

Workers power

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Forty years
of public
health care

USSR



in crisis

Monthly paper of the Workers Power group No.107 July 1988 ISSN 0263-1121 30p/10p strikers

SOUTH AFRICA

BLACK WORKERS STRIKE BACK!

SOUTH AFRICA'S black working class has yet again demonstrated its ability to defy the apartheid state and defend its organisations. It has proved once again that it has not been cowed by that racist state.

In the face of renewed and even more draconian emergency provisions black workers staged massive stay aways on 6-8 June and on Soweto Day on 16 June. These heroic struggles against apartheid stand as a beacon of inspiration to workers throughout the world.

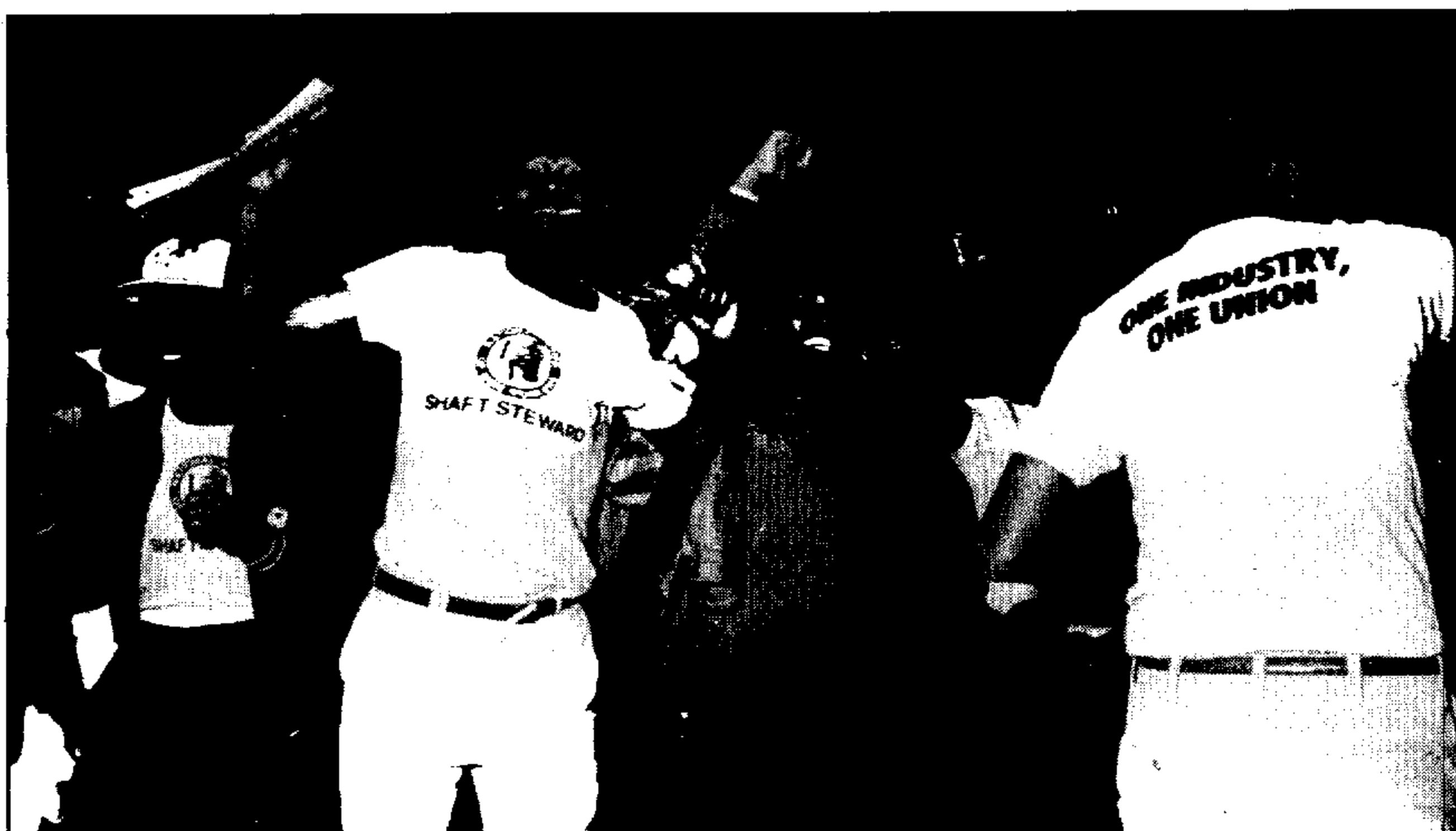
The three day general strike was called by the major union federation COSATU, together with the smaller federation, NACTU. It was in protest against the banning orders muzzling the popular and working class organisations and against the planned trade union laws. The bans mean that trade unions cannot publicly campaign for political aims and that anti-apartheid organisations are silenced.

Outlaws

The new Labour Relations Amendment Bill takes a leaf out of the Thatcherite union-busting book. It outlaws sympathy and 'repeat' strikes (stoppages held over the same issue within a year). It is clearly designed to hit the unions' successful drive to organise workers and win much needed wage hikes—a drive which has continued into 1988 despite the crackdown. Any strike action where 'the employer concerned is unconnected with the dispute' lays the unions open to damages. As the South African black unions already operate on a shoe-string, and as another set of laws prohibits the international trade union movement financing them they are facing the possibility of going bust. If they abide by these laws then they will become toothless associations and of little use to black workers.

Employers

The bosses have made it perfectly clear that they will use these laws. They are out to break the black unions. The 'progressive' employers gathered in the employers organisation SACCOLA stand four square behind these new anti-union laws. Last ditch talks between COSATU and SACCOLA failed to produce any independent statement from the employers distancing themselves from the government's plans. Instead, they took out advertisements in the press to try and persuade readers that the laws were 'reasonable'. Since Anglo American bust the



Striking South African miners

Report

miners' strike last August, the employers have been on the offensive, allowing the state or their own security forces to harass and break up shop stewards' meetings and union offices. Before the June stay-aways the more hawkish employers threatened COSATU, NACTU and their constituent unions with mass sackings if the stay-away went ahead. Its huge success has made that threat virtually impossible to carry through, but the employers' behaviour shows that they are looking to break the power of the unions in the period ahead.

Defend

The bosses' victory is by no means assured. Figures for the stay-aways show that workers in all regions and industries will act with solid determination to defend their unions. In the industrial heartland, the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging triangle, 80% of industrial, 50% of commercial and 40% of transport workers joined the strike. Even more significant was the 70% stay away in the Natal area where the scab union of Chief Buthelezi (a collaborator with the apartheid state) tried to prevent strike action. It is true that the turnout was low in the gold mines, where the National Union of Mineworkers has not yet recovered from last summer's defeat, but coal and diamond miners came out in substantial numbers.

Both the 6-8 June and Soweto Day strikes also demonstrated that town-

FREE NELSON MANDELA!
FREE MOSES MAYEKISO!
FREE THE SHARPEVILLE SIX!

DEMONSTRATE

Sunday 17 July
10.30 Finsbury Park
London N4

ship organisations are still operating although on an underground and informal basis. But they remain effective. This was clear on 16 June when the discipline in the Johannesburg and Pretoria townships achieved up to 90% stay away.

The problem facing the working class movement now, if it is to build on this strength, is not just the massive repression and employers' offensive. There is a burning question of political direction. The African National Congress (ANC) hoped to force negotiations and the dismantling of apartheid by 'making the country ungovernable' in the 1985-7 period. It was hoping that it could win over 'progressives' amongst the white bosses to a democratic settlement. These hopes were always ill founded. The bosses' new offensive should have put the final nail into this strategy's coffin. Yet the ANC still cling to it.

Many in the trade union movement had less trust in the employers, but

still hoped to build the unions in a framework of legality until they were strong enough to form a real workers' opposition to apartheid. That road is also now being closed. The first phase of the new bosses' offensive has been met with militant resistance.

That resistance must be built upon. The black South African workers must take a new road, the road of socialist revolution. This means fighting to commit the unions to socialist politics and to opposing the cross class alliance advanced by the ANC.

Solidarity

It means posing the need for political strikes against the regime and solidarity strikes in defiance of the law. It means arguing for the armed defence of township and workers' organisations and strikes. It means welding together a workers' party—openly where possible and underground where necessary—around a revolutionary programme for working class seizure of power.

This is a difficult road. It will require courage and sacrifice. For this very reason every worker in Britain must fight to win the labour movement here to the most far reaching solidarity possible.

- ◆ Long live COSATU!
- ◆ Down with the anti union laws, emergency rules and banning orders!
- ◆ Down with the apartheid state!

FREE NELSON MANDELA!
FREE MOSES MAYEKISO!
FREE THE SHARPEVILLE SIX!

NELSON MANDELA has spent the prime of his life in jail. His extraordinary reserves of commitment and courage have meant that he reaches seventy with his spirit uncrushed.

That commitment was never more clearly demonstrated than by his response to Botha's offer of freedom in 1985 in return for Mandela renouncing the ANC and its armed struggle. 'I cannot and will not give any undertaking in a time when I am not yet free. I will remain an outlawed South African.'

The South African regime survives only through massive repression. An estimated 2,500 activists are still detained. Thousands more languish in apartheid prisons, convicted for trade union and political activity. The death sentence is regularly meted out to young militants who take up the armed struggle. Now the regime intends to hang the Sharpeville Six; not for killing collaborators, but for being associated with unknown youths who did.

Meanwhile, the Alexandra detainees, including metalworkers union president Moses Mayekiso, still face the likelihood of long sentences. The regime wants to stifle the voice of this generation of leaders as it tried to silence Mandela's.

A huge responsibility rests on the shoulders of the international workers' movement. Mandela's birthday should be the occasion for mass action to force his release and the release of all the political prisoners.

We must review the call for workers' sanctions especially if Botha refuses to commute the death sentence on the Sharpeville Six. The clampdown on the South African black unions and anti-apartheid organisations means that their continuing struggle goes unreported. All the more need for workers' organisations internationally to keep South Africa in the forefront of their campaigns, to keep open every possible link with the black trade unions.

Kick Kinnock while he's down!

A SERIES of events last month exposed the cracks behind the gloss of Neil Kinnock's leadership of the Labour Party. The TGWU refused to endorse any of the candidates for the Labour leadership. Kinnock publicly ditched Labour's unilateralist policy on a TV interview. He then attacked everyone who called it a change. He then changed his position back again!

This pirouette lost Kinnock his defence spokesman, a lot of credibility and the confidence of one of his key union backers, Ron Todd of the TGWU. Following Davies' resignation and Kinnock's humiliating U-turn, the Parliamentary Labour Party has been seething with rumour and recrimination. 'Kinnock must go' has been the whispered battlecry of the Labour hard right.

Kinnock's leadership has run aground because it is attempting the impossible. He is trying to adapt Labour to the so called realities of Thatcherism—i.e. to embrace chunks of her market and popular capitalism orientated policies and rid the party of its trade union dominated image.

He doesn't want to break with the unions altogether—as Owen had—but rather to prove to the bosses that he could tame them and win them around to a sort of 'social Thatcherism'.

At the same time he set about convincing the unions and the 'soft-left' that nothing was changing. Predictably it was Labour's unilateralist nuclear disarmament policy which revealed him as an emperor without a stitch of political clothing.

Unilateralism is the policy of the major trade unions and most of the constituency parties. It reflects millions of workers' understandable desire to avoid being nuked out of existence. But there is no chance of the British ruling class even letting Labour into office committed to dismantling its powerful nuclear arsenal. So Kinnock's major remaining task was to push through a rejection of unilateralism.

The mixture of arrogant confidence and downright ineptness with which he tried to carry through this task has caused him a whole number of problems. They are problems that reflect the contradictions lodged within his whole project for adapting Labour to Thatcherite 'reality'.

It is easy to forget, given Kinnock's record of witch-hunting and scabbing, that he was originally the left half of the 'dream ticket'. This was a compromise engineered by the Labour right and centre to ensure they did not end up with another Michael Foot. The basis of the 'dream' was that Kinnock would persuade the labour left to see sense, to 're-align' in order to win elections. On economic policy the right's 'dream' is already coming true, with the Labour left's nationalisers, planners and anti-Europeans now an isolated rump.

On defence Kinnock has signally failed to deliver. His two weeks as a multilateralist produced so many cracks in the 're-aligned' left—most importantly the warning from Todd and the T&G—that Kinnock 'bottled out'.

The disarray of the Labour leadership presents an important chance for the Benn/Heffer campaign to break out of its marginalisation. A campaign that went for Kinnock's jugular could begin to drive a wedge into the 're-aligned' left. Thousands of Labour Party activists and trade union members have gone along with Kinnock because it seemed there was no alternative. If Kinnock was being challenged by leaders with a record of struggle, a concrete strategy for action now against the Tories and a real organisational network there would be a chance of convincing them otherwise.

But the Benn/Heffer campaign has proved incapable of meeting that challenge. Benn's chosen battleground with Kinnock is the world of socialist principles. His chosen method of fighting is swapping platitudes. His chosen method of organisation was shown at the Chesterfield Socialist Conference. Here delegates were herded into 'workshop discussions' for a leisurely debate about 'new policies' for Labour. The question of how these policies were to be implemented, what to do in the face of state and financial opposition to them was never addressed by the organisers.

Kinnock's demoralised wavering and the Labour left's inability to utilise it shows up the chronic lack of direction that exists for every wing of reformism.

Kinnock cannot effectively fight Thatcher because he is fighting on her political terrain—the market as guarantee of freedom and practice. And while we continue to demand that Benn and Heffer fight Kinnock vigorously and on the basis of a class campaign, the signs are that they have already accepted the terrain of battle dictated by Kinnock. The invitation to Benn to speak at the ASLEF conference has not heralded a turn to the unions, to the rank and file at all.

The crisis of direction in all wings of reformism shows with absolute clarity, the need for a new revolutionary leadership in the British working class.

'Marxism and unilateralism' see page 7

Children of the Thatcher revolution

by Mark Hoskisson

'Hooliganism' is now the number one media buzz word. The TV and papers are full of stories about rural riots, football riots and even hippy riots. Amateur sociologists among the football commentators were quick to identify the underlying cause: drink. They had an equally simple solution: repression.

The Tory Sports Minister, Colin Moynihan was interviewed more times than Bobby Robson. His message was always the same—football hooliganism is England's shame, more law and order is the only way to stop it. They already have the video cameras to spy on spectators in grounds, the membership schemes that make buying tickets for a game more complicated than claiming benefit from the DHSS and, of course, the ban on drink in the grounds. Now even more restrictive measures are being planned.

No worker can condone the anti-social behaviour that football hooligans are more than capable of. But we are not in favour of calling for more law and order to deal with it. The law is the bosses' law—framed and interpreted by their representatives in Parliament and the courts. The order is imposed by a police force that is monolithic in its anti-working class attitudes and practice.

So what do we say about the army of youth who engaged in battles with rival fans and German police in Dusseldorf, Stuttgart and Frankfurt?

First, that they were engaged in a privatised version of the kind of activity carried out regularly by the British Army 'for Queen and country'. Second, that their heads were stuffed full of the very same patriotic garbage that is the daily theme of Thatcherism. Third, that their excessive drinking has provided the profits of Thatcher's friends in the brewing industry for years, and through that a hefty portion of Tory Party funds. Every aspect of the behaviour the ruling class condemns is a product of the Thatcher years.

For years England's support (as compared to say Scotland's in the traditional end of season clash) was of a sombre, muted variety. Patriotism in the 1970s tended to be felt mainly towards clubs. Hooligan battles tended, therefore, to be overwhelmingly an inter-club—that is an inter-region affair. Of course this regional chauvinism was not somehow better or more quaint than the xenophobic sentiments expressed by England's hooligan battalions. On the contrary, it paved the way for rabid nationalism precisely by fuelling the idea that 'people who are not from around here' are legitimate targets of attack. Regional chauvinism is one of the many methods that capitalist society uses to divide sections of the working class against each other.

It is the 1980s which have seen it channelled into vicious racist and nationalist forays overseas. So too have the 80s been the decade of the professional 'firms'—well paid, often white collar workers in their 20s with Thatcherite jobs and fascist politics. The 1982 World Cup in Spain was a landmark in the rise of English football violence abroad. The English fans had a perfect model

to copy in the British Army's recent 'dago bashing' exercise in the Malvinas War. The events in Germany are a continuation of this aggressive nationalist hooliganism.

The gutter press has outdone even Jimmy Hill in the hypocrisy stakes. The Sun wrung its hands about the 'violence', the 'thugs', then carried the headline: 'World War 3'. The same paper is littered with references to 'frogs', 'krauts' and 'dirty Arabs'.

So while the Thatcherites, in haughty and essentially anti-working class terms, condemn the behaviour of the hooligans, they are avoiding their own responsibility for that behaviour. Their 'revolution' with its devastating impact on Britain's cities, their daily propaganda in favour of a culture of greed and competitive individualism, and most of all their frenzied nationalism have all played their part in creating a small layer of youth within the working class that uses football as the focus for violence.

These youth see themselves as part of Thatcher's patriotic army defending England's honour abroad (little wonder the gangs teamed up with members of the British Army of the Rhine in a combined operation to smash up Frankfurt's pubs). In such circumstances it is not difficult for extreme right wing, racist and fascist ideas to flourish. Ruud Gullit, the black Dutch player, was subjected to systematic 'monkey chants' in one match and one match alone—England versus Holland. The racists made themselves heard every time he touched the ball. Fascist propaganda was openly being circulated amongst English fans. Some of the notorious 'firms' that operate in British clubs—the Chelsea Headhunters being one—have organised links with the National Front and the British National Party.

How do we fight this menace? There are two ways of doing this. Inside the working class at large we have to develop a consistent class struggle practice that can harness the energy and fighting spirit

of youth to progressive causes. The young miners sporting Sheffield Wednesday colours and the young printers who went to Millwall in the afternoon and stewarded Wapping pickets at night show that football supporters are not a single mass of potential fascists.

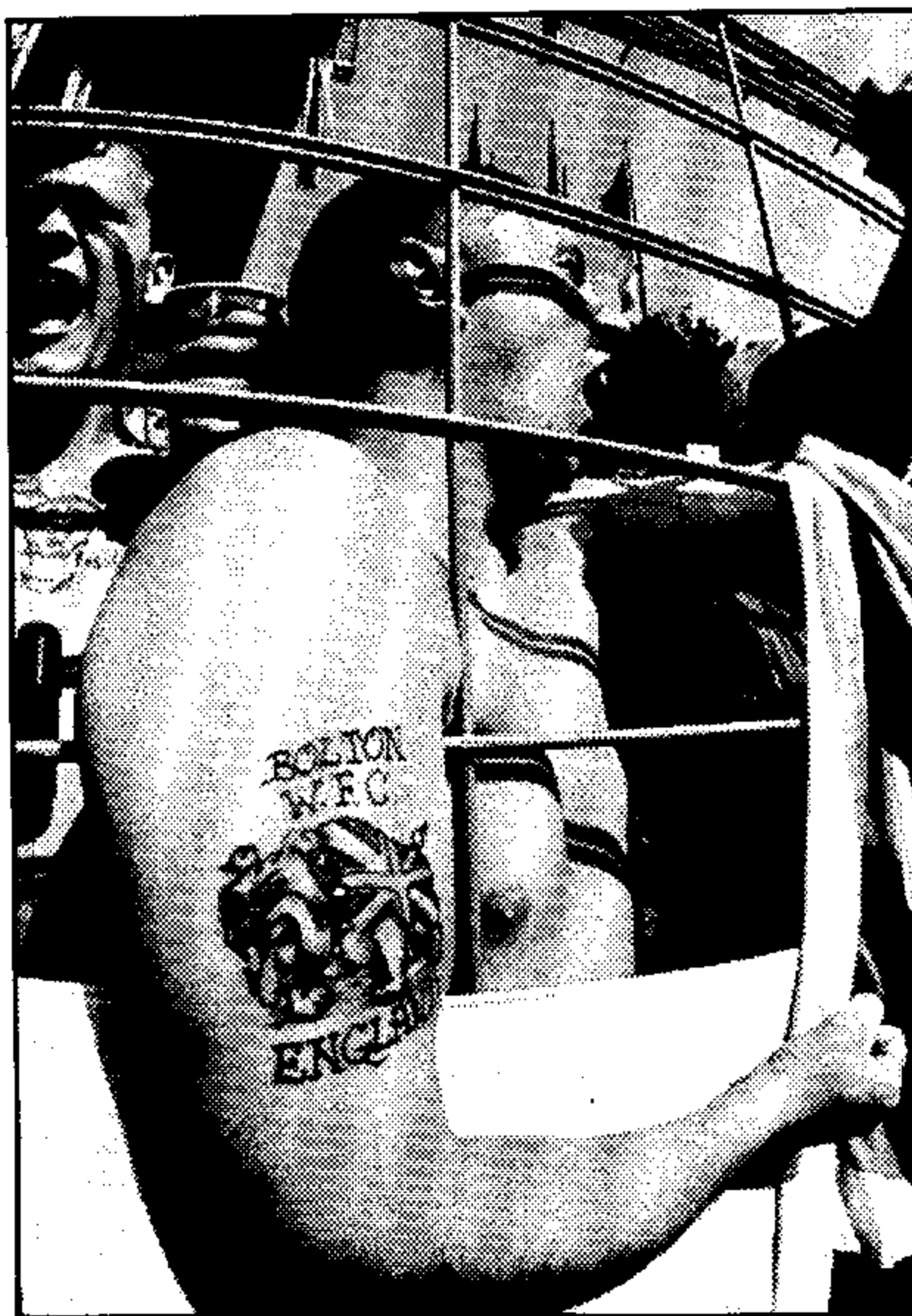
Here were youth whose loyalties to their club were transcended to a large extent by a loyalty to their class. At the same time the workers' movement must fight to combat every expression of regionalism or nationalism inside the working class. When southern fans wave five pound notes at Geordie crowds, when visiting supporters treat London supporters to choruses of 'you dirty cockney bastards' they sow the seeds of defeat for their own struggle.

The law and order lobby ranges from Jimmy Hill—who from the comfort of the commentary box protests that the hooligans have 'nothing to do with football'—through to Moynihan and Thatcher. They want more repression in the grounds, pure and simple. The labour movement must not make common cause with them. In the absence of a mass workers' sports movement that could—and in the future must—destroy the regional and national rivalries that flow from sport under capitalism, measures must be taken around the grounds.

One starting point would be for labour movement organised propaganda and street meetings on match day aimed against racism. The casual racism that leads to the barracking of black players must be eradicated through systematic campaigning around the grounds. Where fascists try to organise at the grounds the labour movement must organise to physically smash them. And, given that many trade unionists go to matches every week the labour movement should organise its own groups of stewards who can verbally if possible, physically if necessary, prevent mindless violence breaking out or give the gang members who cause trouble a lasting lesson in labour movement discipline. At the same time such groups could protect fans from unprovoked attacks by the police—a not infrequent occurrence, especially for visiting fans.

We should also fight for a major improvement in the ground facilities. In many grounds, the conditions you have to watch the match in are pretty brutalising. This means taking on the big business interests who run football for profit and could not really care less about their fans.

All of these measures recognise that it is amongst the fans themselves—organised through the labour movement—that trouble can be stopped. And they are measures that must be counterposed to the Tories' plans. Their proposals on drink are anti-working class. They do not apply to club directors. They will not apply to the champagne swilling toffs at Ascot or Henley. But the key thing is for the workers' movement itself to wake up and start resisting Thatcher. There is something worth fighting for: it is the overthrow of capitalism, but only a revolutionary strategy can rally the mass of impatient and angry working class youth to this worthwhile cause. ■



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Fund Appeal

This month we reached our target of £5,000. In fact we surpassed it. Our thanks to readers and supporters in Cardiff - £30, Coventry - £93, Glasgow - £10, Leeds - £45, Liverpool - £35.92, E London - £182, N London £30, S London - £80, Southampton - £27.50, Stoke - £52 and £50 from a reader in France. This brings the month's total to £635.42 taking the grand total for this fund to £5,017.58. Thanks to everyone. Next month we start a new fund drive.



Scabherder Hammond—drive him out!

Expel EETPU

Workers Power has argued for years that Hammond's EETPU should be booted out of the TUC. David Green looks at their impending suspension and asks: Where now for the left in the union?

ON WEDNESDAY 22nd June, the General Council of the TUC gave Eric Hammond's EETPU two weeks' notice of suspension from the TUC. The reason given was the unions refusal to observe an order of the TUC Disputes Committee to withdraw from two single-union no-strike deals.

But no one should be fooled by this into thinking that the TUC has signalled opposition to these deals in general. The fact that the basic right to strike is being sold in return for recognition is not what bothers the trade union bureaucrats. Several of Hammond's most vociferous critics have been signing 'sweetheart' deals. Ken Gill's Manufacturing, Science and Finance union (MSF) entered into a 'beauty contest' alongside other unions—including EETPU—competing for a single union deal at Star Electronics in Ebbw Vale. The GMB has been making single union deals at the same time as fighting Hammond with words at the TUC.

In these deals, the bureaucrats are selling themselves to the bosses as the people who can ensure industrial peace in return for more membership subscriptions. These are no strike deals by another name. As the T&G's new recruitment proposals state:

'We must reaffirm our image as a business-like and influential partner in industrial relations which employers know they can deal with. This is essential to developing recognitions on new sites.' (our emphasis)

The real reason for the suspension is that the EETPU have not played the game. In signing the deals at Orion Electronics and Christian Salvesen they incurred the enmity of other union leaders angry at the 'un-

fair competition' they were facing. At Orion the T&G had members prior to EETPU signing the deal and there had even been a stoppage in support of T&G recognition! The last straw for the General Councils was Hammond's defiance of TUC arbitration, vowing to continue the no-strike deals 'even if that means breaking every rule in the TUC book'. Hammond has been punished not for class treachery ('let he who is without sin cast the first stone') but for refusing to abide by the rules of the bureaucratic club. As the GMB stated in the Financial Times on the 21 June:

'the main complaint against the EETPU is that it has refused to comply.'

Hammond's scab outfit should have been kicked out of the TUC years ago. The reason is clear enough—they are a yellow, company union. In September 1984 at the height of the miners' strike Hammond announced his intention to ignore the TUC resolution calling for a ban on moving or handling scab coal. By Autumn 1985 EETPU was recruiting and training scabs in preparation for Murdoch's move to Wapping. Throughout 1986 Hammond was central to News International's scab-herding operation earning the hatred of the strikers and the fulsome praise of the bosses for his efforts.

The EETPU have not only been allowed to get away with this renunciation of the most basic principles of trade unionism but have been given a free hand to push their brand of class collaboration within the TUC. Despite condemnation of EETPU's role in the Wapping dispute at the TUC's September 1986 Congress, nothing whatsoever was done to discipline them.

On the contrary, they have since acted as trailblazers for other unions in adopting the methods of US trade unionism—financial services, credit cards, insurance and banking. It is therefore no surprise that in the typed transcript of Willis' speech that would have been given to the EETPU conference (if Hammond hadn't cancelled his invitation!) he says: 'I do not wish to dwell at length on the Wapping affair'. To have done so would only have emphasised Willis' criminal inaction.

Even today, EETPU remains part of the TUC. Notice of suspension is not enough. They should be expelled immediately.

But not all EETPU members are scabs. A militant minority exists that wants to prevent Hammond using their union as the core of a new scab union federation. Many support the oppositional paper *Flashlight*, which decided on 25 June to campaign for a No vote in the EETPU ballot on the leadership's attitude to the TUC.

This last ditch attempt to rally opposition to the scab leadership is absolutely correct. But there can be little hope now of overturning Hammond. When COHSE was expelled from the TUC for complying with Heath's anti-union laws, it provided a massive spur to the left in overturning the existing right wing leadership. The same determination is needed now—but the expulsion comes too late to give the left a chance of saving EETPU for the working class. Whether the end product is forming an electricians section of an existing union or an alternative electricians union affiliated to the TUC cannot be predicted at this stage. But a split with Hammond is unavoidable, and militants in the EETPU should not flinch from it.

Merger mania

by an MSF member

'BY THE 1990s there will be three or four big general unions potentially competing for members.' Such is the vision of the unions' future held by GMB leader John Edmonds. And if the drive towards mergers leading to the creation of yet more general unions continues his words may well come to pass.

So far this year NALGO and NUPE's conferences have decided to support the principle of a merged union. COHSE are discussing whether to get in on the act. The AEU and EETPU continue to make mating calls to one another despite the likely departure from the TUC by the electricians. Even the scab-herding UDM have tried to offset their falling membership rolls by trying to organise the clergy in their ranks!

The merger strategy is one of the trade union bureaucracy's answers to the many problems they are facing under Thatcher. And like all their answers it is designed to avoid class struggle policies for the unions altogether. The most immediate advantage of mergers is that they can compensate for the loss of members suffered over the last several years. Latest figures do suggest that the rate of this decline is slowing down, but this is cold comfort considering the more favourable employment trends that exist at present as compared with the early 1980s. The overall density of unionisation in the workforce is continuing to fall.

The experience of the ASTMS and TASS merger last year (which led to the formation of the white collar giant, the MSF) has whetted the appetite of other union bosses. The MSF has grown by 22,000 members since its formation and Jenkins and Gill retain their control of the union. It looks like a good bureaucratic model to follow.

Another advantage that the TUC tops can see in mergers is that the bigger the general union the bigger the block vote in both the TUC and the Labour Party. In terms of influence and brokerage within the labour movement this is an important objective for the union leaders.

The mergers that are being carried through are not enhancing democracy in the unions. They are rather strengthening the grip of the bureaucrats. If the EETPU merged with the AEU it would be the AEU rule book (in formal terms one of the most democratic in the TUC) that would be thrown in the bin.

Worse, a smaller number of huge general unions, organising workers in

many disparate industries, would lead to fatal divisions at a workplace level. Unions would engage in 'beauty contests' aimed at tempting potential recruits with promises of financial services packages, cheap holidays and so on, and at tempting the bosses with single union and no-strike deals. The potential for solidarity and the ending of sectionalism would be dissipated. For example a fusion of NALGO and NUPE could put cleaners and nurses in the same union branch as their managers.

Opposition to mergers that create more general unions, however, does not mean that militants should rest content with this 'great movement of ours' as it is currently organised and led. We are not against mergers as such. We are for specific mergers that lead to the creation of industrial unions—unions that embrace all the workers, irrespective of trade, in a single industry.

The need for industrial unions is demonstrated in nearly every strike. Take the health dispute last winter. The existence of different unions representing health workers weakened the ability to resist the Tories' onslaught on the NHS. COHSE called a day of action. NUPE called one for a different day. The result was confusion and a divided protest. And, the leaders skillfully exploited inter-union rivalries to cover over their own misleadership by blaming the other union for the weakened impact of the action. The separate strikes of car workers were weakened in the same way.

An industrial union could—providing of course it was won to class struggle policies and led by militant class fighters—cut through such rivalries, eradicating sectional divisions and strengthening the chances of victory by unifying the workforce in every conflict with the bosses.

With the bosses and bureaucrats pushing for more and more single union deals and with general unions being touted as the best competitive vehicles for winning members in the framework of such deals the fight for industrial unions is becoming ever more important in the British working class. In the remaining union conferences, at the TUC and, most importantly inside the plants and workplaces smitten by sectional divisions and inter-union rivalries the genuinely felt need for unity expressed by many workers must be harnessed into a campaign around the slogan—*One Industry, One Union!*

Nalگو conference

by Ann Wackett Nalگو Delegate (personal capacity)

The cold winds of New Realism blew through the 1988 Nalگو annual conference held between 13 and 17 June. Nalگو members in the electricity and water industry are now facing privatisation. In local government, thousands of jobs have been lost through vacancy freezes implemented by Labour councils. The combined effects of ratecapping, privatisation and the Poll Tax mean that redundancies threaten many of these workers.

The NEC's response was to repeat the refrain of Kinnock and Willis—that no serious fight should be mounted against Thatcher. Delegates were told to comply with Tory laws at all costs, and that the way to fight is through 'broad-based campaigns' to win over 'public opinion'.

NEC resolutions on privatisation said nothing about the need to take industrial action. A resolution passed in the annual group meeting of water workers did call for 'industrial action on specific issues'—but was hedged by a commitment not to break the law.

The NEC and National Local Government Committee argued successfully against non-compliance with anti-local government legislation and against industrial action to fight the cuts. Conference policy on non-cooperation with privatisation was overturned in favour of seeking 'in-house agreements'.

Given the terms of the Local Government Bill, this will lead to wide scale deterioration in pay and conditions, and to many job losses.

However there was a militant minority. A resolution calling for non-compliance with Section 28, including support for members deemed to be breaking the law, was passed overwhelmingly. Conference agreed a policy of non-cooperation with Employment Training pending 'detailed advice from the NEC'. Both the pay offer to local government workers of 4.8% and the offer to health workers of 5.5% were rejected and a campaign of industrial action is to be launched in the health sector.

Where arguments for action were won, the rank-and-file must demand the NEC campaigns for these policies to be implemented, and backs members taking action.

Non-compliance with Section 28 and Employment Training must be organised. Militants must launch a campaign now for all-out action to eradicate low pay.

Strike action will be needed to beat back the attacks in all areas of the public sector. They will need to be organised against opposition from the NEC. The task of building a rank-and-file movement in Nalگو has never been so urgent.

FORTY YEARS AFTER it was founded, the NHS is in crisis. That crisis has not been solved by the extra £1 billion the Tories released in December, or by the £749 million nurses' pay award. Beds, wards and hospitals continue to close because there is not enough money and too few staff. The waiting list is 688,000 and growing. New advances in medicine and technology go unused through lack of funds. Meanwhile the private contractors are destroying health and safety standards in the laundries, wards and kitchens.

The NHS crisis appears as a funding crisis. By the beginning of 1988 Health Authorities were £150 million in the red. The new 'financial year' has masked this shortfall but every level of NHS management expects the crisis to return later in the year.

But the level of spending required to meet demands placed on the NHS is enormous—50% extra according to one Tory health expert. Because of this the Tories are coming to realise that nothing short of the destruction of the NHS as a free service will resolve the crisis on the bosses' terms. They are quietly preparing to blow apart the compromise the NHS is based on: a compromise between workers' health needs and the profits of the employers.

The most drastic action they are considering is the introduction of compulsory charges for all treatment and a compulsory health insurance scheme to ensure it is workers who pay for the NHS crisis.

To resist this massive attack on our health and living standards, the working class too needs a radical answer to the NHS crisis. We too need a strategy for resolving the contradiction between profit and need that is lodged at the heart of the NHS. It must be a strategy for resolving this contradiction in our favour.

The NHS was formed on 5 July 1948. It was hailed as the centrepiece of Labour's 'socialist' programme and steered through parliament by Aneurin Bevan, the hero of the Labour left. But in creating the NHS Bevan made a whole series of compromises with the capitalists.

Resistance

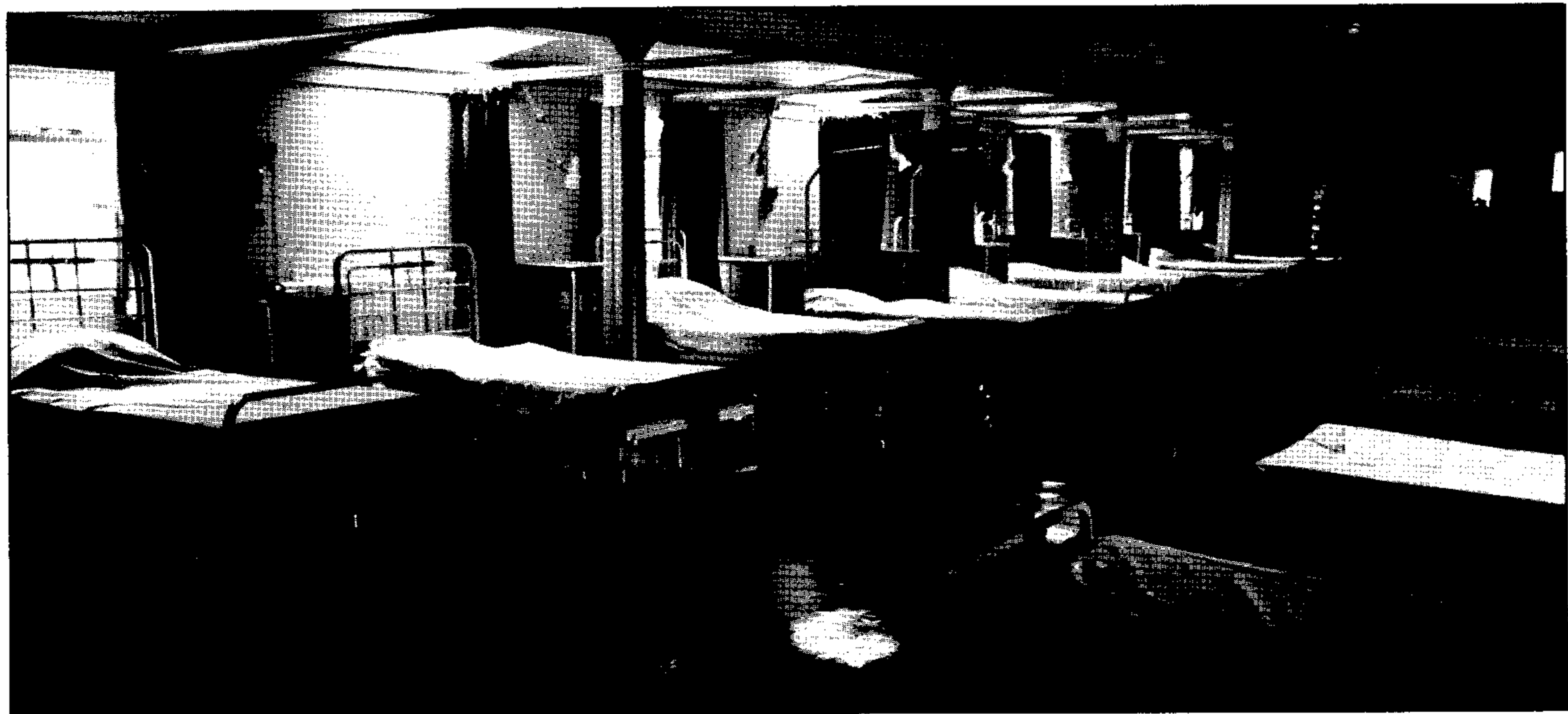
First, in the face of a campaign of resistance by the British Medical Association, Bevan conceded doctors the right to treat private patients within the NHS. He ruled out the introduction of a '100% salaried service' leaving doctors in hospitals and general practice to levy fees alongside wages. Although Bevan's Bill ruled out the buying and selling of GP practices he paid out once and for all compensation to the tune of £66 million. Summing up his compromise, Bevan said he'd 'stuffed the doctors' mouths with pound notes'.

Much more important in the long term was Bevan's compromise on control of the NHS. Against Labour Conference policy Bevan rejected elected local authority control of the NHS in favour of appointed local health authorities. Justified in terms of 'centralised planning', this ensured that NHS management was a bureaucratic rubber stamp mechanism. This was to be used with deadly effectiveness by the health cutting Labour and Tory governments of the 1970s and 80s. Not even trade union bureaucrats, let alone rank and file NHS workers, were allowed onto the local boards. The guaranteed places for consultants ensured the sectional interest of the top doctors continued to influence the direction of the NHS.

Bevan's third compromise was on charges. Although Labour policy was for a 100% free service, Bevan's bid did not rule out prescription and other charges. By 1951 the first charges were introduced, by the 'socialist' government of Bevan, Atlee, and co.

The last main compromise with the profiteers, and the biggest, was the refusal to nationalise the drug and supply companies. Not only did this leave them to profit from the NHS, it guaranteed an ever expanding market to the drug monopolies. Using

The NHS is forty years old this month. While Labour and trade union leaders spend the anniversary celebrating the derailment of the health workers' strikes the Tories are planning a major assault on free health care. *Paul Mason* argues that the working class needs its own radical solution to the NHS crisis.



Closed orthopaedic ward in Shropshire

John Harris (IFL)

Why is the NHS in crisis?

every trick in the monopoly capitalist book firms like ICI, La Roche, EMI, Fisons etc. have price-fixed and 'patented' their way to mega-profits.

Today the NHS spends £1.6 billion a year on drugs. Out of this, La Roche for example expect a return on investment between 320% and 5,000%!

Bevan's compromises with capitalism were not the result of corruption, lack of resolve or confusion. They arose out of the very nature of the NHS as a reform granted by capital-



Aneurin Bevan

ism. And they were the inevitable result of Labour's strategy of limiting working class advance to such reforms under capitalism.

Ever since the 1840s, when the Factory Acts limited the length of the working day, the capitalist state has been used to suppress the working of the profit motive in one area or another in order to ensure the survival of the profit system as a whole. So it was not a sudden conversion to socialism, but the economic need for a healthy workforce that won the Tories and Liberals to broad agreement over the need for a free health service.

But the creation of the NHS, like all reforms, was not granted by the ruling class simply deciding in the abstract that it would be a good idea to

have a health service. Its final form was shaped by the class struggle. And while private practice, appointed boards, the emphasis on 'patching up' rather than preventative medicine etc, represented victories for capitalism in that struggle, the creation of a basically free service linked to need represented a gain for workers. It was the result of mass pressure, of working class aspirations for social progress, expressed in the landslide vote for Labour in 1945.

From the very moment health spending was, to an important extent, freed from the stranglehold of the profit motive it rocketed, becoming immediately a major drain on public expenditure and thereby on the profits of the whole ruling class. By 1951 Health spending far outstripped Bevan's predictions. Enoch Powell, writing as a health minister in the early 1960s, bemoaned the limitless drain on government spending:

'There is virtually no limit to the amount of medical care an individual is capable of absorbing.'

It is the contradiction between this drain on profits and the absolute limits on the money capitalists are prepared to pay to secure a basically healthy workforce which propels the bosses to try to claw back this gain. As long as the post war economic boom increased the mass of profits, they could live with the NHS. Once the boom ended the NHS became a key battleground in the struggle to make workers pay for the profit system's crisis.

The 1970s saw Labour introduce the first health cuts, Thatcher continued them. Whatever Thatcher's figures about increased spending the fact that matters is that funding has declined relative to need. To back up the cuts Thatcher introduced a new layer of General Managers in the NHS whose pay is related to cost cutting success!

Alongside the cuts Thatcher brought in privatisation. This had the effect of all but destroying union activity and solidarity in some areas, and allowed both private and 'in-house' managers alike to cut pay and

standards of work.

But as last winter's funding crisis revealed, bone-deep cuts plus privatisation do not in themselves decisively reverse the gain embodied in the NHS.

The solutions advanced by the right wing think-tanks for the Tory third term fall into two camps. On the one hand there are a variety of piecemeal measures culled from Thatcherite ideology but which do not form a really coherent strategy. These include the 'internal market'—buying and selling of operations etc, between health authorities to even up costs and reduce 'inefficiency'; encouraging the growth of private health insurance and private hospitals by giving tax concessions to BUPA members and allowing private hospitals to compete within the 'internal market'; the extension of charges to a much wider layer of treatment including hospital food, overnight stays and countless other services provided in hospitals today.

This whole strategy is based on the idea that introducing market forces 'from below' will gradually transform the NHS into a healthy capitalist enterprise.

Far-sighted

But the more far-sighted Tory politicians, those who see the need to strategically destroy the gain of the NHS, reject this in favour of the outright strategy of compulsory health insurance and the introduction of full blown treatment charges on the US model. Whether or not there is a struggle between the two wings going on behind John Moore's silent 'review of NHS funding', we must prepare to resist any variant of the think-tank proposals.

The key to resisting this attack lies in workers' action. From January to March this year health workers' action on pay and condition could have sparked mass action by workers' outside the NHS in defence of services. The conditions which fuelled the health workers' action have not gone away, despite the pay award. We must

use every opportunity to launch and generalise such action again.

Most of all we need a strategy to fight for over and above interim payments and percentage funding increases. The size of the payments needed for a really adequate NHS mean we will have to strike at the heart of capitalism to achieve them.

Where will the money come from to pay for a decent health service? From the profits of the rich. We should fight for the nationalisation of the drug and supply companies without compensation. All private practice should be abolished; all private hospitals and clinics should be nationalised and integrated into the NHS.

Against the unelected Health Authorities we should fight for workers' control of the NHS. Excluding nurses from the Health Boards in 1946 Bevan asked disdainfully:

'If the nurses are to be consulted, why not also the hospital domestics? The radiotherapists? The physiotherapists and so on?'

He knew, as the bosses know now, that if health workers were given any say in the running of the NHS they would never tolerate the situation which leaves the David Barbers and Matthew Crawfords dying for lack of staff and funds. They would never tolerate the linen shortages that leave patients lying in unchanged beds. They would never tolerate the ward closures, the operation quotas, the patients who are not fully recovered sent home early, all of the conditions which blight their daily working lives at present. Hospital and regional committees of rank and file NHS workers from every section should fight for a consistent veto over management decisions, blocking every measure which puts profit before need.

Defending the NHS today cannot be separated from the fight to transform it. Nationalisation and workers control of every aspect of health provision is the key to that transformation. Until then the NHS will be a service where the health needs of workers are systematically denied by the employers' thirst for profit. ■

Two states No solution

The revolt against Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza continues. It poses once again the question: For what type of state should the Palestinian resistance be fighting? *David Green* examines the question that has occupied the PLO for decades.

IT IS easy to understand what the Palestinian uprising is aimed against: the brutal denial of self-determination for an oppressed people. But for what positive goals have the scores of Palestinian youth died in the current uprising? Above all what kind of state is the resistance struggling to bring into being?

The answer to this question has changed over the years and with it so has the attitude of the PLO to the Jewish population of Palestine and the borders of the proposed state.

Stooges

Prior to the 1967 war the PLO position (as determined by Fatah, the largest faction) was to see the Jews simply as colonial stooges. Consequently, the PLO Charter of 1964 afforded only Jews of Palestinian origin the option to remain in the region following the destruction of Israel, a formulation excluding 95% of the Jewish population.

In 1968 however, Fatah expressed the view that in a democratic Palestine:

'Jews will again live in harmony side by side with... Arab Palestinians.'

This novel argument clearly paved the way for a radically new notion of Palestinian statehood, one which was expressed that year at Fatah's Third Congress which called for:

'A democratic, progressive, non-sectarian state in which Jews, Christians and Muslims would live together in peace and enjoy the same rights.'

This formula in fact was in one sense a progressive break with previously dominant ideas within the resistance. In the 1950s and early 1960s the liberation struggle was led ideologically by pan-Arabist movements such as the Arab Nationalist Movement and later the Arab Liberation Front. In reality these movements reflected the narrow, conservative interests of one or more bourgeois Arab regimes in the area. These regimes used the Palestinian struggle as a Trojan horse for their own annexationist and sometimes anti-Semitic plans.

The PLO's stress on the *Palestinian* and *democratic* character of the state cut against the land grabbing designs of the Arab states, and the stressing of non-sectarianism offset the danger of chauvinism and confessionalism dominating the resistance.

Yet Fatah's insistence on the 'Palestinian-ness' of the struggle created its own problems. Refugees suffering repression under despotic Arab regimes such as the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan were not to be 'diverted' by entering into struggle against them. Despite its formal 'independence' from

the Arab regimes Fatah held to a strict policy of 'non-interference' in their affairs.

This view perfectly expressed the narrow class interests of the Palestinian bourgeoisie of the regional diaspora in places such as Jordan. But it was a deadly snare for the Palestinian workers and peasants. This was tragically underlined when Fatah politically disarmed the semi-insurrectional general strike in Jordan in 1970 (a movement in which the Palestinian refugees—70% of the Jordanian population—were central) and to the massacre of 2-3,000 fighters by forces loyal to King Hussein.

Up until 1973 no tendency in the resistance advocated a Palestinian 'mini-state' on the West Bank and Gaza. Such a proposal was rightly viewed as an unacceptable compromise of the legitimate right of the Palestinians to a state in the whole of Palestine.

In the early years after the 1967 war and Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza the PLO designated all proposals for a mini-state as a plot by imperialism and Zionism to stabilise its rule and end resistance. Arafat argued in 1970: 'We shall oppose the establishment of this state to the last member of the Palestinian people, for if ever such a state is established it will spell the end of the whole Palestinian cause.'

Yet the Jordanian attack on the PLO fighters in 1970 undermined support for a return of the West Bank to Jordanian rule (pre-1967 situation) and the sentiment for a separate state grew within the West Bank. The PDFLP (Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) increasingly articulated the idea of a West Bank 'national authority' as a transitional stage to a liberated zone—free of occupying troops but no longer under Jordanian tutelage.

Despaired

It took the defeat of the Arab states by Israel in the October war of 1973 to bring this idea into the mainstream of PLO thinking. Instead of breaking with the bankrupt Arab national regimes and basing themselves firmly on the Arab workers and peasants of the region, the demoralised PLO leadership despaired of overthrowing the Zionist state and looked to US imperialism to help negotiate a political solution which would involve recognising Israel's right to exist. Arafat's deputy Said Hammami argued after the October war:

'Past decades of enmity do not provide a good ground for an immediate realisation of a state in partnership. I believe that the first step towards that

should be a mutual recognition for the two respective parties.'

It was to be expected that the mini-state proposal should provoke widespread opposition within the PLO. A 'Rejection Front' was formed, led primarily by the PFLP. Against the PDFLP's argument that a 'national authority' would be a transitional step towards the liberation of the whole of Palestine, PFLP leader George Habash insisted that in fact it would lead to the Palestinians being geographically, economically and militarily squeezed by Israel and Jordan. He also insisted correctly that a West Bank state would betray the interests and aspirations of Palestinians from the areas now within the borders of Israel:

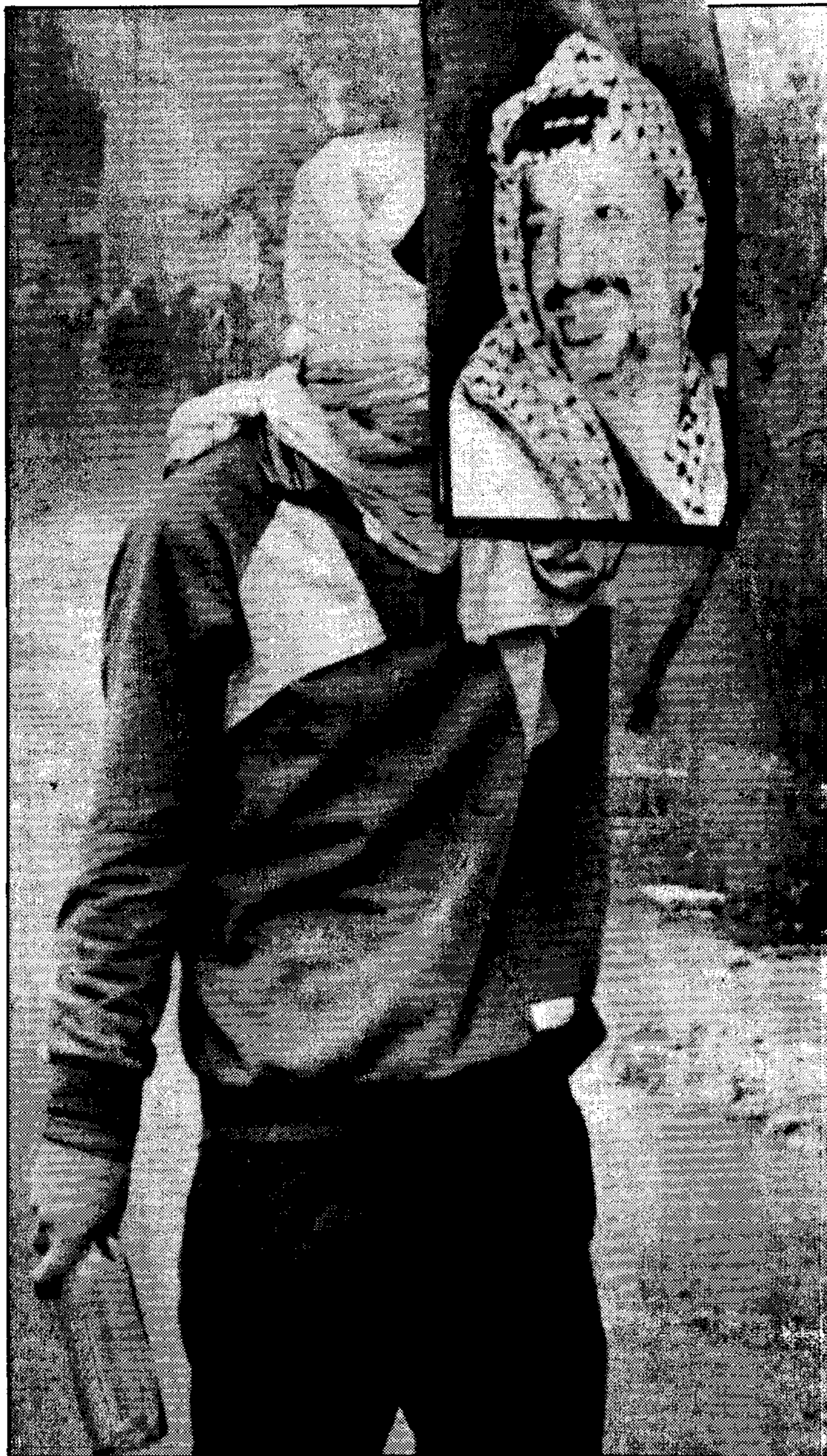
'And the rest of our people? An essential contradiction will exist between the state and the Palestinian masses from the 1948 areas whose vital questions will not be solved by this state.'

Opposition

Indeed refugees from these areas, such as those living in Tel Zaatar, reacted with sustained opposition to the mini-state proposal. Despite several correct criticisms the rejectionists were never able to break with Fatah and the PLO. The fundamental reason for this lay in the shared acceptance with Fatah, the PDFLP and indeed with every other tendency within the PLO of the crowning slogan of the 'Democratic Secular State'.

This slogan is a trap because of its silence on the class character of the state. A capitalist Palestine would without doubt remain cruelly exploited by imperialism while providing an opportunity for collaborators and careerists within the PLO to taste the fruits of office. But crucially the very notion of such a state being a desirable or necessary stage in the liberation of Palestine dictates a strategy which bases itself on forces other than the proletariat and peasantry of the region. Thus Fatah and the PFLP have a shared emphasis on diplomatic manoeuvre and isolated guerrilla actions which are ineffective against the Zionist military machine. An entirely bourgeois slogan demands that bourgeois methods are predominant.

Neither the minimum programme of a mini-state or the maximum programme of a democratic secular state offers the hope of a lasting and just solution for the Palestinians. The proposal for a West Bank state is not a sign of the maturity of the resistance but of its political weakness; a legacy of defeat. What would it solve? The US and Israeli Labour Party are prepared to countenance one on condition that it



Arafat's politics hold back Palestinian fighters

continue to act as a reservoir of cheap labour and a captive market for Israeli goods.

If such a state came into existence through a deal with imperialism and Labour Zionism it would involve the disarming of the resistance, leaving them even more helpless in the face of Zionism. It would leave Israel free to continue to threaten and divide the Arab world and so leave the region prey to imperialist exploitation and oppression. Of course, should a Palestinian West Bank state come into existence as a 'liberated zone' in the teeth of opposition from Zionism, revolutionary communists would block it. But no Trotskyist could take political responsibility for such a project. Our goal is quite different. Our slogan is for a unitary secular workers' state of Palestine.

This slogan affirms all that is positive in Palestinian thought on the issue to date whilst extending it crucially to embrace the question of social revolution. And raising this question points the way to the only means of breaking Israeli-Jewish workers, or at least key sections of them, from the Zionist state.

The events of 1987-88 have confirmed our view that it is the

proletariat, increasing in concentration and strength throughout the Middle East, which holds the key to the destruction of the Zionist state and the liberation of Palestine. Against the maintenance of the racist Zionist state in any form we advance a programme for a revolution based on armed councils of Palestinian workers, fighters, camp-dwellers and peasants, seeking support from those sections of the Israeli Jewish working class that can be won away from identification with imperialist interests, and from the workers of the surrounding Arab nations. In this way the national and democratic revolution can be made permanent

Struggling

The revolution must be made permanent if it is to succeed in achieving its first goal of real national self-determination for *all* Palestinians. The 18% of Israeli Arabs, as well as those in the West Bank are struggling to realise a Palestinian state in all of pre-1947 Palestine.

If this is to happen it must be led by the workers and peasants. But on the morrow of their victory they will be forced to pursue their independent class interests—for expropriation of

the large landowners and businesses. If they do not they will be super-exploited even more intensely than before and this vicious exploitation will be justified by demagogic claims about the need to make sacrifices to build the new nation.

The Palestinian workers and peasants would also need urgently to extend the revolution into the surrounding Arab states, with their stronger working classes and more industrially based and diversified economies. The existence of huge Palestinian refugee communities in these countries makes this struggle all the more possible. A Socialist United States of the Middle East is the political expression of the interdependence of these struggles against imperialism and Zionism. Only a Socialist United States of the Middle East could provide the political framework for obliterating all forms of national oppression in the region.

Out of the youth engaged in the uprising, out of the Jewish progressives who can be broken from left Zionism in the course of opposition to the repression in the West Bank, a Trotskyist vanguard party can and must be built around the perspective of permanent revolution. ■

THE SOCIALIST Workers Party has always made a point of distancing itself from 'orthodox Trotskyism'. Rather than describe itself as a Trotskyist organisation it claims merely to stand in the tradition of Trotsky or to 'stem from' Trotskyism.

The reasons for this are not hard to find. When, in the late 1940s, Tony Cliff's grouping embraced a state-capitalist analysis of the USSR, it began a process of rejecting all the essentials of Trotskyism. Permanent Revolution was revised by Cliff in a manner that afforded the petit-bourgeoisie of certain semi-colonies (India was his favourite example) a historic role in the struggle for 'democracy'. The Transitional Programme, and its entire method were rejected in favour of a strictly militant trade-unionist practice in the class struggle. Trotsky's struggle for a new international party was dismissed as a futile adventure which itself disoriented post-war Trotskyism.

The Cliffites justified their rejection of Trotskyism by pointing to the gross opportunism of the post-war Trotskyists. The International Secretariat of the Fourth International, led by Pablo/Mandel and its rival, the International Committee (of Gerry Healy fame) committed a whole series of political errors. These errors, though, stemmed not from the Trotskyism of these groupings, but from their definite break from it. Unwilling to recognise this, the Cliffites threw out the baby with the bathwater; the writings of the revolutionary leader with the writings of his confused imitators.

Of course the Cliffite groupings (Socialist Review/International Socialists/SWP) have always paid tribute to selected aspects of Trotsky's politics, his grasp of tactics such as the united front, his understanding of fascism, his analysis of the popular front etc. These elements of Trotsky's heritage will, rightly, be praised during the SWP's lectures on the fiftieth anniversary of the FI's foundation. However, the question SWP members must face up to is whether the party's break from the essentials of Trotskyism—in particular the Transitional Programme and its method—has been compensated for by a superior revolutionary practice.

Trampling

Workers Power, having once been a faction inside the IS, is convinced that the SWP are as guilty of trampling on the revolutionary programme as the degenerate centrist fragments of the Fourth International.

We base this on our experience of the SWP's practice in a whole range of major struggles—steel 1980, health 1982, Warrington 1983, miners 1984-5, printers 1986 and health 1988. In each case the SWP has steadfastly refused to raise demands that the workers themselves were not already raising. The SWP refused to give a lead to those workers when they came up against the limitations of both their spontaneous demands (their existing consciousness in other words) and their limited and sectional forms of organisation. In particular in the recent health dispute the SWP opposed steps towards

a solidly based, national rank and file steward's organisation.

The reasons the SWP give for their refusal to fight for the class to take up transitional demands vary. Today it is because of the 'downturn'. In the early 1970s it was because the 'upturn' was automatically transforming workers' consciousness. At root, however, the reason lies in their rejection of Trotsky's (and the healthy Comintern's) programmatic method.

Critique

This shows through clearly in the major books that SWP leaders have written on Trotsky. John Molyneux has written the most serious and extended critique of Trotsky from the point of view of the SWP. He argues that while Trotsky, especially through the experience of 1917, transcended many of the weaknesses of the Second International tradition (as well as incorporating its strengths), there were important residues of this method which left key aspects of Trotsky's politics fatally flawed.

Trotsky's failure to understand the need for a combat party of revolution before 1917, his 'brilliant failure' to grasp the social nature of the USSR under Stalin, his over mechanical attempt to map out all the stages of revolutionary strategy in the Transitional Programme and his inflated view of the prospects for the Fourth International in the 1930s, are all 'rooted in the deterministic interpretation that Trotsky inherited from the leading authorities of the Second International.'

While he was evidently 'permanently inoculated' from fatalism with regard to revolutionary policy after 1917, this 'did not lead to a reassessment of his basic philosophical position which remained determinist and positivist'.

Molyneux, not surprisingly, singles out the Transitional Programme (TP) for attack. It is, he writes 'to a far greater extent than many of Trotsky's other works, . . . both profoundly flawed and historically limited.' The criticisms he raises are themselves 'profoundly flawed'. In the first place he criticises Trotsky's conception of

productive forces in which he states that economic prerequisites for revolution had already 'achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate.' The SWP argue that this was only ever at best half true for the 1930s, that the whole edifice of transitional demands are tied to this view and thus only applicable in a period like the 1930s which was one 'of revolutionary or near revolutionary situations.'

Whilst Trotsky's perspectives were based on the idea that capitalism had now placed absolute limits on the productive forces there was nothing fatalistic about his conclusions. He correctly identified the national limitations on the international economy as the source of World War I and its ensuing revolutionary possibilities, and pinpointed the very same contradiction as the source of two decades of stagnation and the drive to World War II. He wrote 'each nation tried to repulse all the others and to seize the world market for its own purposes. They could not succeed and now we see that capitalist society enters a new stage.'

On the basis of this he postulated only 'socialism or barbarism' as immediate perspectives. Given that one nation, the USA, actually succeeded in 'seizing the world market' there is clearly an error. But it is an error of analysis—the underestimation of the untapped economic potential of the USA—entirely similar to the one committed by Marx and Engels who saw capitalism as exhausted in 1848.

Only once did Trotsky refer to a third possibility of a potential respite for the bourgeoisie. In March, 1938 he argued, 'that is not excluded, but then we will be obliged to realise a strategic retreat.'

Method

The implication of Molyneux's argument is that this 'strategic retreat' would have to involve abandoning the transitional method for the old maximum/minimum programme, tailored for a period of extended social peace.

This ignores the whole history of the development of transitional demands and action programmes. It was precisely in a period of strategic retreat—after World War I and the ebb of the revolutionary tide—that the Comintern elaborated transitional demands. After World War II and its thwarted revolutionary aftermath it was necessary to outline a new perspective, and refocus the transitional programme to that perspective.

The new situation did not destroy the validity of the Transitional

THE SWP TROTSKY

From Maxism 88 this month through to the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International the British Socialist Workers Party will be organising countless meetings and lectures on Trotsky and Trotskyism. Keith Hassell explains why the SWP's criticisms of Trotsky are misplaced and how they fall into repeated errors as a result of their break with Trotskyism.

Programme as a whole. This was because despite the 'long boom', imperialism could not escape and throw into reverse all the features of the imperialist epoch. It remained one of wars and revolutions in which the uneven and combined development of world capitalism produced a whole series of crises in a whole series of countries—China, Korea, Algeria, Hungary, Indo-China, Indonesia, etc.

Crisis

In each case transitional action programmes focused on the immediate crisis facing the workers and peasants of those countries and directing their struggles towards the establishment of working class power was essential.

Even in the imperialist west during that period of long boom transitional demands and method did not lose their validity. The SWP claim that transitional demands do not strike 'at the foundations of the bourgeois regime', as Trotsky's Programme envisaged, if the situation is stable. For the SWP the alternative as expressed by Molyneux is:

'In struggles in non-revolutionary situations (for example, a strike) it is more important for revolutionaries to find demands that fit the situation, and therefore actually carry the struggle forward, than it is to search for demands which, in words, lead to the conquest of power, and in reality lead to irrelevance.'

It is true that the Transitional Programme was written for a period in which the convulsive crises of the 1930s and the imminence of world war raised the possibility that partial struggles would rapidly lead to a situation of general-

ised working class action and to the question of political power being posed repeatedly in a number of countries. In these situations the whole range of demands from the factory committee right up to the workers' militia and workers' government could be expected to become a key question of agitation by the revolutionaries.

But outside of these situations the demands that need to be advanced agitational still need to include ones that are imbued with the central method of the TP, namely, workers' control. This is what Trotsky meant in the TP when he says

'The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution.'

Caricature

The SWP caricature this statement from Trotsky. Not infrequently they accuse us of raising the dictatorship of the proletariat at a time when an all out strike is necessary. This caricature betrays a very dangerous short-sightedness on the part of the SWP. It fails to grasp that the fight, even for partial elements of workers' control in a particular struggle, serves as a bridge between the struggle for reforms and a revolutionary struggle against capital.

Nor does Trotsky, as the SWP imply, counterpose partial demands and transitional demands. For Trotsky immediate demands fought for by revolutionary tactics could become the starting point for winning the masses to broader transitional demands: 'Every local, partial, economic demand must be an approach to a general demand in our transitional programme'.

And the fight for that demand can take forward the political and organisational struggle of the working class, even if it does not lead to mass revolutionary consciousness at once.

Nationalisation

Take the example of nationalisation in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. We know it was not socialism; we know it was undertaken to rescue ailing capitalist industries. Revolutionaries would have emphasised agitational the question of workers' control over all aspects of the job (hiring and firing, safety, speed of work etc) and no compensation to the bosses. In other words it was possible, through encroaching on the rule of capital to use workers' control and the demand to make the bosses pay (by refusing them handouts) to prepare for future battles when renewed crisis made concessions and compromises less and less tenable for the bosses.

The SWP's refusal to adopt such a measure actually leads them, not Trotsky or ourselves,

to counterpose partial and transitional demands. Trotsky wrote: 'The Fourth International does not discard the programme of the old 'minimal' demands to the degree which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective.'

Connect

This is what the SWP will not do. They never connect the struggle for partial demands with a revolutionary perspective based on the fight for workers' control. Rather they limit their demands to ones aimed at generalising working class support for the existing level of struggle and the spontaneously arising demands. It is implied in the SWP's critique of the Transitional Programme that they see some use for transitional demands in revolutionary or near revolutionary situations. But in fact they do not. Why? Because as Molyneux indicates, 'quoting Gramsci favourably, it is possible 'to foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the struggle.'

This is nothing less than a rejection of the scientific nature of the Marxist programme and the leading role of the party in drawing it up. If the party is the memory of the class then the programme codifies the general experience of the class internationally and applies it in any situation.

Historic

The Transitional Programme's historic merit was that it outlined the major tactics that the working class will have to deploy on the road to power. It did not and could not detail every minor conjunctural demand or concrete expression of these general tactics.

In rejecting the whole programmatic method of Trotskyism it is the SWP who lapse back into a form of 'Second Internationalism'. They fall back into the rigid separation of minimum and maximum demands. At the moment this takes the form of combining a purely trade unionist practice with general propaganda for socialist ideas. The SWP are well known for devoting time and energy to providing organisational solidarity for workers who are in struggle.

The SWP see it as the key task of the revolutionary party to generalise support for that struggle on the basis of the existing level of demands. In the Great Strike of 1984/85 they argued that the way forward was primarily in terms of building bigger and better pickets to fight for the demands of the strike. The limited nature of these demands—limited by the NUM leadership—was never questioned. Only the leadership's failure to build bigger pickets was attacked.

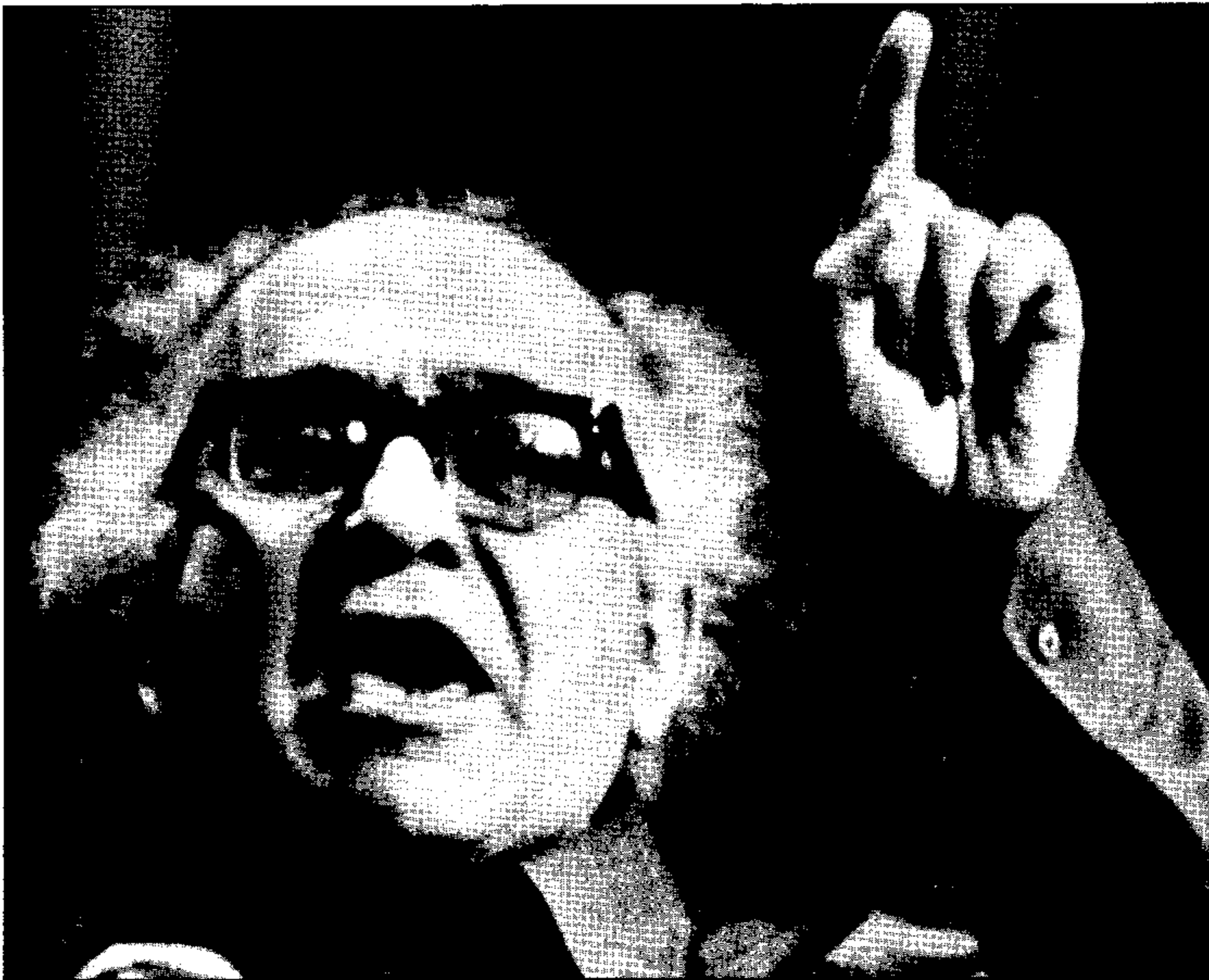
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The SWP justify such an approach by arguing that there is an inherent logic in the class struggle which turns economic struggles into political ones through the intervention of the state into economic battles (use of police, courts, laws etc). Duncan Hallas another SWP leader who has written a book on Trotsky has said 'This political struggle can be carried through only on the basis, in the first place, of economic struggles, of sectional struggles. No magic general slogans can replace clear, realistic and con-

crete leadership in these sectional struggles.'

The SWP are right to suggest that workers' struggles can and do give rise to 'spontaneous' political consciousness and are a key point of departure for revolutionaries seeking to win worker militants to a revolutionary party.

They are dead wrong to suggest that the political struggle emanating from this will be automatically revolutionary. As the miners' strike showed only too well, the spontaneous political class consciousness of the ma-

majority never raised itself above that of the militant sectional trade unionism of Scargill. The strike was defeated for that reason.

The SWP did nothing to raise demands which were politically in advance of that consciousness. Even on the question of pickets they refused to call for their organised defence—despite the obvious need for such defence in the face of a militarised police force—on the grounds that such a demand was too advanced. In fact miners, who organised, albeit in a haphazard way, their own defence groups, were in advance of the SWP.

Inevitably the SWP's attitude to programme has implications for their attitude towards the building of an international revolutionary tendency. In a nutshell the SWP reject the idea that an international can be built at present and go on to say that the Fourth International itself was a tragic mistake, that it should never have been built.

Evolution

The whole evolution of the Cliffites since their split with the FI in the late 1940s has been more and more towards a national-centred view of how to build an International. Their starting point is to question whether or not Trotsky should have founded the Fourth International given the weakness of the groupings that constituted it in 1938.

In explaining Trotsky's insistence after 1936 that his followers found an International as soon as possible Molyneux declares that it was because 'he needed an apocalyptic view of the future to sustain his revolutionary will'

A 'now-or-never' outlook took hold of him and impaired his judgement. This is a rejection of Trotsky's own justification; namely, that the struggle of the Left Opposition since the late 1920s had produced a wealth of analyses and documents that codified and welded together a coherent revolutionary pole of attraction.

In addition the imminence of world war required the creation of a democratic-centralist organisation and leadership capable of guiding the sections of the FI in immensely difficult situations. And an International was vital if sections were to take advantage of the revolutionary crises as well as survive the repression that was expected to come with the war.

Doomed

Duncan Hallas does concede some of these points but argues that Trotsky's supposed 'messianism' was a 'necessary deviation from his mature view'. Necessary to hold his followers together, but ultimately doomed to failure. This ignores completely the gain—in terms of maintenance of a revolutionary banner in the midst of the carnage and reaction of the war—that the foundation of the Fourth International represented.

The SWP insist that an international can only be founded when it is rooted in strong national parties. The defeats of the 1930s had isolated the Trotskyists and according to Hallas the events of 1936 in Spain 'had demonstrated the indispensability of parties rooted in their national working classes through a long period of struggle for partial demands' before launching an international.

Hallas turns cause and effect on its head. The events in Spain and particularly the regionalist and nationalist deviations that underlay the opportunism of the POUM testified to the need for an international party. As Trotsky said in the Transitional Programme:

'A revolutionary proletarian tendency...cannot thrive and develop in one isolated country; on the very next day after its formation it must seek or create international ties, an international platform, because a guarantee of

the correctness of the national road can only be found along this road. A tendency which remains shut in nationally over a stretch of years condemns itself irrevocably to degeneration.'

The SWP itself is evidence of this. Real internationalism begins with the 'international platform' (i.e. programme) and a leadership which can intervene to correct the tendencies towards an adaptation to the prejudices and preoccupations of the national working class.

The SWP, with its persistent adaptation to the spontaneous trade union consciousness of the powerful British trade union movement, has degenerated along national lines. It is a degeneration that has led it on a variety of occasions (from Korea, through Cuba to the Malvinas) into abstentionism or neutralism in relation to struggles between the USSR and imperialism and between the imperialists and semi-colonies.

The project of building big national parties first across the world is a guarantee that a genuine international programme cannot be constructed at all. The cost of such a project will inevitably be a view of international class struggles from the distorted lenses of the national terrain leading to an over or under-estimation of the weight and centrality of certain questions.

Admiration

At best what is arrived at is a mutual admiration society in which a polite agreement is reached that the national groups know best about their own national class struggles and should be left to get on with them.

This bore fruit for the SWP in its disastrous mid-1970s attempt to unite 'nationally rooted' groups as diverse as the Maoist Avanguardia Operaia (Italy), the guerillist PRB-BR (Portugal) and the abstract propagandist Lutte Ouvriere (France).

From the point of view of this fiasco the SWP have nothing to teach Trotskyists or those struggling to refound a revolutionary international.

The SWP is not a Trotskyist group. In effect they want to have their cake and eat it. Duncan Hallas concludes that Trotsky's life-long struggle was 'an indispensable contribution' to the synthesis of theory and practice. Yet of the four main areas of Trotsky's thought he identifies—Permanent Revolution, Stalinism, strategy and tactics, party and class—the SWP's theory and practice is seriously at odds with all of them.

We only have to consider the contradiction between Trotsky's support for the USSR against Germany in World War II and the SWP's understanding of it as an inter-imperialist war to see the fragility of their veneration for the FI's founder. Given their position on the USSR should they not brand Trotsky as a social chauvinist towards Russian Imperialism—despite his previous contribution to Marxism?.

Inconsistent

By attacking Trotsky's programmatic method and hence his international strategy for working class power the SWP's defence of certain of his conjunctural analyses and tactics is rendered shallow and inconsistent.

It is possible and necessary to be sharply critical of Trotsky's weaknesses as long as we know how to correct them on the basis of his method. But it is the method of Trotsky that the SWP critics find most objectionable. Trotskyism needs to be re-elaborated certainly, but that can only be done by understanding the full importance of Trotsky's contribution. The crowning point of that contribution was the completion of the Transitional Programme and the founding of the FI, which Trotsky himself judged to be 'the most important work of my life'. ■

In Defence of Marxism

The Pros and Cons of Unilateralism

NEIL KINNOCK'S faltering attempts to dump Labour's policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament comes as no surprise. Without ditching unilateralism Kinnock has little chance of persuading the employers that Labour can be trusted to hold office.

But while the Labour left and right work themselves into a frenzy for or against unilateralism, revolutionary Marxists begin from the fact that both nuclear and conventional 'defence' policies remain policies for the defence of capitalism. This does not mean we stand aside from the debate. But the arguments and methods we employ to defend Labour's unilateral policy are a far cry from the pacifist, neutralist arguments of the Labour left.

For Marxists 'war is the continuation of politics by other means'. British imperialism occupies a key subordinate role in US imperialism's political and military dominance of the capitalist world. It needs its nuclear arsenal to maintain that role. It is committed to expanding and modernising its nuclear weapons (the introduction of Trident) at the expense of its conventional forces, especially the navy.

This is because the old military structures, including the 'big navy' corresponded to the different political role of an ailing dominant imperialism in charge of a colonial empire. The only reductions in nuclear weapons British imperialism can tolerate are those dictated by the USA.

This is the quandary facing the Kinnockites. They are wholly committed to managing British capitalism and to maintaining Britain's 'special relationship' with the US within NATO.

Yet their party is wedded to nuclear disarmament by conference policy and the strength of the union block vote. This in turn is a reflection of the desire of millions of workers not to see the world destroyed in a nuclear carnage.

For the last two elections the Labour leaders have muddled through with this contradiction. In the 1987 election Kinnock made one last bid to sell unilateralism to the bosses, borrowing all the arguments and rhetoric of the 'big navy' lobby inside the British establishment.

But the recipe for a 'stronger navy, airforce, army' did not fit the needs of the nuclear imperialist alliance Britain is a key part of. And this from a man who readily accuses the Labour left of 'living in the past'.

Revolutionaries in the Labour Party and trade unions should defend the unilateralist policy precisely because it threatens to undermine the strength and stability of the ruling class. As long as they cannot readily turn to a trusted Labour leadership to bail them out of a crisis the bosses' room for manoeuvre is limited.

We are also committed to stopping their drive to arm themselves to the teeth with nuclear weapons. But neither the strategy nor the slogan of unilateral nuclear disarmament are ours.

First of all unilateral nuclear disarmament draws a qualitative distinction between nu-

clear and conventional weapons. Various reasons are given for this in the anti-nuclear movement, from the argument that nuclear weapons could spark off an 'accidental war' to the assertion that missiles are 'symbols of male power'. In one sense of course nuclear weapons are qualitatively different from previous weapons in that they have the immediate potential to plunge the world into barbarism.

But those who start from the technological threat of nuclear war always end up divorcing it from its root causes in class society. From the radical sounding premise that nuclear weapons are a catastrophic threat to human life emerges the conclusion that imperialist wars fought with napalm chemicals and saturation bombing are more acceptable. This is the conclusion on which Labour's unilateralists base their whole policy, arguing that better armed conventional forces will give us 'the power to defend our country'.

Much more consistent are the total pacifists, whose support for nuclear disarmament stems from their opposition to all violence. Marxists reject pacifism

first of all because it is utopian. It asks the working class to trust its rulers to disarm themselves. It imagines that capitalism—which is based on exploitation and riven with wars and international rivalries—could simply transform itself into a stable peaceful social system.

Secondly, when it is applied to the just struggle of the oppressed, pacifism is not just utopian but reactionary. It advocates that revolutionary fighters, anti-imperialist armies or degenerate workers' states lay down their arms.

Marxists on the other hand regard the violence of the exploited and oppressed as just. For this reason in particular we don't demand the Soviet Union give up its nuclear weapons. Since 1947 the existence of the USSR's nuclear bomb has prevented US imperialism from inflicting Hiroshimas all over the world. The existence of the Soviet bomb, for example, held the US back from using atomic weapons against North Vietnam.

It is not weapons which cause war, but class conflict. Today that conflict actual and potential takes many military forms. One crucial form it takes today is the military alliance ranged against the USSR and the degenerate workers' states. In this conflict we are for the defence of the USSR.

Likewise in any military conflict between colonial and semi-colonial countries and imperialism the working class should be on the side of the oppressed. In wars between imperialist powers (and their political prelude, trade wars) the working class cannot take sides.

Above all a revolutionary strategy for working class power demands that the exploited disarm the bosses by arming themselves. It is only in the context of this strategy that we defend Labour's unilateral policy and fight to mobilise masses of workers to force its implementation. ■

Workers must Break with the bosses' parties

The US workers are faced with a choice between two bosses' parties in November's elections. *Arthur Merton* and *GR McColl* look at the alternative to voting for either of them.

THE TWO bosses' men who want to be President of the United States—Republican George Bush and Democrat Michael Dukakis—offer the working class no choice at all. Come January 1989, when Reagan steps down, whichever of these men moves into the White House, the onslaught on the organised working class that has characterised the Reagan years will continue.

The US workers do not even have the possibility of voting for a reformist candidate in the elections. Political life is dominated by two parties that are openly capitalist. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats have any organised base in the working class. Nor, despite Jesse Jackson's sometimes left rhetoric, does either party want such a base. The question that is posed to every militant trade unionist in the US by the forthcoming elections is why is there no workers' candidate?

The fundamental answer to this lies in the policies of the US trade union leadership. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) currently led by Lane Kirkland, has always been tied, politically, to either the Republicans or the Democrats. The AFL leaders have simply traded favours with the bosses—some promises of concessions in return for delivering the union vote. The Democratic Party has been the union leaders' usual 'friend of labor' (though switches to the Republicans have happened). Yet this self-same party is the one that introduced vicious anti-union laws in the 1940s (Taft-Hartley). It is the self-same party that has reneged on its promise to repeal those laws every time a Democrat has got inside the White House. And the same pattern holds true for every other promise made to the unions.

concessions

The situation is a bit like the one the British unions were in during the nineteenth century. Then the leaders of the TUC looked to the Liberal Party for help and concessions. And like the TUC then, the AFL today tie not only themselves to the bourgeoisie but also the organisations of the US working class. In political terms this is a serious weakness. How can it be over-

come? The first task is to break the unions from the bourgeoisie. Immediately this means agitating to stop workers from voting for either Bush or Dukakis and to stop unions endorsing either candidate. But this negative action begs the question of who should workers vote for. Our answer to this is to call on the union leaders, to form an independent workers' party, a Labor Party, and to fight amongst the rank and file for this project. This party should be based on the unions and should stand candidates against the two open bosses' parties. In the elections, then, the slogans should be—no votes for the bosses' parties, unions break with the bourgeoisie, build a Labor Party.

But—and it is a big but—what will be the policies and nature of the Labor Party we are saying should be built? One thing needs to be made crystal clear. We are against the idea that the US workers need to build a party on the British labourite model. We are against the idea that the US workers need to go through a reformist political stage before they can build a revolutionary party. And this view means that we have definite proposals for the type of party that needs to be fought for inside the unions.

In the late 1930s Trotsky advised his US followers to fight for a Labor Party. He argued that it was necessary to make a united front with workers who had been radicalised by the development of industrial unions (the Congress of Industrial Unions—CIO—is now united with the AFL) on the question of breaking with the bourgeoisie. But on the question of the programme and nature of the party, he urged that his followers fight to get the party to adopt the revolutionary programme. Whether or not the Labor Party became reformist was, therefore, a question of struggle. Revolutionaries had a duty to try and prevent it from developing in that direction. The US Trotskyists—the Socialist Workers Party—explained in their founding documents how they would concretise this fight. Their explanation still stands as a model for revolutionaries today:

'Whenever the revolutionists find themselves in a Labor Party, they will stand at each stage for those concrete policies and actions which sum up a progressive and class perspective; for complete breaks with the capitalist parties and no support of candidates on capitalist tickets; for direct mass action and avoidance of limitation to

parliamentary activities; for full internal democracy; for support and defense of concrete working class rights against their invasion from any source, including from candidates of the Labor Party itself; etc.'

And they added that their fight for the 'programme of transitional demands [was] in order to fructify the mass movement in favour of a Labor Party and lead it in a revolutionary direction'.

In essence then, the fight for the Labor Party is part and parcel of the fight for a revolutionary party, not the fight to create a reformist one. The question of whether such a party based on the unions develops in a revolutionary or reformist direction is one that will be decided in struggle.

But one other question remains. In the 1930s the CIO was a mass movement. Today there is no equivalent movement. Therefore, we need a sober estimate of what real prospects there are for building a Labor Party along the lines we have explained in the USA. The popularity of Jackson, the left-talking Democrat, should not fool us into thinking that these prospects are rosy. Certainly his popularity with black and white workers, despite the fact that he is a 100% Democrat, i.e. a 100% pro-capitalist politician, reflects the frustration those workers feel after the ravages of Reagan and the treachery of their union leaders. But organised US labour is in a desperately weak situation. During the Reagan years the decline in union membership has reflected the defeats suffered by the US working class. For example, the miners' union, the UMW, has ceased to be a force in the expanding western coalfields and so the proportion of organised miners has plunged dramatically, from roughly one third of the labour force in 1980 to less than 18% in 1984. The fate of union organisation amongst miners has been an extreme example of the more general decline of one-time labour strongholds. Federal government statistics suggest that by 1986 just over 17% of the total US labour force belonged to a bona fide trade union. Between 1981 and 1983 the AFL-CIO reported that 55 of its affiliates registered membership losses, as against 13 registering gains.

density

Unlike Britain, the sharp reduction in trade union density cannot be solely attributed to massive job losses in the wake of the recession which shook manufacturing capital to its foundations in America's so-called 'rustbelt'. Indeed, trade union membership as a proportion of the workforce has been in long term decline. Even in the context of the enormous boom of the Kennedy-Johnson years, fuelled by imperialism's escalating bombardment of Vietnam, AFL-CIO unions failed to grow. Of the estimated 35 million jobs added to the US economy between 1960 and 1980, a mere 2 million were actually organised. Virtually all of those workers were government employees. In the manufacturing core of

the economy the unions were failing to recruit in the face of the bosses' re-orientation of investment to the emerging 'sunbelt' and especially those states with ironically dubbed 'right to work' laws—i.e. right to scab laws. However there is no doubt that the Reagan years have witnessed an accelerated decline of union fortunes.

Although trade union density among government employees has remained essentially constant in the 1980s, Reagan and his ruthlessly anti-union backers scored a decisive blow against union organisation in the civil service with the 1981 dismemberment of PATCO, the tiny air traffic controllers' organisation whose 1980 convention actually endorsed Reagan. Even the self-proclaimed left of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy sat on its hands as PATCO stewards were imprisoned on conspiracy charges. The assault by the Reagan administration on federal employees' post-war gains continued in 1984 with the imposition of a two tier pay structure on postal workers as strike action rapidly collapsed.

isolated

At the same time key battles in the private sector—such as the heroic meatpackers' local P-9 strike at Hormel have been deliberately isolated by the bureaucracy. The end result has been a series of bitter defeats that have weakened the capacity of the rank and file to take on and defeat the union leaders.

So, we are not in a late 1930s situation today, with a mass movement pushing in the direction of a Labor Party. However, this does not mean that revolutionaries should leave the slogan on ice until happier times. On the contrary, in the unions the elections will be discussed.

Propaganda for the Labor Party can be made. The political rallies and meetings of Jackson also provide openings for militants to argue the need for class independence as the starting point for the 'little class warfare' that Jackson demagogically calls for. In other words propaganda for the Labor Party, focused around the elections can play a role in preparing the ground for the time when a new explosion of militancy in the US working class poses the fight for political independence as an immediate, agitational task.

The fight for the political programme around which such a party can be formed must indeed start now. Militants must be won to a perspective of rolling back the Reaganite offensive in the unions, workplaces and in the field of social provision. More than that, revolutionaries can advance elements of the revolutionary transitional programme that point in an anti-capitalist direction. In the car plants, the fight is to reverse the process of 'give backs'—wage cuts combined with job stability—that the bosses have been enforcing through the 1980s. That cannot be done without winning back and extending whole elements of workers' control over production, hiring and firing. In the mines and the sun-belt, the battle is for unionisation.

That cannot be done without building on and systematising the tradition of arming the picket lines against the goon squads and state forces. The whole working class must be won to defending the rights of black, Latino and all immigrant workers. That can't be done without winning the class to the organised defence of black areas. Adequate welfare, health and housing must be presented as issues for the whole class, not just its poor underbelly. Revolutionaries must show how vital it is to break Wall Street's stranglehold on government and the economy if the bosses are to be made to pay for these necessary measures. On all occasions, revolutionaries must warn of the treachery of the pro-capitalist union leaders.

The slogan for an independent working class party may not have wide resonance now, but the fight for the programme of such a party, the fight to organise a militant minority and the propaganda for such a party can indeed begin. ■



Hormel strikers stabbed in the back by bureaucrats

ON 6 JULY Mexico goes to the polls to elect a new President, Senate and House of Deputies. There is little to fear in predicting an overwhelming victory for the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The PRI has won every election overwhelmingly for the last 57 years! These victories are not just the result of the regular and massive fraud perpetrated by the ruling party—the hundreds of thousands of fictitious voters on the electoral rolls, the stuffed ballot boxes and intimidation at the polls which are a common feature of all Mexican 'elections'. It also reflects the form of bourgeois political rule developed in Mexico since the revolution of 1910.

The 1988 elections are, however, somewhat different. The Mexican bourgeoisie is seriously divided over how to solve the dramatic economic crisis which struck the country in 1982 and from which the economy has still to recover. These divisions are reflected in the first serious challenge to the PRI's preponderance on the electoral terrain. The well established bourgeois opposition party, the National Action Party (PAN), poses the biggest threat to the PRI's monopoly of power. Based on the powerful northern Mexican capitalists, this party is expected to gain at least 15% of the votes even under the chronically rigged Mexican electoral system.

The PRI itself has not escaped from this division. It is deeply divided between the so-called 'politicos', the traditionalist party bosses whose positions at state and local level depend on the 'old corruption', and the 'tecnicos', a tendency willing to countenance a role for a bourgeois opposition and semi-democratic elections. The PRI has already suffered a significant split, with Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the son of Lazaro Cardenas, president in the 1930s, leading the 'democratic current' out of the PRI. Cardenas is standing for the presidency as the candidate of the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) and the Popular Socialist Party (PPS). The roots of these divisions in bourgeois circles lie in the desire of powerful sections of capitalists, enthusiastically supported by US imperialism, to break with the 'state capitalist' traditions of the Mexican economy and political system.

Under General Lazaro Cardenas, who ruled as President from 1934 to 1940, the basis of this system was laid. Carde-

Mexico's elections reveal serious divisions within its bourgeoisie. The ruling party has had to bury the legacy of the Cardenas 'institutional' revolution in order to modernise the economy. *Stuart King and Tim O'Halloran* explain the background.

Mexican elections The end of an era



The old president and the new

nas was a classic 'left-Bonapartist' ruler, balancing between the contending classes in Mexican society, while attempting to preserve and promote 'independent' capitalist development. His policies quickly brought him into conflict with the US imperialist companies in Mexico as well as with the capitalists who were dependent on them. As with other Latin American rulers such as Peron in Argentina, Cardenas had to rely on a carefully constructed mass base among the workers and peasants. His regime had to lean for support on these classes to achieve even a degree of independence from imperialist control.

Important concessions were made to the workers and peasants. These included a radical agrarian reform which gave land to the peasants through the communally held 'ejidos'. The right to strike was guaranteed (although not to state employees because they worked for a 'revolutionary state'). Prices were controlled while wages and conditions improved. Workers and peasants were brought into carefully controlled mass organisations, the National Peasant Federation (CNC) and the Federation of Mexican Workers (CTM); which provide to this day the mass base of support for the PRI. The union apparatus became a component of the government/party state machine.

Cardenas combined this with a highly 'statist' economic strategy which involved the nationalisation of the US-owned oil industry and cotton interests, and the construction of state-run companies in all the 'strategic' areas of the

economy including transport and energy. By the 1940s, the PRI's 'leftist' phase was over, but social peace could be guaranteed through the cast iron control over the workers' and peasants' organisations. The economy grew rapidly until the 1970s, with GDP growth rates of 5 to 8% a year.

But by the 1970s the Mexican economy was suffering from deep rooted problems. Despite its so-called independent industrialisation its economy came to be increasingly dominated by its giant North American neighbour. The USA today takes 62% of all Mexico's exports and provides 70% of imports. US based transnationals own 57% of the auto-industry, 49% of petrochemicals, 76% of rubber, 54% of mining and metals, 72% of copper and aluminium, 47% of food etc, etc. In 1977, of the top 500 US companies, 277 had Mexican operations. Not for nothing does Mexico host the largest CIA mission in the hemisphere! Its development into the thirteenth largest capitalist economy in the world also disguised what the Mexican capitalists recognised as a chronically inefficient economy characterised by low productivity of labour and low investment.

The 'modernising' capitalists especially the large bankers and industrialists in the northern states of Sonora, Chihuahua and Coahuila, whose proximity to the USA made them most open to imperialist links, progressively set about trying to throw off the state grip on the economy.

This meant breaking the PRI's monopoly of political power, developing the PAN as an alternative, attacking

the state/party bureaucracy and sidelining the CTM bureaucracy from its privileged position within the state machine. This would allow the development of 'free enterprise' through privatisation and the driving down of wages and conditions. They wanted the final breaking up of the 'ejidos' in order to allow the untrammelled rule of capitalist agri-business in the countryside.

The economic and political crisis looming in the 1970s was postponed with the enormous expansion of the oil industry from the mid-1970s. Mexico rapidly became the fourth largest oil producer in the world. Massive oil revenues combined with the seemingly bottomless purse of the international loan sharks kept the economy buoyant and the bourgeoisie content into the early 1980s. By then Mexico was deriving 75% of its export revenue from oil. In the same period Mexico's indebtedness had grown enormously. From a mere \$4.5 billion owed in the early 1970s, it jumped to \$80 billion during the presidency of Lopes Portilla (1976-82)! The next President Miguel de la Madrid broke the \$100 billion mark. Today interest repayments account for 75% of all Mexico's export revenues.

The collapse of oil prices in the early 1980s combined with this enormous debt burden threw the country into a deep economic and political crisis from which it has yet to emerge. 1983 saw GDP decline by 5%, while the 1982-88 period is likely to see an annual average of less than 2% growth per year. This chronic stagnation in the Mexican economy gave added impetus to the PAN which has gained in strength throughout the 1980s at the expense of the PRI. The PRI retained the support of those bourgeois sectors which have most to fear from 'free competition', the small and medium capitalists who depend on state protection for their survival. Nevertheless under both Lopes Portilla and more dramatically under Miguel de la Madrid the PRI has shifted in the direction of the PAN, a shift reflected in the promotion of the 'tecnicos' within the party and in the removal of limits on the role of foreign capital.

foundations

However the PRI leadership cannot pursue the Pan solution without risking blowing apart its very foundations. Thus the necessity for the Mexican ruling class, encouraged by the imperialists, to promote a 'multi-party' system i.e. a second bourgeois party waiting in the wings.

The PRI is already having difficulty holding its three class alliance together. As a good bourgeois party the PRI made the workers and peasants pay dearly for the crisis of the capitalist system in the 1980s. Under the auspices of the IMF, de la Madrid introduced a dramatic attack on workers' and peasants' living standards after 1982. While official unemployment rose from 4.7% in 1982 to nearly 18% in 1987, unemployment and underemployment was estimated to affect 50% of the population. Real wages collapsed dramatically as inflation ran out of control (100% in 1986, 150% in 1987). It is estimated that the official minimum wage now stands at less than 50% of its 1976 level, and over half the population earn less than the minimum. Where working class resistance to

these attacks managed to break out of the bureaucratic stranglehold of the CTM it suffered the traditional repression from the state apparatus. Mass sackings of militants became common. In 1983 de la Madrid broke a strike by the Nuclear Power Workers Union, one of the most militant unions in Mexico, by closing down the entire state run uranium company. This all but annihilated the union. A 65 day strike in 1987 by teachers, members of the 150,000 strong 'democratic movement' within the PRI dominated SNTE (a teacher union with 750,000 members), ended in defeat, with two teachers killed and many injured by police actions.

stranglehold

Despite the growing opposition to the government offensive and the development of workers' and peasants' community organisations independent of the PRI, the left has failed to break the stranglehold of the CTM, and with it the grip of bourgeois nationalism, over the workers' movement. The Mexican Socialist Party (PMS), the largest reformist workers' party containing the Mexican Stalinists, is only predicted to get 4.5% of the votes for its candidate Heberto Castillo, a long standing railway worker militant. It is in fact the PAN with its demagogic claims to be a defender of 'democracy' against PRI monolithism which is garnering the votes of the opposition forces.

It is in this context that the candidature of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas gains its significance. The 'democratic current' is strong on abstract appeals to the 'revolutionary' and 'anti-imperialist' traditions of Lazaro Cardenas's party, but carefully offers no concrete alternative programme for the workers and peasants.

Cardenas calls for expanding demand and the internal market rather than 'export led growth'. He calls for modernisation but not at the cost of jobs. He calls for an end to debt servicing to pay for the growth. But there is no explanation of how this is to be achieved in the teeth of opposition from the big capitalists, foreign investors and particularly US imperialism.

The memory of the Cardenas regime guarantees Cuauhtemoc's campaign a warm reception amongst the masses, who see both the PRI and the PAN as intent on removing the remaining gains made by the workers and peasants during that period. As such, Cardenas represents the main danger for diverting the anger of the masses into the blind alley of 'left nationalism'. There will be no shortage of 'workers' parties' and 'socialists' willing to tie the workers to the chariot wheels of the left wing of the bourgeoisie. The PSM only broke off negotiations with Cardenas when he decided to stand as a PARM candidate. Even a section of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), Mexican section of the USFI, has split in order to support Cardenas's candidature.

For the workers and peasants of Mexico Cuauhtemoc Cardenas represents no solution to their problems. Only the building of a real revolutionary workers' party which can finally settle accounts with both the Mexican capitalists and the imperialist exploiters offers a real road forward out of poverty and exploitation. ■

Bolivia

BOLIVIA'S GOVERNMENT, led by President Victor Paz Estenssoro, has been having a rough time. Paz returned to power in 1985 as a 'born-again' neo-liberal—a monetarist and favourite son of the IMF. His MNR (National Revolutionary Movement) sacked between 17,000 and 20,000 miners from the COMIBOL state mining corporation. Paz Estenssoro then quickly turned his attention to other public sector workers in education, health and the oil industry.

But despite the defeats suffered by the working class at the end of 1985, the MNR's attacks on all sections of workers, as well as on the peasants, have produced renewed opposition. This was reflected in the disastrous results for the MNR in the 1987 elections where the MIR (a party equivalent to Garcia's APRA in Peru) made considerable gains at the MNR's expense, taking over a third of the votes in the urban areas and over 40% in rural ones. Virtually all the major cities are now controlled by opposition parties—the MIR or ADN (the right wing party of dictator Hugo Banzer).

The first half of 1988 saw a major upsurge in the struggle against the government's offensive. Students and teachers had been in the forefront against the attacks on educational provision. In a separate struggle rank and file oil workers of the state oil company YPF—went on indefinite strike in February for a wage increase.

This strike ended in a serious defeat due to the treachery of the leaders. The oil installations were occupied by troops and 600 workers sacked. The union leaders proceeded to sign an agreement with the government over the heads of the workers accepting the sackings and, even worse, a government plan which could lead to a further 3,000 job losses in this industry.

Despite this setback a growing national struggle coalesced around opposition to a government bill for 'Decentralisation of Education and Health'. As in Thatcher's Britain, these two sectors were targeted by the government for massive cuts. Under the guise of 'decentralising' the MNR intends to hand over responsibility to the near bankrupt municipalities. To pay for them they introduced new

The Bolivian workers are on the move again. Our fraternal group in Bolivia, Guia Obrera, has sent us this report.

taxes on fuel—making the workers and peasants pay to keep reduced services! This led to a series of paralysing transport strikes in La Paz. Together with the common knowledge that the IMF had suggested 'privatising' these services. This caused a massive rejection of the government proposals and a growing struggle against them. Even the opposition parties MIR and ADN were forced into verbal opposition. Protest grew throughout March and April with strikes, demonstrations and occupations of the universities. By the end of April the leadership of the COB, the Bolivian trade union centre, called a national 'hunger strike'. The clear intention of the COB executive, led by the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB) and the left reformist 'Axis of Patriotic Convergence' was to divert the struggle into a passive hunger strike. But the mobilisations became more intense.

A mass demonstration in Potosi burned the local police station to the ground. The growing militancy frightened the COB leadership which after eleven days summoned an extended meeting to discuss whether the hunger strike should be continued. Despite a positive vote the Stalinists proceeded to work to undermine the strike.

The executive 'suspended' the strike for two days, supposedly to 'consult' the workers. With the MIR calling for a 'social and political truce' during the Pope's visit to Bolivia in early May, the executive of the COB grasped the opportunity to call off the strike on the pretext of the Pope's imminent arrival. A real chance to throw back the governments attacks was squandered.

The MNR government's position is far from secure. Saddled with a massive foreign debt, with its 'New Economic Policy' not only causing widespread opposition but failing to reactivate the economy as promised (GDP fell by 5% in 1987) Paz's government looks weak.

Rumours abound of growing divisions within the MNR itself, while the ADN, formally part of the 'Pact for Democracy' with the MNR, has attempted to distance itself by making 'left' criticisms in order to prevent the MIR gaining the ascendancy. In this growing ruling class crisis the Bolivian workers may yet have the last word. ■



Armenian demonstrators demand the return of Nagorny Karabakh

USSR: Reform or Revolution?

As the bureaucrats clash at the special party conference, Soviet workers must build an independent leadership, writes *John Hunt*.

THE POLITICAL crisis in the USSR is accelerating day by day at every level of society. It is no secret that the top levels of the party apparatus are bitterly divided between those who want to maintain their privileged authority and those who want various degrees of openness and decentralisation. After months of bureaucratic dog fights the party is due to hold its first special conference for forty seven years, where the two sides are set to do battle. Gorbachev's future is far from secure.

To an important extent the working class has also begun to intervene in the conflicts within the party apparatus. The partial relaxation of the repressive regime, as well as the continuing hardships of everyday life, have given rise to outbursts against the party apparatus throughout the USSR. Local grievances over housing, health care and food supply have fused with outrage at bureaucratic chicanery in choosing conference delegates. Mass rallies in Sakhalin, Kuibyshev, Yaroslavl and Omsk have demanded the sacking of their party secretaries. That same party's central organ—Pravda—has publicly admitted the legitimacy of many of the grievances.

Demonstrations

The non-Russian nationalities are aflame from the Baltic states to the Caucasus. Mass demonstrations in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have demanded various degrees of independence for these small and heavily Russified republics. The party apparatus in Armenia and Azerbaijan are at loggerheads over the future of Nagorny Karabakh—whose people are striking for their politically legitimate and even Soviet Constitutional right to join the Soviet republic of Armenia. Over fifty years of Great Russian chauvinism in its Soviet guise means inevitably that hatred of national oppression is fuelling the political crisis in the USSR.

Many of these struggles are, at least partially, being mediated through the party. The biggest Estonian rally was held to send their delegates to the party conference. The Armenian and Azerbaijani parties have been firm in defending their respective popular demands over Nagorny Karabakh doubtless under mass pressure.

However the letters pages of the

Soviet press are printing more and more pieces calling for greater independence and power for the supposedly representative bodies of the local, republic and all-union Soviets. More important has been the proliferation of independent social and political clubs in the last two years. The political character of these clubs ranges from the confused and potentially progressive to the outright reactionary.

Suppression

It should come as no surprise that Stalinism has blackened the name of socialism to many. The suppression of the works of the Trotskyist tradition is a serious handicap for those trying to reforge a proletarian socialist party in the USSR. Ironically the more 'left' groups such as *Obschina* (Commune), while committed programmatically to the withering away of the state and to a classless society, take their inspiration from pre-Marxist utopian socialism.

The unofficial political spectrum also passes through varieties of Eurocommunist and social democratic influenced groups to the shadowy and thoroughly reactionary proto-fascist *Pamyat* organisation. This actively encourages anti-semitic and racist attacks as well as calling for the reimposition of the 'Russian' order of Joseph Stalin.

In the run up to the conference there have been a range of views expressed within the bureaucracy. Taken as a whole they confirm its bankruptcy and historic lack of direction. The most neanderthal Stalinist elements barely ventured into the political debate. Nevertheless they won a large proportion of the conference delegates and found a voice in Ligachev, Gorbachev's deputy.

In the camp of Perestroika stand Aganbeyyan and Schmelev who want to introduce full blown market mechanisms. In the same camp is also found Burlatsky with his proposal for a plebiscitary Presidential system as a means of restoring the regime's credibility with the masses. Above it all stands Gorbachev himself. He began with a careful and eclectic prospect of modernising the bureaucracy and the economy. That prospect is now the battleground for these diverse but thoroughly bureaucratic answers to economic stagnation.

It is a battle being fought against the bizarre backcloth of the first

beauty competition, the celebration of 1000 years of Russian Christianity, the naming of new saints and the opening of the first Soviet golf course.

The theses presented to the conference are a compromise that no faction in the apparatus would consider to be more than a stopgap. Party officials will now be elected by some form of secret ballot. They will only be able to serve two five year terms of office unless they can muster a 75% mandate for a third term. Citizens will now be given clearer rights to challenge officials legally. No faction will have considered their programme either finally realised or routed by the acceptance of the theses.

While these measures go nowhere near to unlocking the Soviet economy from the bureaucratic grip, they go just far enough to have raised the hopes of workers and the anger of the most conservative bureaucrats. Even if they are passed no faction will consider the struggle over.

Unemployment

The conference theses talk of the 'years of stagnation' that brought the Soviet Union to the brink of economic crisis'. Yet that crisis has not diminished for the Soviet working class. Food supplies are worse rather than better. Bonus payments have been cut. Unemployment now hangs as a spectre over large sections of workers.

There is a growing and assertive culture in the USSR against the new Nephmen and profiteers who prosper under the guise of newly sanctioned co-operatives. That is why the Soviet working class now threatens to transform Gorbachev's 'openness' into a fight against shortages, profiteers, corruption and bureaucratic oppression.

In this situation major dangers confront the Soviet working class. The USSR remains the 'prison house of nations' that Marx recognised in the old Tsarist Empire. However attempts by the Soviet working class to voice their grievances through their separate national channels means only that the central state apparatus will be given more room to manoeuvre. Tragic inter-communal strife between Azerbaijanis and Armenians is a reactionary diversion from the tasks Soviet workers face. So too is the attempt to re-establish the independence of the three Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania and

Estonia. While opposing every form of national and cultural oppression at the hands of the Soviet bureaucracy that these people face, we must argue that only a proletarian internationalist programme can answer the current crisis in the USSR.

The urgent task of the working class vanguard is to organise itself independently. There are elements of Gorbachev's programme workers must defend and struggle to deepen. We are for the rehabilitation of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin. Let their works be published so that Soviet workers can judge for themselves the long hidden history of Stalinist counter-revolution. At the same time workers must organise to resist all the attempts of those within the Gorbachev wing to make the workers pay for the crisis of bureaucratic planning or to foster reactionary movements among the oppressed nations.

For this a revolutionary communist party is necessary. The bureaucratized, military policed CPSU cannot be transformed. Nor does it have a monopoly on the most class conscious layer of the working class. The Soviet workers need a Bolshevik party whose strategic aim is to destroy the bureaucracy as a parasitic caste in Soviet society. Only on the basis of a clearly independent party and programme can the Soviet workers begin to utilise the splits in the bureaucracy and the just national grievances in its struggle for power.

The depth of the crisis gripping the Soviet bureaucracy shows that its days are numbered. The working class must carry out a political revolution or see the USSR fall prey to capitalist restoration and inter-communal strife. Nothing must divert them from achieving political revolution. ■

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Speaking out for reformism

Chris Ramsey reviews
Fighting Back: Speaking Out for Socialism in the Eighties
by Tony Benn
(Hutchinson 1988 £6.95 307pp)

FIGHTING BACK is a selection of Tony Benn's speeches and writings from 1980 to 1988. Published at a time when much attention is focused on the Labour leadership election, it is worthy of close reading and detailed examination. It is a useful illustration of the flawed politics of the Labour left and of reformist socialism in general.

Veteran Benn-watchers will find all the usual themes in this selection: the mass media, the 'feudal' nature of the British state, radical English history, Marx, Tawney and Jesus. What they will also find is someone who opposed the Falklands/Malvinas war because of the detrimental effect bombing Argentina might have on Britain's world standing; someone who proposes nationalising the land 'allowing some modest compensation, according to need, for... big landowners'; someone who calls for the abolition of the House of Lords but only threatens the monarchy with a 'fundamental reappraisal of its constitutional role' if it were to interfere against parliament.

Those who only know Benn from the pages of *Socialist Action*, *Socialist Organiser* or *Labour Briefing* would do well to read this book, and reflect whether: '... throughout our history all progressive change has been secured by moral teaching, and by popular pressure brought to bear on Parliament; and more recently through the ballot box and in the House of Commons.' (p266)

Despite his reputation as an advocate of 'extra-parliamentary action', much talked up by some of the left, Benn is very clear that such action is secondary—subordinate to the goal of a reforming Labour government:

'To talk of extra-parliamentary activity today is to run the risk of being accused of being anti-parliamentary, whereas the truth is that Parliament itself was never democratic in its origins and it was only by popular struggle that Parliament was made democratic.

The power base of the Tory Party is, and always has been, extra-parliamentary, since the landowners, big business, the bankers, the media and the military have no independent basis of democratic power and the power they exercise is all outside Parliament.

We should therefore not agonise over our commitment to popular campaigns to win public support for a House of Commons made up of a majority that will work for Labour as strongly as the forces of the establishment work for the interests of capital.' (p11)

Here the theoretical weakness and ultimate utopianism of Benn's reformist politics stand revealed.

He recognises that the real power of the capitalists lies outside Parliament, in the repressive institutions of the state. Yet he insists that a Labour majority in Parliament could represent the working class with sufficient force to overcome these obstacles! Countless historical experiences, not least the overthrow of Allende in Chile in 1973, show that Benn's parliamentary road leads to a bloodbath for the working class.

The bosses' willingness to use the police, courts, civil service and army against bourgeois democratic institutions reaffirms the Marxist position: there is no peaceful parliamentary road to socialism.

Not that Benn is an uncritical participant in the Parliamentary talking shop. He attacks the pomp, the ceremony, the patronage and the hypocrisy in which the likes of Hattersley take such pride. He does not see Parliament as simply an empty cup into which a Labour ma-

majority can be poured: 'substituting Labour ministers for Tory ministers cannot achieve our objectives'.

His remedy, though, is to change the rules under which those ministers would operate. These changes amount to the abolition of the House of Lords and prime ministerial patronage together with 'a bigger role for Labour MPs, the Labour Party and the trade unions when Labour is in power'. Quite how this would break the power of the judges, civil servants, bankers, media and military—in short the power of capital and its state ma-

chine—is not even addressed.

This fundamental weakness is evident in all of Benn's speeches and writings collected here. The giant step from today's conditions to tomorrow's victory is only ever taken in the mind of the reader. Benn offers no programme, no strategy, no tactics, no organisation and no forces beyond those already assembled under the various existing 'extra-parliamentary' banners and struggles.

Yet it is precisely those existing forces—the unions, the 'movements', the oppressed—that have repeatedly failed to bring down Thatcher, let alone capitalism. Not through lack of will, commitment, struggle or courage, but because the existing organisations and leaderships are inadequate to the task.

We need a party committed to a strategy of revolutionary change, of using our power outside Parliament to break up the bosses' apparatus of coercion and to prevent them from reorganising themselves as a social class. In his commitment to the Parliamentary road—a commitment reiterated in this book—Benn remains part of the problem, not the solution. ■



John Harris (IFL)

David Green reviews
A Very British Coup
Channel Four's new series

THE PROSPECT of a radical reforming Labour government being faced with the threat of a right wing coup is seen as far fetched by some and inevitable by others. **A Very British Coup** is a rare television treatment of what the *New Statesman/Society* has called 'familiar paranoid fantasies of the left, which see the ruling class conspiring to thwart the will of the British people'.

Based on a book by Chris Mullin MP and scripted by Alan Plater, the play's opening scenario is one unfamiliar to many in Britain today: the election of a Labour government amidst an orgy of flag-waving, Union Jacks included, and brass bands playing the 'Red Flag'. Ray McNally cuts a fine, indeed endearing, figure as the undisputed hero of the piece, Prime Minister Harry Perkins. He is the antithesis of the Kinnocks and Gouls.

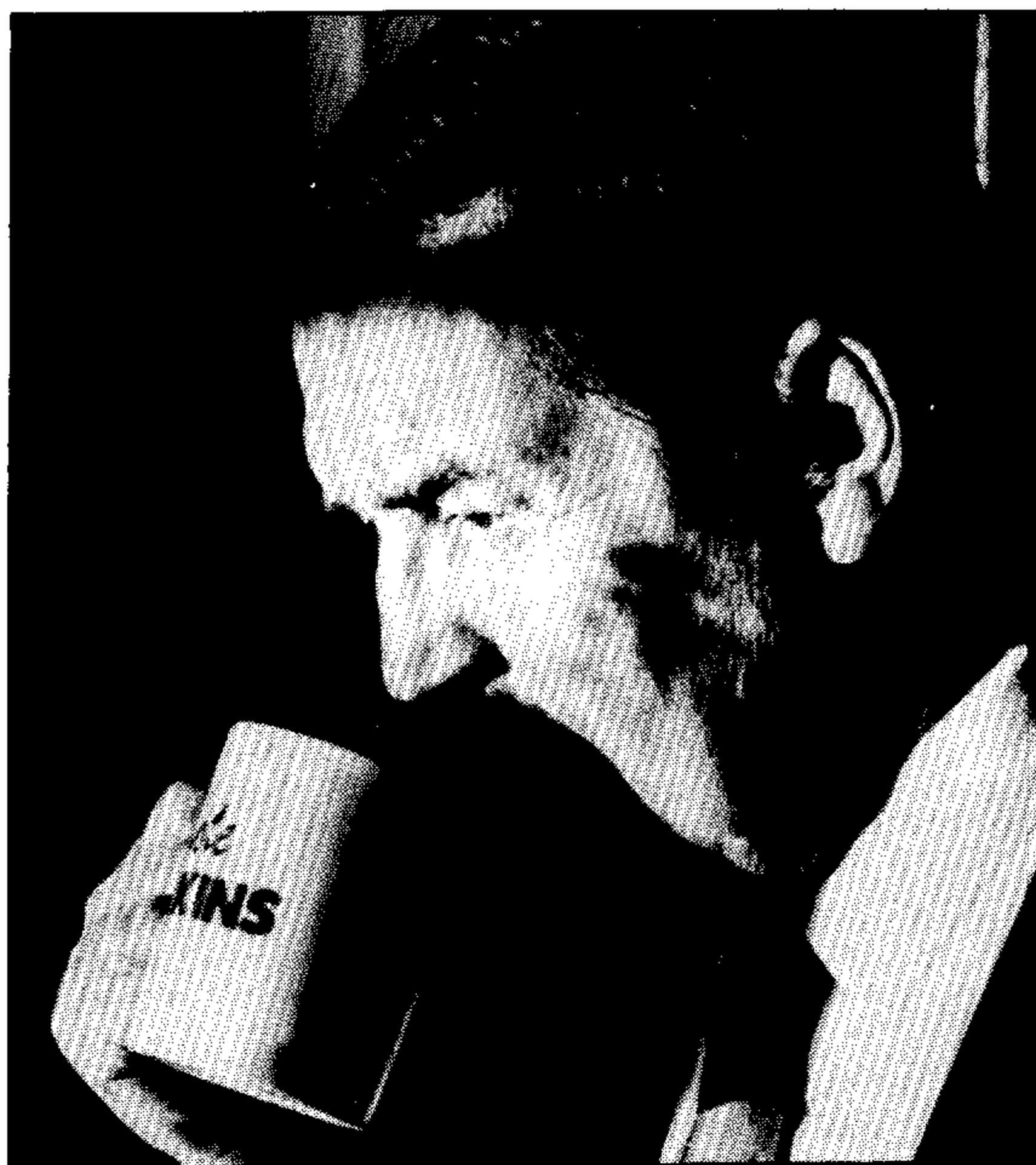
He is committed to genuine left reformist principles such as a referendum on abolition of the monarchy and 'one man, one newspaper'. He has a brilliantly witty style in admonishing the uppity reporters, fiercely proud of his working class background and straightforward in his style and tastes.

He even attempts to put a policy of phased removal of US bases into practice, and the retaliatory punitive economic measures force the Government to arrange for their public spending programme to be funded by the State Bank of Moscow.

When all this goes too far, the ruling class naturally calls a halt. The strength of Mullin's story is that it demonstrates how the British ruling class is no different from any other in its refusal to tolerate any serious challenge. Its rule may be better disguised through years of practice and democratic trappings, but its attachment to power is no less determined. In this aspect **A Very British Coup** is not the 'fantasy' declared by the *New Statesman*, but on the contrary, profoundly realistic.

But its realism is sadly limited. The viewer is left to wonder how Perkins

Channel Four's coup



won the election in the first place, in the teeth of such opposition, and in the same way is left without guidance as to how the 'coup' could be avoided. Mullin is himself on record as saying that Perkins should have done more to mobilise the mass movement. But there is hardly a trace of mass action in the

A caste of thousands?

G R McColl reviews
Trade Unions and Socialist Politics
by John Kelly (Virgo £9.95)

THIS BOOK is a rare and not unwelcome commodity: a work by a university academic which treats the organised working class seriously as an agent of revolutionary change. Kelly lays claim to the Marxist tradition. For him this text marks the latest port of call in a curious political odyssey which has led him from the Revolutionary Communist Group through the *Marxism Today* wing of the Communist Party to a non-aligned outpost on the 'hard left' today.

While it is not a popularly written book, Kelly's style is lucid. *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics* covers a huge swathe of Marxist and sociological literature with economy and (generally) some accuracy. Despite these merits and an excellent refutation of the theoretical justification for 'new realism', this is a book which is riddled with ambiguities and is dangerously wrong in crucial respects.

Kelly launches the volume with a critical but balanced exposition of classical Marxist analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of trade unionism. Beginning with Marx and Engels, he moves swiftly on to Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky, predictably reserving his scorn for the latter. The usual litany of charges is recited, including that of 'simple economic determinism'. Yet Trotsky consistently opposed the notion that objective economic conditions can be the sole determining factor in the class struggle.

This is borne out by his insistence on the need to overcome the working class' crisis of leadership, and by his withering polemics against the trade union bureaucracy.

Kelly's purpose in attacking Trotsky is to pave the way for his later defence of the trade union bureaucracy in his chapter on 'Trade Union Leadership and Collective Bargaining'. He dismisses evidence of the conservative role of the trade union tops as 'ad hoc, unsystematic and anecdotal'. And yet the vulgarity with which much of the centrist left treats the question allows Kelly to pose some pertinent questions: where does the bureaucracy begin? Are all full-time officials tarred with the same brush? What is crucial about bureaucratic behaviour and material privilege? And he correctly quotes Engels to say that identifying traitors doesn't explain or change very much.

The point of course is that Marxism goes beyond naming the traitors to develop a general theory of the nature and origins of the trade union bureaucracy. Lenin noted as long ago as 1916 that the conservatism of trade union leaders was not rooted in officialdom itself. The super-profits generated by Britain's imperial domination of the world market enabled the bourgeoisie to buy off an upper stratum of labour aristocrats, a stratum upon which the bureaucracy rests. Trotsky developed this argument to point out the distinct caste spirit, and caste nature, of the trade union leaders:

'... having risen above the masses, and then having resolved its own "social question" (an assured existence, influence, respect etc) the bureaucracy tends increasingly to keep the masses immobile. Why take risks? It has something to lose.

But when the passivity on which it depends is broken on the right or the left, the magnificence of the bureaucracy comes to an end. Its intelligence and skill are transformed into stupidity and impotence.' Whatever Kelly might argue this is a perfect description of the British trade union bureaucracy which holds good even today under Thatcher.

Organisation

Revolutionary Marxism fights for the organisation of the militant minority into rank and file movements and strives to bring them under a communist leadership committed not simply to deposing a union chief come election time but to transforming the unions from top to bottom. Only such a transformation will enable them to wage class struggle consistently no matter how unfavourable the climate. It opposes bureaucratic privilege whilst not artificially identifying each section of the bureaucracy with the other. It fights with left bureaucrats when possible and against them when necessary, reserving the right of criticism in all situations.

Having ditched classical Marxism with regard to the bureaucracy Kelly faces a difficult task explaining why so many key strikes have been lost in the 1980s. It is ironic that despite his opposition to 'simple economic determinism' he falls back on structural reasons and above all the recession itself in his account of the defeats of the steel, rail and of course mineworkers. In effect Kelly argues that there is little or no prospect of workers winning a major battle against a background of economic crisis for the bosses.

However deep its flaws *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics* is useful for its wealth of statistics documenting the enduring strength of trade unionism in Britain and the advanced capitalist world—giving the lie to the purveyors of doom and gloom in the pages of *Marxism Today* and the upper echelons of the TUC. ■

workers power

POLL TAX

Spread Defiance - Build the Action

Support is growing inside the Scottish working class for outright defiance of the Poll Tax, as the date for its implementation draws near. The Tories chose to impose the Community Charge in Scotland first on the grounds that they didn't have much electoral credibility to lose there anyway. And they firmly believed that they would be able to ride the storm of popular opposition. With Scotland out of the way, they reasoned, the rest of Britain would be easy meat.

The Scottish workers could scupper these plans. They could sink the Tories' flagship. But to do so their clear anger against the Poll Tax must be harnessed into a campaign of defiance and industrial action. Their leaders in the Labour Party and trade union movement seem hell bent on preventing such a campaign developing.

Passive

They are directing all their efforts into limiting the Scottish campaign to one of passive protest in tandem with disenfranchised bosses, the clergy and a variety of other 'progressive' allies. They have made no moves to try and spread an effective defiance campaign throughout Scotland and south of the border.

Estimates of likely Poll Tax bills show that each individual in Glasgow will be expected to cough up £10 a week. For working class families, especially those with grown up children, this will mean massive increases as compared with current rates bills. Meanwhile of course Scottish Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind—not a man troubled by having to make ends meet on a pathetic wage—will have his rates bill cut by £522 a year!

Throughout Scotland meetings held in all the major working class towns and estates have led to the set-

ting up of anti-Poll Tax unions. The issue of defiance is still being hotly debated inside the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) in the run up to the special party conference in September which will finally decide party policy on what action to take against the Poll tax.

While Kinnock has made clear that Scotland will have to abide by the Tories' law, the SLP executive has been fudging the issue. Its inclination is to side with Kinnock and urge compliance, payment of the tax and observation of the law. But it is under a lot of pressure from the rank and file of the party and from the working class in general to take defy the imposition of the Tax.

The Edinburgh Labour Party split on this issue in June, with the left succeeding in drawing the official Scottish TUC/Labour party 'Stop It' campaign into the non-compliance camp. Along with local anti-Poll Tax unions it is taking up the fight for non-implementation, non-registration and non-payment of the Tax.

The danger is that this growing movement for decisive action will be headed off. This is the intention of the Scottish TUC's call for a week of action in September, including as a high point a 15 minute stoppage! This is like calling a general strike during a tea break. It is certainly not the sort of action that will shake Thatcher's bloody-minded resolve to make the Poll Tax stick.

Protest strike action is certainly necessary. Militants should, as a focus for immediate agitation, seek to turn the STUC's call for a 15 minute stoppage into an effective one day general strike. This action should be spread south of the border. Such action can at least begin to marshal the forces for the decisive conflict with Thatcher. On its own, however, even protest strike action—limited in duration and scope—will not sink her flagship.

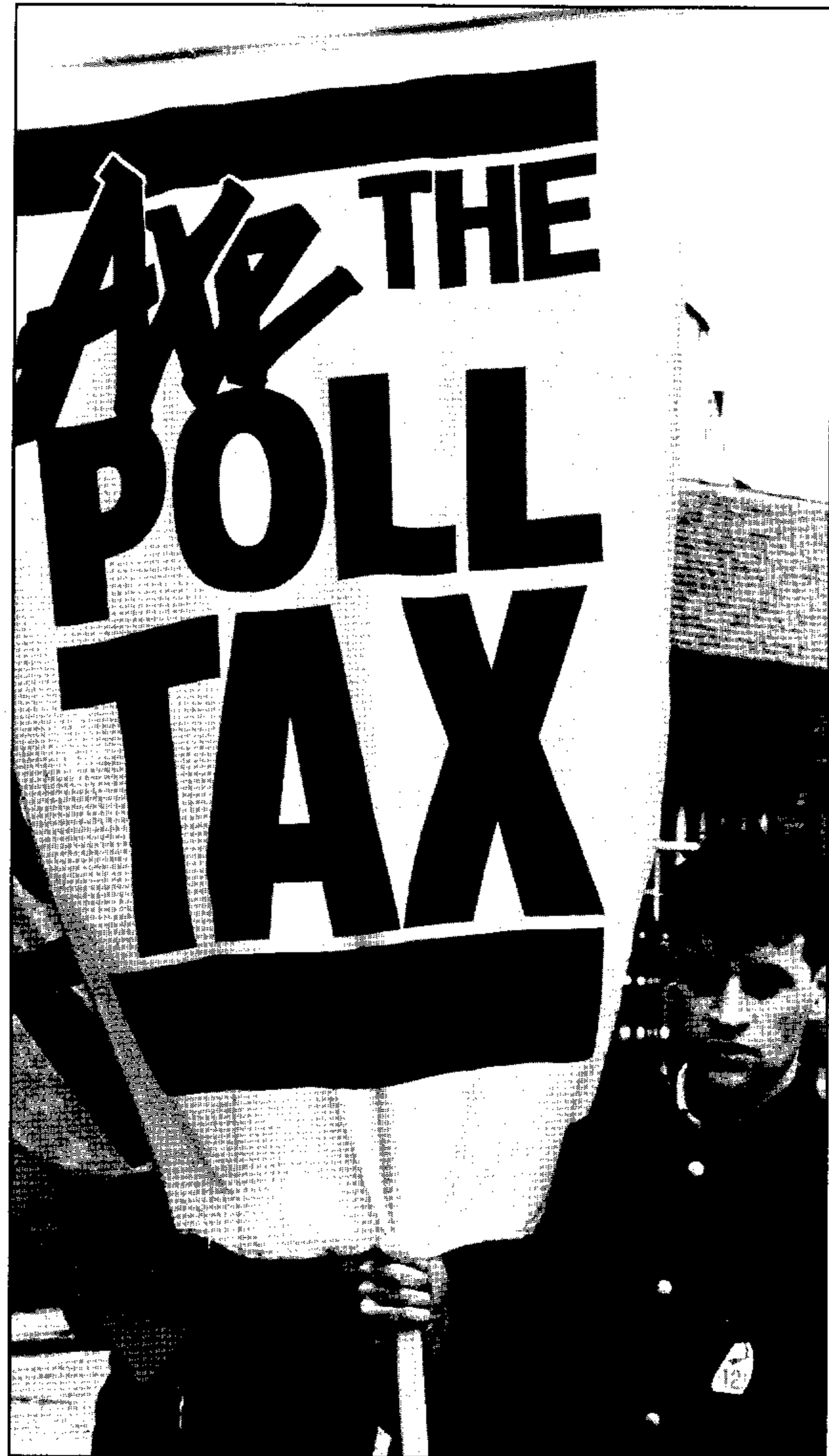
The plans for non-implementation have to be precise and carried out in a carefully co-ordinated fashion. They must involve a fight to force Labour councils to refuse to implement the

charge. They must also involve those workers who will be called upon to administer the new tax. The NALGO conference decision to follow the executive's recommendation not to vote for non-implementation is a setback in this regard. But it need not be a decisive one. The local campaigns in Scotland must devote more efforts to winning local council workers to action instead of spending their time—under the influence of the Stalinists and Kinnockites—wooing dissident bishops and Tories. Council workers can be won to non-implementation if they know they can count on getting the support of other workers. Such support must include solidarity strike action in and outside of the public sector in the event of any worker victimised for operating a policy of non-implementation.

Working class organisations in both the communities and the workplaces can play a crucial role in building that level of commitment and preparing for the necessary solidarity action. The anti-Poll Tax unions—whose main membership base at the moment is amongst working class women—need not restrict themselves to winning non-payment pledges from individual tenants and householders. They can and should campaign now to press council workers in NALGO and other unions in local government, the STUC and the SLP to a full non-implementation policy.

Resistance

They can play a vital role now in drawing in all working class organisations into action councils that can co-ordinate resistance and spread action. Such action councils would have to include representatives of the unions, the tenants organisations, community and unemployed workers' organisations. They would be fighting bodies, really representative of those most affected by the Tory attack, the rank and file of the working class. They would be able to hold the back-sliding leaders—the passive protest merchants who are bowing to Kinnock's orders—to account and replace



John Harris (IFL)

them altogether with determined rank and file fighters.

The labour movement south of the border must not leave the Scottish workers isolated. They will be affected by the Poll Tax too. And their ability to resist it will be affected directly by the success or failure of the battle in Scotland. Work must begin now to win workers, especially council workers, and Labour Party militants, to supporting action taken in Scotland, to adopting non-compliance policy now and to fighting for a perspective of class wide industrial action throughout the country as the best and most effective means of defeating the Poll Tax once and for all.

The always vain hopes of the Labour leaders that the Lords would prevent the worst excesses of Thatcher's 'reform' of the rates getting through have come to nought. The ermine brigade in the upper chamber,

with their vast estates and their town and country properties, were only too eager to see the charge pushed through so that their rates bills could be equalised with those of the poorest sections of the community.

Kinnock's other hope—that the Poll Tax would prove so unpopular it would win Labour the next election—is a pipe-dream, and a dangerous one at that. The successful implementation of the Tax in Scotland and then the rest of the country will weaken the working class and strengthen the Tories. It will be another labour movement scalp for Thatcher. This must not be allowed to happen. The mood for a fight in Scotland must not be squandered by Kinnock's insistence that we grovel to the naked class laws of the Tories. It must be built upon and generalised into a massive campaign to defy and smash the Poll Tax!■

Trade Unionists Against Section 28

The day after the 1988 Pride demo the Trade Unionists Against Section 28 (TUAS) organised a conference in London. One hundred and twenty people attended the conference.

The majority of delegates were from NALGO and the NUT, the unions most directly affected by the Tories' anti-lesbian and gay rights legislation. There were, though, delegates from the T&G, the AEU and TSSA. Delegates came from all over the country. Scotland, Wales, the North East, the Midlands and the South were all represented.

The conference heard speeches opposing Section 28 from Labour MP Mildred Gordon and Lambeth Labour Councillor Rachael Webb. Austin Allen—the Bradford NUT member sacked and reinstated after a strike—also spoke, bringing home the key lessons of his struggle against bigotry. An NUS striker also addressed the conference.

After the speeches and a series of workshops the conference adopted a series of policy motions that pointed

the campaign in the right direction. They recognised the need to oppose new realism, which, for lesbians and gay men means the labour movement retreating on its limited commitments to lesbian and gay rights particularly at the level of local government. They recognised the need to campaign for non-compliance with Section 28 and for industrial action in defence of all those attacked under the provisions of the Section. The conference recognised the central need to campaign against the Section inside the organisations of the labour movement.

While the forces inside the labour movement who are openly committed to the fight for lesbian and gay rights remain a small minority this conference definitely marked a step in the right direction. It was a step towards consolidating those forces and enabling them to expand their influence.

For further information on TUAS contact:
TUAS, c/o 7 Pickwick Court,
London SE9 4SA