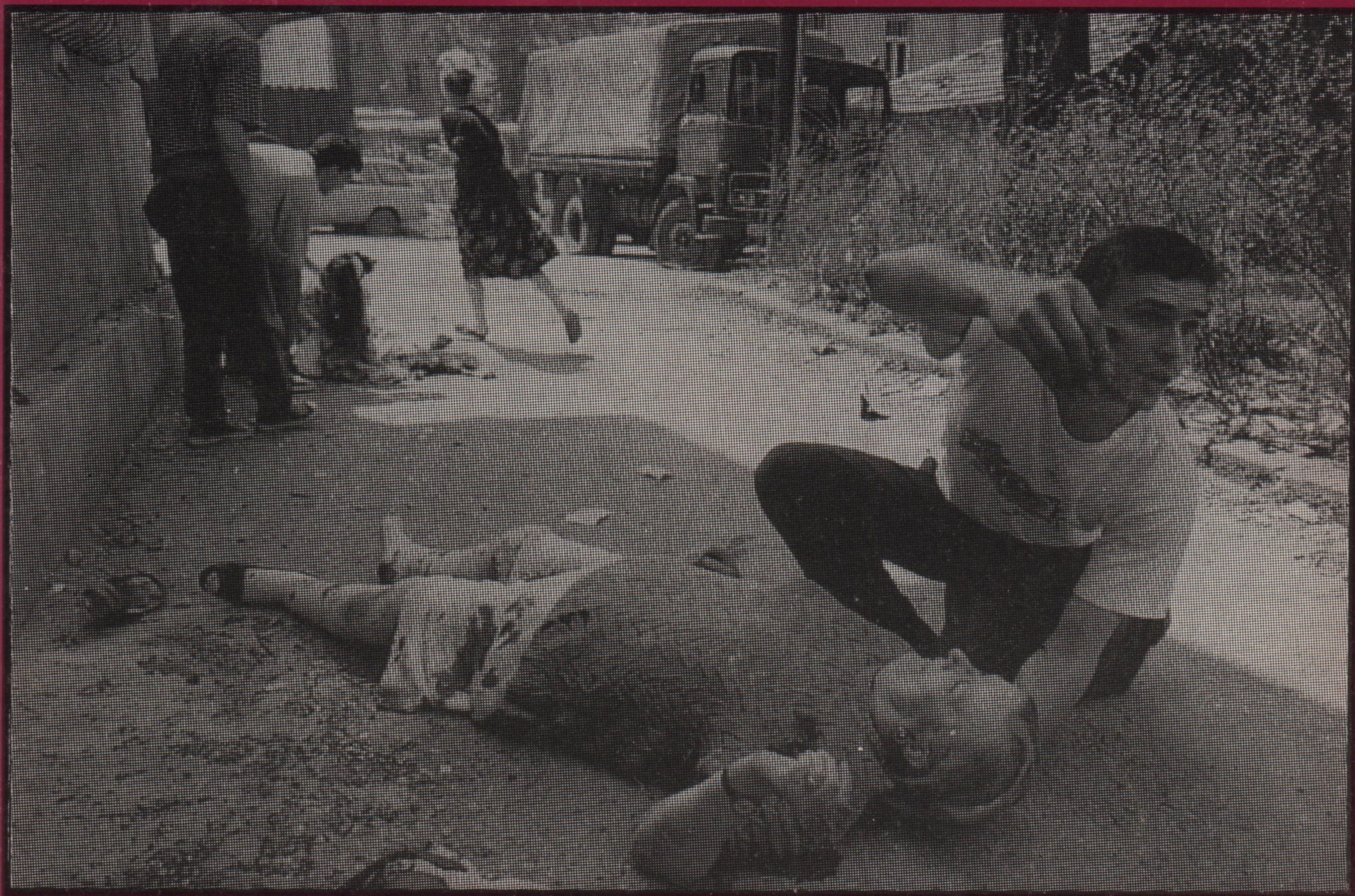


MIR



After the Cold War

Tasks for the unions ●
Monarchy under seige ●
Fighting fascism ●

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After the cold war

This is the most disturbed period in world relations since that which followed the Versailles treaty at the end of World War One.

THE COLLAPSE OF the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has dramatically altered world relations. From 1945 to 1989 the world situation was dominated by the two super-powers of US imperialism and Stalinist Russia. Whilst resting on different and mutually antagonistic social systems, which resulted in intensive competition and clashes mainly in a 'cold' fashion, they nevertheless leaned on one another to bolster their own position. Capitalism used Stalinism as a scarecrow against the threat of revolution. Stalinism, particularly Russian Stalinism, invoked the threat of imperialist invasion to keep in check the movement of the working class. This largely bi-polar world was engulfed in the revolutions of 1989 and the subsequent disintegration of the Stalinist regimes.

Stalinism was the common enemy and the glue that bound world imperialism together.

The Russian revolution, and then following this Stalinism which arose enormously strengthened in the aftermath of World War Two, re-shaped world relations at the cost of undermining the power, incomes and strategic interests of the main imperialist powers. It decisively altered the class balance of forces on a world scale. Without the competition between US imperialism and Stalinist Russia for strategic and other advantages, the colonial bourgeoisie would never have been able to achieve its post-war relative independence. The collapse of Stalinism, together with the effects of the 1980s boom and the seeming triumph of 'the market', has resulted in an increased tendency of the colonial bourgeoisie to abandon this relative independence and become more and more brokers for imperialism.

The collapse of the planned economies was undoubtedly a defeat for the world proletariat. Without in any way diminishing particularly its ideological effects on the workers' movement internationally, this development, however, does not signify a great historic setback on the scale,

for instance, of the triumph of fascism in the inter-war period.

The strength of the working class and its organisations remain largely intact. Capitalism has undoubtedly scored an ideological victory. But with the onset of a world economic slowdown this victory has been short-lived. Ironically the collapse of Stalinism, rather than strengthening world capitalism economically, has had the opposite result. The need to underwrite the unification of Germany led to the huge German budget deficit, which has in turn been a key factor in the currency chaos and the virtual disintegration of the ERM.

Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have collapsed into neo-barbarism with the mass pauperisation of the majority of society. Yugoslavia splinters along national, racial and ethnic lines. A national conflagration, to dwarf all others, looms in the ex-USSR.

This chaos unfolds while capitalist spokesmen wring their hands, impotent to prevent the disintegration of societies promised a dazzling future by returning back to capitalism. The strategists of US imperialism envisaged a 'unipolar' post-Stalinist world with the untrammelled rule of capitalism led by one great power (its own), able to impose 'order' throughout the globe. Instead the most disturbed period in world relations, comparable only to that which followed the Versailles treaty after World War One, has been ushered in.

STALINISM WAS THE common enemy and the glue that bound world imperialism together, acting as a check on inter-imperialist rivalries. There is no one power, like US imperialism in the immediate post-war situation, capable of imposing its will on world capitalism. In 1945, the US accounted for more than half of world industrial output. While still the dominant economic power it now accounts for a quarter of world output, being economically challenged by Japan and Europe.

The 'hardening' of the world into three great trading blocs, a process bemoaned by the strategists of capital, is a polite way of saying that a ferocious inter-imperialist struggle, every much as bitter as in the inter-war period, is under way. The whole of the world is being drawn into either the dollar, the deutschmark, or the yen bloc. And within the blocs there is

a jockeying for position and increasing rivalries.

The contest between the blocs takes the form, at this stage, of gripes, complaints against one another, and occasionally open trade restrictions, as with the recent US 'anti-dumping' measures against foreign steel imports. While shoring up their position in their own 'backyard', each of the blocs seeks to steal a march on its rivals. Japan has sought to consolidate its position in the Pacific Rim, battling for supremacy with the US. Trade between Japan and the six nation states of South East Asia has expanded at a phenomenal rate of 20% each year. Japan's trade in the Asian markets now accounts for 40% of its total trade, with North America 30%.

Five years ago, both regions accounted for 35% of Japan's foreign trade. The fear of being shut out of the American market, indicated by the formation of the North American Free Trade Association, has prompted Japan and its Asian satellites to group together in the 'yen bloc'. Japan is also seeking to use Britain as a backdoor into Europe, with 41% of its total investment in Europe concentrated in Britain.

The new Japanese prime minister, Miyazawa, has proclaimed that "Asia will be the brightest spot over the next century". He perceives this glowing future for the region under the tutelage of Japanese imperialism. The Japanese bourgeois deny any military ambitions. However, the recent controversy over the deployment of the Japanese defence forces, as part of a general strengthening of 'international order', indicates a future potentially powerful military role for a rearmed Japanese imperialism.

The scale of the tension between the US and Japan, under past conditions, would have led at a future stage to war. However the existence of nuclear weapons as well as the class balance of world forces, particularly of the working class in both countries, prevents an armed confrontation between US and Japanese imperialism.

In the post-war period the main doctrine governing the military relationship between imperialism and Stalinism was 'MAD', Mutually Assured Destruction. The same concept, that the nuclear powers can wipe themselves out in the event of war, underpins the main antagonism which now exists between the three capitalist blocs. War is conducted by the capitalists not for its own sake but for markets, raw materials, for political and strategic purposes. The existence of nuclear weapons ensures that in the event of a war mutual destruction would follow. It would also mean the destruction of the productive forces and above all the most important productive force, the working class.

Only if the working class suffers a decisive defeat and military dictatorships in the main capitalist countries ensue could the conditions be created for a nuclear war. Long before this the working class will have many opportunities



Miyazawa, worried by trade war.

to take power. A 'limited nuclear war' is a contradiction in terms and, moreover, would result in mass opposition, uprisings and revolutions. In the 'Third World', however, the position is different. War between unstable and increasingly militarised regimes is not only possible but inevitable.

The future then is one of intensified economic conflict between the US and Japan.

The future then is one of intensified economic conflict between the US and Japan. Europe will be drawn into this vortex, the consequence at a certain stage being a contraction of world trade, economic stagnation and slump.

At the same time, in the vacuum created, the appetites of the lesser imperialist powers have been aroused. Thus the Turkish bourgeoisie, shut out of the EC, seeks to bring the 'lost souls' of the former Ottoman empire under its sway. The Turkic-speaking peoples of the former USSR, largely repelled by the Islamic fundamentalist regimes, are attracted to the 'secular' Muslim state of Turkey, as are the Bosnian Muslims. And as the Gulf war demonstrated, Turkey would not be averse to using Iraq's difficulties to grab territory there.

Compared to the euphoria of three years ago, 'We have won' declared the *Wall Street Journal*, the world bourgeoisie now stands impotent before political and economic developments. 'World growth' seems elusive, with most serious commentators discounting a return to even the rates of growth of the 1980s. Pessimism and deep foreboding prevails: 'trade war has replaced nuclear war as the easy way to international suicide'. And yet, notwithstanding these warnings, the GATT negotiations remain stalemated. While it is not

excluded that some kind of paper deal can be patched up, the OECD's chief economist has recently not ruled out a 1930s style slump. An open trade war could precisely plunge world capitalism from a growth slow-down/recession into slump.

Already it is estimated that 34m will be unemployed in the OECD countries by the end of 1993. This will be 10m more than three years previously. Thus, elements of the 1930s have begun to develop on a world scale, with a permanent stagnating pool of mass unemployment, slow, meagre growth and the features of a long, drawn-out world economic depression. Not a single economic problem - of growth, the elimination of unemployment, the huge gap between rich and poor, the tendency towards protectionism - is capable of being solved by decaying capitalism.

The dream of a new period of capitalist prosperity is ruled out.

The dream of a new period of capitalist prosperity where conflict would be muted or even eliminated is ruled out. In fact the world picture is one of disorder and unbearable economic, social and political tensions.

It is also accompanied by the international phenomenon of weak capitalist governments, plagued by doubts, hesitations and retreats in the face of a hostile and disenchanted population. The Reagan-Thatcher era, of seemingly strong governments able to ride rough-shod over the working class, is consigned to history. Their place has been taken by cardboard cut-outs, feeble imitations - Major, Kohl, Mitterrand and the hapless Bush - besieged by their own populations. The near contempt in which all 'politicians' are held, both in Europe and in America (indicated by the 19% protest vote for Perot in the presidential elections) is the first outward expression of what will become in the future a huge revolutionary wave.

The 1990s will be characterised by a re-awakening of the European proletariat, already underway, but above all by the decisive entry onto the scene of the German, American and Japanese working class.

THE PROMISE OF a capitalist El Dorado in Eastern Europe and the former USSR has turned to ashes. The drop in production in Russia has far outstripped that which took place in America during the 1929-33 crash. There is in fact a combination of 1929-33, a massive drop in production, with elements of Germany 1923, that is, hyper-inflation. The majority of the population have been pauperised.

The countries of Eastern Europe, although not yet having experienced a drop on the scale of Russia, are not far behind. The proletariat is in a stunned and semi-demoralised state. Nevertheless a recoil will take place once the masses perceive that their sufferings are not at all 'temporary' but will become their normal state on the basis of capitalism.

The strikes of the Polish miners and the Kiev arsenal workers are an anticipation of what is likely in the coming period. In the latter case the workers marched on the Ukraine parliament after a 300% hike in prices. The government, afraid that the arms workers could trigger a more general uprising, hastily retreated and doubled the minimum wage.

Profound disillusionment with the consequences of the market, if not completely with the concept of 'the market', has set in. It is those who were first in the queue who express the greatest disenchantment. Thus, a bare 6% of Hungarians - the fat cats who plundered state property - say that conditions have improved since the 'demise of communism': 73% think that the system they now have is completely 'misconceived'.

An even greater disenchantment exists in Poland. The seeming deadlock in society, with a myriad of small parties competing for power, the unbearable social tensions and the resulting weak government, has put the spectre of authoritarianism, of coups, or Bonapartist regimes, onto the agenda.

'Democracy' is not an abstract ideal for the masses. It is perceived as the acquisition of democratic rights, to vote, freedom of assembly, to form trade unions etc, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a better life. And when the results of 'democracy' are the bitter fruits currently being reaped, it is not unexpected that deep despair should set in, leading to the rejection of 'democracy' by a layer of the masses.

Alongside of this is the first signs that the masses' rejection of 'wild capitalism' has taken the form of looking back to some of the 'certainties' of the past. A mood of rejection of the most brutal representatives of renascent capitalism has also emerged. Thus, in Lithuania, which probably went further down the road to the market than any of the states of the former USSR, plummeting production and living standards resulted in the rejection of the bourgeois Sajudis leadership of Landsbergis in favour of the former Communist Party, now re-christened the 'Democratic Labour Party'.

These developments, with similar processes in Bulgaria and Romania, do not indicate a return to Stalinism. The victors promise a more 'humane' progress to 'the market'. They nevertheless anticipate a future class polarisation in all the societies of Eastern Europe and the former USSR. This will ineluctably lead to the creation of separate, class-based parties of the proletariat.

However, it will take a further period of painful experiences before first of all the advanced workers and through them the masses begin to reject the idea of capitalism and the gross inequalities, poverty and unemployment which is its consequence today. In the course of such a movement a new generation will arise, not yet even involved or contemplating political involvement, who will return to the ideas of genuine Marxism, purged of its Stalinist ex-crescence.

Consequently, while the medium and long-term perspective will be for an inevitable resurgence of a regrouped workers' movement, the possibility of military-police dictatorships in Eastern Europe and the states which formerly made up the USSR, should not be excluded.

THE COLLAPSE OF former multi-national states, a little taste of which has been given in the bloody conflagration in Yugoslavia, on a capitalist basis necessarily involves a nightmare scenario for the masses. The processes are indicated by the military picture following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. In 1989 six members adhered to the pact. Following the recent split between the Czech lands and Slovakia, there are now 21 separate armies in the region. Moreover, ancient ethnic and national tensions which lay dormant or were suppressed under Stalinism have been resurrected.

The 'little entente', the pre-war agreement between Romania and Czechoslovakia against Hungary, has once more been floated, this time involving Romania and Slovakia. Hungary, leaning on the Ukraine, is arming to the teeth, with weapons it has bartered with Russia in payment for debts outstanding from the latter. Hungarian minorities exist in both Romania and Slovakia as well as former Yugoslavia. They will be a bone of contention between the new capitalist states which at a certain stage could result in armed clashes.

Indeed, Yugoslavia could merely be a dress rehearsal for a new Balkan war. And the upheavals in Yugoslavia are nothing compared to the looming clashes which could develop in the former USSR. On the fringes of the former Soviet Union war or armed conflicts already affect Georgia, Moldavia, Armenia, Azerbaijan

and Tajikistan.

Enormously weakened economically, Russia still possesses a formidable military machine, whose specific weight within the population is undiminished. The power of the generals was revealed in their virtual public countermanding of Yeltsin's offer to cut down Russia's nuclear arsenal. A total of 36 million people, a quarter of the entire population, live off arms production. Despite recent reductions, Russia will still have an army of 1.5 million and has enough long-range nuclear weapons, 3,000 by the last count, to destroy the planet many times over.

The Ukraine, on the other hand, has 700,000

troops. Even with big reductions promised, the Ukraine has more tanks, armoured vehicles and combat aircraft than any other country in Europe after Russia. The seeds of future conflict, which could result in devastating armed clashes, were shown in the squabble over the Crimea. Economic collapse and with it the threat of an uprising of the discontented masses, means that the fledgling capitalist classes in these states are already edging towards a form of Bonapartism, in the case of Yeltsin of parliamentary Bonapartism.



Yugoslavian refugees flee.

IN THE COLONIAL world, while there is a disparity between regions and between different

countries within the same region, the general picture is of stagnation and even regression, with Africa facing a catastrophe. With economic collapse has come intensified racial, religious and tribal divisions, which in parts of Africa have all but wiped out the very concept of the 'nation'.

The collapse of Stalinism had a more profound effect in the colonial and semi-colonial world than in the advanced industrial countries. The colonial bourgeoisie has increasingly abandoned any pretence to independence with the loss of its ability to manoeuvre between the great powers. Imperialism has undoubtedly been given a freer hand to intervene and subdue the colonial masses by the collapse of Stalinism. Without the support of the former Stalinist states Bush's deployment of such massive military might in the Gulf war would have been extremely difficult.

At the same time, this intervention starkly revealed the severe limitations imposed on even the strongest imperialist power. It showed the



US troops in Somalia.

difficulty of any long-term occupation of decisive areas of the colonial and semi-colonial world. This lesson has been underscored by events in Yugoslavia and will be further demonstrated by the experience of US imperialism in Somalia.

It is above all the class balance of forces, particularly in its own domestic sphere, that conditions the limited character of US imperialism's incursions abroad. The memory of Vietnam still weighs in the national psyche of the American people. Short-term 'police operations' can be tolerated, but only on condition that not too many bodybags come home. This was a factor in preventing the US from completing the Gulf war by occupying the cities of Iraq and overthrowing Saddam. It was one thing to bomb an already retreating army out in the desert. It was another thing to become embroiled in occupying the urban areas of Iraq.

Even in a largely rural environment, Somalia, US imperialism could suffer heavy losses with the inevitable rejection of the Somali workers and peasants of their 'liberators'. Already significant support for Islamic fundamentalism has been witnessed, taking the place, temporarily, of the 'Somali nation'.

It is the fear of Islamic fundamentalism which also explains the limited character of the measures taken against Saddam. Saddam is bad enough. What could follow his forcible overthrow could be even worse as far as the US is concerned. The policy of the US then is to wound but not to kill. Hence the limited 'no fly zones' in the north and south.

The Saddam regime is based on the Sunni minority in the central area around Baghdad.

The majority of the population, 55%, are Shia Muslims, largely concentrated in the south. It is true that the Iran-Iraq war demonstrated that it was the concept of belonging to the Iraqi or Iranian nation which was primary rather than religious allegiances. However, Iranian Shi'ite Islamic fundamentalism still exercises a powerful attractive force for the impoverished Iraqi masses, as it does throughout the whole of the Middle East. Imperialism would prefer a regime other than Saddam's but in the final analysis would tolerate and even support a Saddam-dominated Iraq rather than an Islamic fundamentalist regime.

It is the morbid fear of such a development throughout the Middle East that forms an axis of US im-

perialism's policies in the region. The vacuum which exists, following the collapse of Stalinism, has been partially filled by Islamic fundamentalism. In Algeria, Egypt and Jordan, as well as amongst the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, a big increase for these ideas has been witnessed recently. So rotten is the former alleged 'socialist' regime of the FLN in Algeria that a real possibility of an Islamic fundamentalist regime taking power in the next few years is posed.

The vacuum which exists, following the collapse of Stalinism, has been partially filled by Islamic fundamentalism.

TO THE WORKERS and peasants of the colonial world the regimes of Eastern Europe and the USSR did provide to some extent a 'model' of how to escape from imperialist domination and its attendant poverty and deprivation. They did at least provide the basics of food, shelter, social services etc despite their authoritarian one-party regimes. Their collapse undoubtedly exercised a more disorientating effect ideologically than in the West.

How these events, particularly the collapse of Stalinism, have affected the consciousness of

the masses - of its different layers which draw different conclusions at different stages - how it is viewed in the colonial and semi-colonial world and in the advanced industrial countries, and above all how consciousness will develop in the future, is a key question.

World relations encompasses the class balance of world forces. The collapse of Stalinism does represent an ideological victory for the bourgeois. Taken together with the shift to the right at the tops of the workers' organisations during the 1980s boom, it complicates the working class's ability to draw clear Marxist conclusions. It would be entirely wrong to brush aside the effects on workers' consciousness of these developments. Equally it would be false to also exaggerate their effect. It would leave the most conscious workers unprepared for the sharp, abrupt changes that could develop in the immediate period ahead.

The collapse of Stalinism was most keenly felt in 1989 and 1990, before the onset of the world economic slowdown. It was possible then for the strategists of capital to point to the alleged 'successes' of the market in contrast to the slothful, dislocated Stalinist societies. However, events since then, the economic slowdown of western capitalism and the devastation wreaked by the attempt to return to the market in the ex-Stalinist states, has undermined this offensive.

It is true that the tops of the labour movement and the liberal intelligentsia, under the sway of bourgeois ideas, slavishly worship at the shrine of capitalism. The gist of their argument is that despite all its imperfections capitalism is the only viable system. This is the guiding philosophy not just of the right but also at the present time of the majority of the 'lefts' in the workers' organisations. They are quite unprepared for the sharp turns in economics, social relations and politics which will be the hallmark of the coming decade.

The outlook of the proletariat is, however, entirely different to this layer. In a period of upswing the failure of the planned economies of Eastern Europe and the USSR can be primary, at least in the consciousness of the older layers of the proletariat. The youth, the new layers, as shown by the poll tax struggle in Britain, drew the conclusion that mass movements could overthrow despotic governments. However, even amongst a layer of the youth, the attraction of 'socialism' was dimmed by the collapse of these regimes.

However, ultimately, social conditions determine consciousness. This basic proposition of Marxism is our anchor in the present complicated situation. It is mass unemployment, social deprivation, increasing poverty, which will become primary in the outlook of the proletariat, above all of its new, fresh layers.

The working class can be compelled to go into action in the next period conscious of what it does not want but not clearly comprehending

the alternative. Nevertheless, events would teach the advanced workers, who will seek out the necessary historical precedents to develop the outline of an alternative, even if the organised forces of Marxism, represented in Britain by *Militant*, did not exist.

We should never forget that the basic ideas of socialism existed in a rudimentary form in the proletariat - in the French working class soon after the French revolution, in the English workers summed up in the Chartist movement, and in the socialist sects in Germany - even before Marx or Engels came onto the scene.

Marxism generalised the experience of the proletariat, summing this up in the ideas of scientific socialism. Time and experience, the big events that loom, will be a great teacher of the working class. Without a conscious mass Marxist organisation it will undoubtedly take longer for the proletariat to draw all the necessary conclusions from its experience. It can take a circuitous route. But it is already clear that the pendulum which swung towards the right, primarily at the top of the labour and trade union movement, is already beginning to swing back under the pressure of events in the opposite direction.

The time scale, in the present complicated international situation, is the most difficult to predict. Yet such is the accumulated bitterness of a broad swathe of the population in the advanced industrial countries, stoked up during the 1980s boom, that mass social eruptions on the scale of May 1968, of Portugal and Greece in 1974, and Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, are not only possible but inevitable.

The demise of Stalinism, and of the mass Stalinist parties in western Europe and the colonial and semi-colonial world, has removed an obstacle to the growth of genuine Marxism. The ideas of reformism, which for us are part of the objective situation, can only be overcome by a combination of big events and the work of Marxists within the workers' organisations.

The general conclusion to be drawn from the processes on a world scale is that the future is not one of a revitalised, stabilised epoch of capitalist expansion but an unparalleled period of social upheaval and disturbances. But there is no such thing as a 'final crisis' of capitalism. Without the working class taking power capitalism will always find a way out, albeit on the bones of the working class. Because of the absence of an authoritative Marxist leadership, capitalism's demise will take, as Leon Trotsky pointed out, the form of a drawn-out death agony. However, this will be punctuated by the process of revolution and of counter-revolution. Many opportunities will be presented for linking the ideas of genuine Trotskyism with the mass movement and establishing for the first time since the Russian revolution genuine mass Marxist forces in all countries of the globe. □

International Notes

US Labour

IN DECEMBER, JUST weeks after Clinton's election victory, 200 workers gathered in Detroit for a Cleveland and Detroit area conference of the Labour Party Advocates (LPA) organisation.

The conference had been organised to discuss the issues facing the building of the LPA: the unions relationship to the Democrats, prospects for electoral interventions in 1993 and the historical and international experience of building a working class political organisation.

No speakers had any evidence



US Labor Day demonstration.

of a successful partnership of labour and the Democrats. A rail union leader explained how Edward Kennedy and other Democrat 'friends of labour' had sold them out and warned that the Labour Party Advocates should not become a 'left cover' for labour leaders who would talk about a Labour Party but do nothing about it.

In contradiction to LPA's policy against fielding labour candidates, the session on political action illustrated the success of running candidates. The response towards labour experienced in Vermont, West Virginia

and New Jersey proves what the American Marxist paper *Labour Militant* has argued, that if Labour had run candidates they would have had an enormous impact during November's election.

In Vermont one-term socialist congressman Bernie Sanders was re-elected with almost two-thirds of all votes. James Gibbs, president of Local 2490 of the United Miners Union, and a working miner, explained how the miners through their own experience saw the Democrats collaborating with the owners during the Pittston strike. UMWA local president Jackie Stump won by three-to-one in a write-in ballot, where some illiterate workers had to painstakingly learn to write his name.

In New Jersey, the Communications Workers (CWA) threatened to field candidates against the Democrats as a lever in negotiations. One worker failed to take his name off the ballot in time, did no campaigning whatsoever and discovered a day after the election that he'd come within 200 votes of winning! This is the mood for change that exists today.

Labour Party Advocates still has a policy of not running candidates or having any programme until it reaches 100,000 members. Most likely, therefore, LPA will exist side by side with workers and unions who will be running candidates. Every small test of the mood has loudly echoed the enormous desire for change in the country. Labour, armed with a socialist alternative, must step up to meet this challenge. □

Ireland

TO FORMALLY APPROVE entry into a coalition government with Fianna Fail, a special conference of the Irish

Labour Party was held in January in Dublin. The expulsion in 1989 of leading supporters of *Militant* left a huge vacuum on the left. Only 50 out of the 1,200 present at the conference voted against coalition. Former left Labour TD (MP) Emmet Stagg 'proudly' seconded the motion to coalesce with Fianna Fail.

Former left leader Michael D. Higgins was equally enthusiastic about coalition. He said that the government programme was a great achievement in an era dominated by Reaganism and Thatcherism, criticising those who said that a 'target' of 3,500 house starts wasn't enough to really affect the housing crisis.

From TDs, the Labour Party Administrative Council, senators and councillors, there was no vocal opposition. The former anti-coalition left completely collapsed, being the most uncritical and enthusiastic advocates of coalition.

Why and how could such a craven collapse of the left take place? The reasons go deeper than the lure of the cabinet positions that some of them were offered. Without a clear programme or understanding of what socialism is, many swallowed the propaganda offensive of the capitalists that, because of the collapse of the Stalinist dictatorships, a genuine socialist movement is unviable. They have wrongly concluded that society cannot be changed, that all you can do is adapt it here and there.

But the mood of the people during the election, and the result which was a defeat for all the parties of the right, showed the thirst for radical solutions to the crisis of unemployment, poverty and the evils that flow from them. This is no longer the era of Reagan and Thatcher. □

The Royal Descent

A deep-seated process is gradually undermining the monarchy, argues Dave Cotterill, with important implications for future events.

THE ROYAL FAMILY is beginning to look like a dilapidated Victorian building which stands alone in the middle of a modern industrial estate. Antiques don't come cheap though. To keep them in the style that they are accustomed to they are asking for a new royal yacht. So while workers suffer cuts in wages and living standards, the most pampered family in the world hope to be subsidised by a further £80m of taxpayers' money.

Instead of spending money on Britain's vital infrastructure, the Tories squander money on a crumbling feudal relic. Such obscurities are not lost on the mass of working people. By its very action royalty is undermining its own foundation - reflected in the growing numbers who feel that this institution should be abolished.

For over a century and a half Britain was a dominant world power. During this time the institution of the monarchy was hardly ever questioned and neither were the morals or the values that they supposedly stood for. Right up to the 1960s people would stand for *God Save the Queen* at the end of a cinema film. All classes were drawn around this banner.

Since the end of world war two the situation has reversed. Britain has experienced a dramatic decline in prestige and power, especially through the loss of empire. Paradoxically, the position of the monarchy has not moved in tandem with this economic and social development. If anything, up until the 1980s, the standing of the royals seemed to increase.

It would be a crude caricature of Marxism, however, to equate political developments directly and immediately to underlying economic and social processes. Human consciousness is slow to change and adapt, it lags behind the realities of life. Many, particularly the older generation, have hung on to the old certainties. But in the 1990s the process of dissolution is becoming clear. The old social cement is breaking up.

Commentators of the 1986 wedding of Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson spoke of a closer knit and more British monarchy with two modern-minded young wives 'which would clear away the last dour Germanic remains of the Hanoverian line'. Princess Di and Fergie may have cleared away the dour look but at the same time they have helped to fatally undermine the whole

institution.

World historical trends are in the opposite tradition to feudal remnants. In a world where everyone talks of productivity, competitiveness and technique, the monarchy, House of Lords, aristocracy and class privilege are all outmoded institutions. Who the hell cares about 'received pronunciation' or 'the Queen's English', which is used by a mere 3% of the population. Street credibility is not likely to come through using the slurred allusive nasal whining of the English gentry.

Thatcher's legacy was to try and turn all established institutions upside down. Privatisation was to make everyone accountable to the market. Major followed her with his Citizens' Charter. Neither of these short-sighted individuals has realised the consequences for the monarchy. How can you justify an institution which costs £57m a year and is in no way accountable to parliament or the 'people'? If all the other institutions of the establishment are being turned upside down then there is no reason for the monarchy to remain the same.



The Queen, facing taxing problems.

Social attitudes have undergone a qualitative change - the old ideology is broken down.

A deep-seated process is gradually undermining the monarchy. Social attitudes have undergone

a qualitative change - the old ideology is broken down. Nowadays the 'ideal' nuclear family is in a minority, churches are emptying, the national ideology has been weakened with the idea of Scottish independence, and deference to the law is not the same - testified to by non-payment of the poll tax.

Combined with this is the attitude to the monarchy. Increasingly, and especially as royal scandals unfold, a larger proportion of the population are either agnostic or openly opposed to the continuation of the monarchy. A *Sunday Mirror* poll put this as high as 46%.

The defenders of the faith recognise this sea-change in attitudes, which is why they now talk of modernising the monarchy. In other words, disguise the old order by introducing some thoroughly modern methods - like pop music in the church. Such an approach is inherently contradictory. One of the most successful ploys of the ruling class was to maintain the mystique of royalty.

SINCE THE 1960s the royals have found themselves in a dilemma. Their advisors have pushed them more into the public light to show that they are not out of touch with their subjects. Daily we have been fed a diet of royal pap. Every women's magazine has for decades carried detailed information on the life of the royals and their hangers-on. It has been a gigantic soap opera that has fixated millions - but for how much longer?

Socialists correctly point to the use of the monarchy as a means of distracting people from every day life. Unconsciously, however, the press and media have undermined the very institution that sells their papers. Over-exposure has created more demand for detail and the examination of warts and all has not shown the royals in a very favourable light.

For the middle classes the institution is what they look to not the individual. But monarchy, as Trotsky pointed out, is by its very nature bound up with the personal, so the spectacle of Prince Charles comparing himself to a Tampax does very little for the individual or the institution!

Modern day communications in a cut-throat world of battles over circulation figures, demands that everyone has to keep up with the latest tit-bit of information. Even now parts of the press are prepared to self-censor to try and protect royalty but in the long run it won't work. Not in a world of cable TV, faxes and trans-Atlantic travel.

Years ago any kind of insult to the monarchy, even a perceived one, could result in physical assault by an irate monarchist. Nowadays *Spitting Image* savages the royals and everyone laughs. The defenders of monarchy are increasingly confined to the elderly and the middle classes, especially when the old arguments, that 'the royal family keeps us all together' and so on,

have now fallen to bits. After the events of the last three years it seems that the antics of the younger generation of royals has helped to press the self-destruct button.

Not that the Queen has been blameless. You really have to be removed from reality to be asking

for funds to repair Windsor Castle in the same week that Save the Children Fund is launching a nationwide appeal.

Could we therefore see an end to the monarchy? Most speculation centres around the unlikely succession of Prince Charles, but Labour leaders such as Jack Straw have raised not the abolition of the royals - but reform. Scandinavia is their model - with a 'bicycling monarchy' that exists like any other upper-class family. Already the Queen has agreed to pay tax - the next reform is for all her finances to be made accountable and perhaps an end to the civil list for hangers-on.

But involved in reform of the monarchy are all sorts of other questions. What about the House of Lords or the disestablishment of the Church of England (separating this church from the state) and titles and honours - will they be done away with? Reform will not end the monarchy but it will further weaken the ideology and institution and this could be important in future events.

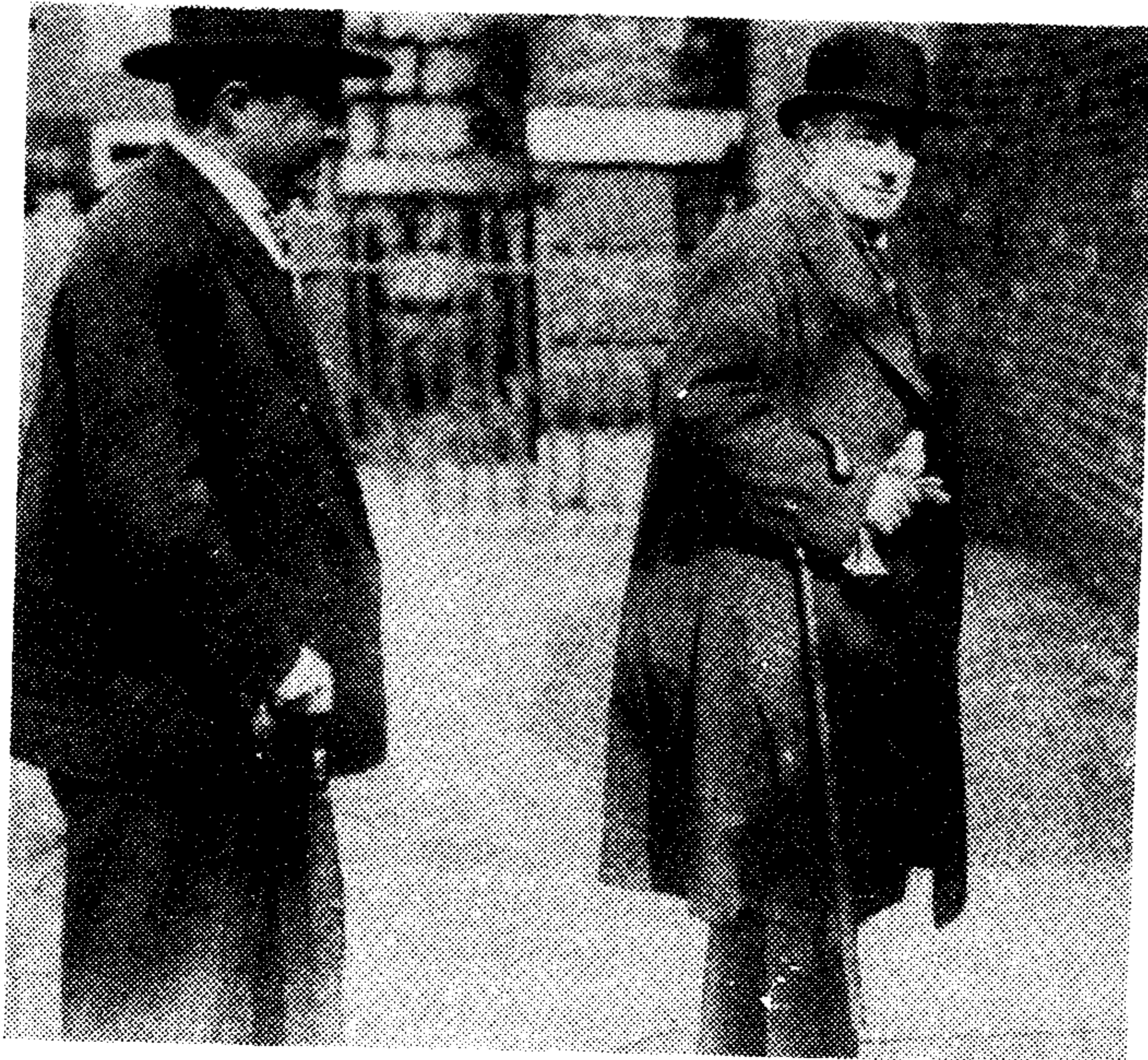
A CRUDE CARICATURE of Marxist ideas is to see economic events as directly and immediately determining social and political developments, whereas the real world is a complex reaction and interaction between all of these elements. Consequently the fossilised institutions of royalty, aristocracy, the House of Lords and the church have a material effect on the development of society. They have had their effect on the outlook on the working class, with the ideology of deference and looking up to the royals.

But consider now if the monarchy was to be used as a reserve constitutional weapon in the future - for example as a means of blocking a left-wing Labour government. How would its authority stand up? Or, for example, if a split takes place in the Tory party, as is entirely possible in the future, how would a royalist faction of right-wing Tories develop if the authority of the monarchy had been badly dented?

Some of its authority could be partially regained, especially if the Queen lives to an old age, Charles abdicates and William becomes successor



Edward & Mrs Simpson.



Baldwin called on George V not to dissolve parliament.

to the crown. But it is hardly likely to return the royals to the good old days.

Many storms have of course been weathered, such as the seven day crisis over the abdication of King Edward VIII in 1936. But at that time the press colluded in hushing up events and thirty years of relative stability, progress and rising living standards were a perfect platform for a young Queen to regain the old authority of the monarchy.

All of that has now gone. Events have turned into their opposite, so the royals have to tread very carefully. Any open support for a right-wing grouping would destroy the so-called impartiality that the monarchy rests on. On the other hand the likelihood is that any right-wing split from the Tory party would ransack the old lumber room for the relics of empire and days when Britain was great.

ENGELS WROTE IN 1844 that "in practice, the power of the crown has been reduced to naught - all struggle against the crown ceased more than a hundred years ago - yet the British constitution cannot exist without the monarchy... Nowhere... is this non-ruling personification worshipped more than in England... the struggle of democracy against the autocracy... is the struggle of the poor against the rich. The democracy towards which England is heading is a social democracy". For Engels the social issues were more relevant to the working class than the pure democratic constitutional issues and only socialism would achieve democratic and social equality.

This was the position taken up by the Marxist movement that developed in the late 1880s. However, the Social Democratic Federation, which often adopted a dogmatic and sectarian approach,

caricatured this position, arguing that it was useless to swap a 'capitalist monarchy for a capitalist republic'. Whilst being nominally correct, this crude analysis was to prove useful to opportunist Labour leaders in the 1920s, who quoted it to justify their lack of any opposition to the monarchy.

Engels' analysis in 1844 was a powerful insight into the workings of Britain's constitution. But by the 1880s the material and social conditions were beginning to change. Britain was advancing on the road of a major imperialist power. Prime ministers such as Gladstone looked to refashion the monarchy — pomp and circumstance were needed to enforce the ideology of the ruling class.

It is from this period that the idea developed of using the monarchy as a powerful reserve weapon

It is from this period that the idea developed of using the monarchy as a powerful reserve weapon, which retains powers even though they are seldom used. An emerging labour and trade union movement formed a powerful challenge to the capitalist class, so it was necessary to create an ideological alternative that would act to overcome class barriers and instead would emphasise a national identity. This the monarchy could fulfil. So whilst *The Times* at the turn of the century could ponder the merits of a republic - because of the cost of the monarchy - the more far-sighted representatives could see the advantages of a constitutional safeguard to block a radicalised working class moving in the direction of socialism.

Thus the monarchy retained the powers to dissolve parliament, to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, and give the royal assent to all parliamentary bills in order for them to become law. These reserve weapons have been used on three occasions in the 20th century - under the banner of a 'constitutional crisis', but in reality reflecting the social and class struggles.

The first occasion was in 1910 when the House of Lords, backed by the King, blocked Lloyd George's Liberal budget which introduced a mild wealth tax, and then took the initiative in pressing for the dissolution of the government. The second occasion was the crisis of the Labour government in 1931. Ramsey Macdonald had been unable to get the Labour cabinet to inflict savage cuts in unemployment benefits. Baldwin, the Tory leader, set to work on King George V, who refused a dissolution of parliament and persuaded Macdonald instead to form a national

government.

Such options have not been discounted under modern day conditions. In 1974, with the defeat of the Tories and the return (as it turned out) of a Labour government, *The Times* raised the possibility of the intervention of the Queen to bring about a Tory-Liberal coalition. Lastly is the example of Australia in 1975 when the Labour government led by Gough Whitlam was brought down by the Australian Governor General acting on the authority of the British monarch.

Britain's unwritten constitution means that in the event of any major political crisis the British monarchy can be wheeled forward with its 'reserve powers'. In addition to her own personal powers the Queen can be supported by the 'Privy Council'. This is an archaic and shadowy body. Few constitutional textbooks give any clear indication of its actual or potential powers. The members are all appointed for life and are subject to no democratic control. In practice, it is a small handful of privy councillors who form the inner circle to secretly advise the Queen. Clearly, in a state of emergency it could become an alternative government.

IN ITS OPPOSITION to the monarchy *Militant* has always emphasised that it is not the Royal Family as such that is important but the issue of who the monarchy represents and its' constitutional reserve powers that would be used to protect the current system. A thousand and one threads bind the Queen to the capitalist class.

This argument still applies with the same force today. However, the muddle that the monarchy find themselves in reveals a deep-seated crisis that will raise the whole issue of whether or not the monarchy is still needed. Republicanism may become a thriving business.

For many on the left it is a source of amazement that the monarchy has been able to survive for so long. Their immediate explanation is that British workers are inherently conservative, and see the royals as a focal point for 'our' national identity.

Leon Trotsky answered this point in his writings on Britain, pointing out that the capitalist class had allowed the restoration of a constitutional monarchy but only on the basis of royalty and the aristocracy adapting themselves to the rule of capital. This conservative but at the same time elastic approach entered not only into the institutions but also into the moral fibre of the ruling class. Thus we had the contradiction of advanced technique combined with feudal relics - something which held back the further development of British capitalism.

All of this was only possible because of the exceptionally favourable conditions which fell to Britain in the 1800s for the development of capitalism on a national basis and then for its further expansion worldwide. "She exploited the

whole world," Trotsky wrote. "This softened the inner contradictions, accumulated conservatism... in the form of the monarchy, House of Lords and the State Church..."

"The British bourgeoisie developed under the protection of ancient institutions, on the one hand adopting itself

to them, and on the other subjecting them to itself, gradually, organically, in an evolutionary way... In this consists what is called the British tradition... it has gradually adapted the old royal and noble to the requirements of the business firm... And it laid down from above upon its proletariat the heavy lid of cultural conservatism".

Thinking in terms of centuries the capitalist class were easily able to draw in the Labour leaders and corrupt them to their way of thinking.

LABOUR SHOULD BE campaigning for the abolition of the monarchy. But only once has the issue been debated at the Labour Party conference - in 1923.

Most Labour leaders have paid lip service to criticism of royalty, but normally end up by saying 'they are just ordinary people - like us'. Even Ken Livingstone, after meeting the Queen Mother, commented that 'I have always thought the Queen was a nice person'. Harold Wilson boasted of his great relationship with the Queen and Neil Kinnock enthused after the royal wedding in 1986 that "that smile (of Fergie) was worth all the rest of it".

It is true that personal attacks on the monarchy are not the means to remove them - but on the other hand they are not a triviality. They are not just a family interested in corgis, hunting, horse-racing and talking to plants. Keir Hardie, the founder of the Independent Labour Party, characterised the royals as 'recipients of outdoor relief' and stated openly that he could 'not see any use for a royal family'.

In an age of mass unemployment, homelessness, inner-city despair and poverty for millions it is obscene that a medieval institution rules over us, squandering money and wallowing in luxury. The riches of the Queen link her directly to the capitalist class, she is the apex of their society. In the age of the computer and micro-chips we have no need for medieval relics. □



Fergie's waxwork in the dustbin at Blackpool.

Tasks for the unions

Decisive action even by a small number of workers, argues Bill Mullins, could in the present situation start off a movement that the TUC would find difficult to control.

A HUGE SEA change has taken place in British society as a result of the pit closure crisis and its aftermath. Large sections of society have taken giant leaps in consciousness to the left. The position of the Tory government has become extremely fragile.

Confirmation of this has recently been given, unexpectedly, by John Baker, chief executive of National Power, one of the two privatised electricity generating monopolies. In leaked confidential papers detailing discussions between the government and the generating companies over coal contracts, Baker is quoted as saying to Michael Heseltine that: "matters had come to an extraordinary point if the government saw itself at risk of losing office, of sacrificing the whole of its energy policy and of intending to restructure several of the energy industries, all because of 10.5 million tonnes of coal". (*The Guardian*, 18 February 1993).

All the pundits, who after the Tories' general election victory declared that the working class had irrevocably accepted the market, were stunned into silence by the mass ranks of the organised working class as they marched last October through the streets of London behind their union banners.

Arthur Scargill became a national hero. The same gutter press that yesterday vilified him, now lauded him for his 'statesmanlike' role in opposing the shutdown of the pits. The superintendent of the South Yorkshire police who arrested Scargill on the Orgreave picket line in 1984, was wheeled out by *The Daily Mirror* to say that he was sorry. *The Sun*, *The Mirror*, *The Mail* and the others, realised that if they didn't reflect the overwhelming anger against the Tories in the pages of their papers, they would lose all authority in the eyes of large numbers of their readers.

The Guardian declared that the events were a 'national uprising' as a small businessman from south east England faxed their letters page calling for a general strike. This gave a glimpse of what Trotsky wrote of in the 1930s, when he said that at certain times it would be the working class that would be seen as the real leader of the nation, looked towards for a lead by the middle class and other layers of society.

Yet we had been told by all the smart alects that the working class was finished. They pointed to the strike figures which by 1990 were at their lowest recorded levels since records began. In contrast, *Militant* drew the conclusion that after disappointment on the electoral field the workers would once again be forced to turn to the industrial field.

But still social commentators, from the comfort of their living rooms, talked about how, as a result of the 1980s boom, two thirds of society were better off - and the bottom dispossessed third didn't count as 'they don't vote anyway'.

It is true that a section of skilled workers saw an increase in their living standards, albeit at the cost of their nerves and muscles as the employers speeded up production. But according to the Low Pay Unit, four out of five workers were actually worse off in 1992 than they were 12 years ago.

The crash of the pound on 'Black Wednesday' was a turning point. With the continuing rise in unemployment, now officially past three million, and the uncertainty for many families over their homes, as six million households have seen the value of their properties plunge, the illusions created by the Tory victory in April were swept away. October saw new layers of workers and youth become involved with the labour movement for the first time in their lives.

BUT IF THE fate of the government was being freely discussed in company boardrooms, how is it that the Tories have survived?

When Norman Willis met a group of Yorkshire miners in Doncaster he was told that "walking round Hyde Park in the rain while the Tories are sat at home in front of the fire, is not enough. We need a strike". But the reaction of the TUC bureaucracy from the very beginning was to dampen down any such dangerous developments.

Millions of workers were waiting for the call for action not just for the miners but also for their own jobs. *Militant* has articulated this urge for unity in action with the slogan of a 24-hour general strike, not as an end in itself but as a means of mobilising millions of workers

in an unstoppable force to bring down the government.

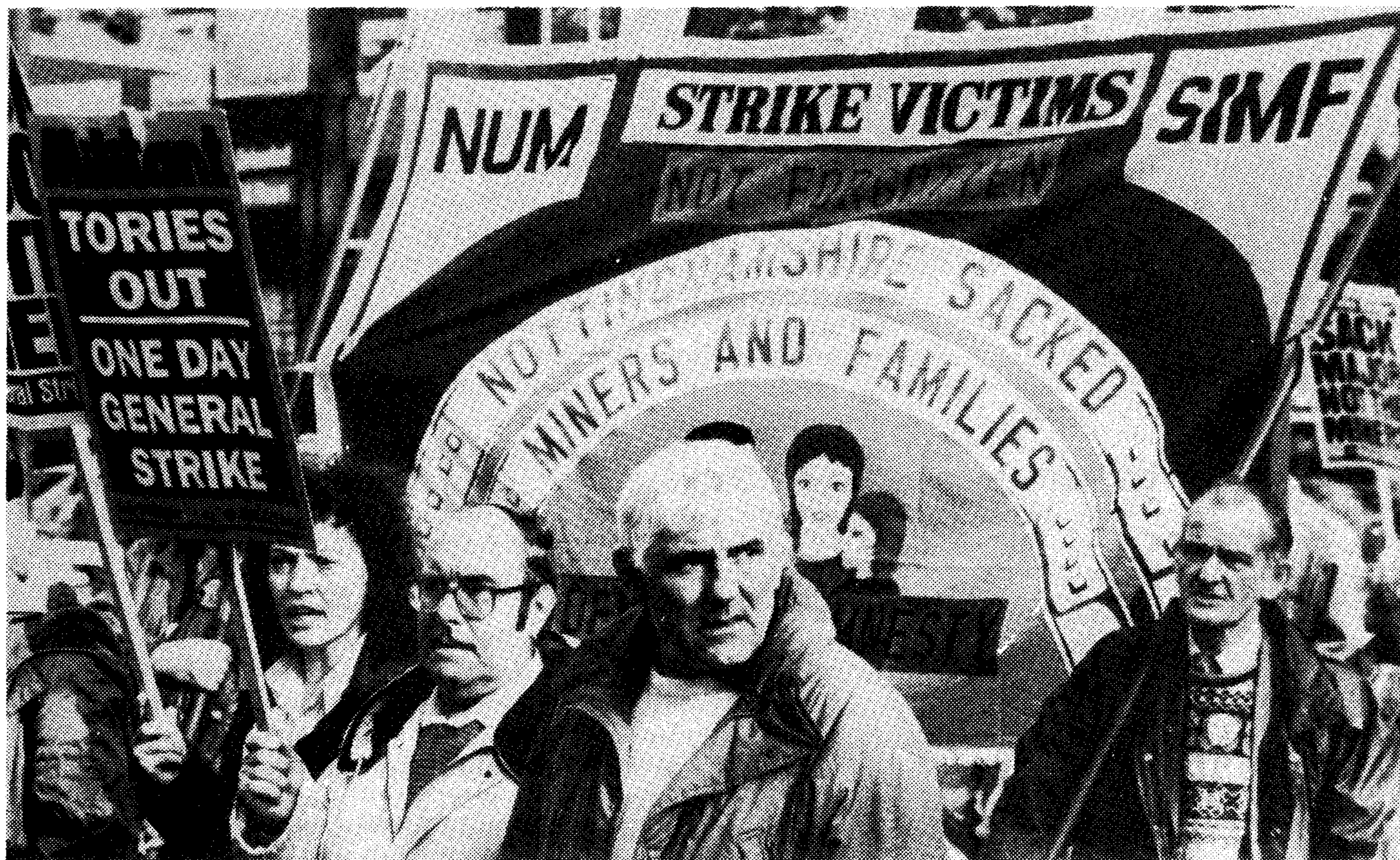
Under pressure the TUC has called a number of days of action. Unfortunately each time a day of action was announced - such as December 9, January 19 or February 18 - it was accompanied with a health warning from the TUC: 'a day of action does not include taking strike action'.

Nonetheless, the pressure on the trade union tops has been enormous. Back in October Derrick Fullick of the train drivers union ASLEF, said on the steps of the TUC's Congress House that "there'll be no more Alamos" in response to the pit closure announcement. By this he meant that the union leaders were not going to take a last-ditch stand in support of the miners. Yet weeks later he was calling on the TUC to organise a series of one-day strikes in the public sector, stating that "we are not doing any service to our members if we carry on marching up and down with banners and banging a drum. We are all under attack and the time has come to co-ordinate action rather than wait for public sector unions to be picked of one

from below on either a local or national level. Like Thatcher before him in relation to the poll tax, Major has made a fundamental error in mistaking the attitude of the labour and trade union leadership as the real position of the working class.

The TUC has vacillated from one day to the next in a desperate attempt to free themselves from the pressure of the movement below. They set up an emergency committee to overlook the pit crisis, which has met on a number of occasions since last October. Then the government announced a maximum 1.5% pay limit for the 5.8 million workers in the public sector, three million of whom are in trade unions. At the same time there was a growing tide of announcements of tens of thousands of local authority workers' job losses, as a result of government cutbacks. This forced the TUC to reconstitute its public services committee. Coupled with the normal general council meetings there was hardly a day went by when members of the TUC were not in session.

All areas of the public sector have come under



by one". (*The Guardian*, 21 November 1992).

A movement from below always sees the union leadership move to the left, in words at least, as they attempt to keep control of the situation. In 1972 the TUC were forced to announce a 24-hour general strike against the jailing of five London dockers. The same could happen again but only on condition that pressure is applied to the union leaders, whilst at the same time union activists prepare for action

attack as the Tories desperately try to bring the budget deficit, now approaching £50bn a year, under control. The Tories are conducting their attack on many fronts simultaneously.

Civil servants face market testing, a prelude to the contracting out of their jobs to the lowest bidder. White collar local authority workers' jobs are subject to compulsory competitive tendering. NHS workers see hospitals closing and the opting out of different parts of the NHS.

The crisis in education is a bomb waiting to explode. Teachers, for so long treated as 'professionals', find themselves at the sharp end of government 'reforms'. These include performance related pay scales and the beginning of the opting out process from local authority control through local management of schools, or LMS. In the nationalised industries privatisation is planned for the railways - dubbed by a Tory critic as a poll tax on wheels - the post office, and even the mines.

The main drive for this is the urgent need for the Tories to cut back on the huge budget deficit. Even the IMF recently 'advised' the government to take 'immediate action'. The Tories' target is one million jobs in the public sector. A mighty battle is pending, but it will depend not just on a willingness to fight back. This is undoubtedly there, as witnessed by the number of local strikes in the public sector. But just as important is the question of leadership.

Activists in the public sector unions, with *Militant* supporters to the fore, have launched a campaign to bring together all these workers under the banner of the public sector alliance. Such is the nature of the political and industrial situation, that decisive action even by a small number of workers could start off a movement that even the TUC would find difficult to control. Inherent within the whole situation in Britain today is the possibility of a 24-hour general strike.

The movement around the miners acted as a lightening conductor for all the pent up rage and anger of millions of the organised working class. Now with the longest economic recession since the 1930s seeming to be giving way to a recovery, albeit weak and uneven, this too will have its effect on the present situation. The workers in Yarrow's shipyard in Glasgow, after being told for the fourth successive year that they had to accept a rise below the level of inflation, looked at an order book full until 1997, and came out on strike. Even a slight improvement in the economy, at least as far as production is concerned, will see this repeated many fold.

A COMPLICATING FACTOR on the industrial front has been the collapse of Stalinism worldwide, which has affected the psychology of a leading layer of mainly older workers.

It has been this layer that has been thrown back the furthest in consciousness by the events of the past decade. This has had an effect to the extent that a certain thread has been broken with the past militant traditions of the shop floor in the big workplaces. This has been illustrated once again in the Leyland Daf crisis.

Major's refusal to intervene in this crisis is indicative of the utter lunacy of a government that represents primarily the interests of the financial establishment, and the City of London

in particular.

The British arm of Leyland Daf, a joint British and Dutch venture, has 26% of the UK market in trucks. Together with its van production, Leyland Daf employs 5,500 in Britain with another 10,000 jobs in the supply industry. It contributes £2bn to the balance of trade, exporting 50% of its production. Even the Dutch government recognised the need to maintain some sort of manufacturing base, putting up £83m for restructuring of the Dutch and Belgium plants.

Never slow to miss a chance Iveco, a joint Ford/Fiat truck-maker, and Mercedes Benz, the leading European lorry producer, took out full page adverts in the British press. Iveco boasted that it was investing £2.5bn for a new range of trucks, pointedly remarking that this was 'private investment'.

The Leyland Daf crisis found the shop floor without a leadership. The convenors and shop stewards threw up their hands and said 'we can do nothing'. In the van factory in Birmingham the situation has been reached where the receivers were able to select out from the workforce who they wanted to make redundant.

Significantly, not one of the 600 workers chosen for redundancy out of a workforce of 2,000, was a shop steward. Only those who were deemed as potential troublemakers were sacked. The overwhelming mood was for an occupation. But the workers found themselves up against the union as well as the receiver.

If an occupation had taken place it would have been a beacon to workers everywhere.

If an occupation had taken place in any of the three Leyland factories in Britain it would have been a beacon to workers in struggle everywhere. Like the occupation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in 1972, it could have mobilised the support of tens of thousands of workers. In fact the response would have gone much further than UCS, such is the charged political and industrial atmosphere that now exists in British society. It could have turned into a regional general strike.

Such developments are inherent in the situation. These future battles will throw up a completely new layer of shop floor leaders with no illusions, prepared to go much further than the older generation, although such will be the pressure of events that also many of the older generation will be brought back into activity. And as that movement develops *Militant* will play a central part in building a leadership prepared to struggle to the end. □

Lessons of the 1970s

John Bulaitis examines the lessons for anti-fascists of the rise and fall of the National Front.

IN JULY 1976, in a council by-election in Lewisham, South London, two fascist candidates won a combined 44% of the vote. The National Front (NF) had recently split in a row over who should be top Führer, and a new formation called the National Party also stood. One united fascist candidate would have probably won the seat - the Labour candidate polled 43%.

In this period NF leader John Tyndall was boasting that his organisation was now the "third main political party in Britain". Indeed the various misfits who stood as fascist candidates were notching up some spectacular electoral successes. At the 1977 Greater London Council elections they polled 120,000 votes - including 20% in Hackney South and 19% in Bethnal Green. This was more than the Liberals and higher than Mosley polled in the 1930s.

They were also organising a series of marches to - as Hitler had put it - "burn into the little man's soul the conviction that although a little worm he is part of a great dragon". Yet by 1979, the "well oiled Nazi machine" the NF leaders boasted about had been reduced to a smouldering wreck. At that year's general election, despite standing nationwide with party political broadcasts, they received a puny 1% of the vote.

It was a fitting touch of irony that one of the major turning points in their fortunes was the battering they received from thousands of anti-fascist demonstrators when they tried to march through that same Lewisham council ward one year later.

AN EXAMINATION OF the rise, struggle against and demise of the NF in the 1970s is useful for those battling against racism and fascism today.

The NF was launched in 1968. Leaders of a number of small Nazi sects came together and agreed to lock up their uniforms, erase their Hitler tapes and present a more 'respectable' image.

Their main tool from the start was racism. Racism is rooted in the history and nature of capitalism itself - a theory to justify the imperialist bondage and looting of whole peoples. Given

Britain's imperial past it is inevitable that some of the racist prejudices of capitalism percolate down into sections of the middle class and more politically backward workers. However, when workers move into action to defend their rights, if correct anti-racist policies are fought for, the conditions are then created for racial differences and prejudices to be overcome. It is not for nothing that the motto of the workers' movement has always been 'unity is strength'. Nonetheless the ruling class will always try to cut across working class struggle by injecting poisonous doses of racism into the social bloodstream.

In 1968 the 'rivers of blood' outbursts by Enoch Powell were a calculated attempt to set back the growing opposition within the labour movement to Wilson's 1964-70 government. Later, in 1972, a massive campaign was launched against Ugandan Asians supposedly 'invading' the country. This was an attempt, this time, to undermine the waves of industrial action that were overwhelming the Heath government and that eventually drove it from office.

The NF gained sustenance from the racist propaganda of the ruling class. They claimed to be recruiting up to 250 members a month in 1973. They polled 16% in a Birmingham by-election and 13% in council elections in Leicester and Blackburn. Beatings and arson attacks against black and asian people reached record levels. But it was under the following Labour government that the NF had its biggest successes already mentioned.

Labour had been elected on a radical programme - "an irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people". At first the mood was 'give them a chance'. Workers caught their breath after the exertions against Heath.

But this was a government of counter-reforms. Unemployment trebled and real living standards fell. IMF sponsored cuts slashed deep incisions into health, education, and housing. A widespread cynicism against the Labour government developed. Yet the trade union tops worked tirelessly to hold back any movement in defence of living standards. They were largely successful for three years.

This was the cue for the ruling class to again play the race card. In April 1976 the gutter press whipped themselves into a frenzy, this time about the 'invasion' of 200 Malawi Asians. Within days two Asian students were knifed to death by racists in East London and another killed in Southall. A hundred racists attacked 12 Asians outside a mosque in Barking.

The National Front became even more confident and gained further support. But now the racist propaganda, attacks and NF activity acted as a 'whip of counter-revolution' and a massive movement started to unfold. Anti-racist and anti-fascist committees sprung into activity and 10,000 marched in Blackburn and Bradford. Southall trades council mobilised 7,000 at three days notice, and a number of large marches took place in East London.

This movement began to be reflected within the Labour Party. At the 1976 party conference a Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) inspired resolution was passed. This called, amongst other demands, for the formation of local labour movement anti-fascist and anti-racist committees, the expulsion of fascists from the trade unions, and Labour councils to ban the fascists from using council property. In November 1976, at the instigation of the LPYS representative on the national executive committee, the Labour Party organised 30,000 on a national march against racism.

A few years earlier the dominant idea in the labour movement had been to ignore the racists. 'Don't give them too much publicity and they will go away'. At the same time Labour ministers gave credence to racist arguments on immigration. Home secretary Roy Jenkins spoke of the need to limit "the ammount of immigration the country can absorb". Bob Mellish, Labour MP for Bermondsey, in a speech cheered on by the Tories, spoke of 'black fascists' and on immigration declared, 'enough is enough'.

Many on the left, in particular the Communist Party which still had a significant influence in the labour movement then, argued for the broadest possible 'alliance' against racism and fascism. They advocated a 'moral crusade' including church leaders, Liberals and, if possible, even Tories.

This ignored the fact that racism breeds on social grievances. Job queues, housing waiting lists and rotting inner cities are all blamed by the racists on black 'immigrants'. Blacks and Asians - who in fact face the worse conditions - are made the scapegoats for the poverty and shortages created by the capitalist system.

In the 1970s the *Militant*-led LPYS were the only official section of the movement who fought for a clear class approach to opposing racism and fascism. They also were the first to take the question up, organising a national campaign and demonstration held in Bradford in 1974.

While not opposed to alliances in concrete action against the fascists with Liberals or even



LPYS contingent at Lewisham, 1977.

Tories (if they could be found), a political alliance with elements who base themselves on capitalism is a fatal mistake. Appeals for 'tolerance' and 'more understanding of cultural differences' do not defend a single job, build new homes or improve the health and education services. Instead the LPYS fought for socialist policies to tackle unemployment and poverty and undermine the basis for racism.

How to respond to the fascist demonstrations?

THROUGHOUT THIS PERIOD the Front organised a series of provocative rallies and parades. The importance of the demonstrations to the fascists is clear from the words of John Tyndall: "I believe our great marches, with drums and banners, have a hypnotic effect on the public and an immense effect in solidifying the allegiance of our followers".

The question was posed of how to respond to the fascist demonstrations. Every time the fascists announced their intention to march *Militant* raised that they should be met with a massive resistance as at Cable Street in 1936. Then Mosley's Brownshirts were routed by 250,000 workers rallying around the slogan, 'They Shall Not Pass'.

Up to 1976 the turnout on the counter-demos to the NF numbered hundreds rather than thousands. They were dominated by the various student 'revolutionary' sects that orbit the outer reaches of the labour movement. The turnout on these earlier demos were insufficient to halt the fascists. Moreover, the sects' approach of failing to differentiate between the state and the fascists led not to stopping the NF marches

but to a series of futile and counterproductive battles with the police.

But from 1976 growing numbers were mobilising. At Wood Green in April 1977, 4,000 people, including large contingents from the black, Jewish and Cypriot communities, attempted to halt 800 fascists. An enormous police operation defended the NF but were unable to protect them from a barrage of eggs, tomatoes, smoke bombs and other more solid objects.

The NF's next national march was to be their denouement at Lewisham. In the run-up to the march the Tory press insisted that they had, 'like anyone else', the democratic 'right to march'. But the role of fascism is to smash all the rights won by the struggle of the working class. Every vestige of democracy would be annihilated. There can be no question of 'free speech' or a platform for fascism.

Lewisham saw an unprecedented police mobilisation including the deployment of paramilitary style equipment, such as riot shields, for the first time in Britain. The local anti-fascist campaign, ALCARAF, dominated by the Communist Party, announced a counter-march. The police promptly banned it from within a mile of the Front. This was accepted without protest by the ALCARAF leaders.

At the end of the counter-march stewards appealed to the demonstrators to go home, or alternatively attend a special church service to pray against racism. The vast majority preferred to put their faith in more practical action. Thousands converged on the New Cross NF assembly point.

The fascists were penned by a massive crowd. The police launched a series of forays to try and clear them a route. Horses charged the section occupied by the LPYS contingent but the demonstration stood its ground, surged through the police lines, and set about dealing with the fascists. The remnants of the NF parade that escaped were set upon by black youth as they reached Lewisham High Street.

THE LEWISHAM EVENTS rocked the ruling class. *Militant* has always warned that the capitalists are prepared to shelve 'democracy' in order to defend their system. In 1973 their main mouthpiece *The Times* had supported the military coup - complete with Nazi techniques of mass murder, torture and concentration camps - against the left wing Allende government in Chile.

Up to Lewisham they were prepared to cultivate the Front as a useful auxiliary tool against the workers' movement in Britain. *The Times* tried to whitewash the NF as a "movement of misguided individuals preoccupied with the decline of the country". They even demanded that the NF be given the 'right to reply' after a hard hitting Labour Party broadcast attacking them as Nazis. Yet soon the capitalist spokespeople were singing a new tune. They were terrified



The Nazi past of Tyndall (right) exposed.

that the NF were provoking a mass counter-movement that they would not be able to control.

When the NF announced they were to march in Manchester the North West region of the TUC called for a mobilisation of 20,000 workers to stop them. Others in the labour movement called for the march to be banned. The Labour government duly invoked the 1936 public order act. This had been introduced in 1936 after the battle of Cable Street. While Mosley was allowed to continue with his marches with police protection, workers' demonstrations and anti-fascist mobilisations in the East End of London were subject to a blanket ban.

Now it had the same affect. NF leader, Martin Webster, was allowed a one-man march surrounded by 2,000 police. Another 5,000 police escorted 500 fascists through Ardwick along a secret pre-arranged route. The whole area was surrounded by police roadblocks who turned back anti-fascists' cars and buses.

But while attempting to place obstacles in the path of the anti-fascist movement, the capitalists also began to undermine the Front itself. Lurid stories about the NF leaders' 'evil, sleazy Nazi' past began appearing in the press. *The Daily Express*, whose racist outbursts against 'immigrants' had aided the growth of the NF, led the chorus.

*The tide had now turned
on the industrial front.*

In addition the Tory leadership made a conscious decision to steal some of their support. Thatcher, aping Enoch Powell's rantings a decade earlier,

spoke of the country being "swamped by people with a different culture."

But it was the organised workers' movement that really tightened the noose around the NF. In the trade unions, the National Union of Railwaymen announced that they would expel fascists (although they later retreated under a barrage from the Tory press) and the GMWU launched a campaign. Striking lorry drivers picketed the garage of Monmouth NF chairman. In the Longbridge car plant 200 workers walked out, forcing management to transfer a fascist worker. In February 1978 thousands of youth led by the LPYS overwhelmed a Young National Front rally in Birmingham.

The tide had now turned on the industrial front. Strikes by firemen, at Grunwicks where workers rallied to support super-exploited Asian workers, at Fords, and the 'winter of discontent' in the public sector, dealt the NF severe body blows. The traditional base for fascism is the petit bourgeois. Hitler mobilised the small shopkeepers, small farmers and others facing bankruptcy and pauperism after the failure of the workers' leaders to provide any answers. But the post-war economic upswing had whittled down these layers.

Therefore, the NF had been forced to base themselves primarily on the more politically backward sections of the working class. This meant their support was very unstable. When the workers' movement re-emerged into activity, many workers and youth who had been duped by the Front's radical demagoguery, had their eyes opened to a force that could really change their conditions.

IT WAS IN the spring of 1978 that the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) held its first mass march and carnival. The ANL was an amorphous broad campaign, involving footballers, pop singers, Liberal politicians as well as Labour and trade union leaders.

Recently the ANL has been relaunched. Its leaders claim that in the 1970s it was the ANL that 'defeated the NF' and 'nipped fascism in the bud'. This is a distortion of the real processes in the 1970s. The ANL undoubtedly captured the imagination of large layers of youth and waged an effective propaganda campaign labelling the NF as Nazis. But its success was really a reflection of the mass movement that had been developing for the previous two years. In fact the 'broad' nature of the ANL - whose leaders were not prepared to do anything to upset their celebrity sponsors - began to act as an obstacle to the mobilisation against the fascists themselves.

Throughout the summer of 1978, one of the main targets of the NF was the Brick Lane area in East London. Bengali workers leaving a local factory were set upon by thugs as they left work. Another incident resulted in the

murder of Altab Ali. The NF attempted to sell papers in the Lane each Sunday.

The community put up a massive resistance. A one-day protest strike mobilised 8,000. There was a mass demonstration of 20,000 and up to 2,000 people occupied the NF sales pitch. The Bengali youth spearheaded a multi-racial self-defence patrol. Support for the community came from all sections of the labour movement. So much so that TUC general secretary Len Murray visited one of the demonstrations and promised the 'TUC would do something in the near future'.

The fascists announced they would march down Brick Lane on the same day as the second big ANL carnival. It would have been entirely possible to mobilise the carnival to halt such a provocation. But the ANL leaders refused, arguing 'don't let the Nazis spoil our day'.

This was the same argument initially put up by the Communist Party leaders when they opposed mobilising against Mosley in Cable Street because they were already organising an anti-fascist demo in Trafalgar Square. They were forced to change under pressure from their rank and file. But the ANL went ahead, mobilising 100,000 anti-fascists to listen to bands while allowing the NF to march without any real challenge.

FOLLOWING THE 1979 election debacle the NF plunged into disarray. In upstairs rooms over East London pubs opposing factions settled their 'differences' with the aid of ammonia canisters. Leadership coups, court injunctions and splits followed.

One of the splinters to emerge from the NF rubble named itself the British National Party. Today the BNP have emerged as the main fascist group in Britain. Their membership remains small. Their leader, the same John Tyndall, looks jealously over the channel at the successes of his European cousins.

But the longest recession since the war, mass unemployment, decaying inner cities and the failure of the Labour leaders to provide any answers, has created a breeding ground for racist sentiments upon which the BNP and other fascist groups can feed.

The fascists have become increasingly bold in their activities, although up to now they have not dared to organise publicised national marches. The opposition to the 'Blood and Honour' concert at Waterloo last September was a serious warning to them. But at the end of January over 500 fascists attempted to attack a 'Troops Out Movement' march. In Tower Hamlets, just before Christmas, they ransacked the local NALGO office. There has been a marked increase in fascist inspired beatings and murder of black and asian people. The massive movements against racism and fascism glimpsed in the 1970s can soon again be on the agenda. □

Towards a Lasting Peace?

*Last year Sinn Fein adopted a new policy document, **Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland**. This, argues Peter Hadden, is a milestone in the shift to the right at the top of Sinn Fein.*

TEN YEARS AGO Sinn Fein appeared to some to be a new radical force. Their doctrine seemed to be one of struggle - victory through the ballot box and the armalite. Their propaganda, at least in the urban areas, was laced with socialist or semi-socialist rhetoric.

At that time *Militant* stood firmly against the illusion held by many, that Sinn Fein's rise heralded a breakthrough in politics. We pointed out that their appeal only to the Catholic community meant that at the very best they could become majority representatives of the minority, but always a minority within the state.

Their reply, that 'victory' would be ultimately achieved not just by politics but by armed struggle, was merely perpetuating another myth. *Militant* has consistently explained over more than two decades that the Provisional IRA's campaign is a dead-end. There is no example in history where individual terrorism has been successful in overthrowing a state.

Rather, the Provisional's methods only give the state the excuse to strengthen itself by introducing draconian legislation and employing brute power on the streets. In Northern Ireland the campaign is doubly doomed because it inevitably alienates and antagonises the majority community, driving them to support the repressive measures introduced to deal

with it.

Without explicitly saying so, Sinn Fein's new document is a tacit admission of this. Nowhere is there even a hint that the armed struggle can succeed. A special section on 'Armed conflict in Ireland' merely states that "armed struggle is recognised by republicans to be an option of last resort when all other avenues to pursue freedom have been attempted and suppressed".

It goes on: "In these circumstances there is an onus on those who proclaim that the armed struggle is counter-productive to advance a credible alternative". This is true, but there is also an onus on those who advocate armed struggle to say what blowing up police stations - and people's homes, attacking town centres and shooting policemen etc - will achieve, and of this there is not a single word in the document.

PAST RELIANCE ON a false strategy has run the organisation against a brick wall and has been replaced by a no less false position - not self-reliance but dependence on outside bodies to come to the rescue and solve the problem. This in turn is based on a completely wrong analysis of what the problem is.

Repeatedly this document asserts that the cause of the ongoing conflict is Britain's

determination to hold onto the North. Certainly it was the British ruling class who created the problem by sowing division in Ireland in order to further their own ends.

But since the opening of trade relations with the South in the 1960s, and with the decline of the Northern economy, the British ruling class have had neither economic, military nor strategic reasons for maintaining partition.

That they are unable to withdraw is because the consequences for them would be worse than the existing situation. When Sinn Fein's document talks of "misleading propaganda about a bloodbath should they leave", and when it states that the rights of Protestants would be guaranteed in a united Ireland, it is flying in the face of reality.

*Sinn Fein
propose a UN
sponsored
conference of all
parties to resolve
the conflict.*

A capitalist united Ireland would be the marriage of two backward and poverty-ridden states and would never be accepted by Protestants who fear,

with some justification, that under the likes of Reynolds, they would end up as a discriminated against minority just as the Catholics were in the Northern state. To move down this road would mean civil war and re-partition.

NOT UNDERSTANDING THIS, Sinn Fein argue that the only problem is Britain's refusal to go: the main conclusion of *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* is that the Dublin government and the SDLP should enlist the support of international powers to persuade them to change their minds.

When they come to deal with the role of the European Community (EC), the United Nations (UN), and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), it is clear that those responsible for drafting this document have been entirely bowled over by the events which took place at the end of the 1980s: the collapse of Stalinism, the long boom of that time, and by the false propaganda put forward by the capitalist powers to describe these events and their significance.

So this document is laced with the terminology of capitalism's most optimistic pundits, phrases such as a "completely new phase of history", the "economic re-structuring of Europe after 1992", and "the political and economic transformation of Europe" etc. All this rings hollow in the present circumstances of depression in Eastern Europe, prolonged recession in the West, and of attacks on living standards, jobs and services and of growing instability throughout.

Sinn Fein propose international pressure to force Britain to withdraw, a UN sponsored conference of all parties in Northern Ireland to resolve the conflict, and oversight by the CSCE and the UN to check abuses of democratic rights etc. When they say that "participation by the United Nations, as guarantor of respect for international law and fundamental human rights could assist discussion to lead



Enniskillen.

to positive action", they show their failure to understand the true role of this and all such capitalist institutions.

The UN does not represent human rights but the interests of the major powers, as was well demonstrated in the Gulf. The current slaughter in Bosnia eloquently refutes the document's claim that the UN has "an indispensable role to play in creating a democratic and peaceful future for the whole of Ireland".

Likewise the CSCE has been formed to allow the major European powers to police Europe. The 'international law' upheld by these institutions is, in the last analysis, a straitjacket to hold in check those who oppose the interests of capitalism.

There is a way forward but it is not to be found in beseeching the major powers to intervene.

SINN FEIN'S NEW doctrine of reliance on outside capitalist powers is an acknowledgement that their old strategy

of building a movement based on the Catholic minority has faltered.

But there is a way forward and it is not to be found in beseeching the major powers to intervene. It is the working class who suffer the effects of the Troubles and the working class who have the power to end them.

In Britain the miners and their supporters have shown the power of mass action. A united mass movement of Catholic and Protestant workers, fighting cuts and poverty, and also combating sectarianism, discrimination and repression, could show a way out.

After two decades of failed solutions there is no point in looking to the existing sectarian and right-wing parties, or to the methods which have failed in the past.

What is needed is a united working class movement fighting for a socialist solution. Instead of looking to the Dublin government it should link with the working class of the South to fight for socialism. And instead of appealing to world capitalism, the working class in the North should look to the working class internationally, seeking their backing and support for the struggle to combat sectarianism and poverty here. □

The politics of the environment

Bill Hopwood examines the social, economic and political issues that are at the base of the environmental crisis.

THE MOUNTING ENVIRONMENTAL crisis consists of many linked changes to the earth and its patterns of life, which interact and react on one another.

Industrial wastes, the burning of fossil fuels, car and truck exhaust, and intensive agriculture, all pollute the atmosphere. Air pollution directly harms life as well as causing acid rain and damaging climate changes. This includes global warming, which threatens a spread of deserts and widespread flooding of coastal areas as the ocean levels rise.

Many Greens argue that saving the planet takes precedence over the struggle for socialism.

Forests are crucial to stable climate and preventing flooding and soil erosion. Called 'the world's lungs', they are crucial to the balance of life, absorbing animals' waste carbon dioxide while releasing oxygen vital to animal life. But much of the industrialised world's forests disappeared in the last 200 years. Most that remain are threatened by acid rain. Half of the original tropical forests have been destroyed.

The environment is not fixed, it is constantly changing. Humanity has altered the world over many centuries. The Mediterranean area has changed with deforestation, the silting up of rivers and the expansion of deserts over two thousand years. North Africa was the main grain growing region of the Roman Empire. Plato, in ancient Greece, complained about the deforestation around Athens. However, the speed and range of change has increased dramatically with the development of capitalism and industrialisation.

The accumulation of quantity has led to a change to quality. The way our world is run is having a dramatic effect on the world we live on. The dramatic changes threaten life. Something must be done. However there is no

agreement on what and how. The pace of change is too fast for many species to genetically adapt. As only humans can consciously change, our choices will effect much of life's survival.

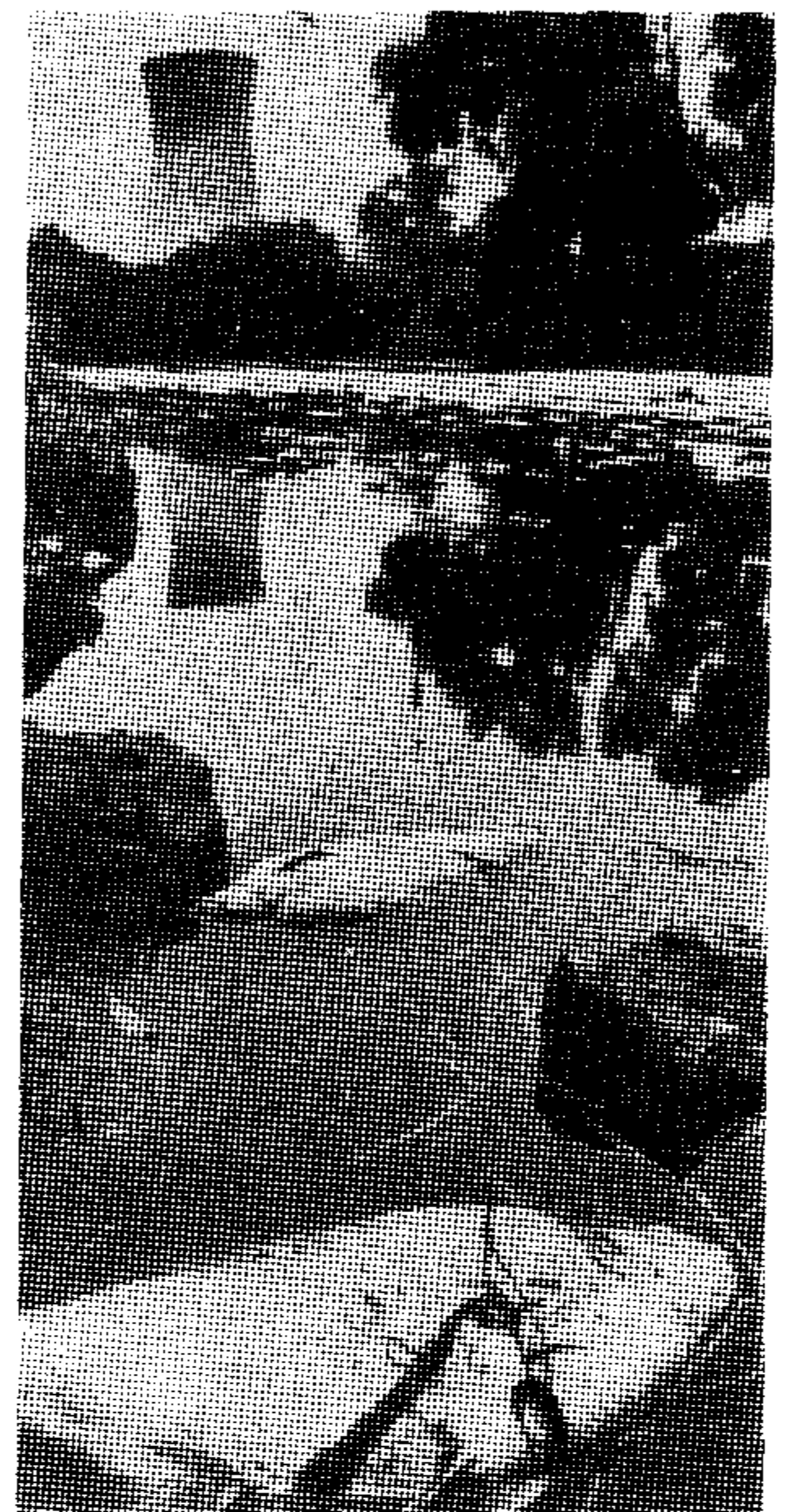
THE ENVIRONMENTAL DILEMMA is more extreme in what is called the third world. Millions of people starve, die of disease and live in grinding poverty. These countries are dominated by the huge multinationals.

Most of the third world is dependent on the sale of raw materials, the price for which has fallen relative to industrialised goods. The dependency on exporting raw materials leads to growing cash crops for export, which destroy the soil while the farm workers starve. Trees are cut for export leading to soil erosion and degradation and floods. Minerals are ripped from the soil polluting rivers, air, and land.

The governments of these countries argue the only way to improve living standards is by increased industrialisation and the development of a modern economy. However, during the boom years of 1950-75 most of them failed to catch up. In fact, the gap between the poor and rich countries has increased.

Many leaders claim there are too many people and that population control is needed to improve living standards and stop the threat to the environment. They suggest various forms of birth control up to and including forced sterilisation. They always point the finger at the poor, demanding that they must stop having children.

Whilst it is true that the earth is finite it is not clear what the ideal population density is. Moreover, population control depends on social conditions. While in many industrialised countries



population is stable, in much of the third world it is still growing. This is due to some improvements in health, which has increased average life expectancy, but the social system still leads to large families. Children in many countries are the only form of social welfare, providing support when parents are sick or old.

The position of women in society has a big influence on birth rates. Education and the at least partial financial independence of women in the industrialised countries have had a big impact on birth rates as women are more able to decide when to have children and how many to have. The only real answer to population growth is to improve economic conditions, with a public welfare system and better education and women's rights.

HOW CAN THE planet be saved? As we live in a capitalist world many of the political and business leaders argue the market offers the best solution.

Environmental improvements can be made under a capitalist system. In the USA lead emissions from car exhausts have been cut as have some waste emissions from industry such as sulphur dioxide and particles. There have been improvements in efficiency of production, for instance between 1973 and 1984 the raw material and energy content of a unit of Japanese production fell 40%. Internationally, between 1971-91, consumption per unit of GDP fell 25% for copper, 40% for iron ore and 50% for tin.

When faced with a serious threat, such as the mounting environmental crisis, the state can take action against individual companies to defend the system as a whole. Some governments have introduced rules governing pollution, such as from cars, or they have set up mechanisms, such as environmental taxes or allowances, to make it more profitable for companies to act in ways beneficial to the environment.

*A Green government based
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would increase them.*

However such schemes ignore the fundamentals of capitalism, which is based on each company trying to increase its profits. It is a system of economic competition and therefore it is incapable of taking an all-round integrated approach to solving problems. Firms often view expenditure on safety and environmental protection as an excessive burden and in the long-run try to find ways around any restrictions,

constantly looking to cut costs.

Already many companies are moving their most polluting factories to areas with less restrictions. The Mexican side of the US border is an environmental disaster. Similarly many polluting Japanese companies have moved to other Asian countries to escape pollution controls. The third world is a dumping ground for hazardous and toxic wastes. The costs of dumping in Africa are one thousandth of those in the West because of the lack of controls.

Also, when profits are being squeezed by recession restrictions are relaxed, as is happening at the moment. There are constant conflicts over which section of society will pay for environmental protection. At the end of the day the extra costs to companies of saving the environment will be passed on to the consumer. The phrase the polluter pays really means the working class pays.

SOME GREENS CLAIM that increased production will eventually so increase pollution and use up resources that human and possibly other life will be destroyed. They argue that saving the planet is the top priority and must take precedence over the struggle for socialism. They put forward economic policies such as nil growth and the redistribution of wealth in favour of poorer countries.

Capitalism needs ever increasing markets and production to survive. A slow down or nil growth for a year or two, such as the present recession, throws the system into crisis. How could capitalism cope with years of no growth? For the poor masses of the underdeveloped world no growth would mean even greater poverty.

During the 1980s production increased in the industrialised countries but the gap between the rich and poor countries widened. GDP fell between the 1960s and the 1980s in Africa by 14%, in the Middle East 10% and Latin America 7%. In 1900 the differential income of the richest to poorest country was 8 to one, in 1967 it was 82 to one and in 1987 it was 130 to one.

How would the present wealth be shared out around the world to end third world poverty? As big business already refuses to cut profits in favour of higher wages or social spending then such a re-division would mean taking from the workers of the industrialised world.

There would be no guarantee that any money would find its way to the poor peasants and workers. All the evidence shows that most of present aid is of no benefit to the masses as most of it is used for big projects and the main benefactors are the ruling elite of the countries receiving the money and the multinational companies.

And how would such a change be carried out? For hundreds of years liberals have urged the capitalists to care, whether about child labour, war or poverty, all to no avail. All the

reforms in the industrialised world have been won by workers organising and struggling.

A policy of make yourself poorer would not mobilise the mass support of workers to force capitalism to change. It is extremely unlikely a Green government would be elected on such a programme and if elected it would still face all the blocks and sabotage of worldwide corporations whose sole interest is profit.

A Green government based on capitalism, rather than solving the world's environmental problems, would increase them, as a lack of growth would increase mass poverty leading to environmental decline and more social disintegration and war. There can be no separation of the struggle to save the planet from the struggle for socialism.

SOMETIMES TECHNOLOGY RATHER than growth is blamed for the environmental crisis. Of course with no technology there would be no problems. However there also would be no society as technology is the foundation of human society.

But anti-technologists don't usually take the argument to its full extent, rather they propose limiting technology. But where to draw the line? The romantic dream of a golden age has a long history. This beautiful past never existed. It is impossible to turn the clock back. We live in a world totally dependent on technology. The question for society is not for or against technology but rather its use and control.

Many of the problems have technical solutions though they are not all being applied. Great savings in energy and raw materials use are possible and some progress has been made in some industries. Much more energy could be saved by increased efficiency and changing wasteful habits. In the early 1980s more electrical energy was used by air conditioning in the USA than the total use in China. Only a third of the energy input in a steam driven electricity generating plant is used. Much of the present waste could be saved or used to heat neighbouring buildings in combined heat and power systems.

Coal is the most plentiful fossil fuel and yet in many industrialised countries it is being replaced by oil and gas as a source of energy. Coal burning can produce many pollutants but with modern methods it can be a clean and efficient fuel. Oil and gas at present rates of use will run out in less than 100 years. There are renewable sources of energy that have hardly been exploited at all. The world is full of energy but capitalism has not invested money in finding ways to use it.

Present production methods and products are often extremely wasteful of raw materials. Scarce resources could be saved by recycling or finding alternatives. Copper, widely used in telecommunications, can be replaced by optic fibres made from glass, for which raw materials are plentiful.

There are 500m automobiles which use one

Possible increased efficiency			
	Model average	Best model	Best prototype
Cars Miles per gallon	18	50	77
Homes Thousand joules per square metre	190	68	11
Refridgerator Kilowatt-hours per day	4	2	1

From *Scientific American*, September 1989

third of the oil produced in the world and large quantities of raw materials. The car is one of the major causes of air pollution. Public transport is a more environmentally efficient means of transport but capitalism does not develop cheap integrated efficient systems.

Food production and distribution is extremely wastefully organised. Millions starve while piles of food are destroyed. Farmers are paid huge subsidies to grow food that is not used while others are paid not to grow food. Intensive agriculture in some regions uses large quantities of chemicals and energy, wastes water and damages the environment, while food production in other regions is extremely backward and unproductive. A planned international food system is technically possible, would eradicate starvation and, stop the destruction of much of the world's forests, freshwater, and topsoil.

It is true that the development of science and technique creates problems. It also solves them. The use of fire was an early technological breakthrough. 'Is fire good or bad?' is a false question. The value of fire depends on its use; burning witches or keeping people warm!

Genetic engineering offers previously undreamed of potential including tackling diseases and producing more efficient strains of plants. It also has the potential of the worst nightmare of manipulating life to increase profit or control human behaviour. It is the same dilemma as fire, who controls the use of technology and for what purpose is it used.

In all societies knowledge is controlled and dominated by the ruling elites' needs and views. Science is not neutral and separate from society. The needs of big business dominate research, development and the use of science. Also the philosophy of the ruling class shapes the views of scientists.

Much of science today is dominated by narrow fields of study. Medicine is dominated by the idea of curing isolated illnesses by a specific technical answer through drugs or surgery. What is needed is an approach based on the inter-connection of different causes and effects. Science needs to take a holistic long term-view, based

on an understanding that all things and processes are interconnected.

CAN WE AFFORD to save the world? At the Earth Summit in Rio, third world countries put forward a target of \$125bn per year help from the West to tackle the environmental problems. The WorldWatch Institution estimated that a ten year programme of \$100-150bn a year would lay the basis for sustainable growth by protecting topsoil, reforestation, raising energy efficiency, resolving third world debt, controlling population and developing renewable energy sources.

The world's rulers spend about one trillion dollars a year on arms, or \$2.7bn a day! This colossal amount of production, money, and human talent would, if redirected, have a dramatic impact on the environment. The world is faced with a combination of interconnected crises but the central issue is how the world is run.

The means of production are in conflict with the social system. The technical means exist to solve many of the problems. If science concentrated its efforts on the unsolved issues many new developments would emerge to tackle them. However at present the control and use of science and technology make the crisis of the environment worse. The social system has to be changed to save the world.

What force can change the way the world is run? There has been a big increase in people's awareness of the threat to the planet. Big business tries to exploit this by putting responsibility for saving the planet onto individuals and in some cases even to boost profits.

There are many campaigns to defend the environment, some of which have gained partial victories and built confidence to fight back. There have also been union campaigns ranging from refusal to transport nuclear waste to demands for safer work practices. These campaigns need to be linked together and given a wider horizon of the social and economic issues that are at the base of the environmental crisis.

The majority of people are workers and poor peasants. They are the most direct sufferers from the destruction of the environment. They work in the polluted atmosphere of industry, live on polluted land, drinking and eating contaminated food. The rich, at least for a time, can escape to the cleaner parts of the globe.

Any solution has to be an international one. Even in the European Community during the boom the national barriers could not be overcome. There have been constant disagreements between the EC countries on tackling environmental issues. The United Nations is unable to resolve any of the world's major conflicts. Only the working class can break down the barriers of the nation state. To tackle the environmental issues requires an international outlook and a change in financial priorities and scientific approach.

It is true that the crisis of the environment has been greater in the former Stalinist states than in the capitalist west. This has been used by the defenders of capitalism to argue against socialism and a planned economy. However the Stalinist states were not socialist. The lack of democracy and the active involvement of the working class in running society lead both to the economic and environmental crisis.

The key to saving the planet is people's control over their lives and production. In the third world and the former Stalinist countries there are no such controls and in these countries the pollution and other problems are greatest. In the industrialised world the working class



Pollution nightmare: children in the Czech lands.

is organised in unions and political parties and through these is able to a limited extent to restrain the most extreme and immediate acts of environmental damage.

Modern society has the technology to destroy life on the planet. On the other hand there is the potential for a life free of hunger, poverty and disease. Technology is the use of human skill and imagination to influence the world around us. However humans are not conquerors of nature; we are not apart from and above nature. The key to human success is to understand nature and to live in harmony with nature.

Capitalism is incapable of such harmony. Its approach is short term: get the highest profits it can now and to hell with the consequences. The world and all life in the world can no longer afford this approach.

People don't cause the problem; in fact, their talents and abilities are the most valuable resource for saving the planet. A world socialist society would release human talent, freeing humanity of the chains of profit, greed, war and oppression, to tackle the many problems of the world. □

Economic Focus

By Pete Watson and David Kaplan

Debt applies the brakes

ECONOMIC UPTURN FOLLOWED by collapse is as natural to capitalism as breathing is to a human being. Workers build up production for the capitalists during a boom only to see it destroyed in a recession.

The engine that powers this trade cycle is profits and profitability. If capitalism cannot get enough return for production then production stops and the economy crashes. Recession ends when the returns are enough for the capitalists to start up production. Employers will seek to drive down workers' wages, bring through redundancies, and speed up productivity, to improve profitability.

An important feature of improving profitability is low interest rates and minimum bad debt. Interest is the section of the unpaid labour of the working class that industrial capitalists have to pay back to the banks for borrowing money. If interest rates and bad debt are low, it will mean more profit available for investment and production. 'Cheap credit' means that bosses are also more likely to borrow to invest.

The present downturn has been continuing now in some countries since mid-1990. One reason for its length is the debt burden that was built up in the 1980s. The OECD *Economic Outlook* No.52, December 1992, deals with this question.

Companies generally took on more debt relative to production in the 1980s, especially in Japan, Britain, Australia and Sweden.

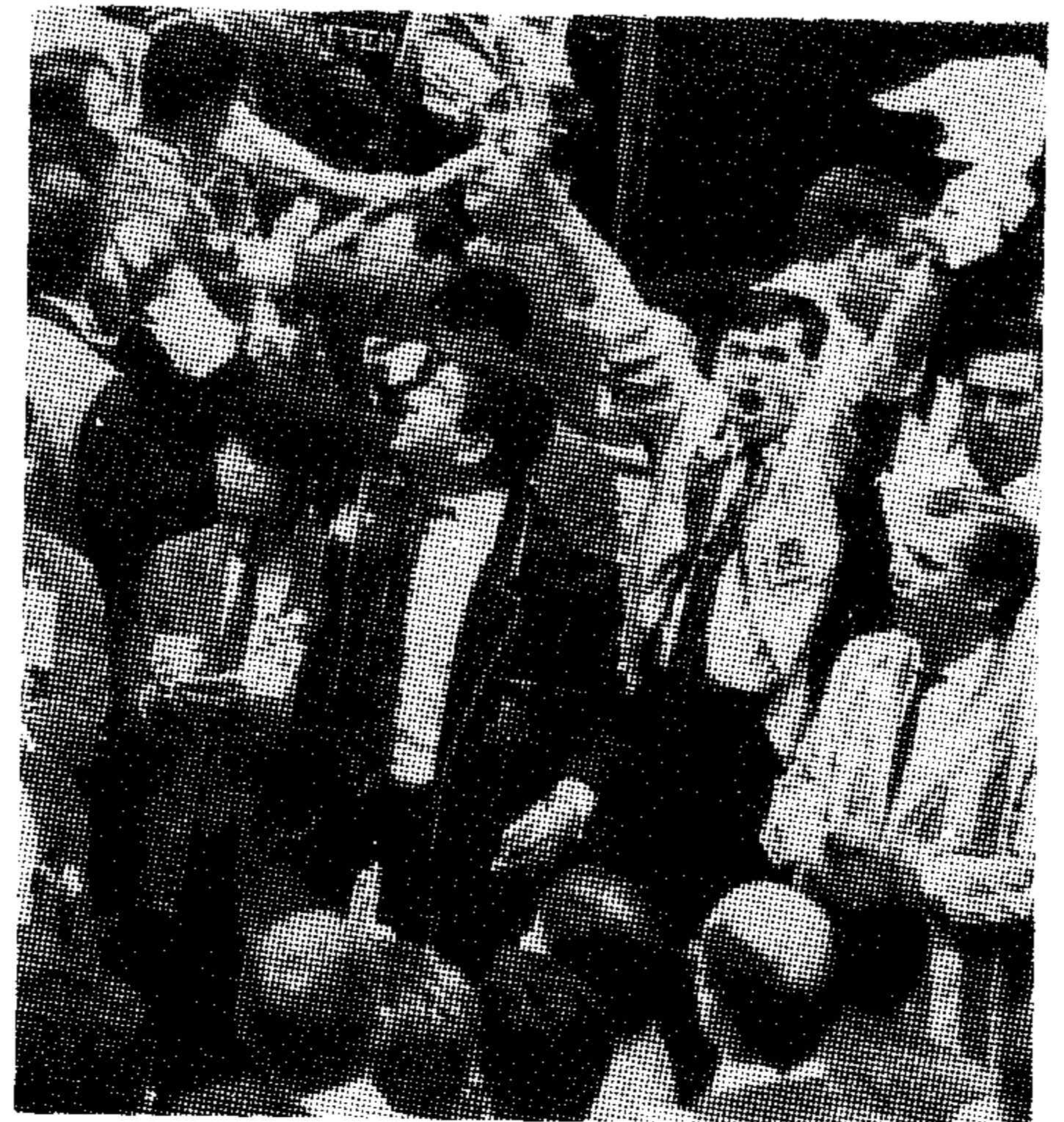
For a while improved sales and profits outpaced debt repayments. By the late 1980s, however, smaller profit margins and higher interest rates pushed debt-payment burdens higher. This burden rose to record levels in the USA, Britain, Australia and matched the previous peak in Canada.

Household sector debt burdens increased during the 1980s to some of the highest levels in at least 20 years. Things were especially bad in Britain. The ratios of both household debt to gross domestic product (GDP) and interest payments to disposable income, doubled during the decade. Households in Australia and Sweden were also sharply affected.

Banks found property speculation very profitable in the 1980s.

ABIG RISE in property and share prices due to easy credit during the 1980s also turned into its opposite. Borrowed funds boosted property prices. With the downturn, property prices crashed and with it went the construction industry. Japan's stock exchange experienced a 60% fall in share prices between 1989 and 1992. Commercial property prices in London fell 45% in the same period.

Falling share and property prices combined with rising debt have also put pressure on the banks. Banks found property speculation very profitable in the 1980s. Its crash in turn has hit them hard. Losses at



commercial banks and savings and loans institutions in the US have caused many bank failures. The situation in Norway, Sweden and Finland was potentially even worse before a large government bail out operation. Japanese banks have had problems. A factor that the OECD report highlights as the cause of this massive debt burden is the relaxation of credit controls and regulations across the world. The international finance markets were allowed to let rip.

The 1980s upturn lasted seven years, from 1983 to 1990. It was however only the years of 1988 to 1990 that saw higher levels of growth and profitability. Debt played a large part in the weak boom years of the 1980s. It now seems that the very length of the 1980s boom in turn has laid the basis for the length of the recession in the early 1990s. The attempts to 'internationalise' finance through reducing government regulation has only helped to create international financial crisis. It is now debt that is a factor in restraining the faltering steps of capitalism towards an upturn. □

IBM in crisis

IBM IS ONE of the world's giant companies, dominating the computer industry. It has a huge \$65bn turnover. Yet last year it sacked 40,000 staff. This year 25,000 are expected to go. A firm once worth \$106bn was at the year's end worth less than \$29bn with \$29bn worth of debt. It is likely to be broken up into smaller companies.

Computer industry growth rates ran at 20% a year during the 1980s, according to the *Financial Times* (7 April 1992). Even capitalist commentators accept that those days won't return.

Recession has hit the industry hard. The world's ten largest information technology suppliers showed a 10% fall in sales in 1991. As James Unruh, chair of Unisys says, "growth has slowed because users are not able to absorb new technology at today's rate of technological change".

Technological change is also attacking IBM. Low cost computers and the standardisation of microchips and operating systems are all leading to an offensive on IBM's monopoly position. □

Health in the US costs

IN A SEEMINGLY radical move, US president Clinton has pledged to guarantee nationwide access to medical care. However, the need to keep down rising health-care costs is the driving force behind the new administration's reform strategy.

From 1970-90, US health-care spending grew at an annual rate of 5.5%, twice as fast as GDP (US 1991/92, OECD). In 1990, per-capita health spending was \$2,566, twice the OECD



Harlem hospital workers demonstrate against bed closures.

average (in Britain it was \$909). The US now spends more than \$800bn a year on medical care.

The share of GDP devoted to health-care spending was 12.1% in 1990 (the OECD average was 7.5%). A substantial part of this bill is footed directly by employers, through insurance premiums for employees. It is therefore a massive drain on the US economy as a whole. The appointment of Hilary Clinton to oversee the plans for a new national health system attests to the seriousness with which the new administration views the imbalance.

Why is the US health bill so high? Part of the reason is the waste that inevitably pervades an unregulated health-care insurance market of 1,500 companies: one-quarter of all costs go on administration. There is little incentive to restrain costs incurred by hospitals: practically any non-experimental procedure is covered under almost all insurance plans, and therefore, once an innovation is shown to be even marginally effective, its market is assured almost regardless of cost. Physicians are predominantly paid on a fee-for-service basis. Any increase in health-care cost is passed directly onto the policy holder through increased premiums.

The voluntary, competitive insurance market is also largely

responsible for gaps in coverage: many employers, especially smaller ones, do not insure their employees because the 'perk' of health-care cover would cut into profit margins. Insurers often require waiting periods before insurance takes effect and disallow coverage for pre-existing conditions (because of increased costs of care). Thirty-five million Americans are not covered by health insurance.

Federal government health expenditure threatens to become the biggest contributor to the budget deficit by the end of the decade, exceeding social security and defence: in 1991, the federal government spent \$104.5bn on Medicare; federal Medicaid state grants were \$52.5bn. Estimates of different proposals to extend coverage to those who do not have it at the moment vary from \$35bn to \$123bn a year.

The increased cost of universal coverage will outstrip reform-programme savings for the next five years, boosting the US budget deficit, and pushing the pledge to extend cover further out of reach. As the *Wall Street Journal* remarked, "creating an effective system... in the US health-care industry is a task on a par with making capitalist economies out of the formerly socialist countries of Eastern Europe" (25 January). □

A Life on the Right

Peter Taaffe reviews The Time of My Life, the autobiography of Denis Healey, for decades a key figure on the Labour right.

DENIS HEALEY HAS occupied a central position within the right-wing of the Labour Party at critical times in its evolution over the last 45 years or so. His admirers claim that he was 'the best Labour prime minister that never was'. Yet his saving grace, viewed historically, is that he never became the Labour leader. If he would have done, given his programme and policies, his reputation would be as tarnished as those of Wilson, Callaghan and Kinnock. In other words, his ideas were never put to the test, except as part of a Labour cabinet, holding influential positions such as defence secretary and chancellor of the exchequer, where he demonstrated an unswerving support for the status quo, that is capitalism.

Although Healey is an intelligent and cultured figure - with an obvious expansive knowledge of classical music, opera and theatre - along with many of his co-thinkers, and the broad swathe of left reformists as well, he has a thinly disguised contempt for theory. Karl Marx is described as 'a great man' and yet Healey extols the virtues of Popperism and proclaims himself an 'eclectic pragmatist'.

On the one side he can declare: "I am a socialist who believes that the Labour Party offers the best hope for Britain's future... I do not believe that I or my colleagues are perfect; nor have I ever believed in the perfectibility of man. But my faith in the moral values which socialism represents, and in those who try to put them into practice, however imperfectly, remains undiminished". (p13)

And yet this 'socialist' can quite happily recount his collaboration with CIA agents, generals, bankers, and seemingly every stripe of opponent of the organised labour movement and working class. His philosophy, which he constantly counterposes to 'impractical' Marxism, he sums up as follows: "And what is socialism, if it is not a crusade?... 'An obstinate will to go down a road by inches to conditions which reduce avoidable suffering'... In my opinion the essential differences in politics concern the priority given to one group of social values rather than another".

This progress 'by inches' is not even on a par with the Fabian doctrine of 'the inevitability of gradualism'. Healey's philosophy is pure liberalism rather than socialism. If it is possible to gradually reform away the worst features of

capitalism, and mankind was to arrive peacefully and painlessly at a classless society, why put forward, as Marxism does, a programme to radically break the economic and political power of capitalism? Because history, not the least Denis Healey's own experience, attests to the fact that not even 'by inches' is it possible, without abrupt changes in the situation, for humankind to advance up the historical ladder of progress.

Indeed, when Healey was chancellor in the Labour government of 1974-79, he received a harsh lesson disproving the very doctrines he enunciates in his book. He introduced for instance a wealth tax, alongside corporation tax, which because of the protests of the City of London - they accused Harold Wilson of being 'a Bolshevik' - was neutered and effectively cancelled out. He actually recounts in this book that under that Labour government not only did the capitalists have the lowest taxes of any of their counterparts in the advanced industrial countries, but that a wealth tax proved to be completely inoperative.

His nostrums for the problems of Britain, as well as his predictions, have been falsified by the development of events. He recommends 'the Swedish Model' for the British Labour Party: "The Labour Party could learn much about a constructive symbiosis between government and the market from the experience of Sweden's Social Democrats, who have earned over half a century of almost uninterrupted power by managing their economy with exceptional efficiency". (p584)

Recent developments in Sweden, however, completely contradict the rosy scenario sketched out by Healey. Consensus has given way to a bitter class conflict as the Swedish ruling class attempt to snatch back the gains of the 'welfare state'. For good measure the author also invokes the example of Japan which is now beginning to suffer the same maladies - slowing down in the rate of growth, contracting investment, a crisis in the financial sector, etc - as the rest of the capitalist world.

The Time of My Life, by Denis Healey,
Penguin, 1990, £6.99.

Available from World Socialist Books, 3/13
Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.
Tel: 081-533-3311.

In a kind of anticipation of the collapse of his 'models' for the future, Healey, like all reformist 'pragmatists', takes refuge in the assertion that it is well-nigh impossible to make 'predictions'. He says, for example, that "in 1907 no-one predicted the First World War or the Bolshevik revolution which grew out of it". This shows that even an intelligent reformist, with more than an average knowledge of history, has a very scanty grasp of the real history of the working class and the labour movement. It was precisely the Marxists internationally who anticipated a world conflagration between the major capitalist imperialist powers.

And Lenin, and above all Trotsky through his theory of the permanent revolution, did precisely 'predict' the Russian revolution. Of course they did not give it the name of 'Bolshevik' either then or subsequently. This was added by the bourgeois calumniators of the revolution who to this day picture it as a 'putsch' and not a genuine expression of the overwhelming majority of the population of Russia seeing the need to overthrow the tsarist autocracy through revolution.

Marxism of course is not in the business of making arithmetical 'predictions'. It is however the science of perspectives, allowing those who are able to apply it skillfully to understand the broad trends within society, which will at a certain stage lead to certain results. Thus we can say that unless British capitalism is replaced by a more sane, harmonious and intelligent means of organising production in society, increased chaos, anarchy, economic collapse and mass pauperisation is inevitable. We can also say with certainty that the British working class will resist ferociously the attempt on the part of the capitalists to thrust them back to the conditions of the past.

Callaghan told Healey privately "he was so disenchanted with the behaviour of the unions that he was contemplating legislation to control them"

THIS BOOK ALSO allows us to understand the social types which dominated the labour movement in the course of the post-war economic boom. For example, when he was head of the Labour Party's international department in the immediate post-1945 period, Healey advertised for a secretary. One of those who applied was Geoffrey Johnson-Smith, but because he was in America he was unable to



Denis Healey, Chancellor in the last Labour government.

attend the selection meeting. Later he became a television star and a Tory MP.

The right-wing of the Labour Party hardly differ in their class background, psychological type and outlook from the tops of the Liberal Party and the so-called 'left-wing' of the Tories. This is why many of them can pass over from the Labour Party, in the case of MacDonald to a national government, or from Labour to Tory as did Reg Prentice, with as little difficulty as a man passing from a smoking to a non-smoking compartment on a train.

Healey also reveals the shameful private feelings and statements of well-known right-wing luminaries of the past. Thus Hugh Dalton, arch right-winger in the Atlee government, revealed that Atlee had offered him the Colonial Office after he had resigned from the Treasury following a budget leak. His response was: "No bloody fear, I told him. A lot of syphilitic niggers. All kicks and no ha'pence. Not me!" This from a leader and a party professional professing 'internationalism' and opposition to racism!

Healey also shows the bitter hostility of Labour leaders, when in power, to the pressure exerted on them by the trade unions. Thus when the opposition to the social contract was building up in the late 1970s, Callaghan told Healey privately "he was so disenchanted with the behaviour of the unions that he was contemplating legislation to control them". As in many other things, Labour's right-wing anticipated the Tories.

In some very interesting chapters on economic policy and in particular his period as chancellor, Healey details his own retreat, and that of other Labour leaders, from the ideas of Keynesian reformism. Another right-wing guru Tony Crosland coined the phrase "the party is over". But it was Healey who translated this into practice with an £8bn cut in government spending in 1976, proportionately the largest cut in public

expenditure in the post-war period.

He denounces the 'punk-monetarism' of Thatcher and the 'crew-cut Keynesianism' of Reagan. Yet it was Denis Healey himself who paved the way for Thatcher and Lawson with their mad policies of monetarism.

Notwithstanding this he gives a very good picture of the changes wrought at the top of the Tory party. In this he shares much of the analysis of *Militant* of the trends at work within the Tories. He points out that Thatcher had hijacked the Conservative Party "from the landowners and given it to the estate agents". He also paints a very graphic picture of the catastrophic falling behind of British capitalism on the basis of Thatcher's policies: "Britain is lagging behind Europe in using computers, Europe behind the US, the US behind Japan. Britain is expected to have a shortage of 50,000 computer technicians in the 1990s, and is hopelessly behind in electronic research and development".

He also very simply but clearly shows the contrast between Japan, where manufacturing has been given a priority, and the decay of US capitalism: "Japan has 1,000 engineers for every hundred lawyers; the US has 1,000 lawyers for every hundred engineers". And yet he professes the belief that socialists "had better learn to live with organised capitalism". This bald phrase would be too much for Labour Party members and therefore Healey dresses it up by declaring "although I prefer the phrase 'market socialism', which is used in Sweden to describe its form of social democracy".

BECAUSE HE WAS at the centre of events in the 1970s and has followed the world economy attentively, although empirically, Healey's account of these developments, of the globalisation of capital, the effects of the 1987 crash etc, are interesting. But he fails to draw the right conclusions from the very diagnosis that he makes. Because he rests firmly in the camp of capitalism, purged of its 'brutality' and 'inefficiency', he naturally is bitterly opposed to those who seek to arm the labour movement with a programme to replace it by a socialist society.

Hence there are many bitter and quite false statements about *Militant* by Healey. He mentions the role of *Militant* supporters within the Labour Party in the campaign for democracy and socialist policies in the early 1980s. Quite falsely, and without any evidence to back up his assertion, he maintains that *Militant* supporters followed



Callaghan, Labour leader (1976)

him around during the deputy leadership contest 'shouting him down'. Many such assertions are made by the bourgeois press, but never proven with facts.

Of the same stripe is his praise of Neil Kinnock: "He started to purge the party of the Trotskyite fungus which had infiltrated some constituencies". This 'purge' has resulted in a catastrophic drop in Labour Party membership and widespread

cynicism amongst the more advanced, politically conscious workers about Labour and above all its leadership. Moreover it did not lead to the result claimed for it in advance, namely, victory in general elections. On the contrary it allowed the Tories to present Labour as divided, and with other factors, laid the basis for the defeats in the 1983, 1987 and 1992 general elections.

In common with the right wing as a whole Healey wishes to distance the Labour Party from its trade union link. He hopes that Labour would introduce the public funding of political parties in order to separate themselves from the 'tainted' but alas necessary wherewithal to keep the Labour Party going - that is, the cash from the trade unions.

There are many other interesting features of this book, from the history of the labour movement in the last 50 years, Healey's own experiences during the war, and in particular his acquaintance with the Socialist parties on the continent. But the central justification for his political activity remains unproven. On the contrary, despite all the efforts in the service, ultimately, of the capitalists in keeping the Labour Party 'safe', reformism has little to show.

All the gains of the post-war period are now under attack as much from 'nice' Major as from Thatcher herself. This shows that it is the crisis of the system, and not this or that individual, which determines the actions of the representatives of capitalism. What is different to the position under Thatcher, however, is that the working class, following the upsurge around the miners, perceives a weakened and divided government. If it uses its power and strength in action, it can force this government to step back.

In the course of this movement the ideas of reformism will also be found to be wanting. Notwithstanding Denis Healey's 'intelligent' but nevertheless bitter denunciations of the left, and particularly Marxism, it will be these ideas that will come to the fore and will lead to a refashioning of the labour movement itself. □

Book Reviews

The Good Old Cause - British Communism, 1920-1991

By Willie Thompson

Published by Pluto Press, 1992, £12-95

Reviewed by David Turner

IN NOVEMBER 1991 the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) voted itself out of existence. Beginning life in 1920, at its peak the CP boasted 55,000 members, two MPs, dozens of councillors and a daily paper. CP members held leading positions in trade unions and working class communities throughout Britain.

The Good Old Cause is a highly condensed version of the CP's history, written by an academic who belonged to the party for thirty years. But revolutionaries looking for a balance sheet of the CP's achievements and an explanation of its failure will be disappointed. The book reeks of the cynicism and defeatism felt by erstwhile 'left wing' intellectuals, now disorientated by the collapse of Stalinism and the move to the right at the tops of the Western labour movement.

can't be found elsewhere, often in better written and more informative books, untainted by Thompson's despairing analysis.

In arguing the alleged futility of trying to build a revolutionary party in Britain, he excuses the conduct of the Labour leaders while damning the working class itself. For example, the Communist International (Comintern) - to which the CP belonged - was born out of the carnage of the first world war and the historic betrayal of the workers' leaders who supported their respective ruling classes. Incredibly, Thompson argues that they could not have done otherwise in the pro-war hysteria of 1914.

Likewise, Thompson excuses the role of the TUC leaders in the 1926 general strike, arguing that the strike never had "any hope of succeeding against a government determined to beat it as a maximum priority and with the resources and public backing to do so".

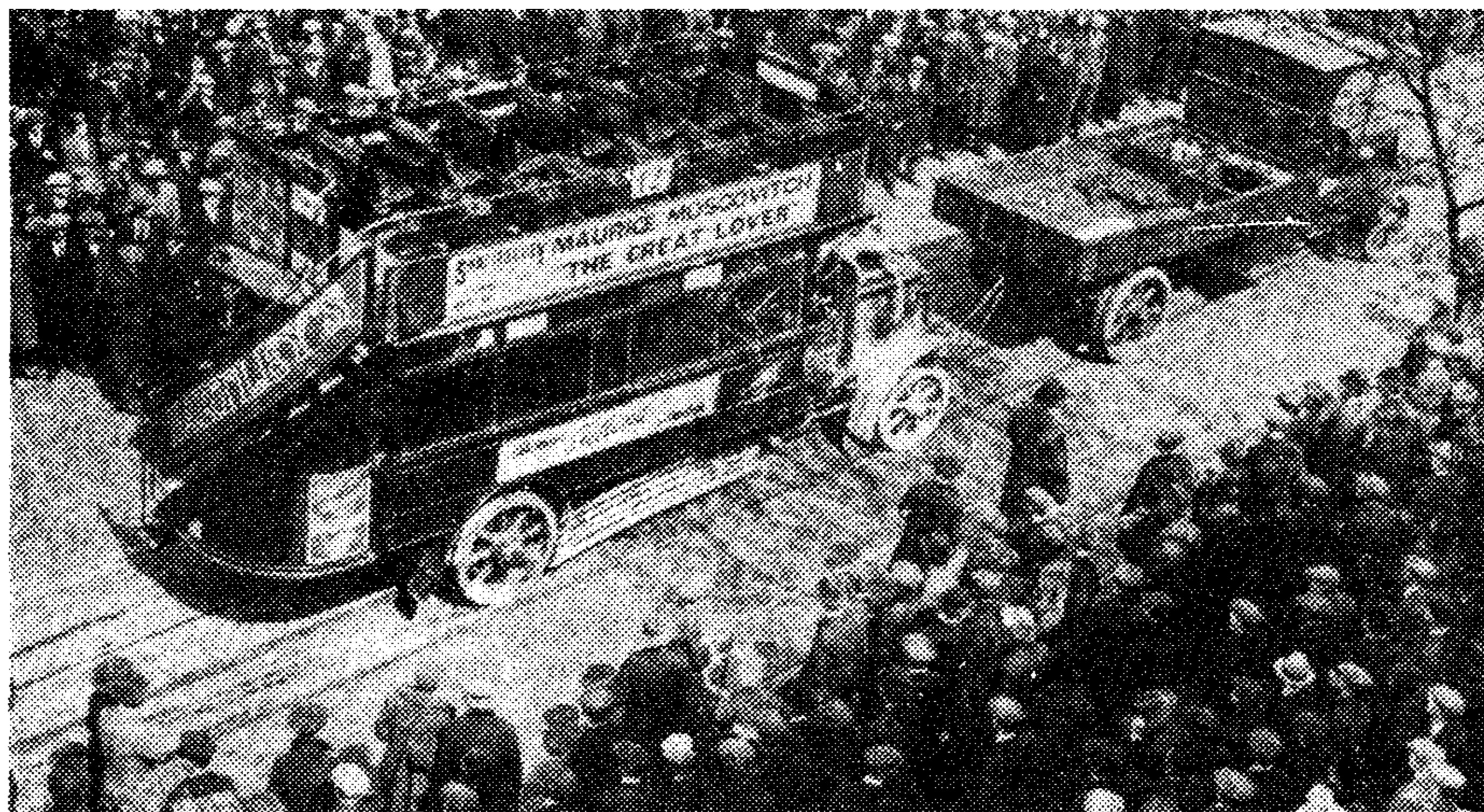
The key to understanding the CP's failure is the fate of the Comintern in the 1920s. As the reactionary bureaucracy headed by

cadres capable of independent critical thought. As such it accepted Stalin's policies rapidly and without question. After an interlude of lunatic ultra-leftism (denouncing the Labour party as 'social-fascist'), the CP in the 1930s embraced the policies of 'Popular Frontism', of collaboration with 'progressive' capitalist parties.

The post-war history of the CP is a tale of inexorable decline. The party's programme, *The British Road To Socialism*, initially drafted with the aid of Stalin himself, became ever more reformist and nationalist, increasingly overlapping with the policies of the Labour lefts.

Following its takeover by Kincockites grouped around *Marxism Today*, the CP disappeared in a blizzard of factions and feuds. Surveying the wreckage, all Thompson can do is despair: Communism was doomed to fail and now there's nothing to stop the "unconstrained military savagery and capitalist rapacity" of the New World Order.

Yet the tragedy of the CP is not that socialism is a hopeless cause, but the betrayal by Stalinism of the historic opportunity that the party represented. We have much to learn from a critical study of the CP's legacy, but Thompson's cynical despairing book is of little value for such a purpose. □



Thompson excuses TUC leaders role in the general strike.

Thompson does provide a summary of the CP's history after 1957, a period until now barely touched by historians of the party. But the period of CP history from which most can be learnt is that before 1957, when the party had its deepest roots in the working class and labour movement. On this, Thompson relates little that

Stalin usurped power in the USSR they foisted on the Comintern policies that put the bureaucracy's interests before those of the world working class.

The CPGB inherited weaknesses of both organisation and theory from the groups that preceded it, and was heavily dependent on Moscow for money and ideas, lacking

Strike Across the Empire - The British seamen's strike of 1925

By Baruch Hirson

and Lorraine Vivian

Published by Clio Publications, 1992, £5-50

Reviewed by Richard Knights

THE 1925 SEAMEN'S strike has been 'hidden' from history. That is, until the painstaking research of Hirson and Vivian, brought together in this short book. Although somewhat drily written, the events recounted speak for themselves.

The strike was a genuine international movement that paralysed the world's most powerful merchant marine - in the teeth of opposition and sabotage from the seamen's own union leadership. It followed a 10% wage cut, offered to the

shipowners by Havelock Wilson, president of the National Sailors and Firemen's Union (NSFU).

The background to the strike was 'Red Friday', July 31, 1925. Then the mine owners, and behind them Baldwin's Tory government, were forced to retreat over plans to cut miners wages. But this was only a tactical retreat, to prepare the ground to fight again. These preparations included securing a firm hold over the merchant fleet, to enable the government to import coal to break a future strike by the miners. And so, a day after 'Red Friday', 140,000 merchant seamen found their wages cut.

On August 2 the strike began in London and rapidly spread to other ports. On 16 August 2,000 seamen marched through Poplar and 35 ships were held up on the Thames! By the end of August however the strike in the UK had begun to collapse. But as ships arrived in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia, seamen refused further duties, immobilising British ships for two to three months.

The strike spread rapidly. In South Africa 1,200 seaman struck with 17 ships idle.

In Australia the strike lasted for 102 days with over 40 ships held in port. In September mass arrests were made, starting with 329 in Melbourne. The local trade union movement held a solidarity march in which the seamen's banner proclaimed 'Prison before slavery - Heros in 1914, slaves in 1925'. They were sentenced to three weeks imprisonment. This was followed by 946 arrests in Sydney. In New Zealand the 86 man crew of the Arawa were jailed for six weeks for being absent without leave. And in South Africa 1,200 seamen struck with 17 ships idle.

The 'strike across the Empire' was eventually broken by the use of 12,000 scabs, some of them foreign seamen. This fuelled racist undertones laid by the refusal of the NSFU to organise foreign seamen in the UK fleet. In the general strike that followed, the NSFU was the only union to openly scab. □

Harold Wilson
By Ben Pimlot
Published by Harper Collins,
1992, £18-50hb

Reviewed by Ken Smith

HAROLD WILSON WAS Labour's longest serving prime minister. He won four elections and was leader of the party for 13 years. Yet since he resigned as prime minister in 1976 he has become one of the most vilified of former party leaders.

A new biography by Ben Pimlot attempts to get under the many myths surrounding Wilson and tries, unsuccessfully in my opinion, to redress the balance in his favour. He also tries to unravel the process by which Wilson became so mistrusted by both right and left in his own party and resigned a broken man.

The biography is a fascinating insight into the struggles in the Labour Party, if only at the leadership level, from 1945 to the defeat of the last Labour government in 1979.

The reason for the contradictory perceptions of Wilson stem from his own political evolution from right to left to right again; often he was capable of shifting positions on an issue within hours. He was seen as untrustworthy, aloof and completely isolated.

The book shows that Wilson was a very clever, ambitious politician who achieved many of his aims. He boasted to his future wife one week after meeting her that he was going to become prime minister. His aims, however, were not socialist ones but were all related to getting to the top and, once there, staying there.

Wilson came from a lower middle-class background and was more affected by radical Liberal politics in his early years than the labour movement. Even in his days at Oxford University in the 1930s when many of his contemporaries - including Denis Healey - were joining the Communist Party, Wilson joined the Liberal society. His evolution into a Labour politician came during the Second World War.

Elected to parliament in 1945 he was a cabinet member within three years. He was seen as a technocrat by many of his colleagues more than a socialist or even Social Democrat.

In 1950 he resigned along with Nye Bevan against Gaitskell's plan as Labour chancellor to impose prescription charges. This marked the beginning of the period in the 1950s where he became heavily involved with the Bevanites, the left wing of the party. Yet by the late 1950s he was in Gaitskell's shadow cabinet as shadow chancellor.

Wilson became leader of the party in 1963 after the sudden death of Gaitskell. He was the centre-left candidate and his years of successful posturing to the left and then the right and middle ground had paid off. When he won the 1964 election he raised great hopes about the new Labour government carrying through the "white heat" of a technological revolution. This was a phrase that was ten times more



Wilson, Labour's longest serving PM.

clever in its appeal than anything Labour leaders have done since. But it was also one that raised expectations which proved impossible to fulfil on the basis of a Labour government staying within the confines of capitalism.

In fact the book shows brilliantly the dilemmas faced by the Labour governments of 1964-70 and 1974-79, where they were continually forced to try and defend the interests of capitalism instead of carrying out a socialist programme of transformation in favour of working-class people.

Overall Pimlot's biography is extremely well written, full of facts, figures and information that does not appear in other books. Although possibly too expensive for many readers at £18-50 for the hardback edition, it would be well worth looking out for when it comes out in paperback. □

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