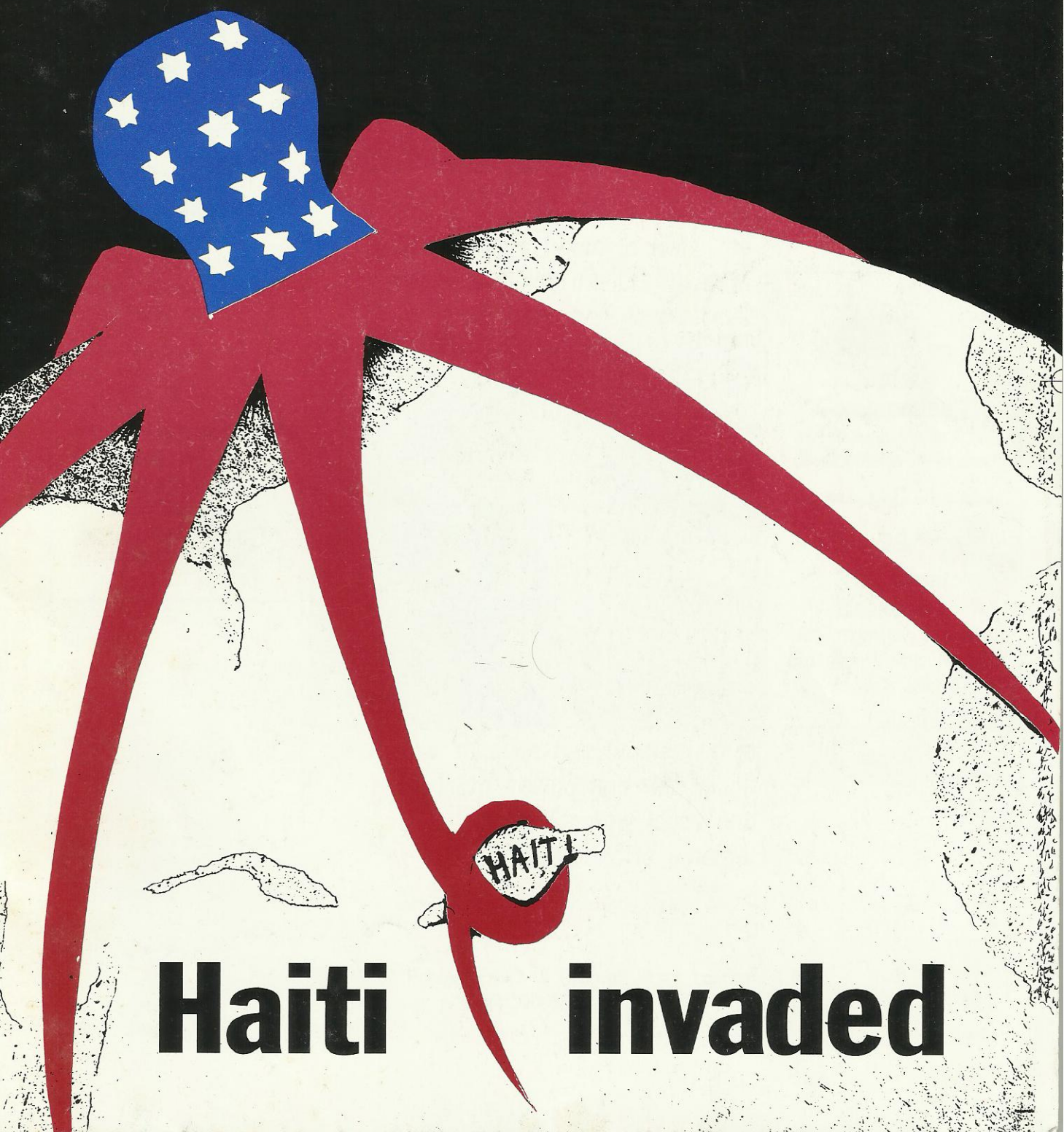


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Haiti

invaded

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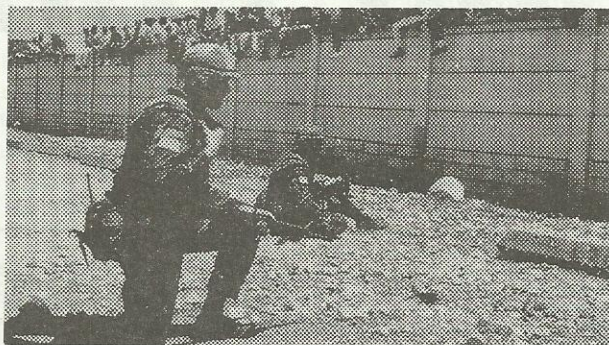
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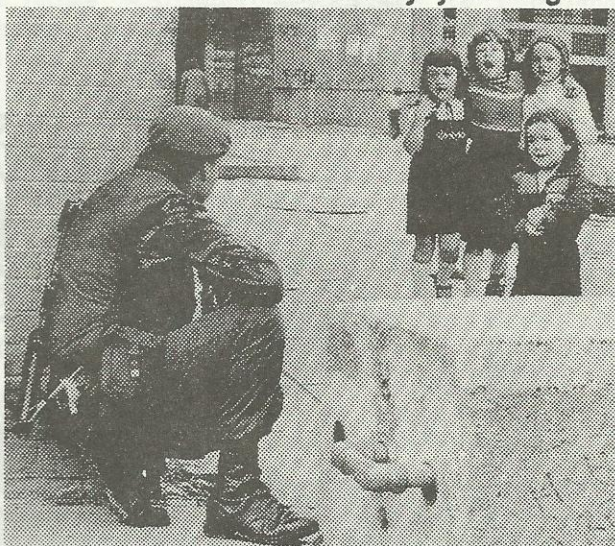
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Clinton's Haitian gamble



With Aristide's return the problems facing the US invasion force have only just begun. Dave Cotterill writes.

THE JOYOUS POPULAR welcome to the US forces who landed in Haiti turned sour in less than a fortnight. When US marines stood by while the police and armed thugs attacked pro-Aristide demonstrators, the mood

turned to fury. There was outrage on the third anniversary of the coup which overthrew Aristide, when thugs working for the regime and militiamen linked to the grotesquely misnamed 'Front for the Progress and Advancement of Haiti' tossed a gre-

nade into the crowd, killing at least five and injuring several dozen. "I hate you Americans", chanted one demonstrator: "You lie to us, you cheat us".

While the junta's assassins roamed the slum areas, the US forces were concentrated in the hillside suburb of Petionville, protecting the homes of the wealthy elite from a feared attack by the hungry, furious masses. As it was, the impoverished workers and slum-dwellers concentrated on seizing food from several big food warehouses owned by two or three of the wealthy families (including one owned by the hated police-chief, Lt-Col Michel Francois) who dominate Haiti's chaotic economy.

Despite the murders and repression on the streets, Clinton was quick to claim the US mission was 'going well'. But many GIs, as was clear from TV reports, were angry that they were ordered to stand back while people were beaten or shot in front of them. The US embassy spokesman, Stanley Schranger, blamed the violence on the reactionary para-military forces linked to the military and the failure of the police to keep order. "We cannot permit such loss of life to continue", he said, "but what we are going to do about it is under discussion".

Such inaction is hardly surprising given Clinton's contradictory aims. The Carter deal with the illegal junta provides for the return of Aristide on 15 October, but at the same time granted an amnesty to the military leaders and made no concrete provision for their removal and exile. The junta reneged on a similar deal last year, and once again responded by unleashing ferocious repression against Aristide's supporters. This was predictable. But Clinton wants a 'humanitarian' intervention to restore democracy, while he is terrified of the political consequences in the US of casualties.

"We want to be able to deal with whatever we might be confronted with."

When they first landed, the main aim of the 15,000 US forces appeared to be to protect themselves and avoid casualties. Such a policy will clearly not resolve the crisis. In congress, the Republicans are already demanding that the troops should be home by Christmas. But the US military commanders are talking of the danger of 'mission creep' - of getting sucked in deeper and deeper. Faced with bloody defiance from the junta's forces, the US has already been forced to take some steps to curb their repressive power. But US strategists are still very uncertain about Aristide, who is deeply feared by Haiti's small, very wealthy ruling elite. The reconvened parliament has already rejected an amnesty for the junta. Aristide's

supporters are demanding revenge for the bloody terror they have endured, and food and jobs to lift them out of the squalid misery of the slums. Already, in the countryside, beyond the reach of the military, the masses are beginning to settle accounts with the hated section chiefs, the Tonton Macoutes they used to control, and the voodoo priests who acted as lackeys and informers.

Commenting on the continued military build-up, a Pentagon spokesman said: "We want to make sure we have all the assets necessary in Haiti to be able to deal with whatever we might be confronted with". What they are facing is not a rapid, in-and-out mission but a colonial-style occupation in which the US will have to grapple with the explosive legacy of its past interventions, the blood that has flowed between US-backed dictators and the masses, the unimaginable gulf between the elite and the toilers, and the stored up fury of the workers and peasants. Neither Clinton nor any of his disorganised gang of advisers, appears to have any real understanding of what they have got into, let alone a strategy to find a way out. The longer they stay, the more the US forces will be seen to openly side with elements of the ruling class, including the military, and the more they will collide with the mass of the people. If under pressure at home, Clinton - or his successor - pulls out precipitately, US imperialism would only have added another destructive intervention to the sufferings of the Haitian people.

IN 1990 FATHER Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected as Haiti's president with 67% of the popular vote. This followed the heroic struggle of the masses which led to the overthrow of the hated 'Baby Doc' Duvalier dictatorship and the seeming rout of his death squads, the Tonton Macoutes. Regarded as the messiah of the masses, Aristide was viewed with suspicion by the Haitian right-wing military and the US establishment. Overthrown by a military coup in September 1991, he fled to the US for sanctuary.

The return of military dictatorship, however, brought new problems for successive US administrations. Up to 100,000 refugees were expected to flee from Haiti to Florida. Fearing the consequences of this for the Democratic Party's electoral prospects, Clinton did a dramatic U-turn in January 1993, reneging on his election promise and continuing the Republican policy of sending the refugees back - during the election campaign he had savagely criticised this in order to win the black vote.

Faced with domestic pressure Clinton then attempted to broker an agreement between Aristide and the military. Under the Governor's Island Agreement, signed in New York last year, the military agreed to Aristide's return in August 1993 and an amnesty for the coup leaders, who would then resign their military posts.

Such was the expectation of a negotiated settle-



Aristide and Clinton.

ment the US lifted sanctions and set sail with a task force to prepare the way for Aristide's return. The military leaders, however, immediately reneged on the agreement. Determined to cling to power, they unleashed an even more savage terror against Aristide's supporters, using death squads closely linked to the army and the police. Arriving in Haiti the US naval force found itself confronted on shore by threatening government organised mobs - and sailed away. Conscious of what had happened to the US forces in Somalia through the TV, the protesters had shouted 'we're going to make a second Somalia here'.

With a split in the state department, and with domestic opposition developing against intervention, Clinton and his advisers decided not to involve US forces in another debacle, and returned to the policy of sanctions. Such actions mainly affected the destitute masses while the Haitian rich got even richer by using their resources to trade in the underground market. As for US business, trade actually increased by 50% despite the sanctions.

Emboldened by this, General Cedras, head of the military, and Colonel Francois, head of the police, encouraged and directed the death squads to systematically terrorise the Haitian workers and peasants - attempting to destroy Aristide's network of support. Since the coup, supporters of Aristide and other opponents of the military dictatorship have been brutally tortured, mutilated and murdered in order to terrorise the whole population. In the shanty town areas where the greatest opposition exists, the death squads, the Macoutes, operated with impunity, raping women and murdering anyone suspected of being an opponent. TV coverage showed the effect of the terror. No one would openly speak out about politics and everything had been driven underground. The only way

that workers could meet without arousing suspicion was around the TV when football was being televised.

The murder squads are deeply entwined with the state forces, but in turn these state forces have been trained by the CIA and supported by US imperialism for decades. Now that they have clashed with US interests, the intelligence agencies have blown the whistle and revealed that the heads of the military and the police are linked to the drug trade - something which, of course, until recently they turned a blind eye to as they did with Noriega in Panama.

In reality, Clinton did not want a conflict with the Haitian military regime. Instead his policy was to create the conditions for a reconciliation between the military and Aristide, with each acting as a check on the other. The priest is not regarded as being trustworthy. The US fears that under pressure from the masses he may try to carry out measures against US interests.

Moreover, the military is acutely aware that it is sitting on a social pressure cooker. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere and the divide between rich and poor could not be greater. The hatred between rich and poor is also added to by a race hatred. Ninety per cent of Haiti's six million population are black, while the powerful, rich elite are mulattoes, of mixed black and white descent. Traditionally, the mulattoes were an exclusive caste which formed Haiti's ruling class. Through his fascistic para-military political apparatus drawn largely from among blacks, 'Papa Doc' Duvalier clipped the political wings of the mulattoe elite, but it remains extremely powerful. Additionally, the masses have endured decades of vicious military rule and terror, and the fear of revenge haunts Haiti's rulers.

In 1986 Baby Doc's regime was overthrown and hundreds of Tonton Macoutes were dispatched to their rightful place. Baby Doc himself was forced to flee into exile by a mass movement and general strikes and it seemed that the power of the Macoutes had been smashed. However, no powerful working class leadership emerged to fill the vacuum which was filled instead by the only other viable force in society, the state forces, trained over decades by US imperialism.

CONTINUING ATROCITIES AND the open defiance of US imperialisms' wishes forced Clinton to up the ante and threaten an invasion. Domestically he was coming under pressure from the Black Caucus of Democratic senators and congressmen. Electorally Clinton's Democratic Party has the support of 83% of black voters so, with congressional elections coming up in November, it was impossible for him to ignore the accusations of indecision, especially after he had agreed to 20,000 Cubans receiving entry visas.

In the past US foreign policy used to be driven by security issues, the threat of revolutions or countries moving into the so-called Soviet bloc. For instance Papa Doc Duvalier at one time flirted with the Eastern bloc. With Castro in power in Cuba this represented a real threat to US interests so they moved to back his vicious dictatorship. Nowadays, because of the collapse of Stalinism, US foreign policy is partly driven by issues which impact on domestic policies such as drugs, refugees and immigrants.

Yet Clinton hesitated over the use of military force because at home a majority were opposed to intervention but more importantly because of the fear of US troops being drawn into a much wider conflict.

Throughout the recent history of the island of Hispaniola (with Haiti on the west and the Dominican Republic on the east) the US has resorted to outright military occupation. In 1915 troops went into Haiti and stayed for 19 years. In 1965 US troops were sent to the Dominican Republic in a quick in-and-out operation. Elections in 1962 had seen the victory of a liberal reformist, Juan Bosch, whose programme included full employment and land reform. In April 1965 US president Lyndon Johnson sent in 22,000 troops because he feared another Cuba and wanted to 'restore democracy' - which has a familiar ring. US troops stood by while Dominican troops massacred 3,000 activists in the slums.

Understanding that the US is motivated by its own economic and political interests, the neighbouring countries of the Caribbean and Latin America have been lukewarm to the idea of armed intervention in Haiti. This partly explains why Clinton has held off for so long before finally threatening an actual invasion. Diplomatically time had to be spent to secure the appearance of international backing and UN support. However, only 1,700 non-

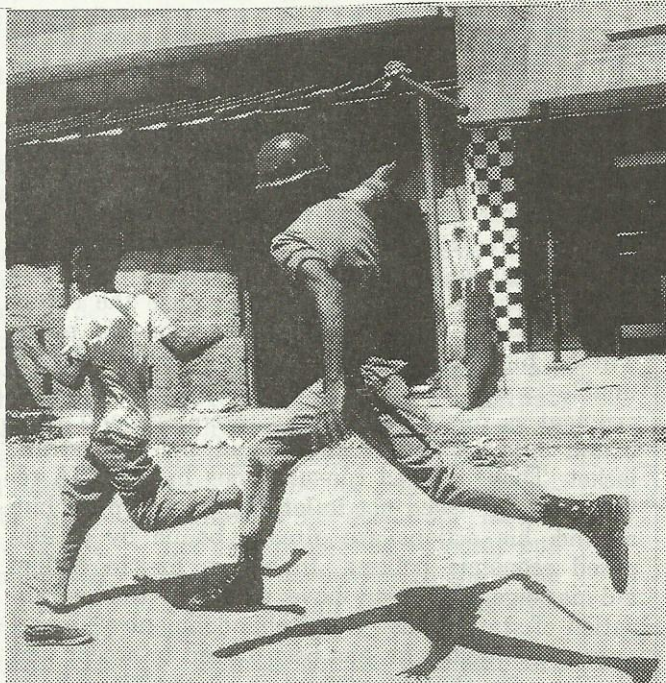
US troops have been scrapped together from 17 nations including Israel, whilst the Caribbean allies will send the magnificent total of 266. To gain backing within the United Nations the US had to do a deal which allowed Russia to take action in Georgia, supposedly on behalf of the United Nations. As *The Financial Times* pointed out, "each country is willing to act only where it conceives its national interest or prestige to be at stake and then looks... for a UN rubber stamp" (August 8, 1994).

This, then, is the 'new world order'

This, then, is the 'new world order' conceived under the Republican, Bush, and put into practise by the Democrats who operate 'gunboat liberalism' and serve notice not to threaten US interests.

Haiti is not a humanitarian UN operation but the naked aggression of US imperialism against a weak and small nation and it serves notice to all the neighbouring countries in the area.

Since the time of Reagan US imperialism has pursued a policy of promoting 'democracy' and free trade. Realising that military dictatorships would only result in revolutionary upheavals, they have attempted to promote democratic transformations in a number of Latin America countries - the exceptions being Haiti and Cuba. At the same time, under the auspices of free trade, US big business has promoted - firstly with the NAFTA agreement covering Canada, the USA and Mexico, but intended eventually to cover the whole of Latin



Haitian police attack a demonstrator.



Former President Jimmy Carter.

America and the Caribbean - a trading zone stretching from Alaska to Tierra del Fuago which US imperialism would dominate. The days when the US could openly back military dictatorships (allegedly against the threat of 'communism') are over.

But as Clinton is well aware, the foundations for building democracy in Haiti are very weak, given the poverty, the polarisation of wealth, and the brutality of the state forces. It was relatively easy to send 15,000 troops in, but that was only the beginning of the problems.

INITIALLY, THE US troops were welcomed by the masses because of the hatred towards the military rulers. But the more politically advanced sections are acutely aware of the intended role of US troops. Bazelias Jean Baptiste of the Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP) explained: "the ultimate goal of any intervention would be to reinforce the status quo - and that is what the Haitian people are fighting to change".

Fr Aristide's return is likely to raise the expectations of the masses and revenge for the terror will be high on the agenda. But Aristide will be unable to deliver any major reforms. The US government is mistrustful of his intentions and have bound him in an economic and political strait-jacket. Though taped conversations by the CIA reveal that he vowed not to let Washington push him around, his actions are already bound by US-imposed economic policies. In return for an \$800m aid package Haiti will have to accept the privatisation of state industry and abandonment of import quotas. Politically he has been forced to accept new elections for the government in December and for his position as president in 1995. And if this is not

enough to make him a safe representative, then there is always the military and the militias to fall back on.

Dominated by US imperialism and dependent on imported food and US manufacturing, working for 14 cents an hour in US factories and now lorded over by US forces, it may not take much before conflict breaks out and then a Somalian situation develops.

This nightmare scenario haunts the Clinton administration and explains why they have attempted to involve other nations. But enormous problems will now confront them. The military, the police death squads and the rich remain totally opposed to Aristide and yet the US will attempt to get the two sides to co-operate with each other.

In the short-term run up to the November congressional elections Clinton is unlikely to derive much electoral benefit for the Democrats as views are focused on domestic issues and the actual implementation of the agreement. But US workers will not have missed the usual hypocrisy of their politicians. Under the Republican president Bush the Democrats argued that the president should not have the prerogative to authorise intervention in Kuwait or Panama but should submit to congress. Now under a Democratic president, Clinton has ignored the congress and used his presidential powers.

Clinton is now likely to increase the pressure on Cuba to introduce parliamentary democracy and market reforms. At the same time his poll rating could be boosted by his apparent 'toughness' with Japan in trade talks.

US imperialism will regret its decision to police its own backyard.

All of this is in the short term, however, whilst in the medium to long-term US imperialism will regret its decision to police its own backyard.

A former Democrat assistant secretary of state for the Americas, Bernard Arnsen, warned recently that the free market miracle was not working "even where it seems to be working. In Chile, for example, it is not reaching 40% of the population. We saw the dark side of the so-called Mexican miracle with the Chipas uprising - by the time Clinton holds his Miami summit in December we will be seeing the economic crisis spreading throughout Latin America, where the gap between rich and poor has never yawned wider, with political repercussions that could remind us the age of political revolutions may not be over". But as Haitian troops continue to brutalise and murder under the watchful eye of US troops then the reverberations may be felt first in the US. □

Old fashioned modernisers

John Bulaitis looks at Tony Blair's 'new thinking' about socialism and capitalism.

DURING NEIL KINNOCK'S days as Labour leader the word 'socialism' was to become the 'S' word. Kinnock was so eager to prove his credentials to the Tory press that he had it removed from all policy documents and the speeches of party spokespersons.

Tony Blair, in contrast, while signalling his intent to remove Clause Four from Labour's constitution, is not afraid to speak of 'socialism'. He recently explained his 'new thinking' in a pamphlet - published by the Fabian society under the title *Socialism* - while his close collaborator and fellow leader of the 'modernisers', Gordon Brown, has also written one subtitled *A Socialist Agenda for Fairness*.

Indeed, Labour's right wing have a new buzz-word - 'ethical socialism'. Brown even announces that "in the new global economy our socialist analysis is more relevant than ever". Yet, a cursory read of these pamphlets is enough to show that the two Labour leaders are

playing a grown-up version of the children's game 'Simon says'. They say one thing but mean something entirely different. So, instead of 'socialist analysis' we get an insight into the ideology behind the attempt to eliminate Labour's socialist traditions and the party's links with the organised working class.

Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution speaks of a society based on the "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange". Yet now, Brown defines the "modern, popular view of socialism" as the recognition that "markets are in the public interest". It's about the "community working together".

This 'broad, national' view of 'socialism' will indeed be 'popular' with the millionaire bosses. But what possible 'community of interests' is there between someone like Sir Geoffrey Mulcahy, chairman of Woolworths on £1.3m a year, and his 30,000 workers struggling by on not much more than £100 a week?

Where is the 'public interest' when the market condemns 300,000 building workers to the dole when their skills are needed to build and renovate millions of homes?

THE SOCIALISM OF Marx, proclaims Blair "is dead... Since the collapse of communism, (ethical socialism is) the only serious view... that can remain". Like the capitalist class, Blair equates the former dictatorships in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with socialism. But these regimes were opposed by genuine Marxists. Leon Trotsky waged an inexorable struggle against Stalin's bureaucratic rule while Blair's friends, the Fabians, were singing its praises. He explained that socialism means not only a planned economy but requires 'democracy in the same way a human body needs oxygen'.

Blair is not the first and certainly won't be the last to announce Marxism 'historically redundant'. But few have the

temerity to announce in its place (in eight pages!) a "clear vision... both radical and modern". The irony is that Blair's 'new thinking' is nothing more than a crude plagiarism of socialists who predated the 'old-fashioned' Marx - after having expurgated the early socialists' indignation at the system and their fighting spirit.

Blair speaks of "social justice, cohesion, equality of opportunity and community" to be achieved by a "social partnership" where bosses and workers act together to "promote the public good". In the early 19th century, Robert Owen, William Thompson, John Bray and others spoke a similar language, with Robert Owen trying to 'prove' his ideas by running a cotton mill in New Lanarkshire on these principles. For them, the path to a new society was through convincing everyone, including the bosses, of the superiority of socialism over capitalism. Their 'utopian' idea of a 'social partnership' was a reflection of the fact that large-scale industry was only just developing and the emerging working-class was only in its formative stages.

Soon, however, the mighty struggles of the Chartist movement were to show the irreconcilable contradiction between the interests of the capitalists and the working-class. It was the recognition of this antagonism that gave rise to the ideas of Marxism or scientific socialism.

But Marx, Blair claims, had a "false view of class" that was "too narrow". Instead of class, these Labour leaders talk of 'citizenship' and the "collective power of all". What real difference is there between this and John Major's strictures about a 'classless society'?

Yet facts in Brown's pamphlet demolish 'the modernisers' own arguments and show that the gap between rich and poor has never been greater. "Unemployment has trebled, while wages are now more unequal than at any time since the 1880s... the homeless beg in the streets

alongside news-stands proclaiming the latest six-figure salary increase of a corporate executive".

But was it not 'the time-limited' Marx who explained the tendency of the capitalist market to create an "industrial reserve army, that weighs down on the active labour army and holds its pretensions in check"? Did he not also predict the inevitability of an increasing polarisation as "the greater social wealth... the greater is official pauperism"?

Marx, Blair claims, had a "false view of class".

Marx's other sin, according to Blair, was to "misunderstand the nature and development of a modern market economy". But again it was Marx who foresaw how "the centralisation of capital" leads to "the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market". The largest companies are now bigger in financial terms than all but the largest nation states. In 1989 there were only 19 countries with a gross domestic product larger than the annual revenue of General Motors.

Even *The Independent* recently recognised that "it is fine to argue for revitalised communities but achieving the reality today is a far harder task than it was for Robert Owen. If Mr Blair reaches Downing Street, he will have to contend with a complex, international, capitalist economy whose every impulse is to reduce society to its atomical parts".

Incredibly, Gordon Brown argues that this 'new global economy' means that while "one hundred years ago the Marxist analysts said that the question for capital in Britain was how best to exploit labour to enhance the value of capital

to the benefit of the few" today the issue is "not how capital can exploit labour but how labour... can best use - even exploit - modern capital". How a worker is supposed to exploit a capitalist is conveniently not explained.

Marx's analysis of the 'market' system is more relevant than ever. He explained that it is based on the bosses buying the labour power of the workers but only paying them a proportion of the real value of their labour. Profit, in the last analysis, amounts to the unpaid labour of the working class. While Brown and Blair speak of the 'dynamic' character of the market, this exploitation of the workers, making them unable to buy back the goods they have produced, leads to inevitable crisis. As Marx put it "the ultimate reason for all real crisis always lies in the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses".

Despite the almost unimaginable human achievements in science and technology over the last 50 years, a period largely of economic upswing, millions of the world's population face hunger and the lack of rudimentary health care. In the world's richest countries 35 million are on the dole. In the words of Marx the capitalist mode of production, has "come to a standstill at a point determined by the production and realisation of profit, not by the satisfaction of human needs".

The experience of the chaos and anarchy of the market system will draw ever growing numbers of working-class people to reject the Labour leaders 'old-fashioned' apologies for capitalism and join the fight for real socialist change. □

Socialism, by Tony Blair.
Fabian Pamphlet No.565,
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Society, 1994, 8pp, £3-50.

*A Socialist Agenda for
Fairness*, by Gordon Brown.
Fabian Pamphlet No.563,
1994, £3-50.

After the ceasefire



A respite in 'the Troubles' has opened up new possibilities for working class politics in Northern Ireland, argues Peter Hadden.

EARLY IN 1971 the provisional IRA campaign began in earnest. Then and in the months which followed a combination of mass unemployment, discrimination and state repression drove thousands of Catholic working-class youth into their ranks.

At that time *Militant* stood against the mood in Catholic working class areas and argued that the Provisional's methods could not succeed. More than twenty years on the IRA decision to call off the campaign is a confirmation of what we argued then and since.

The ceasefire announcement was welcomed in Catholic working-class areas. There was a sense of relief in these war-exhausted communities that at last it was over. This was interlaced with expecta-

tions of substantial concessions, and a belief that a victory of sorts must have been won because 'the IRA would not have called it off if they hadn't got something'.

It was the IRA not the British government which shifted its ground.

Although this optimism has been encouraged by Sinn Fein leaders the unmistakable truth is that it was the IRA not the British government which

shifted its ground and backed down.

Behind the scenes concessions were undoubtedly given to bring about the ceasefire, but these were on secondary questions. Repression would be eased, the broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein, which over-dubbing by actors had in any case turned into a farce, would end. Border roads blocked by the army would be opened, there would be a gradual demilitarisation including the phasing down of the army presence, and some prisoners would be released. After a period of 'decontamination' Sinn Fein would be included in political talks.

On what Gerry Adams refers to as the 'core' issues - British withdrawal, self-determination, and a British commitment to 'persuade' Protestants to accept constitutional change, nothing was given.

It is true that there have been substantial changes in the position of Catholics in the Northern state. Before 'the Troubles' they were a discriminated against minority, held in submission by a repressive Unionist state.

While a residue of past discrimination lingers, especially in employment - Catholics are still twice as likely as Protestants to be out of work - all the more blatant practices built up by the Unionists have been swept away.

These gains however were not won by the IRA but by the mass movement which developed in the Catholic working class areas, starting with the civil rights struggles of 1968-69. In reality the days when Catholics were prepared to put up with their position as second-class citizens denied political rights, were numbered from the moment civil rights became a mass movement of the Catholic youth in October 1968.

Those in Catholic working-class areas are right today to celebrate the twenty-five years of resistance which has meant no going back to things as they were. But, contrary to what republican spokespersons argue, the IRA was not the cutting edge of that resistance. More accurately, it detracted from it. It gave the state the excuse for the repression used to contain the Catholic areas. It alienated Protestants and deepened the division between the working class, so pushing back the prospects of building a united class movement powerful enough to defeat and overthrow the state. Certainly the campaign was sustained with determination, energy and courage. But linked to false methods these qualities are wasted. Those who argue that it was a success should consider just what could have been achieved if the revolutionary energy, the sacrifice and the endeavour used to maintain it, had instead been put behind the methods of mass struggle and the ideas of class unity and socialism.

A journalist with *The Irish People*, an American-produced pro-IRA paper, expressed this feeling when he wrote: "There's been a military stalemate for years but the IRA have done what they said they'd do - broken Britain's will to stay in Northern Ireland".

There is no truth in this whatsoever. When they partitioned Ireland in 1920-21, holding on to what became Northern Ireland, the main purpose of the British ruling class was to cut across the prospect of socialist revolution should the national and social questions in Ireland become one. There were other military and strategic reasons, but first and foremost it was a tactic of divide and rule, of promoting religious divisions in order to preserve capitalism.

By the 1960s, especially with the signing of a free trade agreement with the Southern Irish government and with military strategic reasons for retaining a foothold in Ireland made redundant both by the coming of the age of nuclear weapons and Britain's decline to a third-rate military power, they no longer had any reason to maintain partition.

They would have preferred to withdraw, to see Ireland reunited, and to seek to maintain their domination by economic not political or military means. Protestant opposition meant they could not achieve this. Any attempt to force Protestants into a capitalist united Ireland would only lead to civil war and repartition.

So when British Tory ministers now declare that they have no selfish, strategic or economic interests in Northern Ireland they are not stating something forced on them by the IRA campaign. Rather they are only saying publicly what has been their position since before the IRA campaign began, not that they have no interests in Ireland, but that their selfish, strategic and economic interests are best served by ending their direct control over the North.

AT THE BEGINNING of the 1980s, when Sinn Fein developed as a political force on the back of Catholic outrage at government intransigence over the prison hunger strike, the republican movement adopted the so-called 'ballot-box and Armalite strategy'.

At the time *Militant* explained that the attempt to marry the mutually exclusive methods of mass political action with the secretive and by its nature elitist methods of individual terrorism would come unstuck.

A section of the IRA leadership had come to recognise that their 'long war' was unwinnable.

The ceasefire results from the failure of both elements of this strategy as well as from the inevitable conflict between the two. By the mid-1980s a section of the IRA leadership had come to recog-



nise that their 'long war' was unwinnable. While the British government could not entirely crush them, for their part, despite huge arms supplies from Libya, they had no hope of success by military means.

Meanwhile Sinn Fein managed to win about 10% of the vote in successive Northern elections. The Armalite and the ballot-box strategy led to an increasing reliance by the leadership on the political road. But while Sinn Fein could depend on solid support especially in Catholic working-class areas it failed to dislodge the SDLP as the majority nationalist party. South of the border its strenuous efforts to build a political base came to nothing. It could depend on less than 2% of the vote.

Unable to offer any prospect of Sinn Fein going beyond its existing base of support this political strategy became not a strategy of building Sinn Fein to the point where it could take political power but instead one of cutting deals with other nationalists.

During the early period of the Troubles, the republican leadership continually denounced the

'constitutional nationalists' of the SDLP, and the major parties of the Southern establishment, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. By the mid-1980s this same leadership, increasingly disillusioned with its own efforts, had moved to the right and began to embrace these people.

As early as 1986 secret talks took place via intermediaries between Gerry Adams and the Fianna Fail leader Charles Haughey in Dublin. Sinn Fein began to develop a growing faith that right-wing Dublin governments would deliver on its behalf.

Talks between SDLP leader John Hume and Gerry Adams begun publicly in 1988, appear to have been privately encouraged by Fianna Fail leaders, and managed to achieve a broad range of agreement.

The collapse of Stalinism and the apparent strengthening of imperialism, consolidated these processes within Sinn Fein. Events in South Africa and the Middle East strengthened their illusions in a democratic settlement brokered by outside bodies.

A major Sinn Fein document, *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, issued in 1992, called upon capitalist institutions such as the 'Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe' and the United Nations, to be involved in helping check human rights abuses and finding a solution. It argued that "the United Nations has an indispensable role to play in creating a democratic and peaceful future for the whole of Ireland".

Gerry Adams on his two visits to America in 1994 to meet the Irish American political establishment and to pressure the Clinton administration directly, followed a path well-worn before him by John Hume. Adams and Sinn Fein, in their efforts to build a nationalist bloc, have stepped over to the ground of the SDLP and Fianna Fail, not visa versa.

Aware of the changes taking place in the republican leadership the British government, especially after the removal of Thatcher in November 1990, began to make public and private overtures to Sinn Fein and the IRA. Secret talks through intermediaries were held stretching over the first half of 1993. The leadership of the Official Unionist Party, the largest of the Protestant political parties, were kept well abreast of these developments, and given sufficient assurances to prevent them reacting to any future deal with the fury with which they reacted to the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. By 1993 the Dublin government were also discussing, again through intermediaries, with the leadership of the two main loyalist paramilitary groups, the UDA and the UVF.

The result of all this was the December 1993 Downing Street Declaration which set out to entice the republican leadership into the world of bourgeois politics, while at the same time placating the unionists with contrary assurances. Sinn Fein could not accept the terms of this declaration but they wanted to go through the door it opened to talks

and to the corridors of capitalist political power. When the leadership had prepared the ranks sufficiently to ensure that there would be no split, the ceasefire was announced.

IN PROTESTANT WORKING-CLASS areas the initial reaction to the ceasefire was one of fear that a deal had been done, that the IRA had indeed won. This did not however spill over into a massive upsurge in paramilitary activity.

As in Catholic areas here also there was a feeling of war-weariness and a strong desire for peace. Despite suspicions of a 'sell-out' by the British government the predominant mood was to 'wait and see'.

As with the IRA, the loyalist paramilitaries do not exist in a vacuum. Recent years have seen a succession of united mass movements of Catholic and Protestant workers protesting against sectarian killings. In virtually every case these movements have been triggered by initial protests called by Militant Labour members through various union organisations.

When the IRA blew up a van filled with Protestant building workers at Teebane in Mid-Ulster in January 1992 the Militant-led Mid-Ulster Trades Council called a partial general strike. Soon after the UDA murdered five Catholics in a bookie's shop in Belfast's Ormeau Road. The example of Mid-Ulster forced the reluctant hand of the trade union leaders who responded with a lunch-time rally of 20,000 in Belfast city centre.

Last Autumn an initiative by a Militant Labour member was the key factor in leading to a walkout by Shorts workers after a Catholic was murdered on site. Soon after this the IRA killed nine Protestants when a botched bomb devastated a Shankill Road fishmonger's shop. Catholic workers from Shorts and Harland and Wolff joined their Protestant workmates to march to the scene in protest. Loyalist attacks against a bar in Co. Derry left seven dead and the trade union leaders were forced to respond with a day of mass protest in November in which at least 80,000 took part.

Such demonstrations were an important factor in persuading the IRA to call off its campaign. They were finding that when they escalated their actions the sectarian consequences only provoked outrage among the working-class and led to isolation.

Loyalist paramilitaries, despite their gangsterism and their long history as little more than sectarian death-squads, sometimes operating at the behest of sections of the state, are also not immune to such pressures. In May of this year, after the UVF murdered a Catholic as he worked on a ship in the Harland and Wolff shipyard, the entire workforce of this company, once a symbol of anti-Catholic intimidation and discrimination, walked out in protest.

So, both the UDA and UVF have reacted to the IRA ceasefire with caution. Polls in areas like the

Shankill Road have shown a majority in favour of a loyalist ceasefire also, although among younger Protestants the percentage who favour carrying on is higher.

Failed attempts at sectarian atrocities such as a bomb on board the Belfast-Dublin train which did not explode and a failed gun attack on a Catholic bar in North Belfast, are a warning that loyalist violence is not yet at an end. However, given that the IRA ceasefire holds, the UVF certainly, but also the UDA, are likely to scale-down and even to end their campaigns.

The main focus of the conflict, for the next period, is likely to be on the political rather than the military plane. A protracted process of negotiations, involving unionists, the SDLP, Sinn Féin, probably the loyalist paramilitaries in some political guise, and the London and Dublin governments, is likely to open up.

Although it will be a rocky road it is possible that some agreement can be worked out. This would involve a new Assembly in the North with an in-built arrangement for power to be shared between unionists and nationalists, and a degree of Dublin involvement through North-South committees looking after matters such as tourism and economic cooperation. The constitutional claim over the North contained in Articles Two and Three of the Southern constitution is likely to be revoked, while the 1920 Government of Ireland Act by which Westminster legislated for partition would also be amended so as to give people in the North the right to opt-out of the union with Britain.

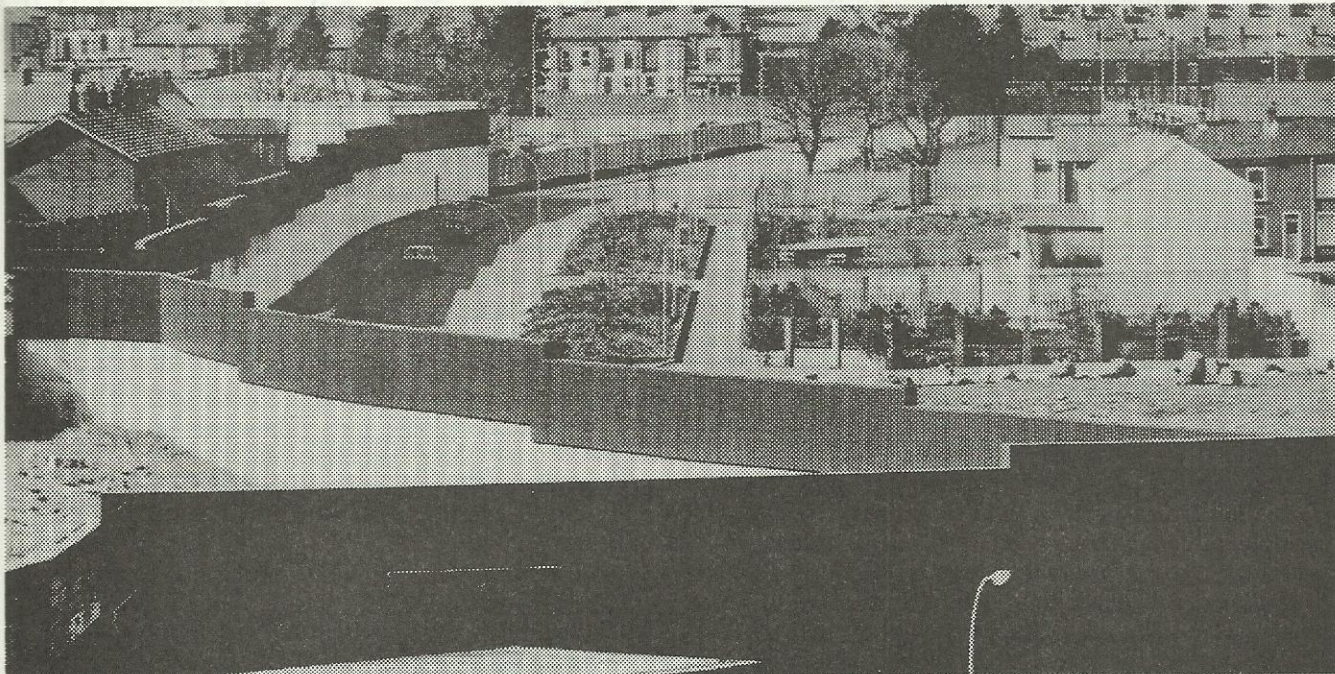
The only firm constitutional pledge given to date by Major has been a concession to the unionists, not to Sinn Féin. Any final package is to be submitted to a referendum in the North. A simultaneous referendum in the South would be probable.

There are potential pitfalls standing in the way of such an agreement - disputes over the degree and timing of Dublin involvement, splinters from the IRA or loyalist groups trying to disrupt the whole process, opposition from people like Paisley, and the possibility that fears and frustrations might develop in working-class areas, Catholic and Protestant.

The predominant mood however is that the violence should be ended. If paramilitary activity is drastically scaled down or ended for a period, efforts by groups on either side to restart it would likely meet with outrage. It is possible that this mood can carry the political talks through all the obstacles to an agreement.

SUCH AN AGREEMENT would not mean that the problem has been resolved or the conflict ended. Power-sharing between sectarian political blocs does not mean that the barriers within society are broken down.

The same politicians who agree to share the spoils of office with 'the other side' can only guar-



The 'peace' line.

antee their own futures by ensuring that the sectarian political divide remains. Power-sharing thus tends to institutionalise rather than eradicate sectarianism.

Nor will there be any resolution of the national problem. Things have got this far because the British government have been stressing quite opposite implications of their proposals to unionists and nationalists. Unionists are being cosseted with assurances that the link with Britain will continue for as long as there is a majority for it.

*The predominant mood
is that the violence
should be ended.*

Nationalists are being told that Britain would present no obstacle to a united Ireland should there be a majority for that - and reminded also that Catholics are expected to outnumber Protestants in Northern Ireland, possibly in twenty or thirty years time.

This is no reconciliation of conflicting national aspirations but a sure formula for a sharpening of the conflict at some future time. The national problem remains irresolvable on a capitalist basis. Protestants will never accept a capitalist united Ireland fearing that they, as the new minority, would end up as second-class citizens.

Sinn Fein's strategy to overcome this only shows how little they understand of the outlook of Protestant workers. Their idea, reiterated again and

again, that Britain must become 'persuaders' of Protestants, is based on the belief that Protestants refuse to budge from opposition to a united Ireland only because Westminster guarantees their future as part of Britain. Consequently, the argument runs, they have no incentive to consider other options. Remove the guarantee, 'persuade', that is 'coerce' Protestants, and they would come to terms with their all-Ireland fate.

The reality is that such moves on the part of Britain would convince Protestants that they were being 'sold out' and would push them in the direction of civil war. They would not become reconciled to reunification but would choose what to them would be the lesser evil of independence.

Catholics, even the Catholic working-class, may accept some interim accommodation within Northern Ireland. Few believe that a united Ireland is possible in the short term. When Southern prime minister Albert Reynolds said that reunification was at least 20 years off, Gerry Adams in an interview in the *Andersonstown News* sounded only a fraction more optimistic: "I certainly think that 20 years is far too long. I, and others like me, who have struggled for 25 years, am not prepared to say this is how long it will take. If it takes that long, fair enough".

Catholics may be prepared to wait but the Catholic working-class in particular, retain the aspiration to a united Ireland. In so far as they go along with present developments it is because they see them as step-by-step, albeit slowly, to eventual reunification.

Their hopes will be disappointed. The strategy of reliance on the political representatives of Southern Irish capitalism, US imperialism, and the

institutions of world capitalism, will prove no more effective than did the long campaign of the Provisionals.

Nor will the Protestant working-class be satisfied with the outcome. The economic decline of many Protestant working-class areas has already led to a feeling of neglect and a growing consciousness that they are the new underclass. The Protestant Shankill Road in Belfast is one such area. Recently published statistics give a grim picture of social conditions within it. Twenty-six per cent of its people are unemployed. Only in half of the households is there a wage earner. Eighty per cent of its one-parent families live on less than £110 per week. Seventy-two per cent of its young people have tried alcohol, 33% have tried drugs and 8% have sold drugs. Twenty-eight per cent have stolen a car and 17% shoplift. If such conditions continue and if no class alternative is possible, Protestant uncertainty and anger will mount no matter what deals are worked out by the sectarian politicians.

Hopes have been expressed in an economic 'peace dividend'.

Hopes have been expressed in an economic 'peace dividend', particularly in the form of aid and investment from America, that will begin to tackle the problem of unemployment and social decay in both Catholic and Protestant areas. Figures of \$130 million in US aid over three years, of new investment creating 25,000 jobs, of 10,000 new jobs in tourism, plus unspecified extra EC funds, have been loosely tossed around.

Much of this is little more than wild speculation of what will be forthcoming. There is little doubt that there will be some extra funding, most of it going in prestige projects or to businesses in the form of grants. Some increase in private investment from the US is also possible, as US firms are drawn to Northern Ireland as a cheap-labour gateway to Europe. Tourism could also increase especially if there is agreement to promote North-South holiday packages.

Against this is the possible loss of up to 20,000 jobs in security. These would be mostly full-time, well-paid jobs with plenty of overtime. Many of those that replace them are likely to be low-paid and part-time.

Then there is the economic peace dividend the Tory government is likely to wish to extract. Public spending in Northern Ireland has been maintained at higher levels than in Britain, substantial funds have been pumped into city-centre regeneration and other projects largely in an effort to draw support from the IRA and Sinn Fein. Now there is

likely to be backbench pressure on the government to hold back on some of the £4 billion subsidy given each year to keep services in Northern Ireland afloat.

The aid and new investment which is likely to come will barely scratch the surface of the mass unemployment and widespread poverty. It is the continuation of these problems, together with privatisation, low wages, and increasing exploitation, which will eat away at the basis of any settlement reached under capitalism. Ultimately the choice remains; either we build workers' unity in the struggle to overthrow capitalism and achieve a socialist solution or there will be renewed sectarian violence, even civil war.

THE IRA CEASEFIRE signals the probable end of 'the Troubles' in the form they have taken for over two decades. A new situation has opened and with it there is the basis for new ideas, new organisations to emerge.

The IRA's last campaign, the ineffective border campaign, was called off in 1962. In the years which followed a significant shift to the left took place. The youth turned away from the discredited ideas of individual terrorism to the methods of mass struggle. World events, especially the May 1968 general strikes in France, left a deep imprint. All this prepared for the explosion of socialist ideas during the initial stages of the civil rights movement in 1968.

Class issues and with them socialist ideas can again come to the fore.

History will not exactly repeat itself. Today's conditions are very different from those of the 1960s. But it is likely that the next generation of youth will question the ideas which have been dominant throughout the Troubles. Class issues and with them socialist ideas can again come to the fore.

The IRA are supported by some and tolerated by many in Catholic working-class areas because their proclaimed cause of resisting repression and combatting the old sectarian state is seen as legitimate. Loyalist paramilitaries are tolerated mainly because many Protestant workers see no other defence against the IRA or a united Ireland.

If the issues of repression and discrimination on one side and IRA violence on the other recede, and these organisations continue with their fund raising activities and their crude methods of exercising control, resentment, even opposition, can begin to develop within their own communities.

Class questions can come to the fore and the tendency towards class unity can be reestablished.

An upsurge in industrial struggles, including struggles in Britain and the South, could reinforce this.

The idea of building a new party to represent the interests of the working-class could begin to take on more flesh. Already community workers in the Shankill area, together with some individuals with UDA and UVF connections, have issued a call for a new political party for working-class Protestants. Although there are sectarian overtones to this, it illustrates the class pressures already there among Protestants.

The existing sectarian parties have long enjoyed the luxury of permanent opposition. At times most of them have tapped the overwhelming mood of opposition to Tory economic policies with anti-Tory rhetoric.

In a new assembly they would be handed control over local services including health and education. Their failure to challenge Tory policies, reverse past privatisations, scrap health trusts, etc, would be there for all to see.

In recent years support for the building of a socialist Labour Party to challenge the existing parties has been restricted to quite a narrow layer of trade union activists. In the run-up to a new assembly, and once these parties show their true face within that assembly, this could change, and change quite quickly. Militant Labour intend to take an initiative in raising this issue within the broad labour movement, discussing with community activists, and preparing for a conference which could launch such a party.

IN ORDER TO develop a base in working-class areas a socialist organisation needs to take up all the issues which effect people's lives. In Catholic areas this means campaigning to end state repression.

Repression has always been justified by the state as necessary to stop the IRA. Now that the IRA has stopped this excuse no longer holds. Undemocratic powers which are now maintained represent an obvious threat to the working-class and its organisations. The call for the scrapping of all repressive legislation and for the complete dismantling of the apparatus of repression built up over 25 years needs to be raised.

The call for the withdrawal of troops can now be posed more bluntly, without provoking a sectarian response from Protestants. Alongside this, the issue of the building by trade unions and working-class community groups of anti-sectarian committees to combat intimidation and provide defence needs also to be raised.

The tentacles of repression stretch to Britain also. About 1,000 out of MI5's staff of 2,000 are engaged in combatting 'Ulster terrorism'. If retained those people are likely to end up combatting 'socialist subversion' in Britain. The call for the scrapping of MI5 and all other secret agencies must be raised.

Policing is set to become a key issue in Catholic areas of Northern Ireland. Attempts will be made by the state to revamp the RUC so as to make it



acceptable to Catholics.

Meanwhile the paramilitaries are likely to continue to exert their own control, the beatings and kneecappings will probably continue.

Socialists should demand the disbandment of the RUC and their replacement with genuine community police forces, run by elected committees with majority representation given to representatives of trade unions and community groups, and with sectarians excluded from service. A socialist solution to the national question needs also to be put forward. This should reject all the capitalist options, the status quo, independence and a capitalist united Ireland. A socialist solution means the unity of the working-class in the North, North and South, and with the British working class, to overthrow capitalism throughout these islands.

On a socialist basis it would be possible to reach a resolution which would involve no coercion and would guarantee the religious, cultural and national rights of all minorities.

Within the framework of a socialist Ireland and a socialist federation of Britain and Ireland the problem could be solved. Within Ireland the hardening of Protestant opposition means that the slogan of a socialist united Ireland can no longer be baldly posed.

In advocating a socialist Ireland the right of Protestants to opt out of a unitary state should they so desire needs to be guaranteed. Militant Labour does not advocate this. We stand for the unity of the Protestant and Catholic working-class but only by showing that socialists have no interest in coercing either section of the community can a united class movement powerful enough to overthrow both existing states in Ireland be built.

The IRA ceasefire has not solved the problem. But it has created an opportunity for the ideas of socialism to develop to challenge the dominant sectarian ideas of the past. Only if this challenge is not met over the years which lie ahead will there be the prospect of even worse sectarian violence than has been experienced so far. □

Economic Focus

By Pete Watson

Why the interest?

THE TORY GOVERNMENT has been blowing its trumpet about the British economy recently. Growth is now at the fastest rate for six years and production stands 3.8%, higher than last year. Tory strategists are hoping for a 'feel good' factor involving tax cuts and an unemployment drop to help them at the next general election. To see the real situation, however, requires a look beneath the surface of these figures at the deeper national and international factors at work.

In the years 1988 to 1990 Britain had a relatively healthy growth rate. This was partly based on a jump in real investment in manufacturing industry. What is the situation today?

Since 1989 total UK investment has fallen by a third: the lowest as a proportion of production (Gross Domestic Product) for 30 years. An element in this low investment is the 'short termism' of the British ruling class. (See *MIR* No.57 for more detail). Most UK companies insist on 'payback' of investment within two to three years, making long-term investment plans very difficult. But companies are also reluctant to spend because they are often still repaying debts built up in the 1980s.

The upturn experienced after 1983 was led by credit. Debts were racked up by companies, consumers and government in the belief that the upturn was long-lived and debt could be paid off later. Those debts are weighing on the mind of con-

sumers. British people are currently reducing spending and saving. Poverty is growing. Despite the myth that Britain is reaching 'boom time', real personal disposable income fell by 1.8% between the first and second quarter of 1994.

There is no prospect of massive government-led spending. Attacks on the public sector, welfare state and public spending in general is the strict policy of government in Britain and, in the main, internationally. The present ratio of gross accumulated public debt to production (GDP) in the advanced capitalist countries (OECD) is 70% and climbing. There is little sign therefore at the moment of any consumer-led boom. Investment levels show that employers are not planning a massive increase in production.

Underlying processes show the weakness of Britain's recovery.

This brings us to the question of interest rates. If British bosses were expecting a long-term healthy growth of the economy, interest rates would typically be low. At the beginning of an upturn borrowing from the banks is at a low ebb because of the preceding collapse of industry and employment. Financiers keep interest rates low to encourage companies and people to borrow. They expect to recoup the

money at a later stage with interest. If interest rates rise, however, it is a sign that the world's financiers are worried about the future. They don't wish to lend money to dodgy companies that may go bust.

Government and bosses also promote interest rate rises to squeeze out inflation. By making money more expensive to borrow they hope to reduce the amount of money available to people and therefore keep inflation in check. Inflation is a sign of economic difficulty for capitalism. With strong growth in investment and production inflation should be kept down. If the British economy looks such a picture of health, why did interest rates go up half-a-per cent in September to 5.75%? Former Chancellor Lamont has predicted interest rates as high as 7%.

It is clear that even at this early stage of economic recovery inflation will develop. The retail price index rose 0.5% between July and August. This news prompted a sharp drop on the British stock market. Underlying processes show the weakness of Britain's recovery. There is little to 'feel good' about.

Britain is not the only economy suffering from rising interest rates. World finance markets took a tumble in September when the USA's trade figures were published. The difference between imports and exports showed a deficit of \$11bn in July - the second-worst ever. As recovery takes place imports are being sucked into the US economy. Again inflationary fears are driving up interest rates in the USA.

The world trend is for interest rates to rise. This will in



Defence spending

DEFENCE SPENDING IS a good example of the resources that are wasted under capitalism. A new jet fighter, the Eurofighter, will cost over \$110 million each. They are so expensive that some experts believe that they will never be used!

But that is chicken-feed compared to the US 'Stealth' aircraft. This aircraft is so clever, say its makers, that it does not need escort fighters or radio-jamming aircraft. Which is probably just as well as each one costs \$2bn!

The big military manufacturers are linked by a thousand threads to government. Military personnel and government ministers intermingle to make sure that all sides make a fast buck.

But now it seems that some of these threads are being cut. With the collapse of Stalinism capitalist governments in the West are cutting defence budgets. US defence spending is expected to fall from a peak of 6.5% of GDP in 1986 to no more than 3.2% by 1997. By then three million defence jobs will have gone. Currently one worker in the industry is losing his or her job every 30 seconds.

Here would lie an opportunity to use these skills for the benefit of society. Couldn't the technology available to send a cruise missile to its target be put to better use? Norman Augustine, tipped to be Lockheed Martin's next boss, replies: "I would submit that defence conversion does not consist of training unemployed aerospace workers to become unemployed autoworkers".

Meanwhile there is still plenty of profit to be made in the increasing number of national conflicts across the globe. Regional military spending in the Middle East for example is expected to run at 20%, of the regions entire GDP for the foreseeable future. □

turn have an effect on the economic recovery. Companies will be reluctant to borrow to expand production because of the increased cost of loans.

The world economy cannot find immediate hope in Germany and Japan, the two giants next to the US. It was Japanese growth that contributed to the length of the upturn from 1983 to 1990, while Germany is the most powerful economy in Europe. The Christian Democrat government in Germany has sought to 'talk-up' the economy in the hope of gaining votes in the federal elections. But in 1993 Germany was in recession, the economy shrinking by 1.7%. This year growth in the economy has been mainly in housing construction and restocking warehouses. Investment is still very sluggish.

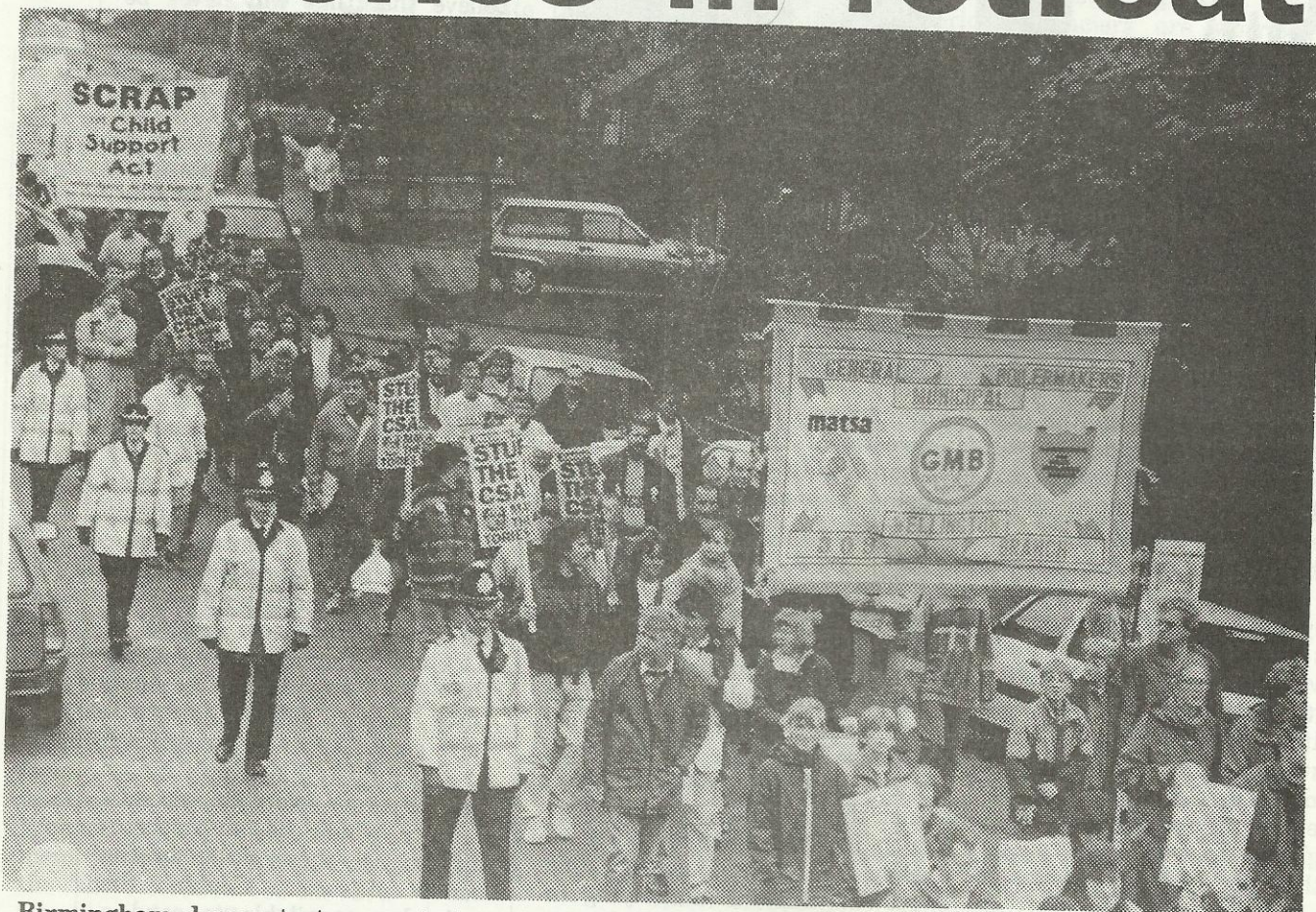
Japan is only now just coming out of recession. Growth was at 0.4% for the first six months of this year. Profitability of industry is rising and forecast at 16% this year compared to a 26% fall last year. But consumer spending is low: sales in Tokyo stores fell for the thirtieth month in succession in August. Investment in industry is still getting worse. The big

companies expect to cut capital investment by 3.8% this year. There is little chance of Japan being a motor for the world economy in the immediate future.

The general picture therefore emerges of a world economy only slowly coming out of recession. Some countries such as the US, Australia and Canada are leading the way. This is not because they are in any way the healthiest economies. It is just that as they entered recession in 1990 - before the rest - they are now showing some growth. But the underlying indicators of investment and so on show a weak recovery. Inflationary fears are forcing up interest rates. Growth in Japan and the US coupled with a big expansion of credit were big motivators of the upturn from 1983 to 1990. A lot of factors that contributed to that upturn are now missing.

Militant Labour has characterised the coming years as years of long-term depression. Weak unhealthy growth will be followed by recession. Today's world economy confirms this analysis. □

Child Support Act: Tories in retreat



Birmingham demonstrators protest against the CSA.

Christine Thomas examines the problems facing the Tories after 18 months of the Child Support Act - and Labour's failure to respond.

THE GOVERNMENT IS desperately searching for a way out of its worst legislative cock-up since the poll tax, wrote *The Economist* on the first anniversary of the Child Support Act (CSA) in April this year. At that time, all over the country, single parents, absent parents and second families were holding huge demonstrations and rallies to protest at the suffering and hardship the Child Support Act was generating. MPs' post bags were bulging with letters complain-

ing about the Act, many of them from former Tory supporters. In the face of such an onslaught of opposition the Tories decided to set up yet another review.

The Child Support Agency itself is clearly in total chaos. In July, Ros Hepplewhite, then head of the Agency, was forced to admit as much. "Performance has not always measured up to the standards we set out to achieve" she said, when the Agency missed its target for benefit savings by

20%. "We apologise to our clients for the difficulties they have experienced because of our shortcomings". Two months later she had resigned, unable to withstand the pressures of the job.

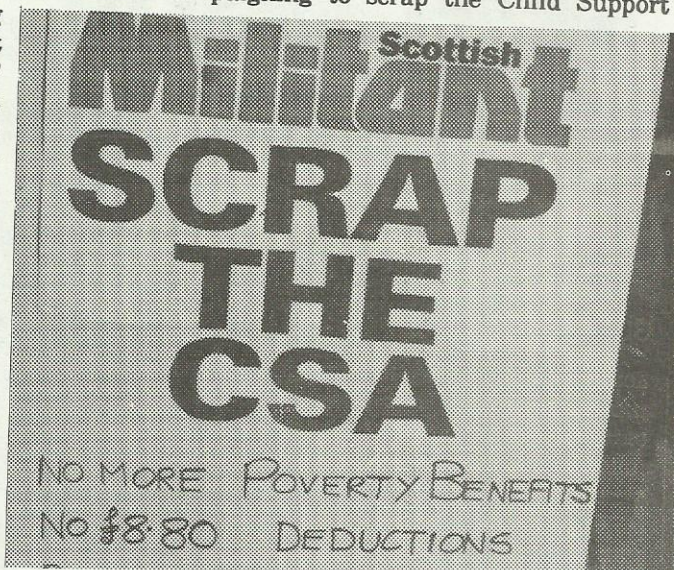
Once again the Tories are divided about what to do next. Should they make minor alterations to the CSA in the hope that this will stem the growing tide of opposition? Or should they opt for 'root and branch' changes as some MPs are demanding? Back in February some minor concessions to absent fathers were made but had little effect on the escalating protest action. The Tories are clearly worried that granting a few more concessions will once again fail to cut across the deep-rooted anger that has developed. However, any attempts at fundamental reform would seriously challenge their plans to cut back on public spending. One Tory backbencher summed up their dilemma: "The party is torn because no simple solution exists".

The TUC voted at its annual conference to scrap the Act.

The launch of yet another Tory review has also opened up a debate amongst groups campaigning against the Child Support Act: should it be reformed or repealed? Support for total repeal has been steadily growing, fuelled by the chaos in the Agency and the Tories' weakness. Significantly, the TUC voted at its annual conference to scrap the Act. This marks an important change of policy reflecting the mounting opposition both inside and outside the trade unions, where the majority of union conferences voted for repeal rather than reform. Only the right-wing leadership of the civil service union, the CPSA, has held out against repeal, arguing that it would jeopardise the jobs of workers in the Child Support Agency. Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument would mean we should oppose full employment on the grounds that it would mean job losses in Unemployment Benefit Offices! Clearly such a position is untenable. Their arguments appear even more spurious in the light of their lack of determined opposition to 'market testing' in the civil service and the job losses that could result.

Militant Labour members have played a key role in moving resolutions in the trade unions in support of repeal, especially in the shopworkers' union USDAW from which the successful TUC motion came. At the same time, we have called for a fair and flexible maintenance system which would be non-coercive for single parents and benefit them financially. By taking into account individual circumstances and judging each case on its own merit such a system would not only guarantee the redeployment of workers currently employed in the

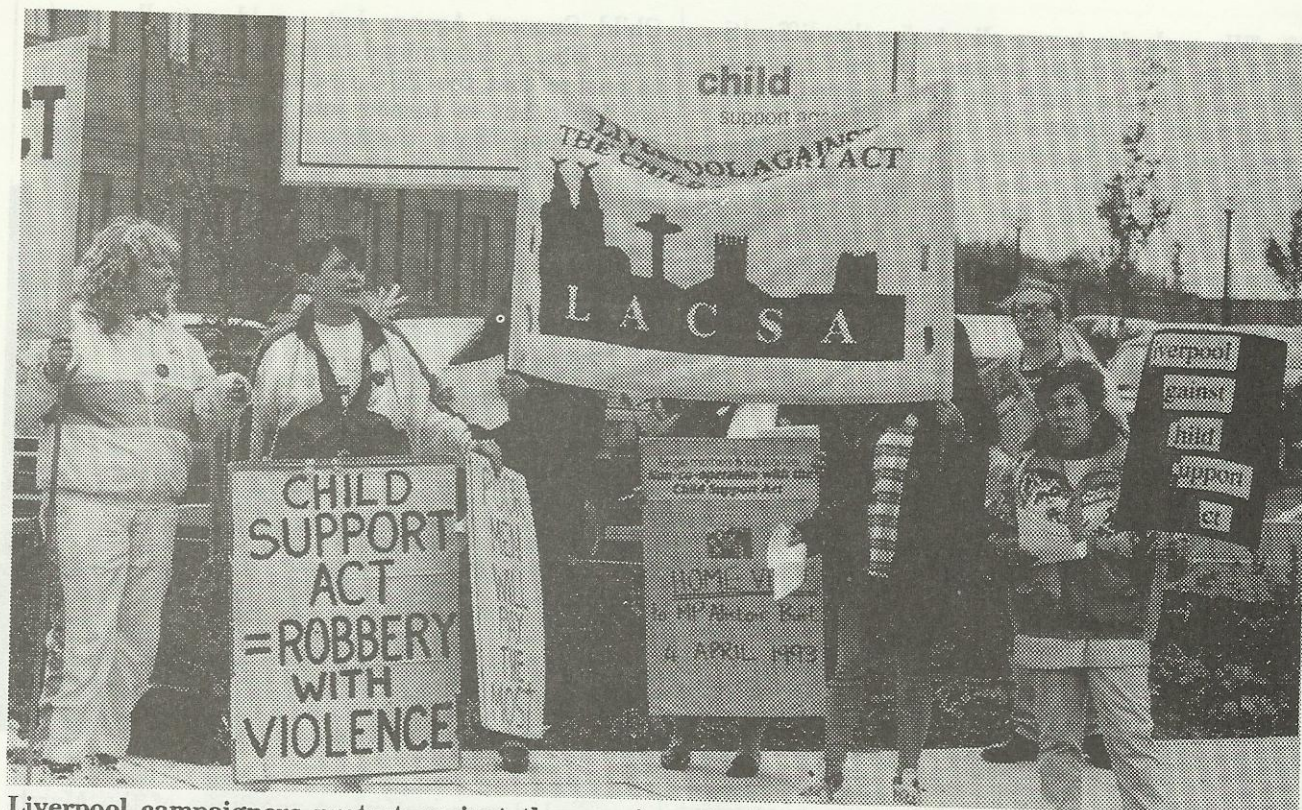
Child Support Agency but would actually create more jobs. A determined campaign is now essential to ensure that the TUC resolution does not remain on paper but is turned into effective action. The trade unions have the potential to unite together all those campaigning to scrap the Child Support



Act. Pressure should be put on the TUC to call a national demonstration on the lines of the March demonstration against racism, which mobilised over 40,000 people. With the Child Support Agency in such an horrendous mess, this kind of united action could be enough to provoke its final collapse.

UNITY IS VITAL if the Child Support Act is to be defeated. Whenever they are faced with growing opposition to their social policies the Tories invariably attempt to sow divisions amongst campaigning groups in order to cut across the movement. Absent parents and their partners have been encouraged to vent their anger on grasping vindictive 'parents with care', out to screw them for every penny they've got; while single parents are urged to get their revenge on 'irresponsible' ex-partners who are 'living it up' while they and their children are struggling in poverty. A concerted media effort initially peddled the myth that the majority of single parents would benefit from the CSA, although now even some of the Tory-supporting papers are critical. Nevertheless, statements still appear such as that of Polly Toynbee, the BBC's Social Affairs editor, who in an article in *The Guardian* (2 February, 1994) described the Child Support Act as "the biggest redistribution of wealth in their (womens') favour since the Married Women's Property Act of 1882".

Unfortunately, the leadership of some groups claiming to speak for single parents have given credence to this baseless argument. "It is a mess but it remains our only hope", declared Sue Slipman, director of the National Council for One Parent Families (NCOPF), in May. "If the CSA collapses it will be a disaster for one-parent fami-



Liverpool campaigners protest against the opening of a local office.

lies everywhere". The Child Support Act has been a disaster for single parents from day one. According to the Agency's own statistics, in its first year only £15 million in new money was raised and only £3 million actually reached single parents. Because maintenance payments are deducted pound for pound from benefit the majority of single parents are no better off. A survey of single parents in the South East who had co-operated with the Child Support Agency, carried out by the National Council for One Parent Families itself, found that 80% had received no money at all. Many are worse off. By April last year at least 700 single parents had suffered benefit deductions for refusing to co-operate. Organisations such as the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux have extensively catalogued the suffering and hardship that single parents on income support are experiencing as a result of the Child Support Act.

Single parents face enormous practical difficulties when it comes to getting organised and making their views heard. Yet many have done so, often against all the odds. The National Council for One Parent Families claims to represent and speak for single parents. Whenever the media is looking for someone to put the case for single parents Sue Slipman is frequently the person who is interviewed. In that case she has a duty to set the record straight and explain what the Child Support Act really means. Her comments have been unhelpful and divisive, providing ammunition for attempts at divide and rule. Although supposedly 'apolitical' the National Council for One Parent Families has been seen by many single parents as little more

than a prop for the Tories.

WHY DO GROUPS like the National Council for One Parent Families support reform rather than repeal? It all comes down to principles. Sue Slipman at a recent forum on the future of the CSA at the House of Commons, reiterated her support for the 'principle' behind it. "The principle behind the Child Support Agency has widespread public support", wrote Labour MP Frank Field in *The Guardian*. "The TUC therefore supported the principle of the Act", stated an interim report to the 1994 TUC women's conference.

*"If the CSA collapses it will be a disaster for one-parent families everywhere",
Sue Slipman.*

What 'principle' are they referring to? In 1990 the Tories outlined their proposals for a new maintenance system in a White Paper entitled *Children Come First*. They argued that the number of single parents had more than doubled since 1971 to 1.3 million, with 2.2 million dependent children. Eighty per cent of single parents were claiming income

support but only 30% were receiving regular maintenance averaging at £27 a week: men should be responsible for their children, contributing financially to their upbringing. Under the new system 'errant' fathers would be vigorously pursued for maintenance payments. "My message to those men who have chosen to walk away from their family responsibilities", said John Patten, then minister of state at the Home Office, "is that you cannot stop being a father". The idea that men should have financial responsibility for their children was generally supported. But was the 'principle' behind the Child Support Act really about fathers facing up to their responsibilities in order that children could be put first?

Sue Slipman and the National Council for One Parent Families were consulted by the Tories when drawing up their proposals. "There is obviously concern that the government will use increased maintenance to recoup money for the state", she

Most single parents will be no better off than before".

The role of leadership is to anticipate and foresee events. Although the National Council for One Parent Families claims it speaks for ordinary single parents it is clear that its leadership has become divorced from the concerns and problems of the majority of single parents struggling to bring up children on income support. Enjoying living standards much higher than the people they claim to represent they totally failed to see the real implications of the Child Support Act. Now, very late in the day, the NCOPF appears to have woken up to reality and had a change of heart. Sue Slipman is now saying that the NCOPF may have to withdraw its support unless the CSA is made to work for single parents. She should never have given it her support in the first place.

When the Act went through parliament the majority of Labour MPs did not vote against it.



said in January 1990. "However, the government has raised our expectations much higher than this scenario". Militant Labour in contrast pointed out that recouping money for the state was indeed the real 'principle' behind the new proposals. Faced at the time with a potential public sector debt of £50bn, the aim of the Tories was to make savings of £500 million by cutting benefits to single parents and where possible getting them off benefit all together. In the 1992 pre-election edition of the *Militant International Review* we wrote that "the Tory government try to give the impression this is being carried out to alleviate the poverty in which single parents live. But any maintenance is deducted pound for pound out of the income support of single parents, and after £15, for family credit recipients. In other words, the main beneficiary of the maintenance collected will be the treasury.

THE LABOUR PARTY also supports reform rather than the repeal of the Child Support Act. When the Act went through parliament the majority of Labour MPs did not vote against it. It seems incredible that after eleven years of Tory attacks, Labour MPs believed that the Tories would introduce a piece of legislation with the financial interests of children at heart, that the government responsible for freezing child benefit, for the closure of nurseries, for subjecting one in three children to a life of poverty, would suddenly change course. "My gut reaction was that nothing good would come of it", admitted Audrey Wise, speaking in the House of Commons. "Unfortunately the opposition were mislead because we actually believed the title of the White Paper *Children Come First*".

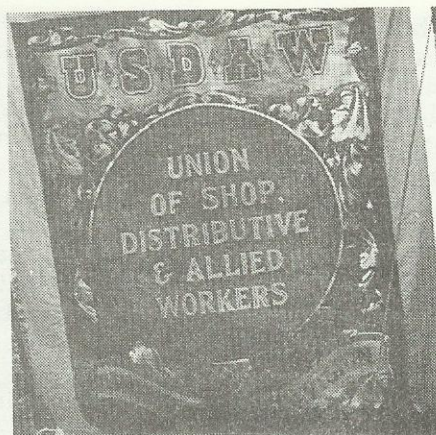
Slashing state spending to boost the profits of the rich is understandably an unpopular strategy. To try and make their policies more acceptable the Tories attempt to dress them up with ideological propaganda. Unfortunately the Labour leadership appear to fall for the Tories' propaganda every time. When, for example, in an attempt to soften public opinion for future housing spending cuts, the Tories accused young single parents of jumping the housing list, Labour MP David Blunkett rose to the bait. "We need... positive housing policies", he declared, "which do not encourage the belief that the only way to a home is having a baby". This despite information from 30 local authorities showing that it is rare for unmarried or pregnant girls to present themselves for rehousing. He should

have been calling for a crash house-building programme, for the right of everyone to a decent home, regardless of how they choose to live their personal lives. But because he and the rest of the Labour leadership are not prepared to challenge the capitalist system they end up accepting its economic limitations, accepting the idea that resources must be rationed, whether it be housing, health care or state benefits. With no economic alternative or independent class analysis of their own they also end up adopting the moral agenda of the ruling class.

Tony Blair, in one of his first speeches after becoming Labour leader, commented: "The vast majority of single parents do not choose to be single parents... if they do I personally don't agree with them in doing that". Such comments play into the hands of the Tories who have targeted single parents as scapegoats for their economic policies, which are the real causes of unemployment, homelessness and the majority of social problems in this country. The Labour leadership should be outlining policies that will allow everyone to live free of poverty in relationships of their choice, not moralising about single parents and jumping on the Tories ideological bandwagon.

THROUGH THEIR PROPAGANDA, the Tories try to promote one ideal family, where women and children who do not work are economically dependent on a male breadwinner. However, even the Tories themselves have had to accept that this 'ideal' nuclear family is fast disappearing, that the majority of women now go out to work and are in the workforce to stay. The Child Support Agency itself has revealed the myriad of different and often complex family relationships and households in which people choose to live. The Tories understand that it is not possible to turn back the clock or legislate to push back the changes that are taking place in the family and in society. However this does not prevent them scapegoating single parents or continuing to promote the kind of family which accommodates their economic interests. The maintenance assessment under the Child Support Act includes a carers allowance which effectively reintroduces maintenance for wives. Individual women are to be economically dependent on individual men, even though they do not live together and are no longer having a relationship.

The current debate extends beyond the Child Support Act and the question of child maintenance to the wider issue of alleviating the poverty of single parents and their children. In 1990 the Family Policy Studies Institute argued that maintenance would not be enough to end the poverty of single parents: "A comprehensive strategy for lone parents is needed which will take into account the level of benefits for children and obstacles to women's employment such as the shortage of child-care places". Britain has one of the lowest levels of child benefit in



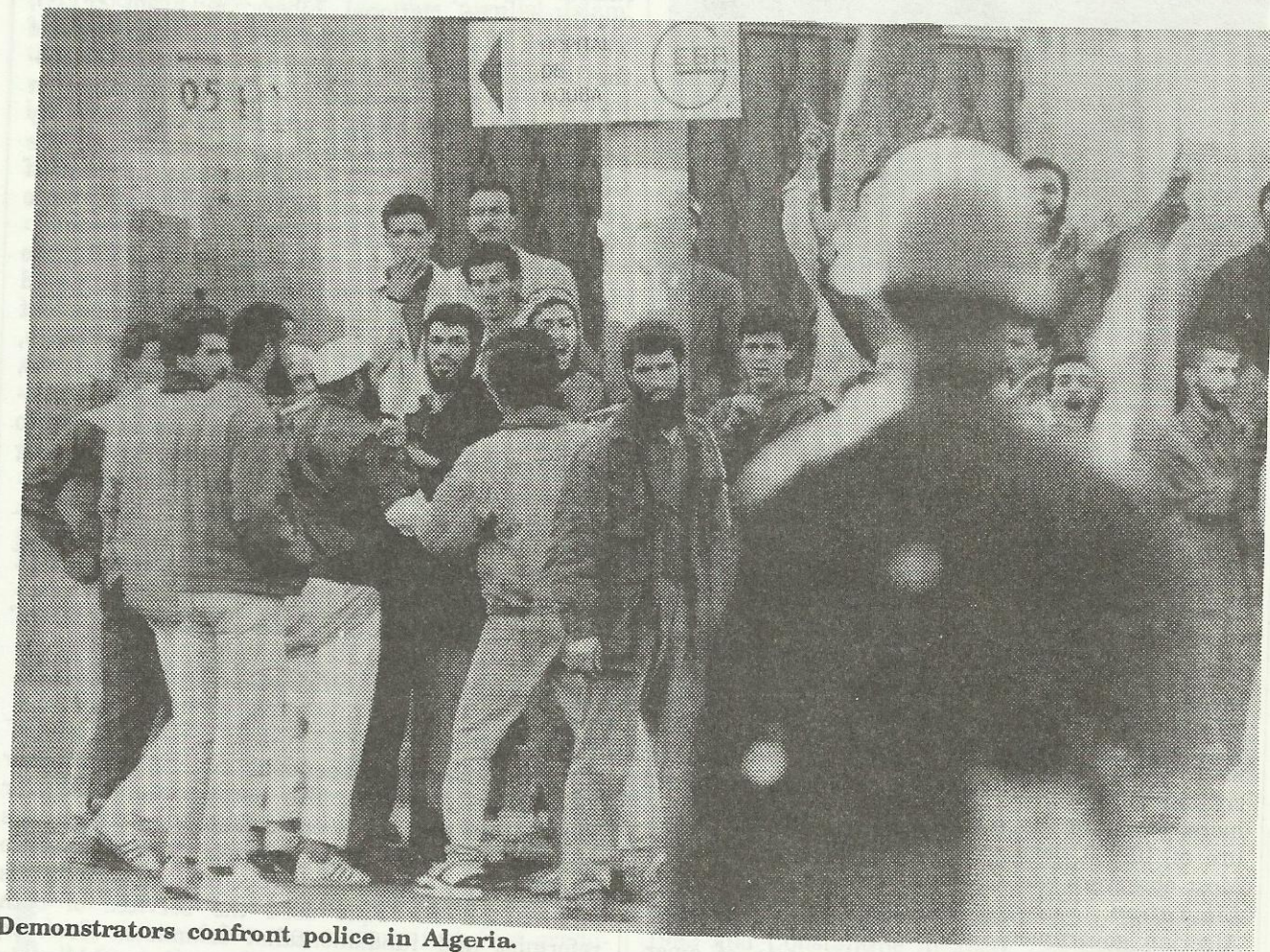
USDAW moved the resolution opposing the CSA at TUC Conference.

Europe and one of the worst provision of state-run nurseries. A survey conducted by the DSS found that 75% of single parents on income support would prefer to go out to work. When asked why they didn't do so, the two most common reasons given were lack of affordable child-care and being no better off because of low wages and the loss of benefits such as housing benefit and mortgage interest payments.

The 'new look' Labour Party has so far failed to properly address any of these questions. On child-care, they originally made a commitment to the introduction of a nursery place for all three and four-year olds within the life-time of one parliament, and then backed off. They are no longer prepared to commit themselves to a timetable. How does that differ from the Tories who support nursery education 'as resources allow'? On low pay, the leadership is currently trying to fudge the question of a minimum wage. Even half male median earnings, which is what they initially proposed, would only work out at about £4 an hour. The European Commission says that £6 an hour is the minimum below which nobody should have to fall. It is not even clear whether the party will adhere to the idea of universal child benefit. By refusing to commit themselves to concrete policy proposals, the Labour leaders are accepting the economic constraints and restrictions of working within the capitalist system.

Single parents should have choice. The choice to work, through the provision of free, flexible, good quality child-care, and a guaranteed minimum wage that allows them and their children an adequate standard of living. If they decide to stay at home to look after children, they should be able to do so free of poverty. Single parents should have choice in how they live their personal relationships, without being forced into economic and financial dependence on individual men. A crisis-ridden capitalist system cannot guarantee these choices. A socialist planned economy under democratic control, however, would allow the freeing of economic resources to enable all of us to live the lives we choose, free from ideological or economic restraints. □

Towards an 'Historic Compromise'?

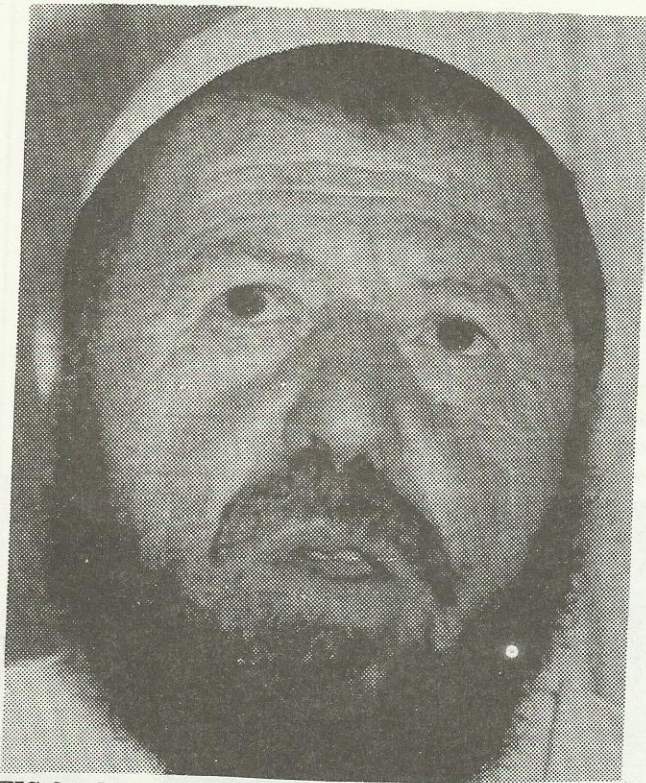


Demonstrators confront police in Algeria.

David Cameron looks at the latest turn of events in Algeria.

A COMPROMISE AGREEMENT between the military-dominated regime headed by General Liamine Zeroual and the fundamentalists of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) now seems more and more likely. Negotiations between the two sides are already under way. The clearest sign of a turn in the situation was the transfer in September of the two principal FIS leaders, Abbasi Madani and Ali Belhadj, from

prison to house arrest and the release of other leading FIS figures. This was not the first sign that the government was ready for a dialogue with the FIS. When General Zeroual became president in February this year, two FIS leaders were freed and in April prime minister Redha Malek, who was opposed to a deal with the fundamentalists, was sacked. If an agreement is concluded, it could open the way for the FIS to come to power legally, while



FIS leader Madani.

respecting the vested interests of the present holders of power.

Superficially this turn of events may seem surprising. In January 1992 the Algerian army intervened to prevent the holding of the second round of legislative elections which would have resulted in certain FIS victory. Without directly taking power the army pushed out discredited President Chadli Benjedid and established the High Committee of State (HCE) fronted by Mohammed Boudiaf, one of the leaders of the independence struggle, later assassinated. The FIS was banned and for two-and-a-half years the government has been engaged in an increasingly bloody civil war with armed Islamic groups. In the process the civilian mask of the regime has slipped more and more, revealing its military face. The official figure of 10,000 dead is certainly an underestimate. Most observers would double it and the Paris daily *Liberation*, (15 September, 1994) claimed that the Algerian government admits privately that 28,000 people have been killed since the state of emergency was introduced in February 1992 - two thirds of them since November 1993.

On closer examination, however, we can see that the opposition between the two forces is less absolute than it appears. In the first place, Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria is not a force that comes from outside the political and military establishment. It has represented a component of that establishment from the war of independence onwards, although some of its leaders developed in radical opposition to the FLN regime from the late-1970s onwards. Secondly, the army's refusal to

accept a FIS victory had very little to do with defending democracy or secular values, and everything to do with the defence of its own privileges, which are linked to its control of the state machine. There is a wing of the Algerian ruling class that advocates bourgeois democracy and/or secular values as the way to develop capitalism in Algeria. But it does not dominate the military hierarchy.

TODAY'S ALGERIA HAS its roots in the war of independence from France of 1954-62. This struggle took place in the context of the general upswing of the colonial revolution and in particular of the rise of the Arab nationalist movement and the coming to power of radical regimes in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and other countries. The National Liberation Front (FLN), which led the independence struggle, was part of the broad Arab revolutionary movement. But ideologically it was a poor relation. The Algerian revolutionary movement produced no coherent body of ideas as did the Ba'ath Party or Nasserism. The 'socialist' ideology of the FLN was a mixture of populism and Islam, and its nationalism was more Algerian than pan-Arab.

Algerian 'socialism' was based above all on state control of the oil and gas sectors which accounted for 98% of revenue from exports, the development of a state industrial sector with these revenues, and links with the Soviet bloc. On this basis, Algeria could have a foreign policy largely independent of imperialism. There was no attempt to accompany this economic development by building a modern democratic secular state.

Newly independent Algeria was never formally secular.

Indeed, newly independent Algeria was never even formally secular. The partisans of a secular state within the FLN were defeated and Islam was declared to be the state religion at independence in 1962. The state took direct control of religious affairs, and the FLN used the services of both reformist and fundamentalist Islamists. However, some Islamic currents who objected to this state control, remained aloof from the regime and there was the development of a 'parallel Islam'.

The FLN pursued a policy of 'cultural restoration', inspired by the idea of going back to an idealised vision of Algeria's Arab and Muslim roots after 130 years of colonisation. This implied the introduction of religious education in schools, exclusion of women from public life, promotion of the Arabic language, a programme of mosque-building. This 'Arab-Islamic' orientation was defended both by Algeria's first president Ahmed Ben Bella and

by Houari Boumedienne, who overthrew him in a military coup in 1965.

Boumedienne was an authentic Bonapartist figure. He balanced between the nascent bourgeoisie and the worker and peasant masses, but also between the military hierarchy, the overlapping bureaucracies of the FLN and the state, and the different factions within them. Especially in the period when he was consolidating his power, he did not hesitate to use the fundamentalists to counter the influence of the left-wing of the FLN and the (illegal) Communist Party, whom he used in turn when the regime radicalised its policies in the 1970s.

During the Boumedienne years fundamentalist Islamic currents developed their influence in Algerian society 'from below', as the 'parallel Islam' attracted "all the individuals and groups hostile to the economic transformations directed against private property" (Mohammed Harbi, a leader of the left-wing of the FLN in the 1950s and 1960s, writing in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 1994). But the fundamentalists also penetrated 'from above', taking advantage of the policy of 'cultural restoration'. They came to dominate the fields of education, culture and law. Madani himself taught at the Institute of Social Sciences in Algiers - a breeding ground for future fundamentalist activists.

In the 1970s the FLN regime had a real legitimacy in the eyes of the masses - a legitimacy which came from its leadership of the independence struggle, from its development of the economy and from its independent foreign policy and radical anti-imperialist rhetoric. But although Algeria went a long way towards the establishment of a state-controlled economy, it never took the Cuban road, never completed the break with imperialism, especially French imperialism, never established a workers' state. The contradictions in Algerian society started to manifest themselves, particularly after Boumedienne's death in 1979. The population became more and more conscious of the fact that behind the facade of Algerian 'socialism' lay an important and increasing social differentiation between the privileged elite and the mass of the population, and also of the degree of corruption within the regime.

IN THE COURSE of the 1980s the economic base of the regime was undermined, first gradually and then drastically in 1985-86, by the collapse of the prices of oil and gas and consequently of the state's revenues. The standard of living of the population began to fall, unemployment rocketed to 25% of the active population - the government would have to create 200,000 jobs a year just to absorb all the youth coming onto the labour market. During the 1980s Algeria's foreign debt rose steadily to its present level of \$26bn. Simply paying the interest on this debt now absorbs 80% of Algeria's income from exports. 'Independent' Algeria's dependence on imperialism

became greater and greater - not only for credits and access to technology but even for food imports to feed the population.

In this context the regime became more and more discredited, especially in the eyes of the youth who constituted two-thirds of the population - Algeria's population has doubled since independence - and who had limited patience with a corrupt and inept regime ruling more and more in the name of its past achievements.

These changes in the popular attitude towards the regime began to find their expression in movements from below. In April 1980 mass demonstrations took place in Tizi-Ouzou, capital of the region of Kabylia, inhabited by Algeria's Berber minority which makes up about 20% of Algeria's population. This 'Kabyle Spring' demanded the recognition of tamazigh, the Berber language, and in general of the Berber identity within Algeria. This was the biggest mass movement since the immediate post-independence period. The Kabyles, who played a key role in the independence struggle,



Boudiaf - installed by the military in 1992.

were challenging head-on the official 'Arab-Islamic' ideology which denied their separate identity.

In the course of the 1980s there were major riots in two of Algeria's biggest cities, in Oran in 1982 and Constantine in 1986. At the same time the more extreme fundamentalists attempted to launch guerrilla movements in rural areas. Ali Benhadj, today number two in the FIS leadership, took part in one such attempt.

All these movements were repressed by the FLN regime, but under the surface of an apparently uniform one-party state independent organisations began to develop. The Berber movement continued after 1980 in spite of the repression, a 'co-ordination' (composed of delegates elected by the students in each university) independent of the official student union was created during the big student



FIS spokesperson Ait Ahmed.

there was a wave of strikes.

October 1988 opened up a three-year period of the broadest political liberty Algeria has known.

This new period enabled the fundamentalist forces which had been strengthened under Chadli and had played a key role in October 1988 to come out into the open. The FIS, legalised in September 1989, organized the bulk of the fundamentalist currents. There were also more moderate Islamic parties, like the MDA of Ben Bella, and Hamas.

The FIS is indeed a front, with many currents within it. What unites its components is the desire to establish an Islamic state. Differences exist over precisely what an Islamic state is and even more on how to achieve it. In fact, most of the debates have been not on questions of policy, but on the tactics for winning power.

The electoral base of the Front is extremely loose. What welds it together is a mixture of hatred of the present regime and the illusion that an application of strict Islamic principles can solve Algeria's problems. The leadership of the FIS is conscious of this. The party has never adopted a programme - social, political or economic - for fear of losing part of its support. It has never held a congress. Madani declared in May 1991: "The congress will meet after the proclamation of the Islamic state". A congress, of course, would highlight the lack of a programme and the divisions and incoherences within the FIS. The party's discourse is therefore limited to a broad defence of Islamic principles of solidarity, equality and justice, linked to violent denunciations of a corrupt and impious regime and the cultivation of its own image of moral rectitude. At the same time, the FIS has also built its base by organizing through the mosques practical help to the poor, the homeless, and the unemployed, who felt themselves to be - and were - abandoned by the government.

The main debate in 1989-91 was on whether or how to use the democratic process. Broadly speaking, the fundamentalists are opposed to the principle of democracy because it advocates that society be run by citizens and not by God's law. Within this general framework, there are those who are prepared to use elections to win an Islamic state and those who reject any road except a violent one.

The FIS stood in the municipal elections of June 1990 and got 54% of the votes. This success was something of a poisoned gift for the fundamentalists. The FIS could not deliver the houses and jobs it had promised, its mayors were often incompe-

strike of 1987, the PAGS (the illegal Communist Party) had substantial influence in the unions and among intellectuals. Above all there was the development of powerful but diffuse Islamic currents.

Under the presidency of Chadli Benjedid, who succeeded Boumedienne on the latter's death in 1979, the FLN moved, cautiously at first, towards pro-market and pro-imperialist policies. This orientation was known as the 'infithah' (opening). It paralleled the evolution of a series of other radical regimes in the Third World faced with the effects of the capitalist crisis and the weakening of the Soviet bloc. Now all the regime's enemies were on the left - those who defended the gains of the preceding period - and it was looking for an ideology to replace Boumedienne 'socialism'. Increasingly, it turned towards Islam, and consciously used the fundamentalists against the left and the Berberists, especially in the universities. Already in 1986 a group of generals, advised by a future leader of the FIS, Ali Djeddi, proposed the proclamation of an Islamic state.

ALL THE UNDERLYING tensions in Algerian society exploded in October 1988. Faced with riots by unemployed youth which devastated the centre of Algiers, the state reacted with unheard-of violence, sending in the army and killing hundreds. But it was too late. In the wake of the riots the FLN was forced to abandon its monopoly of power. Chadli remained in office, but a new constitution was promulgated and approved by referendum in February 1989. It provided for the separation of the FLN from the state, free elections with freedom for other political parties, independence of the mass organisations, including the unions, from the state and the FLN. October 1988 opened up a three-year period of the broadest political liberty Algeria has ever known. Political parties and associations mushroomed and

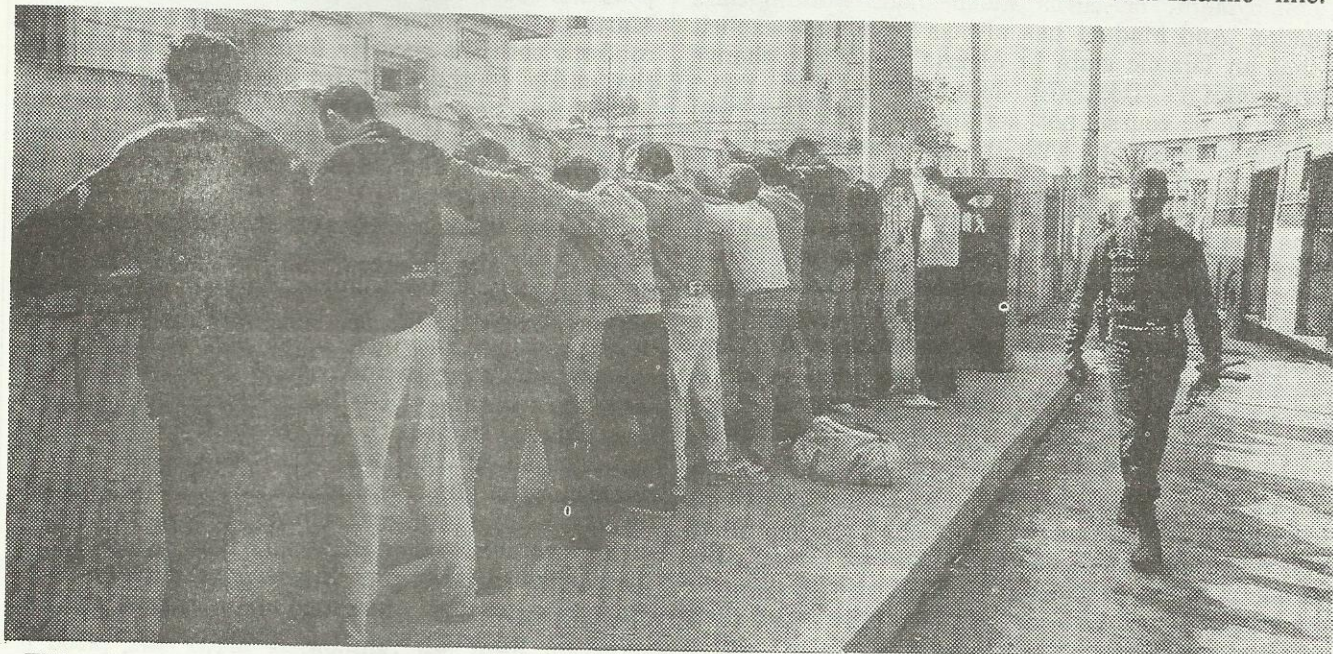
tent, and the first taste of Islamic puritanism in the towns it controlled did not please all those who had voted for it. The FIS also lost support during this period because of its embarrassed position during the Gulf war. Its links to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (important sources of revenue for the FIS) prevented it coming out clearly in defence of Iraq, while the Algerian masses demonstrated in their hundreds of thousands against imperialism.

Nevertheless, the FIS could hardly refuse to participate in the legislative elections fixed for 1991, which it would not necessarily have won. The government resolved the FIS leadership's problem by introducing an electoral law highly unfavourable to the Front, which promptly called a general strike demanding the annulment of this law and an immediate presidential election. When the strike began to falter, Madani went for double or quits. The fundamentalists organized violent street demonstrations under the slogans 'Down with democracy!' 'An Islamic state without a vote!', 'Neither Charter nor Constitution, the Word of God, the Word of the Prophet!'. They succeeded in mo-

gravely underestimated the determination of the fundamentalists and the extent of mass hatred for its own rule.

The imperialists are ready to live with the FIS.

THE EXTREME VIOLENCE of the confrontation between the regime and the FIS has exaggerated the extent of the differences between them. Interviewed in *Le Monde* (27 September, 1994), Said Sadi, general secretary of the Berber-based bourgeois anti-fundamentalist party RCD, said that there were only two ways forward for Algeria - (bourgeois) democracy or the 'national-Islamist' road. There is a large degree of agreement between the dominant wing of the regime and the FIS on the 'national-Islamic' line.



FIS prisoners guarded by Algerian police.

bilizing the pent-up anger of the urban youth and provoking the intervention of the army. In this way the FIS regained the initiative, in spite of the arrest of its leaders, and the elections were postponed. When they were held six months later the FIS won, though with a million votes less than in 1990.

When the army refused to accept the verdict of the electorate, it was supported by not insignificant sectors of the urban middle classes and civil servants who depend on the state for their livelihood. The regime thought in January 1992 that by leaning on this base and smashing the FIS through repression it could re-consolidate its power. It

Having tried wholesale repression and failed it was inevitable that the regime would turn towards a compromise and it was predictable that the leadership of the FIS would react positively.

What is pushing the two sides close together is not only the failure of the government to smash the FIS and forge a coherent alternative from the non-fundamentalist parties, but also the depth of the economic crisis facing Algeria today and its consequences. The government has signed, and is applying, a 'structural adjustment programme' with the IMF and will have to impose ever harsher sacrifices on the Algerian masses. For that it needs a government with a broader popular base than it

has or can have.

It is now clear that the imperialists are ready to live with the FIS. According to *The Economist* (24 September, 1994), the fundamentalist opponents of an agreement "see the release of the FIS leaders as a Western-inspired conspiracy to prepare the way for the sort of moderate Islamic regime that the West can live with - an interpretation that does indeed capture the thought at the back of many Western minds". And in fact the imperialists have shifted their policy. Britain and the USA have for some time had a more open attitude towards the FIS and now France, principal backer of the present regime and its repression, is moving towards acceptance of an agreement. On September 26 the European Union welcomed the steps taken towards dialogue with the FIS and called for 'political reconciliation'.

By a 'moderate' Islamic regime the imperialists mean one that does not threaten their interests. They do not mind whether it holds elections, represses the Berbers, pushes women out of employment, or curbs independent working-class action. And Madani has always been most explicit that an Islamic state in Algeria would not change the country's links with imperialism.

It is of course not certain that the FIS will conclude an accord with the government, but it is becoming probable, and it is certain that this is the objective of the central FIS leadership and of the dominant sector of the regime. They want to end the civil war and govern together.

Opposition, however, can come from two sources. In the first place, the most radical wing of the fundamentalists will refuse any truck with the army. But it would be wrong to see this refusal as potentially progressive. This wing is also the most reactionary and obscurantist and largely organized by veterans of the Afghan counter-revolution. Secondly, a part of the army opposed to fundamentalism could ally with the bourgeois 'democrats' and try a coup to prevent a deal. But even if it succeeded it would then have no more solution to the war than Zeroual, other than more and more repression.

It is not sure that the FIS would still win elections, if these are held: but it would certainly represent a force that couldn't be ignored. If the FIS comes to power, alone or in coalition, it will certainly disillusion its own supporters and be riven by dissensions itself. But there is no easy road from popular disillusion to organized resistance and the development of an alternative. And there is no sign of any progressive wing emerging from the fundamentalist movement.

THE ONLY REGION where there is mass popular opposition to the FIS and the regime is in Kabylia, although the political leadership is in the hands of bourgeois parties, the populist Socialist Forces Front (FFS) and the liberal RCD. On 21 September Kabylia was

paralyzed by the first in a series of general strikes for the recognition of the Berber language, and a demonstration of hundreds of thousands took place in the city of Bejaia. This massive show of force was not only for the defence of the rights of the Berbers: it represented a rejection by the Kabyles of the regime and the FIS, together or separately. Clashes are occurring between Kabyle villagers and fundamentalist guerrillas and self-defence militias have been formed in certain areas. An agreement between the FIS and the regime could lead to a Kabyle uprising and moves towards secession.

A key task for Algerian Marxists is to support the Berber movement in its demands for cultural rights - in particular the central demand for the recognition of their language and for it to be taught in schools - while opposing the movement's bourgeois leadership and arguing against secession and for unity with Arab-speaking workers and peasants.

The situation facing the Algerian workers and peasants today is difficult, as is the intervention of Marxists. Independent working-class activity has to confront both the security forces of the regime and the gangs of the FIS. In this situation all left political parties are in crisis. The PAGS has broken up: its main successor group, Ettahadi, peddles illusions in the High Committee of State and in bourgeois democracy.

But the tasks of Marxists in Algeria are clear. They fight for the political independence of the working-class: for the independence of the unions from the state and for the building of a mass workers' party. They give no support to the present regime which is the instrument of the bourgeoisie and of imperialism. On the contrary they are the best fighters against the diktats of the IMF, for the cancellation of the debt, for real national independence, for the re-nationalisation of all privatised companies, for workers' control, for a price freeze. They are the best defenders of democratic rights, in particular the rights of women and of the Berbers and for the separation of religion from the state. In fighting for this programme there can be no alliance with the fundamentalists, who represent a mortal danger for the working-class. The task is to break youth, workers and peasants from their illusions in fundamentalism.

The pro-imperialist Said Sadi is wrong when he says that the choice for Algeria is between bourgeois democracy and national-Islamism. There is no room for a stable bourgeois democracy in Algeria. The only choice capitalism offers Algeria today is a military-police dictatorship at the service of imperialism, with or without the FIS.

The only alternative is to fight for a workers' and peasants' government, to take the road of genuine socialism. This road will probably be long and difficult but it is the only way to free Algeria from the stranglehold of imperialism and from indigenous reaction and obscurantism. □

The Great Reckoning



A book by William Rees-Mogg provides an insight into how the capitalists themselves see the years ahead. Mike Waddington writes.

IMAGINE A TOUR guide of the US that concludes with the advice: "If you are wealthy enough to afford it, consider purchasing a property in Switzerland, such as a chalet or a condo. This would be a valuable insurance against unrest and megapolitical breakdown". Or, "if you are very rich, it might be prudent to hire a personal bodyguard. As an alternative, you should consider acquiring weapons as a last resort to defend your family if you live in an area where public order is breaking down".

These cheerful conclusions are the ultimate advice offered to the rich in the recently re-published book, *The Great Reckoning*, the most apocalyptic perspective written by capitalist commentators for the capitalists themselves. It is the perfect antidote to any notion of capitalist triumphalism that may still be around.

The authors are well known commentators: William Rees-Mogg, peer of the realm, former editor of *The Times* and then *Independent* columnist; and James Dale Davidson, amongst other things, an economic advisor to the government of Belarus.

One of their activities is to produce a newsletter called *Strategic Investment*, currently with a 30,000 circulation. "In a sense", they say, "this book is an advertisement for our view of investment" which is that 'instability means prizes'. So, for example, although they don't rate Russia's chances of success they nevertheless recommend investing some

The Great Reckoning: How the World Will Change Before The Year 2000.

By William Rees-Mogg and James Dale Davidson.

Re-published by Pan Books, 1994, £7.99.

money there: "We are investing small sums in Belarus and other former Soviet republics... while the odds are stacked against success, that is only part of the story. For an investment that *does* work, the profit payoff would not be 10% or even 10:1. It could be 100:1 or even 1,000:1". So these two are seriously into making money, even if they are not too hopeful for the rest of society.

However they make clear that "we have tried to be objective and not merely say what would sell. We have forecast wars, revolutions, recessions and even depression. Sometimes we have regretted having to forecast these unpleasant developments. We would have preferred not to have to tell you about a world falling apart. But given that it was falling apart, we wished to find ways to help put it back together" (p208).

The inspiration for the book came in one of those typically English bourgeois experiences; Lord Rees-Mogg's attempt to take tea at the New York Waldorf Hotel. "He was trying to order tea in the Waldorf Hotel... After waiting a long time for service, he observed that the condition of the famous



New York Hotels was a metaphor for the decline of empire... the sense of encroaching ruin was so palpable that he said that one could not have been suprised to learn that there were 'barbarians in the basement'." Fortunately they substantiate their argument with a little more detail than the tale of Rees-Mogg's thirst: and what a story it is.

ROBERT A SIRICO is a troubled priest. He recently had an article published in *The Financial Times*, 'Capitalism Must Seize the High Ground' (9 August, 1994). In it he argued that while "few would dispute that events in the past few years have demonstrated the practical desirability of markets over socialism, yet there is good reason to doubt that capitalism's victory is total... (it) has not captured the moral or high ground... Thus its security as a system of economic organisation is not guaranteed anywhere in the world... no one dreams of capitalism".

Rees-Mogg and Davidson answer these points. Dreams? You should be so lucky. They quote Jeremiah, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved". The real flavour of the economic depression they predict is summed up in their opening dedication from the 13th century, "Day of Wrath and doom impending... Heaven and Earth in ashes ending".

Were it not for the fact that this book is written by serious people, you would be forgiven for thinking we are dealing with some bizarre religious cult or sect. In a sense we are - they are capitalist fundamentalists. To Sirico's concerns about things going wrong, they say, don't worry about things

going wrong, they've gone wrong - and badly.

"We expect the nineties to be a decade of escalating economic and political disorder."

"We are living in a period which has the authentic feeling that the world could come to an end, or at least that some immense change could occur" (pxi). "We believe it will prove impossible to sustain a political economy which attempts to prevent anyone losing" (p17). We are in for a "decade of depression" (p13). "There is a widespread assumption that economic progress since World War II has been permanent... We expect the nineties to be a decade of escalating economic and political disorder unparalleled since the 1930s... We fear the economic, social and political consequences of depression" (pp47-50).

In other words the brilliant lights of capitalist victory were just that, temporary blinding flashes of the fall of Stalinism. "Although Marxism is dead, the market has not triumphed as a matter of ideas... A Marxist mist... still hangs over our intellectual culture and clouds the vision of many" (p42).

"Even a cursory overview... should be enough to show that the world economy is far more vulner-

able to a system failure than most people would imagine. The day before an earthquake, the great city gleams in the sun, with scarcely a hint that beneath the surface, pressures are building along the fault lines" (p264).

THIS BOOK COVERS a great many of the defining themes of this new period in history which Militant Labour has analysed - the collapse of Stalinism, the decline of US economic power, the colonial revolution - but from a completely opposite point of view.

The dire warnings of catastrophe from these prophets of profit forget that for every statistic of economic slowdown, somebody's job goes. For every forecast of depression, or of a return to the 1930s, the lives of millions of working class people will be squeezed, and many crushed.

Their cares are not ours: "make-work jobs and the like can be understood as attempts to buy-off violence prone, poorly skilled people", part of the "blackmail, the exploitation of the capitalists by the workers".

The contempt continues: "We hear very little overt criticism of the unwillingness of the poor to apply themselves. Quite the opposite. The common response is to exonerate the poor for their part in economic decline, while the more successful are blamed. This makes about as much sense as a farmer beating his most productive milk cows because the rest of his herd has gone dry" (p408).

As for the 'underdeveloped world', the authors write: "Overall consumption in Latin America dropped by 13% over the decade of the 1980s and it could plunge even further in the 1990s as world depression lowers prices". The "death of communism... foreshadows a significant drop in the level of Western aid... because these countries will no longer be able to play off east-west rivalry".

They predict a depression, the causes of which start in the US, especially the federal government's unsustainable budget deficit. In 1992 62 cents in every tax dollar went to pay interest on this debt. At this rate by 2015 service charges would consume 100% of GDP. In the mid-1980s the American budget deficit alone was greater than the economies of 158 countries (out of a total of 167).

*Every family on average
lives \$10,000 beyond its
means.*

Every family on average lives \$10,000 beyond its means and corporate debt stands at 40% of US GDP: "It will be wiped away. Either an economic deflation will cause the financial system to implode, or a political inflation of an extreme kind will obliterate much of the value of debts denomi-

nated in dollars".

The US, the authors argue, is going through the same process of decline that Britain went through. Seventy-five years ago only the US was 'richer' than Britain, now 20 countries are. *The Economist* magazine calculates that had the US grown at the same rate as up to 1973, incomes would now be 50% higher. Under George Bush 69% of households experienced a fall in income. In 1948 the US had 44% of world industrial output and its economy was eight times larger than Japan. No longer. The US invests around one third of the Japanese rate. For every ten lawyers that graduate in the US there is one engineer. In Japan it is exactly the other way round. According to the *Harvard Business Review*, for every one fault on a Japanese assembly line, there are 70 in the US. They also comment on the political leadership of America: "US Congressmen in the 1980s had more job security than the politbureau in North Korea".

The top six US exports to Japan are cornseed, soybeans, coal, wood, cotton and wheat. Whereas Japanese exports to the US are cars, tape recorders, trucks, office machinery and computer chips.

The US allowed many Asian countries unrestricted access to the US market after the second world war as part of its effort to halt the spread of Stalinism, to hold off revolution. Now the US wants some pay-back. But how? "Unless the US is actually prepared to employ military force against Germany and Japan, its super-power capacities will avail little in economic competition" (p35).

THE RISE OF Japanese economic muscle has brought other consequences, including Japanese banks financing the US budget deficit for speculative ends. Twenty-five per cent of world credit growth is from Japanese banks. The potential consequences are spelt out: "A trigger of the second and deeper stage of depression this time will be the withdrawal of Japanese investment as a consequence of the collapse of asset markets". Japan invested three trillion dollars between 1986 and 1991 in its economy, and now has massive overcapacity.

Basically, Japanese capital expanded in the 1980s as land prices rocketed in Japan (boosting the value of the assets backing the loans). Before the Tokyo market crashed a single prefecture (district) in Tokyo was valued as greater than the whole of Canada. Since 1992 prices have probably fallen by around 50% (p159). This leaves the Japanese banks more exposed than the Savings and Loans institutions that Bush had to step in to save in the US: in 1990 US banks had 25% of their assets in land.

"Japan will have to re-invent a military. It will have to spend hundreds of billions to rehouse much of its population (some mortgages in Japan already cover two generations - MW)... the world depression will be more severe in Japan than in any other

country... likely to encourage the militancy of unions, a slackening of work effort and investment in education and more extensive income redistribution" (p167).

A shortage of capital in Japan could result in money being called back in. The authors point to the fact that in November 1992 Germany went to Japan for loans and came back empty handed. "Now that the assets crash has wiped away their loan loss reserves... they will be unable to lend at accustomed levels... it peaked with the Japanese stock market in 1989 and has since fallen in half, to \$100bn annually".

Russia needs 15 years of west German investment levels to catch up

In total they calculate that three to four trillion dollars worth of excess debt still needs to be liquidated - there are 204 US banks waiting to be liquidated with 1,044 more on its problem list.

No one economy has the power to stabilise the world. German re-unification cost six times more than estimated. Russia needs 15 years of west German investment levels to catch up - it can't be done. Their only hope is to let the system work its own way through. They use the analogy of the Florida pine, which only releases its seed in a fire (p267)!

There is a lot of talk of cycles in the book, to justify the view that there is hope at the end of it. They point out that prices fell overall in the nineteenth century: 47 years of inflation and 53 years of deflation. Prices this century are up 3,000% (mainly because of 50 years 'cold war').

They 'rediscover' dialectics or as they say 'non-linearities' (p68) to show how small changes can have a profound effect - in all directions both up and down. This leads them to say of Marx: "Wrong though Marx was in many ways, part of his theory of historical development is valid. He was right in



Rees Mogg.

thinking that historic change is sometimes caused by changes in the underlying means of production. This is one of the truffles of truth to be dug for in the enchanted forest of Marxism... It does seem to be true, as Marx argued, that 'social revolution' results when the 'material forces of production in society came into conflict with the existing relations of production'."

Adam Smith, an early prophet of capitalism, always believed that capitalists had a mission; a historical mission to develop the world. The new prophets like Rees-Mogg and Davidson show the exact opposite; short termism. The long term is unthinkable; capitalism points down; society unwinds; it breaks down.

Rees-Mogg says eat green and yellow vegetables, cut your income by 75% and read the bible - the only possible preparation for the depression. Alternatively, take comfort from their nightmares and let their crisis be our opportunity to overthrow the lot of them. □

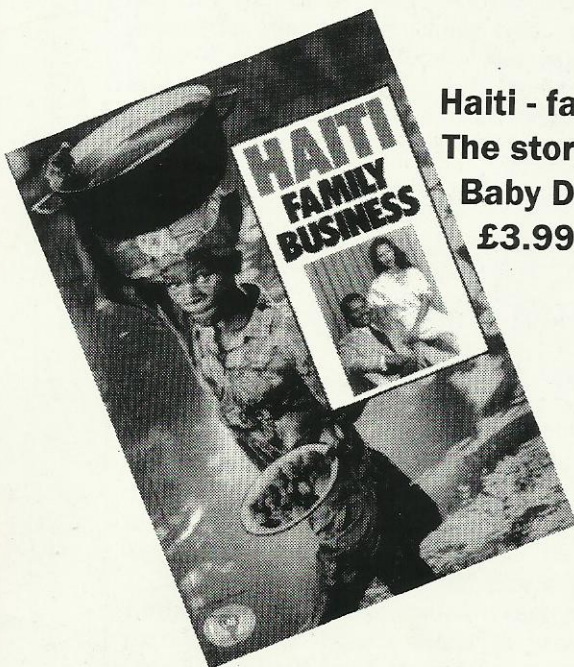
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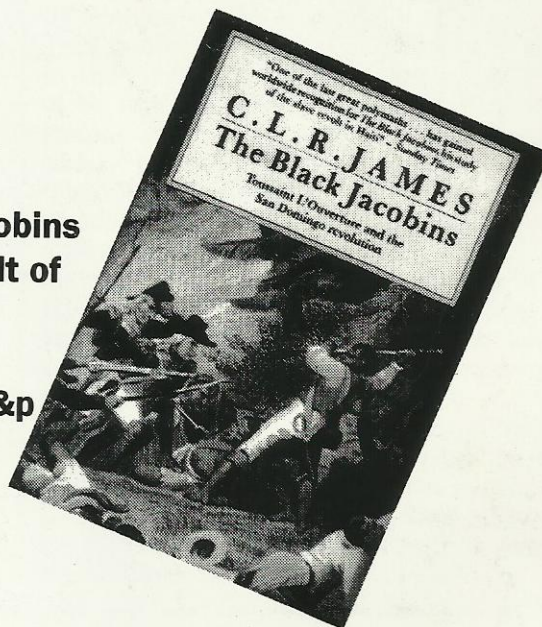
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