

Militant International Review

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Europe in tiers

Plus...Councils on the frontline...The third Balkan war...Can Cuba survive?

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Editor: Lynn Walsh
3-13 Hepscott Road London E9 5HB.



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A decisive turn in Britain

THE ARTICLES FOR this issue of the *Militant International Review* were written and in the hands of our printers in early October. Unfortunately, due to production difficulties, its publication has been delayed for a fortnight. In that period, on October 13, the Tories made their fateful announcement to close 31 pits and put over 30,000 miners on the dole.

In our editorial in this issue we explain that the events around 'Black Wednesday', September 16, with the shattering of the exchange rate mechanism, were an important turning point internationally. A symptom of the economic problems accumulating for world capitalism, they were a major blow to the prestige of all the EC governments, not least in Britain. Just 160 days since the election, and the authority of Major's government was broken.

This was the context in which the Tories' pit closure announcement was made. It triggered an avalanche of protest, not just in sympathy with the miners but against the seemingly inexorable slide to economic

disaster. Weakened previously by the ERM humiliation, the Major government was forced to turn and turn again. Now, as we anticipated, they have even hinted at a move to semi-Keynesian measures, albeit on infrastructure projects only and accompanied by attacks on public sector pay and services.

A decisive change in the situation has occurred in Britain. The Tory government is in crisis — we now read reports that Major was literally broken during Black Wednesday, suffering from a 'nervous setback'. The outlines of the future break-up of the Conservative party have appeared, with Douglas Hurd desperately warning the Brighton conference of the present lessons of the 19th century inner-party battles over free trade and the corn laws. And above all a profound change is taking place in the consciousness and confidence of the working class, presaging a new turbulent period ahead.

All these questions we will return to in future editions of the *MIR*.

Europe unravels

The tumultuous events of recent weeks in western Europe will impact on political and economic developments across the globe. They are an important turning point in world perspectives.



EC commission president Delors.

With the collapse of Stalinism, new inter-imperialist strains have surfaced

THE SHATTERING OF the exchange rate mechanism, and the subsequent events surrounding this, represent a major defeat for capitalism internationally. The exchange rate mechanism (ERM) was set up in 1979 as the precursor of a single currency. It was seen as a further step toward a united Europe, which would lead to a new era of peace and prosperity for its 340 million inhabitants.

True, the prospect of a further development of European integration produced an ambivalent response from its north American and Japanese rivals, grappling with the transformation of world relations after the collapse of Stalinism and the end of the cold war. On the one hand, a Pentagon 'Defense Planning Guidance' document released this February, argued for an American foreign policy "to deter the emergence later in this decade of a global 'adversarial rival' or international coalition" which would threaten US interests. This included a more integrated Europe. The initial draft, before it was diplomatically re-worded in May, warned, for example, against "the emergence of European-only security arrangements." (*Financial Times*, 26 May 1992).

On the other hand, another section of US strategists, including a group closely linked to the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, has argued that, with "greater economic parity among north America, east Asia and Europe" causing "a sea change in world trade and finance, we have no choice but to move from what was formerly the hegemony of a single country to collective management by the industrial democracies." (*The Carnegie Commission, America and the New World*, July 1992).

This idea is completely illusory. It is true that the US, while still the pre-eminent capitalist power, has lost, at least economically, the 'hegemonic' position it enjoyed over its capitalist rivals at the end of world war two. But it was the existence of the Soviet Union and the Stalinist states of eastern Europe as a powerful bloc against imperialism that, since 1945, overrode the persisting mutual rivalries of the major capitalist powers. With the collapse of Stalinism that era is over. World relations, including world economic relations, will never be the same again. New inter-imperialist strains have surfaced, and will deepen in the future.

Nonetheless, a more integrated European Community (EC) was looked to by the US and Japan to handle the exploding crisis in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Despite their fears that it could turn into a protectionist 'Fortress Europe', it was also looked towards to provide a locomotive to help pull the world economy out of its present stagnation.

But now the effective break-up of the ERM and the following antagonisms, especially between the British and German bourgeois, mean in reality the end of the Maastricht treaty. In spite of the majority for the Yes vote in the French referendum, the idea of European monetary and political union is now no longer credible even as a distant aspiration. Notwithstanding the protestations to the contrary, for example at the EC finance ministers meeting at the end of September, the more likely prospect now is for a two or three tier Europe, dominated by a 'Deutschmark zone' of Germany, the Benelux countries, and even for a period France, with increasing antagonisms between the various capitalist classes.

While efforts will still be made to patch together the exchange rate mechanism again, and moves to create a single market will continue, these will not prevent the process of increasing national antagonisms becoming more dominant. These events brilliantly confirm the basic ideas of Marxism, represented in Britain by the *Militant* and the *Militant International Review* (*MIR*) that on a capitalist basis the unification of Europe was ruled out and that the bourgeois cannot overcome the different competitive interests created by the private ownership of the means of production and the existence of the nation state.

Thus, for example, in contrast to the initial euphoria of the capitalist media at the time of Britain's entry into the ERM in October 1990, in the following issue of the *MIR* we soberly explained that, while it was "possible on the basis of an economic upswing for the capitalists, like thieves sharing out the swag, to co-operate in lowering tariff barriers, seeking to co-ordinate and harmonise tax, customs duties, laws etc... once the upswing turns into stagnation, never mind downswing, it will be every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. The battle... between Britain and France on agriculture," we argued, "merely foreshadows future, inevitable conflicts." (*MIR* No.45, p6).

THE CRISIS OF the exchange rate mechanism and European integration will impact upon developments in the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. But it will not change the *direction* of the processes in these countries, although it could affect the tempo.

The authority of the 'market' and the western bourgeois has been weakened by these events. It will be less easy now for the IMF, and the ignorant bourgeois economists 'advising' these regimes, to get the same slavish response to their demands from the governments in these countries as they have in the past period. The process to capitalist restoration will continue but the crisis in the west is likely to buttress that wing of the pro-capitalist forces which seeks to move to capitalism by the slower route. In the former Soviet Union it is likely to reinforce the Ruskoi/Volsky Civic Union wing. This means a strengthening of the forces of Russian nationalism in the corridors of power in Moscow.

The increased antagonisms between the western European bourgeois will also weaken their ability to intervene in the conflicts to their east. Under cover of this crisis in the west the nationalist forces in the east will feel confident to pursue their aims more determinedly. The overall result then in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union of these events will be to tend to increase national conflicts and increase the antagonisms between the different wings of the various regimes.



Major and German chancellor Kohl.

Of course the other effect will be to increase the questioning of the 'market' and capitalism among the best layers of the working class and youth in the former stalinist countries. The Los Angeles riots showed that US capitalism had serious problems at home. The problems of European integration will show that capitalism in western Europe and worldwide is wracked by fundamental contradictions. It further weakens the ideological offensive of the bourgeois on a world scale, and this includes eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

THE PROSPECTS FOR world economic growth have been damaged by the crisis around the exchange rate mechanism. The increased currency instability weakens investment, especially international investment. At the same time these events have reduced the prospect of agreement on the current General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks. This round of talks, which started in December 1986, have been deadlocked. Disputes have flared between the US and the EC on agricultural subsidies in particular, which have been maintained by the capitalists in the past for social reasons, to balance the rural areas against the industrial areas. With the European governments, especially France and Germany, weakened, it will be less likely that they will be prepared to force sacrifices on their farmers to placate the US government. This unwillingness will be strengthened by Bush's recent electoral promise to hand out an extra \$1bn to US farmers. The US pressure on Germany to lower its interest rates to provide a market for US exports will further poison the atmosphere.

Faced with the breaking down of the world trading system of GATT in the recent period,





**Paralysis in the
Italian
parliament.**

regional trading blocs have begun to form in Europe, north America and south east Asia. The battle between these trading blocs is set to worsen but at the same time these blocs themselves will be increasingly convulsed by internal conflicts. Ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement is proving difficult. Antagonisms are increasing in south east Asia. Now the European bloc is riven with the accusations, currency instability and competitive devaluations which have recently exploded to the surface.

The short-term economic prospects have been worsened by these recent developments in Europe. Even before, the outlook was not good. In the USA in August retail sales, industrial production and capacity utilisation all fell by 0.5%. Growth in the second quarter of 1992 was less than half the growth in the first quarter. Increasingly it looks as if the US economy is set to move into a 'triple dip'.

Japan, according to the *Financial Times*, "may be on the verge of its worst recession for almost 20 years." (22 September 1992). GDP growth was only 0.2% in the second quarter of this year. Moreover this prognosis was made after the government spending package of 10.7 trillion yen (£43bn), announced in August. "Many private sector economists," reported the *Financial Times*, "believe the economy faces such serious problems — overcapacity in manufacturing, huge bad debts which could disable the banking system and stagnant private consumption — that it will fall further unless the government takes additional action."

The British economy remains in recession, the German economy is grinding to a halt: its GDP fell 0.5% in the second quarter of this year. Its high interest rates have a deflationary effect throughout Europe, as do the attempts to cut budget deficits in Greece, Italy, Sweden and most of the major European economies. In France industrial production fell by 0.4% in June. The world economy is therefore in danger of entering recession on a worldwide scale.

THE QUESTION POSED is — where is growth to come from for this to be averted? Marx spoke of two 'departments' of production: 'department one' being the production of the means of production, and 'department two' being the production of the means of consumption. Little prospect of growth can be anticipated from department one, the means of production. Overcapacity exists worldwide: the market is not there for major investment in this area. On top of this a severe crisis of profitability is now sweeping world capitalism from Japan to the US to Europe. In the post war period in the US, at this point in the recovery stage in the capitalist cycle of boom and slump, corporate profits would have been recovering at a rate of 32.2% on average. In the present 'recovery' the rate is

4.3%. This crisis of profitability, added to the lack of markets, cuts across growth coming from the development of the means of production.

Department two, the means of consumption, provides no basis for growth either in the immediate future. Unemployment in the OECD countries has risen from 25m to 30m in the past two years. Reeling under the massive debts piled up in the 1980s, the working class and middle classes, the source of the major portion of consumption, either cannot make ends meet or put any surplus they may have into paying off debts or saving against an uncertain future.

On top of this the falling price of assets, especially houses, after the rise in these prices in the 1980s, further cuts into spending power. In California in the 1980s the combined book value of homes rose by \$1bn every 48 hours. Now these are falling and with them the ability of their owners to consume. This is a phenomenon which is taking place worldwide.

The 1980s boom has resulted in a massive build-up in the debt of governments, corporations and consumers. This fuelled the 1982-90 boom. In the US, for example, public and private debt reached 197% of GDP. As Marx explained, credit allows capitalism temporarily to go further than its own limits. But now this massive debt build-up drags like a dead weight on the world economy and pulls world capitalism back toward its limits. In the 1980s the debt crisis of the ex-colonial countries surfaced. Now in the 1990s the debt crisis of the advanced capitalist countries is added onto this.

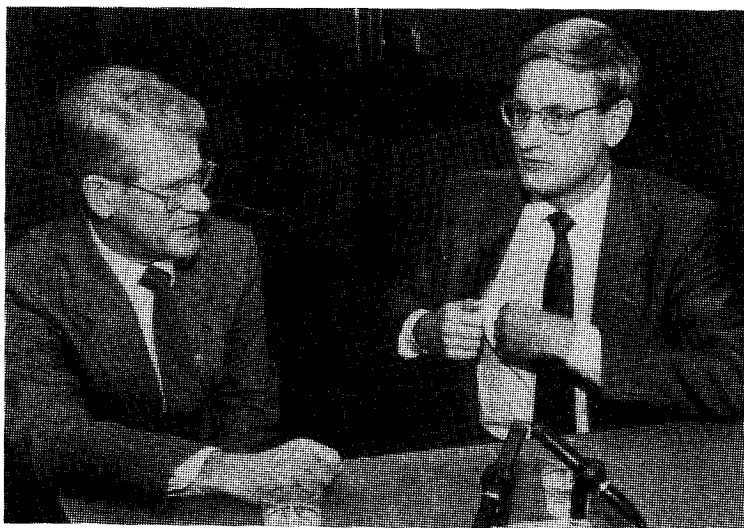
Faced with worldwide economic stagnation at best, the bourgeois internationally are abandoning monetarism and moving to a semi-Keynesian position. The Japanese government, because of their budget surplus, are the most capable of carrying out this policy. But even Japan is expected to have a shortfall by the end of the year and may be forced to issue bonds to pay for its spending programme, which will take money from elsewhere in the economy. Nonetheless, albeit to a lesser extent, the capitalists internationally are now beginning to consider some increase in state spending, for example Clinton's plans in the US. An increasingly vocal wing of the capitalists and their media internationally calls for such measures.

Such state spending will be mainly on infrastructure. And given the budget deficits that exist in most countries, it will be accompanied by a massive onslaught on public spending on services, public sector pay and jobs. This is leading to huge conflicts in the public sector, as has been seen in Canada, Greece, Germany and now Italy. Battles loom in the public sector in Britain, including in the key arena of local government. (See article on pages 6-11). This attack on the public sector will tend to negate the spending programme on the infrastructure and, when taken with the other factors outlined

above and the defence cuts flowing from the collapse of stalinism, the overall economic effects will tend to be deflationary.

The short-term perspective for the world economy, therefore, is stagnation at best, such as that experienced over the past six to twelve months, or, perhaps somewhat more likely, a net fall in world output which could last for some time.

It could not be ruled out that this could develop into a world slump. In fact, this is less likely, as the bourgeois would move to prop up the financial institutions and revert to the printing press to avert this, albeit at the cost of an explosion in inflation. But one qualification that should be put on this is that, if protectionism exploded out of control, then this could put more serious economic possibilities more firmly on the agenda.



But into these processes must be added the role of the leaders of the mass reformist organisations, the workers' parties — Labour, Socialist and Communist — and the trade unions. As the economic crisis deepens the reformist leaders have moved further to the right, holding out their arms to prop up capitalism. Increasingly the bourgeois are being forced to rest upon the mass reformist leaders. In Sweden the leaders of the opposition Social Democrats, backed by the trade union federation, the LO, actually entered into an agreement with the Thatcherite government of premier Bildt to help carry through the cuts.

Swedish prime Minister Bildt (right) with Social Democrat leader, Carlsson.

The severity of the crisis, with the abject capitulation of the reformist leaders and the smallness of the forces of Marxism may, as in Sweden now, result in illusions developing among sections of the working class that the collaboration of their leaders with the capitalists is the only alternative. But such attitudes will not last long in the face of the unfolding attacks. At first in those sectors most directly affected by the cuts, and then gradually spreading throughout the working class, resistance will surface.

The deepening of the crisis and the capitulation of the reformist leaders will increase the tensions between the working class and its leadership. As the process unfolds new splits will take place and opposition currents emerge within these organisations. In some countries new organisations can be thrown-up in which the ideas of Marxism can find a significant echo.

Rank-and-file opposition movements will develop in the unions and the workplaces. In the unions themselves at a certain stage new figures will step forward to take a stand under pressure of the rank-and-file, and in some cases under the fear of the advances of the forces of Marxism. The deepening crisis of capitalism is accompanied by the deepening crisis of reformism. In this situation, with clear principles, a clear programme, and flexible tactics, *Militant*, and our international co-thinkers, can make great gains in the events that lie ahead.

THE EVENTS OF the past weeks in western Europe are set to have very significant political effects. It is clear that after the Reagan-Thatcher 1980s the pendulum has begun to swing back on a world scale. The ending of the illusion of unifying Europe, the shattering of 'capitalism with a human face' in Sweden and Germany, the prolonged economic stagnation, the terminal condition of the Bush presidency, the broken authority of the Major government after just 160 days: all are signs of the slipping away of the 1980s era of capitalist triumphalism and the beginning of a new turbulent period.

The prolonged boom from 1982-90, the collapse of Stalinism, and the victory of imperialism in the Gulf war, combined to enable the bourgeois to launch a powerful ideological offensive. The recent events have dealt this offensive a serious blow. At first among the most combative sections of the working class and youth, and then as events proceed, more widely, the working class will begin to seek an alternative to capitalism.

In Europe severe convulsions are on the agenda. The explosive struggles in Greece, with three general strikes in three weeks and street fighting with the police, are an indication of the intensity of the class battles that will increasingly unfold. The crisis of Italian capitalism is not only economic but also one of the corruption and paralysis of the state. In a sign of things to come internationally, in the longer term, the government has sought bonapartist 'emergency' powers to deal with the crisis.

In all twelve countries of the EC, and in fact throughout most of western Europe, practically every government has been severely weakened by the recent events. Yet from this position of political weakness they are moving to step up their attacks on the working class. The perception of workers that these governments are vulnerable will add strength to their resistance and will lead to a new offensive between the classes.

After the Reagan-Thatcher 1980s the pendulum has begun to swing back

Councils' last stand

With the public sector in the frontline Louise James asks, can local government survive the Tories' fourth term?

**The Tories
are moving to
'Americanise'
local
government**

ONE OF THE central features of the Tories' fourth term will be their renewed assault on the powers of local councils. Despite the defeat they suffered over the poll tax, once again they are moving to curb local government.

Extended compulsory competitive tendering, the opting out of schools and homes from council control, further financial restrictions on council budgets: all will inexorably lead, if not resisted, to the 'Americanisation' of local government. There, cities are run by elite boards of elected officials whose sole responsibility is to allocate state contracts to the private sector. Large sections of the poorest layers are left literally outside society, with no public services at all.

Even before the turmoil on the currency exchanges, the Tories were being spurred on in this drive by the developing economic crisis. The fall-away in tax revenues and rising unemployment has added to the escalating public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR). This is expected to reach a massive £32bn, almost 5% of gross domestic product (GDP), by the end of this year — with predictions of a £40bn deficit next year! The present percentage is as high as that inherited by Thatcher in 1979 — when the Tories came to power on a manifesto which argued that "the state takes too much of the nation's income; its share must be steadily reduced"!

Public spending is now a huge 43% of GDP. With the Tories' exchange rate strategy shattered by the recent dramatic events, they are now looking to 'fiscal policies', ie tax increases and, especially, spending cuts, to combat the inflationary consequences of sterling's devaluation. The public sector is in the front line. During the emergency debate in the House of Commons, the Chancellor, Norman Lamont, declared that control of public expenditure and public sector pay were "at the top of my agenda." Despite the added demands on spending created by the introduction of the council tax, new 'care in the community' responsibilities, and the teachers' pay award, the savage cuts that are likely to be made in the November public spending announcement will see local government further hit.

These short-term considerations, however, coincide with the long-term strategic aim of Thatcherism — and now, 'Majorism' — to 'roll back the frontiers' of the state, including local government. This is necessary, from the point of view of the ruling class, in order to restore the long-term profitability of British capitalism. Financing the 'social wage' of public services, through company taxes and business rates, is an imposition on their profits. Local government, as the provider of housing, education, social services, leisure facilities, waste disposal, the fire service etc — services worth over £60bn



annually — is a key component of the 'social wage'. It is also an important alternative focus of power to central government.

Ironically, first Thatcher and now Major, have conducted the assault on local councils under the banner of 'citizens' rights', promising to 'empower the consumer'. In fact, the advent of Thatcherism heralded the greatest centralisation of power seen in British society since world war two. As *The Guardian* columnist, Hugo Young, said of this process in his book *One of Us*, "Whatever else this might be, it was not an exercise in reducing the power of the central state. Rather, bodies that might rival the central state were emasculated or dismantled."

Since 1979 more than 120 pieces of anti-local government legislation have been passed. Over thirteen years the Tories have moved from establishing enterprise zones free of council controls, to the deregulation of public transport; through ratecapping and the abolition of the Greater London Council and metropolitan county councils, to the poll tax. Now a new stage in the battle looms.

THE TORIES ARE committed to a long-term goal of ending local government's role as a provider of housing. Their aims are threefold: to reduce state expenditure; to create, they hope, a permanent social base for capitalism (Thatcher's 'property-owning democracy'); and to remove the 'disincentive to labour mobility' caused by the secure tenancies, and cheaper

rents, of public rented housing. They have already moved a long way down this road, adopting a dual approach.

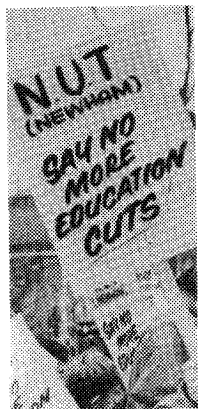
From 1979 to 1990 public spending on housing investment was cut from £11.3bn to £5.3bn. Severe restrictions were placed on how councils could spend their money. The 1989 Local Government and Housing Finance Act 'ring-fenced' housing revenue accounts (receipts from council rents etc) to stop transfers to or from the general rate fund (the income from poll tax, business rates, government revenue support grant etc). This removed an important discretionary power from the hands of elected local councillors.

Thus, any decrease in government housing subsidies, or increase in management or maintenance costs, had to be met by an increase in rents. The aim was, and still is, to force rents upwards to 'market' levels — to 'encourage' tenants to look outside the council sector. Since the Act was introduced council rents have risen by 44%, according to the Association of District Councils. (*The Guardian*, 28 July 1992).

The other side to this strategy, was to offer a series of attractive 'alternatives' outside the local authority sector. This included the 'Right-to-Buy', which, with generous discounts of up to 50%, led to over one-and-a-half million tenants buying their homes. But this represented just 20% of the council housing stock, leaving over five million homes in the council sector. The initial response of most council tenants to

Newham council workers demonstrate.

Since 1979 over 120 pieces of anti-local government legislation have been passed



other measures, such as the first attempt to introduce Housing Action Trusts (HATS) in 1988, was one of hostility. Local authorities still own over two-thirds of rented housing in Britain — sales to new landlords, primarily housing associations, have only affected 2.5% of council housing. (*The Observer*, 5 July 1992).

But with the re-election of the Tories, a new offensive has been launched. 'Alternatives' to council housing, many formulated before the election, are now being pushed by the Department of Environment (DoE) with new vigour.

In addition to a re-vamped HATS programme, these alternatives include the wholesale selling-off of council homes — 'voluntary transfer' — to housing associations. The Tories have promised to pump money into housing associations — £2bn a year for the next three years — most of which would have previously gone into council housing.

Other measures include the 'estate action programme' — where DoE grants are tied to 'changes in housing management' — and the promotion of estate management boards (EMBs) and tenants' management co-ops (TMCs). These give tenants varying degrees of control over estate budgets, depending on which scheme they take up. In 1991-1992 £270m was made available to encourage tenants to take up these schemes, to tempt them onto the first steps away from the council sector.

A SIMILAR STRATEGY has been adopted towards state education. Polytechnics and colleges of higher education were moved out of local authority control, becoming 'free' standing organisations with the governing bodies re-organised to include representatives of private industry. From April 1993, the 450 further education colleges and 113 sixth-form colleges are to follow. The governing bodies determine college budgets threatening, for example, student union funding. National pay bargaining agreements will be under threat as individual colleges can fix their own wages and conditions.

The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced the local management of schools (LMS), passing on control of school budgets to governing bodies. Under LMS, schools are funded according to a formula based mainly on the number and age of pupils. Consequently, schools will have to 'compete' for pupils in order to obtain maximum budgets. Such competition will inevitably lead to selection, the first step to a two-tier system. Because funding is also based on average rather than actual salary levels of teachers, and schools now have to pay out of their own budgets for services such as swimming and transport previously provided by the local authority, most schools over the next few years will find themselves in deficit.

Local management of schools was introduced as a first step to encourage them to opt out of council control into grant maintained status (GMS). Grant maintained schools are run entirely by their heads and governing bodies, of which only a minority are elected. The governing body has the power to hire-and-fire staff and negotiate wage levels. Day-to-day running costs are paid directly to the school by the Department for Education, although it is planned to set-up appointed regional funding bodies when a sufficient number of schools have opted out. While to date only 278 out of the 25,000 schools in the state sector have opted out — just 1% — the government expects a total of 4,000 to become grant maintained within three years, including a majority of secondary schools.

WHAT ARE THE prospects for a fightback to defend council housing and local authority provision of state education? A key consideration still in determining how and through what avenues a struggle could unfold, is the role of the Labour and trade union leaders.

The prolonged world boom of the 1980s, coupled with the collapse of Stalinism, had a profound effect above all on the consciousness of the Labour leaders. This has been compounded by the successive election defeats suffered by Labour. Labour council leaders today have swallowed the Tories' ideology that the capitalist 'market' is more 'efficient' at providing 'responsive' public services.

Thus, immediately after the election, in a Labour Party broadsheet ironically entitled *The Challenge of the Fourth Term*, Phyllis Starkey, Labour leader of Oxford city council, argued that, to "exercise effective quality control", to "get the service our electors want... it may mean seriously considering management buy-outs or allowing council employees to go into partnership with an external company." Jeremy Beecham, leader of Newcastle council and chair of the Labour-controlled Association of Metropolitan Authorities, spelt out the implications for local authority workers' jobs and conditions: "let's admit it... cost effectiveness and the needs of the service have to take priority over the traditional practices of both management and the workforce."

In fact, the 'market' is less of a guarantor of 'efficiency', 'quality control' and the 'needs of the service' than extending democratic control and accountability in housing, education, and other council services. It introduces unnecessary costs which result from competition, such as product or service duplication and advertising. However, 'market forces' can be used to drive down wages, and local government is a 'service industry' where labour is the major 'cost'. According to the *Local Government Chronicle*, (2 August 1992), pay accounts for 64% of all local authority spending.

The Labour council leaders are meeting 'the challenge of the fourth term' by... preparing their surrender. Before the election only 18, mainly Tory, councils had completed the 'voluntary transfer' of under 100,000 homes. Now over 150 councils are considering transfers. Some Labour councils are considering encouraging schools to opt out en bloc so that they can combine together to 'save' the central services currently provided by local education authorities.

This attitude is an important difference even with the verbal opposition of Labour council leaders in the battles of the mid-1980s. Then, in the fight against ratecapping, over 20 Labour local authorities agreed a joint strategy of not setting a rate until the Tories had made concessions. This campaign, in the last few months of 1984 and the beginning of 1985, received an enthusiastic echo from council workers and workers generally. It included a one-day London local authority strike, with 100,000 workers taking action, and a demonstration of 30,000.

True, the fighting talk of these council leaders such as Islington's Margaret Hodge and David Blunkett, then the leader of the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire', was just that — fighting talk. The abandonment of the battlefield by these then 'lefts' meant that Lambeth and the *Militant*-influenced Liverpool council were left to fight the Tories alone. The defeat of the struggle against ratecapping both strengthened the hand of the government and pushed the Labour leadership further to the right. In the aftermath most Labour authorities had only one 'strategy' against the cuts: the hope that Labour would win the general election in 1987. In the meantime confrontation was delayed by a combination of cuts and 'creative accounting'.

But with the Tories re-elected, the offensive against local councils continued. The poll tax was introduced which, along with the uniform business rate set by central government, reduced councils' control of locally raised revenue to 15% of total local government expenditure. This smaller tax base meant that a one per cent increase in revenue would require a council to levy a seven per cent increase in its poll tax.

The idea was that poll tax payers would rebel against 'high' council spending in order to keep poll tax bills low, as ratepayers had demonstrated in the early-1980s against a number of Labour councils that had raised rates to compensate for cuts in government grants. What happened, of course, not least because of the role of *Militant* supporters in organising and giving direction to the struggle, was that they 'rebelled' against the poll tax!

This was despite the role of the Labour leaders. Councils had a clear choice — fight or implement the poll tax. Without exception, ignoring the millions who refused to pay and the thousands of protestors outside the town halls

— the biggest movement of civil disobedience ever seen in Britain — Labour councils complied with the Tories' legislation without a fight, once again looking to a future Labour government to bail them out.

Now the Tories have been re-elected for a fourth term. After 13 years of manoeuvring to avoid a confrontation, Labour councils are now setting their agendas around government principles to dismantle local government. This mood of demoralisation was summed up by Harry Rimmer, the current leader of Liverpool council: "Those who want to stand up to the government and pretend we can find the money (to improve council services) are talking bullshit." (*Sunday Times*, 16 August 1992).

THINGS WERE NOT much better at the tops of the trade union movement. The strategy of the union leaders too was to wait for a Labour government to save local councils. Now, however, faced with the reality of a continued offensive, the union leaders will come under enormous pressure from the membership to defend jobs and conditions.

Moreover, presently it is Labour councils who are pioneering the offensive against local authority workers. Newham council, having sacked striking poll tax workers protesting at compulsory redundancies, then went to the High Court under the Tories' anti-union laws, to win an injunction against the entire Newham NALGO membership. Camden council earlier this year sacked 25 social workers after provoking a year long strike.

Such attacks will compel the local authority union leaders, albeit reluctantly, to distance themselves from the Labour council leaders. In some cases the pressure from below will be resisted by witch-hunting the activists. This was the response of the NUPE full-time officials in Durham, where nine of the eleven local government branches in the region had produced a bulletin criticising council cuts. The post-election NUPE conference also backed the leadership's position, after a sharp debate, to reject a fighting motion against compulsory competitive tendering (CCT).

This contrasts with the situation in NALGO where the national local government committee 'cuts strategy' guidelines urge branches "to take appropriate measures", including industrial action, in defense of jobs and services. While the NUT leaders managed, with difficulty, to resist the call for national strike action against teacher redundancies at the Easter NUT conference, votes for action have been and will be won at local level. Moreover, the merger of the three public sector unions, NUPE, COHSE and NALGO, into one union, UNISON, will raise the confidence of local authority workers in their capacity to successfully defend their jobs and conditions.



David Blunkett.

Presently it is Labour councils leading the offensive against local authority workers

**The local
authority
unions are
potentially a
decisive
section of the
working class**

The local authority unions — not just UNISON but the teachers' unions, the GMB, TGWU and UCATT — are not broken. In fact they are potentially a decisive section of the working class, with enormous latent power. Local councils employ over two-and-a-half million workers — over 50% of the total public sector workforce — with a higher level of unionisation compared to the equivalent service industries in the private sector.

Nonetheless, the strategy of 'leaving it to the branches' to defend local jobs and services is insufficient. It underestimates the seriousness of the Tories' intent to deal not just with local government but with the public sector as a whole. The public sector unions are now in the frontline in the same way the NUM was after the Tories' re-election in 1983. In Newham, moreover, this strategy led the NALGO leadership to make deals with management behind the backs of the strikers to end the strike, rather than fight for a decisive victory as a springboard for a national campaign.

The primary cause of the defeat of the miners was the failure of the TUC leaders, and of the left-led unions independently of the TUC, to organise decisive solidarity action. What is needed now to meet the Tories new offensive is action across the public sector as a whole, with the organisation of a public sector alliance. The local authority unions should take the lead in this. Imagine what could be achieved in London, for example, where the local authorities are the largest employers in 30 out of the 32 boroughs, if joint action was organised in a public sector alliance of local authority workers, teachers, firefighters, tube and bus workers, postal workers, NHS workers, civil servants and students! At the very least, the battles ahead will open the way for the development of rank-and-file movements, amongst local authority workers and with other public sector workers, of borough-wide Broad Lefts, of Joint Shop Stewards Committees at a sectional and borough level, and even at regional and national levels.

THE OPPOSITION OF the council workforce can strengthen, and in turn be strengthened by, the resistance that will develop in working class communities to the attacks on local services. This was a feature of the magnificent campaign in Hillingdon, in which a huge 80% of tenants voted against attempts by the council to transfer its entire housing stock to a housing association. The local NALGO branch worked with the tenants' Campaign Against the Transfer of Council Housing (CATCH) from an early stage, paying for two mailings to all 14,500 households and producing their own leaflet defending council housing.

However, resistance in the community will not develop in a straight line. The years of underfunding, with the acquiescence of Labour

councils, has taken its toll on tenants who live in council slums or parents whose children attend cash-starved state schools. Tenants and parents are also attracted to the idea, however illusory it may be, of having more control over running their estate or local school. In this context, the Tory alternatives can appear to some to at least offer a way out.

It was this sense of desperation, that there was no other way to get something done, along with the huge financial incentives offered, that accounted for the result of the recent ballot of Liverpool's high-rise council tenants. On a 79% turnout, 82% voted to transfer to a HAT.

Other factors, peculiar to the recent history of Liverpool, also came into play. The right-wing Labour council, whose leader, Harry Rimmer, is the vice-chair of the HAT, campaigned for a yes vote, along with the Liberals and Tories. Only the Liverpool Labour councillors group and the Broad Left, who are carrying on the traditions of the heroic struggle of Liverpool council from 1983-85, warned of the clear dangers to tenants of joining the HAT. But the £128m that the HAT expects to receive, is more than the amount that was demanded by the council to meet its budget deficits in the battles of the mid-1980s! Not surprisingly, given the setbacks of the last period, including Labour's general election defeat, many tenants swallowed their doubts about the HAT and voted yes.

The HAT will cover 5,387 homes, just 8% of Liverpool's council housing stock. If all of Liverpool's 60,000 council houses were to receive the same level of investment as that promised to the HAT, the government would have to spend over £1.4bn. To spend an equivalent amount on the 5.1m council houses in the UK would cost £121bn, 20% of Britain's GDP! This reveals quite clearly the Tories' strategy. HATS are a 'loss leader', to tempt other tenants to 'come inside' from the council sector. And where better to advertise than Liverpool? As *The Sunday Times* gloated: "Tenants in socialism's once strongest bastion have proved the keenest of all to escape their council landlords... where there was Hatton there will now be HATS." (16 August 1992).

Similarly, the first schools to opt out received higher funds than local authority schools. If the same favourable treatment were to be given to 4,000 schools, it would add nearly £600m to government spending. (*The Guardian*, 31 March 1992). Opt outs have also slowed down the efforts of local councils to close or merge schools to meet the fall in secondary age pupils, from 4.1 million in 1979 to three million in 1991. The Audit Commission estimates the cost of surplus secondary school places at £350m. (*The Guardian*, 20 July 1992).

Yet the purpose of the Tories' assault on local government is not to increase public spending

but to reduce it! While 'flagship' schools or alternative housing schemes may, at least initially, receive extra cash, those that follow won't.

TENANTS AND PARENTS are not tempted to look outside the public sector for ideological reasons, but for material ones. Consequently, even if significant steps are taken along the road to ending council services, they will be followed by a massive rebound.

Of course, this movement will not proceed like a pendulum, swinging evenly in one direction and then the next. There will be local variants, setbacks and defeats, because of the failure of the Labour leaders to pull together the different strands of opposition that exist to the Tories' plans. The process of 'Americanisation' can go far. But the outlines of a rebound are already there. Pointing to the one-and-a-half million people with 'negative equity' — with mortgages worth more than the value of their house — and the 600,000 mortgage holders with average arrears of £4,000, *The Guardian* commented, "some economists believe that we may not see a proper recovery (of the housing market) until the next century — and that the limits of home ownership have been breached." (23 July 1992).

Council housing itself was born out of struggles against the consequences of 'market forces' in housing. The 1919 Housing Act, which opened the way for council housing, was introduced in response to the rent strikes which took place against profiteering landlords during the first world war. The 1915 Glasgow rent strike involved 25,000 private tenants, spilling over into action in the factories. Similarly, all significant advances in the provision of state education — and there was no free universal secondary education until after world war two — came as the result of struggle.

A foretaste of the battles to come in education today was given by the recent events at Woodroffe School in Dorset. Having opted out last September the school had accumulated an £80,000 deficit and sacked seven teachers. Parents organised in protest and teachers passed a vote of no confidence in the school authorities. Consequently, the governors' chairperson stood down and the headteacher was suspended. (*The Guardian*, 12 September 1992). All this followed the July education white paper announcing new funding methods which threatens cuts in 40% of the already existing grant maintained schools! (*Sunday Times*, 9 August 1992). A further indication of a new mood is the response in Scotland to the recent Tory proposals to privatise water. The Tories announced their water privatisation plans for England and Wales in 1986. While there was opposition, reflected in public opinion polls, privatisation was carried through by 1989. By contrast, in Scotland, a real campaign of resist-

ance looms. Today is a different period to the late 1980s, the height of the boom.

BUT THE DIMINISHED aura of 'the market' is not the only difference with the late 1980s. The experience of the anti-poll tax campaign, in Scotland in particular but also in England and Wales, has affected the consciousness of millions. It established, or more accurately, re-established, methods of struggle in working class communities — organised mass non-payment, mobilising the community to resist bailiffs and so on — which will be used again in the battles to defend local services. Capitalist commentators are already nervously drawing parallels between the prospects for resistance to water privatisation in Scotland, and the mass civil disobedience that defeated the poll tax.

The poll tax replacement, the council tax, may not provoke the same widescale opposition as the poll tax. With one demand per dwelling, there will be half the number of bills. Those who paid 20% of the poll tax will get a full 100% rebate. There will be transitional arrangements for two years for those with council tax bills higher than their last poll tax demand. Nonetheless, bills will be a lot higher than initial estimates.

Moreover, while the council tax for the highest band properties will be three times that for the lowest band, this is a much narrower differential than under the old rating system. Under the rates 10% of households with the highest rates paid 25% of all domestic rates. For all its faults, this was a progressive feature of the old rating system. In contrast, under the poll tax this group paid just 13% of all the revenue due, which meant a transfer of £2.4bn from the 'bottom 90%' to the top 10%! Under the council tax, with a limited difference between the highest and the lowest tax bands, a disproportionate burden will still fall on the middle and low band properties.

The council tax has the same enforcement procedures as for the poll tax. There will be countless appeals against house valuations and disputed liability. At the very least, against a background of mortgage debts, rising unemployment and continuing action to collect poll tax arrears, the council tax is unlikely to reverse the 'culture of resistance' created by the struggle against the poll tax.

It will certainly not erode the authority earned by those fighters in working class communities, foremost amongst whom were supporters of the *Militant*, who saw the struggle against the poll tax through to the end. In the new battles that will develop around the defense of council services, in the unions, on the estates and in the schools, *Militant* will again be to the fore, fighting for the tactics, strategy and perspectives that can bring the Tories offensive to a halt.

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The anti-poll tax campaign re-established methods of struggle that will be used again in the battles ahead

The Balkans at war



*Why has civil war exploded into life in a region where national and ethnic tensions had apparently been reduced for over forty years? **Kevin Simpson** examines the Balkan crisis.*

Will the civil war spread? How can a peaceful solution be found?

DUBROVNIK, SPLIT, SARAJEVO... names that before 1989 were only mentioned in the media as picturesque resorts, are now synonymous with blood on the streets, besieged cities, and destitute refugees. The third Balkan war is another example of Bush's 'new world order'. The difference is that this conflict strikes at the heart of the stability of Europe. It has already caused the biggest population movement in Europe since world war two, with tens of thousands killed and injured.

Why has this civil war developed? Will it spread? Will the west intervene militarily? How can a peaceful solution be found?

For centuries, the Balkans has been a region of periodic conflict, whose peoples have been subjugated and set against one another. The different social systems of feudalism, capitalism, and Stalinism all proved incapable of answering the national aspirations of the Balkan people. Now the attempt to restore capitalism following the fall of Stalinism has catapulted the unresolved national tensions to the surface. The west promised the Balkan people democracy, freedom of choice, and a decent standard of living. Instead, it brought them 'a living hell'.

THE MAIN ETHNIC groups which made up what became known as Yugoslavia are Slavs, who trace their origins to Asian tribes. Originally only divided by time and geography, they

soon fell under the influence of the huge empires in the region. The Balkans was a meeting point between the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Ottoman empires — the division between the two separating Croatia (under the influence of the former) from Serbia (under the influence of the latter).

It became the fracture line where east met west and also the division between the two wings of christianity: Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox church. Muslims, who mainly lived in what became known as Bosnia-Herzegovina, were originally a religious sect who faced persecution from the christian Orthodox church and converted to Islam, after being invaded by the Turks. The Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires used the people of the Balkans to fight proxy battles for them, manipulating religious differences to deepen the division between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. Their leaders received limited concessions and material reward in return.

The beginning of the collapse of the feudal empires in the region, spurred on by the development of capitalism in western Europe, saw the setting up of independent Balkan states, the first being Serbia. However, capitalism was weak, developing late in the region, and unable to play an independent role, relying on foreign investment and technology. It was also tied to the remnants of feudalism, the landlords and



The devastated Croatian town of Vukovar.

their privileges. Firstly French, and then German, Russian and British imperialism, attempted to exploit the economic and strategic importance of the region.

The earlier development of capitalism in north western Europe was progressive in that states were unified, opening the way for huge economic development and trade. In many cases, regional and ethnic conflicts were smoothed over and became part of history. But in its weak condition, capitalism was unable to play the role of unifying the Slav people on the basis of a peaceful solution to national and ethnic frictions. In each state, it was forced to viciously exploit the workers and peasants in order to survive on the world market. To divert the attention of the masses from the real causes of the problems they faced, nationalism was used — the reasons for poverty and social crisis were to be found 'across the border', according to the capitalist class of each Balkan state.

This friction often erupted into armed conflict, sometimes surreptitiously encouraged by western imperialism. The Balkan wars of 1912-1913 were an attempt by the different Balkan nations to conquer as much of the disintegrating Turkish Ottoman empire as possible. None of the contradictions were solved. As a result, the region was drawn into the first world war.

After the war, to ensure the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire, British and French imperialism pushed for the formation of a new state, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats

and Slovenes, renamed Yugoslavia in 1929. The allied powers were able to rest on the aspirations of the Balkan people who wanted self-determination, and the growing pan-Slavian sentiment.

In fact this new state was unstable from the beginning, representing a patchwork of ethnic and national groups. Autocratic rule was the norm. In the 1920s the Communist Party, trade unions, and even the opposition Croatian Peasants' Party were banned. This was the type of 'democracy' capitalism provided. The Croats and Slovenes had been forced into an unequal unity with Serbia. Serbs predominated in the state machine. The tension reached such a level that Croatian members of parliament were shot during a debate in 1928. Brutal repression was used, and a dictatorship under the King was declared.

Under the influence of fascist Germany, Yugoslavia signed the Tripartite pact. This alliance with Germany resulted in a mass uprising, led by junior army officers. German occupation of Yugoslavia followed. To reinforce his control, Hitler blatantly used the friction between Serbs and Croats by announcing the setting up of an 'independent' Croat state. It was nothing more than a puppet fascist regime.

The partisans, with Tito and the Communist Party at their head, led an armed struggle for national liberation against the fascists. Their propaganda called for the defeat of the fascist foreign occupiers, an end to poverty, and land

Capitalism was unable to unify the Slav people



Tito, partisan leader in 1942 (top) and then, in 1952. Genuine workers' control is incompatible with the rule of a bureaucracy.

reform. Nearly two million perished in a vicious armed struggle. By the end of the war, 800,000 men and women, including Serbs and Croats, were partisans. They drove out the German army. In its wake, the partisans' liberation committees took power with enormous popular support.

THE REGIME TITO led was an image of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. The Stalinist bureaucracy of Tito's Communist Party, formed from the officer corps of the partisans, had no alternative but to nationalise what remained of the economy because of the revolutionary pressure beneath them and the vacuum that existed in society.

The planned economy, despite the inefficiency and mismanagement of the bureaucracy, led to huge industrialisation, with an estimated five-fold increase in personal incomes. Up to 1983 electricity consumption per head of population rose twelve times. Increases in living standards saw a reduction in tension between national and ethnic groups. A contributory factor was the explosion in urban growth which drew together people from different national groups in towns and cities.

But how did the reality compare to Tito's propaganda as far as ethnic and national minorities were concerned? The hopes of the Yugoslav masses were high — the experience of fighting fascism had an effect in beginning to forge a Yugoslav national consciousness. But this was dependent on the new regime guaranteeing a decent standard of living and an end to the oppression of minorities.

Leon Trotsky explained in *The Revolution Betrayed* that demands for national and ethnic autonomy could come into conflict with the needs of a centralised planned economy in a socialist society. He outlined how this contradiction could begin to be resolved: "Only the actual participation of the interested masses in the administration of their own destinies can at each new stage draw the necessary lines between the legitimate demands of economic centralism and the living gravitations of national culture." (pp170-171)

But genuine workers' participation is incompatible with the rule of a bureaucracy. Instead, the Yugoslav regime used reform and repression, in different quantities at different times, to keep the lid on national tensions.

Tito was forced into a delicate balancing act. Power was decentralised right down to local level in an attempt to stimulate economic growth and to appease the demands of the increasingly restive bureaucracies in each republic. But to remain in control, Tito, like so many others before him, used divide and rule. While formally conceding power to the republics, he played a potentially explosive ethnic chess game. He ensured that ethnic minorities took a

high proportion of administrative posts in each republic; in Croatia and Kosovo, it was Serbs, while in Serbia, to a lesser extent, it was Croats and Hungarians.

Decentralisation resulted in a huge growth in the bureaucracy. The economic crisis was worsened by the country's isolation after the split between the Yugoslav and Soviet bureaucracy. Despite balancing between east and west, Tito's regime got the worst of both worlds — huge debts with western banks and unfavourable trade agreements with the Soviet Union. Controls on credit and foreign trade were lifted, while individual companies were allowed to set up their own banks and even print money. By the 1980s, in parts of the federation, joblessness had reached 80%, and inflation 200%.

Tito had been forced to make more concessions to the leaders of the republics than other Stalinist regimes in eastern Europe: partially because the memory of previous ethnic conflict was still fresh but also because no ethnic group had an overwhelming specific weight within the federation. Also Yugoslavia did not have the backing of the material resources and armed might of the Soviet Union. In the 1974 constitution the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina were given status as a nation, while Kosovo and Vojvodina were elevated to autonomous republics. At the same time it was made illegal to tell jokes which were based on ethnic background. But such concessions did not pacify ordinary workers; they merely increased their anger because of raised, and then dashed, expectations. Moreover, each concession was balanced by rival legislation in an attempt to maintain ultimate central control.

UNLIKE MOST OF eastern Europe, the 1980s was a period of huge upheaval and struggle by the Yugoslav working class. In the initial stages protest had a strong nationalist content, representing a reaction by workers to their oppression by a corrupt and inefficient Serbian dominated federal bureaucracy. Workers felt their oppression as workers but also as members of a national minority, and expressed their opposition as such. Moreover, discontent was encouraged by the bureaucracy of each republic, within certain limits, as a lever against the central Yugoslavian bureaucracy.

Strikes became more prolonged and militant. In 1988, the trade unions called for a federal general strike to bring down the government. This was backed by the occupation of the federal parliament. The workers' calls for 'genuine self-management socialism' represented a step towards the ideas of political revolution; the need to drive out the bureaucracy and put in its place a regime of genuine workers' democracy and a planned economy based on the needs of society.

Significantly, strike waves stopped recognis-

ing the borders between the republics — in 1988 there were federal postal and telecommunications strikes as well as railway strikes involving Slovenian and Serbian workers. Wide layers could experience that they had more in common with fellow workers in different republics than they did with their own 'leaders'. If there had been a genuine revolutionary party that could explain that a political revolution to drive out the bureaucracy was necessary, then the working class could have taken power, thus laying the basis for solving the problems of the federation.

The lack of such an alternative destined the movement to setbacks and eventual defeat. The federal and Montenegrin governments resigned in 1989. They were replaced by new bureaucrats. While reforms were granted, these were whittled away, and with them workers' confidence and morale.

The 1980s represented a turning point for Yugoslavia: economic collapse and stagnation; the intensification of a struggle between the federal and republican bureaucracies; titanic struggles by the working class. Economic regression was exacerbated by increasingly contradictory social and economic policies, at federal and republican level, as different sections of the bureaucracy clashed in the face of the impasse of Yugoslav society.

The huge demonstrations etc which heralded the collapse of Stalinism in 1989 in other eastern European countries were not repeated in Yugoslavia, where the movement was in retreat. Yet the same conditions were present: economic collapse and hatred of the bureaucracy. And the same lack of a strong revolutionary organisation meant no socialist alternative was put to Stalinism.

The disillusionment with Stalinism, which dirtied the name of socialism, along with the capitalist boom of the 1980s, saw illusions in the market grow. These were given force by Yugoslav guest-workers returning home from Germany and other western European countries. Counter-revolution began to take hold. But there were potentially broader foundations for counter-revolution in Yugoslavia. Economic collapse was greater and the working class had struggled for a decade without seemingly being able to fundamentally change the situation. Added to this were underlying, and unresolved, national and ethnic tensions.

Pro-capitalist tendencies within the bureaucracy had gradually gained the upper hand, at a different rate in different parts of the federation. They were greater in Slovenia and Croatia, because of higher living standards and economic development, and historic links with Germany and Austria. There was increasing opposition to funding the federal bureaucracy and the poorer republics. The demand for independence articulated by the new pro-capitalist governments of



these two republics reflected this.

The attempt to restore the market in Yugoslavia resulted in all the contradictions of post-war capitalism being injected into the foundations of society. Trade between the republics collapsed as it did with the rest of eastern Europe and the then Soviet Union. Economic catastrophe loomed: confusion, fear and disappointment increased. In desperation the working class looked for an explanation of the problems they faced.

Running in tandem with this process was the increasing use of nationalist rhetoric by the republican governments, especially Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic, of Croatia and Serbia respectively. This was to divert the attention of the masses from their economic plight but was also a means by which these ex-Communists distanced themselves from the old Stalinist regime. With the collapse of Stalinism, the federal government increasingly played second fiddle to the republics. Serbia became the dominant force, backed by the Serbian dominated hierarchy of the Yugoslav army (JNA).

Tudjman and Milosevic increasingly leant on reactionary nationalist paramilitary groups to consolidate their power. In order not to lose support to their ultra-nationalist allies, they became prisoners of their own propaganda and were caught in an ever ascending spiral of nationalist demagoguery. Soon after his election, Tudjman sacked all Serbs employed by the state and replaced them with Croats. For the majority of Serbs, whose ethnic origins were previously of little importance, this became a burning issue. So did apparently small differences in the Serb and Croat languages. All street signs had names in Serbian cyrillic lettering deleted from them, leaving only their equivalent in Croat

Relatives of conscript soldiers protest outside the Yugoslav army's Belgrade HQ.



Franjo Tudjman.

latin lettering.

The Serbian government responded by denouncing the Croatian government as a return to the fascist Ustashe regime. The forcible incorporation of Vojvodina and Kosovo into Serbia, together with the demand of the JNA that the federation should stay together, led to Croat fears of a 'Greater Serbia'.

The declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia was a blow against the prestige and potential resources of both the federal army and the Serbian ruling class. To stop the complete disintegration of the federation, they invaded Slovenia, but without points of support, were forced to withdraw to concentrate on the more easily defensible Croatian territory with its sizeable Serbian minority. Milosevic and the Serbian paramilitaries whipped up fear among the Croatian minority Serb population. Serb paramilitaries were handed the JNA arsenals. Redivision was taken to its horrifying logical conclusion and the phrase 'ethnic cleansing' entered modern day vocabulary.

With this background, the spread of civil war to the ethnically heterogeneous Bosnia-Herzegovina was certain. But the demand by the EC powers that a referendum be held in order to 'legalise' the calls for independence, simply brought that forward. Despite the fact that the Muslims constituted the largest ethnic group in the republic, they were caught in a struggle between the Serb and Croat armies for increased influence and territory. Now the ethnic balance of regions in the republic has been changed, using terror and armed force, with the Muslims, who form 43% of the population, having 5% of the territory.

THE DESCENT INTO civil war in the Balkans is a huge test for Marxism. *Militant's* aim is a society where there are no borders or barriers, with complete cultural freedom and no discrimination on the basis of race, religion or creed.

The Bolsheviks' sensitive approach to the national question ensured their victory during the 1917 Russian revolution. The demand for the right of all oppressed nations to self-determination formed a vital part of their programme. It was designed to win the confidence of the masses of oppressed nations as a first step to convincing them of the idea of a voluntary federation of socialist states.

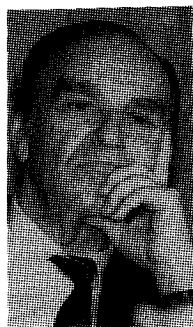
However, Lenin once said: "An abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all." The concrete conditions of any situation must be taken into account, above all the level which national consciousness has reached. This is necessary to be able to formulate an approach which, while recognising the justifiable fears of a minority, acts as a bridge to unify workers in the struggle for socialism, whatever their ethnic or national background.

Before the referenda on independence in Slovenia and Croatia, the most conscious workers and youth could have been convinced by an explanation which supported the right to self-determination, but warned that independence on a capitalist basis would solve none of their problems. While defending the right to independence, if that was the wish of the majority, at that stage we argued for greater autonomy and the extension of democratic rights for national groupings in education, culture and so on. We warned that capitalist 'independence' would, in fact, lead to the subservience of Slovenia and Croatia to the western European economic giants, particularly Germany. The way forward was to drive out the bureaucracy through political revolution, and construct a new, voluntary, federation of workers' democracies with an integrated planned economy which reflected the needs of the working class of all national and ethnic groups.

But the overwhelming votes for independence, followed by the intervention of the Serb-dominated federal army, were concrete facts which could not be ignored. The situation was completely changed. No support could appear to be given to the attempt by the Yugoslav army to forcibly hold together the federation and Serbian domination of it. It was then necessary for Slovenian workers to be won to the idea of an independent workers' state in which the new capitalist class was driven from power, as a first step to a Balkan federation of workers' democracies. A similar approach was necessary for workers in Croatia, with one vitally important difference.

The only way to prevent the Serbian minority in Croatia from being won over to the ultra-right Serbian nationalists would have been to convince them they would not face discrimination in an independent workers' Croatia. This could only have been done by a mass movement to drive out the nationalist Tudjman government. To have successfully allayed the fears of the Serbian minority this would have had to have a programme which guaranteed the rights of the Serbian minority to speak their own language, practise their own culture freely, and ensured no discrimination in jobs or education on the basis of national background.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the government rested on the fears of the Muslims and Croats, and demanded independence from the Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia. But self-determination for whom? Did Serbs and Croats living in the republic regard themselves as Bosnians? The civil war in Croatia had already begun to tear apart the different communities in Bosnia. Rather than protecting the Bosnian republic from Serbian aggression, the drive for independence by the Bosnian regime merely pushed the Serbian minority into the hands of Milosevic and his even more reactionary henchman in the



**Bosnian
president
Izetbegovic.**

**'An abstract
presentation
of the
question of
nationalism is
of no use at
all'**



Radovan
Karadzic.

republic. Radovan Karadzic. It therefore guaranteed the dismemberment of the republic.

The descent into civil war was not predetermined, even after the lull following the movements of the 1980s. A decisive movement of the working class could have cut across the bloodshed. Based on democratically elected committees from all sections of the working class and committed to workers' unity, such a movement could have launched a massive campaign of propaganda, demonstrations and strike action in support for an end to the civil war. Guarantees for the rights of minorities would have to have been linked with the building of defence committees against the armed paramilitaries. In turn, these would only have had an attractive power if they had been linked to the struggle to overthrow the nationalist capitalist regimes in the different republics and the fight for a socialist society.

Opportunities for building such a movement have occurred. Following the declaration of Bosnian independence in February, workers and youth from all of Sarajevo's communities occupied the parliament to defend it against Serbian paramilitaries. In March 1991, an anti-Milosevic student movement developed in Belgrade. One month later 700,000 textile workers took to the streets to demand better wages, the biggest movement of industrial workers since the war. But these movements were isolated and hamstrung by a leadership with nationalist tendencies.

In Bosnia, the instinctive reaction of people who had been living side by side for decades was at first for unity. As late as August of this year, in Trnopolje, an unprotected refugee camp attacked by Serb paramilitaries was defended by local Serbs. Sarajevo is still defended by an ethnically mixed population.

Yet this instinctive unity against the horrific prospect of bloody civil war, without a programme for socialism, could not put forward an explanation as to how to build a society where national conflict could be solved. In a situation where no alternative was offered, the intervention of even small groups of well-armed paramilitaries was enough to tear apart formerly united communities.

A NEW GREATER Serbia, with imperialist aspirations in the region, represents a threat to the stability of central and eastern Europe. This is why atrocities committed by the Serbian paramilitaries and soldiers are trumpeted from every newspaper while those perpetrated by the Croats are given scant coverage. The dictatorship of Milosevic is attacked while the autocratic rule of Croatia's Tudjman is almost ignored.

For months a furious debate has taken place amongst the western imperialist powers about armed intervention in the Balkans. Military

intervention is always a high risk strategy and is the last choice for imperialism. This debate has revealed the different tensions among the world's imperialist powers, increasingly obvious since the collapse of Stalinism. Yet their paralysis at finding a solution is reminiscent of a rabbit transfixed in the headlamps of a fast approaching car.

The immediate effects of this conflict for western European imperialism have been: an interruption in trade and possibilities of developing new markets in Slovenia and Croatia; the destabilisation caused by the biggest influx of refugees into western Europe since world war two; and most importantly, the danger of the conflict spreading to surrounding states with the possibility of regional powers like Turkey and Greece being drawn in. As a defence analyst for the Institute for Public Policy Research argued recently: "It is about Europe's future security policy in eastern Europe and the Balkans... By not taking direct action of any kind... we are telling potential dictators to go ahead with ethnic cleansing and grabbing land."

US imperialism's concern was not as immediate as in the Gulf because the war is not on its doorstep and doesn't threaten western oil supplies. But from the beginning the US has been concerned at the long-term effect on the world balance of forces. Because of apparent inaction by the EC powers, the US felt forced to enter the debate. But the US bourgeois themselves are not united on a strategy, with the joint chief of staff, Colin Powell, recently coming out against any military intervention.

A long-term danger for imperialism worldwide is the creation of a new European *diaspora* —made up of Bosnia's Muslims. A new Muslim consciousness is being forged as a result of bitter resentment at their abandonment and the oppression they have faced.

For Germany, with a large Turkish immigrant population, and Spain and France, with their big communities of north African Arabs who could be sympathetic to Bosnia's Muslims, this is a potential timebomb. The US representative at the UN suggested that peace-keeping measures be co-ordinated with the Bosnian government. Margaret Thatcher suggested supplying arms to Bosnian Muslims. These proposals represented a desire to try to draw the Bosnian Muslim leaders into the orbit of western imperialism.

The human tidal wave of refugees that has flooded into western Europe has posed the most immediate problem for EC governments, particularly those with, up to now, more liberal immigration policies. The preferred destination for most Yugoslav asylum seekers is Germany, where at least 200,000 have fled, many to live with relatives. Germany is seen as having the promise of high living standards and stability.

The reality is of a country whose social fabric is being undermined by the huge economic

A new
European
diaspora is
being created



Milan Panic,
above, and
Slobodan
Milosevic.

costs of reunification and the instability that has followed. On top of this is the economic crisis which has begun to drive down working class living standards, creating friction between them and refugees from all over eastern Europe. The economic cost to the German ruling class, and their fears for the future stability of their country, has led the government to propose a quota system so that all EC countries 'can bear the burden' of the influx of Yugoslav refugees.

The US is most concerned at the potential involvement of Turkey and Iran. Iran's attempted acquisition of nuclear submarines from Russia and its occupation of three islands in the mouth of the Gulf, has heightened fears of its role as a regional power. US imperialism is attempting to play Turkey off against Iran without letting either gain the upper hand.

France was the first EC country to raise the idea of military intervention, to promote its interests in the region and bolster its authority as a world power against an increasingly assertive German imperialism. Other EC countries raised the possibility of using the Western European Union (WEU) for military intervention. The US was completely against this attempt by the EC powers to establish prestige for their own independent armed forces.

The imperialist powers fear becoming involved in a Beirut-type situation. At the moment, a full-scale intervention is the least likely possibility, but this is the only measure imperialism could take to impose its will upon the Serbian paramilitaries. Opponents of military intervention cite the example of Tito's partisans who tied up twelve German army divisions through guerilla attacks during the war. To prevent such an eventuality, air strikes and up to 200,000 ground troops would be required. The logistics of such an operation are staggering: 2,000 tons of provisions daily along miles of supply lines, through mountainous terrain. It could also mean all-out war against Serbia and eventually, armed opposition from both Croat and Muslim paramilitaries.

Those who favour full-scale military intervention question local support for Serbian paramilitaries. They doubt the morale of the Yugoslav troops and the cohesiveness of the Serbian regime. One report spoke of only a 30% response to the last army call-up in Serbia. But low morale and splits in the Serbian regime could turn into their opposites as a result of western intervention, as memories of previous foreign invasions are invoked.

Whether imperialism steps up its military commitments depends on developments in the region. The decision to allow UN troops to be lightly armed and return fire opens up the possibility of the west being drawn into all-out armed conflict without having made the conscious decision to do so. What is clear is that the UN peacekeeping force has failed miserably so

far. In effect it is being used to police and legitimise a redivided Balkans.

One factor in determining future developments is the power struggle within the Serbian ruling class. Portrayed as a clash between Milan Panic, the prime minister of the so-called Yugoslav federation, and Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, it is in fact a struggle between two trends within the new Serbian ruling class. Milosevic represents a more nationalist section which is not prepared to allow anything to bar it from building a Greater Serbia. Milan Panic, a millionaire businessman wanted in the US for fraud, was regarded as a joke at first. Despite his maverick nature, he represents those who fear that continued isolation from the west will lose them everything.

Whatever Panic's conciliatory attitude, both wings want as much territory, and therefore influence, as they can get. Both are prepared to make concessions in Serbian occupied territory in Croatia to come to an agreement with Tudjman about the final carving-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the federal army's recent agreement to withdraw from the Prevlavka peninsula in Croatia shows. But Milosevic is more tied to the reactionary paramilitaries who have their base in the Serbian enclaves in Croatia, limiting his ability to make concessions.

It is not clear who will be victorious. There is no doubt that Milosevic still retains influence within the state apparatus — in February and May there were extensive purges of the military. The important point is not that Milosevic was able to carry out these purges but that they were necessary in the first place. At the moment, Panic, resting on ordinary Serbs' discontent with the hardships of war, is reported to have 70% support in public opinion polls. However, it is unlikely that he would encourage a movement to drive out Milosevic at the moment. He fears the anger of the working class more than he does the danger of Milosevic's policies. If Panic was to win the upper hand, then it would increase the likelihood of Serbia agreeing to a short-term ceasefire in Bosnia. But it would not provide a long-term solution and there is no guarantee that Panic could make the ceasefire stick with the Serbian paramilitaries.

A recent CIA secret report estimates that between 30,000 and 217,000 people could die in Bosnia this winter through lack of supplies. This prompted the announcement that US imperialism wanted a no-flight zone over Bosnia. This reflects the US's fear of the effects of mass starvation on world public opinion and on the region. Such a move would probably reduce fighting in the short term.

BUT THERE ARE more dominoes waiting to fall. Kosovo could be the next candidate to be

consumed by civil war. Made up of 90% ethnic Albanians, the republic has suffered most from Serbian oppression. Virtually under military occupation, over 100,000 Albanians have been dismissed from their public sector jobs. An underground Albanian government has been elected. An uprising in Kosovo would have implications for neighbouring Albania which wants unification with Kosovo. If an intense struggle developed this demand could gain mass support in Kosovo.

Fighting there could easily spread to neighbouring Macedonia which has an Albanian minority in the west. Macedonia is far from stable — the government still awaits recognition and desperately needed aid from the EC. This has been blocked by Greece which says Macedonian independence will lead to claims on its territory, which contains a Macedonian minority. Macedonia's economic crisis, worsened by lack of recognition, has already led to the fall of one government and could lead to a much more nationalist administration that did make claims on Greek territory. Turkey, seeing the opportunity to strengthen its position in the region, has supported Macedonian attempts to have its independence recognised.

Even without the spread of civil war, borders are in the process of being redrawn. Croatian and Serbian republics have been announced within Bosnia. It is likely that this republic's effective cantonisation will be completed shortly, leaving a city-state of Bosnia, in Sarajevo. As this process reaches its conclusion, it is possible that non-Muslims will leave or be driven out of Sarajevo. It is also likely that the semi-truce between Croatia and the Bosnian government will break down, especially after the former have reached agreement with the Serb government on how to divide Bosnia, leading to a flare-up of Muslim-Croat conflict.

Intra-ethnic strife is also a possibility especially if the Croatian and Serbian governments agree to limit the independence of Serb enclaves in Croatia. There are already strains between Milosevic and the leadership of the Serb republic of Krajina, an enclave in western Croatia. And in August, Nikola Kraljevic, a commander of the HOS (the neofascist Croatian paramilitary group), was shot dead in Bosnia by Croatian soldiers.

The longer-term economic prospects for all the republics, bad before, are now dire. The different republics started off in a worse position than their eastern European counterparts, because of the integrated nature of the federal economy. The collapse of markets in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union crippled the republics even further. The development of civil war has meant what inter-republic trade there was, came to a standstill.

War has brought hyper-inflation, mass unemployment and shortages. Serbia may see

100,000% inflation by the end of the year. Output is 30% down on last year, while unemployment is over 25%. On top of this the burden of housing and feeding hundreds of thousands of Serbian refugees is being carried by the working class. Croatia's war effort has cost \$18bn, with one third of its industry destroyed. As a result output will be down by 30% this year. Even Slovenia, which has not been directly involved in the war, has inflation of 30%.

The regimes in the different republics will become increasingly autocratic, in order to remain in power, in the face of anti-war movements and struggles for better living standards. The possibility of dictatorships similar to those in the interwar period will be present in the future.

A SOLUTION TO the Balkan crisis can only be found by the working class of the region. The collapse of the federation has unfortunately effectively split the trade unions along republican lines. There are some independent trade unions such as the fiercely anti-Milosevic journalists' union, Nezavisnost. And one million workdays have been lost through strike action in Slovenia, which has seen the beginnings of workers' struggle.

Eventually, sickened by the carnage and by the devastation of living standards, whilst the new profiteers get rich, workers will move into conflict with their ruling classes. If an end to sectarian conflict is to be achieved then from the beginning these movements will have to have a sensitive approach to the national question. The experience of the struggle will raise workers' consciousness as to the need for unity. But it will require the conscious intervention of a revolutionary organisation which is sensitive to the historical experience of oppressed national minorities, and takes this into account not only when formulating its demands but in its day-to-day activity, to begin to lay the basis to end national conflict.

Guarantees against discrimination of all national or ethnic minorities will have to be the norm. The right of all refugees to return to their republics will have to be fought for. To drive out the paramilitaries, anti-sectarian committees of self-defence will have to be set-up, democratically elected and under the control of the working class.

This will be the foundation of a struggle to defeat capitalism in the Balkans. A Balkan federation of workers' democracies based on a democratic planned economy would lay the basis for ending the bloodshed that has engulfed the region for two years. This would be a fitting revenge for the false ideologies which have imprisoned the Balkan peoples over the last century. □

A solution to the Balkan crisis can only be found by the working class

Can Cuba survive?

Ximena Campos, a recent visitor to Cuba, examines the perspectives for the Cuban regime.



Fidel Castro.

'SOCIALISM OR DEATH'. The slogan posted in the main streets of Havana is meant to show the determination of the Cuban regime to defend the revolution to the end, in the face of increasing international isolation and US imperialist aggression. Throughout the island calls to resistance, to defend the gains of the revolution and for national independence, attempt to rally support behind the regime at a time of dramatic economic, political and social crisis.

The political representatives of US imperialism eagerly anticipate the demise of the Cuban regime. Castro came to power in 1959 after an heroic three-year guerilla campaign. With Cuban society in ferment, by the end of 1960 landlordism and capitalism had been eliminated and US influence on the island expunged. Resting on a planned economy, and on the support of the Moscow bureaucracy, the new regime was able to achieve major social advances for the Cuban masses. Land was distributed to the peasantry. A guaranteed job with a living wage, and free access to health and education, were introduced. Consequently, infant mortality fell to 10.6 per 1,000 live births, life expectancy increased to 74 years and literacy rates rose to 96% — levels comparable to those of the advanced capitalist countries.

These indisputable achievements, in the teeth of American opposition, were, for decades, an inspiration to the exploited and oppressed of the third world, particularly in Latin America. The survival of the Cuban regime, just a few miles from the coast of mainland America, was a constant affront to the prestige of US imperialism for over 30 years.

Today Cuba is like a besieged fortress. In the past, its heavy dependence on the ex-USSR and

Eastern European states, with whom it undertook up to 85% of its trade, protected the island from the cycles and shocks of the world capitalist economy, the drastic falls in the prices of raw materials, the worsening terms of trade and high interest rates that crippled the majority of third world countries. The link with the former Stalinist states was also the source of important benefits through cheap credits, guaranteed markets and preferential trade prices. For decades the ex-USSR brought Cuban sugar at three, sometimes four times, its price on the world market. It sold its oil at a price that allowed Cuba to re-export it, which became one of Cuba's main sources of foreign exchange.

The collapse of Stalinism in the ex-USSR and eastern Europe, however, means that, from mid-1992, all new trade has to be undertaken at world market prices and in hard currency. This is a major blow to the regime, which at the same time, is the victim of a punitive economic embargo by US imperialism.

The immediate effects of unfavourable international conditions had already become clear in 1986. Then, with a fall in the world market prices of sugar and oil, Cuba lost 40% of its income from exports. It was forced to halve its imports from capitalist countries and re-introduce rationing of some key products. The situation today, however, is far more dramatic, to the extent that it puts into question the very survival of the gains of the revolution.

EVEN BEFORE THE earth-shattering events in eastern Europe, Cuban society was going through a period of turmoil as criticisms against bureaucratic mismanagement and inefficiency were becoming increasingly open. Recognising



the widespread popular unease, and the need to break the deadlock in the economy, the Cuban leadership launched its 'campaign of rectification of errors' in 1986, which included a period of limited public debate. At assemblies organised in factories, state farms and collectives, neighbourhoods and universities, workers voiced their concern that the economy was sinking under a huge and inefficient bureaucratic apparatus where no forms of check or control against mismanagement existed. There was open criticism at the total lack of discussion and consultation when targets were fixed or methods of production and quality of goods decided. Protests were voiced at the corruption of party and state officials.

The strongest censure came from the youth — a mood the Communist youth organisation was forced to partially reflect — who hit hard against the authoritarianism and rigidity of the regime. There were demands to democratise the methods of appointing state officials and the party's leading bodies.

Castro attended many of the assemblies and was seen to hear out the workers; he even changed his mind after a strongly argued case or two. But this is totally different to the system of workers' democracy necessary for the functioning of a planned economy. Unlike under capitalism, where the 'market', although in a totally chaotic and wasteful fashion, exercises certain controls on productivity, quality and efficiency — pushing out the most incompetent sectors

through bankruptcies etc during the course of the capitalist cycle of boom and slump — a planned economy can only function efficiently and take society forward on the basis of workers' control and management. This would mean a network of decision-taking that guarantees democratic participation and control on the part of workers and consumers, dealing with the most immediate problems to the issues that determine the strategies of development. This has never existed in Cuba.

The bureaucratisation of Cuban society has its origins in the very character of the 1959 revolution. As is the case today, Castro has always leant on the masses in periods of crisis, be it against the threat of imperialist aggression or the need to take on a section of the bureaucracy. But never have the workers and peasants been drawn into the actual running of society. From the very beginnings of the revolution all decisions were left in the hands of Castro and a small group of leaders who, although enjoying enormous popular support, crystalised into a ruling elite above and out of the control of the masses. Although in the 1970s popular assemblies were set up, these organisations functioned only at local level. Even then workers were blacklisted, harassed or lost their jobs if they became too vocal in their denunciations of irregularities in the administration.

The measures taken in 1986 attempted to redress some of the worse cases of corruption and inefficiency, including a clampdown on the

A Cuban street sign — 'Socialism or death!'

private sector in agriculture. But, like Gorbachev's perestroika, they couldn't attack the root cause of the crisis which was the bureaucratic system itself.

THE COLLAPSE OF its trading network, on top of the bureaucratic mismanagement of the economy, have pushed Cuba into a qualitatively different crisis. The end of subsidised prices and the introduction of trade on the basis of hard currency has forced the island to reduce its imports by 50% this year, and its fuel consumption by 60%, resulting in severe dislocation of production. This meant not only a short-fall of food and wheat but also of chemical products, including key fertilizers for agriculture, and spare parts for machinery. The drastic fall of fuel imports has led to the total shut-down of key industries and short-time work for many factories.

In 1991 GDP fell by between 25-30%, and is expected to fall by a similar proportion this year. The gravity of the situation is seen in the sugar industry which accounts for 70% of Cuba's foreign earnings. Not only has the economy lost US\$2bn in sugar revenue with the ending of the preferential prices paid by the ex-USSR; but due to shortages of fuel, lubricants and spare parts essential for mechanical harvesters and mills, the 1991-92 harvest is expected to be the lowest in decades. Foreign observers estimate that Cuba's export revenue for this year will cover only around 30% of its import needs, excluding oil supplies. In response, the government has called on volunteers to cut the cane manually.

In February 1990, the regime introduced the 'Special Period in Time of Peace', a plan of measures of increasing severity according to the degree of crisis. The last stage — named 'Zero Option' — would put the economy on a war footing and would be reached when the island was left with no fuel supply. The measures imposed heavy reductions in the use of fuel such as the replacement of tractors by oxen in agriculture, the use of bicycles instead of cars, reduced domestic energy consumption, street lighting etc. The plan also re-introduced rationing of over 240 items in daily use, from food to shoes and hygiene products. In an attempt to deal with serious food shortages the regime mobilized redundant factory and administrative workers, as well as students, to send them to the countryside to increase the production and distribution of fruit and vegetables.

The effects of the crisis on daily life have been dramatic. Thousands of workers have been made redundant, the transport system is collapsing and family life now revolves around getting hold of essential goods. All dairy products have been rationed as state farms can't import feed for animals. Bread has been rationed to one roll per person per day, rice to 5lbs per month.

sugar to 1lb per month and coffee to 4ozs per month. Yet even then there is no guarantee of supplies. Chicken or meat have been rationed to 1lb per person every nine days, but supplies haven't arrived since January this year. The long hours wasted daily in queues, and the irregularities of the supplies, are forcing increasing numbers onto the black market and there are recent reports of food trains being attacked.

For the first time since the revolution children are begging in the streets, not for money but for pens and paper, as there is no paper for schools and limited supplies for newsprint. The health service, one of the prides of the revolution, has no petrol for ambulances and suffers chronic shortages of X-ray plates, cotton wool, anaesthetics and medicine.

With the introduction of the emergency plans, Castro and the Cuban regime have stepped up their propaganda against the dangers of direct US military intervention. They point to the attempts by the US congress to tighten the economic embargo. The Communist youth organisation celebrated its anniversary this year by digging underground shelters throughout Havana, to prepare for US bombardments. Although this possibility cannot be totally excluded, it is not in this that lies the real dangers to the gains made by the masses since 1959 — but in the isolation of the revolution in a small backward economy in the context of a new world balance of forces.

THE DEFENCE OF the planned economy — and despite the gross bureaucratic deformations of the Cuban regime this has been the basis of the many historical gains of the masses in the last 30 years — does not only depend on the wishes or determination of the working masses or their leaders, but, in the final analysis, on achieving a higher technique and labour productivity than capitalism. Only by developing the productive forces to a higher degree than under capitalism could a planned economy, even on the basis of a workers' democracy, consolidate itself and resist the pressures of a capitalist world economy.

When in 1917 Lenin and Trotsky raised the perspective of the working class coming to power in Russia, they never thought that it would be possible to consolidate the workers' state in conditions of backwardness and isolation. This is why they linked the survival of the young Soviet state to the extension of the revolution to the more advanced countries of Europe.

Trotsky made clear the source of the threat to the Soviet planned economy in the late-1920s in *The Draft Programme of the Communist International*: "The capitalist world shows us by its export and import figures that it has other instruments of persuasion than those of military intervention. To the extent that productivity of labour and the productivity of a social system as a whole are measured on the market by the cor-

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elation of prices, it is not so much military intervention as the intervention of cheaper capitalist commodities that constitutes perhaps the greatest immediate menace to Soviet economy." (pp36-37)

When in 1960 Castro was confronted with the US economic blockade, he was able to stand up to imperialism by abolishing capitalism and landlordism and by turning to the USSR and its alternative trade network for support. The enormous aid extended, together with the possibilities opened up by a planned economy, allowed Cuba to develop an industrial base and make major scientific breakthroughs in areas such as biotechnology and genetic engineering. Most of all it allowed the regime to implement a policy of wealth distribution through huge state investment in basic services that completely transformed the lives of working people. Today, the disintegration of the USSR and the COM-ECON trade bloc forces Cuba back onto the capitalist world market. But on the basis of outdated Soviet technology, and a heavy dependence on one cash crop for export, it will do so with many of the weaknesses and disadvantages of other underdeveloped countries.

In an interview in January this year, Julio Carranza, an economist from the regime, explained the meaning of the change in world relations for the island: "We are trying to find a way out of our present crisis... We have to rethink the strategy for economic development in Cuba. All the roads that were conceived up to two or three years ago have been overtaken by history, because of a fundamental change in the international situation. Cuba has to change her strategy for development and the first step is to re-insert ourselves in the world market on a new basis. In order to do this it is necessary to play within the laws of the world market and despite the fact that they are unjust laws and difficult for the underdeveloped world, they are the only ones that exist. There is no other market but the capitalist market..." According to Carranza their first priority was to have access to "fuel and markets that are difficult to penetrate today. In the search for these elements — capital, technology and markets — Cuba has opened its doors to foreign capital so that they can help us, give us the scarce resources and become investors." (*El Mercurio*, 19 January, 1992)

The new strategy is already at work. In June this year at a conference for foreign investors, 125 capitalists, amongst them Kodak, Proctor and Gamble and American Express, were told that Cuba was open to foreign investment in a whole range of industries from oil exploration to pharmaceuticals. Already there are 60 joint ventures, mainly in the tourist trade, where Spanish capitalists have taken the initiative.

The capitalists were told that a typical foreign developer could recover their investment in

three-and-a-half years and that approval to set up a textile factory, for example, would only take between 25 and 30 days. The vice-president of the Bank of Cuba added that they would consider debt-equity swaps to attract foreign investment, although fresh money would have to be part of such a deal. This is the same method used by other Latin American countries, which have sold state assets for reductions in their foreign debt. There is now also talk of partially lifting the present laws that limit foreign ownership to 49% of an enterprise.

In 1991, Castro told foreign businessmen: "It is perfectly possible for the socialist system to collaborate with the capitalist system." He then went on to point out the benefits of investing in Cuba: "You can repatriate your capital with greater ease than anywhere else in the world, because repatriation of capital is automatic here... we have adopted adequate labour legislation and tax facilities that don't exist in any other country... the government wants to create a free trade zone in the island so that private foreign investors can set up export and import businesses." (*El Mercurio*, December 1991)

In July this year, the national assembly made changes to the constitution which indicate the new direction society is taking. The new wording refers to "the socialist ownership of the *fundamental* means of production" as against the previous wording of "all the means of production." Before, article 18 stated that "foreign trade is the exclusive function of the state..." Now the same article reads: "The state directs and controls foreign trade. The law establishes the state institutions and authorities that are authorised to: create enterprises for foreign trade, regulate the export and import operations, and determine the persons or corporations that have a legal capacity for carrying out said export or import operations, and for concluding commercial agreements." A new article has been added stating that: "The state recognises the ownership of mixed enterprises, economic societies, and the associations that are formed in accordance with the law..."

In short, these changes signify that foreign private investment will be allowed in the state sector, that foreign private ownership is legally recognised in joint-stock companies, and that some state enterprises will be given greater autonomy to make decisions in their own sector, including the right to import and export without government permission.

IN AND OF themselves the measures introduced, and the constitutional changes, would not necessarily represent a danger to the planned economy or lead to capitalist restoration in Cuba. Even a democratic workers' state would incorporate into the planned economy, particularly in its initial stages, significant elements of market relations in a period of transition to-

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wards socialism. The fundamental question would be: what economic relations will predominate? This is determined by the general direction in which society is moving.

In Cuba, foreign capitalists still face important limitations and the US\$400-500m expected in foreign investment this year, most of it in tourism, still represents no more than two per cent of the island's GDP. But in the context of the new world relations, as a result of the collapse of Stalinism, these measures represent the first steps towards the undermining of the state monopoly of foreign trade — a key element in the protection of the nationalised economy from capitalist international competition — and the break up of the planned economy.

Castro is insisting that Cuba doesn't want capitalism. "Capital and capitalism are not the same," he said in June this year. "Capitalists will not be the owners of our country. The country will continue to be socialist." (*Financial Times*, 14 July, 1992). When saying this he reflects, not so much the wishes of the bureaucratic caste at the top of society, but the tenacious desire of the mass of working people to defend the social conquests of the revolution. Nevertheless, Cuba's economy is slowly drawing to a halt. The lack of raw materials, credit, foreign currency and investments, as well as markets, is slowly strangling the economy despite the enormous sacrifices and determination being shown by workers and peasants. At the same time, Cuba is now being pushed to compete in the world market where it is at a disadvantage with respect to labour productivity.

In the final analysis, unless there is a fundamental change in the international balance of forces with the coming to power of the working class in one of the advanced capitalist countries, the tendency towards the restoration of capitalism in Cuba will be strengthened and become dominant. In the context of generalised crisis, those sectors of the economy with closer links with foreign capital — and therefore access to hard currency, raw materials, markets etc — will become the most dynamic sectors of the economy and, over time, will become the dominant sectors. It is here where the dangers of capitalist restoration lie. According to the *Financial Times*, (29 July, 1992), tourism has already become the country's largest foreign exchange earner. Biotechnology, along with opening up the health service to tourists, are the other two areas targetted for growth, and both are being offered to foreign capital to 'help' their development.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF this change of direction will, however, be resisted by a large section of the population including the youth who, although extremely critical of the bureaucratisation of society, are nevertheless deeply conscious of the enormous gains achieved under

the planned economy in the last 30 years. The scars of the poverty and humiliation suffered under capitalism are still present amongst the workers and peasants, who have passed on to the next generation an awareness of the historical conquest the overthrow of capitalism and landlordism meant. Cuba's highly developed health service and education system, its guarantee of employment and a living wage, along with its pensions and childcare facilities etc, contrasts sharply with the miserable conditions of the masses in the rest of Latin America. There is a broad awareness that capitalism in Cuba would not be like Miami but more akin to the other poor south and central American states. This consciousness is different to that which existed in eastern Europe prior to the revolutions of 1989, where the masses had western European capitalism as a model, especially the 'successful' West German economy.

At the same time, there is increasing hostility to the effects of some of the concessions being made to foreign capital, especially in tourism. The existence of a parallel economy for tourists, where everything that is scarce for ordinary Cubans can be freely bought with dollars — and the exclusion of the local population from the bars, restaurants, shops, and even the beaches set aside for foreign tourists — is giving birth to strong resentment against a 'tourist apartheid'. Prostitution and black marketeering around the big hotels of Havana, linked to the growth of the tourist trade, are leading to increased repression against ordinary youth who are for the first time being stopped in the streets by the police searching for dollars, black market goods or drugs.

Moreover, while the island is being increasingly opened up to private capital, the regime has stepped up its propaganda campaign re-asserting Cuba's long struggle for national independence, stressing the need for unity against aggression at a time of national difficulties.

All these factors, plus the increasing crisis and disintegration of the ex-USSR and eastern Europe — Castro regularly points out that these societies have not resolved any of their old problems but have only added new ones as a result of their move back to capitalism — explains the support the regime still has amongst wide layers of workers and peasants, including the youth. Even open opponents of the regime have had to admit that, as yet, no cohesive opposition has developed and that Castro still has a strong base of popular support, unlike the leaders of the former Stalinist states in eastern Europe.

NONETHELESS, INCREASING OPPOSITION against the regime, and open divisions within the bureaucracy, will develop as the crisis worsens. These are inevitable not only because

of deepening hardships but because greater numbers of workers see no way out of the present situation. The older generation often says that they have lived through three periods of difficulties: under capitalism, the first years of the revolution and now. Of the three many say that this is the hardest because they cannot see a way out.

Under conditions of international isolation, with the lack of a genuine Marxist alternative that could show a way out through a revolutionary internationalist perspective, there is total confusion and a sense of hopelessness which marks a decisive difference with other periods of crisis. Although the older generation is more patient there is growing demoralisation and exhaustion. Amongst the youth, a feeling that the situation can't go on for much longer, that things have to change, predominates. Few of them, as yet, express support for capitalism in Cuba, though many want to leave for Europe and the US.

Widening differentiations are bound to grow in the next period between those with jobs and those without, between those close to the tourist and foreign sector — with access to dollars and the black economy — and those not, exacerbating the political tensions. In this situation the already existing divisions within the bureaucracy — in respect to the speed of political reforms as well as the scale of the concessions to private capital — will increasingly come into the open.

The constitutional reforms introduced in July allow, for the first time, direct elections to the provincial and national assemblies, although the ban on opposition groups is maintained. They also however give Castro greater constitutional powers, including the right to declare a state of emergency, to head the national defense council and to take personal control of the armed forces in an emergency. At the same time the regime has organised a clampdown with the creation of 'Rapid Response Brigades'. Up to now these have been used to harass known dissident groups, even though, as yet, these have no roots or wide support amongst the masses.

Although, as yet, no section of the bureaucracy has argued publicly in favour of capitalist restoration, as the economic and international pressures mount, support for such changes are bound to surface. It is probably from the most privileged layers of the bureaucracy, above all their sons and daughters who did not participate in the direct struggle, who see no way out for themselves under the present impasse and hope to reap some of the benefits of a change of system, that support for outright capitalism will take root.

Other sections of the bureaucracy, including Castro himself who is fighting for survival, will put up resistance to such a fundamental change. For example, if under conditions of a slump in



the world economy there is a movement back towards re-nationalisation by other Latin American governments. Castro could attempt to lean on them for support, as he is attempting to do by negotiating favourable trade deals with the Chinese bureaucracy and some Arab states. There could unfold, therefore, a very turbulent process in Cuba with swings and zig-zags in government policy — from concessions to foreign and private capital to clampdowns and movements towards re-centralization and back again — as the different pressures within society, finding their expression within the bureaucracy, battle themselves out.

In the end international factors are decisive. Cuban workers and peasants face an extremely difficult period ahead. To defend the historical conquests of the revolution it is necessary not only to overthrow the bureaucratic regime which exists now and replace it with the conscious control and management of society by the working class, but also to adopt a resolute policy of workers' internationalism.

Since the revolution, the Cuban masses have given active support to the struggles of workers and peasants in many of the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The regime, however, never saw the victories of these struggles as decisive for the survival of the planned economy, upon which it rests. But it will only be possible to preserve the gains of the revolution and lay the basis of a genuine workers' democracy, with the victory of the working class in other countries and the creation of a new system of economic co-operation based on the solidarity of workers' states. Here lies the hope of the Cuban masses whose struggle in the past has done much to inspire the exploited and oppressed masses of the third world. □

Queuing in Havana — for irregular supplies.

Ripples in the Universe

COSMOLOGY IS IN crisis. The 'big bang' theory of the origin of the universe is currently the prevailing orthodoxy amongst cosmologists. But it is under challenge from many directions. A growing minority, for example, question whether the cosmic background radiation and the all-round recession/red-shift of stars, the main physical evidence claimed in support of the current orthodoxy, does bear out the big bang interpretation.

Many scientists, moreover, have fundamental theoretical-philosophical objections to the big bang theory. They reject the extrapolation backwards in time of the expansionary model to give an origin of the universe in a 'singularity', a

point of zero time and zero matter, to which currently known physical laws cannot be applied and which leaves open, especially for those who attempt to combine science with religious belief, the possibility of creation.

*Clearly, the big bang theory, which has itself been through a number of major reformulations in successive attempts to account for newly-discovered physical phenomena, largely consists of theoretical modelling and scientific speculation. This debate, which will undoubtedly intensify in the next few years, is of great interest to Marxists. In this issue, **Pete Mason** argues the case for a version of the big bang theory.*

Science exists within the ideologies and prejudices of class-based society

ON APRIL 24, *The Independent* carried a big front-page story under the headline: 'How the Universe Began'. That Sunday, *The Observer* asked 'Has Man conquered the Universe?' It quoted Steven Hawking, renowned cosmologist, claiming that this was the "discovery of the century, if not of all time." What was this discovery? What truth, if any, lay behind the hype? What should our attitude be to scientific discoveries?

For some good reasons, and some bad, scientists and the more abstract sciences are viewed sceptically. Education, and even knowledge itself, has been jealously guarded by a select few through the centuries. The elitism of science is, however, partly an illusion created by our lack of familiarity with the subject. For instance, in dealing with modern cosmological mod-

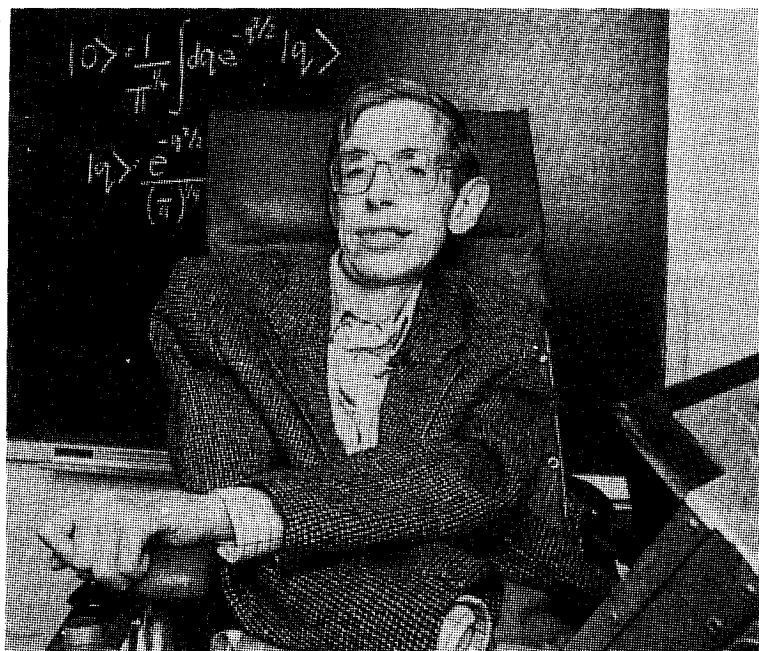
els, a reader new to the subject can't expect to read this article in the same way as they might an article about things they are familiar with. Science, like any field of knowledge, requires study, reflection, discussion, application, and more study, before you can become familiar with its concepts. Hopefully, this article will serve as an introduction to this process. But if you are willing to put in the time, there is no reason why you can't develop your understanding to a high degree — if that's what you want!

But in any society which is divided into haves and have-nots, from slave societies to modern-day capitalism, science cannot be examined without asking political questions. For instance, what sort of scientific research is funded? What sort of ideas manage to get any further

than a few scribbled notes? Also, science lives within the ideologies, the presuppositions, the prejudices of class-based society. Scientists are often blind to the real forces at work. Einstein later bitterly regretted that his work had prepared the way for the development of the atomic bomb. Scientists don't always appreciate the exploitative nature of capitalism and what the end result of their research will be.

Of course, this is not true for all. The class struggle will always be echoed in the laboratory rooms. Even well known cosmologist Steven Hawking, hardly a lowly scientist, gave an exacting, very perceptive and powerful condemnation of the Tories, in one of the 'How I will vote' newspaper articles prior to the last election.

And this also means that in a



Steven Hawking, left and above, George Smoot of Berkeley University, announcing the COBE satellite findings.

society riven by clashes between the opposing forces of right and might, and especially where revolutions are everywhere overthrowing old ruling elites and everything is up for question, just in such a climate the most revolutionary ideas are likely to burst forth. As the aspirations of the downtrodden reach their highest hopes and some seemingly god-given eternal regime seems to be tottering, what was unthinkable becomes reality, and thought is inspired to examine things previously considered impossible.

It is also true that the more capitalism can encourage creativity and allow freedom of thought, the more it will be able later to harness the ideas that emerge. The invention and development of personal computers by young hippies and hackers in garages has been harnessed to promote home working, a super-exploitative bonus for capitalism.

But fundamentally, when it comes down to the end result, the value, or at least, the immediate value, of a scientific discovery depends on who has control over it — who funds it, who owns it. New technology in the workplace is often resisted because it seems only to make things harder, hours longer, conditions worse, and at the same time, impoverish us more by putting more people out of

work. Hardly an advancement! Today, this is the result of science in the hands of the bosses.

WHAT IS THE big bang? And what is the present state of cosmology? One of the paradoxes unexplained since Newton's time, was why gravity was not causing the universe to collapse in on itself. Newton had suggested a force of repulsion which exactly balanced out the gravitational effect of the stars. This was clearly an arbitrary addition to his theory, and anyway, didn't work. But Einstein did more or less the same thing, introducing a 'constant' into his equations to stop them predicting the collapse of the universe. A static universe was an unquestioned assumption for centuries.

Hubble proposed that it was *expanding* in 1924. This explained a number of paradoxes that were arising as scientists looked out into the universe. It was (and still is) the best model to explain the observations, and from it a host of predictions could be tested. It removed the need for the 'constant' that Einstein had introduced into his equations.

Hubble discovered that every galaxy is receding from us. The further away the galaxy, the faster it is moving. It is as if we were at the very centre of this expansion. In reality, the situa-

tion is analogous in three dimensions to a point on a balloon which is being inflated. Every other point seems to be moving away from it, and the further away the observed point, the faster it will be moving away.

You can trace back such an expansion and make certain predictions about what the universe must have looked like before. Theories of a 'big bang' arose, to explain the beginnings of our universe and its expansion. Initially this theory was greeted with derision — in fact it was its opponents who coined the term big bang. It was later postulated that the radiation from such a big bang should still be around, although very, very much colder. Theories predicted what such radiation would look like and where it could be found. At the same time, in 1964, Penzias and Wilson, who were trying to measure something else, reported having trouble from radiation of the sort described.

With the discovery of this 'background radiation' the big bang theoretical model of the universe began to gain acceptance, and in time became the new orthodoxy. Now the many alternative theoretical models found themselves in the position of being the challengers to the 'given' orthodoxy.

THIS TAKES US to the latter part

A static universe was an unquestioned assumption for centuries

**Problems for
the big bang
theoretical
model were
making
scientists
uneasy**

of this century. The discovery of the 'background radiation' which had seemed to give so much support to the big bang model, was now providing new sets of problems for this theory.

Nothing added up. Perhaps 99% of the universe is absent without leave — no one can find it. Scientists named this stuff 'dark matter' because they can't see it, although they can see its effects, on galaxies, and clusters of galaxies, for example.

Increasingly, particle physicists, studying atoms and sub-atomic particles, were participating in the studies of the cosmos. They spawned a dozen different theoretical models incorporating the behaviour of the early matter in the proposed big bang, from which all present matter was formed.

And yet the 'standard model' of particles of matter and the forces that act on them, is still a model in it's very early stages — bits and pieces have yet to be seen, and other bits, called virtual particles, can't be seen, by definition! Composing electrons and protons are a range of strange creatures named in an almost flippant way. 'Quarks' of different 'flavours', called for instance 'charm', 'up', and 'down' — and then there is the mysterious 'higgs boson' on which all mass depends. The names appear to suggest the scientists are saying 'well, this is what the theories and observations suggest, but...' These subatomic particles began to appear in the theories about the beginnings of the universe. But yet quantum mechanics, a very successful model of the behaviour of subatomic particles, and Einstein's theory of relativity, which had revolutionised our understanding of events on a very large scale, could not be combined. Quantum mechanics uses statistical methods, defining events by probability. But relativity is a 'classical' theory, using methods going back to Newton's time. While in general application in their own fields they held good, if they were both brought in to the problems of cosmology, there arose circumstances in which they contradicted each other.

For instance general relativity

suggested that under the effect of gravity, all the matter in the universe would be reduced to a point infinitely small, a 'singularity', and that all known physical laws would cease to apply. This 'singularity' seemed to be a paradox — a mathematical hoax — and presented a big problem. It is really treading on the toes of quantum mechanics anyway, which deals with things at an atomic level, and which rules out such a possibility.

And perhaps the most important single part of general relativity, gravity, is completely disregarded by quantum mechanics. This is because it is so weak when dealing with sub-atomic particles, as to be negligible. However, in models of the big bang and black holes, whose gravitational effect was so great that even light cannot escape, this is not the case. The search for a quantum mechanics theory of gravity is on, to give a different interpretation of what happens when general relativity equations no longer apply and tend to infinity. And for these reasons, it was becoming necessary to somehow combine quantum mechanics and general relativity.

OTHER PROBLEMS FOR the big bang theoretical models made the scientists uneasy. Why has the universe got so much matter in it? The time scale was wrong — things could not have developed as far as they have in the time suggested. The universe was too uniform. For instance, the temperature is the same throughout the universe, so far as we can tell from things like the background radiation. How could there be the same observable features all round the universe, when big bang models predicted that radiation from one part of the early universe would not be able to traverse it, so as to bring about the uniformity we observe?

The background radiation was remarkably smooth, confounding all predictions. How could such an explosion have given off such a smooth radiation? Experimentation since 1964 had been attempting to find irregularities or 'ripples' in the background

radiation without success. Furthermore, we know that the universe is highly structured, with great walls of galaxies. How could matter have clumped together so quickly, if by some strange event, the explosion was such a smooth one?

Even worse, calculations suggested a tremendous fluke, or series of remarkable coincidences at the beginning of the universe, that must have held for the universe to expand as it had without quickly collapsing in on itself.

Then finally the massively expanding knowledge of our universe was giving a larger and larger figure for the amount of matter which we simply can't find. The end result of all this was that the simple model of an expanding universe started off by a big bang was beginning to spawn a dozen different versions, some with quite arbitrary assumptions yet to be confirmed. It was beginning to look like the period prior to Copernicus, when models trying to explain the movement of the planets became more and more complex and arbitrary.

Even the calculations on which the big bang are based were by no means certain. For instance, measurements of the expansion of the universe are extremely uncertain, giving figures for the age of the universe of anything between eight and twenty billion years. And then, after all, the background radiation might be a product of some intermediate and or local incident which coincidentally produced radiation of the uniformity, temperature and frequency of that observed.

AT THIS TIME a theory studying apparently chaotic events, called chaos theory, developed. One such event studied was a special effect which had been observed in general in nature, an example of which occurs when there is a disturbance of water, such as the splash caused by a stone. Under special circumstances, instead of a chaotic and quite short dispersion of the energy of the splash, one specially shaped wave is formed, which is very stable, and travels

for some distance, retaining its shape and overcoming the local irregularities of the splash, thus smoothing out the original splash into the special characteristics of this wave form.

The mathematics of such a wave shape had now been worked out. The initial conditions of such a rapid and uniform expansion, if applied to the big bang, lay within the range of possibilities still being investigated by scientists. The suggestion that such an event may have happened in the big bang helped solve a number of the problems with which scientists were grappling. It gave predictions for the disturbances or ripples in the background radiation without which galaxies could not have formed, and these lay within the range still not ruled out by experiment.

The remarkable smoothness of the universe, its remarkable balancing act between the point of collapse and the point of chaotic dissipation, its rapid development, could be answered, if there was experimental confirmation of the predictions it gave. It was suggested that our universe was the result of a period of very rapid expansion or 'inflation' which had the sort of properties of the wave caused by the splash.

The first tenuous results of the NASA satellite, Cosmic Background Radiation Explorer (COBE), first launched in 1989 after years of delay, supports the big bang theory by detecting ripples. These are the 'sensational' observations which the newspapers reported earlier this year. They had been collated throughout last year and the results verified over the first three months of this year. Jasper Wall, of the Royal Greenwich Observatory, is quoted in the *New Scientist* as saying: "If COBE hadn't found the fluctuations, we would have had to rethink a lot of our basic theories — including general relativity."

Since Einstein's theory of general relativity is now incorporated into calculations in satellite navigation systems and used routinely as a basis for our general understanding of large-scale events, this would have present-

ed a few headaches!

But more than this, the results provide support for the inflation model, a theory which uses quantum mechanics to predict the behaviour of subatomic particles in this period of inflation, thus combining general relativity with quantum mechanics. Quantum mechanics predicts certain minute fluctuations from which form the necessary ripples, around which the galaxies form.

It has been suggested that in the original chaos of the big bang, there would be regions in this chaos, which due to these minute fluctuations in the fog of primordial matter, would contain particles which reach a value which repelled each other like gravity in reverse. This would cause this region of space to expand at an ever increasing rate, until it eventually cooled enough for the effect to wear off, and what we now see as our universe resulted, still expanding at the near critical rate. In this process an enormous amount of matter is produced, but this particular model does not need any special circumstances to have taken place in the big bang, for our universe to have ended up as it is.

OF COURSE, UNLIKE the newspapers, the scientists (in general) are very cautious — "the data therefore supports the inflation model, though it does not prove it," according to British cosmologist Martin Rees (*New Scientist*). The experiments can now be followed up by instruments on the ground, and a further satellite is planned which is 100 times as sensitive to the radiation frequencies being detected. Until this work is done, the results of the COBE satellite remain open to question. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to understand the excitement of the scientists in finding that they now have a model which gives a coherent explanation of events since the big bang, and which also works towards the combining of quantum mechanics and general relativity — and for which they now have some, at least tenuous, support from experimental evidence!

Finally, the theory gives a figure for the amount of 'dark matter', so-called simply because we can't see it, that should abound in the universe. It is perhaps not surprising that scientists have yet to detect everything that exists in the universe. When it was first noted in the 1930s that the gravitational effect observed was far greater than the estimated amount of mass around on a galactic and intergalactic scale, no-one was desperately concerned — new things were being found all the time, and black holes, for instance, were yet to be postulated, let alone found. Dead stars, black holes, 'cosmic string', there were plenty of possibilities. Recently, calculations have suggested that there may be millions of black holes in every galaxy. Other recent calculations have suggested that specific conditions may allow hydrogen mixed with some heavier elements to solidify, forming enormous invisible ice clouds round galaxies.

Further investigation into the details of the fluctuations in the background radiation may help to fathom this mystery. A popular theory supported by the evidence so far is that the dark matter is composed of weakly interacting massive particles — or WIMPs for short. These are subatomic particles, although relatively big (for a sub-atomic particle that is — don't expect to see one doing a ton down the M1), but they rarely interact with other particles.

It could be suggested that since this dark matter is said to comprise some ninety per cent of the mass of the universe, that this is a prime site for further unexpected discoveries which will throw a different light on all the theories and models that we presently have, perhaps throwing into question some of our fondest held theoretical models, like the big bang and relativity, in the same way as relativity did previously to Newtonian physics. Nevertheless, experiments are beginning, primarily in a salt mine in Britain, to see whether such theoretical particles will actually interact in the specific ways proposed by scientists with existing matter. □

The first tenuous results of COBE support the big bang theory

Book Reviews

Big Boys' Rules: the secret struggle against the IRA

By Mark Urban

Published by Faber and Faber,
1992, at £14.99

Reviewed by John Dolan

BIG BOYS' RULES covers the years 1976 to 1987 in Northern Ireland. It is based upon research plus 60 interviews with ex-army special forces members, senior ex-security forces members, ex-specialist intelligence workers, solicitors, republican activists, constables, soldiers and members of the public who witnessed gunbattles. The author, Mark Urban, now a BBC2 *Newsnight* reporter, himself served in the British army in 1979.

The book highlights many instances of the ruthless behaviour of the British state, notably the SAS. The standard SAS operation, documented again and again in this book, is of an IRA active service unit (ASU) either going to an arms dump or on an operation which the SAS have been tipped off about (usually from an IRA informer — Urban estimates one in 40 IRA members are informers), and being shot without warning.

For example, three unarmed IRA members on a mission to blow up a post office depot in 1978, with no apparent threat to human life, were killed by five SAS men informed of the attack, who fired a total of 111 shots at them. An indication of their behaviour is the fact that one quarter of SAS killings in Northern Ireland have been of people with no paramilitary links.

A COMMON LINK between many of the high-ranking RUC and army officers mentioned in the book is their colonial background — Palestine, Kenya, Malaya, Oman, Cyprus and Borneo were all mentioned in describing their earlier military careers.

Their attitude to their role in Northern Ireland is graphically illustrated. The army's yellow card



guidelines on reasonable force says that "firearms must only be used as a last resort." Yet Urban interviewed an ex-intelligence NCO who told him: "I do not object to this capital punishment or this policy of shooting without warning at armed terrorists."

Another intelligence officer told him: "I can't see why we can't admit that we are shooting these terrorists." The very title of the book comes from the army saying "big boys' games, big boys' rules"; any IRA member caught 'on active service' can expect to be shot.

Coroners' inquests into state killings are shown to be a whitewash. Soldiers and police often lie to the courts to cover up events and protect their informers. For reasons of army and RUC morale and reputation, convictions are highly unlikely.

One striking feature about the IRA members killed is their youth. For example the 'active service unit' ambushed (an army colloquialism for a killing) by the SAS in February 1985 were 16, 20 and 22 years of age. Many of the IRA members referred to in this book were in their late teens or early twenties.

TO MANY WORKERS in Britain, horrified by the methods employed by the IRA, the actions of the army and RUC can be excused in dealing with 'terrorist murderers'. But there are many dangers for the labour movement which even at this stage are clearly exposed by British imperialism's actions in Northern Ireland. MI5's F-Branch, dealing with counter-subversion, has a definition of subversive which includes Liberty (formerly the National Council for Civil Liberties)! The army's (dis)information policy unit was involved in printing fake leaflets and posters to discredit the IRA and loyalist paramilitaries in the 1970s. An ex-senior army officer's justification to Mark Urban for lying to the media and CID about shootings was to prevent the army from "being held ransom to that mythical commodity you call truth."

The army's 'bible' for operations in Northern Ireland is called *Land Operations, Volume Three — counter-revolutionary operations*. The term 'counter-revolutionary' is revealing. Certainly, in the future, the type of actions taken against the IRA documented in this book could be used against

One quarter
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links

those fighting for a socialist society and the overthrow of capitalism in England, Scotland and Wales.

Another incident in the book which will be of interest to CPSA members is when Colin Wallace, who was a government 'dirty tricks' agent in the 1970s, appealed to a civil service board against his dismissal. His appeal was rejected after Ministry of Defence officials had a word with the board.

Of course the armed forces aren't superhuman — some of the tales of incompetence in the book are humorous, like the British army patrol who thought they were witnessing an invasion of Northern Ireland by the Southern army, until they realised they had strayed into the Irish Republic by mistake.

More significantly, the army, RUC and UDR were riven with tensions and jealousy in the 1970s. An ex-army officer says of this time: "Fighting the IRA was about number nine on my list of problems every morning." Informers for one section were being

arrested by another section.

And despite all the state surveillance of the IRA, an organisation of approximately 350 active members, the IRA had an informer in the RUC in 1980, and had tapped the phone calls of senior officers in the late 1970s.

The thinking of the armed forces hierarchy shows through clearly in the book. According to an intelligence officer "it's all a matter of acceptable levels." As well as taking into account the interests of British imperialism itself, there is the fear that killing IRA members creates martyrs and leads to further recruits for them. This strategy is counterposed by those who say, like a sergeant serving in Northern Ireland, "we've all basically got the same idea of how we could end this, but world opinion wouldn't stand for it."

Another SAS sergeant unwittingly shows up the futility of the IRA's campaign of individual terrorism when compared to what a mass movement could achieve in rendering groups like the SAS

helpless: "With its sinister streets and alienated population, Belfast was no place for highly trained special forces operators."

Bearing in mind the subject of this book, conclusive proof of events is impossible to give. But Mark Urban seems to have got a lot of information out of his army interviews to give the clearest picture you are likely to read.

But all of the tactics and technology used by undercover units described in this book have already been revealed at one time or another, and the book has had 15 alterations made from the original draft due to the intervention of the D-Notice Committee. This is the department which can keep the media from publishing and broadcasting known news stories, most recently used during the Gulf war.

Despite this, it chronicles many actions of the state in Northern Ireland, has lots of useful facts and figures, and confirms the ruthless measures many socialists have long known the British state has been employing there.

Poll Tax Rebellion

By Danny Burns

Published by Attack

International, 1992, £4.95

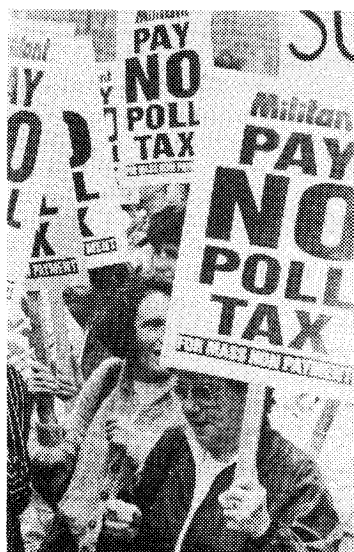
Reviewed by Martin Cock

SINCE MICHAEL HESELTINE'S March 1991 announcement that the poll tax was to be scrapped, two lies have been spread to belittle the anti-poll tax movement.

Lie number one — 'it had nothing to do with non-payment' — started on the day of abolition. Every pundit and every politician — from the Tory 'rebels' to the Liberal victors in the Ribble Valley by-election, to the right-wing Labour leaders who had done so much to attack the anti-poll tax campaign — popped up to claim their central role in beating the tax.

But this lie began to crumble from the day it started. Tory and Labour leaders alike, fearing their discrediting in the eyes of millions of workers who could see the councils and courts straining under the weight of non-payment, were forced to admit that, in the words of John Major, 'the poll tax is uncollectable'.

And so began lie number two. This was a bit more clever and



first appeared in outline in *The Observer*, 24 March 1991: "If the poll tax is dead it was killed by non-payment... it was left to a rag-tag army of ordinary people to destroy a bad law." This was soon refined down to, 'well, OK, non-payment did defeat the poll tax but it just happened and would have happened without the anti-poll tax unions or the involvement of groups like *Militant*'.

It is certainly true to say that non-payment would have happened come what may, mainly due to poverty. But it is ridiculous to argue that the millions of leaflets explaining people's rights, the thousands of demonstrations and meetings, didn't play a decisive role in convincing millions of non-payers that they weren't alone and to hold out right to the end.

Danny Burns, along with others, played an important role in building the anti-poll tax movement in the south west of England. It is a great shame, therefore, that he has written a book, *Poll Tax Rebellion*, which maintains some of the myths around lie number two and adds, for good measure, a third lie — that the city and borough-wide federations were an insignificance, and that the involvement of 'political' people, ie *Militant* supporters, was a hindrance to the movement.

BURNS' BOOK NEATLY divides the anti-poll tax movement into two distinct parts: the whimpers of protest from the Labour leadership and other 'politicians' and the grass-roots based non-payment campaign involving 'ordinary' people.

The one contribution this book

**What was
Militant's role
in the
anti-poll tax
campaign?**

does make is in its first two chapters, where it outlines (albeit in a distorted way) the history of the pathetic protests of the official labour movement — the Stop It Campaign, Labour's 'Poll Tax Protest' and so on.

There is much here which the Labour leaders should not be allowed to forget. For example, Donald Dewar, Labour's Shadow Scottish Secretary, is quoted from September 1988: "This is a party that aspires to be in government... I don't believe such a party can afford selective amnesia when it comes to the law of the land."

But Donald Dewar was only hypothesising about 'selective amnesia'. Danny Burns, in the rest of the book, seems to have been inflicted with a particularly acute case of this handy illness.

The overwhelming theme of the remainder of the book is to contrast "the big difference between those (APTUs) which were run by independent activists and many others... which were dominated or controlled by political groups." (ie *Militant* — MC)

In Burns' amnesia-ridden world, there were two distinct types of anti-poll tax unions. Firstly, there were the 'genuine', 'pure' ones, run by 'ordinary communities' which were models of democracy and mass participation. Then there were the bad ones, run by nasty *Militants* who were obsessed with dominating things and with minutes, matters arising and treasurers' reports. And never the twain shall meet!

He quotes from a number of activists throughout the book to try and uphold this division — probably the most 'damning' came from Edinburgh: "We had one

member who was very officious and wanted everything done right. We couldn't quite see the point. We just wanted to get out there and fight the sheriff officers."

This quote came from Jackie Moyers of Mayfield APTU — what Burns forgets to mention in his rush to tar *Militant* with the 'bureaucrats' brush, is that Jackie is a *Militant* supporter, as is his wife Chris, who between them are the most quoted 'rank-and-file activists' in the book!

WHILE BURNS MANAGES a few begrudging compliments about *Militant* early on ("Of all the Left groupings they had by far the strongest working class base"; "they were the only part of the established labour movement who put forward a strategically coherent policy") they don't stop his obvious hatred of Marxism getting the better of him.

Anything associated with *Militant* supporters is belittled. The People's March Against the Poll Tax was 'elitist'. Dave Nellist, who was the parliamentary spokesperson of the non-payment campaign and became known as the 'anti-poll tax MP', doesn't even merit a mention.

The 200,000-strong March 31 1990 demonstration was "called by the non-payment campaign" — as though the one million leaflets and posters produced by the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation never existed. Indeed, Burns claims that the Federation was 'insignificant' and comes out in support of the Labour leadership's attack on it as a '*Militant* front'. In another fine display of 'selective amnesia' Burns forgets to mention that he stood for national secret-

ary of this 'insignificant' body for two years running!

Burns lays heavy emphasis (40 out of 200 pages) on the Trafalgar Square riot and the demonstration at Brixton prison attacked by the police. Indeed, his book is published by the same company which published *Poll Tax Riot*, which effectively argued that Trafalgar Square was the single most important event in the defeat of the poll tax. (The arguments in this pamphlet are dealt with in *MIR* No.45)

Burns' analysis comes straight from the anarchist tradition of 'spontaneity'. He argues that "most of the successful Anti-Poll Tax Unions operated on a principle of parallel development." Well, my APTU had over 1,000 members and was extremely successful, but we had never heard of this 'principle'!

What it apparently means is that "sometimes strategies which appear to be contradictory can actually reinforce each other". So "the actions of those who are not prepared to break the law were not undermined by (those) who chose to throw fire bombs... the occupations of the courts didn't prevent those who wanted to argue legal technicalities!"

In other words, everyone could do whatever they like 'in the name of the Anti-Poll Tax Union' — so what was the point in discussing tactics, what was the point in the union or in meetings at all? This is basically an argument against democracy in a movement.

Marxism is not a bureaucratic imposition drafted onto the struggles of the working class. Rather, it is a method of utilising past struggles (theory is nothing more than concentrated experience) for current battles.

Militant's role in the poll tax struggle was in this tradition. Our aim is not to stifle the immense hidden initiative and talent of workers in bureaucratic structures. On the contrary, the job of Marxists is to tap initiative and anger and give it coherent direction.

This approach is in contrast to those who argue for 'spontaneity' and 'parallel development'. Directionless struggle is precisely that — it gets you nowhere. Reading Danny Burns' book feels a bit like getting nowhere. It's certainly nothing like a real history of the anti-poll tax movement.

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