

Workers power

INSIDE

- Why Thatcher had to go
- A balance sheet of the Thatcher years
- Victor Serge

British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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Don't wait for an election!

Stop him now!

THATCHER DECLARED herself "thrilled" at the election of John Major. It is easy to see why. The new Prime Minister is committed 100% to the politics which have gripped working people by the throat for the last eleven years. This is the man who had Thatcher's backing, who was warmly praised by Tebbit and Cecil Parkinson.

No effort was spared to show John Major as a "man of the people", a man who has known what it is to be unemployed, who never went to university let alone Oxbridge.

Don't be fooled. John Major is not one of us; Major is a Thatcherite.

As Chancellor he has helped thousands of others to know what it's like to be unemployed. As Thatcher's poodle he has supported policies that have denied thousands of working class youth a place in university or poly.

Major stands by every one of Thatcher's attacks on our jobs, services, living standards and organisations. He has rejected some of Thatcher's fourth term schemes only in order to safeguard the victories the Tories scored over the working class in the first three terms.

Major takes office, just as Thatcher did in 1979, at the start of an economic recession. As Chancellor he was the last person to admit that recession had

started. As Prime Minister he will be the first to make sure that workers and their families pay the price of getting out of the recession.

Kinnock and the TUC have no intention of fighting Major's plans. They have been mesmerised by Thatcher for eleven

A situation we can and must turn around

years. Now they are trembling like frightened rabbits at the thought of a new face, and a Gulf War, delivering the Tories another term of office.

Having spent years sabotaging resistance to the Tories, the Labour leadership will devote the coming months to pushing the line that workers should sit tight and "wait for a Labour Government".

The greatest tragedy of Thatcher's tearful departure was that it was not mass workers' action

which forced Thatcher to resign. It was a ruling class coup which nailed her.

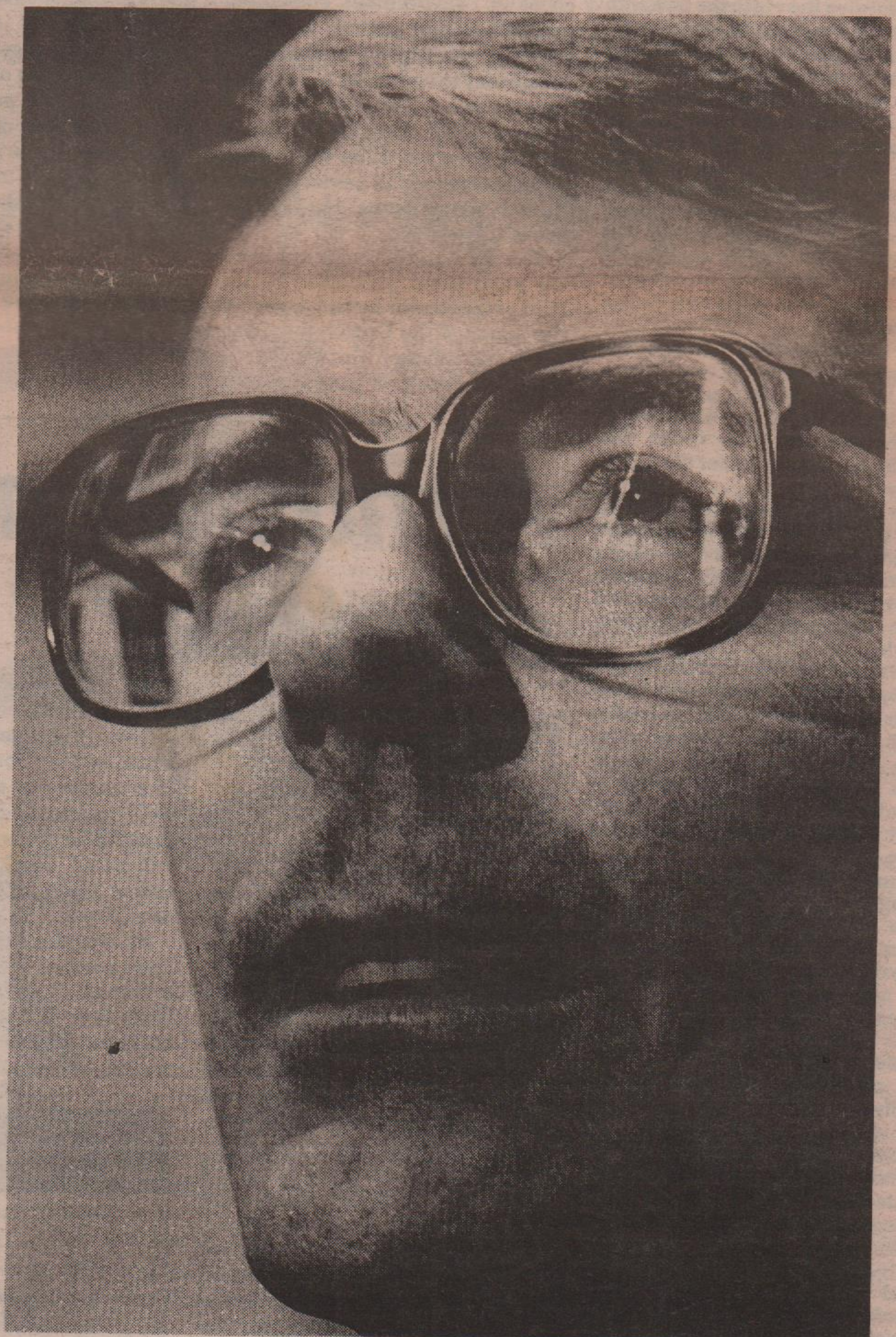
Of course, they were frightened that mass resentment would defeat them at the polls. But the failure of the anti-Poll Tax struggle up to now, like the failure of most strikes and struggles of the last decade, meant that they were in no immediate danger of being defeated on the streets.

That is a situation we can and must turn around.

Three key elements of the Thatcher third term programme hang in the balance: the Poll Tax, the NHS reforms and the attack on education.

Unless we resist them by mass direct action all the Tories' promises to "review" these measures will fall far short of what we need.

We don't want to review them: we want to smash them. But to do that the working class has to stop being the spectator of events, watching politi-



cians and pundits on TV make the running.

Before the new cabinet settles down to its new agenda the working class must spell out its own:

- mass strike action to smash the Poll Tax
- mass resistance to the Tory plans for health and education
- pay rises well above

inflation; cut the hours, not the jobs

- workers' action to stop the war: break the blockade, Troops out of the Gulf!

Age of consent?

EARLIER THIS month the lower house of the Dutch parliament passed a measure which effectively lowered the age of consent to 12. Although sex for youth up to the age of 16 is still illegal, the new law says that unless there is a complaint no action will be taken.

The measure goes some way toward allowing young people to have sexual relationships without the fear of prosecution. But a prosecution can still be made if the parents object.

Nevertheless, the Dutch decision does serve to highlight the assumptions upon which age of consent laws are based. It highlights the appalling situation that still exists in this country with regard to attitudes towards children's rights and youth sexuality.

In Britain sex between consenting partners is illegal for all those under 16 and for those under 21 in the case of gay men.

This probably seems natural and eternal to most people yet until 1885 there was no age of consent as such, only a minimum age for legal marriage—12 for girls and 14 for boys. That year intercourse with a girl was made illegal, even with her consent, ostensibly as a measure to stamp out child brothels.

Of course, child prostitution did not stop with the passing of this law but it did give the state the power to interfere in the lives of young people. It enabled parents to use the law against their own offspring.

The popular view that the age of consent law protects young people is ill-founded. In fact the law legitimises the view that youth under 16 have no sexuality. Therefore counselling, information and advice are not easily available to them. The very things which could equip them to express themselves through, and exert control over, their own bodies are denied.

Far from protecting young people the age of consent oppresses them. It is invoked against people who have both consented. Young people can be prosecuted or taken into care for having sex under the age of consent.

Nor does the law protect children from abuse. The bulk of available evidence suggests that most abuse occurs within the family, committed by fathers, uncles, brothers and other male relatives and family friends.

This fact serves to point up the reality that it is the family itself under capitalism which oppresses youth. The family functions to reproduce present and future generations of worker and do its bit in indoctrinating youth so that capitalist values are instilled as the norm.

Central to this process is denying young people meaningful independence while growing up. Parental and state control over sexuality and its expression are but one part of this oppressive experience.

Real protection for children would arise from fighting for their independence and their release from the constraints imposed by the family.

It would mean applying the laws against rape and sexual assault on an individual basis, with no arbitrarily decided "age" at which youth become able to consent in the eyes of the law.

There is nothing unnatural about child and youth sexuality. They should have the right to control it. Age of consent laws deny this right; they control and oppress rather than enlighten and protect.

They remove the possibility of children having the consciousness or power to be able to defend themselves. The age of consent law should go. In its place we need a positive programme of rights for children and youth under capitalism. ■

MEDIA PUNDITS and politicians from across the parliamentary spectrum have pointed to the release of the Guildford 4 and the now almost certain release of the Birmingham 6 as evidence of the reformable and fundamentally fair nature of the British judicial system. This view turns a conveniently blind eye to the long and difficult campaigns waged on behalf of these prisoners. It also conceals the underlying motives for the British authorities' sudden change of heart in freeing these victims of judicial railroading.

Tories like Northern Ireland Minister, Peter Brooke, are increasingly concerned about the ability of the Haughey government in Dublin to sell the 1987 extradition treaty to its own people. To defuse domestic opposition to the extradition of republican fighters to stand trial in British courts the Irish state needs proof of the reformed character of British justice.

In short, the price of freedom for the Guildford 4 and Birmingham 6 may well be the imprisonment in Britain of Dessie Ellis and others struggling against the British military occupation of the six counties.

Dessie Ellis had staged a five week hunger strike in Portlaoise Prison in the south of Ireland until a court in the "Free State" ordered his extradition to Britain. He had already served most of an eight year sentence on a series of explosives charges when an Irish magistrate court issued warrants the day before his scheduled release.

He appeared in a Birmingham court on 14 November, emaciated and wheelchair bound, to face a remand hearing on a charge of conspiracy to endanger life at some time between January 1981 and October 1983. During that very period, however, Ellis was either in police custody or under Special Branch surveillance. He is a victim of a frame-up.

The Birmingham remand hearing gave some indication of the kind of treatment he can expect at the hands of the British judiciary. When his solicitor, Gareth Pierce, sought to speak for him, the mag-



Dublin march for Dessie Ellis; now British workers must take up the fight

Release Dessie Ellis!

istrate told her, "...that's enough from you" before walking out of the court as she spoke.

Ellis' alleged co-conspirator, Danny McNamee, is currently serving 25 years after his conviction based on a prosecution case which consisted of nothing more than three finger prints—one on a battery, alleged to be part of an IRA bomb, another on masking tape supposedly attached to an arms cache and the third on another piece of masking tape. On two occasions the prosecution altered the charges against McNamee, the second time on the final day of his trial after both

prosecution and defence had made their closing speeches.

A fierce witch-hunt of McNamee in the press, led predictably by the Sun, accompanied his trial. A front page headline screamed: "Blood on the Hands of the IRA's Evil Master Bomber".

McNamee's appeal is due to be heard later this month. His treatment to date is undoubtedly an anticipation of what awaits Dessie Ellis in the months ahead. The Ellis case is obviously significant in its own right and merits the support of British workers committed to the defence of democratic rights as well as the Irish people's

right to self-determination.

This extradition, however, is likely to be just the start of an increasingly close collaboration between the British and Irish states under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the 1987 extradition treaty, leading to many more Irish republicans facing the rough justice of British courts and jails. ■

Danny McNamee Support Group
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P O Box 447
London SW9 8BW

A mutant ninja solstice?

MARX DESCRIBED religion as the heart of a heartless world and the soul of a soulless condition. This is truer of Christmas than any other religious festival.

It is a repository for all the qualities, all the hopes and aspirations that individuals and society at large cannot and do not fulfill the rest of the year.

It is the festival of the child for a world where millions of children are malnourished and mistreated. It is the festival of the idealised family in a world where the real family is split asunder by oppression, anxiety and poverty.

It is the festival of the home in a society where large numbers are homeless or live in squalid slums. It is a time of celebration and good cheer when many more than usual seek escape through suicide; what a testimony to the yawning gap between the warm Dickensian dream and the cold bare reality of Christmas.

Another is the televised sight of London's down and outs being given a bed and Christmas fare for two or three days and then dispatched to the January cold of the bull ring beneath Waterloo Bridge.

This year's celebrations will have an even greater element of unconscious satire. Doubtless the army of crusaders in the Saudi desert will be televised singing carols and praying for "Peace on earth, Goodwill to all men"; all men that is except Iraqis in general and Saddam Hussein in particular.

Meanwhile, back home working class parents will be whipped into a frenzy of spending to "prove" their love and affection for their children. Pillow cases full of assorted toys, clothes and sweets

whose only real attraction is that they have Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles stamped, embossed or painted all over them.

Spend, spend, spend! Consume at all costs! The advertising industry thunders out its message. Nor does relief come with 25 December; the January sales and summer holidays are on us before the pud has digested.

But with the hangover come the government spokesmen, the clerics and the charity fundraisers. All of them are ready to pounce on us

to denounce the masses for their "self-indulgence".

For the government too much spending on credit proves the need for wage restraint and higher interest rates to punish us for our excesses. The clergy condemn the commercialisation of Christmas and mourn the loss of its spiritual significance. The registered charities guilt-trip the unwary revelers, making them feel responsible for the hospital wards closed by government cuts and the famines in Africa caused by IMF strictures.

So would socialists—like Cromwell's puritan followers or Robespierre's Jacobins seek to suppress Christmas entirely? Not at all!

Karl Marx urged us to pluck the imaginary flowers of religion from the chain that binds humanity "not so that man will wear the chain without any fantasy or consolation but so that he will shake off the chain and pick the living flower". We should reject the sickly sentimental paraphernalia of Christmas and use the mid-winter holiday to reconstitute our minds and bodies for the struggles ahead; struggles to build a world which needs no special season of peace and goodwill because wars and social conflict have faded into memory.

Marx and Engels themselves enjoyed the old pagan high-spirits of the mid-winter festival. There is no better recommendation to us.

A Happy Winter Solstice to all our readers! ■

OUT NOW!

the middle east:
repression and
revolt

a workers power pamphlet 75p inc p&p

Why she went

IN THE end it was Thatcher's closest allies who convinced her to go. For the sake of the Party they left the proverbial "revolver on the table". The trigger was Europe, and the bullet was the Poll Tax.

Europe alone would not have been enough to finish Thatcher off.

Surrounded and outmanoeuvred, presented with threats and ultimatums from within the Cabinet, it had been possible to drag her towards Europe. They no doubt planned to keep her until after the next election when she would make way for a more pro-European Thatcherite "consolidator".

But the debates on Europe took place in the context of continuing opposition to the Poll Tax. Visible anger and growing resentment against this hated tax threatened to break whole sections of the electorate away from Tory loyalty. The loss of support in the vital marginals of the Midlands and the North was set to unseat dozens of backbench Tories.

Howe's resignation acted as a catalyst. All the discontent of the Tory backbenchers was channelled into the leadership contest and there found clear expression in competing programmes for the ruling class and diverse recipes for saving the Party from electoral annihilation.

The Poll Tax was not the only cause of backbench grumbling. The whole third term was going badly for the Tories. The Poll Tax, the NHS market reforms, the restructuring of education and the privatisation of the utilities—all this had the smell of pointless radicalism.

All this, plus the fact that the 1990s started with an economic recession and high inflation added up to a profound crisis of Thatcherism. The electoral base of Thatcherism, fashioned out of council house sales, rising wages, cheap shares and low interest rates was fast eroding under the impact of crippling

mortgages, falling stock markets, and rising unemployment.

No worker in their right mind will lament Thatcher's demise. But the tragedy is that it was an inner circle of Tory slimeballs who finished her off, not the mass of workers whose lives she has trodden on for eleven years.

From the steel strike, through the miners strike to the anti-Poll Tax struggle the opportunities were there to finish her off. But compared to the bosses' warrior queen the workers' movement had only cowards and simpletons for leaders. Our movement staggered from one senseless defeat to another.

Thatcher went because working class bitterness threatened to sweep away the Tories at the next election. And with her disappear the plans for more nightmarish Thatcherite policies: tolls on the motorways, the replacement of state benefits by private insurance, and the privatisation of the last 30% of state owned industry.

But Thatcher has resigned to save Thatcherism itself, or at least the four fifths of it already cemented into place as the political consensus of the 1990s.

Anti-union laws, privatised industry, means tested benefits, the strangulation of local government and the "marketising" of public services. All these remain firmly embedded not only in the programme of new Tory leader. They have become orthodox in the Labour party as well.

The assaults on the working class do not end with the fall of the arch enemy.

There is nothing to stop the Tories healing their wounds, uniting the Party and re-modelling the government to include all the factions inside if workers only sit back and watch the parliamentary puppet show.

Having gathered their composure the Tories will

EDITORIAL



draw on the legacy of Thatcherism and set about plotting a course out of the recession at the expense of the working class. Her anti-union laws will be used to stop generalised resistance to factory closures; her censorship laws will be enforced to isolate the struggle of the anti-unionist population in the Six Counties; her riot police will batter down resistance in the inner cities.

Men in grey suits will not save us from the coming onslaught. Only united and determined workers' action can do that. We have to make every effort in the next weeks and months to make it happen before the Tories strike back. ■

IN THE drama of Thatcher's downfall, Neil Kinnock has played a bit part. The sound-bites concentrated on his admiration for her courage and determination, his contempt for her assassins, and a pseudo-constitutional complaint about the Tories getting rid of their leader in this way.

At a time when millions of workers and their families will have experienced nothing but delight at the downfall of the most anti-working class British Prime Minister this century, Kinnock concentrated on paying her courteous compliments.

But it should come as no surprise that Neil Kinnock fails to give voice to the gut feelings of the victims of Thatcherism, of the millions who suffered unemployment, and decaying social services.

Since he replaced Michael Foot in 1983, Kinnock has only led one thing: an enormous and panic-stricken retreat in the face of Thatcherism.

All the modest and partial reforms the left fought for and won in the years 1979-81 were jettisoned in the name of realism. Promises to restore the savage cuts in health and education were junked. Re-nationalisation of the privatised industries and services were declared to be "not a priority". Privatisation of council houses was accepted in the name of winning the "home owning democracy" for Labour. The most difficult task, the scuttling of Labour's commitment to nuclear disarmament took a little longer but it happened all the same.

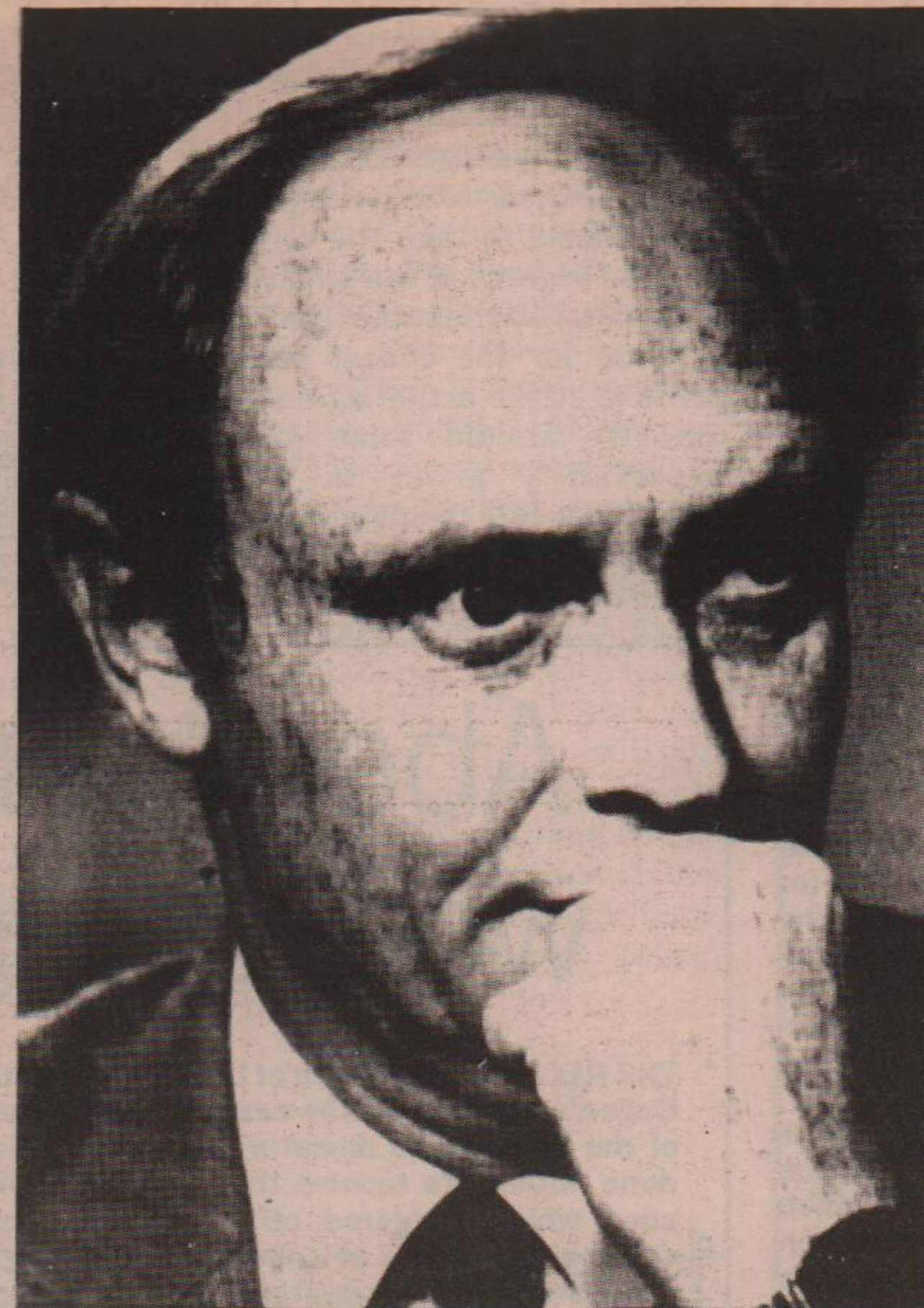
This surrender to the Thatcher "revolution" was carried through in the name of "winning power". Power eluded him in 1987, despite the soft focus cliff-top walks, balloons and roses. Yet electoral defeat only strengthened Kinnock's hold on the party. It proved the need for even more fundamental concessions, he argued.

Under Kinnock Labour's basic principles became: no spending that the bosses cannot afford; no re-nationalisations, let alone new nationalisations.

Labour accepts the market economy. It gives few promises to the working class, except those that can be paid for out of "future growth", or "savings due to efficiency".

In short Labour accepts the profit system and to patch it up Kinnock is prepared to repeat all the cant phrases of Thatcherism. No wonder that amongst the paeans of praise that the millionaire media are singing to Thatcher is her "conversion" of

Why he has to go



the Labour Party back into the recognisable party of Gaitskell, Wilson and Callaghan.

Kinnock, like these gentlemen before him, has offered the Labour Party to the CBI and the City as a ratchet mechanism to prevent any roll back of the bosses' gains while "their own" party is out of office.

But this was all predicated on Thatcher and the doctrinaire neo-liberals hanging on to power. With Thatcher's fall, Kinnock and his advisers face the alarming prospect that a new Tory leader will steal his clothes.

Suddenly Labour's easy run against Thatcher has disappeared. Instead of a leader staggering un-

der the burden of the Poll Tax, high interest and mortgage rates, and rumbled as the butcher of the health service and schools Kinnock will have to face a Tory leader who can throw off most of these liabilities.

The Labour leadership goes into an election campaign with no distinct programme for the bosses. After the seven years of Kinnock's leadership it has not even the pretence of a programme for the working class.

The demise of Thatcher has left the Labour front bench visibly disorientated and dismayed. That is what led to the sorry spectacle of Kinnock and co. trying to prop her up in her final hours by maintaining a confidence debate which would rally her party behind her. That is what prompted their tributes and testimonials.

The new Tory lead in the opinion polls may prove a mirage. But if Labour's lead shrinks or disappears, if Kinnock takes a pasting at the despatch box, then it could be Labour that faces a leadership crisis before the elections.

And so it should. The present crisis of the Tory party is an open invitation for workers to launch an attack on all fronts. That fightback would expose the biggest fraud of the Thatcher revolution—that the working class and the Labour movement is down and out for the count.

If Labour can recapture "power" only at the price of copying a Thatcher or a Heseltine then this will be no "power" for the working class.

Real power comes from organisation and struggle by the great mass of working people themselves. It is to be found on that part of the class battlefield where the rank and file trade blows with the bosses and their state machine—not on the green leather benches, and across the despatch box where the party leaders trade compliments. ■

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POLL TAX

Now kill it off!

THATCHER IS sunk. The organised resistance to the poll tax, combined with massive resentment amongst those who have paid, clearly contributed to the crisis which brought down Thatcher.

But the poll tax itself is still in place.

The Tories are now set to try and win back electoral support through some tinkering with the levels of the tax, but the central injustices will remain unless the anti-poll tax movement turns the Tory retreat into a full scale Tory defeat!

We must use the advantage gained from the Tory crisis to build up the movement again, to take to the streets, build industrial action and smash the poll tax once and for all.

Workers will still face crippling poll tax bills next spring, more cuts in council services with tax capping and job losses and low pay for many local government workers as the councils try to keep the tax low.

Snooping

The promise of reform of the tax will not stop the bailiffs snooping round our estates or keep the summonses away. And a lower tax with a wider safety net for the low paid will still not get rid of the injustice of a tax that makes everyone contribute equally to local government spending regardless of income.

The Tories' "community charge" was the final blow in a ten year

offensive against the independence and spending power of local authorities, especially those under Labour control in the inner cities.

That offensive has seen local authorities stripped of an estimated £46 billion in central government grants, legally obliged to sell off prime council houses and caving into Tory legislation such as "rate-capping" which meant the loss of nurseries, libraries and a whole range of leisure facilities.

One possible "reform" of the poll tax from the Tories would remove the education service from the control of locally elected councillors, thus sweeping away one piece of local democratic accountability.

The Labour Party and trade union leaders argue that we should wait until the next general election when Labour will deliver on its promise to scrap the poll tax.

But even if Kinnock was as good as his word there would be no guarantee of increased funding for local services. The burden of maintaining or even improving education, housing and welfare provision would still fall onto the shoulders of ordinary working class people.

Mess

Kinnock will not ask the bosses to pick up the tab for the social mess their system creates.

We dare not be lulled into a false sense of security over the months ahead. The kangaroo courts will continue to rubber stamp liability orders and deny McKenzie's friends. The bailiffs will not stop seizing personal property with the connivance of the police unless we organise to stop them with pickets and defence squads.

For all these reasons fighters against the poll tax should redouble their efforts to take the struggle into the organised working class.

We must up the stakes and wage a battle for the widest possible political strike action against the tax. We should seize on the opportunity given to us by Thatcher's fall to mobilise trade unionists against the poll tax as never before. ■

there they want more "action on the ground", but they have never disputed the "mass non-payment can win" position since their lightning conversion to it eighteen months ago.

At this conference they succeeded in diverting attention and dividing the opposition to Militant. The SWP did put up an alternative leadership slate. But no-one else could vote for them because no-one knew who they were or what they stood for as opposed to the Militant leadership! Their candidate for communications officer, Jonathan Davies, has done so little in the campaign in his borough, Wandsworth, that he managed not one local nomination!

After a day of reducing the conference to a debate about the date of a demo the SWP lost the vote for every position they stood for. They will no doubt exit from the local campaigns once again, offering no way forward for activists who want to really drive home the blows and force the Tories to scrap the tax altogether.

The conference failed to bring the Militant leadership to account for its treacherous behaviour over the past year, including their scandalous response to the Trafalgar Square demonstration, and their squandering of the mass movement that had developed against the tax.

The conference did pass a number of positive resolutions, including those from Tooting APTU which commit the Fed leadership to organising defence squads on the estates, actively campaigning for strike action against wage and benefit arrestment, and for unofficial action to defend workers victimised as a result of action against the poll tax. But with the overall policy and the leadership unchanged we will have to battle to get these implemented.

The failure to change course towards a strategy that could really defeat the Tories on the poll tax is a major set back for the campaign. The antics of Militant and the SWP in ensuring this outcome is yet another example of their inability to lead any kind of successful working class struggle. ■

FEDERATION

Complacency reigns

THE ALL Britain Anti Poll Tax Federation held its second conference within a week of Thatcher's downfall. The new Prime Minister is committed to "reforming" the tax. It was a perfect opportunity for activists to get together and hammer out a battle plan to turn the Tory retreat on the tax into a rout.

But was this opportunity taken? No. The two major groups within the Federation, Militant and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), ensured that the chance was missed.

What should the conference have done? The 3D slate was standing against the Militant dominated leadership on a platform of opposition to the "civil disobedience" orientation of the Fed's "mass non-payment and win" campaign. 3D called for "combining mass non-payment with mass trade union action backed by occupations, demonstrations and actions against cuts."

We needed a discussion on how to build such action within the working class, how to resist wage arrestments and cuts in services through massive strike action by local government and other workers. A new leadership should have been elected committed to building such action. And there should have been a critical balance sheet of the Fed's failure over the last 12 months. The SWP, rather than support the 3D opposition and call for a different strategy to defeat the tax, wasted the time of its 300 or more delegates arguing that "we need a demonstration on 8 December to finish the Tories off."

Whatever the conference was discussing—wage arrestment, the Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign, council cuts, the lessons of the Greenwich strike—all the SWP could say was "lets call a demo".

But it will take a lot more than a demo to finish the Tories off. Trafalgar square was one of the biggest and most militant demos of the century, but because Militant were able to demobilise the action over the summer it did not bring the Tories down. In fact the SWP have never offered an alternative strategy to the Militant line. Here and



Militant Maerdy: families supporting the Great Strike

Maerdy's inglorious end

BY PETE ASHFORD

MAERDY COLLIERY, the last pit in the Rhondda valley, closes at the end of this month. Its closure is symbolic not just for the South Wales NUM, but for the national union and the labour movement as a whole. The media will descend like vultures on the pit village, eager to contrast Maerdy's militant past with the apparently passive present.

The NUM lodge committee are helping the media circus by staging a final "carnival" at the pit, followed by a march to the Workmans' Institute after the last shift ends on 21 December. The day will be more of a funeral for the South Wales NUM than a festival. Not surprisingly, many miners will not take part, out of disgust towards the region's leadership since the defeat of the 1984-'85 strike.

Since its merger with Tower colliery in the nearby Cynon valley Maerdy has faced the threat of closure. The last coal from the pit emerged four years ago. Before World War II the Rhondda valley's 50 pits had employed over 70,000 miners.

The Maerdy lodge had continued to exist after the merger with Tower but only in name. Its virtual collapse was in sad contrast to its record during the Great Strike when it was one of only five mines—all in South Wales—where no-one scabbed. The Maerdy lodge sent strikers to picket in other coalfields. Maerdy's reputation as "little Moscow" dates from the 1926 General Strike when its

geographical isolation combined with its cosmopolitan community and the crucial influence of the fledgling Communist Party (CP) to shape its radical politics.

The lodge included such well-known CP members as Horner and Ablett whose leadership put Maerdy at the front of such initiatives as the Miners Minority Movement and the Unemployed Workers' Movement. Maerdy's miners also supported campaigns for women's access to contraception, and backed the young Indian workers' movement and the anti-Franco side in the Spanish Civil War.

While elements of these militant traditions survived into the 1980s the lodge leadership became more and more involved with the attempt to end the strike through an "orderly return to work". Behind the scenes lodge committee members like Arfan Evans were working hand-in-glove with Kim Howells (now a Kinnockite MP) and the then South Wales President, Emlyn Williams, to call off the strike. This back-to-work campaign at once caught the eye of the bosses' media and did much to sap the morale of strikers in other areas.

There were genuine geological reasons behind British Coal's (BC) decision to close Maerdy, but the circumstances surrounding the closure including no offer of transfers to other jobs in the industry (previous BC practice) owe much to the leadership's grovelling to BC since 1985. The mounting toll of pit closures in South Wales has fed demoralisation and apathy, reflected most recently in the vote to reject an overtime ban in pursuit of the national pay claim.

The South Wales leadership had done its best to ensure a low poll and a no vote, threatening to break from the NUM if the vote had gone in favour of action. This was largely bluff by Dutfield and Rees who would probably lose their posts without the financial backing of Sheffield, but it had the desired effect. Now Welsh miners face the prospect of a nine hour day and six day working week in exchange for an 11% wage rise. The alternative on offer from BC is a nominal rise of 8%, a real wage cut.

The history of Maerdy over the course of six decades offers valuable lessons—both positive and negative—for future struggles. For today's working class militants its past should be a source of inspiration not a quaint museum piece of the good old days. Its ignominious passing shows only too well the disastrous path charted for the working class by Kinnock's Labour Party and the new realists in the union bureaucracy. ■

Aberdeen oil workers' tour

THE RECENT publication of Lord Cullen's enquiry into the causes of the Piper Alpha disaster has done nothing to resolve the issues which triggered off this summer's wave of one-day strikes and rig occupations in the North Sea oil industry.

The Cullen report addresses only one aspect of the demands advanced by supporters of the Oil Industry Liaison Committee (OILC), which co-ordinated the industrial action. It makes no mention of union recognition for offshore workers, although more than 700 men and women remain victimised, locked out without compensation and with very little support from the official unions.

OILC activists remain absolutely committed to the battle against

the multi-national oil bosses and their own union bureaucrats.

A group of oil workers from Aberdeen will be addressing trade union and Labour Party branch meetings as well as appearing on college campuses in London between 3 and 7 December.

The tour, jointly sponsored by the Socialist Movement and the Solidarity Network, has received numerous invitations from London workplaces but the schedule is not yet full. For further information about the tour ring John or Mark at the Hackney Trade Union Support Unit on 071 241 3799. ■

Donations to the OILC should be sent c/o Criterion Buildings 52 Guild St, Aberdeen, Scotland, AB1 2NB.

EDUCATION

Students fight back

BY GR McCOLL

NO SECTOR of the post-1945 welfare state emerged unscathed from eleven years of Thatcherism. The systems of further and higher education were certainly no exceptions—and the damaging legacy continues.

The injection of ever greater doses of market forces into the universities has left a number of institutions near bankruptcy. Management at Bristol University have responded with a hiring freeze and the threat of large-scale course closures. Liverpool and Edinburgh along with “modern” campus universities such as Keele and Surrey are poised to follow suit, while the whole University of London teeters on the brink; under the Tories the proportion of its income from the exchequer has slumped by 15%.

The new breed of college administrator, personified by the LSE's director, John Ashworth, is bent on making staff and students pay dearly to bridge the chasm between rising student numbers and static or dwindling resources. Ashworth and the provost at University College, London, both floated the idea of “top up” fees of £200 to £1,000 for certain categories of home and EC students.

For the moment both college administrations have beaten tactical retreats in the face of angry opposition from both students and academics, but Ashworth clearly intends to pursue cost-cutting alternatives in the form of course closures and attacks on the conditions of both lecturers and abysmally paid campus workers.

In the polytechnic sector the picture is grimmer still. A little more than 18 months since effective privatisation, polytechnic managers are engaged in a fierce bidding war, zealously implementing key aspects of Kenneth Baker's “Great Education Reform” Act. The desperate competition to boost

student numbers, and thereby revenue, has led to dangerously overcrowded classrooms and a worsening of the ongoing student housing crisis.

At Leicester Poly. enrolment on one course alone has shot up from about 60 to nearly 230 in the space of a year, with no increases in staffing. Poly students in Stoke and Lancashire spent several weeks of their first term sleeping on the floors of college gyms.

The dramatic restructuring of educational institutions, combined with the Tories' attempts to make Further Education colleges conform to the needs of the bosses for cheaply trained labour, has gone hand-in-hand with a series of attacks on student living standards and union organisation. This year has seen the long-delayed student loans scheme become a reality. At the same time the Tories have stripped students of housing benefit and the right to claim income support.

The Poll Tax has compounded the financial misery for many students while creating still more barriers to entry for thousands of academically able working class youth, women and black people. Labour councils such as Sheffield are using the impact of the Tax as an excuse for drastic cuts in discretionary grants. BBC Radio 4's Today programme has aired reports of students driven into prostitution in order to make ends meet.

Student unions, the very bodies which should be fending off these attacks, are themselves under the hammer. The union at the Polytechnic of North London, which waged a courageous battle against the presence of the notorious fascist, Patrick Harrington, in 1984, has all but collapsed after the college administration stopped its

funds in retaliation for the democratic election of two expelled students onto the union's executive. Only the Tories' recent paralysis and the NUS bureaucrats' complete lack of activity has staved off legislation to end the NUS closed shop.

Some students might be forgiven for failing to recognise the importance of their national union. Under the leadership of several executives, dominated by the National Organisation of Labour Students, itself committed to Kinnockite “new realism”, NUS has repeatedly squandered opportunities to repel the Thatcherite offensive.

It refused to channel the very real anger of thousands of its members into a nationwide wave of occupations against the loans legislation. This handed the Tories an unearned victory. Time and again NUS presidents have disavowed direct action over a host of concerns, choosing instead to wait for a Kinnock-led Labour government. But Labour's front bench is making very few promises to reverse the damage done by the Tories.

Most of the budding bureaucrats at the head of NUS have had nothing to do with the series of rent strikes at universities like Bradford and Kent in response to the housing crisis and exorbitant hall rents. Instead, the leadership is peddling its most laughable and insulting stunt yet: a photo competition for the worst student flat/house in Britain. The winner will have the satisfaction of knowing that the evidence of appalling living conditions just might appear on a Panorama documentary.

The tasks facing student militants are made only slightly easier with Thatcher's departure from No.10. Over the next few months they need to regroup and mobilise opposition to the ongoing erosion of education. We need to link the fight against such attacks as “top up” fees to a positive programme for the abolition of exorbitant fees for overseas students, for the payment of a living grant to all post-16 students and an end to poverty pay for all campus workers. This can lay the basis for a campaign which is both broad and militant, forging links not only with lecturers but porters, librarians and other ancillary staff. This will pose the sharpest challenge to the current “do nothing” national leadership and hold out the best chance of victory against the tight-fisted government and its loyal college administrators. ■

**POST**
Mail harassment

They offered to transfer the supervisor to another sorting office thirty miles away. Following the union's recommendation the workers voted by a narrow majority to accept and return to work.

There are many lessons in this struggle for the labour movement nationwide. Firstly, on a positive note, by a taking a firm and principled stand against sexual harassment Oxford postal workers have shown their willingness to struggle beyond “bread and butter issues”. They have sent a signal to the bosses and to union bureaucrats that work-

ers can be very fierce in support of their sisters despite their own sexist attitudes.

Unfortunately, the compromise reached is only a symbolic rap on the knuckles against sexual harassment, with the very management which dismissed the issue as “industrial blackmail” now happily posturing as an enemy of sexual abuse. And with union backing at that! Workers should have held out for a workers' enquiry in which workers' themselves could have decided on any disciplinary measures to be taken. ■

**SPOTLIGHT ON THE ECONOMY****Monopoly money**

IF YOU want an example of what Marxists mean by “monopoly capitalism” there couldn't be a better one than the Sky-BSB merger. A lot has changed since Lenin summed up the features of monopoly capitalism in 1916 but the whole BSB merger deal shows how fundamental they remain to capitalism.

Rupert Murdoch's Sky TV and British Satellite Broadcasting were locked in a cut-throat conflict over the market for satellite TV in Britain. Both were backed by giant capitalist multinationals. Both were up to their eyeballs in debt.

So on 3 November they called off their bitter advertising and sales battle and signed a merger deal. 120,000 households who had bought BSB's “squarial” receivers woke up to find they now owned the satellite equivalent of a Betamax video as the merged company announced it would be switching to Sky's technology. Even more annoyed were those who had bought both Sky and BSB equipment.

But feigning most annoyance was the Independent Television Commission (ITC). Only the day before the merger was announced, the new Broadcasting Act became law. The ITC, set up to police the Act during the massive expansion and diversification of broadcasting in the 1990s, faced a merger which breaks every rule in the book they are supposed to work by.

Magnates

The merger gave Rupert Murdoch's News Corp a 50% stake in the new company. But the Act allows newspaper magnates to own only 20%, and non-EC nationals are banned from owning any of the satellite stations franchised by the ITC.

Of course, the ITC would be within its rights to enforce the law which took up hundreds of hours of parliamentary time to enact. But when Murdoch threatened to respond by stopping broadcasts immediately on the BSB dishes the Tories rushed to reassure him.

Arts minister David Mellor told reporters that “the markets should decide” the future of BSB's franchise. It is not unusual to hear Tory ministers waffling on about the virtue of “the markets”. But the Sky-BSB merger disproves the popular Tory myth that “competition gives more choice” and that “market forces bring greater efficiency”.

It is a fundamental law of modern capitalism that competition in the so-called “free market” leads to monopoly; that monopoly subordinates efficiency and technological advance to profit—eradicating choice; that monopoly capitalists can dictate policy to the “democratically elected” governments, even of powerful imperialist countries; and that those governments are in fact private clubs of big industrialists and bankers.

The extent of the collusion between big capitalists like Murdoch and the politicians was shown by the fact that he telephoned Thatcher about the move one week before any statutory body accountable to parliament heard about it.

The possibility of a mass satellite TV system emerged because of technological advances which reduced satellite broadcasting time to a price within reach of large private companies and satellite receiver dishes to a price which ordinary “punters” could afford.

Instead of allowing money and resources to be devoted to developing that technology further the profit system pitched two competing capitalist firms into a battle to eradicate each other. In pursuit of “gaining an edge over their competitors” both BSB and Sky poured millions into advertising, sales and programme acquisition.



To make their respective sport and movie channels “the one to watch” the competitors sent the bidding for big matches, fights and films “into the ozone layer” to use The Economist's words.

Did this result in “more choice” once the two systems were up and running? Initially BSB's advertising made much of the fact that this was a “quality system”, with “no stripping Italian housewives” etc. Very soon the effect of competition reduced both Sky and BSB to the lowest common denominator of old films, minority sports, endless game shows, chat shows and snooker.

With the merger the “choice” has dropped from a projected 15 channels to just five, all under the effective control of the man who brought you the Sun.

Not only is programme choice drastically limited but choice of equipment has been eradicated. Who cares, you might say, as long as it works. But the point is that BSB's D-MAC system was by far the most advanced. It was geared to the new kind of television sets and videos appearing in the high street which can make the most out of “high-resolution TV”. The company which put technological advance before making the fastest buck was rewarded with near bankruptcy by “market forces”.

Classic

The whole affair is a classic example of monopoly capitalist “loss leading”.

Both companies were prepared to lose millions in order to establish a base of customers. But the fierceness of the competition ensured that by the time the merger happened Sky was losing £2.2 million a week and BSB £8 million!

But now that competition has turned into monopoly overnight the biggest losers will be satellite TV viewers.

The blockbuster movies of the early days will give way to a diet of pap. The selling techniques of Sky—which involve salesmen pressuring children and old people to sign for dishes they cannot pay for, promising brick coloured dishes then delivering the garish white ones—will be stepped up. These are the virtues of a monopoly for the capitalist concerned.

And as for market forces and greater choice: try choosing a left wing film or play on Murdoch's satellite. ■

After sinking Margaret Thatcher, Michael Heseltine was himself sunk by Thatcher loyalists in parliament and the Tory constituencies. But his distinctive programme on Europe remains one which the whole ruling class will have to grapple with. **Mark Abram** looks at the man who planned his career to

include Downing Street in the 1990s, and how he nearly got there.

As the man who supposedly toppled Thatcher some workers would probably prefer a Heseltine-led or influenced government. After all, he has said he will conduct a "fundamental review of the Poll Tax". His supporters tell us that he is remembered in Liverpool for the "compassion" he showed in the aftermath of the inner-city uprising of July 1981.

But the reality is that Heseltine is a thoroughly reactionary capitalist politician, one completely committed to the bulk of Thatcher's anti-working class policies and the architect of some of them.

When he left Oxford he took a £1,000 inheritance and with a friend bought a boarding house in Notting Hill Gate in 1955. Recent West Indian immigrants faced racist abuse and extortionate rents. There was no security of tenure and no rent restrictions in those days and Heseltine exploited this to the full.

In his "gloomy and dilapidated" boarding house Heseltine let 15 rooms and made a tidy sum. Like most of his breed he locked out those unable to keep up with the rent. After a year he sold the property to buy the New Court Hotel in Bayswater. This future leading figure in the Party of the family and "upright morals" was not so upstanding that he could resist making his money by allowing local prostitutes to carry on their work on his premises.

Wealth

Today his personal wealth stands at £60 million, making him one of the richest men in the country. He owns five homes, including an £11 million house and farm near Banbury.

Heseltine's parliamentary career began in 1966 when he won a safe seat at Tavistock. When Heath came to office in 1970 Heseltine was already devoted to his leader's pro-Europeanism that was to take Britain into the Common Market in 1973.

In that year Heseltine—by now Minister of Aerospace—argued what was to become a familiar theme:

"For many years I have believed that for Britain and Europe the arguments lead overwhelmingly to the conclusion that... we would find it increasingly difficult to maintain an advanced industrial base unless we moulded together a partnership of nations that in total would be the equal of the competition to which the rest of the world would increasingly expose us."

Under Thatcher after 1975 this argument was less welcome within the ranks of the Tory Party. Thatcher wanted a firm commitment to Britain's independence in Europe and any alliances should be in the first place with the USA.

This difference did not amount to a breach or a coherent alternative strategy for the British ruling class in the 1970s. In fact, it was Heseltine's conversion to Thatcher's hard nosed anti-working class domestic policies that dominated his political evolution during the late 1970s.

After the Tory victory in 1979 Heseltine was appointed Secretary of State for Environment, a post he

held for three years. In office he was a loyal Thatcherite. He implemented and designed some of the worst policies of the first term and refused to join the 'wets' rebellion against social spending cuts during the depths of the recession in 1980-81.

He presided over the biggest fall in public sector house building to levels not seen since the 1920s. In 1979 107,000 public sector houses were completed; only 49,200 were finished in 1982. At the same time Heseltine was busy selling off the existing stock, some half a million in the first Thatcher term. Remaining council house rents were doubled in cash terms while government subsidies were cut by 50% in real terms.

As to his role in regenerating the inner-cities after the uprisings of 1981, facts speak louder than his pompous bleatings. In the year 1982-83 only £270 million was spent on urban regeneration programmes nationally. This sum was dwarfed by cutbacks in rate support grant to many inner city authorities.

Heseltine waged war on local democracy and local government spending for Thatcher. As Labour councils twisted and turned to avoid the consequences of central funding cuts so Heseltine passed more and more legislation to cut off the avenues of escape.

In early 1983 he was made Secretary of State for Defence. He made his name by wearing combat jackets at Greenham Common and threatening to shoot the women there. He helped oversee a dirty tricks campaign against the CND, lent political support to the prosecution of Sarah Tisdall and later Clive Ponting for issuing leaks from his department.

Co-operation

While Defence Minister his distinctive programme towards Europe re-emerged. The huge and escalating costs of research and procurement in defence brought home to Heseltine the need for a greater plan of co-operation between the European imperialists. The costs of research and production could not be born easily by one country. But this required an effort of political will and leadership to make it happen. Echoing his words of 1973 he said in 1984:

"There is also a general appreciation that the only way forward is political—not industrial, not military, not research-led. It is in the end only the ultimate customer, the national taxpayer, who, through their politicians, can bring about the co-ordinated market place that alone will deliver the efficiencies and economies. I do not believe that the market itself will produce such a solution. Governments must take the lead."

This speech combined the two themes for which he has become known; state direction of industry in the Japanese and French sense (which does not necessarily imply government spending) and a firm pro-Europeanism.

What makes Tarzan tick?



Heseltine fatally wounded Thatcher but what is his alternative?

In late 1985 the relatively minor issue of the fate of a British helicopter company (Westland) brought him into conflict with Thatcher. Westland was on the brink of financial collapse; its future could only be secured by a link up with a bigger partner. Thatcher favoured the US firm, Sikorski. Heseltine saw the opportunity to enhance Britain's partnership with its European allies. The obstacles that Thatcher put in his way led him to resign in January 1986.

The last five years have seen a closer relationship with the EC become absolutely essential for the future of British capitalism. For twenty years and more Britain has seen an ever growing quantity of its trade directed towards Europe and away from the USA and Commonwealth.

After 1985 the European imperialists decided on a timetable of closer economic integration starting with a tariff and barrier free market by 1992. The reduction in the overhead costs to trade and competition was in the interests of all capitalists.

But even here Thatcher had to be dragged screaming into the debate over the rules and methods of such a market, fearing the diminution of political power in London lay at the end of this road. It took the threatened resignation of two Cabinet Ministers to get her even to agree to belated entry into the ERM.

Her resistance grew more pronounced as the next stages of economic integration were moved up the agenda—monetary co-ordination and a single currency. A single currency has benefits for the European capitalist class, cutting out

the costs of currency exchange in trade. Already it is reckoned that US companies gain some \$100 million a year advantage in Europe because they already have a common currency—the US dollar.

Thatcher's Prime Ministerial stance and veto was in danger of leaving British capitalism trailing behind once again, letting the other states negotiate over the rules which would inevitably be drawn up to the disadvantage of Britain. This was what led to Howe's resignation.

Programme

It is Heseltine who has the clearest programme of engaging British capitalism in the process to make it work to its maximum advantage. He is clear that such an approach, like Thatcher's, starts from bringing the core of Thatcherism to bear on the other European states:

"We can, for example, push our partners into extending privatisation. We can aid the Commission's campaign against government underpinning of nationalised industries and other barriers which distort free markets." (*Financial Times* 20/11/90)

There is also much to lose by not being in at the start:

"The consequences for the City of London are critical to our national self-interest. We face some stark choices. Are funds to flow to Frankfurt and Paris and industrial investment to the Continent rather than here?"

Thatcher has been determined to sharply curtail the process of European integration for fear that "Europe" may end up determining

a set of economic and political interests in conflict with the USA. This is not mere purblind nationalism. It is a belief that the UK has—more than any other European power—global financial and investment interests that require a global free market; Britain's confinement within a "European bloc" threatens to reduce Britain's imperialist reach.

Realists like Heseltine see that for a declining European power like Britain closer co-operation with the EC, with all its attendant risks vis a vis the USA and wider imperialist interests, is essential. This is clear in his support for the single currency which is not motivated from high idealism but rather from a perception that British imperialism's national interest is best served by using the EC to bind and mitigate the growing power of a united Germany.

Common

A common currency—after fixed exchange rates have been achieved and supervised by an independent central bank—is the only way to offset the *de facto* power of the German mark. To be a vassal of German imperialism or a junior partner—that is the choice that Heseltine recognises exists for British capitalism and which Thatcherism fails to grasp the full significance of.

Heseltine's other appeal to Britain's bosses is his different approach to government direction of industry and training. Thatcher insisted that the free market must be left to its own devices.

For the bosses this approach had the historical merit of destroying redundant capital and the influence of the trade unions in the decisions of management. But its limits lay in charting a path of regeneration of industry in a very competitive world market.

Heseltine's industrial model is Japan where the fusion of state ministries and industry has achieved a greater co-ordination of training, education, transport and communication development with the investment decisions of the banks and industry.

His detractors in the Tory party accuse him of "corporatism", the "failed policies of the 1970s". But from the standpoint of British capitalism this accusation is misplaced. Corporatism assigned an equal and responsible role to the trade union leadership in these decisions. Neither the Japanese state today nor Heseltine in the future intends this to happen.

At the close of the 1980s the widespread recognition of the disastrous state of transport, the continued shortage of skilled labour (even in a recession!) have brought the bosses up starkly against the limits and dysfunctional nature of the leader who had delivered them so much.

In the end Heseltine's ideas proved more powerful than a Cabinet majority. Whether they can regenerate declining British capitalism is an altogether different matter. ■

[All unattributed quotations from *Heseltine: The Unauthorised Biography* by Julian Critchley]

Thatcherism: the damage

Thatcher set out to "rid Britain of socialism". Paul Morris surveys the results of an eleven year onslaught on the working class.

IN 1979 Keith Joseph, Thatcher's mentor, targeted the unions as the main obstacle to the Tory project:

"Unless the present imbalance of union bargaining is redressed it will be impossible to start the huge task of national recovery".

Thatcher decided that legal shackles were the key to beating trade union militancy.

What distinguished Thatcher from previous ruling class politicians was the ruthlessness and conscious planning she applied to this task.

At every turn the Tories attempted to avoid issues which would provoke generalised resistance by the working class. They took on sections of workers one at a time, starting with the steel workers, car workers and weaker public sector workers. By the mid 1980s they were confident enough to take on and defeat the big battalions of the trade union movement: the miners, printers, seafarers and dockers.

Not one of these defeats was inevitable. For every one the blame lies squarely with the trade union leaders. Whilst Thatcher operated with the generalised battle plan of a class warrior, they were operating with the sectional mentality of the bureaucrat. Whilst Thatcher was prepared to change the law in order to ensure their defeat the bureaucrats cringed before legality.

No fewer than six rounds of anti-union laws have left us in a situation where:

- secret ballots are compulsory before workers can strike
- solidarity action is illegal
- secondary picketing is banned
- unions and even individual militants face fines and sequestration for taking effective action
- unions can be forced to discipline

Living standards

THATCHER MADE the poor poorer and the rich richer. The yuppies were by no means figments of media imagination.

The richest 1% have had their incomes boosted by 74%. The richest 10% are earning 47% more than in 1979. Tax cuts alone have given an extra £639 a week to those whose salaries top £70,000. No wonder champagne consumption has more than doubled in the Thatcher decade.

But one million people in the lowest income group have seen their earnings drop by 10 to 15%. Between 1979 and 1987 the number of people living on less than half the average income rose from 4.4 million to 7.7 million, dragging one and a half million children into poverty.

But if the yuppies were real so was "loadsamoney". Throughout the 1980s Thatcher was able to maintain the loyalty of the skilled working class through real pay increases. Whilst many public sector workers had their real wages held below inflation Thatcher allowed private sector pay to "find its own level". Whilst this has meant a decade of productivity deals, restructured conditions and agreements at work, the result was that real pay rose for the majority of those in full time work.

The decade of "increased home ownership" closes with 76,000 families over 6 months in mortgage arrears. Millions of investors have

The unions

workers leading unofficial action ● unions are banned at GCHQ

Despite their initial squeals of agony and occasional promises to go to jail the union leaders have largely accommodated to the new legislation.

One by one they have taken government money to pay for ballots, utilised the ballot laws to make sure the membership can't fight and used the threat of sequestration to head off any action which might be deemed illegal.

In turn this "new realism" has penetrated very deep into the rank

and file although it has not stopped rank and file workers fighting back. It has led them again and again into the dead end of selective action and passive protest aimed at winning public sympathy rather than hitting the bosses' profits.

And the effect of all this? There has been a 30% fall in trade union membership; from over 12 million in 1979 to 8.3 million today.

But the decline in union membership and the legal shackles have not destroyed trade unionism in Britain in the way that Thatcher had hoped. Where the unions still exist they play

a significant role in defending wages. Optimistic militants and pessimistic bosses alike have pointed to recent figures showing that closed shops can force up pay to an average one third above other comparable workplaces. Unionised firms pay an average 9% above non-union firms.

But this is cold comfort. The massive defeats inflicted on the trade union movement, the generation of militants broken by victimisation and unemployment, the cementing of anti-union laws into the programme of the Labour Party and the union leaders themselves, the massive strength of new realism amongst rank and file workers illustrated in recent ballots from the NUM to the NUT: this is Thatcher's "achievement". And it will take more than a change of face in Downing Street to undermine it. □



Striking miners: battered by police, betrayed by their leaders—their defeat was a turning point in the 1980s.

begun to realise that, as the small print says, shares may go down as well as up.

Thatcher's conscious strategy of divide and rule, used so effectively against the unions, was deeply rooted in the material divisions her "miracle" opened up within the working class.

The earnings gap between the highest and lowest 10% of manual workers is the widest since records began in 1868!

In one industry after another Tory pay "restructuring" and part time working has left differentials higher, encouraging workers to fight each other in the scramble for a higher grade or bonus.

And the council house sales which have benefited more than 3 million

individual working class families have consigned 126,000 families to life in bed and breakfast hotels or cardboard city.

Despite Thatcher's success in shifting wealth decisively from the poor to the rich, real pay levels remain a growing problem for the ruling class. Whilst individual bosses are not yet prepared to take on private sector workers, the recession and entry into the ERM make this a necessity for the early 1990s.

No socialist should console themselves that Thatcher has "failed to drive down overall pay levels". Her economic policies meant she never really tried. It is the 1990s that will see the bosses move on pay. And then Thatcher's shackles on the unions will be utilised to the full. □

Services

THATCHER PROMISED to ease the burden of public spending for the bosses. She slashed the high tax brackets and with them fell service provision in the NHS, education and local government.

Over 10 years Thatcher progressively reduced the amount central government paid to fund council services. As a consequence the amount workers contribute via rates grew from 18% to 27%. Not content with this the Tories invented one device after another to force councils to cut spending.

However the councils' ability to indulge in "creative accounting" allowed many to resist the harsh cuts the Tories were demanding.

So they brought in the Poll Tax, abolishing the rates and linking council spending directly to the amount local people could be made to pay. It was designed so that the yearly tax bill could become a lever for local Tories to force down spending and ultimately to undermine Labour's electoral support in the cities.

In health and education Thatcher waited until the third term before trying to deliver big structural changes. Both the NHS and the education service have suffered from funding shortages throughout the Thatcher years.

The hospital waiting lists of nearly a million testify to the effects. But in the third term Thatcher became determined to introduce "market forces" into these vital sectors of social provision.

The 1988 Education Act and the 1989 NHS Bill have introduced an "internal market" which is already exacerbating deficiencies as schools and hospitals prepare for having to "pay their way".

In fact over the Thatcher decade public spending grew—by 20%. But Thatcher slowed the rate of growth, slashed government spending as a proportion of GDP and drastically altered the way it can be spent. The pay-off for the bosses has been massive tax cuts and a bonanza for the privateers the Tories have allowed into health, education and council services.

Paradoxically however it has been the Poll Tax, plus the health and education plans that roused public opinion—bosses as well as working class—against Thatcher. Precisely because the public services are part of capitalism, because the employers need a trained and educated, relatively healthy workforce, with houses to live in and services to look after the old and young, sections of the bosses have bridled at the third term agenda. □

By "eradicating socialism" Thatcher meant fundamentally reversing the post war gains of the working class and destroying its organised power.

- She has inflicted major defeats on our organisations, taming the unions and "Thatcherising" the Labour Party.
- She has thrown millions into poverty and degradation and set worker against worker.
- She has slashed the real level of services to make the rich richer.

But if she set out to abolish the post war gains she has failed. If she wanted to reduce workers' organisations and government services to the same level as in the USA she has clearly failed.

None of this minimises the extent of her victories, the blame that must lie for them with the Labour and trade union leaders, or the difficulty workers will have in fighting back.

But it shows that Thatcher did not sweep all before her, and that major confrontations lie ahead as well as behind us. □

IN LATE November the Supreme Soviet passed a resolution stating that the country faces a "critical situation". This was no panic mongering. The USSR is collapsing on all fronts.

The Soviet Union's military alliance, the Warsaw Pact, has ceased to exist; the governments of Eastern Europe are queuing to join NATO. The USSR's major international trade network of Comecon has gone the same way.

The disintegrative tendencies within the USSR become more apparent by the day. In the words of the poet W. B. Yeats, "things fall apart, the centre cannot hold." Key elements of the economic mechanism are visibly dissolving. Under the old "command administrative" system every plant, every region and every collective farm knew what they were obliged to supply to the centre.

In conjunction with local party chiefs they argued with the centre over their quotas and often provided less than the stipulated amount. But this did allow a centralised system of distribution to function, however inadequate it was meeting the needs of the soviet masses.

That system has been dismantled. Under the system of *Khozrchet* (self-financing) every enterprise, farm and region is now free to make its own decisions about production and distribution. Each is encouraged to make a profit for itself. Under the impact of this the economy of the USSR is breaking up into a series of local, regional and national units with less and less co-ordination between them.

This is obvious from the course taken by the non-Russian republics. They are increasingly deciding who to trade with and what the terms of trade will be. Estonia, for example, has opened up negotiations with Leningrad over the exchange of produce. Collective farms in Georgia find it more profitable to hire lorries and send their produce direct to the streets of the major cities rather than sell it to the centre at state prices.

Actions

This tendency is not only manifest in the actions of the republics. Within each of the republics themselves, and within Russia in particular, we are also witnessing the break up of bureaucratic planning on regional lines.

Within the Russian republic, towns such as Perm, Yaroslavl and Omsk have laid down strict conditions for the exchange of their products to other regions and towns. The industrial towns have entered directly into arrangements with rural areas for the exchange of industrial goods for food.

At an enterprise level this also means that management is now scouring the country and, in rare cases, the world market for sales outlets and raw materials regardless of the targets of the last five year plan.

The disintegration of the mechanisms of the Stalinist planned economy is not simply the result of the obvious inadequacies of that system. It intersects with the disintegration of the Soviet Union along national lines. Most republics are trying to free themselves from the dictats of the central plan in order to prepare for a variety of forms of independence from the USSR itself. Boris Yeltsin's Russian republic has now negotiated four treaties with other republics for bilateral trade, most importantly with the Ukraine.

The effect of economic and national disintegration on the life of the masses is dramatic. It has meant shortages in the state shops

on a scale not seen since the 1950s. Even bread has disappeared from the state shops in the major cities. Supplies have reappeared on private markets at extortionate prices that give some hint of what full-blooded marketisation would mean for the masses.

Meat is being sold at at least 400% over official prices. Chocolate sells for 370% of its state price.

In response to these shortages the state has resorted to rationing. In more and more towns, workers are paid a only a small part of their salaries in roubles. They receive enough to pay for their rent, local bills and transport. For the rest they get coupons exchangeable only in their home town or region.

Throughout the Ukraine there is now a coupon system that deprives all non-residents of the right to buy in state shops. Moscow City Council has introduced similar rules.

Such is the scale of the collapse of the soviet economy that these nationalist and regionalist measures are failing to provide even the goods which the ration system guarantees. In provincial towns there have been strikes over the failure of local authorities to provide the meagre five packets of cigarettes per month promised by the ration system.

Road

This economic and political fragmentation is a clear indicator of the road the USSR will have to travel to get to the restored capitalism which sections of bureaucrats desire. Powerful regional bureaucrats recognise this and actively assist the process.

The pro-market reformers in the USSR see competition and the profit system as the solutions to every economic problem. But the inevitable result of both is the survival of the fittest.

In a long established capitalist system the extinction of the weakest and most unprofitable economic units rarely leads to total social collapse. The losses that occur due to individual factory closures in Britain because of their lack of competitiveness are compensated for elsewhere in the chain because of the market system. But the USSR remains a workers' state, and inefficient enterprises cannot unilaterally close in the Soviet Union without immediate and far

reaching disruption to the more efficient sectors.

SOVIET UNION

The centre cannot hold

In the late 1980s the world order was policed by Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan has now retired to his ranch. Thatcher has been ousted by those most slavishly loyal to her. Is Gorbachev the next to go? John Hunt surveys a superpower on the edge of collapse.

reaching disruption to the more efficient sectors.

Without the right to sack and drive down pay giving managers the right to compete is like giving them the kiss of death.

Gorbachev and the ruling bureaucrats know this full well. Even the pro-capitalist economists whose "plans" for orderly restoration have been occupying the bureaucrats' debating chambers know it. Which is why they again and again urge caution and a centralised approach. Meanwhile, the world's capitalists are also counting on Gorbachev. They know that only a centralised and orderly restoration of capitalism is worth committing money to.

The problem is that the cold wind of economic collapse is hardly felt in the Kremlin's special shops. Sitting in the universities and economic ministries Gorbachev's economic advisers do not come under the daily pressure of local workers and bureaucrats urging them to "do alright" for one particular republic, city or plant.

The central writ of the soviet bureaucracy is growing weaker by the day. The traditional communication line between the centre and the lowest units of soviet economy

and society—the Communist Party—is breaking up. It has lost at least half a million members this year. Pravda, its daily paper, is losing readers so dramatically that its Stalinist journalists recently called a mass meeting to demand the sacking of its editor.

The CPs in the republics are asserting themselves against the centre and at the same time seeing their candidates swept aside in local elections. Their CPs no longer rule Armenia, Georgia or the Baltic Republics.

In Russia the CP has experienced the defections of leading members, most notably Yeltsin, Popov and Stankevich. Major cities are now ruled by non-party members, including both Moscow and Leningrad.

The party has also lost its guaranteed leadership of the official trade unions that still, formally, organise the majority of workers. In October the All Union Congress of Trade Unions resolved to reform itself as the Confederation of Trade Unions. In a bid to undercut the challenge of unofficial unions it rejected the leading role of the Communist Party.

However, Mikhail Gorbachev has been looking for alternatives to the CPSU as a means of ruling the USSR. Faced with the process of national and economic disintegration he has increasingly taken on powers to be the Bonapartist arbitrator of factional, regional and national conflicts.

He recently contemplated the possibility of "dictatorship as necessary to regain control". He granted himself the power to ban specific strikes and to institute states of emergency. He sent in troops to Baku, Tblisi and Moldova in the name of holding the USSR together. He demanded the right to sanction or ban demonstrations within one mile of the Kremlin walls.

Initially he introduced, in a manner reminiscent of the old Tsarist state, a Presidential Council. It was to work parallel to the official Soviet government under Prime Minister Ryshkov. It was to comprise leading military figures, radical marketeering economists and Russian nationalist figures.

This council failed to secure unambiguous support for a dramatic rush to marketisation. Those who wished to rapidly restore capitalism by Presidential decree faced major obstacles that decrees could not surmount.

The Presidential Council, having broken up the old mechanism

has proved incapable of providing any alternative which would stave off economic collapse and anarchy. Instead it has now been broken up itself.

In order to quell the national republics Gorbachev has established a "Federation Council" comprised of himself, his chosen advisers and the Presidents of the national republics. Its job is to "coordinate the efforts of the centre and the republics".

He wants to establish a National Security Council under his control. He also proposes a Council of Ministers, of "new modern minded people with initiative" chosen by him.

What he means by that are thoroughly modern minded people prepared to share his project of draconian anti-crisis measures in the here and now and a longer term project of marketisation.

The immediate draconian aspect is underlined by the fact that the "modern minded" KGB are to be given extra powers to act against "economic sabotage" and to ensure food supplies for this winter. At the same time radical marketeers like Shatalin and Abalkin have been given the green light to draw up more plans for rapid marketisation in the future.

Measures

Adding further to Gorbachev's powers, the Federation Council can also be circumvented legally by the President. He has been empowered to take measures without consulting the republics that are "provided for under the law, right up to extraordinary measures". He has a license to send more troops into the republics to repress independence struggles, and against strikers should he so wish.

Gorbachev's hopes of success are based on three factors. firstly, the international backing he can secure from imperialism; secondly, the disarray amongst his opponents in the party, republican and state apparatuses; thirdly, and most vitally the crisis of leadership in the Soviet working class.

All of the imperialist leaders are giving full backing to Gorbachev. But they cannot halt the collapse of the Soviet economy.

Bonn is offering an airlift of food from Berlin. Norway is sending two trucks of old clothes to the Murmansk region. But this is a drop in the ocean.

What Gorbachev needs is hard cash. But Soviet indebtedness is already proving a major obstacle



Soviet miners' strike 1989



wants them to endure hyperinflation and mass unemployment. But even the official unions are now committed to resisting price increases and the sell off of state property to bureaucrats and speculators.

This should not blind us to the fact that the working class is itself suffering the effects of the disintegration of the USSR and its ideological crisis. Independent unions have been built in most major towns. A flourishing independent workers' press is part of this process. But there is a profound crisis of leadership in its ranks.

According to Lev Yolovik in a recent interview with Workers Power members, Sotsprof is now divided into three factions one of which wants to transform it into a trading company. The independent Confederation of Labour is falling increasingly into the hands of marketeer professors. The second congress of miners in Donetsk in October was a muted affair and even received a message of support from Gorbachev who had been fraternally invited to attend the meeting.

All this demonstrates what genuine Leninists have always known—that trade unions by their own "spontaneous" efforts produce only a reformist consciousness. They fall into the hands of bourgeois experts and bureaucrats. The truth (unpalatable as it appears to the majority today) is that the Soviet workers movement needs a revolutionary communist party first and foremost to challenge the marketising quacks and fakers and lead the fight against the restorationist bureaucracy. The Soviet Union, on present course, is a society on the brink of disintegration and common ruin. Gorbachev's centralising measures cannot reverse that process. The so called radical opponents can only accelerate it.

The one force that can reverse this process is the working class. Because it is the only force that can avert economic chaos, national disintegration and communal bloodshed the crisis of the USSR in a very real sense is today reduced to the crisis of leadership, the question of whether the workers can build a new party committed to these goals.

Crisis

The political crisis of the workers' organisations is the one material factor which revolutionary Marxists have the possibility to change. Only the working class has the material interest and the means to retain centralised planning throughout the USSR without the inequality and national oppression inherent in the present system.

The working class must take the remains of the plan into their own hands, renovate it and democratise it to meet the workers' immediate need for food, clothing and the other necessities.

To do this it must take power into its own hands, not via the powerless fake parliamentary bodies in the USSR and its republics but via grassroots organs of working class power—it must build new delegate workers' councils in every city and republic, linked via an all-Union workers' council with sovereign power.

It must solve the national question on the basis of a free union of workers' states. That was the position of the Bolsheviks in 1917, It must be the position of revolutionary socialists in the 1990s. Only in this way can Soviet society be reconstructed in the revolutionary and democratic manner it so obviously requires. ■

to investment from the West. The imperialists may sing Gorbachev's praises but they do not have the means of bailing him out of his economic crisis. They have enough on their plates trying to restore capitalism in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.

There are only tiny pockets within Soviet society who could substitute for foreign capital in this process. The old corrupt nomenklatura can afford to buy up pockets of state industry that might potentially be lucrative, but those pockets are small indeed. The speculators who have lived and enriched themselves from the black market also have the means to purchase state assets. But they only have an interest in a tiny proportion of the economy. The richer collective farm workers have shown a marked reluctance to take the risk of leasing any land from the regime and breaking their links with the collective farms.

Wild

The mass of Soviet workers at the moment entertain wild illusions in the power of imperialist monopolies to bail them out. But they hate the only indigenous forces capable of becoming capitalists and will fight to prevent them taking over what is considered to be public property. They hate the privileged and rich nomenklatura bureaucrats. If anything they hate even more the speculators and so called "co-operators" who have grown rich as a result of shortages.

The conservative bureaucratic opposition is still in disarray and

this is to Gorbachev's advantage. They have been caught between demanding decisive measures from the centre and, at the same time, devising their own local solutions to the accelerating crisis. The republics, however stridently their governments may talk of independence, know that they need economic co-operation within the parameters of the existing USSR. The West's support for Gorbachev and refusal to back the independence of Lithuania reminds them of this. The German Bundesbank has openly said it doubts whether any of the Soviet republics possess the base for an independent economy.

Within the Russian Federation itself the process of disintegration goes hand in hand with calls for a strong central authority. Yeltsin has made his own proposals for a new union within which Russia will call all the shots in appointing the key ministries.

He is proposing an emergency coalition government, a proposal Gorbachev can accept as long as he remains in command. For the time being Gorbachev has the dubious pleasure of knowing that the now pseudo-parliamentary opposition has no alternative to his plan for strong central power. But he does not have the means to impose that power. Even the army itself is divided on national lines and between the upper and middle ranks of officers.

Gorbachev's greatest fear remains the Soviet working class. The miners' strike of 1989 was a resounding warning to him. Now he wants the workers to accept shortages and rationing. Next he

**IN DEFENCE OF
MARXISM**



**What
about the
hostages?**

IN THE months since the US launched its war preparations against Iraq Bush and Thatcher have howled with moral outrage at the fate of the western hostages held by Saddam Hussein's regime.

The seizure of western workers, professionals and businessmen is repeatedly denounced as an act of fiendish barbarism. "Even Hitler didn't do that!" exclaimed the US president.

Leaving aside the monumental insult to fascism's millions of victims, there is nothing new about this sort of propaganda in the run-up to a war. Its cynical purpose is to mobilise moral indignation on the home front against the bestial enemy who has attacked the innocent. In 1914 the French and British press railed against the "rape" of Belgium by the "Huns".

This propaganda is essential for any campaign to persuade ordinary working people to accept the sacrifices of a bloody war. The real causes and objectives such as the profits of the big oil companies would not do at all to persuade workers to ally down their lives.

Saddam stands accused of using the lives of non-combatants. Yet innocent civilians always suffer under the conditions of modern war.

The allegations are nothing but cynical hypocrisy when made by people like Bush and Thatcher. Saddam authorised the seizure of hostages and their billeting at key installations in response to the imperialists' own threats to bombard Iraq's cities, economic targets and military installations. In such an attack many thousands of civilians would die.

The US has repeatedly shown its willingness to rain down death and destruction on the innocent. Only two decades ago the US Air Force sought to bomb Vietnam "back into the Stone Age".

A generation before this, US atomic weapons incinerated tens of thousands of Japanese civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, making these cities cancer-riddled hells for the survivors. British and US bombers razed Dresden and Hamburg, killing tens of thousands more.

Refugees

During World War Two Britain interned "aliens" including anti-fascist refugees from Germany. The US imprisoned hundreds of Japanese, including many who had become US citizens.

When the apologists for imperialist morality are confronted with such undeniable evidence of "our" side's atrocities they suddenly resort to arguments about relative good and evil and what is expedient.

They may claim that the bombing of Hiroshima saved millions of lives, especially American ones, by removing the need to invade Japan, which was already suing for peace. Put bluntly and stripped of moral window dressing, for them too the end justifies the means.

The imperialist ruling classes, like all previous ruling and exploiting groups, remain obliged to hide the real objectives of domination and plunder behind ringing declarations. In recent months "our" leaders have become eloquent about the rights of small nations and cited the authority of international law for their actions.

In reality, war is not waged according to law. As the Reagan administration's shameless defiance of rulings by the International Court of Justice showed, its "thunderbolts" are impotent when an imperialist power stands accused.

The taking of hostages by Iraq must be seen in this context. As in other historical confrontations the militarily weaker side has played on a coincidental advantage in the form of workers, diplomats and business people from the enemy countries in the hope that the imperialists will not bomb their own citizens.

The real responsibility for the plight of western hostages rests with the imperialist warmongers themselves, a perception shared by a clear majority of hostages and their families. Saddam, of course, is utilising on this for his own propaganda purposes. In effect, his actions are designed to avoid or at least postpone a shooting war.

Tactic

Hostage taking is a military tactic, usually adopted by the weaker side against those with superior armed forces. The working class has itself had to use the tactic of hostage taking, as in the case of the 1871 Paris Commune.

The defenders of this first ever workers' government took hundreds of hostages including the Archbishop of Paris. They did so while under siege from the forces loyal to the capitalists in order to save the lives of Communist prisoners who had already endured terrible atrocities at the hands of their captors.

Faced with a similar albeit even greater threat from the forces of reaction the Bolsheviks took hostages in 1919 from the ranks of the bourgeoisie and Tsarist supporters.

Some may object that Saddam's actions have nothing to do with defending the Iraqi proletariat, but are motivated solely by his desire to incorporate Kuwait. Whilst it is true, this objection ignores the fundamental fact that the conflict in the Gulf is now between the major imperialist powers and a semi-colonial country.

The aim of these powers is to consolidate their capacity to divide and exploit the whole region and its strategic natural resources. Their victory would almost certainly mean the establishment of a permanent base in Kuwait for policing the region. It would be a victory for the most powerful enemies of the world's working class.

In a war between an imperialist and a semi-colonial country revolutionaries take the side of the oppressed country. For us there can be "just wars", but we adopt class criteria not moral criteria to define them.

Regardless of Saddam's motives the taking of hostages has put an obstacle in the way of the imperialist war drive. It is justified both in principle and as a tactic in practice.

There is a very easy way for the imperialist leaders to secure the safety of the hostages, spare the lives of thousands of Iraqi civilians and of the soldiers in their own armies: get out of the Gulf now! ■

Irish Labour's phantom presidency

Mary Robinson, widely acclaimed as "Ireland's first Left president", is nothing of the sort writes Jim Larkin from Dublin.

ROBINSON'S VICTORY in last month's presidential election has been claimed as a triumph for the forces of secularism and socialism in the Republic. But the new president has virtually no power. Even if she had, her campaign showed she has no intention of actually fighting for any of the "liberal" causes she symbolises.

A popular election is not required unless a Dáil party sponsors a rival candidate to the one proposed by the Government. For 17 years there has been no such election but three "agreed" presidents. The right-wing of the Irish Labour Party drafted her to contest Fianna Fáil's unbroken hold on this purely honorary office. Labour leader Dick Spring believed that a serious challenge to Fianna Fáil's hold on this symbolic post could somehow boost his own electoral prestige. Robinson apparently believed she could be a "symbol" of social concern in Irish politics, especially for women.

Consultation

The president is a titular head of state who presents ministerial seals of office and signs Dáil legislation. The office has only two minor discretionary powers.

Otherwise she may speak and act only in consultation with the government and as ceremonial representative of the state—attending the crowning of Japanese emperors or receiving the Queen of Holland.

Robinson is a constitutional lawyer with a record of successes in challenging the Irish state on women's rights, contraception, gay rights and abortion information. So why should she allow herself to be drafted for seven stifling years as an empty token isolated in the former Vice-Regal Lodge of British Governor Generals in Dublin's Phoenix Park?

Her chief handler, ex-Workers Party Stalinist and television producer Eoghan Harris, told the *Irish Times* after her victory:

"I didn't work for Mary Robinson in the Park because I wanted her to do anything in the Park. I don't want her to do anything in the Park. I don't believe anybody else does. I believe she's the only person who genuinely wants to do something in the Park. I think, deep down, the Irish people don't want her to do anything... For Mary Robinson to be in the Park is itself a political statement of enormous importance."

What Robinson promised to "do" is simply "to open up the presidency to all the people". Her powers just about extend to welcoming representatives of marginal groups to tea in the Vice-Regal Lodge!

What she made clear she would not, and could not, do is take a public position on any of the issues of democratic rights for women and gays which earned her her reputation.

Although Labour, the Workers' Party and the biggest trade union were her only organised supporters, she repeatedly rejected claims that she was the candidate of the labour movement.

As a powerless, president the working class could not effectively demand any action from Robinson which would either benefit them or expose her. Nor did her Labour or Workers Party back-



ers use her campaign to mobilise action on any issue. That would likely have lost her the election!

For these reasons the Irish Workers Group called for workers to abstain in the election.

Her victory was unexpected up to two weeks beforehand. But in a remarkable manoeuvre by Fine Gael, the Fianna Fáil candidate, deputy premier Brian Lenihan, was shown to have lied in public. He denied lobbying the president not to dissolve the Dáil in February 1982 when Garret Fitzgerald's Fine Gael coalition collapsed. Lenihan was forced to resign his ministerial position and his 15% lead was slashed. But his astonishing recovery proved once more the strength of Fianna Fáil populism. Lenihan won 44% of the first-preference vote against Robinson's 39%. The second count gave her 53% to Lenihan's 47% only when Fine Gael's 17% vote was distributed almost entirely to her. She was the clear second choice of the anti-Fianna Fáil bosses.

Robinson's supporters delude themselves that they have struck a blow against corrupt Fianna Fáil. In fact the reformist leaders have only succeeded in refurbishing popular illusions in the sham democracy of a presidency which can in no way benefit the working class.

They have done this at a moment when the political corruption of Irish bourgeois politics was exposed for all to see—in Lenihan's and Haughey's lies and in their collusion with the frauds of the giant Goodman meat exporting firm

The reformists claim to have given new hope to Irish women, but on the burning issues of contraception, abortion information and divorce their campaign repudiated any call for action and endorsed Robinson's refusal to be drawn on these issues.

Support

Fianna Fáil's electoral support remains intact as the largest party. It is the preferred social partner of the trade union bureaucracy. At this very moment these social partners are debating a ten-year perspective for 'national development' based on wage restraint which they will be selling to the mass of workers in the weeks ahead.

The left has organised a rank and file campaign of opposition, but it will be an uphill struggle against workers' illusions in this social partnership. In conditions of looming economic crisis a party which can so effectively dominate the working class will remain the clear choice of the ruling class for government no matter how many fake left presidents it allows. ■

USA

Since the start of Operation Desert Shield a mood of popular opposition has emerged to Bush's intervention in the Gulf. Dave Roberts reports from San Francisco on the sea change in public opinion and the opportunities confronting anti-war activists.

Will Bush get burned?

AFTER ONE of the longest honeymoons in US political history George Bush finds himself an embattled president. Since the record high approval ratings after the US invasion of Panama last December, Bush's popularity has slumped dramatically in the past two months.

The fiasco over the budget deficit and the scandal surrounding the federal government's \$500 billion bail-out of the savings and loans banks have been major factors in Bush's fall from grace in the polls. More important still is widespread unease at the administration's drive to war in the Gulf.

Following Bush's dispatch of the first 200,000 troops to the region polls showed 80% support for his decision. By mid-November a similar survey revealed that a mere 47% of Americans were still behind "their" Commander-in-Chief. Only 28% of those polled would support a first strike to drive Iraq out of Kuwait.

A widespread anti-war movement has sought to mobilise some of this public sentiment. Committees against the war have sprung up across the country and most major cities have witnessed demonstrations. Students from Colombia University in New York to Berkeley in northern California have staged "teach-ins" and campus protests, while Vietnam veterans like Ron Kovic (author of *Born on the Fourth of July*) have joined anti-war platforms.

The once unified resolve of the country's bourgeois politicians has shown signs of stress. Democrats in Congress have taken a cue from the vocal opposition to the war and have started to flex their constitutional muscle against the threat of Bush launching a surprise first strike.

Along with some senior figures in the Bush administration these Democrats are still haunted by the spectre of the US defeat in Vietnam which the Reagan years did not really exorcise from mass consciousness. Bush, of course, is quick to deny any comparison. His embarrassing vice-president, Dan Quayle, reminds us that

"Vietnam was a jungle whereas Kuwait is a desert"! Much of the US working class is only too aware that a shooting war in the Gulf could rapidly surpass the death toll of 58,000 Americans in Vietnam.

Today, as during the Vietnam War, blacks, latinos and other "ethnic" groups in the US are grossly overrepresented in the ranks of the military. There may not be conscription in 1990 but a poverty draft persists as joblessness and few educational opportunities drive many into the army.

Black and latino troops make up at least 30% of the Gulf task force. They are heavily concentrated among the likely combatants in the event of a shooting war. Little wonder, then, that anti-war feeling is especially strong within the still segregated non-white working class.

The legacy of Vietnam means there is a basis for a large anti-war movement, but the activists of today share many weaknesses with those of two decades ago. In the absence of a real workers party and with the organised working class drastically weakened by a decade of defeats, many have turned once again to the liberal wing of the Democrats.

Daniel Ellsberg, a leading Democratic supporter in the anti-war movement, made his name by leaking the "Pentagon Papers" in 1969, thus exposing the fabric of lies told to the US population to win its support for the Vietnam War. A recent interview with Ellsberg revealed how pro-imperialist such "progressive" Democrats really are:

"I think the embargo and blockade... that doesn't exclude essential food and medicine, should be maintained as long as necessary to force Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait."

(*East Bay Express*, 19/10/90). While many platform speakers are prepared to mouth slogans such as "No war for big oil", much of the anti-war mood shares a distinct chauvinism. The cry once more is "Bring our boys home". This wholly understandable concern with families, friends and lovers does not yet extend to the

plight of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and other Arab people who would perish in a shooting war.

In the main the three national campaigns against the war have refused to raise any call to break the blockade for fear of alienating "popular support". They have also shied away from the one social force that could translate anti-imperialist slogans into reality—the organised working class. In spite of industrial and political defeats that class still has considerable strength.

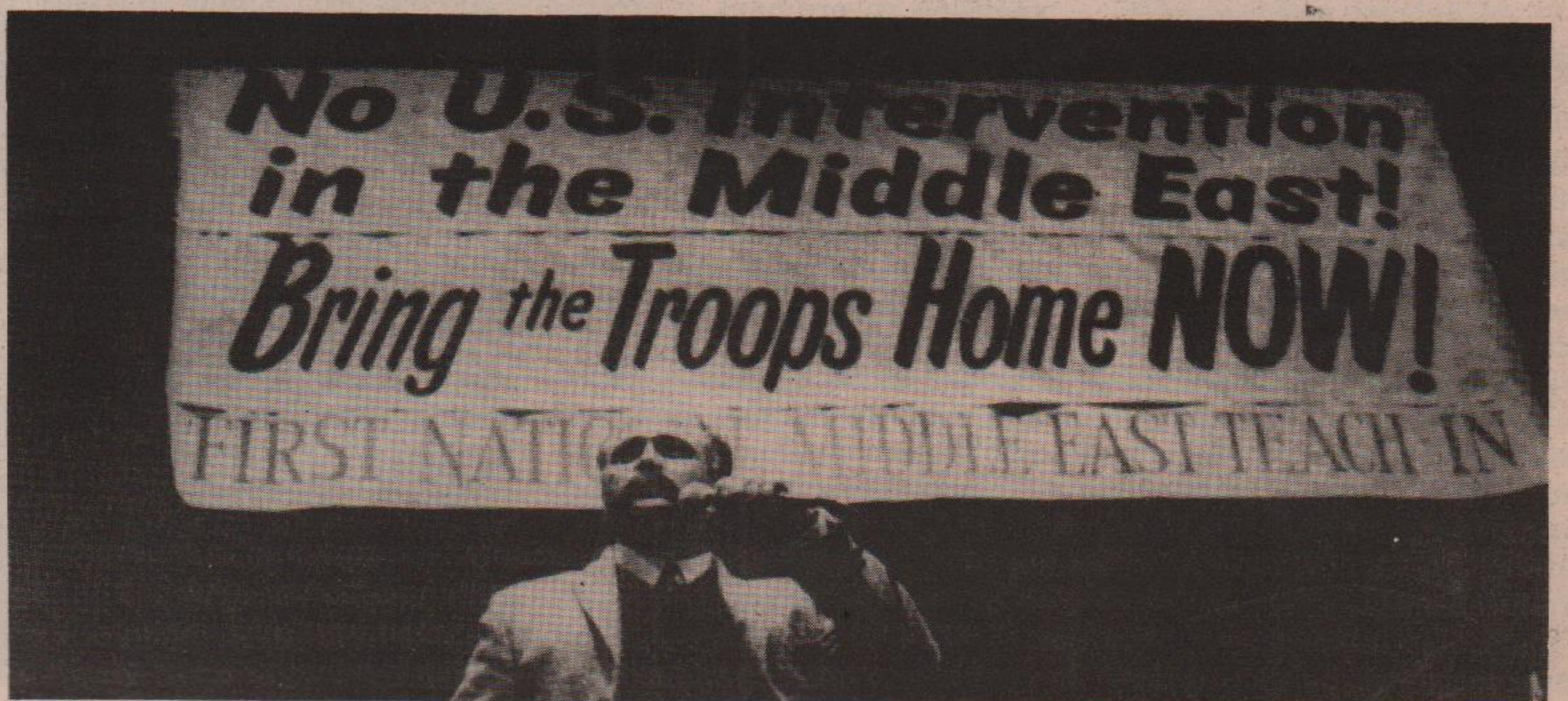
A sustained effort to win industrial action by transport workers and other key sections would be no easy task. But it could stop the Pentagon's war plans in their tracks. Recent efforts in San Francisco to forge links between opponents of the war and Greyhound bus workers, engaged in a long and bitter dispute, mark a small but encouraging start.

The anti-war movement must also address the crucial question of morale among ordinary troops and reservists. In Vietnam disillusionment and even open rebellion combined with the courageous determination of the National Liberation Front to inflict the most humiliating defeat ever on US imperialism.

There have already been signs of discontent and resistance within the ranks of those due to go to Saudi Arabia. A small number of soldiers and reservists have followed the brave if misguided example of Marine Corporal Jeff Paterson who would not board a plane bound for the Gulf and now faces the prospect of a court martial in Hawaii.

Clearly, socialists must defend these outstanding individuals against the brutal persecution of the US state, while recognising that their attempts to resist the war drive can never substitute for agitation within the ranks to convince troops to turn their weapons on their own imperialist rulers. ■

For more on the US anti-war movement see *LRCI Column*, page 12.



Ron Kovic speaks to anti-war rally

IN 1982 Israeli backed Lebanese forces massacred Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatilla camps. Israeli premier Menachem Begin told a complaining US Jewish leader:

"You must decide whether you are a Jew or an American. To be a Jew means to give full support to the government of Israel and to back the Prime Minister unequivocally on all issues, whether you agree with him or not."

It flows from this idea that to criticise the actions of the Israeli government—or to go further and question the right of the state of Israel to exist in its present form—is to be anti-semitic. The logic is simple: anti-semitism is fear and loathing of Jews; to be a Jew means to support Israel. Therefore to fail to support Israel is anti-semitic.

Socialists completely reject this view. Zionism, the ideology that insists that what is good for Israel is good for Jews, is a trap for Jews as much as it is an oppressive weapon against the Palestinians.

Israel was born as an oppressor state. The 17% of the Arab citizens inside Israel who were not forced out after 1948 were reduced to second class citizenship. Even today Arab Israelis earn only 68% of the Ashkenazi Jews' wage; of 1,839 high officials in the mid-1980s only 16 were Arabs.

Arabs are not allowed to serve inside the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), with the exception of the small Druze community. This means that many important state benefits that are only open to army veterans are denied to Arab Israelis. They receive only half the government aid per person that is spent on Jewish Israelis.

For the Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens the situation has been much worse. Israel has occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza since 1967 and the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon since 1982.

Israel has taken one third of the West Bank land for its own 120 settlements; 70,000 Israelis have been settled there in the teeth of Palestinian opposition. Since December 1987 this opposition has exploded in the West Bank—the intifada. Since then over 1,000 Palestinians have died, nearly 800 at the hands of the IDF.

Israel is thoroughly pro-imperialist. This loyalty comes at a high price. Israel is funded overwhelmingly by US grants and other credits without which Israel could not survive in its present form. But in return the US has secured a valuable ally.

Through its foreign policy and wars Israel divides and subjugates the Arab states in the region keeping them incapable of unity against itself and imperialism; it is a nuclear power and receives the most advanced US military technology and intelligence with which to pursue its aims. Israel has backed every US adventure abroad from Vietnam through to Panama and Granada. It has helped to act as a conduit for goods and arms to countries that the US cannot deal with for diplomatic reasons, such as South Africa.

Many socialists will accept this analysis of Israel and Zionism and support the right of the Palestinians to their own state alongside the state of Israel; they will condemn the discrimination against the Arabs. Yet they will argue that Israel—whatever it may mean for Arabs—is a secure and relatively democratic state for Israeli Jews, a haven and even a refuge for all Jews around the world.

This is another Zionist lie. Zi-

ISRAEL

Refuge or trap for Jews?



Israeli soldiers: defending an oppressor state

onism does not represent the interests of all Jews, even inside Israel.

Israel's Jews are broadly divided into two groups. First there are the Ashkenazi Jews. These are the Jews, originally from eastern Europe, who formed the bulk of the 'pioneers' of the settlements in the Mandate period. They represent 85% of world Jewry but only 10% of them live in Israel; yet they are the dominant elite and ruling class; they are the key political leaders and capitalists, the mainstay of the judiciary, the civil service, the military and secret service, the professional middle class and the academics.

On the other hand, 70% of Jews in Israel are Sephardic. This is a loose term originally referring to Spanish Jews but now, together with the term 'oriental', designating those Jews who broadly originate from the Arab world. While there are many important ethnic and cultural differences between Jews within this group (e.g. between Iraqi, Moroccan etc.) they do suffer from many of the same

and legitimate Jewish culture.

There has been a long history of protest by Sephardics against the state, against the terrible conditions they suffer in transit camps, and the slum conditions they endure, while the new Ashkenazi immigrants (e.g. most recently from Russia) are set up for life with the best housing and grants.

At most, Israel may be said to represent the interest of Israeli Hebrew-speaking Jews of Ashkenazi descent who enjoy the full privileges provided by US funds and share in the super-exploitation of Arab labour. This allows them to live as a labour aristocracy and professional middle class.

So what kind of solution do we seek?

Many on the left argue that we should recognise the right of the Palestinians to their own homeland and state in the West Bank but also recognise the right of the Jews in Israel to their own state in Israel, that Israeli Jews too have the right of self-determination.

We oppose this for several reasons.

There are 13 million Jews in the world. Less than four million of them live in Israel. Despite this Israel's supporters cultivate the belief that what's good for Israel is good for Jews. Keith Harvey, speaking at Permanent Revolution 90, explained why they are wrong.

problems inside Israel. Although Sephardics are only 10% of world Jews, two-thirds of them live in Israel.

But here is a bitter irony for it is precisely these who are second class citizens in their own country.

They are discriminated against in housing where in the 'black belts' and development towns they are herded into slum conditions. Many of them, coming from the surrounding Middle East countries, have given up their original petit-bourgeois life and been subject to terrible exploitation by the Ashkenazis who regard them as inferior and subject them to racist abuse.

Many Sephardics came from Arabic speaking communities sharing their literature, music and broader culture. Yet once inside Israel the Zionist state has worked relentlessly to eliminate all traces of this 'backward' and eastern tradition and pressure them into accepting the Ashkenazi culture as the only genuine

the right to self-determination has to be judged not abstractly but from the standpoint of the class interests of the workers and oppressed. Viewed in this way it is clear that Israel owes its existence and growth to the oppression of another people and the Israeli Jews cannot exercise their 'right' to self-determination in any other way.

If Israel retreats into pre-1967 borders it will still be left as a policeman for imperialism and oppressor of the Arab peoples of the region, ready to strike out against any genuine liberation movement.

To those who argue that this denies the legitimate aspirations of the Jewish people we say: if there are aspects of an Israeli Jewish state that can only flourish and survive on the basis of continued privileges over the Arab Palestinians, if it can only be maintained by discrimination and force, then it has no right to exist at all.

Marxists do not actively promote national cultures, seeking to preserve them at all costs

against the tendencies to voluntary assimilation. Of course, we are for the right of all minority or cultural groups to practice their religion and culture, within a secular state, free from persecution and discrimination.

But is it too much to believe that the lines of conflict between Palestinians and Jews in Israel can be broken down, that together a force can be built from within that can dissolve and overthrow the Zionist state?

We believe such a force can be constructed on certain conditions. The first is that no concessions are made to Zionism. On the contrary the privileges of the Israeli Jews, even the marginal ones enjoyed by the poorest Sephardic, must be opposed by a mighty struggle.

Initially this force will overwhelmingly consist of the Palestinians in the area; those inside Israel, the West Bank and Jordan. But not only them. If a great movement of the workers and camp dwellers can be built, a

movement that breaks from the "guerrilla struggle plus diplomacy" strategy of the PLO, and mobilises a thousand intifadas then it can weaken the support for Israel from outside. In turn this can fragment the Jewish pro-Zionist bloc and begin to bring home to tens of thousands of Sephardic Jews that their privileges are not worth defending and that they should throw in their lot with the Palestinians.

Many on the Ashkenazi Israeli left are sceptical of this. They point to Sephardic support for the right wing opponents of Labour—the Likud—and claim they are intrinsically anti-Arab.

This is at best a half truth. A higher proportion of Ashkenazis vote for the far right, anti-Arab parties. It is this layer that is in the vanguard of the West Bank settlements.

Most of the 60% Sephardics who vote Likud do so because of decades of betrayals by Labour while in office; it is a protest vote against the Ashkenazi establishment that has kept them oppressed and for a party that has, through the development of private sector capitalism in Israel, given some of them the hope of social advancement into the petit-bourgeoisie.

But there is another side of the story. There is a long history of Sephardic Jews aiding the struggle of the Palestinians to gain their freedom. The Black Panthers in the early 1970s were the most visible and progressive expression of this.

We believe a workers state can be built in Palestine. The Palestinians' national aspirations are democratic, progressive and justified. One indication of this is that the great majority of their political representatives have never adopted a policy of "drive Jews into the sea".

Revolutionary socialists fight for a unitary, non confessional, multi-national state that safeguards the rights of Jews as well as Arabs. Only nationalised and planned property, on the land as well as in industry, can accommodate and reconcile the interests of the communities of Palestine. But only the working class can bring this about. It will necessarily be a workers' state.

Only revolutionary socialism can guarantee a state which really reflects the interests of Jews, in the Middle East—by linking that state's destiny to the fate of the working class of the whole region. ■



the LRCI

NEWS FROM THE SECTIONS

PODER OBRERO (PERU)

Fighting "Fuji-shock"

PERUVIAN COMRADES in Poder Obrero PO(P) have worked feverishly in recent weeks amid the strike wave sweeping both the public and private sectors. They produced a bulletin aimed at all those in battle calling for the election of a recallable strike committee with the purpose of organising a general strike. PO(P) found their call taken up by key sections of workers including the electricity, paper and steel union federations. The committee has adopted a number of crucial elements in the LRCI's programme around the questions of workers control and the opening of company books.

The state, however, has responded with swift brutality to the strike wave. Among its victims is Miguel Chuquipondo, a leading figure in the chemical textile workers union. Arrested on 7 November he is reportedly still in police custody awaiting a possible transfer to Peru's notorious maximum security prison. PO(P) is calling on the international labour movement to rally to Chuquipondo and demand the Fujimori government release him immediately.

In Lima PO(P) has intervened in a range of activities opposing imperialism's war drive in the Gulf including a youth forum in solidarity with Iraq and Palestine. Comrades have also played a key role in the socialist youth movement, Coordinadora Juvenil Popular, who jointly staged a forum on the crisis of Stalinism and a day-long fete in a shanty town. This is doubly important since the CJP involves both the socialist and communist youth organisations and is fighting for a national congress of popular youth organisations. In all PO(P) has produced three lengthy documents plus the strike bulletin in recent weeks.

Get your trade union or Labour Party branch to send letters demanding the immediate release of Miguel Chuquipondo to:

- Presidente Alberto Fujimori, Palacio de Gobierno, Plazas de Armas, Lima, Peru
- Peruvian Ambassador, 52 Sloane Street, London SW1



Fujimori

REVOLUTIONARY TROTSKYIST TENDENCY

Against Bush's war

SUPPORTERS OF the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (RTT), sympathisers of the LRCI in the San Francisco Bay Area, have played an active part in building opposition to the Gulf war on an anti-imperialist basis. They have worked in both the Campaign against a Vietnam War in the Middle East (CAVME), dominated by Socialist Action, an affiliate of the USFI, and the Emergency Committee against US Intervention in the Middle East, led by the left Stalinists of the Workers World Party. These champions of the suppression of the Chinese democracy movement and Ceausescu's regime abused the powers of the chair of a Bay Area meeting to ensure defeat for a motion from the RTT calling for all platform speakers at a 20 October rally to be opposed to the blockade. Instead they foisted on the crowd the former Democratic governor of New Mexico who actually supports the US military presence in Saudi Arabia.

The third left strand in the anti-war movement is the creature of the Revolutionary Communist Party (US), an organisation linked to the Peruvian Maoist guerrillas of Sendero Luminoso. Its efforts have included the organisation of a delegation to Iraq including one-time boxing champion, Muhammad Ali. On the home front it has sought to stage publicity stunts including single-handed attempts to shut down military bases. What currently unites all three campaigns is despair at the prospects of carrying an anti-imperialist message into the US working class.

GRUPPE ARBEITERMACHT (OST)

A collection at Permanent Revolution 90 raised £450 for the fighting fund of GAM (Ost) the LRCI's sympathising section in the ex-GDR.

The LRCI
Arbeiter/Innenstandpunkt (Austria), Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany), Irish Workers Group, Poder Obrero (Peru), Pouvoir Ouvrier (France), Workers Power Group (Britain)
The Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (USA) and the GAM(Ost) are sympathising sections. Poder Obrero (OCIR) (Bolivia) is in the process of discussions with the LRCI with the aim of becoming an affiliated section.

GERMANY

Barricades in Berlin

As barricades go up again in Berlin and the Social Democrats send in the tanks, **Richard Brenner** in East Berlin reports on three days of street fighting that shook German politics.

AFTER THE Berlin police cleared houses occupied by squatters in the Prenslauer Berg and Lichtenburg districts on 13 November, news of the evictions spread quickly to the largest concentration of occupied properties east of the former Wall.

In the streets around Mainzerstrasse in the Friedrichshain area, squatters prepared themselves immediately and efficiently against the expected police assault. Disregarding assurances from the city council, at that time governed by a coalition of SPD and the Alternative List (a Green and radical alliance), barricades were thrown up around the entire network of streets and alleys connecting the principal squats.

Huge concrete palisades, metal railings, cars and even Christian Democrat election placards were used to seal off the main streets. The occupiers commandeered a tram and laid it across the rear end of the Mainzerstrasse, preventing any police attack from that direction.

The attack came late in the afternoon. Around 1500 police, almost all from West Berlin, swarmed around the entrances to the defended area and fought running battles with youth along the alleys leading to the Alexanderplatz. Despite the clouds of gas the defenders remained steadfast behind the barricades, subjecting the police to a barrage of stones, flares and Molotov cocktails. Too weak in numbers, and unprepared for the ferocity of the defence, the police withdrew.

Walter Momper, SPD mayor of Berlin, had the nerve to demand that the barricades be lifted in return for a guarantee that the



Berlin: after Momper's police went in

New Forum were aiming to demobilise the struggle just as they had one year earlier.

But no matter how effective the preparations of the squatters may have been, no isolated group of youth could hope to defeat the full might of the state. The decisive attack from the police was at dawn on 15 November. Around 4,500 police from all over western Germany smashed through the front entrance to the Mainzerstrasse, using tanks to demolish the barricades.

A tear gas canister was fired directly into the living room of one family and police shot three squatters. Hundreds of arrests followed as the area was cleared and sealed off.

The attack had a very definite goal. It was not to "restore order" because despite media lies relations between the occupiers and the local community were not strained and the violence was directly provoked by the police.

The real reason was to protect

Despite the clouds of gas the defenders remained steadfast behind the barricades, subjecting the police to a barrage of stones, flares and Molotov cocktails. But no matter how effective the preparations of the squatters may have been, no isolated group of youth could hope to defeat the full might of the state.

evictions would not take place. But given that he is an established liar, the squatters naturally ignored him.

Battles continued throughout the next day, when representatives from New Forum suddenly appeared, brandishing their slogan "No Violence!" This did not cut much ice with either the police or the squatters.

As one speaker from the Trotskyist Tendency in the PDS told a crowd in an impromptu meeting in the Mainzerstrasse, the

profits of the landowners and speculators.

The properties in the Mainzerstrasse were empty last year when the Wall came down. But the western bosses plan massive rises in the very low rents in East Berlin. They wanted the houses to stay empty until the rises had gone through.

In addition, the new political lords of the city wanted to stamp their authority on it. East Berlin has learned very quickly that the democratic state is no stranger to

the ruthless use of force to embed market values.

The Social Democrats who must take responsibility for these actions are no strangers to hypocrisy either. One week after the evictions SPD leader Oscar Lafontaine announced in a trendy Berlin paper, *Tageszeitung*:

"Anyone who doesn't have a roof over their head, or no longer knows how much it will cost, does not live in secure social conditions".

The thousands that his party has thrown onto the streets do not need to be told this.

The squatters themselves are mainly unemployed youth, students, draft avoiders and anarchists. They live very much within the confines of their own sub-culture and make little or no effort to forge links with the working class.

This is the key to understanding why the defence of the Mainzer lost. It was not in the first place a question of military preparation but of political strategy. On the face of it East Berlin workers could have developed a good deal of sympathy with the movement designed to put empty property to use.

But the "autonomous" movement of the squatters convened no joint meetings with the local community to resist the attacks on rent and housing. They regarded the local working class with disdain for not wanting to "drop out" of capitalist society. So one patronising leaflet issued by anarchists addressed to the local population called on them to "Break the chains in your heads!". The failure to mobilise the working class in support left the defence of the squats fatally isolated.

The whole episode shows the determination of the German bosses to crush resistance to their plans to make east Germany profit safe for investment. The workers of the former GDR will soon be on the sharp end of similar attacks. They must organise against the massive job cuts and rent rises that are on the way. The Trotskyist Tendency in the PDS is fighting for a programme that can do just that. ■

WHEN FUJIMORI hit the scene he was neither the candidate of the left nor the chosen instrument of the Peruvian right-wing and US administration. The latter had put their hopes and \$10 million behind the reactionary novelist Vargas Llosa. The left backed the United Left.

Fujimori was the President of the National Assembly of University Deans, and was a TV presenter for two years. In his pamphlet "Tsumany President" Fujimori explains the strange origins of his party, Cambio 90:

"In September 1988 I organised a meeting with eight professors of the University. I told them about my ideas, but they did not take notice of it. Three weeks later I invited them again, and I said that we could nominate some candidates for Senators and Members of Parliament. Still they were not convinced but without much enthusiasm they decided to support me."

Fujimori enlisted the support of Maximo San Roman who is the President of APEMIPE, the society for the small industrialists of Lima. Through similar lobbying Cambio 90 finally emerged as an alliance of small capitalists and technocrats.

While sharing many of the fundamental policies of Vargas Llosa's FREDEMO bloc Cambio 90's distinctiveness stemmed from its ability to project a technocratic and populist version of FREDEMO's neo-liberal policies. This populist base was further strengthened by the absorption into Cambio 90 of several Protestant religious sects that have close contacts with extreme right religious groups.

Fujimori may have sprung from thin air but his government could only have materialised thanks to the support of the workers parties in the second round, chief amongst them the United Left.

By contrast, Poder Obrero of Peru (PO(P)) was the only group which, from the beginning, maintained that all the presidential candidates were bourgeois, reactionary and pro-imperialist. Consequently, PO(P) called for a blank or spoiled vote and to prepare an indefinite national strike against the inevitable economic austerity packages to come.

The left group, Partido Unitario Mariateguista (PUM) asked Fujimori to apply a right wing programme but one less draconian than that of Vargas Llosa! The

PERU

Gripped by strikes

When Alberto Fujimori won the race for President of Peru in April this year many people in Peru were as astonished by his victory as those in Europe and North America. Diego Mocar draws on a series of articles from Poder Obrero (Peru) to show that there are few surprises in his actions since.

PUM demanded that Fujimori tax the rich, that the state should defend wage levels, and that he should promote education and health:

"We do not believe that what the candidate of Cambio 90 had said until now is in contradiction with these fundamental points, points which are in the direction of organising the economy in a popular and national way".

Behind this disgraceful left cover for Fujimori the PUM sought an economic shock but one with the permission of the reformist class collaborators.

The new President took office on 29 July. After a nailbiting wait, Fujimori's Prime Minister, Juan Carlos Hurtado, announced the new government's economic plan on 8 August.

It introduced the Peruvian people to the worst economic shock

they have ever suffered.

Overnight, there were huge increases in the prices of basic commodities. Items like rice, bread and milk have increased in price by seven times, whilst the minimum wage has only been increased four fold. It now stands at £78 per month. Yet it costs £7.80 to give a family of four one decent meal a day.

The measures included the elimination of controlled prices and a rise in taxes. A gallon of petrol has gone up 30 times, making it nearly the most expensive in the world. The effect on the poor and the infirm has been dramatic. For example, the price of medicines has gone up 400% since 8 August. In general inflation is running at 122%.

Ironically, the huge "black" and "informal" economy (from illegal rackets to street pedlars) which

provided much of Fujimori's support during the election, is one of the hardest hit sectors. In short, the whole programme is rather similar to that proposed by FREDEMO. The difference is that the shock proposed by Vargas Llosa was not so drastic as that undertaken by Fujimori!

The workers were not slow to act. A demonstration to the presidential palace and mass looting in which the people distributed the food among themselves were the opening warning shots by the masses.

But presented with this opportunity for a fight back the leaders of the left and the trade unions opposed the call for an indefinite general strike. Instead they called a limited national stoppage and passive demonstrations, and then hardly sought support for these.

Meanwhile, Fujimori is

strengthening his links with the military. Cambio 90 has an extremely weak position in Congress, and many of those who supported him are now distancing themselves. Faced with this defection Fujimori seems to have turned to the armed forces for the support he needs. Military representation in the cabinet has been increased, whilst control of the repression against the workers has been handed over entirely to the army. The special units in the army have also been given greater powers. If the crisis deepens and workers escalate their resistance then Fujimori may well turn into an open Bonapartist leader resting on the armed forces and disregarding the empty husk of Congress.

Fujimori's government has made a firm decision to reach an agreement with the IMF on how to "reinsert Peru into the international economy". In mid-September it was announced that Peru would be signing a military co-operation treaty with the US. In return Fujimori continues to beg more economic aid.

Despite the police and military repression the Peruvian labour movement has maintained a permanent wave of strikes and occupation of factories. The workers of Carbolan (a subsidiary of the German transnational Pelikan) are in the fore of this struggle. The miners are on indefinite general strike. So are 400,000 public employees at time of writing.

The oil, electricity, textile and bank workers have also launched strikes and demonstrations. Everything shows that the workers are prepared to fight to the end to defeat Fujimori's government. The obstacles facing the workers are to be found primarily in the treacherous policies of the Stalinist and reformist leaders of the working class. The Peruvian workers are reaching a dramatic historic moment, in which it seems that one class will have to defeat the other, not just this or that section of them.

The only way forward for the Peruvian workers and impoverished urban and rural masses is the building of a revolutionary party. In the process of building that party the masses have to defend themselves from the attacks of Fujimori's administration and to break with the reformist policies of their leaders. It is crucial to rally forces around the following demands:

- For a national fight back committee accountable to the rank and file
- Abolition of the state of emergency; release all political and trade union prisoners
- For a sliding scale of wages and hours
- Occupations against closures and privatisations
- Workers' control of production; give land to those that work it
- Nationalisation of all banks, industries and transport without compensation
- Repudiate the external debt
- Break all treaties and military pacts with the imperialist countries
- For an indefinite general strike
- Build workers' militias; for a workers' and peasants' government
- For the Socialist Federation of Latin America!



Miners and peasants unite to protest against austerity

FRANCE

Students take the streets

AFTER FIVE years French students have taken to the streets again. In 1986 it was to oppose plans to make it more difficult to get a university place. In weeks of action one student was killed and scores injured; but they did wreck the "reform" and with it Prime Minister Chirac's chances in the 1988 presidential election.

This October and November, school students organised a series of protests against the state of secondary education and the terrible poverty of life in the suburbs. Leaking roofs, crumbling buildings, poor equipment lack of teachers and supervisory staff; allvied for top place on the list of complaints.

A series of sexual attacks on pupils, violence against teachers

and hostility to police harassment of black youth led to "security" in school becoming a major issue.

Beginning in the Paris suburbs, students in the lycées (15-18 years old) went on strike. The demands of the local committees quickly focused on teacher numbers—the call for a pupil-teacher ratio of 25 to 1 was widely taken up—and money to repair dilapidated buildings.

A joint demonstration was organised in Paris at the end of October, with tens of thousands of school students. The government's response was a promise—the creation of 900 new supervisory posts—and a prayer; that the movement would die a death during the half-term holidays.

This hope was dashed as the

movement emerged from the holidays strengthened. A further joint demonstration was organised in Paris on 12 November, with the participation of the major teaching unions. Notably absent were university students or any other union federations. Despite the fact that the plight of schools merely highlights the terrible situation in the massive French state sector, the union leaders did not see fit to link their struggles with those of the school students. This was a bureaucratic decision for which French workers will pay dearly over the next months.

Hundreds of thousands of school students from all over France joined in, many of them refusing to pay for their train tickets, successfully relying on pressure on railway workers to ensure a free passage. The demonstration was a massive success and resulted in a government climbdown.

The government—a minority coalition of the Socialist Party and assorted non-party bourgeois politicians—was meanwhile facing other problems. A new anti-working-class and anti-democratic "reform" to the health system had met the joint opposition of the right-wing parties and the Communist Party. The re-

sult was a motion of no-confidence which threatened to bring down the Rocard government.

The Prime Minister was under severe pressure to show that his government was still in control and could solve the schools crisis. President Mitterrand, hoping for a change in Prime Minister, met the students and said he "understood" their problems—implying that Rocard didn't!

Education Minister Jospin then magically found £450 million to fund repairs and 1700 new posts. This is less than half the figure put forward by the students, and will do nothing in itself to solve the underlying problem; namely, that the lack of teachers stems from bad pay and conditions.

For the moment the students seem satisfied with their partial victory. However, they will undoubtedly be back on the streets.

The government's financial solution will do nothing to fundamentally change the position of most youth in French society, or to offer them a decent future beyond the school gates. For the moment, though, as in 1968 and 1986, French students have sent a clear message to youth all over the world: if you fight, you can win! ■

VICTOR SERGE was born in Brussels on 30 December 1890 into a poverty wracked family of Russian political exiles.

When he died of a heart attack in Mexico City in 1947 his body was taken to a police station. His family and friends found that the upturned soles of his shoes had holes in them, his clothes were threadbare and of the coarsest material. Victor Serge accumulated nothing materially from his forty years as a revolutionary.

He served five years in capitalist prisons and three years in the camps of Stalin's Russia. Forced to flee France by the Nazis he spent the last years of his life in hardship and exile in Mexico.

Yet Serge's writings testify to the fact that he gained an incomparable store of intellectual and moral riches from this life—riches which he succeeded in handing on to future generations. For Serge's whole life was spent in the ebb and flow of revolution and counter-revolution. He took up his position in the ranks of conscious and dedicated revolutionaries.

Serge's family belonged to the generation of the Russian Narodniks who pitted themselves in bitter struggle against the Tsarist Autocracy. Serge remembered towards the end of his life: "On the walls of our humble and makeshift lodgings there were always the portraits of men who had been hanged."

Indeed throughout his life he was to know as comrades and friends a long succession of the victims and martyrs of the class struggle.

Fighters

Because he became a writer of tremendous power, he was able to immortalise these fighters. Today thanks to him we can appreciate what manner of men and women they were who, between 1917 and 1923, turned the world upside down.

But perhaps even more importantly Serge took part in and chronicled the struggle against the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the Communist International.

After leaving the youth movement of the Belgian workers' party he migrated to Paris. Here he was drawn to Anarchist individualism. Many of his new acquaintances and friends became embroiled in the half-criminal, half-political world of the "Bonnot gang". Bank raids, shoot-outs with the police ended for many of the young desperadoes on the guillotine or in suicide. Serge, editor of the periodical *L'Anarchie*, was framed as an accomplice of the gang.

He received a five year jail sentence. His experiences here were later to be distilled in his novel *Men in Prison* (1930). Serge rapidly rejected his crazed ultra-individualism of this period, recognising its total despair faced with the juggernaut of the bourgeois state. But in a deeper sense he never abandoned the viewpoint of the free individual, morally compelled to stand up against the full power of the whole machinery of "justice", its spies, police narks, courts and prisons.

Though Serge was to rally to the Bolsheviks, to recognise the necessity of the workers' state, the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the Red Terror itself, it remained for him a "cruel necessity", to quote Cromwell, and moreover a dangerous and corrupting necessity.

This unresolved contradiction in Serge's outlook was at one and the same time the source of the tension and drama in his creative works; the origin of his enormous courage in standing up to triumphant Stalinism. But it also lay at

VICTOR SERGE

From anarchism to Bolshevism

30 December marks the centenary of the birth of Victor Serge. Serge symbolised the generation of young workers who made the transition from anarchism to Bolshevism under the influence of the Russian revolution. Mike Evans pays tribute to the writer and revolutionary.

the roots of the political failure of his final exile (1936-47).

However in 1919 Serge arrived in Petrograd and threw himself unstintingly into the service of the revolution. The city was racked by cold, hunger and threatened with capture by the forces of counter-revolution. The workers' dictatorship had been obliged by the brutal facts of civil war to resort to coercion—not only against the class enemy, but also against tired, exhausted, demoralised and backward elements within the proletariat itself.

This was still, however, a dictatorship of the real fighting vanguard of workers, sailors and Red Army fighters, elected by the soviets. But the privations of war and famine and the shattering of many of the workers' illusions in a rapid progress to equality and plenty had taken its toll on the masses. Cracks, even chasms were emerging between the vanguard and the rest of the class.

The worst such example occurred towards the end of the Civil War in 1921 in Petrograd and Kronstadt. Serge, despite his later polemics on the subject, rallied unequivocally to the Bolshevik Party. He recognised the errors of the party leadership in Petrograd. But he remained clear that there was no possible replacement for the Bolsheviks, that without them the workers' state would collapse, and that the anarchist call for a third uprising to "regenerate" the revolution was a utopia.

He wrote at the time: "Despite its mistakes and abuses, the Bolshevik Party is at present the supremely organised, intelligent and stable force which, despite everything, deserves our confidence. The Revolution has no other mainstay, and is no longer capable of any thoroughgoing regeneration."

Serge played a central role in Petrograd in the work that led to the foundation of the Communist International. His articles were a regular feature of its publications and he helped prepare its first Congresses.

In 1923 Serge rallied to the cause of the Opposition against the Troika of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamanev and like many oppositionists found himself posted abroad from 1923 to 1926, largely in Germany and Austria.

From 1926 until his expulsion from the party in 1928 Serge was a prominent member of the United Opposition. His *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* present a unique witness to events—Trotsky's last speech to the Central Committee, interrupted by shouts of "Menshevik! Traitor! Renegade! Liberal! Liar! Scum!"; Joffe's suicide and funeral, the occasion for Trotsky's last public speech—all these feature vividly in Serge's memoirs. So do the characters, the grey malevolent Stalin, the excitable and changeable Zinoviev—a "sincere demagogue" Serge calls him.



After the defeat of the Opposition and a short spell in jail, Serge devoted himself to long term literary work. He wrote *Year One of the Russian Revolution*. Serge called it "merely" a history. But it is one which paints a lively picture of the early Bolshevik party with its critical spirit, its differences of opinion, its interaction with the masses.

Serge was clearly determined, if political activity was forbidden him, to record and bear witness to the great historic moments of the epoch. He began a series of novels—*Men in Prison* (1930), *Birth of Our Power* (1931) and *Conquered City* (1932).

In 1933 Serge was arrested once again and deported to Orenburg on the Ural river. His novel *Midnight in the Century* is based on this experience. In it he describes the agonising arguments of the exiled oppositionists trying to come to terms with the extent of the degeneration of the regime and with their own links to "the Party". In the end it is a worker Rodin who voices the need for a break with the now utterly Stalinist party:

"Listen to me" he tells his comrades, "It is no longer true; something has been lost forever. Lenin will never rise again in his mausoleum. Our only brothers are the working people who no longer have either rights or bread. They're the ones we must talk to. It is with them we must remake the revolution and first of all a completely different party."

There are no single heroes in Serge's novels. Every individual perceives only part of the truth. Despite his clear and unequivocal defence of the working class and its liberation, Serge can get inside the murky consciousness even of Stalin and his GPU chiefs.

Rescued by an international campaign he was expelled from the USSR. He was obliged to leave the manuscripts of two further novels behind him in the Stalinist vaults.

At first Serge rallied to the Movement for the Fourth International, becoming a member of its General Council. But in 1937 serious political differences led to a split. Serge rejected Trotsky's criticisms of the Spanish POUM as "sectarian". He became involved in a sharp polemic with Trotsky over the question of Kronstadt, the operations of the Cheka and the morality of the practice of taking hostages.

Nevertheless Serge did co-operate with Trotsky's son Sedov in the work of exposing the Moscow trials in the years 1936-38.

In his memoirs he recalls how "... more than once we had lingered until dawn in the streets of Montparnasse, labouring together to comb out the tangle of the Moscow trials, pausing from time to time under a street lamp for one or other of us to exclaim: we are in a labyrinth of utter madness!"

This nightmare world is the subject of what is perhaps Serge's greatest novel, *The Case of Comrade Tulyev*, started in Paris but not completed until 1942 in Mexico.

Poverty

Serge's last years in Mexico were spent in considerable poverty. And of course the danger of Stalinist assassination, which had brought Trotsky's life to an end, stalked him too. Once after meeting Natalia Sedova, Trotsky's widow, he noted in his diary: "We are the sole survivors of the Russian revolution here and perhaps anywhere in the world... There is nobody left who knows what the Russian revolution was really like."

But it would be wrong to think that, having lived through and written about such tragic events, Serge ended his life in pessimism and despair.

In the last words of *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* written in February 1943, he speaks of events that are "throwing the people of entire continents into the necessity for starting life afresh on new foundations," despite the failures of revolutionaries. He continues:

"That these foundations must be of social justice, of liberty, is for me a wonderfully evident fact which little by little is asserting itself beyond the inhumanity of the present time. The future seems to me to be full of possibilities greater than any we have yet glimpsed throughout the past. May the passion, the experience and even the faults of my fighting generation have some small power to illuminate the way forward". ■



Soviet soldiers at Kronstadt

Dear comrades,

The anti-Stalinist revolutions in Eastern Europe of 1989/90 have been a test of the validity of the Trotskyist theory of Stalinism and therefore the likelihood of Trotskyism ever becoming a mass force in Eastern Europe.

Workers Power has insisted many times that no peaceful or gradualist restoration of capitalism was possible in these states—an argument based on Trotsky's view that it is not possible to simply "wind the film of reformism backwards" towards capitalism in the Soviet workers' state.

Events seem to have proven otherwise. Already in what was East Germany and almost certainly in every other east European country within the next year or so (with the only likely exception being Europe's museum of Stalinism, Albania) capitalism has been restored.

Revolutions against Stalinist bureaucratic privilege were not, of course, always peaceful. But the lives of Romanian workers were lost in defeating Ceausescu, not in

Peaceful restoration

resisting open capitalist restoration. Similarly, working class resistance to the austerity measures that the restoration of capitalism will bring will surely be far from peaceful. But that is after the event, against the new "free market".

Does Workers Power think that Trotsky's predictions about the impossibility of peaceful restoration apply only to pre-1945 Stalinist Russia?

Other questions arise from this desire to apply Trotskyist theory to the collapse of Stalinism. Briefly, does the expectation of capitalist restoration coming about through civil war lead to an overestimation of the possibility of an anti-Stalinist political revolution and the building of healthy workers' states?

Or has WP/LRCI simply suffered from an excess of revolutionary optimism?

Yours fraternally
Stuart Crosthwaite
Sheffield

We reply:

Certainly capitalism has been peacefully restored in Germany. But there is a danger of generalising too much from the experience of Germany. To restore capitalism means restoring not just property forms but the process of capital accumulation: in short the profit system as a whole.

East Germany had the "advantage" of being able to collapse into a pre-existing and very strong capitalist system on the other side of the wall. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe to restore the accumulation process means first of all attacking real wages, subsidies, social rights etc. Germany was able

to subsidise restoration, at considerable cost. But the problems of the world imperialist economy make a new "Marshall Plan" for the rest of Eastern Europe and the USSR impossible.

None of this means that the Eastern European workers are consciously wedded to the defence of post-capitalist property now, but that they can, and sections of them certainly will, be won to its revolutionary defence in struggle. And this possibility is the cause for justified optimism despite the present absence of a revolutionary party in these countries.

The workers' consciousness was one of the material factors in the pre-war USSR which led Trotsky to believe that the workers' state couldn't be reformed back to capitalism.

Nevertheless Trotsky hinted that a "cold stroke"—a peaceful restoration—was possible after the introduction of the new Soviet Constitution in 1936, modelled on bourgeois legal norms.

Did Trotsky therefore place too much faith in the Soviet working class before 1936? Did his confidence that they would resist—arms in hand—the capitalist counter-revolution contradict his later admission of the possibility of a "constitutional" social overturn?

Workers Power is committed to exploring these questions further. But we firmly believe that only Trotsky's theory is of use, carefully refined and re-elaborated, in explaining the demise of Stalinism just as it was the only theory capable of grasping its origins and expansion. ■

Class law?

Dear Workers Power,

You may be aware of the forthcoming legal wrangle over the ownership of certain properties in the City of Westminster. It appears that some time ago, in an act of benign aristocratic paternalism, the Duke of Westminster gave a 999 year lease on 300 houses to Westminster Council with the explicit provision that the houses be rented exclusively to members of the "working class". Now, of course, in keeping with Heseltine's scheme for the privatisation of council housing, the maniac Tory controlled Council, led by Lady Porter, would like to see them sold off and eventually diverted into the market place. Hence the court case.

The ramifications of this case are important. Firstly, Westminster Council winning the right to sell the houses would lead to a considerable dent in the stock of council housing available to the poorer population of central London. But there are other issues at stake.

To a great extent the case will rest on whether or not the law now accepts the idea of a working class. And if it does exist, what criteria should be used to define—legally—an individual member of the working class able to rent one of these houses? Westminster Council will deploy all the legal heavyweights at their considerable disposal to show, pragmatically, empirically and obviously without recourse to any theoretical model of society, that the working class is simply an

outmoded and meaningless concept in modern capitalist society. By showing the ways in which cultural, ideological and economic strategies traditionally used to define the working class seem to contradict each other, they'll hope to "prove" that an identifiable individual member of the working class does not exist.

If they can show this then they will be able to sell the houses to whoever they like, as the social group they were intended to provide for no longer exists! Neat eh?

But the implications of a Westminster Council win on the issue will not be restricted to the sale of this council property and the subsequent use of the capital thus realised to hold down next year's poll tax.

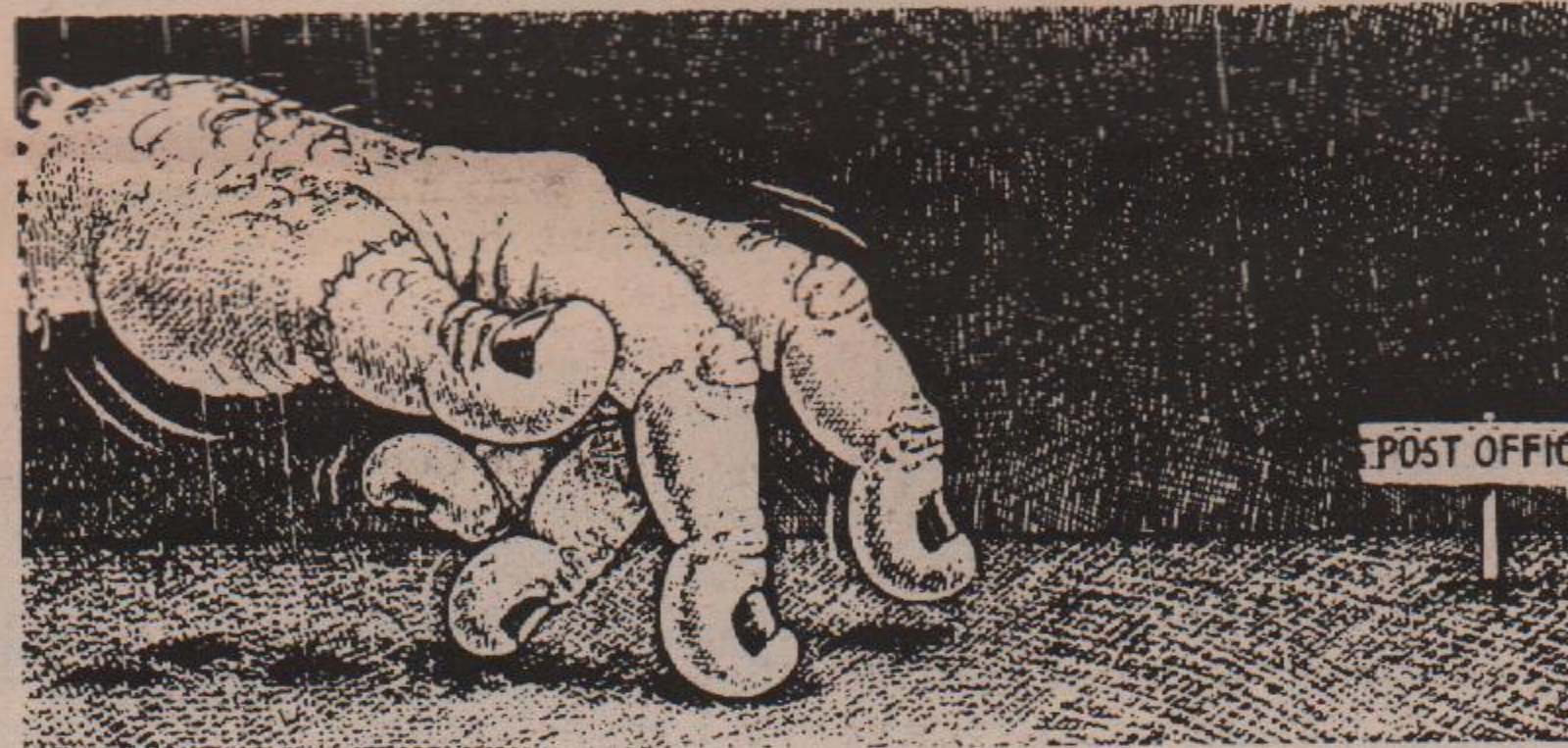
Westminster Council is well known for its radical, pathfinding experimentation with the boundaries of legality—remember the sale of three council cemeteries for just 15p? It has long been a Thatcherite flagship in its unusually extreme implementation of Tory local government policy. A test case such as this is therefore right up Lady Porter's street. One of the cornerstones of contemporary capitalist ideology is the myth that we now live in a classless society. Legal proof of this would suit the ideologists of the right down to the ground.

In comradeship
Robert Stone

This letter has been cut for reasons of space

Write to:
Workers Power,
BCM 7750,
London WC1N 3XX

Silly Sid



Dear comrades,

The bizarre advertising campaign for the sell-off of electricity may be tempting some workers. Before sending off the forms it is worth noting that the *Financial Times* has just revealed that the share prices of three of the top six privatisations have now fallen below their actual issue price, without even taking inflation into account. The "Sid" who was fool enough to hold onto the shares is now poorer than if the money had been hidden under the duvet cover.

Worse is to come. Leading bro-

kers expect the Stock Exchange to fall at least another 20% before the bottom of this bear market is reached. In addition all dividends are about to be slashed as profits slump.

Could it be that re-nationalisation will come back into vogue, as Sid's savings are wiped out and Sid sees state bail-outs as the only solution to this financial plight? Sid is finding that far from being the Iron Lady, Thatcher was really made of fool's gold.

Yours in comradeship
Brian Green, London

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I would like to know more about the Workers Power Group and the LRCI

Make cheques payable to Workers Power and send to:
Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1 3XX

Name:
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WHERE WE STAND

WORKERS POWER is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.

Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need.

Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

The Labour Party is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party and the LPYS, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.

The misnamed Communist Parties are really Stalinist parties—reformist, like the Labour Party, but tied to the bureaucracy that rules in the USSR. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) inflicts terrible defeats on the working class world-wide.

In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, Stalinist bureaucracies rule over the working class. Capitalism has ceased to exist but the workers do not hold political power. To open the road to socialism, a political revolution to smash bureaucratic tyranny is needed. Nevertheless we unconditionally defend these states against the attacks of imperialism and against internal capitalist restoration in order to defend the post-capitalist property relations.

In the trade unions we fight for a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions and councils of action.

We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. We politically oppose the nationalists (bourgeois and petit bourgeois) who lead the struggles of the oppressed nations. To their strategy we counterpose the strategy of permanent revolution, that is the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle by the working class with a programme of socialist revolution and internationalism.

In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class—fighting for revolutionary leadership.

If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!

Fighting Fund

Fund drives often say donations are welcome no matter how large or small. This month we are grateful for £2,000 from a supporter in South London and £15 from one comrade across the Thames in Hackney. Whatever you can afford we can use.

£28,065

Workers power

INSIDE

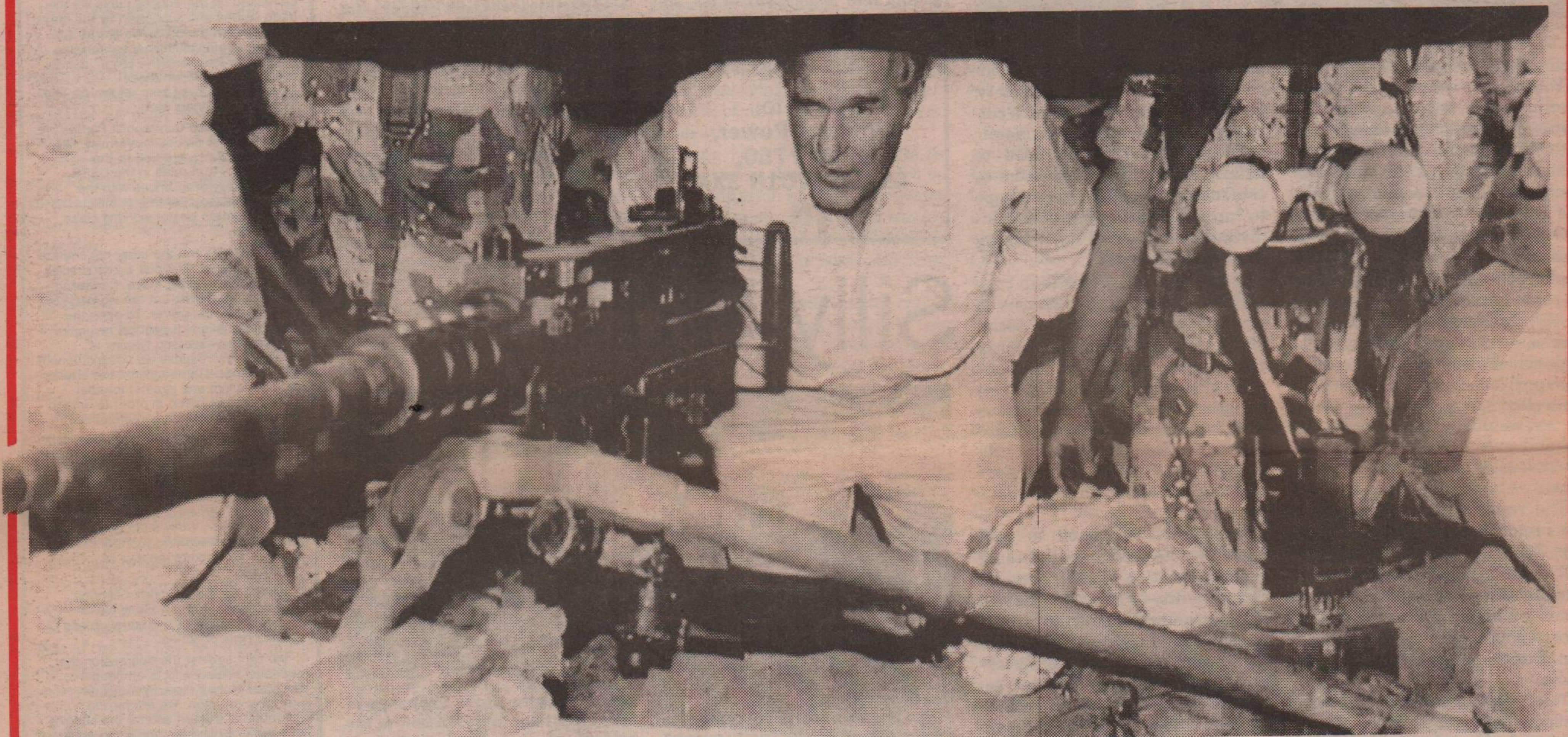
- Israel: refuge or trap for Jews?
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Break the blockade

Hands off Iraq!



George Bush: finger on the trigger

GEORGE BUSH is determined to have a war in the new year. On the political front he has demanded that the UN set a time limit on an Iraqi withdrawal. In anticipation of success he has ordered 200,000 further US troops to the Gulf to add to the 250,000 already there. Britain has followed up with a doubling of its forces to 30,000.

In August Bush justified the troop build up as "wholly defensive". Now he says that the troops are essential to ensure "an adequate offensive military option". But in the background lurks an anti-war movement growing more vocal and more visible. Congress has felt the pressure and now insists that it be allowed to approve any plan for war.

But Bush will not be bound. The Commander-in-Chief asserts his rights. He hopes to by-pass Congress by gaining the approval of the UN security council for any US action. In recent weeks the diplomatic corps have flown

back and forth across the globe with carrot and stick to get backing for a US strike.

The White House hopes to buy Gorbachev's assent with promises of emergency aid this winter. With China Bush hopes to call in a few favours; the US was the first to step in with credits to end China's isolation after the regime's bloody massacre of its own people in Tiananmen Square.

The Arab states are being drip fed promises of further aid and talks over the future of Palestine if they keep the anti-Iraq coalition intact.

In mid-November Bush launched a counter-offensive against the anti-war

movement, stressing three reasons why the troops are in the Gulf.

"First, the world must not reward aggression". But the US has done precisely that over the years with Israel. For example after Israel's invasion of the Lebanon, its army has occupied the southern border for more than eight years. In these years the US government has increased its aid to Israel.

The aggression that "must not be rewarded" is that which hits at US imperialist interests.

Bush admits as much when he states "Second, our national security is at stake... and energy security is national security."

But what god-given

right has the US to plunder and control the oil reserves of the world? For most of this century imperialism has violated the democratic and national rights of dozens of peoples in the region, has broken up and redrawn the borders of states at will—and all for what?

Not for "national" security but for the "profit security" of the west's oil companies; for the big capitalists everywhere whose profits may be squeezed if they have to pay more for oil. For that they are prepared to kill and maim tens of thousands.

"Lastly, innocent lives are at stake", he bleats. But Bush does not have in mind the millions of innocents starved to death by famine in Africa through lack of adequate aid after centuries of plundering its natural wealth; or even the 7,000 people in Pan-

ama mown down by US marines in order to get at one time friend Noriega. He means the dwindling numbers of hostages who themselves stand to become the first casualties of imperialist aggression.

Workers everywhere must stand firm against the White House propaganda and remember one simple truth: imperialism is the cause of the present injustices in that strife torn region. By intrigue and covert action, by war and buying off privileged minorities imperialism has stripped this region of its wealth and undermined its stability. There can be no siding with imperialism to right a wrong that it manufactured.

That's why workers must act now to break the UN-sponsored blockade that is taking effect, whose design is not an alternative to war but to soften up Iraq so that it will

succumb in war. Already the sanctions has meant the rationing of medicines, soaps and some foodstuffs.

That's why workers should campaign to get the imperialist troops out now before they devastate the area completely; that's why workers should support the victory of Iraq should open fighting erupt in the weeks ahead.

Especially in Britain we have much to gain by reversing the Tory war plans. The issues of Europe and the Poll Tax have forced Thatcher out and softened the government up. Denying them the glory of another Falklands and instead inflicting a humiliating defeat on the Tories will hasten the whole crew out of office.

- Imperialist troops out of the Gulf!
- Break the blockade!