

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Socialism and the East European revolutions

See pages 6, 7 and 8

EASTERN EUROPE:



The left begins to organise

By Milka
Tyszkiewicz (Polish
Socialist Party —
Democratic
Revolution,
Wroclaw)

For the first time in almost 60 years, there are leftist and pro-democratic movements and parties organised from below in the Eastern Bloc.

Democracy means we oppose Stalinism. But for us freedom doesn't mean the free market.

Human beings are free when their rights to self-

determination, against the rights of the market, are fully respected. East European workers must fight for their rights to self-organisation, freedom of speech and decision-making.

Every human being on the earth is a member of one family on one earth. Never has our common future been so depen-

dent on everybody's sense of responsibility and solidarity.

Unless we enforce a programme based on solidarity, our cheap labour will destroy your labour market. Your investments will destroy our independence which we have been fighting for.

The East European left faces problems which we cannot solve alone. We need your help.



Milka Tyszkiewicz

The way of the Romanovs

WOMEN'S EYE

By Liz Millward

The media is obsessed with royalty. Taxpayers' money keep them in luxury. Royal weddings attract millions of working class people watching on the TV or lining the streets of London.

Thousands turn up to catch a glimpse of a royal baby. Labour politicians accept 'honours' from the Queen and give glowing accounts of her in their biographies. But is royalty harmless, if expensive? Or should socialists, instead of fawning over them like Kinnoch and his mates, advocate, quite literally, that they should all be shot?

Almost two-thirds of the 1000+ people questioned by *New Woman* magazine don't want to join the royal family. They don't want a share in the wealth that makes the Queen the world's richest woman. They don't want a £5m house as a wedding present. Yet in the same survey, only 11% could not give decisive answers to questions like 'Who would make the best Queen?' or 'Is Princess Diana likely to have an affair?'

I ran a mini-survey amongst my friends and colleagues, asking whether Diana, Anne or Fergie would be the best Queen. Everyone had an answer, but more interesting everyone had a reason for their answer. No one said they didn't care. People think about royalty.

At the same time many people have criticisms of the idea of monarchy. It is anathema in the age of democracy. Lots of people don't agree with the notion of privileges granted by birth, and don't want their taxes used to maintain those privileges for the Queen and hundreds of hangers-on. But for all that they are still interested in royal weddings, births, sex, eating habits and thoughts.

In *New Woman's* survey Diana came top — scoring best in sexiness, beauty and mothering skills. But curiously enough, when it came to who would make the best Queen, Diana and Anne were neck and neck. My own survey put Anne well in the lead (7:1).

Almost three-quarters of the people surveyed by *New Woman* thought Anne 'works hardest for Britain'. It was her charitable work which put Anne at the top of my private survey. Beauty does not necessarily make a good Queen.

Perhaps not everyone is taken in by someone who can describe Eton as a 'local school' even if she does turn her children out well for the camera.

But what should socialists make of all this? Are the royal family as harmless as an expensive and eternal soap opera? Should we keep them on under socialism for the sake of peace? Or should we follow the Bolsheviks' fine answer?

The easy response is to say 'OK, you can stay — but only if you move into a semi, and work for a living'. We could nationalise their vast estates, and turn their palaces into museums. Charles would easily get a job as a planning officer and Diana go back to nursery nursing. Or could they?

Underneath the facade of ordinary people, the royal family believe themselves to be different. Perhaps they don't really think they are descended directly from God, but they do believe in their divine role. The calculatingly soppy tabloids encourage people to think of the royals' 'burden' — but how many of the royals would willingly give it up? (And the power and wealth that go with it). And they are not politically neutered and weightless.

Look at Prince Sihanouk of Kampuchea, or the King of Romania. Both still feel that 'their' people still need and want them. Both feel they have a right to be listened to when their countries are in turmoil.

Monarchy is still a rallying point for reaction the world over. The world has only recently grown out of 'giving' real power to monarchies, and those monarchs left behind have not given up hope of a return to the past.

In times of social upheaval, royalty will be a willing figurehead of the right, and the propaganda campaign in the media every day should be a reminder of this. For all the soap opera entertainment they provide, one day the Windsors will have to go the way of the Romanovs.

Maybe that's why most of *New Woman's* survey respondents didn't want to be royal!

Unite for solidarity with Eastern Bloc socialists!

A letter to the left

The CSWEB conference on 27 January was attended by 500 people who discussed with socialists from the Eastern Bloc and declared their intentions to organise solidarity in the British labour movement.

The conference provided the first opportunity for the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution), the East German United Left, and the Czechoslovak Left Alternative to meet and discuss the current crisis in Eastern Europe.

The East European anti-Stalinist, anti-capitalist lefts are small. The face tremendous difficulties in producing their materials, and in making contacts with the international left. In East Germany particularly, there is growing disappointment

that the Western European left has talked a lot but delivered very little concrete solidarity.

Speaker after speaker at the CSWEB conference stressed the need to overcome their isolation, and for a strong solidarity campaign in the west.

Petr Kuzvart, founder-member of Czechoslovakia's Left Alternative, has said: "We've had a number of contacts with the West European left, with the various sections and tendencies. We were disappointed at the disunity, the division and the sectarianism. At times like these, I wish the western left could come together and mount some kind of united initiative...to distribute our materials as widely as you can."

The trade union caucus at the January 27th conference urged all solidarity groupings — particularly CSWEB and the Sotsprof appeal — to form a united campaign. CSWEB has launched a broad 'Support the Socialists' appeal,

with funds divided equally between Sotsprof, the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution), Czechoslovakia's Left Alternative, and the East German Initiative for Independent Trade Unions (IFUG) and United Left. No money will be retained for expenses and administration. We think this appeal should win support from all socialists.

The need for a joint solidarity campaign for workers in the so-called socialist countries goes far beyond raising funds. There are now a number of groups translating documents, sending and inviting speakers, and making links between working class socialists and students, east and west.

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students, east and west.

Co-ordination between these groups is poor and East European speakers at the CSWEB conference urged us to get our act together. They are running out of time.

Jozef Pinior talked about his perspectives to CSWEB: "It's important for us in Eastern Europe to co-ordinate our struggle against the bureaucracy and capitalist system right across Europe. We need a new, left alternative. Our struggle is a struggle for workers' liberty, democracy and socialism across the world."

People with these views are fighting for socialism in Eastern Europe. They need money and they need unity amongst the British left to organise the most thorough solidarity work.

Mark Osborn
CSWEB

New unions in the USSR

A representative from the new independent socialist trade union federation in the USSR, Sotsprof, spoke at a press conference in London on 12 February

In our opinion, there have never been any genuine trade unions in the USSR.

Ever since Stalin the official trade unions have been part of the structure of the state. They have been unable to fulfil the basic functions of trade unions: defence of workers' interests.

Strikes have always occurred in the Soviet Union. But because of the information blackout no-one hears about the strikes. Strikes, for instance, the 1962 strikes at Novochoerkassk, have been put down by the state and the KGB.

In the 1970s and early 1980s there were several attempts to set up independent trade unions. These organisations were small and did not have much influence.

About a year ago three people — an engineer, an academic and a worker — met in Moscow to lay the basis for Sotsprof, an independent trade union initiative.

We were able to gain a foothold because of a loophole in the Soviet legal constitution. We used the loophole to establish a bank ac-

count and printing press. Through us, workers' committees became legal organisations, also entitled to bank accounts and printing presses.

Our most rapid period of growth was last summer during the mass miners' strikes. Sotsprof organisations began in the Donbass, Kusbas and Vorkuta coalfields. There are now 30 organisations in Sotsprof, totalling about 60,000 members. We are still quite small.

There are still organisations joining. For instance, in January this year the refrigeration workers on the railways joined Sotsprof. With legal help, Sotsprof has won gains for these workers: lowering of the pensionable age, a wage rise and better safety at work.

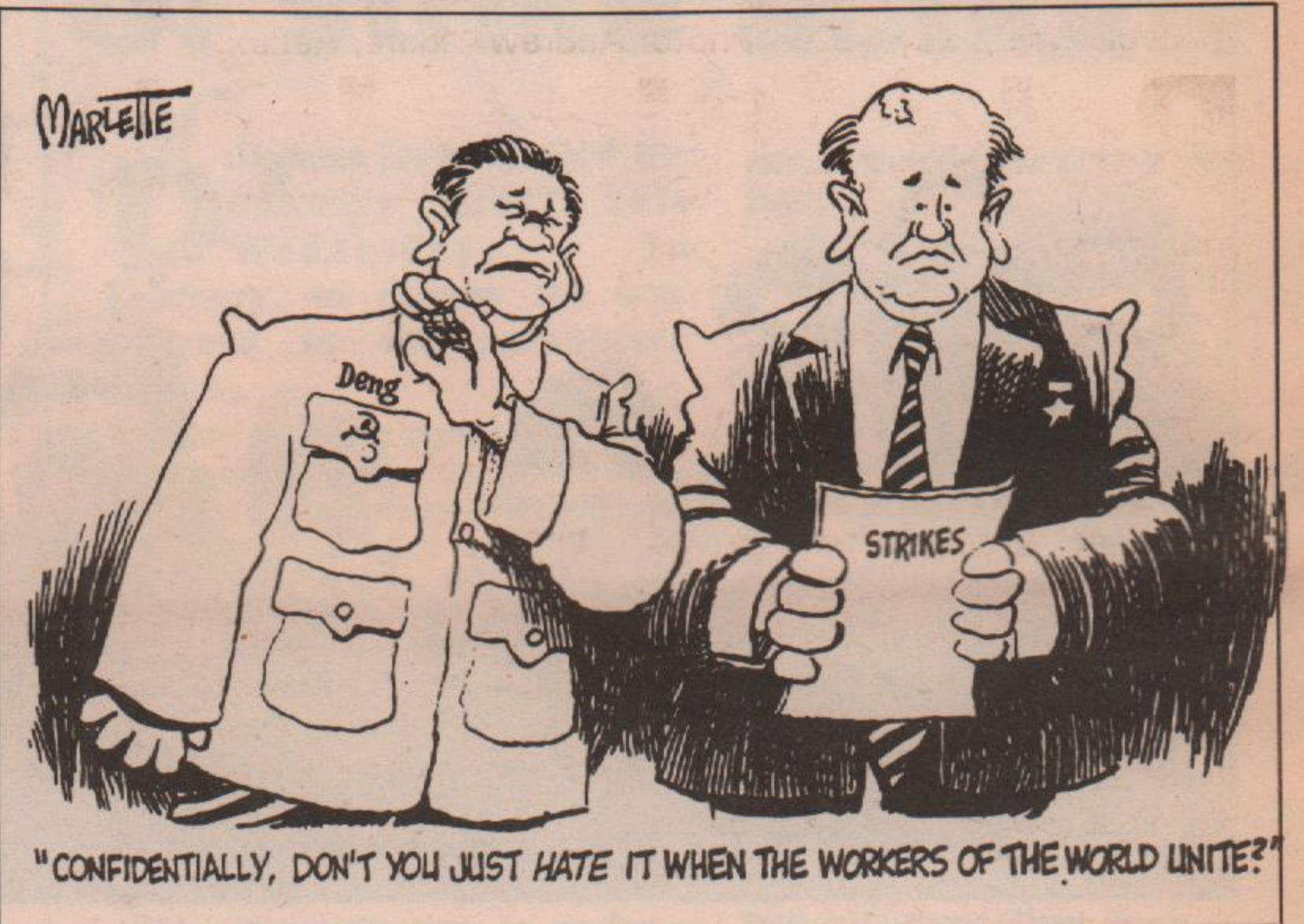
'Shield', the armed forces officers' union, has also joined Sotsprof.

Currently there is a possibility that workers' committees on the Trans-Siberian Railway will join Sotsprof. For the past two months I have been helping these workers to organise.

The basic demands of Sotsprof are for workers' self-management and for the collective ownership of enterprises. For that reason we call ourselves Socialist. We have borrowed many of our tactics from the early period of Solidarnosc.

We think spring may bring new eruptions in the class struggle. With such struggles there is the possibility that Sotsprof may become a mass organisation with hundreds of thousands of members.

Sotsprof works closely with a group attempting to set up a



Socialist party in the Soviet Union.

What is Sotsprof's attitude to the introduction of the market and perestroika?

At the start we thought that perestroika was good — it was so popular. But we believe that Gorbachev's plans do not benefit the workers.

Gorbachev does not act in the workers' interests. These policies assist the upper and middle layers of the apparatus.

The army officers' union is involved in Sotsprof. What are their demands?

They are demanding a smaller army! They are for a professional army. Several members of 'Shield' (colonels and majors) have said that it would not be harmful to the defence of the Soviet Union to cut the army by 50% and get rid of 80% of the generals!

There are no rank and file soldiers in 'Shield'. It is difficult to say exactly who is in 'Shield': people do not advertise their membership.

How does Sotsprof relate to the local soviets?

We believe we should be fully involved in local elections to soviets. The perspective is to fully democratise the local soviets.

There is a good chance in places like Leningrad and Irkutsk — where I am based. In other areas we are likely to achieve a strong left opposition in the local soviets.

When will a Socialist party be formed?

The perspective for a Socialist party depends on a number of things. Firstly, the creation of a mass working-class movement.

During the miners' strikes several members of the strike committees immediately joined the Committee for a Socialist Party. Secondly, what happens in the Communist Party.

Our members work in the 'Democratic Platform' of the Communist Party. The Komsomol (Young Communist organisation) has practically disappeared. In its place has been formed the Movement of Democratic Youth.

If the process takes place rapidly there will be a foundation conference of a new Socialist Party. In fact our strategy is called 'A Socialist Party in 1990!'

Is the discussion confined to small circles of activists, or are the masses discussing the current issues in the factories?

There is a factory movement of worker discussion circles. But there are different layers to the movement.

There is a right-wing. This group is composed of better off workers, close to the apparatus. They formed the United Front of Workers. This is a harmful development. Sotsprof works in the United Front in order to stop it.

The majority of factory workers are not familiar with our ideas — but instinctively they are moving towards self-management.

For example, I stood as a candidate for the highest soviet. I went to a large factory. I spoke, and the majority of workers took up my slogans for self-management.

What do you hope to achieve on your tour of Britain?

As a member of Sotsprof and the Committee for a new Socialist Party I want as many workers as possible to hear about our activities. We want moral and material support.



Eastern Europe Towards capitalism or workers' liberty?

60p plus 15p postage from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA



Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams carrying the coffin of an IRA volunteer, May 1982. Photo: Andrew Moore, Reflex.

Reknitting Ireland and Britain

EDITORIAL

A very important, indeed a truly historic, meeting is due to take place at Westminster on 26 February — the first meeting on a new Anglo-Irish inter-parliamentary group, comprising British MPs from Westminster, Irish TDs from the Dail, and Northern Ireland MPs.

If (or when) there is once again a Northern Ireland home rule parliament in Belfast, it too will send representatives. The group is being set up under the Anglo-Irish Agreement signed in November 1985.

Not since the Imperial Parliament broke up before the general election of December 1918 have such close parliamentary links between Britain and mainstream Irish Nationalist parliamentarians existed.

Sinn Fein fought the 1918 general election on a pledge to secede from Westminster and set up an independent Irish parliament in Dublin. It

won 75 per cent of the Irish seats (with 50-odd per cent of the votes cast), and in January 1919 set up Dail Eireann in Dublin, which declared Ireland a 32 county sovereign and independent Republic outside the British Empire.

There followed the Anglo-Irish war, during which Britain tried to coerce nationalist Ireland. In 1921 peace was made on the basis of a "compromise" enforced by British military might. It included the partition of Ireland, supposed then to be a temporary measure.

The new inter-parliamentary group is part of a general reknitting of Britain and Ireland. The two countries never ceased to have effective joint citizenship, even in the days of the "economic war" of the '30s or Southern Irish neutrality during World War 2. Slowly, and perhaps inexorably, the links have been tightened again, within the general intermeshing of the European Community but more closely.

Years before Britain and Ireland joined the EC in 1972, they had signed an Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement in 1965.

Socialists have no reason to regret this, even though we equally

have no grounds for confidence in the anti-working-class Dublin and Westminster governments.

The bitter experience of the 20 year war in Northern Ireland has proved that the intermixed people there — Protestants who think of themselves as British and Catholics who identify with "Irish Ireland" and the 26-county state — can reach an agreement to coexist, and can create institutions which will allow them to coexist peacefully, only within a framework bigger than the Six Counties, which is inevitably a sectarian bearpit.

A united federal Ireland is the most appropriate framework. But for that to become acceptable to the Protestants, an even broader framework is necessary, an Anglo-Irish framework.

To the ingrained prejudices of Catholic Irish chauvinists, any cooperative links or connections between the sovereign Irish state and Britain is a betrayal of the great cause of Irish freedom. Fortunately only a minority in Ireland hold such views. But they are widespread on the British left — usually in a cruder form than in Ireland: Sinn Fein is almost always more subtle and sensible than its British sympathisers!

We reject such chauvinist politics, as do the vast majority of the Irish working class, and the majority of the Irish people in general.

The tragedy of modern Ireland is that the Irish working class, Catholic and Protestant alike, did not unite on the basis of a fight for a socialist Ireland, while agreeing among themselves to have whatever constitutional arrangement, federalism or whatever, best suited both the Catholic and Protestant communities. Instead the workers followed their divided Catholic and Protestant bourgeois leaders, who plunged Ireland North and South into an age of darkness and a carnival of reaction.

The people of Northern Ireland are still in the grip of that tragedy. No socialist can look to the reactionary London and Dublin governments to solve it; but we cannot regret anything which might even begin to move Ireland away from the impasse and might begin, however inadequately and tentatively, to create a framework within which it will be easier for the Irish working class, Catholic and Protestant, to unite.

Ceausescu's fall shakes French CP

By Stan Crooke

The overthrow of the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu at the close of last year has unleashed a new wave of unrest in the French Communist Party (PCF).

The PCF has always been a much stronger force than its British equivalent, much larger in terms of both membership and also local and

national elected representation, as well as being linked to its own trade union organisation (the CGT).

But the PCF is in a state of accelerating decline. Both the PCF and the CGT have been losing members in recent years, whilst the party's share of the vote has slumped by 50% in the last two decades. One reason for this decline is the PCF's increasingly rightward shift in domestic French politics.

Another important reason is the party's generally slavish attitude towards the Eastern European

regimes which are now collapsing around its ears. For example, the PCF long denied the existence of Khrushchev's 1956 report (which exposed some of Stalin's crimes), and supported the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and of Afghanistan in 1979.

The Romanian insurrection has focused attention on the links between the PCF (and, in particular, its General Secretary, Georges Marchais) and the Romanian Communist Party and the Ceausescus.

Marchais and his wife have spent four holidays in Romania, at the personal invitation of the Ceausescus, and were also lent a yacht by the latter (would any holiday on the shores of the Black Sea be complete without one?). On each occasion, Georges Marchais had the honour of one or more discussions with the "Genius of the Carpathians".

In November 1989, only weeks before the insurrection, the PCF sent an official delegation to the congress of the Romanian CP, and, in December, on the very eve of the

insurrection, published a report on the Eastern European states which, secondary criticisms apart, attributed to them an "overall positive balance" of achievements.

Marchais' defence seems to have cut little ice in the PCF. Only about a third of the party's political bureau (its leading committee) still back Marchais; the leader of the CGT no longer supports him; and many journalists on the PCF newspaper are also critical of him.

Opposition to Marchais is increasingly vocal and widespread. But it is not necessarily particularly left-wing. On the contrary, it has much in common with the non-class politics of the *Seven Days* newspaper in this country. In any case, the problem is not Marchais himself, but the whole political record of the PCF.

Whether Marchais stays or goes, the ongoing decline of the PCF is certain to continue. And socialists will have no more cause to regret its demise than they had to regret the overthrow of the Ceausescus with whom it had such fraternal ties.

Pass the sick bag

Daily Express
The Guardian
Daily Mirror
Daily Star

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

Regular readers may have noticed that I have quite a soft spot for certain right-wing journalists and columns — Peregrine Worsthorne, Ferdinand Mount and the *Telegraph's* splendid 'Peter Simple', for instance.

But even my quirky tastes do not extend to Sir John Junor, the former editor and columnist of the *Sunday Express*, who recently jumped ship to the *Mail on Sunday*.

I understand that Junor does have a certain cult following amongst some lefties (eg. Paul Foot) who, presumably, find him amusingly eccentric.

To me he's just a tedious club bore, bellowing forth a stream of predictable clichés and prejudices. His tirades against such varied targets as the Bishop of Durham, gays, the Archbishop of Canterbury, gays, female Labour MPs, gays, black Labour MPs, gays... etc, etc, have a mannered self-satisfaction about them that marks Junor out as a conscious parody of himself.

Out of morbid curiosity, I bought a *Mail on Sunday* this week. Junor's column was pretty poor stuff, mainly devoted to a very boring account of a freebie to Argentina. The only surprise here was that Junor managed to be quite polite about the Argentinians who are, when all is said and done, foreigners and therefore fair game.

Could it be that Junor is becoming less studiously odious? No: tucked away at the bottom of the column was quite the most contemptible piece of writing I have stumbled upon in a long while.

Nelson Mandela could have walked free from jail long ago, claims Junor. Why did he not do so? Junor's explanation puts it down to Mrs Winnie Mandela: "If I had a wife like her waiting to embrace me, I think I would want to stay in jail forever." Pass the sick bag, Alice!

The *Sun* and the *Mirror* both hit on the same clever front page idea this Monday: using the headline 'Down and Out', they juxtaposed the release of Nelson Mandela with the surprise defeat of heavyweight champion Mike Tyson (Tyson's 'down', Mandela's 'out' — geddit?).

This struck me as a pretty cheap and tasteless way of concocting a front page. After all, what do Tyson and Mandela have in common, apart from both being black?

And since when was the result of a boxing match (however surprising) of equal importance to the release of a political prisoner of Mandela's stature and renown?

Maybe I'm getting too touchy, but the Mandela release struck me as one of those events that is just too important and too moving, to be cheapened by tabloid wisecracking — or Sir John Junor's pathetic attempts at 'humour'.

The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'

Karl Marx

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4 LETTERS

Wage freeze in Eldorado

GRAFFITI

The Social-Democratic government in that social-democratic Eldorado, Sweden, has just out-Thatchered Thatcher by proposing a two-year ban on all strikes.

The ban would be enforced by heavy fines on individual strikers. After some outcry the government has backed down on that, but is still pressing for a total wage freeze for two years. The wage freeze is supposed to be balanced by a ban on dividend payments (but shareholders will get capital gains instead) and a freeze on prices (but not import prices).

The emergency package was prompted by slow growth, high inflation, and a wave of wage strikes by transport, child-care, and health workers.

Whoever else may be taken in by the story that employers and workers are allies and partners, civil service bosses certainly aren't.

A reader in the civil service has told us about what happened after a worker in his office committed suicide. The management made great efforts to find out exactly when the worker had died.

Were they checking the fact so that they could send condolences in the most appropriate way to the worker's family and friends? No: they wanted to be sure that they were not paying a penny too much in sick pay.

Life expectancy for young men in Harlem, the main black district of inner-city New York, is now shorter than in poverty-stricken Bangladesh.

Unemployment, despair, drugs, crime and AIDS whittle down their lives. One of the richest cities of one of the most advanced capitalist countries in the world produces wretchedness equal to

that of one of the most underdeveloped countries.

Margaret Thatcher's "royal we" (as in "we are a grandmother") seems to be catching on.

An obituary of Gerry Healy by Alan Thornett in the latest *Socialist Outlook* recounts how "In 1974 we were expelled with 200 others" from Healy's WRP. "From Cowley" [the Oxford car factory where Thornett then worked], he writes, "we began a political challenge [to Healy]. Within weeks we were hounded and slandered as police agents".

The obituary contains not one word of self-criticism of Thornett's role over many years as the leading public figure of Healy's organisation, attributing Healy's entire bizarre career to the original sin implanted by his few years in the Stalinist party in the 1930s.

Of all the wretched and friendless groups in Eastern Europe, the National Salvation Front in Romania must be among the most beleaguered.

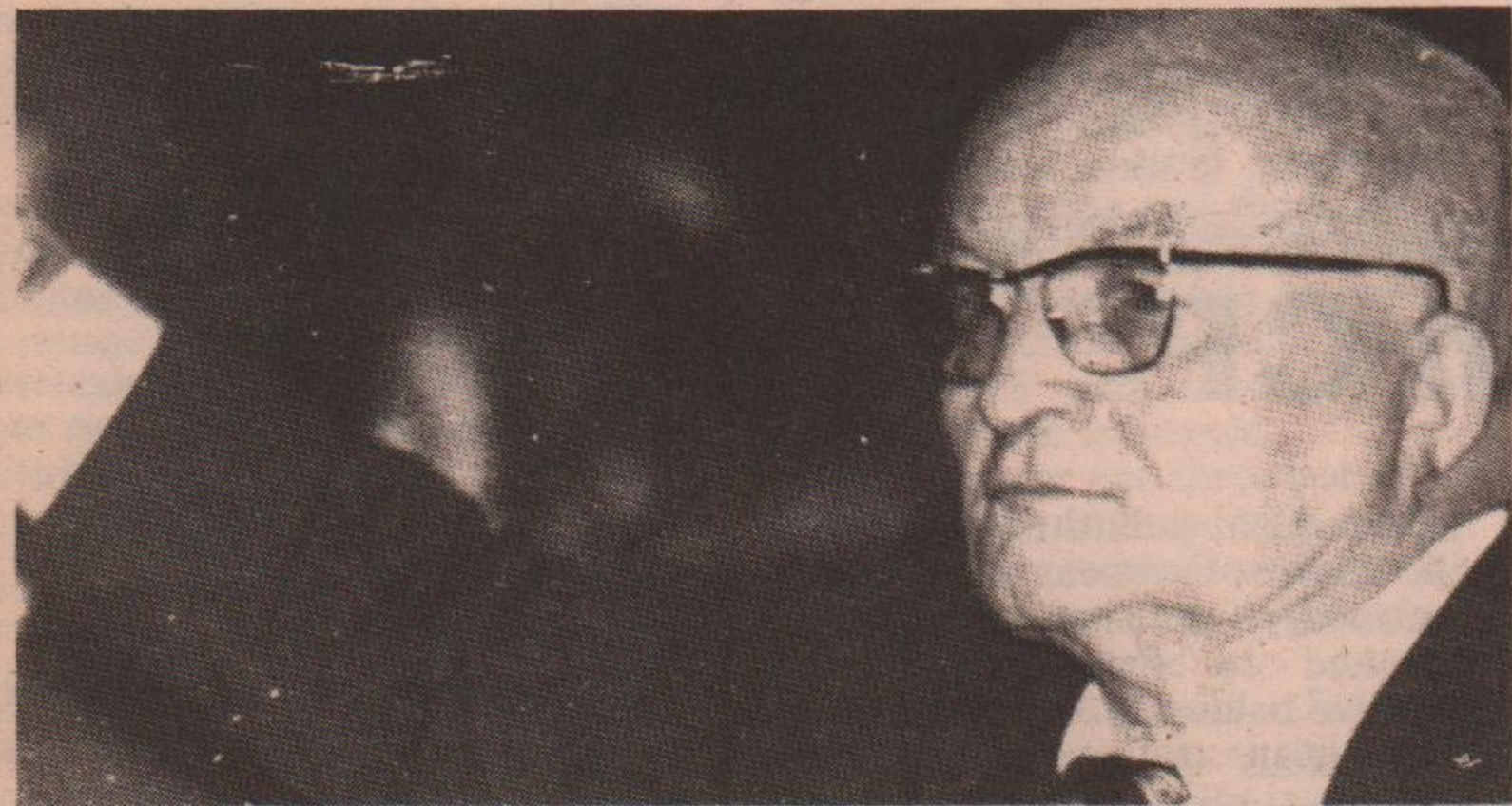
It is a clique of Ceausescu's generals and bureaucrats, trying to maintain Stalinism without Ceausescu. Anger against it is growing on the streets of Romania's cities, with events apparently moving towards either a new revolution or a military coup.

But the National Salvation Front has one friend: the *Socialist Action* group. In the latest issue of their magazine, SA declare:

"What is now unfolding in Romania is the polarisation between reform communists and the army, controlling the National Salvation Front, who are at present defending the non-capitalist character of the workers' state, and an alliance of ultra-reactionary capitalist parties..."

"Socialists are clearly on the side of the National Salvation Front in that struggle".

About the emerging independent trade unions in Romania *Socialist Action* says not a word.



Gerry Healy: "Oh father forsaken, forgive your son".

CLPs CONFERENCE

Saturday 7 April
Wakefield Town Hall

(Registration starts 10.30am)

Workshops include:

- CLPs Bill of Rights
- Organising Effective Campaigning
- Party Constitutional Changes
- Accountability of Elected Representatives

On the Friday evening before the conference a rally will be held, organised by Wakefield CLP. Further information from CLPs Conference, c/o 11 Egremont Promenade, Wallasey, Merseyside L44 8BG

Hal Draper

Hal Draper, veteran American socialist, died on 25 January at the age of 75, in Berkeley, California, where he had lived for over 30 years.

Draper had been a founding member of the Workers Party and the Independent Socialist League, which succeeded it. Although small, the WP/ISL played an important role in elaborating the ideas of revolutionary democratic socialism during the 1940s and 1950s. The ISL publications, *Labor Action* (of which Draper was editor), *The New Internationalist*, and the student magazine *Anvil*, were influential far beyond the tiny membership of the organisation itself.

The particular contribution of the WP/ISL — most commonly, but misleadingly, known as "Shachtmanites" — was the theory of "bureaucratic collectivism" to explain the phenomenon of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and, in the post-war era, the countries of Eastern Europe, China, and Cuba.

In his analysis, Draper rejected the theory of a monolithic totalitarian Stalinist society which led so many socialists and liberals to support the Western cold war camp as the "lesser evil". Draper also analysed the tendency towards the bureaucratic collectivisation or statification of capitalism and found the ideological seeds of this current within the socialist movement to the degree that it identified "socialism" with the statification of capitalism.

This was an identification — common to social democrats and Fabians, not to mention self-styled "Trotskyists" and apologists for Stalinism — which Draper rejected and went on in his study of Marx to demonstrate to be antithetical to the



Labor Action, the paper Draper edited, revolutionary democratic views of Marx himself.

In the last three decades of his life, Hal began to write the series of books and pamphlets for which he is best known today — the four volumes of *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* (the fourth was completed shortly before his death and will be published later this year), *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat from Marx to Lenin*, and *The Two Souls of Socialism*. They are an important legacy for the socialist movement as it faces the task of reconstructing socialism after the long night of Stalinism.

Hal's belief in the necessary relationship between democracy and socialism he found born out in his scholarly study of Marx's socialism. Marx's — but certainly not always that of the "Marxists" who followed. Through his study of Marx and his deep scholarly examination of the history of the socialist movement, Hal came to reject "sectism" such as that which infects the

numerous Trotskyist groups in the US and Britain, many of whom are to be found as individuals or as members of groups in the Labour Party today.

The chapters in *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* on sectism ought to be read and pondered by all socialists who find themselves trapped in the cul-de-sac of sectarianism and who have brought this sterile outlook to bear upon their activities within the British left with such disastrous consequences.

Draper's talents were not limited to politics. One of the most amazing of his achievements was the translation of all of Heine's poetry into English verse (Oxford University Press, 1985). No one had ever successfully attempted this and Hal's translation was hailed by Heine scholars for the way in which it conveyed Heine's spirit and meaning in poetry.

In the 1970s, Draper founded the Centre for Socialist History in Berkeley.

A.L.

Capital makes the choices

THE HIDDEN HAND

By Colin Foster

We don't want to talk about politics or ideology like all the other Polish magazines — we simply want to make money", says Andrzej Gesing, editor of the new magazine *Seksi*.

And money he is making. The first issue of 200,000 copies sold out quickly.

According to the *Independent*, "it is a low-brow sex magazine which consists primarily of poor quality reprints of smutty articles

from West Germany."

Polish television is going the same way. The new free-market way to sell your goods is to advertise them on TV with naked women.

Meanwhile the anti-Stalinist left in Poland, the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution, can publish its ideas only through small and smudgy bulletins, produced by the laborious technology of screen printing. The free market does not mean free and equal access to ideas.

It is the same throughout Eastern Europe. The anti-Stalinist left can publish a few scrappy leaflets, if that — the Left Alternative in Czechoslovakia, until recently, did not even have a stencil duplicator. Meanwhile Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell now own mass-circulation newspapers in Hungary.

According to Thatcherite economists, the free market

guarantees "consumer sovereignty". Through the "hidden hand" of supply and demand, the public gets what it wants. But the newspaper market shows the falsity of this as much as any other.

Almost every major newspaper in Britain supports the Tories or (occasionally) the centre parties. The *Daily Mirror* consistently supports Labour's right wing, other papers like the *Guardian* and the *Observer* flirt with it, and there are occasional aberrations like *Today's* support for the Green Party.

But the entire range of opinion on the left of Roy Hattersley has no direct reflection in the press.

The reason is not that the majority have a fixed desire to read newspapers whose opinions are more right-wing than their own. It is that to launch a mass-circulation newspaper requires lots of capital. And people who have lots of capital are generally right-wing.

The family and childcare

LETTER

As a member of the SWP it is hardly surprising I find fault with the content of your paper.

However, the reactionary heterosexist content of Liz Millward's 'Women's Eye' in issue 431 set it apart.

Two statements stand out: "In the hands of a government we could trust to do the best for the nation's

children, Thatcher's proposals would make sense and maybe deserve support". Whilst recognising that the family can provide a haven in a hostile world, socialists have always recognised that it is also a unit of exploitation.

A workers' government, like the Bolsheviks in 1917, would therefore look to communalise the functions of the family including childcare. Children would therefore not be a burden upon certain individuals, and would also have a wider experience in which to develop their abilities and autonomy. Such a government would not be hounding

mothers or fathers to accept their "responsibilities" on behalf of the "nation".

The sister also informs us "Thatcher justly pointed out that children lose out when their father leaves. She thinks 'family life' is good for children. I think she's probably right." This insults every single parent (male or female) who does a decent job for their kids when their parent leaves. Clearly the sister believes only traditional heterosexual couples can provide "family life".

Mark Stevens
Nottingham

De Klerk must move fast

By Bob Fine

Watching on TV Nelson Mandela emerge from twenty six years of captivity, I must confess to finding an unmistakable lump involuntarily growing in my throat, and probably linking me to many millions of other viewers.

There must be a whole generation of young activists for whom the words "Free Mandela" accompanied or sometimes even induced entry into left politics. And now his personal sacrifice is over, he is free and the myth may at last become the man.

I say this not without personal reservations. I remember my own dismay at what I felt to be a cult of a personality which was constructed around his name, if my memory is right, in the early 1980s, and which had a damaging impact on the political culture of the liberation movement. The elevation of Mandela was a symbol of the aspirations of a downtrodden people but it also expressed what the

'The perils of Glasnost in South Africa are no less than in the Soviet Union.'

Italians call the "leaderismo" which permeated the politics of liberation.

Mandela's release is a major step forward for the struggle against apartheid — not just for the ANC but for struggle as a whole. This is not primarily because of Mandela's vaunted personal qualities — though I found the reality of Mandela more positive than the myth and his performance impressive — but because the new political situation represents the breaking down of huge barriers which for years have stood in the way of the development of the working class.

Most of the pundits — Peter

Snow on 'Newsnight' was a dramatic example — altogether misinterpreted Mandela's speech as simply an intransigent re-assertion of the armed struggle and the demand for a unitary, democratic, non-racial South Africa. After saluting the ANC, the Communist Party and the armed struggle of the Umkonto We Sizwe, what Mandela did was build a bridge to the suspension of the armed struggle in favour of negotiations with the government.

What he said was that the initiation of the armed struggle in 1961 was defensive, that it continues to be necessary as a defensive struggle today, but — this was the crucial bit — that he looked forward to the creation of conditions which would allow for the suspension/end of the armed struggle. He then spelt out those conditions, which were also the conditions for substantive negotiations with the government: first, the lifting of the state of emergency and second, the release of all and not just some of the political prisoners.

It is entirely conceivable that agreement with the government could be reached on both these issues. Indeed Van de Maerwe, the architect of the De Klerk strategy, immediately responded that the problem of defining political prisoners could be resolved in discussions. The lifting of the state of emergency is also on the cards — and would leave the "security forces" with enormous powers intact. The other ANC condition which I did not hear mentioned was "troops out of the townships" — I am not clear if this precondition has been dropped. It is also interesting that the ANC's leading spokesperson, Tabo Mbeki (who is very much on the glasnost wing of the Communist Party), endorsed what Mandela had to say on this matter.

Mandela offered a number of other bridges towards negotiation. He described De Klerk as "a man of integrity". He defined his own role in negotiations with De Klerk and other government ministers as designed for the "normalisation of the political process". He finished his speech with an extract from his famous speech in the dock in 1964, saying that he stood implacably against white domination but also



Mandela: free at last

against black domination and for a non-racial democracy. This formulation opens the door for negotiating some kind of "minority rights" for whites.

The most cryptic part of Mandela's speech was when he said that "as a lawyer and a disciplined member of the ANC" he stood by all the strategies and the tactics of the ANC. He also affirmed the principle that leaders of the liberation movement should be democratically accountable to and elected by the organisation they represent. He and Mbeki certainly seem to be in accord.

For the government, Van de Maerwe did not rule out the possibility of a joint ANC-Nationalist government. It seems to me that the Nationalists have to

move very fast, since it will be very difficult for them either to backtrack or to stand still at this stage. On the extreme right of white politics, the hounds are baying. Television shots of the police behaving in their normal animal fashion and of the Nazi AWB mouthing off about their own armed struggle, are testimony of the dangers of a right military backlash against the government. The perils of 'glasnost' in South Africa are no less than in the Soviet Union.

On the left of the liberation movement, there is likely to emerge strong criticism of the abandonment of the armed struggle and of the switch from non-collaboration to negotiation. We should avoid this temptation. First, the armed struggle should not be seen as the

mark of revolutionism or socialism in the anti-apartheid movement.

Second, negotiations should not be equated with lack of conviction or sell-out. Thirdly, the move to negotiation and participation — the two current buzz words — offers a potentially more favourable terrain for working class struggle than we have seen for some years.

Hopefully the left will avoid a simple reflex negation of the new turn in liberation politics. What is needed rather is the immediate development and articulation of a working class political voice. The base for this has necessarily to come from what are at present by far the largest organisations of the working class: the independent unions in COSATU and NACTU.

Sinn Fein and the Protestants

NORTH AND SOUTH

By Patrick Murphy

There was a certain amount of soul-searching at last week's Ard Fheis (annual conference) of Sinn Fein in Dublin.

On the surface, of course, Gerry Adams clung to the thin straw provided by Peter Brooke a few months ago when he admitted that the IRA could not be defeated. But underneath there was none of the heady optimism of the early 1980s. The Republican movement faces serious problems and the leaders clearly know it.

First, the 'armed struggle' is leading nowhere. It cannot be defeated, but equally it cannot win. Meanwhile it is wearing down the nationalist community more than the transient regiments of the British Army. The problem was highlighted by the latest victim of IRA action, a young Nationalist attending the annual Bloody Sunday

rally in Derry in the immediate run-up to the conference.

Second, Sinn Fein's election strategy is floundering. The party's Northern voters are shifting to the SDLP or abstaining in noticeable numbers. In the South they have never had a significant vote. Adams blamed the abstentionist policy for this and changed it at the 1986 Ard Fheis. He advised the party then not to expect immediate success at the next election, it would be the 'election after next' when results would really improve. In fact that election was held in June 1989; there was a clear revival of left wing votes but Sinn Fein's vote declined sharply (from 1.9% to 1.2%!).

Finally, Adams demonstrated at least some awareness that Sinn Fein need to consider its attitude and approach to the minority community in Ireland, the Northern Protestants. He repeated the claim, made at the previous conference, that he had met with representatives of the Protestant community to 'explain Sinn Fein's strategy and policy'. The nature and significance of these talks is difficult to divine. Adams, understandably, couldn't name the 'representatives', though he hinted that they were part of mainstream Unionism.

The discussion will continue with 'as wide a spectrum of Unionist opinion as possible', because Sinn Fein is 'morally bound to seek dialogue as part of the search for peace among our people'. On the other hand Adams made it clear that he thought it very unlikely that 'any sizeable section of the working class Protestants in the North will desert

'Any move away from straightforward communalism and Catholic nationalism is to be welcomed.'

the Unionist parties while the Union with Britain remains'.

There are encouraging aspects to these developments, though they are very limited. Clearly the Sinn Fein leadership want to reassure the Protestants or be seen to do so. Any move away from straightforward communalism and Catholic nationalism is to be welcomed. These revelations by Adams were received with no opposition; in fact they

were apparently welcomed, suggesting a mood of concern about the issue in the Republican movement. All of this places Sinn Fein head and shoulders above its sympathisers on the British left. So why am I so guarded in my optimism?

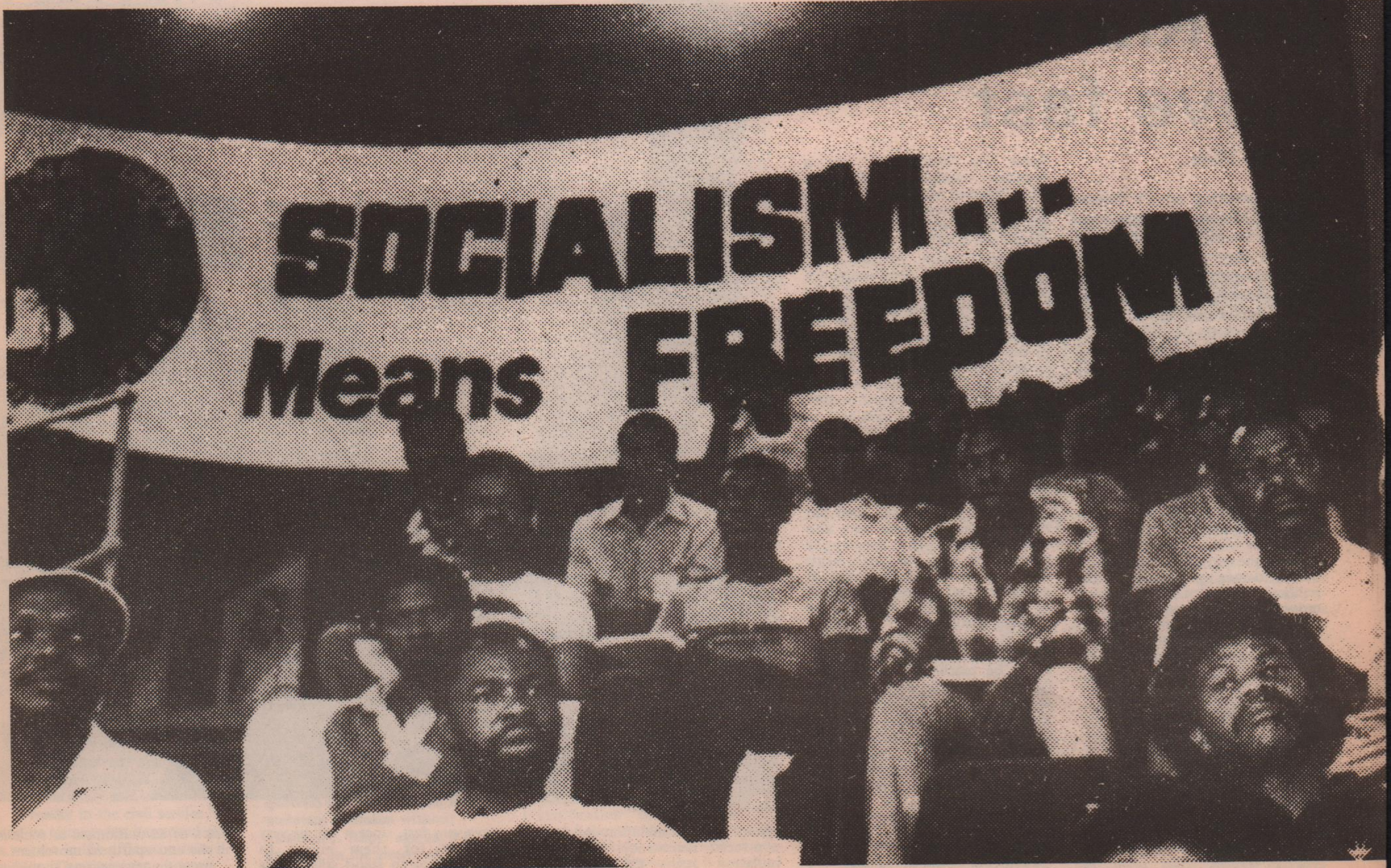
Essentially because this concern with Protestant fears and identity makes absolutely no difference to Sinn Fein and IRA practice on the ground. It is a negotiating plan; there is no connection with Republican strategy. This is not a minor, nitpicking complaint. No more depressing evidence of the chronic communalism of Sinn Fein politics can be imagined than the declaration by the IRA last week that all workers at Shorts Engineering factory are legitimate targets because they work mainly on defence contracts. Shorts mainly employ Protestants, in fact it is notorious for discrimination in employment. Under pressure from civil rights campaigners and the FEA it is now employing more Catholics.

To make its workers military targets is a piece of sectarian lunacy, certain to destroy any degree of unity that does exist on the factory floor. It is, however, characteristic of Sinn Fein and IRA

strategy. To conduct an armed struggle against anyone vaguely connected with security work in Northern Ireland is simply to declare war on the vast bulk of Protestants. No amount of talks with Unionist representatives will alter the effect that this 'war' has on the ground.

A serious political campaign for working class unity and an agreed democratic solution is simply not compatible with a war on all those supporting British rule because the Protestant community at the moment overwhelmingly supports the union with Britain.

Perhaps the Republicans can use their talks with Protestants to face that reality. The existence of a distinct Protestant community, within a British-created statelet but without the firm guarantees of British government support which they enjoyed in the past amounts to a unique combination in Irish history. It is in fact the biggest challenge Irish nationalism has ever faced. Even within its own tradition, however, the challenge can be met, but only by discarding the strategy of armed struggle against Britain in favour of a political struggle to unite the Irish working-class around a democratic solution.



Stalinism is dying. Long live Socialism!

A socialist manifesto from the editorial board of Socialist Organiser

Today the bourgeoisie can march in triumph right across Europe. Ex-Stalinists, ex-socialists, ex-Marxists, ex-radicals join the loyal crowds.

But beyond the cheering squads, off the thoroughfares, out of the limelight, grow bitterness and anger, lacking only confidence to turn into rebellion.

As the economy of the free market and private profit spreads in Eastern Europe, the exuberant joy of the democratic revolutions will turn into the hard, set, strained faces of the workers on the streets of Poland's cities. There, where the drive towards capitalist orthodoxy has gone furthest in Eastern Europe, the workers have their living standards cut by up to two-thirds in the course of one month, and a sudden rise of unemployment.

In the western advanced capitalist countries there is now a permanent pool of over 30 million unemployed. Growing numbers are not only unemployed but destitute. London and New York, the two greatest centres of the new fortunes grabbed in the money markets and stock exchanges in the 1980s, have 75,000 homeless apiece. Beggars line their streets.

The misery of the minority is an index of the insecurity of the majority. Industries and enterprises move from boom to slump at feverish speed; almost no worker can be sure of their livelihood; almost no working-class family is untouched by the wild gyrations that periodically scoop thousands out of the workforce and hurl them on to the dole queues.

Inequality and exploitation are increasing everywhere. In the United States, real wages have been stagnant or declining since the early 1970s. In those countries where wages have risen, incomes from exploitation have risen much faster.

In Latin America and Africa there are not tens, but hundreds of millions of unemployed. Rich Western banks demand their interest payments; the local exploiters who squandered the money borrowed from the banks pass on the bill to the workers and peasants. They have forced down workers' living standards by an average of 25 per cent in many countries. The majority lose whatever slight progress out of poverty they made over previous decades; great numbers suffer malnutrition; sizeable minorities starve.

Capitalism does develop the productive forces. It does draw millions out of rural squalor, educate them, expand their horizons, develop their ambitions. Taunting and shoddy though its promises are, they lever society out of stagnation.

But the essence and foundation

of capitalism is the confiscation of the creative powers of the workers by the capitalists, and the trashing of those workers for whose labour the capitalist market has no demand. It pulls the workers into more productive, more concentrated, more cooperative, more technically-equipped labour, and at the same time pushes them away from participating in the creative possibilities of the technology they create.

Fifty years ago the capitalist free market was utterly discredited as a way of regulating production and distribution. It created chaos and misery. Only a "managed" capitalism, if that, seemed sustainable and defensible.

In the 1950s and '60s the defenders of capitalism began to hope and to claim that such "management" could cure all the essential ills of capitalism, and provide for security, increasing equality, and stable democracy. In the 1970s and '80s all those claims for capitalist state economic management were thoroughly discredited. But now the argument has turned full circle: the free market is the banner which leads the bourgeoisie's new triumphal parade.

Relatively free trade on a world scale does offer better prospects for capitalism than a world of trade blocs, which is the only alternative in a system of nation states and private profit. Today that relatively free world market is being used by the capitalists as a sharp weapon of

restructuring.

Nationalisation in the West turns out to have been merely a method for capitalism to put some large-scale industries under state protection when they were considered nationally essential, discarded once they are no longer so. State welfare is shown to have been a hand-out which capitalism conceded in a boom period, but will take back in time of economic difficulty, when it can get a sufficient reserve army of workers fit to work without such expense.

For the destructive purposes of the bourgeoisie, the free market works quite well. Yet the best use of new technology demands more education and training, freer flow of information, more social investment. It demands planning and cooperation.

The free market produces just the same evils that it always produced. Capitalism has not rediscovered some lost magic. It has not conquered its ills. It has not solved its inner conflicts. The world regime of relatively free trade, on which its recent successes depend, is vulnerable, not secure. It has been under pressure from protectionism for two decades now. The stock exchange crash of October 1987 gave warning of how unstable its financial balances are. A similar crash affecting the dollar could send the whole world into a huge slump. The lives of millions could be wrecked by the fluctuations of millionaires' greedy gambles with pieces of coloured paper: that is how capitalism works, more so today than ever.

The collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe does not vindicate capitalism. Stalinism was never the working class alternative to capitalism. It was not made by the working class. The Russian Revolution was made by the working class; but the Stalinist structure was erected only on the grave of that revolution, only by crushing all the organisations of the working class and in the first place crushing the Bolshevik party which had led the revolution.

That crushing, in one form or another, was inevitable if the

workers' revolution remained isolated in backward Russia; the Bolsheviks knew that and predicted it. The reason why it remained isolated was the lack of revolutionary workers' parties like the Bolshevik in Western Europe.

Stalinism is not the achievement of workers' struggle, of socialism, of Bolshevism. It represents the defeat of workers' struggles, of socialism, and of Bolshevism, both in the USSR and in all other Stalinist countries, where the Stalinist regimes were imposed on the working class by bureaucratic military machines.

"The triumph of Stalinism in one third of the globe...corrupted and demoralised most of two generations of worker activists."

Stalinism is an ugly sibling of capitalism, not its successor. Inequality; exploitation; alienation of the creative powers of labour and of human solidarity; domination by a small privileged minority; irresponsible destruction of the environment in pursuit of narrow economic goals — the characteristic evils of capitalism are reproduced under Stalinism, and to them is added a hideous totalitarian regime similar to the worst of capitalist tyrannies.

Where Stalinist regimes have introduced job security in place of capitalism's characteristic insecurity of employment, they have accompanied it with equally harassing forms of insecurity for the worker — routinely, goods and services can be got only by bribery, string-pulling, the black market, or queuing.

As East European workers will find, a great deal of what they rebelled against in the Stalinist systems was no more than an exaggerated and twisted form of what

A key lesson from Eastern Europe



South African miners' union conference

Ruth Cockcroft and Cathy Nugent examine the experience of the East European revolutions so far

Who could have foreseen the working class across the whole of Eastern Europe awakening so suddenly to an awareness of its own strength?

In Eastern Europe the working class numbers millions. Prospects for socialism have been given an immense boost by the awakening of this giant army of millions of workers who will find no means of defending themselves except the tried and tested methods of trade union and political self-organisation as a class.

However, the East European working class is, at present, a subordinate part of a "people's" movement which has no specifically working class politics. The politics of the broad popular movement include demands for an ill-defined "democracy" and for the "market". Most workers, when asked, say they want a socially responsible market and democratic freedoms which are far deeper, more substantial and more all-embracing than is the parliamentary democracy of the West.

Evidence suggests that by "democracy" workers express the ideas of running their own workplaces, of creating democratic structures in the newly emerging independent trade unions, and of writing, for themselves, laws which serve working people.

Workers not yet independent

As yet the working class in Eastern Europe has not formed its own democratic class structures, workers' councils ('soviets').

In the past such alternative forms of working class democracy have appeared as the spontaneous product of uprisings in which mass working class movements are in-

involved. Through these new democratic structures workers begin to articulate and fight for political demands as a united, politically independent class.

In the 1917 Russian Revolution, for example, there came into existence a "dual power" in which two forms of government emerged, one the organic form of working class power, the workers' councils ('soviets'), the other, the Provisional government, led by Kerensky, which aimed to stabilise a Russian bourgeois democracy.

Workers' Councils and mass strikes have already been the weapons of the working class in face of Stalinist oppression in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia at various times in the last 35 years. Strikes have played a part in the East European revolutions. These weapons and means of working class self-mobilisation may again become central in the period ahead as workers have to begin to act as workers to defend themselves, as they surely will. But the reality now is proletarian support for vague ideas of "democracy", and for pro-market governments. There is no "dual power", there is no mass revolutionary class-conscious workers' movement.

In contrast, to the working class, the majority of people involved in the East European revolutions, there is the minority of liberal intellectuals, the layer which has placed itself at the head of the people's movements. They articulate demands which have political clarity and are well defined in their championing of capitalism. Sections of the bureaucracy agree with the dissident intelligentsia in advocating and promoting market capitalism and parliamentary democracy.

Unlike the working class, the intelligentsia has had room under Stalinism (even in spite of harsh repression) to generate a political programme, to become assured of its future political role and to gain the confidence to propagate its own ideology. The intellectuals gain their clarity and confidence from being the local representatives and understudies of the West European bourgeoisie, with all its immense

wealth, experience and prestige.

Clearly, the intelligentsia have had some networks, loose organisations, and forums in which to develop ideas and politics before the revolutions. So have the various churches, who play a major role. The working class has had no such organisation.

The working class has not even had trade unions in which to organise independently, still less an arena in which to develop its own political and philosophical ideas through the free exercise of speech, writing and assembly.

In Eastern Europe (and the USSR) things are made even more difficult for the newly awakening working class movements by the Stalinist misuse of the words and ideas used by socialist movements to define and express the interests of the working class. The names, symbols, banners and objectives of the old socialists have been made hateful to millions of workers because of their misuse by the Stalinists to camouflage and try to justify their own anti-socialist rule over so many grim decades.

Revolutionary organisation

The greatest vacuum in Eastern Europe and Russia has been the absence of a revolutionary party of the working class — a party which had analysed and learned from the age of Stalinism, without forgetting what capitalism was and is; a party which could oppose Stalinism without supporting capitalism West European-style — in short an organisation which would fight the ideas of the intellectuals, the bureaucrats and the churches and vindicate genuine socialism.

The differences between the new East European governments and the working class will accelerate as moves towards market mechanisms produce austerity, inflation and unemployment. Huge struggles are inevitable. But bitter history teaches us that the most heroic of workers' struggles cannot be victorious unless socialists have built a party of politically conscious militants, a party which has learned from the experience of workers throughout history, a party which can actively intervene in working class struggles and decisively change their nature by giving them a clarity of goals and methods they would otherwise lack — a clarity for the working class such as the intelligentsia in Eastern Europe has for capitalism.

Trotsky put the point like this: "Events have proved that without a party capable of directing the proletarian revolution, the revolution itself is rendered impossible. The proletariat cannot seize power by a spontaneous uprising. Even in highly industrialised and highly cultured Germany the spontaneous uprising of the workers in November 1918 only succeeded in transferring power into the hands of the bourgeoisie. One propertied class can seize the power that has been wrested from another propertied class because it is able to base itself upon the riches, its cultural level and its innumerable connections with the old state apparatus. But there is nothing else that can serve the proletariat as the substitute for its own party." (Lessons of October)

Turn to page 8

workers have rebelled against in capitalism. Their revolt vindicates capitalism, but the workers' revolt against capitalism.

Even limited democracy of the parliamentary sort is won and sustained only by workers' struggles. A fuller democracy giving the masses the people real control over their lives — including their economic circumstances — is possible only through the working class replacing capitalism, dignified, secure, creative lives for the majority are possible only with working-class socialism, not with capitalism.

Socialism means the substitution of democratic planning for need instead of the bankers' and shareholders' bottom line as the guiding principle of production. It means conscious solidarity and cooperation instead of the free-market law of devil take the hindmost. It means movement towards the replacement of wage labour by the principle of "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs". It means democracy which covers economic affairs, too. It means a "semi-state" of working-class self-administration in place of privileged militarist, bureaucratic state machines. It means individual freedom based on lifting the burden of insecurity, poverty, servility and exhausting drudgery from the majority and given them access to education, culture, and the development of their creative abilities. It means people using technology, rather than technology using people.

The collapse of Stalinism invalidates these ideals. In no way does it brand them as utopian or unworkable.

Socialism is possible. But it will not come automatically. It has to be made by the working class.

And for now the working class lacks the confidence and clarity to disrupt the triumphal parade of the bourgeoisie. For now many workers in Eastern Europe say they want no experiments with some ideal new system opposed both to Stalinism and capitalism; they want something which works, something

tried and tested, and they believe the market economy is it.

But it could never have been the case that the progress of the working class would be like the progress of the bourgeoisie, a gradual rise of wealth, culture, organisation and self-confidence under the old regime. The workers' struggle for self-liberation is a struggle with great zig-zags, tremendous leaps forward and terrible regressions. It cannot be otherwise with a class which is the basic slave class until its day of self-liberation.

The worst of those regressions was the triumph of Stalinism in one third of the globe. It corrupted, disoriented and demoralised most of two generations of worker activists.

The disorientation and demoralisation does not end with the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe. In the short term it may get worse. Nor is Stalinism dead. It still rules a quarter of the world's people, in China. It may still make comebacks, though surely minor ones, in Europe.

Yet the revolts in Eastern Europe are not only inspiring examples of how the masses can make history against the rulers and exploiters; they are also a great step towards ridding the whole world workers' movement of the syphilis of Stalinism.

In every decade of this century, the workers in some country or another have shown their ability to organise as a potential ruling class, a force to remake society. They have been defeated, and in most of those defeats Stalinism played a great role.

New workers' revolutionary struggles will arise, and Stalinism will be weaker. The struggles can win. Whether they win depends on what replaces Stalinism as a political influence in the workers' movement. That it will be some sort of socialist, cooperative or collectivist influence we can be sure; the position of the working class under capitalism guarantees that. Whether it is a clear revolutionary Marxist influence depends on us. We have a world to win.



A key lesson from Eastern Europe

From page 7

Today, as events continue to unfold in Eastern Europe, as the bloody defeat of the embryonic Chinese workers' movement last summer goes down into history, as pro-bourgeois forces fill the political vacuum in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, we have once again proof of the burning need for a revolutionary organisation.

Unfortunately the proof is negative proof. The newly reborn East European workers' movement is delivering state power to pro-bourgeois Stalinists and marketeers.

Those words by Trotsky above are all the more tragic because their correctness has been obvious for decades to all honest students of working class history.

Workers as revolutionaries

Unlike the bourgeoisie, which germinates and grows in wealth and culture and becomes politically mature under the old feudal or neo-feudal regime, where it already exists as an exploiting class — and to an extent can even do this under a decrepit, rotting Stalinism, in Poland for example — the working class has no such advantages. The working class is born and always remains a wage-slave class under capitalism. The role of the working class is that of wage slaves, that of the basic exploited class.

The bourgeoisie, when they were progressive on a world-historic scale, developed their own means of production and access to culture, education, and the institutions of the state, even before they took power. The bourgeois revolution can be indirect, and can even be delivered to the bourgeoisie by forces outside the immediate control of its own class.

The French Revolution was won by the sans-culottes, the radical plebeian masses, under the influence of the Jacobins. In contrast, the proletarian revolution can only be a conscious political act. It can only be an act of the working class itself. For the workers' revolution, politics dominates, because politics is the means by which the working class organises itself as a conscious force — a "class for itself", as Marxists put it — and then proceeds to win, by political action, its own economic emancipation.

The creation of a classless society and the development of the consciousness of the working class so that it understands its own historic interests cannot, as we have seen, be the result of spontaneous rebellions alone. The contradictory reality is one of uneven development in the consolidation of the workers' movement and in the development of ideas within the working class which correspond to its interests.

The effects of Stalinism

It is even more complex and contradictory in the USSR and Eastern Europe now, because of the peculiarities of Stalinism. For example, in Eastern Europe now some of the best and most heroic working-class militants have suicidal illusions in free market economics, and believe that parliamentary democracy of the West European sort is effective self-rule for the working class majority. Workers who live in countries such as Britain have learned the contrary.

Workers who rebel against market capitalism have only to go for the opposite of market capitalism to arrive at some notion — however crude, underdeveloped, and ultimately inadequate — of a viable working-class alternative, what might be called democratic

collectivism. Those instinctive rebel ideas are not the same thing as scientific awareness of society and politics. Such clarity has to be fused with the spontaneous working-class struggles by the activity of Marxists who have adequately theorised from the whole world-wide experience of the working class and made a scientific overview of bourgeois society and of the evolution of human society in general. But spontaneous workers' revolt against market capitalism does lead naturally and easily towards Marxist ideas, however. Workers in struggle learn with astonishing rapidity.

In Eastern Europe, when workers obey the rebel's gut instinct to overthrow and negate the system that oppresses them, the natural untutored impulse is to go for the system which in the West seems to breed both freedom and prosperity.

The phenomenon parallels what we see in the West, where good working-class militants have often blindly and ignorantly supported Stalinism in the East because it seems to be the opposite of what they faced immediately in their own conditions. Today, in Eastern Europe, the reflex rejection of the immediate system and the embracing of its seeming opposite is an overwhelming mass movement.

In practice it makes workers who want real, effective self-government when they embrace democracy, and freedom from the dictates of bungling and grotesquely inefficient state bureaucrats when they support the market, prey to liberal intellectuals, turncoat bureaucrats and conniving political priests who do not want any of the things the workers want, and most of whom will actually conspire and if necessary fight to stop the workers getting what they want.

A Marxist organisation is irreplaceable in such conditions if the working class is to defend itself in even the most minimal way — an organisation that does not start with a blind negation and inversion of Stalinism, but can see Stalinism in its place in history and knows also about that other system of working-class exploitation and oppression within the forms of freedom and democracy — in short, an organisation which is a true memory of the working class and can thus help the masses of newly roused workers to hammer out an independent working-class outlook and programme which corresponds to their real interests and to the desires they express as "democracy" and "the market".

Class and ideas

The working class does not possess privileged access to culture, arts and science. Workers do not possess leisure time in which to develop ideas. Everywhere the workers' movement is pervaded by alien class ideology, by the ideas of the ruling class.

A variant of that domination by the ruling class is when rebel workers take the motto "my enemy's enemy is my friend" and accept as their answer to their immediate class enemy the alien ideas of that enemy's enemy. They take on a negative rather than positive imprint of their own ruling class, but an imprint nonetheless.

It is not true that the Stalinist enemies of capitalism, or the capitalist enemies of Stalinism, are our friends! Both the pro-Stalinist Arthur Scargill and the pro-capitalist Lech Walesa are terrible examples of what such politics can do to people who want to be working-class militants.

We need independent working-class politics, and only Marxism can generate consistently independent working-class politics.

Although economic class struggle



Polish Socialist Party (DR) protest in Poland

is an instinctive rebellion of the working class, it is not in itself enough to create stable revolutionary socialist consciousness or to generate an adequate working-class strategy. The Bolsheviks welded together a party of revolutionaries which attempted to articulate an independent set of working-class ideas to guide the spontaneous rebellion. This meant the merging into a whole of the "conscious" role of the Bolsheviks — who suggested ideas to the class, generalised the results of the creative innovation of parts of the class, making them available to the whole class,

and so on — with all levels of working-class struggle and organisation.

The sad thing now about the wonderful movement of the East European, and increasingly of the Russian, working class, is that the workers have to begin almost from scratch, learning from immediate experience, with too little in the way of the accumulated and codified working-class experience which a pre-existing organisation of Marxists would be able to contribute. Years of Stalinist repression annihilated socialist militants and all but uprooted and obliterated the

genuine traditions of socialism and of unfalsified Marxism.

Our class in Eastern Europe, after the long night of Stalinism has lifted, is a class almost without a long-term memory. It will for this reason act against its own interests, or fail to act for its interests, and may have to pay dearly as a result.

Not for a very long time has there been clearer proof that the work of (for now) small groups of Marxists — which outsiders usually dismiss as a waste of time and life — is no idle activity, but an irreplaceable part of the fight for working-class self-emancipation.

WHERE WE STAND

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working class socialism.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under

workers' control. We want democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide, including the struggle of

workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

We stand: For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working class-based women's movement.

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

We want Labour Party and trade union members who support our basic ideas to become supporters of the paper — to take a bundle of papers to sell each week and pay a small contribution to help meet the paper's deficit. Our policy is democratically controlled by our supporters through Annual General Meetings and an elected National Editorial Board.

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Siberian miner speaks out

Interview with Valentin Kazimirovich Kopasov, a mechanic at the Central mine, and co-chairperson of the Vorkuta Town Workers (Strike) Committee.

Valentin Kazimirovich, we meet you after agreement with the government has been reached and put into action, and after the strike has been ended. It is possible to talk in more relaxed circumstances. In your opinion, what is the main result of the strike?

I believe that the strike which took place showed above all to the miners — and not just to them — the real attitude of the command-administrative apparatus towards what is happening in the country.

Our strike was not a chance occurrence, and, even more so, it was not a case of machinations by some extremists or other. By the close of October all reasonable measures, all warnings, all appeals to the government, had been tried out. They did not want to listen to us, and therefore the miners were forced to influence the system by methods which, in their opinion, were more effective.

I repeat: the strike ripened, everybody saw this, but they did nothing to prevent it.

What had to be done to prevent it?

Send a competent commission to Vorkuta, one capable of understanding why the agreements reached during the summer with the government were not being carried out. I am thinking of decree 608 of the Soviet ministry.

But were there really only a few visits to you by important Moscow commissions after the end of July?

Yes. The deputy minister came, the chairperson of the Central Committee of the trade union came... But matters did not go beyond confirming the fact that decree 608 was not being carried out in the way it should have been. These commissions did not make any decisions of their own, and did not give any guarantees. Indeed, it would have been laughable to demand such things from them.

That is to say, you expected a personal visit from Gorbachev to Vorkuta, or, "at a bare minimum", from Ryzhkov?

Not necessarily. We expected anyone capable of taking decisions. Or even anyone who would have risked getting in touch with those who could do so. The telephone line to Moscow, thank God, functions normally here... But, I repeat, they openly pushed us along into a strike, by an unending series of delays.

Does this mean that the miners left their pit-faces for over a month merely in order to draw attention to themselves?

No, of course not "merely". But we really did not begin the strike in the way that the mass media have portrayed it. We put forward five specific points, on the basis of which, as subsequently became clear, it would have been possible to find a compromise without any strike, or at least at the earliest stages of a strike.

Translated from *Ogonok*, 20 January 1990. Our translator stresses that, as *Ogonok* is a legal magazine, Valentin Kazimirovich would therefore be likely to be showing some restraint in his answers.



Miners hold mass meeting in the centre of Prokopyevsk

Valentin Kazimirovich, what is disturbing is how the packet of your demands changed in the course of the strike, and how new points appeared in them again and again, even in the process of talks with the government.

I do not agree. The demands remained unchanged. I'll remind you of them.

- The abolition of "serfdom". We insisted that the Northern nadbavki [ie. extra payments made to miners because of harsh working conditions in the North] were not "burnt out" when the worker moved to another enterprise.

- The abolition of the disciplinary code in the coal-mining industry, which embodied the despotic nature of the administration.

- The punishment of those guilty of sabotaging decree 608.

- The legalisation of workers' (strike) committees.

- The resolution of the question of the "boys and girls" — that is to say, that nadbavki be paid to natives of the North as soon as they start working, rather than that such payments be earned in the manner of those who only come to the North [ie. but were not born there].

We immediately declared that as soon as we saw that these five questions were really being resolved, then we would end the strike. And we did not put forward any other demands. Unless it was the case that retaliatory steps were taken against us.

But you are not saying anything about the political demands.

Yes, we also put forward political demands of a general democratic character. But we were not of the view that such demands had to be fulfilled immediately and that, if they were not fulfilled, then we would strike indefinitely. We merely asked that our demands be considered, and this, you will agree, is something quite different.

We did not intend to dictate to the Congress [of People's Deputies] what decision it should be taking, but we felt that it was important that the deputies knew what we, the miners of Vorkuta, wanted, and what we supported.

I also think that all our demands were completely reasonable, and that there was nothing extremist about them.

That is to say, if we return to the "five points", your position is: if they had been immediately accepted

for discussion, then the strike would also have been ended just as immediately.

Yes. If there had not been a mass of unpleasant nuances. I have already said that I cannot help feeling that someone did not have the least desire to see us reach an agreement by peaceful means. It was demanded of us, the workers, that we show restraint in our words and actions, but don't we really have the right to demand the same from our opponents? When they constantly dropped us hints about the possibility of punishing the developing workers' movement, or, moreover, when they even uttered words about the possibility of using

"Our strike was not a chance occurrence, and, even more so it was not a case of machinations by some extremists... all appeals to our government had been tried out. They would not listen to us."

troops, the possibility of declaring a state of emergency...

Who was it who intimidated you in such a manner?

For example: such ideas were expressed on the radio in Vorkuta, though, it is true, in the form of a question — "and what if troops were to be sent in?" But perhaps someone does not understand how miners react to this, to such things.

Or, another example, on Central television someone like a responsible leader appears and tells the whole country that decree 608 is being fulfilled at almost a faster rate than scheduled, that all our claims are without foundation, and that those who are responsible for implementation of decree 608 should not be punished but be proposed for a medal. How could we react "with restraint" to this?

Or the courts which considered our strike to be "illegal"...

But the court was really acting precisely within the framework of the law which had just been adopted by the Supreme Soviet...

I think that the courts were also stirring things up. The miners reason as follows: if it was not for them, then we would have finished the strike a lot earlier, in an organised manner and without any additional claims on the government. And this would have happened, as I have said, by 17th or 18th November at the latest, at the beginning of the talks in Moscow. But someone found it necessary to come up with this legal ruling precisely on 17 November. The judgement shocked the miners and complicated the talks.

But don't you accept that this is an elementary coincidence?

All "coincidences" worked exclusively to the effect of stirring up the strike, and not to the effect of ending it.

Another such question. Even if there was not an escalation of the demands, there was an escalation of the votes of no confidence which the miners passed, it would seem, in relation to all and sundry... The regional chiefs, the secretaries of the party committees, the directors of the pits, the Executive Committee, the Town Committee, the Regional Committee... And when we finally learnt that the Vorkutskaya mine had demanded the resignation of the government...

Yes. I myself said at that time that their next step will surely be a vote of no confidence in Margaret Thatcher.

Valentin Kazimirovich, does such a point of view express, as it were, that certain destructive forces made use of your strike? For example, the reproaches addressed to so-called "lefts" — certain people's deputies, activists of the popular fronts, and people running co-operatives, who often came to Vorkuta to address the miners.

I think that "lefts" as much as "rights" used our strike. Some with more success, others with less. Many hands tried to raise the temperature in the strike. This too is to be added to the number of lessons about which you are speaking.

I think that we must always remember that a strike is an extreme measure, and that one must be very

cautious in resorting to it. And, of course, in no case, inflict upon the country such economic damage as was inflicted by our strike. Although I consider that we were largely simply forced into this action.

But doesn't it seem to you that this keenness for a strike, this desire to achieve a resolution of all questions by means of strikes, is very dangerous?

I think that the working class, by way of its politicisation and organisation, can achieve what it wants, and by means of more reasonable methods. The fact is that the greatest danger which lies in wait for us right now is the danger of yielding to the influence of the populists who play on people's emotions, who reject everything, who criticise everything, and who appeal — even if, more often than not, covertly — for the use of violence. This is the most dangerous road along which we are being pushed.

In Vorkuta, there are also those who, having created a favourable mood in a meeting, demand things which, judged rationally, cannot be achieved, or, at best, can be achieved only with difficulty. For example, let us introduce regional khozraschot [ie. economic self-management, economic autonomy] straight away, tomorrow! Or, let us increase the pension for all pensioners to 200-250 roubles right now! And, of course, everyone is in favour, and he is a hero...

Excuse me, but the reform of the Northern nadbavki for which you are fighting (if, of course, it is extended to cover not just miners but all inhabitants of the North, which is only just), is this demand a realistic one right now?

It is not fully realistic today, and we completely understand this. But people want to hear a concrete and definite deadline: how long do we have to wait — two, three years, five years?

And you will have trust in the answer?

Yes. But I repeat: people want a concrete answer. They are tired of "promises in general". And the same populists play upon this, they win over the people and where they will then direct the people — that is not known. God forbid that the workers' movement should fall under the influence of the next

Life on a garbage heap

CINEMA

Liz Quinn reviews
'Last Exit to Brooklyn'

If 'Last Exit to Brooklyn' had been filmed in the mid-'60s, when it was written, it would undoubtedly have been seen as shocking and disturbing.

By today's standards, this harrowing adaptation of Hubert Selby's novel is violent and disturbing but not as harrowing as its reputation leads you to believe.

Set in the back streets and seedy bars of Brooklyn during the 1950s, we see a number of characters trying to maintain some sort of existence.

Tralala is a prostitute, who, with the help of a group of so-called 'friends', or rather pimps, manages to 'rip off' GIs and others. We see how Tralala becomes a victim herself.

One particular GI falls desperately in love with her. When she receives no payment from him, she tries to prove her worth and is the half-willing victim of a grotesque gang rape.

Harry Black is a homosexual who is also a union leader. When the union expels him for using union funds for his own end, his partner, who does not see their relationship as being a serious one, rejects him.

Harry breaks down and is brutally beaten after trying to assault a young boy.

A strike at the local factory becomes violent as police use force to break through the barricade strikers put up outside the factory. The strikers reply by



Harry Black (Stephen Lang), gay union organiser

sabotaging the trucks and lorries that were used to break the picket line.

With these and other characters, the film depicts life in Brooklyn as rather desperate and grim. The set is very dark, to accentuate the depressive atmosphere, but despite this the film is touched with elements of love and compassion.

I'm told that the movie, grim though it is, is considerably lighter and more optimistic than Hubert Selby's novel. The novel was banned in Britain when it was first published here, in 1967.

It then became the subject of two famous trials, major landmarks in the history of the long battle to establish

literary and artistic freedom in Britain. Hubert Selby's novel was finally allowed legal publication in 1969.

'Last Exit' is an enlightening film which depicts and exposes the injustice of life under capitalism at its most brutalising, and shows how people try to exist and be human beings even on garbage heaps such as this movie's Brooklyn.

Siberian miner speaks out

From page 9

strong personality who comes along. Then again it would be: "Give us the dictatorship of the proletariat!", "Down with the co-operatives, with the NEPmen!". But we've seen all this already. That's why it is very important that people with a sober head should emerge as the leadership of the movement.

But doesn't it seem to you that in the inflamed circumstances of meetings, of strikes, of court rulings, it is precisely cool heads with their sober approach to things who will not enjoy popularity? On the contrary, it will be very easy to stamp them, shall we say, as traitors to the interests of the working class.

Yes, and this is already occurring. But I'll tell you that you can stick such a label on someone only where people are politically uneducated. Political culture is vitally important for us, and I think that we are now achieving that culture.

Valentin Kazimirovich, you stress precisely the workers' movement, and not, shall we say, the movement of labourers or toilers in general. Have I understood you correctly?

Yes. Apart from the working class there is no other force in society capable of steering the country towards change. There is still the army. Only if the working class itself strives for change does someone want to use the army.

Please, let's leave the army out of this. But with regard to the workers, is there not here the seed of the latest counterposing of different sections of society on the basis of their class affiliations?

Under no circumstances! In our situation it is criminal to counterpose workers and the intelligentsia, workers and those who run co-operatives, workers and scientists. We already know where this can lead. I merely see that at the present moment in time workers are that section of society which is the least socially defended, and which is therefore ready to demand decisive changes, as well as possessing the power to ensure that its opinions are taken into consideration.

But won't it be the case, as has already happened in history, that a small group of people, cloaking itself in "the interests of the class", will impose its will, a small group of high-handed people, of persons of dubious moral qualities who are more politically developed than others?

There is such a danger. Even now I see a lot of such people who use pressure, playing upon the emotions of people, slyly acquiring for themselves good posts, positions, and privileges. But there are such people in all movements, and you have to relate to this just as you have to relate to reality. And even now (in any case, in Vorkuta) a sharply negative attitude towards such people is emerging. After the last six months we have learnt a lot, including how to understand people better. And now it is of less and less importance whether you have a loud or a quiet voice.

Vorkuta
December 1989

(translator: Stan Crooke)

Notes:
"Soviet Ministry" is presumably Ministry of Mines or Coal Mines.

Decree 608 is presumably the decree which "settled" the strikes in the summer.

Nadbavki are presumably (a) only paid after a certain period of time of working in the North (see demand 5 of the miners); (b) only paid to miners.

The "someone" referred to by Valentin Kazimirovich is presumably the KGB.

Ozonok is not a socialist magazine. It is mainly a literary-cultural magazine. Its politics are pro-Gorbachev, pro-Eltsin, pro-glasnost. It is pretty liberal in terms of what it prints — eg. lots of extracts from previously banned works.

It does happen to a mouse

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

Mice are popular with medical researchers for several reasons. They are easy to keep; they breed young so that several generations can be produced in a year; they are mammals, like us, with many similarities in structure and metabolism, often suffering similar diseases; and they have a high metabolic rate so that their childhood, maturity and old age are packed into a couple of years.

This makes them very convenient for studying problems of interest to

us, such as immune defences and cancers. Many different strains of mice have been bred for different purposes, including one with an implanted human cancer gene, which develops tumours within a few months of birth. It is, of course, used in the study of cancer treatments. This strain is the "property" of the Du Pont drug company, which has patented it under the name of OncoMouse (from the Greek for "cancer").

Some have particular behaviour patterns, geneticists were able to breed active and inactive strains of mice simply by isolating active and inactive individuals from a population of mice. The resulting strains differed thirtyfold in rates of activity.

Others have particular genetic defects: nude mice have no hair; obese mice become tremendously rotund and may be able to tell us something about the causes of some obesity in humans; mice with severe

combined immune deficiency (SCID), a total lack of defences against infection, are of immense value, as described below.

Mice have been used to uncover the mechanisms of graft acceptance and rejection and that research ultimately resulted in the now commonplace grafting of donor kidneys and other organs into humans. SCID mice are genetically unable to reject any grafted organs or cells and this fact has been used to develop a "model" for the human immune system which does not involve experimenting on humans.

Immature cells of the human immune system are injected into the SCID mice. They are not rejected and neither, being immature, do they attack the mice. Instead, they develop into the full range of human immune cells. They can then be infected with the AIDS virus, HIV, and various treatments tested. Because of their speeded up lives, results of tests should be available

faster than by using other "models" for HIV infection.

Another exciting possibility is the insertion of genes for human genetic disorders into mice. This has already been done with the gene for sickle cell anaemia. Such "genetically engineered" mice may display similar symptoms, aiding understanding of these conditions. The feasibility of gene therapy can also be investigated. Thus, it could be possible to insert normal blood-making cells into the bone marrow of a sickle cell anaemia sufferer, etc. It would be extremely unethical to try this on people if there were a chance of it making them more ill.

The suffering caused to laboratory mice is no greater than that caused to hospital patients (and indeed may be less). Those concerned about cruelty to mice would be better advised to campaign against the domestic cat.

Contempt for the membership

INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

Poor old Ron Todd! His own election as TGWU General Secretary back in 1985 had to be re-run after a series of well publicised complaints of 'irregularities'.

The last National Executive Council elections in 1988 (which resulted in a 17-22 majority for the 'Broad Left') were immediately challenged by the right-wing's unofficial 'leader', Brian Nicholson and the legal action that followed is still not resolved. Now Todd faces another 'ballot-rigging' row.

The NEC elections that closed earlier this month were the first to be held under the Tories' legislation requiring

secret ballots. The Electoral Reform Society acted as scrutineer and supervised the count. Surely this time, nothing could go wrong? But it could, and it did. The scrutineers discovered ballot papers that shouldn't have been there — they were from the union's reserve stock of unissued papers, stored at Transport House. The numbers involved were relatively small (less than 2,000) but Todd clearly had no option but to abort the entire election and order a re-ballot — at a cost of £500,000.

Given the bitterness of the left vs right battle that has riven the union ever since Todd's election in 1985, some observers naturally suspected foul play by one or other of the organised factions. This, however, is almost certainly not what happened — the ballot-rigging was too inept and amateurish. Most likely it was the work of a freelance zealot (either that, or it was a very clever ploy to sabotage the elections, but that really would be getting into the realms of conspiracy theory...)

Nevertheless, it is a fact that for years systematic ballot-rigging did take place, with both 'left' and right making exten-

sive use of the notorious branch 'block-voting' system. For many activists, this was a way of life, and it probably never occurred to them that what they were doing was wrong. It is a sad irony that it took the Tories' anti-union legislation to force the union to sort out its electoral arrangements. Even now, things are far from perfect: very little information about candidates reaches the rank and file and branches can only circulate material about candidates that have actually been nominated by that particular branch!

A contempt for the membership characterises both the 'left' and the 'right' groups and their continual squabbling on the National Executive (about the *News on Sunday*, the union's hotel in London, the forthcoming subs increase, etc, etc) is carried on behind tightly closed doors with only the occasional rumour reaching the rank and file, usually in the bourgeois press.

The TGWU right are a vile crew who would like to turn the union back into the dictatorial monolith that it was in the 1950s under Bevin and Deakin; they have close links with the AEU leader-

ship and the EETPU and have turned entire regions of the union into virtual 'no-go' areas for the Todd/Morris leadership.

But the 'Broad Left' must also take their share of the blame for this state of affairs. Despite their majority on the NEC, they have consistently failed to open up the union to rank and file involvement or to campaign amongst the membership for 'left' policies. They operate through secretive 'invitation-only' meetings and only really stir themselves at election time.

The present behind-the-scenes power struggle between Bill Morris and Jack Dromey for the 'left' franchise in the next General Secretary election is a classic case in point — even most Broad Left 'members' don't really know what's going on or what policy differences are at stake in this simmering battle.

There is a real possibility that the 'hard right' will regain control of the NEC this year and that a right winger could replace Todd in a couple of years time. If that happens, the TGWU 'left' will only have themselves to blame.

CPSA: fight agencies!

Mark Serwotka, branch secretary of Merthyr Tydfil CPSA and secretary of 'Branches Against Agencies', talked to SO.

The Agencies Conference is an unofficial branch-based rank and file conference of CPSA members. We want to identify the threats posed by agencies and organise fighting back.

This is the only issue apart from pay that can unite different sections across the whole of the CPSA union.

Where did it originate from?
The idea originated from DHSS Merthyr Tydfil branch — a branch with Socialist Caucus influence.

Last May's CPSA official conference called for total opposition to agencies. This reflected pressure from the members. But within 2 weeks it became clear that the right-wing union leadership were more than willing to cooperate with agencies.

Faced with this, the Merthyr Tydfil branch decided the issue was so important they would have to start something off themselves. From a series of all-member meetings we decided to launch an initiative. The branch mailed every CPSA branch in the union last June/July, arguing that members have to do something themselves and to join a campaign in opposition to agencies.

Initially we received around 80 replies to the letter — half wanting to know more and the rest expressing support.

So we called a mass meeting for all branches interested in the campaign where 'Branches Against Agencies' was set up last August. The campaign was established and run openly — each sponsoring branch allowed one delegate to organising meetings. We decided that any effective campaign must be democratic and run by the rank and file.

How was it built?
The emphasis was on a broad campaign based on the branches not dominated by any one political tendency. We carried articles in the *Activist* (the Socialist Caucus magazine in CPSA) and used the network of caucus members to contact neighbouring branches.

We wrote to both the Broad Left and Broad Left '84 asking them to get involved too.

When they found out what was happening, the union leadership sent a three page all-members circular denouncing Merthyr Tydfil branch and me by name. This very heavy handed response showed they had been thrown on to the defensive — sending out the letter was unprecedented.

But the spin-off was to give our campaign more publicity and we had people phoning up wanting to know more about the campaign.

Since then the leadership have pursued a continued harassment campaign — threatening branches with suspension if they send money; taking legal advice about which rules they could use to suspend people; using all the rule book tricks to block the campaign.

At the same time they had to concede they had done nothing. The NEC felt obliged to set up a series of workshops to look into the effects of agencies. This led to the incredible spectacle of Ellis (General Secretary) writing to me personally saying if we called off the con-

ference he would give our branch a workshop of our own!

On the one hand they were harassing the campaign organisers, on the other admitting they had done nothing.

What has been the response of the Broad Left in the CPSA?

In a word, terrible. At best lukewarm, at worst downright obstructive. Officially, the Broad Left argued against an unofficial conference. But behind the scenes Militant Broad Left members tried to set up an alternative event around a West Midlands Area workshop — this local event now became national. But it was not organised openly and democratically and was only to be a talking shop. They argued against a branch-based conference, paying more attention to the union leadership's response than to what needed to be done to beat agencies.

So in the event they too were forced to admit they had been doing nothing up until then.

Anyway, last August we approached the West Midlands people for a joint campaign — but they refused. Even though the official position of the Broad Left was to run a joint campaign. They went ahead with their workshop in September and out of that came the National Agencies Steering Committee, which was little more than a Militant front.

Meanwhile, Branches Against Agencies had decided to call a national rank and file conference for 3 February and we took this proposal to Broad Left national conference in November, calling again for unity around the conference on the 3rd. This was defeated on the casting vote of the chair — with everybody in the Broad Left lined up against the Militant who were refusing to budge.

Yet within a week the Broad Left were forced to do a u-turn by pressure from activists and they approached us for a joint conference which we agreed to, on the proviso that it would be a branch-based rank and file event.

At the beginning of January we all agreed to put back the conference to 17 February to allow us to get more branches involved.

It was only at this stage, after nearly 6 months, that the SWP threw their weight behind the campaign. Up until then they had been tied to the apron strings of the BL, arguing we should not go ahead without them.

If Socialist Caucus people had not kept pushing against all the odds the idea would have fizzled out and there would have been no conference.

How many are you expecting to come to the conference?

We expect 75-100 branches. 50 have already paid up but we're expecting more on the day. This will be the first unofficial branch-based conference ever called in the union in defiance of the leadership.

How is it to be organised?
In a non-bureaucratic, totally democratic way. All sponsoring branches can submit motions. All motions have been sent out in advance so branches can mandate their delegates. Nearly 30 motions have been sent in, mostly arguing for action — officially if possible, unofficial if not.

What do you want to come out of it?
The conference will not be a talking shop but a launch pad for a real,

fighting campaign against agency status. We want a broad-based campaign, national and across sections. And one that devises a strategy of industrial action. Obviously we want the union leadership to call official action over agencies. But if they refuse, we are prepared to organise unofficially. This is the best way to put pressure on them in the first place.

A committee will be elected at the conference to organise the campaign.

The Militant-dominated BL are arguing to tie the conference to the next CPSA election campaign to push for a Broad Left NEC. They are counterposing industrial action to these elections, saying we can only beat agencies by electing a Broad Left NEC.

Socialist Caucus members are arguing to build a campaign on the ground now around industrial action as the only way of stopping agencies.

We need a permanent campaign structure to fight agencies, whoever is on the NEC. Of course we want to get a BL NEC and will be in the forefront of campaigning for one but we would still need a rank and file campaign of activists to keep up the pressure to stop the NEC — left or right — from selling out.

Where now for engineers?

The engineers' campaign for a 35-hour week has reached a decisive turning point.

As we go to press, the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU) strategy committee is meeting to decide how to intensify the campaign.

They will be debating whether or not to increase the pressure on British Aerospace or diversify the dispute by pulling out key sites of the car components factories Lucas and Weir, and

possibly Catton's Foundry in Leeds.

Any escalation should be welcomed, but the key to winning this dispute is to go for national action for the national claim.

Engineers are going to have to move beyond the existing strategy of selective subsidised action if the Hobson's choice that the strategy committee currently faces is to be avoided.

The employers' decision to break off from national talks and effectively scrap the national agreement is potentially a major blow to all engineers. It opens up the possibility of playing-off different groups of workers with divide-and-rule tactics and removes the protection for the less well organised enshrined in the agreement's minimum rates.

A first step towards this would be a one-day national engineering strike. It would provide a much needed boost to the campaign.

The levy is unlikely to be picked up without national action to rekindle interest.

Ford strike

The strike by electricians and craft workers at Ford's UK plants is now in its second week.

Already the action is affecting production at Southampton, which is at a standstill, and Genk where nearly 4,000 have been laid off.

The tragedy so far is that production workers and even some electricians in the anti-Hammond EPIU have not been supporting this action.

But this strike is not divisive, it is Ford's offer that is divisive. The electricians are opposing strings that will introduce new differentials in their ranks. Production workers should follow their lead and refuse to sign the local productivity deals that promise an extra 3%. That 3% should be awarded without the strings to every Ford worker!

Even if it's true that electricians have crossed picket lines in the past, support for them now will be an important blow for workers' unity. It will make divisions in the future less likely. In turn, if the electricians defeat Ford's strings then it will strengthen every other Ford worker in their day to day battles.

- Support the strikers
- Respect picket lines
- Boycott all strikers' work and refuse to work with scabs

Manchester benefit strike

TOWN HALLS ROUNDUP

Counter staff at Manchester Council's Benefit Service started an indefinite strike on Tuesday 13 February.

Manchester Benefits Service (MBS) mainly deals with Housing Benefit claims.

The strike is over pay and the increased use of part-time staff. It was sparked by the council advertising for two part-time staff. After acknowledging problems over staffing levels, the council went for the cheapest answer of advertising for two part-time staff to cover the busy period from 12 to 2.30.

Counter staff also have an outstanding grievance over pay. They want regrading from Scale 2 to Scale 3/4.

The strike received unanimous backing from a 100-strong NALGO meeting of MBS staff. The meeting also agreed to start a levy to give financial support to the strike.

Unfortunately the support of

NALGO members in MBS has not been reflected in support from the NALGO branch officials. Their response so far has been hostile.

The strike is not just about a better deal for staff, but also for a better service to the public. Poor staffing and poor pay mean poor service.

Council housing workers in Longsight, Manchester, returned to work last week after a three day strike.

Management's high-handed attempt to force a clerical officer to transfer to an office on the other side of the city prompted the workers to walk out. She was given only half a day's notice of the transfer.

Compulsory transfers seem to be on the increase, as part of a drive from the council towards more flexibility.

Southwark council workers, members of the white collar union NALGO, have started a programme of selective action against the council's job-cutting plans. Full report next week.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER



Students: on to the streets!

The way to beat loans!

Mark Sandell (Kent Area NUS in personal capacity) reports on the campaign against student loans

The National Union of Students has called two weeks of action against loans, which should see one of the biggest mobilisations of students since Thatcher came to power.

Tragically, whatever the size of the march on 15 February, and other action around the country running up to and inspired by it, the NUS national leaders have done nothing to build a serious campaign.

They have not set up a loans action desk at NUS HQ, the NUS Executive's 'loans task force' has not met this year, and NUS has done next to nothing to build the march on the 15th.

They have also broken central mandates in the loans motion passed only three months ago at the NUS Winter Conference, by refusing to call a national shut-down,

not organising an activist conference to draw together the national campaign, and totally rejecting any form of rolling programme of action.

Victory over loans is central for the Tories. It is their 'flagship' in education. The whole student movement must take on the battle against loans and for our own concept of education, based on access for all.

Even with a good national leadership we would need an active rank and file movement, an activist-based campaign taking direct action such as a wave of occupations; shut-downs; and marches. With our current leadership this rank and file movement must be built from the ground up, starting now!

We need to fight to stop the loans bill being passed, but not give up if the Tories get it through. We must fight loans all the way through its implementation, refusing to pay back our loans, taking direct action to prevent implementation, and linking up with education unions to fight loans and other attacks like fees, which may come in their wake.

Any battle against the Tories must tie students together with the labour movement. A great opportunity to do this has been squandered by the Labour Students leadership of NUS through their attitude to the Poll Tax campaign.

Around the country student left

activists are involved in local anti-Poll Tax campaigns, making direct links with the labour movement and the local communities, but the NUS leadership have totally ignored the Poll Tax campaign, expending energy only on telling people to pay the Poll Tax.

They have flouted the Left Unity policy passed at NUS Winter Conference calling for mass non-payment and non-collection.

We need a militant student activist movement. Left Unity is such a movement. We must build on the ground but hold the leadership to account.

The next NUS conference will present us with the chance to rid ourselves of the right wing 'independents', put some decent left activists onto the National Executive, and build a socialist campaign for a Labour victory inside NUS.

A socialist campaign for a Labour victory would not only take on the tasks of building for a Labour victory in the student movement far better than the Kinnockites, but can build an active left inside NUS to push home our positive demands for campaigns like mass non-payment and non-collection of the Poll Tax, a mass campaign including direct action against loans, and demands for education to be taken up by Labour now and in government.

Ambulance dispute

Strike with emergency cover!

For a TUC day of strike action!

Delegates from around the country meet this Wednesday, 14 February, to discuss the way forward in the ambulance dispute.

There are some signs of weakness on the employers' side. David Rennie, chair of the employers' side of the Whitley Council — that covers ambulance workers' pay — has proposed the setting up of an arbitration service especially for ambulance workers.

This is obviously a long way from the unions' claim but a sign of weakness nonetheless.

The employers' weakness should be exploited.

Now is not the time to go for a rotten compromise.

But there is a danger that the debate at the delegate meeting will focus solely on the idea of an all-out strike *without* cover. There is another and better option: an all-out strike *with* emergency cover.

This would be the best way of unifying the ambulance workers and escalating the action. It would break down the divisions between those on strike, those locked out or suspended in some form, and those still on full pay.

A national strike ultimatum would also increase the pressure on management to concede some elements of trade union control over emergency cover. With every ambulance worker out on strike, it would make the argument for solidarity strike action from other workers much easier.

It is vital to separate out this option from that of 'no cover'. We need occupations to prevent lock-outs, and appeals to the army and police to stop scabbing (not just by walking off the job, but by arranging a transfer of emergency duties under workers' control).

Ambulance workers should not be frightened off from this option by threats of injunctions or the withdrawal of insurance cover. Let's dare the Tories to jail a professional life-saver for refusing to let unqualified troops or police do their job.

'No cover' would backfire in the propaganda war, making it much more difficult to convince other groups of workers to take strike action in support. If the ambulance workers had been on all-out strike with no cover during the storms of 25 January, what would have happened? Almost certainly they would have gone to help — thus seeming to break their strike. If they had

not, it would have eroded their support.

Major walk-out would also split the ambulance workers' own ranks, as many people who are by no means strike-breakers would work to maintain some emergency service. Those who would stay on strike would — whether they liked it or not — be forced to accept police and army scabbing in order to save lives.

Strike in the Health Service are generally weaker than those in, say, engineering, because they don't hit profits. But public opinion on its own won't shift the Tories.

The countless deaths of working-class people as a result of the Tories' NHS cuts have not led them into a U-turn. They don't care. If they did, then they would not lead thousands of pensioners freeze to death every winter.

"The key to winning this dispute is to get other workers who do have economic and political muscle to use it".

The tragedies that would result from the total withdrawal of cover (or provoking enough lock-outs and suspensions to overstretch the police and army) would not force this evil government to back down.

Therefore the key to beating the Tories in this battle is to get other groups of workers who do have the economic and political muscle to use it. Let's put the bosses across industry to put pressure on Thatcher to surrender.

The response to the call for action on 30 January shows quite clearly the depth of support that exists. One recent poll showed that 50 per cent of the population (and 30 per cent of Tory voters!) were prepared to strike for the ambulance workers.

The TUC should now call, at the earliest possible opportunity, a proper full-scale day of *strike* action as the first step in a rolling programme.

Other groups of workers who have pay claims and other issues in the pipeline should move forward the timetable of their disputes to strike alongside the ambulance workers. Let's make the Tories fight on more than one front!

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