

FIGHT THATCHER'S THUGGERY

BUILD A MASS MOVEMENT TO DEFEND DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

BY GEOFF PILLING

A BATTERY of proposed legislation aimed at the rights and living standards of millions was introduced into parliament last week.

Among a series of vicious measures the Tories plan to scrap legislation protecting the working hours and conditions of 16 - 18 year olds and women.

It could pave the way for the employment of women in the mines. This is Thatcher's return to Victorian values with a vengeance.

Over three quarters of a million young people are at risk as Thatcher proposes to scrap laws that prevent the employment of young people before 7 a.m. and after 8 p.m. and limit their hours to a maximum of 10 in any one day.

Collaboration

The very same week union leaders prepared to continue their shameful collaboration with the Tory Employment Training schemes - a thinly disguised compulsory labour.

The Tories want to abolish the Training Commission and bring the administration of cheap labour schemes directly under the control of the Department of Employment.

In another betrayal of millions of youth, the TUC was last week expected to agree to soften guidelines which will allow unions to negotiate with local employers on co-operation with such schemes.

This will open the way for some union leaders to administer these cheap labour arrangements.

Two pieces of legislation are aimed directly at the fight of the Irish working class.

The Northern Ireland (Elected Authorities) Bill will require signed declarations by District Council and Assembly candidates that, if elected, they will not support or assist proscribed organisations in the North of Ireland.

The other bill will cut remi-

ssions for 'terrorist' offences committed in the North of Ireland from one half to one third.

Labour spokesman on northern Ireland, Kevin McNamara, described the decision as 'ill-conceived and depressing' saying that remission had been one of the most effective weapons against terrorism.

In other words, he differs from the Tories merely on how best to fight the Irish working class and Republican movement.

Hammer

Council house tenants come under the hammer in measures forcing Councils to use money from council house sales to clear debts rather than spending the proceeds on new projects.

This measure alone could raise rents by a staggering £20 per week.

Identity

The compulsory identity scheme for football fans will be extended to other sports such as rugby union, rugby league and cricket as the Sports Minister sees fit.

This measure is the first step towards a blanket identity card system for all youth.

By their cowardly inaction and in many cases their open collaboration the trade union and Labour leaders have paved the way for this latest Tory assault on the democratic rights of the whole of the working class, the youth, the Irish, the poor, the sick, the aged and sections of the middle class, many of whom voted for Thatcher

in the last election.

In Britain, the rights of the oppressed depend on the strength of the working class which is expressed through the trade union movement. It is the failure of the TUC and Labour leadership to mobilise the working class against the anti-trade union laws which now encourages Thatcher's gang of thieves to be confident that they can rob the working class of everything it has.

A campaign throughout the Labour movement to defend the rights and living standards of all those being battered by the Thatcher government is now of primary urgency. Such a campaign is inseparable from the struggle against the treacherous reformist and Stalinist leadership of the working class.

Irish group ready to join Preparatory Committee

BY JOHN STEELE

At a meeting in Belfast on the 20 November the newly formed Socialist Revolutionary Group (SRG) confirmed its full support for the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference of Trotskyists. The Group pledged itself to fight for the reconstruction of the Fourth International and committed its members to take full responsibility in the work of the Preparatory Committee.

In a statement the group said that they were proud to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International in a real concrete way.

Only the building of a revolutionary working class leadership and an Irish section of the Fourth International can unite the working class and smash British imperialism.

This work must proceed from a

firm internationalist political foundation.

The SRG's statement attacked the petty-bourgeois nationalism of the Sinn Fein leadership, divorcing the National struggle from the fight for socialism. The assertion from Gerry Adams that 'Socialism is not now on the agenda' ranks with the treachery of De Valera's infamous 'Labour must wait'. Only the socialist revolution can remove partition and complete the national-democratic tasks.

In both the north and south of Ireland the crisis of imperialism forces the capitalists to attack the working class.

In the 26 counties, Haughey's £300 million cuts in government spending includes the slashing of the local authority house-building programme, increases in university fees and local council charges, and £89 million cuts in social welfare.

The economy of the six county statelet, artificially main-

tained by Britain for political reasons, faces new attacks in the decision to privatise the Harland and Wolff shipyards and Short's aircraft factory. Thatcher's blocking of a £10 million order for the shipyards is helping to shatter the last illusions of the Protestant working class.

The Socialist Revolutionary Group will fight to relate all these struggles to the crisis of imperialism, and the necessity of building a vanguard Marxist party. An integral part of this fight is the need to expose the influence of Stalinism - in the demonstrations and rallies against privatisation the Stalinist trade union officials handed the leadership to extreme right wing unionist MPs.

The SRG's statement concluded:

**Defeat British Imperialism!
For a United Socialist Ireland!**

Build the Irish Section of the Fourth International!

Workers Press

Palestine and the Fourth International

The Palestine National Council, under the joint pressure of Moscow and Washington has declared the formation of a ghetto 'state' on the West Bank and Gaza strip.

This decision has brought into the open the PLO's betrayal of the heroic and unbroken fight stretching over 40 years and more to liberate the Palestinian people from Zionism and oppression.

Workers and youth throughout the world have been inspired by the devotion and intransigence of the Palestinians, especially its youth, against Zionist terror and the collusion of Stalinism and imperialism.

This question is of particular importance for the Fourth International (FI), and especially the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP). It was one of the issues on which the abandonment of Trotskyism by the WRP and the International Committee which it dominated first emerged in the 1970s.

The Trotskyist movement has a proud history of principled struggle against Zionism. In 1947-1948 Stalin collaborated with US imperialism in setting up the state of Israel, dispossessing the Palestinians of their homeland.

Social democracy, of course, had always been an apologist for Zionism. Only the Trotskyists clearly explained its reactionary character - they declared that the sufferings of the Jewish masses of Europe could only be overcome through the socialist revolution.

Of course, we supported unconditionally every battle against imperialism, however limited and under whatever leadership. But the way forward in the Middle East lay in the building of a proletarian leadership for the national liberation struggle, a section of the FI.

This would unite the masses of workers and peasants in the establishment of a socialist united states of the Middle East. Only in this way could the rights of all national and religious groups be satisfied and imperialism defeated. Any other policy was an illusion.

Despite many ambiguities, this was the position of Trotskyism in the 1960s. In many quarters it was condemned as being 'utopian'. Zionism always pretended that there was no time for Jews to wait for the socialist revolution.

And the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois groups within the emerging Palestine Liberation Organisation told us that their methods - on the one hand diplomatic manoeuvres with reactionary Arab regimes, with imperialism, and with Moscow and Peking Stalinists and on the other, hijackings and individual heroism - would somehow force imperialism to give way.

But, as the International Committee of the Fourth International (IC) increasingly moved away from Marxist principles, the slightest criticism of Arafat disappeared from its pronouncements. This was a reflection of the pressure of Stalinism which itself increasingly dominated the PLO. Despite all the IC's contacts with the region any attempts to win Palestinians to Trotskyism was stopped. This, in effect, left them under the political and ideological influence of Stalinism.

(Healy continues this pro-Stalinist line. In the 'Marxist Monthly' - May 1988, Vanessa Redgrave writes: 'Today the political revolution in the Soviet Union drives forward the Palestinian revolution and undermines the very foundation of Zionism.' And further, 'Gorbachev's public declaration of January 1988 recognises the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people under the leadership of Yassir Arafat and pledges the full support of the USSR for the right of self-determination of the Palestinian nation'.)

The degeneration of the IC and its sections, especially the Workers Revolutionary Party, accelerated rapidly. Only after the WRP expelled this leadership in 1985 could the understanding of this process and its correction begin.

It was interesting last week to see Torrance's 'Newline', in the Healy tradition, giving a rapturous welcome to Arafat's new line, and Colonel Gaddafi's recognition of the new state. Newline told its readers that Moscow would never follow the colonel's lead. The very next day however, the news that it had done just that was greeted with equal joy.

We have no indication yet as to the attitude of the so-called 'International Communist Party', followers of the Workers League in the United States. Workers League secretary, David North, who played a prominent part in Healy's reactionary turn in the Middle East, has never uttered a word of self-criticism on this question, nor, indeed, on any other.

Meanwhile, the WRP will continue to participate in the work of reconstructing the FI through the Preparatory Committee. High up on our list of tasks will be the establishment of the international within the Palestinian working class. Basing ourselves on the theory and traditions of Trotsky we shall fight alongside the heroic Palestinian masses against any compromise with Zionism and against the betrayals of Arafat and his supporters.

WORKERS PRESS FIGHTING FUND

£897 is needed to complete our November Fighting Fund. At the time of writing we have seven days left.

Every member of the Workers Revolutionary Party must go all out this week end to ensure the collection of donations - big and small.

To all our readers, new and old, we say: Just look at Labour's thoroughly reactionary response to Thatcher's latest round of thuggery, and Gorbachev's cynical contempt for masses of people under attack, expressed in his visit to Thatcher.

Workers Press campaigns to build up the mass movement against Thatcher and her apologists in the labour and trade union movement. We invite you to join us in the rebuilding of the Fourth International. Make a donation to our Fighting Fund today.

Dot Gibson

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'Beginnings of the political revolution' a report by Peter Fryer on his recent visit to the Soviet Union

CORRECTIONS: Page 5 of Workers Press No. 141 19 November, the article introduced as 're-printed' from the June-October issue of 'Combat International' is an edited translation.

Page 8, due to a misunderstanding, the article titled 'Govan - two fingers to the Labour Party' was wrongly credited to West Scotland WRP instead of Simon Pirani.

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HE BLURTED OUT THE TRUTH - BUT ONLY SOME OF IT

FOR reminding his countrymen that the coming to power of Hitler in 1933 and his political regime were widely acclaimed, Dr. Philipp Jenninger, Speaker of the Bonn parliament, has been forced to resign. German politicians did not like to be reminded of their past, of the debt which German capitalism owes to the Nazis.

Overweight businessmen speeding up and down the autobahnen in their flash Mercedes know it (or should do). Those old enough probably have their brown shirts still tucked away in a bottom drawer.

In many ways there is a continuity between the rule of the Kaiser (which ended with defeat in 1918), the short-lived Weimar Republic, the Third Reich of Hitler and the present regime in the Federal Republic of Germany.

However different their forms and methods, they all represented the needs of German capitalism; to contain the working class at home and press its interests against its foreign rivals whether by war or by peaceful conquests.

The coming to power of Hitler was acclaimed by the German middle and upper classes with enthusiasm in January 1933 because, in the very depths of the worst economic and social crisis in the history of modern Germany, Hitler promised to do just that and appeared to be doing it.

What the present-day politicians unconsciously reproach Hitler for is his failure to win the war. Until then, the class had every reason to support the Nazi regime.

Jenninger rattles off Hitler's 'triumphs':

'The re-incorporation of the Saar, the introduction of the general draft, massive re-armament, the conclusion of the German-British fleet accords, the re-occupation of the Rhineland, the Olympic summer games in Berlin, the annexation of Austria, the Great German Empire and finally, the Munich agreement, the cutting up of Czechoslovakia - the Treaty of Versailles was just a scrap of paper and the German Empire was the leading power.'

A remarkable record indeed, but one which could not have been achieved without the support and sympathy with which Hitler's policies were greeted by foreign governments and business.

They not only envied the way in which Hitler smashed the trade unions and political parties of their working class (he did in a few weeks what is taking the Thatcher government years to accomplish) but they also fully supported his aim to wipe out 'Bolshevism'.

In his book 'Mein Kampf' (presented to every German married couple at their wedding), he announced his intention to destroy the Soviet Union and annex the Ukraine as a great granary for Germany.

The notorious Anglo-German Naval Treaty, referred to by Jenninger, was one of the sopas the British ruling class offered to Hitler if he would direct the expansionist ambitions of Germany to

BY TOM KEMP

the East and leave their colonial empire intact.

The Munich agreement (1938) was a further last desperate step along this path. Only when it was clear that British and German interests were incompatible did Churchillian policy of opposition to German demands win out.

Only then did the British Government publish a white paper 'revealing' the terror methods of the Nazi regime (which it had hitherto regarded with esteem and had been making deals with), facts which had been available in any public library for years.

The Attlee-Bevin government (which nationalised the mines in Britain) handed back the great Ruhr mining and industrial belt to its 'legitimate' owners in 1947 so that German capitalism could get back on its feet again. The great Ruhr capitalists had been the backers of Hitler, the main beneficiaries of re-armament and the territorial conquests of the Reich (including slave labour). They and their like (thanks to Hitler!) are wealthier and more powerful than they have ever been.

Jenninger repeats the claim of every apologist and admirer of Hitler: he conquered unemployment.

But note the sequence of events. He first smashed the German working class movement, that assured him the sympathy of the whole capitalist class, and not just the barons of heavy industry who had financed his rise to power.

He was then able, with the help of financial 'wizard', Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, to finance first a programme of public works and then massive re-armament.

There was no mystery about how unemployment had been overcome. The jobless had been put into uniform, into labour corps and arms factories.

It was deficit spending on a massive scale, unprecedented and inconceivable except under an iron dictatorship, which, at the same time, had the confidence and support of businessmen and bankers.

Of course, as a result of the war and the economic collapse which followed these huge debts were cancelled out so that Germany could, as it were, begin again with a fresh set of marbles.

The result was a huge volume of government paper which threatened the return of a hyper-inflation like that of 1923.

War was no longer an option for Hitler; it was the only way to avert financial collapse. Hence, from 1937-8 he was more and more ready to take the risk of war.

Jenninger omitted to say that Hitler's successes continued during the first part of the Second World War and continued to have the backing of the capitalists and middle class.

Only when the Russian gamble failed and the United States entered the war did Hitler's star begin to wane.

The note of anti-semitism in Jenninger's speech rightly gave offence. And as far as the Jews were concerned: Hadn't they in the past measured themselves for roles that did not suit them?

Didn't they finally have to accept restrictions? Didn't they perhaps even deserve to be shown their place? And above all: Apart from wild exaggerations, didn't basic points of propaganda reflect one's own speculation and convictions?

What it reflects, in fact, was that anti-semitism was widely supported by certain Germans before and after Hitler.

Doctors without patients, lawyers without briefs and shopkeepers without customers were happy to see their Jewish competitors eliminated and their property sold off at rock-bottom prices.

The terrible logic of this policy was to be found in the gas chambers where Jews, gypsies and other undesirables were exterminated like vermin while the governments of Britain and the U.S. looked on.

Hitler lost the war and the ruling class which had backed him veered over to the American camp and became the best allies in the Cold War. Hitler had been too puny to smash 'Bolshevism'; that task had to be shouldered by others.

The German ruling class, those who had backed Hitler, those who had exploited slave labour, those who had built and supplied the death camps, were soon back in business.

De-nazification was perfunctory. The U.S. secret services enabled many Nazis, like Klaus Barbie, to escape to safe havens because of their 'help'.

The former storm-troopers devoted themselves to making money, with great success. As a class the German workers paid for Hitlerism at an extremely high price.

It was defeated, beheaded, confused. The workers movement did recover, but in the new Federal Republic it ceased to be a serious contender for power as it had been from 1918 until 1933.

The Social Democratic leaders had been whipped into total docility. The Stalinists had discredited themselves and never recovered their pre-Hitler support (East Germany, the DDR, is another story).

Resurgent German capitalism after 1947 thus owed an enormous debt to Hitler and the Nazis: the systematic annihilation of the workers' movement and its bravest leaders, the smashing of its organisations and the extirpation of all theoretical links with the past.

The Federal Republic was built on the soil fertilized with the bodies of all those who died under its predecessors.

Even the institutions of the bourgeois state had been modernized and made more serviceable for capitalist rule in the second half of the twentieth century under Hitler (as German historians admit).

While renouncing open anti-semitism and returning to parliamentarism of the crassest type, the historic goals of German imperialism remained.

(Incidentally, after a few years the chairs in the Bonn Parliament had to be changed because most of the deputies could no longer sit comfortably in the originals!

Their girth grew as capitalism in Germany got back onto its feet).

In the history of German imperialism the Hitler regime, the Third Reich which lasted not 1,000 years, as Hitler had promised, but ended ingloriously in a German bunker after only 12, was not the great aberration some people would like to make it.

In a very fundamental sense continuity was preserved.

German society is dominated today by the same class, by even the same families, as in the time of the Kaiser.

They got their banks and factories back even if they were temporarily taken away by foreign invaders or the German working class.

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The great Ruhr capitalists had been the backers of Hitler, the main beneficiaries of re-armament and the territorial conquests of the Reich (including slave labour).

They and their like (thanks to Hitler!) are wealthier and more powerful than they have ever been.

Certainly, Jenninger blurted out the truth - but only part of it.

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GORBACHEV AND SOUTH AFRICA

Bureaucracy sacrifices world socialist revolution for deal with imperialism

BY CLIFF SLAUGHTER

GORBACHEV'S presentation of his 'new political thinking' at this year's Special Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was no mere speechmaking. He really was putting forward the thinking behind the Stalinist bureaucracy's latest decisions to sacrifice the world socialist revolution for a deal with imperialism.

We have pointed out, especially at our 9 October meeting to mark 50 years of the Fourth International, that the working masses of South Africa would be among the first to be cynically sold out.

Confirmation comes in a recent report from Moscow in the Observer newspaper, and this report itself preceded last week's announcement of the deal for withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

Allister Sparks, 'one of the first South African journalists invited to Moscow', based his article on interviews with leading officials in the Soviet Foreign Ministry Southern Africa Department and senior members of the Institute for African Studies in Moscow.

Gorbachev's report referred enthusiastically to the value of Soviet contacts with all kinds of political figures of different

persuasions. For South Africa, reports Sparks, this means:

'...the Russians now want to widen their contacts and hear other views and assessments (not only the African National Congress), including those of supporters of the white minority government.'

Besides the fact that among the journalists admitted to Moscow are reporters from pro-Government papers, Sparks notes that deputy head of the 'Southern Africa Department', Asoyan, spent two months deputising as charge d'affaires in the Soviet embassy in Lesotho, a small state entirely surrounded by South Africa.

'He found it a good listening post. Asoyan got on the telephone and called scores of people in South Africa, including members of the politically dominant Afrikaner community, some of whom beat a path to his door for more detailed conversations. 'It was a fascinating experience,' he says. 'I learned a lot.'

Behind this is the 'new political thinking' of the Gorbachev faction, looking for ways of adjusting its relations with imperialism, stabilising the 'trouble spots' in the world, removing sources of tension; in reality, using its material and political influence to assure

the defeat of revolution and of national liberation struggles in order that imperialism will not be provoked and will appreciate the efforts of the bureaucracy, and thus be more inclined to offer credits and other economic concessions.

With this outlook, the Stalinist bureaucracy uses every setback to the workers' struggle to build up a mood of 'defeat' and to justify its own craven capitulation to the class enemy. This is the real meaning behind Sparks' impressionistic conclusion:

'But particularly since the suppression of the recent black uprising, there is a new appreciation in Moscow of the Pretoria regime's repressive power and the unlikelihood of it being overthrown by a popular uprising.'

The Kremlin bureaucracy is quite calculating and cynical about its political line. Yevgeny Tarabrin, senior member of the Institute for African Studies, told Sparks:

'We are not going to go on spending money on armed forces for nothing. Angola has cost us billions. The U.S. has spent only some \$30 million in aid to UNITA, while we have spent 10 to 20 times more than that. What for? We need the money for other purposes.'

The recent sharp move to the right in the political line of the ANC and the Communist Party of South Africa, declaring a willingness to collaborate with the racist South African ruling class 'provided it shows a willingness to move towards majority rule', is entirely in line with its past opposition to any programme of socialist revolution, but it goes further, by dropping the perspective of removing the apartheid regime.

This new stage of betrayal is along the line marked out by Gorbachev and his dominant faction. As Sparks reports the words of a senior Soviet adviser:

'Africa is in bad shape, and we certainly don't want to see the destruction of its largest and most successful economy, which is in South Africa. That is why we don't want to see too much reconstruction too soon there.'

What clearer proof could there be of the truth fought for by Trotsky and the Left Opposition: that 'socialism in one country' so beloved of the Stalinists, means that at all costs there must be socialist revolution in no other country.

That would disturb the imperialists, revive the revolutionary traditions and actions of the Soviet working class, and toll the bell for the bureaucracy.



Justice for Birmingham 6

WORKERS PRESS has been sent this interview with one of the Birmingham Six, **JOHNNY WALKER**, by John Bowden, and we are pleased to publish it as part of the campaign for their release. The Birmingham Six were imprisoned in 1975, framed for pub bombings in a wave of anti-Irish witch-hunting which meant that a group of men travelling to Ireland on the night of the bombings could be picked up, have 'confessions' beaten out of them, and convicted on the basis of absurdly unscientific forensic 'evidence'. The campaign for their release has been intensified by the farcical proceedings in the court earlier this year, when their appeal was rejected.

JOHN BOWDEN: As you approach the 14th anniversary of your conviction and imprisonment what are your thoughts and feelings now about the situation with your case, especially since the appeal rejection?

JOHNNY WALKER: The appeal was a watershed in an important way for me. All six of us went to the appeal with an open mind; we believed that the case for our innocence was now sufficiently strong enough to budge them, and we were understandably quite hopeful or optimistic about the outcome of the appeal.

In other words, we felt that all the important legal arguments had been answered or won. Nothing that happened during the appeal, during the actual examination of the evidence, caused us to change our feelings about that.

But of course our appeal was eventually rejected out of hand.

That was a terrible blow, and one that made me realize that the whole thing was a charade, a game that we were never really going to be allowed to win anyway. Now I'm more convinced than I've ever been that there is no such thing as British justice, it simply doesn't exist in reality.

You know, at the end of the day the establishment just closed ranks on us in order to uphold our wrongful conviction. They conspired behind the scenes to actually pervert justice.

What we were ultimately confronted with at that appeal was a deliberate and calculated cover-up, a brick wall that simply

wouldn't listen or respond to the truth; in fact wasn't really interested in it. As far as I was concerned it only illustrated what so-called British justice amounted to - injustice and lies.

JB: How closely affected, do you imagine, is the fate of your case by the course and development of Britain's involvement in Northern Ireland?

JW: Well, it's obvious that the British government is intensifying or stepping up its war against the IRA, and I think that this is obviously reflected in the legal system's treatment of, or attitude towards our own case.

At the time of our arrest and original trial we were alleged to be IRA members, and as far as the government is concerned we are now IRA members.

At the very least we are here in prison because of the war in Ireland, and the

question of whether we remain here or are released is obviously bound up in an important way with what happens in Ireland, or at least influenced by it in an important way.

At the end of the day I don't think what happens or has happened to us can be separated or looked at in isolation from what Britain is doing in Ireland.

We had hoped that the Free-State government would take a more active role on our behalf, but the extent of its collaboration with Britain, highlighted in particular by the extradition business, obviously prevent it from genuinely supporting us or the campaign for our release.

Before we appealed we got all sorts of messages that the Free-State government would be really pushing to get us out, but at the end of the day they've done basically nothing to help or support us.

I feel very depressed about the continuing situation in Northern Ireland and the stepping-up of Britain's war there because it inevitably means that myself and the other five have a long way yet to go before we're likely to ever be released.

JB: How broad-based would you like the campaign for your release to be?

JW: Let me answer that in the following way: public opinion immediately after the Birmingham pub bombings allowed the police to pick up six innocent Irishmen and torture confessions out of them. It allowed them a completely free hand to do as they pleased in terms of framing us and then getting us convicted.

Now it will be public opinion that ultimately gets us released. I therefore ask all progressive groups and organisations who are genuinely committed to the cause of justice to join and support our campaign, to highlight and publicize our case amongst as many ordinary working class people as possible.

We desperately need public support, and we need it from all sections of the population, especially from working class people.

You know, since we were arrested in 1974 people's perception of the police in this country has changed considerably.

I think that black people, especially, have always known what the British police are really like; but now even white working class people are beginning to wake up, and the miners' strike in particular forced a lot of ordinary working class people to change their opinions of the British police.

I think that today, as opposed to the time when we were first arrested, a lot of people are prepared to accept that we are the victims of a blatant injustice; all we now need is for more and more people to actually come out and support our campaign.

Because at the end of the day the struggle for justice in this country is the duty and responsibility of everyone. The working class must fight for justice in all possible fronts, which includes the fight to win the release of innocent Irish people imprisoned in this country on trumped-up charges.

Over the years in prison one thing that I have come to realize and understand deeply is that our situation is but one dimension of a much wider thing involving the suppression of Irish people, and I suppose, ultimately we're talking about the suppression of whole groups of people by this system, both here and throughout the world.

I strongly believe that all of us, the oppressed throughout the world, share a common interest in winning our freedom.

The campaign for our release is politically neutral, in the sense that it appeals to all classes and sections of the population to support us; but although it is organised to highlight our particular case, or based on the 'single issue' of our continuing imprisonment, it should also be an instrument of mobilisation around the whole question of Britain's military involvement in Northern Ireland - the real backdrop, so to speak of our case.

JB: Have you or your campaign received much open support from the Catholic church?

JW: We've had some degree of open support from the Catholic Church in the Irish Free-State. People like Cardinal O'Fiaich and Bishop Edward Daly, in particular have been very good; but of course the Catholic church hierarchy throughout the world is inherently conservative, and the Irish church is no exception.

As far as the Catholic church in

England is concerned, forget it. We've received absolutely no support at all from that quarter.

As far as I'm concerned Cardinal Hume is an Englishman first and a Catholic second; in other words his ultimate and real loyalty lies first and foremost with the British political establishment. He hasn't shown the least interest in our case and has never once commented on it.

It seems to me that the Catholic church in England is very good and enthusiastic about condemning socialist or left-wing governments around the world, but when it comes to speaking out against injustice in this country it seems to maintain a very conspicuous silence indeed.

In my honest opinion, the church here in England is little more than a lackey of the state, as mouthpiece of the well-off and powerful.

Look at its track record. It fully and openly supports Britain's involvement in Ireland, and have never done anything whatsoever to improve the conditions of Irish political prisoners in this country.

I really can't adequately express the extent of my anger at the sheer hypocrisy of the Catholic church in this country.

JB: You've now been in prison 14 years. How are you treated by the prison authorities?

JW: Well, let's be absolutely clear about the fact that the prison authorities are fully aware of my innocence. They always have been; but of course they continue to keep me locked up.

It's very difficult for me to describe the pain and anguish of being an innocent person locked up in prison for life; the agony and fear of growing older in this place, of watching and feeling my life pass away when I know deep in my heart that I committed no crime.

After 14 years in prison that agony is becoming progressively worse. Prison is a killer - everything about it is designed to kill and destroy the human being; and if it wasn't for the love and support of my family, which itself encourages a continuing sense of hope, I'm not sure that I could have survived the last 14 years of this hell.

The support of other prisoners also has been an important factor in my survival here.

I often reflect on that now infamous statement by Lord Denning in which he said, in relation to our case, that it was better that innocent people should remain in prison rather than the integrity of the establishment be called into question, and I start to fear that maybe I'll be here in prison for eternity.

That's why it's so vitally important that we receive the help and support of ordinary people as well as sympathetic and progressive governments.

Without that support the truth about our case will forever be ignored or denied by the British government, and we shall remain and probably die in prison.

Two nations

THAT the poor in this country are getting much poorer, and the rich are getting much richer, is now a matter of daily observation.

Those who have eyes to see need only look around them, in any of our big cities, to witness scenes of wretchedness, desolation, and social contrast that vividly call to mind those days of Victorian values when, in Disraeli's celebrated saying, Britain was divided into two nations.

It's not just a question of north and south - though, to be sure, figures put out by the Central Statistical Office earlier this month confirmed that the difference in income between Britain's richest and poorest regions is now greater than ever.

Estimates for what is called 'gross domestic product' show that in 1987 people living in London earned on average 25 per cent more than those living in Scotland, 57 per cent more than those living in Wales - and 67 per cent more than those living in the part of Ireland still under British occupation.

But even within relatively prosperous London there is what a 'Guardian' headline calls a 'growing army of beggars' - an army that is growing still faster since last April's changes in social security, which robbed many people of a quarter of their income and are driving more and more young homeless people on the streets.

Five years ago it was unusual to be accosted by a beggar in central London; in 1988 it happens all the time. And a large number of the beggars are young people.

'Outcast Britons on treadmill of despair', says another 'Guardian' headline. There are now in fact about 130,000 homeless people in this country - the same figure as the population of Milton Keynes.

Some of the homeless sleep in bed-and-breakfast hotels, squats, hostels, night shelters, and short-life property. Others sleep rough on park benches, in car parks, or in shanty towns of cardboard boxes.

The growing impoverishment and degradation of the poor are of course the calculated result of government policy, which shamelessly robs the poor to give to the rich.

For instance, the freezing of child benefits is saving the government £203 million, only £70 million of which will be used to help poorer families; the remaining £130 million goes back to the Treasury to help pay for tax cuts for the rich.

Of those who lost out last April, more than a million were disabled people, which is no doubt why the government that robbed them did its best to suppress this month's shaming report on disability by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

They're robbers. And they're murderers too. Their policies are killing an increasing number of babies whose unemployed parents are too poor to heat their homes. Professor John Emery and Dr Elizabeth Taylor proved recently in the 'Lancet' that there is a direct correlation between unemployment and cot deaths.

The highest infant mortality in the country (13.7 per 1,000 live births) is in Bradford. The lowest (5.8 per 1,000 live births) is in east Hertfordshire and Bexley.

Look now for a moment at the second of these two nations: the nation inhabited by the likes of Michael Heseltine, whose personal fortune was recently estimated at £60 million; the nation inhabited by the customers of the Bibendum restaurant in London's Fulham Road ('the capital's newest real-food restaurant', whatever that means), who, according to last weekend's 'Sunday Times', think nothing of spending £45 per head per night on dinner.

I've been thumbing through the 'London number' of 'Country Life', published on 3 November. Here can be found advertisements for houses in London and the south-east, priced at 'around £395,000', £460,000, £515,000, £575,000, 'excess of £700,000', and so on for page after page.

Here, too, is advertised 'the ideal family gift' for the wealthy family too idle to clean their own shoes: a push-button electric shoe polisher, a positive snip at £125 including VAT.

In Harrods' pet department, I'm told, the rich can now purchase a fashion collection for their dogs that includes the following: Burberry raincoats complete with distinctive checked lining; a waxed cotton Burberry 'designed for rougher play'; slogan T-shirts for 'those more casual moments'; tweed Dr Watson coats and tartan Sherlock Holmes coats, both with matching hats; and, for rich bitches, 'velvet Lily Langtry ensembles'.

When the lap-dogs of the British rich are better fed, better housed, better cared for, and better dressed than the children of the British poor, we are in an age of decadence for which history offers few parallels.

AS I SEE IT

BY TOM OWEN

The Welsh Renaissance

IT IS generally assumed that the literature and culture of the British Isles is English. The normative assumptions of an imperialist culture manifest themselves at all levels of social life and their consequences are corrosive and stultifying.

Racism, linguistic arrogance and literary snobbery are not just part of the armoury of imperialism, they are a lived experience, a materialising of social, historical and international relations of production.

It seems natural for monolingual British people to believe that other language speakers 'jabber' or 'speak fast', or for English literary academics to dismiss world literatures as of little interest because of the pre-eminence of English letters.

Therefore Tolstoy is of interest only because it is claimed he was influenced by Dickens, French classical theatre because it was inferior to Shakespeare etc.. Nor is this phenomenon exclusive to British imperialism.

It is only four years ago that Mitterand repealed the Napoleonic law that excluded all the minority languages like Breton, Basque, Langue D'oc etc. from public life. There is in the British

Isles an extraordinarily rich and diverse literature, English, Irish, Welsh and more recently Afro-Caribbean and Asian British.

As is the case in all situations of literary diglossia there is often an obsessive search for identity amidst the conflicting pressures of traditionalism, ethnic stereotyping and anglicisation.

In the case of Welsh literature, if we clear away the stereotypes of the gloomy mist-laden bard or drunken bohemian, Anglo-Welsh enfant terrible, we can discover a veritable treasury of literary forms, the short story and the realist novel of the 19th and 20th century, an elegant Renaissance poetry and some fine and tragic heroic early poetry often accompanied by a rich mythology.

What is astonishing about this achievement is that, like the language, it exists at all. This is particularly the case with the poetry of the 'Welsh Renaissance', which flourished for nearly two centuries in the most impoverished economic and cultural contexts.

The level of economic and social development was so low in the principality during the century preceding the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1282, that even attempts at the foundation of feudal economies by 'Llewellyn the Great' failed. There were no medieval cities and religious culture and patronage was restricted to one or two Cistercian abbeys like Strata Florida and Valhe Creicis.

But in the two centuries after

the invasion we witness an unrivalled literary revival of high poetic sophistication and elegance unmatched in the Celtic world and only overtaken by English poetry of the period at the end of the 16th century.

As one critic notes, the work of these poets was 'proper to full humanity' and that 'as such, this poetry is of profound interest...because it exemplifies what is possibly the lowest limit of natural endowment that high civilisation can have, and yet come to flower.'

The period seems a striking confirmation of Marx's comment that, 'as regards art, it is well known that some of its peaks by no means correspond to the general development of society; nor do they therefore to the material substructure, the skeleton as it were of its organisation' (Critique of Political Economy).

Significantly, the literary Renaissance was not accompanied by a parallel development in theology, abstract thought, early science or for that matter early prose. All literary and intellectual forms seemed to have been distilled into poetry. The poetry was not typically tribal, heroic or feudal.

What the poets seem to have done is to overcome the cultural stalemate which ossified the older heroic and classical forms of Welsh verse and synthesised the forms and traditions of Romano-Christian art, Brethonic mythology, Welsh heroic and classical verse with new French

and European influences.

But the poetry is unique in Western culture. The traditional motifs of praise of patron, praise of women, celebration of generosity and hospitality are counterpointed by dialectically opposed counter images.

Instead of the poet as guest, we have the outlaw, the thief, the feast of the lord becomes the feast of the birds of the forest, the manor house becomes the tavern or the poet's hut in the glade where he conducts his sexual adventures. Welsh poetry appeals to the ear as well as the eye and the poetic vehicle was the 'cywydd deuair hirion' (the poem of two long lines, or eight syllable couplets).

The musical appeal was enhanced by cyghanedd or harmony - a complex alliterative patterning accompanied by internal rhymes. Despite the distance of the principality from European Renaissance centres, the work of the great poets like Dafydd ap Gwilym has at its centre the same preoccupation as the Italian Renaissance, humanity and individualism.

In Wales, in the most unexpected circumstances these concerns flourish in poetry. Trotsky's aphoristic quotations from 'Literature and Revolution' may point to an explanation of this historical anomaly. 'The practical dependence of art, especially the art of words on material technique is insignificant...The human word is the most portable of all materials.'

THE POETRY AND POLITICS OF THE SCOTTISH QUESTION

MAYBE the euphoria surrounding the recent Govan by-election will take a while to subside north of the border; but when it does the most important historical question still to be resolved in the Clydeside working class will be the same as it has been since the 1920s and 1930s.

It is not the question of Scottish nationalism: it is the question of Stalinism.

Christopher Grieve (1892-1978) was a noted Scottish Stalinist. Better known as Hugh MacDiarmid, he was also a talented poet, with a real claim to be regarded as a great one.

In the aftermath of the 1917 Russian revolution and his own experience in World War I, he came to the conclusion that, for the Scottish people, the advance beyond capitalist destruction into socialism depended on establishing (or re-establishing) a cultural identity separate from England.

Increasingly he made a sometimes absurdly idealist (even solipsist) amalgam between his own need to find ways of expressing his poetic genius - in which he, encouraged by other notable figures, firmly believed - and the future of Scottish culture.

He was influenced - as were many artists of the modernist literary and artistic movements of the early twentieth century - by the nineteenth century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's ideas - the role of the 'superman', the driving force of 'the will to power', etc. - were essentially reactionary and were to play their part in Nazism.

But for many creative people what they understood of these ideas seemed to offer a way in which talent and genius could lead an intractable world out of the 'waste land' of capitalist decay on the one hand, and the philistine, mechanical socialism dominant in the Second International (1889-1914) on the other.

Ideas such as these (not necessarily derived directly from Nietzsche himself), married to a silly but superficially not un-supportable conception that the Scots have a particular capacity for living with unresolved intellectual and emotional contradictions (I'll be 'aye whaur extremes meet',

Alan Bold, 'MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve, a critical biography' (John Murray, £17.95)

Mick Hume and Derek Owen, 'Is There a Scottish Solution? The working class and the assembly debate' (Junius, £3.95)

wrote MacDiarmid), led the poet to concoct an eclectic theoretical brew, which allowed him to flirt with fascism before finding in Josef Stalin the real 'superman' of the twentieth century.

MacDiarmid, a seeker after a spiritually satisfying culture in the material chaos of a world of war and slump, thus hitched his wagon to the greatest destroy of the aspiration - unleashed by the October Revolution - for a society in which there would be a real, collective basis for individual spiritual fulfilment.

MacDiarmid, who proclaimed himself both as an embodiment of the highest achievements of Scots culture and as a practitioner of a communist aesthetic, found himself shunned by Scottish nationalists because of his 'communism'; and expelled (twice!) by the Communist Party because he would not abandon his nationalism.

He was certainly in a position of extreme contradiction; and, for most of the 1930s, he lived in near-penury with his second wife and son on a remote Shetland island - suffering a mental breakdown at one point.

This small-town Scot (he was the son of a Border postman), unlike most of the English public-school intellectuals who became Stalin followers at the same time, remained committed to Stalinism and all the consequences of its counter-revolutionary theory of 'socialism in a single country'. In 1957 - after Khrushchev's 'secret speech' on Stalin's crimes and the suppression in blood of the Hungarian revolution - he re-joined the Communist Party of Great Britain.

He made his peace with former opponents like the Stalinist stalwart, Willie Gallacher, and, at a public celebration in Edinburgh in the 1970s, he publicly declared himself a 'Stalinist-Leninist'.

This is the aspect of MacDiarmid's life and significance most directly relevant to Scottish

- and, therefore, British - politics today. It is the aspect least well addressed (it is really only hinted at) in Alan Bold's well-written, enjoyable and informative, new biography of the poet.

But MacDiarmid's story, as Bold tells it, is fascinating in its own right; and his contradictory, often courageous, life poses vital issues for those who think seriously about it today.

How important has the political integrity of the three historic kingdoms of Great Britain been to British capitalism's capacity to avoid revolution?

What is the relationship between artistic and literary creativity on the one hand, and on the other the aspirations of the working class in the 'epoch of wars and revolutions' which began in 1914?

Above all, how did so many people in the 1930s come to identify their hope for a peaceful world free of capitalist dictatorship (fascism) with Stalin's death machine?

Govan is neither a concentration-camp, nor a gulag; far from it. But death and destruction have been wrought there by the Tories' capitalist system, aided by the Labour reformists ('we can run it better'), and - it is important to insist - the Communist Party Stalinists.

For it was the Stalinists whose 'peaceful road to socialism' 'work-in' at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in the early 1970s has turned out to be the road to the capitalist violence of unemployment, poverty and the destruction of social services.

MacDiarmid's most famous, and best, long poem is 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle', written in 1926 in a manner particularly well explained by Bold. In the Nationalist thistle Govan working and unemployed people have found a weapon with which to protest at the cruelties of the capitalist circus, with its Tory ringmaster, its trained lions of

Labourism (apologies, lions: you can at least still roar!), and its Stalinist jugglers.

But they have only posed the class questions in their own contradictory way. They have not answered them. A revolutionary party, which must be built in a struggle against Stalinism and by keeping in mind Trotsky's dictum that such a party is 'the memory of the working class', has an indispensable part to play in finding the answers.

MacDiarmid came up with the wrong answers - disastrously so, you may think. But he posed some of the right questions. Critically studied, maybe his poetry might reveal some provocative connections with the problems of British social, political and aesthetic life today.

For such a study - apart from the poems themselves - Bold's excellent biography is likely to remain the obvious starting point for some time.

Mick Hume's and Derek Owen's book 'Is There a Scottish Solution?' should also be mentioned in this connection. It appeared some months ago, and apology is due to the authors and publisher for not noticing it before - it appeared when Workers Press was temporarily suspended.

Centred as it is on exposing the 'redundant', 'bureaucratic' campaign for a Scottish assembly (mini-parliament), 'Is There a Scottish Solution?' may, in part, seem somewhat overtaken by events; but it remains a serious attempt to provide a socialist militant's guide to Scottish history.

I do not agree with the way the authors pose the relationship between historical knowledge and present politics and I think they exaggerate the importance of discrediting the assembly campaign as such, as opposed to the politics of many of its supporters. But these things readers will judge for themselves, and maybe the book could valuably open up a correspondence on the Scottish question in Workers Press.

It is, or should be, of interest far South of the River Tweed.

Terry Brotherstone



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Scottish poll tax campaign

BY HILARY HORROCKS

OVER 300 delegates and visitors attended the second conference of the Strathclyde Anti-Poll-Tax Federation in Glasgow last weekend.

Practical initiatives for extending mass action against the tax were few and far between, however, as a Militant dominated executive committee threw its weight behind proposals for show piece rallies and demonstrations in the period leading up to April 1989, when the first poll tax bills will be delivered in Scotland.

Resolutions came from several groups opposing the executive line.

They called for a conference of trade unionists to be convened urgently - before an agreed 'Unity Conference' for the whole of Scotland and before a mass demonstration.

Many resolutions also opposed - unsuccessfully - the executive move to reduce the number of trade union representatives on the executive.

Delegates warned that the low proportion of trade unionists at the conference indicated the Federation's leadership was paying too little attention to building links between community and union campaigns against the poll tax.

A significant minority also called for greater democracy in the organisation - a larger executive, with greater representation from the community groups; and the building of links with all possible community and ethnic groups in England and Wales. These proposals were derided by platform speakers as 'naive' and 'unrealistic'.

The most outrageous proposal from the executive committee - for the local groups making up the federation to finance two full time organisers - was vigorously opposed by a minority who argued that it was politically and financially wrong to impose two 'professionals' on a fledgling movement which needed the greatest democracy and accountability.

The important battle on these issues will certainly continue within the Strathclyde Federation.

The independent movement of the working class as expressed in the hundreds of anti-poll tax campaigns which have sprung up all over Scotland, horrifies Militant as much as the Labour party leadership.

It was reflected throughout the conference in their denunciation of the Scottish Nationalist Party, to whom the voters in Govan turned in disgust at the Labourites.

What was really being denounced was the temerity of the working class to assert their independence in this way.

Secret police war plans are revealed

BY KEITH SCOTCHER

A REPORT by the South Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority has revealed secret plans for the role of the police during war situations.

The report was produced without the co-operation of the police or access to the Police War Book, a restricted document held by Chief Constables.

The main findings are: that the police in an 'emergency' will be armed with a wide range of weapons and be able to use 'full fire power' to keep control.

A national force would be organised on similar lines to police operations during the miners strike and the police national

computer used to intern up to 20,000 'subversives' on MIS's secret list in prisons, sports stadiums, and on the Isle of Wight.

Retired

Sixty-six thousand extra officers would be found by refusing resignations, recalling retired officers and directing selected civilian employees to uniformed duties - to include guarding key installations and the forming of special self-sufficient support units, consisting of 23 officers, would be dispersed to safe havens.

Helping the public would not be a high priority, the report states.

The Authority emergency planning officer says the report was produced because little was

known due to the refusal of the police to co-operate and security who classification of documents.

- The Royal Ulster Constabulary has announced 'cuts' in a reorganisation to concentrate on its war against 'terrorism'. The RUC is closing down 11 police stations and transferring 80 men from traffic duties, community relations and crime prevention.

- A participant at a VIP weapons training centre was killed when hit by a live round during war games. The centre in Braintree, Essex is run for businessmen and 'survivalists' by a former soldier and policeman.

After the recent government amnesty on illegal weapons when some 50,000 guns were surrendered, one authority - the City of London police - announced that not a single weapon had been handed in.

Come into my parlour...

WORKERS PRESS was glad to attend a recent meeting on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We report here two comments. A young Hungarian told us he is afraid that some of the older generation are becoming loyal oppositionists.

The bureaucracy is inviting them into their parlour, he said, and he added that he was sure the students must turn to the working class in the struggle against the bureaucracy.

A woman from Czechoslovakia talked about the 'Prague Spring'. She told us that whatever Dubcek said now, in 1968 he had signed away the struggle just when the entire population was prepared to fight and sections of the Soviet army were refusing to take action against the Czechoslovakian people.

'Dubcek is just a loveable old loyal oppositionist' she said.

These comments are interesting in relation to the 'Guardian' report of a 300-strong meeting in Moscow to discuss Trotsky, at which a petition was signed calling for the co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution to be fully rehabilitated and his books published.

This petition will go to the politburo committee studying the cases of Stalin's victims.

It is a sign of the turmoil in the Soviet Union that such a meeting takes place, especially when no permission was asked.

But beware Gorbachev's 'softly softly' approach; it goes alongside the strengthening of the police and new legislation aimed against demonstrations and meetings.

LABOUR LEADERS BLEAT

BY LIZ LEICESTER

A NEW Local Government and Housing Bill which will stop local authorities subsidising council rents from general rates is to be introduced in Parliament this year.

Coming into effect just as the Poll Tax is introduced in England and Wales, it will mean massive rent rises for council tenants - as much as £20 a week.

Hardship

Already facing increasing hardship with cuts in services and housing benefits, and rent rises, tenants will be forced to buy their own flats, accept private landlords, or move out of the city areas altogether.

Large council estates in the inner cities are potential gold mines for Thatcher's friends the property developers - this is the latest in a string of legislation brought in to line their pockets. Another section of the proposed legislation will force local authorities with any surplus on their housing revenue accounts to finance housing benefits for tenants who previously would have received it from the DHSS.

Sixty per cent of council tenants are currently receive housing benefit and the remaining 40 per cent tend to be lower paid workers.

Rebate

The DHSS pays £2.75 billion a year in rent rebate to tenants - they want to reduce that by forcing one section of the working class to subsidise another. The vast majority of Labour councilors and trade union leaders have gone along with all the Tory

Openly

measures to dismantle local authorities and public services, however much they have moaned about it, bleating that they can't break the law, they have acted more and more openly as policemen of the working class, straining to contain the anger and hatred felt by workers for Thatcher and those who dance to her tune. They should be thrown out of the Labour movement.