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Islamic fundamentalism

Fighting racist attacks ●

Strikes in Ukraine ●

The world economy ●

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*What does Islamic fundamentalism represent? Can it provide a way out for the masses of the Middle East, north Africa and elsewhere? **Nick Wrack** looks at its implications for the struggle for socialism.*

WITH THE COLLAPSE of Stalinism in the former-USSR, and the removal of the threat of Soviet-backed regimes coming to power in the colonial and ex-colonial world, Islamic fundamentalism has replaced 'communism' in the demonology of imperialism. The imperialist powers are terrified at the prospect of potentially hostile fundamentalist regimes coming to power in the Middle East or north Africa which may be forced by the pressure of the working class and poor peasantry to take action against their economic interests.

Islamic fundamentalism is a growing trend throughout this key strategic and economic region for the advanced capitalist countries. From the challenge of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria and the bombing campaign of Gama'a al-Islamiya in Egypt, to the increasing support for militant Islamic groups in Lebanon and the Israeli-occupied territories, imperialism and the governments of the area are facing a rising tide of opposition expressed in the language of Islam. The US decision to intervene in Somalia was partly motivated by the fear that, as the country

disintegrated, Islamic fundamentalism could provide a rallying point for the population. Situated opposite the Arabian peninsula, an Islamic regime in Somalia could pose a direct threat to the interests of imperialism.

Ironically, the intervention of the US and the UN has served to strengthen the fundamentalists. General Aidid, whose standing has been greatly enhanced by the UN attacks on him, is increasingly using Islamic rhetoric to bolster his position. Rallies in south Mogadishu have become radically Islamic, with imams from the fundamentalist Ittihad movement urging jihad, or holy war, against the US.

A similar effect can be seen in Lebanon. The barrage of missiles fired by Israel in July on the Shi'a Muslim south, forcing 400,000 refugees to flee, will drive many recruits into the ranks of Hezbollah.

It is not surprising that the radical anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Islamic preachers finds receptive ears, whether in the Palestinian camps or in the slums of Cairo. The idea that the US, and the West in general, is at war with Islam is confirmed in their eyes by the Gulf war and the continued sanctions against Iraq. They compare the recent bombing of Baghdad with the reluctance to defend Muslims in Bosnia. They see the massive aid given to Israel and the fact that after twenty months of peace talks there is still no sign of an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza or the West Bank.

The rulers of the Arab countries are condemned for their capitulation to imperialism. Rulers like Mubarak of Egypt are rightly seen as pliant tools in the hands of US imperialism. Egypt receives \$2bn per year in aid from the US - only Israel receives more - ensuring its complicity in imperialist aggression like the Gulf war.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is a consequence of the horrendous living conditions facing the overwhelming mass of the populations, due to the exploitation by imperialism and the inability of the weak national rulers to develop the economy, combined with the absence at the moment of any alternative movements which appear capable of leading a struggle for change.

The 1980s economic boom in the advanced capitalist countries was in large part due to their intensified exploitation of the colonial and ex-colonial world. Through their domination of world trade the imperialist powers forced down the price of raw materials exported by these countries, including the price of oil, thus depriving them of essential revenue. When these countries turned to the IMF and the World Bank, loans were only granted on the basis of severe austerity measures.

The economic recession at the end of the 1980s exacerbated the problems for the colonial countries, as imperialism tightened its squeeze. The collapse of Stalinism has given much freer rein to imperialism, removing any limited room for diplomatic and economic manoeuvre which the colonial countries

had before.

The collapse of the planned economy has also had an effect on the consciousness of the masses in the region. While the fundamental strength of the working class internationally remains intact, the apparent failure of 'socialism' has served to confuse many workers and youth and led them to look for other solutions.

ANY ATTEMPT TO seek an explanation for the growing support for the various forms of Islamic fundamentalism in the religion of Islam itself would be futile. Such an explanation will only be found in the social and economic conditions of the area. It reflects the desperate searching on the part of the oppressed masses for a way out of the seemingly eternal hell of poverty, hunger, unemployment and disease.

Marx described religion as "the sigh of the oppressed". Lenin explained that "the deepest root of religion today is the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in the face of the blind forces of capitalism". In the absence of any worldly salvation many seek solace in religion. When the religious leaders include in their sermons attacks on the ruling elites and urge a struggle against them, even when this is couched in religious phraseology, it seems to echo the thoughts of the oppressed masses themselves.

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different ways according
to class interests.*

In calling for a return to the pure 'fundamentals' of Islam they argue for a purging of all Western, alien or non-Islamic influences which have corrupted the culture and led society astray. Thus, their religious fundamentalism is mixed up with a radical anti-imperialism, to which the oppressed masses bring their own interpretation.

Common to all the fundamentalist organisations is the aim of establishing a completely Islamic theocracy or religious state in which the Sharia, or Islamic law, would be enforced. As in Iran this would include the enforced Islamic dress code such as the wearing of the veil for women, and the segregation of the sexes in education and other institutions. Marxists are completely opposed to any attempts to subject people to religious laws against their wishes. While defending the right of everyone to practice the religion of their choice Marxists stand for the complete separation of church and state.

Islam itself is not intrinsically any more radical or reactionary than other religions. The social content and outlook of any religion will be deter-

mined and altered by the changing conditions of society. Like all religions the teachings of Islam can be interpreted in different ways according to the class interests of those who seek to utilise it.

While the development of Islam and its teachings, and the split into the different branches of Sunni, Shi'a and others, is not completely irrelevant to an explanation of Islamic fundamentalism, these factors are subordinate to the wider class struggles within society and of necessity must reflect them, albeit in a distorted fashion.

In Saudi Arabia, where Islamic law is enforced, both the dictatorship of the Saudi royal family and the developing opposition's arguments for democratic reforms are justified in terms of the Koran.

The fundamentalist leaders of the different groups represent sections of the bourgeois or petty bourgeois. The Muslim Brotherhood opposed the secular Arab nationalism of Nasser, the Egyptian leader from 1954-70, and the land reforms and nationalisations he implemented. In Syria they consistently opposed the reforms of the Baath government based on its abolition of the private ownership of industry and land reform, calling for jihad against the Assad regime. Like all the other fundamentalist leaders they condemn atheistic communism and are virulently anti-socialist. Consequently, although for much of their history they have been suppressed by the Egyptian government, they have also been encouraged as a counterweight to the secular left and Communist Party.

In Afghanistan various Muslim guerrilla organisations fought a counter-revolutionary war, financed and trained by the CIA, to defeat the former Stalinist Najibullah regime. These forces represented the reactionary landlord class which opposed the reforms carried out by the regime. The fundamentalist state of Saudi Arabia is one of the USA's most loyal client states in the Middle East.

However, Islamic fundamentalism is not a homogeneous phenomenon. When it develops as a movement basing itself upon the poor and oppressed, and begins to reflect their desire for change, it becomes a strange hybrid combining contradictory and opposed class interests. On the one hand are the interests of the reactionary leaders, who base themselves on the continuation of capitalist, and in some cases feudal, property relations. On the other hand is a revolutionary desire to change society on the part of the oppressed which



Egyptian fundamentalists demonstrate.

can only be satisfied by sweeping away all vestiges of capitalism and feudalism.

The Islamic fundamentalist groups, whose basic aim of the establishment of an Islamic state is thoroughly reactionary, can appear as a radical force only in the absence of a mass socialist movement. This is especially because of the demise of the region's Communist Parties following the collapse of Stalinism but also due to their past failure to lead the masses to power.

Throughout the region there have been many occasions when the working class, despite its relatively small size, has had the opportunity to overthrow capitalism. But under the direction of Moscow, which did not want socialist revolutions to take place, the Communist Parties of the Middle East were led to support bourgeois nationalist movements and so derailed many revolutionary situations.

In Iraq in 1958, when the bourgeois democrat Kassem took power, the CP emerged from the underground with a mass following. In 1959 they led a May Day demonstration of half a million workers in Baghdad. Instead of leading a struggle for power they gave their support to Kassem and when he was toppled by a military coup in 1963, over 5,000 communists and their supporters were slaughtered.

In Sudan in 1969 the CP backed a military takeover led by General Numeiri. Despite having a million members out of a population of only 14 million, in 1971 the CP and trade union leaders were arrested and executed. The Numeiri dictatorship increasingly relied on Islamic rhetoric to maintain some support, introducing the Sharia in 1983. Numeiri was overthrown by a revolutionary uprising in 1985, but once again no organisation was capable of giving a lead. In 1989 another

coup brought the present Islamic military regime to power.

Arab nationalism, which under Nasser won mass support, also proved ultimately incapable of standing up to the power of imperialism. Because Nasser was not prepared to completely break the power of the capitalists and landlords Egypt remained subservient to the interests of imperialism.

With the failure of secular Arab nationalist movements and the betrayal of the Communist Parties, sections of the working class and peasantry have looked to the various Islamic organisations as a vehicle for change. In this sense the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is an expression of the impasse of capitalism in the region and the need for the oppressed masses to find a way out.

WERE ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM to come to power in any of the countries where it is now developing as a force, the most likely case being Algeria, it would not solve any of the economic and social problems facing the masses. With no coherent economic or political programme to change society, the Islamic fundamentalist leaders in power would inevitably try to attack the democratic rights and living standards of the workers and peasants who helped to bring them to power.

However, it is not pre-ordained that the reactionary class elements in the leadership of the Islamic fundamentalist movement would triumph in the course of a revolutionary process. In such a situation Islamic fundamentalist movements combine both revolution and counter-revolution and the question of which predominates and is finally successful depends upon the balance of class forces within society. A key factor will be whether there is a Marxist organisation with a clear programme, capable of developing into a mass force, and able to lead the working class and poor peasantry to power.

Where such a party does not exist, or fails to utilise the revolutionary developments to win the mass of the working class to its banner, then the basis would be laid for the counter-revolutionary element within Islamic fundamentalism, based on the middle classes and landlords, to secure victory for reaction.

This is what happened in Iran where the revolution of 1979 brought the mullahs to power. Even here, the ultimate triumph of the counter-revolution was not easily achieved and was only possible due to the abject failure of the Communist Party, known as the Tudeh, and other left forces.

The Tudeh party had in the past developed a mass following. In 1946, having led massive strikes, the CP were brought into government, compromised and then thrown out. On the basis of revolutionary events in 1951, the Tudeh party regained mass support. But it failed to utilise this, instead backing the bourgeois democrat Mossadeq, and by 1953 the Shah had been reinstated by a CIA-backed coup.

In the revolution which toppled the Shah, the working class, especially the oil workers, played the decisive part. The Shah of Iran was a client of US imperialism, presiding over a repressive regime in which opposition was prohibited. From October 1977, throughout the whole of 1978, there was an escalating wave of demonstrations and strikes culminating in an insurrectionary movement in February 1979.

Given the repression of the Shah's regime one of the few places where dissent could be expressed was in the mosque. Albeit in a distorted and inchoate manner, the mullahs reflected the discontent of the masses. Their radical sermons were interpreted by the masses in their own way. The mullahs themselves were opposed to the Shah because of the confiscation of church land, and due to their link with the bazaar merchants who opposed the foreign domination of industry and trade. In the absence of any alternative leadership, the mullahs were able to assume a key position in the fight against the Shah and ride to power upon the backs of the working class.

In the revolution which toppled the Shah, the working class played the decisive part.

Had the working class been conscious of the power it had in its hands and organised itself to defend that power, the beginnings of a socialist workers' republic could have been established. An international appeal to the workers and poor peasants throughout the Gulf region, the Middle East and beyond, appealing also for support from the working class in the advanced capitalist countries, would have won an enthusiastic response and ensured the success of the revolution. Unfortunately, due to the absence of a genuine Marxist organisation, the workers' movement at the critical moments remained rudderless.

The Tudeh played little role in the events of 1979, simply tail-ending the actions of the Islamic clerics around Khomeini. At no time did the Tudeh put forward the need for soviets, or workers' councils, to be set up to organise the revolution and to defend its gains. Instead they declared that "the political programme of Ayatollah Khomeini... (was) in accordance with the position it had itself adopted". (*Morning Star*, 27 January, 1979). In this way the Tudeh reinforced the position of Khomeini rather than explain the reactionary nature of his programme and the interests which he represented.

ONCE IN POWER there was an immediate conflict of interests, reflected within the clergy itself. The Islamic Republic Party



Anti-American demonstration, Teheran, 1979.

established by the clerics of the newly-formed Revolutionary Council was connected to the old petit bourgeois and the bazaar merchants, who stood for the protection of private property and a government based on their interests. While aiming to represent the economic outlook of this conservative strata, the clerics had to take account of the popular resentment of the masses to the merchants and landlords and their demands for change.

Khomeini immediately tried to restrain the working class and contain their aspirations to overthrow the economic system. However, in the initial period, faced with the enormous strength of the workers' movement, the new regime was forced to go much further than it wanted. Within four months, banks, insurance companies and major sections of industry were nationalised with no resistance from their owners. Strikes and factory occupations developed despite the pleas for restraint from Khomeini. Where the bosses fled the workers started up production on their own and demanded that the government nationalise the plants, which it was obliged to do. The newly established Islamic government had to tread very cautiously so as not to provoke the working class into opposition. In March 1979, thousands demonstrated against proposed laws enforcing women to wear the veil and the regime backed down.

The class character of the new regime was clear from the beginning. On the day the insurance companies were nationalised a bill was published

setting up courts with power to impose ten-year prison sentences for "disruptive tactics in factories or worker agitation". Gradually the regime was able to consolidate itself. The Islamic Republican Guard was used to suppress the left organisations. Clerics were appointed to run the factories taken over by the workers. By May 1983 the Tudeh, which had been the only 'Marxist' party to be officially legalised by the revolutionary council, was banned and its leaders arrested.

The regime relied heavily on anti-imperialist rhetoric to win support, especially utilising the American hostages in November 1979. When Iraq invaded Iran in 1980 the masses rallied to defend

the revolution. The regime, given room for manoeuvre, was able to go onto the offensive against the opposition. The veil was enforced in 1981. By August 1982 all secular law was null and void and the Sharia was implemented. By 1982 40,000 teachers had been purged. Thousands of working class oppositionists were murdered.

The opposition to the regime is becoming more open.

The Iranian regime under Khomeini, and then Rafsanjani, being unable to provide any solution to the economic problems of capitalism, entered crisis. Splits emerged within the regime between those, such as Rafsanjani, who wanted to turn more towards the western capitalist powers for trade and economic assistance, and those who reflected more the revolutionary traditions of the mass of the population. The regime has to walk a fine tightrope between trying to arrive at an understanding with imperialism and using anti-imperialist rhetoric to keep the support of the masses. This attempt to face both ways at once is encapsulated at the luxury Hotel Azadi in Teheran. In the lobby there is a sign saying 'Down with the USA', but at the reception desk guests are told that bills can only be settled in

US dollars.

The continuing anti-imperialist fervour of the masses was shown by the demonstration of one million in Teheran at the outbreak of the Gulf war, demanding joint action alongside Iraq against the US. This was despite the eight-year long war with Iraq in which 400,000 Iranians died. If the regime does not take this attitude into account it could unleash a movement which would cause it to fall.

This is all the more the case given the growing discontent. While 20% of the population own 49% of the country's wealth there are up to 15m unemployed out of a population of 60m. Youth in particular are hostile to the regime with its strict moral code in addition to the economic catastrophe: 60% of the population is under 20 years old. These youth have no recollection of life under the Shah and see only the miserable conditions that the present regime brings, placing the blame on 'the turbanned ones'. The mullahs have been warned by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to abandon their expensive homes and BMWs or risk facing the wrath of the people. They have become the nomenklatura of a religious dictatorship.

While the habit of referring to the lavatory as 'dafar-e-imam', or 'the imman's seat', may reflect a subtle form of subversion, the opposition to the regime is becoming more open. Strikes have taken place, including strikes of the oil workers in early 1992, and riots broken out in a number of cities. In an attempt to clamp down on the growing unrest the regime has reconstituted the 'baseej', its irregular shock troops. The dissatisfaction with the regime extends even into the police and the conventional security forces. On occasions the police have intervened to prevent the Revolutionary Guard detaining women for infringing the dress code.

Given the developing unrest and discontent with the regime it is only a matter of time before the working class regroups and asserts itself more determinedly. With the absence of an organised opposition it is possible that a new movement of the working class will manifest itself initially under the banner of a wing of Islam, couching its demands in Islamic terms.

The Iranian revolution, with the overthrow of a powerful pro-western monarch and its seeming ability to stand up to imperialism over the last fourteen years, has attracted many in the Middle East to the banner of fundamentalism. As the opposition to the Islamic dictatorship in Iran develops, the real nature of the regime will be seen not only within Iran but elsewhere in the region and its power of attraction will diminish.

IN ALGERIA, THE FIS was originally formed in 1981 as a religious organisation, sanctioned by the FLN government as an outlet for religious sentiment to counter left-wing opposition and maintain stability. During food riots in October 1988 the FIS acted as a restraining influence. But in

1990, when the ban on political parties was lifted, the FIS transformed itself into a party, attacking government corruption.

In the local elections of June 1990 the FIS won 54% of the vote, taking control of 32 of the 48 regional authorities. In the first round of the general election, held in December 1991, the FIS won 47% of the vote, gaining 188 of the 231 seats in which there was an overall winner, compared with only 23% and 15 seats for the ruling FLN. Faced with the prospect of a fundamentalist victory, the military intervened to annul the election in January 1992 and, in March, banned the FIS. The FIS has since developed a guerrilla organisation capable of taking on the government forces in two-day gun battles, with between 10,000 and 15,000 armed activists. It has made inroads into the military itself.

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throughout the region.*

If the FIS were to come to power in Algeria it would act as a catalyst for fundamentalist movements throughout the region, threatening the regimes in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and as far away as Jordan.

Support for the FIS comes not only from those drawn by its fundamentalist religious appeal but even from sections of the secular urban population, where its support rests more on its reputation for incorruptibility and out of hatred for the country's FLN rulers.

The FLN has squandered the revolutionary authority it had previously earned. In an eight-year long war they united the Algerian masses in a revolutionary struggle for national independence against French imperialism, which was eventually forced to withdraw in 1962. There was widespread support for the idea of socialism which was proclaimed in the constitution. However, the failure to defend the living standards of the population, the brutal repression of any opposition, and the rotten corruption of the government served to discredit 'socialism' and created fertile ground for fundamentalism to flourish.

The economy is in absolute crisis with 70% of foreign exchange earnings serving its \$27bn foreign debt. Unemployment is over 30%. Food subsidies were cut in 1992, putting basic needs beyond the reach of many.

There are undoubtedly many who fear and oppose the establishment of a fundamentalist state. On 2 January 1992, after the landslide vote for the FIS, the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), based mainly in the Berber-speaking Kabylie area, organised an anti-fundamentalist demonstration in Algiers of over 100,000. Although the FFS had won only 7% of the vote it gained 25 seats, more than

the FLN, sweeping the board in the Berber-speaking area and winning some seats in Algiers. The demonstration drew in participants from all over Algeria - Arabs and Berbers, workers and sections of the middle class, school students and the unemployed. There were a large number of women and some of the FLN and UGTA, the main trade union federation, took part. They chanted, 'No to fundamentalism! No to dictatorship!'

The FFS was well-placed to transform itself from a party based on the Berbers into a national alternative both to the FLN and the FIS. Had it been capable of explaining a programme for the socialist transformation of society it could have won support from the discontented masses who had turned in desperation to the FIS, as well as those who feared what the advent of the FIS to power would mean for Algeria's secular traditions.

Unfortunately the FFS posed no clear alternative, even trying to silence the more radical elements on the march. Although the FFS denounced the suspension of the elections it has not called demonstrations or protests since. The Communist party, called the Party of Socialist Vanguard (PAGS), welcomed the coup!

In March 1993, around 100,000 marched in the centre of Algiers. Chanting 'Neither Teheran nor Khartoum', they protested at the growing wave of terrorism carried out by the FIS-backed guerrillas. Although the demonstration was organised with government help, with state companies closed and thousands of employees given transport to Algiers, many demonstrators also chanted anti-government slogans, showing that they supported neither the government nor the fundamentalists.

THE EXPERIENCE OF Islamic fundamentalism in power in Iran demonstrates its ultimately reactionary character. If it comes to power elsewhere the working class and poor peasantry will learn from bitter experience the need to search for new means of struggle, just as the Iranian workers are now having to do. Islamic fundamentalism in power under conditions of international recession would be extremely unstable and would very quickly begin to succumb to the antagonistic class pressures within society and start to split.

The only way of ending the horrific conditions faced by the masses, whether in Iran or Algeria, is not through the false demagogy of the Islamic clergy but through the programme of revolutionary Marxism. The freeing of these countries from imperialist exploitation cannot be carried out by the Islamic fundamentalists. This task rests with the working class, drawing behind it the poor peasantry and leading the struggle for the socialist revolution.

Even where the working class constitutes only a small proportion of the population it plays the decisive role by virtue of its role in production. Throughout this region there exists a powerful

working class with a revolutionary history. The Egyptian working class, with 23 unions affiliated to the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, has 5m organised workers. In Algeria in March 1991, although affiliated to the ruling FLN, the UGTA organised a two-day general strike, the first since independence in 1962, in protest at price rises. (The FIS boycotted the strike claiming it was simply a struggle between wings of the FLN). It will be through strikes and demonstrations, general strikes and insurrections that the working class will strive to change society. It is necessary to build strong Marxist organisations in all of these countries so that revolutionary opportunities are not lost as in the past.

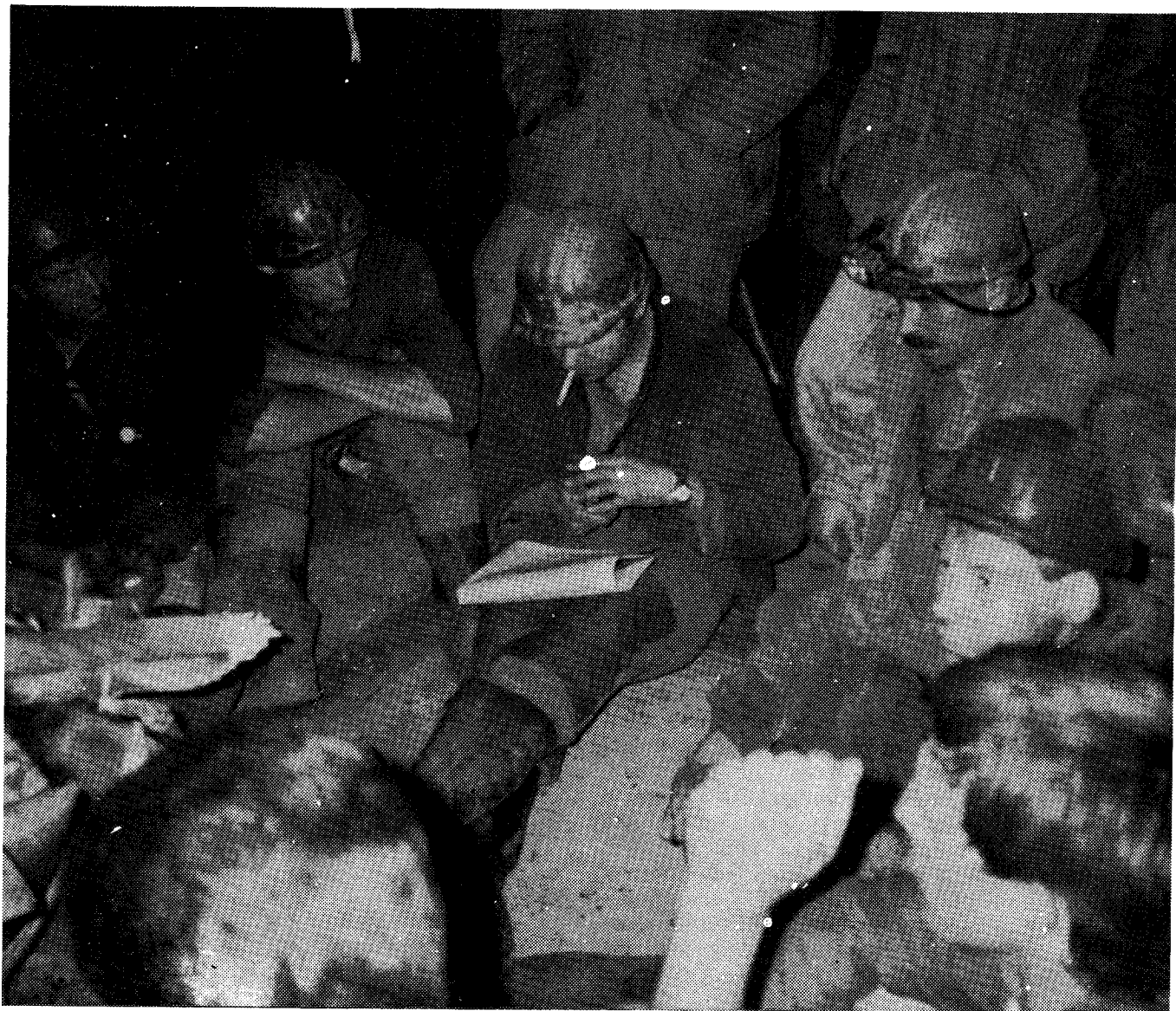
The revolutionary socialist transformation of society in north Africa and the Middle East can only be carried out by the conscious action of the working class armed with the programme of Marxism based on an international perspective. Marxists have to find a way to reach the predominantly young working class, including the ranks of the unemployed and the peasantry, in all the countries of the region.

The rise of fundamentalism is a complicating factor for the struggle to transform society.

By raising the clear programme of Marxism it would be possible to build the basis for mass Marxist organisations. A fight for democratic demands - the right to vote, to organise, to strike, to freedom of religion - together with such demands as a shorter working week and a sliding scale of wages linked to prices, would win widespread support. By linking these demands to the call for a revolutionary constituent assembly and the establishment of a workers' government, based on the expropriation of the land and industry from the big landowners and capitalists and the introduction of a plan for organising and developing the economy, mass revolutionary organisations could be created.

The rise of fundamentalism is a complicating factor for the working class in its struggle to transform society. But with this programme, and by exposing the inadequacies of the policies of the fundamentalist leaders, the masses who at this stage are looking towards them could be won away and form part of a mass force for socialism. The working class of Algeria, Egypt, Iran and the other countries of the region will rediscover their revolutionary traditions and move to overthrow their corrupt governments and the domination of the imperialist powers. □

Lessons of the Ukraine strikes



Strikers read *Militant's* sister paper, *Raboyocha Demokratika*.

The June strike wave, argues Elizabeth Clarke, represents the awakening of a working class, a class feeling its power.

FOR NEARLY TWO weeks in June the central square of Donetsk was thronged day and night by striking miners, engineers and textile workers, demanding the resignation of Ukraine's president, Leonid Kravchuk, the government and the soviets at all levels. They were joined by

teachers, shop workers, students, even theatre and ballet workers. As the strike spread to Lugansk and Dnieperpetrovsk, delegations and telegrams of support arrived from cities throughout the Ukraine and beyond its borders. Even the Crimea was reported to be in a 'pre-strike' situation.

On June 16, Kravchuk declared, "the situation has become an emergency not only on the economic but on the political level. Production is grinding to a halt". The speeches of the president himself and the stormy debates in the supreme soviet were relayed live to the crowd in October Square from the steps of the local soviet building, nicknamed the 'White House'. On June 17 a government commission flew in to parley with what had become an inter-regional strike committee. Not one commission member appeared in the square to address the crowd. A panicked Kravchuk reshuffled his cabinet. He promoted Donetsk mayor and former director of the Zasyadka pit, where the strike started, to the post of first vice-premier, with responsibility for resolving the crisis.

Russia's president, Boris Yeltsin, has been locked in battle with the Ukrainian leadership over control of the Black Sea Fleet and the nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory. There are continual arguments over Ukraine's long-standing debts for subsidised Russian energy supplies. But seeing the danger of a general strike in the Donbas escalating and 'infecting' the mighty and discontented Russian working class, in talks on June 17, Yeltsin promised Kravchuk a waiver on energy debts worth £250bn roubles (nearly half the total) and a further £250bn credit to be paid back in three years.

He also hastily retreated on the issue of immediate world prices for Russian oil and gas. It was this measure which was behind the very price rises that had sparked the strike wave. Now the prices would not reach world levels immediately but go up in stages before 1 January, 1994. (By August, however, Russia again closed down the pipelines to the Ukraine because of arrears on hard currency payments.)

The announcement on June 5 that prices on a whole range of basic necessities would be immediately increased between three and five times, struck the hard-pressed population of the Ukraine like a thunderbolt. In the context of a 20% annual fall in industrial output and a budget deficit of nearly 40% of GDP, so-called 'independence' from Moscow has brought no visible advantages. Factories, like the Donetsk Cotton Fabric Combine with an 8,000 workforce, are standing idle due to a lack of raw materials - in this case from November 1992 until April this year.

The miners had already warned of action in the event of further price rises.

Subsidies to the mining industry amount to more than three trillion Karbovonets ('coupons') a year or one third of the state budget, but they are regularly delayed and only partially paid up. The miners had already warned of action in the

event of any further price rises and had threatened to stop supplying coal from July 1. The new price rises reduced their monthly wage to the equivalent of ten kilogrammes of sausage (the traditional measure of value!), compared to 22 in pre-perestroika days.

Special grievances had accumulated in the Donetsk region. With 10% of the population of the Ukraine it contributes 48% of coal and 42% of steel. Its agriculture is one and a half times more efficient than the Ukraine average. It contributes nearly 89bn Karbovonets to the state budget and retains just 6bn. Yet average investment per head in the non-industrial sphere, ie services, welfare and so on, is 104.5 roubles in the Don region, while in the Ukraine as a whole it is 173.4 roubles. An added irritation, where a majority of the population is Russian, had been the imposition of Ukrainian as the only state language. Frequently the Ukrainian national flag is taken down from above the 'White House' and replaced by the red flag. (The miners columns entering October Square bore red flags and no others.)

While the majority of Russian-speaking workers in the eastern Ukraine voted for independence in 1991, many now blame the breaking of the links with Moscow for the economic and social crisis in the region: 80% of its industry was tied to Russia. One of the demands of the miners was for the re-establishment of cultural as well as economic links with the Russian Federation and for two equal state languages, Russian and Ukrainian.

HOSTILITY TOWARDS KIEV has arisen from the inability of the national bureaucracy-turning-bourgeois to solve any of the basic economic and social problems. "They are continually squabbling over the division of power, while we starve", commented strikers in the square. As in Russia, a struggle has been taking place over the pace of 'reform', with prime minister Kuchma calling for special powers to push through the 'shock therapy' of rapid privatisation. Former Communist Party ideologue president Kravchuk has opposed him, but has never voiced opposition in principle to the transition to market relations.

But little progress if any has been made along this road. Privatisation of land has gone further in the Ukraine than in Russia but the process in industry has hardly begun. A voucher scheme has been talked of but so far shelved. The idea consisted of lodging 30,000 roubles in banks for every citizen to use for the purchase of state property. What seemed like a vast sum only months ago, in the context of inflation at the beginning of the year running at 13,000% (50% per month), it arouses little enthusiasm amongst the population.

As in Russia, the failure of the tops to come up with solutions is accompanied by a deep resentment amongst the population. They are bitter about the widespread corruption, speculation and



Miners march into October Square.

picketted the Russian parliament. Apart from demanding back-money due to them they were also objecting to the 'freeing' of prices on coal. They fear on this basis the collapse of demand for their product. The deflation aimed for through abolishing subsidies to industry (part of the IMF and World Bank dictated policies) would be more than cancelled out by the massive inflation caused by the effects of the prices of oil, coal and gas reaching world levels. When the average wage of a Uk-

rainian or Russian worker amounts to no more than £25 a month - at current exchange rates - the consequences for the mass of the population are horrifying.

crime, from petty theft to 'prikhvatization' - the seizure of industry by members of the old nomenklatura and the rising bourgeoisie (often one and the same layer). They have grown cynical of politicians - especially those who have come from their ranks and gone over into the pampered world of local and national parliaments. Zvyagilski is cited by many a miner: elected as director of his pit in 1989, made mayor of the town and now, as first vice premier, chief 'firehose' for the Kravchuk government.

Without a huge shift in policy - a return to planning but with genuine workers' control and management in all the countries of what was the USSR - life will become a nightmare. 'We only want to feed our children', pleaded the Donetsk strikers. Some women workers speaking in the square finished in tears of despair. This is a pointer of what is to come.

The morning after the strike leaders had signed a deal, miners listening to speeches at the 'White House' were angry. What had they got but promises again? Why was the agreement signed in the middle of the night? Why were the strikers themselves not consulted? Having heard no answer that satisfied them and being told the speeches were over, they started up an ominous rhythmical beating of their helmets on the steps which only stopped when the president of the strike committee came out to explain himself. Even on the following night, miners from the Zasyadka pit kept the braziers burning and vowed they would fight to the end. 'What we needed was another Lenin', commented one young miner. 'Why should we hack and hew at seams 50cms high, just to see others get rich?'

Huge concessions were made which only a movement with a revolutionary dimension could have won.

The lives of those who work underground in the Donbas, as in Vorkuta and the Kuzbas in Russia and Karaganda in Kazakhstan, are increasingly at risk due to shortages of basic equipment, wooden pit props etc. Above ground whole communities are threatened. The cold wind of market forces finds the overwhelming majority of pits unviable without enormous amounts of state assistance.

BUT THE EVENTS in the Ukraine in June also give a glimpse of the power that workers have to bring a government to its knees. Huge concessions were made on wages, income tax, pensions, 'indexation', payment for days on strike and so on, which only a movement with a revolutionary dimension could have won. But on a capitalist basis, implementing this agreement will quadruple the existing government budget deficit. Inflation will wipe out the gains within months, if not weeks.

In this context, the early enthusiasm of the miners for 'market reforms' and world prices for coal etc, has waned. In June, the Kuzbas miners

A referendum has been promised for September 26. But this is far from the 'removal' of the government demanded by the strikers. Removal itself would be meaningless without alternative

workers' representatives being ready to take their place and without a policy to end the anarchy of capitalism.

A battle on the scale of a general strike brings into sharp relief all the basic conflicts of interest in society. Welling up from below amongst the ranks of the miners and broadening to encompass layers never before involved in strike struggle, it is an absolutely inevitable stage in the development towards revolutionary change. It poses the question of who runs society, who is the strongest power? And here the question is not just of numbers and industrial might but of expressed aims and of a conscious struggle for control.

In the Ukraine, as in so many similar situations, the tops of society were paralysed or vacillated between making concessions and establishing repressive measures. The middle layers begin to kick out at their masters and look to the workers for help in striking blows at their common enemy. The heavy battalions of the workers enter the fray and declare 'we are not prepared to continue in the old way' and new and more timorous layers join their ranks. As Trotsky commented in 1931, in relation to the first movements of the Spanish workers after the fall of the de Rivera dictatorship, "the semi-spontaneous spread of strikes ...is an absolutely unavoidable stage of the revolution, the stage of the awakening of the masses, their mobilisation, and their entry into struggle... The veterans stretch their limbs, the new recruits learn. Through the medium of these strikes, the class begins to feel itself a class".

But without a party, without a voice, without a political leadership conscious of what needs to be done, without even a hint of an alternative to the old way of doing things, to the old leadership in government and in the workers' committees themselves, compromise on the economic front and defeat in terms of power are inevitable.

THE RANKS OF the strikers swelled. Two hundred and thirty out of the 250 pits stood idle. Forty mine construction sites and 70 processing plants came to a halt and more than 400 factories and workplaces in other industries joined the strike. The participants felt that victory must be theirs. Their leaders, mindful of the empty promises that ended the miners' strikes of 1989 and 1991, declared in the early days of the strike that agreement on the economic demands of the workers would not be sufficient on its own. The political demands must also be fulfilled.

The masses were convinced that the old rulers had proved incapable of satisfying their demands - unable to control inflation, guarantee the supply of raw materials, cheap food or even wages. The 'politicians' at all levels could not deal with the 'mafia', the black marketeers and speculators: they were themselves up to their eyes in the so-called 'commercial structures', receiving bribes and living easy.

Genuine representatives of workers, having looked at reality and learning a little from history, would have been able to convince the aroused masses to place no trust in the 'higher-ups' but to find independent solutions, to have confidence in their own ability to root out corruption, to call to account all public representatives, to eliminate middlemen and speculators, and to control production, distribution and exchange through their own organisations, as they had begun to do in the course of the strike in 1989. This was not what was meant by the much-publicised talk of 'self-management', or 'self-rule'. The workers in the square at Donetsk thought their leaders or even management must have tagged on these demands to their list. The strikers were in favour of more local 'control' if it meant less bureaucracy, less privilege and more say for workers. But no one had indicated how such control could be exercised.

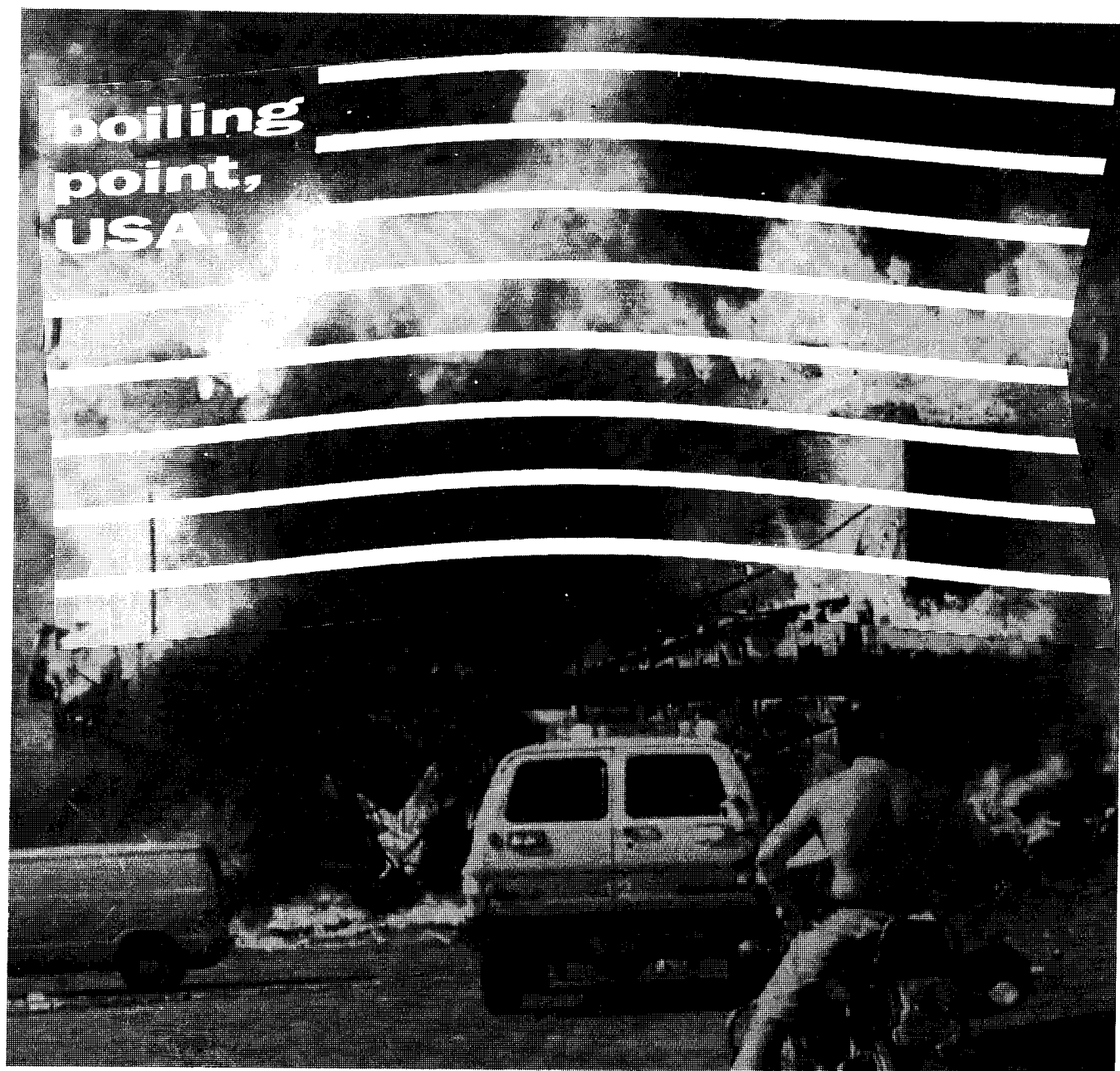
'Separation' from Russia had already proved to be a backward step. Nothing would be solved by separation from Kiev. The main concern was how to get everything working again. 'Markets? Capitalism? We don't know what these mean. But we don't know any more what socialism means either'.

Workers in all countries rarely imagine that they themselves can run society.

Workers in all countries rarely imagine that they themselves can run society. They have been 'conditioned' all their lives to think otherwise. Coming to this conclusion represents one of the last stages before a revolutionary takeover. The first stage is that of deep discontent and also of illusions. As strikes and general strikes develop, defeats as well as successes are not only inevitable but are a necessary part of the development of workers' consciousness of the need for political struggle.

What we have seen in the Ukraine and will see repeated in Russia, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan and elsewhere, is the awakening of a working class, a working class feeling its power. The last disconsolate miners in the Donetsk square sensed a deep disappointment - a feeling that something much more could have been achieved if their leaders had not let them down, but unsure as yet as to what all the implications would be. They will search for a way out, draw conclusions on the need for organisation, for parties, for programmes.

The next few years will hold more hard lessons for them and the tens of millions of workers in the countries of the former USSR. But the steeled and battle-hardened army of proletarians which comes out of this period will be a mighty force for revolutionary change. □



John Throne looks at a book by an ex-Republican strategist on the discontent accumulating in the US today.

EARLIER THIS YEAR an economic forecaster at one of the world's best known universities made the following statement: "If I look ahead 10 or 20 years I can see growth resuming but we have dug a hole so deep that the mother of all recoveries won't get us out for a while". Yet this is not a university in Moscow or Leningrad nor another bleak assessment of the economic prospects for the ex-USSR. The forecast is from the University of California in Los Angeles and

the economy is that of the state of California.

From the gold rush 150 years ago up until 1990, when the 1980s boom ended and the collapse of Stalinism set in train cuts in military spending, California was the golden state. Its gold, natural resources, climate, and its location facing toward the Pacific, combined to attract a continuous inflow of immigrants with the Californian dream, the apex of the American dream, in their sights. In 1992 for the first time in the history of the

state, more people left the state than moved in. With this development US capitalism entered a new era.

This is basically the conclusion drawn in his new book *Boiling Point* by Kevin Phillips, former chief political analyst for the 1968 Nixon presidential campaign who today sits as a member of the political strategists panel of *The Wall Street Journal*. On the first page Phillips writes: "America has reached boiling point. In 1964 a mere 29% had told poll-takers that government was run for the benefit of a few big interests... By 1992 the proportion of Americans who felt that government favoured the rich and powerful had reached 80%". He quotes Harvard economic historian Claudia Goldin whose research has found "inequality at its highest since the great levelling of wages and wealth during the New Deal and World War Two". While he makes no mention of the fact that this 'great levelling' resulted from the movement of the US working class begun by the great strikes of 1934 and carried on through the 1936-37 sit-ins, and this is a major flaw in his book, Phillips provides statistic after statistic and quote after quote which shows the American dream of the post-war decades is over and that a powerful mood for change is surging up below the surface.

Between 1929 and 1945 the share of US national income going to the richest 1% of the population fell from 13% to 7%. By 1990 the share of the top 1% had risen again to 13%. Private production workers average weekly earnings were \$315 in 1975 but only \$264 by 1989 (in 1982 prices).

Between 1973 and 1992 wages overall fell by 19% while productivity rose by 24%. Between 1979-87 the average US worker worked 95 hours a year more, had one third less vacation time, while leisure time fell from 26.2 hours to 17.7 hours per week.

*He writes to warn his
class without arming the
working class theoretically.*

Phillips's book gives page after page of such statistics showing the class polarisation that is developing and the mood of anger and demand for change that exists. It leads him to conclude: "In the US and Europe alike, popular fear of downward mobility has been one of history's proven sources of political radicalism, both cultural and economic. As we have seen, polarisation and anger among ordinary citizens of previous great economic powers who saw themselves losing ground, led to food and tax riots and finally revolution". He quotes columnist Max Lerner as saying: "The 1990s may prove to be the decade when the explosive anger breaks out openly and plays havoc with party loyalties".



President Roosevelt.

Phillips stresses the political symptoms of the building revolt such as the 19 million votes for Perot and the 62% of votes cast against Bush. However other powerful signs of the coming class upheaval and rising working class struggle in the US, in the main omitted by Phillips, are the Los Angeles uprising of 1992, the largest urban uprising in US history, and the three largest demonstrations in US history, the 350,000-500,000 AFL-CIO march in 1991, the 600,000 on the womens march in 1992 and the march of one million in early 1993 organised by gay, lesbian, womens, civil rights and community organisations.

PHILLIPS'S BOOK IS worth reading for the statistics and quotations that it provides. However, when he seeks to go into history, class analysis and political perspectives, he is totally at sea. This flows from his class position as a strategist for US capitalism. He writes, as he is trained to do, to warn his class of the dangers without arming the working class theoretically. As a result his entire thrust is that it is the squeezing of the 'middle class' that is the problem and the middle class includes all except the top 1-5% wealth holders and the bottom 5-10% in extreme poverty.

The working class as an independent class and the source of opposition and change is written out of Phillips's history. He makes great play of populist movements in US history but he lumps all changes in mood and opposition movements in this category. The populist movement of the 1890s was the desperate attempt by the ruined urban and rural small property holders, a historically out-dated class, to prevent their destruction at

the hands of developing monopoly capitalism in the form of the 'Robber Barons'.

The beginnings of the independent movement of the working class at this time - the rise of the American Federation of Labour, the 'Wobblies' (IWW), Debs and the Socialist Party - are ignored. But this was the first movement of the new progressive class, as opposed to the cry of rage from the doomed middle classes. The 'levelling' of wealth, as he puts it, in the late-1930s and 1940s, he does not attribute to the independent movement of the working class spearheaded by the rise of the CIO.

In passing Phillips provides the figures to disprove Lassalle's 'Iron Law of Wages', that is that there is no point in striking for more economic gains as wage increases will be taken back by price increases. This is basically the conception of the AFL-CIO leaders and most trade union leaders today. The modern version is that increased wages will lead to workplaces being moved abroad or jobs going non-union. As already mentioned above the movement of the working class in the US reduced the share of wealth going to the top 1% from 13% to 7%. The top income tax was raised to 94% by 1944 as the Roosevelt government squeezed its own class in order to save capitalism in the face of economic crisis and rising working class militancy.

Incidentally this 94% top income tax rate is three times the present rate. It shows that there is a certain basis for a limited New Deal administration in the US in the future as most strategic-thinking elements of the ruling class would be prepared to make a few concessions in order to keep the rising working class movement under control.

These facts also show that even though concessions can be won at times by big movements, as long as the capitalist class own and control the economy, when the movement of the working class ebbs and the economy enters into crisis these concessions will be taken back. This confirms the analysis of Marxism that only when the ownership of the dominant sections of the economy are taken out of the hands of the capitalist class and put under the ownership and control of the working class can inequality and exploitation be ended.

THERE ARE MANY other interesting items in Phillips's book. For example he quotes Don Lacey, editor of the newsletter *Workpace Trends*, an information sheet for US employers in relation to the assault on workers wages and conditions. Lacey says in justification of the attacks against the working class: "This not just a recession. This is the end of a 40-year boom. Everything we consider to be a normal workplace relationship is not, it is a post-war boom relationship". This confirms the argument of Marxism that union leaders must recognise that the new economic situation makes it impossible for US bosses, from their point of view, to go back to

the ways of the 1950s and 1960s, and that the old methods of the trade union leaders now lead to defeat after defeat.

Phillips's conclusion about a rising tide of revolt building in the US is correct. There has been a major shift in consciousness over the past three years alone. During the 1980s the general mood was that things were not going so well, but this was accompanied with a widespread hope that this was only temporary and things would work out. However, now there is a deeply held and thoroughly widespread consciousness that US society is in a fundamental crisis, that the traditional political parties and leaders are incapable of fixing things, and that people are going to have to take action themselves. This is a change of great significance with repercussions for the entire globe.

*This not just a recession.
This is the end of a
40-year boom.*

US capitalism is now the world's largest debtor. It was its largest creditor in 1980. Total debt in society is \$12 trillion today compared to \$2 trillion in 1980. There is no longer an avenue for escape to the west and south west as the developments in California show. The south and west and the old mainly rural racist south have been industrialised. The hinterlands of Atlanta, Georgia, the Carolinas, northern Florida, northern Alabama and southern Tennessee now have 27% of their workforces in manufacturing while the national average is 17%.

A Minneapolis teamster recently gave his opinion of the situation in the US. "You cannot fix it (the US economy and society). The whole thing has to be thrown out and started again. I'm ready for revolution". This statement combines a realisation of the crisis as well as the pragmatism, and weakness of tradition, in US society. It indicates the enormous movements for change that lie ahead and which will unfold at US tempo, that is, in great explosive bursts. This Minneapolis teamster's analysis and conclusion is far superior to that of Phillips. Nevertheless, it is worth reading Phillips's *Boiling Point* for the statistics and quotes it provides and its confirmation of the crises and struggles facing US capitalism from the pen of one of its own strategists. □



Andrea Enisuh asks, what can be done to defend black and Asian communities from racist attacks?

THE MURDER IN April of Stephen Lawrence by a gang of white thugs produced renewed calls in the black and Asian community for something to be done to stop racist attacks. Bernie Grant MP declared that the black and Asian community "will not allow our young people to go on being murdered. Every community has the right to defend itself in law. If the police won't defend us, we must defend ourselves". (*The Voice*, 27 April, 1993). Calls for black self-defence were made in the black press and supported by local race monitoring groups. Dev Barrah of Greenwich Action Committee Against Racial Attacks (GACARA) said: "We have to reverse the fear so

that ordinary decent people can walk the streets".

Since then, in television and radio discussions and in public meetings, the call for self-defence has been raised. All agree that *something* has to be done to defend black and Asian communities. The question rarely concretely addressed, however, is *what*? How does a community 'reverse the fear'? How can the effective defence of black and Asian communities be organised?

Racial violence in Britain is at an all-time high. Some cases have been met by protest meetings, pickets and demonstrations. These are an important part of the struggle against racism. A show of strength against racists can help to isolate them.

Protests can also serve as support for black and Asian communities in the local area.

However individual demonstrations are invariably not enough to effectively stem the flow of racist attacks. Consistent community-based campaigns, involving local people, trade unionists, tenants associations and community organisations, are also needed.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence hit the headlines. Yet there are thousands of racist attacks that take place daily and go almost unnoticed. A substantial number of these are focused around the home, with families being verbally and physically attacked and harassed by racists from their neighbourhood. How, for example, in these instances, does a community 'reverse the fear'? Can institutions such as the police, the courts and local authorities, combat racist attacks?

The black and Asian community have always been open to every avenue that could possibly protect them from attack. Even now support is growing for the proposal from several Labour MPs for legislation making racial violence a criminal offence. However this legislation on its own would never be enough to protect black and Asian people.

In many cases of assault, harassment and even murder, the local police refuse to accept that they are racially motivated and are not 'normal' crimes. The south London area of Greenwich, for example, has become known as Britain's racist murder capital after four killings in just two and a half years. Yet Stephen Lawrence was the first recorded racial murder victim. How would the existence on the statute books of a criminal offence of racial violence change the attitude of the police? The decision in July of the Crown Prosecution Service to drop charges against two teenagers accused of murdering Stephen Lawrence will inevitably increase the growing feeling that the police are incapable of protecting black and Asian people.

Despite paper policies and glossy advertising campaigns declaring that 'racial harassment is a crime', councils have also not been capable of effectively stemming the flow of racism. Bristol council for example recently had to pay out £10,000 compensation to a family who had endured eleven years of harassment. Despite reporting this to the council on numerous occasions, nothing was done.

Some councils have adopted policies of evicting tenants guilty of racial harassment. Other councils offer 'victims' the opportunity to be rehoused. But neither policy on their own can stop racist attacks taking place.

Many black and Asian families do not want to be uprooted and rehoused. Moreover this policy can also lead to the formation of ghettoised housing. It can have the effect of encouraging local racists to step up their activities to achieve an all-white estate.

Alternatively, evicting a racist tenant without a

community campaign to explain why, can result in a backlash. The community must be involved in uprooting racists every step of the way. Any individual victim of harassment must be defended by as strong a force as possible and not left to feel isolated. In any community struggle against racism the main aim must be to isolate the racists.

The impotence of the police, courts and councils to deal with racial harassment on the estates was highlighted in *The Independent* magazine recently, which recounted the case of a family in Greenwich, the Js, who had suffered 12 years of harassment from two white families in their area. Constant racial abuse culminated in the family being attacked in their home with baseball bats. On previous occasions when the Js had called the police they had been told nothing could be done until someone was injured, even though the white families had, according to the local housing office, been the subject of numerous complaints from other tenants.

After the assault, injunctions to keep the peace were issued against the racists but also against the Js! The harassment continued. "It is terrible", said Mrs J, that her children know "that nobody, not their parents, the police, courts, *nobody* can protect them. So we've got to sell up". (*The Independent*, 12 June 1993). They had been driven from their home.

So what could a community campaign have done that the police, courts and council didn't? Firstly it could have served to isolate the racists with a campaign of leaflets, meetings etc to show the strength of feeling against the racist families' actions, identifying them and monitoring their activities.

When the racists' workplaces, if any, were discovered, the trade unions there could have been approached to discuss what action they could have taken against the racists in their midst. Concrete support could also have been organised, rotas to defend the family, telephone trees, modelled on the experience of the anti-poll tax campaign's 'bailiff busters', that could have sprung into action when the attacks happened. Whereas one neighbour eventually came to try to defend the family a strong body of neighbours could have been organised. Such community pressure could also have served to force the police to act.

IN THE CASE of the Js the racists were known to the family. But what about attacks that take place in the streets, where the perpetrators are not known to the victims? This was the situation, for example, facing the Bangladeshi community in the Drummond Street area of Camden, north London, in April 1992, when a gang of white racists, armed with hammers and knuckledusters, rampaged through the area, eventually being confronted by local Bengali youth. But this was not an isolated attack. There had been a 40% rise in racist attacks in the area in the

preceding two years. In such a situation is there a case for community defence groups or patrols to be organised?

While patrols could have a role to play, again this would have to be as part of a broad campaign involving the mass of the community. Only the community controlling the actions of such groups would make them more than simply vigilantes, settling personal grievances or acting on individual prejudices. This was a feature of the 'anti-crime' vigilante groups studied by the TV programme *Panorama* (2 August, 1993). They included the recently jailed 'Norfolk Two', who actually abducted someone who they thought, mistakenly, had stolen their property!

Moreover, the police would respond heavily to the activity of such patrols. Attempts by Asian youth in Newham in the early 1980s to organise escorts to protect school students from persistent racist attacks, were met with arrests. Similarly, in the Camden case above, it was four Bengali youth who were charged with grievous bodily harm! Eventually, the 'Drummond Street Four' as they became known, were acquitted in June this year after a long campaign. Only the pressure of mass community support for such activities could compel the local police and the courts to accede to another force effectively 'policing' the area.

A sufficiently well-organised and broadly supported local community campaign could therefore play a dual role. The community could organise an effective campaign against the racists that they led, organised and controlled. But also it would act as a check on the police. In itself it could exert enough pressure to force the police to act in cases of racial harassment and attacks.

The anti-poll tax movement, with a well-organised structure resting on the broad support of millions of non-payers, which ultimately defeated the poll tax and brought down Thatcher, showed what can be achieved by a community based campaign. This was despite the active hostility of the Labour Party leaders to the non-payment campaign and the inertia of the trade union leaders over the issue.

Yet despite the present inactivity of most of the national union leaders in mobilising to defeat racism, anti-racist campaigns, including local community defence campaigns, must still strive to win the trade unions, locally and nationally, to be part of the fight.

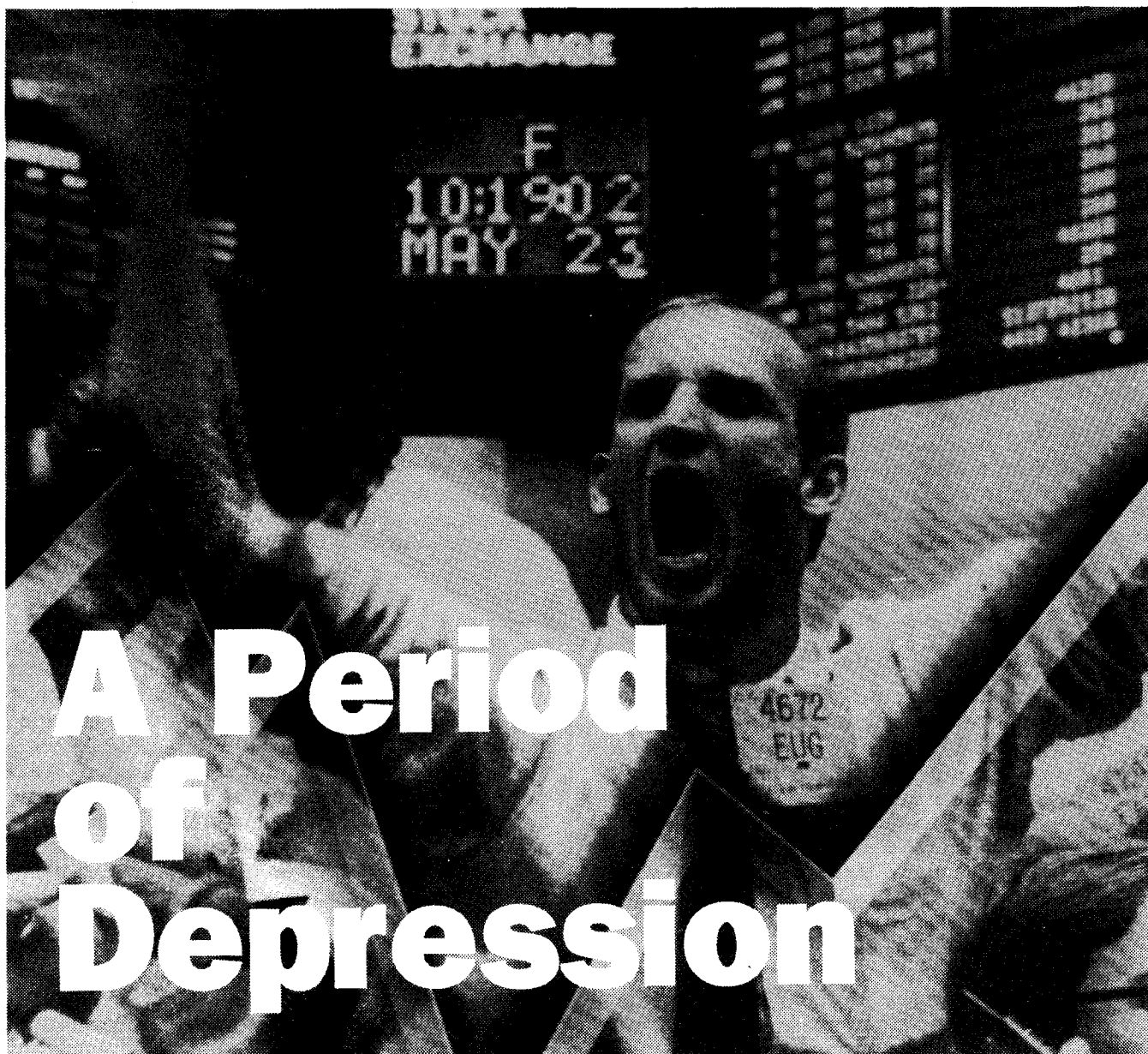
In the current period the role the Labour Party and the trade unions can play in the struggle against racist attacks may not be immediately apparent. But we must never forget the potential power of the organised working class, uniting in the trade unions millions of workers, black and white, men and women.

The cases of Stephen Lawrence, Rolan Adams and others show that not all racist attacks take place in the home or are part of a constant campaign against one family. The family of



Stephen Lawrence claimed that before his murder neither they nor he had experienced racial harassment, let alone racial violence. Racist gangs can and will attack individuals at any time, unless they are so isolated in society at large that the fear is indeed 'reversed'.

This means organisations such as Youth against Racism in Europe (YRE) building a powerful campaign that can show the strength of the anti-racist movement not just in one community but nationally. But it also means building a movement that can provide the socialist alternative that is necessary to stop the spread of racist ideas and eradicate the rotten economic and social conditions in which racism breeds. □



A Period of Depression

*Is the world economy in just another cyclical recession? Or a long-term period of depression? **Lynn Walsh** examines the arguments.*

THE SEASONS HAVE changed many times since Clinton, Major, and other capitalist leaders first pointed to 'green shoots of recovery'. Yet so far, recovery from the recession which began in 1990 has been feeble, to say the least. The huge mountain of debt built up during the 1980s expansion still acts as a drag on the advanced capitalist economies, despite cuts in interest rates. Unemployment has not been significantly reduced, and will remain at around 34m in the OECD countries. Stagnation in Japan and a decline of production in Germany now threaten to dampen the recovery in the US, Canada, Britain, and the other 'Anglo-Saxon' economies.

In promising recovery just around the corner, capitalist leaders talk as if they were dealing with just another short-term cycle. Recovery, they imply, will naturally follow recession, just as spring follows winter. Yet there are a growing number of commentators who are more realistic - and far more pessimistic. They recognise that since the exhaustion of the long upswing which followed the second world war, the economic climate has changed, and changed utterly.

Commenting on the 'contradictory signals' emitted by the US economy in 1992, a prominent economist raised the question: "Is it conceivable that the United States has entered a period not simply

of recession and temporary cyclical downturn, but of long-term, persistent stagnation?... Stagnation has been evident in numerous economic indicators for a considerable period". (Gar Alverovitz, *Washington Post/Guardian Weekly*, 19 April, 1992).

Early in 1993, another economist, James Davidson, of Strategic Advisors Corporation, Boston, poured scorn on renewed claims of a US recovery: "The past three years have not been a normal postwar recession, but a depression. Depressions don't end just because we have an election or a Christmas shopping spree". (*Wall Street Journal*, 11 February, 1993).

Davidson goes on to define depressions as "periods of long-term structural adjustment that require the liquidation of bad debts and the shrinkage of excess capacity. This process has only just begun. If I am correct, the current episode of strength will soon peter out in a triple dip, followed by a deeper stage of depression".

Davidson dates the beginning of the current depression back to 1973-74: "...the current depression was set in motion 20 years ago by the OPEC shock, a trillion dollar wealth transfer that raised inflation and lowered real rates of growth."

How they have changed their tune! Only two or three years ago the *Wall Street Journal* was a strident voice of capitalist triumphalism. In 1989-90, as the Stalinist economies crumbled into dust, the Reagan boom was presented as the 'Mother of all Recoveries', introducing a new era of everlasting upward progress.

Under the headline 'Reagan's Awesome Economic Boom', the *Wall Street Journal* (8 March, 1991) boasted: "The 92-month economic expansion in the US that began in November 1982 and ended in July 1990 was three-and-a-half times as long as the average peacetime expansion since 1919, and second only to the record of 106 months in 1961-69. Such an exceptionally long period of rising output and employment left the country with enormous cumulative gains that will be barely dented by what appears to be a mild downturn". But the real legacy of the 1980s is not 'cumulative gains' - it is an accumulation of intractable problems and sharpened international contradictions.

THE US WAS the main locomotive of the 1980s expansion. But it was fuelled by massive quantities of debt - by the \$200bn plus Federal budget deficit, and by massive corporate and household/consumer debt. This was largely financed from the capital flows generated by the trade and current account surpluses built up by Japan and Germany. As a result, international imbalances were aggravated, sharpening trade tensions between the deficit and the surplus countries.

Despite heavy investment in high-technology sectors - like computers and electronic equipment, electronic consumer goods, telecommunications, and vehicles - the 1980s expansion failed to reverse the long-term overall decline of investment levels

and productivity growth that began in the late 1960s. Despite the recovery of profits, mainly achieved through squeezing more effort out of fewer workers, capital investment remained at a lower level than in the long upswing. In Europe mass unemployment reached a new plateau between 9m and 12m, while the growth of jobs in the US was based on the spread of poverty-level wages, casualisation, part-time working and double jobs, especially for women.

Internationally, economic relations became much more volatile. The exchange rates of the major currencies have fluctuated like a roller-coaster. A flood of 'hot money' swirled from one national economy to another, as speculators attempted to profit from exchange-rate and interest-rate fluctuations. These speculative flows reached \$880bn a day by 1992.

This is a new period, totally different from the long upswing of 1950-73. During that period there were stable world economic relations, sponsored by US capitalism, with its overwhelming economic and strategic power. The Bretton Woods system of fixed (but adjustable) exchange rates, anchored to the US dollar (which was in turn pegged to gold) provided a reliable medium for world trade and finance. The accelerated growth of world trade, facilitated by rapid tariff reductions under the GATT system, was one of the most dynamic stimulants to growth. There was a rapid catching up by Germany, Japan, and other advanced economies through the transfer of US technology and assembly-line production techniques, initially spurred by the worldwide investment of the US multinational corporations.

Within the advanced capitalist economies, historically high levels of real wages and state expenditure helped sustain high levels of demand, which stimulated high levels of capitalist investment and profitability.

The short-term trade cycle continued to operate, but was relatively short and shallow compared to the nineteenth century. Recessions involved either small falls in output or merely stagnation. Moreover, recessions tended to be 'self-correcting', eliminating some of the problems facing the capitalists. For instance, excessive credit tended to be squeezed out, unprofitable firms eliminated, balance of payments problems curbed, etc. Upswings tended to raise the level of growth above the previous peaks. Beneath the short-term trade cycle there was a sustained upward curve of capitalist production.

After two decades, however, the underlying conditions of the long upswing were inevitably eroded. A slowdown in the growth of productivity, under conditions of full employment and strong trade union organisation, resulted in a squeeze on capitalist profits. There was a slowing of investment, further retarding productivity growth. By the late 1960s all the conditions for a crisis were being prepared. In the early 1970s growing US inflation and the instability of the dollar led to a breakdown



Mass unemployment - here to stay.

of the world monetary system. In 1973 the quadrupling of oil prices by the OPEC oil producers, partly in response to growing inflation, triggered the world slump of 1974-75, the first major downturn since the second world war.

This undoubtedly marked the end of the upswing, as was widely recognised at the time. In retrospect, however, 1974-75 can also be seen as the beginning of a new historical period: an era of depression.

This does not mean that there has been a steady, downward curve in the world capitalist economy since 1974-75. There is still a short-term cycle of recession and recovery. The expansion of 1983-89, for instance, was hailed as a great boom. However, in contrast to the postwar upswing, the recoveries after 1975 no longer corrected the factors tending to produce downturns. Nor did they they secure strong, broadly-based growth.

The limited recovery of 1976-79 was accompanied by accelerating price inflation, producing the term "stagflation". In contrast, the remarkable recovery of the 1980s was accompanied by a marked reduction in price inflation levels - but at the same time, brought about a massive inflation of property and financial asset prices. Profitability was partially restored - without leading to a full recovery of investment. Real wages were squeezed, unemployment rose to new levels, while state expenditure was cut back - all undermining the market for capitalism. There was an acceleration of world trade and capital flows, but this went with an unprecedented instability in world financial markets, highlighted by the financial crash of 1987 and the crisis facing major international banks.

*While there can be
short-term recoveries, the
underlying trend is
towards decline and crisis.*

In short, while there can be short-term recoveries, the underlying trend of the world capitalist economy is towards decline and crisis. Nevertheless, use of the term 'depression' may well be questioned. This partly reflects the fact that the word came to be considered almost archaic during the postwar upswing.

THE TERM 'DEPRESSION' is commonly associated with the period immediately following the world financial crash in the autumn of 1929. In the US GNP fell for four consecutive years, by a total of over 30%. In Germany GNP fell by 16% during 1929-33, and in Britain by 6% during 1929-31. This period of economic collapse, mass unemployment and poverty is commonly known as the 'Great Depression'. As a result, 'depression' is often assumed to mean 'slump' or 'deep slump'.

But this is really a confusion of the clear terminology required to understand economic developments. 'Slump' properly refers to the trough phase of the relatively short-term economic cycle, when there is an absolute fall in production and

trade. 1929-33 was undoubtedly a deep slump. Since the second world war there have been two slumps, 1974-75 and 1979-81, which came after the exhaustion of the long upswing.

The sustained 1950-73 upswing (in the advanced capitalist countries) is commonly referred to as 'the post-war boom', the 'long boom', or simply 'the boom'. This was really stretching the term 'boom' to cover a protracted upswing, whereas strictly speaking it refers to the recovery phase of the short-term cycle following a recession or slump.

The upswing was punctuated by relatively shallow recessions, each giving way to renewed growth which surpassed previous levels. During this 'golden age', as it is now nostalgically called, the apostles of capitalism claimed that slumps and depressions were things of the past, never to return.

The definition of 'recession' varies slightly from country to country. In the US and Britain it usually refers to an absolute decline in production over three successive quarters. In Germany and Japan, which until recently had higher growth rates, recession frequently refers to periods of slow growth or stagnation, not necessarily absolute decline. For most capitalist economists, who believe in the everlasting growth potential of the market economy, 'recession' has become a euphemism for 'slump' - which has almost become a taboo word.

The word 'depression' also virtually disappeared from the economic vocabulary, except as a term to describe the 1930s. Only now is it beginning to be used again in the pages of the serious capitalist press.

In the entry 'depressions' in the four-volume *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* (1987), the economic historian Sidney Pollard writes that the term depression "is reserved for longer periods of more serious adversity on an international scale, in particular the Great Depressions of 1873-96 and of the 1930s. By analogy, the distressed years following the Napoleonic wars and the years since the downturn of 1973 have also been included in that category".

Pollard observes that "such was the extent of their economic adversity, that it is only the four to six years following the New York stock exchange crash of autumn 1929 which are commonly referred to as the 'Great Depression'." However, "in more normal circumstances, the whole of the three Juglars (short-term trade cycles averaging about seven years during the nineteenth century, named after Clement Juglar), 1920-39 or 1920-45, might have been taken as the depression..."

The first world war was followed by a slump in 1920-21. The industrial capitalist economies were gripped by inflation, mass unemployment, and intense international rivalry leading to trade wars. The frenzied boom of the late 1920s was followed by the stock exchange crash of 1929 and the economic slump of 1929-33. Moreover, writes Pollard, "the trade cycle boom of 1937 was extremely weak and carried many signs of turning into a

further severe depression, which was avoided only by the preparations for (the second world) war".

The term 'depression', therefore, defines a prolonged economic conjuncture characterised by growing 'organic' or 'structural' problems, as opposed to cyclical problems, for capitalism. Depressions, however, do not conform to some abstract pattern. Each depression develops under concrete historical conditions, and has its own particular characteristics and trajectory.

THE EXPRESSION, 'Great Depression' was first used to describe the two decades from about 1873 to 1895-96, a period of sharp cyclical crises in the leading capitalist countries, ie Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. In contrast to today's tendency to accelerated inflation, the main feature was a prolonged decline in prices, ranging between 30% and 45% over the whole period. This flowed from intensified international competition and overproduction. Periodic downturns, accompanied by financial crashes, provoked high unemployment, exacerbating overproduction and the collapse of profits.

Writing a new preface to Marx's *Capital*, Volume 1, in 1886, in the middle of this period, Frederick Engels commented that "The ten-year cycle of stagnation, prosperity, overproduction and crisis... seems indeed to have run its course; but only to land us in the slough of despond of a permanent and chronic depression. The sighed-for period of prosperity will not come; as often as we seem to perceive its heralding symptoms, so often do they vanish into air. Meanwhile, each succeeding winter brings up a fresh great question: 'What to do with the unemployed?' But while the number of unemployed keeps swelling from year to year, there is nobody to answer that question; and one can almost calculate the moment when the unemployed, losing patience, will take their own fate into their hands".

It was around this time that bourgeois economists, who were mostly completely ignorant of Marx's earlier and more profound analysis of the cyclical nature of capitalism, began to discover the phenomenon of trade cycles. In 1889, for instance, the French economist Clement Juglar published his *Commercial Crises and their Periodic Return*. France in particular was hit by periodic speculative bubbles followed by financial collapse and a fall in production.

While the effects of unemployment were savage, however, employed workers benefited from an overall increase in real wages as a result of falling prices - and this encouraged workers' struggles to organise trade unions and secure better conditions.

During the 1880s and 1890s, moreover, the foundations were laid for the future leadership of German and US capitalism, which overtook British capitalism towards the end of the nineteenth century. US capitalism, with abundant land and raw materials, labour drawn from Europe, and rapid technological development, was on the verge

of a phenomenal period of expansion which established its world supremacy. Unlike today, the growth of the US economy offered an escape route for millions of Europe's unemployed.

The growth of US and German capitalism provided the impulse for a new economic upswing between 1896 and 1913. The prolonged boom of that period represents the biggest expansionary period of capitalism prior to the 1950-73 upswing. Yet the intensified competition between the capitalist powers led to a competitive scramble for markets and colonies, which exploded in the first world war of 1914-18. The barbarous military conflict was then followed by a new period of great depression, much more brutal than the previous depression.

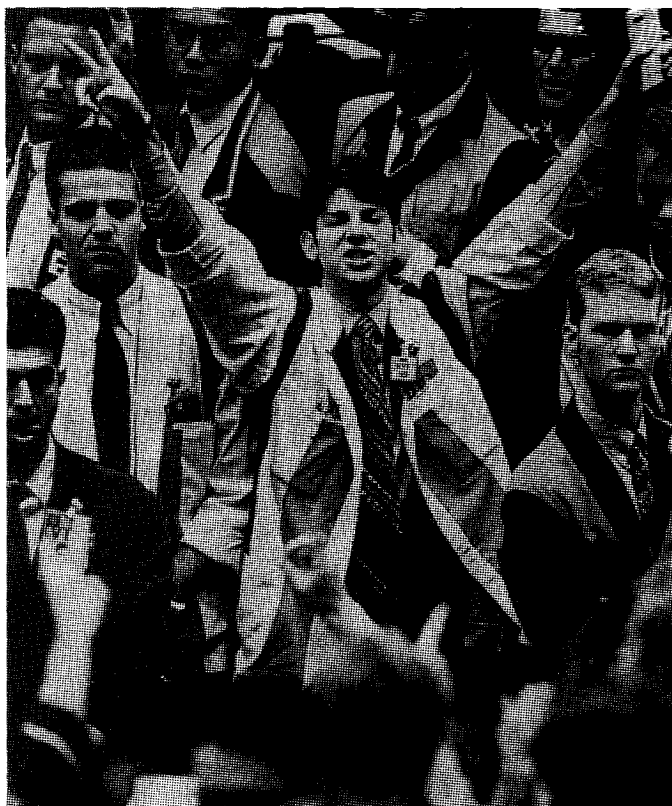
THE HISTORY OF short-term economic cycles and, more especially, long-term cycles of upswing and depression punctuated by social crises and wars, underlines the erratic, unplanned nature of capitalism. Periods of economic progress, in which the forces of production are developed and living standards are (usually very unequally) raised, are bought only at the cost of long periods of mass unemployment and poverty, profound insecurity, and bloody conflict between rival capitalist states.

From a historical and theoretical point of view, therefore, the boom-time claims of bourgeois apologists in the 1960s were absurd. They argued that through state intervention and Keynesian-type economic management, the capitalist system (alias the 'mixed economy') could achieve perpetual growth, uninterrupted by serious crises. Through the 'social market', giving workers' higher wages and welfare benefits, there would be social harmony and political stability, leaving behind forever the class conflict of the 1930s.

*The current depression,
defined as a period of
stagnation and decline,
must be dated back to
1973-74.*

Dreams like that depended on the high rate of growth achieved in the 1960s, which capitalism, because of the contradictions at the heart of the system, could not indefinitely sustain. For those with a historical perspective, it can be no surprise that the upswing has given way to a new depression. As always, consciousness lags behind reality, and the vision of bourgeois commentators is invariably distorted by wishful thinking.

Referring to the current period, Sidney Pollard writes: "The depression itself was triggered by the floating of the dollar in 1973 and the drastic oil price rises engineered by the OPEC countries



in 1973-74 and again in 1979, but these themselves were symptoms and consequences of creeping inflation which had accompanied the remarkable world boom of 1945-73... Inflation apart, the current depression bears some marked similarities with earlier ones".

Looking back, the current depression, defined as a period of stagnation and decline, must inevitably be dated back to 1973-74. That crisis marked a qualitative change for world capitalism. The abundant supply of cheap oil seized up, inflation exploded, and the hegemonic position of the US dollar collapsed, throwing the world money system into chaos. These shocks detonated the disintegration of the favourable nexus of economic and social relations, nationally and internationally, which supported the long upswing.

The new depression will inevitably have its own unique trajectory. It will pass through a series of phases, some of which will appear to contradict the underlying curve, or even the whole character of the period - as was the case with the 1980s expansion. Moreover, the current depression may well be more protracted than previous depressions.

THERE HAVE ALREADY been several distinct phases since 1973, which can be briefly summarised as follows:

1. The first phase 1974-79 began with a short, sharp slump in the advanced capitalist countries (ACCs) in 1974-75. This was followed by a weak recovery between 1976-79. Annual growth averaged only 2.7% in the OECD countries as a whole, compared with 4.5% during 1951-73. High unemployment was combined with high inflation: 'stag-

flation'. Capitalist profitability declined sharply, leading to reduced levels of capital investment and productivity growth. The effects of the slump were cushioned by the 'recycling' of the oil producers' 'petro-dollars' (when real interest rates were very low because of high inflation) via the big international banks. First the loans went to governments in the advanced capitalist countries to finance their budget deficits, and subsequently to governments in the underdeveloped countries - priming a debt timebomb for the 1980s. After the experience of stagflation, the strategists of the bourgeoisie abandoned Keynesian economics and turned to neo-liberal or monetarist policies.

2. A second phase 1979-89 began with a slump in 1980-82. The downturn was deliberately provoked by the adoption of monetarist policies: a severe squeeze on liquidity through tightening the money supply, imposing high interest rates, and curbing the growth of government spending in order to squeeze out inflation.

The US then led the advanced capitalist countries in a prolonged recovery during 1983-89. This comprised two cycles, 1983-85 and 1986-89, punctuated by the dramatic fall of the dollar. The US expansion was basically a massive consumer boom sustained by the huge Federal budget deficit and the phenomenal growth of corporate and household credit, ie debt. The US expansion was supplied with industrial and consumer goods by Germany and Japan and largely financed from the capital surpluses which they built up as a result. Unemployment was sharply reduced in the US, but at the cost of low wages, casualisation, etc, while remaining historically high in Europe.

Overall, the OECD economies grew by 2.8% per year during 1979-90, only fractionally higher than 1973-79 (2.7%). A marked recovery in capitalist profitability was achieved mainly through squeezing workers' wages. But there was no accompanying investment boom. There was an orgy of speculative profiteering in property and financial markets, but definitely no return to the 'Golden Age' of 1950-73 for the real economy. There was a process of 'capital deepening', replacing old plant with new labour-saving equipment in fast-growing, high technology sectors (electronics, electronic consumer goods, telecommunications equipment, vehicles, etc). But there was little 'capital widening', ie very little investment in new factories, additional capacity, etc. As a result, there was a horrendous growth of 'structural' - permanent as opposed to cyclical - unemployment.

3. The latest phase opened at the end of 1989, with a recession in the US, Canada, Britain, Australia and the Nordic countries. This was a relatively shallow downturn, apart from Britain and the Nordic countries, but prolonged. The recovery in the US has faltered several times and is still weak, more like 1976-79 than the 1980s. The main retarding factor has been the enormous weight of the debt built up during the 1980s, which was increased in real terms by the

sharp decline of property and share prices (an effect known as 'debt-deflation'). This has depressed consumer spending and investment. Recovery in the Anglo-Saxon economies is also being held back by the recession in Japan and Germany. Japan was hit especially hard by the fall in asset prices and instability in its financial system. Germany, which went through a growth spurt at the time of unification in 1990, has now plunged into a deep recession.

Desynchronisation between the cycle in the Anglo-Saxon economies, on the one hand, and Germany/France and Japan, on the other hand, will undoubtedly slow down overall cyclical recovery in the advanced capitalist countries.

UNDERLYING THIS CHRONOLOGICAL development of depression are a number of fundamental problems.

In each of these phases, there were developments that tended to mitigate and counteract the sources of economic crisis, which capitalist governments



Leaders fail to solve exchange rate instability.

attempted to reinforce through their policies. Such action, however, invariably fostered the elements of future crises. For example, in 1974-75 the expansion of liquidity (facilitated by floating exchange rates and the recycling of oil money) mitigated the crisis - but fuelled inflation and laid the basis of the Third World debt crisis in the 1980s. As another example, in the 1980s the tightening of the money supply and high interest rates sharply reduced price inflation, but at the same time stimulated asset price inflation (property prices, share prices, etc) which fuelled the expansion of credit and speculative activity. Curbs on wages and a shakeout of labour partially restored profitability, but at the same time cut the market

for capitalist goods, especially when workers reached their credit limits.

This is not just a question of swapping one crisis symptom for another. There is a spiral of accumulating contradictions - which means that the position of world capitalism is now far worse than before the 1980-82 slump.

Within the national economies of the advanced capitalist countries, with variations from country to country, there has been an undermining of the favourable social-economic conditions of the postwar period. There has been a sharp reversal during the 1980s of the limited but significant postwar shift of wealth and income away from the capitalist class and towards the working class through higher real wages, full employment, progressive taxation and higher state expenditure. This has restored short-term profits but profoundly eroded the market for goods, on which the profits of the capitalists ultimately depend. Without the prospect of a sustained market, the capitalists will not invest in the new plant and equipment essential for long-term growth, despite high short-term profits. The crisis of demand was mitigated, or postponed, during the 1980s expansion by demand for luxury goods from the wealthy, who profited from the speculative boom, and the additional credit (ie debt) taken on by middle-class and working-class consumers.

New technology has also contributed to the tendency towards depression. In the 1950s and 1960s new technology linked to mass, assembly-line production methods (introduced widely in the US in the 1940s) generated an enormous expansion of industry, and accompanying transport, communications, and other infrastructure. Whole new industries developed: vehicles, aircraft, electronics, synthetic materials, etc. Since the mid-1970s, however, new technology has mainly been introduced by the capitalists to save labour and inputs such as energy and materials. This has cut the market for both capital goods and consumer goods.

The economic hegemony of US capitalism, on which the postwar economic order rested, has been undermined.

Internationally, the favourable relations of the postwar period have also been fundamentally undermined. Above all, the economic hegemony of US capitalism, on which the postwar economic order rested, has been undermined. The dollar is still the main world currency. But the US is now a debtor nation and can no longer act as an effective anchor to the world money and financial system. The stable framework of the Bretton Woods money

system has given way to the instability and periodic turmoil of the floating exchange rate regime, as demonstrated again in the EMS crises of September 1992 and July/August 1993. The deadlock in the Uruguay round of the GATT negotiations is a reflection of the creeping protectionism between the EC, Japan, and the US - with the crystallisation of rival trade blocs. Massive speculative capital flows make it impossible for capitalist governments to adopt national economic policies insulated from the turmoil of the world economy.

The underdeveloped countries of the Third World did not experience a boom during the 1980s. The profound social and economic crisis of these countries is beyond the scope of this article. It is enough to say here that the partial industrialisation process which developed during the postwar upswing has been halted, apart from the Asian Tigers, and in some countries partly reversed. In order to pay the interest on their debts, even after rescheduling, many countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia have had to revert to concentrating on the production of raw materials and food products, despite the massive fall in commodity prices, to pay off their debts. This is a turn back to the direction of the old colonial division of labour of the nineteenth century, in which the underdeveloped countries exchanged their primary products for manufactured goods from the advanced capitalist countries - on unfavourable terms of trade.

Today, the character of the short-term economic cycle cannot be understood apart from the development, over a longer time scale, of a new depression in the world economy. Successive recoveries have a feeble, uneven character, while successive downturns are likely to be increasingly severe. "The downturn of the early 1990s has been a depression," writes James Davidson, "but not yet one with a capital 'D'. Only Britain amongst the advanced countries has experienced a fall in output as severe as that of the 1930s, and only in Scandinavia has unemployment reached the extreme levels seen in the deepest stage of the Great Depression. If this is a depression, as I believe, the worst is yet to come". (*Wall Street Journal*, 11 February, 1993).

In contrast to the superficial optimism of the politicians, who have to woo voters, the serious bourgeois strategists look to the future with foreboding and dread. They understand that the inability of capitalism to secure growth and prevent the rise of mass unemployment is a certain recipe for social conflict and political struggles. Few of them pretend to have any real solutions. They hope to 'muddle through', preparing in the event of deep crisis to defend their wealth and power regardless of the cost to working people. For the working class, therefore, the prospect of a Great Depression poses an urgent historical challenge: sharpen the ideas, build the organisations, and work out the strategy and tactics required to sweep away this organically diseased system. □

Letters

Send your views, comments or criticisms to: *MIR*, 3/13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.

Dear *MIR*,

In *MIR* issue No.51, May/June 1993, you included an article, 'The Korean miracle ends' by a Korean activist, Kim. I read this with some interest as it is difficult to find very much information about events in Korea.

There did seem to be one or two inaccuracies in the article which I should like to point out. Firstly, the 'Chuje' philosophy mentioned is normally referred to as the Juche set of ideas as originally developed by Kim Il Sung. Perhaps the misspelling

is due to translation?

Secondly the Juche idea does not hold that "Marxism is an outdated idea" (p17) but rather the reverse. This cannot be a problem of translation, but either a deliberate error or a lack of research. If any of your readers wish to know more about North Korea and the Juche idea then they could do no better than read *Korea: Pioneer of Communism* by Keith Bennet, Mosquito Press, 27a Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX. This book deals extensively

with all aspects of North Korea.

Lastly, surely a united Korea under the leadership of the Korean people is the solution to the present degradation in South Korea. It would also remove the US cold war machine and end the very real threat of their nuclear weapons. All socialists should support the right of a nation to decide its own future for its people.

Best wishes,
Mick Bonfield,
Surrey

Dear comrades,

I would like to appeal for more clearly explained and presented material on issues related to attacks on single parent families and on crime and the 'decaying social fabric'.

Although the recent *MIR* 'Nature or Nurture' article was an excellent, probably the first, effort to look behind these issues, I think the individual issues have to be examined theoretically.

This has become very important as the ruling class are now, through the media, able to 'float' reactionary ideas, call for a 'debate', ie ask for support from Labour on the fundamental points, and then adopt them as 'truths'. The fall of left reformism has left no other force but ourselves to oppose this reactionary drift.

I think there is a real interest in both of these issues. However, I have been disappointed that the ma-

terial in the paper has been mostly agitational. I'm sure that the Tory media has produced more than enough lies on single parents, for example, for them to be answered in an *MIR* article.

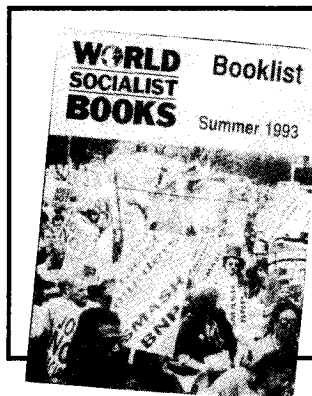
Just as we have to re-explain the basic principles and history of the socialist and union movement (also a good source for the *MIR*) so we now have the responsibility of helping the politically-aware sections of the class to answer the deluge of lies.

These are, let us face it, aimed at splitting working class communities as well as

preparing the ground for cuts in social security, housing, education and the legal system, for example, trial by jury.

I am really pleased that the *MIR* is bi-monthly and have enjoyed the articles. We do need articles in the *MIR*, like the one on SATs, which look at 'in-the-news' issues together with items of theory relating to our campaigns, as well as historical, international, scientific, artistic and maybe even some 'off the wall' items.

Clive Jones,
Oxford



For a guide to reading and a selection of titles in print on various subjects, write off for a copy of the 24-page World Socialist Books Summer Booklist. Just send your name and address and a first class stamp to World Socialist Books, 3-13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB or phone 081-533-3311.

the *dhé* (emphatic). *demons.*
adj. called the definite
article, used to denote
a particular person or
thing

need *néd, n.* want of something
which one cannot do without;
necessity.

for *för, prep.* in the place
of ; in favour of; in account
of.

words *wûrd, n.* a unit of
spoken language; a written
sign representing such an
utterance; (in *pl.*) language.

***Peter Taaffe** reviews two books providing a fascinating insight
into the voice, its relationship to personality and ultimately of
society.*

PATSY RODENBURG IS head of the Voice Department at London's Royal National Theatre and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She is an eminent voice teacher consulted by actors like Anthony Sher and Ian McKellen as well as politicians and others who wish to improve their voice communication.

She has written two excellent books, *The Right to Speak*, *Working with the Voice*, published in 1992, followed this year by *The Need for Words*, *Voice and the Text*. Members of Militant Labour who frequently use their voice in the cause of socialism will find some fascinating insights in their pages. Both are worth reading to acquire a deeper knowledge of correct breathing techniques, which is the effective foundation and support system for the voice, of how words are formed, the physicality of the voice, etc.

But their value goes beyond just a script for voice improvement. In a thorough examination of the voice, its relationship to the personality and ultimately of society, it is possible for the con-

scientious reader to acquire a greater vocal self-awareness. The author comments: "It is almost as if they (people inhibited or finding difficulty in speaking) have been forcibly gagged even though the muffle is an invisible one. The gag is usually one of an assortment of habits that undermine the potential of anyone's voice and speech. All these habits contribute to an acute fear that so many of us have in common: the fear of speaking out in public or even in private."

"A recent opinion poll taken in America, asking people what single thing frightens them most, put speaking in public at the top of the list of fears, above loneliness, financial worry... even death!"

The Right To Speak, 1992, £7.99, and *The Need for Words*, 1993, £9.99, by Patsy Rodenburg. Published by Methuen. Available from World Socialist Books, 3-13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.

The author contends that there is no such thing as a 'bad voice' and perhaps more controversially that everyone has the potential to 'sing'. Patsy Rodenburg correctly abhors the lack of authenticity, the snobbishness, even 'vocal imperialism' of the possessing classes when it comes to the use of the voice. She comments: "In effect, I think our voice becomes a sort of lie detector that instantly traps a speaker whenever he or she is being unauthentic". And to the flat, monotonous, uninteresting speaker, she proffers very good advice: "If it matters to you, it matters to others".

SOME OF THE most interesting aspects of *The Right to Speak* are those that point out the class character of speech and the almost innate right which the rich and powerful arrogate to themselves to speak and to be heard.

The author has listened to the middle and upper-class accents of those who regularly visit the Barbican Centre for performances of the Royal Shakespeare Company. She comments: "You hear all around you the same upper-class voices boring into your head. They sound demanding, belittling and frankly self-important. But listen carefully. They are actually saying very little, nor are they saying it very well. Only the sound is socially acceptable. Sit in any Mayfair restaurant or have tea in one of the grander London hotels and you can hear the same kind of voices zapping around the space as if all of us ought to be part of the conversation. To me all these 'cultivated' voices are saying one thing: 'The right to speak is mine and mine alone'."

She points out that quick assumptions about people are sometimes based entirely on how their voice sounds and not on what sense is being made by the speaker. Commenting on the political effect of different voice sounds, she writes about the 'deferential' voter: "I have found myself in many political discussions with people who vote for the Conservative Party even though that group's policies do not serve their needs. I have heard convictions expressed that simply boil down to: 'Well the Labour or Liberal candidate doesn't *sound* as though he could govern. The Conservative fellow *sounds* more impressive'."

The author rails against attempts to suppress or hide the 'natural voice' and the rich regional accents which Britain still possesses. She has, like this reviewer, an abiding love and (unlike the reviewer) deep knowledge of Shakespeare. But she also points to the snobbish, predominantly upper-class attitude which recoils in horror at 'regional accents' sometimes resorted to by actors when performing the plays of the great bard. Audiences at performances of *The War of the Roses* were indignant when the Earl of Northumberland, for instance, spoke in a Northumberland accent!

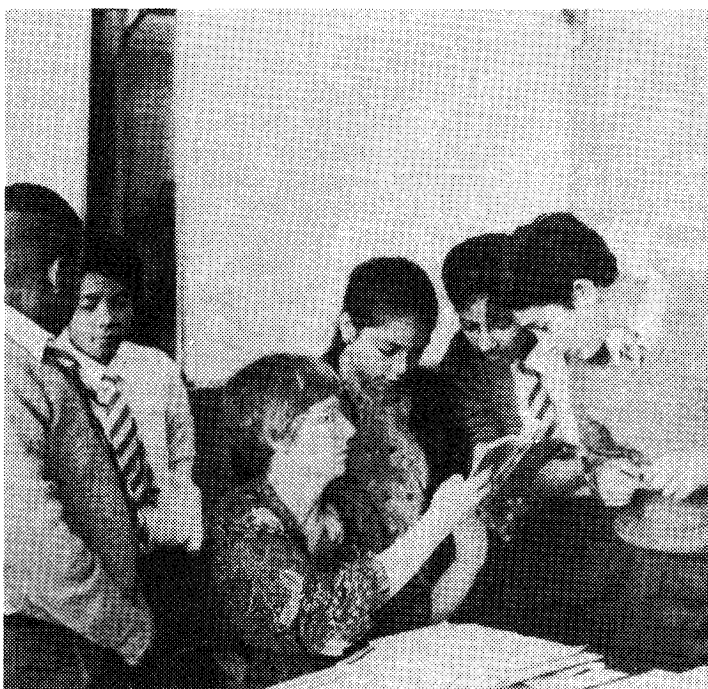
If there is one theme in both books, it is the determination of the author to make us

conscious of accumulated habits arising from class, sexual and racial oppression which block the full release of vocal potential. She points out that "many of us have been taught *not* to feel easy about expressing words and sounds openly. Our society likes to control the volume and keep us vocal hostages; it doesn't want to hear the thoughts and opinions of certain groups like children, women and minorities". The consequence of all this is that "we first learn to shut down and then begin to shut up".

Quick assumptions about people are sometimes based entirely on how their voice sounds.

The voice is also used to manipulate and is part of any power relationship. This doesn't have to take the form of shouting. There is the 'devoicer' or whisperer, someone who speaks so low and 'confidentially' that we must literally lean in to hear them. Falling into this category are so-called 'guru'-like figures or "anyone who has created an aura of power and control by simply speaking softly". She points out that "girls are consistently told to speak quietly and nicely, boys to be assertive and fluent", and yet "statistically, more men stutter than women (four out of every five stutterers are males)". At the same time, women find it more difficult to speak about 'important issues'. This is becoming less the case today because of the increased confidence and combativity of women.

Naturally, because the author is a woman, there





Physical posture is important.

are some illuminating passages on the differences between men and women reflected in voices. Women will question more, listen more attentively, make supportive, caring noises, and use a greater variety of inflexion: in other words, "women tend to be supportive with their voices and men tend to dominate".

It is possible to 'see through the eyes of women' just how the vocal habits of men, quite unconsciously, but nevertheless wrongly, can inhibit and diminish women and their voices. Patsy Rodenburg stresses: "Please don't interpret my comments as being those of a radical feminist. Do realise, though, that the womens' movement has given back to many females the rights to their own voices by getting them to drop artificial vocal guises and actually drop their voices back to their natural middle range".

She points out that "many male speakers brace and hold themselves across the shoulders, pulling them back, lifting their upper chests the way a pigeon does in the puffed-up power of a mating dance". At the same time, however, as the 'caring, sharing male' allegedly increases in numbers, speech teachers "have noticed that devoicing is on the rise amongst men, presumably as a counteraction to bluff assertiveness". The role reversal of men and women, with some men more 'caring' and women becoming much more assertive, has produced, according to Patsy Rodenburg, a peculiar reaction: "Nowadays, of all things, I have female friends who complain that their men are crying too much and being overly attentive vocally".

A LARGE PART of *The Right to Speak* deals with the technical question of voice work, exercising the voice. Also stressed are the

dangers to the voice, particularly from loud music at parties and in pubs, and the baleful effects of smoking and alcohol on the voice. Set out are a series of exercises which if followed can considerably improve the vocal power of the consistent student.

Much of the material is for the specialised actor or speaker, but will prove to be enormously useful to the average individual determined to improve their vocal ability. How many people, for example, are aware that the physical posture that we adopt has a profound effect on the sound that comes out of our mouth? Above all, this book, linked to *The Need for Words*, shows the way urban dwellers have increasingly cut themselves off from an oral tradition that "transmits knowledge and experience from breath to breath rather than just from mind to mind".

The Need for Words continues many of the themes of *The Right to Speak* but also explores words, their use today, and how this links to an oral tradition which Patsy Rodenburg believes is in danger of dying out in modern society. She points out: "A cry of joy or an uninhibited sob can jolt us to the core, but words that express either of these passions in complex detail move us even more strongly, because they connect emotion with an intention. Pure sounds do have an integrity all of their own. But words can make sense of raw passions. 'Language most shows a man: *speak that I may see thee*', wrote Ben Johnson".

Speaking is of course a natural act that we take for granted. But the ability to use words affectively is likened by the author to somebody playing a piano. We all can strike the keys, but it takes practice, choice, and above all desire, in order to learn to play the piano. Words should

be connected with a clear process of thought and "it should signal variety and a facility with words".

Patsy Rodenburg makes conscious in a quite gripping fashion what anybody who has an interest in language instinctively feels. In so doing, she can enormously assist even quite experienced speakers, as well as the inexperienced, to think about and improve the use of words and language generally.

She quite correctly rails against modern society's bias against words and understanding, against the 'sound bites', the 'quick-fix phrases' of advertising and the tendency of the all-pervasive media to usurp our need for words. This has "sundered our right to speak". She states quite bluntly: "Somewhere along the line we stopped being an oral society".

She correctly attacks 'political language' which is "long on proposals but vague about solutions". However, she makes a mistake here by identifying 'political language' with the obfuscation and downright lies which are the stock and trade of *capitalist* politicians.

Honesty and an ability to tell the truth is one of the ways in which to interest and hold audiences, thereby ensuring that the oral tradition will be restored. The greatest 'heightened moments' are those when ordinary working people enter the scene of history, and as Patsy Rodenburg points out, suddenly find the voice to express their feelings.

Despite these limitations, the 'words' of the author are very instructive and informative. She points out that oracy is the ability to be fluent with words and this is being lost because "to put it quite bluntly, we have stopped talking to one another. We have ceased being an oral culture. Families sit around a lighted box called television 'watching' rather than 'discussing' events. Our stories come to us in pictures. If we don't see it we won't believe it. The message in words is often rigidly controlled and clipped. I suppose you could say we have a greater need for pictures than words".

PATSY RODENBURG DOES not counterpose oracy to the literary tradition. Nor does she merely want to turn back the wheel of history before the advent of the mass media. But the oral tradition is in grave danger she maintains and "perhaps we need to preserve the traditions of oracy rather like we would preserve a precious rain forest. Both transfer the air we breathe into a capacity for words".

She points out that the speaking voice today is in general much lighter and more undeveloped than ten years ago. Her denunciation of the all-pervasive TV set, moreover, has been verified recently in the warnings of educationalists and others who point out that loud music, radio and constant use of the TV can hold back the language development of babies. In modern society noise

pollution is almost as harmful, as detrimental to health, as air pollution, water pollution, etc.

This reviewer also believes that Patsy Rodenburg's case for the therapeutic effect of words, of discussion, is overwhelming and is often lost sight of.

Teachers themselves are not conscious, or at least not sufficiently so, of a problem which leads in some instances to them telling students "not to shout, but tell them by *shouting at them*". Teachers who have not mastered how to speak can themselves suffer pain and "believe this is a *natural* occupational hazard". The author correctly says: "In essence, the teacher-pupil relationship is really a two-way conversation... a vital part of education dies with the dying voice". However, she does not concentrate purely on speaking and the voice, but believes that an improvement in this field will lead to good writing and good reading habits.

At the same time, she criticises the modern education system and "its distressing lack of opportunities for general and unthreatening debate". She comes out against a threatening or intolerant approach adopted in debates, but goes a little too far in implying that debates should end in accommodation rather than anger. It is necessary to adopt an open and tolerant attitude in debates, to listen to other points of view, as a necessary means of clarifying issues and encouraging inexperienced speakers, debaters, etc. At the same time, when class issues are involved, it is precisely anger and not 'accommodation' which can often be, and correctly so, the outcome of debate and discussion.

Some of the most enjoyable and stimulating parts of *The Need for Words* is where the author deals with 'wit and word play', irony and satire. For words and speech to be properly appreciated, it should not be filtered, at least not all of the time, through TV or films, "but to hear and judge a message directly, in the flesh, may be something human beings need". Without question, a live speech or a live piece of music, or a live performance such as a play, has more of an effect, greater immediacy, than when it is refracted through television or even film.

The sections dealing with public speech, words and the role of women and modern society, the effect of national boundaries, the cultural and physical barriers to the development of words and speech are worthy of study.

The overwhelming effect on the reader of these books will be to deepen knowledge of the voice, of words, of a capacity to use speech and words. The exercises which Patsy Rodenburg sets out for the voice, if assiduously followed, can undoubtedly lead to an increased performance by most speakers. There is no 'instant solution' to be found here or anywhere, but these illuminating books can establish a platform which can benefit aspiring speakers, thereby making a contribution to maintaining and expanding the oral tradition. □

Book Reviews

Fascism and anti-fascism in the Medway Towns, 1927-1940

By David Turner

Published by the Kent Anti-Fascist Action Committee, 1993, £3

**Reviewed by
Derek McMillan**

FOR MARXISTS, HISTORY is not simply a matter of academic interest, nor is it simply a record of facts - although David Turner's book contains a wealth of these. We can apply the lessons of the past to the problems of the present.

Although the term 'fascist' is never openly used by the British National Party (BNP), it is widely accepted by everyone, including BNP members who justify Hitler's extermination programme, that they are an embryonic fascist organisation.

The CPGB were able to win over the best Labour workers.

In the 1920s, David Turner's book relates, the National Fascisti, whose leadership used to meet in the basement of the Boy Scout headquarters, were a 'respectable' organisation used to steward Conservative Party meetings and with many links with the diehard right Tories. The Tories openly used the small

Fascisti gangs to assist them during the general strike.

However, the National Fascisti were amateurs compared with the British Union of Fascists. The book gives chapter and verse on how Mosley's blackshirt gangs had finance from big business and from the Italian fascists, as well as considerable support from the local press in Chatham.

A section of the capitalist class toyed with the idea of making an alliance with Hitler and backing Mosley's dreams of power. They rapidly disowned and later even imprisoned Mosley when it became clear that the fascist movement was arousing a mass working class opposition in which the Labour League of Youth and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) played a leading role.

The Communist Party's errors are not glossed over. They swung from denouncing Labour workers as 'social fascists' to the opportunist policy of a Popular Front with the Liberals, 'progressive capitalists' and other sworn enemies of the working class.

Nevertheless, the lesson for Militant Labour is clear. The CPGB, despite their errors, were able to approach and win over the best Labour workers - especially the youth - because they were seen as the only organisation to 'stand up and be counted'

against racist attacks on the Jewish community in the area. The denunciations of the Labour leaders did not affect the rank-and-file although they tended to modify the statements of those who had their career to think



Fascist leader Mosley.

about.

This excellent book is available from the Kent Anti-Fascist Action Committee - the price is a bit steep but the money is going to an excellent cause! □



The Latin American Left - From the fall of Allende to Perestroika

Edited by Barry Carr and Steve Ellner

Published by the Latin American Bureau, 1993, £12-99

Reviewed by Ximena Campos

THE LATIN AMERICAN Left - From the fall of Allende to Perestroika is the ambitious title of a new publication by the Latin American Bureau, who have produced a steady stream of good material on Latin America.

In a series of twelve short

essays the book charts the uneven development of the labour movement and the 'left' in the Latin American continent during the turbulent decades of the 1970s and 1980s. Along with material on events in eight specific countries, the book also includes general material on the devel-

opment of the trade union movement in the region and the guerrilla struggle, as well as a specific article on the surge of the Partido de trabajadores (the Workers' Party) in Brazil.

Throughout the various articles the key issues that face the Latin American labour movement are raised:

The effects of the years of military dictatorship on the organizations of the labour and trade union movement; the attitude of the various left groups to bourgeois democracy and its limited character today; the structural changes in the economy that have taken place in the 1980s, the product of the collapse of the bourgeoisie's attempt to develop a national based industry and market, the debt crisis and the wholesale adoption of neo-liberal policies; the impact of the policies of de-industrialization, liberalization of labour markets, and the growth of a huge informal economy on the strength and level of organization of the working class; the ideological crisis of the left as a result of the defeat of the 'peaceful road to socialism' in Chile and, more fundamentally, the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR; and also the limits, defeats and degeneration of the guerilla movements that developed in the late-1970s and early-1980s in a continent still under the influence of the Cuban revolution and the Sandinista victory of 1979.

The uneven character of developments in the region, with the massive eruption of the working class in the late-1970s and early-1980s in powerful general strikes against the dictatorships and austerity measures, and the setbacks suffered as a result of recession and neo-liberal policies, are also described. Some of the articles also refer to debates on the programmes of some of the left parties and groups, around some of the key issues they faced in that period.

The essays are brief, considering the subjects they are dealing



Sandinista leader Ortega and Castro.

with, and therefore most of them exclude background material. This could make it difficult to follow for first time readers.

Moreover, the book is written by academics, some of which have clearly little direct links with the struggle of the working class, and therefore do not reflect the debates or perspective of the labour movement let alone

the various moods of the class at different stages of the struggle. Consequently, there is little in-depth analysis and few conclusions, which makes the final result superficial. This is the most disappointing aspect of a book that has such an appealing title for readers keen to follow events in the Latin American continent. ☐

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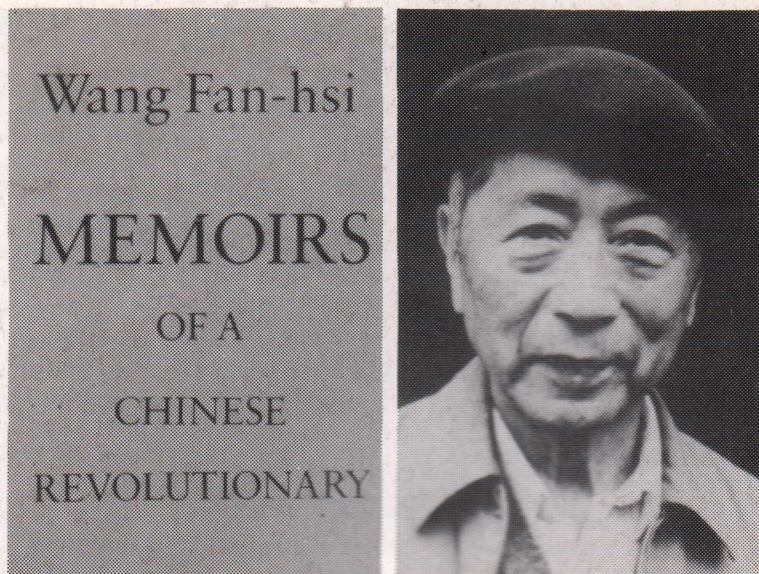
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