

# Judges do Thatcher's dirty work

AN EXTREMELY serious situation now exists for the entire working class and labour movement in Britain.

During the past ten years the Tories have been laying down section by section an all-encompassing legislative noose ready to be linked up and tightened into a stranglehold when the contradictions of British capitalism explode into open crisis.

This is not a matter of anti-union laws alone but a whole series of political, economic, legal and social debilitating, restricting and controlling measures.

Already working people are coming increasingly into conflict with what is in essence a complete system of state repression now being laid down at an accelerating rate.

● When rail workers wanted to take action in support of nurses they were threatened with legal action under the laws that ban secondary action.

● When seafarers wanted to hold a national ballot for strike action, in line – as they thought – with the Tories' own rules, they were barred by a judge. Then under the secondary picketing laws the courts set out to smash their union by seizing its funds.

● The rate-capping of Labour Councils in inner-city areas, as well as increasing the impoverishment of local people, has also hit funding to trade unions, community groups, voluntary organisations, ethnic bodies and the representatives of minorities who fight for the well-being and rights of their members.

## BERNARD FRANKS

● The plans for operating the poll tax, as well as debilitating millions of people economically, include a total system for identifying and monitoring the movements of the entire adult population. Every householder and landlord will be a continuous supplier of information, while identity cards are advocated for young people – the hardest to track.

● Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill not only aims at eliminating non-discriminatory rates but actually imposes discrimination against lesbians and gay men. It also holds serious implications in terms of censorship of school books, library books, films, plays, comics etc.

● The so-called 'freedom of speech' law now enforced in colleges gives full licence to fascists and Zionists to speak against the will of the student body while giving college managements wide powers to clamp down on student activism, be it in support of the struggles of workers here or abroad or in regard to student issues.

● An 'exhaustive inquiry' into the role of student unions in universities, polytechnics and colleges was announced by Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker on 18 April, especially aimed at the National Union of Students (NUS).

● The 1986 Public Order Act restricts the right to picket, demonstrate and hold open-air meetings. It supplies the police

with powers to re-route, cut short or ban a demonstration.

● The Employment Bill is a scabs' charter giving legal and financial backing to individuals who defy democratically-arrived-at union decisions. It seeks to impose a postal ballot for the political fund and alter election procedures to ensure that right-wingers retain office and left-wingers are removed.

● The Education Bill aims to smash up the integrated comprehensive school system while imposing strict state-control of the curriculum, in this way returning to an elitist structure under which working

class children simply receive vocational training suited to their subordinate roles in industry or commerce.

● The Adult Training Scheme will force the long-term unemployed, aged 18 to 50, into menial jobs for their dole-plus-£10-a-week.

● Availability-for-work rules have been tightened up while the 21 hour rule – whereby the unemployed can study for this length of time per week without losing benefit – will be abolished.

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Conflict with the law



# Workers Press

## Behind the euphoria

Sick people tend to be obsessed with the thermometer. Financial markets and leaders of the capitalist world show an equally obsessive interest in the US trade figures.

Despite the notoriously unreliable quality of the monthly statistics, every slight improvement in these figures is greeted with euphoria. Every worsening is met with mounting despair. Such is the precarious state of the patient's health—the patient in this case being the world capitalist economy.

The unreliability of the Department of Commerce's figures can be judged by the fact that when seasonally adjusted figures for the exports and imports from the beginning of 1986 onwards were released last week, a major slice of what had been greeted as the wonderful improvements in the March statistics were adjusted away.

In one respect the world bankers and industrial magnates are quite right to react to the US trade figures in the way that they do. For the stability of American capitalism remains the key to the stability of world capitalist economy, just as its instability threatens the stability of the entire system. The American market remains the largest market for many countries of Europe, for Japan and the Far East and the dollar, for all its weaknesses, remains the single most important trading and finance currency.

What the Commerce Department took away last week appears to have been recovered. Against all expectations, the April figures showed a seasonally adjusted deficit of just under \$10bn. A deficit of some \$12bn had been expected.

The dollar rose sharply throughout world markets. Here itself is a measure of the crisis. The trade gap continues to mount but the dollar improves. In other words, the news was bad but it could have been even worse!

More sober voices suggested that the market's reaction may be well out of line. In particular fears were expressed about renewed inflationary pressures in the US economy, echoed in last week's call from the Bank for International Settlement for tighter fiscal controls.

In the first place it is impossible to chart future trends with any degree of accuracy. If figures for the first four months are taken, the deficit was somewhat under \$50bn—a substantial gap. If the April figures alone are considered the deficit would be over \$120bn. If the trends for the last six months were to be maintained, the deficit would disappear entirely within the space of some two years. You pay your money and you take your choice.

Second, April's improvement was due principally to a sharp fall back in US imports of some six per cent. Exports, after riding sharply over the last few months also fell back—by 2.5 per cent. Hence the overall improvement in the figures.

Imports of office machinery, clothing, electrical and industrial machinery, footwear and steel products were all sharply down. Cars were one of the few sectors showing an increase in import levels.

World capitalism can take little comfort from such trends. America's imports are the rest of the world's exports. A stagnant, or even worse, declining level of US imports spells ruin for important sectors of world capitalist manufacturing.

This is the contradiction that continues to hang over the American economy. Any forces which tend to correct the huge US external deficit at the same time accelerates the forces creating the conditions for depression throughout world capitalism.

But the longer the US deficit remains uncorrected the weaker the dollar and consequently the greater the instability throughout world financial markets.

The Reagan presidency was marked by an attempt to ignore this contradiction as the US deficit was allowed to soar unchecked. But the contradiction will not go away. It will stare the next President, be it Dukakis or Bush, straight in the face.

## WORKERS PRESS FIGHTING FUND

£10,000 by 30 September 1988

In so far: £2,269.02

THIS WEEK we received £398.19.

Special thanks to a reader in Japan who sent a substantial donation—this was a real welcome to the return of Workers Press.

Our fund was coming in even though Workers Press was not being produced. But if we are to reach our target of £10,000 by the end of September, we have a lot of catching up to do.

The response to the paper shows that we have many readers who were eagerly awaiting its return and we have every confidence that you will ensure

the success of the fund.

For our part, we intend to have more events, like the Peter Fryer lectures, which introduce new readers to the work and policies of Workers Press.

The Peter Fryer lectures were very successful. An average of 70 people attended and comrades, members of other socialist organisations, expressed their interest in continuing to hold such lectures.

We invite you to join us in the campaign to build the Workers Press and give generously to our Fighting Fund.

Dot Gibson

Send all donations to:

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## Harry McShane

HARRY McShane, widely regarded as the last representative of 'Red Clydeside'—the militant anti-capitalist struggles of the west of Scotland labour movement between 1914 and 1920—died in April, aged 96.

His life was commemorated on Sunday 22 May by a meeting and ceilidh at the Peoples' Palace museum in Glasgow, organised by the Socialist Workers Party, the group with which he was most associated in his latter years.

Known particularly as a comrade of the intransigent revolutionary internationalist and Marxist educator, John MacLean (1879—1923), one of McShane's later public appearances in Glasgow was at the first annual John MacLean memorial lecture, mounted by the Lanarkshire teachers' union (EIS) in 1986.

McShane, already in his mid-nineties, took the chance to reassert his endorsement not only of MacLean's anti-war stand and his support of the Russian Revolution, but also to contrast his uncompromising atheism favourably with the obscurantist attempts to marry socialist ideas with religion, indulged in by other 'Red Clydesiders' such as John Wheatley.

Like MacLean, McShane refused to join the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920, rightly perceiving its theoretical weaknesses, but wrongly failing to recognise the new party as a necessary, internationalist step for the British working class. He corrected the mistake before MacLean died, leading to a painful break with his political mentor.

Later renowned as a leader of the Hunger Marches of the 1930s, McShane broke with the CPGB in 1953 soon after Stalin's death. This was three years before the major flood of resignations from the ranks of the Stalinist party. Perhaps partly for this reason, McShane, while making a serious theoretical assessment and en-

dorsing the Hungarian revolution of 1956, never seems to have found his way to entirely consistent conclusions concerning Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism between 1924 and 1940.

On Friday 13 May, at a ceremony on Glasgow Green to scatter McShane's ashes on the ground where he often addressed mass working class audiences, his comrade of more than four decades, Leslie Foster, said: 'To socialists of bygone years this was indeed hallowed ground. In those days socialists would call it 'the college on the Green'. Surely Harry McShane was one of its brightest students.'

'The Chartists spoke here... the pioneers of the Social Democratic Federation in Glasgow fought here for the right of free speech. And it was on this greensward that Harry McShane and Guy Aldred, 35 years on, had to fight again for the right of assembly.'

On this spot, John MacLean, Jimmy Maxton and Willie Gallagher denounced the miseries of capitalism. Harry was a soapbox man, a street corner orator. At Fleshers Haugh, Jail Square, or Nelson's monument, he chronicled the annals of Glasgow's poor. A Marxist to the core, he would say in a simple way that the poor will always be with us, as long as capitalism is with us.

'His politics however were not of the parish pump. He had wider horizons. His roots were Scottish. He was at Knydart along with Hugh McDiarmid when demobbed Highland ex-servicemen seized back their land...'

In his latter years, Harry regretted the failure of the Labour movement to honour its pioneers, the unsung socialist heroes. Those of us who were his friends have a great opportunity to redress the balance. That indeed would be a proper way to remember this special man. Harry McShane—you built better than you knew.'



# Black week for apartheid

If the past few days are anything to go by, Botha's apartheid state is in for a rough ride in the coming period.

In response to escalating internal and external resistance, the Pretoria government extended the State of Emergency for the third successive year, and called up army reservists.

The government's image did not improve when Interpol issued a warrant for the arrest

of South African diplomat Joseph Klue, a policeman, in connection with the murder of ANC representative Dulcie September, who was killed by a professional assassin's bullet in Paris on 29 March.

The press reported that South Africa may have lost air superiority over the Southern Angolan war-zone. They came to this conclusion when Western diplomats announced that

Argentina has been shipping Mirage-3 air frames to SA ports. The Angolans claim that their modern MIG-23s have shot down tens of South African Mirage F-1CZs in nine months.

In Namibia, 25,000 school children have maintained a stay-away schools boycott since 17 March, protesting the presence of South African military bases in the immediate vicinity of four schools.

International condemnation of the judicial farce which brought the innocent Sharpeville Six one step nearer the gallows last week has done little to wipe Pretoria's blood-stained image.

Its sham reforms, however, were graphically illustrated last Saturday at a mass celebration in honour of Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday in Umlazi's King Zwelithini stadium, near Durban. When Pretoria stooge, chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the KwaZulu 'homeland leader', and others called for Mandela's immediate release from jail before an audience of 40,000, in clear contravention of numerous State of Emergency restrictions, Pretoria had nothing whatever to say. Obviously, there are blacks... and blacks!

## Celebration

When the British Anti-Apartheid Movement and Elephant House organised a celebration of Nelson Mandela's birthday with a political concert in Wembley stadium, Pretoria went berserk.

Through its London embassy it accused the BBC (who with 60 other national networks had arranged to broadcast the concert) of giving airtime to an event which would assist 'terrorism'.

Somebody's dirty tricks department spent thousands of pounds on huge quantities of a glossy brochure handed out free outside Wembley stadium by groups of heavysset young white men. It purported to be a 'souvenir programme', but was in fact a thinly disguised attack on Mandela and the ANC which went to great lengths the close connections with the South African Communist Party (not for the same reasons that we do).

The only ones who appear to have been intimidated by Pretoria's empty threats (parroted by 24 Conservative MPs, led by

John Carlyle, MP) were the concert organisers—who tried to discourage artists from making political statements on stage, and refused to read out a message from Nelson Mandela smuggled out of Pollsmore prison in time for the concert—and Mr Michael Checkland, Director General of the BBC—who, directly contradicting what was printed in his own house organ, Radio Times, claimed that the concert was a purely musical event!

But the artists, the technicians and the 70,000 strong audience would have none of it. Annie Lennox of Eurythmics took out her own insurance against quick-fingered censors by making her appeal for the release of all political prisoners over the finale of 'Brand New Day'!

## Loser

For all the grunts of righteous indignation, Pretoria had backed a loser from the start. Three days before the Wembley concert the BBC had aired a documentary which left audiences in no doubt as to who the real-life terrorists are. It dealt with the arbitrary detention without trial, beatings and torture of black South African children from the townships.

These acts of unspeakable brutality, perpetrated routinely by Botha's 'law-enforcement officers', to extract false confessions from innocent children, placed the Pretoria government—and its agents in our own 'Mother of parliaments'—in their proper perspective.

A white schoolgirl who appeared in 'Suffer the Children' was asked how life could be changed for the children of South Africa. She replied: 'People did try to make it a peaceful way of changing, but it didn't work. Now I see the change being a revolution, with armed struggle.'

At this stage, Pretoria may feel that it can afford to dismiss the thoughts of a white South African schoolgirl, prophetic though they may be. What it cannot dismiss, and what will have shaken it to the core, is that vast areas of South Africa were brought to a grinding halt for three days last week by two million black workers when they staged the longest and largest strike ever.

Tom Scott-Robson

## Mitterand faces party revolt

After last week's electoral fiasco, France's President Francois Mitterand faces a hung parliament, and a revolt in the Socialist Party. Rank-and-file party activists and trade unionists blame electoral disappointment on their leader's rightward turn, and Mitterand's manoeuvres for a deal—the so-called 'opening to the centre'.

'They tried playing-down socialism, appealing to the 'moderates', said a Parisian Socialist Party member. 'It doesn't work. When the Centre had to make a choice, it sided with a Right that was leaning so close to the National Front it was hard to tell the difference.'

The Socialist Party's Paris Federation has rejected Mitterand's protege, Rocard, for the Party leadership, voting for their own 'left of centre' candidate.

The French Tories of the UDF made a deal with Jean Marie Le Pen's fascist National Front in the South of France. This was blessed also by the Gaullist RPR in Paris in a secret meeting.

Despite losing his Marseilles seat, ex-paratrooper Le Pen hopes to use the parliamentary crisis and his deals with the 'respectable' Right to further his aims of power. 'If you don't give us our rightful representation in parliament we will make ourselves felt elsewhere,' he declared ominously. In plainer words, more street violence and racist attacks can be expected.

During the election campaign the Socialist Party leadership and Mitterand (who actually gave up his party card some years ago for 'national unity' with the Right)

tried to appease the fascists, as well as the so-called 'Centre'.

Not once did Socialist Party spokespersons call Le Pen a fascist — they stuck to terms like 'exclusionist' and 'xenophobe'. On television, Mitterand stated that: 'Of course, we all agree there are too many immigrants in France, the thing is to deal with the problem humanely.'

The Socialist Party did not mention the word 'Socialism' throughout the campaign. It put forward no real policies to answer workers' problems. Its slogan was simply 'a majority for the President'.

Mitterand made it clear beforehand that he did not want a big majority, because it would make it harder to do his deal with the Tories. The answer given by many disillusioned workers and lower middle class people is something else, however.

Over 30 per cent of the electorate abstained — the biggest abstention in French history, and clearly a large part of it normally Socialist Party voters. The other significant event, confounding capitalist press pundits, was a temporary revival in the fortunes of the Communist Party.

From 6.5 per cent in the presidential election, its vote rose to 11.5 per cent, and it may hold the balance in parliament. What this represents is not a renewed strength of Stalinism, but revived trade union militancy in recent years, coupled with disgust among workers at reformist opportunism. The various 'left groups' in France have failed to offer a convincing alternative — the Trotskyist movement will have to do that.



## Playing on a rubber field

REX WARNER is, I suppose, little read nowadays, but in the thirties his social allegory 'The Wild Goose Chase' was much admired. Its strange blend of Kafka and anti-fascism was greatly to the taste of the times.

I read it again the other day, for the first time for over 40 years, and once more found that I most enjoyed the section which was originally published as a separate story in 'New Writing'. This describes a football match between the 'Pros' - the 'progressive' party that promises change by peaceful means through existing legal and parliamentary machinery - and the 'Cons'.

The result of the game is announced beforehand, and whenever the 'Pros' manage to gain any advantage it is brutally snatched from them by trickery and violence.

'As he ran it seemed to him that the goal posts were receding from him and, looking downwards to his feet, he observed that the rubber field was rapidly changing consistency, stretching out like elastic. Farther and farther retreated the goal posts as he, with the whole Pro team ran on. The whole ground was expanding at a terrific pace, and looking over his shoulder George could not see the ends of the crowded stands. It is some damned mechanism, he thought, still running, and suddenly the lights went out and

there arose a hullabaloo from the spectators above which, after a short interval, George could distinguish the rattle of a machine-gun and groans, sounds of collapse all around him.'

Old Corruption has always played the game in this fashion. It has changed the position of the goal posts, or changed in some way the rules of the game, whenever it has had to meet a real threat to its power - or even merely to avoid a minor defeat, embarrassment, or humiliation.

Two examples of this have surfaced in the last couple of weeks.

First we had the news that it is proposed to abolish altogether the right to challenge jurors. This proposal, forecast in Workers Press last November, follows a decade or more of stealthy erosion of the traditional jury system.

## Counterbalance

Our rulers have never relished this system, which has operated all too often, in their eyes, as a democratic counterbalance to the overweening power of the state.

When juries in the 1790s and later defiantly refused to convict radical leaders on trial for their lives, the authorities took to shamelessly packing juries with their own supporters. With the help of informers they would 'prick' lists of jurors according to their supposed loyalty to the government of the day.

This system has survived. 'Pricking' is nowadays, in a more sophisticated form, one of the duties of the Special Branch.

But surveillance of juries hasn't worked as well as Old Corruption would like. They're still getting too many

acquittals, especially in political cases. So they've been steadily reducing the number of jurors whom a defendant can peremptorily challenge in an attempt to secure a balanced jury.

Now, if press reports are to be believed, it's proposed to abolish peremptory challenges altogether, thus wiping out at a stroke yet another of our age-old traditional liberties.

At the same time the government is planning to bring in a new Official Secrets Act, officially described as 'draconian', that will increase the chances of successfully prosecuting civil servants who leak information and journalists who publish leaked information.

It will no longer be possible to argue, as Clive Ponting did, that information was leaked in the public good. Nor will it any longer be possible to justify publication on the ground that the information published was already in the public domain.

These are truly astonishing proposals, so much so that even some Tory MPs are reported to be disturbed by them.

My guess is that the Thatcher government is not merely smarting at the long list of court room fiascos it has endured, but is expecting a period of intense social struggle in the not too distant future.

So it is once more altering the rules in its own favour. It is changing the position of the goal posts in the middle of the game. It is bringing into play the 'damned mechanism' that stretches the rubber field.

Against these stratagems the working class has its organisation, its strength, and its awareness of what is going on. We shall need all three in the days that lie ahead.

## AS I SEE IT...



## BY TOM OWEN

I AM happy that my two sons have seen four seas before the age of 11.

It is a modest achievement in fact - the Celtic Sea, the North Sea, the Channel and the Mediterranean. At their age I had only seen what was then called the Irish sea, and the Mersey, which looked like a sea. The other seas were the blue bits on maps. (green was non-descript nations, red represented the British Empire then, not the socialist states).

Francis Bacon, one of the founders of the empirical method and a shrewd social observer, valued travel above all things for 'broadening the mind'. Even in times of the debased and destructive 'tourist' industry many more working class people have been able to travel, and experience other cultures and languages, not just as a result of being in uniform, and that can only be good.

That is why I had to think about a story told by a YTS instructor who took a group of

Sheffield trainees to the water park in the Rother Valley. 'Is this the North sea?' a lad asked. It's one thing to confuse the Mersey estuary with the Irish sea but the difference between the North sea and a windsurfing lake is another question.

The lad had never left Sheffield, and probably not even his housing estate. Did he not do geography lessons at school (if he got around to going to them)? Well the new 'student-centred learning' does away with 'subjects', it prefers 'projects' and 'themes'. Neither project nor formal teaching, nor up to that point YTS 'skills' teaching had given him the education to recognise a sea.

Can Baker and Mrs. T. be right about the education system 'failing' our children? Educationalists and politicians have always talked of 'failure' in the public education system; twenty years ago sociologists wondered why working class children 'failed' in schools. Now Tories claim that teachers 'fail' 'our children'.

The arguments advanced by reformers, radicals, and reactionary 'radicals', are really about the relationship between the working class and the state. It is worth following some of the arguments about 'failure' in detail.

## Optimism

In the sixties, despite the optimism of the comprehensive experiment, educationalists still doubted the success of the educational experience of the working class. What they meant by that was, of course, many different things. Some reformers claimed that the reason was because the working class

was 'deprived', and that a long process of social reform would benefit the working class and raise them from their 'apathy' etc.

Some socio-linguists went so far as to suggest that working class language was 'restricted' and the child would resist the more open 'elaborate' language of the middle class.

This produced a counter argument in America where the issue of racism and Black American English had a more overt and volatile political dimension.

Radical linguists attacked the 'deficiency' or the 'deprivation' model and defended the 'logic of non-standard' English. Thatcher and Baker have a simple minded solution - teach them prescriptive traditional grammar and that will solve the problem together with a dose of discipline.

For Marxists the problem remains, how can a kid who does not have the rudiments of knowledge become an internationalist? Firstly Marxism does not deal with 'deprivation' or 'deficiency' when analysing society. These are two terms that none of the previous punters will ever understand, never mind use - exploitation and oppression.

Exploitation is the process of extraction of surplus value from human labour power under capitalist ownership of productive forces. Oppression is the result of the politics, ideologies and physical force required to maintain these property relationships.

Once that working class child, just as the most illiterate landless peasant grasps this as the scientific discovery that will elevate his class and all humanity then the scales of ignorance and parochialism will fall from his eyes and horizons will be boundless.



# Moscow summit reports worthy of Hollywood

THE REPORTING of the recent Moscow summit in the capitalist press had a fairy-tale quality worthy of Hollywood. We are asked to believe that Reagan, a life-long rabid anti-communist, who only months ago was referring to the Soviet Union as the 'Evil Empire' has now had a change of heart and wishes to see a new era in US-Soviet relations.

In reality the latest round of arms talks reveal a growing tension within US capitalism over the whole question of defence expenditure. Faced with deepening economic problems, sections of US capital see the Soviet Union as a potential field for profitable investment and a virtually unlimited consumer market.

Although not widely reported in the press, Reagan's entourage included a team of top US businessmen whose mission in Moscow was to draft a new and extensive trade agreement. Their group, which included representatives from Sabisco Inc., Johnson and Johnson, Ford Motor Co., Eastman Kodak, Chevron Corp. and New York's merchant banks wish to see an end to the old cold war rhetoric. As their spokesman Dwayne Andreas put it:

The business community we represent is anxiously looking forward to the day when there's less emphasis on arms and more emphasis on mutually profitable trade'. When in his subsequent Guildhall speech in London, Reagan announced that: 'The entire world

BY KEITH GIBBARD

salutes the Prime Minister for being the first to suggest that we could 'do business' with Mr. Gorbachev' these gentlemen no doubt gave each other knowing winks.

There is however another fraction of US capital which is far less sanguine about the prospects of a major reduction in arms spending. It consists of the prime defence contractors which grew fat during the early Reagan years with the biggest 'peace-time' military expansion in history.

The top six — General Dynamics, McDonnell Douglas, United Technologies, Boeing, General Electric and Lockheed — rely on US Department of Defence contracts for over half of their total sales. Heavily concentrated along California's high-tech 'sunrise industry' coast these companies dug deep into their pockets to put Reagan into the White House in the first place. They were well rewarded, Star Wars and all. From the outset Reagan made it clear that the US role as world policeman for imperialism was to be expanded. As recently as 1984, he summarised the Reagan Doctrine:

'We began with renewed realism — a clear-eyed understanding of the world we live in and of our inescapable global responsibilities. Our industries depend on the importation of energy and minerals from distant lands. Our

prosperity requires a sound international financial system and free and open trading markets. And our security is inseparable from the security of our friends and neighbours...

## Despair

'Gone are the days when the United States was perceived as a rudderless superpower, a helpless hostage to world events. American leadership is back. Peace through strength is not a slogan, it is a fact of life. And we will not return to the days of handwringing, defeatism, decline and despair.'

Now, however, there is growing alarm within the US ruling class that as economic power declines, in the face of intense competition from Japan and Europe, defence represents a massive burden of unproductive expenditure which US capital can no longer carry alone. A congressional report published this month, pointed out that whilst US defence spending has increased by 45 per cent in the 1980's, the equivalent figure for West Germany was just 2.9 per cent.

With the Pentagon forecasting that defence expenditure will rise to \$400 billion by 1991, the federal budget deficit has spiralled under Reagan, whilst in the major US cities basic public amenities — roads, bridges, schools and hospitals — go unrepaired.

In recent years, the US administration has been attempting to force its imperialist rivals to share the arms bill, Japan in particular is being urged to step up its defence commitment, despite such a move being in breach of article nine of Japan's 'peace' constitution.

## Shoulder

As the Moscow summit ended, US Defence Secretary, Frank Carlucci, flew to Tokyo where in a speech at the Japan National Press Club, he warned against false hopes of a more relaxed atmosphere in which Japanese companies could sell high technology goods to the Soviet Union and called for continued co-operation in defence. For their part the Japanese government agreed to shoulder the lion's share of a \$6.5 billion joint US-Japan project to design an advanced jet fighter based on the McDonnell Douglas F-16 aircraft.

However, the post-war period when the USA could impose its will on its capitalist neighbours has gone for good, broken under the upsurge of the working class throughout the world. As the US economy stagnates and the calls for protectionism grow louder, relations within the imperialist camp increasingly resemble 'a fight amongst hostile brothers' as Marx so accurately expressed it.

# US ARMED FORCES RECRUIT MORE WOMEN

Although the then President, Richard Nixon, abolished the draft (call-up) in 1972 to head off opposition to the Vietnam War, the Military Service Act is still in force. That means that young men are obliged to register with the military from 60 days before to 60 days after their eighteenth birthday. They then become liable to military service in the case of an 'emergency'.

Those not registering are liable to a maximum penalty of five years in gaol and/or a fine of \$10,000. All the apparatus for full or partial conscription of young American males is thus in force.

Although some 500,000 have not registered legal action so far has only been taken against a handful of resisters. For example, since January 1984, action has only been taken against 16 young men, of

whom eight have been convicted for avowing their opposition to military service.

The Pentagon thus has to depend upon volunteers to maintain the strength of the armed forces, which have become wholly professional forces. Total enrollment now amounts to about 2.5 million, about a tenth of whom are stationed in the US's far-flung bases throughout the world. Many, if not most of the newly enlisted men join because they lack the education or skills to get decent civilian jobs or a place in a college or university when they finish high school. Many recruits are barely literate.

The pressures of the market place do therefore ensure a more or less adequate supply of cannon fodder, even if the young men have to be taught elementary learning skills before they are suitably brainwashed. In recent years there has been some improvement in the job market and male recruits have fallen short of the Pentagon's needs. Hence a drive to recruit more women and to train them for jobs hitherto performed by men.

Women now make up 10.2 per cent of the armed forces, higher than in Britain (five per cent),

France (three per cent) and West Germany and the Soviet Union (only one per cent). The US figure is up from only 2.5 per cent in the mid 1970s.

If the position of women in society is to be measured by the proportion in the military, the US rates top marks!

In fact, women volunteers play an increasingly indispensable part in the Pentagon's war plans as well as enabling it to avoid a reimposition of the draft — which would run into tremendous political opposition.

Practically no duty, with the exception of direct combat, is closed to US servicewomen. They perform many tasks formerly considered male preserves and are no longer confined to cooking and typing.

They fly planes, including those refuelling bombers, serve in ships at sea and staff underground capsules from which nuclear weapons will be launched in the event of war.

A quarter of the crew of the repair ship, Acadia, operating in the Persian Gulf, is female. Many technical jobs, such as the servicing of aircraft, are carried out by

women in all four services (ie including the marines, where they only make up five per cent of the personnel).

By filling key skilled jobs, they release men to prepare for more lethal activities. But the question also arises of whether women, already trained for armed combat, should actually engage in it. It seems the logical next step, despite some public squeamishness. Meanwhile, sensational stories of sexual harassment and of lesbianism have appeared in the press.

However high women may rise in the officer corps, the final decisions are made by male officers who make up the high command and dominate the government.

But there seems no reason why women from the ruling class should not occupy such positions in time as well as slogging it out with the infantry or piloting bomber planes. Equality for women, under capitalism, presumably means the right to kill or be killed on behalf of the system and the risk of being injured, tortured or raped by the enemy. It can only be a matter of time before this kind of 'equality' becomes available for American women.



# LETTERS

## Peter provokes

PERHAPS the best indictment of K. Ainsworth's view (letters 11.6.88) that Peter Fryer is a waste of space' (in Workers Press, that is!) are the frequent criticisms and debates that his column provokes.

Comrade Ainsworth's letter and this letter are good examples. The question isn't 'why is Peter Fryer in Workers Press?' rather 'why isn't Peter Fryer in the WRP?'

In last week's 'Personal Column' Peter formulated three varieties of opponents to Marxism; to these I would like to add a large number of others but, for the moment, let's deal with one: Namely, those who are conversant with Marxist theory, see the necessity of a revolutionary party based on that theory but fail to enter the movement and fight to build it.

No doubt he has his disagreements with the WRP, if so, let's hear them. Fence-sitting isn't a revolutionary passtime.

*Chris Boylan  
Leicester*

Now that the Workers Press has resumed production and will be coming out on a weekly basis, we welcome all letters from readers and sympathisers. Please make sure that they are no more than 200 words long.

## Corrections

TWO corrections are needed to the letter from 'A London Reader' (11 June) referring to the Conway Hall lectures by Peter Fryer on 'Aspects of British Black History'.

Fryer didn't say that at least a third of those transported from Africa died during the voyage. What he did say was that, of those transported in British ships, between a twelfth and a third died on the way.

He didn't say that the expectation of life on the sugar plantations was only three or four years. What he did say was that, of those who survived the 'middle passage', one in three died in their first three years in the New World.

*Another London reader*



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# MAHABHARATA 'STORMED THE HEAVENS'

WHILE Workers Press was in regenerative exile, Peter Brook's ten-hour long production of the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata* — an unforgettable tale of creation, exile and war — stormed the heavens at Glasgow's Mayfest.

The unsurpassable highlight of the annual festival, this theatrical saga, forged by Brook and Jean-Claude Carriere from a Sanskrit poem many times longer than the Bible, sets out to tell 'the poetical history of mankind.'

## Recreated

It was done in a half-demolished transport building on Glasgow's South Side. This had been recreated into a magnificently self-fulfilling space, wherein to transport audiences, not so much into an illusion of India, more into a real world of its own, in which the basic elements recognised in the ancient world — air, earth, fire and water — dominated the whole experience.

With a complete absence of electronics or elaborate machinery which put to shame the current conceptions of grand theatre prevailing in London's West End, the multinational and multi-talented cast involved their audience in a sweeping narrative whose impact was reminiscent of what it was like to see a film in cinemascope for the first time.

The production has now left Britain and is not to return in the predictable future. No London management apparently has the guts to handle it. And, since I am no expert on Hinduism, this is not the place to begin a critical discourse on the work's philosophical basis.

If, as is planned, Brook films *The Mahabharata* in India for Channel 4 next year, this may provide the opportunity to enter into an analysis of the ideas informing the enterprise.

## Critical

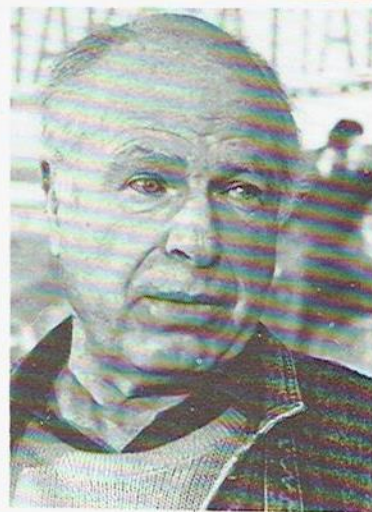
The director himself — having had his problems with the British theatrical Establish-

ment in the past — refused to overestimate the production. To call it a 'landmark' is 'a load of shit', he told one interviewer.

A look at the critical response to the Glasgow production — with a few honourable exceptions, either platitudes in purple prose or (in a small minority of cases) uncomprehending dismissiveness — may provide the clue to why he should say this.

But what this theatrical event did — in my experience to date, uniquely — was to give an inkling of the possibilities of theatre in a socialist society. What an instrument it will be for making realisable the interpenetration of what seem hopelessly separate, historically determined cultures, for interpreting previously unimagined experiences of the past to generations consciously making a truly human future!

The philosophy underlying Brook's passionate skirmish (I doubt if he would claim it was more) with Hindu culture permits him to give (even if he



Director Peter Brook

sought to do so, which he probably does not) no special guidance for the overthrow of the Thatcher cult — nor indeed of capitalism in general.

But *The Mahabharata* did give a real, physical sense of what, at least some aspects of the culture of socialism may be like — a rare, privileged, (if all too brief and limited) peek from the waste land of capitalist decay into the infinite potentialities of the dangerous future of humankind.

Terry Brotherstone

# Chesterfield revisited

## A discussion article

by John Rees

Chesterfield 11 and 12 June, a two day conference bringing together 2,000 activists from all over Britain. All the ingredients of 80s style conference were there — 'policy' groups, plenaries, discussion papers. Every political group in and out of the Labour party was represented. Chesterfield poses a number of questions:

1. Did the conference represent a movement within the trade union and labour movement?
2. What is this movement?
3. What is the international context of this movement?
4. What tasks are posed for revolutionaries after Chesterfield?

The conference was the high-point of the 'Socialist' movement — Socialist Society, Conference of Socialist Economists and Regional Support Groups all feed into a national network which has its publications like *Interlink* as well as considerable intellectual resources.

What is this movement? We must not engage in phrasemongering at this point. The Chesterfield 'events' and the people behind them have their historical place and a political

orientation which can aptly be described as centrist.

Centrism is not just a 'British' phenomenon; it amounts to a trend in the working class which poses socialist principles and policies heavily overlaid with a religious and idealist character.

The task of the working class is to take power, the latter's leading role in the liberation of the whole of humanity are absent from the centrist notions about the way forward out of imperialist crisis.

At the level of appearances, centrism lacks historical sweep and imagination and vacillates on the existing political plane — guiding without foresight.

Beneath this form however is contained a real political danger: centrism is part of the working class movement; it recruits many veteran political campaigners from left and right, Benn and Heffer are examples, it also attracts many 'birds of passage': most importantly it oscillates between differing political movements, Stalinism on the one hand and

the varying left tendencies on the other.

It is in this context and this context alone that centrism solidarises with National Liberation movements.

Centrism is not an independent political force precisely because it cannot pose the revolutionary tasks of working class power and human liberation.

## Reason

For this reason it often appears as the unifying force on the world stage: uncritically supporting Gorbachev and the Soviet bureaucracy's 'peace plans', the latter's co-existence with Reagan, and yet at the same time offering fulsome support to those National Liberation movements the Reagan/Gorbachev summits seek to smash up in some shoddy deal.

Centrism offers a platform of unity to a working class that hungers for unity. An understanding of these contradictions is the prerequisite of any analysis of Chesterfield or of the Benn/Heffer campaign.

Internationally this movement has tendencies in many countries. It acts as a pole of

attraction when the waves of struggle appear to drown those small struggling groups seeking to place this or that revolutionary agenda before the working class. It is often at moments when the conditions seem ripe for revolutionary change that the torch held in weak and small hands falters and and competent and assured politicians of the establishment offer a firm handshake to pull everyone into the centrist movement: this is the context for Tony Benn.

## Fought

What is to be done?

The line of independence of the working class has to be fought for in every sphere of life: we are not arguing for a current or tendency within existing movements, we are fighting for the only progressive and revolutionary force on this planet — the working class. The fight is therefore for the paper and the party; that this is a world task is irrefutable, that it has to be realised in every working class community is the task of the hour, only cynics and centrists will shy away.



# Opposition to Poll Tax grows

COMMUNITY-based working-class organisations are springing up in Scotland on an unprecedented scale in opposition to the Tory government's poll tax.

The Labour and trade union bureaucracy are going through contortions trying to sit on this spontaneous movement.

In Strathclyde - Britain's largest local authority covering Glasgow and its suburbs - at least 60 local groups are now campaigning against the poll tax. New groups sprout almost daily: the latest additions are in the Glasgow housing schemes of Sighthill and Castlemilk, the old mining village of Kilsyth and the suburb of Darnley.

On Monday 16 May, the group in Pollokshields on Glasgow's south side initiated a lobby, and called on the Regional Council's Labour group to refuse assistance to the poll tax registrar who works with council staff, from council buildings, and with council money.

The ladies and gentlemen of the Labour group did not even consider taking this stand, which would have meant risking prosecution. But councillors Bill Miller and Margaret Dick did at least move a motion to delay endorsement of council minutes recording over

BY SIMON PIRANI

£1 million expenditure on poll tax administration.

Legal advisers were called, and confirmed that this tame protest would not offend the Tory law. (Mrs. Thatcher wouldn't have lost much sleep over it either!) Even so, the Labour group voted by 30 to 19 NOT to delay endorsement of the minutes.

So three Labour councillors out of five were not prepared even to make a TOKEN, LEGAL GESTURE against Thatcher's hated tax!

The Scottish TUC-backed 'Stop It' campaign, headed by Labour MP Brian Wilson, is in charge of trying to contain and control the anti-poll tax movement. Wilson started by condemning tactics of non-registration or non-payment - but his trade union colleagues had to back down in the face of pressure from Edinburgh and other left-wing trades councils, and passed a motion at the recent STUC congress that the tax be opposed by 'any and every' means.

The Scottish TUC leaders will be seeking to impose themselves on the anti-poll tax movement at their anti-poll tax rally in Glasgow on Thursday 23 June - with no resolutions from the floor of course.

In April, Glasgow's 'Stop It' campaign rejected a resolution to organise a discussion conference, bringing together community and union forces. The city's trades union council, dominated by the Communist Party Stalinists, turned down a similar call when a resolution to that effect, from the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) teachers' union, fell, for want of a seconder.

So a meeting of 39 community groups, again initiated from Pollokshields, decided to organise its own conference, in Glasgow's City Halls on Sunday 10 July. Invitations are going to trade unions, trades councils, community councils and tenants' associations as well as the anti-poll tax groups.

**Socialists and Workers Press readers must aim to build up the strength of the anti-poll tax groups. This movement will grow and gain confidence in opposition to the bureaucratic Labour leaders, who implement the poll tax through the Labour councils, and try to stifle opposition to it through 'Stop It'.**

**The movement must place no trust in the Labour traitors. It must demand they refuse to implement the poll-tax. It must demand their presence in forums like the July 10 conference. It must demand they organise a strike movement against the poll-tax - reject the STUC's proposed gimmick 'ten-minute strike': start with a one-day general strike!**

One of the hurdles the anti-poll tax groups are having to surmount is the pseudo-Trotskyist 'Militant' tendency.

'The most effective way that ordinary people can voice their opposition to the cowardly and subservient policies of the Labour leadership', the 'Militant' tells us in a pamphlet on the poll tax, is 'by actually joining the Labour Party and participating in the struggle to transform the Labour Party into a fighting socialist organisation...'

The Labour Party will never become a 'fighting socialist organisation' capable of defeating capitalism. The 'Militant's' false perspective ties the working class to the internal business of the Labour Party; in fact this business is but a pale reflection of movements outside.

Furthermore, 'Militant' sees the aim of 'transforming' the Labour Party as ... to put more 'pressure' on the Tories. 'If every Labour council in Scotland were to announce that they were halting all co-operation with the poll tax,' they say, 'the trickle of dissent on the Tory backbenches would rapidly turn into a torrent of opposition.'

Such reformist nonsense has nothing to do with Trotskyism, which aims to build revolutionary leadership to confront and defeat the reformist and Stalinist traitors.

Thursday 23 June: STUC rally on the poll tax, McLellan galleries, Glasgow. Saturday 25 June: demonstrations against the poll tax in Govanhill and Paisley. Monday 27 June: lobby of Strathclyde region Labour group at 12.30 p.m., India Street, Glasgow. Sunday 10 July: Strathclyde Anti-Poll Tax conference at City Halls, Glasgow. Anti-poll tax groups from outside Strathclyde welcome too.

continued from page one

● From September, all 16 and 17 year olds will be ineligible for benefits and must accept a place on a YTS or other job substitute scheme. This and the two above measures comprise a step towards the American 'Workfare' system, a variant on the Poor Law's Workhouse or Labour Test, under which the unemployed must accept harsh and degrading work to qualify for relief.

● The 1948 Welfare Reforms, on which the poorest members of society heavily depend - the NHS (including eyesight and dental care), the Social Security and National Insurance systems, are in the process of being undermined in both financial and operational terms.

● The pension system is to be deregulated as a step towards privatisation, forcing dependence on share markets susceptible to collapse and crash.

● The government has referred the work of television and film crews to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to pronounce on their alleged restrictive practices.

'Ministers have made clear that legislation to do away with restrictive practices may be introduced.' (Guardian, April 20 1988).

A broad application across the public sector is proposed, from mining, dockyards, to civil service, local government and the NHS, also in the ferry industry. Clearly under such laws employers will in each case police their own workforce.

● The ban on unions at GCHQ in January 1984 opened the door to a flood of withdrawals of union recognition or replacement with one-union deal where privatisation, rationalisation and take-overs have occurred.

● The plan to set up a Broadcasting Standards Authority is a preparation for widespread

previewing, scrutiny and vetting of TV and radio programmes leading to a wide-ranging censorship of fiction, current affairs and eventually news.

## Social Control

Millions of working class and middle class people in trade unions and local communities, unaware of the full extent of these laws, will be in for a series of massive shocks when they seek to defend their rights and conditions only to find themselves acting illegally and in direct conflict with the law.

The interlocking of these separate measures will bring about a total system of legal, political and social control of the working class.

A major aim will be to enforce a severe economic regime which involves the smashing of trade unions or their subordination to the state, and imposition of full flexibility, low pay, casual

working and hire-and-fire conditions so that everyone will legally be required to work as directed. Basically you will be breaking the law if your employer says you are.

## Onslaught

Such conditions fit in with the aim of Thatcher and Co., that where industries continue to exist they shall be able to compete favourably on world markets against the current lowest prices.

This onslaught cannot be fought on the old unions-versus-employers basis or even on the previous unions-versus-government basis of pressure to force a change in policy.

The urgent task is to build a leadership based on the understanding that this growing social and political crisis can be resolved only through a social revolution which will overthrow capitalism and lay the basis for socialism.

We urge all those who agree with us to join us in building the Workers Revolutionary Party.