

No 2
March/April

Socialist Action

75p

*Defend
unilateralism*



*No to pacts and PR • Poland — Walesa and Jaruselski
Women for Socialism and LWAC*

Editorial

The tactics of the left

The tasks facing the left in the party following Labour's last election defeat were clear. Faced with a 'fundamental rethink' of Labour's aims and values — a concerted attempt by the leadership to ditch whatever central left policies remained — the priority was to take seriously the attempt to ditch unilateral nuclear disarmament, to remove any commitment to nationalisation, to reverse the gains in terms of party democracy made in the last ten years, to tackle the refusal to address the swelling tide of demands of women and black people, and to fight the attempt to move Labour to support proportional representation — that is in practice to move to a coalition with the SLD.

Concentrating on the Policy Review and the individual policies under attack would have maximised the potential for the widest possible alliance of the left with the 'soft left', or 'loyalists' in the party. These forces see themselves as in support of the leadership but also of policies such as unilateralism, nationalisation, party democracy or measures to redress the balance in representation of women and black people. The type of difficulty the right would face if this tactic was pursued was seen at last year's party conference in the victories for the left on unilateralism, one-woman-on parliamentary shortlists, and the national minimum wage.

Instead the left embarked on tactics — the Socialist Conference and the leadership contest — which did not confront this. The left did not give a lead in defending left policies and thereby helped give a clearer path to the offensive of the right than was necessary.

The practical consequence of concentrating on alliances outside the party was to downplay the work needed in the party to defend key policies — perfectly logically given that the key forces worked with outside, the Socialist Society, are not interested in winning the fight in the Labour Party but in creating a new party outside it. The effect of the leadership contest was to push the soft left and the right together — not divide them.

The consequence was to dramatically overstate the strength of the right by making the key gauge of relative strength voting on the leadership contest — where the left was smashed. In fact what last year's conference showed was that on a number of individual policies majorities can be mobilised, if the choices are presented clearly. Instead of recording victories the left felt drastically weakened — a self-inflicted defeat on which the right is now capitalising.

The Campaign Group and the left of the party should have concentrated on the Policy Review. A national conference called by the Campaign Group against the Policy Review would have received massive support — and been a much better response than the Socialist Conference.

What could have been achieved was shown recently in East and South East London. 150 Labour Party members attended a conference organised in East London on 4 February to discuss the implications of the policy review and how the left can respond. One hundred and twenty people attended a similar conference in South East London on 17 February. This is the type of initiative which the left should have been taking up and down the country for the entire last year. Sessions included the key issues in the policy review — unilateralism, economic policy, women and labour, black people and labour, modernising the party. The audiences very much consisted of rank and file activists, local constituency officers and so on.

Such events are an essential part of clarifying for Labour Party members what is involved in the policy review and coordinating the response to ensure the left is as strong as possible at party conference.

It is still not too late for the left to take such an initiative nationally and these conferences should be repeated everywhere possible in the period up to party conference, especially in time to influence discussion at conference and conference resolutions.

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Socialist Action

Building an alliance for socialism
PO Box 50, London N1 2XP

Editorial
01-254 0261

Business
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Why Gorbachev aids the right on unilateralism

Alan Williams

Defend unilateralism

1989 is the crucial year for the defence of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Already Neil Kinnock has launched his second public attack on it. It is therefore vital to restate the principles involved in defending it and their practical consequences.

The reason unilateral nuclear disarmament is demanded is because multilateral nuclear disarmament is a fraud. This is even obvious. The USSR has proposed the elimination of all nuclear weapons by the year 2000. The United States explicitly is *against* the elimination of nuclear weapons. To make British nuclear disarmament conditional on the United States, which says it is *not* in favour of the elimination of nuclear weapons is farcical. Such a policy will end up with Britain *retaining*, not eliminating its nuclear weapons.

If Kinnock's moves make no sense from the point of view of nuclear disarmament they do provide the key to his entire false course for the Labour movement. Kinnock's moves are prompted by his determination to prove that the Labour Party is a 'safe' party of government for capital. This is not the case so long as the party remains committed to 'unconditionally removing all nuclear weapons and nuclear bases from British soil and waters in the first parliament of the next Labour government'.

Displacing unilateral nuclear disarmament through the democratic channels of the Labour Party has so far proved an insurmountable obstacle to the Labour leadership. That is why pressure is now building up within the trade unions leading to this year's conferences. It is also why Kinnock himself is forced out into the open on the issue.

Kinnock knows that this is the last chance to persuade conference to ditch unilateralism. The party leadership calculates any show of disunity after this conference would lose it the

election and therefore it cannot afford to hold the dumping of unilateralism over until later.

The pressure on the party leadership from the rank and file on this issue was demonstrated clearly at the Labour Party policy review consultation on women, held the day after Kinnock's TV attack on unilateralism. The event was dominated by the issue of unilateral nuclear disarmament. There was near-unanimous support for a statement in defence of unilateralism circulated by Labour CND.

Kinnock and the right wing believe that unilateralism loses Labour elections. That is why, instead of taking the opportunity of Gorbachev's nuclear weapons and disarmament initiatives to point out the relevance of a unilateralist policy, they have argued that these initiatives make that policy redundant. The Labour leadership's response to Mikhail Gorbachev's initiatives is a commitment that Labour will now alter its policy and consider keeping the bomb!

This policy is absurd even in electoral terms. Unilateralism is not the reason that Labour has failed to win the last two general elections. The polls show that only a tiny minority of electors who consider voting Labour are influenced in their voting by unilateralism. All political analysts know that elections are won or lost on the economy. Here the consequences of the Labour leadership's defence policy actually makes it virtually impossible for Labour to win an election.

The parliamentary Labour Party supports the policy of the 1987 election — of refusing to cut defence spending to the same level of GDP as the other West European states. Such a position means Labour accepting an arms spending burden of £7,000 million which cripples its economic policy.

The further deepening of this wrong policy, symbolised in abandoning nuclear disar-



Supporting unilateralism in earlier days — which way will they all go now?

mament, will make it even more certain Labour cannot win the election.

Given the stakes involved the maximum forces must be mustered in support of unilateralism. In that context *Tribune's* statement in the 17 February issue, 'Disarmament: an appeal to Labour and the unions', was timely. However the statement includes a commitment that: '...that Britain should dismantle its own nuclear arsenal and remove American nuclear weapons from British soil and waters within the lifetime of the first parliament of the next Labour government'.

This will clearly be perceived by the rank and file of the party and by the public alike as a reaffirmation of unilateralism. Such a statement has the potential to attract broad support within the party and the trade unions. But it must be pointed out that it is not a restatement of the existing party policy. *Tribune* remains silent on the

removal of nuclear bases, whilst declaring in its editorial introduction that the statement is: '...a short summary of the position which we believe the Labour Party should adopt as the most effective means by which a future Labour government could speed the pace of world disarmament and achieve a non-nuclear defence policy for Britain'.

Defending the continued commitment to remove nuclear bases is vital. Britain has no control over American bases or what they contain in them. Asking the United States to remove its nuclear warheads from this country (which could be the way the ambiguous *Tribune* statement is interpreted) is not the same as dismantling those bases and preventing any possibility of nuclear facilities being used. It is the full commitment of Labour conference that must be defended.

Carol Turner, Labour CND

Hammond's new moves

The role played by the EETPU in its break with the TUC has been clarified still further since the beginning of the year:

- the EETPU is balloting its members on closer links with the UDM.

- it circulated prison warders following the strike at Wandsworth jail to urge them to leave the Prison Officers Association and join the EETPU. Hammond announced similar initiatives for the NHS and local authorities.

- it has been seeking to persuade small groups of dissident TGWU members to join it.

- it has signed three new single union, no-strike, deals on greenfield sites with the Advanced Design Electronics of Liverpool, P&W Plastics of Merseyside and TDS Circuits of Blackburn.

The context is that manufacturing industry is growing rapidly — up six per cent over the last year, almost twice as fast as the economy as a whole.

In this situation capital

urgently needs another round of screw tightening against the trade unions. One aspect will be a further assault on the public sector unions. The provocations staged against the Prison Officers (not that we have any sympathy with them!) around Wandsworth are undoubtedly intended to create a climate for banning strikes in so called 'essential services'. Tory backbenchers have re-raised the issue of the closed shop.

Hammond fits directly into all these moves — which is why capital has been careful to prop him up by placing him on NEDO.

First the EETPU acted as a centre for anti-strike scab organisations — strengthening links with the UDM, approaches to anti-strike prison officers, earlier approaches to the 'Professional Associations of Teachers' etc.

Second, and this is the EETPU's main role, is its no-strike deals in manufacturing. The EETPU cannot make substantial inroads into TUC unions in

established workplaces. However the EETPU has an eye on the significant number of *new* manufacturing plants opening up.

It is here, where a captive union membership can be delivered by the employer before the factory is even built, that the EETPU aims to grow.

Third the EETPU plays a useful role in fighting particular unions — in particular the MSF. At the end of March 1988 the EETPU launched a campaign, headed by national officer Ron Sanderson, the chief negotiator of no strike deals, to persuade workers promoted to white collar grades to stay in the EETPU.

Reporting Hammond's campaign the *Financial Times* noted: 'The EETPU is particularly concerned by the... merger of TASS, the manufacturing union, and ASTMS, the white collar union, which would create a powerful union with established roots in the technical area. Mr Hammond predicted that the

EETPU would become the main union for technicians as it would provide the natural political home for white collar workers.'

Finally the EETPU remains the pivot of capital's goal of splitting the TUC. The right wing of the TUC is posing the way of dealing with the EETPU as bringing it back into TUC membership via amalgamation with the AEU.

The details of the latest merger proposals put by the AEU to the EETPU clarify it would be a merger on Hammond's terms. The aim is to push these proposals through the AEU national committee in April and the EETPU rules revision conference in July.

An amalgamated union set up on that basis, which would overturn the existing democracy of the AEU, would simply be the vehicle through which Hammond would prepare a new and larger split of the TUC.

Hammond is continuing his drive against the TUC even from outside it.

NUS leadership moves further right

After the shambles of NUS Winter conference, which took no discussion on how to fight the proposals for student loans, student militancy has not died down. With the 'Democratic Left' (DL) leadership of NOLS using 'student violence' as an excuse for calling no further actions, the fight against loans increasingly demands a fight against the 'Democratic Left' NUS leadership.

The DL have done everything in their power to de-mobilise against loans.

In London a demonstration was called for 1 February with the support of the majority of Student Union executive members in London. Under pressure from the DL nationally, the DL voted (with a majority of one) to withdraw the support of NUS London.

However the demonstration went ahead and over 2000 attended. Only 13 attended the picket of the DES, called as an alternative.

At NUS conference in March a major debate will be the reform of NUS, with the DL attempting to safeguard their own position by reducing the number of elections and conferences of NUS.

Their alliance with the right wing, pro-SDP 'Students for Students' is becoming increasingly clear, with the DL preferring to stand a candidate against SSiN for the NUS executive than against Cosmo Hawkes, 'Students for Students' candidate for national secretary.

With support building up in the DL for pulling NOLS

out of any involvement in NUS, the Labour right sees 'Students for Students' as the replacement leadership. There has to be a fight to keep NOLS in NUS, alongside building an alternative to the coalitionist politics of the DL.

The role of the DL in the battle to ensure that black students are in the leadership of the students movement is no less shameful. Having not stood or supported a black candidate in NUS for 10 years, they are again standing an all-white slate for NUS executive this year. A Black Sections candidate will be standing for the NOLS national committee at conference this March. This is an opportunity to begin to change this situation.

NOLS conference will

NUS
NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

also decide whether Labour Students cast their vote in favour of unilateralism at Labour Party conference. The resolution being promoted by the DL is the same as the fudge proposal defeated at Labour Party conference. Unilateralist resolutions have been submitted by Campaign Student and this, along with the fight to win NOLS to a militant, mass campaign against loans, will be a crunch debate for NOLS.

POLLY VITTORINI

No deals with the SNP

1989 sees the introduction of the poll tax in Scotland, payment commencing from 1 April. Ten years of returning a Labour majority to Westminster and ten years of experiencing Tory policies from the Thatcher government. These years have been a catalogue of closures: in manufacturing, engineering, and the traditional industries of coal, steel, and shipbuilding.

The Scottish coalfields now employ only 4,000 and face a very uncertain future as the privatisation of the Scottish Electricity Board goes ahead. The much-acclaimed extension of service industries in Scotland has meant part-time, low-paid jobs.

The inability of the Labour Party in Scotland to defend the Scottish people against this onslaught undoubtedly led to the electoral defeat in Govan in November 1988. The result of 48 per cent for the SNP and 36 per cent for Labour in a constituency with a previous Labour majority of 19,509 shocked the labour movement and pushed the SNP into the limelight, reminiscent of their popularity in the early '70s.

Their recent decision, much disputed even within their own ranks, to withdraw from talks about a Scottish Constitutional Convention has resulted in a 4 per cent drop in their support in the polls. However, support for the SNP still stands around 28 per cent, Labour at 41 per cent and the Tories at 20 per cent, with 8 per cent for the Democrats and 2 per cent for the SDP.

The SNP is aiming to win at least 30 per cent of the vote in the Euro-elections, and take seats from Labour. They are campaigning under the banner of 'Scotland in Europe', arguing for independence within Europe and portraying the EEC as bringing gains to the Scottish people.

Labour has been trapped in the framework of welcoming aspects of the EEC membership and to date has failed to get across the threat to Scottish jobs.

The party in Scotland and nationally has failed to pursue credible strategies of opposition to Thatcher's offensive in Scotland.

Frustration with the 'Feeble Fifty' Labour MPs has been building up since the '87 General Election. Local Government elections in 1988 reflected a swing to the SNP. Under this pressure, different strategies within the labour movement have been developing.

March 1988 saw the launch of Scottish Labour Action, involving some members of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, committed to a higher profile for the Labour Party on Scottish affairs, and for some control within the party. For example, the full time staff for the Scottish Labour Party are appointed by Walworth Road, and the disastrous Govan by-election campaign was essentially run by Walworth Road.

More action on the poll tax is also a central part of Scottish Labour Action's platform. However, right from the beginning, Scottish Labour Action have tied themselves to Kinnock's leadership of the party.

The SLA now question the ability of Labour to win at the next general election. Ian Smart, (member of Scottish Labour Party Executive) writing in *Radical Scotland*, puts forward the argument for a 'dual mandate' — this forms the basis of SLA sponsored resolutions to Scottish Party Conference in March. He argues that Labour should seek a 'dual mandate' at the next General Election. That is, whilst fighting to return a majority government to Westminster, in the event of that failing, the achievement of a majority of Labour MPs in Scotland (or of pro-assembly votes, or both), would be regarded as a mandate to negotiate with any Westminster government for a Scottish Assembly.

In other words the Scottish labour movement should prepare for the inevitable — Labour's defeat at the next general election. Following



Photo: John Harris (FL)

the Govan by-election, Campbell Christie of the STUC promoted discussion around the need for a 'Thatcher free Scotland' — that is of alliances with other political parties with the common denominator being 'Scotland'. Scottish Labour Action pose the same issue with their formulation of 'pro-Assembly votes', and the NUM Scottish Area under the leadership of George Bolton, argue at this year's Scottish Party conference for all-party Scottish unity against the Tories. Resolutions from Motherwell North (John Reid MP) also call for electoral pacts.

All this adds up to a concerted campaign for electoral pacts by Labour in Scotland.

This is to use the demand for an assembly as a cover for not fighting Thatcher's attacks on the working class and refusing to build the alliances necessary to defend the working class. Labour must support an assembly but we must see it as part of the democratic tools needed to defend the working class and organise the fight against unemployment, the poll tax, housing, the health service, nuclear weapons and all the other policies of the Thatcher government for which the Scottish electorate did not vote.

What are proposed now are pacts with those such as the Scottish Liberals, and the Scottish National Party who have no strategy or policies to reverse the key policies of

Thatcherism.

Some sections of the left notably those organised around the Socialist Conference add further confusion by arguing wrongly that there is a socialist wing to the SNP. The recent 'Socialism in Scotland' conference organised joint platforms with the SNP and Labour, again encouraging talk of electoral pacts.

Proportional representation is also being floated, as a suitable basis for electing a Scottish Assembly, by prominent supporters of both the SLA and the LCC. PR would be a mechanism for an alliance with the SNP.

Labour in Scotland must fight the defeatism which leads to proposals for PR and pacts. This is the opposite of the argument from Robin Cook in the January edition of *Radical Scotland* that it is 'not necessary to achieve a complete clear majority for Labour — it is essential to deny her (Thatcher) a majority at the next election'. We are looking for a Labour majority. This not helped by initiatives such as the Scottish Socialist Party, involving prominent Labour members such as Alex Wood, to be launched in May.

Only radical Labour policies can reverse the decline in living standards and the policies of Thatcher. We will not get agreement on these policies with the SNP.

ANN HENDERSON

Why Labour must give democracy to its black members

Discussions around the affiliated organisations option opened by the vote on composite 5 at 1988 party conference are now progressing. The process will culminate with a proposal from the NEC at 1989 party conference in October.

The Labour party Black Section has proposed that a unitary organisation open to black people who are members of the party or who are eligible for membership of the party be established, and gain guaranteed representation on party bodies at all levels.

At this early stage, it is clear that among the likely points of disagreement are the form of representation at national level — whether there will be reserved places on the NEC for delegates from black organisations themselves.

Contrary to the first paragraph of composite 5, passed overwhelmingly by party conference, both the self-determination of black people organising in the labour movement, and the direct representation of black people at all, and, in particular, at national level, could be called into question.

Firstly, both Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley have gone on public record as saying that they will not tolerate the establishment of black-only forms of organisation within the structure of the party.

Secondly, purely political motivations exist for opposition to the proposal that places are created on the NEC to enable black people to be represented directly. These motivations have more to do with maintaining the current balance of forces on the NEC, than they have to do with the concern to expand the basis of democracy in the movement.

The opening statement of composite 5 is concerned with extending the legitimacy of the Labour Party as the party of preference for black people throughout the country. It reads:

'Conference recognises that the principles of self-determination and direct

representation for ethnic minorities are essential within a democratic socialist party.'

The word essential in this statement reflects a very general point of concern — that the vote for the party among black people, as among almost every other section of the population is diminishing. This is especially alarming as it is estimated that almost one eighth of Labour's vote at the last general election came from black people, and that fifty Labour MP's depend on the black vote for their seats.

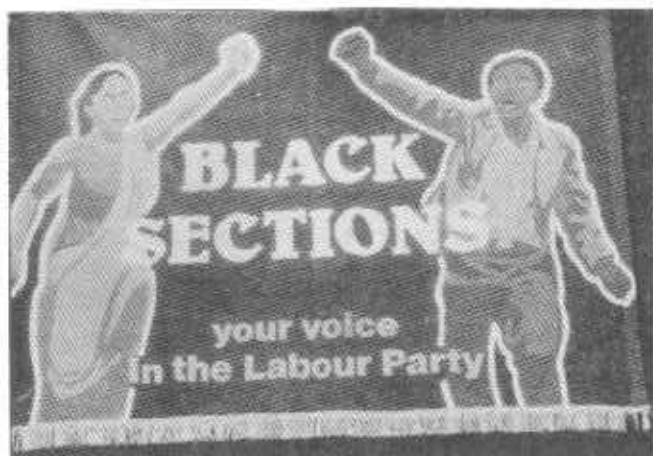
But to rebuild support in the black community, who have witnessed before the extent to which Labour's leaders will strain every muscle to prevent black self-organisation emerging in the party, has to be accompanied by a drive to rebuild Labour's legitimacy as the party that promotes the interests of black people.

First, Labour will never stem the flow of black votes away from the party, if it doesn't adjust to the fact that black people are an irreducible component of the labour movement, and need to be reflected as such.

Secondly, to be truly reflective of the concerns of black people, such an organisation, and its delegates to party bodies, must represent the policy arrived at collectively by black people themselves. This in no way inhibits or prevents white people from participating in a discussion on anti-racist strategy, or anything else for that matter — it simply establishes the black view of that strategy prior to wider deliberation.

In order for positive progress to be made on this question vital to the rebuilding of the party over the coming period, it is necessary that petty concerns do not subvert the triumph of democracy. In the end, the only way to qualitatively extend the party's membership and support, is to extend its legitimacy.

Mike Wongsam
Treasurer, Labour Party Black Section



The victimisation of Benny Bunsee

ON 24 October last year Hounslow council started proceedings which led to the sacking of its principal race adviser Benny Bunsee. It is one of a series of attacks taking place on race and women's units in Labour controlled local authorities in London.

Lewisham council is being asked to scrap its race and women's units. In Hackney Linda Bellos, ex-leader of Lamberth council and head of Hackney's women's unit, has proposed abolition of all separate race, women, and police units. Brent council only narrowly voted to defeat the same proposals. These different units are being disbanded in favour of 'Equal Opportunities Policies'.

Bunsee was an outspoken opponent of this development — pointing out that while women's and race units, for example, had to cooperate closely, and all forms of oppression had to be combatted, they were *not* the same thing.

Bunsee pointed out: 'Black people face the specific problems of racist attacks. The rate of unemployment in the black community is two to three times that in the white community — a problem not faced by white women. There are specific curriculum problems in schools for the black community which are different for women. Similarly the problem of sexual harassment of women, or reproduc-

tive rights, is not the same as that of racism. Black women have long emphasised they face significantly different priorities to white women. These cannot in practice be fudged and blurred into catch all "equal opportunities" without the specific problems of black people, or women, being ignored.'

There have been resignations of black officers in Hounslow — Ismail Simjee, team leader in the housing department — and Sanjay VEDI was suspended as chair of the equal opportunities committee for protesting against the council disciplining Asian students after a physical clash with white students who had been allegedly going around beating up black students.

Black groups have almost invariably not been consulted on these changes. In Lewisham NALGO, the only group consulted and with many black members, complained bitterly of their views being ignored and having been deceived. In Hackney no black groups were consulted.

Black Hackney councillor Lloyd King describes what is happening as: 'a policy of putting race relations in the cupboard while expecting black people's continued loyal support.'

Benny Bunsee's victimisation is not only important in itself. It is a symptom of deeply disturbing trends in the London Labour Party.

Sinn Fein's Ard Fheis

Sinn Fein, at its Ard Fheis (conference) on 28/29 January, adopted overwhelmingly the following perspective: 'This Ard Fheis adopts in principle the need for an all-Ireland anti-imperialist mass movement ... Such a movement should be made up of the broadest range of political and social forces ... The central political objectives of an anti-imperialist programme should be the end of partition and the achievement of national independence and unity in the context of Irish national self-determination ... Such a movement should be organised throughout the 32 Counties, and its demands should be framed to reflect the need for democratic, political, economic, social and cultural rights in Ireland.'

The logic of this perspective is simple and correct. Ireland is not just *any* capitalist country — it is a country dominated by British imperialism. Partition and British rule in the Six Counties are the most visible aspect of this. But imperialist domination has shaped the history of Ireland for 800 years and is the dominating feature of its economy, politics and the entire society today.

The annual outflow of profits, dividends and royalties from the 26 counties amounts to eight per cent of GNP and absorbs twenty per cent of export earnings. Thirty five per cent of exports still go to Britain.

This imperialist domination determines the internal structure of the country. Ireland is the only country in Western Europe whose population has *declined* in the last 100 years. Since 1919 one in every two people born in the 26 counties has left the country. Total employment today is twelve per cent *less* than it was in the mid-1920s. Nineteen per cent of the workforce is unemployed and officially more than 30,000 people — nearly one per cent of its population — are forced to

emigrate every year. Fifteen per cent workforce in the 26 counties is still employed in agriculture, compared to just slightly over two per cent in Britain.

For Irish women, partition has meant religious anti-woman bigotry reinforcing legal and social inequality north and south of the border.

Ending this imperialist domination is a key task of the class struggle in Ireland.

The Irish capitalist class, and its bourgeois nationalist parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael in the south and the SDLP in the north, have failed to do this and in fact uphold and materially benefit from British domination of Ireland.

The paper by Sinn Fein's executive on the anti-imperialist mass movement said: 'It appeals to all who have a common interest in get-

ting rid of imperialism ... It has the potential to unite workers, small farmers and small business people ... A mass movement would see the fusion of all those campaigns and interests which are adversely affected by imperialism — and denial of national self-determination ... They will be drawn through their own struggle inevitably to take on the controlling interests in Ireland which prevent their demands being met. These are the class and foreign interests which stand in the way of national self-determination.'

In his presidential address Gerry Adams explained: 'The ruling clique in Ireland uphold above all else the interests of British and multi-national capitalism in Ireland. They only have power because they have yet to be confronted by the combined forces of Irish

democracy. Sinn Fein has a crucial role to play in helping to bring these different forces together. This is the historic task we face in the 20th year of our struggle.'

It was James Connolly who first spelt out the alliance of class forces necessary to free Ireland: the working class, has to organise itself independently, and create a strategic alliance with the petty bourgeoisie — the small farmers, shop keepers, etc — and, women. The same perspective, in countries dominated by imperialism, was systematised in the theses on the 'anti-imperialist united front' adopted by the fourth congress of the Communist International in 1922 which explained: '...the slogan of an anti-imperialist united front will help to expose the vacillations of the various bourgeois nationalist groups.'

The perspective adopted by Sinn Fein, which is a revolutionary nationalist not a marxist party, has essential common elements with that of Connolly and the Comintern. It aims to unmask the contradiction between the words and the deeds of the bourgeois nationalist parties which retain the overwhelming majority support in Ireland.

This follows on logically from Sinn Fein's decision in 1986 to take up any seats won in parliamentary elections in the south — tactics aiming to win a majority in the 32 counties to the struggle against British imperialism.

Consistent with this is the position that: 'Participation in this movement should not be dependent on one's attitude to armed struggle' and the statement by the IRA that the role of the armed struggle in the Six Counties is not to '... hinder but complement efforts to build a broad-based front against imperialism.'

These decisions should be welcomed by everyone who wants to end British rule in Ireland. Gerry Adams' unequivocal support, at the Ard Fheis, for the 'Time to Go' campaign in Britain fits coherently into this framework.

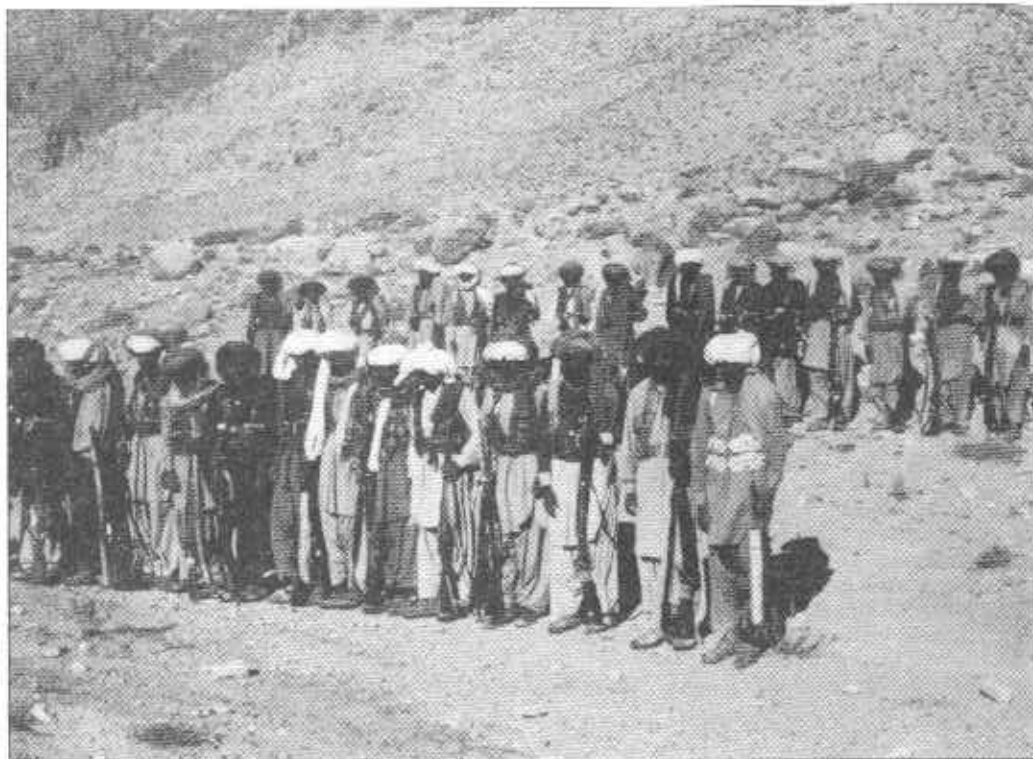


Defeat in Afghanistan

WHEN the last Soviet troops pulled out from Afghanistan on 15 February they left behind a PDPA regime in Afghanistan facing almost certain defeat at the hands of the mujahadeen. This would be a major defeat for the people of Afghanistan and for the struggle against capitalism and imperialism internationally. It will also bring the majority of the British left up against the harsh reality of the mujahadeen forces they have been supporting for the last ten years.

When the PDPA took power in Kabul, well before the Soviet intervention of 1979, it stood for, in a distorted form, an attempt to implement some of the tasks of a national democratic revolution in Afghanistan. That is it had limited proposals for land reform, education, improvement of the position of women. The mujahadeen opposition represented opposition to all these — they stood for landlordism, maintenance of the medieval oppression of women, localism, and the most backward forces in Afghanistan society.

The fact that the Soviet Union invaded in 1979 did not alter the social character of the forces in the conflict. The PDPA regime in Kabul remained more socially progressive than the mujahadeen reactionaries — who by this time had deepened their reactionary character through direct links with imperialism. The programme the mujahadeen are attempting to take power on involves the physical annihilation of the most advanced forces in the Afghan working class, restriction or suppression of the trade unions, the restoration of untrammelled power for the landlords, and the removal of even the most limited rights from women. They represent localism, landlordism and particularism in Afghanistan and their chief



economic 'innovation' since the civil war began has been widespread involvement in heroin production.

The character of the mujahadeen was further clarified at the shura (council) convened in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi in February with the wrangles that surrounded it between shias and sunnis, military commanders and politicians in exile, and the protests by Uzbeks and Turkmans about their under-representation. The key political divisions which surfaced were over whether to reinstate the King, that is go back to a situation more backward than prior to the PDPA seizure of power, or institute a regime still more reactionary than the monarchy — a localised, Islamic Republic. The mujahadeen are politically among the most reactionary forces in the world.

It was undoubtedly because it believed that the PDPA regime was going to be defeated that the Soviet

Union intervened in 1979. It is far more likely that the Soviet intervention made the ensuing defeat still worse. But it did not alter the social character of the contending forces. The victory of the PDPA would have been a step forward in Afghanistan. The victory of the reactionary mujahadeen will probably set back the struggle in Afghanistan for decades. That is the balance sheet of the war.

Yet the truth is that most of the left in Britain has supported this reactionary force in an alliance with imperialism. The argument has been the 'right of nations to self-determination'. But the right of nations to self-determination is subordinate to class criteria. As Lenin put it socialism: 'assesses any national demand... from the angle of the workers class struggle.' In any case the victory of the mujahadeen will not lead to self-determination for Afghanistan but its deeper subordination to imperialism. The victory of

the reactionary mujahadeen over the PDPA represents not a step forward but a step backward for the Afghanistan and international working class.

Those on the left who during the war civil sided with the so-called Afghan resistance will wake up to the harsh reality of the situation, for objectively they were siding with imperialism, reactionary Islamic fundamentalism, drug dealers, feudal or even more backward formations, who in all certainty will assassinate in cold blood thousands of people for the crime of having attempted to introduce national democratic reforms into Afghanistan.

The PDPA did not succeed in smashing the reactionary forces which confronted them. That is a pity. Even now it would be better that they were able to do so. The fact that they are most unlikely to is a setback for the people of Afghanistan and for the international working class.

Paraguay: the fall of Stroessner

What to many may look like just a rift within the same gang of crooks governing Paraguay, the poorest Latin American country, led on 2 February to the violent overthrow of the longest-lasting dictator of the Western world, Alfredo Stroessner, by his relative, general Andres Rodriguez.

Ostensibly, Rodriguez led the coup that overthrew Stroessner after the latter retired Rodriguez from his position as commander of the army's most powerful unit. Beneath the surface of the rift lies something much deeper.

The most stable dictatorship in the world had shown signs of internal strains for some time. The 34-year long dictator had surrounded himself with a group of unconditional supporters who have come to occupy the decisive levers of powers in government as well as in the Colorado Party, Stroessner's personal political machine. Membership of the Colorado party 'was a prerequisite for any job in government service, the military or even in nursing and teaching' (*Time* 13 Feb).

The ascendancy of the nouveau rich led to a widening schism within the party between the Stroessneristas and the traditionalists, who were excluded or given a smaller share of the booty and who were linked to more orthodox sectors of the economy.

The people of Paraguay received very little from the unorthodox combination of activities which brought about the economic bonanza. A large proportion of the money was pocketed by the militant faction, and at the beginning of the 1980s as the foreign debt began to bite hard, capital fled the country, and economic growth slowed down drastically. Repression increased and opposition to the dictatorship took a growingly bold character — rallying around the Catholic church which became a medium for expressing opposition to Stroessner.

Stroessner replied by suppressing dissidence from the traditionalists within his Col-

orado party. A month before the coup, the dictator sacked many mid ranking army officers but maintained more acquiescent generals. This transferred the political opposition into the army. Matters were brought to a head when Stroessner tried to sack Rodriguez.

Rodriguez has promised elections in 90 days, restoration of human rights and is attempting to build bridges towards the Catholic Church.

The anti-Stroessner opposition is extremely weak consisting essentially of ramshackle, unstable formations with little, if any, political tradition in the country, most of them of bourgeois stock. Rodriguez speaking at his first press conference on the elections said 'Communist parties would not be allowed to participate' (the *Guardian*, 7 Feb 1989). The trade union movement is also extremely weak and was severely repressed by Stroessner.

Rodriguez's first act will be to try to restore the unity of the Colorado party to provide a more solid basis for his rule. However, there is no guarantee that he will succeed. If he doesn't, he is likely to be removed by another general, undermining the regime even further. Stroessnerism either of the traditionalist or the nouveau rich brand will not allow the rotten and unorthodox basis of their power and wealth to be undermined by exuberant democratic gestures.

The Authentic Radical Liberal Party, one of the anti-Stroessner parties which enjoys the most popular support, organised a rally on 11 February, which gathered 20,000 people in Asuncion, the capital — an event not seen for decades in Paraguay. Its leader, Domingo Laino, the most popular opposition leader called on Rodriguez to delay general elections, due on 1 May, to allow the opposition parties to organise. The opposition know they have a hard task but the collapse of the continent's oldest and vilest dictatorship is an index of the depth of the crisis now affecting Latin America.

JAVIER



As the Intifada in the West Bank and Gaza enters its 15 month, its repercussions continue to be felt around the world. It has exposed the true brutality of the Zionist monster.

Even the US's 1988 report on human rights devoted 20 pages to condemning Israel and a British all-party delegation has described the brutality of the Zionist troops as 'unbelievable'.

The United Leadership of the Uprising has hailed Hussein's renunciation of long held ambitions over the West Bank last August as the greatest achievement of the uprising.

Despite the many negative features of the Jordanian withdrawal, it paved the way, in December, for the Palestine National Council's (PNC) declaration of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories. The declaration was greeted with jubilation throughout the Palestinian diaspora and the new state is already recognised by over 50 countries.

Although there was unanimous support for the declaration of the new state within the PNC, the implications of recognising Israel and therefore abandoning the goal of a democratic, secular state in the whole of Palestine, were not lost on the participants. Opposition to acceptance of UN resolutions 242 and 338 was led by George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

This tension, between those who see the declaration of a Palestinian state as part of a two state solution and those who view it as a transitional step towards the goal of overthrowing the Zionist state, is already growing. An abortive guerrilla mission on February by the PFLP and the Palestine Liberation Front was partly aimed at showing

Palestine lives

opposition to 'Arafat's capitulationist policy'.

Arafat's speech in Geneva recognising Israel and renouncing 'terrorism' led to the US opening talks with the PLO. However the US has not suddenly discovered the justice of the Palestinian cause, even less is it about to ditch Israel.

Hussein's retreat has closed off the option of a Jordanian/Israeli confederation in the short term, but American intentions remain to derail the Palestinian revolution by creating some form of Palestinian bantustan, unarmed and totally dominated by the Israeli state.

Gorbachev, eager to help imperialism in 'resolving regional conflicts', has also stepped in. Moscow has reopened diplomatic relations with Israel, affirmed its support for the Israeli state's right to secure borders and put pressure on dissidents such as the PFLP to maintain unity under Arafat's leadership.

The Zionists have, however, closed ranks against any negotiation. Likud and the Labour Party have entered another coalition, the cornerstones of which are a refusal to talk to the PLO and the continuing colonisation of the occupied territories by 'settlers'.

The reasons are clear. The occupied territories are Israel's second largest market, and a source of cheap labour and water for its settlements. In any case the Zionist state is founded on the denial of any notion of Palestinian national rights. A Palestinian state would strike at the heart of Zionist mythology. In Israeli politics support for Zionism cuts like a knife through all other political differences.

The central tasks for those doing solidarity work in Britain remain that of building political and material support for the intifada and for the demand of unconditional Zionist withdrawal from the occupied territories, coupled now with the demand that Britain recognise the new Palestinian state.

Rashid Ashraf

It was Lenin who outlined the fundamental rule in politics: 'There is a Latin tag *cui prodest?* meaning "who stands to gain?" When it is not immediately apparent which political or social groups, forces or alignments advocate certain proposals, measures, etc, one should always ask: "Who stands to gain?" It is not important *who* directly advocates a particular policy... What is important is *who stands to gain* from these views, proposals, measures.' (Lenin, *Who stands to gain?*).

At the end of last year the right wing of the Labour Party, led by John Evans, opened a campaign for the party to enter a pact with the Social and Liberal Democrats and to support proportional representation.

This is not a new proposal — it has been argued by the EETPU leadership, the *New Statesman* and *Marxism Today* since at least 1983. What is new is that senior figures on the right of NEC, the shadow cabinet and the Parliamentary Labour Party are sufficiently emboldened to now openly argue for a pacts and PR. These included Shadow Health spokesperson Robin Cook, shadow environment spokesperson John Cunningham and former shadow

local government spokesperson Jeff Rooker. The *Sunday Times* claimed that a poll of Labour MPs it conducted in December last year showed that one in five Labour MPs favoured a pact. The Labour Coordinating Committee conference at the beginning of December adopted support for PR.

The focal point of all this was John Evans' call for an electoral pact with the SLD

and support for PR carried on the *Guardian's* agenda page. This was rejected by the party's December NEC with only Robin Cook and John Evans abstaining on the resolution which opposed: '... any electoral pacts with other political parties or the introduction of changes in the electoral system designed to make such pacts more likely.'

Neil Kinnock responded to Evans' proposals saying: 'he understood they had been put forward "with constructive intentions" but the proposals had simply not been thought through.'

Since the NEC, however, the right wing have intensified their campaign. Evans stated in *Tribune* on 10 February: 'I believe that a one-off arrangement between the SLD and the Labour Party is the only realistic method of bringing down the Thatcher government. No one has managed to suggest a more viable alternative.'

John Cunningham, launching Labour's campaign for the county council elections on 13 February said: '...he did not object to local parties considering electoral pacts to fight elections in areas where the chance of outright victory was remote. The decision was one to be taken locally.' (*Financial Times* 14 February 1989).

The campaign is now being taken into the unions. Resolutions supporting PR will be going to both

Who stands to gain from PR?

the AEU and USDAW annual conferences. Gavin Laird, general secretary of the AEU, has made clear that if adopted by the AEU this will go forward as the AEU's resolution to Labour Party conference. Peter Kellner in the *Independent* noted the: 'grouping of trade unionists, Labour First, which warns that outright Labour victory next time is "impossible".' This continues the positions advocated by the EETPU leadership as far back as 1983 when Frank Chapple, then general secretary wrote in the *Times*: 'I am convinced that it will not be long before some rank-and-file members start suggesting that instead of giving our money to a no-hope Labour Party, we should donate it to the cause of proportional representation!' (*Times* 17 June 1983).

Jeff Rooker wrote to every CLP in the West Midlands in November urging them to adopt one of eight model resolutions on electoral reform for the West Midlands regional party conference. Three appear on the order paper.

In Scotland, where Labour has a majority of the MPs, Scottish Labour Action's forthcoming conference on Scottish Home Rule has a session entitled 'Electing the Assembly — facing up to the Proportional Representation debate' where the speaker is Robin Cook. In a parallel development Charter 88 was launched on 30 November. Its core is the call for proportional representation and it brings together right wing



trade union leaders like Gavin Laird, leading figures from the SLD, such as Michael Meadowcroft, Labour Party members and various intellectuals from the Socialist Society.

The significance of Charter 88's campaign for PR was correctly noted by Martin Linton and Patrick Wintour who reported: 'A small group was brought together spanning the centre and socialist left which drafted the Charter published today — Anthony Barnett, Richard Holme (a prominent Democrat), Mary Kaldor, Stuart Weir (Editor of *New Statesman and Society*), Hilary Wainwright and Professors John Keane and David Marquand' (*Guardian* 30 January 1989).

The *New Statesman and Society*, which campaigned in favour of 'tactical voting' at the last two general elections, sponsors and provides the mailing address for Charter 88.

This orientation of abandoning the practical fight for a majority Labour government and seeking a pact with the SLD and/or the SDP fits logically with the goals of Labour's policy review. These are to overturn those policies which commit a Labour government to reversing Thatcherism — including unilateral nuclear disarmament. Such a shift of course removes the fundamental political obstacles to a coalition with the SLD.

Not only does the call for a pact throw a much needed life line to the SLD and SDP but the political goals of the right wing of the party are the same as those spelt out by the SDP when they split from the party in 1982. They precisely objected to unilateral nuclear disarmament, opposition to the EEC, the party's links with the trade unions and public ownership.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that David Owen has gone out of his way to welcome them. The *Financial Times* on 9 February noted that speaking during the Richmond by-election campaign: 'Owen developed his view that a pact between the three opposition parties offered the only hope of overturning Mrs Thatcher... Owen said: "The important thing is to assert SDP values... If Labour comes closer we would be fools not to welcome it." In an apparent attempt to lay the foundations for an eventual rapprochement between Labour and the SDP, he added that an electoral pact between the three

opposition parties would be "not impossible but difficult to achieve"... Dr Owen's remarks follow recent comments from Ashdown which suggested that he was not as diametrically opposed to the principle of eventual pacts with other parties as he had first suggested when taking over as SLD leader.

In an interview with the *Independent* newspaper in September of last year Owen spelt out his strategy towards Labour: 'Owen says ...he believes Labour will change its defence policy one day, making a political realignment possible... "That is why the SDP should survive — to be there. It is possible by continuing to take their votes, we may force them to face reality before the election. I would prefer them to do that."

This entire course corresponds to the basic goal of British capital — which is to reorganise the entire British political system to ensure that if the most effective instrument of capitalist policy — the Tory Party — cannot be kept in power, there is a safe alternative to it already in place. And 'safe' from the point of view of capital today means a government that would not overturn the fundamental features of Thatcherism.

This need arises both from the most long term trends in British politics and conjunctural features.

Throughout the post-war period the underlying trend of Tory Party electoral support has been to fall inexorably. As John Ross pointed out in *Thatcher and Friends: The Anatomy of the Tory Party*: 'With the exception of 1945-51, when the Conservative vote was temporarily depressed by the colossal post war Labour landslide, every Conservative victory since 1931 has seen the Tory vote at a lower level than the one before. Each consecutive Conservative defeat saw the Conservative vote fall to a lower figure than the one previously.'

The long-term declining trend of support for the Tory Party accelerated between 1964 and 1979 when the Tories lost four general elections out of five. It was precisely at this point that key sections of British capital started to build up the Liberal Party as an alternative to Labour — a course that was intensified with the creation of the SDP and then the Alliance.

Contrary to the assertions of *Marxism Today* Margaret Thatcher did not, and could not, succeed in reversing the long term decline in Tory Party support. After the initial

CHARTER

88



victory of 1979 the Tory vote slipped again in 1983 and 1987. What she was able to do was use the one-off windfall of a £100 billion from North Sea oil to slow down that decline in support.

Today, however, this long term trend combines with short term developments. The problem for the government — and this is why capital is now dusting off the file marked 'possible alternatives to Thatcher' — is that oil revenues are now a quarter of their peak level and the British economy is being squeezed by its more powerful imperialist rivals. The British economy is now running its largest-ever balance of trade deficit — £14.25 billion in 1988.

Given the decline in oil revenues the only way this deficit can be eliminated is by simultaneously cutting domestic demand and increasing manufacturing output and exports. Manufacturing output has increased by seven per cent in 1988 whilst the effects of successive rises in interest rates are now working through into a decline in retail sales as living standards are squeezed by dearer mortgages and tighter credit.

The political problem for British capital in this is clear. These policies hit the living standards of the working class — including precisely the more prosperous sections of the working class whose votes Thatcher must retain to win the next general election. At the same time building up manufacturing industry strengthens the objective position of the working class and trade unions in manufacturing.

In this situation capital would like to keep Thatcher in power but if this proves impossible it wants to make sure it has an alternative government to hand which will not overturn the chief planks of Thatcherism.

This is exactly the function and policy of both the SLD and the SDP and of the campaign to commit Labour to a pact with one or both of them. Both are parties created and financed by big capital. Both are committed to building upon and not reversing Thatcherism. Both aim to grind down Labour's support.

It is the SLD and SDP which are the instruments chosen by British capital to carry through its political offensive against the Labour Party. That is why it is so ludicrous to give

credence to the idea that in some sense they can be the labour movement's allies against Thatcher. The most crass recent statement of this view is by Tricia Davis and David Green in the February 1989 issue of *Marxism Today*: 'There is good reason to believe that the Democrats might be persuaded. Since the rupture with Dr Owen, the SLD belongs far more unambiguously in the anti-Thatcherite camp. Unlike Labour, which throughout the postwar period has been one of the two beneficiaries of the two-party system, the Democrats belong to a disadvantaged tradition... Paddy Ashdown may now talk of going it alone and replacing the Labour Party as the main party of the left, but this is mainly rhetoric... there is much in common between Labour and the Democrats on many questions.'

The reality, of course, is the opposite, the purpose of the SLD — and the SDP — is to achieve what the Tories did not achieve historically — to slice into the political support of the Labour Party.

Labour has lost 45 votes to the Liberals and SDP for every vote lost to the Tories since 1966. This had nothing to do with support for their policies. On the contrary the back of Labour support was broken in the periods of right wing Labour government 1964-70 and 1974-79, in particular by incomes policies — precisely the periods when the SDP leadership were Labour ministers. It is due to the fact that the British working class is far more anti-Tory than it is pro-Labour.

The meaning of the campaign for Labour to enter a pact with the SLD or SDP is quite clear in this context. It is to close off any chance of a majority government by Labour — the only government with any potential to reverse the chief works of Thatcherism.

PR has precisely the same function in British politics today. Labour has never gained enough votes to form a majority government under a PR system. The aim of introducing PR is to institutionalise coalitions thereby making impossible the reversal of the restrictions of trade union rights, the privatisations, civil liberties and maintaining the nuclear weapons programme. In addition the introduction of PR into local government would eliminate Labour control from the majority of local councils in Britain leading to further cuts in social services and jobs.



Photo: Rex Features Ltd

Robin Cook MP, who did not vote for the NEC's resolution against pacts, launching Charter 88 outside

Ken Livingstone was therefore correct when he wrote in *Tribune* on 13 January: 'To reduce democracy to an electoral system, be it proportional representation or any other is ridiculous. Far more basic democratic rights than the system of voting are the freedom of independent trade unions, free local government, freedom from the threat of nuclear annihilation, the right to protect essential services and utilities, decent pensions, freedom from poverty. These are the fundamental freedoms which Thatcherism attacks and which a pact with the SLD would ensure were not tackled.'

'To reduce democracy to an electoral system, PR or any other, is ridiculous.'

'The introduction of proportional representation in that framework would restrict, not expand, democracy. The role of such a pact would not be to overturn but to institutionalise Thatcherism — to render it permanent whatever party was in power.'

The real thrust of the supporters of PR is shown by fact that Charter 88, which purports to deal with the fundamental democratic rights threatened by Thatcher, does not even mention the single most serious restriction of democracy carried through since 1979: that is the government's draconian attacks on trade union rights.

This omission is no accident. Trade union rights affecting millions of people are not defended by Charter 88 because to do so would make agreement with the SLD and SDP supporters of the Charter impossible. Similarly no reference is made to the rights of women and to combatting racism in the Charter. The gross attacks on civil liberties resulting from the British presence in Ireland are ignored.

These issues as well as social and economic rights and the extension of democracy into the economy itself, are not in the Charter because it accepts the agenda set by the SLD and SDP — who are closer to Thatcher than the Labour Party on those issues.

That is why Hilary Wainwright and Anthony Arblaster, of the Socialist Society, make themselves ridiculous when they reply to Livingstone: 'You were right to oppose electoral pacts in your column but wrong to lump in Charter 88 with the idea!'

Because, the fact is PR, in the present relation of class forces in Britain, would make pacts inevitable. It would enormously strengthen the Labour right who advocate such pacts with the SLD-SDP. That is its objective political content today and



side parliament.

that is why those supporting it have to accept the agenda set by the SLD signatories to Charter 88. It is then disingenuous for Arblaster and Wainwright to complain: 'Many of us would have liked to see social rights — to work, to adequate housing to free health care and education at any age or level, to gender and racial equality, for instance — explicitly included in the charter rather than referred to as issues for debate. And we would prefer a stronger commitment to a democratic judiciary. But to hold back support because of disagreements of this sort is to miss the point.' The point is those things *cannot* be fought for in alliance with the SLD or SDP and by omitting them one precisely accepts their agenda. The idea that the beneficiary would be a (non-existent) left Socialist Party which would be able to propose a pact *to the left* with Labour is to completely ignore the real relation of class forces — to place oneself outside political reality.

The premises for the Socialist Society's promotion of PR are in fact thoroughly sectarian. They are based on the idea that PR will make it possible for a new 'socialist party' to split off from Labour — not any attempt to answer the real problems facing the working class today.

Richard Kuper explained in *Labour Briefing*: 'Of course what the current system accomplishes most clearly of all is the marginalisation of the left ... How the terms of the debate would be changed if Labour were in danger of being outflanked from the left — by socialist greens, for example ... What PR would give is the opportunity of fighting inside or outside the Labour Party, for policies we believe in ... in my view an even more vital experience could be gained by having a clear and unambiguous socialist voice — an independent socialist party — at large in the country ... If the battle within the party were won, we might end up with 30 per cent of the electorate behind us in the first instance. If it were lost we might be down to 15 per cent. Even that would give us around 100 seats in parliament ...'

The idea that a party to the left of Labour could gain 15 per cent of the vote and 100 seats in parliament in the class relation of forces in Britain today is absurd. It is the type of perspective which led to the launch and the ignominious collapse of *News on Sunday* — the idea that the only thing holding millions back from embracing socialism is the absence of a platform from which the Socialist Society can argue for it or the absence of 'popular propaganda'.

It is thoroughly sectarian because it subordinates the general interests of the working class and labour movement to this utopian scheme. In reality, a socialist party to the left of Labour today would be lucky to get two per cent of the vote and the bourgeoisie would certainly organise so that it got no seats in parliament. Through their role in the Socialist Conference and the absence of any alternative position actively argued within it the Socialist Society are being given a platform to spread confusion on PR — the real beneficiaries of which are Ashdown, Owen, Laird and Evans.

But far more serious is the confusion on PR on the left in the trade unions. Ron Todd, general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, immediately rejected Evans proposal for a pact with the SLD but he also told the *Independent*: 'I think proportional representation is on the horizon and the party has to come to terms with it.' (12 December 1988). The Communist Party are promoting both PR and a pact in the unions.

The *Morning Star*, which plays a

'If the Tory Party cannot be kept in power there has to be a safe alternative in place.'

leading role in the MSF, responded to John Evans' proposal with an editorial entitled 'PR is part of the way ahead' which said: 'Certainly, on existing percentage votes gained by the various parties, we would not have a Labour government, but neither would we have a Tory government with a big Commons majority.

'Proportional representation is a more democratic method of voting. As such it is in accord with the socialist objectives of the labour movement.' (*Morning Star* 20 December 1988). The reality is that the *Morning Star* wants PR both for its own sectarian purposes, to try to get Communist MPs, and most importantly, to project its own Popular Front alliance of a coalition of Labour with the SLD-SDP.

This fetishisation of one or other democratic demand such as PR outside the overall political context was excellently polemicised against by Lenin in another context, that of self-determination, in the following terms: 'The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute but only a *small part* of the general-democratic (now: general socialist) world movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so it must be rejected!' (Lenin, *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed up*).

That is the point about PR today in British politics. PR might, in some situation, be preferable to a first-past-the-post electoral system — it depends. But whatever its 'general' merits concretely ripping it out of context, allowing the part to contradict the whole, would mean maintaining Thatcher's attacks on trade union rights, on women, on black people, on privatisation, on Ireland and on the NHS, on housing and education. PR would render Thatcherism permanent by eliminating the possibility of any government that could overturn it — a majority Labour government. It would create a permanent excuse for Labour not to overturn Thatcherism — the argument that it wanted to, but its coalition partners would not accept it.

The answer to the question posed in the title of this article: 'Who stands to gain from PR?' is quite simply: 'All of those who want to maintain Thatcherism even without Thatcher.' And that is why PR, like pacts, must be completely rejected by the labour movement today.

REDMOND O'NEILL

New political trends in Poland

Since the defeat of the Jaruzelski regime in the referendum over market reform in November 1987 a sharp change in the political situation in Poland has taken place. The Walesa wing of Solidarnosc and the regime have attempted to come together in the perspective of strengthening market mechanisms, limitation of working class living standards, closer economic links with the West, and legalisation for the Walesa wing of Solidarnosc. Opposition to this 'convergence' has come both from forces to its right — explicitly pro-capitalist currents — and from authentically left wing currents — of which the most important is the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution (PPS-DR).

ZBIGNIEW KOWALEWSKI looks at the background.



In December 1981, general Jaruzelski and his team decided that in order to preserve the bureaucratic regime, faced with a revolution in the making, there was no other alternative but to establish a state of war and the dictatorship of the Military Committee of National Salvation. Solidarnosc was declared outlawed for good. There would never be negotiations with its president, Lech Walesa. After seven years of efforts to eliminate Solidarnosc from the working class and Polish society, Jaruzelski and his team announced to the bureaucracy that the country may again become ungovernable if a new committee of national salvation is not established, this time round with the participation of Walesa. The man portrayed until recently as public enemy number one must now be recognised as partner number one. Solidarnosc, portrayed until recently as an anti-system force, must now become an indispensable component of the pro-system forces. This is our last chance; let's act quickly, before it's too late.

Such was in substance the message conveyed by the new prime minister, Rakowski to the Central Committee of the POUP last January. This drastic political turnabout did not prevail on the parliament of bureaucrats except after dramatic and desperate pressure exerted by Jaruzelski, who threatened to resign immediately from the posts of top

leader of party and state if it was not approved.

It would be mistaken to see in this the hand of the Gorbachevian perestroika and glasnost. The relationships within the 'Soviet bloc' have not, for decades, been simply ones of 'centre-periphery' — contrary to what is believed in the West. The USSR was sinking in the so-called 'Breshnevian stagnation and conservatism' when in Poland the bureaucracy was signing the agreements with the strike committees and accept the setting up of the first mass independent trade union in the 'bloc'.

It is evident that the 'Gorbachevian' course in the 'big brother' (the USSR) facilitates the new course in Poland, in the same way as the turnabout of October 1956 was facilitated by the green light given to Gomulka by Khrushchev. But if once more the Polish bureaucracy is making a very 'revisionist' political turnabout, it is because its power is already historically much more unstable than that of its sister bureaucracies. Instability, which since the workers uprising in Poznan in June 1956 has become periodic, and forces the bureaucracy to think out ever more innovative patterns of rule to avoid the threat of finding itself faced with an ungovernable country and losing its power.

However, the periodic invention of new patterns of domination is a double-edged weapon: it carries with

it the progressive exhaustion of the ability to rule of the Polish bureaucracy. Being the most inventive bureaucracy of them all, it is simultaneously the most worn out — its rule is more limited and more fragile. It confronts a working class which in every political cycle shows an increasing degree of accumulation of will and ability to defend its rights, its dignity and its interests on an ever higher plane.

In the Autumn of 1987, the Polish regime mobilised all its resources to implement the so-called 'second stage of the economic reform'. After the resounding failure of the first stage, this time round it was seriously implementing a radical market reform. Bureaucratic planning — in fact, a command economy — had long ago exhausted its ability to work. The bureaucracy was by its very social nature — that of a parasitic layer — incapable of ensuring the regulation of the economy by the plan, and the regime was forced to resort to the market on a grand scale. The state of collapse and decomposition in which the national economy finds itself, the enormous external debt and the growing pressure by restorationist forces within the bureaucracy itself, as much as from imperialism and finance capital, forced the regime to radically accelerate the market reform. On the social field, conditions for it seemed favourable. The defeat of the regime in the November 1987 referendum was however simply the first surprise the bureaucracy was to receive. After the rejection of the project of economic reform by the majority of the Polish people in this referendum, mass struggles broke out.

The two waves of workers strikes and students protests, in April-May and in August 1988, brought about a change in the general political situation of the regime. These strikes were a vigorous reaction to the first social effects of turning towards a market economy. The mobilisation under the slogan of the sliding scale of wages for all workers in the country, launched by the 20,000 steel workers of Nova Huta, wrecked the market reform. In the August strikes, the central slogan of the strikers was already political: 'there cannot be liberty without Solidarity'. But what shook the regime more than anything else, was the emergence of a new generation of militants in the factories and universities, which immediately took the form of a worker-student alliance. The sociologists of

the bureaucracy in a panic started to denounce the spectre of a youth rebellion, the threat of a political Intifada. And as if to confirm their worst fears, stone-throwing at the police by youth has become more and more frequent in the last months.

Walesa, by bringing an end to the strikes and demonstrating his willingness to prevent new waves of social struggles, has been recognised by Jaruzelski and his team as the key element in the situation. Walesa, the trade union leaders who follow him and the intellectuals who surround him, coincide, at present, on four fundamental questions with Jaruzelski's team: their support for a radical market reform, their decision to oppose the continuation and generalisation of mass social struggles, their willingness to oppose the radicalisation of youth, and their aspiration to bring about a 'national reconciliation'. The association of the 'Constructive Opposition' — Walesa's current — with the exercise of political power, is in fact no more than the legitimisation of bureaucratic power, which is what Jaruzelski's new project seeks. But at the same time the legitimacy of the 'Constructive Opposition' itself among the masses, and above all among its militant and radical sections constitute a serious problem. Its legitimacy today is extremely low and Walesa, the only one to enjoy it, experiences continuous ebbs and flows in his authority.

Under these conditions, the concessions to the mass demand for trade union freedom, and the legalisation of Solidarnosc, become the cornerstone of the whole project. The bureaucracy's big dilemma is how to satisfy these demands and prevent Solidarnosc from becoming once again a powerful instrument of mass struggles, of workers' and people's self-organisation, and the vehicle to articulate the demands for bread and freedom. If Solidarnosc re-emerges on the basis of negotiations with a select group of people and not as a result of the pressure of a general strike, Jaruzelski, Rakowski and Kiszczak hope to tame the independent trade union. What is decisive is that Solidarnosc abstain — or put the brakes — on workers' strikes and large industrial actions for the several years necessary to restructure the economy and saturate it with market mechanisms. Walesa and Jaruzelski make efforts to convince each other that this is possible.

Meanwhile, a recomposition of Solidarnosc and the opposition in general is taking place at great speed. On the basis of workers militancy and the youth radicalisation, the 'anti-system' forces opposed to the course embarked upon by the 'constructive opposition' are crystallising, they regroup themselves, set up alliances, gain political time and mass influence and mobilise the factories and the universities onto the streets. For the first time, a small left wing force is active in this process. It is the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution (PSP-DR) which seeks to erect an alternative proletarian and socialist power, based on political democracy, workers self-management and the socialised economy. This party intervenes in the reconstruction of Solidarnosc from below in the factories and in the Independent Association of Students (NZS) in the universities. It carries out a number of activities in coordination with the Fighting Solidarity Organization (OSW), the Warsaw Solidarnosc Interenterprise Workers Committee (MRKS), radicalised sections of the Peace and Liberty Movement (WIP) and the Federation of Fighting Youth (FWW) and various local militant groups.

The demobilisation of the masses and a round table or the mobilisation of the masses and a rectangular table: the political polarisation of the Polish social movement takes place today in the framework of this alternative.

Support Polish Socialists

In a context dominated by the adoption of the market as the solution to the economic problems facing Poland, the emergence of the Polish Socialist Party — Democratic Revolution, a political current which stands for proletarian and socialist power based on political democracy, workers' self-management and the socialised economy ought to be strongly supported by socialists in Britain.

The PPS-DR's political opposition to Jaruzelski's latest attempts to co-opt Solidarnosc into helping the regime to stop the reactivation of the mass movement and mass struggles has made it a favourite target for repression.

Show your support by sending donations to the PPS-DR London International Office. Contact David Holland, Director of the PPS-DR International Office: The Basement, 92 Ladbroke Grove, London W11 2HE. Tel: 01 229 6259.

Over recent years the Women's Action Committee (LWAC) has made gains in the Labour Party, including winning one woman on every parliamentary shortlist, and a big increase in support for the election of the women's places on the party's NEC by women. WAC has also forged alliances with women in the trade unions. A minority in WAC disagreed with the orientation that brought these successes and split and set up Women for Socialism, which contains a number of different political forces. But behind the apparent tactical differences lie fundamental issues of strategy with general relevance for the fight for socialism. JUDE WOODWARD considers the logic behind the tactics.



The differences between the Labour Women's Action Committee (LWAC) and Women for Socialism are not simply of overall political strategy — what class forces must be allied to overthrow capitalism in Britain and achieve women's liberation — but also over the current stage of the class struggle. Any discussion on the tactics necessary in the struggle for women's liberation today cannot be timeless but must start from the actual position of women in society, and its historical development. It is therefore worth briefly reviewing these facts before going on to their precise tactical implications.

The position of women in society underwent a radical transformation after the Second World War. In the period of the long boom the problem of expanding the labour force forced the bourgeoisie to take steps that began to make inroads into the traditional role of women within the family — in particular that women did not work after marriage.

The scale of this change can be seen by examining simple facts. By 1931, the last census date before World War II, still only 11 per cent of married women of working age were in work. From 1951 onwards the rise in the proportion of married women

Women for Socialism and LWAC

in work was dramatic. By 1983 49 per cent of married women were in the labour force. Today 66 per cent of women of working age are in or seeking paid work.

This presents the labour movement with both an opportunity and a challenge. Whereas in previous periods the question of women's liberation presented itself largely from outside the organised labour movement — for example the suffragettes struggle prior to the First World War — today the majority of women of working age are in or seeking paid work and a far higher proportion of these are organised within the labour movement.

In the period prior to the First World War, when a massive movement of women fighting for the vote emerged there was a fight inside the labour movement for the TUC and Labour Party to take up this struggle. However the force of women organised inside the labour movement itself was so weak numerically, that, especially in the context of the continuing weight of right-wing craft trade unionism, and political currents linked to it, including on the socialist left — like Hyndman's SDF — the labour movement totally failed to come up to the challenge.

Nor did the record of the labour movement in more recent decades register substantial progress. At a series of crucial points where it was possible to take a significant step forward in women's rights, first the change has come, and then the labour movement has finally got round to supporting it. This was classically the case on abortion rights.

Equally it took the TUC three decades of discussion before it finally adopted a position in favour of

equal pay. The policy for a national minimum wage was only adopted by the TUC and Labour Party in 1986.

This failure of the labour movement has both strategic and tactical implications.

It has had enormous electoral repercussions for the Labour Party. In the period from women gaining the vote after the First World War until 1955 the Tories maintained 8 per cent more support among women than among men.

After the Second World War the Tories maintained themselves in power because Labour did not successfully address itself to winning women's votes. Labour defeated the Tories among men in 1951, 1955, 1959 and 1970 but lost these elections because it enjoyed no such support among women voters.

However the traditional Tory dominance of women's votes has crumbled. In 1955 eight per cent more women than men voted Tory. This gap had fallen to two per cent in 1974 and zero per cent by 1987. However Labour has not gained the votes of women deserting the Conservatives. Since 1955 Labour's support among women has fallen by 14 percentage points while Liberal and Alliance support has increased by 23 points.

The fact is Labour cannot win the support of women in the electorate unless it undergoes a radical change, so that instead of tagging behind events it responds more immediately to the specific demands generated by women in society. This is becoming more urgent today, as the bourgeoisie is itself forced to make substantial concessions to women in order to bring them into

the workforce. Some employers have already begun to introduce workplace creches for example. Such developments are bound to accelerate as the squeeze goes on the size of the workforce in the 1990s.

Similarly, economic predictions point to a tendency for the gap between male and female earnings to narrow in the 1990s, and for women's participation in higher and further education to increase. The Labour Party in an immediate electoral sense, nor the trade unions for more strategic reasons, can afford to lag behind these developments. They should be leading the campaign for such improvements now, to push them as far as they can go beyond the limits that the bourgeoisie will seek to impose, rather than allow the bourgeoisie and the directly capitalist parties to take the credit for these changes, and to mould them to their own interests.

But this also has even more profound strategic implications in the struggle for socialism.

In an advanced imperialist country such as Britain, the capitalist class is immensely powerful economically, but, at the same time, on its own it is a very small layer in society. The capitalist class can only maintain its rule by organising and grouping around itself different forces and social layers, so that it is able to politically dominate society.

On the one hand capital attempts to organise around itself all intermediary social layers, the upper professional and intellectual layers and the bulk of the rural population. However, in an advanced industrialised country such as Britain these intermediary layers are not the numerically largest element of the ruling class's alliances. The crucial elements that the ruling class organises around itself are sections of the working class and working class community.

The upper echelons of the working class are won over by direct economic privileges. However, the ruling class in Britain has also historically based itself, as we have seen, on disproportionate support from women in the working class community. Confronted with this system of bourgeois alliances even a united working class is not sufficiently powerful to overthrow capital. The working class too has to present itself as the leader of the whole of society and not only itself — indeed achieving this is a precondition for uniting the working class itself.

For the working class to have a

'For the working class the most important alliance within the state itself, is with women.'

strategy which places itself in this hegemonic position in society, it has to not only be seen as, but *really be* the force that will destroy British imperialist domination of Ireland and semi-colonial countries; really be the force that will take every measure to destroy racism; really be the force that will introduce the extension of democracy into the antiquated British state, eliminating its feudal elements and, for example, its undemocratic relations with Scotland.

But in a country like Britain the most important single alliance, within the state itself, is with the great mass of women, whether paid workers or not, by really being the champion of every concrete step in women's rights and liberation, and also the real force which, by means of overthrowing the capitalist system will lead humanity in the struggle to eradicate the oppression of women entirely. This informs the perspectives on the immediate steps that can be taken today.

The failure of the labour movement to take the lead on even those limited steps forward that women can take today, simply reflects that the working class in Britain remains dominated by corporate, economic, politics which are incapable of either uniting it internally or creating the broader alliance of forces which it needs to seriously confront capital.

This is a completely fundamental strategic question posed for the labour movement. Developing such a strategy, corresponding to the needs of women, is first of all political, based on winning labour movement support for definite women's demands and measures. This alliance of the working class with women has to take not only a political but an organisational form, and this requires the specific organisation of women within the organisations of the working class.

Today the existing organisations of the working class, with all their drawbacks and weaknesses, remain the only organisations with effective power to take up a struggle against capital — and therefore the most powerful instruments that exist to take forward women's struggles. This practical reality is why the women's movement which started in the late 1960s in a struggle outside the labour movement has increasingly turned into it. This is not a derailing of the women's movement, still less its disappearance, but its deepening.

As the demands of the women's movement reached out from the initial activists to touch larger and larger numbers of women it necessarily changed in organisational form — to transforming the labour movement organisations themselves.

Such a struggle within the organisations of the working class, to transform them politically and organisationally on the question of women, is necessary to advance towards a hegemonic leadership of the working class. Today the relationship of forces exists for such progress, starting in the left-wing of the labour movement, but with real possibilities of some significant steps at the level of the majority positions of the labour movement as a whole.

Furthermore through a struggle for such hegemonic politics within the trade unions and the Labour Party the internal contradictions of the Labour Party itself will be deepened, fractures will appear, and a new and more politically advanced mass party of the working class will eventually become possible. But this cannot be achieved by going round or setting up minuscule alternatives to the most profound organisational and political processes in the working class which exist at present.

This is the real significance of the Labour Women's Organisation, as it is the political centre of the ma-



major forces in the labour movement seeking to transform its politics on women. The fight to build and transform this organisation is therefore also the tactical key to the present phase of the struggle for women's liberation — and, in a different perspective, crucial in the fight against the existing corporate and backward politics of the labour movement. The Labour Women's Organisation is a political focus for women in the trade unions and individual Labour activists, bringing them together as a potentially powerful force in the labour movement as a whole. Also, by its nature, it is oriented to the problem of winning the mass of women to the labour movement. It is building *this* organisation, not an imaginary alternative to it, which is the step which has to be taken today.

This is why the key tactical decision in the struggle for women's liberation is to build and develop the Labour Women's Organisation, both politically and by fighting, as LWAC does, for it to become a central and permanent component of the whole structure of the labour movement.

Women for Socialism is precisely ambiguous on this key tactical choice. While it may well attract women who have been active in a whole number of women's campaigns, the only coherent way forward is for them to join the Labour Women's Organisation, involve themselves in the fight to transform the labour movement, and in this framework develop policy and campaigns on the broadest possible basis on every individual issue of women's rights and liberation as it is raised — from abortion to sexual harassment, from Clause 28 to employment rights. Without that framework Women for Socialism can be no more than a talking shop which will end up by falling apart as it offers no way forward.

Inside the Labour Party supporters of Women for Socialism tend to counterpose it to LWAC, because they do not support the orientation of LWAC into the labour movement. However the most fundamental counterposition is not with LWAC, but with an orientation into the Labour Party, building the Labour Women's Organisation, deepening its links with women organised in the unions in particular, but also the student movement, and orienting to a serious fight to transform the labour movement.

This orientation informs the centrality given to such ques-

tions as the demand for the women's conference to elect the women's seats on Labour's NEC, all the measures advocated by LWAC to strengthen and render more influential the Labour Women's Organisation, positive action in reselection of MPs, and the proposal to introduce quotas at every level of the party. Despite lip-service to these proposals, effectively they are downplayed by Women for Socialism, for example they do not feature centrally at all on the agenda of the Women for Socialism conference.

But these are the measures necessary to place women more centrally in the party, and make it capable of responding on all issues that affect women.

Secondly, this issue underpins differences on the tactics towards women in the trade unions. The forces now organised in Women for Socialism were deeply hostile to the proposal to give the trade unions 50 per cent of the vote at women's conference, seeking every opportunity to confuse and dissipate the support for it in the women's organisation. But this proposal was key to beginning to cement an alliance with women in the trade unions to take forward the women's organisation as a whole.

It is not possible to create a Labour Women's Organisation with real influence in the labour movement without the support of women in the trade unions, for only on this basis can there be a serious fight to win in the Labour Party as a whole. However the basis for such an alliance had to be a genuine and progressive compromise, which gave the trade unions real weight in the women's organisation, while maintaining the greatest influence possible for women activists in the party who will remain the political leading edge on many questions.

Such a women's organisation would not be so easily won to adopt the positions, or elect the representatives, of the hard left, but would at the same time become more genuinely representative of the real majority political positions of women organised in the Labour Party and provide a forum to fight to change those policies. The choice was between fighting to create a serious organisation of women, with influence in the labour movement, but within which the hard left would have to pursue careful tactics in order to win majorities for its central positions, or a ghetto, advocating 'pure' policies but devoid of influence, and incapable of affect-

ing the overall orientation of the labour movement as a whole in any direction.

This also creates the best framework within which to develop policy and the broadest campaigns around each specific issue of women's rights and liberation that arises. This was clearly seen in the case of the fight against the Alton bill last year, which on the basis of this alliance of forces within the labour movement was able to reach out to women beyond the labour movement itself.

It is not possible to maintain the level of mobilisation of women at all times that is achieved during a particular struggle on abortion rights, or was seen among women in the mining communities and beyond during the NUM strike, or was developed for a period of time around the Greenham movement against the missiles. But each such wave of struggle can be taken further, and greater numbers of cadre accumulated for the future if at the centre of such waves of struggle is powerful organisation of women in the labour movement.

Building movements and campaigns of women beyond the labour movement whenever this is posed is not contradictory to, but aided by, placing at the centre of our strategy the key issue of transforming the labour movement, and, as the tactical step in that today, building the Labour Women's Organisation, locally, regionally and nationally.

The differences with Women for Socialism are not simply tactical, but raise crucial questions of strategy and orientation in the struggle for women's liberation and for socialism. The issue is not about an illusory 'twin-track' approach, of inside and outside the Labour Party, but crucially — although not only — concerns the choice to wage a real fight in the labour movement on women. The latter choice places building the Labour Women's Organisation at the centre of its tactics, and the political positions and demands of LWAC as the continuing element in the fight that has to be waged in the labour movement as a whole.

This is both the current phase of building a women's liberation movement, which constitutes a deepening of the processes that began to unfold from the late '60s onwards, and an essential fight in the struggle to change the politics of the working class as a whole so that it can win and lead the majority of the population in the struggle for socialism.

'The choice is whether or not to wage a real fight in the labour movement on women.'





Mother Ireland — image and reality

Mother Ireland produced by Derry Film and Video, dedicated to the memory of Miriam James, and banned from Channel 4 reflects a new synthesis of understanding of the relationship of the struggle for Irish national liberation and the struggle of women in Ireland for their liberation. ANNE KANE assesses the film and the context of its appearance.

As the producers say, their aim was to detail 'the unrecorded role of women in Irish history', explore the images which have historically distorted the reality of women's lives and experience, which have personified Ireland as female, and, by discussion with participants past and present, begin to write women back into the national struggle. In doing so they have put together a film which is an impressive blending of interview, historical film, cartoons and drawings, and music.



NELL McCAFFERTY: *There has been a 'sea change' in the lives and consciousness of Irish women, north and south, in the last twenty years.*

Most importantly they have substantiated a crucial political message: that not only are the struggles of women and for national liberation not in contradiction, they are in utter interdependence; the rising of 1916 representing the powerful unity of bringing together the women's struggle, the national struggle and that of labour.

With this theme *Mother Ireland* is very much a product of a new political consciousness. From a political point of view, a few years ago its production would have

been virtually impossible. It appears in a definite political context, where, for instance, there is intensive examination by Sinn Féin of its necessary system of alliances. It reflects the 'sea change' referred to by Nell McCafferty in the film, in the lives and consciousness of Irish women, north and south, in the last twenty years. And it has considerable relevance in Britain, given the openings, reflected in the response to the Time To Go campaign, to forge a new alliance of support for British withdrawal.

Mother Ireland takes its starting point as the image of Ireland as a woman, specifically as a mother, helpless, awaiting rescue, devoted and with great fortitude, which permeates Irish history and Irish nationalism in the last two centuries. It is an image which the historian Margaret MacCurtain points out proliferated as the real social independence and status of women declined, in particular following the 1846/47 'Famine', and fed the models of womanhood demanded by Irish society.

As the film maker Pat Murphy puts it in the film, portraying a country as a woman leads to women being absorbed into the mythology.

This contradiction between image and reality is the core of the film: hidden from the historical record are the lessons which the real role of women in the nationalist movement, and the relations between that movement and the women's movement hold for today.

The period around 1916 is central. Constance Markiewicz explained, it saw the combination of three struggles: the national struggle with those of women and of labour. It was this objective alliance which was essential to drive the British state

out of Ireland.

While it was made possible by the coinciding of crisis in each, the key issue of divide was between those such as Markiewicz, Connolly and Larkin, in the national and labour movement, who sought to combine all three struggles to greatest united effect, and of people such as the Sheehy-Skeffingtons in the suffrage movement, who saw other struggles only as distractions from that for an independent Ireland, to be subordinated to the struggle for independence.

The cultural context of this was precisely one where Ireland was portrayed in plays, literature and art, as a proud and beautiful young woman awaiting rescue. The metaphor of woman for Ireland further undermining the legitimacy of the struggles of women for the vote, for instance, portrayed as anti-nationalist by aiming demands at Westminster.

Two quite different courses of action resulted. While the main pre-war Irish bourgeois party, the Irish Parliamentary Party was voting against the Women's Suffrage Bill in 1912, and subsequently voted against the women's suffrage amendments to the Home Rule Bill, James Connolly was appearing on platforms of the Irish Women's Franchise League. This link marked the beginning of co-operation between the suffrage movement and the labour movement. 1911 saw the establishment of the Irish Women's Workers Union, the work of Jim Larkin and Della Larkin amongst others. In the 1913 lockout the whole membership of the IWWU came out in solidarity for six months, while suffragettes organised soup kitchens for the strikers.

The same tensions manifested themselves inside the nationalist movement. They had been seen previously in the experience of the Ladies Land League in the 1880s, formed as a women's support organisation to the Land League led by Parnell, the Ladies Land League took

over the leadership of the movement for land reform when the male leaders were imprisoned only to be disbanded by them on their release because they were considered too radical.



Photo: Report

MAIRÉAD FARRELL: *'Living in Belfast was a political education in itself ... you became aware, that I just have to do something here.'*

Cumann na mBan, formed as an auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers in 1914, played a vital role in mobilising women in support of national independence up to, and especially after 1916, when it became the predominant organisation of women, absorbing into its ranks women previously active in the suffrage, trade union and other struggles as well as many women new to political activity. The annual convention of Cumann na mBan in 1921 recorded nearly 800 branches. Cumann na mBan was undoubtedly conservative in its view of the contribution women had to make: Constance Markiewicz's criticism of its supportive role taking her into the ranks of Connolly's Irish Citizen Army. Nonetheless this was a massive social movement of women, which at the very least challenged notions of women's passivity and which was alive to the debates on women's suffrage and role in society.

The defeat of the 1916 rising and the execution of its leading and most progressive figures, the partition of

Ireland, and the victory of the pro-Treaty side in the civil war brought the triumph of reaction both north and south. Nowhere was this clearer than in the legal and social status of women.

Mother Ireland as an image again came into its own. And again the image flourished while the real status and rights of women diminished. The 1920s and 1930s saw laws in the south introduced prohibiting divorce and contraception, permitting censorship of any publications referring to contraception, outlawing women from a number of areas of employment, powers to prevent local dances, amongst others.

This repression culminated in the place of women decreed in the 1937 constitution: 'The state recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of duties in the home'.

Finally *Mother Ireland* considers the last twenty years. The resurgence of the republican movement, coinciding with the emergence of a new women's movement and political consciousness amongst women has posed again and more sharply the question: what is the mutual relevance of these two movements?

Sinn Fein's policy document *Eire Nua*, published in 1971, had no mention of women at all. From the point of view of the women's movement, in the south at least, Nell McCafferty explained how, in establishing a group in 1970 'for the liberation of Irish women' it was agreed not to raise the north, since it would divide the women. Inevitably the 'north' came up anyway. In 1980 Nell McCafferty was writing essays declaring 'Armagh is a feminist issue'. Since 1970 a whole new generation of women have entered Sinn Fein, women influenced both by the ex-

perience of the repression of the last twenty years, and by a feminist political consciousness.

This has led to changes inside Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein's department of women's affairs was established in 1980 and the first policy document on women issued that year. It still declared 'we are totally opposed to abortion', a policy which was fought relentlessly producing at least some improvement. However while Sinn Fein declared themselves opposed to the campaign to insert an anti-abortion amendment into the constitution, its abstention from the actual campaign to defeat it could only encourage women in the twenty six counties to consider Sinn Fein irrelevant to their lives as women.

By depicting the historical record *Mother Ireland* raises the key matter: that the issue facing Sinn Fein is exactly that facing Connolly, Markiewicz and the movement earlier this century: how to demonstrate the common interests of women with those of the republican struggle and to win a fusion.

Rita O'Hare correctly says in the film 'what can be achieved by the women's movement alone is limited'. The fact is that those today who are confining themselves to such a view are few. The problem cannot be reduced to the slogan that there can be no women's liberation without national liberation. First comes the problem of constructing the most effective movement for national liberation. This can only be done, as in the movement around 1916, by harnessing the energy of all those who are oppressed by British imperialism into a single alliance for liberation.

Mother Ireland
Produced by Derry Film and Video
Directed by Arnie Crilly
Available from Derry Film and Video, 1 Westend Park, Derry BT48 9JF



Photo courtesy of Rio Cinema, London E8

For Queen and Country

For Queen and Country, directed by Martin Stellman and with Denzil Washington as Reuben, the central character, is a portrait of being black in Thatcher's Britain. Returning home after ten years as a paratrooper, taking in Belfast and the Falklands, Reuben meets the slum conditions of inner city housing estates, poverty and hopelessness, virtually total unemployment with the most lucrative alternative the heroin circuit and the omnipresent racist police.

Finally with his British citizenship removed, and his best friend shot by a detective in the Rambo style, Reuben has had enough and goes for the police killer. At the same time the black community has collectively taken on the police in scenes clearly modelled on Broadwater Farm.

Unfortunately, the film's erratic structure renders its message very confused. Reuben is filled with illusions, all of which are knocked down, but at breakneck pace; he rats on the youth preparing the petrol bomb, only to have his friend shot minutes later. An ex-army mate, now a cop, finally shoots him down — the symbolism is obvious. All strong political statements demanding greater length and depth. But still a film worth seeing.

The Rainbow — a challenge to the Left

For decades now participation in the electoral system in the United States has been in continuous decline. The vast majority in the US do not vote. A break down by economic group shows 70 per cent of those earning over \$25,000 voting, while only 25 per cent of those with an income below \$10,000 bothering to vote. Presidential elections attract even less participation, around 25 per cent of the electorate. RASHID ASHRAF review some of the recent books on the emergence of the 'rainbow' in US politics.

The two parties which dominate American politics, the Democrats and the Republicans, consistently represent the interests of capital in power. Working class apathy is, in part, the perception of this fact.

The central strategic task for socialists in the US is the creation of a Party of Labour and these three publications help us to approach this question from different angles.

The Lesser Evil is composed of a series of debates ranging over the years 1959 to 1976 between leaders of the American Socialist Workers Party and socialists who advocate entry into the Democratic Party in order to reform it.

The book highlights the persistent attempts, over three decades, by socialists to change the nature of the Democratic Party. George Breitman's rebuttal of the contention that the Democratic Party could be taken over and turned into a Labour Party is perhaps the most impressive section of the book.

However, the book is also important in highlighting another problem. This is that parallel with the failure of those inside the Democrats to change it has been the equally spectacular failure of all those outside it, such as the SWP, to build an alternative.

The SWP's position, that the Democrats are no different from the Republicans, is fundamentally correct at one level and just as obviously wrong at another. It is true that, as a

bourgeois party, it can never be used to represent the interests of the working class.

The very fact that the book is a debate on the Democrats and not the Republicans, however, points to the real difference between them. The Democratic Party is a coalition, albeit completely dominated by capital, which includes sections of the Labour bureaucracy and which commands support from the most progressive elements in America to this day.

The important question therefore, is not whether the Democratic Party can be reformed, but how best to intervene into the break-up of the coalition it represents, as an integral part of the process of building an alternative. The other two books are important in helping to answer this question.

The Rainbow Challenge is a comprehensive account of the latest attempts to reform the Democratic Party: the Rainbow Coalition and Jesse Jackson's candidature for President. Collins, a field organiser and national officer for Jackson's 1984 campaign, is well placed to give this account.

Collins situates the Rainbow phenomena historically and traces its roots back to the mass movements of the sixties. She shows how the creation of the Rainbow represented a political maturation and convergence of activists from diverse origins: the anti-Vietnam war, the women's liberation and anti-nuclear movements,

civil rights campaigns and Black, Chicano and Native American nationalist movements, small farmers and a section of the Labour leadership.

Contrary to popular myth, the Rainbow arose independently of Jackson and agreed to support him only after he had already declared his intentions. Jackson's campaign, in projecting alternative politics to a mass audience, unleashed a profoundly radical dynamic.

Despite some weaknesses, for example the skating over the struggles to stop Jackson imposing his own handpicked 'leaders' and bureaucratic structure on the Rainbow, Collins' book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand American politics today.

The big problem with Collins book is her failure to understand the function of Jackson's campaign in channelling, once again, all of this potential for radical change into the dead-end of the Democratic Party.

The Rainbow and the Democratic Party published by Solidarity, is one of the few attempts by the Marxist left in America to address itself directly to the activists of the Rainbow and Jackson's supporters.

Unfortunately, the pamphlet ends where it should have started. Pointing out the nature of the Democratic Party, the impossibility of reforming it, the bureaucratic deformations of the Rainbow Coalition etc, and the need for a Party of Labour does no more than state the problem: after 40 years of experience to the contrary the most radical elements in America still have illusions in their ability to reform the Democratic Party. And 30 years after Breitman the left still has nothing more to say to them than 'your



struggle is hopeless, join us'.

The question the comrades do not even pose, let alone answer, is how to intervene into the existing forces at their present level of consciousness — faith in the Democratic Party — in order to move forward? Answering this question implies more sophisticated tactics than mere propagandising.

The political currents which make up the Rainbow will form a central part of any socialist party created in America and building such a party means detaching them from the Democratic Party and smashing up the alliance with capital that it represents.

In order to lead these currents, however, socialists have to be a part of them, helping to clarify the problems with the present orientations, structures etc, instead of using these as an excuse for sectarian abstention from the Rainbow.

Some have already drawn this conclusion. Ironically, Peter Camejo, one of the SWP contributors to *The Lesser Evil* is now an officer of the Rainbow Coalition in California. The American left as a whole too needs to address the tactical considerations of how, not whether, to intervene into the Rainbow.

The Lesser Evil, Harrington, Camejo & Others, Pathfinder Press
The Rainbow Challenge, Sheila D Collins, Monthly Review Press
The Rainbow and the Democratic Party, A Socialist Perspective, Ed Joanna Misnik, Solidarity Pamphlet

Why Gorbachev aids the right wing on unilateralism

AT the beginning of February Gerald Kaufmann led the Labour Party Policy Review Group on Defence and Foreign Policy on a visit to Moscow. The outcome, was direct help, and almost certainly a conscious intervention, by the Soviet leadership, to aid Kinnoek, and the right, against the unilateralist left wing of the Labour Party. Nor is this the first time the Soviet leadership has acted in this way. It also intervened to aid the right in the previous fight over unilateralism in the 1950s and early 1960s. This has puzzled and shocked many on the left. ALAN WILLIAMS looks at why the Soviet leadership acts in this way.

The present intervention by the Soviet leadership in Labour's fight over unilateralism is an almost mechanical repetition of the previous role it played in this in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The issue of unilateral nuclear disarmament first became an issue in the Labour Party in 1957 when there were 127 conference resolutions on disarmament with a large number favouring unilateralism. However the decisive speech at that conference was that by Aneurin Bevan. He announced, in a famous phrase, that for Britain to adopt unilateral nuclear disarmament would be for the British Foreign Secretary 'to go naked into the conference chamber'. The speech was Bevan's definitive break with the left which he had led in the early 1950s.

For present purposes what is interesting is the role played in the events leading to Bevan's speech by the Soviet leadership. During 1957 Bevan had made speeches which were ambiguous but tended towards unilateral nuclear disarmament. Speaking in Manchester in summer 1957, for example, Bevan declared: 'We can make the H-bomb but we are not going to make it. We believe that what the human race needs is leadership in the opposite direction and we are going to give it.'

But in September 1957 Bevan visited the Soviet Union where he met CPSU general secretary Khrushchev. Bevan then went to the Labour Party conference where the *Daily Express* noted: 'Mr Bevan has been telling his friends that Mr K said to him, "Do not create a vacuum in Europe by giving up the bomb"'. Bevan's speech defended the position supported by Gaitskell and in line with that advocated by Khrushchev.

A further clarification of position came from the stance taken by the CPGB — at that time still slavishly pro-Moscow and having supported the Soviet intervention in Hungary less than a year earlier. At the 1957 conference the unilateralist CLPs were joined by the TGWU, the FBU, the NUTGW and the Constructional Engineering Union. But the CPGB led unions, the ETU, and the Scottish miners, voted *against* the resolution for unilateral nuclear disarmament and instead with Gaitskell and the right for an anti-unilateralist AEU resolution. The CPGB's *Daily Worker* argued that unilateralism was 'divisive' and that 'the most "left" sounding demand has in practice helped the right wing!'

At each point the CPGB counterposed the call for negotiations and

summits to the demand for unilateral action. Only when the CPGB was overtaken by the mass movement of CND to its left, in 1960, did the party abruptly change line and support unilateralism — participating for the first time in the Aldermaston march of that year.

At first sight this bloc between the Soviet leadership, and the CPGB, and the right wing — one now repeated between Kaufmann and Gorbachev's supporters, appears a paradox. It was clear that the multilateralists of the 1950s were a fraud. Despite limited agreement, notably the partial nuclear test ban treaty, the period after the end of the 1950s saw a rapid acceleration of the arms race. The United States under Kennedy accelerated its building of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and introduced submarine launched missiles. US military spending accelerated more rapidly than at any time since the Korean war as it began the road to the war in Vietnam. Britain acquired Polaris from the United States. France exploded its first nuclear weapons. The West responded to the Soviet leadership's calls for summits and multilateral disarmament by accelerating the arms race.

The pattern is the same today. Despite the peace initiatives of Gorbachev, and the signing of the INF treaty, the Western powers are stepping up their military pressure against the USSR — with the INF treaty being followed by the intention of the NATO powers to introduce sea and air launched cruise missiles into Europe, with pressure from the US and Thatcher for the 'modernisation', that is the increase in the effectiveness, of nuclear weapons in Europe, and behind all this lying the continuing development of 'Star Wars'. After the INF treaty there will, by the early 1990s, be *more*, not less, Cruise missiles in Europe.

Indeed, typically, after each step of multi-lateral nuclear 'disarmament' imperialism steps up its military pressure against the USSR — the period of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties in the 1970s was followed by the Reagan arms build up for example.

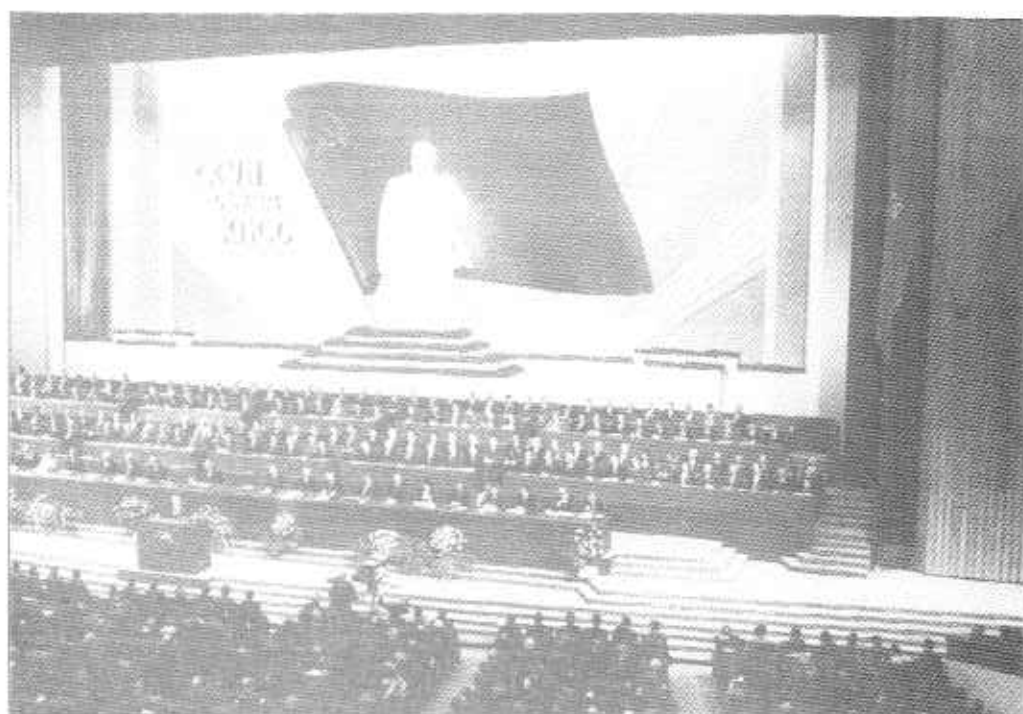
The central point involved was well put by Lenin — in his polemic with Kautsky over the issue of 'disarmament': 'Kautsky wants to persuade the capitalists ... to believe that war is horrible, while disarmament is beneficial, in exactly the same way, and with exactly the same

results as the Christian churchman, speaking from the pulpit, would persuade the capitalist to believe that love of one's fellow men is a divine commandment ... Kautsky's ... is just a petty bourgeois *exhortation* to the financiers that they should refrain from doing evil! It is perfectly possible to force partial concessions out of the imperialist states — to force them to abandon certain weapons systems, or end particular wars. But the idea that the imperialists can be persuaded to adopt *general* disarmament, or to give up their historical pressure to eliminate the USSR and other non-capitalist societies is purely utopian.

Ernest Mandel, in *Peaceful Coexistence and World Revolution*, outlined this excellently in relation to the previous policies advocated by the Soviet leadership under Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev — those of 'socialism in one country' and 'peaceful coexistence': 'Underlying both is the hope that somehow, in some way, world imperialism will reconcile itself to the existence of the USSR, and "let it alone", if only the USSR lets world imperialism alone also.'

But the truth, in particular in periods of economic crisis, is that capital is *forced* to seek to expand its fields of exploitation in all directions. If any individual capital does not do this it gives a decisive competitive advantage to other capitals. Capital therefore seeks to increase the exploitation of the working class in its own countries, intensify its exploitation of the semi-colonial countries and attempts to break down the non-capitalist societies, workers states, of Eastern Europe, Asia and Cuba in order to subordinate their economies once more to capitalist exploitation. In the inter-war capitalist crisis this took the form of fascism in the imperialist states, colonial wars of conquest, and Hitler's invasion of the USSR. In the present period it takes the form of increased exploitation in the imperialist states, the debt crisis, localised wars and other means of pressure against the semi-colonial countries, and attempts to increase military pressure on, and economically undermine, the workers states.

Far from seeking to come to agreement with the workers states the imperialists seek to subvert and evade such agreements. A classic case is nuclear weapons themselves. Gorbachev has proposed a concrete plan for the elimination of all nuclear weapons by the year 2000. It is the



Gorbachev speaks to the Soviet Communist Party conference

United States, and Thatcher, who have stated that they are *against* the elimination of nuclear weapons — in short that multilateral elimination of nuclear weapons is absurd.

Gorbachev himself has now gone beyond Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev in superseding the concepts of 'socialism in one country' and 'peaceful coexistence' with the idea that there are common 'human interests' which unite the USSR and the capitalist states. But this simply deepens the Soviet leadership's thrust of seeking to defend the USSR through agreements and deals with imperialism.

This is indeed inevitable given the social nature of the Soviet leadership. Indeed it is the *only* path open to the Soviet leadership, a bureaucracy, even although it is not actually the way to further the interests of the USSR itself. Mandel again put it accurately: 'From the specific place of that bureaucracy in Soviet society flows its specific role in world politics. It is not a new class, but a privileged stratum of the proletariat which has usurped exclusive exercise of political power ... within the framework of a planned socialised economy. It can appropriate its essential privileges in the means of consumption only on the dual basis of the collective property of the means of production on one hand and political passivity of the Soviet masses on the other ... It is ... afraid of any upsetting of the international status quo ... because it fears the profound transformations which an

extension of the international revolution would provoke ... in the political apathy of the Soviet working class! The Soviet leadership seeks to defend the USSR not by the international extension of the class struggle, including seeking alliances with those deepening the class struggle, but through agreements with the imperialists to maintain the international status quo — because any extension of the class struggle would undermine the situation of the bureaucracy within the USSR.

Such attempts however invariably fail to deliver the expected results and are temporary. Because while the Soviet bureaucracy may be seeking agreement with imperialism, imperialism is not seeking agreement with it — on the contrary imperialism is seeking to overthrow the social character of the states on which the bureaucracy is based. By strategically conciliating imperialism, by allowing it to make gains, the bureaucracy actually encourages its aggressiveness.

This is why the peace initiatives of Gorbachev will be followed not by reconciliation by imperialism but by a new offensive against the working class, the semi-colonial states, and the USSR. It is why Gorbachev, as with previous Soviet leaders since Stalin, lines up with the right wing in the Labour movement. It is why any movement against nuclear weapons in the West, while it can come to concrete agreement with the Soviet leadership, must be completely independent of it and, as much as possible, understand its nature.

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