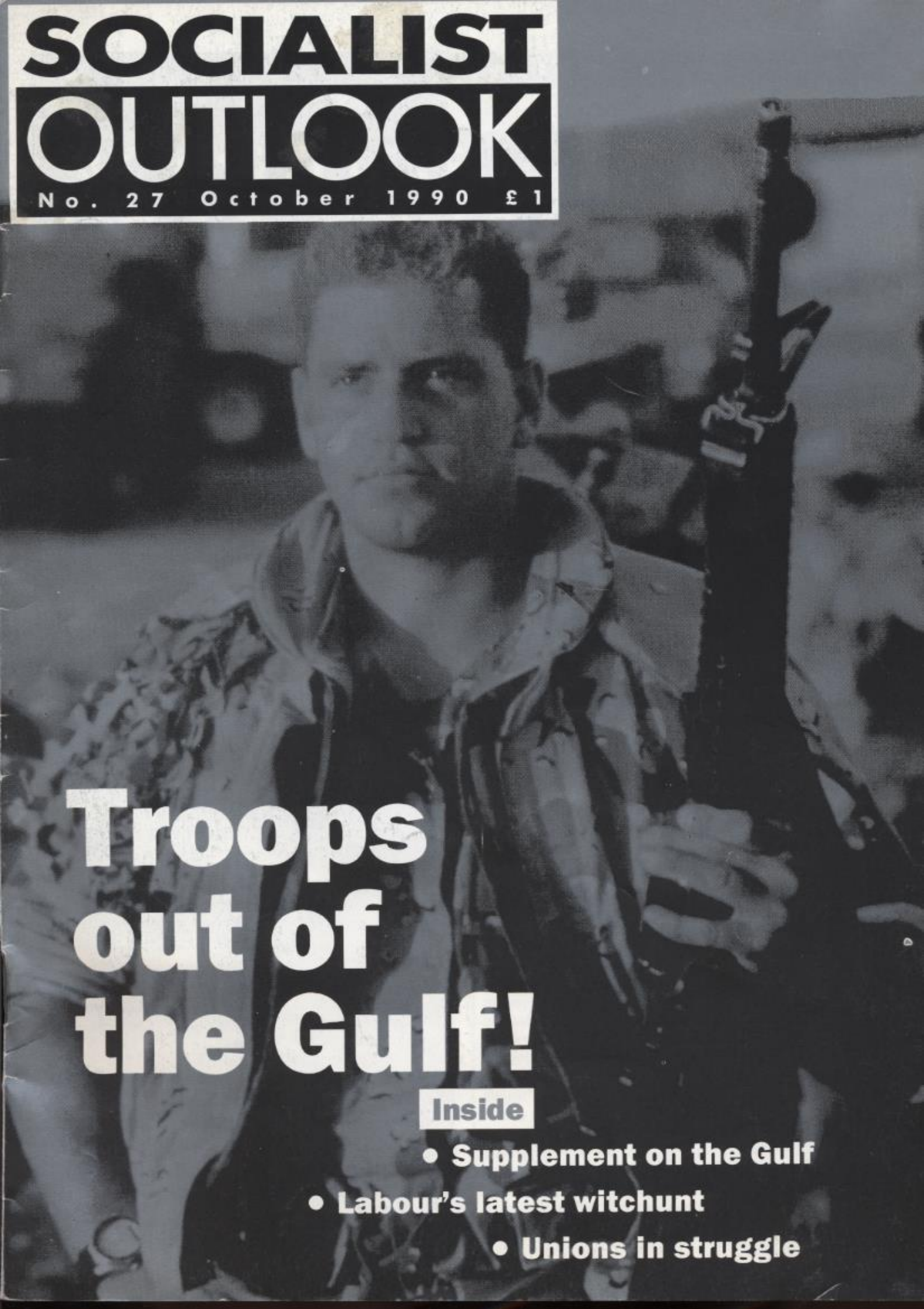


SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

No. 27 October 1990 £1



Troops out of the Gulf!

Inside

- Supplement on the Gulf
- Labour's latest witchhunt
- Unions in struggle



John Harris (NUJ)

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Contents

UPDATE

1 ● EDITORIAL

2-3 ● Gulf war: build a mass campaign

3 ● There was a war on

4 ● South Africa – the roots of violence

5-6

Labour's witch-hunt escalates

Pete Firmin

7-9

Off to market with the Tories:

Labour goes shopping for solutions

Jean Reilly and Jane Wells

9-11

Poll Tax: The fight hots up but are we winning?

Roland Wood

11-12

Gorbachev bankrupt on national question

Rick Simon

13-20

SUPPLEMENT

Gulf Crisis

Twenty questions and answers on the Gulf Crisis

John Lister

Why Bush is flexing US military muscles

Paul Lawson

21-25

UNIONS IN STRUGGLE

Korean workers battle for unions

Paul Field

How strikers beat Beverly Hills cops

Harry Brighthouse

Oil workers' refined tactics show the way forward

Pat Sikorski

26-29

The SWP and eastern Europe

Phil Hearse

29-31

REVIEWS

● Safe, smug and depressing

● Greasepaint – or black actors?

● A Mars a day ...

32

Obituary

32-33

LETTERS

Don't let Bush dig in: get the troops out now!

"Roll up that map, we shall not need it...". The famous words on the turmoil of nations and national borders created by the outbreak of the Napoleonic wars could also apply to the new period opened by the dispatch of tens of thousands of US troops to the Gulf to counter Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Whichever way the present conflict is resolved, it will result in lasting changes in the balance of power, not only in the oil-rich Gulf but on a world scale.

Margaret Thatcher was perhaps the first to recognise the opportunity for imperialism to exploit Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's rash adventure in invading Kuwait. She saw that the situation offered a new opportunity for the western imperialist powers to strengthen their hand in the Middle East. While Bush initially dithered, a long phone call to Thatcher was reportedly the turning point in his decision to send in what will be 125,000 troops to Saudi Arabia.

But though their tanks, heavy artillery and other equipment are still arriving by sea, we can be sure that the US troops got to the Gulf much faster than they will leave: indeed as with Thatcher's costly 'Fortress Falklands', it seems that long after the present crisis dies down a major new imperialist encampment will remain in the region for many years.

The reason is clear: Bush might succeed in using the USA's new \$2 trillion arsenal to reimpose old-fashioned imperialist control over this strategically vital region for the world's economy. He might succeed in ousting the Iraqis from Kuwait – and even in toppling Saddam Hussein: yet all this would mark not the end but a new stage of the crisis.

The removal of Saddam would raise the immediate problem of installing and preserving a new, collaborationist regime in Iraq acceptable to the USA. This would be no easy task once the Iraqi population has experienced the rigours of the imperialist blockade and possibly witnessed mass slaughter at the hands of US forces.

The anger of the Arab and Palestinian masses at the US intervention is already causing serious problems for several bourgeois Arab regimes – both those, like Egypt and Syria, which have sent troops to give "Arab cover" to the US military effort in the Gulf, and King Hussein's vacillating regime in Jordan. A surge of outraged anger and mass struggle if Saddam were defeated could yet topple one or more of these regimes and sweep new radical forces to power, creating fresh headaches for Washington's strategists.

In addition, if the unloved Emir of Kuwait and his barbaric feudal order are reinstated with the aid of US bayonets, the

longer-term question of how to preserve this and other outposts of feudalism in the Gulf states (including Saudi Arabia) will remain unsolved.

All the signs are therefore that a US victory over Saddam would inevitably lead into a major continuing military commitment in the Gulf. It would also strengthen those elements of the US establishment who argue for the use of brute force to solve other political problems facing imperialism – making it more likely that US troops would be used to repress revolutionary struggles and remove those other regimes in the 'third world' which incur Washington's displeasure. We have already seen evidence of an overtly aggressive interventionist line by US imperialism in its recent bloody invasion of Panama to impose a stooge government compliant to Washington.

All thought of a "peace dividend" from reductions in military spending after the end of the Cold War would be dropped: a major new impetus would be given to arms manufacturers, while pressure is already mounting from Thatcher and the State Department for the remilitarisation of Japan and Germany to help the Americans keep the Gulf safe for capitalism. Yet at the same time there would be an even bigger contradiction in capitalist power relations between the unchallenged global dominance of the USA and its status as the world's biggest debtor nation.

These political implications of a possible imperialist victory are grim enough for socialists: but a war in the Gulf would have other, human and social consequences.

A stand-off between Saddam's tank brigades and US naval and air-backed land forces could bring a horrendous slaughter in the desert: as the eight-year Iran-Iraq war showed, Saddam's army is unlikely to give way easily or collapse quickly.

Meanwhile there will be a huge toll of civilian casualties and a new tidal wave of refugees from the war zone into neighbouring countries. Even if the prolonged enforcement of trade sanctions on Iraq through the US blockade does not swiftly trigger a shooting war in the Gulf, it could have dire effects. **The outbreak of epidemic disease, and the hunger, squalor and misery of the refugees huddled in Jordanian transit camps give us a glimpse of the conditions that sanctions – the supposedly "non-violent" policy – are intended to force upon the Iraqi people by cutting vital supplies of food, medicines and other necessities.**

All of these implications of the US/British intervention are plain enough to see, and the conclusion is clear: imperialist troops must be withdrawn from the Gulf, and the UN sanctions must be lifted, before they lead into a major war in which the losers must be the Arab masses of the Middle East.



Bush's war drive must be stopped

Yet once again the British labour movement has witnessed the shameful capitulation of its leadership to an imperialist war drive.

Kinnock, showing he has learned nothing and forgotten nothing from the Falklands war of 1982 – which Thatcher used to win reelection – or the period when Harold Wilson's Labour government slavishly supported US barbarism in Vietnam, tail-ends Thatcher into backing the American intervention.

Other Labour MPs take refuge in the argument that the intervention has been carried out under a fig-leaf of legitimacy from a United Nations resolution – apparently forgetting that the UN was also used as a flag of convenience by the USA for its war in Korea which left millions dead in 1950-53. In both cases the cause embraced by the UN has been reactionary. Then the war was waged to prop up Syngman Rhee's corrupt dictatorship (and thousands of US troops have remained in South Korea ever since): the latest war is to keep oil cheap and the Gulf safe for feudal sheikhdoms.

Naturally as socialists we oppose the Saddam regime which has brutally repressed the Iraqi left and workers' movement, committed barbaric atrocities against the Kurdish people and has embarked on an indefensible invasion of Kuwait. We call for troops to be withdrawn from Kuwait at once.

But socialists must also insist the the ousting of Saddam Hussein, and the removal of the corrupt Kuwaiti royal family must be a task for the Arab masses themselves and all those who live and work in those countries. We call for working class action to oust Saddam; we are not for the return of the Emir but for a democratically elected constituent assembly in Kuwait. Of course,

imperialism would be as stongly opposed to this as it is to Saddam and that is another reason why we demand the withdrawal of imperialist troops.

Given the huge and almost unanimous media hysteria against Saddam as a "crazy" dictator, it is no surprise that public opinion should for now be strongly behind Thatcher and Bush: but once the shooting starts, and bodies of young soldiers sacrificed to save reactionary royal houses begin to be shipped back to Britain, the USA and elsewhere, we can expect that to change. It is by no means clear that the USA has overcome the 'Vietnam syndrome' which has so irritated and restricted State Department hawks itching to use brute force around the world: similar resistance could break out in Britain if more troops, ships and planes are sent.

But for socialists it is not enough to wait until a predictable series of tragedies and disasters begins to create a backlash against war in the Gulf and confirms we were right to oppose intervention: we have to support any initiative against the war, and fight *now* to build campaigning committees and activities at local and national level to block the British involvement in the war effort. Socialist Outlook is supporting the anti-imperialist Campaign Against War in the Gulf (see below).

We can usefully begin by targeting pressure on the wretched majority of Labour MPs who trekked into the lobby to vote with the Tory warmongers while just 35 voted against Thatcher in the emergency Commons debate.

Gulf war: build a mass campaign

Thatcher's decision to send ground troops and tanks as well as air and naval forces to back the US war effort in the Gulf underlines the importance for socialists of building an anti-war movement in Britain.

Socialist Outlook supports any initiative and protest against the war drive, no matter how limited. Our goal is to build a genuine mass campaign and we know this means joining forces with those who do not necessarily share our view of imperialism, our criticism of the UN, or our call for withdrawal of troops.

In the immediate response to the sending of US troops to Saudi Arabia, we have therefore worked to build the Campaign Against War in the Gulf jointly with other political currents on the left. In playing a key role in the fight for the first united national demonstration against war in the Gulf, we have shown that

we are willing to compromise where necessary with forces to our right who are against a US-led war, but oppose the troops out demand.

We have applied the traditional tactic of the United front – in which we seek to maximise the unity of forces in struggle, while insisting on our right as a distinct political current to argue for our own politics and slogans within the broader movement.

Experience proves that such broad alliances can only function effectively if organised in a democratic, open manner – rather than the traditional alliance of bureaucrats in a smoke-filled room; or a 'united campaign' where others are only allowed to participate after all the real decisions are already made.

Socialist Outlook supporters have attempted from the beginning to build the campaign around the demand 'US/British



US forces mass on the border of Saudi Arabia

Troops Out of the Gulf!'. Unity could be built around such a demand between the far left, the Labour left and sections of the peace movement, despite disagreements over issues such as the role of the UN.

While such differences are politically important, to allow disagreement on additional detail to block the possibility of unity around the demand for imperialist withdrawal would be ultraleftism of the worst kind.

As is so often the case, ultraleftism has proved to be one

of the obstacles to building such a united campaign and from the Revolutionary Communist Party and its front campaigns is nothing new. The RCP's entire political practice is characterised by ultraleft abstentionism, so their call for their 'own' demonstration came as no great surprise.

However, the initial response to appeals for united action from the Socialist Workers Party was more disappointing. The SWP has a more mixed history – having participated in the very important campaigns against the

Vietnam War (VSC) and against British fascism in the late 1970s – the Anti-Nazi League. On the other hand, we should recall, in the miners' strike it took the SWP some 6 months to agree to participate in the massive network of miners' support groups. On this occasion too it has taken sustained pressure for the SWP to eventually come in to the Campaign Against War in the Gulf.

At the other end of the political spectrum, a united campaign has been blocked by those forces that reject an anti-imperialist political line. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) has always been torn apart by disputes between those that wish to 'oppose war' in an abstract sense; and those that wish to point politically to where the blame lies.

The factional manoeuvring within CND over the last period – and in particular the 'Now you see him, now you don't' antics of Bruce Kent – are ample testimony to this. The apolitical attitude of the Green Party also reflects their lack of any understanding of imperialism.

Clearly then, it is vital that the left continues to build the Campaign Against War in the Gulf, which is organised on an anti-imperialist political platform, and functions in a democratic manner. While it was correct to attempt to achieve unity with the CND based Committee to Stop the War (CSW) – and to be prepared to make certain compromises to do so – it quickly became clear that this was not possible.

The argument with the CSW was over the issue of democracy, not demands. If it had been possible for anti-imperialists to fight their corner in an open, democratic forum, a united campaign would have been possible. The variant that has finally resulted – a single demonstration, on September 15, with a distinct anti-imperialist contingent – is, however, something that the entire left and peace movements should be able to support.

Socialists should make every effort to participate in and build the CAWG, forming local groups with campaigning activity, public meetings and anti-war publicity. Organising further action against imperialism's war plans is a vital task.

'There was a war on' said MP Dennis Skinner last July in defence of miner's union President Arthur Scargill and General Secretary Peter Heathfield; this explains the central issues involved in the present witch-hunt of the leadership team of the Great Miners strike of 1984-5.

The famous 'Class War' headline that appeared on the miners' newspaper during the strike made explicit the reality of perhaps the longest and certainly one of the most bitter battles between capital and labour seen in Britain since the Industrial Revolution.

The lies and slanders of Maxwell's *Daily Mirror* campaign about 'mis-appropriation' and 'mis-handling' of money meant for striking miners and their communities should have long since been buried.

The Lightman report made it clear that neither Scargill or Heathfield pocketed a penny, and that loans for house buying, which took place before and after the strike, were above board and repaid in full.

Those who continue to snipe about 'undemocratic' and 'unaccountable' handling of funds seem to forget that at the end of 1984 agents of the British state were running around the world's finance centres trying to trace any NUM funds; that the union was completely sequestered from November; and that there were at least those right-wing members of the NUM executive who would have immediately passed on information to the Coal Board and the government if it had been brought before the executive committee.

What rank and file miners wanted, and got, was continued representation during the strike, and the continued existence of the NUM.

However the smear campaign continues, especially concerning the allegations of receiving money from Libya and the alleged 'mis-use' of money from Soviet miners.

The target here is not just Scargill and the NUM but the International Miner's Organisation

(IMO).

Scargill's line in practice during the strike was to get money from any source – even the devil himself – to sustain the fight. This is absolutely right. The truth about how much of our – the taxpayers' – money was expropriated by the Tories to finance their union-busting



John Harris (NUJ)

operation will probably never be known. £7 billion is almost certainly a minimum.

The truth about the money from Soviet miners is that an original payment was made into an NUM account in Switzerland, but was then mysteriously returned. No money was then paid into any account over which Scargill or Heathfield had any control until after the strike was over, and then only into the IMO funds, for use by miners internationally.

There is a political link in the emergence of the Gorbachev leadership in the Kremlin, which has set out to improve its relations with western governments at the expense of betraying working class struggles. Now the East German, Bulgarian, Czech and Soviet miners's unions are all reported to want to leave the IMO and join the smaller western – i.e. pro-capitalist – orientated Miners' International Federation (MIF).

The alliance between the bureaucratic apparatus of the unions in the imperialist countries and its counterparts in the Stalinist regimes is clear.

Their common aim is to isolate and smash the only trade union international with a leader-

ship independent of ties either to the multi-national mining and oil conglomerates in the west, or to the union 'nomenklaturas' of the east which continue to faithfully implement the state policy of Gorbachev's regime.

Gorbachev's aim is to open up the fabulous mineral wealth of Siberia to the very same mining and oil conglomerates that already enjoy the collaboration of the MIF bureaucracy.

Neither group wants a miners' international like the IMO, which has grown – by supporting miners' industrial action in places like Morocco, Namibia, Chile, and the Philippines – to a total of 43 affiliates and 6.5 million members. In contrast the MIF – controlled by the West German and US union – only has around 2 million members.

The NUM remains politically very strong. With the world tottering on the edge of a war over energy resources, coal mined here still provides 80 per cent of energy resources for power generation.

Scargill and Heathfield are now on the counter-attack, as the best means of defending the union. It is fitting that the Women Against Pit Closures organisation is the body to publish the rebutt of the Lightman report and be the sponsor of the 30 or so coalfield meetings being held to rally the NUM membership and their communities.

With this initiative and the backing of the overwhelming majority of the activists represented in the Yorkshire, North-East, Midlands and Nottinghamshire area councils, Scargill and Heathfield are fighting to rebuild the fighting strength of the union.

Defending the class struggle tradition represented by Scargill and the NUM in the unions must be part of any fightback today. That's why *Socialist Outlook* and its readers welcome and support the 'Defend Scargill – Defend the NUM' campaign being sponsored by *Socialist Worker* and urge labour movement bodies to lend support.

Pat Sikorski

South Africa – the roots of violence

On February 2nd 1990, President de Klerk of South Africa proclaimed that the season of violence had come to an end. It was something which belonged to the past. Today, just eight months later, there is more violence in South Africa than ever before.

The cause of the current battles in the townships of the Transvaal is easily identified. The Chief Minister of the Zulu 'homeland', Mangosuthu Buthelezi, has extended his struggle against the ANC-led liberation movement from Natal, where it had already caused hundreds of deaths, to the industrial heartland of South Africa around Johannesburg.

His aim: to pole-axe the negotiations between the ANC leadership and the Pretoria regime; to win himself a place at the conference table, and a leading role in the government of a post-apartheid South Africa.

Buthelezi is an ambitious man and completely unscrupulous about the way he pursues his ambitions. In the years when Nelson Mandela was in gaol, and the ANC, PAC, Black Consciousness and other organisations were banned, the Zulu-based Inkatha movement was the only black organisation with a mass base legally existing.

The South African establishment as well as overseas powers tried to make full use of this situation to bolster his position. He frequently appeared on television in South Africa, Britain, the United States and elsewhere. He negotiated with big business, visited and was visited by foreign politicians, and set up



Inkatha's attacks have now spread to the townships

representatives in the major capitals of the world.

In July this year, he was the principal speaker at a conference in London organised by the Tory think-tank, the Centre for Political Studies, billed as a conference on Britain and South Africa. It was opened with an introduction by William Waldegrave, Minister at the Foreign Office. One of the speakers at this conference, Bruce Anderson of the *Sunday Telegraph* complained that the Chief was not violent enough in response to the violence of the ANC.

For years Buthelezi has been a particular favourite of Margaret Thatcher and a frequent guest at 10 Downing Street and Chequers. She frequently used him to counter the ANC's claim to represent the great majority of blacks in South Africa. The six million Zulus were, after all, the biggest 'tribe'. She took little notice of opinion polls which showed that Buthelezi did not enjoy majority support even among the Zulus, maintaining himself in power by totalitarian brutality.

Because Inkatha is almost wholly Zulu-based, the current wave of fighting in the townships has been ascribed to 'inter-tribal' rivalries. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the industrialised urban areas of South Africa there has been 'inter-tribal' mixture for more than a century.

When, in the heyday of Verwoerdian apartheid, the government tried to segregate the inhabitants of the demolished

Sophiatown into distinct 'tribal' zones in Soweto – Xhosa, Zulu or Sotho, most of them had no idea to which they were supposed to belong. In Natal there have been as many Zulu victims of Buthelezi's impis as others.

The battle is a political one. Chief Buthelezi is the champion of private enterprise, an opponent of sanctions. He is hungry for power. He has openly threatened to 'shoot his way into the negotiation chamber'.

While most objective observers are quite emphatic that it is Buthelezi and Inkatha who unleashed the wave of violence that has left more than 500 dead in the Transvaal townships, it is also clear that the ANC leadership was unable to control its own followers. The result was complete anarchy, further complicated by the fact that the police openly sided with the Inkatha bands.

Even the government now seems to have recognised this, and it is the army not the police, which has been sent to the townships to restore order. Inexplicably, in the midst of all this, Nelson Mandela has once again gone for a trip overseas – at a time when resolute leadership is desperately needed.

No one who knows the history of South Africa will be surprised at this latest manifestation of violence. Since white men first set foot in the country, black people have been kept in subjection by whites through violence. Apartheid is only the grossest expression of this. As a result, for

both blacks and whites, violence has become a way of life.

If apartheid fertilises the endemic violence, this has been furthered by massive unemployment, acute economic crisis and the under-education of blacks in the segregated schools. The continuing bulldozing of squatter homes, leaving families homeless and hopeless, has also fuelled the embers of violence.

There are more than 5 million unemployed in South Africa. But with the rural areas unable to provide a basic level of subsistence, there is an ever-growing movement into the towns and cities, where there are no jobs and no homes. The consequence is a growing crime wave.

Black violence – which makes the headlines – is paralleled by increasing violence from right-wing whites. A Latin American pattern of vigilantes is emerging. Violence is openly threatened by the Conservative Party and practised by the AWB and other far-right groups.

Despite the ANC leadership's attempt to arrive at a peaceful and orderly end to apartheid, the portents are that we will witness an increase in violence. Even if some sort of political solution is hammered out, the huge economic disparity between the small group of whites and the huge majority of blacks will remain. This festering sore can only be cured by lancing.

Charlie van Gelderen

Labour's witch-hunt escalates

by Pete Firmin (vice-chair, End the Ban)

Recent months have seen a new surge of attacks on the left in the Labour Party. The proscription of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, expulsion of councillors from Labour Groups for their refusal to support the Poll Tax and rent rises, further expulsions of *Militant* supporters, tacit support for the attacks on Arthur Scargill led by the *Daily Mirror*, and the proscription of *Socialist Organiser* are the best-known examples.

There is a common strand to all aspects of the witch-hunt going beyond the arbitrariness of singling out particular 'tendencies' (*Socialist Organiser*, *Militant*) and not others or the vindictiveness of local right-wingers, who feel they have been given the green light by the activities of the national bureaucracy.

In addition to wanting to prove to the ruling class and its mouthpiece, the media, that the Labour Party's policies are an asset, not a threat, Kinnock wants to show that he can deal with any opposition to those policies. Thus, we have action against those who stand in the way of promoting Labour's 'responsible' image (in particular those prepared to fight the Poll Tax rather than simply say how nasty it is) and attempts to eliminate potential opponents of a Labour government's austerity programme.

In his speech to this year's TUC, Kinnock made clear that a government led by him will not be one from which the working class can expect 'favours' (they will be reserved for the ruling class).

Far from favours, he knows (and the vote at the TUC to drop calls for the repeal of the anti-union laws is further evidence) that there will be conflict with the working class. Retaining the Tories' anti-union laws and abolishing the block vote at Labour Party conference are intended both to help a Labour government defeat the unions when such conflict comes, and to prevent any revolt reaching into the Labour Party itself.

Robert Maxwell doesn't need any direct encouragement from Kinnock to conduct his campaign against Scargill (in which the 'charges' have changed several times as each has been disproved). Both Maxwell and Kin-

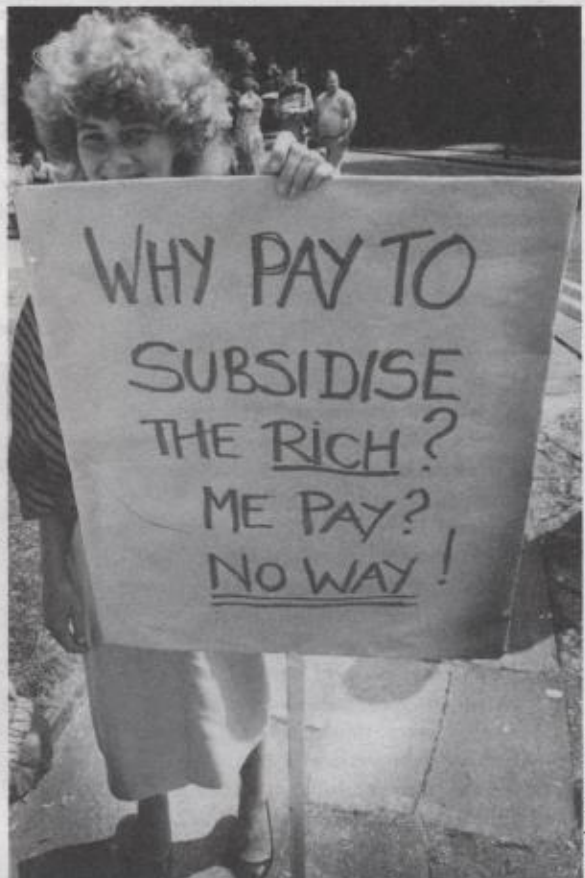
nock want to erase the memory of the miners' strike as one of the greatest anti-Tory battles: but they also want to see Scargill removed as a possible focus for the left of the trade union movement against a Labour government. Organisations on the left of the party are also seen as a possible future focus for that opposition, just as they were during the Wilson and Callaghan governments of 1974-79 and afterwards.

This renewed escalation of the witch-hunt coincides with the run-up to the next general election, with Kinnock trying to make the final adjustments to both policy and organisation. It runs alongside the proposals to do away with the automatic right to reselection of MPs, the introduction of one member, one vote (i.e. the abolition of delegate democracy), and possibly postal ballots for virtually all decisions, as well as proposals to reduce the influence of Party conference on policy.

Only for a short period in Labour's history, from the mid-70s to 1982, did a relatively relaxed internal regime exist without the threat of proscriptions and expulsions. This all changed with the expulsion of the editorial board of *Militant* in 1982. Since then there has been a steady stream of expulsions, suspension of District and Constituency Labour Parties etc, together with the destruction of the Young Socialists, the attacks on women's organisation and the refusal to recognise any kind of black self-organisation. Throughout this period the left has been unable to provide a common defence against such attacks for several reasons.

The response to the first witch-hunt (of the *Militant* Editorial Board) was strong, but weakened in two crucial respects. Most important was the unwillingness of *Militant* to build a common campaign with all of the left against the witch-hunt. Instead it chose to conduct its own campaign, solely as a *Militant* promotion exercise, with the result that it alienated many of those initially willing to defend it.

Another problem was the refusal of sec-



Labour's witch-hunt is attacking poll tax activists

John Harris (NUJ)

tions of the left (such as the leadership of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy) to recognise that registration was being introduced as a device to attack *Militant*, and that therefore a united rejection was required by the left. The fact that CLPD decided to apply for registration left *Militant* exposed.

Militant supporters later chose to appeal to the courts (as their only course of action) to prevent them being expelled. This was futile in its results, and politically wrong (how can an organisation seriously oppose the interference of the courts into the affairs of the unions but encourage the same interference into the Labour Party?). They dropped any attempt to campaign against the witch-hunt, which left those still willing to fight it doing so on their behalf, without their backing.

At the same time a response developed among sections of the left of distancing itself from defence of *Militant* by means of spurious political arguments, while defending other victims of the witch-hunt. It was claimed that *Militant* weren't really part of the Left because of their attitude to Black Sections, women's sections and their policy on Ireland, as if these weaknesses were the reason the bureaucracy was attacking them.

Thus much of the left moved away from a principled position of solidarity against attack by the bureaucracy to a selective approach of only defending those with whom they had more common ground - with the result that

the defence against any witch-hunt was weakened.

The result of this weakness is a much greater confidence of the bureaucracy to go on the attack, in the knowledge that there will be hardly any resistance. For several years the NEC report to Labour conference has contained long lists of those expelled, with little or no opposition expressed.

The proposal to proscribe *Socialist Organiser* arose out of the Birkenhead selection saga. When Frank Field, a right-wing maverick who has been a thorn in the flesh of the Merseyside labour movement for years, was deselected by Birkenhead CLP he lashed out with a scurrilous 'dossier' and threatened to stand as an independent against Labour.

The protection of sitting MPs being dear to the heart of Walworth Road, it took this catalogue of gossip, innuendo and half-truths seriously. Although not denying that selection had been run completely in accordance with the rules, they decided to use the opportunity for a new purge of the Left and re-run the selection, giving Field another chance.

Amongst other things, Field's 'dossier' named *Militant* supporters in Birkenhead and pointed to the influence of *Socialist Organiser* in neighbouring Wallasey. Field had previously excelled himself by calling on people not to vote Labour in Wallasey in the 1987 general election because the candidate was the (then) *Socialist Organiser* supporter Lol Duffy.

The *Militant* supporters in Birkenhead are in the process of being expelled, and Labour's organisation department took the opportunity to produce their own 'report' on *Socialist Organiser*.

Yet *Socialist Organiser* itself was never once contacted to discuss this and letters and phone calls were never responded to. When an issue of *Socialist Organiser* showed this report to be a fabrication, the report was drastically changed, and a new one submitted to the NEC.

With virtually no discussion, the NEC in July then endorsed the proposal that *Socialist Organiser* be proscribed as a 'party within a party'. The fact that the Walworth Road bureaucrats didn't feel it necessary to go through even a pretence of allowing *Socialist Organiser* to answer the allegations shows how confident they felt about the left's response.

Particularly sickening throughout the whole episode has been the response of the 'soft left'. David Blunkett said in advance of the NEC meeting that he would want to hear the evidence before reaching a conclusion; yet he and other members of the soft left on Labour's NEC left before the decision on *Socialist Organiser*. One of them, Clare Short, has since gone into print in *Tribune*, defending the proscription. In this, Short is continuing a dishonourable record of the soft left over many years and witch-hunts.

A beacon of principled light in this has been the attitude of Phil Kelly, the editor of *Tribune*, who has come out strongly against this witch-hunt. Speaking at the 'End the Ban' rally on September 1st, he made it clear that he sees no contradiction between defence of *Socialist Organiser* and opposition to many of its policies, such as non-payment of the Poll Tax.

The 'End the Ban' committee was set up to organise a broad defence campaign and publicise the case against the proscription of



The ideas innocks'ants' to lence
The ideas Kinnock wants to silence

Phil Kelly: speaking at the End the Ban rally

Socialist Organiser. Labour Party Socialists, Women for Socialism, *Labour Briefing* and *Socialist Outlook* have supported it from the beginning. The attitude of others has been less encouraging.

Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) essentially made conditions for its participation - the dissolution of the Socialist Organiser Alliance, the admitted organisation of SO supporters, and a policy of not talking to the bourgeois media. Most other organisations of the left have yet to be seen to show any support.

Militant and *Socialist Worker*, for instance, have devoted many columns to the witch-hunt of councillors in Liverpool for opposing rent rises, but have not even mentioned the witch-hunt against SO.

Motivated by sectarianism - political disagreement with *Socialist Organiser* and a reluctance to admit the existence of any/other organisations on the left in the Labour Party, this attitude weakens all of the left. Any successful witch-hunt is a defeat for democracy in the labour movement, strengthening the hold of the bureaucracy and weakening the ability

of the left to fight new realism. And, of course, it is a basic truism that the bureaucracy, once having tasted blood, moves on to attack other organisations.

'End the Ban' has managed to get the support of many in the labour movement, MPs, trades unionists (including the Bakers' Union executive) and individuals. *Socialist Organiser* has refused, rightly, to take the issue to the courts (although, given the lack of 'natural justice', they would probably have a good case) and is concentrating on a campaign instead.

At a meeting on 18th August the Socialist Organiser Alliance reluctantly decided to disband in order to enable its members to retain Labour Party membership. 'End the Ban' is now focussing on a campaign for emergency resolutions to Labour Party conference calling for no further disciplinary action in the light of this decision.

There is a good chance of getting many such resolutions passed, and although the chances of winning are slim, a sizable vote in support at conference could make the bureaucracy think again about carrying this witch-hunt through.

Some on the left seem to think that *Socialist Organiser* has conceded an issue of principle by announcing the dissolution of its organisation. There is no such principle. What would be unprincipled, however, is to make concessions on policy to avoid a witch-hunt.

Thus the argument by *Socialist Organiser* supporters that any kind of left campaign around the general election is out of the question because of the witch-hunt seems to be an act of self-censorship, offering the bureaucracy precisely what it wants - the silencing of the left. The lack of serious campaigning by the left in the Labour Party (and *Militant* in particular) on the Poll Tax weakens our ability to resist the proscription of the All Britain anti-Poll Tax Federation.

A further worrying aspect of *Socialist Organiser's* defence is the way in which it has denied that the organisation was a 'Leninist sect', as claimed by Walworth Road. It has attempted to show how different it is to *Militant* in this respect, as if the bureaucracy were interested in the differences in democratic functioning of left groups. As if the bureaucracy had some basic understanding of or affection for democracy anyway! The effect of it appears to be saying "it was all right to witch-hunt *Militant*, they are a sect, but we aren't".

Fighting all aspects of the witch-hunt is an act of basic solidarity. Disagreements over policy should be taken up within this context. The immediate task is to maximise support against the witch-hunt of SO for Labour Party conference. Hopefully the left can go on from that to fight all witch-hunts, without selection.

'End the Ban' can be contacted c/o 12a Canonbury St, London N1 2TD.



John Harris (NUJ)

Kinnock heralds his own 'economic miracle' but workers won't be impressed

Off to market with the Tories: Labour goes shopping for solutions

As Britain's economic problems mount, **JEAN REILLY** and **JANE WELLS** take stock of the situation and look forward to the Labour and Conservative Party Conferences: to see what's in store for them – and us.

Once a year the major parties gather to promote their policies and to present their favoured profiles to the viewers at home as well as to the party faithful and not so faithful.

Neil Kinnock will attempt to look calmly in control and for all the world like a prime minister in waiting.

John Smith will lay it on the line about public spending restraint and studiously make no promises (knowing the trade union leaders will be good boys in any case). John Major on the other side will do much the same.

With growing international tension over the Gulf, and a mounting economic crisis at home, both main parties are faced with the

task of providing credible short as well as long-term solutions to keep the voters happy.

Recession: the facts

Britain appears to be on – if not over – the brink of a new recession. Economic pundits everywhere are forecasting a bleak future, made bleaker if the conflict in the Gulf turns into a long war of attrition and vital Saudi oil production capacity is cut back for any period of time.

All the key economic indicators signal a return to the problems of the early eighties, with the combination of a strong, over-valued pound (ie when British money, and therefore goods, are expensive, and imports cheap) and rising oil prices hitting profits – leading to a potentially very sharp fall in share prices and a sharp rise in unemployment.

Sterling is now very strong – although it is not as overvalued as it was when recession hit in the early eighties. But the 'petro-currency' effect, with Britain cushioned from the the inflationary effects of the Gulf crisis by its independent oil reserves, may well lead to an even

stronger pound, as other competing economies suffer. In late August the pound reached its highest point in nine years against an (admittedly weak) dollar and at the same time it passed the three deutschmark level.

War in the Gulf

The likely escalation of the Gulf conflict into a full-scale war can only make things worse. As oil production is cut, oil prices will go up. The IMF has warned that an escalation could lead to recession in the world's seven leading economies as the consequent inflation bites and trade balances deteriorate.

Because Britain is the only major industrial nation which is self-sufficient in oil, its trade balance will not be so directly affected by oil price rises. The rest of Europe, America and Japan however, will suffer. The developing countries with high levels of debt will be worst hit, according to the IMF.

But in Britain the strengthening of the pound against the currencies of the major trading partners could significantly worsen the trade balance here by making imports

cheaper. That's an alarming prospect for the government. Recent figures show that Britain's visible trade deficit was almost #24 billion in the red in 1989. This means the deficit has more than doubled since 1987. The slump in trade in manufactured goods goes a long way to explain these figures.

The financial markets are worried too about what the Arab States could do with their \$675 billion deposited in Western banks.

Economic slowdown and Tory 'solutions'

In Britain, unemployment has been rising steadily for the last four months and is accelerating. This is due in part to the harsh application of the economic brakes - very high interest rates - over the last two years. Chancellor John Major is clearly prepared to ride out a rise in unemployment, despite the obvious signs that the economy is now cooling down. The Tories have done this before in the early eighties; this time however, the stakes are higher because the effects are not so containable.

The Tories' very high interest rate policy has resulted in investment - starting from a low base - falling still further. The CBI's July *Quarterly Industrial Trends* survey showed that 30% of firms reported that their order books are below normal: the worst since 1983. But the regional breakdown of CBI findings make especially worrying reading for the Tories.

When asked about business optimism, capacity utilisation and plans to shed labour, the south east and west midlands gave the most pessimistic answers. These electorally key regions contain between them nearly fifty marginal parliamentary seats; they have sustained the Tories throughout the boom years of the mid to late eighties.

The attempt to stem the rising tide of credit has now led to bank and building society lending falling to its lowest for three years. Bank lending to the personal sector was growing at 15% a year ago, now it's growing at only 6%. Even the housing bubble has finally burst: and the Tories could see another section of key voters disappear with it. Mortgage reposessions in the first six months of 1990 have nearly doubled compared to last year, and mortgage

arrears have risen by 50%.

Europe

Another central issue which has been exercising the mind of Mr Major over recent months is the question of Britain's entry (or not) into the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System.



High interest rates and high unemployment: warning signs for the Tories

Joining the ERM would mean that the value of sterling would be set at a constant rate in relation to other currencies.

The strength of the pound makes this in many ways a good time for the Tories to join the ERM and to fix rates against the other member currencies at or near their current levels. It would give a clear indication that the pound was going to be held at its present level and not allowed to rise any further, and would offer welcome relief to British capital keen to encourage more sales of British goods at home and abroad, by making exports cheaper and imports more expensive.

There are two major stumbling blocks, however. With the current low level of the dollar, British firms would still be uncompetitive in US markets, and at the current relative rates of inflation, they would be uncompetitive in Europe too.

The Tories may well be hoping that a Gulf

War will push up inflation rates in the rest of Europe, thereby improving Britain's trading position. But tying sterling to low-inflation currencies may well have dire consequences for the British trade balance in the longer term.

The effect of all this on employment and on standards of living for British workers is clear. Loss of US markets - still a major trading partner for Britain - will lead to closures and redundancies here. Whilst an over-valued pound may bring cheaper imports, and short-term reductions in interest rates will give some relief to beleaguered mortgage-holders, none of this amounts to real protection from the effects of recession, inflation and rising unemployment. When the ranks of the Government's previously well-cushioned if not always well-heeled supporters start to feel the pinch, then the Tories have to worry.

According to a recent Gallup poll, 47% believe that the economic situation will get worse over the next year. It looks like they're right.

At this year's Tory Party conference, alongside the ritual signals about public spending and tough talking on everything, the Conservatives will have to set the political tone to take them through to the election. The priority will be to reassure their supporters and win back waverers.

In the face of that, and bearing in mind the real political setbacks they have suffered over the last year, they will be looking for victims. If a Gulf War run by the Americans with Thatcher in support doesn't offer the same flag-waving potential as the Falklands, two old favourites might do the trick.

Wage inflation is seen as a critical contributor to short-term problems ills, so some union-bashing might come in handy, as well as giving Employment Minister Michael Howard something to do.

And *local government* spending has refused to go away - so if the Tories can find a way of taking housing and education out of town hall control, it might save on poll tax bills as well as giving the impression of 'doing something'.

Labour's 'alternatives'

Whilst Labour's leaders have dithered on the question of full membership of the EMS, **SOCIALIST OUTLOOK** no 27, October 1990

they are completely in favour of fixed exchange rates and membership of the ERM as a 'mechanism for tackling inflation'.

Clearly they believe that the rate of sterling at the point of entry is crucial. But they are apparently less concerned with a competitive rate (ie a low rate) than with stability at whatever rate is set. A low rate would have the effect of reducing the trade deficit and making British firms more competitive. But it would also have the effect of making imports more expensive, further increasing inflation, and therefore reducing living standards for workers in Britain.

Key participants in the Policy Review process have argued that membership of the ERM would be a useful brake on any tendency towards a run on sterling following the election of a Labour government.

It is clear that, despite the limitation on domestic policies that would be imposed by membership of the ERM, Kinnock and his co-thinkers are prepared to give up control of, and therefore responsibility for, Labour's policies. Harsh anti-inflationary measures with inevitable attacks on workers' living standards will be defended on the basis that the Labour government no longer controls the instruments necessary to run the economy any other way.

Labour is already paving the way for all this by talking tough on pay and the unions.

Shadow Chancellor John Smith, has warned that in the new Europe, British workers must be careful not to price themselves out of the competition. To make sure his message is received, understood and obeyed, most of the central Tory trade union measures will be kept on the statute book. The point will be hammered home further at Labour's own conference in October.

To make sure all this happens, and smoothly, Labour's leaders have prepared the ground carefully.

Determined to avoid the scenes of the seventies when the trade unions brought their opposition to the Labour government's wage controls right into the Labour Party, Kinnock is proposing that a weaker conference, with looser ties to the working class, would have less say in drawing up policy. The members, without the means of influencing policy, simply wouldn't matter.

If Kinnock's proposed organisational overhaul gets the go-ahead, we will witness sweeping changes on a scale not yet seen, and the death of what little democracy already exists in the Labour Party. Policy changes have come and gone in the past. But these reforms will make sure policy is made from the top, is passed through the movement as required, and doesn't go have to face any unseemly political challenges.

Crawling up quietly behind Thatcher, and winning the next election by default seems to be as high as Kinnock's sights are set.



John Harris (NLU)

Poll tax activism remains strong: but only a minority of non-payers are involved

Poll Tax

The fight hots up: but are we winning?

by Roland Wood

Many councils in England and Wales are well into the process of Court action to obtain Liability Orders against those who haven't paid the Poll Tax.

The number of summonses issued represents a very significant level of mass non-payment - a combination of those who simply can't pay (the majority) and those who can but have stood in solidarity with the poorest layers of the working class.

The Courts have provided an important focus for an anti-poll tax movement that was, since the end of March, fast losing momentum. Once again new people have become politically active for the first time. Local anti-poll tax groups have been strengthened and broadened beyond the limited base of the organised left.

At each new stage in the struggle more people will get involved; but many will have been intimidated into paying. If the mass character of the movement is to be maintained we must continually fight for collective solidarity.

The Court cases have also highlighted many of the problems within the anti-poll tax movement.

Militant tells us that "We are winning!" The Socialist Workers Party proclaim that "Court cases make the difference!" But are we, and do they? Yes and no: but more no than yes.

The struggle around the Courts has

provided victories of one kind or another. In some very diverse areas there have been relatively large and important mobilisations and demonstrations. Overall, one in ten of those who have been summonsed have turned up to Court. But how can this new level of participation be sustained?

Militant and the SWP overestimate the strength and solidity of the movement, attempting to show a mass movement that is on the offensive when it is actually on the defensive. We are defending people in Court; we are defending people against the possible use of bailiffs ... Of course as socialists we are for the defence of the independent interests of the working class and defence of working class living standards; so what is the problem?

The problem is this: The movement's aim is to defeat the poll tax; many would also like if possible to bring Thatcher down with it - but neither the *Militant* or the SWP are building any bridge to link the current stage of the movement with the fulfillment of that aim, any strategy that will genuinely take the movement onto the offensive.

This confusion has been reflected, certainly in the case of *Militant*, in the generalised approach that they have argued the movement should have to the Courts. If 'we are winning' generally, then are we winning in the Courts. Again, yes and no. Where 'victories' have occurred (eg. adjournments) it has been largely due to the physical presence of hundreds of non-payers turning up at Court for a hearing.

This has been the major factor in blocking Court proceedings and preventing (for the moment) Liability Orders being granted against hundreds of people – thus giving breathing space to consolidate the movement and develop further mobilisation. But to argue, as *Militant* supporters have done, that in a showdown between some vague notion of proletarian justice and the reality of bourgeois law 'we will win', does a disservice to the movement.

The aim of the magistrates, on behalf of the local council, is to grant Liability Orders against people who have not paid the poll tax. They may wish to appear as independent 'arbitrators', but as an arm of the bourgeois state they are not neutral. Arbitration does not take place in a vacuum; it takes place within the existing framework of society, and in this case the framework of bourgeois law – including the poll tax.

Of course, concessions will sometimes be made by arbitrators; usually this depends upon the balance of forces. But the basic aim of arbitration is to maintain the status quo as such, if necessary by compromising a bit on secondary questions.

Arguments that have been taking place in many courts over the use of 'Mackenzie's friends' are a useful illustration. The legal precedent for the right of each Respondent (the non-payer) to have advice from a "friend" on how to deal with the procedures of the Court and what type of questions to ask the Council Officer is set out in a 1970 Court of Appeal ruling. This ruling was consequently incorporated into *Stones*, the procedural bible for Civil Courts. Non-payment of the Poll Tax is a civil matter.

Consequently, the right of each Respondent to have a 'Mackenzie' ought to be an admitted fact. In Sutton, a summarised account of the original ruling was read out by one of the Respondents forcing the Court to agree –

to compromise – on this specific issue. In order to force this limited concession it was necessary to play by bourgeois rules in, what is after all, a bourgeois game.

But this is where the concessions stop. Reference to the conduct and status of the Mackenzie in the rest of the 1970 ruling is more open to different legal interpretation.

authority to limit the potential for dragging cases out for as long as is possible by insisting upon strict adherence to Court procedures. Short of having sympathetic lawyers constantly on tap, the decisions of the Court are much harder to challenge successfully. The Courts are changing their tactics from week to week, using their authority to make the rules up as

they go along. Time-wasting has only really been successful when one or two of the Respondents are eloquent, confident and well briefed enough to just keeping going. Unless the Court has previously decided that it will sit right into the evening until all cases have been dealt with then adjournments will be given.

But adjournments are only partial victories. Liability Orders have been prevented, but only in the short term. The real victory is the rise in the numbers, and the level of confidence and militancy of those people who turn up at Court. The overwhelming majority leave the Court still committed to non-payment. More people are also seeing the links that can be made between different areas and forms of struggle. This is a minority – but it is an important minority. The better organised the anti-poll tax movement is – both inside and outside the Court – the more this will be the case. Revolutionary socialists need to sustain, to the best of their ability, the confidence and militancy of those layers of the working class that have shown a willingness to fight back – regardless of who wins the next election – or these victories will be lost.

Resistance around the Courts is very uneven. In some areas campaigns are attempting to cope with Court cases four or five times a week. If a local campaign is weak the problems of responding effectively to the levels of non-payment can multiply horrendously. No amount of triumphalist gloss can hide these facts.

Once again we return to the problems of sustaining the momentum of a mass movement; of organising previously unorganised layers of the working class. Certainly in Sutton and probably in other areas, many non-payers are not in unions – and of those that are many have not been active. They have little or



Organising in the unions as well as in the community is now vital

John Harris (NUJ)

The magistrate's ruling on interpretation will always have more authority than the opinion of either the 'Mackenzie' or the Respondent.

Moreover, concessions can of course be taken away, or indeed refused. If a consistent mobilisation of non-payers is successful – two or more Courts may well be used. This is now the case in Sutton, with the right to a Mackenzie recognised in one Court but not in the other. Many Courts have never allowed the use of Mackenzies.

Further to this, the Courts will use their

no experience of organising with others.

Rather than begin to find ways of *seriously* tackling these problems, *Militant* would appear to prefer that we put all our eggs into one basket. Their disproportionate concentration upon defence against bailiffs, ignoring the fight for trade union action, could potentially leave many campaigns paralysed when the local Council opts for wage arrestment as the initial form of debt recovery.

"Mass non-payment will win!" *Militant* tells us; and they no doubt hope it will, because it cuts out the more complex business of building a genuine line-up of forces across the workers' movement as a whole that *can* defeat the poll tax – but may also lay down roots for the emergence of an ongoing mass movement.

The movement at the moment is volatile. It is rooted in the working class more by inevitability than by design (it was inevitable that the working class would be the hardest hit by the tax). Coping with the pressures and the contradictions of a mass movement of this kind, a movement organised around a single economic issue, is no easy task.

No one on the left has a monopoly of wisdom on how to solve these problems let alone any real experience of a movement of this kind or of how to tackle the challenges that have been thrown up.

What is required is a unity of purpose; a unity between the different areas of struggle against the Poll Tax and an ability to integrate new experiences and struggles into the overall character of the movement.

The effects of capping, along side an emergent financial crisis in a number of previously "clean" councils underlines the necessity of a 'twin-track' strategy of building mass non-payment action alongside the fight in the unions, especially the local government unions, for action around wage arrestment, non-collection and the cuts.

The target of the poll tax is to force cuts in jobs and services. Through the intermediary of compliant councils the Tories hope to pass the cost of non-payment on to the workforce, and through cuts in services, back on to the community. The fight against the poll tax – as a defence of living standards and of democratic rights – will become inseparable from the fight against cuts.

This is the strategic thread to what we have been arguing for some time. The majority of the anti-poll tax movement exists on the outside of the organised labour movement. The existence of over 14 million non-payers offers a lead to those fighting for trade union action against the threat of wage arrestment and potentially, in the specific unions concerned, against the implementation of the tax and against cuts.

Mass non-payment will not win on its own. It does not mean that its importance should be underestimated. It is a form of direct political action that needs to be brought in to the very heart of the existing organisations of the working class.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK no 27, October 1990



Landsbergis casts his vote for independence in the Lithuanian parliament

Gorbachev bankrupt on national question

By Rick Simon

Armenia has become the latest Soviet republic to declare its independence. The only surprise is the length of time Armenia has taken, given the character of its conflict with Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and Moscow's patent failure to recognise Armenia's just demands.

Nine other republics had preceded it in claiming varying degrees of autonomy from Moscow. The degree to which the USSR's constituent republics would rather get out than implement central directives reveals the extent of the crisis afflicting the Soviet Union.

For decades most of the USSR's constituent republics acquiesced in their own desecration at the hands of the centralised bureaucracy. Corruption among local Party leaders was rife, and ecological disaster looms in a number of republics as a result of centrally-imposed economic policies.

Perestroika and glasnost have changed all of that. Perestroika was a set of policies designed to transform the Soviet economy while maintaining the bureaucracy's hold on political power within the unitary Soviet state.

Glasnost was a tool to assist the forging of an alliance to implement perestroika in the face of bureaucratic opposition. The political liberalisation which glasnost entailed meant, however, unleashing unpredictable forces. As the inability of the central bureaucracy to deal with the mounting economic problems became apparent, and broad popular movements with a nationalist orientation took an increasing hold on the political life of the republics, with demands that links with the centre should, to one degree or another, be severed.

The nationalist currents drew succour from the fact that none of the non-Russian republics felt that they were voluntary members of the Soviet Union in the first place. This tendency was particularly prevalent in the Baltic

republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which had been forcibly incorporated into the USSR as part of the Stalin-Hitler Pact in 1939 and, enjoying a generally higher standard of living than the rest of the Soviet Union, felt they had nothing to lose through independence.

The nationalists have set the pace, while the Soviet Communist Party's leadership has simply prevaricated when faced with demands for greater autonomy. A crucial Plenum of the Central Committee to discuss the nationalities question was repeatedly postponed; expressions of popular feeling were brutally suppressed in Georgia; and in Azerbaijan a pogrom against Armenian inhabitants, probably instigated by the local Party bosses, served as a pretext for the use of Soviet troops to suppress the Azerbaijani Popular Front.

The republics are now in turmoil. In the past year, more days have been lost through strikes for nationalist than for economic demands – even including last year's gigantic miners' strike.

The Congress and the republics

The drive towards the establishment of more autonomous national republics has been accelerated by two major factors. Firstly, the new, more 'democratic', state bodies provide only an illusory advance on the previously rigged electoral process.

The Congress of People's Deputies is at least partially elected through genuine multi-candidate elections, but one third of the deputies are 'elected' by social organisations including the CPSU, and trade unions. The Congress in turn elects the Supreme Soviet, which was formerly (in name only) the supreme law-making body.

The Supreme Soviet is composed of two chambers: the Soviet of the Union, with representation from across the USSR based on

population size; and the Soviet of Nationalities, in which all republics have equal representation. The Supreme Soviet now has some distinct power, but it is ultimately subordinate to the Congress.

From the point of view of the republics' bureaucracies, the new Supreme Soviet is a step backwards from the old arrangements. Under the old system, the republics had equal representation in the directly-elected Soviet of Nationalities, which had equal legislative status with the Soviet of the Union. But now all legislation is the ultimate preserve of the Russian-dominated Congress.

As if all this were not complicated enough, Gorbachev has now been voted extensive powers as an executive President. Despite the fact that this could mean that the interests of the republics would be over-ridden still further, many republic leaderships welcomed the move, if only in the hope that it would get things moving. Gorbachev assembled around him a Presidential Council, which has effectively by-passed the Politburo and to a certain extent the Supreme Soviet.

Perestroika and the republics

The other factor has been economic. Perestroika promised greater autonomy at enterprise, regional and republic levels. Despite the laws on individual and cooperative economic activity and the Law on State Enterprise, little has changed.

A new Law on Foundations of Economic Relations in the USSR is being introduced. This will grant all republics economic autonomy by 1991. This will entail the ability to set a budget, levy some taxes, establish a separate banking system, and manage industries formerly under central control.

The aim was to establish autonomous relations in an expanding economy in which the reforms were working. In fact, the very reverse is the case. The autonomy of the republics is being established in conditions of chronic shortage, in which all attempts at reform have so far foundered. Republics are therefore reluctant to continue economic links to Moscow on the old basis, and are withholding supplies until new contractual arrangements are worked out. This is most noticeable at the moment with cigarettes: but such conflicts can only exacerbate centrifugal tendencies.

The question of autonomy is now inextricably bound up with the moves toward marketisation of the Soviet economy. Radicals both in Russia and in the republics see the development of a market as a means of equalising relations between the USSR's constituent elements and placing them on a voluntary basis.

The Baltic states

The Baltic states have been the most advanced in seeking firstly to establish stronger ties among themselves – leading to a Baltic common market by 1993. They have also strengthened their political co-operation. The



Yeltsin wrongly sees the market as the method for true independence

Baltic Assembly which took place in May 1989 led to the so-called 'Baltic Way' on August 23 1989, when millions of Balts joined hands in a gigantic human chain on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Stalin-Hitler Pact.

Since then there have been monthly meetings of the Baltic Council coordinating the popular fronts in the three states, an inter-governmental gathering, and the meeting of the chairs of the states' Supreme Soviets. On June 12 the three states met with Gorbachev for the first time.

The declared goal of the Baltic states is 'self-determination and independence in a neutral and demilitarised zone of Europe'. Lithuania has, however, been the most forthright in declaring independence, while Estonia and Latvia have adopted a more cautious tone.

Lithuania's declaration led to Moscow imposing an economic blockade on the republic, which has had a crippling effect on the Lithuanian economy in terms of energy supplies. The other effect was to force Lithuania, apart from developing closer ties with the other Baltic republics, to pursue external economic links with the West.

According to the Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, while the blockade has cost Lithuanian industry 102 million roubles, 344 million roubles worth of goods has been imported, and 563 million roubles worth exported through barter with producers.

A new Union treaty?

Gorbachev's solution to the nationalities' problem is to draw up a new Union treaty. Initially, he was opposed to this, and the delay exacerbated the situation. Nevertheless, a working group of the Council of the Federation was established on June 12 to draw up a first draft.

Discussions have concentrated on two things. First, the type of association that the Soviet Union should be: confederal (with the emphasis on relations between sovereign states); federal (with the emphasis on rights ceded to the centre); or a combination (some

republics having a confederal, others a federal relationship).

Gorbachev talks of a confederation but in reality he is anxious to maintain the integrity of the existing USSR.

The second focus has been on developing a mechanism for secession from the Soviet Union – always a theoretical constitutional right, but never before tested. The suggested mechanism envisages three phases. First, a referendum of the entire population of the republic concerned; second, if a vote is positive, a five-year waiting period; and third, massive reparations from the republic to the Union for daring to leave the fold.

In Lithuania's case, reparations would not just entail monetary penalties (21 billion roubles) but also protracted squabbles over competing territorial claims. Not surprisingly, such an attitude has pushed republics even further towards taking unilateral action.

There is no simple solution to the national question in the Soviet Union. The existence of a unitary Soviet state for 70 years has led to considerable interpenetration of nationalities and enormous economic interdependence.

Nor is this just a case of the 'imperialist' Russian centre's 'colonisation' of the periphery. Unquestionably, a policy of Russification has been pursued in an attempt to establish the dominance of the Russian language and culture. In many republics, however, a majority of ethnic Russian workers are in inferior jobs and in some instances other, smaller nationalities have been the victims of oppression.

Marxists support the right of nations to self-determination, but secession from the USSR is, in itself, no answer to the dire economic, ecological and social problems confronting the nationalities. It only becomes part of the solution if it permits the genuine popular will to be expressed in determining voluntary relations with the remainder of the USSR and with other states, and enables steps to be taken towards genuine economic integration and democratic planning.



US marines ready themselves for action

Twenty questions and answers on the Gulf crisis

By JOHN LISTER

Q: Don't socialists agree Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator?

A: Socialists have consistently argued that the Iraqi regime is a savage dictatorship: We argued this throughout the Iran-Iraq war, when it suited the USA, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and others to supply Saddam with cash to wage his offensive against Ayatollah Khomeini.

We argued the same against the Kremlin supplying billions of dollars worth of arms to a regime that in 1963 and 1977-78 conducted a bloodbath of Iraqi Communist party members, and which has used chemical weapons and other barbaric methods to crush the struggles of the oppressed Kurdish minority for self-

determination.

Nobody can lecture socialists on the evils of Saddam Hussein, who rose to power as part of a CIA-backed coup against the Nasserite Qassim regime in 1963.

But our opposition to Saddam does not mean that we have to cede to George Bush and Thatcher the right to topple regimes with which they fall out, or to choose which successor regime to instal in Iraq.

A US-sponsored replacement regime for Saddam would equal or exceed the present levels of repression of Iraqi and Kurdish workers and peasants, and would seek to bolster the bloody Zionist regime in Israel.

Q: But surely somebody must stop Saddam before he invades Saudi Arabia?

A: This is an argument for the USA to play the role of global policeman: and like our own police, they would be upholding the system of capitalism and exploitation on a world scale.

While the US and western media ring with hysterical anti-Saddam propaganda, he has attracted wide popular support from the Palestinian and Arab masses in Jordan and elsewhere, who support him precisely because he is standing up to the hated Americans and attacking the Gulf regimes.

They don't want Saddam stopped, or the restoration of the feudal 'status quo in Kuwait: are we to disregard their wishes and rely on the judgement of the Pentagon and the oil sheikhs instead?

The permanent crisis, the in-

“Arab cover”
for the US
forces in the
Gulf.”

“While the US and western media ring with hysterical anti-Saddam propaganda, he has attracted wide popular support from the Palestinian and Arab masses. They don't want Saddam stopped, or the restoration of the feudal 'status quo in Kuwait”

"Until recently Syria has been seen by the western imperialists as a threat – but now Assad's troops provide welcome "Arab cover" for the US forces in the Gulf."

qualities, the national borders and many of the feudal regimes of today's Middle East are the creation of the imperialist powers, in their quest for political and economic domination and a "stability" that preserves cheap oil supplies.

They were happy enough to prop up Saddam as long as he seemed a useful counter to Iran and a reliable supplier of oil: they only want to "stop" him from changing the balance of forces in the region. As one former assistant US Defence Secretary, Lawrence Korb, points out: "If Kuwait grew carrots, we couldn't give a damn".

Recent years have seen a varying list of Arab national leaders and dictatorships on the US-imperialist 'hit list'. Not long ago, Reagan ordered the bombing of Libya in an attempt to kill Gaddafi: yet in 1987 Washington largely ignored the Iraqi Exocet missile attack on the USS Stark in the Gulf.

Until recently Syria has been seen by the western imperialists as a threat – but now Assad's troops provide welcome "Arab cover" for the US forces in the Gulf.

The political and social crises of the Middle East are matters that must be resolved by the people who live there: the involvement of imperialist armies attempting once again to impose their own vested interests through brute force can only prolong the agony.

Q: Are you saying that socialists would do nothing to protect Saudi Arabia against Saddam?

A: The only part of Saudi Arabia the USA is committed to defend is the oilfields. But there is still little or no evidence to support claims that Saddam was actually going to invade.

Indeed it was always obvious that any attempt by Iraq or anyone else to seize control of Saudi Arabia, which holds almost 20 per cent of the world's oil supplies would result in intervention from the USA – whether or not the US felt obliged to take action over Kuwait.

As one US official admitted to *Newsweek* early in August – even before the full force had begun to assemble – the US did not really believe Saddam was likely to invade: "He's nuts, but he's not *that* nuts".

In any event, unless we are prepared to agree to the establishment of a permanent, large western-led military presence in the Gulf to impose and preserve 'order' in the form of a 'pax Americana' (and thus permanently *prevent* any progressive political changes, let alone the possibility of socialist revolution), we must insist that the issue of which regimes should stand or fall is a matter for the Arab masses themselves.

As socialists, our task is to fight against further western economic exploitation and military repression of the workers and peasants of the Mid-

dle East, and to encourage, support and build solidarity with those working class and revolutionary movements that are brave enough to challenge the various repressive and exploitive regimes there.

We are *not* for the defence of the royal House of Saud, with its 4,000 fabulously rich princes imposing barbaric repression, outlawing elections, parliament, and strikes and institutionalising brutal 'Islamic' punishments to help maintain a balance of terror.

We don't want to help make the Gulf safe for feudalism: nor do most Arab workers, especially those who have worked in the Gulf states. Nor – ironically – do most Americans, or the troops in the field.

Q: Of course it would be better if the Iraqi workers could deal with Saddam, but we must be realistic: since there is no real opposition in Iraq, doesn't someone, perhaps the UN, have to intervene?

A: If forces from the left were to overthrow Saddam tomorrow, we can be sure this would trigger renewed hostility from the USA.

We should remember the reactionary hysteria – and determined attempts at destabilisation – with which the USA has always greeted radical governments, whether they be elected (as in Allende's Chile, destabilised by the CIA), the fruits of popular revolution (Nicaragua, confronted by blockade, sabotage and the contra war), or even fundamentalist radicals such as Khomeini in Iran.

The fact is that Washington reserves the right to remove or instal regimes to suit its global requirements. The imperialist war machine has not simply mobilised against Saddam as an individual, but has been wheeled out to defend – and restore – the old regimes that have served imperialism so well, and restore the balance of forces in favour of imperialism.

Q: The moves against Saddam are not just by the USA. Doesn't the involvement of most European governments and even Japan act as a restraint on Bush?

A: It is much more likely that having pulled these partners into the situation, Bush, egged on by Thatcher, will pressurise more of



The crisis of the Middle East must be solved by the Arab masses

them into a more aggressive stance on other issues.

There is already growing US anger that Japan has been so reluctant to get involved, with discussion on whether the Japanese constitution should be changed to allow it to send troops abroad.

Thatcher is forcing similar debate in Germany, with her vicious attack on Kohl's government for failing to send troops to the Gulf. She clearly intends to use the whole situation as a pretext to open up discussion on a new global role for NATO as a tool of imperialist policy, now that its original reason for existence, the Cold War, has disappeared.

From her point of view the Gulf crisis has come at exactly the right time to help argue against any British disarmament in the aftermath of the East European events. That is one reason she has been so keen to commit British forces to the US Gulf adventure.

Q: But it is not just Western powers: the intervention against Saddam is supported by a majority of the Arab League nations. Doesn't this convince you?

A: We must remember who gets to vote at Arab League conferences, and how powerful a persuader is the Saudi Arabian chequebook – especially when combined with financial offers and veiled threats emanating from the USA.

Egyptian leader Mubarak has been promised the cancellation of \$7 billion in debts to the USA for his role in supplying troops. Syria has long been in the pocket of the Saudis, whose subsidies keep Assad's troops in Lebanon. King Hassan of Morocco – no friend of Arab workers or peasants – could be expected to solidarise with fellow royals ousted in Kuwait, especially when US arms and cash are at stake.

In each case troops have been sent to the Gulf by regimes that tolerate no political dissent or democracy at home: and in each case analysts agree that the move has been massively opposed by the Arab masses:



Arab support provides fig leaf for US imperialism

there have even been riots in Damascus. Indeed Washington fears that the pressures may topple Mubarak as well as Jordan's King Hussein – especially if Saddam is crushed by imperialism.

They all know who is really in charge of the Gulf war-drive, but are prepared to provide a fig-leaf of Arab involvement – as US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney admitted "We need that Arab cover".

That is why it is so important to Washington to keep the Israeli warmongers at arm's length from the intervention, since any overt Zionist involvement could trigger a new wave of mass Arab anger and shatter the fragile anti-Saddam coalition.

Q: Why then do you oppose UN involvement, which brings in many non-aligned nations: doesn't this take the affair out of American hands?

A: George Bush ordered a naval blockade on Iraq *before* he even consulted the United Nations. Both he and Reagan despise the UN, and the US Congress has a long record of disregarding or ridiculing it and its findings, especially when these expose US breaches of international law such as the mining of Nicaraguan ports. The USA has even refused to pay its subscriptions to the UN, and owes it more than \$670m!

Only *after* the blockade was in place, and the US military build-up in Saudi Arabia had already reached such a scale that it would take many months – even years – to withdraw, did the hunt begin for a formula that

would lend a veneer of legality to the blockade, sanction any use of force, and rope in other nations.

Bush does not want US troops to be under UN control: there is anyway no machinery for this to happen, since the UN Military Staff Committee has been defunct since the Korean War ended in 1953.

UN involvement is a device to legitimise a unilateral US intervention: and if the UN will not go far enough in action against Saddam, the USA could yet decide to press ahead on its own steam.

The cynicism of US intervention is exposed by one obvious question: if the UN is suddenly such a decisive body, and its resolutions on the Middle East have become directives to be implemented with military force, why does the USA still not lift a finger to force the Israeli Zionists to implement Resolution 242 and pull out of their illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip?

Q: But even Gorbachev has backed the US stand on the UN Security Council. Only Cuba, Yemen, the PLO and Libya have distanced themselves from the blockade. Why should socialists disagree?

A: Gorbachev's foreign policy has made continual concessions to imperialism in the quest for 'solutions' to 'regional conflicts'. Beset by economic crisis at home, he has set out to find ways to minimise costly international involvement.

The crisis of bureaucratic rule in the USSR which brought glasnost

"Like new realism at home, this line of foreign policy begins with defeatism and inevitably leads to new blows against the working class."

"There is no sign of UN or US forces rallying to the aid of the Palestinian Intifada on the West Bank... The USA itself has mounted invasions of small nations – most recently Grenada and Panama (with 8,000 dead), and maintained its harassment of Nicaragua to oust the elected Sandinista government. Neither the USA nor the UN has lifted a finger to help the Kurds in their fight for self-determination from Iran and Iraq."

has also triggered the collapse of stalinist regimes across Eastern Europe – and with this the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact as a viable force.

In winding up the Cold War and appealing for a place alongside the major capitalist powers in a 'common European home', Gorbachev has effectively ceded to the USA the role of global policeman – in Central America, Southern Africa, and now the Middle East – and abandoned even the pretence that the Kremlin seeks to challenge capitalism.

His economic strategy rests upon securing vast sums of western investment to modernise and develop the flagging Soviet economy, and this translates into licking the boots of the Western bankers, proving himself and the USSR a suitably 'reliable' borrower.

Like new realism at home, this line of foreign policy begins with defeatism and inevitably leads to new blows against the working class. Socialists therefore oppose Gorbachev's foreign policy, and with it his capitulation to the US war drive in the Gulf.

Q: So what do socialists say about Saddam's invasion of Kuwait?

A: The invasion was inspired solely by the objective of becoming the dominant power in the Gulf and the Middle East – to the greater glory of the Iraqi bureaucratic bourgeoisie.

We see nothing progressive in this from the viewpoint of the Arab workers and peasants. Indeed the Iraqi regime is not anti-imperialist, but a bourgeois nationalist regime tied hand and foot to imperialism on a world scale.

Kuwait has never been part of Iraq, despite being an artificial creation of imperialism. There is no justification to any claim that it is 'really part of Iraq'.

Q: Do socialists call for the restoration of the Kuwaiti regime as the legitimate government there?

A: It is not clear on what basis it could be described as 'legitimate'. There have never been proper elections, let alone a popular mandate. Even *Newsweek*, the right wing US magazine, comments that:

"Earlier American Presidents went to war to make the world safe for democracy. Restoring the Emir of

Kuwait would be making the country safe for feudalism". (3/9/90)

The ruling al-Sabah family of Kuwait has salted away a personal fortune in excess of \$50 billion by presiding over a regime in which only 40 percent of its 2.1 million population have any rights, and the vote is restricted to just 60,000 property-owning males. The press has been censored and parliament closed since 1986.

The Kuwaiti city-state now receives most of its income not from oil but from its huge international investments.

Socialists call for the overthrow of this reactionary ruling caste by the Arab workers and peasants. We call for a constituent assembly to be elected by all those who live and work in Kuwait, including the tens of thousands of highly exploited migrant workers.

Without accepting any notion of Kuwait as a 'nation', socialists nevertheless oppose the annexation of Kuwait: only a free decision of the inhabitants could justify Kuwait's integration into Iraq.

Q: Does this mean that socialists call for the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait?

A: Yes, the invasion was counter-revolutionary from the outset. Even had it gone unchallenged it would simply have given an economic and political boost to Saddam's anti-working class regime. It has also given imperialism an ideal pretext for an offensive to reassert its control in the region.

Bush hopes to persuade the American electorate that Reagan was right to squander over \$2 trillion on rearmament during the 1980s, and to be able to lay the ghost of the 'Vietnam syndrome' that has held the US back from involvement in what might have become major shooting wars. And Thatcher is using the situation to combat pressures towards disarmament and the release of a post-Cold War "peace dividend".

There is nothing progressive to be achieved by maintaining an Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, other than fostering the myth of Saddam as an 'anti-imperialist'. The troops should be withdrawn.

Q: Would this attitude change if the USA/UN were to attack Iraq or attempt forcibly to regain Kuwait?

A: In the event of such a war, waged by or under the control of imperialist powers against a dependent, semi-colonial regime, we would be compelled to side *against imperialism*, and thus to give critical support to Iraq.

The defeat of our own imperialist ruling class, and that of the USA, in such a predatory war would open up new scope not only for the struggles of the Palestinians and Arab masses of the Middle East, but for other liberation and revolutionary struggles elsewhere in the world. It could also open up a major political crisis for the imperialist powers at home.

However we would not relinquish our call for a working class, revolutionary challenge to Saddam within Iraq. We entrust Saddam with no revolutionary or progressive role.

In practice, the call for critical support to Iraq would raise little if any mass support even in left wing circles in Britain or the USA. Our major agitation would have to centre not on this but on opposition at every level to the war effort, the fight for the withdrawal of troops, and propaganda to expose the real motives for the war.

Q: Does this mean socialists disregard the defence of small nations like Kuwait in the face of aggression?

A: Neither the USA nor the UN has any record of fighting to defend small nations against aggression. Between them, they connived to establish Israel – against Arab wishes – in 1948, as a predator, racist state imposed upon the relatively small Palestinian nation.

Since then the US has funnelled arms and aid to Israel as it has successively expanded its borders in 1948, 1967 and 1973, and sat back while Zionist troops stormed into South Lebanon in 1982, leaving over 14,000 dead. There is no sign of UN or US forces rallying to the aid of the Palestinian Intifada on the West Bank that is fighting to throw off the yoke of Zionist military occupation: there is no oil involved.

The USA itself has mounted invasions of small nations – most recently Grenada and Panama (with 8,000 dead), and maintained its harassment of Nicaragua to oust the elected Sandinista government.

Neither the USA nor the UN has lifted a finger to help the Kurds in their fight for self-determination from

Iran and Iraq.

Socialists have taken up each of these issues, and continue to campaign on them: we yield to nobody on our defence of democratic rights of small nations and national minorities – but we know from bitter experience that this can only be achieved in struggle against imperialism.

Q: What would a socialist government do if asked to intervene as the USA was by the Kuwaitis?

A: It is important to realise that if we were a socialist government, in the current situation we too would be confronted by US harassment and military threats. We would be preparing to defend ourselves.

The fact is that the USA was not asked to intervene: it *told* the Emir of Kuwait to issue an appeal. As *Newsweek* points out quite candidly:

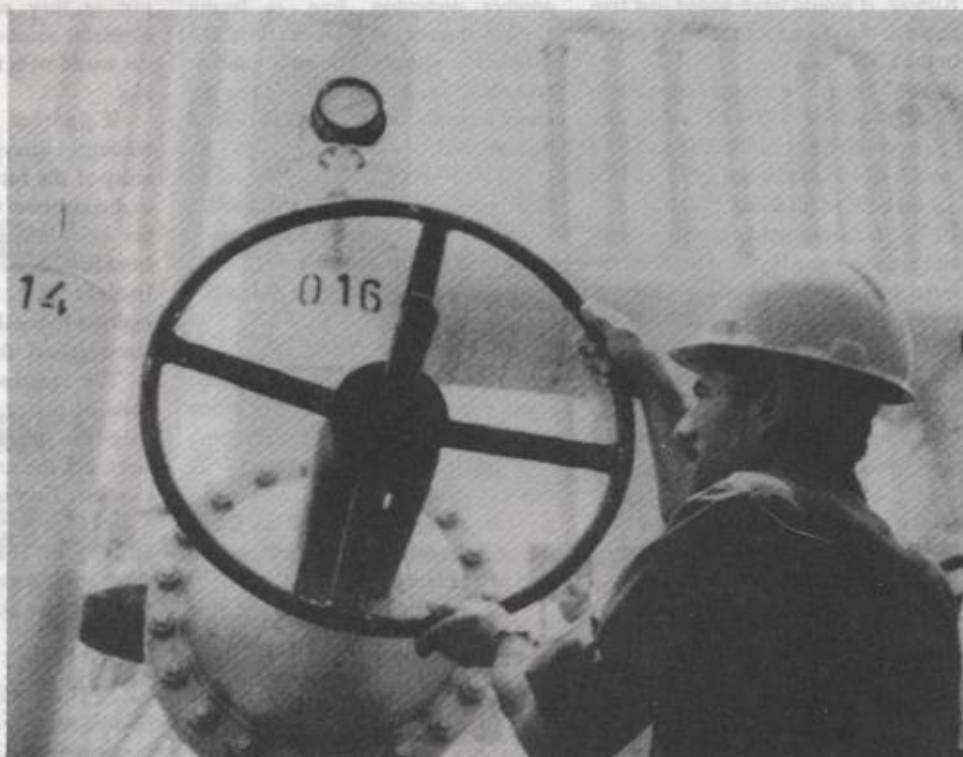
"Washington wrote a letter for the Kuwaiti emir to sign, in which he asked the United States to help him by blockading Iraq". (27/8/90)

Conspicuously this took place after the blockade had been decided.

Even the Saudi Arabian royal family initially required persuading to agree to the huge US military build-up on their soil. They tried to impose two conditions – that there must be "no quick unilateral pull-out, as in Lebanon" that might leave the Saudis in the lurch; and that if the Saudis asked the US to leave, they would leave immediately. Cynically – knowing that its task force of 125,000 troops would take months or years to remove once they had arrived – the US agreed.

Now George Bush has successfully twisted Saudi arms to persuade them to foot the bill for much of the \$6 billion cost of keeping the US forces in the Gulf until the end of the year.

There is no way these reactionary monarchs would have asked a socialist government to intervene on



Plentiful supplies of oil for the US: a key question

their behalf. A socialist government would have established its line of policy on the Middle East by supporting the struggles of the Palestinians and Kurds, and of the Arab workers and peasants.

If we were leading a socialist government right now, we would be using every possible international forum – possibly including a tactical intervention at the UN – to denounce the unholy coalition that is promoting imperialist ambitions in the Gulf, oppose any intervention, and challenge the imposition of sanctions.

Q: You can't believe the whole thing is just about oil and propping up reactionary governments? There must be more to it than that.

A: A real problem for the US warmongers is the absence of any idealistic pretext for the present intervention. The end of the Cold War (coupled with the emergence of the USSR – and China – in the camp of those backing the UN blockade) has left little for the USA to boast about in its intervention. As one "senior US official" told *Newsweek*:

"Our anti-Soviet, anti-communist objective was just a veil for the real objective all along, which was oil, plentiful oil at reasonable prices. Now the veil has been stripped away."

Q: Yes, but surely we must on-

sure that oil is available to all, otherwise the whole world will be plunged into crisis?

A: To argue that the intervention is justified simply to guarantee supplies of under-priced oil from underdeveloped economies is to embrace Victorian values in a new way – and revert to the old-fashioned imperialism, using brute force and gunboats as the means to obtain cheap materials and labour.

The oil is available now only on terms that guarantee vast profits to the multinational oil monopolies. Decades of imperialist exploitation has ensured that while the western economies have grown fat on cheap energy, and the ruling cliques of the oil-producing states have salted away vast fortunes, the Arab masses – exploited and repressed by stooge reactionary regimes – have gained little or nothing.

The oil-producing states themselves have been consistently and shamelessly ripped off. In 1989, oil prices adjusted for inflation had fallen 62 percent below their 1981 level – and 15 percent below the level established in 1974 in the aftermath of the first 'oil shock'.

One American analyst attacked Bush's intervention in the Gulf, branding it as the "five cent war": he argued that if Saddam Hussein had achieved in full the price increase (to \$25 per barrel) he was calling for from OPEC before the clash with

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"We must stand firmly opposed to any imperialist pretext for war against Iraq, not least a "war to avoid war" which threatens to become a prolonged, barbaric episode of mass slaughter"

Kuwait, it would have added just five cents to the price of a gallon of petrol in the USA.

To cause as much economic damage as the 1979 oil crisis, the price would have had to rise to \$50 a barrel; and to match the 1973 crisis it would need to hit \$120.

But far from holding prices down and supplies steady, the war fears, the blockade, the disruption, the increased fuel needs of 125,000 troops, and other fall-out from the intervention have almost doubled prices, which are now pushing towards the \$40 a barrel mark: without the war, they would be much lower!

Q: How about the argument that we must act now to stop 'crazy' Saddam getting his hands on nuclear weapons?

A: We must stand firmly opposed to any imperialist pretext for war against Iraq, not least a "war to avoid war" which threatens to become a prolonged, barbaric episode of mass slaughter.

The long-term solution to peace in the region lies in the hands of the Arab masses, not the benevolent attentions of outside powers – even when (as in Korea) they wear blue UN helmets.

The only people to have seriously discussed using nuclear weapons in the Middle East are the USA (as one means of winning a land war against Saddam without losing tens of thousands of US dead) and Israel.

Other members of the nuclear "club" include South Africa and possibly Pakistan: why has nothing been done to disarm these reactionary regimes?

Socialists oppose any use of nuclear weapons, and fight in the imperialist countries for unilateral nuclear disarmament. But why should a few nations expect to be able to hold on to a monopoly on these weapons – even while they discuss the possibility of using them against their latest enemies?

After dropping the Bomb on Japan, the US next discussed using it against the USSR as the Cold War set in, and then Mao's China (during the Korean War). Is it surprising that these leaderships immediately felt obliged to protect themselves by acquiring the same weaponry?

Since then the US has discussed using the Bomb against vastly weaker opponents that it still could not hope easily to defeat by 'conventional' means – Cuba and Vietnam. Now

another underdog, Iraq, is facing similar threats, and knows that the Zionists already have nuclear weapons, is it surprising that the Iraqis have looked for ways to defend themselves?

Q: If you oppose military action but also oppose Saddam, why don't you support economic sanctions to force him to retreat?

A: There is nothing non-violent about sanctions. While military action is designed to bludgeon an enemy into defeat, economic sanctions – in this case a total blockade and embargo – are designed to starve the Iraqis into submission: they are designed to hurt just as much.

The imperialists who argue that sanctions are 'non-violent' are the very ones who insist that by potentially interfering with a small percentage of western oil supplies Saddam has made intervention unavoidable.

Now they want to cut off *all* of Iraq's foreign trade. This means not just its income from oil exports, but also its vital imports of food. Imperialists gloat that the Iraqi diet is heavily dependent on bread, while Iraq imports 90 percent of its wheat, 90 percent of its corn, and all of its soyabans for animal feed, while oil represents 97 percent of its exports. The aim is to starve and strangle Iraq until Saddam concedes.

Worse, the naval blockade is clearly also an attempt to create a provocation that could justify a US attack on Iraqi shipping, or even a ground attack. The blockade itself is a pretext for the huge build-up of naval forces in the Gulf, and once these combine with the troops, tanks and artillery supposedly 'defending' Saudi Arabia (dispatched in the biggest airlift since D-Day), the pressure will mount for them to be used in a bid for 'peace by Christmas'.

Q: Surely if the whole world unites around sanctions, Saddam will be forced to climb down?

A: Saddam may make a deal at any point – or he may hold out, deciding to fight back. If the whole world really was united on sanctions, there would be no need for the naval blockade.

The fact is that every capitalist distrusts every other capitalist, while many see no real reason why they should not supply Saddam's regime,

just as they supply dozens of unpleasant, reactionary regimes around the world with full US and UN blessing.

If Saddam sits things out for a while, he may well see the fragile unity of the forces against him begin to disintegrate. Or he may try to force the USA more clearly out into the front line, to pile extra pressure on the Iraqis and some of the Arab regimes to break ranks and join Iraq's stand against 'the Great Satan'.

The sanctions are a tool of imperialist policy, and they represent a long-term threat. They are only the start, not the end of a process of escalation. They must be opposed.

Q: Why all this talk of war? If Saddam does not attack Saudi Arabia, the USA will not attack Iraq.

A: How long could such a situation go on, at a cost of billions of dollars a month?

The US objective has never been limited to the restoration of the Kuwaiti regimes – for which few have any enthusiasm – or even the liberation of Kuwait (which US analysts now admit could be almost completely destroyed in a military battle to drive out the Iraqis). Since the first despatch of troops, US leaders have looked to go further and oust Saddam – though their choice of alternative rulers for Iraq is almost non-existent. *Newsweek* reported on August 20 that:

"Bush has signed an intelligence "finding" ordering the CIA to do what it can to destabilise Iraq politically and get rid of Saddam by almost any means short of killing him".

In the same issue it reports the discussions on how the US high command envisage a possible battle to 'defend' Saudi Arabia:

"The United States knows that repelling an Iraqi invasion [of Saudi Arabia] would be difficult. *So the US plan is to take the battle to the enemy.* "We're going to flatten Iraq," says a senior Pentagon official. The targets will not be cities but rather oil refineries, power stations, missile sites and military bases. For carpet bombing, the US would use some 50 B-52s ...".

The longer the US troops swelter in the Saudi desert, and the more hardware arrives to equip the US to conduct a ground war against Saddam, the greater the pressure on Bush to bring matters to a head and go onto the offensive.

"Worse, the naval blockade is clearly also an attempt to create a provocation that could justify a US attack on Iraqi shipping, or even a ground attack"

Why Bush is flexing US military muscles

By Paul Lawson

Two speeches US Secretary of State James Baker on the 4th and 5th September sum up American war aims in the Gulf. In the first, he said that the US aim was not just to get Iraq out of Kuwait, but to 'ensure a stable Middle East' - under American domination.

In the second speech he stated: 'America must lead, and our people must understand that. ... only American engagement can shape the peaceful world our people deeply desire.' It could not be clearer. In the post cold-war era, the US expects to assume the role of world cop, which it started to lose after being defeated in Vietnam.

The opportunity for the US to resume the role of world policeman has been created by the deepening peaceful-coexistence policy of Gorbachev. Without the sharp move to the right in Soviet foreign policy, the prospect of a US strike against Iraq would be much less. In the Gulf crisis the US has been able to count on Soviet support - just as Gorbachev gave the green light at the Malta summit for the US invasion of Panama.

Throughout the 1980s the US under Reagan and 'defence' chief Casper Weinberger tried to use its military predominance to strengthen its political - and thereby economic - leadership of the West. The second cold war, star wars and the ideology of the 'evil empire' was the result. But the struggle to assert US hegemony was waged with particular forcefulness in the Middle East.

The background to US intervention in the Middle East in the 1980s was not simply a desire to combat waning Soviet influence in the



US marine: In defence of the 'free world'...

region, and the general strategic aim of defending the oilfields. It was also about the fierce economic competition between the major imperialist powers in the region. 1983 figures, for example show imports to the region from Western Europe at \$63 billion, from the US at \$23.4bn and from Japan at \$10 bn.

When the Reagan administration came to power in 1980 it immediately sought to deepen its military alliances with Israel and reactionary Arab governments. By the end of 1981, the Pentagon had carried out joint desert exercises with Egyptian forces ('Operation Bright Star'), signed a strategic co-operation agreement with Israel and proposed to Congress an increase of 325 per cent in foreign military sales in the region. Egypt's foreign minister, Abed el-Halim described Bright Star as 'a rehearsal for a possible joint operation in the Gulf'.

Reagan also decided on the upgrading of Saudi Arabia's F-15 fighters, the construction of new air bases in Saudi Arabia and the permanent stationing of AWACs 'over the horizon' radar planes in the Gulf. America used the IMF to relax loan conditions to countries its regarded as key 'strategic assets' like Egypt and Israel - while imposing harsh conditions on countries like Morocco and Tunisia which are less important to it.

Warfighting

The overall scheme of US attempts to dominate the region is to rely first on the alliance with Israel, and then on drawing reactionary Arab regimes ever closer to its economic and military interests. In the 1980s it began prolonged military intervention to achieve these objec-

tives. Warplanes from the Navy's Sixth Fleet engaged Libyan fighters over the Gulf of Sidra in August 1981. US troops went to the Sinai peninsula to 'supervise' the withdrawal of Israeli troops, agreed at the Camp David accords. In August 1982 marines landed in Lebanon as part of the multi-national force to oversee the Israeli expulsion of the PLO fighters, and to restore the authority of the right wing Christian Maronite government. Beginning in the autumn of 1983 the US increased its involvement in the conflict, using sea and air forces to attack Lebanese and Syrian positions around Beirut airport, and then in the coastal hill towns.

By 1984 US forces were militarily involved in the Gulf as result of the Iran-Iraq war. During the war the US did not regard either Iran or Iraq as stable 'assets'. But it was concerned not to allow a victory for Iran, which could have had profound destabilising effects on the region, or to allow the complete disruption of oil supplies. In February 1984 a destroyer launched missiles against an Iranian patrol aircraft. This was followed up by US mine-sweeping operations, the attack on an Iranian mine-laying ship in September 1987, the shooting down of an Iranian civilian airliner and the bombardment of Iranian oil rigs.

Strategic consensus

A key problem for US foreign policy, in balancing between its alliance with Israel and keeping the reactionary Arab regimes in tow, has been the persistence of the Palestinian issue. The State Department has a policy of trying to maintain diplomatic initiatives on this question, without ever doing anything

that might lead to a solution to the problem, or indeed seriously embarrass Israel. In the early 1980s the US succeeded in pushing through the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Sinai, but Israel repeatedly launched attacks into Lebanon, annexed the Golan Heights and cracked down harshly against the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

By 1982 these developments had undermined Reagan's attempt to win a 'strategic consensus' in the region. In Egypt and Bahrain military cooperation with the US was increasingly questioned, and the provocations against Libya proved counterproductive in winning closer friends in the Arab world.

The strategic quandary was resolved by full-scale Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. The Israeli bombing of Beirut was highly embarrassing for Reagan in the region. But in the end, despite tactical differences with the Israelis, the administration had to decide which side it was on. It decided that its strategic interests in the region were best served by firming up its alliance with Israel and waving the big stick very publicly.

In August 1982 eight hundred American marines landed in Beirut with the objective of supervising the withdrawal of the PLO guerrillas and shoring up the government of fascist street-fighter Bashir Gemayel. The marines helped to ensure government control of the airport and secure the south east environs of the city.

They had another function - to accustom US public opinion to the sight of their military forces in action in the Middle east. The whole operation was scuttled when pro-Iranian forces blew up the central US barracks, killing more than 200. The marines were 'redeployed' out of Lebanon in February 1984.

At this point the US had thoroughly succeeded in alienating the reactionary Arab regimes. But the Reagan-Weinberger team pressed on, sanctioning new Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and conducting joint naval exercises with Israel.

Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia were all particularly dismayed by the new US-Israeli strategic accord. Attention now turned away from Lebanon to the 'tanker war' in the Gulf.

All the Arab regimes became increasingly alarmed at the consequences of the destruction in the Gulf, and the likelihood of an Iranian victory in

regime have a common historical root, namely the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1978. Before this, imperialist hegemony in the region was ensured through a primary alliance between the US and Iran which had a massive and lavishly equipped army, and only secondarily through alliance with Saudi Arabia.

It might be thought that the Saddam Hussein regime could begin to substitute for as the major power in the region on which America could rely. But there is a major objection to this from Israel - namely that Iraq is an Arab country whose tanks and planes could reach the Israeli border with Jordan in less than a day. The drift of US policy, in rejecting the idea of a close alliance with Iraq, has been to opt for strengthening Saudi Arabia combined with upping direct US military involvement in the region.

Bush has now seized the initiative to bring to fruition all the efforts of the 1980s. He has imposed on Saudi Arabia absolute subordination to US political and military objectives. He has united most the Arab regimes behind US military intervention. He has seized

on an issue that pushes the question of the Palestinian intifada into the background and leaves Israel in a strong position - something which has only been aided by the very low profile which Israel has adopted in the whole business.

To complete this operation requires one thing: a rapidly won war against Saddam Hussein. To increasingly adopt direct military intervention as the central fact of foreign policy in the region means that military intervention must be successful. Anything less - either a negotiated settlement which gives Saddam concessions, or a prolonged bloody war which no one wins rapidly, could lead to an enormous upheaval in the Arab world and endanger some of the US's key allies. The next few months will see whether the militarisation of US foreign policy in the Middle East has been a success.



US Intervention In the Gulf pushes Intifada into the background

the ground war. The US recemented its alliances with right wing Arab regimes by its tilt towards Iraq. After US military engagement against Iran became a fact the Arab regimes drew closer to US foreign policy objectives.

The Gulf

Throughout the 1980s the United States prepared to fight a war in the Gulf. The speed of the military response to the invasion of Kuwait shows that this was the implementation of a long-planned operation. This preparation took the form first of the 'Rapid Deployment Force', which was replaced by the 'Central Command', a force comprising 300,000 army, navy and airforce personnel which has been created to deploy rapidly from the USA and the Pacific towards the Middle East. War fighting in the desert has been practised repeatedly.

Instability in the Gulf

The Iran-Iraq war and the rising ambitions of Saddam Hussein's

John Harford/FTL

"No... most... stand... firmly... posed... in... any... imperialist... pretext... for... war... against... Iraq... not... least... a... 'war... to... avoid... war'... which... threatens... to... become... a... prolonged... barbaric... episode... of... mass... slaughter"

"Worse... the... naval... blockade... is... clearly... also... an... attempt... to... create... a... provocation... that... could... justify... a... US... attack... on... Iraqi... shipping... or... even... a... ground... attack"

Korean workers battle for unions

By Paul Field

After decades of fierce repression by a military dictatorship subordinate to the whims of US imperialism, June 1987 saw up to five million people take to the streets of South Korea almost daily, to take part in simultaneous nationwide rallies demanding democracy.

The People's June 10 rally took place in 21 areas across South Korea; the People's March on June 26 spread to 33 cities and four counties nationwide. The size, strength and militancy of the demonstrations, together with pressure from the USA (which consoled itself with the knowledge that the only opposition party capable of defeating President Chun was also pro-American and conservative) forced the regime to make a number of limited concessions.

The supposed reforms contained in a June 29 declaration included 'freedom of the press' and 'improvements in basic human rights'. But they failed to materialise in the months and years that followed.

Recent events have shown that the system still remains brutally oppressive and authoritarian by western bourgeois democratic standards, with a right wing coalition in parliament blocking even any minimal form of opposition.

The July 1987 strike wave

Nevertheless, the apparent concessions on democratisation increased people's confidence and created the right political atmosphere for the workers to begin a determined fight for improved wages and working conditions.

In July and August, more than three million workers took strike action in over 3,400 factories across Korea, demanding improved conditions and the organisation of an independent democratic trade union. An average of 44 new strikes took place per day (776 on the single day of August 28 1987), compared to an average of just 0.76 per day in 1986.

At the height of the action, tens of thousands of workers armed with molotov cocktails, safety helmets and heavy vehicles broke through barricades set up by the authorities, and overcame the vicious suppression of heavily-armed riot police.

This strike wave was inspired by the appalling labour conditions – which consist of wages far below the minimum living cost; the longest working hours in the world; and an extremely high rate of industrial accidents and occupational sickness. Workers still work a 55-hour week, and face four fatal accidents a day due to dangerous machinery and physical fatigue.

The Democratic Union Movement

About 1,000 independent democratic unions were formed during the course of the strikes. Their very formation represented a qualitative development in workers' consciousness: the recognition that at times of militant activity the existing management-controlled 'yellow' unions would be an obstacle in their struggle.

Common features of the new unions as they have developed since 1987 have been a high level of internal democracy, more independence of their leaders from management, and a greater emphasis on *political* objectives, especially the reform of the state's anti-union laws.

The fact that these unions have continued to grow despite the most brutal state repression reflects the courageous determination of grass roots activists – and to some extent a shift in the balance of forces since 1987.

The repression of the Democratic Unions

The reponse of the ruling class to the workers' struggles since 1987 has been the use of hired thugs – the *Kusadae* ('Save the Company Brigade') – along with closures, lockouts and dismissals. The state has consistently encouraged the violent suppression of strikes and picketing and usually dispatches large numbers of riot police in case the *Kusadae* are overcome by the workers.

One example of the kind of orchestrated violence that is often used against democratic unions can be found in the vicious offensive launched against workers at Hyundai Engineering. It began when they struck in February 1988, demanding the release of imprisoned activists, recognition of the leadership of the new union, and the reinstatement of sacked workers.

The bosses ordered *Kusadae* to carry out a violent strikebreaking campaign including physical assaults on strikers and members of their families, and cutting off all supplies of water electricity and food to the occupying



Workers battle for independent unions

workers. The strike was finally smashed by a raid of Baekgoldan (specially trained riot police).

Yet just nine months after suffering such violent repression, the Hyundai workers again showed their defiance when 18,000 staged an all-out strike (calling among other things for a reduction of the working week from 54 to 44 hours). The strike lasted four months, until in April 1989 the government sent in 70 anti-strike units (a total of 14,000 riot police!) to end the dispute.

The level of violence used against Hyundai workers is reflected in every other struggle, with the fiercest conflicts occurring between workers and the management of foreign multi-nationals, where conditions are even worse than in Korean companies.

When Tandy Computers refused to recognise their new union, workers struck, took the Director hostage and attacked the US Chamber of Commerce. Driven to desperation, workers at another US-owned firm, Motorola Korea, doused themselves in petrol and threatened to immolate themselves if police intervened to break the strike. The *Kusadae* flicked a lighted match onto one of the union leaders as an example of what would happen if they did not disperse.

Accusations that union activists are under

the influence of North Korean agents has only increased the growing politicisation of the Democratic Union Movement, with demands for reunification of Korea and democracy appearing more frequently alongside demands for better wages and improved conditions.

Assault on the Teachers' Union

A particular target for the state, because it represents the Democratic Union Movement's growing support among white collar and professional workers, is the recently-established but currently illegal Chunkyojo, National Teachers' Union. Its formation is a violation of the Public Service Act, which prohibits collective action by public employees. The strength of the NTU could inspire more government workers to organise themselves in democratic unions.

Formed in May 1989, the NTU attracted an initial membership of 21,000 teachers, though this had declined to 14,000 by the end of the year as a result of state harassment. Riot police arrested over a thousand members at the Union's founding conference. Those involved have faced harsh treatment ranging from sackings and physical attacks to arrests (40 leaders by the end of August) and 'red scare' tactics, claiming that they are a pro-communist organisation.

For their part, the teachers say pay and conditions are of secondary importance to the educational reforms they want to see enforced. Central to these reforms is the search for 'true education' - an end to the pressurised and competitive system which causes 200 suicides a year among high school students, and an end to the government's manipulation of what is taught in schools.

Claiming that the authorities only allow them to teach a single, distorted perspective on Korea's history and current affairs, Chunkyojo says that it rejects 'propaganda education' designed to defend 'the vested interests of those in power'.

The fight for a new national union alliance

Recognising the limited power of single company-based unions to fight against the coordinated reaction of the ruling class and unilateral intervention of the state, the democratic unions began to build regional and occupational alliances.

Local labour movement support organisations, which comprise progressive student, community and church groups, have played an important role in strengthening these local alliances. There are currently 14 regional alliances in South Korea, with offices staffed by ex-students and sacked union activists. These play a vital role in providing support for union activities, training in the organisation of strikes and protests, political education of union members, and providing welfare support.

Despite being forced by the draconian labour code to affiliate to the bureaucratic pro-government Federation of Korean Trade

Unions, there has always been a general acceptance among the Democratic Unions that its subordination to the government and capitalist class has acted as a powerful brake on the development of the workers' movement.

An important aspect of the union movement's work since 1987 has therefore been to establish a National Independent Union Alliance with the ability to coordinate action on a national basis and - in the words of the Inchon Regional Workers Federation 'capable of defending the interests of the toiling masses'.

The formation of Chunnohyup

Three years of hard work culminated on January 18 1990 with the historic formation of KAGTU, the Korean Alliance of Genuine Trade Unions, Chunnohyup. Seeing the existence of a national, independent trade union movement for the first time since the 1940s, the state has been stung into a sustained, vicious attack aimed at smothering the new Alliance at birth.

Three days before its formation, Chunnohyup was declared illegal, and Seoul was placed under a state of seige to prevent the inaugural rally from taking place. With over 15,000 police guarding the publicly-disclosed site of the rally (Seoul National University); heavy police surveillance of train and bus stations to prevent regional delegations attending; and a number of union leaders placed under house arrest, it appeared that the government had been successful in sabotaging the launch of KAGT.

However, anticipating large scale state intervention, the Union leaders had secretly organised to hold the rally a day before the official date, at Sung Kyun Kwan University. On the day, 500 delegates, representing some 200,000 workers from all 14 regional alliances attended the conference, which elected a leadership, voted on a number of resolutions, and endorsed a programme of demands. Local riot police - belatedly informed of the new rally site - converged on the meeting, only to be confronted by workers and students who prevented them from entering the University just long enough for the assembly to declare the formation of Chunnohyup. After forcing their way in, the police arrested and injured 136 people.

The anti-union laws

Along with the use of naked violence, the government has implemented a number of repressive laws in an attempt to crush the 600 unions affiliated to KAGTU. The most basic of these, introduced since January, enforces the regular public auditing of union books and financial accounts. In effect, this has meant that the leaders of any union that has decided to join Chunnohyup can be imprisoned for misappropriation of union funds.

Even more sinister is the Orwellian 'National Security Law'. This specifies that anyone who violates the 'National Principle'

(never defined) and engages in any activity that could conceivably assist the North Korean government and weaken the state (demonstrations, strikes, pickets and public debates) is committing a criminal offence and is liable to prosecution. Formerly used more against students and political activists, with the upturn of the class struggle 100 union militants have been imprisoned.

Simply to call for repeal of the National Security Law is in itself a crime! In addition to all these pieces of anti-union legislation, the government has recently set up a hotline on which any employer can contact the new Riot Police Task Force whenever they need pickets arrested or beaten up.

The May General Strike

The response of the democratic union movement to this violent onslaught has been to defend Chunnohyup through struggle. One leading union activist told me that they were always clear the establishment would move quickly to destroy any independent national union movement.

The first major test came just three months after the formation of KAGTU. On April 25, militant workers at the Hyundai naval shipyard began a sit-in strike in protest at the arrest of union leaders. The government promptly sent in 12,000 riot police by air, sea and land to evict the workers from the yards. In the violent clashes that ensued, 20,000 workers armed with molotov cocktails fought with police - who used bulldozers to break down barricades, and teargas to disperse strikers.

Angered by the level of force used against their brothers, workers in nearby Ulsan staged solidarity strikes and demonstrations every day for a week. Responding to the wave of unrest this triggered, and the widespread support for workers on strike at the Korean Broadcasting System, Chunnohyup called a General Strike for May 1.

Relying on its regional structures, KAGTU succeeded in coordinating a General Strike in over 200 factories nationwide, while rallies were held in 14 cities. Their ability to wield influence far beyond Chunnohyup's 300,000 members has sent shock waves through the ruling class.

The government crackdown

Unable to destroy the 600 democratic unions of Chunnohyup, the government has sought to cut off its head by arresting 450 of its leading activists, and forcing 100 into hiding since May. The increased confidence and determination of the membership, together with resolute support from students and community groups, have ensured that the union continues to function despite the problems caused by this crackdown.

However in the teeth of the systematic attack by the South Korean state and employers on this vibrant new workers' movement, there remains an urgent necessity for international support and solidarity with Korean workers and KAGTU.

How strikers beat Beverly Hills cops

By Harry Brighthouse

On June 15, 500 protestors, including 140 Latino janitors, marched from Roxbury Park in Beverly Hills to nearby Century City, a cluster of huge corporate skyscrapers.

The demonstration was in support of the janitors of the biggest buildings in Century City, who were on strike against the Danish-based cleaning contractor International Service Systems (ISS), demanding union recognition.

As they reached the turning from Olympic Boulevard into the Plaza, police stopped them without explanation, despite a permit having been issued for them to march into Century City.

Within minutes, police charged at the demonstrators with their night-sticks flailing. They repeatedly struck demonstrators, cutting off individuals and beating them whenever they tried to rise from the floor.

Over 90 people were injured, 19 of them seriously. Injuries included fractured jaws, skulls, arms and legs. Three pregnant women were beaten, one of them while clutching her one-year old child; another subsequently miscarried.

Police showed no mercy, and ultimately arrested over 40 fleeing demonstrators for 'remaining on the scene of a riot'.

Los Angeles, the second largest city in the USA, is not known as a union town. Less than 18 percent of the official workforce is unionised, and there is a huge unofficial workforce which is almost entirely unorganised.

Until the late 1970s the cleaning industry was largely unionised. The introduction of the contract system, however, together with the large influx of refugee and often undocumented labourers from Central America, enabled bosses to de-unionise the industry and to lower wages and to lower wages from an average of \$12 an hour with full health benefits in 1979 to \$4.50 an hour with no



Brutal police attack on justice for janitors demonstration

benefits in 1987. (Reasonable health insurance cover costs about 20 percent of the after-tax wage of a low-wage worker)

This system provides both an incentive for contractors to break unions, and an excuse for non-union contractors to refuse to recognise unions ('If we recognise you, your members will lose their jobs because we'll lose the contract'). In addition, undocumented workers live in constant fear of deportation.

In response to the deunionisation of cleaning work, the Hospital and Service Employees International Union SEIU (nearest equivalent to NUPE in Britain) began a national 'Justice for Janitors' campaign in the mid-1980s. Organisers were employed in particular cities to win union recognition for the janitors, often facing police harassment. In Denver, one entire organising committee was deported overnight. But the brutality of June 15 has not been seen against organised labour in Los Angeles since the 1930s.

The campaign had already had some success in organising janitors in downtown LA. But Century City, built in the 1960s as a plush setting for major corporate headquarter buildings, seemed an unbreakable bastion of unorganised labour. JMB Realty, the management of most of the buildings, had already ditched one contractor immediately after it was unionised. And with a billion dollar turnover, ISS is the biggest cleaning corporation in the world.

So the SEIU organisers pursued a corporate campaign for many months previous to the strike. Workers held noisy lunchtime demonstrations in the central plaza. In red 'Justice for Janitors' T-shirts, they frequented the local cocktail bars without buying drinks. They mailed rubbish to the corporate headquarters, and had supporters cause massive traffic jams in the early morning rush hour.

When the workers struck on May 29 they were aiming at a short strike that would be part of this 'guerrilla' campaign. Picketing

was bound to be limited in impact because so few workers were involved (each building is cleaned by fewer than 50 workers) and buildings had so many entrances, while scabs were so easy to find. Nobody, including, it seemed, the strikers themselves, thought they could win.

On June 1, 500 people turned out at a lunchtime demonstration through the lobbies of the corporate buildings and over to the posh shopping mall; the police were entirely taken by surprise.

On the night of June 15, however, the whole of Los Angeles (which has no great love for its Police Department) watched on TV as cops brutally attacked defenceless and passive workers.

The police tried to brand the (mainly Central American) janitors as 'illegal aliens hired by the union to disrupt Century City'.

Instead of demoralising the workers, the attack strengthened their resolve. I got an indication of how deep support for the strike had become when I went to my bank on June 18. Having been prominent in the TV coverage, I was greeted as a hero by the cashiers, and unanimously told to get better and to make sure the strike was won.

After the weekend several unorganised workers from other buildings spontaneously joined the strike and the union. With a community support committee, the strikers planned a demonstration to reclaim the streets - and won a restraining order on the police - for June 29.

In the event the June 29 demonstration was to celebrate the most spectacular victory for the Los Angeles labour movement in more than half a century. Local councillors' offices had been flooded with calls, as had the offices of ISS and JMB. Mayor Tom Bradley, an ex-cop, was forced to order a Police Commission inquiry into the June 15 violence.

Finally, a week after the beatings, 10,000 New York janitors threatened a sympathy

strike – a move unprecedented in recent years. ISS came to the negotiating table instantly, and three days later a meeting of strikers ratified a contract granting union recognition, full health benefits and paid vacations, and a 10 percent pay rise.

As part of the agreement all law suits between the Union and ISS were dropped, though the Union is going ahead with a \$10 million civil suit against the LA Police Department. Rocio Saenz, one of the organisers, said 'The victory was more complete than we could ever have hoped'.

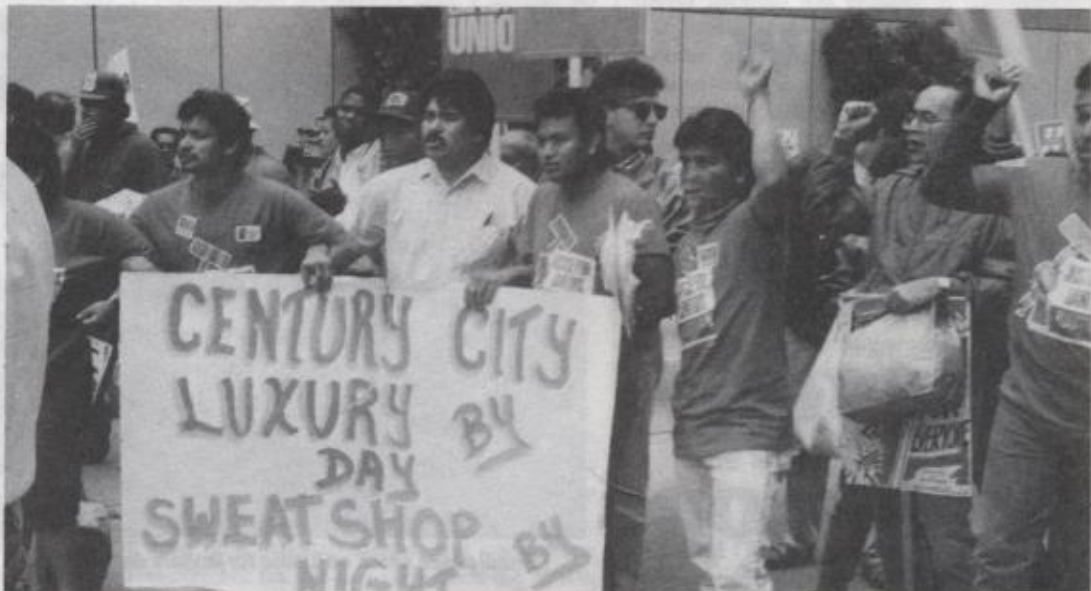
This struggle has already inspired other workers in LA. Soon after June 15, striking nurses at Kaiser Permanente Hospital held an aggressive mass picket which was swelled by bandaged janitors. Bilingual Teaching Assistants in the LA Unified School District are using similar tactics in their campaign for regular hours and better working conditions, and are looking to the janitors' strike as a model of organising.

The Century City strike is symptomatic of what might be called a 'real new realism' among US rank and file organisers. In the past five years the rank and file caucus Teamsters for a Democratic Union, and the New Directions Movement in the United Auto Workers union, have had some spectacular successes. On top of these challenges to conservative union bureaucrats came the victory early this year of a year-long miners' strike at Pittston, Virginia. There is a new militancy in many union campaigns; more workers in struggle have begun to wear red T-shirts and camouflage jackets, and begun to talk the language and use the tactics of a class struggle left.

The 'real new realists' know that community support is often needed if struggles are to be successful; but they also realise that support can only be won with aggressive tactics, by showing potential supporters that strikers have the will to win.

Most of all, though, the victory is a tremendous leap forward for the Latino working class in the south west. What the Century City janitors have shown is that, far from being an obstacle to the success of the labour movement, Latino immigrants will be at the centre of the re-organised working class. And what they have shown other Latino immigrants is that with energy, determination and courage, they too can win.

(Harry Brighouse is a member of the Los Angeles branch of the US marxist organisation Solidarity)



New wave of militancy amongst traditionally unorganised workers

Stephen Gellis

Oil workers' refined tactics show the way forward

By Pat Sikorski

The battle being fought out in the North Sea for safety and union rights of oil workers is one of the most important the movement has seen for several years.

Nearly 500 oil workers have died offshore – victims of oil companies routinely breaking the law in their chase for profits.

A clear victory in this fight would mean a massive breakthrough for union organisation in all those areas of industry where there has been massive restructuring of hiring patterns – sub-contracting or 'the lump' – with the resultant eradication of union organisation and safe working conditions. Obvious areas are the construction industry, catering, textiles, ancillary services in the NHS and the food industry.

This kind of fight offers a far better way of unionising women workers, part-time workers and those on wages below the legal minimum than the growing wave of inter-union membership wars – such as that between the GMB and TGWU in catering (where they have just ripped up a 'no poaching' agreement) and the internecine war started by train driver's union ASLEP against the NUR on the railways.

The TUC could quickly win the oil dispute within days by calling an all-out strike of all union members in the industry. But the full-time leaders of the seven unions involved have instead promised a ballot across the North Sea for official strikes to win the reinstatement of the hundreds of workers that the oil companies

have sacked and locked out.

This will take weeks to organise, and is certain to get bogged down in legal challenges under the Tory anti-union laws. But while the companies can break every safety law and regulation in the book, union officials insist their members stick by the Tory laws.

This of course has been the pattern of defeat after defeat during the Thatcher years. Rather than persuading the union leaders to police their rank and file through seeking a consensus between government and TUC chiefs (as happened under Wilson and Callaghan's Labour government) Thatcher has utilised the civil courts – to threaten the privileged life-style of the bureaucracy if they don't play ball, by imposing punitive fines and sequestration on the unions.

When the union officials met the unofficial Oil Industry Liaison Committee, and agreed to hold the ballot, some urged that the unofficial one-day strikes be suspended. The OILC rightly refused, and said it would continue to call action.

In the meantime the companies have gained injunctions against OILC supporters occupying the oil rigs. These militants are the indispensable, highly active and visible core of the dispute. Their presence on the rigs is an essential symbol of the continuing fight. The danger is that the union head offices will hold off or delay the ballot unless the unofficial sit-ins are called off.

The other thing about this dispute has been the spread of solidarity strike action. For the first time for a long time other workers have taken supportive strike action. This is also unlawful, and will be opposed by the officials.

The North Sea strikes follow a pattern of unofficial rebellions that have included last year's construction (steel erectors) strike in London; the London Underground workers' strike; and strikes this year by teachers and local government workers against the effects of the Poll Tax.

But there have been strict limits to these struggles, imposed by three factors:

* The gathering pace of the economic slowdown has been compounded by the government's policy of high interest rates: this has meant an inexorable rise in unemployment figures, record numbers of firms applying for receivership, and an explosion of mortgage fore-closures. The number of job losses being announced has started to accumulate rapidly – 50,000 in building by the end of the year; 5,000 at Ravenscraig Steel; 5,000 at National Power; 2,000 at ICT's agri-chemical division; many thousands in retail and catering, and so on.

* The union bureaucrats insist that all the Tory anti-union laws be adhered to (and this will now continue even under a Labour government!). This has been coupled with union leaders exploiting the restructuring of manufacturing industry and resultant re-composition of the workforce as a pretext to attack militancy and class struggle methods as 'outdated' and extol the supposed (as yet un-proven) virtues of 'new realism'.

* This has helped create the cumulative effect of one defeat or sell-out after another, impeding struggles from moving from the defensive to the offensive, and severely limited the levels of solidarity action.

Even where this does not lead to outright defeat it can produce some unhappy compromises: in engineering for example, although industrial action, including some extremely long, isolated strikes, has now secured deals at 650 factories for a 37-hour week – covering 300,000 workers – there are very valid doubts about self-financing deals that involve speed-up, 'bell to bell' working.

All this underlines the extent to which the crucial balance of forces between the shop stewards and their full-time officials remains tilted firmly in favour of the latter – to the disadvantage of workers at the sharp end of the fight.

The work of socialists – such as the Trade Union committee of the Socialist Movement – who are fighting to regroup and organise class struggle forces in the trade unions and combat the pernicious influence of new realism becomes even more vital as new struggles break out.

TUC: more cabbage-like than green

By Pat Sikorski



One cabbage succeeds another: Willis and Monk at the TUC

If the TUC had been at all serious about its recent call for the shop stewards' movement to go 'green', taking up issues of the environment and safety at work, then it would have placed the oil workers' fight for unionisation at the centre of its debates in Blackpool this year.

To establish a strong union presence at the centre of the oil industry, one of the major polluters of the environment, would be a major achievement in the fight for 'green' policies.

In reality, as everyone really knew, the object of the TUC proposal was to further neutralise the most active of the estimated 250,000 shop stewards, and limit the degree of independence which they still retain from union head offices and the structures of management.

The TUC says it wants these stewards to have more 'negotiating power': but they clearly see a 'green steward' as no more than a souped-up Health and Safety rep. The stewards, given little or no influence over the day-to-day issues affecting their members, would become increasingly irrelevant, kept busy monitoring the environmental needs of the workforce, factory and community. Meanwhile the full-time union official would sit down with management to negotiate away hard-won conditions and long-cherished (if limited) elements of trade union control over the work process through 'self-financing' pay deals.

In this way the TUC leaders aim cynically to exploit the new environmental awareness which all socialists must welcome, and turn it

into a means to weaken the only guarantee of environmental or workplace improvements – strongly-organised unions, led by a network of workplace-based activists willing and able to lead strike action to win and protect those standards.

For their part, the TUC leaders demand the employers cooperate with these new 'watchdogs', or face the threat of ... legislation!

The TUC hopes that if they can restrict and police their shop stewards in this way, they can again become influential under the next government. They are already volunteering to put

their members' heads in the noose of national level 'collective bargaining' with the incoming government (or, to be more honest about it, a new national pay policy on the model of the hated and discredited 'social contract' which slashed the value of wages under Wilson and Callaghan).

Of course if the Tories win the next election, all this pious nonsense will evaporate in the heat of what will undoubtedly be a massive renewed assault on workers' living standards, jobs and union rights.

The TUC's plans rely entirely on the return of a Labour government, whose reactionary trade union policies it has now adopted (though by a much more narrow majority than expected). Yet history shows that only a working class confident in itself and its strength, and intent on change in society turns out to vote Labour and kick out the Tories. The present Labour leadership – with its opposition to each and every manifestation of anti-Tory struggle, and abandonment of even the most limited commitment to pro-working class policies – could not have done more to demoralise and demobilise the best sections of the working class.

In slavishly toeing Kinnock's defeatist line, the TUC has ironically made it less, not more likely that Labour will be returned to office. Nothing could be further from the needs of today's working class. It has perhaps never been tougher to do so, but, as the oil workers have shown, workers must continue to ignore the policies flowing from the TUC, and rely on their own struggles.

A theory that can't cope with facts

The SWP and eastern Europe

By Phil Hearse

The truth of Marxist theory can only be confirmed by practice. So, the dramatic developments in Eastern Europe in the last year have been an important test of the competing theories of the character of the Stalinist states.

Every Marxist and semi-Marxist tendency claims to have found confirmation of its theories in the dramatic crisis in the Eastern bloc. None more so than the Socialist Workers Party, which like a laborious Heineken advert insists 'only state capitalism can explain this'. Chris Harman devoted 82 pages to this task in *International Socialism* No. 46, and another 19 pages to a review of Ernest Mandel's book *Beyond Perestroika* in *IS* 47 (1).

In fact, the attempt to fit the Eastern bloc crisis into the 'state capitalist' framework leads not only to chronic theoretical incoherence but also to a very dangerous political conclusion: that, if capitalism is restored in Eastern Europe, this will only be the replacement of one form of capitalism with another, and hence simply a 'move sideways'. This is most surely not the way to attempt to arm the most class conscious workers in these countries for the massive struggles ahead. In this article we look first at the theoretical basis of the SWP's claims, and then at their political conclusions.

At first sight, the idea that the Soviet Union, China, eastern Europe and Cuba are all variants of the same system that exists in the capitalist world appears to defy elementary common sense. But, as Chris Harman would be the first to point out, Marxism is not about 'common sense' but discovering the underlying 'laws of motion' which make social systems tick. So how does Harman explain the mechanisms of 'state capitalism'?

According to Harman, following Tony



'State capitalism'; no way forward for east European workers

Cliff (2), these states are capitalist not because of their internal organisation, but because of 'competition' – mainly military competition – with the other capitalist countries.

Cliff and Harman are, of course wise not to claim that the countries of the eastern bloc are capitalist on the basis of their internal or-

ganisation. For Marx insisted, most explicitly in the *Grundrisse*, that capital can only exist as 'many capitals' – firms competing with one another for profits, the central dynamic of the capitalist order.

But no such system exists where the means of production are collectivised. Despite the

'State capitalism': a theory

The 'state capitalism' as portrayed by comrades Tony Cliff and Chris Harman is indeed a curious variety of capitalism, functioning outside any normal capitalist rules.

Somehow even after this system has allegedly been in place for over six decades in the USSR and 40 years in Eastern Europe, the 'state bourgeoisie' apparently failed to notice that vital components of capitalism were missing:

- A lack of capital: the sight of East Europe's decrepit, antiquated factories, the spectacle of Lech Walesa touring the western capitals desperately pleading for foreign investment, and the feeble progress towards privatisation – for lack of available domestic investors – are all testimony to the lack of sufficient free or fixed capital to function and survive in the world market.

- A lack of capitalists. With much of the 'state bourgeoisie' unceremoniously dumped from office (and thus instantly relegated from bourgeoisie to proletariat) by the events of 1989, it has become obvious to all but the SWP that all the East European bourgeoisie and big landlords were expropriated over 40 years ago. Would-be marketisers are now scouring the world's lounge bars searching for emigre capitalists,

while various small-time bureaucratic spivs jockey for the chance to become small businessmen. Yet along with the expropriation of the old capitalists went the structure of property and company law needed to run a capitalist economy – creating still more headaches for today's western bankers! The privatisation and consolidation of a new capitalist ruling class in these countries will be no quick change.

- A lack of commodities. Page one of Marx's *Capital* tells us that "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities'". Yet it is precisely the lack of such basic commodities as food, soap, toilet paper, cigarettes and vodka that has confirmed the failure and crisis of bureaucratic rule.

- The lack of a market. While the 'market' system sacrifices the fulfilment of social need in order to focus on what is profitable, the bureaucratic 'plan', freed from this constraint, substitutes the numbing straitjacket of the command economy, the quota and the norm – crushing any concept of workers' control or initiative. This is certainly not socialism – but it's light years from capitalism, too!

- The lack of profits. Western bankers weighing up their prospects in Eastern



Lack of basic commodities confirms the crisis of bureaucratic rule

existence in some eastern European countries of small firms and private peasant production, generalised commodity production, in which goods are produced by independent, private labour for the market, does not exist. Harman tries to escape from the conundrum this way:-
 '...if old style "free market" competition

plays a very little role, a new form of competition dominates it completely. This is military competition between rival state capitalist ruling classes of different countries. This competition has similar effects on the organisation of production in each country to those economic competition has on the organisation

that lacks something

Europe are appalled to find the majority of state industries are *bankrupt*, and that:

"For now the lack of investment in the East [of Germany] may simply reflect the fact that there is nothing worth buying". (*The Independent* 21.8.90)

The losses are not recent or temporary, but chronic and endemic to the shambles of bureaucratic mismanagement, covered over by subsidies and a tissue of lies. No capitalist economy could function at such a loss in this way year after year without outside support.

- The lack of any drive to exploitation. Western industrialists are appalled at the huge manning levels that still prevail in East European industry: western retailers boggle at the forbidding shops with their redundant teams of clerks issuing and collecting chits. The Stalinist model – as a non-capitalist system insulated from world competitive pressures – has deliberately avoided changes that eradicated jobs and retreated from measures that would cut workers' living standards. Now, as we have already seen in Poland, the moves towards the free market seem likely to slash the value of wages and to throw 40 million Soviet workers out of their jobs, along with a third of the East German workforce and millions elsewhere in East Europe.

- The absence of any drive to imperialist expansion. Far from exploiting the workers

of East Europe, Soviet economic links have been characterised by huge open and hidden *subsidies* to prop up flagging economies. The same is true of Vietnam, Cuba and countless other recipients of Soviet economic aid, which pay a certain political price, but are not exploited economically. While poverty-stricken recipients of western aid in 'third world' countries are fleeced through huge interest payments, the USSR has exported wealth, training and expertise to its protege regimes.

- The absence of free foreign trade. The state monopoly on foreign trade and non-convertibility of currencies which has applied throughout Eastern Europe are recognised by all but the SWP as a major obstacle to the functioning or rebirth of capitalism. They are symptoms of the complete ousting from power of the capitalist classes in the events of 1944-50.

Of course in exceptional circumstances and unusual conditions in the balance of class forces at home or internationally, one or more of these anomalies might be visible in a capitalist economy: but for a 'capitalist' system to function for decades without capital, capitalists, commodities, market, profits or exploitation stretches the definition well beyond breaking point.

of production inside each firm... The threat of military defeat compels the giant state capitalist class to impose the law of value on its enterprises just as the smallest individual entrepreneur is forced by the threat of bankruptcy'.

In other words, it has been not profits but arms competition which forced the USSR to 'compete' with the imperialist powers, thus relating the value of each concrete act of labour inside the USSR to the value of labour in the capitalist west. Cliff and Harman even claim that it was arms competition that was the driving force of Soviet industrialisation.

Now, there is no doubt that massive arms production has distorted the development of the Soviet economy, and contributed to the present crisis. But the claim that arms competition 'makes the USSR capitalist' is completely unproven. To prove that arms competition has made the USSR capitalist, it would be necessary to show that it has imposed a system

which has the characteristics of capitalism – production for profit, investment flowing to those enterprises which are most 'profitable', production ending with the accumulation of vast amounts of capital in the form of money, the optimisation of profit being the driving force of the economy. None of these things exist – yet – in the Soviet Union. Indeed it is precisely one of the main complaints of the pro-marketisers in the Gorbachev camp and beyond that they don't!

In sticking to what used to be summarised as the 'permanent arms economy' theory of why the USSR is capitalist, Harman follows the well-trodden founding theories of the SWP, which he debated with Ernest Mandel 20 years ago (3). But in defending state capitalist theory in an unfavorable situation, Harman makes more explicit some of the underlying propositions of his theory. The first is the idea that all industrialised countries are a form of 'state capitalism'; the system in the Eastern bloc is just one variant of the 20th century trend towards all capitalism being 'state capitalism'. Harman argues:-

'... the tendency towards state control of the whole economy was not something unique to Stalinism. It was something which happened to various degrees throughout the capitalist world, particularly in its weaker national elements, in the period which stretched from the First World War and the crisis of 1929-33 through to the 1970s... The two world wars and the crisis of the 1930s led to a massive degree of fusion between the state and the giant enterprises in the advanced capitalisms: this was the major point made as early as 1916 by Bukharin and Lenin in their studies of imperialism. But in the late 1930s the scale of state control of industrial activity in Nazi Germany was such as to persuade the famous Austro-Marxist economist Hilferding

that a new mode of production had been established.' (IS 46:p37)

And again: 'There is, so to speak, a "merging together" of industry and the state. This merging finds its fullest development in all-out imperialist wars, in which the state and capital work to plan the economy internally, while destroying rival capitalisms physically.' (IS 47: p151)

This analysis is compounded by Harman's references to the West offering a 'more open and free' state capitalism (alternatively 'multinational state capitalism') - as opposed to the 'autarchic' state capitalism of this East.

Now this is a classic restatement of what used to be known as 'convergence theory' - that the role of the state east and west was bringing both camps to a similar sort of system. The objections to it are numerous, but here we list the most obvious.

First, the increased and obvious role of the state in western capitalism, does not result in a full merging of the state and capital, even under Nazism, even in wartime. In the era of the 'multinationals' this is absolutely obvious - often their operations are totally outside the control of any national state ('multinational state capitalism' is an absurdity).

During World War Two, the big trusts made huge private profits from the war effort. But despite this, the war economy did not become a permanent feature, far less a culminating point: it remained an emergency measure for the capitalist class. The national planning of this type of economy was dismantled after the war, despite attempts at Keynesian 'indicative planning'. So the modern era where many fields of production are dominated by a few monopolies does not result in 'planned capitalism', or the removal of capitalist competition and the anarchy of the market. The almost obsessive deregulation policies pursued by Thatcher, Reagan and other neo-liberals confirms the new trend to unravel state control.

Second, Harman's theory amounts to saying the east is just a more complete or autarchic version of state capitalism. It fails

to explain (and this runs through his whole theory) the enormous hostility between these two types of 'state capitalism'. Inter-imperialist competition of course exists between all imperialist powers. But why the

capitalist'. But such states have no necessary hostility to western capitalism, and are generally subordinate to imperialism. After all, didn't the SWP (wrongly) argue that Iraq was simply a tool of US imperialism during the Iran-Iraq war?



Gorbachev: a bureaucrat but not a capitalist

Since - according to the SWP - the Soviet Union is just one variant of modern capitalism, it follows that Gorbachevism and the eastern bloc crisis are variants of capitalist crisis - a crisis of overproduction (IS 46 pp44-52), of the rising organic composition of capital. But since capital in the Marxist sense doesn't exist in the USSR (how can it, when even according to Cliff the internal organisation is not capitalist?) this theory has some difficulties.

According to Harman (4) it is the 'urge to accumulate' which drives the Soviet bureaucracy. It invests too much, and devotes too little to consumption. Now, the theory of permanent arms economy can explain over-investment in the arms sector, but it cannot explain this mysterious 'urge to accumulate' more

division of the world into two competing blocs? Why the cold war? Why this huge conflict which has dominated the post-war world? Surely it was because of the incompatibility of these two systems?

There was always an ambiguity in state capitalist theory as to whether state capitalism was a different mode of production, or just a variant of the same mode of production. Harman is explicit in arguing that it is basically the same mode of production. And in saying so Harman renders the whole history of the 20th century completely inexplicable.

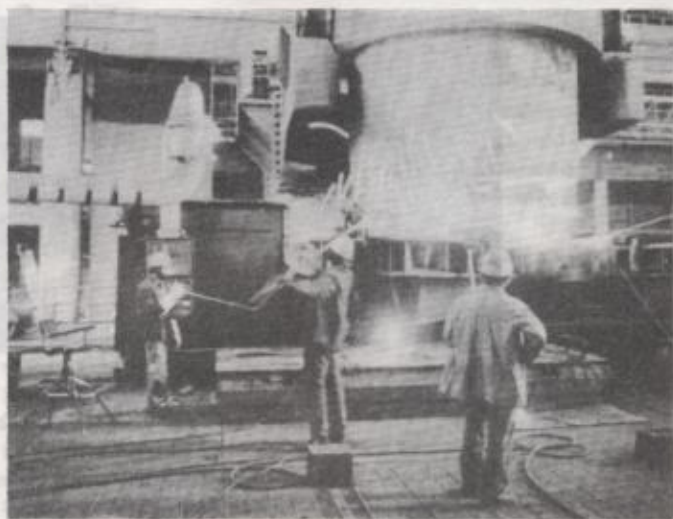
Until recently, Tony Cliff and Harman always referred to the Soviet ruling caste ('class') as 'the bureaucracy'. Now Harman has come clean, and following Bettelheim and other pro-Chinese theorists who claimed in the 1960s and 70s that the Soviet Union was just 'capitalist', refers to the bureaucracy as the 'state bourgeoisie'.

A further complication of the 'state capitalist' approach is that there have existed states in the third world - modern Iraq is a good case - in which the state does completely dominate capitalist economies. There is a good case for calling these 'state

factories, tractors, machinery etc. from which the Soviet bureaucracy is supposed to suffer.

In fact, the Soviet bureaucracy is driven not by some mysterious urge to accumulate, but by the defence of its social position and privileges, including its privileged level of consumption. The crisis in the USSR is a crisis of bureaucratic planning, including often a failure to invest. If some sectors are characterised by over-investment, it is because of the inefficient and wasteful use of resources, endemic in the bureaucratized economies. The crisis is not a 'crisis of overproduction' of capital, but a crisis driven by the inability of the system to use resources rationally, to innovate, to meet the consumption needs of the masses.

In part, but only in part, this is a result of over-investment in the arms industry. But this is not the essence of the matter. Since Harman is referring not to the over-accumulation of capital in the Marxist sense, but to too much investment in fixed plant and producer goods, couldn't the bureaucracy solve the crisis by investing a little less? But less investment would not



Nationalised property must be defended against privatisation

solve the basic problem of the inefficient and wasteful use of resources, which is a product of bureaucratic rule itself. Less investment could, while bureaucratic rule survives, chronically worsen the crisis. The political conclusions of the SWP's theories are disastrous. Harman is explicit:

'... before socialists in the Eastern states can take advantage of the factors in the situation which favour them, they have to be clear about certain important points. First, they have to grasp that the transition from state capitalism to multinational capitalism is neither a step backwards nor a step forwards but a step sideways... Unfortunately there are still socialists in the Eastern states who have not fully grasped this' (!).

Apparently the conclusion from this bizarre approach is that we should support workers struggles in Eastern Europe, but not defend nationalised property against privatisation!

Of course, the restoration of capitalism in the eastern states is not yet a certainty. If it happens, it will be the result of defeats imposed on the working class. The SWP, by insisting that it is already in place, logically, fails to grasp that capitalism can only be restored through a massive attack on the working class, including removing its social gains, which are based on nationalised property.

A concrete example. The IMF has told Hungary that it will make loans - provided these go to private enterprises and housing rents are charged at 'market prices'. Rents haven't changed in Hungary for forty years. This implies a huge attack on the Hungarian working class. But where exactly did these cheap rents, a basic factor in working class living standards, come from? Wasn't it something to do with the absence of capitalism?

The workers in the GDR, where capitalism is being established, will soon discover what the capitalist order has in store for them - mass unemployment with perhaps a third of the workforce unemployed, the destruction of social services like free childcare, subsidised

rents, cheap transport and so on. Part and parcel of the working class resistance to austerity must be the defence of its social gains, which are based on collectivised property. No wonder some socialists in eastern Europe can't see what the SWP is getting at.

The international implications of the crisis in the east are not referred to by Harman. But the deepening of the peaceful coexistence course implied by perestroika has had deeply reactionary effects internationally, strengthening the hand of

imperialism. The US invasion of Panama was given the green light by Gorbachev. Only Soviet complicity allowed the US intervention in the Gulf. Since such developments don't fit in with state capitalist theory they are simply ignored.

More generally, Chris Harman attempts to insinuate that those failing to hold the theory of state capitalism, were in some way or other soft on Stalinism. Thus we learn that in 1956 'part of Pablo's supporters supported the suppression of the Hungarian revolution by Soviet tanks'. Michel Pablo of course in 1956 was a central leader of the Fourth International; but no part of the Fourth International whatever did anything but support the workers revolution. We learn the intriguing information that Tariq Ali, who is soft on Gorbachev, was most influenced by 'Isaac Deutscher, Leon Trotsky and Ernest Mandel' (in that order). Logic: Deutscher, Mandel, Tariq Ali (and Trotsky!) are all basically the same in being soft on Stalinism. The left can do without this kind of silliness.

For decades many on the left have regarded the debate about the character of the Soviet Union and the other Stalinised states as a kind of esoteric theological exercise played by bizarre revolutionary groups. But the present crisis in the east, and the attempts of imperialism and internal forces to bring about the restoration of capitalism show it is anything but. The restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, eastern Europe, China and Cuba would have immense reactionary implications, and set back the struggle for socialism. A theory which would describe it as 'moving sideways' is a failure.

- (1) *The Storm Breaks: IS 46*
- (2) *State Capitalism in Russia* Tony Cliff, Bookmarks
- (3) See E. Mandel: *The mystifications of State Capitalism. International No. 2 1970*
- (4) *IS 46: pp*



Nice idea; shame about the picture

Safe, smug and depressing

Dick Tracy

Starring Madonna and Warren Beatty

Reviewed by DAVID GRANT

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Is it a comic or is it a film? No! Its Warren Beatty in Dick Tracy! From the man who brought you Reds comes another over-long and under-edited Hollywood epic.

Dick Tracy, the movie, (as opposed to the T-shirt, poster, etc) takes the world of the comic book hero and animates it with big-name stars, hamming it up for all they're worth. With no real intention of trying to add another dimension to the two that the characters possess on the original printed page, we find Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino and Madonna tum in adequate, but immediately forgettable performances, in what is actually a rather predictable and boring romp.

True, it looks very impressive, and in fact does look like a comic book. But then with one of the best camera operators in the world, Vittorio Storaro, guiding things along, you would hardly expect less.

It makes you wonder why he, and all the others for that matter, bothered. Can it really be just for the money? Perhaps the amounts involved are sufficient motivation. Quantity has a quality all of its own, as a certain famous film critic, VI Lenin, once remarked.

Or perhaps its that these films always seem to promise so much more, both to the actors and audiences? Certainly the hype attached to each succeeding blockbuster always manages

to catch my attention and I dutifully pay up to take in each extravaganza as it rolls along. It seems that, in Britain at least, this is something of a trend. Box office audiences are up. Films released in America, that once took months to reach audiences here, are now winging their way across the Atlantic without any delay.

But these films are almost always a disappointment. Why?

Perhaps its because there are such huge sums of money invested in them that the producers and directors are under enormous pressure to go for safe, and therefore inevitably simple, subjects, styles and characters. Ironically, despite the huge amounts of risk capital involved, risk is a factor almost always absent from the script.

Which is why bringing comic books to life is in vogue. It is a world inhabited by characters whose moral and personal codes are one-dimensional (Oh, alright, two then) and known in advance. The goodies are good, the baddies, bad. Anyone who doesn't fit into either of these categories will not survive the film. Witness the fate of *Breathless Mahoney* (Madonna). Let's face it, a temptress who engages in a spot of cross-dressing and role-reversal is hardly likely to make it in Dick's clean-shaven, straight 'n' proud America.

And clean it most certainly is! Part of the appeal of this type of fantasy is that it shows you a world where, even if the city is full of gangsters and crime, at least the streets are clean. Its a world where you can career around in your car, guns blazing, without encountering traffic jams, and park without fear of clamping. And there's another, rather more disturbing, aspect to this fabled American city. There don't appear to be any black people in it!

Like *Batman* and the Schwarzenegger films, *Dick Tracy* is testimony to the paucity of ideas emanating from the American film industry. A safe, smug, conservative morality tale, its box-office success is a depressing reminder of the comic strip agenda that neo-liberals like Reagan, Bush and Thatcher have established as reality.

But that's another horror movie entirely. And thankfully a script which, we as the audience,

Greasepaint – or black actors?

By Kathy Kirkham

The recent battle between a wealthy theatre producer and the US actors' union, American Equity, over the staging on Broadway of the West End musical 'Miss Saigon', is still reverberating round the theatre establishment on both sides of the Atlantic.

For raising the issue of racism in the theatre, Equity was lambasted by the media, by theatre critics and by many of its own members for interfering with artistic freedom.

In London's West End, British actor Jonathan Pryce had been playing the lead character in 'Miss Saigon', a Euro-Asian pimp, wearing prosthetics to give his eyes a slanted look. A reciprocal agreement between British and American Equity would have allowed him, as the star and a British Equity member, to transfer to the US production when it opened in New York next April.

However, the leaders of American Equity, apparently under pressure from the union's Race Equality Committee, told the show's producer Cameron Macintosh that Pryce's portrayal would offend the black community in the States. They objected to Pryce transferring to the US production and asked Macintosh to seek an American-Asian performer for the role.

The fact that 'Miss Saigon' had already taken some \$15 million in advance bookings on Broadway gave the union some extra leverage. But multi-millionaire Macintosh said he could afford to take the musical elsewhere. His threat to pull out put the much-needed jobs for 34 actors and large stage crew in the balance.

A truce looked possible at one point. After 600 members petitioned their union to come to an agreement, Equity announced it would welcome Jonathan Pryce – minus the prosthetics. In

return, it sought undertakings from Cameron Macintosh that

he would look for qualified Asian actors as replacements or understudies on Broadway, prioritise Asian actors for the lead role in future productions and assist with the vocal training of those Asian actors who might be considered for such roles.

Macintosh, however, maintained that Equity had still not accepted his artistic freedom as the producer and cancelled the Broadway production altogether.

While the theatre establishment and the right wing inside both British and American Equity sigh that the union 'shot itself in the foot', the real issue – the dire situation of black performers – has been conveniently pushed to the background.

For every Eddie Murphy or Whoopie Goldberg there are thousands more black performers in the US and Britain who, as one union official put it, 'celebrate if they even get an audition'. American Equity's records indicate, for instance, that from April 1989 to May 1990, 33 out of a total of nearly 100 shows covered by union agreement – representing 504 roles – included no black actors at all. An additional 12 productions included only a couple.

Black actors have the worst of all worlds. Casting directors still give the majority of non colour-specific parts to white performers. Even when the plots of plays or films call for characters of a specific racial origin, the plum roles still go to white 'stars'.

During the 'Miss Saigon' affair American Equity was accused of advocating that casting be drawn strictly along racial or ethnic lines. How could anyone suggest that Laurence Olivier should not have played Othello



White actors get priority for most roles

or Ben Kingsley, Ghandi, shocked theatre critics asked.

Equity calls this a total distortion of the issue: 'Jews (for example) have always been able to play Italians, Italians have always been able to play Jews, and both have always been able to play Asians. Asian actors, however, almost never have the opportunity to play either Jews or Italians and continue to struggle even to play themselves.'

The union also points out that the practice of white actors using make-up to darken their skins to play people of colour is likely to remain a highly sensitive issue as long as others are barred from roles solely because of the colour of their skin.

The question remains of how actors' unions can begin to address such widespread discrimination against their black members, especially in the now highly commercialised theatre world and in the film industry. The kind of positive demands which Equity belatedly began to make of Cameron Macintosh were a move in this direction i.e. towards 'integrated casting'.

But unions have to formulate a concrete programme of action with their own black members and campaign for these throughout their organisations. Otherwise if they are resisted by producers, the unions will not have the support of their own members to back up these demands, as Equity found to its cost.

Only in the context of a programme of measures to win training, job opportunities and visibility for a growing number of black performers at all levels will it be possible to begin to break down the white star syndrome.

A Mars a day ...

Total Recall

Starring Arnold Schwarzenegger

Reviewed by BEV BYRNE

NO GAUDY graphics, no spectacular stunts, just the name of the movie and the name of the star, Arnold Schwarzenegger: that is enough to guarantee another Hollywood blockbuster.

Schwarzenegger is of course big movie business, and it is he and his big biceps which put 'bums on seats'. The Schwarzenegger fans are there to see him do what he does best – kill. It doesn't really matter whether Schwarzenegger is a good guy or the bad guy, his audience just want to see him bulging, blazing and burning to the bitter end.

Total Recall is no exception. It does, however differ from previous Schwarzenegger films: here Schwarzenegger talks! Previous Schwarzenegger scripts have tended to limit his verbal output: but here he is quipping and questioning like a couple of James Bonds who have been spliced together and made to wear futuristic casual gear.

To be fair, he's quite a jolly sort of chap. And it is quite nice to see him in the opening shots at home with his loving and lascivious young wife as she comforts him after a nasty nightmare in which his face explodes on Mars.

The world in which Douglas Quaid (Schwarzenegger) lives, loves and works is reminiscent of our own dear planet, but with whizzier streamlined cars, lots of Corbusian concrete, and heavy security. It is the year 2084, and work appears to be the only thing which has not been transformed by technology.

Quaid, afraid to be late, rushes to his job as a construction worker, complete with heavy duty Kango. His dreams about Mars haunt him, and he decides to go to a firm called Recall Inc, who will, for a few hundred credits, implant a memory of a holiday in your head (cheaper than taking the shuttle greyhound to Saturn or Venus). This memory implant

will enable Quaid to play out a fantasy as an undercover agent on Mars with the aid of a 'sleazy, athletic, but demure brunette', chosen out of a mix and match catalogue.

Of course the whole thing goes terribly wrong (thus proving that private medicine is not so great after all) and Quaid finds himself up against a ruthless bunch of killers – minus his memory. The story then follows his search for his missing mind.

The opening sequences of the film are promising, and when Quaid attempts to pass through Mars immigration dressed as a woman in a brilliant and grotesque scene, expectations are high. However the art director failed to exploit the visual potential of a future world that is both familiar and 'sci-fi' strange. One can't help but compare this with the totally believable world depicted in Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner*, where a similar post-holocaust homegenous society inhabits a decaying, damp and discarded city. Scott's gashly vision of the future struck a balance between reality and fiction: *Total Recall* on the other hand presents a world looking exactly like Mexico City.

Once the action shifts to Mars, any hope of an imaginative movie totally disintegrates. It is reminiscent of 1950s science fiction without any of the laughs; lots of rock, red dust, domes and caves.

Mars is controlled by a crazed capitalist who is exploiting the workforce, many of whom have developed mutations due to the poor living conditions on the Red Planet. Quaid becomes involved with a revolutionary group, and with the aid of a dusky maiden (literally the woman of his dreams) battles with the oppressors.

It is here that plot-wise things become difficult to follow. Quaid knows that he has been someone else because a video recording of his mirror image tells him "You're not you. You're me". The crazed capitalist is constantly telling him that he is a smooth and be-suited ally. The revolutionaries hail him as a



Schwarzenegger's audiences are now much easier to find

mountainous Che Guevara. Will the real Quaid please stand up?

This is further complicated by the implication that all the action on Mars is merely a figment of Quaid's memory implant, and that therefore none of it exists. The audience is constantly invited to doubt which is reality. Quaid is the good guy and the bad guy; his earthly wife is a faithless fraud; the revolutionary leader Kuato turns out to be two people literally rolled into one. But does any of it matter, since the events may not be happening anyway?

This is the most fascinating element proposed in the film: but one scene undermines the tension between dream, reality and duplicity. It becomes clear Quaid is living a reality – and from that point on the audience knows that Mars exists and Quaid/Schwarzenegger can get on with saving the planet.

One might think that all the tampering with reality would drag *Total Recall* out of the genre of run-of-the-mill sci-fi with expensive special effects. The author of the original story, Philip K. Dick, loves to play around with cosmic quantum questions. But instead of using the world of film artifice to describe phenomena which are normally inaccessible, the director has chosen to make 'Rambo goes to Mars'.

Schwarzenegger lumbers round the unimaginative Martian film set, stirring up insurrection, panic, passion and lots of red dust and polystyrene. Each new scene contains a twist and a turn. But everyone knows that in the end Quaid will discover that he is a nice guy after all and will save the world – or at least Mars.

The expensive special effects only serve to beef up some very dull and repetitive battle scenes, and there are so many of them that you forget to put your fingers over your eyes in the end.

There is of course a grand finale where everything explodes, including a few more heads. As the extras stand around gazing at the new blue sky which Quaid has somehow manufactured out of thin air, one can't help but think that Mars is a pretty dull place, even with oxygen.

Why is it that Hollywood takes all the potential wonder and fascination out of the future? The chaps who made this movie chose to ignore all the interesting bits and just make a 'blow 'em away' movie.

However, to judge from the whooping and clapping which went on in the cinema every time Schwarzenegger blasted someone's face, perhaps Hollywood possesses more insight into our present society than it does of our future.

An outstanding intellectual for the Fourth International

Louis Sinclair 1909 – 1990

The death of Louis Sinclair after a serious illness, on Saturday, 7 July 1990, has removed from the ranks of the Fourth International one of its outstanding intellectuals.

Louis entered the Trotskyist movement when he joined the Glasgow branch of the Revolutionary Socialist League, an affiliate of the International Left Opposition, in 1937.

In 1943, he was in Italy with the British army. Mussolini had been ousted. The suppressed socialist and communist movements emerged from underground. From their cellars and attics, booksellers produced the banned works of Marx, Engels, Labriola, Lenin and other Marxists; some of them still uncut. It was a time of political ferment.

This was the sort of intellectual atmosphere in which Louis thrived. With other Trotskyists in the British and American armed forces, he established contact with the small Trotskyist group around Nicola di Bartolomea (Fosca. With his fluent French and rapidly acquired Italian, Louis was a big asset in educating young cadres and winning their adherence to the ideas of the Fourth International.

On his return to Glasgow in 1945, he immediately dispatched to the comrades in Naples his precious collection of Trotsky's works in French.

For a short time after its founding in 1945, he was a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party, then the British section of the Fourth International. For the rest of his long life, he was not formally a member of any organisation, but remained a loyal supporter,

both politically and materially, of the Fourth International. For him, Trotskyism was the marxism of the second half of the twentieth century.

The greater part of the next twenty years he spent on compiling his massive Trotsky bibliography, which is now in its second enlarged edition and has become a standard work of reference. In the pursuit of this project, he ac-

quired a hand bookshop that he did not enter or write to. It was quite a revelation, when accompanying him of some of these excursions to see how readily he was recognised. As soon as he entered the premises, the bookseller would say: 'Mr Sinclair, I have the book you have been looking for', and produce it from under the counter.

He corresponded with people in all parts of the world and nearly every post would bring him something. I remember with what pride he showed me a copy of Trotsky's *Germany: What Next?* in an obscure Indonesian dialect.

Louis rarely spoke from a public platform. He was most at home speaking to small groups, and especially enjoyed talking to young comrades, probing their brains and helping them with their problems. He was always being consulted by students writing theses on Trotskyism and related subjects, and by would-be authors: he was always more than ready with his help and advice.

He took a great interest in recent events in the Soviet Union, and always on the lookout for new material on Trotsky and the Left Opposition emerging from the archives.

He also compiled an index of pre-war internal bulletins of the Fourth International which should be a valuable source for research for historians and students of the period.

He will be sorely missed as a friend and teacher by all who knew him and learned from him.

By Charlie van Gelderen

Louis Sinclair

A meeting to commemorate the unique contribution of Louis Sinclair to Trotskyism and the Fourth International will take place at:

**Adam Smith Building
University of Glasgow
on Friday September 28th at 7.30pm**

All communications to:
**Tony Southall
67 Gleneff Street
Glasgow, G41
Telephone: (041) 423 7929**

cumulated an unrivalled collection of Trotsky's writings, and of books and articles on Trotsky. This collection is now in the library of Glasgow University and should surely now be named *The Louis Sinclair collection*.

It was no easy task. He must have visited every major library in Europe and America in his search for material; ransacked the archives of every Trotskyist or ex-Trotskyist he could get hold of. There can hardly be a second-

It was only recently that I received a box of papers containing all the records from Cape Town for the year 1935. These are, as far as I know, the only records of the early Trotskyist movement in South Africa, and this will now provide documentary evidence of the activities of those pioneer Trotskyists.

In respect to Gordon the situation is now beyond doubt. In January 1935, Gordon signed a membership form showing that he was a charter member of the Workers Party. I relied on other testimony when I wrote my book – but obviously I was correct.

**Baruch Hirson
London**

South African Trotskyism

In *Socialist Outlook* 26 there is a review by Charlie van Gelderen of my book *Yours for the Union*. In his comments, Charlie questioned the accuracy of my statement that Max Gordon, the organiser of black trade unions in the 1930s in the Witwatersrand, was a member of the Workers Party of South Africa. Not so, he writes, Gordon was a member of the Lenin Club.

I am not certain whether many of your readers stopped to ask themselves what these organisations were – or indeed where Charlie obtained his information.

Very briefly, those socialists who sym-

pathised with the left opposition in the early 1930s in Cape Town coalesced to launch a club at which socialist ideas could be discussed. That was the Lenin Club. Unfortunately two factions emerged, and after some discussion the majority broke away to form the Workers Party. The minority formed the Communist League and they retained the Lenin Club as an open forum.

In trying to write the history of those groups I interviewed some early activists and for some years had to rely on the information obtained from them. Charlie was most helpful and his account was accepted, with the reservation that oral testimony has to be checked.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Ultra-left farewell to socialism?

The end of the sovereignty of Labour conference, the accountability of MPs and the rank and file individual and affiliated members's direct involvement in policy-making could be the outcome of this year's Labour Party Conference.

Jane Wells seems to share this view. In her article in the June issue of *Socialist Outlook* she stresses the threat the proposals to be put before this year's conference pose, and that thought they are described by the Party's General Secretary as "tinkering amendments", they are far from being so. She makes clear that they represent the first instalment of changes to be completed at the conference following the next general election.

One might therefore have expected Jane Wells to urge all sections of the left within the Party to unite behind demands which (if carried at conference) would frustrate the NEC's plans.

Yet whilst the Campaign for Labour Party democracy (CLPD) and Labour Left Liaison are mobilising the rank and file in favour of resolutions to this year's conference countering the NEC proposals (i.e. in the immediate present) Jane Wells (and presumably *Socialist Outlook*) argue that what is needed is an approach which "embraces and builds on the experience of struggles that working people face every day, and brings them into the Party to join the fight for working class democracy".

With this approach, she effectively writes off the struggle for socialism in the admittedly unfavourable circumstances of the political present, and - in the best social-democratic tradition - postpones the 'real' struggle to some indefinite future.

The underlying idea of "Economism" is the prioritisation of the economic struggle of the working class as against the political struggle. In the Labour Party today we have a mass political organisation arising out of its close ties with mass trade union organisations.

Unlike the left-wing Russian Social Democrats, the early British socialists proved incapable of striking deep roots in the mass movement. Not surprisingly, the reformist ideology of the Parliamentary labour Party managed to firmly establish itself in the inevitably reformist minded trade union movement.

The Labour Party's close relationship with the trade union movement nevertheless means that Labour is the mass party of the British working class. For socialists, therefore, the



Harry Sloan is on holiday: last seen somewhere in the vicinity of Baghdad

path to the Labour voters, the working class and the masses in general leads through the Labour Party.

Yet, like supporters of "Economism" in Russia at the turn of the century, our present-day proponents of this doctrine shrink from the formidable political task of winning the mass Labour movement for socialism.

In order to justify what is effectively a withdrawal from politics, they have invented the 'theory' that support of the mass political party for socialist policies can somehow be won outside that party, or alternatively, by setting up a halfway house on that party's periphery, by building, to quote Jane Wells again "on the experiences working people face every day", (i.e. the economic struggles of the working class).

Organisations with imaginary high political potential are being set up - outside the real political mass organisation of the working class. Behind an elaborate structure of self-deception, pseudo-political activities - such as the concentration on producing innumerable weeklies, fortnightlies, monthlies, quarterlies or the holding of innumerable meetings and conferences - are being passed off as 'campaigning', and being substituted for involvement in the arena in which political class struggle is being forced out: the Labour Party.

Like their Russian predecessors the advocates of the current version of "Economism" leave politics to those intent on preserving capitalist society.

Jane Wells disregards 70 years of failed attempts to create an effective socialist force outside the Labour Party. Militant workers and non-Labour socialists will not be convinced of the need to join the Labour Party by building castles in the air - such as the 'campaigning' of the Socialist Movement - but only when the Labour left is successful. This was demonstrated during the years of the Bevanite advance and more recently when significant gains were achieved both on 'issues such as nuclear disarmament and public ownership, and during the struggles for mandatory reselection and wider franchise for the election of the Leader and Deputy Leader. These victories were not won

by 'campaigning' outside the Labour Party but by persistent and systematic efforts of socialists within it.

To whom is Jane Wells referring when she says:

"It is a serious mistake ... to argue (as some do) that ... you lay the groundwork for left-wing policies not by campaigning for socialist politics now, but by refining party procedures to make sure the structures for accountability are there ready for when the Left is on the up again".

It can only be CLPD. Yet this is not CLPD's position. CLPD does not separate campaigning for socialist policies from campaigning for Party democracy in the way Jane Wells suggests, for in its view the two go together and cannot be separated.

This year one of CLPD's model resolutions demands the reduction of defence expenditure - not exactly a demand to refine party procedures.

The fact that CLPD is prioritising constitutional issues (as well as the cuts in defence expenditure) is above all because of the dire results for the Party if the present leadership succeeds in pushing through the changes outlined above. These changes would allow the leadership, and a future labour government, to be immune to rank and file pressure.

It is a pity that the Left's limited resources are being dispersed in all directions at this time, when repelling the attack on what remains of the democratic gains of 1979-81 is an absolute priority.

**Vladimir Derer
London**

(This letter was cut from 2,300 words: Ed.)

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