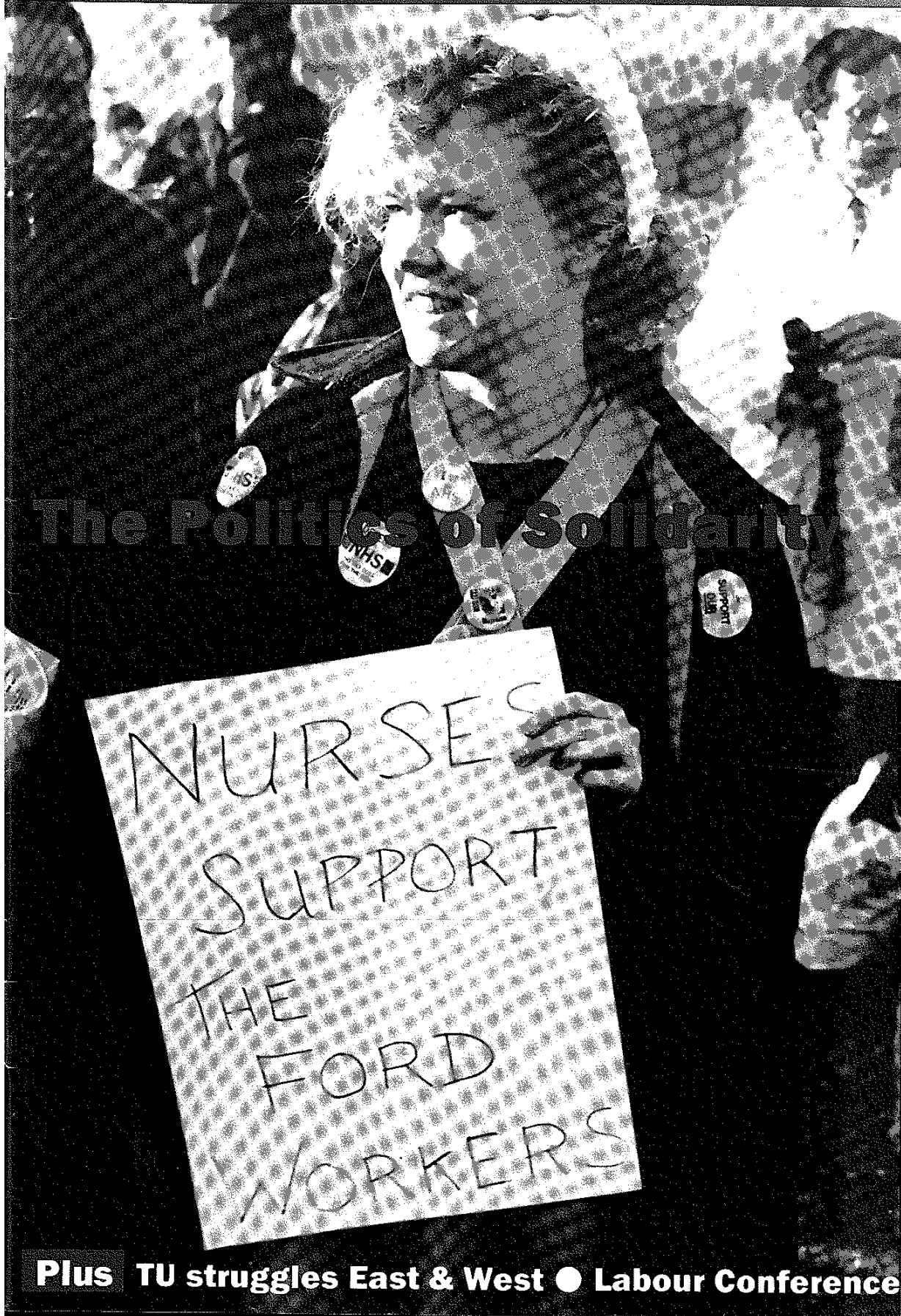


# SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

No. 19 NOVEMBER 1989 £1



The Politics of Solidarity

Plus TU struggles East & West ● Labour Conference ● Mexico



Fighting for solidarity – see Trade Union supplement, pages 13-20  
(PHOTO: Graeme Cookson)

## Socialist Outlook

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# SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

No 19, November 1989

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# Lessons from Hungary

*Q: When is a workers' state not a workers' state?*

*A: When its leaders change their minds!*

Anyone believing this to be the case will be quite happy to accept without batting an eyelid the abrupt announcement by acting Hungarian President Matyas Szuros that the 'People's Republic' has now become simply a republic, based on bourgeois democracy.

Those of the Stalinist persuasion – not least those 'tankies' who welcomed or have subsequently defended the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary – will find these events harder to swallow or explain. Anyone thinking the post-war regimes in Hungary, like those of other East European countries were in fact 'socialist countries' ruled by the working class has been having a hard time of it lately.

Not only do the workers when asked invariably give the ruling Stalinist bureaucracies the thumbs down, but the Stalinist leaders themselves, after decades of unimaginably incompetent and brutal mismanagement and ineptitude that have made their 'socialist' economies the basket-cases of Europe, are now leading disciples of Thatcherite views on the market economy, privatising state enterprises, setting up stock exchanges, opening the once 'planned' economies to external capitalist investment and encouraging small businesses.

However a closer look at the origins of the Hungarian 'People's Republic' gives more of an insight into the apparent riddle of why the workers are not up in arms opposing those who are dismantling the edifice of their 'socialist country'.

In the inter-war years, the Hungarian regime under Admiral Horthy formed an alliance with Nazi Germany, and declared war on the USSR: it was invaded by the Red Army in 1944. The Hungarian Communist Party, illegal for 25 years, numbered only a dozen in 1942 and a few thousand in 1944: yet by the end of 1945 it had swollen to 500,000 members, recruiting wholesale among the police, the military and former fellow travellers of the Horthy regime and the fascist Arrow Cross.

The 1945 elections, organised under Red Army occupation were permitted by Stalin only on the basis that whoever won, the Communist Party would control the Ministry of the Interior, and thus the secret police. In the event the CP won only 17 percent of the vote, trailing far behind the right wing Smallholders Party which took 59 percent. A coalition government was formed with Smallholders Party leaders as President and Prime Minister; but the Ministry of the Interior began work on lining them up for a show-trial, driving many right wingers out of the country. The CP pieced together a new electoral front which secured 60 percent of the vote in 1947 (though the CP share was only 22 percent). A social democrat took over as President – and then in 1948 the CP forced the Socialist Party into a merger, to form the grotesquely misnamed Hungarian Workers Party.

Despite the rampant economic crisis (the exchange rate at one point hit the quadrillion to the pound level), nationalisation of much capitalist property began very late, with the banks nationalised only in January 1948 and major industry that spring. In the summer of 1949 a huge purge of the Stalinist party began, which was to expel 150,000-200,000 members and form a monolithic Stalinist bureaucracy, devoid of any political independence from the Kremlin or the Party's central leadership. Only in August 1949 was a new constitution adopted similar to those elsewhere in Eastern Europe, symbolising the fact that the power and property of the old capitalists and landlords had been overturned: but throughout the process the workers had played

no active role and never held power in their hands.

Hungary's now disbanded People's Republic has therefore never been popular or democratic. It was not a healthy proletarian revolution that went wrong, but the deformed offspring of a bureaucratic and military process carried through under the eyes and guns of the secret police (holding files on at least 10 percent of the entire Hungarian population), the Kremlin, and Stalin's Red Army.

Though the nationalisation of industry and the massive, overdue land reform which at last eradicated feudal relations in Hungary represented historic progress, the way they were achieved created a negative impact on most Hungarians and the international working class. The regime could never claim the popular base that characterised the Yugoslav regime (resting on mass Communist-led partisan struggle), or Castro's regime in Cuba.

Trotsky, writing in 1940 of the possibility that Stalin's Red Army might overturn capitalist property in Eastern Poland, warned that:

'The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organisation of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and the only decisive standpoint, the politics of Moscow taken as a whole completely retains its reactionary character and remains the chief obstacle on the road to world revolution'.

*(In Defence of Marxism)*

Far from being 'almost' a revolutionary workers' state, the Hungarian People's Republic was something qualitatively different, a *deformed workers' state*, a nationalised economy which had never known proletarian political power, carrying all of the reactionary weight of bureaucracy of the later degenerated Soviet Union but none of the revolutionary strengths that could win the loyalty and commitment of the masses.

Khrushchev's 1956 invasion to repress the mass working class upsurge – and similar brutish action by Moscow to contain movements in East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia – did nothing but reinforce the profound alienation of the people from the 'People's Republics'.

Now the very different tactics of Gorbachev have lifted the threat of Soviet military intervention in Eastern Europe – and pulled the rug from under former stooge Stalinist regimes.

Yet as the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution) points out in its analysis of the new Polish government (in this journal), the new processes of change are *still* being decided and imposed on the working class from above. The fight for workers' control as a basis for genuine socialist planning would be as tough in a bourgeois democratic Hungary as it is now: the workers who have never held power in their hands would *still* not be allowed to set the agenda for change.

Revolutionaries will take heart from the fact that in the struggles against Stalinist bureaucratic regimes throughout Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union itself, and also in China in the prelude to the Beijing massacre, the workers are recognising the need to build trade union organisations to defend themselves and their interests as a class. Within such struggles, the fight for a revolutionary programme aimed to take power from the bureaucrats and place it in the hands of genuine workers' councils is the best answer to those who fear the possible restoration of capitalism.

# Guildford Four: Trial by television?

It is not surprising that the press and television have been dominated in mid-October by reporting of the release of the Guildford Four. However, amidst all the analysis of the case and its implications for the British system of 'justice', one aspect of the case, and that of the Birmingham Six, has been ignored. That is, the role of the media in the background to their arrest and sentencing.

The mass hysteria and blood-lust against everything Irish which was the backdrop to the original Guildford and Birmingham court cases was whipped up to a very large extent by the press and television. Media coverage of demonstrations calling for a return of the death penalty and for 'murdering Paddies' to go home was, to say the least, sympathetic.

Ironically though, it will be this self-same baying for blood

by the media, and the atmosphere which it creates, which will be used as an excuse by the police officers due to be charged with 'over zealous' collection of evidence in the Guildford case. These officers, who are being set up to be the scapegoats for very senior members of the police force and the judiciary, will probably cite media coverage as evidence of the pressure they were under to get a conviction for the bombings.

Given all this, however, it was the height of irony that October 19, the day the Guildford Four won their appeal against their convictions for the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings, was also the first anniversary of the introduction of the broadcasting restrictions on Sinn Fein and ten other organisations. This ban, which has led to a marked reduc-

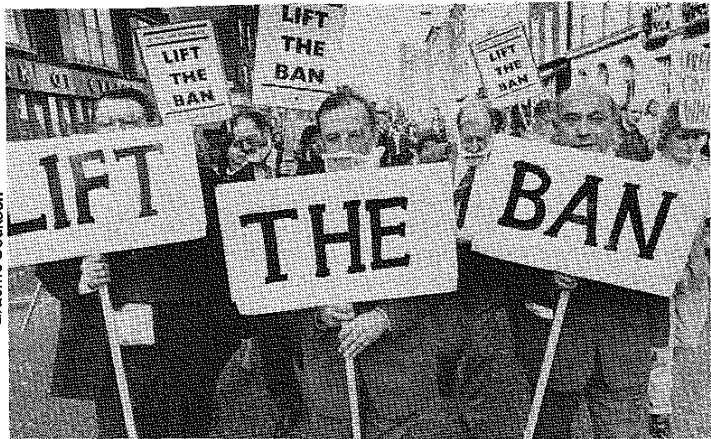
tion in serious coverage of Ireland and its 'British problem', will do nothing to prevent a repeat of the hysterical and irresponsible coverage of the Guildford and Birmingham cases. In fact, it makes it more likely.

The link between the broadcasting ban and the Guildford case is highlighted most effectively by the decision of a local radio station in Guildford, which refused to broadcast an interview with Errol Smalley, an uncle of Paul Hill and a campaigner on his behalf. Presumably this decision was made on the grounds that as a supporter of the Four, Smalley was therefore a supporter of the IRA. On this line of reasoning, the number of people who could

eventually be refused access to radio and television, constitutes a sizeable section of the population.

One final point. Amidst all the understandable jubilation at the release of Hill, Richardson, Conlon and Armstrong, and the renewed hope their case gives to the Birmingham Six, let us not forget the Winchester Three. Spurred on by the success of the Guildford appeal, let's renew our efforts to make sure that these three young Irish people, jailed for alleged conspiracy to murder Tom King, don't have to spend fifteen years in jail before their obvious innocence is admitted by the British state.

*Jean Reilly*



Graeme Cooke

2,000 joined the NUJ's October 19 demonstration and rally to mark the first anniversary of the Tory broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein and other groups

## Moving forward on Lesbian and Gay rights

The triumph of the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) at Labour Party conference was the only clear victory over the Policy Review of the whole week. On an issue where the leadership has consistently shown itself either terrified at what it sees as the electoral implications of supporting full equality for lesbians and gay men, or else is simply prejudiced, a majority was won against Kinnock and Hattersley.

Lesbian and gay liberation is an important component of a socialist programme. It represents a challenge both to the ideology and the organisation of capitalist

society, which requires the compulsory heterosexual family for its survival and reproduction. The struggle for lesbian and gay liberation requires the autonomous organisation of lesbians and gay men, and support of the labour movement.

Today, that struggle necessarily takes the form of campaigning for democratic rights for lesbians and gay men through the demand for full equality in law, and the ending of all discrimination. Five years ago LCLGR determined to focus its campaigning on winning a firm policy commitment from the Labour Party.

In 1985, the first ever debate was held, and won, with the NEC narrowly opposing on the issue of an equal age of consent. The policy was reaffirmed in 1986:

and then in 1988, in the year of Section 28, lesbian and gay rights won the support of 84% of the conference. The same NEC which had twice unanimously supported the policy, *dropped* the commitment to full equality – in particular on the age of consent – in the Policy Review.

LCLGR's campaign successfully turned round a majority, which by definition included a majority of centre and centre-right unions and delegates, at the most right wing Labour conference of the decade. Years of campaigning in the Labour movement had finally made the issue of democratic rights for lesbians and gay men part of the movement's agenda and the argument for full equality unanswerable.

The campaign had been waged throughout by a united front approach to the leadership of the labour movement on the issue of equality, and the mobilisation of support at rank and file level. A powerful constituency of backing had been won, reaching from the far left, through the soft left Labour Coordinating Committee to the centre of the movement.

The victory provides the basis for future campaigning. There is little chance that this small blot on the Kinnock leadership's otherwise clean sheet will be allowed an easy passage into the Party's manifesto. Yet that has to be the next target. The long term must be a programme of legislation by the next Labour government directed at eliminating all

# Thatcher still in charge – for how long?

Sandwiched between two economic disasters – the interest rate hike to 15% and the mini crash on the world's stock markets on the anniversary of October 1987 – the Tory Party Conference in Blackpool failed miserably to rally popular support for Thatcher.

The clear indications of a precarious economy gave Labour a ten point lead in the opinion polls by the Thursday of the Conference!

Lawson's 'keynote' speech gave little cheer either to the Tories in Blackpool, many of them fearful for their seats in the Commons, or the country as a whole. Nor did it stop the Stock Market falling over 200 points on the Monday of the following week, in response to the falls on Wall Street. Along with the increasing unpopularity of their policies, on privatisation of water and electricity, on the NHS, on the Poll tax, these economic indicators leave the Tories very exposed.

In such a context the Conference also saw some very definite signs of the ambitions of

future Tory leaders. Thatcher no longer looks so invincible: the question of the successor was being openly discussed. And if anyone was in any doubt, the Conference and fringe speeches of Baker and Heseltine dispelled it immediately.

Kenneth Baker, fresh from his years in charge of Education, quoted Shakespeare, just to prove he had not wasted his time there. Michael Heseltine, with the more problematic image of Tarzan to throw off, adopted the sonorous tones of Churchill, to prove his leadership qualities. Even the woolly Geoffrey Howe, only just recovered from his demotion from the Foreign Office, suggested that Thatcher might need to soften her tone a bit, and the Party might need to emulate the Labour Party's 'listening' image!

However by Friday afternoon it was still clear that none of these contenders in the wings have the guts or the weight of support to mount a serious challenge to Thatcher unless she were to stand aside or lose the next election.

As for policies, there seemed to be few new ones. The 'Green Agenda' won't be ready for a year; the Tories have dropped, for

the time being, their onslaught on the National Union of Students' 'closed shop' (they've enough problems imposing student loans); and there were over £1 billion-worth of concessions made on providing the Poll Tax 'safety net'.

Back in London, however, Norman Fowler, the (Un)employment Secretary, was

revealing some more vicious attacks on the unions. Contained in the new Green Paper, which he hopes to incorporate into legislation in the autumn, are proposals to allow employers to selectively sack unofficial strikers and to take away their right to go to a tribunal to claim unfair dismissal.

The proposals also demand that unions take more unequivocal action to repudiate unofficial action, with the threat of sequestration if this is not carried out. Fowler has for now backed off trying to ban strikes in essential services, though this may come later.

Perhaps this retreat was because Thatcher was also trying to portray the Tory revolution as the



Picking up litter – but not votes!

inspiration for Gorbachevism! Following in his footsteps in banning strikes in essential services would not have had quite the right ring to it in her keynote speech before the predictable record-breaking standing ovation, where Thatcher proclaimed:

'The message on our banners in 1979 – freedom, opportunity, family, enterprise, ownership – are now inscribed on the banners in Leipzig, Warsaw, Budapest and even Moscow'

Even in its decline Thatcherism still makes claim to sweeping socialism from the whole world. Well, we'll see!

*Jane Kelly*

discrimination. This would knock away a strong prop of prejudice. The other strand would need to be the implementation of positive images of lesbians and gay men and of our sexuality in education and the media. This will be a harder struggle still.

The first goal remains to preserve the policy. LCLGR has powerful allies at all levels of the labour movement to assist in this battle. It is possible now that there is even a majority on the NEC for it.

LCLGR will therefore be stepping up its effort to keep the pressure on the leadership. It will do so through work with allies at the top and through a public campaign, directed through the labour movement and towards lesbians and gay men, to mobilise support for those fighting at leadership level and pressure on those

wavering under the weight of Kinnock and Hattersley.

A critical element in this campaign will be the trade unions. While the work of lesbian and gay activists has led to many unions now having their own equality policies, the latest being the TGWU, there are many where policy does not exist, or where it is weak and undefended.

Here and everywhere else in the struggle, we must look to the support of the left. Lesbian and gay rights has occupied its small place in the shopping list of good causes of the left, without ever receiving much real support when it matters. Well, it matters now, and socialists will be asked to educate themselves on the issues, and to campaign vigorously for equal rights in their unions, their parties and their communities.

Of all the agenda of the left,



Lobbying their way to victory – LCLGR in Brighton

lesbian and gay rights is likely to be one of the few which stands a chance in the running battle on policy up to the next election. The time has long gone when the left

should have begun to take up this issue seriously. There is no better time than now to make a start. We might even win.

*Peter Purton*

# Poll Tax Crunch period both sides of the border

Six months into Poll Tax implementation in Scotland and six months away from its introduction in England and Wales the need to build a united democratic movement against the tax could not be greater.

The task facing the anti-poll tax movement is enormous – but not impossible. The Poll Tax is a central element in the Tory offensive against the working class, bringing together a number of strands of Tory policy. It is the culmination of a ten year attack on local government and local democracy; it makes a further shift in the burden of taxation from rich to poor; it undermines a basic gain of the working class in a bourgeois democracy – the right to vote – as people attempt to avoid the tax through not registering to vote.

The massive unpopularity of the tax – especially in urban areas – is clear. At one recent ward-based meeting in Tottenham over 100 working class people white,

black, young, old turned out to express their anger and commitment to refuse to pay. However this anger still has to be organised into a genuinely mass campaign of non-compliance. Even in Scotland, with nearly 1,000,000 non-payers, only a fraction of this number are active in local campaigns.

If the movement is to succeed the maximum unity in action has to be developed, with an authoritative leadership that can coordinate action. The national conference for all anti-poll tax groups called for November 25th (initiated by Terry Fields MP) at Manchester Free Trade Hall provides the opportunity to build such unity and leadership.

Unfortunately, events leading up to Nov 25th could undermine the success of the conference as supporters of *Militant* at a local and national level have behaved in a sectarian manner, counterposing themselves to already existing anti-poll tax groups and seeking to organisationally control and dominate moves towards



Gordon Morgan

Scottish demonstrators: now the warrant sales begin

a national federation of anti-poll tax groups.

Whilst there is general desire in the movement for unity, *Socialist Outlook* would argue that the movement's structures have to be built up from grass roots level, reflecting the political plurality and diversity of the forces involved, which we recognise as a strength, not imposing a schema from above which has been *Militant's* approach.

Those forces within the anti-poll tax movement committed to building a campaign based on non-payment, non-collection and non-implementation came together in a national meeting on September 3 originally called by the Socialist Movement. Supporters of *Militant* who had already set in motion the Nov 25th conference were present and whilst the Sept 3rd meeting (characterised by the numbers of non-aligned activists present) voted to support the Nov 25th conference, there was a heated debate between *Militant* supporters and the rest around questions of democracy and sectarianism.

The Sept 3 meeting also illustrated the diversity of the currents and groups which are within a non-payment framework. This diversity can and does strengthen the movement, contributing to its dynamism and creativity. It has also provided a positive experience of socialists, anarchists and libertarians working together.

However, the movement has to be more than democratic and non-sectarian – it needs to have a clear labour movement orientation at all levels of the campaign. There has been a tendency for

local anti-poll tax groups to concentrate on building up community resistance and not making a high enough priority of making links with workplaces and unions.

There are exciting developments in some of the unions. Inner London CPSA is taking one day strike action (as we go to press) in support of workers refusing to cooperate with passing on information about claimants to CCROs. The disruption caused to the registration process by the national NALGO pay strike shows the potential of workplace action.

Within the anti-poll tax movement socialists need to highlight the importance of such workplace action in defeating the tax. Our slogan isn't one of simply 'Don't pay' – but the three 'd's' – 'don't pay; don't collect; don't implement'. In many ways, non-collection and non-implementation will be much harder to build than non-payment. The full weight of the labour bureaucracy, who continue their violent opposition to the non-compliance strategy, and the employers will come down on workers who do take action against the tax. The stronger the non-payment movement, the more confident workers will be in taking on their own misleaders and bosses. But the anti-poll tax movement has to be working now at rank and file level in the unions as well as making demands and putting pressure on Labour local authorities, local and national trade union leaderships, and the Labour Party to actively oppose the tax, not the movement against it.

Jane Connor

## Conference

### 'Which Way for Socialists in the Unions?'

Sheffield Polytechnic Student Union,  
Pond St Sheffield (opposite BR station)

November 11 & 12

11am-5pm Saturday; 10am-4pm Sunday

Workshops include:

Defiance not Compliance - anti union laws  
Private Vices, Public virtues – fighting privatisation  
Positive Action and Organising for Change – women and black people in the unions  
and much more

Delegates £10, individuals £6/£4. Credentials from  
The Socialist Conference (TU), PO Box 118,  
Chesterfield, Derbyshire



Graeme Cookson

As European bureaucrats prepare to tone down their proposals to placate Margaret Thatcher, 10,000 trade unionists have demonstrated in Brussels to show their support for a Social Charter to include among other things, pension rights: here the rally is addressed by British pensioners' leader Jack Jones.

# The Socialist Outlook for Europe

Outlook for Socialism, the weekend of debate and discussion organised by this journal, is now taking shape, with many speakers from across Europe confirmed, providing a full programme of socialist discussion on many of the key questions facing the working class in Europe, East and

West.

The weekend of rallies, plenary sessions and workshops will be based around five main themes – The crisis of stalinism; Socialists and 1992; Lesbian and gay struggles in Europe; Women's struggles in Europe; and Is Socialism in Crisis?

Opening the event with a rally on the Friday evening, marxist economist and writer Ernest Mandel; Zbigniew Kowalewski, ex-Solidarnosc organiser and marxist writer, Branka Magas, a contributor to *New Left Review* on Eastern Europe, and Ai Meun Lim, a leader of the Chinese Solidarity Campaign, will speak on the Crisis of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and China.

The Saturday morning begins with a plenary on Socialists and 1992, where the European editor of *The Guardian*, John Palmer, will be joined by Oliver MacDonald, editor of *Labour Focus* on Eastern Europe.

Later on, there will be two sessions of workshops, giving

participants a chance to air their views on numerous questions facing socialists in Europe.

On Eastern Europe, for example, Peter Tatchell will address the question of lesbian and gay liberation; Barbara Holland, author of *Soviet Sisterhood*, has been invited to look at the position of women in the USSR; Gunter Minnerup, author of *Citizens and Comrades – Socialism in a World of Nation States*, will address the questions posed by the national movements in Eastern Europe; Zbigniew Kowalewski, along with a speaker from the Polish Socialist Party, will explain recent developments in Poland.

On Western Europe and 1992, Patrick Camiller of *New Left Review* will discuss the workers' parties across Europe with Dave Packer of *Socialist Outlook*; and Penny Kemp of the Association of Socialist Greens will survey the evolution of the Green movements across the continent; Joy Hurcombe, of Labour

CND, will look at recent developments in NATO; and a roundtable discussion will take place on the student movement, involving representatives of the Greens, the Communist Party, and Socialist Outlook.

In the evening, representatives of the Spanish, Dutch and British lesbian and gay movements will lead a plenary session on Lesbian and Gay Struggles in Europe. This will be followed by a social with a disco and licensed bar.

The Sunday sessions will begin with a plenary on Women's Struggles in Europe, with Irene Breugel, of the Socialist Society; and we have invited Alice Mahon MP of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs to join her; in addition, a leading representative of the Fourth International will be on the platform.

This will be followed by another session of workshops, and a final session entitled Is Socialism in Crisis?, with Ken Livingstone MP and marxist writer, Tariq Ali, among others.

**The Great Debate – Socialists and the Stalinist States.**  
A debate between Socialist Organiser and Socialist Outlook on the nature of the Stalinist States.  
**November 6th 7pm.**

Room S13, Institute of Education Students Union Bedford Way, London WC1

# Labour conference: Time for a post mortem?

Labour party conference 1989 was everything you could have feared – and more.

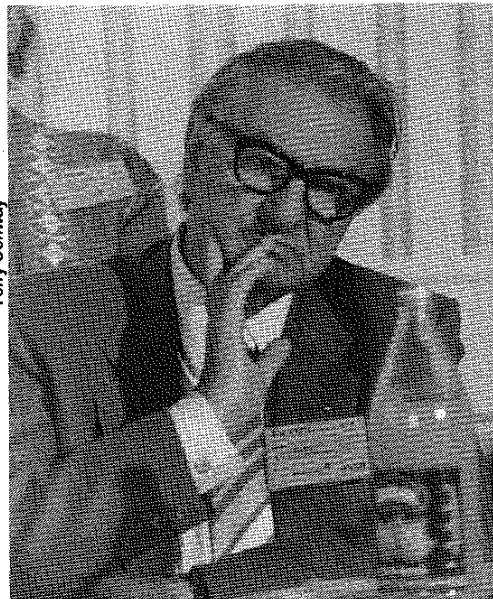
The party emerged from this conference with a policy on the unions combining Wilson's *In Place of Strife* together with plans for an Industrial Relations Court. Unilateralism was defeated – and while Joan Ruddock and Ron Todd argued for it, they made it clear that once conference had decided, their mouths would be tightly buttoned, ditching principles for hollow-sounding unity. While the passing of the motion to reduce defence spending was a victory, we can be all too certain that it won't be part of Labour's manifesto for the general election, which will be the most right wing for decades.

On the poll tax, the voices of the million people in Scotland who have not paid, and the thousands upon thousands in England and Wales that have not registered were scarcely heard, as the leadership's so-called strategy was rubber stamped. On the economy, we heard a range of platitudes which do nothing to address the depth of the crisis, the impact this is having on working class living standards and the very real problems that will face any future Labour government. We can be sure with these policies that any 'honeymoon' period of such a government will be short indeed.

The position of the leadership that Labour women should be seen but not heard was sold to conference on the basis of a phoney debate about quotas. Increased involvement of women at all levels of the party is something that Labour women have long fought for, but such demands have always been framed as part of a campaign for power for the collective voice of women through the women's conference. It was particularly galling that the Labour Women's Action Committee, originally formed to fight for precisely these demands has now reduced its strategy to one of fighting for quotas without power, and that even on this question they were prepared to remit their resolution to the NEC rather than let conference decide. It was left to Women for Socialism to provide the only voice for socialist feminists raised at Brighton

In a sense, the most depressing thing about the week were the votes that opened and

closed it – on the question of party democracy itself. In the opening session, conference voted that the Policy Review would take precedence over resolutions; thus placing power in the hands of the NEC and Shadow Cabinet rather than the membership. And the Edmonds proposals, which closed the week represent a further attack on democracy; weakening the links with the unions, consigning the CLPs to the role of fundraisers and electioneering (though probably only through telephone canvassing – talking to people face to face is getting a bit radical these days!) The closing down of democracy in the labour movement, and the threat that Labour's organic links with the unions could be broken is one of the key issues facing the left inside and



Terry Conway

Left on the fringe: Eric Hoffer

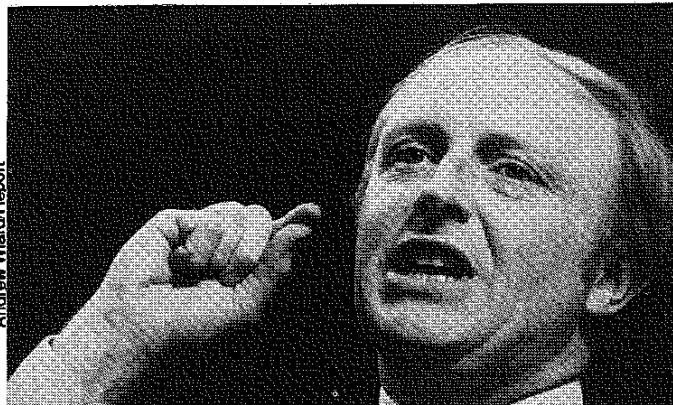
decided, especially amongst CLP delegates, and many still warmly applauded left wing speeches from Scargill and Benn

There were other successes too. The Pergamon lobby of Maxwell's beano attracted the noisy support of over 300 people, after the dispute had been raised on conference floor by both an NUM delegate and Brenda Dean from SOGAT. Pergamon strikers, together with striking CPSA members from Wolverhampton journalists from Aberdeen and sacked workers from the Essex Chronicle used the occasion of conference to reach new layers of support for their struggles.

On the fringe, while the meeting addressed by Sinn Fein MP Gerry Adams stole the limelight (and attracted many delegates), there were other successes. A packed meeting organised by 'Voices

for Salman Rushdie' heard Gita Saghal from Southall Black Sisters, Maryam from CARI Narendra Makanji from Black Sections and Mike Marqusee from Labour Briefing argue the case against racism and fundamentalism. The high point of the meeting was the repudiation given to Keith Vaz, who the previous evening had misused the Black Sections platform to denounce *Voices* as racist – with the sole effect of ensuring a large attendance at this meeting. Vaz challenged *Voices* to debate him in Leicester – a challenge that was happily accepted,

In general however it was clear that attendance at left fringe meetings was down on previous years. Many activists decided they had better things to do with their energies than sit through Neil's stage-managed show.



Andrew Ward/Report

Following Wilson's footsteps to Number 10? Nell Kinnock

outside the Labour Party: if carried through it would represent a major defeat for the working class as a whole.

But despite this, which is what most a you will have seen on TV screens and in the papers, there were some positive moments for the left. On conference floor, as well as the partial victory on defence, there was the magnificent success on Lesbian and Gay rights which the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights fought so hard to achieve. And on Black sections, we saw an increased vote for the composite on self-organisation, a resounding defeat for Hattersley's racist nonsense, and the Morris proposals lost by only 648,000 votes, after a hard hitting debate in which the left clearly won the argument. There was clearly disquiet about much of what was





Andrew Wiant/Report

The campaign to defend unilateralism was left to peter out

*Labour Briefing* held a useful fringe meeting on the Sunday of conference with an all-women platform, at which Mandy Mudd addressed the question many are undoubtedly asking – why socialists should be in the Labour Party. She pointed out that what was crucial was not the policies of the party but its relationship with the organised labour movement.

The Women for Socialism fringe meeting provided a useful forum for labour women to share ideas and experiences – and called a picket of the Labour Life meeting the following day which was to be addressed by that defender of children's rights, Stuart Bell.

A packed meeting on Thursday lunchtime listened to a range of speakers from the Campaign Group of MPs assess what the week had meant for the left. Two speakers for the floor argued that the responsibility for Livingstone's removal from the NEC – the only defeat those speakers seemed concerned with – lay with the supporters of what has become known as the 'twin-track' approach of building the left both inside the Labour Party and linking up with campaigns and movements outside.

This hardly veiled attack on supporters of the Socialist Movement, on those who had been fighting the class struggle rather than being obsessed solely with inner-party organisation, gained scant support from either platform or audience. It is not a matter of continuing along two unconnected lines of march: a recognition that to rebuild the strength of the left it is necessary to build support in areas where Labour Party membership is not strong – the trade unions and mass campaigns – is surely now indispensable if Kinnockite new realism is to be confronted and defeated.

For the lesson above all that must be learnt from Brighton is that the time for



Terry Conway

'Voices for Salman Rushdie'

resolution-mongering for its own sake is long past. The victories of lesbian and gay rights and the lesser one on black sections were achieved by campaigns which have strong links with movements outside the party; many of those on the lobby of conference called by LCLGR for example are not party members.

In addition it is clear that following conference, many activists have thought of tearing up their party cards, and sadly some have already done so. To stem that tide, the injection of the sort of debates on strategy that have been developed through different parts of the Socialist Movement – be it through the November trade union conference in Sheffield, Women for Socialism, the Irish policy group or whatever – can give new confidence to socialists that they are not alone and that links can be made with activists both inside and outside the party.

It is true of course that the left inside the party needs to be better organised. The campaign – if such it can indeed be called – around left candidates for the NEC this year was pathetic, and not helped either by the lack of democratic debate at the base of the party about who should be on such a slate. And on unilateralism, it was scandalous that so few organisations were prepared to in-

volve themselves in the campaign launched by *Labour Briefing* around defence of party policy on this issue, that in the end it petered out through lack of support.

In the light of all of this, it is extremely positive that the Socialist Movement has taken a decision to begin to organise its supporters in the Labour Party on a systematic and public basis. Steps towards this were taken both at a meeting held at conference itself and a follow-up in Birmingham the subsequent weekend, and plans are now being laid for a full launch conference early next year. Such a forum will allow the left in the party to develop policies on a more coherent basis and so raise the often pathetic level of political discussion in the party as a whole. It will give confidence and support to committed socialists who feel isolated in right-wing wards and constituencies. It will allow a full debate on the platforms and slates we want to support for the NEC and at regional level.

Although two years is a long time in politics, it does look extremely likely that the outcome of general election will be a Labour government in office. But a government elected on the policies passed at this year's conference will launch massive attacks on the working class which has just voted it in – and which will have high expectations that it will act in its favour. The resultant clash seems set to make the Winter of Discontent seem like industrial peace by comparison.

In this situation, the political fights within the party will explode in a way which far exceeds anything we have so far seen. If on the other hand, Thatcher were to manage another manoeuvre as she did with the Falklands war, or Labour to score another disastrous series of own goals so that Kinnock were to lose another election, again the battles in the party will intensify further. In either event, the idea that the fight for the soul of the Labour party is over, that socialists can afford to put their energies solely into working in the unions or in mass campaigns such as fighting the poll tax, are extremely short-sighted and only play into the hands of the 'new realists'.

From every conceivable point of view, the 'twin-track' approach which uses the methods and lessons of the class struggle and takes them into the party, that understands that the working class wants answers at the level of government as well as in terms of trade union demands, is one that every socialist must support and fight for.

*Terry Conway*

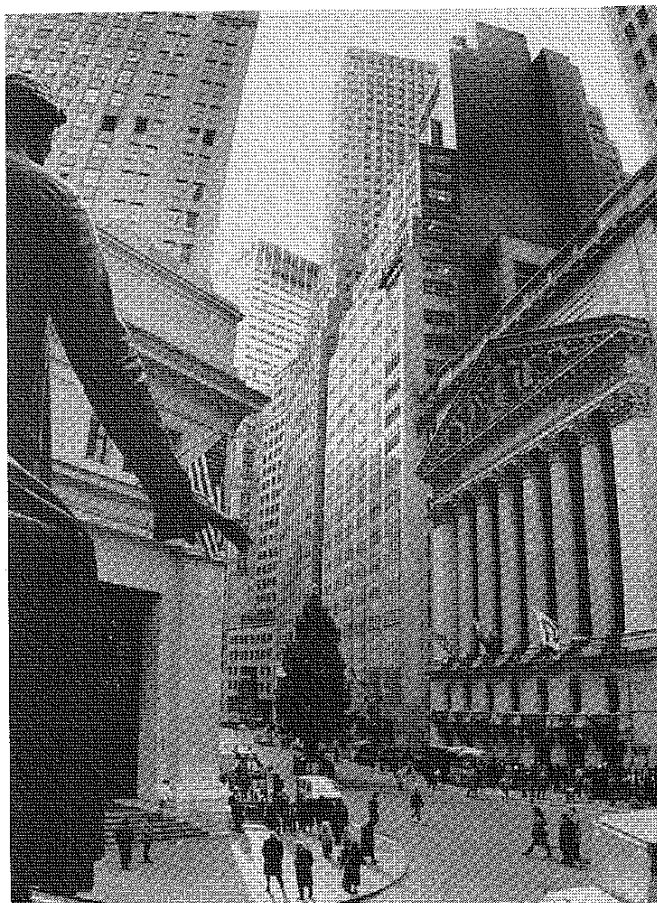
# Media recognises collapse of Lawson's 'miracle'

Despite Nigel Lawson's efforts at Blackpool, the Tories' economic policies are on the rocks. With the mortgage rate at 14%, inflation (excluding the cost of housing) at over 7 percent, and the balance of payments heading for a £23 billion deficit for the year, the government's 'economic miracle' has become an Alice in Wonderland tale. Even Lawson's strongest supporters in the national press are losing confidence as rifts widen between Lawson and Thatcher's main economic adviser, Alan Walters.

It is useful to look back at the situation in 1988, the high point in Lawson's chancellorship. Output in the manufacturing sector appeared to be increasing sharply, and the Tories found themselves sitting on a 'budget surplus' (more money was coming into the exchequer than was being spent) – as a result of massive revenues from privatisation and higher than expected income from North Sea oil. Unemployment was beginning to fall slowly, resulting in an increase in tax receipts for the Treasury. Declaring that their economic strategy had been a resounding success, Lawson and Thatcher took the brakes off their austerity policy and in the context of *relatively* low interest rates, cut income tax by 2p in the pound and slashed the tax bill of the rich. This was in line with their longer term plans for expanding the economy through 'market' or 'consumer-led' mechanisms.

So what has gone wrong for Lawson? Certainly the decision by West Germany to increase interest rates in early October didn't help. The most recent rise here came in response to this, but since the 'Lawson boom' started there has been a total rise in interest rates of 40%.

Lawson has been faced with similar contradictions and long term problems as other chancellors. British capitalism's weak manufacturing base means that levels of increased consumer spending – or 'demand-led growth' as the Keynesians call it – have not been matched by the increases in output that



Wall Street – more influential than Lawson's rhetoric

Keynesian theory assumes. In short, the British economy 'overheats' very quickly and at comparatively low levels of activity.

The post war years saw 'overheating' take place against a background of relatively full employment. Governments deflated and pushed up unemployment, but to levels that rarely exceeded half a million. The Lawson 'economic miracle' took place against an unemployment rate that was only slightly below two million and contained huge regional variations. The result of 'overheating' has been a significant increase in inflation and the mounting trade deficit, as consumers armed with credit cards buy foreign goods at the expense of more costly British ones.

In trying to bring about a 'soft landing', Lawson has had gradually to increase interest rates. However, his handling of the economy has resulted in loss of confidence by international finance and the cashing of sterling deposits in favour of other currencies. To attract back these speculators, Lawson has had to offer them the recent increases in interest rates – to support the pound.

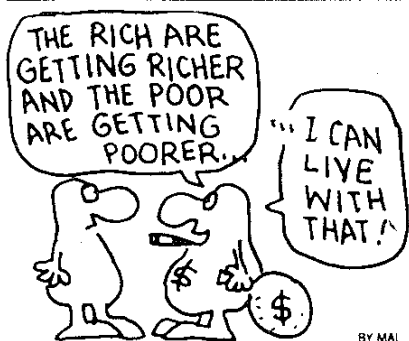
The weakness of the British manufacturing sector in relation to other capitalist economies has long been recognised by most marxists, although their analysis of why has often differed. They have pointed variously to the strength of the working class, to the backwardness of the British ruling class in its obsession with financial capital at the expense of manufacturing capital, and the existence of an archaic social structure. This is not to deny the importance and influence of general and international developments in capitalism – but rather to acknowledge that within the generalised crisis affecting the capitalist world there are certain particularities about the British economy.

Labour governments have attempted 'corporatist' solutions to modernise industrial production. They have set up wage-cutting incomes policies and huge government planning agencies, seeking 'planning agreements' with big business, but not tackling the power of financial capital or the stranglehold on industry exercised by the 'high pound' demanded by the City. This same reformist approach has traditionally dominated the thinking of the

Labour left, although proponents of the Alternative Economic Strategy of the 70's did debate the merits of exchange control and protectionist import duties to safeguard 'British' industries against 'foreign' competition.

The Tories have had a quite different approach to dealing with the 'supply side' problem of British capitalism. In the early 1980s they deliberately crashed the economy – under the banner of monetarism – to create a 'shake out' much of the excess capacity in the traditional sectors of manufacturing. They also set out through use of unemployment and anti-union laws to impose a dramatic reduction in labour costs.

At the same time they have promoted the 'enterprise culture' in the most profitable sectors – such as electronics and fast foods, and encouraged Japanese-style labour discipline. They have continued to give the City a free hand, and indeed promoted it. They have openly attacked demands to join the European Monetary System – where the



BY MAL

pound would be linked to other currencies, particularly the Deutschmark, rather than allowed to float against the Yen and the Dollar.

This strategy has produced an industrial graveyard in parts of the North and a new industrial aristocracy in sections of the South East benefiting from high levels of unemployment in manufacturing industries and the super profits pouring into south-east commuter areas from the City. Behind this, needless to say, in view of the way the British electoral system operates, is the recognition that the Labour vote can rise in the North without affecting the Tory majority south of Birmingham.

Yet the Tories have dug a hole they will find increasingly difficult to climb out of. Lawson has talked about interest rates going higher if necessary, knowing full well that this will attack those sections of the working class that the Tories have depended on in their promotion of a 'home owning' democracy.

The mortgage payments on a semi in Peterborough have probably risen by at least £150 a month since the beginning of 1988. This spells big trouble for Thatcher on the pay front. In addition, a further increase in interest rates could throw the whole economy into recession with unemployment rising once again.

At the time this article is being written, the world stock-exchanges are beginning to lurch up and down again and the Tories are plunging in the opinion polls. Yet the Labour frontbench team have little original to say on the economy. John Smith said he wouldn't make the same 'mistakes' as Nigel Lawson, and is in favour of 'credit controls' - which we assume would even affect the Labour Party's own new credit card! - and of joining the European Monetary System immediately.

While lending all possible support to those sections of workers already responding to these latest developments by taking industrial action or submitting even larger pay claims continuing escalation of wages disputes, we must combat the wretched line emerging from Labour's front bench, and elaborate some socialist answers to the economic crisis. There is an urgent need for the left around the Socialist Movement to initiate a serious debate around a socialist economic policy that goes beyond the left Keynesian Alternative Economic Strategy of the 70's.

Martin Allen

## Fighting Mexico's Thatcherite offensive

Mexico has one of the biggest debts with the imperialist countries. Its present political system was born out of one of the greatest revolutions of the Twentieth Century - aptly described by Adolfo Gilly as the 'interrupted' revolution. Although it brought some important gains for the Mexican masses it did not decisively break the umbilical cord of dependency with Imperialism in the way Cuba and Nicaragua have done. Last month's *Socialist Outlook* gave a graphic account of the consequences of that continued dependency. Millions of Mexican workers are forced to cross the border to the USA to find work.

Today Mexico is going through a political earthquake just as dramatic as the terrible natural earthquake of a few years ago. The one party system organised by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucionalista* (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party) is beginning to be seriously challenged for the first time.

In the 1988 presidential elections the PRI candidate was defeated by Cardenas, the son of the famous 1940s populist president who gave refuge to Trotsky and made some real reforms. The PRI system had to resort to massive fraud to get their candidate, Salinas, installed as president. Protests on a scale not seen for generations were organised. Salinas and the PRI weathered the storm but have paid a big political price. The one-party system is dead.

At the same time the explosive upsurge of the *Cardenista* movement, now organised as the PRD (*Partido de la Revolucion Democratica*, Party of the Democratic Revolution) confronted the Mexican socialist and revolutionary left with a big political test.

*Socialist Outlook* correspondent DAVE KELLAWAY talked to Sergio Rodriguez, National Secretary of the PRT (*Partido Revolucionario de los y las Trabajadores*, Revolutionary Workers Party), in Mexico City at the end of August. Sergio is one of the founder members of the PRT, Mexican section of the Trotskyist Fourth International (USFI). He was involved in the historic 1968 student movement which was brutally repressed with hundreds killed just before the Olympics of that year.

*DK: It seems the new President, Salinas, is doing a bit of a 'Thatcher' on Mexican society. What is his programme?*

First you have to understand the Salinas' overall project which is backed by the dominant sectors of the ruling class and US imperialism. He sees himself leading a Mexican transition to democracy that is not so radically different to processes going on in other Latin American countries. The Spanish experience particularly inspires him and Felipe Gonzalez is his role model.

The central task he has set his government is nothing less than a decisive change in the old clientalist, semi-welfare state. This state was born out of the radical Mexican revolution 70 years ago. The axis of PRI political domination is the incorporation of mass trade unions and peasant organisations into the state structure via the PRI one-party system. The system did produce 60 years of political stability in a continent where political instability is more commonplace, but at the cost of low labour productivity holding back more modern industrial development. The leader of the Mexican TUC, Velasquez, physically expresses this arrangement. He has been in office for 50 years!

So Salinas wants to modernise politics, the economy and social relations. Hence his new deal with the IMF, the closing down of 'lame duck' state run industries, his privatisation plans, his attacks on the bureaucratic leadership of the oil workers union and his proposed electoral reforms to dilute the PRI oneparty system. The media here have coined a very apt word for the project 'charrostronka' [*charro* being the colloquial term for the old style trade union bureaucrats].

*Could you explain the explosive rise of the Cardenista movement?*

All these changes bring the Salinas team into contradiction with parts of the PRI apparatus who want to maintain much more of the old populist, clientalist system. Here is where Cardenas and his new movement fit in - the real social basis of the Cardenas people is these disaffected bourgeois sectors of the apparatus.

Cardenas thinks that Salinas' reforms will so fracture the traditional Mexican social fabric that it will produce dangerous social, even revolutionary, explosions. Instead Cardenas wants to reproduce a modified social pact based on the old historic populism. Thus he talks loudly of defending the gains of the



Dave Kellaway

500,000 live as street vendors in the vast informal economy of Mexico City

Mexican people, supporting Mexican national industry and of IMF unfairness.

At the same time in the 1988 elections big sections of the masses saw Cardenas as a way of defeating what they saw as the source of all their problems, the PRI.

Now within our party there is a small number of comrades who say the vote for Cardenas was not just a vote to get rid of the PRI but also a vote for Cardenas' democratic programme, for the best features of the 1917 revolution. A concrete example which supports the majority position is provided by the recent 1989 state elections for governor in Baja California. In 1988 52% voted there for Cardenas but in 1989 the rightwing opposition party, the PAN (National Action Party), won the election and the Cardenistas (now called the PRD Democratic Revolution Party) only scored 4 percent.

If the 1988 vote had been a programmatic vote for Cardenismo then you would not have had such a big decline. It just looked to the average voter in that state that the PAN candidate had a better chance of beating the PRI. Incidentally Salinas' new look pluralism meant that for the first time a non-PRI state governor was allowed to take office.

The problem with the PRD political project is that it is basically an electoral strategy in a situation where the PRI will not allow it any room for electoral advantage. Although the PRD won a majority of town halls in the state of Michoacan, in recent elections Salinas has refused to repeat the gesture made in Baja California. Whilst Salinas is eventually looking to doing a deal with the PAN, a party fully in favour of modern capitalist restructuring, he is naturally opposed to any compromise at the present time with Cardenas who poses a much more dangerous threat to



Dave Kellaway

Sergio Rodriguez (left) with Rosario Ibarra (PRT Presidential candidate) at a press conference

the traditional PRI base. In any case the abstention rate in Michoacan was nearly 80% which reflects a certain disillusionment of the masses with electoral politics.

On top of this the PRD does not want to organise the masses despite its great popularity. You have to remember that it is a bourgeois party with many bosses in its higher ranks—they don't want militant trade unions or peasant organisations running around under the PRD banner. Even on the democratic question where it is most militant, the PRD leadership keeps within certain limits. In Michoacan the PRD base occupied over 70 town halls but nationally the leadership is taking its distance from such methods.

**DK: What about all the various socialist or 'revolutionary' currents and individuals who have joined the PRD, including some of the PRT's former leading comrades and MPs like Adolfo Gilly, Ricardo Pascoe and Pedro Penaloza?**

Obviously many of these socialists do have a different view of what party the PRD

should be. They would like more of a movement or struggle approach. But they are not at all organised as a socialist current or opposition. There is no battle going on between the 'socialists' and the leadership. In fact our ex-MP comrades are not even inside the same loose groupings that exist inside the PRD Adolfo Gilly is with one lot, Pascoe another and then Penaloza with another.

**DK: So what is the PRT attitude towards the PRD?**

Certain comrades, about 5% of our membership, have what the majority considers a slightly 'tail-endist' approach. They call for a anti-imperialist united front with the PRD. Our view in the majority is full support for a united front with the Cardenista masses but we take our own independent initiatives.

We must always clearly and publicly give our opinion on the character of the PRD. For instance recently with the Michoacan affair the PRD agreed with a compromise deal whereby they were given 6 state deputies to the PRI's 12—despite the fact that everyone knows that the PRD won a landslide there. Indeed they had been campaigning and taking over local town halls on that basis. We denounced this compromise.

Our principled position in no way affects our ability to participate in united actions with the PRD. Cardenas himself has a very positive attitude. Recently at a meeting in Mexico City concerning Michoacan he congratulated our party on its systematic defence of democratic rights. We also speak on the same platform in all the big mobilisations.

Of course a crunch question is whether to

have an electoral pact with the PRD. This was the basis for the exit of some of our MPs and other comrades in the lead up to the July 88 elections. An overwhelming majority of the PRT are opposed to such an agreement.

*DK: Nonetheless it has been a very testing time for the party over the last year or so, don't you agree?*

Certainly a big test, one of the biggest since we founded the party after 1968. There was enormous pressure for us to join the stampede of the left into the arms of Cardenas. Advertisements were paid for in the newspapers calling on the PRT to join in.

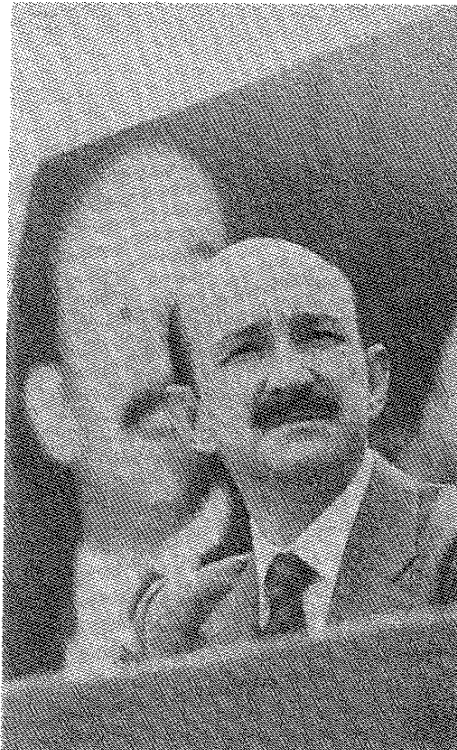
You have to understand before the July 88 elections we were dominant on the Mexican left. Two months before the Cardenas phenomenon took off we were sitting here in this very headquarters with the whole spectrum of the Mexican left. They were here to discuss an electoral front and eventual revolutionary unity.

This situation has totally changed. We are in a new period requiring different tactics. Before, we could take the initiative for a lot of actions and draw other political forces in. Now as I explained before our crucial tactic is the united front with Cardenista masses. We confidently expect a crisis in the PRD – not between the 'socialistas' and the leadership but between its overall line and strategy and whole sectors of the masses, precisely because the PRD does not have an answer to the burning social problems.

Our great advantage is that the PRT is known nationally. We get a good reception in PRD-led mass meetings. For many PRD supporters the PRT is the second option. Furthermore the relationship of forces between the PRD and the PRT is not so unfavourable since the masses who support the PRD have not joined in great numbers. We believe they have around 40,000 members – a long way from Gilly's forecast of 5 million! [the PRT has several thousand members, Eds]

Obviously the fact we lost our representatives in parliament due to the Cardenas effect is a real blow since it also automatically means we lose our legal registration as a party. Our real score in 1988 was 180,000 compared to 450,000 previously. Legal registration means your party's name is placed on the ballot paper wherever you want to stand candidates. It also provides state funds.

But we must not exaggerate the effects of this change. Recently there was a successful



*President Salinas (left) and opponent Cardenas: debating the way forward for the bourgeoisie*

strike by the teachers' union. It is the biggest trade union in the whole of Latin America with 1,200,000 members. The PRT played a key role in the strike and holds more leadership positions than the PRD so we can still intervene without legal registration. Many of us have been in the situation before.

In fact electoral politics can take up too much of our members' time. We have found that our work in the mass sectors has improved since the loss of registration. We pay more attention to recruitment. Participation is still possible in elections either in alliance with other parties or as write-in candidates. In the Oaxaca region recently, where our peasant support is good, we won seats and then occupied four town halls when the PRI cheated us out of the victory.

We have many cadres in our trade union work but much of it has to be done without identifying ourselves as PRT because of victimisation and repression. Our work is mostly among the oil workers, teachers, car workers, textile workers and telecommunications. The recent case of the Ford comrades sacked because they criticised the PRI trade union bosses is a case in point.

Our most important mass work is still among the peasants where we lead a peasant organisation, the UGOCEP of around 200,000 members. Our comrades and sympathisers suffer the worst repression in this sector just the other day a UGOCEP leader was assassinated. During the 1988 election campaign 4 comrades were killed and 2 women comrades raped.

Another area of mass work is the urban movement organising tenants and shantytown dwellers. You probably saw the central area of Mexico City while you have been here. Well just around the National Palace we are the major force in organising a neighbourhood of 5000 families under threat from urban renewal. Our comrades were very active in the struggle of the earthquake victims helping to win then proper rebuilt housing. [there was a recent British TV documentary on this movement]

*DK: Can you win back legal registration?*

To win back the registration we have to prove we have 65,000 members. The membership lists have to be perused and certified by a notary so it is a tall order. We aim to hold 150 district meetings with between 150 and 300 persons at each. Hopefully we can register many of these supporters into membership. The deadline is July 1990 and although it will be very tough the campaign is necessary and the objective is not impossible.

One last thing comrades in Europe can do for us at the moment is to campaign for the appearance of Jose Ramon Garcia. He is a state leader of the PRT who was kidnapped nearly a year ago now. We have made many initiatives on this case but the Mexican government is very vulnerable to international pressure so even quite a small effort by you in Europe can make a difference. Amnesty International have already taken up his case [see recent article in *Labour Briefing*, September, for more details].

# Behind the Broadwater Farm raid

On Friday, September 30th the Metropolitan Police used massive force to invade the homes of people on Broadwater Farm. DAVE PALMER looks at what lay behind the action, and how socialists should build solidarity with the Farm

It is generally accepted that the main reason for the raid was that Chief Superintendent Melvin had been charged with offences by the Police Complaints Authority, primarily relating to the way he treated the juveniles in the Blakelock murder case.

Melvin was in charge of the Serious Crimes Squad at Scotland Yard and of the inquiry into the murders on the Farm and the investigation following it in 1985. So the raid is being seen quite rightly as a hit-back by the Metropolitan Police because of the miniscule moves taken against Melvin – which in any case are unlikely to result in prosecution or discipline.

So the raid took place, based on the bizarre evidence of an observation team who had been watching the local launderette. They claimed that of 2500 people going into the launderette only 250 took in any washing. This ignored the fact that there is a phone in the launderette and was used to back a claim that the building was being used as a centre for drug-dealing.

400 police sledgehammered down people's doors and left notes on their kitchen

tables saying 'Sorry we couldn't find anything, yours the Metropolitan Police' They strip-searched people. They made very few arrests and found a very small quantity of drugs – some cannabis and a small quantity of cocaine. Clearly the amount of force used was completely unjustifiable and the amount of resources allocated bore no relation to the actual scale of the drug problem.

The way the use of cannabis is criminalised and the law applied in a very arbitrary and uneven way against black youth is part of a criminalisation of black youth themselves. This raid is a particularly extreme and farcical example of this process.

It seems possible that there was collaboration between the police, council officers and Haringey Council itself. Accusations that Dolly Kiffin was a police informer were made by people who were present when the police arrived on the Farm. Kiffin used to run the Youth Association and had a de facto control over the activities of the Defence Campaign – which severely limited its effectiveness. She had resigned from the Youth Association two days before the raid. There are accusations of corruption against her ( she was convicted in court earlier this year on charges of obstructing the course of justice) and she has now disappeared to Jamaica. It is alleged that she knew of the police raid in advance and had neither opposed it nor informed anyone on the Farm that it was about to happen.

The police have been highly criticised for this raid and the resulting anger gave new impetus to the Defence Campaign. A lot of people turned up to the subsequent picket around the Tottenham 3. For the first time in 4 years there was a mass meeting on the estate that was overwhelmingly opposed to the raid and

bitter and angry about the actions of the police. There was also a large picket of the police station the following week. But now that these mass mobilisations have taken place, strategic questions still have to be answered.

Prior to the raid the campaign in support of the Tottenham 3 was in abeyance. The Law Lords had refused grounds to appeal against the original conviction. Although there was a very successful picket last year outside Wormwood Scrubs the day before the Law Lords heard the case, there has been little opportunity to do anything since. The only way that the situation could be shifted is if the Home Secretary agreed to reopen the case. In the absence of that there hasn't seemed much room for manoeuvre.

Although the campaign has been relatively successful it hasn't sufficiently assessed the way the political situation has changed, particularly the political relation between the black population and the police. At the beginning of the 1980s there were a number of successful campaigns against state harassment of the black community. In the mid- to late-80s there has been progress on the question of black self-organisation in the labour movement, but less headway in mass anti-racist campaigns based in the communities.

There have been long term internal problems on the Farm, basically in relation to the operation of the Youth Association and the unaccountable power of Dolly Kiffin, but also because of the objective problems outlined above and an inability of all concerned to grasp the potential for building a really broad-based campaign.

It's clear however that a new situation has opened up. The whole Guildford 4 ruling changes the whole ball game. Now is the time to go on the offensive and exploit any shift in the judiciary's usually hardnosed position towards these things.

The problem has always been to try to link the Tottenham 3 case to these other cases in the mind of the public. In fact, it is virtually identical in that it is based entirely on confessional evidence, but as yet there has not been the same weight of support mobilised around it. There must be a massive demand across the labour and students' movements for the Home Secretary to review the case.



Huge demonstrations have greeted the release from South African jail of veteran ANC leaders including Walter Sisulu.



Kinnock's bandwagon seems rolling towards a collision with the unions under a Labour government

# In Place of Struggle: Labour's plan for the unions

JANE WELLS

Since this year's Brighton Conference rubber-stamped the Policy Review document, the Labour Party has become committed to introducing anti-union laws combining aspects of *In Place of Strife* (which helped defeat the Wilson government in 1969-70) and the Industrial Relations Act, which helped bring down Ted Heath's Tory government in 1974.

The adopted text 'Meet the Challenge Make the Change' sets out Kinnock's - predictably vague - framework for industrial relations legislation under a future Labour government.

Labour calls for the removal of the following aspects of post-1979 Conservative trade union law:

- n The right to selectively sack strikers even after proper ballots;
- n Encouragement to employers to artificially split companies simply to avoid the effects of a primary dispute;
- n The use of ex-parte injunctions and sequestration to prevent/stop disputes.

So far, so good (just about). But they then go on to say, on secondary action, that 'if workers have a genuine interest in the outcome of a dispute and democratically seek to

take appropriate sympathetic action in response to those in dispute they should be able to do so within the law.' 'Genuine interest', and 'appropriate' action, are unfortunately not defined.

Subsequent statements by Labour front-benchers have clarified the position: sympathetic action will not be deemed 'genuine' and 'appropriate' if the media don't like it. Miners will, promise Labour, not be allowed to picket in support of striking nurses, for example. Speculating on other restrictions in the *Independent*, Employment spokesperson Michael Meacher assured bosses at home and abroad: 'Would it be lawful for workers to refuse to handle imports from South Africa? ... Answer, no.'

The policy review also preserves the right of government and the courts to interfere with and prescribe on internal union affairs. 'Union members', says the Policy Review, 'should have the right to a secret ballot on decisions relating to strikes as well as in the election of union executives ... any union member should be able to appeal to an independent tribunal if a ballot has not been held.'

What they left out is most important of all.

Labour's Policy Review fails to tackle the problem of unions' vulnerability to unpredictable and expen-

sive civil action. Under the present system, unions can still be taken to court by employers even if all the legal procedures (balloting etc) have been observed. All the employers have to prove is that a dispute falls outside the court's own narrow definition of a 'trade dispute' (which the courts can largely make up as they go along), and that union's are guilty of one of number of civil wrongs ('industrial torts'). Common industrial torts include: inducing breach of contract; interference with a business by unlawful means; intimidation and conspiracy. New ones can be added as judges see fit.

Unless unions are made immune to these kinds of action, the courts will always be available for employer's spoiling actions to scupper strikes. Unions did win complete immunity after 1906, but the Tories had severely limited immunity by 1982 (building on the Labour Government's more modest success in shackling the unions in the early 1970s).

All the Labour Party has to say on the subject is the meaningless formula of 'employees must have the right to engage in lawful industrial action without their unions being subject to the sort of court action which can see all their unions' funds sequestrated and the money of union

**"Subsequent statements by Labour front-benchers have clarified the position: sympathetic action will not be deemed 'genuine' and 'appropriate' if the media don't like it. Miners will, promise Labour, not be allowed to picket in support of striking nurses, for example"**

**"The TUC drew an important – if modest – marker for a future Labour Government. Less than four weeks later they stepped back and let Labour cross it"**

members frozen.' Sequestration, they say 'is completely unacceptable; and it will not be part of our new constructive framework of industrial relations law.'

But without the full and unambiguous restoration of immunity, Labour's promises of a 'fairer future' for the unions is not worth the reams of paper it's written on. Labour know that – but are too timid to do anything about it. The unions know it, too.

Led by the TGWU and MSF, the TUC Congress in September tried to fill in the gap.

A huge composite was moved by the MSF and supported by other unions, including calls for 'immunity in Tort (civil law) for trade unions'. Supporting the composite in the debate, Bill Morris, Deputy General Secretary of the TGWU, said: 'There can be no half-measures; there can be no tinkering. The Tory anti-union laws which sack strikers and drag unions through the courts must go. We need a new framework of Labour law'. In the absence of any alternative, even the right-wing AEU and GMB unions voted for the motion. It was carried unanimously.

The reaction by politicians and the press to the TUC's decision was swift and wholly negative. In reality, the motion carried did little more than underline the legal steps that would need to be taken to ensure that Labour's stated aims could be fulfilled. But 'immunity' rings alarm bells and Labour's leaders already are nervous about their union links, and especially about being seen to let the unions stand 'above the law'. That was the Tories' immediate line of attack.

Conservative Party Chairman Kenneth Baker claimed that the unions were 'once again putting themselves above the law', adding that the 'weasel words' of Labour's Policy Review were now laid bare.

Neil ('I'm dead hard') Kinnock's cringing response was to point out that Labour and the unions are separate bodies with separate policies and that 'The unions have their view, but I will be the Labour Prime Minister'. Unnamed 'Walworth Road officials' (read Peter Mandelson) made statements to the same effect.

Michael Meacher tried to argue that the TUC position was compatible with Labour's (much to the delight, goes the rumour, of the Labour leader, who is expected to make use of this to argue that Meacher's lack of judgement/left-wing leanings make him unsuitable for membership of the

Shadow Cabinet). The GMB General Secretary John Edmonds and the AEU President Bill Jordan, once they had caught on to the significance of what had slipped through, condemned their own decision as 'unwise' and 'dangerous'.

All this, of course, helped pile on the pressure for the Labour Party Conference. Press speculation about a pre-conference stitch-up and climb-down by the unions once they realised the error of their ways, (again fuelled by Walworth Road), was rife.

Unfortunately the press got it right this time. Stitch-up and climb-down there was. In composing, the offending 'immunity', originally tabled by the TGWU, disappeared. Emergency resolutions welcoming the TUC decision were ruled out of order; and left-wing motions demanding the removal of all post-1979 laws and the right for unions to write their own rule books were defeated – heavily.

Instead delegates and, most importantly, most of the unions (including the 'left' TGWU and MSF), opted for an anodyne formula which called for a 'fair and positive framework of industrial relations legislation' but committed the Party to no specifics.

Bill Jordan of the AEU used the opportunity provided by the debate to hammer home his own brand of new realism which in effect set the tone of the compromise reached on the issue: 'Today's party is a party of law makers, not law breakers.' It was left to Arthur Scargill to point out the similarities between the proposals in the Policy Review and the Wilson Government's 'In Place of Strife' anti-trade union legislation.

Meanwhile, following top-level talks between Labour and the unions, a joint statement by the TGWU and Michael Meacher was issued, 'clarifying' Labour's proposals. In fact it was intended to confuse the issue and to bury any clarity so deep that it could never be dug out again.

What the statement says is that the status quo on immunities will be retained. Labour would tighten up some of the legal definitions and procedures currently used to trap unions, but they will still be vulnerable to civil action and to (limited) sequestration. The current powers of judges to keep inventing new liabilities for unions and to apply punitive sanctions will be reined in. New specialist courts, including lay representatives, will be set up to adjudicate on these issues, reminiscent of the National Industrial Relations Court set up under Ted Heath's

union-busting legislation.

What the statement means is no commitment to repeal Tory trade union laws; no right to strike (only limited protection under the 'trade dispute' definition) and more sequestrations (just 'fairer' ones!).

Why are Labour's leaders so touchy on this – just as the trade unions are enjoying an unprecedented popularity following some successes in the summer of discontent, and as Thatcher is increasingly seen to be acting unreasonably and vindictively towards them?

The fact is that Labour's leaders want these laws – deterrents, sanctions and all. A Labour Government with Kinnock's policies – just like the Wilson and Callaghan administrations before – will need its trade union laws when its economic policies are in tatters and it goes back to the working class and asks it to foot the bill for a few measly reforms with wage restraint and other austerity measures.

How to respond and fight these essentially right-wing policies does pose an awkward question for the likes of Ken Livingstone, and for those who argue that Conference sovereignty has to take precedence, even over socialist principles, whatever the effect those decisions might have on the working class in the real world. In the event of a Labour Government, will their watchword then become, not 'wait for the Labour Government', but 'sit down and shut up until the next conference – we'll sort it out then?'

The TUC drew an important – if modest – marker for a future Labour Government. Less than four weeks later they stepped back and let Labour cross it. It is in the nature of the beast that is a union leader to pronounce a principle one day and to do a deal to disperse with it the next.

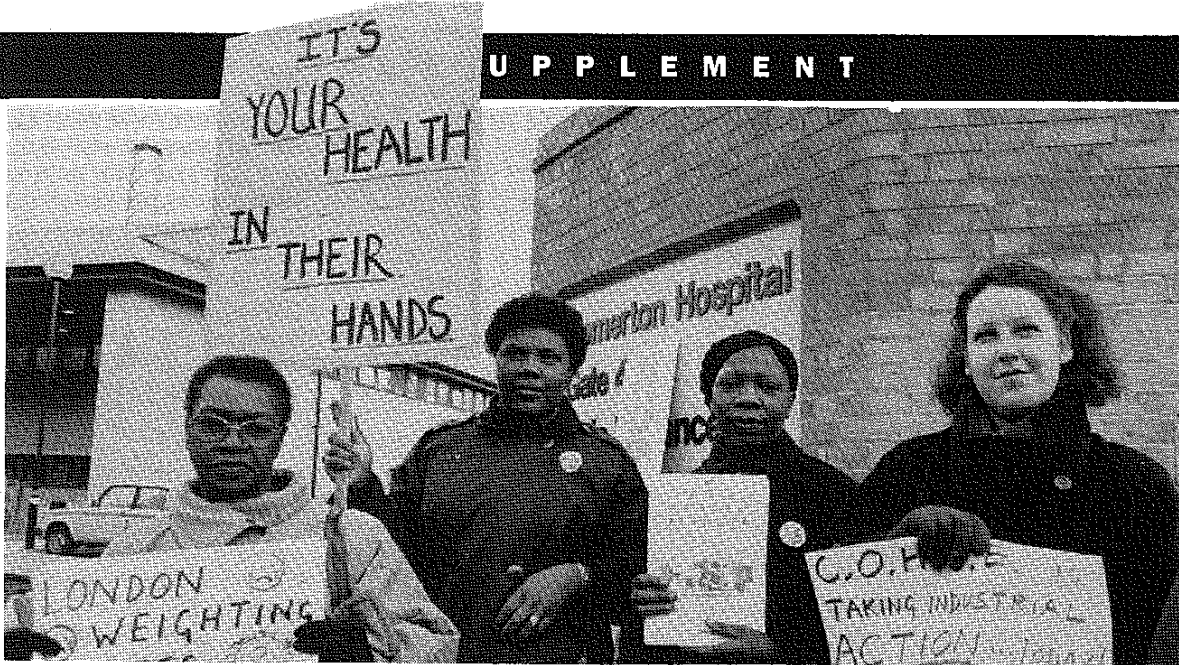
Labour's 'democracy' is likely to be the next casualty – as a direct consequence of the U-turn on trade union legislation. Insulating the Labour Party from the organised working class follows logically from protecting Labour in Government from the working class.

The challenge now – to defend conference and the union link, and to reverse Labour's disastrous rightward drift – can only be met by a left prepared not only to organise itself, but to address itself politically and organisationally to the working class as well.

**"The unions have their view, but I will be the Labour Prime Minister" – Neil Kinnock**



Graeme Cookson



*In serious need of solidarity: health workers fight for the whole of the working class*

# Arming for battle against new realism

The Socialist Movement has just published the draft policy statement which is to be discussed at the conference for socialists in the unions being organised in Sheffield on November 11 and 12. ALAN THORNETT reports.

"On the one hand, the five years of retreat which followed the miners' strike has now given way to the more confident mood as expressed in this summer's industrial upsurge, with its series of remarkable strike votes expressed in the strength of the strikes that followed. ... But on the other hand, recent struggles show that many of the features which have been so destructive in the past are still present. The London Underground strike in classic fashion ended with a deal agreed over the heads of the rank and file by their leaders. The British Rail strike could have won much more by getting completely rid of the strings that were attached, and in our view the defeat of the dockers was due, in major part, to the failure of TGWU leaders to adopt a policy of defiance of the Tory anti-union laws".

"We have to reject compromises and rebuild trade union strength on the basis of militant struggle to improve the wages and working conditions of trade union members, and

build solidarity with those in struggle and with those victimised in the process".

These extracts from the Introduction to the draft policy statement for the Sheffield conference sum up the bold purpose that makes it so important for trade unionists: it is above all an attempt to organise and regroup a class struggle current that will take up the battle for a wholesale shift of policy inside the trade union movement.

At present it is clear that, despite the important industrial upsurge in the summer and the likelihood that such action will be repeated in coming months, new realism remains the dominant political force in the Labour and trade union movement.

It was new realism which allowed the dockers to be defeated, and it was new realism which pushed the Policy Review document through the Labour Party conference last month, with disastrous implications for the trade union movement.

Under the policy review, Labour, if elected in two years time — a prospect which looks increasingly likely despite the Kinnock leadership — will keep (and seek to enforce) the bulk of Tory anti-union legislation

adopted since 1982. What they intend to keep amounts to far greater attack on the trade union movement than was contained in In Place of Strife — Labour's anti-union laws defeated by mass unofficial action against Harold Wilson's government twenty years ago.

It is this situation which makes the conference for socialists in the trade unions, called by the Socialist Movement for November 11 and 12, so important. Recent struggles have showed fresh layers of workers joining the fight against the employers and the Tory government; but there is no organised current to channel this development along political lines, and offer an alternative line of leadership.

All previous initiatives for politically-based rank and file organisation in the unions have ceased to be effective. The oldest, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) formed in the 1970s under the then united Communist Party, never achieved any real independence from the 'left' trade union bureaucracy, and has now dwindled in size, with its politics tied to the breakaway Communist Party of Britain (CPB). The Broad Left Or-

**"Tony Benn still has a big base of support amongst the trade union rank and file ... the weakness has been that this support has not been organised in between union conferences — but the Socialist Movement initiative could mark a change in that"**

**"We cannot accept the continued criminalisation of trade union activity. We must campaign for the complete repeal of all anti-trade union legislation adopted by the Tories since 1980 and for full restoration of immunities"**

ganising Committee (BLOC), always dominated by *Militant* and never gaining anything like the LCDTU's implantation in the unions, has ceased to function at a national level. The various 'Rank and File' initiatives which the Socialist Workers Party used to sponsor in the 1970s have also long been abandoned as the SWP, embracing the theory of a 'downtum' in class struggle has pulled back from any real challenge to the bureaucracy in the unions. There is clearly a vacuum, and the Socialist Movement, which is itself a political response to the development of new realism, is by far the best placed to take the kind of non-sectarian initiative to fill it.

Although the Socialist Movement has been weak in the unions it has the potential to develop. Tony Benn still has a big base of support amongst the trade union rank and file - as can be seen by the size of the fringe meetings he attracts at trade union conferences. The weakness has been that this support has not been organised to fight for policies and in support of trade union struggles in between union conferences - but the Socialist Movement initiative could mark a change in that.

The draft policy statement published in advance of the November conference presents four central themes:

- developing a political struggle against new realism;
- confronting and defying the anti-union laws;
- solidarity with those in struggle;
- the fight for democracy in the trade union movement.

These are clearly the key themes around which a fight-back against the right-wing should be organised. They draw a line of divide between between those who are for collaboration with the employers and compliance with the law, and those who argue for a class struggle line in the unions in opposition to new realism and class compromise.

Any sectarian attempt to narrow down the basis of the conference, and what comes out of it, to a list of 'pure' propaganda demands acceptable to revolutionary socialists should be rejected. The task at the present time, with new realism in control of the bulk of the trade union movement, is to strengthen and support those fighting new realism in the unions and to build an organised new realist current.

The draft policy document puts it this way:

"The main purpose of this conference is to strengthen opposition to new realism at every level and to

begin to rebuild the unions through successful struggle against the employers and the government. The key to this is the democratisation of the trade union movement itself, particularly through the maximum involvement and participation of trade union members."

It is also strong on the anti-union laws, saying:

"Socialists have to re-establish 'defiance not compliance' as the policy of the movement. The defeat of the dockers demonstrates once again that this is the biggest single problem faced by the trade union movement. One of the tasks of the Socialist Movement is to campaign to create the conditions which will make "defiance not compliance" a reality, because the trade unions will continue to be defeated while these laws are obeyed".

"It cannot be credibly argued that a trade union movement of nine million members affiliated to the TUC has no alternative but to comply with the Tory laws. Every time these laws are complied with, new ones are brought in - new legislation is being introduced in the coming years to challenge unofficial strikes and abolish the closed shop".

And it is clear on repeal the repeal of the laws by a future Labour government:

"We cannot accept the continued criminalisation of trade union activity. We must campaign for the complete repeal of all anti-trade union legislation adopted by the Tories since 1980 and for full restoration of immunities".

An important feature of the conference document is that it backs up its substantial section on trade union democracy by itself adopting democratic procedures - something which has not always been the case with previous such initiatives (where the final outcome has often been decided by the dominant political faction well in advance, and bulldozed through by bureaucratic procedures and action from the chair). The Sheffield conference has been organised by a committee elected at the June conference of the Socialist Movement, and, significantly, the draft statement submitted (prepared by a sub committee, and circulated in advance) can be amended at the conference.

The scope of the statement, 7,500 words with 22 sections, also breaks new ground for such a conference. It contains a substantial section on the employers' offensive against the trade

unions and the workforce, detailing many of techniques which have been developed over recent years, including 'workers' participation', and new working practices and agreements. It has sections on solidarity, rank and file organisation, the changing nature of the workforce, new technology unemployment and training, low pay, privatisation, the NHS, and the attack on education and the education unions.

Probably the most important breakthrough the conference makes over previous such initiatives is its treatment of a range of social issues as central themes for the trade union movement. These include issues facing women, black workers, and lesbian and gay workers in the unions. These are key themes for the conference, linked to workshops organised by Women For Socialism, the Socialist Movement Lesbian and Gay policy Group, Trade Unionists Against Section 28, Labour Party Black Sections, and the NALGO Black Workers Group.

The integration of the issues runs into the opening plenary where as well as Tony Benn, Betty Heathfield and other well-known speakers, the platform will include a speaker from the NALGO Black Workers Group and an out lesbian women speaking for the Socialist Teachers Alliance. It is the first such conference to have an out lesbian women on its opening platform.

The policy document also has a lengthy section on environmental issues, which it insists must be a part of the trade union agenda:

"Socialists have to reassert that protection of the environment is a trade union issue. The adoption of a wide-ranging document on ecology and opposition to nuclear power by the 1989 TUC Congress opens the possibility of building action on the ecology question in the rank and file of the trade union movement. Such action will build upon existing trade union action and policies".

Health and safety issues are also taken on:

"Health and safety, both in the workplace and in the public domain, has now become a major political issue. It can no longer be denied that Tory policy and philosophy, and the resulting drive for profitability at whatever cost, lies behind the series of tragedies witnessed over the past year in Britain".

And on international issues:

"The Socialist Movement believes that it would be necessary for a

**"The success of the conference must be judged by its ability to take further initiatives that will consolidate a class struggle left and strengthen the implantation of the Socialist Movement in the unions"**

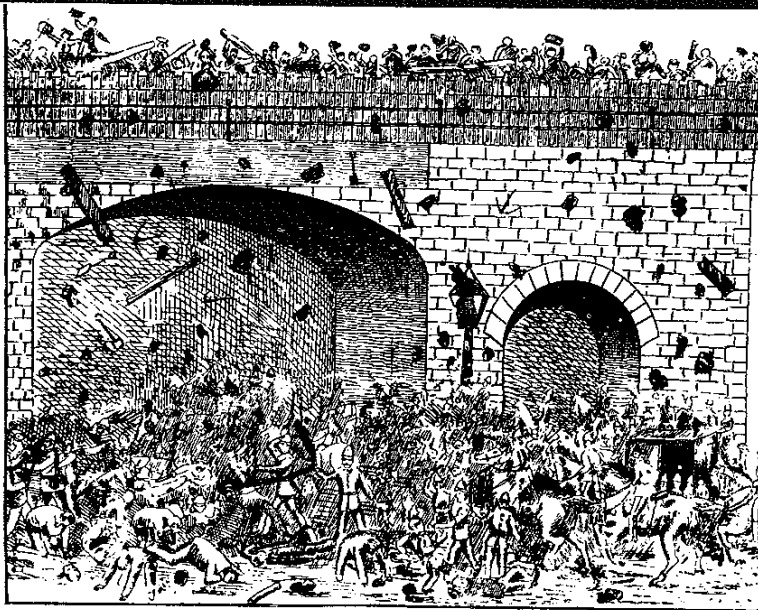
socialist government to control the operation of financial institutions and large private companies. This policy is even more significant in the case of multi-national corporations – many of which are involved in the super-exploitation of labour on a world wide scale. A socialist government should have power to confiscate assets or tax the operations of all multi-national companies and their operations”.

It is clear from the amendments already appended to the policy document that the issue of the European Community and the single European market in 1992 is going to be a major debating point at the conference. The main draft of the document, correctly sees 1992 as precipitating an attack on the working class across Europe as the big employers rationalise to adapt to the new conditions and take full advantage of them. An amendment from a minority on the drafting sub-committee however propose as amendment which says:

“The coming of the single European market in 1992 presents the trade union movement with a whole range of new threats and opportunities. On the one hand, the concentration and socialisation of capital symbolised by the market represents a move forward in the organisation of production, creating new structures and links across national boundaries which can only be to the ultimate benefit of workers sharing common class interests...”

All these things are key debates which have to be taken on by socialists in the trade unions as a part of the preparation of a political current which can confront new realism. The final version of the policy statement when adopted may be published as a pamphlet, and the Socialist Movement’s own structures will need to be strengthened to relate more strongly to the trade unions.

In the longer term the success of the conference must be judged by its ability to take further initiatives that will consolidate a class struggle left and strengthen the implantation of the Socialist Movement in the unions, and build its influence with broad lefts and sections of workers entering struggles. Our aim should be to ensure that every bureaucratic manoeuvre and sell-out is exposed and combatted, and that sections entering battle know that they do not have to fight alone. The Sheffield conference will not achieve that in one step: but it could be the crucial starting point along that road.



Leeds gas workers fighting the 'Battle of Wortley Bridge'

## Back to Basics Trotskyism: the politics of class struggle

“As schools of war, the Unions are unexcelled. In them is developed the peculiar courage of the English”

This is how Engels in the mid 1840s summed up his admiration for the militancy and self-sacrifice of the early workers’ movement as it battled for existence in the teeth of brutal state repression. His *Condition of the Working Class in England* chronicles repeated pitched battles between strikers and troops, and the open – often lethal – violent attacks of strikers on scabs, including throwing sulphuric acid into scabs’ faces. He shows how the early unions were formed because for week after week, year after year a reservoir of workers could be found who were prepared to risk life and limb and to flout not only anti-union laws but almost any law in order to mount their challenge to the power of the employers.

However Engels did not idealise these early union militants: he consistently pointed to their political weaknesses, and the one-sidedness of trade union struggle, which confronts employers at the level of the workplace or company, but which

does not confront the ruling class as a whole or its state machine.

From these very earliest stages of working class organisation there has been a political tension, a contradiction within trade unionism which continues as a major issue in today’s apparently very different labour movement. The wing of the movement which looks to pursue an outright and uncompromising class struggle against the employers – a struggle which could, if politically developed and generalised, lead logically to revolutionary conclusions – comes under constant pressure from the economic facts of life (the need, in the absence of an immediate revolution, to earn sufficient to live from day to day under capitalism) and from the larger section of workers who for the most part seek only to use trade union strength to secure certain concessions, reforms *within* the framework of capitalism. For this, normally majority, section of trade unionists, there is little or no thought of overturning the power and ownership of even *one* capitalist, let alone the whole system.

The tension between these components of the workers’ movement is

“Engels consistently pointed to the one-sidedness of trade union struggle, which confronts employers at the level of the workplace or company, but which does not confront the ruling class as a whole or its state machine”

**“it is self-deceiving to turn to an idealistic conception of the working class “rank and file” as some kind of fount of ideological purity ... It can be simply a glorified way of urging the rank and file to stay at a political level they have already reached on their own”**

by no means a simple or mechanical one. There is no ‘pure’ revolutionary class struggle wing to line up opposite a rival body of unadulterated reformists and class conciliators. On the contrary, trade union and other struggles over the decades have shown us that the *same workforce* under different conditions can be capable of swaying in either direction. Workers who at one point – given firm leadership – can be roused to peaks of class consciousness, self-sacrifice and militant action, can at other times vote reluctantly or otherwise to accept shabby compromise deals rather than pursue what they see as a hopeless or useless fight.

The pressures towards compromise are most frequently developed into argued politics of class collaboration and a systematic line of *confining* workers to reformist demands by bureaucratic layers of full-time union officials and representatives, detached from the bitter realities of exploitation in the workplace, and finding a privileged position as professional go-betweens in dealings with the employers. But the same political and material pressures also bear down and find their reflection in many shop stewards committees and among the union rank and file as a whole.

This should not surprise marxists, who argue that in class society, the ideology of the dominant class is reinforced by material relations of power and material institutions shaping the conditions of daily life, and is therefore itself dominant unless *consciously* overturned through the development of an alternative ideology.

This is why it is self-deceiving to turn to an idealistic conception of the working class “rank and file” as some kind of fount of ideological purity or any automatic political answer to the bankruptcy of bureaucratic trade union and political leadership. While rank and file workers feel much more acutely the pressures that drive them into struggle, only a fight to develop a new political leadership in opposition to their existing bureaucratic leaders offers any way forward.

Anything else is simply a glorified way of urging the rank and file to stay at a political level they have already reached on their own: indeed political currents today whose political message centres on a largely non-political reliance on the trade union “rank and file” tend to *counterpose* this to any serious fight within the unions or the wider labour movement to expose and

replace the existing bureaucratic leadership. Ultra-left denunciations and phrases can in this way conceal an abstentionist political line (of which one obvious symptom is a refusal to stand against the right wing for office for fear of winning and then becoming contaminated by class collaboration!)

The marxist method consists in building on the inherent tendency to class struggle, the constant and recurring clashes of class interest between the union membership, the employers and the ruling class, and within this context raising demands and political analysis which generalise from but go beyond the experiences of those in struggle, to point towards revolutionary political conclusions.

The politics of reformism emerge most strongly as an obstacle to class struggle at the moments of sharpest crisis. In economic recession, the reformist leader meekly kow-tows to the ‘right’ of the employers to safeguard their viability at the expense of their workforce, urging workers to ‘tighten their belts’ and abandon resistance to redundancies and speed-up. Likewise in war time, the reformist rallies to the defence of the capitalist ‘fatherland’, patriotically boosting the profits of the ruling bourgeoisie.

It was the reformist degeneration of the formally ‘marxist’ parties of the Second International, leading to their total capitulation in 1914 to the patriotic hysteria of World War One, which convinced Lenin and the Bolsheviks of the need for a new, Communist International that would consistently uphold the politics of class struggle and internationalism.

The new ‘Comintern’, formed in 1919 in the aftermath of the victorious Russian Revolution, recognised the centrality of trade union struggle, and went on to develop detailed discussions and documents on tactics for work in the trade unions and wider workers’ movement. These tactics went back to the marxist starting point, building on the class struggle dynamic within the unions, and seeking to raise demands which could form a bridge between the day-to-day reformist consciousness of the large majority of workers and the revolutionary politics needed for the struggle for power.

These demands, elaborated and explained at some length in the Comintern’s *Theses on Tactics*, begin from mundane trade union issues such as defence of jobs, pay and living, but lead, through struggle,

towards the reorganisation and revolutionary mobilisation of the working class at factory and neighbourhood level, raising the issue of socialism and state power.

Such demands were intended as a *transition* from fighting for improvements within capitalism to fighting for socialist revolution, and became known as *transitional demands*. They ran alongside a developing awareness among the early leaders of the Comintern that the mass of workers who still remained tied to reformist trade unions and Social Democratic parties could only be won to revolutionary politics through a process of *struggle*. Their own experiences would teach them political lessons in a way that no amount of Bolshevik propaganda leaflets or lectures could hope to achieve.

It was not enough for marxists to preach the evils of capitalism and the virtues of socialism: it was necessary to fight with and alongside the broad mass of the working class, to forge a *united front* between the Communist Parties and the mass reformist organisations on issues of key importance to the workers, in which through common experiences the marxists could show the bankruptcy of the reformist leaders and prove their own credentials as an alternative leadership ready to take their place.

Unfortunately this method of working was derailed almost before it began, firstly by the early sectarianism and inexperience of many of the new Communist Parties, and then by the bureaucratic degeneration of the Bolshevik Party itself under the influence of Joseph Stalin in the mid 1920s. Stalin’s notion of the united front was in this early phase to seek cosy links with sections of ‘sympathetic’ trade union bureaucrats.

Thus in Britain the promising beginnings of a class struggle left wing regroupment in the unions, the Minority Movement, which formed a national framework involving mass support in 1924, was steered under the influence of the Communist Party towards a soft relationship with a group of TUC ‘lefts’, especially the group which began to speak out in favour of unity between British and Russian trade unions and lent their names to the Anglo Russian Trade Union Committee.

The bureaucrats cultivated by Stalin significantly kept the Minority Movement at arm’s length, and were to join the TUC right wing in the betrayal of the 1926 General Strike:

but the Communist Party line right up to the point of the sell-out was to demand "All power to the General Council". As George Hardy, Communist Party member and secretary of the Minority Movement admitted:

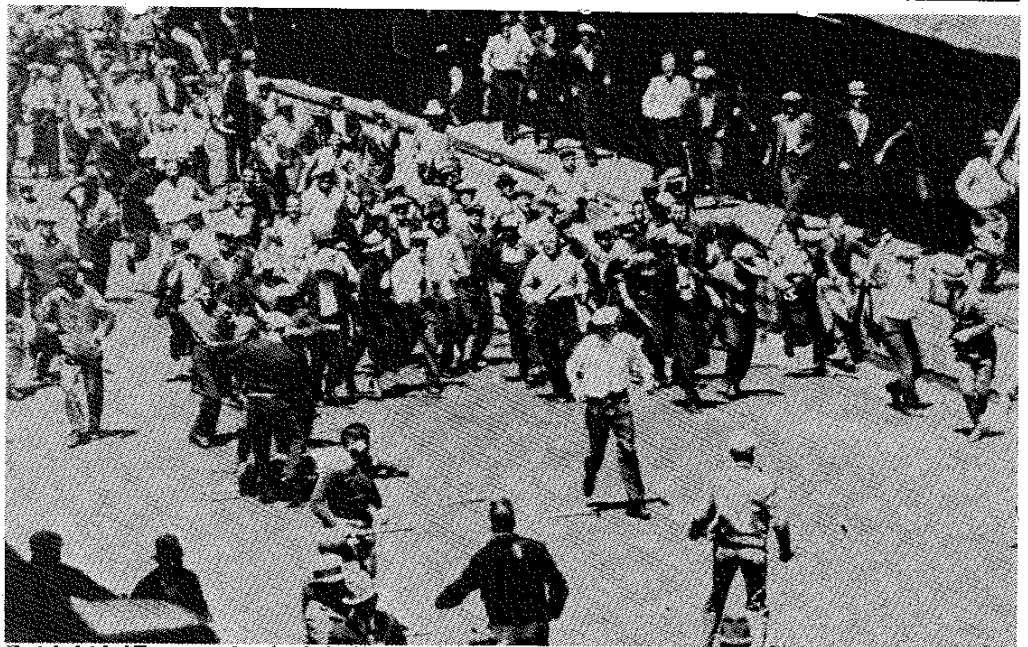
"Although we knew of what treachery the right wing leaders were capable, we did not clearly understand the part played by the so-called 'left' in the union leadership. In the main they turned out to be windbags and capitulated to the right wing. We were taught a major lesson; that while edevolving a movem to the left officially, the main point in preparing for action must always be to develop a class conscious leadership among the rank and file."

(G. Hardy: *Those Stormy Years*)

Of course the treachery of the TUC 'lefts' had not been entirely unexpected. Leon Trotsky, in casting a critical eye over the politics and orientation of the British CP had consistently warned of the danger of overestimating the TUC 'lefts' and underestimating the British working class. But he was even more energetic in combatting the next phase of Stalinist policy, which from 1928 onwards switched abruptly from cuddling up to 'left' (and not-so-left) reformist leaders to an extreme sectarian denunciation of social democrats as 'social fascists'.

The root cause of Stalin's policy switch was not, as he proclaimed, the beginning of a new phase of world politics, a so-called 'Third Period' of all-out confrontation of 'class against class' in which the reformist leaders were simply agents of reaction within the workers' movement: it was the onset of huge economic, political and social crisis in the Soviet Union itself, to which Stalin responded with brutal repression of the most prosperous section of the peasantry and a sudden switch to a crash programme of industrialisation.

As a political rationalisation for this about-face, Stalin announced the 'Third Period', and a bureaucratised Comintern imposed suicidally sectarian policies on Communist Parties in every country, which were directed to form breakaway 'red' unions and to abandon any form of united front with 'social fascist' leaders. The policy of the united front was rewritten to insist it could only apply 'from



Trotskyist-led Teamsters fought pitched battles in Minneapolis, 1934

below', excluding the main mass leaders of the reformist organisations, and therefore on such a small scale as to make no impact on the broader layers of the social democratic workers.

The most catastrophic consequence of this 7-year phase of Comintern policy, against which only the Trotskyist Left Opposition dared to argue consistently, was in Germany, where a massively organised, powerful workers' movement was left cynically divided in the teeth of Hitler's drive for power, and then crushed after the Nazis' preventable victory in 1933.

The bitter lessons of this historic defeat for the working class were learned only by the Trotskyist opposition, which recognised that a Comintern which had followed such a bankrupt policy so blindly and unquestioningly, and which even after the German defeat made no attempt to analyse the errors it had made, was hopelessly bureaucratised and dead for the purposes of revolution. A new international movement would be needed to raise once more the banner of revolutionary marxism and offer leadership to the working class.

As Stalin's subservient band of bureaucrats betrayed in Germany and then switched course yet again, lurching in 1935 from ultra-left sectarianism to the crass class collaborationist opportunism of seeking 'Popular Front' alliances with sections of the so-called 'democratic bourgeoisie', the small forces of Trotskyism kept their eyes firmly on

the development of class struggle in Europe and the USA, and nailed their colours firmly to the mast of work in the trade unions. As early as 1932 a key text summarising the principles of the International Left Opposition insisted upon:

"Recognition of the necessity for systematic Communist work in the proletarian mass organisations, particularly the reformist trade unions ...

"Recognition of the necessity to mobilise the masses under *transitional slogans* corresponding to the concrete situation in each country ..."

(*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1932-3, p 53*)

In the United States, the class struggle principles defended by the Left Opposition were given a practical expression by the struggles of the Communist League, led by James P. Cannon, himself previously a union organiser for the 'Wobblies' (IWW, Industrial Workers of the World) and a member of the US Communist Party until he embraced Trotsky's critique of Stalinism. In the early 1930s the still tiny US Trotskyist forces, who had begun by concentrating exclusively on winning workers from the Communist Party, found openings to engage directly and play a leading role in industrial struggles, including strikes by hotel workers, but most significantly the huge unionisation drive in the trucking and warehouse industries from 1934 which turned Minneapolis into a union town and recruited tens of thousands of low-paid workers into the formerly conservative, craft-minded Teamsters

**"In the early 1930s the still tiny US Trotskyist forces found openings to engage directly and play a leading role in industrial struggles, including strikes by hotel workers, but most significantly the huge unionisation drive in the trucking and warehouse industries in Minneapolis from 1934"**



Fighting In Place of Strife, May Day 1969

union.

The tremendous victories achieved under Trotskyist leadership in Minneapolis and the American north west helped attract other class struggle forces, notably militants of the centrist American Workers Party led by A.J. Muste, who were engaged in unionisation battles in the US car industry. The Communist League merged with the AWP to form the Workers Party, as a wave of sit-down strikes and pitched battles were fought against company goon squads, police and the National Guard in Toledo, Flint, Detroit and other car industry centres.

The lessons drawn from these precious experiences of mass agitational work in the trade unions not only underlined the organic link between Trotskyist politics and the class struggle, but also laid the basis for further development of the system of transitional demands taken forward from the early Comintern. In particular the Teamster strikes and the car industry battles developed practical experience of workers' self-defence and of strike committees.

Other lessons were also learned in the struggles against Stalinist and reformist politics. In the fight for a united front policy against Hitler in Germany and the attempt to develop agitation around an alternative workers' plan to meet the economic and social crisis, the issue of workers' control of production was further developed. This was also strengthened from the experiences of the workers in Barcelona and other parts of Spain as they took control of industries in the fight to defeat Franco, while the Stalinists lined up alongside the so-called 'democratic' bourgeoisie to oppose workers control and murder the most class conscious militants. In France, too, militant sit-down strikes and the escalating governmental crisis were

keenly followed by Trotsky, who spelled out boldly the need for an action programme coupled with the fight for an armed workers' militia to defeat the threats from the fascists.

The last issue of *Socialist Outlook* contrasted the line of the Trotskyists with that of the reformist parties and Stalinists during World War 2. The line of divide has remained the class line in the

years since the end of the war. Class battles in which Trotskyists have played prominent roles – on the London buses and the docks (1950s and 1960s), in the car industry and engineering (1960s and 1970s), in the NHS and hotel and catering (1970s and 1980s) – have repeatedly found the Communist Party lined up with the most conservative and right wing layers of the trade union bureaucracy in opposition to escalation of the struggles or in implementing sell-out compromise settlements.

In Britain the Labour Party has had periods in government managing capitalism and periods in opposition advising the Tories how to manage it better. The unions have on occasion clashed with Labour ministers, (notably in 1969 over Harold Wilson's anti-union *In Place of Strife* proposals and during the 'winter of discontent' of 1978-79) but never embraced a serious socialist alternative going beyond the pursuit of annual pay demands and piecemeal demands within the framework of an increasingly crisis-ridden capitalism.

The 1989 Labour Conference seems to have set the stage for yet another demoralising period in which a Labour government sets out to attack its own base of supporters rather than seek to overturn capitalism. It will be more important than ever to ensure that such developments are fought tooth and nail by a conscious, class struggle opposition in the trade unions.

The Communist Party of Great Britain, which in 1951 at the behest of Joe Stalin renounced any revolutionary aspirations and embraced instead the Parliamentary policy of the *British Road to Socialism*, has continued since the war to cuddle up to sections of the trade union bureaucracy in the hopes of increasing its own influence. The CPGB has

itself now split into warring factions, focussed around rival publications – the more overtly right wing Eurocommunist *Marxism Today* (CPGB) and the more traditional Stalinist *Morning Star* (now run by the Communist Party of Britain). But it was only a few years ago (in 1983) that both wings were united in silencing class conscious youth shouting anti-Tory slogans on the People's March for Jobs, for fear of offending the various platforms of bishops, big-wigs and 'anti-Thatcher Tories' assembled as part of this latter-day Popular Front.

While *Marxism Today* has now shifted its ground so far to the right that it offers political guidance to the Kinnock Labour leadership, the *Morning Star* has set out to hold its base of support in the unions (and in the union bureaucracy) by projecting the image of a class struggle wing. This has led to some interesting if fleeting alliances between *Morning Star* supporters and Trotskyists, and now the involvement of the *Morning Star* and the Liaison Committee for Defence of Trade Unions in the Socialist Movement and its Trade Union Conference.

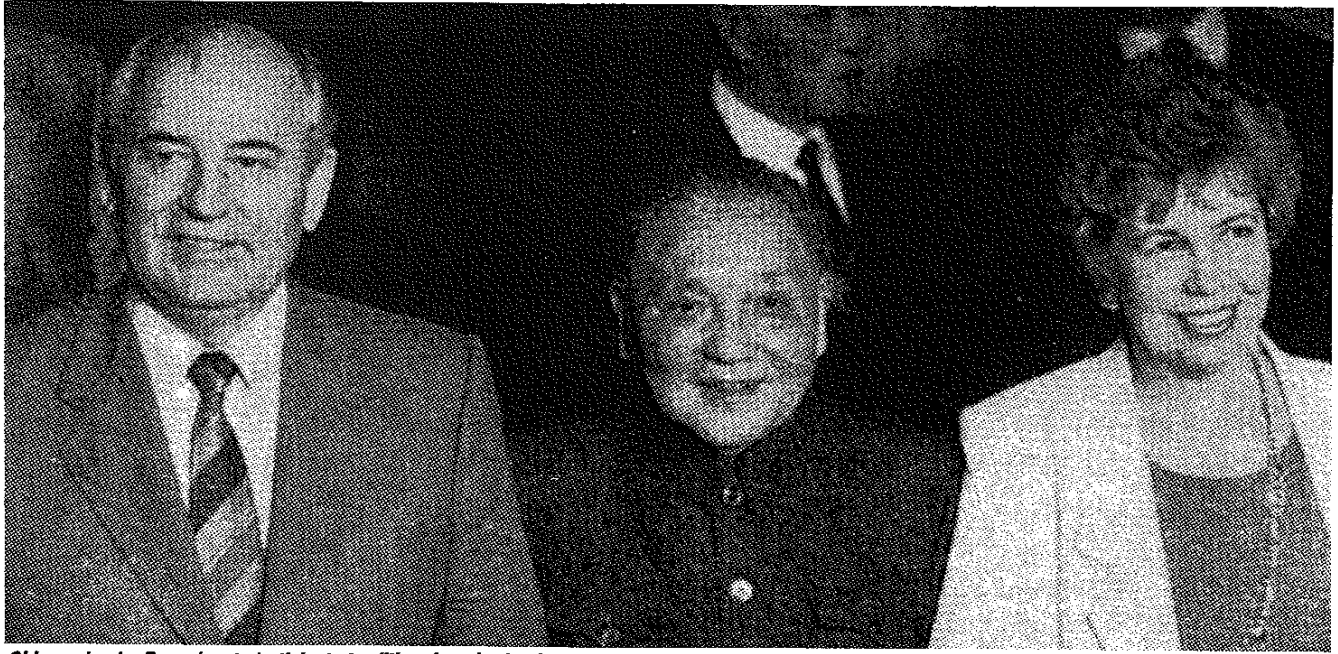
Of course unity in action against the Tories and the employers' offensive must be built on the broadest possible basis: where the policies of the *Morning Star* coincide with the interests of the working class and the demands of other left currents it would be unprincipled not to strike together. However history shows us that such coincidental agreement can be short-lived, and that the legacy of Stalinism in the unions is a far from happy or progressive one. While socialists should welcome any forces making a genuine break from Stalinism, there must be no attempt to fudge over genuine political differences.

The development of a new current of marxism in the unions as the conscious alternative to Stalinism and the blinkered politics of reformism and 'non-political' trade unionism is the key issue for the British workers' movement. Hopefully the escalation of class struggle under the combined hammer blows of inflation and Tory government attacks will open fresh opportunities for marxists to reach industrial and other workers, showing practical solidarity, explaining the manoeuvres and warning of possible sell-outs by bureaucratic leaders, and putting forward a more developed political programme for the battles to come.

**Further reading:**

**From Militancy to Marxism - ALAN THORNETT (Left View Books**

**Teamster Rebellion (and three more volumes) - FARRELL DOBBS (Monad Press, New York)**



Chinese leader Deng (centre) sticks to traditional methods of repressing workers: Gorbachev is trying different tactics to make them work.

# Gorbachev versus the workers

By David Shepherd

'THE PROLETARIAT is up in arms against its own government' said the *Financial Times* at the height of the miners' strike which shook the USSR last July. By October the same newspaper was still editorialising along the same lines: 'Workers' power has come to the First Workers' State, and it threatens to deepen the crisis'.

The response of the Soviet Union's rulers to the July action was complete capitulation to the miners' demands. But the hypocrisy of President Gorbachev's TV statement that 'The workers are taking matters into their own hands thoroughly, and this inspires me greatly' was revealed by his attempt in October to get the Supreme Soviet to ban all strikes in every sector of the economy for fifteen months. In the space of ten weeks the official response to an escalating spiral of workers' unrest had turned from climb-down to clamp-down.

Demonstrating a not insignificant degree of independence, the Supreme Soviet refused to go all the way with the president's wishes, instead issuing an emergency decree banning strikes in the energy, transport, chemicals and steel industries and introducing a comprehensive new draft law on industrial disputes which provides, among other things, a framework for compulsory arbitration and a (restricted) legal basis for strike action. It also agreed to send in the troops to restore rail links between Armenia and Azerbaijan which were being disrupted by an Azerbaijani blockade – part of the ongoing dispute over the status of the Armenian-populated territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The emergency measures were not as draconian as Gorbachev wanted, but they nevertheless signalled a determination on the part of the regime to stamp out, or at least head off, a rising tide of working-class militancy which, according to Gorbachev, could have resulted in 'the escalation of a process which, if unchecked, can affect everything we are doing'. His fears were well grounded.

The miners' strike last summer – the most significant strike to be reported since the 1920s – was merely the high-point of a rising level of working-class struggle which, according to first deputy prime minister Lev Voronin, had resulted in the loss of no less than five million working days through strike action in the first nine months of this year. In the first half of the year – before the miners' strike – strikes were averaging 15,000 workers out each day. The success of the miners' strike prompted further struggles, with a variety of demands, in most cases organised and led by workers' and strike committees which are independent of and opposed to the official trade union structures.

By the end of September the stage seemed set for a further escalation of industrial struggle: coal miners were threatening action in support of demands for reforms of their industry, railworkers had engaged in sporadic action with strikes in Azerbaijan, Moldavia, Ukraine and Lithuania and a Union-wide stoppage was on the cards, drivers on Moscow's underground seemed set to join them with action in support of their demand for a doubling of their wages to put them on a par with regular train drivers. The action on the railways – combined with the after-effects of the miners' strike and inefficient management – had resulted in their operating forty million tonnes below their target for the first eight months of the year: hundreds of thousands of tonnes of food and other consumer goods were still waiting to be unloaded in Soviet ports.

It remains to be seen what effect the strike ban will have, but all the indications are that the working class is set to give the authorities a bumpy ride through the winter. It is quite possible that Gorbachev will not be able to enforce his ban and that widespread industrial unrest will continue. But even if there is a big reduction in the level of strike action his problems are far from over.

The context of the Soviet workers' unrest is the deepening

economic crisis. The situation is now so bad that people are looking back at the 1970s, officially dubbed the Brezhnevite 'period of stagnation', as a time of relative economic well-being. Even the most basic consumer goods are difficult if not impossible to obtain: such items as razor blades, underwear, soap, sanitary towels and, in many areas, basic foodstuffs such as milk. These shortages have been combined with an increasing level of inflation which, in defiance of price controls, is up in double figures.

The inflation rate is not due to official price rises but is partly the result of 'back door' increases on the enormous parallel market and partly the effect of enterprises marking up prices through repackaging their products so as to avoid price controls. It gives a rather hollow ring to the boast of Valentin Pavlov, the former chair of the State Prices Committee (popularly known as the Committee for Inflation!), that 'Not one direct price rise took place during my term in office'.

The prices of many commodities are, nevertheless, strictly controlled and massively subsidised by the central authorities. This has contradictory effects, especially in a situation where wages are rising at an annual rate of 15.7 per cent while output this year has gone up just one per cent. One result is a very high level of liquidity in the economy in the context of massive shortages of all kinds of commodities. Increasingly roubles cannot be exchanged for goods and services. Many people have money (indeed there is a huge level of savings); they simply have nothing to spend it on. It is this which accounts for the fact that, along with demands for higher wages, one of the main demands of the miners in July was for thousands of tonnes of food (sugar, meat, condensed milk, tea, coffee) and other basic goods to be shipped in to their regions. You can't eat roubles.

For Gorbachevite economists such as Abel Aganbegyan a major price reform is an absolutely indispensable element of perestroika. But the social and political consequences of a price hike would be immense. It would be seen – quite rightly – as a major attack on the living standards of the workers, wiping out the value of their savings at a stroke. No doubt the authorities are aware that it was the attempted price rises in Poland in 1970-71, 1976 and 1980 that led to the strikes and mobilisations out of which Solidarnosc was formed.

Since official price rises are a difficult option for the regime for the time being, the attempt to stem the flow of unspendable roubles into the economy is taking the form of wage-restraint. From 1 October any enterprise which gives an increase of more than three per cent to its workforce will be hit by punitive new taxes.

There is therefore a huge gulf between the hopes that all the talk of economic reform has aroused among the workers and the rapidly deteriorating reality of their every-day lives. In July the *Financial Times* quoted a miner: 'We called 1985 the year the dam burst, when Mr Gorbachev came to power. We have been waiting for results ever since.' The conjunction of political liberalisation, rising aspirations for change and falling standards of living is an explosive one. Workers are not prepared to sit back and wait for Gorbachev to deliver.

But to say that the perestroika economic reforms are proceeding at a snail's pace would be an exaggeration – progress is even slower than that. Vladimir Tikhonov, an academic and member of the Congress of People's Deputies, has pointed out that the only real progress so far has been the promotion of co-operatives, 'the rest', he says, 'is slogans'.

The promotion of co-operatives (in effect, private businesses) has been one of the most unpopular of Gorbachev's policies. Indeed one of the demands of the miners' strike was for a prohibition on the establish-



*It may sound good to pro-market academics, but it's no fun working for a Soviet cooperative*

ment of co-operatives and the disbandment of existing medical and food co-operatives. The reason is simple: the establishment of these businesses has led to the enrichment of a layer of Soviet Arthur Dalrymple-type entrepreneurs, sniffing the chance of a 'nice little earner' at the workers' expense. In many cases they have made their profits by buying scarce (but cheap) state-produced goods and then selling them at vastly inflated prices – legalised profiteering.

The unpopularity of this particular market reform has even made itself felt at the level of the Supreme Soviet which in October decided that local councils would be empowered to set maximum price levels for co-operatives in their areas. Other, tougher, controls such as banning state officials from participating in co-operatives and outlawing the practice of buying and reselling goods from the state sector were rejected however. So the development of the legal private sector remains a recipe for corruption and a source of considerable resentment and discontent among the workers.

In this context the most worrying thing for the Soviet leadership is the form that shopfloor anger is taking. The official trade union structures have in virtually all cases been completely bypassed. It is the dynamic of working-class struggles towards independent organisational forms and a mixture of economic and political demands which is a real nightmare for the Gorbachev team – and which accounts for October's attempted clamp-down. To understand just what it is that frightens the Soviet rulers so much it is worth looking in some detail at the events of last July.

After the 1.4 million workers in iron and steel, the 1.3 million miners are the Soviet Union's second biggest industrial workforce. This gives some indication of the huge size and importance of the mining sector in the Soviet economy. Soviet miners are amongst the highest paid workers in the Soviet Union: in 1987 the average miner's monthly wage was Rs450 (£450 at the official exchange rate) – more than double the national average of Rs210, while skilled miners were earning Rs600. Miners have better annual holidays, access to holiday homes, tourist camps and sanatoria than other industrial workers. This situation is the partly the result of the Brezhnevite legacy of prioritising heavy industry and guaranteeing certain basic conditions for the key industrial workforces.

Nevertheless, by July the economic crisis was beginning to bite hard and a whole plethora of grievances – from health and safety issues to shortages of consumer goods and housing problems – came to a head.

The strike spread rapidly, starting in the Kuznetsk region of Siberia on 10 July and embracing the Donets region in the Ukraine – the USSR's biggest coalfield – within days. By 19 July in Prokopyevsk (the main mining town in the Siberian coalfield) some 90 per cent of industrial workers were striking in sympathy with the miners. By 20



July the strike had spread to four other coalfields – Vorkuta (Siberia), Karaganda (Kazakhstan), Dnepr (Ukraine) and Rostov-on-Don. In all some 250,000 workers were out.

The demands of the strikers evolved in the process of the struggle, basic economic demands being rapidly augmented by overtly political ones. Miners were calling for a new constitution, for an emergency session of the Congress of People's Deputies and (according to some reports) for the Congress to curb the power of the Communist Party Central Committee. In addition there were demands in some areas for pre-term elections to city councils, for the dismissal of various officials and so on.

The *Guardian* reported that the strike committees which organised and led the dispute in every city and town 'have temporarily become a kind of alternative government': as the effective power in many towns they kept order by means of workers' patrols acting in co-operation with the local police. Interviewed in the *Morning Star* in October, Soviet deputy Vladimir Samarin complained that the strike committees established during the summer had tended to demand powers 'outside their competence': some wanted to set up regional and all-Union strike committee structures, 'This would be dual power, which would not be positive', he said.

That Samarin should be discussing the role of the committees twelve weeks after the government's concessions on all the basic economic demands had ended the strike reflects the fact that these committees remained in existence, carrying on extended negotiations with the government. (In late September leaders of the strike committees from the Donbas field were in Moscow meeting deputy prime minister Voronin.) One concession made to end the strike was that strike committee members would be guaranteed full pay from their employer while carrying out full time (unofficial) trade union duties.

Many miners compared the developments to the establishment of Solidarity in Poland. The *Financial Times* reported one Novokuznetsk strike committee member as saying 'We're the new Solidarity. We don't trust Mr Gorbachev'. The *Guardian* quoted Yuri Yesterov, a member of the Kemerovo strike committee, who said that his aim was to 'fight that bureaucratic apparatus that sits on our neck – the people who don't work and live better than anyone else'. Miners in Chervonohrad demanded the establishment of an independent trade union to be called 'Solidarity'.

The role of the official trade union structures and the workers' attitude towards them is very well expressed by reference to one of the strikers' thirty-seven main demands: a reduction of fifty per cent in the number of official trade union staff! An official union leader was asked by western journalists if he could cite a single case of the union intervening 'to protect the interests of the workers in conflicts with the heads of mines and enterprises'. 'I do not know of any such cases', said Mr A.F. Chebotayev, central committee secretary of the official miners' union! To many it seems a travesty that the term 'trade union' should be used to describe such an organisation.

However, shocked by the events of July, the official trade unions are beginning to attempt to develop some semblance of credibility

among the workers. In mid-October the official unions' council put forward a draft law that would give the unions major new powers, including the right to veto factory closures and lay-offs, to reverse unjustified price increases, to control the activities of the co-operatives and to decide how the profits of state enterprises should be spent.

The *Economist* commented: 'These powers, if granted, would in effect bring Mr Gorbachev's liberalising economic reforms to a halt'. There is little evidence however that the official trade union leopard is

really changing its spots. Rather, it is attempting to head off the development towards independent trade unionism. In the *Morning Star* interview cited above, Vladimir Samarin suggested that 'the many good new leaders' thrown up by the strikes should be put forward as candidates for official trade union and local council posts, to 'infuse the existing trade union ... bodies with fresh new blood'.

It seems that a twin-track strategy of the strike ban, on the one hand, and the incorporation of workers' leaders in the official structures, on the other, is the favoured tactic for diffusing the situation. The official unions, however, will only gain credibility to the extent that they intervene actively to defend workers' interests. And this they are not well equipped to do.

The mood of working-class militancy is reflected not only in the level of strike struggles but also through every opportunity that workers get for independent political expression. The results of

the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies as long ago as last March demonstrated a mass popular sentiment of disillusionment with the progress of the reforms so far combined with an impatience for further more far-reaching changes. Those local party leaders who had been the strongest in opposing change were among the main victims. Those candidates such as Boris Yeltsin who attacked bureaucratic privilege and called for more rapid reforms were rewarded with huge votes (an 89.4 per cent Moscow majority in Yeltsin's case).

An opinion poll published in *Pravda* on 16 October showed that only four per cent of those polled believed that the authority of the Communist Party was still 'high', almost fifty per cent said it was 'low'.

The row over Gorbachev's demand in October that Vladislav Starkov, editor of the mass circulation weekly *Argumenti i Fakti*, should resign was caused by the publication in that journal of an opinion poll which revealed that radical reformers such as Yeltsin and non-party members were far and away the most popular members of the Congress. *Argumenti i Fakti* is the single most popular publication in the Soviet Union, with a print run of twenty million. The Soviet president expressed his concern that the press was giving 'the impression that we are in a place up to our necks in petrol, and all that is needed is one spark'. If there is such an impression, however, President Gorbachev – with his panic demand for a total strike ban – must be seen as being as responsible for it as any newspaper editor, if not more so.

Meanwhile the socialist left is beginning to adapt its perspectives in the light of the dramatic appearance of the working class on the political stage. In a tremendously exciting development, moves are under-



**Gorby meets the Queen: is he more popular with monarchs than workers?**

way for the establishment of a socialist party linked to the emerging independent trade union structures – and to socialist elements inside the Communist Party. They have already established links with the Polish Socialist Party (DR).

The proposal to organise support for a socialist perspective within the Communist Party is especially significant. With between nineteen and twenty million members the CPSU is bigger than the total population size of most member states of the United Nations. A very high proportion of its membership is ordinary workers. All kinds of political positions are present among its members. Estimates of the size of the *nomenklatura* (the system by which all the key bureaucrats are appointed) put it at about three million – which would indicate that any crude identification of the party membership with the bureaucracy as such is wrong. The new socialist club within the CPSU – ironically called Communists for Socialism! – has a massive potential audience for radical socialist ideas.

Boris Kagarlitsky, a leading figure in the new socialist left, in London in September to give the Isaac Deutscher memorial lecture, explained that the perspective of the new party would be for socialist self-management and democratic planning and that it would reject any idea of 'critical support' for the programme of any wing of the ruling



Gorby meets the car workers – at a plant near Moscow

authorities.

It is now more than clear that there is a burning need to build a socialist current within the Soviet working class independent of, and politically opposed to, all wings of the ruling bureaucracy; a current which understands the need to unite with the reformers against the conservatives on democratic and other issues, but which is able to articulate a fully socialist alternative to the perspective of reforming 'from above' the crumbling bureaucratic edifice that today constitutes the Soviet Union.

## No fond farewell for Honecker

# Who will Gorby help in East Germany?

By Gus Fagan

On Wednesday, 18 October, Erich Honecker, leader of the GDR since 1971, was forced to resign by a mass movement which was taking the country to the brink of revolution. He was replaced by Egon Krenz, a 52-year-old conservative who has been groomed for the past six years as Honecker's successor. The replacement of Honecker by another member of the all-conservative 21-man Politburo is clearly a stop-gap manoeuvre while the regime struggles desperately to defuse the situation.

The extent of discontent in the GDR has been obvious for a long time. Conversations with ordinary party members showed that within the ranks of the party there was widespread enthusiasm for Gorbachev-style reform. Outside the party anger and frustration were building up as the aged leadership refused to make any concessions to the popular mood.

Some, despairing of change, left for West Germany: in the past year alone there were 100,000 legal exit visas granted. Then in

August Hungary opened up its border to the West and within a few months another 50,000 mostly young people took the easy route out, thus giving dramatic expression to the developing crisis.

It was only a matter of time before the crisis would explode and the final spark was lit by the Fortieth Anniversary celebrations and Gorbachev's visit. The masses came onto the streets shouting their support for Gorbachev. "*Gorbi Hilf!*" (Gorby help us) became the slogan of the day. Gorbachev made clear his support for popular demands: "Only those are in danger who refuse to respond to life", he said. He also made it clear that if the aged leadership should provoke its people to revolt, it would not be rescued by Soviet tanks as it had been in 1953. The Brezhnev doctrine was a thing of the past.

Demonstrations grew throughout the GDR. On 9 October 70,000 demonstrated in Leipzig. There were demonstrations in Halle (20,000), Plauen (15,000) and in East Berlin. At first the state security replied with the usual brutality but soon the size of the mass protest ruled out violence as an option. On Monday 16 October

the biggest demonstration in the history of the GDR took place in Leipzig. Between 120,000 and 150,000, twenty per cent of the population of the GDR's second-biggest city, were on the street. The slogan now was "*Wir sind das Volk!*" (We are the people). On Wednesday the resignation of Honecker was announced.

The limited concessions that have been made in the first few days and the rejection of demands for free elections, party plurality, recognition of the newly formed opposition groups, etc. means that this is only the beginning of the struggle in East Germany.

Apart from the mass demonstrations, other signs of the rapidly mounting crisis were evident in September and October. The old intimidation had disappeared and six or seven reform groups openly agitated without fear. The largest of them, *Neues Forum* (New Forum), has registered over 12,000 supporters. A new social-democratic party has been formed. Leaders of the other parties in the parliament dominated by the stalinist party, the SED, began publicly to criticize the regime. Important organizations in intellectual



20 percent of the population on the streets: the giant Leipzig demo shakes out Honecker – but how will Krenz fare?

and cultural life openly called for reform, among them the Writers Union in Berlin and the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig.

The mass demonstrations, and loss of support among the intellectuals, in the context of intense international pressure from Moscow and Bonn, forced Honecker's resignation. In the official announcement of his departure "for health reasons", he wasn't even thanked.

In the case of Hungary and Poland we are familiar with the economic crisis which has formed the background to the political crisis of Stalinist rule and which led to the adoption, among intellectuals and party leaders, of a liberal market orientation. What is the situation in East Germany? Western journalists and academics (as well as apologists for the regime) point to the economic successes of the GDR. A growth-rate of 4% in the first half of this year is very respectable. National income per capita grew 120% between 1970 and 1987 (73% in Japan and 44% in West Germany). Although some question the accuracy of these figures, no one doubts that there have been some real achievements. Surveys indicate that the GDR population has a very positive attitude towards the 'achievements of socialism': socialized production, the social security and education system.

But there are some real problems. Economic autarky, the attempt to produce everything themselves, although partly caused by lack of Western currency and the poor quality of goods in Comecon, became a virtue. Massive investment in fields such as microelectronics (14 billion marks) and large-scale subsidizing of basic products (bread, vegetables), combined with a reluctance to borrow from Western banks, has led to severe shortages and high prices in the consumer

goods market. Bread is cheap (quarter of the price in West Germany) but coffee is beyond the reach of the ordinary worker (25 marks for 250 gr in 1985, the equivalent of 4 hours work at average wage). A radio-cassette recorder which in West Germany would cost 200 DM



New man – new policies? Egon Krenz

(13 hours labour), in East Germany costs 1200 marks (208 hours labour).

Hence the widespread discontent with the economy. Growth rates don't mean a great deal if there's nothing in the shops or what's there is ridiculously expensive. Doris Cornelien, a sympathetic expert on the problems of the East German economy, describes it this way: 'In the GDR everyone has food to eat – generally too much, in fact – and everyone is comfortably dressed. But there's nothing beyond that: no variety, no quality, no modern

or fashionable products. So no one is motivated to work hard. What's there to do with the extra cash?'

This discontent expressed itself especially among young people attracted by West German prosperity and limited career prospects at home. Whether we like it or not, most young people in the East want a car. But in East Germany, where the car industry is a management disaster, the young worker knows that he/she will probably have to wait until they're 35 to get a car which, even then, really belongs in a museum. So economic discontent is very real and is a big factor among those mostly young people whom we have seen on the TV screens boarding the trains for the West and, to the astonishment of the locals, leaving their home-manufactured *Trabis* behind in the streets of Prague and Budapest.

Price reform and improvement in efficiency in an economy which is very material-, energy- and labour-intensive will be no easy matter, as has been demonstrated in the cases of Hungary and the Soviet Union. Opinions vary on the urgency and type of economic reforms required.

But for those who left the country, as well as for the other 99% of the workforce who remained in the GDR, it was the political/social aspect which had become most intolerable – political and cultural repression, boring censored newspapers, banned novels, banned songs, banned hair-styles, banned travel, rigged elections, fake parliaments. With liberalization in the Soviet Union and the collapse of stalinist rule in Poland and Hungary, it was inevitable that GDR society would begin to assert itself. The demands are for political and cultural freedom, freedom of information and expression, proper elections

nd an end to travel restrictions. It remains to be seen how far Krenz will go to meet those demands.

And what of 'the German question' – another favourite topic of the Western media and politicians? The conservative West German paper, *Die Zeit*, commented (13 Oct.):

'What is very noticeable is that there is one demand which is not heard – reunification. These intellectual, religious and political spokespersons of reform don't want to abolish the GDR, only to change it. ... The capitalist FRG is not their model: they are dreaming once again of "socialism with a human face".'

'We want to change the situation in the GDR', says Birbel Bohley, spokesperson for New Forum, 'an open border, free travel, but not reunification'. The mass demonstrations in Leipzig which shouted 'We are the people' are not looking for exit visas but political

change.

But the question of reunification is indeed posed, and it will be posed all the more if the reforms in the East are not implemented. For the Soviet Union, the future of East Germany depends on the kinds of relationships that are established between East and West Europe as a whole. 'The fate of the Germans', said Gorbachev in Bonn, 'depends absolutely on the fate of the whole of Europe, it is part of the perspective of the creation of a common European home.' The West German establishment has been at pains to assert that, in the words of Genscher, the foreign minister, 'German federalism must develop as part of a developing European federalism'. The SPD speaks of a Germany 'united only in the framework of a united states of Europe'. Indeed the Western bourgeois states as well as the Soviet Union want to avoid what Genscher

calls a 'de-europeanization' of the German question.

The European right, by no means united around a common strategy for Western Europe, certainly have no agreed strategy for East European states like Poland and the GDR. The democratization of East Germany, an advanced industrial society with a strong left-wing tradition and without, up to now, many prominent defenders of the capitalist road, may not fit well into the right-wing scheme of things. The cold-war strategy of reunification through absorption is not wanted by the majority in either part of Germany. The future of East Germany and the future of Europe are indeed bound together and present a real challenge to the left in Europe as a whole.

# Socialists spell out tasks for Solidarity

## 'On the new government in Poland' Statement by the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution)

In the last issue of *Socialist Outlook* we carried our analysis of the new situation in Poland, and referred to the promising political contribution of the small forces of the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution). Their policy document responding to the inclusion of Solidarity leaders in the Polish government has just been translated into English.

The appointment of Tadeusz Mazowiecki as premier of the People's Republic of Poland is an expression of the deepening of the crisis of the system of the ruling nomenklatura.

This socio-economic phenomenon has its roots in the establishment of Solidarity, independent of the bureaucracy of the workers' movement, in August 1980. The eight-year long effort of General Jaruzelski's regime to stifle the self-organisation of society has ended in fiasco.

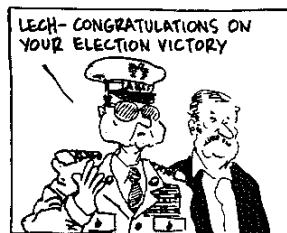
The appointment of the Mazowiecki government does not however mean that society has taken power. It has been constructed on the basis of 32 percent democracy and at the price of a guarantee not to disturb the foundations of the system which has existed hitherto. The fundamental structures of opower – the office of President, the ministries of Internal Affairs and defence, the National Bank of Poland – are not only outside

social control, but outside the control of the premier himself. The group of opposition leaders represented by the new premier who have agreed to these conditions have not exploited to the full the opportunity arising from strikes and the bankruptcy of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP)

Nonetheless the establishment of the government does create possibilities for the fulfillment of social expectations. These may be listed as follows:

1.) The destruction of all the remnants of totalitarian governments; the liquidation of the mechanisms of domination of the state over

society, above all the dissolution of the Security Police, the Zomo and the ORMO, together with the reform of the penal code, with the end of securing democratic freedoms.





*A warning to the bureaucracy: Solidarity shows its mass support, May Day 1988*

This means also the destruction of the privileged status of the PUWP and all the groups connected to it (the democratic Party, the Peasants' Party, the Union of Socialist Youth, and so on). All those fulfilling leading functions in administration or the economy should be subject to election. All local administration should be subject to free, secret, equal, proportional and direct elections.

A guarantee of freedom of political and social activity. This means that there should be no restriction on the right to strike or on the creation of trade unions. This should include the police force and the army, in accord with clause no.2 of the 21 demands of the Gdansk Inter-factory strike committee in 1980: 'Securing the right to strike and the security of strikers and those rendering them assistance'.

In accordance with demand no.7, payment should be 'made to all strikers for the period of the strike as for medical leave'.

The activity of political parties, which are the basis of modern democracy and a condition of the subjectivity of society, should not be legally restricted.

Real freedom of the press and of information should be guaranteed through the liquidation of censorship and the destruction of the material and legal basis for monopoly in this area. This refers especially to the press distribution network, which should be put at the disposal of all political, social and cultural groups. Radio and television should be subjected to representative bodies at an appropriate level, and access to them should be guaranteed to all political groups.

2.) The economy should be subjected to social needs, with the goal of a modern twenty first century economy, which should guarantee to all members of society satisfactory living conditions i.e. at least the right to a nourishing diet, dignified housing, comprehensive health



*Now Soviet workers are following the Polish lead*

service and universal access to social services (for example nurseries, education and culture).

The indispensable condition for the realisation of these goals is the subordination of the economy to the producers. Only such a model of social life can guarantee to each person the possibility of self-realisation, and it is the indispensable condition of the emancipation of society. To the last moment of its existence, the government of Mieczyslaw Rakowski followed in the footsteps of its predecessors, in executing faits accomplis which orientated the Polish economy in wholly the opposite direction.

The possibilities for appropriation by the nomenclatura were widened, and opportunities

given for the development of speculative and corrupt capital. The conditions were created for the sale of the national means of production to foreign capital. What is more, it permitted the precipitate rise in foodstuff prices through the introduction of market mechanisms in a situation in which there were acute food shortages; it continued the process of linking up the bureaucratic economy with market mechanisms, so worsening the position of the majority of society. The government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki should radically break from the policy of the preceding government.

3.) The application of planning, self-management and the market. There should be an awareness that the destiny of the economy rests first and foremost in the hands of the

workers themselves. Only through the self-organisation of the workers and through their initiative can the resistance of the old Party-state apparatus be overcome. Only in this way will the new government be able to realise economic changes that are favourable to the workers.

In accordance with thesis no.1 of the Solidarity programme, adopted by the First Congress of Delegates in 1981:

'We demand a self-managed and democratic reform at every level of management and a new socio-economic system, combining planning, self-management and the market ... The social enterprise should be the

basic organisational unit in the economy. It should be controlled by the workers' council, as a representative of the workforce. The Director should be responsible for operational matters and he should be appointed competitively by the council, which also has the right to dismiss him ... The reform should socialise planning'.

The realisation of a reform understood in this way requires social control over production by self-management organisations of workers, farmers and artisans. These should be concentrated in self management chambers at regional and national level. Such control requires:

- Ensuring identical possibilities for the activity of self-management organisations, trade unions and other bodies representing workers in all sectors of ownership, together with a unified legal system relating to production, employment, trade, working conditions and wages.

- The transformation of working relations within the enterprise in the direction of liberating labour, especially through restricting the numbers of supervisory staff and guaranteeing that they are subject to election.

- The public availability of economic information. Workers' control over the means and goals of production is an indispensable stage on the road to society enjoying full responsibility for the management of the economy. This involves monitoring production, cooperative links between self-managements and Chambers of Self Management (with reports on the state of enterprises and of the economy). This will make possible a national democratic discussion on the principles of central allocation of economic surpluses and an ever-wider satisfaction of the needs expressed by society.

It will not be possible to eliminate the application of market mechanisms of distribution until socio economic development has reached a sufficient level to satisfy needs for particular products. However in conditions of scarcity, decisions about the application of free market mechanisms should be subjected to the will of a society conscious of its needs.

4.) The self defence of workers from the effects of the crisis. The painfulness of the present economic crisis requires that the workers undertake self defence activity:

- Workers' control over prices. The regional structures of Solidarity, in cooperation with, amongst others, commissions of the union on trade and services, must produce a weekly public accounting on the rise in the cost of living. On this basis the introduction of a weekly cost of living bonus should be demanded. The government should resolve to take determined steps to arrest the rise in



Walesa: turning his back on Solidarity's First Congress policies?

prices.

- Social control over the distribution of foodstuffs. In accord with thesis no.7 of the programme of Solidarity, adopted by the First National Congress of Delegates in 1981, in conditions of intense scarcity of foodstuffs, the basic structures of Solidarity should:

'set up a nation-wide network of trade union commissions on the market and food, to coordinate centrally and in cooperation with the organisations of Rural Solidarity'.

The Tadeusz Mazowiecki government should recognise such commissions, regardless of who controls the various stockpiles of consumer goods. They should also refer to the stockpiles controlled by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence.

- Giving a real value to work. Preceding governments began the process of connecting prices on the internal market to the level of world market prices. The share of labour in the gross costs of production has been reduced to a minimum. The Mazowiecki government, in agreement with Solidarity, should carry out a radical reform of the wages system, and first and foremost increase the proportion of labour costs in the overall cost of production to the world average level.

- The right to work. In accord with thesis no.9 of the programme of Solidarity adopted by the First Congress in 1981:

'We are for the universal right to work and against unemployment ... At enterprises anticipating pay-roll cuts, factory commissions should examine the possibilities of shifting employees within the enterprise in such a way as to enable them to get other jobs or to work shorter shifts without loss of pay'.

Like the trade unions in Western Europe, we demand the 35-hour working week.

- The renunciation of debts. As the premier rightly pointed out in his speech to the Sejm:

'The economy is in a deep state of foreign indebtedness'.

Forty nine billion dollars were borrowed from 1971 on, and there still remain thirty nine billion to be paid back. Society cannot be responsible for debts incurred by the nomenklatura governments.

- Full economic and political sovereignty. We should reject the IMF conditions which, if fulfilled, would lead necessarily to a drastic reduction in living standards in Poland as well as the sub-

ordination of Polish economic policy to foreign capital. The military and economic agreements resulting from Poland's membership of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance which restrict sovereignty should also be subject to revision.

5.) The Self Managing Republic. In accord with the programme of Solidarity adopted at the First Congress in 1981:

'We want a real socialisation of the system of management and of the economy, and therefore we are aiming at a Self Managing Poland'.

- Free elections to constituent bodies. The Basic Law must be an expression of the conscious free will of society. The new government should announce free elections to a Legislative Assembly. These elections should be free, equal, secret, direct and universal. Particular attention should be directed to ensuring all candidates receive identical material facilities for conducting their campaigns.

- The question of government. The road to the Self Managing Republic requires the complete liquidation of the nomenklatura authorities. Only a self organised workers' movement is equal to this task. This movement has been enriched by the experience of martial law and underground activity. It should struggle to take power in the workplace and at regional and national level.

(Translated by and available from the International Office of the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution), The Basement, 92, Ladbroke Grove, London W11.)

# Greens and Growth

IN OUR last issue, Steve Roberts argued that the Left in Britain should take on board the main planks of the 'Green' programme. Here PHIL HEARSE argues that the issue of economic growth is central to any dialogue between socialists and the Greens.

No socialist could be anything other than delighted by the fact that the anti-nuclear and anti-NATO Greens have replaced the pro-nuclear SLD and SDP as the third party in the opinion polls. The huge amount of media coverage of the Green Party conference is merely confirmation that ecological issues are here to stay as a major factor in politics. But before socialists merely try to 'add on' the Green programme to their own politics, it would be as well to take a critical look at what this programme implies. Creating a 'red-green' alliance might be more difficult than some comrades think.

Support for policies which defend the environment of course goes well beyond the Green Party. The Green Party itself has all the hallmarks of a radical petty bourgeois party, and is criss-crossed by numerous political currents from eco-socialism to the kind of eco-fascism expressed in the writings of Edward Goldsmith, editor of *The Ecologist*.

At the European elections, the 15 per cent of the vote won by the Greens came disproportionately from former Alliance and Tory voters. Sara Parkin's attack at the Green conference on red-green 'parasites', and the insistence of the Green leadership that their party is 'neither right nor left' is an obvious attempt to keep together the Greens new-found electoral constituency.

Opinion polls showed that 94 per cent of the electorate did not know what the Greens stand for. At a General Election they are likely to gain a much reduced vote, both because the Tories will point out vigorously that this is an anti-NATO party, and because under the present electoral system the Greens can't form the government.

But whether Green 'speakers' like Sara Parkin and David Icke like it or not, the demands of the Green Party are incompatible with the needs of British capitalism and the big transnational corporations. Objectively the Green Party is a radical party, but evidently not a party of the labour movement. In fact, the British Greens – unlike their German counterparts formed on the basis of the peace movement mobilisation and including hundreds of former cadres of left wing organisations – are on the right of the international Green movement.

The Green Party in Britain has emerged in its present form because of the slowness with which the labour movement has responded to

the ecological crisis. The dual task for socialists now is to work out a socialist response to that crisis, and to attempt to form an alliance with those sections of the ecological movement, inside and outside the Green Party on specific issues, and – on a more permanent basis – with those Greens who agree on a socialist solution to the ecological crisis.

Only the most Neanderthal socialists (like the Revolutionary Communist Party in *Living Marxism*) now argue that the ecological crisis is a myth. The scientific evidence of global warming being linked to 'greenhouse' gasses like carbon dioxide and synthetic complex fluorocarbons like CFCs is irrefutable. This is just the most dramatic and potentially catastrophic form of environmental degradation which has effected not only the capitalist countries, but also the deformed workers states (sometimes more savagely).

It is impossible to tell whether the damage to the ozone layer has now gone so far that it is irreversible. We do not know whether we can prevent the catastrophe of violent climatic changes and the gradual melting of the poles. But since socialism requires a planet for the human race to live on we have to work on the assumption that the earth can be saved. If it can be, then it can only be done on the basis of the kind of international planning and regulation which only international socialism can provide. Ecological concerns naturally come up against the interests of both capitalism and the bureaucracy in the stalinist-ruled workers states. The most consistent Greens are also socialists.

It is the issue of economic growth which is the most controversial issue between Greens and socialists. Many Greens posit a nil-growth or negative growth society. Some even argue for 'de-industrialisation'. While it is obviously true that ecologically damaging industrial and agricultural methods and processes are the prime cause of the environmental crisis, it is not proven that industrialisation itself is incompatible with and environment-friendly economic system.

Overcoming world poverty requires massive economic growth and further industrialisation. Socialism in its full sense – a society of 'abundance' – requires massive economic growth, even in the advanced countries like Britain. It would be quite wrong, for example, to argue that even in a country like Britain (where millions live below the poverty line) economic growth has gone far enough and all that is needed is the abolition of capitalism. The liberation of

human race from drudgery and the slavery of alienated labour is impossible without enormous further economic growth. Indeed, the creation of a society of economic abundance is the centrepiece of any socialist project.

Socialists therefore have to argue for a programme of *ecologically sustainable growth*. Socialist planning would create the basis for the more rational use of existing resources and for the investment needed to find alternatives environmentally damaging industrial processes. There should be no illusions that working through all the necessary changes and alternatives will be any easy process, but there are obvious areas which could be addressed immediately. Transport, for example, is one area where the socialist answer – better, cheaper public transport as an alternative to the millions of private cars – is automatically ecologically preferable.

It seems clear that the type of intensive economic development needed to create the basis for socialism will be based on computerisation and robotisation, which is still in its infancy, despite all the hype about the 'information technology society'. Even under capitalism, though, the application of this technology is becoming more widespread. There is no reason why it should be damaging to the environment.

There is nothing that has yet been discovered in the silicon chip which is destructive to the environment. Provided that alternative energy sources to fossil fuels and nuclear power can be found, there is no reason why we cannot build a society based on 'automation plus workers control', opening the way towards international socialism. But still, the implementation of an environment-friendly programme of growth *does* presuppose the overthrow of capitalism and the stalinist bureaucracies.

How then should socialists proceed? The strategic task is the fight to win the labour movement to campaigning on environmental issues and reworking the socialist programme in a 'green' direction – which, as we have said, cannot be achieved by trying to 'add on' the Green programme to socialism.

Revolutionary socialists have to try to forge an alliance with 'red greens' inside and outside the Green Party to fight together for a programme of ecologically sustainable socialist planning. The last two decades have shown us that the 'red' programme has to go 'green': but to be implementable in the real world the 'green' programme has to go 'red'.

# No easy remedies for Nicaraguan crisis

## Nicaragua – Dynamics of an Unfinished Revolution

by Alan Benjamin  
(Walnut Publishing, San Francisco, 1989).

Available from *Socialist Outlook* at £5.50 including p&p.

Reviewed by Patrick Baker

This book is a welcome contribution to the debate among socialists around the development of the Nicaraguan revolution. Largely based on primary research and extensive contacts with indigenous social research bodies – particularly the Managua-based ITZTANI institute – the book analyses some of the key aspects of Nicaragua's development since the 1979 revolution.

The author, a leader of the US marxist organisation Socialist Action, is neither an uncritical cheerleader nor a simple commentator. His critical approach has led to unusually sharp polemics from some other US marxists – such as Paul LeBlanc, a leader of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency – who claims, among other things, that 'Socialist Action comrades appear to believe (in contradiction to Trotsky) that a socialist economy can be brought to Nicaragua and solve the country's most pressing problems without the spread of socialist revolution...' (1).

Such a comment is difficult to reconcile with the key concluding passage of the book 'Extending the revolution: Key to Survival', in which the author surveys the other Central

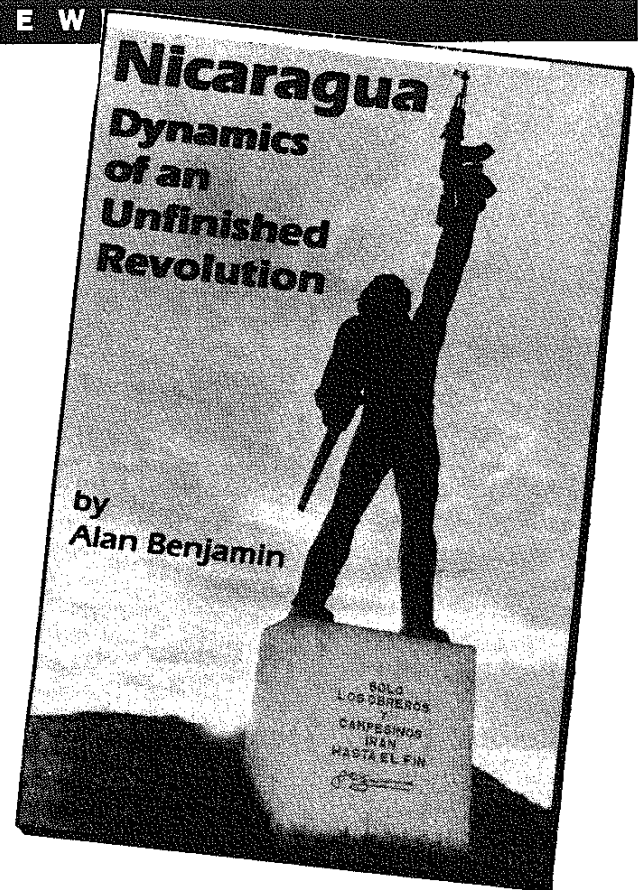
American revolutionary struggles, and concludes that 'The fate of the Nicaraguan revolution is inextricably tied to the outcome of these struggles' (2).

LeBlanc's critique also ignores the main strength of Benjamin's analysis: his detailed account of the Sandinistas' policy of class alliance in their attempt to shore up the ailing Nicaraguan economy, and the political and economic consequences of this policy.

From the beginning, Benjamin recognises the incredible strains and pressures that have faced this tiny, underdeveloped country: the Contra war, financed by the world's strongest imperialist power; the crippling economic consequences of this war, combined with the effects of the economic blockade, and minimal aid from the USSR.

Benjamin does not argue that all these adverse circumstances could be reversed simply through a voluntaristic turn by the FSLN leadership. However, he does argue that in such circumstances the Sandinistas' policy of reliance on, and therefore extensive concessions to, the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, often at the expense of the working class and poor peasantry, has not and will not improve the dire political and economic situation that the Nicaraguan people face. In addition, it has led to some friction between the Sandinistas' base in the rural and urban unions and the leadership.

Benjamin catalogues the various circumstances in which the Sandinistas have turned to such policies: in relation to the



agrarian reform; in response to pressure not only from the USA, but also such 'allies' as the USSR and European Social Democracy; and in relation to the Arias/Esquipulas 'peace plans'.

On each occasion, the Sandinistas' pleas for investment in the Nicaraguan economy on the part of the 'patriotic bourgeoisie' have fallen on deaf ears, and been met instead by decapitalisation and the flight of billions of dollars of capital to Miami.

Yet it is not only on a domestic level that the Sandinistas have, on occasion, chosen some strange friends: they have hailed the re-election of the PRI in Mexico, despite their cancellation of vital oil supplies to Nicaragua; and the crushing of Solidarnosc, though they may have reconsidered when the Kremlin bureaucracy cut their aid programme.

The point of such criticisms is not to wave the Trotskyist *Transitional Programme* at the Sandinistas, but to point out that the bourgeoisie as a class cannot be relied upon – concessions notwithstanding – to shore up an anti-imperialist revolution such

as that in Nicaragua.

Though the use of the market (to one degree or another) is by no means excluded as a tactic, particularly in an underdeveloped country such as Nicaragua, this is not the same as a strategic alliance with the bourgeoisie.

Benjamin's work is informed by the marxist notion that, particularly in such circumstances, it is only the *working class*, in alliance with the poor peasantry, that can be relied upon to free such a country from the hold of imperialism as a part of the struggle for socialism.

As such this book, though fairly short and thus not entirely comprehensive, contains a wealth of information as well as marxist analysis, and will prove very useful to all those in solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution.

### NOTES

(1) Understanding the Nicaraguan revolution – P. LeBlanc, *BIDOM* no. 67, p. 15.

(2) *Dynamics* pp 169-170



# Just some reformist rubbish?

**Livingstone's Labour**  
By Ken Livingstone,  
Published by Unwin  
Hyman, £12.95 hardback

**Reviewed by Mick Woods**

The title of this review is Ken's inscription in my copy. Reformist – yes: rubbish – no. This book represents that very rare creature – an integrated world outlook from a left reformist viewpoint. It deserves to be read and its component parts debated.

Labour lost the last election because it was unable to convince working people that its shopping list for the welfare state could be financed from anywhere but their pay packets. The disarray of the party spokespeople as support collapsed in the last two weeks of that campaign back in 1987 still lingers in the mind.

This weakness must have been reinforced by the memories of those cursed enough to be able to remember such phrases as 'the pound in your pocket has not been devalued' and references to the IMF along with Phase 1, Phase 2, and so on of wage controls. If Labour confines itself to the same old game (capitalism) and plays it by the rules, then many of the Party's natural constituency will opt to back those who invented the game in the first place.

Starting from the need for a radical economic policy, Ken writes convincingly and plausibly on the need for a complete review of policies – economic, social, international and environmental – to empower and create a natural Labour majority, drawn largely from sections of the population at present marginal to the labour movement.

The central theme, strength and weakness of the book is the attempt to analyse the stagnation of the British economy and

prepare an economic strategy which goes beyond classical Keynesianism.

Britain, argues Livingstone, is the embodiment of a nation based on finance capital (much of Lenin's seminal work *Imperialism, Highest Stage of Capitalism* was based on the workings of the British economy. Conscious decisions were taken 150 years ago to use the strength of the British economy (based on the 18th century slave trade) to create large free trade area within the empire. This captive market and source of raw materials cushioned industry and shifted the balance of economic power towards the City.

Both nineteenth and twentieth century investment patterns have been characterised by a flight of capital away from domestic development, which yields a lower return than foreign investment in low wage areas or completely 'unproductive' speculation.

The remedy proposed is to force the City to invest in domestic development, cut defence expenditure to the levels of other West European nations, thereby releasing £9 billion to create jobs via a programme of public works which would stimulate domestic demand. Allied to this would be a programme of skills training and research and development – an area where Britain has lagged behind its competitors since the late nineteenth century.



Livingstone: looking right or left?



Ken and Neil agree Labour is 'the party of production'

Leaving aside such debates as 'can we support any level of arms expenditure?', the question is can such a strategy work? What is absent from the book is the issue of ownership. Nationalisation is usually mentioned in the same sentence as 'Morrisonian bureaucracy'; control is seen in terms of planning agreements at the 'carrot' end, while the heaviest stick proposed is that of punitive levels of taxation.

To this extent the policy is less radical than the Alternative Economic Strategy of the mid 1970s. It is however a good deal more radical than Labour's Policy Review, which represents no challenge at all to the entrenched power of the City.

At root it is a populist appeal which Ken poses – to some extent as great a symptom of the rightward shift as the Policy

Review. Aiming against the domination of finance capital through the Tory government, he counterposes Labour as the party of production – a phrase which brings back more memories of Wilson and 'the white heat of the technological revolution'.

Is industry straining, yearning to get out

from under under the iron heel of finance capital? Or are they mostly members of the same multi-national corporations? At the end of the day, the old question keeps coming back: what about the workers?

The failure to devise a truly socialist economic strategy based on public ownership and workers' control leaves the good intentions of both this book and the Party drifting rootlessly in the wake of a government which has increasingly set its own ruthless agenda for the economy.

While we're in nostalgic mood, we should remember that even the 1974 Labour government came to power promising an irreversible shift in wealth and power in favour of working people. Ken doesn't even go that far.

# Keeping the Dresden fires burning

**SingaLonga WarYears!**

By Max Bygraves  
Parkfield Music, on record,  
video, tape and CD

**Reviewed by David Grant**

There is something truly appalling about this musical compilation of popular songs from the early 1940s. No, it's not just the sound of Max Bygraves' voice. Neither is it only the monotonous tempo blending the first verse and chorus of one song into the next, nor the lyrics – which are a redefinition of the word bland.

If this was wartime entertainment aimed at keeping morale high, it's no wonder everyone hoped it would be over by Christmas. Style and delivery of the music aside, there is something genuinely disturbing about the content of this particular piece of fifty-years-on memorabilia.

In May 1945, JB Priestley wrote of Britain and the British during the previous six years:

'We had a glimpse then of what life might be if men and women freely dedicated themselves, not to their appetites and prejudices, their vanities and fears, but to some great communal task.'

The view, carefully nurtured by the British ruling class, that the war had been a time of joint sacrifice, even egalitarianism, in the face of a common foe, remains the myth it always was. Despite changes brought about by the mass evacuation of inner cities and large scale recruitment of women into the wartime economy, the class structure of Britain, along with its petty-minded chauvinist ideology, remained firmly intact.

The testimony of many children who were evacuated to middle class families that treated them little better than drudges or the racism that greeted black US soldiers stands in sharp contrast

to the sentiments expressed in the *White Cliffs of Dover*.

Nonetheless, the myth of a classless Britain at war is a surprisingly enduring one. The unashamed TV advertising of this compilation, the photo of Max

Bygraves on the front cover – in which he seems to be saying 'It was great wasn't it?' – right down to the song with the chilling title, *Let's Have Another One*, reflect the unchallenged view of what the second world war meant to the British.

The fact that 55 million people died in the carnage, that countless millions were uprooted, smashed physically or mentally is never even hinted at. In fact, it was all rather civilised, even fun. Sales, not protest, greeted the release of this tawdry little collection. Why is this?

The crisis of humanity being, in essence, a crisis of proletarian leadership, is a notion that supplies one answer to this question, although doubtless Max Bygraves could turn this into a mind-numbing concept album too.

The first world war, fought between 1914-18, was an inter-imperialist war in which the working classes clearly had no interest in participating. The left knew this because Lenin, with the authority of the Russian Revolution behind him, said so. A gun was a metal tube with a worker at each end. The first world war became known as the imperialist war.

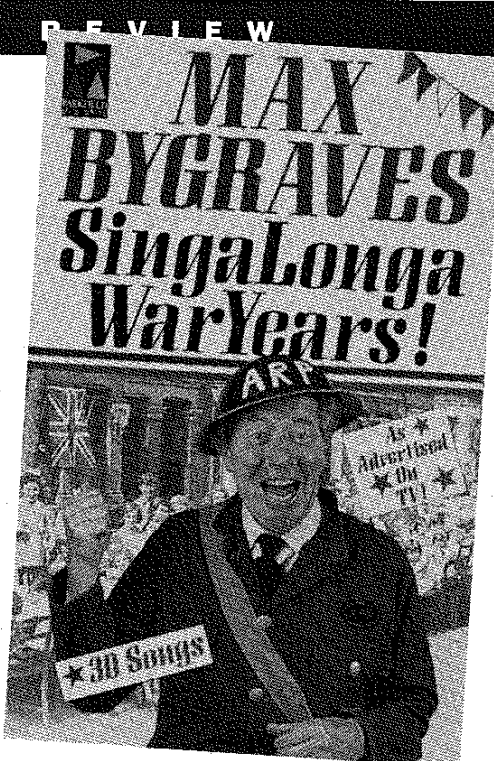
But only Trotsky called the war of 1939-45 the second imperialist war. It became seen as the struggle against 'fascist' Germany, or, according to Stalin,

(after the end of the Stalin-Hitler Pact in 1941) the struggle to defend socialist Russia. There was no suggestion from the Communist Parties that *this* inter-imperialist war should be turned into a civil war against the bourgeoisie.

The class struggle at home was suspended to fight the Nazi threat. Class collaboration gave the Communist Party its biggest ever membership in Britain and Labour swept to power in the 1945 General Election. With the ideological ground effectively unchallenged, it is not hard to see why sugar-coated, sanitised songs met with a success they have retained ever since.

But then perhaps it is unfair to heap yet another crime onto the head of Joseph Stalin, even though this is seemingly the most popular new board game in Moscow at the moment.

Max Bygraves may not be entirely Stalin's fault: he could, after all, be just another one of those aberrations peculiar to Britain's class structure and history of class struggle. Or maybe a phenomenon, like fascism, which the ruling classes only make use of when all other political options have been exhausted. It hardly needs to be added that our slogan for both should be 'Never Again'.



## Days of earnest awakening

**Dead Poets' Society**  
Film starring Robyn Williams

**Reviewed by Valerie Coultas**

Dead Poets' Society is one of the few recent films that I've seen twice. Set in a disciplinary American preparatory school in the early 1960s it portrays the earnest awakening of a group of 17 year old boys, as they are tutored in poetry to 'seize the day' by unorthodox teacher John Keating, played by Robyn Williams.

The pupils decide to re-establish the Dead Poets' Society (a creation of John Keating when he was a pupil at the school) and the poetry reading sessions inspire each boy in turn to take more control over their lives.

Neil, among the most passionate and responsive to his new teacher, defies an overbearing and ambitious father's instructions not to participate in extra-curricular activities by playing Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The angry father decides to remove Neil from the school, and Neil, unable to foresee a future where he will be able to choose his own way of life, makes the ultimate gesture of free will and shoots himself with his father's gun.

The film ends memorably as Keating, scapegoated by the school establishment and the parents for Neil's suicide, is saluted at he leaves the classroom by his ex-pupils.

Both Neil's suicide and the final scene illustrate the main theme of the film, which is to show that the individual has free will and that men (sic!) should 'take the walk less travelled by others'. 'Only in their dreams can men be truly free', argues Keating in a conversation with another more conformist colleague.

The film has been criticised for its individualistic philosophy. But I didn't take this as the main point. The individual charisma and non-conformity of the teacher, wittily played by Robyn Williams, does inspire the pupils



Francis Duhamel/Touchstone

*Earnest scene from Dead Poets Society*

to organise themselves in the Dead Poets' Society and gain strength from this. The mini-rebellion at the end has a political edge to it. The boys are standing up for justice and against injustice in their school. The suggestion is that at this point the school has lost control over them and will be unable to punish them effectively.

The actors, scenery and dialogue capture the enthusiasms and insecurities of the young men well. *Dead Poets' Society* recreates the cultural revolt of the beatnik era and will strike a chord with those who were also at school at that time. But I still couldn't really work out why John Keating chose to go back and teach in that particular school.

## SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

### Teachers' unions hold the key

I've been reading Ken Jones analysis of education since the days of Radical Education in the early 70's, so it was with some interest that I turned to the 'Tory Classroom Offensive' (SO 18).

As usual, much of his analysis is to the point. But I felt that the question 'which way forward?' is not as sharply posed as it might have been.

For example, Jones is correct to argue that the national curriculum, so far, seems to have been more of a victory for best practice in the teaching profession than Tory ideology. But we cannot assume that MacGregor will be content with this. The interference with the proposals of the History Working Group is probably a sign of things to come. Nor can we rely, for a strategy, on the subversion of the various Tory 'reforms' from within. This may

turn out to be possible of course, but much will depend on other factors.

So, for example, Jones is right to suggest that trade unions are not enough to deal with the challenges that face us. But trade union organisation will be the core and the key. Links with the community, with pupils and parents will be best built from a position of confidence engendered by successful union organisation.

Equally, the Labour Party at local at national level should be pressured. But we shouldn't be too optimistic about the probable results. At a local level, (Richard Hatcher please note), the Labour Party, whatever the intention, are managers who will have to manage the Tory measures.

Secondly, to hope that the Labour party nationally will suddenly start to pay attention to questions of content and control in education, as opposed to provision, seems rather to ignore what Kinnock is up to with the policy review.

Resistance to Macgregor and change for the better can be achieved. But they will have to come from below, and through, initially, the unions. Surely one of the lasting lessons of the radical education of the 1960s and 1970s is that the system cannot really be worked with any lasting success. To defend and advance we will have to rely on the forces we ourselves can build.

**Keith Flett  
Tottenham**

### Think again on PR!

In his thorough piece on 'Ten years in the life of the Labour Party' (SO 18), Pete Firmin maintains that in 1981/2, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) was 'caught in the trap of its own policy of conference sovereignty'.

It is difficult to understand why he uses the word 'trap'. Conference sovereignty is the bedrock of a socialist party, and this means we cannot pick and choose which decisions we will follow.

Conference sovereignty is now under its greatest ever attack as a consequence of the GMB-sponsored proposals outlined by Jane Wells in her article (also in SO 18). Having a consistent record on this issue, CLPD is in a better position to campaign against these proposals.

Finally, the article by Jane Wells gave a good insight into the agenda of the Labour Party Annual Conference, and correctly pointed out that it is the right who are organising for PR within the Party. Unfortunately, in contradistinction to this, the last paragraph contained the usual ritualistic plea in favour of PR.

It would be helpful if *Socialist Outlook* would set out in detail why it is at this particular moment in the class struggle – when the LCC and the right wing (eg EETPU and AEU) within the Labour Party are organising for PR; when the bourgeois press (and *Marxism Today*) have had a co-ordinated campaign for PR; when this is precisely the lifeline that Owen and the ratbags in the so-called Centre so desperately need – that at this very moment the supporters of *Socialist Outlook* should be so willing to assist them in this enterprise.

Surely those who purport to be marxists should assess institutions like PR in terms of the existing concrete social conditions, not in terms of some long term a-historical project?

For historical reasons, the class divisions in this country are clearer than elsewhere in western capitalism, and voting patterns reflect this. There is a party for the ruling class and a party for the working class. PR would undermine class-based voting, would massively strengthen the so-called centre parties, and would prevent a socialist party from forming a majority government.

Socialist Outlook should go back to the drawing-board on this one!

**Pete Willsman  
CLPD**

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