Thatcherism and the ‘designer’ left

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LETTERS
The Crunch of '89

SIXTY YEARS AFTER the traumas of the Wall Street Crash, a new American president takes office amid growing trepidation. Capitalist leaders’ fears over the colossal US budget deficit are again rising to crisis levels.

If George Bush does nothing, confidence could be undermined: but if he takes any firm action to correct the US economic crisis, that combined with the already mounting pressure towards trade war between the USA and the European Community, could have massive knock-on effects throughout the world.

All this could rapidly multiply the problems faced by Chancellor Nigel Lawson as the British consumer credit gravy train runs out of steam, exposing how hollow has been the much-acclaimed ‘boom’. After skidding unconvincingly through trade deficits and rising inflation at the end of 1988, Lawson, still claiming to be in control, launched into the New Year with yet another rise in mortgage interest rates, again channelling many of the recent recruits to Thatcher’s ‘property owning democracy’.

For many mortgage-paying workers there could be worse to come. The new rise in bank interest rates and the widespread expectation of a recessionary period beginning this year is likely to put many more jobs again under threat. However dire may be the politics of the TUC and Labour leaders, the union movement must escape from a new sharpening of the class struggle in 1989, combining battles in defence of democratic rights and against reactionary Tory social policies with a new wave of trade union struggles, as workers are forced either to fight in defence of their jobs and living standards, or sacrifice them on the altar of capitalist ‘viability’.

Soaring costs of housing run alongside a new, dramatic end to the period of relatively low general inflation, which will also have brutal effects on millions of unemployed, low-paid class C and pensioners, who have already been left far behind the living standards of more prosperous sections of employed workers. The new wave of inflation will prompt more workers to look not only for larger wage increases this year, but also for policies to protect their standard of living in more lasting fashion. While the employers seek to use inflation to whittle down the real level of wages, the union leaders have for too long allowed the problems and concerns of the employers to set the framework for pay negotiations, when the starting point should be the defence of working class living standards.

Union conferences and negotiating committees should adopt the policy of protecting all basic wage increases against inflation through the fight for cost of living clauses in all wage agreements, ensuring regular increases to keep pace with the rise in price of goods, housing and services. Many will be looking enviously towards the Ford workers, whose strike was settled on a deal that now gives them an increase of 2 percent above the current level of inflation. Though the 2 percent figure could have been larger, given the strength of the strike, the settlement protects their living standards at a time when many are under attack, and points a way forward.

Alongside pay battles this year will come a new wave of speed-up, redundancies and closures as the recession and high interest rates once again begin to force employers to attack jobs to safeguard and increase their profits. Few unions other than the miners have ever seriously challenged the notion that the employer has the ‘right’ to make a firm ‘viable’ even at the expense of the jobs and wages of the workforce and the destruction of the communities involved. Of course cynics find it fashionable to scoff after the event at the setbacks suffered since by the NUM: but the scale of the job losses in the pits has completely vindicated the warnings and stand taken by Arthur Scargill, and remind us of the need for the whole movement to mobilise in defence of jobs.

Instead, some unions have retreated even further since the miners’ strike, and embraced the defeatist politics of ‘new realism’, according to which it is supposedly in the workers’ own interests for unions to collaborate with employers in single-union, non-strike deals, redundancies and speed-up in order to maximise profitability, and make each firm ‘competitive’ – at the expense of its workforce. The extreme version of this is the ‘business unionism’ of the EETPU, which sees strikebreaking and the destruction of other unions as the way to secure its relations with the employers.

In reality, every concession made to the employers simply fuels their appetite for more, convincing them that the unions are a soft touch. Each concession also undermines union strength elsewhere, since it forces other employers to remain ‘competitive’ by forcing down wages and imposing similar speed-up on their workforce.

Nine years of Thatcherism have already left a sorry trail of devastated, demoralised, dwindling communities wrecked by previous closures of coal, steel, shipbuilding, textile and engineering plants. The lessons must be learned, and the fight redoubled to defend existing jobs through a policy of strike action and occupations demanding work-sharing without loss of pay, uniting in mass action to break out of the straitjacket of anti-union laws.

As the major employers regroup and restructure in order to contend with the coming recession, huge mergers and takeovers are again on the agenda: the comings and goings on the future of GEC are simply the latest examples. Labour leaders have offered nothing but mealy-mouthed, nationalistic protests against a possible ‘foreign’ takeover of the major ‘British’ defence firm, and demanding the Monopolies Commission (that old friend of the working class!) step in to see fair play.

Instead the trade unions in GEC and elsewhere should be demanding the full opening of the books of the firms and banks involved, to reveal their back-room connections, the scale of exploitation that has accumulated GEC’s £1.3 billion balance sheet, and the case for expropriating the whole lot. Taking a look at the Tory book in the aftermath of the collapse of the Barlow Clowes firm of Speculators, such expropriation of major industry should (as with the renationalisation of privatised industries) be without compensation.

In short, the worsening of the crisis of capitalism in 1989 cries out for a socialist response, based not on Kinnock-style pipedreams of reforming and patching up the system (which are increasingly based on attempting to work within the archery of the free market), but upon defence of the independent interests of the working class.

It is perhaps ironic that the sharpening of the conflict in the workplace, and the renewed Tory offensive on other issues, including the Poll Tax and the new White Paper on the NHS, should be met by a Labour Party cutting its campaigning work and grass-roots conferences while the dead weight of top-level Walworth Road bureaucracy is left intact.

Nothing could more clearly undermine the key, bitter lesson of the last ten years: activists must get organised at local level to build class struggle resistance to the employers’ offensive and campaigns in defence of democratic rights, and not wait for national officials to come up with the goods. At the same time, political initiatives such as the Chesterfield movement’s local and national conferences and policy groups, offer a wide spectrum of socialists a forum to debate openly the kind of programme and policies that must be fought for in the organised labour movement in the struggles to come.
The last bastions?

The government announced its health service review when public concern about waiting lists, hospital closures and staff shortages was at a peak last year.

The ministerial group assembled (with strong Treasury representation) for the secret review quickly focussed not on funding - the fundamental problem - but on restructuring the service.

The (leaked) recommendations of that review are not designed to improve health services, but are about chipping away at the edges of one of the great bastions of the welfare state and opening up a vast new 'market' to private capital.

Key amongst the Tories' proposals (due for publication by the end of January) are likely to be:

- Pilot projects for an 'internal market' in the NHS. This means health authorities will buy and sell services between each other - or from the private sector. It is likely to lead to hospitals (particularly the prestigious London teaching hospitals) specialising in more 'marketable' services and to patients having to travel to obtain treatment;
- GPs to hold budgets for buying services for their patients. The scheme is sketchy - but given that the likely purpose is to use the system to limit spending, patients again are likely suffer;
- Hospitals will be able to 'opt-out' from local health authorities like schools or housing estates.

Only with hospitals there's no indication that consultation (in however loaded a way), will be a condition. Hospital managers and top doctors are most likely to pursue such options to create 'self-governing' hospitals where the potential for profits are highest - i.e. in the larger teaching or specialist hospitals. Patients, local communities and health workers are unlikely to get a say. The measures, if adopted, would turn the clock back fifty years. Local accountability, and very probably the full range of services currently available locally (especially less profitable ones like long-term geriatric and psychiatric care), would disappear.

- 'Taking the politics out of health care'. This means getting rid of local authority representatives currently sitting on health authorities, and cutting the size and powers of regional health authorities, which the government is trying to turn into business-style boards of management.
- Tax relief will be made available to elderly people buying private health insurance. Not many older people can get it (only the young and healthy need apply), or seem to want it at the moment.

This measure is chiefly significant as a signal of the government's intention to encourage more people to take out private cover and is only the beginning of that process.

Although perhaps not as regressive as had been feared, these proposals are a dangerous first step in the direction of fundamentally

Poll Tax campaign at critical stage

The movement against the poll tax is now at a critical stage. In many areas in England and Wales the campaign is continuing to develop and beginning to sink roots in the local labour movement, while in Scotland mobilisations are continuing.

The 10 December conference in Newcastle organised by the Socialist Conference, provided a useful opportunity for militants to exchange ideas and experiences.

The next three months are crucial in building a campaign. However, two vital ingredients are missing - a united campaign and a national focus. The call, issued by both Newcastle and the Oxford conference that preceded it, for the TUC and Labour Party to organise a mass demonstration on 8 April needs to be followed through with resolutions at every level of the labour movement. But equally important, so does the call for an authoritative national conference of anti-poll tax activists which can speak on behalf of the whole movement.

Both conferences supported such a call, but with differences about its composition and emphasis. The Oxford resolution stresses the involvement of local poll tax groups, whereas Newcastle underlined the need to involve trade unions.

In fact, a movement which can defeat the tax must draw in all those organising at different levels. Trade union action, based on non-co-operation with and obstruction of the tax, will be vital. In this context, the conference called by Lambeth NALGO on 18 April, which seeks to bring together those fighting the tax in that union will be vital. Fighting for councils not to implement the tax at every stage is a further essential strand of our strategy. But neither of these can be achieved without building community support around obstruction of the register and non-payment. It is only such a mass movement which can give trade unionists and councillors the confidence to act.

In this context, the deletion of the call for 'Committees of 100' as part of a mass non-payment campaign from the resolution presented to Newcastle represents a significant weakness. Comrades from the SWP argued that these committees, and non-payment itself represent a divergence from the real issues. It was not possible for those who supported the original draft to explain how non-payment, when used collectively, can be a powerful tool for the movement and to differentiate our approach from those who have used it to divert from the fight for action by councils and trade unions.

It is necessary to remember that the campaign we have to wage will be a long term one, which will have to gain and retain momentum over several years. So, for example, the fact that most councils are currently co-operating with the tax does not mean that local campaigns should not continue to demand that they obstruct it.

It may be possible to build up a relationship of forces which can convince them of the need to do this, for example when it becomes clearer what implementation will mean in terms of local support for Labour. It may be possible to convince trade unionists who currently only see the implications of the tax on their own pockets not to co-operate with passing information to poll tax units on civil liberties grounds as well as because of the effect on their workloads.

While it remains vital to continue the debate over non-payment, the attitude of forces on the right of the campaign is far more pernicious. The ILP (Independent Labour Publications) attempted to play a very destructive role in Newcastle, arguing that a national demonstration was the only issue. Subsequently they have denounced the Newcastle initiative and with the support of the Communist Party, tried to block co-operation between Oxford and Newcastle.

They have tried to impose undemocratic structures - which effectively deny a voice to trade unionists - onto any future conference against the poll tax and have sought to make the committee which came out of Oxford - which should be a working body into something more grandiose and bureaucratic. Their main aim is this is to exclude the hard left, by arguing that it is no possible to contain such wide political disagreements in one campaign and
undermining the structure of a tax-funded, free-to-users and locally comprehensive service. One minister ‘closely involved’ with the review has warned that this will be the last chance for the NHS to survive in its present form under a Conservative government.

Hot on the heels of the leaked health review came Kenneth Baker’s speech to an education conference at Lancaster University which promised an ‘expansion in higher education: but only on an American model, with business (as well as students themselves) coming up with the cash.

Defence of our health service and free education clearly demand an immediate campaign by trade unionists, community organisations, Labour parties and students: if this is not forthcoming, Thatcher could be given another easy ride in her efforts to roll back the frontiers of the welfare state.

Jane Wells

therefore to posture as the real leadership of poll tax activism.

We must continue to argue against such manoeuvres. A united national conference against the poll tax must be organised as a priority involving delegates from poll tax groups, trade unions, Labour Parties, student unions and so on, and has ample opportunity to discuss and debate out various tactics. Any attempt to exclude one section of the movement, in arguing that one group holds the key to it all will result in a failure to set up an authoritative campaign.

The campaign in Scotland has been severely weakened by political disagreements leading to a myriad of structures with virtually no communication let alone coordination between them.

As registration draws closer in England and Wales (even though it may be delayed), and the demand for payment in Scotland, such resentment will only result in the defeat of the campaign and loss of the opportunity to sink Thatcher’s flagship.

Theresa Conway

Mick Gosling (centre) with Dagenham militants opposing any sell-out of the last pay strike

Victimisation at Fords

WITH THE sacking last November of Mick Gosling, the chair of the biggest TGWU branch at Fords Dagenham, Ford management have thrown down a major challenge to the trade unions in their British plants.

Gosling was taken in front of management on Friday 18 November, and sacked on the basis of a series of trumped up charges — being absent from his job at a meeting on Ireland, inviting unconstitutional stoppages and falsifying his application form when he started work at Fords ten years ago.

These charges were were promptly refuted by the trade union delegation who pointed out that most of them were downright lies. Management offered to withdraw the sacking if he signed a statement that this was a final warning against which there would be no appeal — which meant that he could be instantly dismissed at management’s discretion. He quite rightly refused to sign such a document which would have put him in an impossible position and create an unacceptable precedent. Since that time he has remained suspended on pay awaiting the disciplinary procedure.

Ford, however, are no more interested in the facts of the matter than Michael Edwards was interested in the details when he sacked Derek Robinson in British Leyland in November 1979, with disastrous results for the trade union movement. The car employers have a history of such victimisations.

Robinson was sacked for writing his views in a publication of the shop stewards combine committee, in order to discipline the shop stewards organisation as a whole. Bob Cullen, TGWU deputy convenor at Austin Rover in Cowley, was sacked two years ago for something which happened when he was not even there. Management eventually accepted that this was the case but refused to reinstate him just the same.

Now they have coldly decided to make a move against the Ford unions following the militancy displayed in the strike early last year.

They know that the role played by the militant 1/1107 branch was decisive in that strike. They were the best organised, gave full information to their members and were the only major section of the Ford trade unions which campaigned effectively against the sell-out. The PTA, which the 1/1107 branch covers voiced against the sell-out and for the continuation of the strike.

Since the strike the branch has campaigned against the conditions accepted in the deal. In particular, they produced material exposing the dangers in Ford’s ‘quality circles’ and ‘group leader’ schemes. With the election of Steve Riley, the secretary of the 1/1107 branch, to the National Executive of the TGWU last year, they made an impact on the trade unions at national level — helping to push the TGWU to the left.

The defence of Mick Gosling therefore, is a matter of the defence of the trade union movement at Ford.

Not surprisingly, Mick Gosling was sacked just before Christmas to wrong-foot the unions. Now management are dragging out the procedures to make it even more difficult for the unions to respond.

It is now two months since Mick Gosling was sacked and his appeal has been adjourned.

The quicker there is a decision for the rank and file to respond to the better. Derek Robinson had massive support at the time of his sacking — yet three months later when AEU leader Terry Duffy put the issue to a mass meeting the call for action was heavily defeated.

It looks like being three months before a decision is taken in this case as well.

Ford management have announced that the Sierra is to be taken from Dagenham and moved to Belc Lump — leaving Dagenham as one model plant. No doubt this is another repudiation of the militancy action last year. The workforce must know that management claims of only a ‘small’ job loss are meaningless. Once the plant is a one model plant, job losses are ultimately inevitable.

This does not make it any easier to defend Mick Gosling, but it does make it even more urgent.

If Ford workers are going to defend their jobs they are going to need a strong trade union movement — and that means taking on Fords and defending Mick Gosling.

Alan Thornett

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Women for Socialism has its first national conference on February 25-26

Socialist feminism: into the nineties

NEARLY A DECADE of Thatcher’s attacks, often specifically aimed at reversing the gains made for women in the 1970s, have revealed a glaring need for a socialist feminist organisation. Socialist Feminism Into the Nineties, bringing together women from all parts of the labour movement, from campaigns and from the solidarity movement, will be the first such conference for nearly ten years.

Not that Women for Socialism should substitute itself for the separate spheres of struggle which women are engaged in. Like the socialist feminist current of the 1970s, which played an important role in co-ordinating and organising against attacks on abortion rights and for the right to work — so today, an autonomous women’s movement, with a socialist framework, is needed to link up the different aspects of women’s struggles.

And there is no shortage of battles. Women have been especially hard hit by the changes in employment deliberately engineered by this government — flexible working practices, part-time and low-paid jobs, temporary work. Amongst the unemployed, women have again been singled out (along with young people), hit hardest by such new rules as availability to work.

Women are fighting on a range of other issues too. Black women fighting deportation; women fighting in defence of democratic rights — the right to control our own fertility, to determine our own sexuality, women fighting trade union battles — like the nurses and the teachers, and disputes like R&O, all showing the continuing capacity of women to defend their hard won positions.

At such a time, the Kinnock leadership spends more time undermining and attacking women than fighting for our rights: destroying the effectiveness of the Labour Party Women’s Conference; not inviting the Labour Party Women’s Sections to the Policy Review discussion on women, and determined to present the Labour Party as ‘more concerned with the family’ than the Tories. Nor is the trade union leadership any better. Terrified of Thatcher, they are incapable of defending women members.

Women for Socialism, with about 300 members, formed out of the first Chesterfield Conference. It is an autonomous organisation, in line with the Socialist Conference policy on the autonomy of oppressed groups. Like that organisation, it relates both to the demands of the class struggle and to policy development, and will play an important role in keeping women’s demands on the table. If Women for Socialism is able to play a co-ordinating role, linking together the struggles as they break out, giving leadership and showing a way forward by developing policy demands which relate to the struggles, then it will be an important asset.

Over the last decade radical feminist ideas have made the running on a number of issues. Many women, previously active in the women’s movement, re-oriented their work towards the labour movement in 1979/80, joining the Minority left in the Labour Party and the unions. The focus of attention for many shifted away from single issue campaigns towards trying to change policy and practices in the wider labour movement, and there have been some successes.

However, this left the way clear for radical feminism to take the lead on questions like violence against women and the peace camps. With the decline of the Labour Left, especially after the defeat of the Miners’ strike in 1985, women activists in the Labour Party have become isolated, demoralised, sometimes fighting to defend gains made by women’s committees on local councils while the council itself was making cuts in housing, education, or social services — all areas where women are vulnerable.

On some questions, this dominance of radical feminist thinking has influenced feminists in the labour movement too. Their analysis of pornography is the theory and rape is the practice, led local Labour authorities, on the instigation of their Women’s or Equal Rights committees, to ban films such as Pasolini’s ‘Salò’ as pornographic. In so doing they fell into the pitfall of censorship, which, since the arrival of Section 28, is now seen more clearly as a trap set by the radical right.

The peace camps too, especially at Greenham, were strongly influenced by radical feminism. As CND and the peace movement declined, partly floundering on the rocks of the Communist Party’s endless search for a cross-class ‘popular front’, their ideas came to dominate completely, leading to the attractively simple, but wrong slogan of ‘Take the toys from the boys’, a slogan which evacuates class from the issue of nuclear weapons. When the Cruise missiles were eventually installed at Greenham, this lack of class analysis left the movement without a way forward.

Sometimes radical feminist ideas have even been deliberately and cynically marshalled to argue for a feminist orientation away from the labour movement, such as in the pernicious writings and speeches of Bev Campbell, whose politics exemplify the Communist Party’s popular front.

Women for Socialism must learn from some of these problems, just as we must make the socialist feminist current this time more representative — of black women and working class women. It has made a good start, anti-imperialism is to be an important component, building on some of the links made by the Sisterhood & Solidarity conference held in June 1987. Women against Pit Closures as well as a number of Labour Party Women’s Sections are affiliated.

We should build on these links. In a situation where neither the Labour Party nor the trade unions are doing anything for women, Women for Socialism has an important role to play.

Jane Kelly.
Viraj Mendis deportation presages new crackdown

The government has sent a clear message to all those opposing immigration and nationality laws. The Home Office will not compromise on a tough implementation of these laws.

Both the deportation and the way it was carried out are intended to scare the black community and the churches, temples and mosques, considering giving sanctuary to those facing deportation.

The government wants to teach all anti-racists a lesson. That is why the police smashed their way into the church, more than a week after Viraj had formally applied to go to Denmark, when he was still awaiting a reply from the Danish authorities. This is also why they decided to send him back to Sri Lanka, despite the fact that the state of Bremen in West Germany had agreed to take him, and other countries were still considering their response.

It is becoming clear that immigration officials planned to follow this action with a sweep on other 'illegal' immigrants, and had decided that it was necessary to get rid of Viraj first. They have been building up information for sometime about people's whereabouts and have special squad of police officers, whose sole responsibility is this work.

The government will pay a political price for their actions.

Viraj Mendis: a lesson for all those opposing immigration laws

support for Viraj's right to stay in Britain is still strong. Many people are outraged at the way the police broke into the sanctuary and cannot accept that the Home Office could not send him to a third country.

For months, civil war conditions in Sri Lanka have been seen on the news. The right wing JVP have killed hundreds, if not thousands, of people who they believe have made concessions to Tamil separatists. Viraj could well be on their death list because of his well-known support for Tamil self-determination.

The Foreign Office in the last few months has warned tourists and business people not to go to Sri Lanka because of the political violence. There is evidence that at least two Tamils, forcibly returned from Britain last year, have been arrested more than once and say that they were mistreated in prison.

While the Sri Lankan government itself is unlikely to move against Mendis, because of the publicity this would get while they are trying to clean up their image and pretend that violence is on the decline. However, the position of the Home Office that he, and others are not in danger is a bare-faced - and conspicious - lie.

In a last minute attempt to stop the deportation, Labour MPs tried to raise the debate in the House of Commons. Bill Morris, Deputy General Secretary TGWU, went to Warwick to try to get his members not to prepare the plane on which Viraj was to leave.

All this is, of course, too little and too late, but it gives a glimpse of what the labour movement could do if it is mobilised against deportations.

About 50 people got deported from Britain every week. Industrial action at the airports and high profile campaigns against the immigration and nationality laws could prevent many of these happening. It is necessary, especially if the crackdown happens, to mobilise all of those who have been involved in Viraj's campaign, all of those angry at his deportation, against all of these cases.

Manchester NALGO has decided to organise a national conference on immigration and nationality in order to take the issue into the labour movement.

The conference is organised jointly with Francis and Moji's Defence Campaign and the Black members group in Manchester NALGO. It will take place on Saturday 15th April with workshops and plenaries in Manchester Town Hall and the Mechanics Institute. In the current situation, it is vital that this event is seriously built and well-attended.

Finn Jensen
The Russian ‘threat’ and the German danger

AN EDITORIAL in The Times of January 20 warned the top people of Britain about "The German Danger." January 20, 1989, not as we might have thought, 1939. But things get curiouser. Not only have we slipped back 50 years, but The Times points the finger at the agent of the German menace. We follow the finger and find — the reassuring, silver-haired figure of the USSR's Foreign Minister, Edward Shevardnadze.

Shevardnadze, it seems, in alliance with a certain Mikhail Gorbachev, has been plotting to divide the Western alliance by means of unilateral cuts in Soviet armed forces. Rupert Murdoch's sleuths have followed his trail.

At the United Nations in December, Gorbachev announced his intention of reducing the size of the Soviet army by 500,000 men and removing divisions and tanks from eastern Europe. Later in Moscow, he spelled out his plans to a small group of international conspiroirs, amongst whom we can name former French President Giscard D'Estaing, former Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone, and a certain Henry Kissinger (any leads on him?).

There was to be a 14.2 percent cut in the military budget and a 19.5 percent reduction in spending on armaments and military hardware.

The Western European connection is in the hands of Shevardnadze. In Paris, at the international conference on chemical weapons, he stated that the Soviet Union would begin unilaterally to destroy its own chemical arsenal; then in Vienna, at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, he explained that when the Soviet divisions left East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia they would dismantle their short-range nuclear missiles as well as some nuclear-capable artillery pieces.

What has all this to do with the "German Danger?" The danger the public opinion in West Germany will now mobilize against plans to replace NATO's 88 obsolete Lance missile launchers located in West Germany. Such a mobilization is made more likely by the fact that the Soviet Union is removing those short-range nuclear missiles which are targeted on West Germany.

"The Wall Street Journal" explains: "Although (West German) Chancellor Kohl shares some American views, he differs: opinion polls make clear there is doveshiness about among his voters." (9/1/89)

"Nor is it only West Germany: "Our main problem is to rationalise our behaviour in the defence area," means Dutch prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, while confusion reigns among the British public, who, according to opinion polls, no longer consider the Soviet Union a threat.

Urgent measures are required. Reagan's Secretary of State George Schultz, assisted by Britain's Geoffrey Howe, although unable to engage a western public opinion in a full-scale conventional battle in Vienna, was still able to stage an effective guerilla action around the question of human rights. Schultz pointed to events in nearby Czechoslovakia, where police were smashing up demonstrations on the anniversary of the death of Jan Palach (who burned himself to death in protest at the invasion of his country by Gorbachev's predecessor Brezhnev) and at the situation in Bulgaria and Romania.

Schultz especially emphasised the continued presence of the Berlin wall — a theme taken up by The Times, which recommended the wall as the issue on which the West German government could face down the peace movement.

However these were just interim measures. For one thing, Shevardnadze has been talking about removing the wall, sending a shiver of curiosity down the spines of western diplomats. More fundamentally, the German danger is supplemented by the Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Polish and other dangers — and too much loose talk about human rights could have nasty consequences. Schultz was careful to exempt those Eastern bloc countries which have gone furthest in accepting the western economic model from his criticism on human rights.

All over Gorbachev's patch people want to be able to read, watch or listen to what they like, say what they like and do where they like. How they ask for more. They seem to believe that they deserve the economic whirlwind to do all these things, not understanding that the German banks have to be paid back first.

Mark Frankland from The Observer reports on the views of a Hungarian worker who would not agree that he or anyone else should make sacrifices to help right the economy. "Why?" he asked. "It's the government, not us, who made this mess."

What if workers in the west began to take a similar line? What if the German left — supported by other satanic forces throughout Europe and the USA — should propose to the peoples of eastern Europe a peaceful and democratic solution to the historic divisions which are the legacy of historic crimes? Perhaps they might even come up with a programme of mutual economic benefit, and lift the burden of debt to West German hands from the shoulders of eastern Europe.

This is the "German danger" in its full-blown form — a real threat to German imperialism and thus to imperialism as a whole. However it is also a danger for Gorbachev. If there were any prospect of a real cooperation between Germans and the other peoples of eastern Europe, the justification for the maintenance of the huge military establishment of the Warsaw Pact would disappear. There would be no argument in favour of keeping the Baltic States or the Ukraine within the boundaries of a Russian-dominated Soviet Union.

Wonder whether the two US and British capital governments have agreed to go to Moscow in 1991, to discuss with Gorbachev how they can make adequately control us, and ensure that demands for peace and human rights do not get out of hand.

Colin Meade
Yugoslavia: who will take charge?

AS HIS NEW year's resolution, Yugoslavia's Branislav Mikulic decided to stop pretending to govern the country. On December 31, 1988, he and his government resigned, and Mikulic denounced Yugoslavia's fragmented political system, which had made it impossible to arrive at decisions.

The six republics and two autonomous regions of the Federation pay little attention to the central government, while the system of economic 'self-management' baffles everybody.

For three weeks, nobody else could be found to take the place of Mikulic, whose ability to win support for austerity policies was undermined by revelations that he owns no less than five luxurious houses, including one in London.

Now he has been succeeded as Prime Minister by Ante Markovic, described by The Guardian as a 'reformist politician with a reputation of being a successful industrial manager.'

Meanwhile the economic crisis gets worse. Yugoslavia has a foreign debt of 23 billion dollars, inflation of 250 percent, and 20 percent unemployment - in the poorest regions as high as 60 percent - while it is estimated that living standards have fallen by 40 percent since 1982.

The ruling Yugoslav bureaucracy's answer has been austerity and the removal of obstacles to the operation of market forces. In opposition to these policies, millions of workers have taken to the streets. Slogans such as 'Down with the socialist bourgeoisie' and 'Let the leaders stand in line for bread' have been heard.

In Montenegro and Vojvodina the whole party and state leaderships have resigned in the face of huge protests lasting whole days and nights, while one of the immediate causes of Mikulic's resignation was the threat of a general strike in Croatia against proposals to reduce social security.

This workers' opposition, however, has so far been kept within the political framework of the bureaucracy by Slobodan Milosevic, the head of the Serbian party, who has placed himself at the head of the movement, and directed it down a nationalist channel.

In line with Milosevic's 'Greater Serbia' policy, many of the workers' mobilisations have supported his calls for tougher measures against the alleged Albanian extremists in the Serbian province of Kosovo, where Albanians are in the majority.

Milosevic is hoping that he will be earned to the top positions in the country's party and state by a Serb nationalist working class. There he will form a strong government, centralised around Serbia, and prove himself to be the man who can get things done by forcing through the bureaucracy's pro-market economic programme, which he has supported. At this point the 'West' will find that Milosevic is not the demagogue they thought, but a serious man with whom it is possible to do business.

However there are serious obstacles strewn across Milosevic's career path. His Serbian centralist programme will arouse tremendous resistance from the other nations in Yugoslavia, while the workers' mobilisations against increasing poverty may turn out to be a genie which cannot easily be stuffed back into the bottle.

Another possible agency for the restoration of law and order is the army, an all Yugoslav institution with its own party organisation. Army circles have played the leading role in attacks on democratic and nationalist activists in Slovenia, where independent groups and single issue movements have flourished in the last few years.

Despite considerable success in resisting centralist attacks, the Slovenian movement does not seem to have any Yugoslav outlook, which may render it dangerously isolated as the crisis continues.

Everything depends on the emergence of a political current which has the courage to fight for full democracy, all respect for the rights of all the nationalities, including the non-Slav Albanians, in the Federation, and places the concrete needs of the population above the attractions either of the West or of anti-Western romantic nationalism.

On this front, it seems that everything remains to be done. The collapse of bureaucratic 'socialism' has led Yugoslavia's intellectuals back into dependence on the 'dominant ideas of the dominant class,' a belief in the magic powers of the free market, and 51 or more varieties of nationalist and religious obscurantism.

A real factor in the Yugoslav crisis will be our own readiness to offer solidarity and engage in serious discussion of fundamentals with anybody in Yugoslavia who comes out for democracy and national equality against all the authoritarian solutions to the pre-revolutionary crisis of the Yugoslav state.

Colin Meade
A revival of student militancy?

Campus militancy was once a major force on the political landscape. The massive student mobilisations of the affluent late 1960s inspired many political activists from all backgrounds, as well as providing a training ground for many of the forces of today's far left.

In the 1980s it is a somewhat different story. Students over the last few years have been noted rather for their apathy than their militancy, despite being better organised than other sections of youth.

Since the Thatcher government came to office in 1979 there has been a dramatic fall in the value of student grants - down by a staggering 23 per cent in real terms. There has also been an erosion in everything from tutorial standards to cuts in housing benefits.

The explanation for students' relative passivity is to be found in the politics of the objective situation and the leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS). 'New realism' has blended with the culture of individual achievement endemic in higher educational institutions to form a mass sub-conscious quasi- Thatcherite view of the world. For many, the world outside the textbook is too ugly and threatening to be confronted.

However, the Tory attacks on education have steadily increased, aimed at re-structuring the whole educational system to meet the needs of private capital and the new developments in higher technology - at the expense of the 'nuts and bolts' and other non-technical disciplines.

This restructuring has also led to massive cuts in the funding of polytechnics, huge debts in universities, and many cost cutting mergers of colleges.

Resistance from the NUS has been minimal. The atmosphere of apathy and influence of the 'textbook culture' have assisted the NUS leadership's policy of 'passive protest'. Concretely, this has meant negotiations with government boards on how best to make cuts without doing too much damage; campaigns of letter-writing to MPs; and a conscious plan to ensure the minimum involvement of the 1.23 million members of NUS.

None of this is surprising from an NUS executive dominated by the pro-Kinnock faction of the Democratic Left (DL), who have controlled NUS through the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) - resorting to any means necessary to contain opposition. Contrary to their verbal commitment to democracy and their libertarian demagogy, the Kinnockites have fended off challenges from the Left by measures which have nothing to do with democracy - such as ruling 'out of order' at NOLS conferences, and using their control of the Communist Party, and the ideology of Marxism Today, to dominate the politics of the leadership, due to the political weakness of the Democratic Left.

The revelation of the Tory plans for student loans last November upset the uneasy balance of the last couple of years, signalling an explosive escalation of the government's attacks on students. From 1990, all social security and housing benefits for students will cease. Grants will be frozen, and increases in costs will be covered by bank loans, with repayments spread over a period of years. The price - even of success, let alone exam failures - will be thousands of pounds of debt, affecting all students apart from the very rich. It will particularly hit working-class students and those from less privileged sections of society, especially women and black students, many of whom will simply not be able to afford to take their places.

The release of the Iouls White Paper was met with massive resistance nationally. A wave of activity drew whole new layers of students into struggle and transformed the atmosphere from one of passivity to one of outrage in student unions across the country. An estimated 50,000 took to the streets on the day of action in mid-November; every major city saw a sizable student demonstration against loans. The NUS leadership were forced to transform what they hoped would be a peaceful and low-key lobby of parliament into a mass demonstration which even at the last minute attracted some 30,000. The demand to 'step up the action' echoed with increasing vigour from the organised left, as all eyes focused on the December NUS conference.

The December 1988 conference in Blackpool was, as expected, a heady affair. The student clash of ideas and delegations heated. Most were shocked and confused by the conduct of both the leadership and the opposition, as an endless barrage of procedural wranglings maintained crisis conditions throughout the three days, with only the odd pause for breath.

The principal element in the situation was two-fold: firstly there was the new background of struggle; but in contrast came the DL/Communist Party plan to restructure NUS. These proposals included a few positive aspects to cover up more negative ones (most notably the complete abolition of the winter conference itself, rendering the NUS leadership even less accountable, and consolidating even further bureaucratised control).

The leadership's attempt to move NUS rightwards clashed head-on with the effects of the anti-loans struggle, creating an atmosphere of confrontation.

NUS leadership still managed to maintain control over the conference. The explosion of anger reached theoretical levels on a few occasions, including a number of occupations of the platform. However it is hard to believe that the NUS leadership could be in a worse state. Their system allows everything to slip into place and the leadership even more decisive than before.

On closer examination of the factional warfare at conference, some clearly related phenomena are revealed. One occupation of the platform - by the Scottish students, after the leadership's bold line on opposition to the Poll Tax had been passed - was greeted by the leadership closing down the conference for the rest of the day. Yet an earlier 'women's' occupation of the platform appeared to be warmly greeted by the leadership and ended with a statement against 'intimidation' of women by 'left factions'.

Until recently, student militancy had ebbed
Later there was a lesbian and gay statement against the 'homophobia' of the 'left factions', and a delegate who spoke on behalf of overseas students ended his speech by insisting that 'left factions will not tell us what to think or do'. Finally a special round of applause for President Mervin Sherlock from the women at the conference was proposed by a Communist party member on the executive.

All these episodes say something about the leadership's political alliances, based on stooges and patronage, and designed to project the pro-Kinoshok DLCP block as champions of the oppressed. This 'big lie' has been used with great effect as a weapon against the left, showing possibly the clearest reflection of the opportunist politics of Marxism Today - a direct intersection between the struggles of the oppressed and the class struggle.

This type of political block can only be built on the weakness of the left on such questions, as seen in Militant's line that 'liberation campaigns are divorced from the class struggle', the SWP view that 'only working-class women are oppressed', and the crude Socialist Organiser theory of 'feminism' which asserts that a whole bureaucratic caste of women defends itself purely by alleging 'sexism' against all men who politically oppose them.

This latter is important because the Socialist Students in NOLS (SSIN) grouping, dominated by Socialist Organiser, has been the traditional opposition to the Democratic Left and the present DLCP block in NUS. This is by virtue of SSIN's past leadership of various important campaigns around welfare issues, and their representation on the NUS executive.

However SSIN has failed to confront the key political problems in NUS, and their 'theory' of feminism has avoided or blocked any real debate with feminists in NUS. Worse, SSIN have, on occasion, when it seemed to their advantage, resorted to some of the bureaucratic methods used by the DLCP.

It is unclear whether SSIN's recent opportunist manoeuvres are related to Socialist Organiser's 'programmatic review', or a simple capitulation to electoralism. One of the worst examples of this was their alliance last year with the pro-zionist Union of Jewish Students - the significance of which they have attempted to downplay.

SSIN's claim to represent the Labour left in NOLS has declining credibility, and its future is as yet unclear, but its decline certainly merits discussion by socialists as part of the general debate on the way forward for the student movement. SSIN will have to stand on their political record in such a debate.

What is needed in NUS is a formation of 'consistent socialists' with sufficient influence to bring about a major shake-up in consciousness and political perception, and to develop the necessary alliances, consistent with class struggle politics, and consistent with the struggles of the oppressed.

This implies an internationalist political outlook of the sort that Socialist Organiser have so clearly lacked.

Socialist Outlook supporters in the colleges are engaged in a project with such an aim, www.socoutlook.org. Whatever the rest of the academic year brings, 1989 is sure to be a stormy year of debate and activity for all socialist students.

Trevor Wongspan

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Fighting Section 28
Not in front of the children?

Socialist Outlook has covered the campaign against Section 28, which prevents local authorities from 'promoting homosexuality', and specifically outlaws teaching that homosexuality is 'acceptable as a family relationship'. In this article, JAMIE GOUGH considers the nature of the prejudice that Section 28 both uses and promotes, and the implications for constructing a socialist society.

Section 28 is being used to weaken or prevent local authorities from taking action to combat discrimination against all lesbians and gay men. But the excuse for doing this, and the focus of the attack, has been the issue of the 'corruption' of youth: that the 'teaching of homosexuality' in schools would lead to school students growing up lesbian or gay. This infringes the right of children to scientific knowledge about their sexuality, and leads to discrimination against lesbians and gay men working with children and young people.

The focus of the campaign against the Section has correctly been to emphasise the infringement of democratic rights that it involves. But there have been divisions about how to argue for these rights, and particularly how to reply to the 'corruption' argument. Some, including this magazine, have argued that there is no question of 'corruption' since lesbian and gay sexuality is equally valid to heterosexuality. Others, notably the Labour Party, have not argued this, or have rather stated that the Labour Party leadership, have not argued this, or have rather stated that lesbian and gay sexuality is 'acceptable in certain contexts'. This has been a very early age. This argument has even been used by some sections of the lesbian and gay movement. In a TV programme made by the editor of a national lesbian and gay newspaper we were informed by a psychiatrist that corruption is impossible because sexual identity is fixed by the age of four.

From birth?

This defensive line of argument simply does not hold water. If people's sexual desires are genetically determined, why has there been such an enormous variation in them between different historical societies not just in sexual behaviour (which can be attributed to circumstances) but in evident sexual desires? In previous societies, and in much of the world today, though there may be a notion that people can be sexually attracted more to one sex than another, there is not the idea that people are ex...
clusively attracted to one sex, that this is associated with a particular type of personality and a particular way of life. The idea of sexual identity is that individuals have an inherent sexuality, including attraction to a particular sex, and that other important things follow from this, in a modern one.

Sexual identity arises from circumstances peculiar to capitalist and post-capitalist societies. People have some possibilities for living outside of the family, and so it becomes possible to live a 'lesbian life' or a 'gay life', a life which flows from your sexual desires. But the difference between heterosexual life and lesbian or gay ('homosexual') life still remains crucial, because the heterosexual family remains the norm, and especially remains the 'proper' place to bring up children. Thus whereas formal sexual desires might be judged good or bad but didn't have major consequences, in modern times the sex that you desire tends to define the whole way that you lead your life, whether you are inside or outside the heterosexual family 'norm'.

Of course, this only happens partially: many people with homosexual desires marry. But for many people their sexual desires lead to a particular way of life. And so sexual desire becomes an even more important feature of people's personality, an identity that one talks about people having 'sexual identities'.

The stigma of 'childlessness'

It is therefore true that lesbians and gay men, especially ones who are open about their sexuality, are less likely to live with children than heterosexuals are. The separation of lesbians and gay men from children is therefore not simply a result of our 'deviant' sexual identity, but is part of that identity: our separation from children shows our 'misfortune', and is a reason for preventing children growing up lesbian or gay. To a considerable extent, being or not being allowed to be with children is part of what defines heterosexuals and homosexuals.

We have a vicious circle...there are heterosexual, lesbian and gay identities, and the latter are 'bad'...children can grow up into lesbian or gay individuals, and this is 'bad'...children must be prevented from growing up lesbian or gay...Lesbians and gay men are prevented from living with and being with children...

Why do people see childlessness as such a disaster? The relationships that an adult can have with a child, are to some extent inherently different from those that she or he can have with other adults just by virtue of age: this would be so in a socialist society too. But the reasons that people value parenthood are also to a large degree specific to capitalist and post-capitalist societies. People want children to look after them in their old age. Inheritance, not just of property, but of skill, and increasingly of 'lifestyle' and 'personality' is important: people want to be perpetuated in another person. Finally, being and rearing children is a form of creativity and productiveness. For working people, alienated from our paid work, raising children is an area where we have a chance to express ourselves. All these historically specific reasons involve alienation for the child, since they tend to construct relationships between adults and children on the basis of considerations which are alien to the child.

A socialist society would enable these alienating reasons for 'having' children to wither away. Old people would not be economically dependent on their children; unequal wealth and skill would not be there to be inherited; and creativity within production as a whole would not require compensation through dictatorial creativity with children. This would open up the possibility of real choice as to whether or not to bring and bring up children. The voluntary abandon of their parents and children would then be part of the waning away of the heterosexual and homosexual identities.

But there is another reason that 'childlessness' is considered a disaster. The central feature of the institutions of the family is that children, within certain legal limits, belong to their parents. They have, or are supposed to have, a different relationship to their biological parents from all other adults, and of course they have no choice over who these parents are. In a socialist society, children would have the right, and in the greatest extent possible the means, to choose which adults they live with. There would not be such pressure on adults to live in couples when living with children. Children would need adults who were committed to them. But the sharp distinction between 'parents' and 'non-parents' would be much eroded. This would further weaken the heterosexual/homosexual distinction.

The fears people have about 'corruption' cannot be side-stepped by saying that lesbians and gay men are born not made. Nor is it simply a matter of combating ignorance, inherited prejudice, or even ruling class propaganda. These fears arise from the conditions within which people live their lives; the biological family as the predominant means of child rearing and the gender system connected to it. The social distinctions and real divisions between heterosexuality and homosexuality, between 'fit' and 'unfit' parents, between parents and non-parents, are logically necessary parts of how the gender and family systems are reproduced. To create alternatives to the family and gender systems as part of creating socialism will mean eroding each of these distinctions and the way in which they reinforce each other.

Issues of childhood and parenthood are explosive. But in defending positive policies in schools and combating right-wing ideas about 'corruption' we need to find ways of speaking about, and enabling others to speak about, these issues.
Palestine National Council:

Backtracking on programme

The continued uprising on the West Bank and Gaza Strip has put forward the objective of full and unconditional sovereignty for the Palestinian people as an immediate demand.

However, the Palestinian National Council’s last meeting held in December, and which was considered to be the council of the uprising, adopted resolutions controversial among Palestinian political organizations and activists.

This meeting addressed itself to two audiences. On the one hand, it appealed to immediate aspirations for an independent and sovereign state, by adopting the declaration of a state of independence.

On the other hand, it addressed the American administration’s long-drawn condition for recognizing the PLO by accepting UN Resolutions 242 and 338. These resolutions had always been rejected by all Palestinian organizations, and had radicalised political opinion against the Arab regimes who accepted them in 1967 and the early 1970s.

The reasons for rejecting 242 and 338 still clearly apply today. For they ignore and exclude any national rights for the Palestinian people. They call for recognition and acceptance of the Israeli state, which among a million Palestinians who were expelled from their homes and homeland in 1948 have no right to return. These states are recognized only as “refugees”.

Later in a press conference Yasser Arafat, PLO head, went further in explicitly accepting the two-state solution. This last PNC meeting is no doubt one of the most important turning points in the history of the PLO. It changes the original PLO political platform of liberation of Palestine and seeking a democratic secular state.

It ends the PLO’s continuous previous rejection of 242 and 338 as a framework for solving the Palestinian national problem. How this PNC meeting and the PLO present policy will affect the struggle in the immediate and long-term future is discussed below in two articles.

The first is by Michel Wazirawawi, leading member of the Revolutionary Communist League in the Israeli state, as an organisation affiliated to the Fourth International.

The second is an interview with Bashir Khairat, member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who was deported from the West Bank in January 1988 by the Israeli authorities, accusing him of being a leading figure in the uprising.

Sana Samer. The following two articles have been translated by Socialist Outlook and edited slightly for reasons of space.

A new balance of forces

Thirteen months of the popular uprising have successfully created a new balance of forces between the Israeli state and the Palestinian national movement, which may eventually lead to a break in the post-1967 log jam.

For this to happen, the PLO leadership should opt for a set of concrete political objectives which may be achieved in the medium term (as a result of this new relationship of forces). Nobody in the occupied territories believes that the popular uprising on its own is sufficient to drive out the Israeli army and the settlers. But most people see the intifada as leverage for permanent pressure on Israeli society as well as on international public opinion, that may lead to negotiations.

The PLO leadership outside Palestine were given instructions by the leaders of the intifada to draw up a political agenda for the popular struggle, and to preserve at all cost the unity between the different political currents within the PLO, without which the uprising would run into serious danger.

At the meeting in Algiers, under the combined pressures of the imperialist states, the Arab bourgeoisies and the Soviet Union, the PNC moved to keep close to its mandate. The main political resolution accepted the principle of the partition of Palestine, and through acknowledging UN resolutions 242 and 338, recognised the Israeli state in its pre-1967 borders. The PLO further declared its readiness to negotiate with Israel, through an international conference, a concrete peace formula.

Despite open differences, especially on the question of resolutions 242 and 338, the political currents within the PLO kept to their word and maintained unity at all cost, remaining seated on the leadership bodies.

The real aim of the Algiers PNC was to find a way to get through to Washington, underlined by the perception that only US imperialism can roll back Israeli’s intransigence and push them to negotiate withdrawal from the occupied territories. Washington did not miss this opportunity, and alter further clarification — in particular on the question of terrorism — was ready to take on board the Algiers resolutions as a turning point in order to justify a U turn in its policy of not dealing with the PLO.

The US decision to reopen official talks — not negotiations — with the PLO has thrown the Israeli ruling class into a panic. The Palestinian masses saw it as a stunning victory. Nevertheless, the real intention of the US remains to force a resolution of the PLO leadership. As soon as Yasser Arafat denounced terrorism, the US administration was quick to request an end to every form of armed struggle and even demanded the winding up of the intifada.

There has been no sign that the PLO leaders intend to put a stop to the uprising, bearing in mind that Arafat relies on it for ammunition to pursue his manoeuvres. The leadership outside Palestine have limited powers to impose anything on the popular movement inside.

While recognising the necessity for certain concessions to allow negotiations to take place, there are real dangers at every stage of Arafat’s diplomacy. Washington will relentlessly squeeze the PLO for more concessions, including a request for Arafat to assent himself by quelling his opponents, no matter what the cost, even if it were a new civil war within the Palestinian national movement.

Currents within the leadership of the PLO and the PLO have declared their readiness to accept the compromises necessary to unite the US as well as the Arab bourgeoisies. The PNC resolutions leave an important gap between the immediate need to end the occupation and achieve Palestinian sovereignty on the West Bank and Gaza, and the achievement of full self-determination for the Palestinian people.

While it is correct, under the short and medium term relationship of forces, to separate the immediate aim from the long term strategic objectives, and to accept as transitory the partition of Palestine and the principle of negotiations with the Zionist government, it remains dangerous and perhaps counter-productive to concede the long-term objectives of the struggle of the Palestinian people.

Either the Palestinian leaders want effectively to confine the outcome of the struggle to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza (in which case they must be ready for a civil war that would make the Zionist occupation seem like a picnic), or else the leadership fully realises that the establishment of...
The strength of the intifadah is unity

BESHIR KHAIRI spoke to Socialist Outlook

What do you think the last Palestine National Council (PNC) achieved, and what are its implications for the uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip?

The last PNC was the council of the intifadah, and its preparation centred on how to support it. Two main issues were raised: first, the question of reconvening the uprising, which were adopted unanimously, expressed the importance of unity, the continuity and escalation of the intifadah, and the armed struggle. The second point on the agenda dealt with three issues: the declaration of independence and the declaration of a state — both unanimously passed — while the third point, the political communique, and particularly its reference to UN resolutions 242 and 338, was the subject of major disagreement.

The opposition achieved 46 votes against and ten abstentions. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was the main core of the opposition. However, while opposing, it also raised the slogan of national unity.

The PFLP has always believed that the most important disagreements it should withdraw from the PLO Executive Committee, while remaining in all other PLO institutions.

By staying inside the Executive we are supporting national unity, but this in no way means that we are ready to cover up our differences. On the contrary, we see that in this very important period of our people’s struggle it is more necessary to uphold our convictions.

How do you analyze what happened at the PNC meeting with regard to the policy of Arafat and the right wing?

Arafat’s speech in front of the UN conference in Geneva was coherent with the PNC meeting. Later at the press conference he introduced some points which I consider to be contradictory. First, regarding the right of the Israeli state to exist, there was nothing referred to it as such in the PNC resolutions. Second, the question of terrorism as explained by Arafat at the PNC meeting was correct and very different from what he stated at the press conference.

We are a liberation movement and do not practice terrorism, and as a people we have been and still are victims of terrorism. On the other hand, the USA has carried out terrorist acts against world-wide liberation movements, and the imperialist scoundrel in the region, the Zionist state, commits daily terrorist acts against our people and the Arab peoples, and has been engaged in international terrorism.

Third, the form in which resolutions 242 and 338 were introduced by Arafat to the press conference were different from the PFLP, which was associated with the right to self-determination and UN resolutions.

The PFLP was very keen that unity should be a number one question, and in fact made a compromise in order to maintain it. But how do you explain the ‘unity until victory’ slogan while the right wing is going its own way? Do you see a breaking point somewhere, and will there be a time when this unity is threatened by the way the leadership is going politically?

We do not understand unity as a means for keeping us silent. What we see is a dialectic of unity and struggle. There is no struggle without unity and we struggle through unity.

The strength of the intifadah is its unity — a unity that goes beyond mere coordination of the different political organisations in the struggle. It is important now not to shake this internal unity, and we think any cleavage in the external unity will be reflected in the struggle inside. The course of the intifadah is towards continuity and escalation, and its development to partial and then general insurrection.

In the same context we look towards increasing the involvement of the 850,000 Palestinians subjected in 1948, including those living under occupation for 20 or 40 years, those under the repression of the Arab regimes, or in the diaspora. We must think not only of short-term objectives but of longer-term strategic ones, in which the main framework of our struggle is the institutions of the PLO.

Can you tell us something about the leadership of the uprising and the character of the change of consciousness that has taken place, and the role of the working class?

The Israeli authorities have worked essentially to annex the Palestinian economy to the Zionist one. The Palestinian workforce in Zionist factories, farms and settlements includes around 120,000 workers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In addition there are 40-50,000 workers without permits. It was clear in the leadership of the intifadah that to stop this large workforce from working an alternative should be created — but this was yet to be prepared.

However there were other ways of crippling the Israeli economy, including the organisation of the labour force and several days of general strikes. Today an increasing number of workers refuse to work in settlements, farms or factories. The leadership of the intifadah is popularising the need for cooperatives and a return to the land.

The burgeoning home economy is the key to the growing conscious support for creating alternatives to dependence on employment in Israeli farms and factories, and helps with the boycott of Israeli produce. A new consciousness has developed on this new material basis of people’s power.

The case of the United National Leadership is another striking example. As soon as a leader is jailed or deported, a dozen others spring up to replace him or her. A new morality of the uprising has also developed. Wedding ceremonies and funerals become national occasions, there is conscious solidarity, a conscious commitment to being a Palestinian, to the love of the land, and a readiness to sacrifice. Each and every citizen has a role to play in the intifadah.

What is the role of the Soviet Union and other international parties in solving the regional problems? What about the role of Syria and Libya, which despite expectations played no role during or after the PNC?

Regardless of our political attitude towards the superpowers (for us the US is the head of the imperialist camp, while the USSR is a friend and ally) the Palestinian national question is a problem for the Palestinians to solve. This means that our choice of a solution is not a Soviet choice, nor American, indeed, but our choice. No solution could be imposed on us while we still retain our leadership and independence.

As for the Arab regimes, they either conspired against the Palestinian national problem, or were silent or gave inadequate support that did not measure up to the uprising and the sacrifices of our people. Libya gives some material support, and Iraq adopted families of martyrs and wounded, but this is not enough.

The Arab Gulf states and billions of dollars to support Iraq’s war, while they pay only crumbs to the Palestinians. As we are paying in blood to defend Arab dignity and land, we have the right for oil money to be directed towards the uprising.
Revolution and Counter-revolution in Central America

In mid-January, President Bush reiterated his support to the right-wing guerrilla movement of Angola at a time when the Cuban troops are withdrawing. Bush was also involved in the Iran-gate scandal, and has always been a hawk on the question of Central America.

Should we expect any change in American policy on Central America after Reagan, or any evolution in a region that for long has looked to be on the brink of being submerged either by revolutionary tides or by floods of repression?

For the millions of poor people living in the isthmus, life remains very hard and the future very grim. Most countries face repression, torture, or murder in varying degrees, from terrifying death squads. To struggle in those circumstances represents a much greater act of courage and faith than in our 'democratic' countries. Hunger and poverty do their deadly work, even more slowly and more painfully; there is no hope of any peaceful end to massive injustices and inequalities. Those in power would destroy everything before they give it up, as Somoza did in Nicaragua in 1979.

In Nicaragua, the revolutionary process born on the 19th July 1979 has been crippled by natural disasters (the most recent being the dramatic hurricane of October 1988) and brought to its knees by the US 'destabilisation'. This has failed militarily to overthrow the Sandinista government but has had some success in destroying the fragile and dependent economy, now in absolute chaos.

The economic problems of the other countries, kept afloat only by millions of US dollars, are reflected in increasing political polarisation. In El Salvador, the 'acceptable' face of Christian Democracy has crumpled, and has opened space for the only alternative: the fascist ARENA party, likely to win the next elections, and posing a dilemma for George Bush. However the Salvadoran revolutionary forces of the FMLN are quite optimistic that victory is possible, as is detailed in the article.

The army is also in power in Guatemala, though not so openly, since it can still hide behind a civilian president, however he cannot disguise the huge problems of a terribly impoverished population and the strength of the revolutionary movement.

Central America raises many issues about revolution, revolutionary leaderships, their problems and ability to win in the face of a massive military and repressive machinery set against them. It raises fundamental but often ignored questions, such as women's liberation or the struggles and participation of indigenous peoples.

It offers living examples to apply and understand revolutionary theory, showing the complexity of real life, in which political weaknesses can cost thousands of lives. Above all, it demonstrates the value of Marxist faith in the oppressed to take control of their destiny and move towards socialism rather than barbarity.

Maria Astorga

"Central America raises many issues about revolution and revolutionary leaderships."

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Nicaragua 10 years on
Which way for the revolution?

As the Nicaraguan Revolution reaches the end of its first decade, a series of questions about its nature still remain in the balance. The revolution remains a profoundly contradictory phenomenon which by its bare facts is able to supply evidence for both those who see it as a socialist revolution and those who doubt the intentions of the ruling Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional (FSLN).

This can be shown at an economic level by two examples: the direction of Sandinista policies has allowed the development of two contradictory class tendencies.

In the first case, in February 1988 the FSLN implemented a series of economic reforms which have led to a decline in the living standards of most workers and peasants. Food guarantees that had previously been universal were withdrawn for all but government workers, whilst the prices of basic grains were no longer controlled and left to the so-called laws of supply and demand. The past few years have seen a disappearance of the popular stores which had guaranteed a decent supply of all basic goods to everyone – especially in the poor neighbourhoods (barrios). The long term closure of the stores, in addition to the more recent economic changes, have had the effect of encouraging and strengthening the petty-bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie and the capitalist market place.

The motive for this policy was to end the shortages that were developing in the supplies of basic grains, and to legalise what was an enormous black market. Included in this move was a more populist change in the currency rate which, by being introduced overnight, ambushed thousands of speculators and, because there was a limit set on the amount to be exchanged, denied the internal supporters of the US-backed anti government 'contra' forces all the funds they had built up in old currency.

Initially, these reforms were very popular because of the short term effect on the speculators, but this turned out to be a side issue compared to what followed. The freeing up of prices did encourage the peasants to grow more, the shortages in supply were overcome; but only at the price of a collapse in the incomes of urban workers and many of the poor peasantry who have no surplus to sell, and lost ground to the general inflationary effects which the reform haled only temporarily. The average Nicaraguan, by the end of July, could barely afford to eat, and white queues had all but disappeared, begging began to reappear on the streets.

“The average Nicaraguan, by the end of July, could barely afford to eat, and while queues had all but disappeared, begging began to reappear on the streets.”
was in progress. Since the plant was the largest private company in Nicaragua its nationalisation was a real warning to the bourgeoisie, but one that was not based on the social struggles of the oppressed.

How we read these apparently contradictory events depends on our overall analysis of the regime. One might suggest that the Frente's long term commitment to the mixed economy produced both the price reform and the nationalisation. The price reform because the dominant bloc in the Frente was not prepared to see the elimination of the mixed economy and wanted to support market conditions in the agricultural sector; the nationalisation because it is not unusual for anti-imperialist petty-bourgeois regimes to carry out wholesale nationalisations in various sectors to guarantee the overall reproduction of the mixed economy. This analysis would put the Frente clearly in the historical tradition of the 'third way', the revolution in the lineage of Mexico rather than Cuba.

Another view is that the nationalisation is another calculated step in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the socialisation of the economy. Price reforms in themselves do not indicate the anti-working class nature of the regime itself given the economic difficulties that it is facing. The Frente have decided to expropriate the part of the economy they feel able to run in a period of war, leaving the petty-bourgeois sector to accumulate and stimulate the economy in the style of the Bolshevik New Economic Policy after the Russian Revolution.

It is not possible to reduce the question to one of economics. Nationalisation is no more indicative of a socialist state or government than the introduction of market mechanisms is an indication of a leadership of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois intent. In the early transitional period of a socialist regime the economic question is crucial but not determinate; the question of who holds political power and how is key.

The FSLN argues that the will of the popular masses in Nicaragua is represented through the National Assembly and that the revolution is a pluralist revolution. Some defend this analysis by claiming that Nicaragua is a pluralist socialist democracy in its early stages. All parties have equal access to the media and have the right to argue for their point of view. This ignores the fact that in Nicaragua one party has a monopoly of control of the state and the armed forces which underpin it. The police force is an explicitly Sandinista police force and the army is explicitly a Sandinista army.

In every area of the state machinery and in every mass organisation the Frente has a monopoly of power. The National Assembly is simply a Constitutional Assembly which the revolutionaries created because of their expected overwhelming dominance within it, and because of the political space this would give them in national and international politics.

This situation does not indicate that the working class and its allies hold power in Nicaragua; it does indicate that perhaps the FSLN hold power on their behalf. The overthrow of Somoza was a rapid affair and the workers and peasants had little experience of self organisation. They were thrown into a situation where they had immense responsibilities with little practical experience. This problem implied a massive cultural revolution in order that the oppressed could begin to run their own lives.

Part of this process was the literacy campaign. Just as the process was gaining hold, the revolution was faced by a massive counter-revolutionary war which has lasted for the last seven years and has effectively drained the resources and the revolutionary zeal of the people. This should not be underestimated.

Economic hardship and war have acted to demobilise the oppressed and to centralise power and resources into the machinery of the FSLN. Many of the local Sandinista Defence Committees (CDSs) whilst functioning are attended mainly by Frente militantes; many workers and peasants are occupied by keeping their heads above water because of the price increases. The everyday struggle to survive in Nicaragua makes it difficult for the oppressed to take part and construct a revolutionary democracy when factory-based proletarians are conspicuous by their absence and the holding blocks of the revolution are peasants, artisans, workers in small shops, street sellers and agricultural proletarians.

The worker peasant alliance as the basis of socialist democracy does not exist as an urban-rural axis but as a rural-rural axis outside the urban centres of power. Where there are proletarians they do not hold power, but on occasion, they participate in it. This problem is reflected at a more political level where there is not a tendency to distinguish between the Frente and the revolution. An opinion poll conducted by Enor, a magazine supportive of the revolution, found that while over 80% in Managua support the revolution, 67% did not support any party with 30% supporting the Frente and 3% supporting all fourteen opposition parties put together. While this is by no means a serious problem for the FSLN per se, it does pose real problems for the formation of a mass participatory socialist democracy.

At both economic and political levels there are significant problems for the revolution, the resolution of which will depend in a great degree on the character of the leadership and its relationship to the revolutionary bloc on which the seizure of power was based. Either the revolution remains in a lengthy transition period or the revolutionary dynamic has been lost and a populist project is about to enter a period of severe crisis which either a reshoot into the world capitalist system or a qualitative break to the
left. The evidence available over the last year suggests that either of these scenarios are an arguable possibility.

The Sandinista leadership is in no severe need of revolutionary Marxist leadership. There are Martistas, Christian, radical social democrats, and radical nationalists in the FSLN and who is dominant is not at all clear.

The overthrow of the old Somoza dictatorship in 1979 was not a definitive socialist revolution, but an anti-religious revolution led by the united front of forces within the FSLN attached to mass organizations. The project of the Frente has been to hold that bloc together while opposing the counter-revolutionary war.

This bloc itself has contradictory tendencies within it (from landless peasants, unemployed workers, street vendors, and party elders to so-called 'patrician bourgeois' which the FSLN has insisted is a part of its project) which at the overthrow either supported the FSLN or accepted its leadership against Somoza. It is these contradictions within the FSLN and the anti-religious bloc, combined with the contradictory tendencies in the economy, alongside the counter-revolution in Nicaragua (in which there has witnessed a substantial demobilization in recent years) that suggest a further break is required to assure the socialist character of the revolution.

With the defeat of the contras almost certain, the counter-revolution will become an internal affair backed by the Central Intelligence Agency by the United States state department. The FSLN will have to depend on the self-organization and mass mobilization of the most oppressed and those in whose historic interests a planned and co-ordinated economy and society will operate. This will imply a transfer of power from the Frente to the workers and peasants in times of crisis and a more plausibly advanced project of mobilizing economic solidarity will be required to assure the socialist character of the revolution.

It is in this next step forward which will be the qualitative break required and could induce a rupture in the anti-religious revolution bloc which may be reflected inside the Frente Sandinista itself. While not recognizing the latter point, Orlando Nunez, a leading revolutionary socialist in the FSLN, outlines such an approach in his book 'Democracia y Revolucion en las Americas'. The strategy is to develop a Popular Assembly of Mass Organizations alongside the National Assembly. There is no discussion of how these two structures would operate together but any new assembly of such a kind would be a step forward to the development of a real socialist democracy. It has also been noted that the CDS army may become instruments for discussing more than revolutionary problems - they may think in terms of issues of universal importance. These two developments would, in turn, negate the role of the bourgeoisie as a political and economic force and reduce the importance of the National Assembly while instituting organs of class rule. This would change the physiology of the Nicaraguan Revolution and imply a definitive and qualitative growing over of the anti-imperialist, anti-religious revolution into a permanent revolution of a socialist character.

It is in a strategy of this type that the hope of the revolution lies. The ability of the FSLN to mobilize the workers and peasants in times of crisis has been demonstrated during the events that led up to the hurricane and the reconsecration project that has followed it; but further mobilizations and qualitative advances can only be assured if the mass base of the FSLN do not suffer further hardship at the hands of the Frente's economic policy.

The FSLN cannot longer allow the free market and so-called liberated prices to do any more damage to the poor and oppressed. They must eliminate these needlessly of capital before they eliminate the political power and organizational will of the oppressed. This would imply, at minimum, re-introducing food guarantees for the poor, eliminating the beggarism that still exists and turning their land over to the landless for the production of basic grains. This would counter supply problems if it were combined with an acceleration of the programme of shifting cotton production over to basic grain production in the Pacific Coastal areas. The massive investment given to the cotton bourgeoisie could then finance the development of basic consumption goods industries (and some capital goods industries) to encourage proletarianization and the production of wage goods to exchange with the peasantry.

Two things are clear. The revolution of 1979 clearly deprived the bourgeoisie and its allies of political power. Secondly while the FSLN claim that it is the people who hold power in Nicaragua it is in fact the FSLN and its armed wing which hold the reins of the state machine and policy-making processes, which have included incorporating the 'bourgeois' and other forces hostile to a socialist project into the revolutionary bloc. It is time that Nicaraguan society went through an exceptional revolutionary crisis which threw together forces and developed a leadership of incredible breadth and depth in opposition to the dictatorship.

Those forces were coherent enough under the leadership of the FSLN to destroy the oligarchy and to have some alternative anti-imperialist vision of a just society of producers; but this did not, and does not, apply that the revolutionary socialist alternative had been left within the revolutionary bloc.

It is this contradictory political reality that is reflected throughout the economy, politics and society in Nicaragua today and leads to the conclusion that the national and international balance of forces alongside the counter-revolutionary war and the politically mixed nature of the Frente leadership has produced in Nicaragua an extended period of what Trotsky believed would be an exceptional circumstance - a workers and farmers' government which has still to make the definitive break towards the socialist revolution.

Will MacMahon

"The FSLN will have to depend on the self-organization and mass mobilization of the most oppressed and those in whose historic interests a planned and socialised economy and society will operate."
11th May 1988 and its consequences

A very Guatemalan coup

The capitalist world only talks about events that suit its ideological purposes or make money. The ongoing massacres of poor peasants or military coups that matter in the political destiny of the oppressed are not worth reporting.

Despite its failure, the attempted coup of the 11th May in Guatemala was significant as it marked a turning point in the policy of the Christian Democratic government of President Cerque, the failure of its counter-insurgency project and the culmination of deep divisions inside the ruling class and the army. Since then, mobilisations of the popular movement and repression have been on the increase.

Last to eat, first to die

Guatemala, the country of beautiful Maya ruins and colourful Indian dresses, is one of the worst to live in. It ranks only third in Latin America for the quality of life. Between 40 and 55% (depending on the estimates) of its population are extremely poor and up to 86% live below the poverty line. It has the worst infant mortality rate and the worst literacy rate of Central America, one of the poorest health records and the most unequal land distribution of Latin America. Life expectancy is very low, in particular among the Indians who represent some 50% of the population. Over 60% of the 2 million adults available for work are completely unemployed. In this intensively racist society, pure-blood Indians are compared to plants and animals whilst the ladinos, the mixed-blood people, dominate society. There are 22 Indian communities all over the country, and all speak a different idiom. This can make communication difficult, as Rigoberta Menchú reported in her personal testimony, 'I...Rigoberta Menchú.' She explained that hunger and poverty are another form of killing in parallel to direct repression.

Guatemala has a strong agro-export sector (based on coffee, cotton and sugar) to the detriment of production for local consumption and in which wages are extremely low, a fairly strong industry — both controlled by a limited number of families.

8% of Guatemalans control 90% of the land. Cotton production, the most labour-intensive, crashed recently due to falling world prices. The private sector did not invest much in the last few years with the recession in the industrial countries and the fear of political instability in the region. Instead, the profits made have been sent abroad or lavishly spent by the tiny ruling class. Prices of staple food, however, keep on increasing: maize and beans tripled in 1985 alone.

Guatemala Ltd

Three interwoven groups control the country and make huge profits. The oligarchy, the Guatemalan ladino elite which started in the last century when coffee became a major produce, has once moved onto industry and other agro-exports. They generate three-quarters of the country's foreign exchange.

The armed forces have always played a much more important role in Guatemala than elsewhere in Central America, because they did not keep to the subordinate role of defending the interests of the ruling class but have developed their economic base, with some generals becoming millionaires.

The Bank of the Army is the 7th largest in the country. The specific nature of the military in the country has prompted some authors to name it 'Garrison State' or 'Garrison Guatemala.'

Decline elements in the 'garrison state'

The US multinationals and banks are often linked to the traditional families and the army. In 1985, there were 483 branches or subsidiaries of US transnationals including 90 of the top 500 US companies. They far outweigh the national industrial capital.

Insurgency and counter-insurgency

Discontent and revolts are natural given the gross inequalities of the situation. Repression has reached unbelievable heights in Guatemala, until the early 80's when major blows were inflicted to the guerrilla organisations. The Guatemalan guerrillas are, with their 20-year history, the oldest insurgent movement on the continent. The various organisations (ERP, ORPA, FAR and PGT) regrouped in the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in February 1982 and, despite their defeat in the massive army counter-offensive of 1981-82, have reemerged as a vigorous political and military force to be included in any solution to the internal crisis.

The counter-insurgency project was designed in 1982 to 'defeat strategically' the URNG by military means, by international isolation and by social measures to lessen the existing contradictions. Part of the measures consisted in militarising the villages by forcing all men to enrol in civil patrols. Numerous villages were destroyed with their inhabitants resettled in model villages mixed with Indians of different communities to destroy the collective sense of solidarity and force them to learn Spanish, the only common language.

"the worst infant mortality rate, the worst literacy rate, one of the poorest health records and the most unequal land distribution of Latin America..."
Never a threat to the system

In January 1986, for the first time after 32 years of unbroken military rule, the civilian president, Vinicio Cerezo, took office. The result was praised by the US Administration as the "final step in the restoration of democracy." It was of course part of their strategy to isolate the "totalitarian" Nicaragua. Rigoberta Menchú said: "Vinicio Cerezo has kept a space for himself with the military because he has never been, and never will be, a threat to the system. That is why he is the President." Cerezo came to power with a very watered down programme that still included a policy of 'active neutrality' in the regional conflict and a stance against the military overthrow of the Sandinista government as advocated by Washington. His efforts won him support from the international community after years of isolation because of the appalling human rights record of Guatemalan. Cerezo had dropped all idea of agrarian reform and wanted to restructure the economy using International Monetary Fund schemes.

These measures required some political opening and led to confrontation between different groups of the oligarchy and the military at the time of the 1987 Peace Plan initiated by President Arias of Costa Rica in an attempt to bring peace to the whole region.

Peace and power

The Escupirigas agreements forced the Guatemalan president to open space for a dialogue with its opposition, as was requested by Nicaragua to the delight of the US strategists. This was totally rejected by the oligarchy which wanted to eradicate the revolutionary movement. The group of the 'Officers of the Mountain' appeared as a major pressure group within the army which forced a unilateral break of the talks. Then came a number of defeats in Cerezo's attempts to win international recognition. As a result, the US aid approved for Guatemala was reduced and the 'neutrality' ended.

The bad and the ugly

In 1976 when the US government cut military aid to the country, some officers were trained in Taiwan army political centres and others in American centres. Israel became the major supplier of military arms and equipment. This resulted in 2 very different concepts - the need for counter-insurgency.

One sector of the army is led by the Defence Minister Gramajo who calls for support of the institutional process. It is supported by the members of the oligarchy involved in exportation, commercialisation industry and financing. The other faction led by the 'Officers of the Mountain' is opposed to dialogue with the URNG, to the agrarian reform, to the return of the International Red Cross, to the presence of the Soviet and Cuban press correspondents (who have had to leave since), and wants the dismissal of Gramajo and the maintenance of the civil self-defence patrol. They are supported by the agro-exporters involved in coffee and cattle production. For them, the government should be totally subordinated to the military and they show little concern for the potential loss of international aid and recognition that this could entail. They believe that 'war is war' and are gaining ground. They are behind the 11th May attempted coup.

At the end of 1987 the army launched a campaign which was to be the 'final battle against the insurgency', 6,000 troops were sent into the Quiché department. The expedition ended without even an official report. According to the URNG, the army suffered some 500 casualties in 60 days of confrontation. At the same time, various plots or rumours of coups in the capital prompted several moves of troops around the country and large military operations had to be suspended because of fears of uprising against the government. The guerrillas were able to strike at the army and extend its operation to nearly half the country. The intensification of the armed conflict failed to meet the army's objectives. With its demand for a political dialogue, the URNG took the initiative. Defence Minister Gramajo tried to justify this by stating: 'The radicals within the army say that dialogue constitutes a political defeat.' To my mind, rather, the dialogue is a reflection of the military victory over the URNG. Dialogue is a euphemism we use to speak of surrender.'

Agreements and disagreements

There was a surrender however. In April, President Cerezo signed an agreement with the UASP (Unity of Labour and Popular Action) — formed at the end of 1987 as a response to the government's policies on electricity, salaries, prices, human rights violations, the right to organise and the return of the land to the peasants— because of the threat of general strike. He signed the union's demands, hence acknowledging their legitimacy and opening political space for their participation. The oligarchy reacted strongly against it, in particular given the political nature of the agreement which included the legalization of the CUC (Committee for Peasant Unity) considered a 'violent faction on the fringes of the law'. The government was also obliged to create conditions for the repairation of refugees living in Mexico and to support the demand of the GAM (Mutual Support Group) to form a commission about the disappeared.

The coup failed. Cerezo and Gramajo are still in control. For the moment. Since the coup, the death squads have grown. At the end of August, more than half a million Guatemalans went on strike as the government has not honoured its promises. The aims of the Cerezo government have all failed and Cerezo is losing more and more credibility. The URNG is getting stronger. The main problem remains the army, as it has been for many years in what some have called Guatemalan. The Guatemalans still talk about the coup because the war ended the Christian Democratic adventure and a new stage for the revolutionary movement.

Maria Astorga
El Salvador

The end is in sight

In 1989 eyes should be turned to El Salvador. In the view of the FMLN armed liberation front, after nine years of civil war, 'the end is at last in sight'. This view is an optimistic one, but not unrealistic. The FMLN paint three scenarios for 1989: a negotiated political settlement to the war, a popular insurrection, or an escalation of the war.

So what has changed in El Salvador? How can you tell when a volcano is about to erupt? It is important to understand the degree of social injustice, poverty and oppression that are the roots of the present civil war. The human rights abuses, the total absence of national sovereignty and the large scale economic crisis that follow from the government's insistence on continuing the war.

The FMLN has been referred to by US observers as having the largest guerrilla army ever in Latin America. They are vastly more powerful than the Nicaraguans or Cubans insurgents on the eve of their revolutions. However they have to be. They are fighting an army that has been rebuilt from top to bottom with massive training and aid from the US. At $2 million a day, US aid is equivalent to 105% of the Salvadoran budget. El Salvador has reached the record dependence of South Vietnam during the height of the Vietnam war.

The Salvadoran army simply cannot handle any more hardware or aid. They cannot expand the number of combatants as much as they wish even by pulling youth out of cinema queues. Their methods of forced recruitment produce an unreliable, disoriented and demoralised army. The FMLN will rely on a level of disintegration and defection from the armed forces to carry through an insurrection.

Even against this highly trained army, the FMLN constantly takes the initiative. Their list of military actions is impressive. They can take any town temporarily and make regular attacks on fortified army barracks including recently in San Salvador.

The mass movement has grown significantly over the last three years. Militant trade unions have been built through strikes and demonstrations. These unions formed the National Unity of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS) which has further sparked the development of other mass organisations. The UNTS has become something more than a trade union organisation, and includes peasants, students, the universities, human rights groups, women's and youth groups.

The UNTS takes a different approach from the trade union movement in the late 1970's. People are facing various problems that have a common link, falling living standards, fewer jobs, rising prices, higher taxes and a reduction in welfare, health and education provision. All of these can be remedied with the government's special economic package which demanded austerity as a military requirement to fight the FMLN.

Salvadorans are being asked to make these sacrifices for a war they do not support. They want peace, and they have been won to the demands of the FMLN and the 'political' wing, the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), the UNTS and the catholic church for a negotiated political settlement to the conflict. Human and civil rights are massively abused with government complicity. The people are becoming increasingly aware that the war is being carried out under instructions from Washington, as well as noting the high levels of US interference at other levels, notably within the trade union movement itself.

The UNTS has brought together the issues of national sovereignty, human and civil rights, living standards and peace. These are all issues connected to the war and to Washington, so the solution is a national political one. The UNTS works to pose a common solution and way of fighting: Unity, self organisation, collective resources for the use of all, national sovereignty and democracy.

Top of the list is a negotiated political settlement to the war. By this they do not mean a deal negotiated between the FMLN/FDR and the government, but a national debate and agreement which involves all the mass organisations. This process has already begun at the Catholic church, the universities and the UNTS have met in forums and conferences to put forward their analysis of the country and potential solutions for discussion.

This creates a very powerful situation. These fortunes are not Soviet, or forms of dual power, for they have no power. However, these forms of mass organisation have enormous potential, for they exist in the midst of a revolutionary civil war, despite every attempt by the government and US to demonise them.

The anti-insurgency programme of the US has failed most clearly in its attempt to produce a stable and respectable government. The Christian Democratic party, the PDC has failed in its mission. Its leader President Napoleon Duarte is dying of political...
cancer as well as of the real thing. The party has been exposed as corrupt and has broken down into factions squabbling about who is to take over from Drama. Their base has gone over either to UNTS or to the far right ARENA party, breaching ground of the death squads.

The ruling class does not know how to deal with the economic, political and military crisis. A growing faction within the ARENA party is in favour of the total war solution. They figure that killing 50,000,000,000 people in one go would stop the mass movement and revolutionary potential in its tracks. At present the death squads have been told to keep the death toll to tens rather than hundreds per month. The figures for 1987 were a dozen dead bodies dumped per month, increasing four-fold for 1988.

With the collapse of the political centre, the US has had to improve relations with ARENA, and with its new leader Christiani who has replaced the notorious d'Aubuisson. It is trying to paint ARENA as a reasonable party committed to human rights. But this does not remove the reality of the polarisation taking place.

The state seems incapable of meeting the demand for a negotiated settlement. Meanwhile it is propped up by massive financial subsidies from the US. While much of this goes in corruption, it is much harder for the US to maintain this aid (second in size only to that given to Israel) if the government is too openly fascist.

In this context, the presidential elections in March are quite important. They will be fraudulent and only a minority will participate, but they might be decisive in deciding the balance of forces within the bourgeoisie and influencing their subsequent strategy. ARENA is trying to win, although probably not with an outright majority, so it might have to go to a second round.

It is very interesting that the FDR have decided to participate and stand candidates as part of the newly established Democratic Convergence (CD). This has resulted in an open but apparently friendly split between the two revolutionary fronts FMLN and FDR. The FMLN will not call for a vote for CD, but for abstention. Both fronts stress the tactical nature of the disagreement, because they agree that the elections are fraudulent and that power cannot come from winning votes through them.

Guillermo Ungo of the Socialist international affiliated MNR is standing for president, and Reni Roldan of the Social Democratic party, which is not part of the FDR, is standing for vice-president.

CD say they are not competing for votes, but in order to put forward their policies, in particular a negotiated political settlement to the conflict. If they hold a balance of votes between the two parties, they will not recommend that their supporters votes for either of the other parties.

The international context is critical. The most difficult issue is that of a popular insurrection and military victory by the FMLN. The US would undoubtedly be met by an invasion of US troops. The FMLN/FDR is very aware of this and is preparing the ground to make its efforts as difficult as possible for any US intervention.

The US policy is to contain the situation, given that its plans to defeat the FMLN and set up a plan based on democracy have miserably failed. There is no reason to believe that the Bush administration will differ from Reagan's. The US is particularly eager to get the international trade union movement to aid its attempts to set up parallel unions in El Salvador in order to undermine the mass movement. The CIA continues this work with British trade unions, but the TUC itself has taken a stand in favour of promoting the UNTS, which is a boost for the Salvadoran labour movement.

Latin American governments take the Salvadoran revolutionary situation seriously and are probably more aware than the US government of the effect of a US invasion on the whole subcontinent. Arguably they would prefer a tame revolution to a violent counter-revolution imposed by the US. This is also the view of the Socialist International.

Guillermo Ungo of the FDR is also the vice president of the Socialist International and was invited to report to the European parliament in November, a sure sign of the differences that the European capitalists have with the US counter-revolutionary approach.

What are the essential features of the Salvadoran revolution? Firstly the size of the US intervention prior to an insurrection means that the revolutionary faces a task far more difficult both militarily and politically than that faced by Nicaragua or Cuba. Given this the revolutionaries have achieved a great deal, something not to be underestimated.

The project of the revolutionaries has been to win hegemony. They have gone a long way towards their demand for a negotiated political solution. A large social political movement has developed which is much broader than the FMLN fighters. If the movement continues to grow and the government refuses to recognise it, repressing it instead, the conditions will be set for an insurrection, one of the FMLN's scenarios.

But what would a negotiated political solution mean? Could it be a Lancaster House type solution? Quite possibly, but the best way to look at this is as a framework for a political battle that could go various ways, not as a solution in itself. However, this is not how it is presented by the FMLN.

It is a strategy that is undoubtedly working in the revolutionary's favour, whatever the risks involved with it. Most importantly it is a policy that allows or anticipates mass participation in the process of deciding the future of the country, in a way far more advanced than any bourgeois election process.

The problem is that it is posed as a solution within itself. It is difficult to see from here if people are being misled into believing that peace could be achieved through compromises on both sides. Alternatively the unfolding of the struggle will teach people the need to replace the state structures, and replace them with a new one based on new values and a different social and economic order.

Trotsky put forward as idea in his writings on Britain, that the people will try everything else before revolution. This could be a giant practical lesson that the bourgeois state cannot in any of its forms meet the demands of the people. The choice facing the people would then be the FMLN slogan 'revolution or death'.

In Britain our starting point must be solidarity; support for the right of the Salvadoran people to self-determination; support for the trade unions and the mass movements is their true struggle. The way to do this is through the El Salvador Solidarity Campaign (ELSSOC).

Get your trade union, trades council, Labour Party or whatever to affiliate locally, regionally and nationally to ELSSOC. If you cannot do it yourself, get someone you know to take a regular active role in solidarity work through their local branch of the campaign. The starting point is affiliation and donations.

ELSSOC is vastly under-resourced because people have lost interest over the eight years of the civil war. Now, when El Salvador is nearer popular insurrection than any other country in the world, the campaign will be unable to meet the new demands being put on it unless the left gives it more support. The rewards are not only giving concrete support but being in the best position to learn from the unfolding revolutionary process and its strength and weaknesses.

Gareth Masky
Riding a Tiger into a blind alley

In our last issue (S.O. 11), in ‘Tigers the Indian Army cannot tame’, Finn Jensen argued that as ‘the leading force - politically and militarily’ - in the fight for a liberated Tamil Eelam’, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) should be supported by socialists internationally, irrespective of differences over their tactics. M. MANICKAM and LAL SILVA take issue with him below.

Jensen’s analysis contains inaccuracies and fails to deal with the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and the role of different political and military groups from a class perspective. His article reproduces uncritically the selective facts and interpretations which the LTTE use, and so Jensen unwittingly abandons a Marxist approach.

Tamils and the Tamil nation

Tamils make up about 21.5 per cent of the population of Sri Lanka. But there are significant caste, class, political and economic differences between the Tamils in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, and the Tamil plantation workers who live mainly in the Central and Uva provinces. Jensen knaps them together.

And by stating that ‘A plantation economy was introduced in Sri Lanka which forced hundreds of thousands of Tamil labourers to migrate to the Sinhalese south’, Jensen gives the impression that a significant proportion of these Tamil plantation workers came from the north and east of Sri Lanka, or Ceylon, as it was then called. This was not the case. All the plantation workers came from South India and they were regarded as low caste ‘untouchables’ by Ceylon Tamils, who were used as middle management and as supervisory personnel by the British plantation Raj. In 1948 when the first post-independence government formed by the conservative United National Party (UNP) disenfranchised the Tamil plantation workers, the overwhelming majority of Ceylon Tamil MPs voted in favour of that draconian act. The Marxist and Liberal MPs (mainly Sinhalese) voted and campaigned against it. Furthermore, up until 1965, Ceylon Tamil politicians regularly formed coalition governments with the UNP.

This accounts not only for the traditional antagonism between the plantation Tamils and Ceylon Tamils, but also for the total lack of support amongst plantation Tamils for the demand for a separate Tamil state, despite the super-exploitation they have suffered for many decades.

These are not just historical issues. Even today, the LTTE has no programme for the tea plantation workers, and have consistently failed to support their struggles. In fact any attempt to campaign on the specific demands of the plantation workers has been opposed by the LTTE as a diversion. Not surprisingly in the recent presidential elections held last December, the vast majority of the plantation workers voted for the UNP candidate.

For the very same reason it is methodologically incorrect - if we still accept Lenin’s method - to lump together these two separate and distinct communities as one nation. Quite apart from cultural, caste, and class differences between these two groups, they live in different geographical areas and have different national aspirations. For Jensen ‘nationalism’ is an ahistorical concept. He speaks of ‘two nations’ unified by the British, thereby using the term ‘nation’ interchangeably with the term ‘kingdom’. Ironically, immediately prior to the British conquest, the so-called Sinhala Kingdom in Kandy was ruled by Tamil kings and its official language was Tamil.

In our opinion, the development of the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka is a post-imperialist and post-capitalist phenomenon, with its roots in the incapacity of the post-independence Sri Lankan ruling class to fulfill basic tasks of the democratic revolution. It is theoretically and politically incorrect to refer to pre-capitalist political formations as ‘nations’. Jensen falls into this trap.

The development of a Tamil ‘nation’ was by no means a foregone conclusion. In fact there was a far greater degree of class solidarity across Sri Lanka as a whole - both in the ruling class as well as in the working class - than on a linguistic or ethnic basis, in the first decade after independence. The Sinhala and Tamil bourgeoisies ganged up against the Tamil plantation workers in 1948 precisely because these workers had voted for Marxist and working class representatives to parliament that year. If it were not for the Ceylon Tamil representatives, the first government of Sri Lanka would have been a coalition of working class and ethnic minority representatives led by the Trotskyist LSSP (literally translated, the ‘Equal Society Party’).

Tamil resistance

Jensen’s potshot history of Tamil resistance leaves out one very important feature of almost all Tamil political formations including the LTTE. That is their consistent subordination of the interests of the Tamil people to bourgeois and nationalist interests.

Jensen states that in 1976 the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) called for the ‘restoration and reconstitution of the free, sovereign, secular, socialist (!) state of Tamil Eelam’ and that the 1977 general election gave a majority to the Tamil nationalists led by B. Vinitharana and S.ivasagam in Parliament to the right-wing United National Party, with the TULF as the leading opposition party. What has been omitted here is that despite their rhetoric, the TULF was an opportunist bourgeois formation and that in 1977 the TULF made a secret pact with the UNP. In return for certain concessions and possible re-
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Debt of ministerial jobs, the TULF delivered a substantial portion of the Tamil vote outside the north and east to the UNP. Jensen’s article also fails to mention the fact that many of the leading cadres of the LTTE itself were the strongest men of the TULF.

When UNP repression compelled Tamil youths to take up arms, the leadership of most armed groups switched their allegiance from the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie to other ruling classes, including the Indian bourgeoisie. These leaderships consciously and deliberately prevented the development of solidarity between Tamil masses in the north and east and the oppressed Sinhala workers and peasants, or the super-exploited Tamil plantation workers. They would seek the assistance of plantation youth only as foot soldiers in their “Eelam” suicide squads.

Prettifying the LTTE

Max often said that if appearance and reality were the same there would be no need for science. We need to look further, beyond the rhetoric and behind the superficial appearance of LTTE’s class character, and see what Jensen seems to stop, to the real point of their politics.

The LTTE (with, to a lesser extent, the student organisation EROS), more than any other Tamil group, have treated not just the Sri Lankan ruling classes and the Sinhala-dominated army, but also ordinary Sinhala workers and peasants, as their enemies. They have carried out innumerable attacks — massacres of Sinhala civilians. Small children too, have died at their hands. Just like the Sinhala soldiers who indiscriminately attacked Tamil villagers, LTTE cadres have repeatedly attacked Sinhala civilians.

Before the arrival of the Indian peace keeping force in 1987, this policy of the LTTE strengthened the hand of the government and Sinhala chauvinists. It also substantially weakened the efforts of progressive forces in the south. On the other hand, in the north the LTTE supported the rise of self-determination of the Tamil nation and opposed the militarist and chauvinist policies of the government.

While every subjugated nation has a right to determine the tactics and strategy it should adopt in the struggle to free itself, those within that nation must adopt strategies to unify workers and all the oppressed forces against the ruling class. Socialists have an additional responsibility: to assist workers to develop a socialist consciousness. It is not enough merely to tail-end bourgeois and petty-bourgeois currents in the national movement. Through our programme and our actions, socialists must consistently seek to break the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strength.

This is the LTTE it will not do. It is the most right-wing of all the Eelam groups. Instead of promoting political debate and dialogue with other Tamil liberation groups it has attempted to annihilate them — particularly those who raise the awkward issues of caste, class and women’s oppression. Since it is backed by powerful bourgeois interests, it undoubtedly has the firepower to oust its democratic left-wing opponents. Between 1983 and 1987, the LTTE’s assassins have killed 1,500 by the Sri Lankan army or police. Another 1,000 were1 of other groups killed by the LTTE. (A further 250 or so were LTTE members who took cyanide pills when captured by the army, and the remainder were militants killed by their own organisations.)

Organisations such as the Eelam People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), which aims to combat caste oppression and has set up grassroots committees of the masses, have been the chief targets for LTTE liquidation campaigns. Like the Sri Lankan government, which set up special detention camps (the most notorious being at Boosa, near Galle), the LTTE also set up their own version of Boosa. After a bomb was thrown at Kudu, an LTTE militant, all these detentions were summarily executed.

And in January of this year, Anumalithe, the Jaufa leader of the Trekkkyi NSSP, was shot and killed by LTTE forces.

In the Tamil community itself — both nationally and internationally — the LTTE draws its support largely from the upper layers of society. Internationally, many of their main financial support has come from the late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu — M.G. Ranganathan and the American Tamil Association. Many Tamil political parties are suspicious of their connection to the American Tamil money men general LTTE. One of LTTE’s most vociferous supporters (at present campaigning for them in Britain) is N. Sathyendra, the former Chair of Union Carbide in Sri Lanka. He was a vicious anti-working class record co-operating with the Sri Lankan government in 1978 to smash a number of workers’ struggles. He is one amongst many in the LTTE pack. The LTTE claim to be advancing the class struggle, even in the north and east, is, to say the least, absurd.

Relations with the Indian ruling class

The Indians, as Jensen correctly states, certainly trained and armed the LTTE better than other groups. In particular the Indians made sure that left wing groups such as the EPLF were well armed.

The Indians had constant consultations with LTTE leaders. They were the only group consulted by the Indian government immediately before signing the Indian-Sri Lankan accord. To all the others it was presented as a full complicity.

The LTTE did not always oppose the peace accord initially. They accepted it and tried to put pressure on the Indian government to implement it in a manner that would allow the LTTE to dominate the Provincial Councils. In fact to date, the LTTE has not called for the withdrawal of the Indian peace keeping force from Sri Lanka.

The Revolutionary Marxist Party of Sri Lanka accurately characterised the accord as horse-trading between the Indian and Sri Lankan bourgeoisies, over the heads of the Tamil and Sinhala masses. The LTTE is a part of this robber gang and is in no way a revolutionary force. Its quarrel with the Indians is not about transferring social and economic power to the masses. For their part, the Indians want to ensure that the US and other western interests do not establish military bases in Sri Lanka.

Jensen seems to have ignored the fact that the LTTE itself wants to do a diplomatic deal with the Indians. And the Indians do not want to eliminate the LTTE at the risk of weakening their bargaining power with the Sinhala bourgeoisie; so they are snugly using all the political groups to achieve their ends. To this extent Jensen is right — the Indians want to ‘tame’ the Tigers — but not eliminate them. Contrary to LTTE propaganda, the Indian peace keeping force has succeeded in limiting the effectiveness of the LTTE, largely because many people in the north and east have become war weary.

The LTTE’s blind ally

The LTTE policy of alienating all other sections of the oppressed masses in Sri Lanka has driven them more and more into the arms of the Indian and other bourgeoisies. They have fought tooth and nail against any form of democratic grassroots organisation of the masses, opposed moves to challenge caste and class oppression, and sought to maintain their grip by sheer armed might and the physical elimination of any other political organisation. They have alienated not only Sinhala traders and plantation workers, but also a substantial section of the Tamil masses too. In the recent Provincial Council elections a majority of Tamils in the eastern province defied LTTE threats and their call to boycott the elections. The LTTE are not the “leading political and military force” in the fight for Tamil Eelam, as Jensen claims.

The Leninist thesis

Often petty-bourgeois nationalists will brand Lenin’s theories on the national question but emphasise one aspect of his theses and happily abandon another. They draw our attention to Lenin’s insistence that socialists should recognise the right of oppressed nations to decide their own destiny: the right of self-determination, including the right to secede from the oppressor nation.

However, in the very same thesis, Lenin also emphasised that no condition should workers’ organisations be divided on national or ethnic lines. Furthermore the whole thrust of Lenin’s organisation was to raise workers of the oppressed nation, whose socialist consciousness had been blocked by national oppression.

By intervening in the struggle for full democracy, socialists enable these workers to overcome this obstacle and create conditions for a unified struggle to overturn capitalist rule. This involves a dual fight — against chauvinist consciousness of the workers and tail-end in the oppressor nation, and for a class programme and against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois currents in the oppressed nation. Socialists must implement this approach in its totality and struggle against petty-bourgeois chauvinists seeking to steal some of their clothes to serve their own class needs.

The LTTE, like many other petty-bourgeois nationalists, have been quick to adopt those aspects of Lenin’s theories on the national question that suit their class interests, while downplaying and suppressing those that don’t. Viewed from this standpoint it looks like the Tigers have taken Jensen for a ride.

M. Manickam and Lal Silva

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Getting to grips with Thatcherism

Is 'Thatcherism' a completely new political phenomenon, or just a handy smokescreen to mask the capitulation of sections of the Labour, trade union and Communist Party leaderships? Or is the truth somewhere between the two?

In the last issue of Socialist Outlook Phil Hearse in a controversial article suggested Thatcherism represented a decisive move towards a 'strong state', and embodied elements of 'semi-bonapartism'.

Here, JOHN LISTER, opposing the notion of 'semi-bonapartism', widens the debate by looking in more depth at the origins of Thatcherism and its dependence upon the weakness of leadership in the labour movement.

Future articles continuing this debate will also include a political assessment of the 'Charter 88' campaign around democratic rights.

THATCHERISM has in the past few years become the measuring stick for political ideology and method not only in western Europe, Australia and New Zealand but also – especially since Thatcher's Polish visit – in the Stalinist states as well.

Recent articles in two important Soviet publications show that perestroika is bringing in its train a growing appreciation of the politics of the 'Iron Lady', according to the Financial Times. While an article in Pravda was comparatively muted, stressing her success in turning around the economy, accelerating its growth and stabilising the British share of world trade, another author, writing in Sovetskaya Industriya was positively eulogistic.

The British ruling class turned to desperation to Thatcher, writes Mr Lev Makarevich, and chose well: 'In nine years she had lifted the country out of its depressed state, privatised ailing industries and sacked incompetent bureaucrats.' (FT December 6)

Both writers point enthusiastically to the growth of share ownership and home ownership in Britain, and regard the Thatcher reforms as a unified perestroika-style package. Both agree that Labour is unlikely to win the next election, and both are contemptuous of the trade unions, of which Makarevich points out: 'Overcoming them proved easy, since the leadership was paralysed by bureaucracy and fear of the scientific technical revolution.'

This approach is not only illuminating for our understanding of the politics of today's Soviet bureaucracy and the implications of perestroika, but also a reminder that the Thatcherite package of policies has been dependent for its implementation upon a certain relationship of class forces that has been established since 1979.

In this sense it is useful to look at the question of definition of the Thatcher government and its ever-increasing power.

In the December-January issue of Socialist Outlook, Phil Hearse stressed the sinister strengthening of the state machinery and its use by the Thatcher government, as well as her dominant personal role in the cabinet, and warned of the possibility that the government is becoming a 'semi-bonapartist' combination between parliamentary democracy and forms of dictatorship.

In posing the question this way, Phil Hearse has unleashed a number of heated responses (see Letters page). Many feel that the heavy qualifications needed in using the term 'semi-bonapartist' to characterise Thatcherism are so far reaching as to question the value of the label. Indeed the questions arising from it flow thick and fast:

• Would a 'semi-bonapartist' regime, in the sense that Trotsky talked of Bonapartist dictatorships in the 1930s, really remain subject to regular elections in which it could be simply voted out of office?

• Has the Tony Party been repositioned behind the scenes into the power-base of a new totalitarian regime?
IN DEPTH

Is it true that the in-spent revolutionary strength of the working class forces the British bourgeoisie to contemplate such extraordinary measures in order to preserve its class rule?

Are Thatcher’s anti-union and anti-democratic measures—sweeping and breathtaking though they be—qualitatively more draconian than those prevailing in other advanced bourgeois democratic countries (West Germany, the USA, Japan)?

There are other problems with the use of the term ‘semi-bourgeois’. By implicitly (through the analogy with actual dictatorships) exaggerating the extent to which Thatcher’s authoritarian approach rests upon extra-parliamentary support, itonne the serious risk of fostering the illusion that a “real” bourgeois parliamentary government could not act in the increasingly savage fashion we have seen since 1979. Yet in fact Thatcher is simply taking advantage of the British parliamentary system, which has always been wide open to the arbitrary abuse of a large majority by a right-wing party—provided only that it is able to maintain sufficient discipline over its MPs.

The same options have never been open to a majority government of the left, since the full use of these parliamentary powers depends upon the concurrence of both the media and the establishment—the judiciary, police, military, Lords, monarchy and the like—which would certainly intervene to disrupt any programme of reforms from the cupboard. This is of course why the notion of a “parliamentary road to socialism”, whether in the Marxism Today or Militant (“Enabling Act”) version, was a pipe-dream long before Neil Kinnock and Co jettisoned the word “socialism” from Labour’s vocabulary.

A second problem with the insistence on the term “semi-bourgeois” is that by overstating what is new about Thatcherism it can—in the manner of Marxism Today’s fixation with and capitulation to the apparent strength of Thatcherism—open the door to defeating “solutions”.

One such solution that has been raised, though not by anyone writing in Socialist Outlook—could be the search for desperate last-gasp “democratic alliances” on the model of the Stalinions’ ill-fated 1930s ‘Popular Fronts,’ aiming to appeal to “democratic,” anti-authoritarian elements of the middle class and bourgeoisie, precisely those elements who have done so little to fight any aspect of Thatcher’s policies up to now. This would be particularly pernicious if (unlike Phil Hearse’s proposals, but as with Marxism Today and its fellow travellers in the labour movement) such alliances are seen as a substitute for working class political action, or as a step towards coalitionist “anti-Thatcher” electoral fronts.

While only a died-in-the-wool sectarian would disagree with Phil Hearse that every democratic right must be defended against Tory attack through campaigns involving the widest possible united fronts, the extent to which this can be seen as a “front-line response to Thatcherism is limited, not least by the massive extent to which more than a handful of the middle classes, let alone the middle votes, are prepared to become involved in fighting the government (except perhaps on rare, emotive issues such as Clause 28). There is no sign, for instance, of substantial layers of the white-collar bourgeoisie getting actively over the immigration laws, the anti-union laws, or the laughably anti-democratic Housing Act, designed (by counting abstentions) votes for change to force even more council houses into private hands.

However widespread we may wish to throw the campaigning net, and whatever success we have in doing so, the decisive factor in each of these major struggles remains the role and the mass organisations of the working class. And here the issue of leadership is absolutely central. Indeed, what Pravda and Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya point out, but many British analysts forget, is that Thatcher’s successes to date can only be properly understood in the context of analysing the unresolved and appalling crisis of leadership that has confronted the workers’ movement in the 1980s.

Before resorting to new definitions and labels to characterise Thatcherism, we must be clear that the present situation has outgrown the old terms and explanations. Yet there seems no reason to alter our historical understanding of how Thatcherism developed from a chink in the eyes of a handful of right-wing ideologues and the backroom daydreams of the more brutal employers into the present rampant offensive against working class rights and living standards.

Insofar as Thatcherism represents a qualitatively new political force—personified by and imposed through the decisive personality and authority of Thatcher herself, unselecting and remoulding her cabinet in her own image—it derives not from a new dictatorial grip on the state machinery so much as the conscious adoption of a vanguard role by the party of the capitalist class, energetically using the powers already open to them. And this strength of purpose has, especially since Kinnock’s takeover as leader in 1983, been reinforced by the almost total collapse of Labour and trade union opposition.

Socialist Outlook has previously editorialised on former Tory chair Norman Tebbit’s definition of the role of political leadership—moving from analysis to define necessary tasks, and then through determined action to implement the policy decided and if possible convince the electorate (or in any case change the status quo). We have pointed out that Tebbit’s approach—here echoing Thatcher herself—is closer to the ‘Leninist’ notion of the vanguard role of the party than that of the current Labour Party leadership. Tebbit’s method is the polar opposite of the Labour leadership’s timid ‘ask the MCB plan’ posture. The only possible role of how policies should be tailored to avoid offending the existing prejudices of the electorate—ensuring to commitment to radical change.

Thatcher and the strongest elements of her team grasped the role of general leading the counter-attack of British capitalism against the trade movement which, despite—or partially because of—the concessions and reforms won since the war, was saddened with a bureaucratised, passive, complacent trade union and political leadership. Even the more militant shop stewards movement and rank and file forces lacked any developed class conscious socialist leadership capable of withstanding a full-scale onslaught from the employers. The traditional political bases of the shop stewards movement in manufacturing industry, although generally under attack during the Labour government, was the first to suffer the squeeze of recession under the Tories.

The Thatcher years have been marked by a relentless drive to exploit every opportunity opened up for the bosses by this leadership crisis. Learning the lessons from Edward Heath’s half-hearted efforts at anti-union laws and his ignominous retreat, culminating in the electoral defeat of February 1974, and utilising the new police anti-picket squads set up by the Labour government to smash strikes at Grunwick and other farms in the late 1970s, Thatcher resolved to prepare the ground more thoroughly for each confrontation. The Tory strategy relied upon the ‘bullying tactic’ of picking off one section at a time—and took for granted the refusal of TUC and Labour leaders to fight united mass action. Thatcher was allowed to pick the time to provide each fight, and then able to utilise the full forces of the state to hold the line, as unions were confronted one by one.

It was therefore no accident that the Thatcherite tactics were in order—motorisation of policies to squeeze inflation through mass unemployment, anti-union laws to bring home the attack on unions already weakened by the recession, and wave after wave of privatisation to liberate resources for tax cuts and effect what Thatcher expects to be an irreversible blow against the “corporatist” state sector.

Through militancy discipline in the first phase, employers were pressed-ganged into imposing massive cuts, redundancies and speed-up almost across the board in manufacturing industry. As had been seen during the period of Labour government, trade union leaders and shop stewards accustomed to negotiating on wages and conditions in times of
relative expansion, had never questioned the “right” of the employer to a profit, and therefore to make firms “viable” in capitalist terms at a price of massive redundancies and closures. This inability to challenge the logic of capitalism (transformed into an argument that only through collaboration with employers at every level to prevent strikes could jobs be saved) has become the bedrock of today’s politics of “new realism” that dominate both TUC and Labour Party.

The same period brought the relaxation of exchange controls, which enabled the big employers and the finance sector to maximise their profits despite the recession by channelling vast sums of North Sea oil revenues into investment portfolios overseas.

Despite the political weaknesses of the labour movement, this first phase could only have succeeded under conditions where the trade union leaders refused to strengthen and link up the early struggles which quickly broke out against a still new and inexperienced Thatcher government. TUC leaders in February 1980 ganged up not to support but to isolate the marathon 4-month national steel strike (squeezing calls for general strike action and potential support from miners and rail workers) and simultaneously sold out the BL carworkers; other sections too were held back from struggle until after the steelworkers had been forced back to work with a hollow “victory” on pay and the certainty of plant closures to follow.

Given this kind of seemingly limitless elbow room by terrified TUC leaders, Tory policies successfully turned the screw on manufacturing industry, and quickly threw over 2 million additional workers onto the dole queues. This in turn halted the progress of unionisation in the private sector, and also—alongside cuts after cuts in unemployment and social security benefits—began to open up what has been a deliberate and ever-widening gap between the employed and the unemployed working class.

The lesson for today, however, is that it need not have happened. In 1980 it was not the “bureaucratise” use of dictatorial powers which kept Thatcher in office so much as the timidity and treachery of the union leaders.

The Tories next turned their attention to a frontal attack on the trade unions in the form of two major Acts piloted through by Norman Tebbit. Once again the TUC showed itself to be all mouth and no teeth—soon the NGF print workers ran up against the new laws and the courts in fighting Eddy Shilcock’s Messenger Group in Warrington, and the NGF faced threats of sequestration, the TUC collapsed and abandoned its pledges to give industrial support.

By the time the miners, too, had been sequestrated, months into their strike, the TUC had long abandoned even the pretense that it would defy unjust laws, and union chiefs promoting the “new realism” could hardly conceal their hopes that Scargill and the NUM would be defeated. The bitter battles of Wapping and the National Union of Seamen’s retreat in front of the sequestrators in the P&O dispute simply rubbed in the fact that the unions’ bluff had been called, and that virtually every national union leader had been shown to be spineless, and the TUC itself increasingly irrelevant.

It is on this new balance of class forces—backed up and budged on home by new peaks of police thuggery on the picket lines during and since the “strike” that Thatcher’s attack would be sustained. By their tacit support for the government, or refusal to contest Thatcher’s offensive on the NUM, and their insistence upon drawing false, defeatist lessons of such major class battles since 1980, the TUC leaders have also played a key role in consolidating her political grip within important sections of the capitalist class and Tory Party. Even employees who suffered squeezed profits from the earlier monetarist policies have been placated since she delivered the goods in the form of wage cuts and major layoffs against the unions. And even more have been delighted by the short-term profits bonanza opened up by privatisation.

The drive to privatise the major state industries—shortly to reach a new peak with the sale of vast electricity and water industry assets—began in part from the massive squeeze on “profit-making” nationalised industries (steel, shipbuilding, British Airways, BL cars). It also stemmed from the lust to liberate vast profits generated in natural monopolies such as British Telecom and British Gas and it has further developed through mass share issues as a sophisticated bridge to more prosperous sections of the middle classes and employed working class.

Though she has been egged on at each stage to go far further by visionary prophets of the ultra-right, it is still not proven that Thatcher has all along simply been carrying through stages of a pre-formulated overall strategy. One of her former policy advisors, Patrick Minford, in a recent essay, brands the early exercises in council house privatisation as “initially a sideshow” (in Thatcherism, ed Robert Skidelsky). Mobilising the short-term self-interest of existing councils to break up the public sector in housing proved successful and now many more councils are jumping in too. To the voters, it undermined another area of local government; and it boosted the long term profits and prospects of estate agents, private developers, builders and landlords.

Minford then describes the subsequent moves towards mass share issues in the privatisation of the big nationalised industries as a logical follow-up to the unexpectedly popular success of the housing “sale of the century”. Of course, the goal of privatisation could as easily have been earned out by selling shares primarily to big city institutions. As it is, the whole myth of “popular capitalism”—where a few more prosperous share-owning workers labour under the delusion that, they, too, are capitalists—appears to have taken shape empirically rather than to a pre-planned formula. However, the chief long-term advantage for the Tories of dispersing millions of shares to large numbers of individuals is that it makes the task of reversing these measures even more daunting for any subsequent Labour (or socialist) government.

Throughout the Thatcher years there has been a consistent pattern of forcing through measures without due regard for their short-term popularity, in such a way as to pull up the ladder behind them, making it almost impossible for a reformist Labour government to return to the old status quo. Money freed by cutting back on public expenditure ischannelled to the wealthy and to the employed in tax cuts, forcing Labour to contemplate tax increases to restore previous levels. Similarly Tory restrictions on local government, including ratecapping and soon the Poll Tax, have reduced or restricted rates, or thrust the burden from rich to poor, forcing any Labour reform to contemplate major increases. Privatisation of British Aerospace and the planned sale of the water authorities seem certain to follow by huge once-and-for-all asset-stopping land sales as has happened with desperate health authorities selling property to balance their books.

There are still many Tory projects to complete, not least the full exploitation of the current balance of forces to drive still lower the basic rates of pay. The significance of the “slave labour” youth opportunities, youth training, employment training and “Rest” schemes (now backed up by new, brutal cuts in social security and the threat that young refusing such schemes will be declared and authorized as “unemployed” is the overall objective of lowering wage expectations and actual pay levels. The Tories' declared aim will bring in its train the destruction of what remains of trade union organisation, beginning in the lower paid jobs; and in addition they are out to dismantle virtually all of the protective legislation covering the conditions of youth, women and the lowest-paid, some of which dates back to the more enlightened liberalism of a few Victorian pioneers.

The Thatcherite drive towards decentralisation is also having a contradictory effect on the media, where the proposed proliferation of television and radio channels runs counter to reassertive attempts
to impose censorship of sex and violence, and authoritarian manoeuvres on many issues, and to stuff the BBC and IBA governing bodies (and the so-called broadcasting standards council under Lord Rees-Mogg) with hand-picked Thatcherite appointees (the latest example being the head honcho Lord Chalfont installed on the IBA).

What we should recognise here, however, is that the Thatcherite ideal is one in which, while the most prestigious and "official" news sources are carefully vetted and censored, for the most part, as in the USA, most people read and see little or no accurate or serious information. Like broadcast versions of the gutter press, the discredited satellite and other tv channels would offer little or no 'news', and that small quota would be swamped by trashy films, soap operas and game shows - leaving the core of the electorate in the hands of a monopolised political information and expertise, and leaving the labour movement even further removed from access to mass forms of publicity.

Other Thatcherite tricks in the book include the sweeping 'reform' of the NHS and education, to open them up to privatisation along American lines, and force home on the working class a new reality in which, with the rapid erosion and eventual disappearance of the collective, social provisions of the welfare state, in Thatcher's famous phrase "there is no such thing as society, just individuals and families".

The common thread through all of these proposals is to break down the collective strength of the working class, break down collective institutions, and supplant in their stead individualism, self-interest, and divide-and-rule. For every measure which strikes heavy blows and further alienates and antagonises the unemployed, the low-paid, the most exploited sections of the working class, black communities, women and the more socially aware sections of the middle classes, Thatcher has - in the absence of the potential of industrial opposition - been able to counterpose a co-ordination of her electoral base among the most prosperous layers, exploiting and pandering to their greed, their racism, national chauvinism, and anti-communism.

However the polls indicate that it is not so much the electoral appeal of Thatcher's policies as the lack of any credible opposition that has decisively strengthened the Tory hand.

Despite appearances and the popular preoccupation with wappy values, there is little evidence that Thatcherite polities have made much more than a skin-deep impact on most voters, who are far from sharing the Prime Minister's views. Polls information suggests that on such questions as poverty, unemployment, the NHS and education, the POP Tax and other issues - and also on matters of 'morality' such as abortion and restrictions on media coverage - the electorate has remained stubbornly unconvinced by the Tory line. Indeed the new White Paper proposals on the NHS seem to represent in this respect one of the most risky projects to attempted.

The same situation applies in the industrial situation: though the employers by dint of brute force, appallings levels of class collaboration, from many top union leaders, and the stickiness of anti-union laws, have in some instances succeeded in raising levels of exploitation and productivity, this should not be treated as workers accepting the employers' line. Now and again disputes erupt over pay or conditions as soon as workers feel they have an opportunity to fight back.

Much is made in *Marxion Today* and elsewhere of the changing face of the working class in the 1980s, and the supposed end of traditional trade unionism. Again this is largely an excuse for the failure of "designer left" forces to relate to the actual working class as it has developed. In some areas it is clear that the traditional manufacturing industries have been all but wiped out: the old stewards' committees and union strongholds have also been humiliated down - from the one side by management and from the other by their own bureaucratic union officials. But the growth of the service sector - retail, catering and other jobs - does not mean that the working class has disappeared: simply that workers who would otherwise have become manual workers in factories have become unskilled, low-paid workers in shops, warehouses, hotels or burger bars - often under highly exploitative conditions. The task for the unions, as before, is to organise these workers and take up their fight for adequate pay, working conditions, health and safety.

Yet despite the odd teleographic and trendy glossy leaflet targeted at these often part-time staff, many of whom are women and black workers, the absence of a wave of small and larger-scale disputes in the service sector suggests that the unions are not recruiting and not mobilising these layers. This should come as little surprise: the same union bureaucrats who have betrayed and ignored their previous strongest battalions of industrial workers are scarcely likely to become transformed now into model fighters for the downtrodden and oppressed. The bureaucracy has never shown much enthusiasm for recruiting workers whose subscriptions are low, but who bring with them a host of problems and possible confrontations with management.

Once again we return to the question of leadership as central to any serious explanation. Even with firm leadership, victories cannot be guaranteed without, under such adverse circumstances, defeats and setbacks are certain.

Under Thatcher's decisive leadership, the Tory Party is government has effected far-reaching changes, reversing or preparing forever many of the progressive social reforms carried through by successive governments, but there is no doubt that she has spelled the class struggle won over substantial layers of the working class to Thatcherite politics.

Rather than resorting to unprecedented 'bonpartist' measures to contain the working class, Thatcher has followed the more established path of previous authoritarian Tory governments - such as that of Stanley Baldwin, which organised massive scabbing operations and defined the 1926 General Strike, and followed it up after the TUC capitulation with brutal anti-union laws and savage wage-cutting before the 1930s ushered in the new horrors of the means test.

Indeed 'strong government' was also the style of Thatcher's boss Winston Churchill in the leadership of the wartime coalition, with its ruthless repression of strikes and trade union rights. Churchill also led the post-war Tory opposition into the lobbies to oppose the National Health Service Bill, representing a continuity of that strand of Tory thought which always - long before Thatcher - rejected the welfare state.

Once again the continuous attempt to maintain or reconstruct personal prestige in 1943 was not sufficient to prevent the working class, among them returning soldiers, sweeping him out of office and delivering a landslide victory to a radical Labour manifesto. Thatcherism has sunk no deeper roots than Churchill's patriotic wartime battleground: it could be defeated given the right combination of circumstances and a determined Labour leadership.

The measure of the truly wretched political level of today's trade union and Labour leadership is that Baldwin's government had to organise a full-scale scabbing operation and confront a General Strike before it could establish a balance of forces favourable for its attacks on the working class. Churchill required not only the 'patriotic' fervour of the war period but the total complexity of the Labour, trade union and Communist party leaderships to impose his vicious anti-union laws. Yet Thatcher has since 1979 been allowed to confront and inflict huge setbacks on a much larger and stronger trade union movement without undergoing the ordeal of a General Strike, or even sustained united fightback by the trade union movement whatever.

Indeed the defeated politics of the unions leaders have now also translated themselves, via "new realism" into the total collapse of the Labour Party as an effective opposition, despite all of the opportunities that there have been to combat the evils of the new 'free market' economy.

Though workers continue from time to time to rebel against particular Tory attacks, the full-scale political retreat that is taking place under the banner of Labour's 'policy review' threatens to change the political profile of the labour movement for years to come.

As one correspondent points out (Lea letters page), if we have Kinnock who needs bonpartism? It is indeed ironic that while most workers remain relatively impervious, the section of society most impressed and affected by Thatcherite propaganda and values should be the political leadership of the mass working class party that is supposed to lead the opposition.

As a new year of struggle begins with inflation again on the increase, mortgage-payers under pressure, the economy unstable and the government still on the offensive, it is important that discussion on the politics of Thatcherism is focused on the element of the situation that we as class struggle can hope to do something about: the necessity for a new, socialist leadership fighting at every level for mass action by workers to defend democratic rights, the welfare state, jobs, housing and every other post-war gain that is now under attack.

This means fighting tooth and nail against further concessions to Thatcherism in Labour's policy review, but also spelling out a more coherent, socialist response to the economic and social crisis of the 1980s-90s. Instead of using 'Thatcherism' as an excuse for defeatism, a sober recognition of the comprehensive scope of the bosses' offensive must be a stimulus to develop the fightback.
Can Stalinist parties make revolutions?

The discussions now raging on the left over the political assessment of Mikhail Gorbachev, his reforms in the Soviet Union, and of the dramatic developments unfolding in other bureaucratically deformed workers’ states are not the only items of controversy in the analysis of post-war Stalinism.

In our supplement on the 50th anniversary of the Fourth International (November 1988), a special article by Dave Packer included an assessment of the contradictions involved in the post-war upturns of capitalism under the leadership of Communist Parties. Pursuing this question, here FINN JENSEN presents a rejoinder, while DAVE PACKER and PHIL HEARSE develop the debate, which will continue in future issues of Socialist Outlook.

Mao’s break from Stalin’s line

In his article in Socialist Outlook no 10, Dave Packer dealt with an important question. How can we explain that communist parties coming from the Stalinist tradition have been able to lead successful revolutions?

The question is not one of only of historic interest, because the answer has consequences for today: can any of the existing parties from the Stalinist (or Maoist) tradition lead a successful revolution? If some of them might be able to do it, what should be our relation to them?

Dave takes in his article the example of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP):

In the 1930s Trotsky did not expect Mao’s Red Army to come to anything. However, momentous conditions – revolutionary war against the Japanese invasion and the nationalist Guomindang armies, huge revolutionary pressures from the workers and peasants, economic catastrophe, the inability of imperialism to intervene at the end of the world war and so on – allowed the Mao leadership to make a decisive break with the bourgeoisie. All other openings (some of which were tried) were progressively closed off to it. (Page 18)

Trotsky’s view of the Red Army was much more nuanced than that of the Chinese Trotskyists. In 1931 and 1933 in letters to the Chinese Left Opposition he advocated sending commanders into the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the RedArmy, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red Army, in order to test the RCMP’s adherence to the Red

That was also the case with the communist parties in Vietnam and Yugoslavia and that is why they were able to lead successful revolutions. The Vietnamese Communist Party led a struggle for 40 years, which after 1954 threatened the very existence of North Vietnam in its war to liberate South Vietnam. Not a very typical behaviour for Stalinists.

To recognize that a few communist parties from the Stalinist tradition have been able to break with that tradition and lead successful revolutions should of course not make us jump to the conclusion that that could be a pattern for a lot of other communist parties. It is unlikely to be the case in the imperialist countries. In the third world countries we have to analyse each of the communist parties concretely in order to judge whether any of them have the potential to lead socialist revolutions.

The way out of a tangle on Stalinism

Finn Jensen’s argument that Stalinist parties cannot lead revolutions because Stalinism is the subordination of the interests of the world revolution to the narrow interests of the counter-revolutionary Soviet bureaucracy. Therefore he argues, where successful socialist revolutions have occurred, the parties that led them must have broken with Stalinism.

This line of argument proceeds from a self-justifying definition, which is based on circular reasoning. In effect it says Stalinist parties can’t lead revolutions, therefore where revolutions have occurred, the parties that led them can’t be Stalinist. QED.

Communists who hold this view get themselves in a tangle because the question is badly posed. If we formulate the question slightly differently, then it is easier to get at the solution. If we ask ourselves: can Stalinist parties under...
certain conditions, break with their local bourgeoisie and lead a struggle which results in the destruction of local capitalism?—then the answer can only be 'Yes.' That does not lead us to rethink our conception of Stalinism as counter-revolutionary in an overall sense.

Let us look at things a bit more concretely. In eastern Europe, quite obviously Stalinism, under Stalin no less—did break with the bourgeoisie and destroy local capitalism. Stalin's main interest here was to construct a ring of 'friendly' states and it is by no means clear that he set out to destroy capitalism there. In all probability he would have preferred a ring of 'federalist' capitalist states friendly to the Soviet Union. In any case, the intransigence of the local bourgeoisies excluded this option. In Austria Stalin withdrew his troops and handed power back to the capitalist class. Elsewhere, faced with a choice between hostile capitalist classes taking power and installing his own Stalinist puppets, he chose the latter course. Only in Czechoslovakia, and to a lesser extent Poland, were there mass Communist parties with large support among the masses.

You can argue that the military-political notion of the Stalinist bureaucracy is different to Stalinist parties taking power on their own—although of course in Czechoslovakia the local CP did have something to do with coming to power itself—but at least what happened in eastern Europe constitutes some evidence for the fact that Stalinism can in fact break with capitalism to defend its own specific interests. Now, if we look today at a whole number of regimes, like those of China, Albania, North Korea and Vietnam, then we have to ask the question—is this Stalinism? Are there Stalinist parties in power in these countries?

Ernest Mandel, who holds the same theory as Fian Jansen, is quite consistent when he says 'no.' According to him, these are not Stalinists in power; these are 'bureaucratic-centrist' who have a qualitatively less backward and autocratic relationship to the masses than the Stalinist regimes—the Soviet bureaucracy and its allies. Now we think that this is an uncomfortable theory to hold, but at least it has internal consistency. For if you were to assert that these parties are Stalinist today, you would be left, with the obviously self-justifying and tendentious notion that these parties were originally Stalinist, broke with Stalinism to make the revolution and then returned to Stalinism when in power!

Ernest Mandel's version is uncomfortable because it leads to asserting, as he does, that the Chinese, Albanian and Vietnamese are less bureaucratic and manipulative towards the masses—less bureaucratic. In our opinion you would be very hard put to prove that Kim Il-Sung's 


other, was undoubtedly there, but not the decisive thing. A party can led to a more radical break with capitalism than it intended in its original programme and practice; it can't be made to do against its own will!

To develop a satisfactory explanatory framework it is better to abandon the narrow definition of Stalinism and try to develop a definition of the Soviet bureaucracy—which for example an utterly Stalinist regime like the Albanian is clearly not Stalinism in a group of movements and varies which are subordinate to the interests of the bureaucracy of a deformed workers' state, or have their origin in such subordination and (today retain the characteristic bureaucratic theories and practices of the Stalinists.

This is a much more complex, nuanced and problematic definition of Stalinism than 'subordination to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy'—but much less schematic, and much more in tune with reality. After all, if Fian, like Ernest, wishes to rest his theory as the explanation of what happened where there was a Stalinist party, strictly subordinated to Moscow, in the sense of the old Stalinism and Cominform, you will hardly find such a party. The links that most Stalinist parties had directly with the Soviet Union were either very attenuated, non-existent, or heavily mediated through their links with their own bourgeoisie. But we cannot exclude from this that Stalinism is disappearing, although it is in massive crises. Right-wing Stalinist parties like the French, or Italian, maintain a relationship with the masses, with the trade unions and municipal parties and have a type of organisation and cadre development and an ideological formation which makes them characteristically different from the social democratic or bourgeois parties.

In countries in which there is a capitalist state, which ranges over social reality in most parts of the globe. It is a shifting reality, as eastern Europe and China are in the throes of major upheaval, and as the western CPs themselves go through organisational collapse and political transformation. It is therefore a discussion which we should continue. But first off, we want to pose the question: What makes the difference between Stalinist and non-Stalinist parties?

The political line cannot be deduced directly from theory. But the view that 'bureaucratic-centrist' parties have less bureaucratic attitudes than the Stalinists led to the notion that we are not for political revolution in Vietnam. The position of the Fourth International on this question is unchangeable: it has never adopted a position. Until 1963, and may be later, many forces in the world Trotskyism did not have a position for political revolution in China. But the main directly political issue of disagreement has been the overall course of the world revolution since 1945, as Dave Packer explained. The understanding of Stalinism put forward here enables us, we think, to better grasp the long historical detour of the world revolutionary process in this period. The immediate task is to believe the idea put forward in some quarters, that parties like the Chinese seized power 'under pressure from the masses' and against their own will. The pressure of the masses, one way or the other, was undoubtedly there, but not the decisive thing. A party can led to a more radical break with capitalism than it intended in its original programme and practice; it can't be made to do against its own will!

Forward with the struggle, the discussion continues!
Unofficial Secrets

Child Sex Abuse: The Cleveland Case
Beatrix Campbell
Virago Press, £3.95
Reviewed by VALERIE COULTAS

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE is a secret and difficult crime to detect. As with other sex crimes it relies on the willingness of the victim to testify that a crime has been committed. When the perpetrator is a close male relative (as is usually the case), admitting abuse can involve enormous psychological and emotional difficulty for the victim.

Unofficial Secrets tackles some of these issues in the context of the Cleveland case where in 1987 165 boys and girls were diagnosed by paediatricians at Middlesbrough General Hospital as having suffered suspected sexual abuse. Despite admitting that Drs Hagg and Wynn (two paediatricians involved) were not conscious of any abuse, Beatrix Campbell comes down firmly on their side. The medical evidence and the conclusions of the Butler-Sloss enquiry in 1988 she argues that the medical test is as a basis for their diagnosis, despite the campaign of vilification against the doctors and their diagnoses waged by the ‘popular’ press.

A police in Cleveland ‘as a praecurian guard of masculinity’ were incapable, Campbell argues, of dealing with the sexual side of child sexual abuse. Photographs taken by the doctors of the abused children’s genitalia were dismissed as irrelevant and unacceptable evidence, whereas bruises and scars were seen as acceptable evidence of violence. Disbelief in the doctors’ diagnosis was the basis of the retraction of the campaign of the press, the police and the right-wing local Labour MP, Stuart Bell.

The book is strong when it discusses the evidence on child sexual abuse, the breakdown in relationships between police, social services and the medical profession, and discords between doctors and nurses at the time. It is also sensitive to the debate about child sexual abuse and the fact that there are no easy solutions available, especially when social workers seem to have more power to disturb working class lives than middle class lives.

What I was looking for was a chapter that discussed socialist and radical feminist strategy or thinking on child sexual abuse and violence against women in much more detail. How did socialists and feminists campaign in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century? Has the Domestic Violence Act got to the statute books in 1976? Shouldn’t feminists now be campaigning for child sexual abuse acts that call for child referral centres and for society to place the blame for child sexual crimes on the (usually) male perpetrators? What implication does this debate have for an analysis of power relations in the family?

The communist conclusions are the weakest point of the book. Campbell touches on the problem of the silence of feminism in the Cleveland debate only to apologise for it. ‘Activists felt torn by conflicting allegiances both to professionals and parents...’ she writes. The other flaw that mars through the book is that ‘male sexuality’ is assumed to be responsible for child sexual abuse. This idea resists discussion and doesn’t get it. What about the sexuality of men who don’t commit child sexual abuse?

Sharp!

‘Art of the South African Townships’
Gavin Youngs, Published by Thames and Hudson 1988 £6.95
Reviewed by TRACY DOYLE

‘SHARP! is an examination of approval among South Africa’s urban proletariat. American in origin, it is applied to anything which puts one over on “whitey”, or which offers a purchase in the slippery world of getting ahead.’

So states Editor Gavin Youngs in his book “Art of the South African Townships”, in a chapter where he examines the relative history and signification of music and art as a focus of cultural and social life for black people in South Africa.

Music has always been a site of resistance. After many years during which black musicians were ignored and marginalised, the music industry discovered the profit-making potential of these same musicians and many have now achieved a degree of popular success. There has not been a similar breakthrough for black visual artists. Galleries cater for an exclusively white clientele. A national art conference held in Stellenbosch in April 1988, aimed at

addressing ‘special problems’, had an organising committee which did not include one black person. It is not possible to examine the development of art in black South Africa without looking at the systematic attempt to degrade, isolate and dehumanise black people. A situation of second class education, brutal state control and lack of materials from a common starting point for the work of artists of widely differing styles. Much of the cultural heritage of Africa was long since borne away to adorn the museums and drawing rooms of colonial rulers. Youngs provides a detailed analysis of these processes as a background to the 144 photographs that form the basis of this stunning book.

In a country such as South Africa, the very notion of black art is political. The South African government, has used the provisions of the State of Emergency to enforce new and broader definitions of what constitutes a “subversive opinion”. Section One of the Public Safety Act (1953) allows the banning of any picture, photograph, print, engraving, lithograph, painting or drawing. The provision of the law is so wide that even the publication of blank spaces where material has been edited out can be considered subversive. In 1987 Benjamin de Bruyn, appeared in court on charges relating to a number of tattoos on his body, one of which read “God give me freedom but the whites take it away that’s why I am (sic) ANC”. He was ordered to have the tattoos removed and sentenced to an effective 3 years imprisonment.

What also comes out through the book however is the persistence and resilience of black artists. Working with the materials to hand means that many artists have developed a style based on the use of such diverse things as scrap metal and corrugated card. Derrick Nxumalo works in felt pen while Thlou Zupa has a particularly unique form of art. His first drawings, and in fact the greater volume of his work, was done in ink with a bold point pen on ordinary envelopes which he sold to his work mates for less than the price of a picture postcard; these envelopes were used to send letters back to wives and children in the countryside. Geometrical portrayals of farm, jet and city buildings, his pictures show no sign of human life. His world has an alluring innocence, one which renders redundant all social or political issues. In a curious but surprisingly human way his glorification of city life found working-class support from his friends and colleagues precisely because it provided a way of coping with life in the ghettos. For white buyers however his delightfully zany creations serve to convince that life in the backyards ghettos can’t be all that bad.

Based on meetings and discussions with many black artists and containing a large number of brilliant photographs taken by himself, Gavin Youngs’s book is informative and beautiful. It combines an insight into the work of 31 artists with a focus on the extraordinary flowering of black South African art in the 1980s and an examination of the struggles which have shaped it. He describes the efforts to establish a black arts educational programme and books at the ways in which the work of individual artists relates to native and foreign influences and the development of an art of protest. This is a book not to be missed!!
Marxist History?

The Labour Party — A Marxist History
Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein, Bookmarks, 1988. £7.95.

Reviewed by JANE KELLY

BOURGEOIS history, pretending to be objective, is generally written from the point of view of the ruling class. A work of Marxist history, which purports to be, should have as its starting point the interests of the working class in its struggle against capitalism.

Unfortunately the Socialist Worker’s Party’s (SWP) version of the Labour Party is written by Cliff and Gluckstein from the narrow viewpoint of a relatively small organisation and in support of its immediate tactical interests. It contains a devastating critique of Labour’s role in selling out the working class at every opportunity, and as such it could play a role in educating some of the Labour Left who retain illusions in the party. But it does so in a very one-sided way, underplaying the contradictory nature of the Labour Party. It also overstates the role of revolutionary Marxists in relation to this party; including the International Socialists, precursor of the SWP, in the late 1960s. As a result its usefulness as a revolutionary socialist view of the mass party is completely undermined.

Lenin’s formulation of the Labour Party as a ‘bourgeois workers’ party’ appears at the very beginning of the book as the theoretical framework for the argument, but although the writers accept its contradictory character in the abstract, they are mealy-mouthed about the historic gain for the working class that the formation of the Labour Party represented. It is presented as the result of defeat: ‘The ILP was not the child of new unionism, but of its defeat’ (Page 12, their italics). The election of Labour MPs to Parliament is seen as a substitute for trade unionism: ‘a retreat from trade unionism — from the belief that collective organisation could defend itself’ (Page 29, their italics). The party itself was ‘a mixed blessing .. an improvement’ from the openly bourgeois parties, but ‘a nullification’ around the necks of the minority of advanced workers (Page 57). In reality the formation of the Labour Party, as with the building of other mass parties in Europe, represented an important step in the direction of class independence by the working class, despite the betrayals of the leadership. This was always the understanding of Lenin and Trotsky.

Most of what the authors say about its class collaborationist history, its early pact with the Liberals, its sell-out over industrial action, is true. Its pro-imperialist chauvinism and its elevation of ‘national interest’ over class are proof too of its seemingly endless capitulation to the needs of the ruling class. A strong Labour Party in Parliament was seen openly by Sidney Webb and others as a ‘safeguard against Bolshevism’ (Page 71).

But we need only look to the United States, where no mass workers’ party of any sort exists, to see the real gains in the form of class independence that the Labour Party represented and still represents. Less than 25% of the adult population voted in the last US Presidential election. They see no alternative to the bosses. The failure of the US working class to build an independent party not only represents a lesser level of class consciousness, but has a significant impact on the relation of class forces in American society.

But there is a lot more wrong with this book than a lack of one-sidedness in its emphasis. For the one-sidedness flows directly from the narrow interests of the SWP today, from its belief that it is already the mass revolutionary party which will lead the working class to its liberation. It believes that it can play the classic united front role proposed by Lenin and Trotsky in many of their writings in the 1920s. Posing themselves as the alternative to the mass party today, they devote work in the Labour Party by revolutionary Marxists in a footnote discussing the tactics of the early Communist Party, as advised by Lenin. The footnote points out that these tactics were based on a ‘party to party’ united front, with the Communist nominating some 6000 and the Labour Party still in its infancy. Tactics appropriate to parties may not be suitable for massive groups. There have been occasions when the extreme weakness of the revolutionary left has necessitated different tactics. Thus Trotsky had in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the Socialist Review Group (the precursor of the SWP) used ‘communism’ inside the Labour Party. Thus did not evolve a public declaration of revolutionary intent, or insistence on official recognition of the right to free criticism and organisational autonomy. Such extremism had to be recognised as a tactic imposed by great weakness. As soon as it had served the purpose of helping revolutionary minorities to stand on their own feet, extremism had to be abandoned. As a long-term policy it could only lead to absorption by the reformist majority. Such a policy has always been outside the confines of the Labour Party organisation’ (Page 108).

Two questions (at least) arise. First, is a group like the SWP of less than 4000, in a position to impose the classic united front on today’s Labour Party? Of course not. Only once has this been partially achieved, with the Anti-Nazi League at the end of the 1970s. For most of its existence the SWP has been characterised by sectarian denunciations from the sidelines.

Has the SWP’s effective abstention from the struggles of the left in the Labour Party put them in a good position to propose and carry out joint work with the Labour left, as they argue in the conclusion? The experience of the support groups set up during the miners’ strike of 1984-3 answers that: no, again. In many areas, especially where they were strong, the Labour left working with trade unionists, left’s, women’s groups, other left groups initiated and led these support groups. Constituency party rooms were left to organise work from, rallies were organised, money and food collected, pickets supported. It took the SWP months (say six) to realise that the strike was going to last a long time (contradicting their theory of the downturn) and that the support groups were full of militants and activists, many in the Labour Party, who might be won to revolutionary politics. Their turn to those mass was met with such decision — better late than never.

The second question the book ignores is the role played by revolutionary of the Beverian Party, not just in the last decade, but since its inception. Here their attempt to immunise their members from the questions proposed by the and the politics of the Labour left, leads to a distortion by omission. Apart from the footnote quoted above, a short section on the Militant (again because of one of their own projects), and a couple of pages on the Socialist League in the early 1970s, there is no reference to the role (given back to the Trotskyists, including the Socialist Review Group in the 1960s).

More significantly the work of the Socialist Labour League (SLL) in the 1950s is also omitted. The capacity of a small, even ‘muscule’ group to hold the Labour Left, in such a way that the traditional division between the ‘political’ Labour Left and the ‘industrial’ trade unionism was broken down is ignored. A few examples would have illustrated the necessity of this omission.

In the section on Beverianism, the authors discuss the support given by Tribune to the left-wing ‘Blue Union’. Tribune’s editors in 1954, and for the right of dockers to join a union of their choice. Tribune’s stand was apparently largely motivated by the desire to win back ‘Arthur Daks’ who had used the mass force of the TGWU to squash the ‘Blue Union’ (page 265).

Motivated by hatred it might have been, but why didn’t even, who had no link with rank and file workers’ struggles (Page 266) agree to support the ‘Beaver Union’ organised by the unofficial committees put up by rank and file at every dock in Birkenhead, Hull, Liverpool and Manchester? Why? Because the SLL had great influence in these unofficial committees, indeed they had fused with the Beaver Union Workmen’s Committee before the move to the ‘Blue Union’, and were therefore able to link together the dockers and the Beverian. Now was the process simply
about building the Labour left, important though this was in the
game against the right. At the
same time the SLL recruited both
from the dockers and the Labour
Party. Moreover, in the split
from the Communist Party after
the 1956 invasion of Hungary by
the Soviet army, the groups
which tried to recruit the
members of the SLL were by far
the most effective. They
recruited intellectuals including
Peter Fryer and union leaders like
Brian Behan who sat on the
building trades union's National
Executive; the whole of the
Young Communist League
branch in Liverpool, and
building workers and miners too.
They were successful because
they had a line, not only on
Stalinism and the need to build a
traditional party within the
Trotskyist framework, but also on
a credible policy on the Labour
Party and its relation to the trade
unions.

The SLL continued to work
effectively in the Labour Party
and trade unions throughout the
1950s. They mobilised and
linked activities along the
Aldermaston marches under the
slogan: NO WORK ON
ROCKET BASES, NO WORK
ON H-BOMBS, and called for
industrial action against the
nuclear arms race; they helped
organise the left in the 1958
London busworkers strike with
their popular weekly 'Newsletter'.
Although there was early optimism
for democracy in this period was not wholly positive
they sold Tribune but had no
influence over it and some of
their decisions were opportunistic,
then grew from 40 to 450 in 1959 and
from 500 in 1960 to around 200 in 1965-68. To leave
their role out of account all
together is wrong, and
misleading, younger and less
well informed readers. It
suggests that the leadership of
the SWP does not want an
educated discussion in this
organisation on the history of
socialist struggles.

Such omissions make for a
very partial history. This
partiality is most obvious in the
section on the rise of Benn
and the Labour Party in the last
decade.

In their determination to play
down the role of the Labour left, to
minimise the support that Benn
achieved and to declare the
Labour left 'in its death throes' the
SWP suggested at the
Chesterfield Conference, the
authors dissect history, making a
nonsense of the title of the book.

The result is to which the SWP's
strategic decisions of the last ten
colour the books account
of the period calls into question
its whole validity.

Instead of these useful
statistics to counter claims about
the disappearance of the working
class (propagated first by the
Euro-Communists and later
adopted by Kinnock and the
Labour right), much of the
last chapter, 'Labour Under
Thatcher', is both
methodologically wrong and
factually inaccurate.

Methodologically wrong
because they fail to place the
class struggle and the changing
dynamic of struggle, as the
motor force of history at the
centre of the discussion, with the
ministers' strikes of 1984-5 at the
watershed of the decade. Instead
such events are treated as
one among many - no more nor
less central than the
Wimbledon Constitutional
Conference of 1981 or Benn's
Deputy
Leadership campaign later in the
same year. As a result, the
isolation and decrease in size of
the Labour left is not explained
by the defeat of the miners' strike
but by an inevitable decline in
the face of disillusionment
with reformism. This is pure
revolutionary romanticism.

There are factual inaccuracies
too. Throughout the section on
Benn's deputy leadership
campaign the book argues that
his support was much smaller
than Benn's in the 1950s (the
book's support of the
Labour Party had 'shrunken by
three-quarters' (Page 352) and
that Benn's successes in the
years 1979-81 depended entirely
on the goodwill of a whole layer
of union officials' (Page 352).

Whether this is 'goodwill' was the
result of which the SWP's
strategic decisions of the last ten
colour the books account
of the period calls into question
its whole validity.

Statistics are used again in a
partial way to show how Labour
Party membership declined
between 1981 and 1982. Without
the figures for the late 1970s and
1980 this decline can be
misinterpreted. The fact is that
large numbers joined in the late
1970s and early 1980s precisely
because the left was on the
advance. The long term decline
reoccurs itself after Benn's
defeat and even more sharply
after the defeat of the miners.
These set-backs, including the
defeat of the Labour left, have
had an impact on the competitiveness
of the working class and on
the relation of class forces.

Militants in the Labour Party
and the membership of the SWP
deserve better than this. The
Labour Party is an inevitably
reformist, it remains 'the main
political obstacle' (Page 393) to
constructing a revolutionary
consciousness and leadership
within the working class. But
other writers have charted this
before, most notably Ralph
Miliband in his Parliamentary
Sociation of 1961. I expected
more from these writers. This
book has nothing to say about
how that obstacle is to be
removed — apart of course from
joining the SWP.
CHESS

YOUR MOVE, JUDIT

THE RECENT VICTORY of Judit Polgar of Hungary in the Duncan Lawrie mixed chess tournament in London, over a field including two grandmasters, has attracted some attention. Judit, aged 12, is regarded as the strongest ever chess player of her age. At 11 she became the youngest international master - her nearest rival being a 13 year old (Saeed Saeed) and three 14 year olds (Matthew Sadler, Nigel Short and Bobby Fisher). She also won the world under-12 championship, so becoming the first female player to win any world title. She has two chess-playing sisters: Zsuzs (13) who also played in the London tournament and defeated grandmaster Heikki Westerinen, and Zsuzsa (19) who recently came equal first in the world under-20 championship.

Why has chess been so overwhelmingly dominated by men, no woman having ever reached the level of grandmaster. Is it because women lack the necessary intelligence? Or because women lack the 'manly spirit' of which chess is supposed an expression? Or, as suggested by grandmaster Bill Hartston, because women lack the necessary streak of lunacy? Now it is emerging; there is no inherent reason. The Polgar sisters are not freaks, but are part of the growing interest into this bastion of male supremacy.

The first strong woman player was Vera Menchik, who won the women's championship when it was created in 1927. Her inclusion in a major tournament in Carlsbad in 1929 caused amusement; one player, Becker, merrily suggested that anyone beaten by her should be placed in the 'Menchik Club'. He became the founder member. A number of leading players joined the Menchik Club in the following years. Her death in an air crash in 1944 may have set back women's chess for some considerable time.

The women's championship was only revived in 1950, and was held by relatively weak players until the victory of Nina Gaponadashvili in 1962. Treated as a national celebrity in her native Georgia, she encouraged interest in chess among Georgian women and girls.

Georgia became one of the few places to take women chess seriously, but apparently for nationalist reasons. In 1961 Bobby Fischer claimed he was the greatest player ever, and that he could beat any woman, even giving her a knight's odds (a form of handicap which means starting a knight short). The Soviet Chess Federation then challenged him to a match against Gaponadashvili. He declined. Curiously, this received much less publicity than his original claim.

A handful of leading women players have sometimes competed (and held their own) in tournaments with men, women have generally played separately, with their own structure of tournaments, and titles. This may have initially encouraged some women players, but it seems to have become a hindrance. Now a number of women, including the Polgars, are avoiding women's chess, facing the man's open competition, and sometimes having to fight for the right to do so. (The Polgars were banned from international competitions for a time by the Hungarian Chess Federation because of this.)

Press coverage of the Polgars during their visit to London was mostly sympathetic, apart from Dominic Lawson in the Spectator, who said that Zsuzsi was "feminine" but no genius of chess, and accused Judit of having a "monstrous competitiveness", 'killer eyes' and that her favourite English word was 'crushed' (how would she have done giving interview in a foreign language at the age of 12)?

Where is all this leading? Surely we must have the first woman grandmaster soon. Beyond that, who knows? Gary Kasparov may yet receive his come-up for playing as a judge on 'Miss World'.

Campbell MacGregor

LETTERS

Marxism and Individualism

Whilst agreeing with most of what Theresa Conway has to say about the Labour leadership's conference Policy Review document (S.O. October 1988), I see danger in her unqualified criticism of its incessant references to the rights of individuals.

Marx wrote that the aim of the communist revolution was the creation of a society in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. and where the administration of people would give way to the administration of things - both statements which make the human individual the end of emancipatory politics.

Furthermore the Marxist critique of capitalism mutually exposes the philo-nature of the freedom promised to the individual who subordinates him or herself to the needs of capital.

The truth of these insights can be seen for example in the sphere of education, where the free bureaucratic methods of the State are condemned.

Colin Meade

Socialist Organiser

Mick Woods and Pete Paris are in danger of creating a mythology in their article on Socialist Organiser (S.O. 10). They claim that it was Socialist Organiser's 'hunch to the right' which led to the split in 1984 and that the people who set up Socialist Viewpoint opposed this rightward drift. Neither of these claims are true.

In fact the political positions of Socialist Organiser in 1984 was identical to those of Socialist Outlook and Socialist Organiser today was only after the split that the politics of Socialist Organiser changed dramatically on Ireland, on Palestine and now on the USSR and Eastern Europe. The reason for this has been the increased political influence and dominance of Sean Maginnis. It is probably true that Maginnis deliberately and bureaucratically provoked a split among the paper's supporters in order to gain this dominance.

Those who formed Socialist Viewpoint were either unconvincingly booted out, or organised to oppose the lack of proper discussion and democracy. Others were totally undermined and left. The classic bureaucratic methods of Sean Maginnis meant the end of an era in which Socialist Organiser had attempted with some success to apply the methods of the Transitional Programme creatively to the class struggle of the day. After bureaucratic ways had been used and swallowed, the path was open for the creation of a sect based on the developing thoughts of Chairman Maginnis.

The best traditions of Socialist Organiser were continued in Socialist Viewpoint and now in Socialist Outlook. I am certainly not ashamed of having been a supporter of Socialist Organiser and I am happy that some of us joined from the start in 1967 to a principle break in 1984. The break from their traditions on the part of today's Socialist Organiser can be seen in their drastic change of line. On Ireland, for example, Socialist Organiser and its predecessors' Worker's Action and Worker's Fight maintained throughout the 1970s and early 1980s a proud solidarity with the IRA when many left groups capitulated to bourgeois pressure.

On Eastern Europe, we fought tooth and nail inside the international socialist Worker's Party for a 'defeatist position against the majority' on the question of whether to support the student revolution in Poland. Last year we opposed the co-option of our paper to the Labour leader- ship's conference Policy Review document (S.O. October 1988), I see danger in her unqualified criticism of its incessant references to the rights of individuals.

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At all times we maintained three principles: for political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucratic state; for defence of the nationalized economy against imperialist attack; where there was any conflict between the first two, we agreed for support for the self activity of the working class.

This consistent discussion on Stalinism led Socialist Organiser to be of one of the first left groups to support Solidarity in Poland and to call for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. It was extraordinary that at a time when many Trotskyist groups are criticizing their own past softness on Stalinism Socialist Organisers should abandon positions which are consistently correct.

Dave Spencer

Socialist Worker's Party (Ireland)
**Sectarianism**

I am writing because of my concern over the sectarian approach of Socialist Outlook. The cover of S.O. 10 carries the heading 'A socialist response to the Green challenge': You are presenting a socialist response to the ecological crisis, rather than the green movement. An article on this subject should address frankly that Marxists have done very little on the issue, call for a greater commitment from the left, and learn from the experience of those who have already been involved for many years, to discover what role Marxists should play.

**Bonapartism 1**

Phil Hearne's article on Socialist Outlook's stance on Bonapartism (S.O. No. 11) gave too much away in the direction of the Communist Party's document 'New Times' which he criticised in an earlier issue. Hearne believes that the Tones are counter-revolutionary. This implies that Britain was a workers state, or at least in a pre-revolutionary situation, in 1970. As a former editor of Socialist Challenge, Hearne will surely have noticed a degree of continuity (as well as a break) between the policies of Callaghan and Thatcher. Even the poll tax is, in part, another of the series of attacks launched by Labour on local government.

In fact, Hearne's conception of a Bonapartist government leads him to the idea that Thatcher is centrally concerned with the attacks on democratic rights, whereas she is centrally concerned with restoring the profitability of British capitalism. Fortunately, the residual strength of the working class has prevented the bosses from restoring their world position through wage cuts etc. Thus by counselling despair almost of the 'Marxian Today' type rather than optimism about the balance of class forces, Hearne begins to seek a broad democratic alliance with the Tones, etc. The fruits of such ideas were evident when McGregor invited in the new year's issue.

**Bonapartism 2**

The article 'Thatcherism, the coming of the strong state' by Phil Hearne (S.O. 11), whilst pointing out some of the unprecedented excesses of Thatcherism compared with any other British post-war government, still contains more dangers than virtues: Hearne falls into the same terminological trap as the former Workers Revolutionary Party, the legacy of which is contained in the pages of Socialist Outlook. The first feature to be grasped in the notion of Bonapartism (semi or otherwise) is, as Trotsky explained most clearly in his article 'Bonapartism and fascism' (1934), the same article referred to by Hearne, that forms of Bonapartism do not mean that socialist or deep class polarisation renders parliamentary rule impotent.

**Bonapartism 3**

Hearne's contention that the left assumes Bonapartism arises on the independent defeats of the working class is again incorrect. On the contrary, Bonapartism arises when the parliamentary system is unable to contain the struggle of contending classes.

**Socialist Outlook**

Organiser. What is the point of it? — yet another volunteer-run minuscule organisation on another? All the organisations (from the Communist Party leftwards) have some serious, committed, militantly antidemocratic, these organisations do not help your supporters to work with people who hold views different from yours. This is not to say political differences should be ignored. If your publication carries an article on, say, British desperately needs an organisation/publication that can rise above all this, that does not start from the premise that it has all the answers, that is open to other ideas, will discuss differing ideas in a respectful way. Only in this way will you win over the broadest possible alliance to tackle the huge problems facing us. Nobody is going to listen to you if you listen to nobody. It is high time for a change!

*Richard Owens*

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*Geoff Collier*

**Bonapartism 2**

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**Bonapartism 3**

In 'The Coming of the Strong State', Phil Hearne makes mistakes in fact, history and analysis. A complete and comprehensive correction would require an analysis of Bonapartism, the theory of the state, the structure and changes in society and the economy, the successes of Thatcher and the failure and ineptitude of the opposition (why do you need Bonapartes when you have Kimkro?)

In the first place the analysis is anti-centre. Many restrictions in democratic rights are also to be found in other advanced capitalist countries: the illegalities of abortion and homosexuality in Ireland, as well as the press bans on the republican movement; the Federal Republic of Germany has the Bundesverbot, banning radicals from employment in the public services — from teachers to train drivers; in the USA there are various anti-union laws and union bashing by both professional firms and near fascist gangs; and the Israeli TV channel ORTF was the Government station for many years after De Gaulle, although legally independent.

Any trace of the advanced capitalist countries would plug up similar examples. Do they prove that these countries can or have been Bonapartist? It is also important to remember that many democratic rights have been won very recently. Just to go back 25 years, abortion was illegal, so was homosexuality. Women were paid less than men for doing the same job and were instantly and legally refused equal treatment in many areas of life. Was that a Bonapartist system?

'Thatcherism' is a collection of the trends, facts and features that Phil Hearne notes, made into a coherent theory of an authoritarian, anti-democratic strong state beyond parliamentary democracy, precisely to justify the strategy of the Popular Front in the 1930's, and not to analyse a real phenomenon in society.

*Brian Elkington*
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