot remove the basic source of crisis and contradiction under capitalism, which is the incapacity of workers to buy back the goods they produce and the tendency for profit rates to decline. Furthermore, a removal of state subsidies, cuts in spending and privatisation, do not mean wealth and 'freedom of choice' for workers. The 'free market' means freedom to make profits for the few; for the rest, barbaric conditions.

The military police dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile implemented this 'pure' form of monetarism. By 1985 eight million Chileans out of a total population of eleven and a half million were undernourished. Such are the wonders of the 'free market'! Pinochet succeeded temporarily in effecting such a programme because of the defeat of the Chilean working class in the counter-revolution of 1973. The Tories also feared the power of the labour movement. Milton Friedman, theoretician of monetarism, once called trade unions a 'distortion' of the free market. (*Capitalism and Freedom*, 1962). The Tories saw unions as a barrier to capitalist development. They protected wages and conditions. If these were protected it meant slimmer profit margins for the employers. The 1980s therefore saw eight major bills plus other minor legislation intended to shackle the unions in the legal chains of Employment Acts.

These were the intended aims of the Tories. Cut public spending, transfer public owned assets into private hands, cut personal taxation for the rich, control the money supply and therefore inflation, and break the power of the trade unions. Through creating conditions for profitable production, the 1980s were expect-

ed to be a decade of economic growth, job creation and rising living standards. How successful were they?

ONE OF THE proud boasts of the Tories is that they had inflation 'licked' in the 1980s. The facts say otherwise. Inflation, as measured by the Retail Price Index, rose 7.3% a year so that the price level doubled in the 1980s. This was worse than the average for the advanced industrialised world at 5.5% (OECD average). If Britain was to truly be regarded as a world power once again it should compare favourably with the big three industrial nations. The average inflation rate for Germany was 2.9%, Japan 2.2% and the USA 5.5%.

Monetarism was quickly abandoned as the magic potion to cure the British economy. Various monetary measures were used, M0, M2 and M3, to limit and control the money supply. All to no avail. By 1981 Geoffrey Howe, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, virtually disowned monetarism and switched to tax increases as well as cuts to attempt to squeeze out inflation. Interest rates rose during 1981 to 16%, making loans more difficult to come by and shutting industries down.

Inflation fell from 22% in 1980 to 4% in 1983 but at what cost! Tory policy had deepened the recession. The years 1980 to 1983 had the worst recorded growth in post-war history, 0.3%. Over two million jobs were lost: many manufacturing jobs were lost forever. To this catastrophe Thatcher responded with the phrase, TINA — 'There Is No Alternative'.

Inflation fell. This did not mean that the economy had become 'fitter'. Howe's 1981 budget had cut spending in the economy but inflation was falling in most industrialised countries anyway due to the fall in the price of commodities coming from the less developed world. The capitalist class internationally were busy transferring their crisis onto the masses of the ex-colonial world. This remained a feature of the 1980s.

Inflation was to jump again later in the decade when the then Chancellor Nigel Lawson released £4bn into the economy through tax cuts. No economic theory based on capitalism has been able to 'cure' inflation: only a vibrant and healthy economy can suppress inflation. This was not the Britain of the 1980s.

"THE GOVERNMENT OF business is not the business of government" said Nigel Lawson in 1982. The Tories set out to dismantle the public sector. Employment fell in this sector from 7.4 million to six million from 1979 to 1989; 1.5 million council houses were sold by 1989; £29bn was raised through the privatisation of companies such as British Telecom and British Gas; a further £31bn was raised from sales of land and buildings. By 1988 government spend-

ing was 7% less as a proportion of national income than it was in 1982-83.

One of the purposes of this programme was to reduce the level of taxation. Nigel Lawson once said that "exorbitant taxes, like extreme necessity, destroy industry by producing despair." Lower taxation was to bring incentives to work and invest. But despite privatisation the tax burden *rose* not fell. As a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) — the total of Britain's production omitting net income from abroad — the average tax burden rose from 34% in the 1970s to 37% in the 1980s. Moreover, it was higher at the end of the 1980s than at the beginning. The rich didn't suffer though. Through tax cuts, someone on over £70,000 a year in 1990 had gained an incredible £36,060 a year hand out!

But privatisation and public expenditure cuts had a wider purpose than just tax cuts. They were to bring 'efficiency', and 'freedom of individual choice'. They were to bring in 'a share-owning democracy'.

There has been an enormous rise in home ownership. The proportion of owner occupation is now higher than France or West Germany. But this has not created a new system of ownership in Britain. Home ownership merely means that a family's income is dominated by a bank or building society rather than a landlord or local authority. The leap in house repossessions over the last two years confirms this. House prices have jumped on average from £21,000 to £62,000 in the last decade. Prices as a whole have only risen two times.

Hasn't privatisation spread ownership across society? It is true that the number of shareholders has risen from three million in 1979 to nine million in 1988. But 60% of new shareholders own only one share; 22% own only two shares. The percentage of shares held by the personal sector has actually *fallen* in the 1980s, from 28% in 1981 to 20% in 1988. In 1963 it was 54%.

Privatisation has helped government spending. Without its proceeds the government would have overspent for every year of the 1980s except one. But it is just a 'one off'. Like North Sea oil and gas, it can provide a windfall to government revenue. But when all major assets are privatised, what will fill the revenue gap?

"THE TRADE UNIONS have become the biggest obstacle to raising the living standards of the working class as a whole; they are the chief cause of unemployment and the main reason for the decline of the British economy... Britain remains paralysed by the consequences of the coercive powers irresponsibly conferred on the unions by the law; there can be no solution for her until these special privileges are revoked." (*The 1980s: Unemployment and the Unions*).



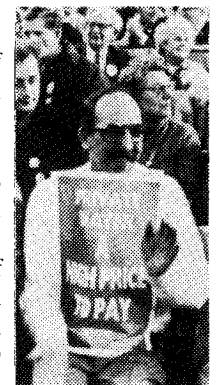
So said Fritz von Hayek, one of Thatcher's favourite economists. While in public the Tories talked of there being "no need for confrontation", (*The Right Approach to the Economy*, 1977), behind the scenes plans were laid for an assault on trade union rights.

Having learnt the lessons of Heath's defeat at the hands of the trade unions in the early 1970s, the Tories played their hand cautiously. Thatcher was to pay dearly for an all out 'big bang' approach to the class struggle when in an over-confident mood she unleashed the poll tax on the working class. But with trade union legislation the Tories attempted to adopt a policy of death by slow strangulation. Acts were passed in most years of the last decade. 'Secondary' picketting was outlawed, unions could be penalised for unofficial action, protective measures for women workers and youth were removed and secret ballots were introduced.

At the same time on the industrial front itself the Tories were feeling their way towards a confrontation with the union they feared most, the National Union of Mineworkers. The 1980 steel strike, the 1981 civil service strike, and the 1982 rail and NHS strikes, were bitterly fought and ended in compromises. The government made concessions to the miners in 1981 to avoid a fight at that time.

In 1978 a secret report from a policy group headed by Nicholas Ridley had been leaked to *The Economist*. The Ridley Report, as it became known, was pessimistic, for example, about the prospects of defeating strikes in the public sector, particularly in water, gas, electricity and the NHS. "The eventual battleground should be chosen by the Tories in a field they think should be won." But it went on to explain how to lay the basis for a victory against the miners. It was

Dismantling the public sector.



Thatcher was
fortunate to
lead a
government
during a
world boom.

necessary, it explained, to build up coal stocks, prepare for coal imports, introduce dual oil and coal firing in all power stations, and encourage non-union lorry drivers. It was also necessary to prepare a "large mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketting." These prophetic words were acted out in 1984-85 when the NUM, comprising just one per cent of the TUC membership, brought the Tories to the brink of defeat.

The miners' strike was prepared for and provoked by the Tories and the ruling class. It cost the economy £2bn. Its defeat meant subsequent unemployment and pit closures for mining communities. Nigel Lawson declared the jump in public spending due to the strike "a worthwhile investment for the nation". (*The Economy Under Mrs Thatcher*, p228)

Trade union membership fell by three million in the 1980s, from 57% to 46% of all employees. Days lost in strike action in the second half of the 1980s fell to a third of the early 1980s. It is wrong however to draw the conclusion that the Tories have won the war and the trade unions are now defeated. Trade union leaders are steeped in this pessimism. But it is they who bear the main responsibility for the defeats inflicted on the working class in the past decade.

The 1980s were not years of industrial peace. The years to 1985 were similar to the 1970s in terms of days lost in strike action. The decline in strike action since then has been an international phenomenon. The boom up to the end of the decade had in some cases allowed employers to buy industrial peace, swapping productivity changes for pay rises, while the reformist prejudices of union leaders had been temporarily strengthened. Warfare between the classes has not been abolished: it has only been temporarily hidden or has appeared in a different form than strike action. But even in this historic low of days lost in strike action, in 1987-89, 92% of strike ballots held produced votes in favour of industrial action.

The offensive against trade unionism has borne fruit for the employers in one sense. Manufacturing labour productivity (real output per employed person) went up by 4.5% a year over the decade. This represents more work per employee as jobs are shed from industry, and more profits extracted per worker by the employer. Average capital productivity (real output per unit of capital) however, only rose 0.8% a year and manufacturing investment only 0.6% a year on average. The picture is one therefore of an economy where profit rates were pushed upwards through the sweat and toil of workers rather than through manufacturing investment.

Any economy that bases its manufacturing strength on an intensified exploitation of labour, through speed-ups, job cuts etc, rather than investment in new plant and machinery will eventually become uncompetitive on a

world scale. A worker has only so much strength and speed to do the job. Neither can he or she work 24 hours a day. Machinery, on the other hand, can constantly be improved to produce goods cheaper and of better quality.

This picture was confirmed in Britain with the rise in imports: after 1988 £11bn more manufactured consumer goods per year came into Britain than were exported. The base of Britain's economy has been increasingly shifted from manufacturing, the heart of a strong economy, towards finance and services. Between 1979-89 there has been no increase in profits at all in manufacturing. Finance and services showed a 7.4% annual increase.

The rate of growth of the British economy in the 1980s — 2.2% per year in a decade of 'boom' — was the same as the 1970s and worse than the 1960s (3.3%). It was 0.6% lower than the average for the advanced industrialised countries. No amount of 'incentives' and 'supply-side' economics could revitalise British capitalism.

Thatcher was fortunate to lead a government during the world boom of 1983-1990. She was able to bask in the reflected glory of the modest progress that was made by the major capitalist powers in those years. She attempted a balancing act between the European Community and the USA as if Britain was their economic equal: her intransigence on Europe and her over-confidence on the poll tax led to her downfall.

Britain's performance was poor next to its competitors. Its growth rate was below average, its unemployment and inflation rates were worse than its rivals. While profitability and productivity grew in the 1980s, its manufacturing base was seriously eroded in comparison with other advanced capitalist countries. That erosion continues.

Investment in all sectors has slumped during the current recession. Gross private non-residential fixed capital — the assets held by the capitalists excluding buildings, stock, money, land and natural resources — fell in 1990 by 0.7% over the previous year. The OECD average for the advanced capitalist countries showed a rise of 5%. In 1991 it was estimated to have fallen by a catastrophic 10.8% compared to an average rise of 0.1%. (OECD December 1991).

Britain's performance was even poorer when it is considered that the world boom of 1983 to 1990 was comparatively weak. In the great post war upswing between 1950 and 1973 more was produced than in the previous three quarters of a century and many times more than any comparable period in human history. By 1973 output was almost three times that of 1950 in the advanced capitalist countries as a whole. In comparison, growth (GDP) between 1983 and 1989 was an average of only 3.6% per year in the advanced industrial countries (OECD).

The first period of the world boom between

1983 and 1987 was a weak consumer-led boom with sluggish investment. US government spending was crucial. President Carter proposed a budget deficit of \$15.8bn for 1981; the deficit in 1992 is expected to be \$345bn! Cheap commodities from the ex-colonial countries were also important. World growth was slow until 1988 and even after then was lower than the 1960-1973 average. Productivity between 1979 and 1988 was less than a third of the average of 1960-1973 and investment and profitability only briefly surpassed the earlier period in 1988 and 1989 (OECD figures).

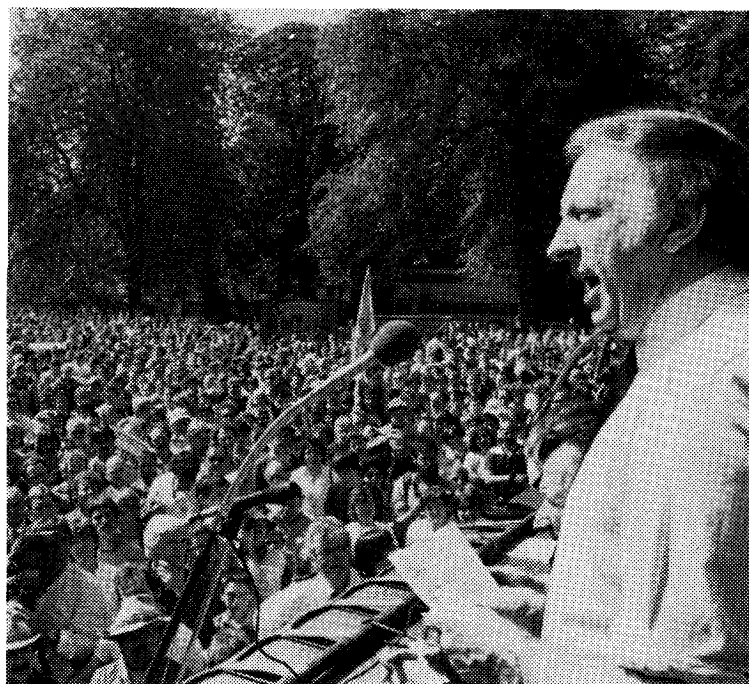
It was only in 1988 that investment rose significantly and a real boom took off. This was due to rising profitability and the necessity to expand production capacity after five years of consumer-led boom. The world economy simultaneously received an extra injection of money capital released by big business because of the collective fear created by the world share crash of 1987. This period of capitalist investment and relatively large increases in production was short-lived. In two years it was over. Britain by 1990 had been a weak partner in what had been a weak boom.

THE TORIES STAND for a 'property owning democracy'. Yet Britain could not even be described as a 'free market'. The 1980s saw increasing monopolisation of industry. While fixed capital spending by industrial and commercial enterprises doubled between 1983 and 1988, expenditure on mergers multiplied eight-fold. In industrial sectors such as cement, tobacco and margarine, the top five companies have a market share of 80-98%. No government, Labour or Tory, can plan growth, jobs and prosperity on the basis of capitalism. Decisions are made in the boardrooms and not through the ballot box. And not even any one boardroom can have a final say on how the economy progresses.

This will undermine the plans of the Labour Party leadership who also base themselves partially on 'supply-side' economics. Training, research and development, and transport, are to be developed by a Labour government to provide the framework for the capitalists to invest and develop the economy as a whole. The Labour leaders policy document, *Looking to the Future* states: "We welcome and endorse the efficiency and realism which markets can provide... the market can be a good servant but is often a bad master." But who would be the servant and who the master?

The same document links public spending growth to economic growth. What if there is no growth? The 8% cut in public spending made in 1977 by the then Labour government was far sharper than cuts made in any one year under Thatcher.

The 1980s were not years of deep right wing



reaction. They were the years of the miners' strike, the Liverpool city council campaign, and the anti-poll tax movement. The self-confidence of the British ruling class and the Tories rose through the decade partly due to the economic boom and the crisis of Stalinism, and also partly because of the utter failure of the leadership of the labour movement to effectively channel the anger of workers against the class enemy. Thatcher and her government scored an important political victory with the Falklands War of 1982. And like other governments around the world, the boom assisted their re-election.

But there was little basis for that self-confidence. There are deep-seated problems in the British economy. The working class remains the decisive force in British society: only a leadership is needed to release its enormous latent power.

If a government that had the friendship of the ruling class and which was 'wind-assisted' by a world boom could not transform the British economy, how can an incoming Labour government? Only a programme that involves the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy can begin to correct the damage done to industry and to workers' lives during the Tories years in office. It must have at its forefront the idea that socialists want democratic control of the economy, not the sham 'democratic socialism' of the Labour leaders. All parliamentary parties at present formally support the right to vote in local and national elections. Why should it not also be our right to vote in the running of the workplaces and our communities? Real and consistent democracy cannot be found in the programme of the Tories or right-wing Labour. It is the property of genuine Marxism. □

The Tories prepared carefully for the miners' strike.



Out of the Ghetto

*Anti-fascist activity in the 1930s.
Building a mass Communist Party
in London's East End. Peter Taaffe
reviews Joe Jacobs' recently
republished autobiography.*



Joe Jacobs.

THROUGHOUT EUROPE RIGHT-WING and neo-fascist organisations seem to be on the march. In France Le Pen's Front Nationale scored an incredible 38% in recent opinion polls. In Belgium the Flemish Bloc registered spectacular victories in the recent general election. In Germany, neo-fascist, right-wing groups and outright fascist organisations have experienced a resurgence. Even in seemingly tranquil Austria, the extreme right-wing Freedom Party received 25% of the vote in local elections in Vienna.

This growth of neo-fascism and racism is fuelled by a combination of factors. On the one side is the influx, which threatens to become a human flood, of economic refugees from the fledgling 'mafia capitalism' in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. To the impoverished Russian masses, Poland appears as an Arcadia. To the Poles Germany appears like an El Dorado.

From the south also, the poverty stricken masses of North Africa seek to escape into Spain, France and Italy. Albanians, Europe's boat people, seek refuge in Italy and Greece. Add to this potent brew the utter incapacity of the official leaders of the European labour and trade union movement to provide a class solution, that is a socialist solution, and the conditions have been created for the neo-fascist and racist demagogues to find an echo. The age-old tactic of divide and rule is once more deployed by a ruling class and its hirelings to deflect attention from themselves, the real culprits of the massive increase in unemployment, poor housing, education and other social deprivation.

This recent sprouting of right wing and neo-fascist organisations, however, can in no way be compared to its pre-war predecessors. Chastened by its experience at the hands of Hitler and Mussolini, let alone Franco, the capitalist class will never again entrust its fate to their would-be modern counterparts. Moreover, the mass basis of fascism, in the form of the rural petit-bourgeois in particular, has been significantly eroded by the post-war economic upswing and

the rapid industrialisation which ensued. This does not exclude that, faced with economic catastrophe and the consequent revolt of working people, that the ruling class will not once more resort to the most drastic measures to retain its rule. In fact, it is certain unless the labour movement shows a way out. But in the future it is more likely that the capitalists will resort to the method of military-police dictatorships — bonapartism — using some of the methods of fascism.

Fascist and neo-fascist organisations will be allotted an important role, but as auxiliaries to such a military dictatorship. This does not mean, however, that they should not be combated by the labour movement as energetically as in the past. Indeed, it is necessary to combat them even in their incipient stage. This is the historical lesson, written in the blood of the German, Spanish, Italian and more recently Chilean workers, that must be absorbed by the new generation of workers.

The tiny British fascist groupings, such as the British National Party, have found little echo as yet. Where they have sought a base, as in Scotland, they have been driven out of working-class areas of Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow by the mobilisation of workers and youth, within which *Militant* in Scotland has played a key role. Nevertheless, it is not excluded that given the rise in unemployment, the crisis in housing and education, and the seeming impotence of the tops of the labour and trade union movement, that fascist and racist groupings could find more of an echo in the period ahead.

If a Labour government is elected and fails to deliver the goods, as is inevitable on the basis of the present programme of the Labour leadership, fascist and racist organisations will exploit for their own ends the inevitable resentment which can accumulate amongst sections of disenfranchised youth, of petit-bourgeois youth in particular, and even of some workers. It is therefore necessary to step up a campaign, particularly amongst the youth, in opposition to racism and fascism. And there is no better way



of politically preparing such a campaign than in studying the excellent *Out of the Ghetto* by Joe Jacobs.

RECENTLY REPRINTED, IT pulsates with the life of the Jewish workers in east London in the inter-war period. The deep affection of Jacobs for the area and its people, which infects the reader, in no way leads him to dress up the grim reality of their everyday existence: the clothes factory "sweatshops were atrocious. Dirt and dust everywhere. The TB rate for our industry was very high." These conditions, together with the general political ferment, led Jacobs, with many of the Jewish workers of the area, to socialism and eventually to 'communism'.

Like many before him he soaked up the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, through almost everything written by Upton Sinclair, Jack London, John Dos Passos, Zola, Romain Rolland, Mann, Tolstoy, Gorky and so on. Despite the backbreaking nature of his work and long hours, sometimes only getting four hours sleep a night, together with the best of his generation he greedily "devoured *Wages, Price and Profit, Wage Labour and Capital... The Communist Manifesto*, great works I thought".

Not satisfied just with the basic ideas of Marxism, however, this generation sought to absorb the theoretical treasures of Marxism, as indispensable weapons for combating the evils of capitalism which surrounded them: "Eventual-

ly, we went on to tackle *Capital* in full. Marx, Engels, Lenin, and always there were classes where we could discuss all these." However, given the poisonous campaign against Trotsky undertaken by the Stalinised 'Communist' Parties, Jacobs was inevitably prejudiced against Trotsky: "Certainly I would not read anything written by Trotsky. You might as well ask a Catholic to read Marie Stoppes, when the church had said he must not."

He clearly underwent a re-evaluation of Trotsky on the basis of the shameful treatment meted out to himself by the leaders of the Communist Party (CP) later on. Before then, however, he was to go through the full gamut, of the ultra-leftism followed by opportunism, of the CP leaders. For example, he reports about when "JT Murphy had been expelled from the CP. This came like a bolt from the blue. The article (in *The Daily Worker* — PT) was a blistering attack for so-called anti-party activity. According to *The Daily Worker*, Murphy had been advocating the extension of trade between the Soviet Union and the capitalist world. He also thought that we should support the idea of extending credit to the Soviet Union. This apparently was anti-party. I didn't know enough about these matters and I am afraid that I only heard the official party line. When JT Murphy was invited to speak at the Circle House in Aldgate, I helped to break up his meeting so that no one could hear what this 'traitor' had to say.

1938 — street life in Whitechapel.



Sir Oswald Mosley.

That's how things were. I feel ashamed of this action now."

This was the wildly ultra-left 'third period' of Stalinism, when the social democrats were condemned as 'social fascists'. Jacobs reports: "During the next few weeks *The Daily Worker* gave a lot of space to attacking Murphy, using language which was usually reserved for use against fascists. Murphy had been a leading and much respected member of the Communist Party for a long time."

But no lies, no amount of bureaucratic hounding of opponents, can ever drown out historical truth, no matter how powerful 'the machine' used to temporarily enforce them. Thus "as time went on, his (Murphy's) views were adopted, but I can't remember a single attempt to withdraw any of the awful things said about him and his ideas. This practise was commonplace without my being aware of it at this time. I had not read Trotsky or any other person who had been cast out. We learnt to accept all of this as the years passed, only to find that the accusers were guilty parties in respect of the charges they made."

And yet the CP, both before and after this mad ultra-left phase, found an echo within the ranks of the Labour Party: "We had many sympathisers in the Labour Party as well as in the trade unions and other workers' organisations. Many of them took part in the activities I have mentioned. Often it was possible to get good campaigns going on special issues, and our contacts in the Labour Party were under fire from the leadership for their 'fellow-travelling'."

There are many facets of this book of relevance to Marxists today. For example the ability of one outstanding rank-and-file CP leader, Nat Cohen, in handling new supporters and potential members of the Communist Party: "He wanted to give everybody an official title. If he had his way, everybody would be an officer. We would find the rank-and-file members later. He would not accept me for any of these positions. Nor some of the others who were already actively associated with him, because he was reasonably sure they would stick. What he wanted was to hold onto the newcomers. I began to learn a lot from him about how to handle people. Very important if you want to organise." 'Open branch meetings' were organised to involve contacts and potential supporters. Closed branch meetings were kept for the discussions of internal matters, involving debates and discussion on strategy and tactics.

The CP, although it had the mighty authority of the October revolution at its back, nevertheless still had to earn its spurs through leading struggles of the British working class, incurring the enmity of the capitalists and their state. Jacobs reports that during September and October 1931, "109 leading Communists and active sympathisers (were) arrested for a variety of

'offences'."

The role occupied by CP militants at that time, generally the most outstanding although politically confused representatives of their generation, is today occupied by supporters of the *Militant*. Of the 170 jailed for non-payment of the poll tax, 18 have been committed supporters of the *Militant*. And as with *Militant* supporters today, CP members were at the forefront of working class discontent at the impositions visited on them by the capitalists.

THE BOOK'S MAIN theme, however, is the rise of fascism, in the form of Mosley's Blackshirt movement, and the role of CP militants such as Jacobs in combating this. There are undoubtedly certain tinges of ultra-leftism in his approach, the elevation of 'direct actionism' and the false counter-posing of this to broader political objectives and perspectives. Nevertheless, what shines through is the basically correct instinct of the best workers, like Jacobs, in how to combat the mortal threat they perceived to them, their class and their organisations from fascism. This is particularly so when compared not only to the passivity of the official leaders of the labour and trade union movement but to the dilatory approach adopted by the very leaders of Jacobs' own party, the Communist Party.

It was the world slump of 1929-33 that saw the emergence of Mosley's fascist movement. The relatively favourable position of British capitalism in comparison to its Italian and German counterparts in particular, had meant that the British ruling class had up to then no need to deploy murderous fascist bands against the working class and its organisations. Fascist organisations were merely kept in reserve for use at a later stage.

This began to change, however, with the slump and the inevitable resistance of the working class. As is well known Mosley himself left the Labour Party in March 1931 to form 'The New Party'. Mosley in turn 'evolved' towards fascism and in the process shed some of those lefts who had mistakenly followed him into this party. By 1934 significant sections of big business were backing Mosley, including Lord Rothermere, owner of *The Daily Mail*, who called on people to join the Blackshirts. Mosley and his fascist forces made serious attempts to break into working class districts, such as Deptford, but were resisted and had to beat a hasty retreat. But at the big 'mass demonstration' organised by Mosley in June 1934, the British working class were given a little taste of what to expect if Mosley was to follow Hitler and Mussolini in taking power. Fascist thugs organised in specially trained bands, mercilessly beat hecklers while the police stood by. Mosley followed this by attempts to penetrate working class areas including the East End.

But they were incapable of holding meetings

in many parts of London. The CP and the Young Communist League (YCL) "were emerging more than ever as the 'leaders' of the fight against fascism." This demanded a new approach by the Communist Party. This in turn brought to a head a simmering conflict which had been brewing in the east London CP. Those youth like Jacobs had come into conflict with the older layer more rooted in the trade unions and with a longer term perspective. He comments "voices were being raised against some of us, who it was said, paid too much attention to street meetings and demonstrations, etc, and not enough to work in the trade unions." He responded by claiming "that those who were mainly engaged in trade union work, were neglecting the other important facets of the class struggle. For example, German fascism, unemployment, rents, Mosley, etc. This kind of argument had been going on for a long time and came to the surface more and more, as time went on."

Jacobs comments "the real basis for this division is to be seen in the fact that the trade union people saw the organised labour movement as the most likely place from which to develop the Communist Party and so hasten the revolution. Whereas it was alleged that those who favoured 'street work' saw the future in terms of the organisation of the unorganised, who were the overwhelming majority of the working-class." He then goes on to make the relevant comment: "You may well wonder why a combination of both should not have been agreed upon. In theory, it was."

The poll tax struggle and the role of the *Militant* in this have shown that it is utterly false to counterpose work amongst the 'organised layers' of the working-class to the so-called 'unorganised'. The organised working-class within the unions and the labour movement are decisive. It is ABC for Marxists, a generally accepted historical proposition, that only the organised working-class in the long run is capable of mobilising behind it the unorganised and downtrodden layers.

Yet there are periods when the labour movement is empty, virtually paralysed, due to the bureaucratic dead hand of right-wing leaders. In this situation, as the poll tax struggle demonstrates, work amongst the so-called 'unorganised' exercises a powerful effect on the organised working-class. *Militant* gained from the poll tax struggle not just amongst the most impoverished sections of the working-class but reached trade unionists, shop stewards — future workers' leaders in the factories — in the course of this movement. They will in due course prove to be a vital leavening in raising up a fighting militant movement in the trade unions themselves. Therefore it is absolutely false to counterpose work in the 'official' labour movement to work allegedly 'outside'. Such an approach can be-



come, in the hands of some, a policy for quiescence and passivity.

The battle of Cable Street.

On the other hand, the ultra-left sects counterpose 'direct action' to the difficult but absolutely vital task of winning the support of the official organisations of the working-class, the Labour Party and trade union movement. The correct policy is to seek to organise those who are prepared to struggle now, but at all stages linking this to the need to win over the shop stewards organisations and the official organisations of the working-class themselves. The echoes of the debate which took place in Jacobs' day in the CP are reflected within the labour movement today.

NINE-TENTHS OF THE right in the approach towards combating fascism lay on the side of Jacobs and his comrades. Mosley had held an inaugural meeting in east London in 1934 but had to be rescued by the police. Nevertheless he announced a rally in Hyde Park for September of that year. Predictably the "official Labour Party, trade union and co-ops, the National Council of Labour, signed by Walter Citrine and Arthur Henderson, called on the workers to have nothing to do with the Mosley rally in Hyde Park." Shades of opposition to the non-payment anti-poll tax campaign! One million leaflets were distributed during the campaign to oppose Mosley and 150,000 mobilised in Hyde Park. The rally was a fiasco. The fascists were hurriedly marched in at 6pm and out again at 7pm under the protection of a massive display of police.

Jacobs' increasingly militant stance brought him into conflict not just with the local but with the national leaders of the CP. The roots of this conflict lay in the instinctive opposition of



Jacobs, and those who supported him, to the methods deployed by the CP leadership nationally and internationally. He thought that "surely the best defence of the Soviet Union would be the extension of the revolution to other countries, especially Germany, France, Spain and Great Britain." Like many CP members at the time and since, he was searching for the ideas of genuine Marxist criticism of Stalinism, as reflected in the works of Trotsky. This is borne out by his comments about Stakhanovism, the trial of the 'Old Bolsheviks', which was met with perplexity, etc. But his opposition grew primarily on the immediate issue of how to combat fascism.

In relation to the arguments of his opponents, "as I saw it, none of these things could be a substitute for workers' participation in direct action to secure the demands of the unemployed and to fight for shorter hours and higher wages. Nor could they be a substitute for direct opposition to landlords, direct defence of civil liberties and democratic rights, and the direct independent pursuance of a whole range of social demands... I felt that any work inside the mass reformist organisations would have to be expressed in such a way as to lead to actions in the factories and on the streets." Modern reformism merely echoes the passivity of its forebears: "It could be argued, and it was, that by reacting as we did, it only served to help Mosley and we were playing into his hands. But what do you do when the local people, on whose doorsteps these fascist meetings were being held, turned out in opposition? Were we to say ignore them, you only play into their hands; what about the anti-semitic abuse, what about the violence, what about the fact that, as each attempt met with some partial success, this only meant a further penetration into areas which had previously been closed to the fascists? Inside the CP and elsewhere, these questions were debated. I think the majority view, certainly among the youth, was that Mosley should be met everywhere with the maximum force available."

Despite his growing doubts Jacobs nevertheless kept up a ferocious work rate for the party that he perceived was the only hope for the working class: "We made a big drive to raise sales of *The Daily Worker* in Stepney. The first weekend selling was from 6am to 8am on Saturday and Sunday, from 10am to 2pm. Then we had a demonstration to Trafalgar Square and then more selling until midnight."

IN THE LEAD up to the famous battle of Cable Street the simmering conflict within the Stepney CP came to the boil. Mosley announced that the British Union of Fascists (BUF) was to march through the East End on October 4th, 1936. The YCL had organised a rally in Trafalgar Square on the same day in support of the Span-

ish workers. The London YCL secretary confirmed to Jacobs that the London district committee of the party (DPC) were going ahead with the plan for the Trafalgar Square demonstration, "he said Spain was more important than Mosley. I was horrified!..."

"This attitude clearly reflected what I already knew was the London district party leadership's position on Mosley. I was furious. I could hardly believe what I was reading. I had been fighting their ideas for years. Here was the confrontation and I could not withdraw. On the contrary, I knew that if the DPC line was carried, a heavy blow would fall upon the workers of east London and workers everywhere. It would also be the end of me. I had nothing to lose and everything to gain by fighting these pernicious tactics."

Moreover, as Jacobs points out "other organisations were organising and calling for opposition to the march. Others were telling people to stay at home and leave it to the police to see that Mosley's hordes behaved. We in the CP were supposed to tell people to go to Trafalgar Square and come back in the evening to protest after Mosley had marched."

Rubbing salt in the wound, the east London organiser left a note for Jacobs, on September 28th, in which he stated "Keep order: no excuse for government to say we, like BUF, are hooligans. If Mosley decides to march let him. Don't attempt disorder (time too short to get a 'They Shall Not Pass' policy across. It would only be a harmful stunt). Best see there is a good, strong meeting at each end of march. Our biggest trouble tonight will be to keep order and discipline."

Jacobs, expressing the fury felt at the time by himself and others like him, states "I could hardly believe my eyes. How could they be so blind as to what was happening in Stepney." He phoned the London CP headquarters and reported that the CP ranks in the East End would defy the London leaders if they persisted with their false policy of mobilising in Trafalgar Square while Mosley was marching through the East End.

A delegation was sent to the East End by the London leadership to impose the line. Jacobs and his friends argued "that the best way to help the Spanish people was to stop Mosley marching through east London. It was, in fact, the same fight. If we said the fascists should not pass, it was what the Spanish were trying to ensure and giving their lives in the process. A victory for Mosley would be a victory for Franco. In any case, the people of east London had their own ideas about all this and would oppose Mosley with their bodies, no matter what the CP said. We argued long and hard."

However, during this meeting an emissary from the national leaders of the CP arrived and "announced that the centre had decided to



change the line. The call would go out to all branches to rally to Aldgate instead of Trafalgar Square on October 4th. The slogan would be 'They Shall Not Pass', which was already being repeated all over Stepney and could not be ignored, in this case, by the CP or anyone else."

In the days leading up to October 4th "I never saw such enthusiasm before. The air was electrified... every kind of anti-fascist organisation was full out. Thousands of people were in the street. Ordinary people who had not taken part in this kind of political activity before."

What followed in the battle of Cable Street is history. It was a decisive turning point in the battle against the fascists in Britain. Estimates of 500,000 — Jacobs puts it at 250,000 — mobilised to confront Mosley's pathetic 2,500 fascists protected by 10,000 police, including mounted police. Despite repeated baton charges, the police and the fascists were repulsed by the workers who threw up fresh barricades when other barricades were demolished. The defeat in Cable Street in 1936 was a big blow to Mosley. Fascist activity in the East End receded, with demoralisation in the fascists' ranks, while the working class were given a big boost to their confidence.

However, after 1936 the policy of the CP and the YCL changed. In line with Stalin's attempts to forge agreements with 'democratic' capitalist countries, the CP proposed a policy of class collaboration between workers and 'good' capitalists. The British CP, abandoning any class analysis of capitalist society, even advocated a

united front with the Tories and Liberals, at one stage calling for a 'national government'. The British CP, attempting to placate Tories and Liberals, distanced itself from any militant opposition to fascism. This was reflected in the refusal to mobilise against Mosley's monster Earls Court rally just before the outbreak of the second world war. Only the Trotskyists and a small band of anti-fascist militants demonstrated in opposition to Mosley.

This was reflected in Stepney with statements in the Stepney CP bulletin that "while it is correct to say that the previous attitude of the party to do everything possible to prevent the conducting of fascist meetings was a proper one in view of the political situation existing at the time, it does not follow that the same attitude would be proper at the present time." Jacobs, with others, resisted this position. Inevitably his conflict with the local and national leadership of the CP led to his expulsion. He nevertheless continued with his heroic work in the labour movement and was eventually re-admitted into the CP only to be expelled once more in 1952.

As a graphic picture of one man's involvement in the labour movement between the wars this book is well worth reading. But it represents a lot more than that. It provides a key on how to fight, and how not to fight, fascism. Its lessons are as relevant to the struggles that loom in the 1990s as they were to the struggles of the 1930s. Readers of the *MIR* should acquire this book and ponder on the many lessons contained in its pages. □

Upwards of 250,000 were mobilised to crush Mosley.

Out of the Ghetto.
Published by
Phoenix
Press, 1991.
£9. Available
from **World Socialist**
Books (see
back cover).

A Welcome Home?

A housing crisis will greet the new government. The MIR invited Peter Lush, secretary of the NALGO Housing Associations branch, to review A Welcome Home – Labour's new strategy for housing.

IN 1966, FOLLOWING the television play *Cathy Come Home*, the housing charity Shelter was founded. *Cathy Come Home* had shown the desperate situation of a young working-class family which faced being made homeless and having their children taken into care.

It is a damning condemnation of capitalism that twenty-five years later, not only is there still a need for organisations such as Shelter but the homelessness crisis has grown much worse. Yet in this period there have been nine years of Labour government, and in some inner-city areas, twenty-five years of Labour councils.

In 1990, 169,526 families or single people were accepted as homeless by local authorities: 45,170 households were housed in temporary accommodation. These figures exclude the thousands of single people or childless couples who are not covered by the homeless persons legislation. The same figures in 1980 were 76,471 and 4,170. In the period of the Tory government, of a 'property owning democracy', there has been an increase of over 100% in homelessness, a 1,000% in households in temporary accommodation. (*All in One Place*,* p48)

The past thirteen years have seen a continuous campaign by the Tories to undermine public housing. The 'right to buy', portrayed as the 'liberation' of council tenants from local authority bureaucracy, has for many ended in grief with mortgage arrears and repair bills. The local authorities have been starved of funds to build new housing, not even being able to spend the receipts from 'right to buy' to replace the houses that were sold. Policies such as Housing Action Trusts and transfer of stock to newly formed housing associations have also aimed to reduce the role of local authorities in council housing.

In 1975, 110,335 new council houses were built, with a total of 144,725 in the public sector. In 1990, only 6,242 new council houses were built, with a total of 20,084 altogether in the public sector. No wonder some families face a sentence of up to four years in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in London whilst

waiting for a place to live.

The Tories have continually promoted home ownership as the answer to the housing crisis. In reality, this option, even with 'right to buy', excluded large sections of the population. Now, the effects of the recession, combined with high interest rates and the commercial outlook of the building societies, forced the government to introduce palliative measures to ease the crisis facing many owner occupiers in the run up to the general election.

In 1991, over 70,000 properties were repossessed because of mortgage arrears. Over 200,000 other mortgage payers are at least six months in arrears. The recent government announcement transferring some of these properties to housing associations to become rented properties, unless backed by large government grants, will produce enormous rents for these properties and could cause financial problems to housing associations that take them on. The real aim is to bail out the government's friends in the building societies as much as the beleaguered mortgage holders, with the societies faced with hundreds of repossessed unsellable properties, and huge financial losses.

This is the magnitude of the crisis that would face an incoming Labour government. Would Labour be able to solve the housing crisis?

PAST LABOUR MANIFESTOS have proudly put forward targets for house building. In the 1950s, Labour and the Tories competed for which party would build more council homes. What is noticeable about *A Welcome Home – Labour's new strategy for housing* is the complete lack of any specific commitments or targets for house building and renovation.

The document starts with *An emergency programme for homeless people*. No socialist

* *All in One Place – The British Housing Story, 1971-1990*, by John Newton, published by the Catholic Housing Aid Society.

Peter Lush writes in a personal capacity.



Homeless in London.

would dispute the need for an emergency programme. But what this offers is half measures, instead of using the resources that exist to end the homelessness crisis.

Before outlining the details of a socialist alternative, it is important to stress a fundamental point: whilst the major building companies and monopolies that control resources are in private hands, it will not be possible to solve the housing crisis. More money can be given to local authorities and housing associations, but whilst the resources are controlled privately, a co-ordinated national house building plan is not possible.

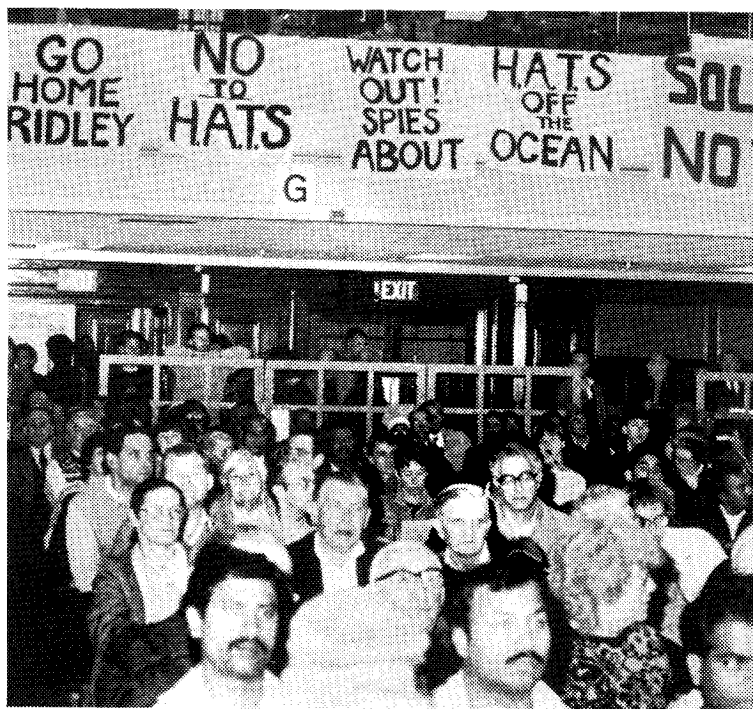
Labour's aims of "clearing inadequate bed-and-breakfast hotels and putting a roof over the heads of those people who are forced to sleep rough" are very laudable. But how will they be achieved?

A *Welcome Home* includes many measures which happen already, such as housing associations managing temporary accommodation for local authorities, partially rehabilitated empty property being used as temporary accommodation and local authorities leasing from the private rented sector. Socialists would also support the other proposals made such as local authorities acquiring properties in the private market, and a right to acquire private properties that have been empty — although a 'long period' should be six months or so, rather than years! Also, landlords and private developers should not be able to make profits through sales to local authorities.

But the key question with all these policies is: how much money is put into them? How many empty properties will local authorities be able to buy? How much money will be given to provide more short stay hostels, with adequate staffing, resettlement workers and, crucially, permanent accommodation for homeless people to move into? If property has been empty for a long time, it often needs a great deal of work to bring it up to a decent standard. Where will the resources come from to do this, and the staff to organise the programmes?

The document also talks of extending the homeless persons legislation to increase the number of people local authorities have a duty to house. The aim of "making all local authorities responsible for all homeless people in their area" is excellent. But this is immediately qualified to areas where homelessness is at low levels, or if there is a "plentiful supply of rented housing." Are there any areas that fit these criteria?!

THE SECTION IN A *Welcome Home* on home ownership offers reforms in areas such as leasehold, and the idea of transferring owner occupiers in trouble with their mortgages into tenants or 'shared ownership' (part rent, part mortgage) schemes. However, instead of legislation

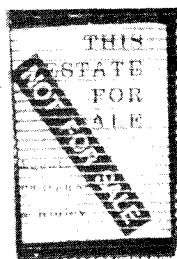


to stop repossessions because of mortgage arrears, they will "encourage lenders to reach sensible arrangements for repayment of arrears". How will this be enforced if building societies put their commercial aims first and continue repossessions?

Over two-thirds of homes are now owner-occupied in Britain, compared to 55% in 1979. (*Guardian*, 5 November, 1991). There has been an increase of 5,700,000 owner occupiers since 1971. Often, working-class families have been forced into home ownership because of the lack of alternative rented accommodation. But, in addition, many have turned to home ownership in a reaction to bureaucratic run, underfunded local authority housing. Any socialist programme for housing needs to recognise this, and look to providing genuine choice in housing.

But a programme that does not challenge the control of the banks and building societies over owner occupation, and does not provide protection from changes in interest rates and the threat of repossession, is only scratching at the surface of the problems facing thousands of mortgage payers. Forty-four percent of all households are paying a mortgage — they often have less protection from eviction than tenants if they hit financial troubles and run up arrears. Why not use the National Housing Bank which the Labour leaders propose, to provide interest free loans to those who want to own their own homes, but at the same time put resources into rented accommodation through local authorities so that people have a genuine choice of what type of housing to live in?

SOME OF LABOUR'S most significant reforms in



the past have been in the area of rented housing. Labour movement activists today should never forget that our predecessors in the movement established council housing as an alternative to private landlordism. The 1965 Rent Act gave protection to private tenants against the horrors of *Rachmanism*, and the 1974 Housing Act extended this to furnished tenants.

The private rented sector has been in decline since the beginning of the century. Attempts to revive it have been ineffective, for the simple economic reason that there are far more profitable and secure areas for capitalists to invest their money! Only 7.5% of households now live in private rented accommodation.

Labour's programme should aim to massively increase the public rented sector, primarily through local authorities, but not opposing the development of housing associations where they play a significant part in housing in a particular area. However, democratic tenant control should be introduced into housing associations as a condition of future funding.

Labour aims to provide legal rights for tenants. But unless local authorities are given the resources to enforce them, they will be meaningless. One proposal is the 'right to repair' — an excellent idea in theory and recently included in Major's 'council tenants charter'. But unless resources are put into repair budgets for local authorities, how are the repairs to be paid for? One inner-London borough has £180 a year to spend on all day-to-day repairs per property (excluding heating). How does this tally with a legal right to repair?

There is also encouragement for tenants to have greater control over their housing. Socialists should support this, as many tenants face seemingly unaccountable faceless bureaucracies in local authority housing departments. Would the crass design mistakes such as high-rise and system building have occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, if the people planning and providing this type of housing had also had to live in it?

But the reality facing many housing co-operatives is that there are no more resources available to them than any other tenants. This can mean tenants spending hours of voluntary work to release small sums to spend on much needed repairs. Socialists should support local control over housing and tenant control, but only if adequate resources are provided to housing co-operatives, and clear guidelines provided for the employment of staff, equal opportunities, etc.

These are important provisos. In a time of housing crisis, some tenants have been encouraged to form co-operatives by cynical Tory councils with the aim of breaking up council housing. The energy and enthusiasm put into forming tenant management co-operatives on council estates, which often arise from frustrat-

ion with the cuts in local authority housing services, could be better used campaigning for more resources for housing, and building a national tenants' movement to fight for tenants' rights. The idea that a 'socialist island' can be created in a sea of capitalist housing is an illusion whilst resources for housing co-operatives are as scarce as for any other sector of public housing.

The section on *The private rented sector* shows the dilemma the Labour leaders face in trying to improve housing under capitalism. It says "If we wish to see the sector continue to cater for mobile people, and for people who have little prospect of gaining housing by a social landlord in the short term, then we must find a way to meet the concerns of private tenants, while at the same time recognising the legitimate economic interests of landlords". Yet it does not "intend to set out here a comprehensive policy for reform" to achieve this! Indeed, the only guarantee given is not to introduce retrospective legislation in the private sector, because of landlords currently making investment decisions! The proposals for registering private landlords and rental deposits being held by an independent body are fine in theory, but would be almost unenforceable in the jungle of the private rented sector.

INCREASING HOME PRODUCTION and improvement should be the most important section of Labour's strategy. Indeed it proclaims that "Labour will marshal the resources of social landlords and private house builders to provide more new and improved homes". Yet continuous qualifications are put on commitments.

The document says that "it is not desirable to fix a single, simple national target for the number of new homes to be built or improved each year". Why not? Socialists would agree that the mistakes of system building in the past must be avoided. But the document itself declares that "more than one million homes (are) unfit for human habitation", so shouldn't that be the first target? According to the Institute of Environmental Health Officers, 2.8 million homes are unfit for human habitation or in need of serious repair. (*Guardian*, 9 September 1991) Why not target to renovate these homes? From 1981-90, two million rented homes were lost. Shouldn't restoring those rented homes be a target? It is quite wrong to abandon a target for new housing, which would be a beacon of hope to those in sub-standard accommodation, because of the argument that quality will be lost. It is now possible to learn from past mistakes, which were often made because limited resources were allocated, and because of the lack of democratic control by tenants.

In fact, the real reason why the Labour leaders will not commit themselves to targets is because to solve the housing crisis would require

an enormous input of resources. For example, the Building Employers' Confederation estimate that £24bn is needed to be spent on repairs to the UK's housing stock. (*Guardian*, 11 September 1991). Throughout the 1980s councils could not afford to rehabilitate sub-standard housing. The Institute of Environmental Health Officers estimate that houses in England and Wales would have to last 2,500 years if they were to be replaced at the rate currently achieved by local councils!

Changes Labour proposes in housing finance, to lift the ring fencing of housing revenue accounts, are welcome. But again, the question of resources is crucial. Already, Labour leaders are warning Labour local authorities not to be expected to be 'bailed out' if Labour win the next election. In 1975, after one year of a Labour government, environment minister Tony Crosland announced that 'the party's over' for local authorities. Now that announcement is being made in advance of Labour winning the election! David Blunkett has warned "there will be no pot of gold for the coming financial year... we will be able to help but not in picking up the bill in extra central government spending". (*Guardian*, 23 December 1991).

The Tories pre-election 'tax bombshell' scare campaign included every spending commitment a Labour spokesperson has ever made. It quoted shadow environment minister Bryan Gould from November 1990, advocating spending an extra £3bn on housing construction, repairs and maintenance. (*Guardian*, 7 January 1992). In fact this was not to be extra money but would come from the receipts from council house sales, of which £1bn would be spent on new homes. Yet this would only build 20,000 public sector homes. Even if this was just in London, this would be less than 650 per borough!

Not much more than £5bn is held by local authorities from 'right to buy' sales. (*Guardian*, 4 October 1991). Yet the Labour leaders want to "relax, progressively the constraints on the use" of even these limited funds! *A Welcome Home* argues that they must avoid "any sudden and unsustainable burst of activity which could lead us back to the industrialised building problems of the 1960s and 1970s." Try explaining to a family stuck in bed and breakfast, bringing up children in overcrowded squalor, that there should not be a 'burst of activity' in housing!

The reliance on market forces, and their incapability of solving the housing crisis, is also shown by the comment that "a construction industry suffering the most severe recession for decades will need some time to respond to the increased demand for materials and skilled labour." So the document calls for the creation of 'community-based construction agencies' to provide a quality building service, safe conditions in the notoriously dangerous building ind-



ustry, and a reliable source of skilled labour. Yet, the Labour leaders restrict these agencies to competing in the market by saying that "we do not intend unfairly to subsidise trading activities at the expense of employment in the private sector. Any legislation would ensure that the agencies have to achieve a set rate of return in relation to their turnover and to conform to agreed accounting standards." In other words, they will have to compete with the private building companies on market terms.

Even on Housing Action Trusts, the Labour leaders do not give a clear commitment to abolish them. Nor does *A Welcome Home* give a clear commitment to stop 'voluntary transfer' where some councils have been able to transfer all their stock to a housing association, ending their role as a social landlord.

A new Labour government would face the task of rebuilding the welfare state and social services that the labour movement fought for decades to establish, and which have faced thirteen years of attack from the Tories. But Labour's plans will be doomed to failure if they attempt to work within the constraints of the market and private ownership system. The resources exist in Britain to end the housing crisis, and to provide quality homes for those in need. Socialists will support every reform, every gain proposed in Labour's strategy. But without fundamental changes to the system, of nationalisation of the monopolies that dominate building, building supply and finance as part of a socialist planned economy, the measures a Labour government can introduce will be very limited, frustrating the hopes of the millions facing housing problems. □

Nearly three million homes are unfit or need serious repair.

No immunity

Margaret Creear examines the questions raised by the January report of the Law Commission, which reversed a 250-year-old ruling on marital immunity for rape.

IN 1917 THE new Soviet government in the USSR abolished marital immunity for rape. This was part of wholesale changes made in the law which ended legal discrimination against women in general, and wives in particular, which had been based on Russia's feudal laws.

In 1991 the British state decided to review the situation. In doing so they were bending to the overwhelming pressure in society to oppose discrimination against and abusive treatment of women. This pressure is based on the growing confidence and relative independence of women themselves, especially younger working-class women. Women going out to work in larger numbers will no longer tolerate the second class status and outrageous discrimination experienced in the past. In spite of the recession, women have maintained themselves as almost half the workforce, even though their wages and conditions have come under further attack.

In the past when women were a much smaller proportion of the workforce, such discrimination was easier to maintain. Even so, it was challenged wherever women were drawn into industry, such as in the textile industry, where women's demands were often incorporated into the programme of the early labour movement. However, most women left paid work when they became wives. They became economically dependent on their husbands and were to a large extent isolated in their homes, bowed down with the responsibilities of child birth and rearing and domestic drudgery.

What went on 'behind closed doors' was only the individual family's business — a completely personal and private matter. The state and the ruling-class relied very heavily on the economic dependence of non-workers — women, children, the elderly and the sick — on individual men rather than on public finances. This is something they are trying to reinforce at the moment with the new legislation on single

parents and maintenance. The Tory government try to give the impression this is being carried out to alleviate the poverty in which single parents live. But any maintenance is deducted pound for pound out of the income support of single parents, and after £15, for family credit recipients. In other words, the main beneficiary of the maintenance collected will be the treasury. Most single parents will be no better off than before.

Apart from the economic role the family has played, the state has always portrayed it as, and encouraged it to be, a unit of authority vested traditionally in the father. Children are brought up to do as they are told, backed up by physical force where necessary. This system of authority was backed up by religion and enshrined in law.

The recent abortion controversy in Ireland underlined the concept of a woman as a vessel for the production of children, with no separate existence. A 14-year-old was raped, became pregnant, and then effectively had her passport withdrawn to prevent her from having an abortion in Britain. She had no more rights than those of the 'unborn'. Such traditional ideas, which relegate women to a biological function, treating them as an object or a means to an end for someone else, were once much more openly stated than they are today in most advanced industrialised countries. But they still influence behaviour and attitudes towards women.

MALE AUTHORITY IN the family was written into British law. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that this was seriously challenged. The Married Women's Property Act of 1895 made conviction for assault grounds for divorce, along with custody of the children and maintenance from the husband's family. In 1891 the legal right of a husband to force his wife to live with him against her will, by locking her in the home, was removed.





But it was very difficult for working-class women to take advantage of the laws, due to cost and due to their total economic dependence on men. It was not until some women were drawn out to work and could to some degree maintain themselves financially — along with the struggle of the labour movement for better wages, municipal housing and the various provisions of the welfare state — that working-class women could realistically consider divorce.

The drawing out to work of women has had a very important and now deeply rooted effect on working-class women in particular. Isolated from other women, in your own home, with the propaganda about how to create a happy marriage putting all the responsibility on the shoulders of women, it is quite possible to believe that anything which goes wrong — your husband losing his temper or criticising the housework, your children 'going off the rails', your inability to cope on low wages — is all your own fault. It must be something you have done. Women can feel a paralysing guilt or make enormous efforts to adapt their behaviour — spend their lives 'treading on egg shells', as many describe it. Usually this is to no avail.

However, when you go to work and start to talk to other women — especially when an event such as Sara Thornton's hunger strike is in the papers — then it becomes clear that what you thought was a personal, private matter is

actually experienced by many if not the majority of women. In other words, it becomes a social issue, for which a solution has to be found not by adapting the behaviour of individual women, but through government policy. Inevitably, women workers begin to look to their trade unions and/or campaigns such as that on domestic violence.

THE FIRST RESPONSE of the state to such shifts in social attitudes is to change the law. After all, it costs nothing. Such legal changes on social issues, whilst raising further the confidence of women to make more demands, are not seen as so fundamental to the capitalists as, for example, the restrictions they have placed on the trade unions, which give them an advantage in the class struggle.

But it is ironic that capitalism is making these concessions because of women's growing confidence at a time when their own system is yet again in recession. One of the effects of this situation is that, whilst passing legislation which should enable women to defend themselves from violence and escape violent relationships, the Tory government is enacting other legislation — such as that on maintenance — and pursuing other policies — such as cuts in social services and council housing — which will make it more difficult for working-class women to leave.

In the past, British law, and through imper-

**British
Aerospace
women workers
on the move.**

**Women will
no longer
tolerate a
second class
status.**



Sara Thorton.

ialism that of many other countries, was based on Hale — Sir Matthew Hale, the head of the judiciary who wrote his *History of the Common Law* in the period of reaction which followed the English revolution of the 17th century.

Generally, married women had no legal existence and no rights separate from their husbands. Hale held, in a 1736 dictum, that rape in marriage could not take place because “by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given herself in this kind to her husband which she cannot retract.” On marriage a woman signed away all her rights, even to her own body. Unlike rape by a stranger, it was not even a case of establishing that a woman had meant ‘no’ when she said ‘no’. She had no right to say ‘no’. Such attitudes and laws reflect the origins of the bourgeois family in slave society.

Gradually these laws have been undermined by other gains women have made. Exceptions to marital immunity for rape have been brought about by divorce and judicial separation. If a husband and wife were still married but no longer cohabiting there was some doubt about whether the man would be immune from a charge of rape, especially if there was a court injunction against him.

The 1956 Sexual Offences Act described rape as ‘unlawful sexual intercourse’. Unfortunately, in this context unlawful usually means ‘outside marriage’. Therefore marital immunity was still assumed to apply. In 1976 the law was allegedly clarified to define rape as being without the consent of the woman. However, the word ‘unlawful’ was still retained, so the confusion and wide scope allowed to judges to exercise their ‘discretion’, not to mention their backward ideas, continued.

In 1990 in the case *Regina v R*, the House of Lords rejected marital immunity. The Law Commission, the official law reform body for England and Wales, began work to clarify the position. And in January this year it reported that, in fact, marital immunity no longer exists.

ON THE SURFACE you might think this was a particularly uncontentious matter. But the discussion it has thrown up shows the remnants of the old ideas in places of influence. More especially, it revealed again the material difficulties which stand in the way of women taking advantage of the law, and therefore the strictly limited effect legal change has on the lives of working-class women in particular.

Obviously any changes in the law of this kind are welcome. A recent survey carried out for *Granada Reports* by Manchester University came to the not surprising conclusion that 96% of married women thought rape in marriage should be made a crime.

However, the main dissent in the law commission’s report comes from the very people who

will have to implement it — the Council of Her Majesty’s Circuit Judges. They thought it would be impractical to prosecute a man for raping his wife and therefore they wanted to limit it to couples who were no longer cohabiting. They felt unsuccessful prosecutions would undermine the seriousness of rape in general. Whilst there are obviously difficulties in prosecuting cases where there are normally only two witnesses, it is hard to see how the difficulties in prosecuting marital rape would undermine the general seriousness of rape any more than allowing a whole section of the community to be immune from prosecution in the first place.

But as usual it was left to the benighted ranks of Tory MPs, in this case Tony Marlow, to defend slavery and slavish attitudes, and doing so using the most ridiculous language, in the debate in parliament. He opposed the law commission’s report on the grounds that women could always get a divorce. Never mind how long that might take and how many more times you might be raped and generally abused in the meantime. He thought the changes were motivated by a combination of “unfortunate women who need our help and support” and ‘wimmin’ — “the ghastly feminist lobby who think men are made of slugs and snails and puppy dogs’ tails, and women are made of sugar and spice and all things nice.”

What the distinction between the two groups really signifies is that he can ‘sympathise’ with women who he sees as poor little helpless victims deserving of charity and pity. What he can’t stand is not just feminists but women who are prepared to stand up and fight and make demands his system may not want to concede. He continued his arguments on the same nursery rhyme level with the statement that these proposals would create a two-tier marriage system — a church wedding where a wife would promise “to love, honour *and obey* until death do us part” and her husband would be allowed to rape her; and a registry office wedding, presumably with no obligation to obey, where marital rape would be a crime.

Although it is quite likely that prosecution will be difficult, the existence of legislation of this kind has the effect of spelling out what is socially unacceptable and gives a legitimacy to women’s struggles. The same can be said of the Equal Pay, Sex Discrimination and Abortion Acts, even though everyone recognises they have not solved the problems and disadvantages of working-class women. In fact the passing of such legislation shifts the focus to how can these socially recognised, just demands be achieved in practice.

SOME DISCUSSION HAS taken place in both the commission report and the newspapers as to whether rape in marriage is as serious as rape by a stranger. This is really a reflection of peo-

ple dragging their heels over the issue. The key question with rape is not the details or the degree of physical violence which accompanies it but the lack of consent by the woman. Carol Sadler in *The Sunday Times*, 2 February 1992, argued that there should be a graded scale of sexual offences as an alternative to the single offence of rape. The implication was that marital rape would be lower down the scale. She dismissed the claim by Women Against Rape that "rape by husbands is just as painful and traumatic as rape by strangers, in some ways worse", as 'bullshit'. She instances a woman who was raped when she was nine months pregnant by a stranger.

However, a married woman described the excruciating pain and long-term emotional damage done when her husband raped her two weeks after giving birth while she still had stitches from the birth. Another woman describes how she was raped by her husband when she was ill in bed with flu. "He really hurt me physically and mentally. I've never forgotten the humiliation of someone you thought you loved doing that to you. It had a dreadful effect on me. I felt cheap. It was as if I was nothing."

A survey conducted amongst married women showed that 84% of women who had been raped by their husbands thought it was as serious as rape by a stranger. Twelve per cent thought it was worse.

One of the problems in proving marital rape, and one of the reasons why it might not always be accompanied by the obvious violence which attracts sympathy, is that although physical violence is often used, the threat of it, especially to a woman who has already been beaten, is often enough. It can also be accompanied by threats not to give the woman money from his wages to run the house, to hurt the children, take them away from her or verbal abuse and mental cruelty.

ONE OF THE most controversial proposals from the commission report, which highlights the limits of the law, revolved around the 'compellability' of wives as witnesses. Basically in the past a wife could not be forced to give evidence against her husband. This has gradually been removed until now wives are compellable for most crimes.

There is a fringe element reflected in the report who believe that if women are given legal rights they are likely to use them frivolously or maliciously and therefore they support compellability to prevent women from wasting police and prosecution time.

However, the law commission itself recommends compellability as a form of protection for the woman on the grounds that if she has no choice but to testify then there would be little point in her husband intimidating her to withdraw the case. They also point out that if wives



are not compellable, the police and prosecution service would be reluctant to take the issue seriously.

One of the dangers with compellability is that if a woman refuses to testify she could be charged with contempt of court and imprisoned or fined. The commission points out that a judge can ignore contempt where there is evidence that a woman has been intimidated, as in fact they do now. However, there are cases such as that of Susan Mellor, who was jailed for a week for refusing to give evidence after she had been threatened by her partner. Other women have been fined.

The commission appealed to the 'sensitivity' of the judiciary on this issue. However, given the inconsistent way in which the law is sometimes applied, women might well feel that 'sensitivity' is found in rather variable amounts amongst judges and it would be best not to have to rely on it. And the final appeal is to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the last having been removed from his position after he was arrested for kerb crawling!

Democratic control of the judiciary would be a safer alternative in producing a judiciary which recognised social changes and applied the law consistently. But in any society the judiciary will reflect the interests of the ruling class, including their ideology. Inconsistency is likely to be the case where no fundamental change in the position of women and the nature of society has taken place.



Many of the women's organisations made the point that compellability will not protect women from intimidation any more than it does now in relation to other crimes. Getting a non-molestation order, an injunction with powers to arrest a violent partner, is difficult and even more difficult to enforce. On the other side, a woman who realised that she could be compelled to give evidence against her will, might be reluctant to call the police in the first place. The continuing prejudice displayed by some judges towards rape victims would also deter some women from reporting rape.

There seems little point in pushing compellability since it is not just the physical presence of the woman in court which is required but the quality and relevance of her evidence which might not be forthcoming if she is there against her will. In the end the legal system would have to take into account her wishes and her assessment of the risks she might face.

In cases of child abuse, rape and domestic violence, the police may show a lack of interest if there is difficulty with evidence, because in the end what matters to them is prosecution and crime statistics and they measure their job accordingly. However, this conflicts with the views of women. Although many women demand the arrest of violent partners only to find that the police do not arrest them, others call the police for immediate protection and to stop

the violence rather than having any intention of proceeding with a prosecution. Others may have an ambivalent attitude. The safety of the woman and her wishes is more important than the certainty of a prosecution.

We have to look at these questions from the point of view of the women who are experiencing abuse, and what will contribute to the morale and unity of the working-class, which cannot be based on the abuse of one section by another. Legal action alone cannot protect women.

AT PRESENT THE ideology regarding women is undergoing change because of material conditions in society and the law is adapting to this. But continuing social and economic inequalities make it difficult for women to resist coercion and limit women's ability to leave a man who acts as if the law has not changed. Whilst in the past women were totally dependent on men economically, there are now many single parents who manage to live on low pay and benefits. But they are amongst the poorest sections of society and therefore economic dependence is still a factor.

Similarly, lack of refuges and cuts, especially in council housing, mean that there may be nowhere else to go. According to the Women Against Rape survey, 79% of women trying to leave a husband who raped them were trapped by lack of money or housing.

In addition to such material problems is the situation created still by capitalist propaganda, the mass media and conditioning in general in society, where women are still led to believe a successful marriage is their main aim in life and depends on their efforts.

Recent propaganda about children suffering as a result of divorce, are an attempt to make women feel guilty as they are the ones who usually end up with the children. The government are trying to deflect attention from the fact that in many cases it is the poverty of single parent families which causes the problems and that children suffer in two-parent families as well. Many harrowing marriages are held together 'for the sake of the children'.

However, unlike changing the law, a minimum wage and benefits linked to it so there would be no fear of poverty; a publicly funded network of refuges; a massive housebuilding and refurbishment programme and so on, would cost money. The real ability of working class women to take advantage of the law will depend on the willingness of the labour movement to fight for such reforms and consolidate these through the socialist transformation of society. A socialist society based on the rational use of resources under democratic planning, rather than exploitation and coercion, would have no use for the inequalities and feudal attitudes still fostered in capitalist society. □

In Alexandra township

A recent visitor to South Africa went to Alexandra, where the township community organised their own defence against Inkatha thugs.

THE TOWNSHIP OF Alexandra, to the north of Johannesburg, provides a graphic illustration of the social crisis confronting the black South African working class, and of the massive struggle it is mounting to liberate itself.

A quarter of a million people live in an area five kilometres square; 40% of them live in shacks; there is 43% unemployment. Before I visited South Africa, I was fully aware of these and many more statistics which illustrated the poverty confronting workers in Alexandra.

But statistics do not prepare you for the shock of meeting families who have to live their whole lives in wooden boxes the size of a couple of double beds. The whole township smells as a result of tens of thousands of people living without rubbish collections and with vastly inadequate water and sanitation. One comrade who I met could only find space to build his home in a spot which becomes flooded every time it rains. Wet weather means bailing a foot of water from the floor of the shack. Small wonder, then, that he suffers from rheumatism and his baby has continual chest infections.

In response to these conditions, and the attacks of the state, the people of Alex have organised big struggles. At the height of the 1984-86 uprising, the Alexandra Action Committee (AAC) was built on the basis of committees in almost every yard. AAC organised rent boycotts and self-defence, digging traps across the roads to prevent armoured vehicles from penetrating the township. AAC leaders, including metal workers' leader Moses Mayekiso, stood trial for treason and were acquitted after an international campaign.

Today, another Alex activist, Philemon Mauku, the vice-chair of the hostels committee of the Alexandra Civic Organisation (AAC's successor), faces serious charges. Philemon was arrested for possession of firearms, and faces a ten-year sentence. He does not deny possession of the guns, but insists that he held them on behalf of the community, who had obtained them to defend their homes and organisations against the violence of Inkatha.



This makes his trial an important opportunity for the ANC to expose the complicity of De Klerk and the state in arming these counter-revolutionary thugs and to test in public the real meaning of the 'peace accord' which De Klerk signed with the ANC and Inkatha, and which is supposed to guarantee communities the right to self-defence.

As part of his legal defence Philemon intends to call representatives of the Alexandra clinic to give expert evidence on the effect of violence in the community. On 10 December, with Philemon and other representatives of the Philemon Mauku Defence Campaign (PMDC), I met David Robb, the clinic's administrator, and Pascal Ngakane, the clinical manager. They agreed

Teachers from Alex demonstrate.

Philemon has been denied legal aid so he has to raise money for his defence. Send donations to CSSA, PO Box 77, London, E8 4TB. Make cheques payable to Campaign for a Socialist South Africa. Send letters of support to The PMDC, PO Box 53514, Troyeville 2139, Johannesburg, South Africa, with copies to the CSSA.



Inkatha thug.

to present evidence in court and outlined to us the impact of political violence on the clinic's work and the life of the community.

David Robb explained that violence was now the number one cause of death and hospitalisation amongst all groups 'from babies upwards'. They had treated 22 political injuries in the previous 60 hours. The clinic itself has been the target of political violence. It has been fire-bombed six or eight times by white right-wingers opposed to its support of decent health care and the struggles of the community in Alex. David Robb told us that since the rise of Inkatha violence the clinic is 'spending a fortune on rapid response and security'.

The PMDC has also been told that on the night of Saturday 7 December Inkatha impis, who had attacked shack dwellers, killing one worker and raping a 68-year old woman, assembled outside the clinic threatening to force their way in and kidnap victims of the violence who had fled there, to prevent them giving evidence to the police. On the following Monday a delegation from Inkatha arrived at the clinic, demanding that it stop 'supporting ANC and ACO'. Clinic workers were told by Inkatha war-lord Peter Simphosa that Inkatha members were 'poised to attack'.

It seems that Inkatha intends depriving the Alexandra community of one of its few quality services. The annual report of the clinic points to the parallel between these attacks on health services and the way in which the South African state through RENAMO destabilised the health service in Mozambique. It says: "Destruction or disintegration of the Alex Health Centre would be a very severe blow to the morale of the community and it must simply not be allowed to happen".

The PMDC was established by the Hostels Committee of the Alexandra Civic Organisation. There are three hostels in Alex. The majority of the residents of the men's hostels, Nobuhle (where Philemon lived) and Madala, have been driven out by Inkatha thugs. The women residents of Helen Joseph hostel are under continual threat from the police, SADF and Inkatha. I was shown round the hostel by two members of the hostel committee, comrades Dorothea (a garment worker) and Violet (who works for a chain store).

The conditions under which the women are forced to live are appalling. Four women share a room roughly ten foot square. Each of them has a locker five foot tall and two foot wide for her clothes. As Dorothea explained, the clothes are so closely squashed together she has to iron them again when she takes them out. One woman whom I met had her children staying with her over the school holidays, six kids had to sleep on an area of floor five foot by five foot.

Two hundred women share five bathrooms (Violet has to get up at 5am in order to be sure

of washing before getting to work); a small laundry with only two sinks and a barrack-like kitchen with half a dozen primus stoves. For this they are asked to pay R27.00 a month (including R2 for 'services' despite not even having electric sockets in the rooms). But 90% of the 4,000 residents have been on a rent strike since July 1990.

In the kitchen I was shown a bullet hole, where the SADF had shot into the room during an attack in July. The soldiers had rampaged over the hostel, searching for arms. Dorothea explained how she had confronted a soldier who had knocked her possessions about: 'don't kick my things when you run around with the red doeks (Inkatha)' she told him, 'you only want to take the arms back to the red doeks'. One soldier had tried to rape a woman in the bathroom. Fortunately her daughter came to her aid.

The women suffer perpetual fear of attack not only by the state and Inkatha, but also by the Tsotsis (gangsters) who roam the township. Violet told me: 'There is no security, theft is here, rape is here, there is even killing in the hostel'. One woman was stabbed with seven holes right inside the gates of the hostel. In such an emergency: in the event of an attack by Inkatha; or even if a resident is taken ill, or goes into labour, there is no telephone for the 4,000 women to summon help. Violet told me how one sick woman had 'died in front of our eyes'.

The hostel authorities do almost nothing to maintain the premises. I was shown windows which have been broken since 1986. As we walked past a piping duct which was broken and gaping open, Violet explained that the building was infested with rats. As if on cue, a two foot-long rat scuttled past the hole. In hot weather the rats roam the corridors to such an extent that the women cannot leave the doors to their rooms open.

Recently the residents have forced the authorities to employ someone to clear up the rubbish. When repeated requests produced no results they collected all the rubbish they could find and dumped it on the manager's office doorstep. Action was soon forthcoming.

The militancy of these women, and their strong support for the campaign of self-defence, has marked them out for threats from Inkatha, who regard the continued existence of even one strongly Congress hostel in Alex as a threat to their position. On the weekend of 7-8 December a chalked message appeared on one of the hostel staircases, announcing an Inkatha meeting in the hostel at 12:00 on Christmas Day (when the hostel would be almost empty). 'Be ready', it said.

The message might have been a hoax, but for women who have lived in the midst of murderous Inkatha attacks for 15 months, there is no alternative but to take it deadly seriously. □



Out of the Ghetto*

**My youth in the
East End, 1913-1939 Joe Jacobs**

*£9.

Also available from World Socialist Books

Trotsky – Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front	£4-95
Trotsky – The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany	£16-45
Guerin – Fascism and big business	£10-95
Piratin – Our Flag Stays Red.....	£6-95
Tressell – The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists	£4-50
Marx – Wage Labour and Capital	60p
Marx – Wages, Price and Profit	60p
Marx and Engels – The Communist Manifesto	60p

World Socialist Books is a book service for the labour movement. We can obtain any book that is in print for you. So why not order ALL your books through us? Orders to: **World Socialist Books**, 3-13 Hepscoot Road, London E9 5HB. Please add 10% on orders under £10. Orders over £10 post free. Cheques etc payable to **World Socialist Books**. Visa and Access cards accepted.