Tory hurricane of change

While Kinnoch and Gould set out to widen Labour’s horizons by chopping down the traditional shrubbery of Clause IV, Thatcher’s demolition squad are using gelignite to reshape the whole political and social landscape.

Already many familiar landmarks have bitten the dust. Anti-union laws and jackboot management have risen in place of the old edifices of class collaboration. A lifetime of low pay and Micky Mouse jobs now threatens youth, in place of apprenticeships and regular wages. Newly privatized firms have taken over the task of ripping off punters needing gas, phones or airline tickets.

The pace of change is accelerating; the Conservative Party has with messianic zeal embraced the mission of wiping socialism from the map — helped by the timid ‘revisionist’ efforts of the Kinnoch team.

Third term Thatcher has since June embarked on a rapid succession of major initiatives which have left Labour and union leaders gasping and demobilized.

- By next April, social security as we know it will have been abolished: claimants will be forced to bid against each other for repayable loans from a cash-limited ‘social fund’ in place of special needs payments; child benefits face the axe, and each month brings fresh cuts in benefit.
- Already, the health service has been deliberately plunged into a deep financial crisis to create conditions to slaughter this most sacred of welfare state cows.
- Education faces both an ideological crackdown through the ‘national curriculum’, and a frontal onslaught on comprehensive schools through Baker’s ‘opting out’ plans.
- Tory minister Waldegrave has admitted that new housing legislation is designed to halt all council housebuilding. It also aims to sell off existing council houses, either one by one to tenants or in job lots to speculators through ‘pick a landlord’ schemes.
- Local government faces further devastation through the poll tax and other restrictions; and of course more industries face privatization.

The aim of this blitzkrieg attack is clear enough: the Tories want to establish a totally new fait accompli by the time of the next election, to exploit to the hilt the appalling weakness of the Labour leadership.

Branded ‘sub-Thatcherism’ by its opponents in Brighton, and decidely welcomed by Norman Tebbit in his Tory conference speech, Labour’s current line amounts to complete capitulation.
- In place of Thatcher’s policy of privatization, share ownership and sales of council houses, Labour’s dynamic leaders propose ... to accept privatization, to advocate share ownership, and to consider selling the remaining council housing stock.
- In reply to Thatcher’s insult to local government, Labour has replied by ... launching its own witch-hunts against left-wing councils, pleading to abide by Tory laws, and waging only a half-cock, parliamentary, opposition to the hated poll tax.
- To challenge Thatcher’s commitment to the reactionary NATO alliance and a ‘British’ nuclear deterrent against the myth of a ‘Soviet threat’, Labour offers ... its own unshakeable commitment to NATO, and a ‘rethink’ of its unilateralist policy (which has already been watered down even by many on the left in a ‘non-nuclear defence policy’).
- While Thatcher presses confidently ahead, tearing up cynical election commitments to safeguard the NHS, Labour’s front bench team are nowhere to be seen or heard.
- Labour leaders will be even more tongue-tied in defending social security — especially since shadow chancellor John Smith has already announced his conversion to Thatcher’s ‘low-tax’ philosophy.

So the rot goes on. At root the problem is a basic political one — a lack of socialist policies or class commitment from the leadership of the labour movement — leaving the working class defenceless in the face of a ruthless and relentless Tory attack, which will now be compounded by the consequences of the stock market collapse.

With the crisis of capitalism once more exposed for all to see, the role of Socialist Outlook and other currents of the hard left must now be to fight in every arena of the labour movement for a coherent socialist programme that will mobilise the working class to meet the crisis. Why not join us in this task?
Since the middle of the summer tensions in the Gulf have risen dramatically, as the United States and Iran have traded military blows more and more aggressively. The real shooting war was started by the US when they attacked an Iranian mine-laying boat, killing some of its crew. It has now escalated to attacks on oil platforms — by the time this article appears something even more dramatic may have occurred.

Obviously the direct and immediate cause of the stand-off was the decision of the US to send its navy to escort American-flagged tankers through the Gulf to 'defend' them from attack by Iran. But this alleged motivation for sending the American navy is entirely spurious. The 'tanker war' has been going on for three years, with hundreds of vessels of many nations attacked by both Iraq and Iran. For three years the United States did nothing. Moreover, the tanker war was started by the Iraqis, whose powerful airforce has carried out not just the majority of the attacks, including attacks on western ships. And yet the United States acts as if it were only Iran that were attacking the tankers.

Reagan took the decision to send the 'escort' ships as a result of the attack on the USS Stark. This US warship was shot up by an Iraqi fighter using anerron missile — not by the Iraqi airforce. That somehow, in its propaganda and the strange minds of Reagan's imagination, Iran got the blame for the Iraqi attack. But the decision to go to war for confrontation was a conscious and deliberate political choice by the Reagan administration. Just over a year ago the White House, in the form of Ollie North and Admiral Poindexter, were caught with their pants down making diplomatic overtures to and selling arms to the Iranians.

This led to the Iran-contra scandal. The confrontation with Iran marks an attempt to cover the Reagan tracks and show that, no, the White House is not soft on terrorism and the Iranian revolution. There have been many periods of uncertainty in US policy towards Iran and the Gulf war since the early 1980s. While the US has generally seen the Islamic fundamentalism of Iran as a threat to its interests in the region, it has been cautious about giving unconditional support to the Iranians. It is strongly distanced by Israel, the closest ally in the Middle East, for the simple reason that it is an Arab power. Israel does not want to see the Iranians victorious and emboldened. Five years ago American planes overflew Saudi Arabia in attack and destroy the French-built nuclear reactor in Iraq. Naturally they feared the outcome of the development of a nuclear capacity by the Arab states. There is no doubt that the United States intelligence and operational assistance was given to this attack.

Reagan has been selling arms to Iran throughout the course of the war.
The views of Israel and the pro-Israeli lobby in the United States are always an important component of US strategic thinking in the Middle East. But in the vital Gulf region, so important for oil supplies to the advanced capitalist countries, the views and security of the reactionary Arab sheikdoms which dominate the region have to be taken into account. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain are fiercely pro-Western, but also scared of the growing strength of the kind of Islamic fundamentalism promoted by Iran.

Throughout the Gulf in both the majority state population and the minority Shi'ite there is a strong surge of fundamentalist sentiment. The new 'growth industries' in the region are mosque construction and new editions of the Koran and learned commentaries on the holy text. More and more women can be seen wearing the veil or the chador. The encroaching oil of the Gulf may all be economic but their political concerns are drawn to earth and practical. Their nightmares are those of the overturning of their beliefs by fundamentalist mullahs. 

The growth of Islamic fundamentalism is becoming a social catastrophe of enormous proportions in the whole of the Middle East and the Arab world. Its causes lie in the disappointment which the
UPFRONT

President Arias of Costa Rica has joined a long line of Nobel prize-winning 'peace-makers' that includes Henry Kissinger and Menachem Begin. But what does his plan portend and what attitude should socialists and solidarity activists take towards it?

The Guatemala peace accord, signed by the presidents of the five Central American countries and due to be fully implemented by 7 November, calls for 'external powers' to cease any military support for 'irregular' forces in the region.

Its other provisions include: guerrilla forces being denied the use of neighbouring countries; negotiation of reductions in armaments and troop levels; a full amnesty; national reconciliation committees being set up in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala; freedom of the press; the right to organise politically; the lifting of states of emergency; and the holding of free elections.

The US administration attempted to derail the accord, even before it was signed. On 5 August Reagan presented an alternative plan calling on the Sandinistas to negotiate with the contras and for an end to Soviet aid to Nicaragua. The US knew that the Sandinistas would never agree to such a proposal and wanted to use their non-compliance as a way of ensuring aid to the contras.

Since the Arias plan was signed, a bill granting the contras $3.5 million in 'humanitarian' aid has passed with strong bipartisan support, and Reagan has asked Congress for a further $200 million in contra aid — the largest amount so far. The aim is to support the contras while trying to obtain maximum concessions from the Sandinistas.

For their part, the Nicaraguans have welcomed the Arias plan as a victory. It legitimises the government while denying legitimacy to the contras.

Nicaragua's economy is in chaos — inflation is running at more than 700 per cent and rationing has been introduced on basic foods, toothpaste, petrol and so forth. The coffee harvest has been damaged by contra killings of coffee pickers, outlying areas have been left uninhabited because of the danger of attack and both industry and agriculture have suffered through the drafting of young people into the army. Seventy-five thousand soldiers have to be fed and paid every week.

Internationally, Nicaragua has become increasingly isolated. West Germany, France, Spain and Italy have ended the aid programmes they once had. Nicaragua has lost the option of credit through its inability to repay the interest on loans.

The Soviet Union too had been tightening the screws. Izvestia recently wrote of 'parasitism, speculation and smuggling' in Nicaragua and the USSR was reluctant to fill the gap left by the suspension of Mexican and Venezuelan oil shipments.

Already, the Arias plan has resulted in economic assistance: the Soviet Union announced on 7 September that it would supply 100,000 more tons of petroleum this year, Peru has agreed to sell Nicaragua 5,000 tons and Cuba will sell 10,000 tons.

The Nicaraguans hope that the accord will allow the revolution a breathing space; a chance to overcome its economic and political isolation. They are now pursuing a diplomatic war, making far better on implementing the accord than either El Salvador or Guatemala.

Nicaragua has lifted the ban on the bourgeois daily La Prensa, reopened 'Radio Catolica' (the voice of the conservative Catholic hierarchy), declared a unilateral cease-fire in three zones, declared an amnesty for all contras who turn themselves in, established over 300 local peace commissions, established the national reconciliation commission (headed by archbishop Cardinal Obando y Arenal) and repealed decree 740 which allows for the confiscation of property of those outside the country for more than six months.

They have reduced some compromises however. The Catholic hierarchy has called for the release from prison of the four thousand Sandinistas and contra imprisoned since the revolution. In what seems a popular move domestically the Sandinistas have so far refused to release the torturers, murderers and rapists used by Somoza and the US government to terrify the workers and peasants of Nicaragua.

The accord grants legitimacy to all governments in power in the region. By seeking to cut off outside aid, and to discredit 'irregular' forces, it equates the contras with the FMLN in El Salvador and the URNG in Guatemala.

In Guatemala the civilian president, Girozyn, is attempting to avoid the accord as a cover for the continuing campaign to wipe out the URNG guerrilla forces. The URNG had previously called for four times for negotiations.
Aquino on borrowed time

IN LESS THAN two years since President Cory Aquino was swept to power in the Philippines on a wave of popular rebellion that ended the Marcos dictatorship, her government is virtually held hostage by the military. The scene looks set for a final coup. In August this year Cory Aquino survived the most serious coup attempt of her presidency, but she paid for the support of the generals who, belatedly, came to her rescue, was the dismissal of her closest cabinet advisors (the remaining "progressives") in favour of hard-liners. Now the military officers have tightened their grip on the regime, a move also applauded by many in the business community. The mass movement that rose up against ex-president Marcos not only wanted to "oust him; it had illusions in Aquino. As late as May 1987, her success in the legislative elections showed that she still enjoyed considerable personal popularity with a people on the rebound from the horrors of a 14-year dictatorship. However, the built-in contradictions between her mass base and her bourgeois politics are now coming home to roost.

From the outset Cory Aquino's government has courted the Americans. At the same time it has sought to maintain the loyalty of the "constitutionalist" wing of the army under chief of staff, Fidel Ramos, in order to counter the growing influence of military leaders of the extreme right. With US aid she has supplied the generals with new weapons to wage "total war" on the guerrillas of the communist-led New People's Army (NPA). During her presidency, leaders of the workers' movement have been arrested, tortured - even assassinated. In many towns and villages government troops collaborate with armed anti-communist vigilante groups. Together they terrorise and murder people who are thought to be NPA sympathisers, who join unions or who simply try to grow food on strips of land fringing the sugar plantations. The miserable poverty of the mass of the people, as in the days of martial law, goes unalleviated by social reforms. A particular bone of contention is the long-promised land reform, a piece of draft legislation currently lost in the labyrinth of Congress. Aquino's land reform scheme has been progressively watered down and deprived of substance, warns the leader of the sugar workers' union, Sergio Chandler. "...if she yields to the pressure of the big landlords who make up her entourage (and isn't she also one of them?) the peasants themselves will force a redistribution of land.

Indeed, as Aquino's refusal to break with the old system of privilege and patronage has become increasingly obvious, the working class has started to mobilise on a number of different fronts. Significantly, the failed coup attempt in August followed a transport strike that paralysed the capital, Manila, and five other regions. The strike was provoked by an inflationary 18 per cent rise in fuel prices suddenly imposed by the government to appease the International Monetary Fund and help to repay interest on the country's crippling $26 billion foreign debt. The resulting explosion of popular discontent gave a new boost to the left, uniting

US troops on manoeuvres in the Philippines

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GILL LEE
ON 26 OCTOBER, the day after the anniversary of the passing of the 1967 abortion act, the first attempt to restrict its provisions was introduced in parliament in the form of David Alton's private member's bill.

The bill seeks to amend the 1967 abortion act to reduce time limits for abortion to 18 weeks. At present, there is no time specified in the act and the current limit of 28 weeks, or viability, whichever is the lower, comes from the 1929 Infant Life Protection Act.

This act was intended to deal with the problem of infanticide originally. By amending the 1967 act, the bill would leave the way open for further amendments to be added at committee stage. Pro-choice groups and others have set up a campaign — Fight Alton's Bill (FAB).

There is no logical reason for a time limit of 18 weeks, even with the most advanced technology. Short of an artificial womb, the fetus cannot survive outside the mother until at least 22 weeks, and until then its lungs are solid. A number of “moderate” MPs will be seeking to persuade Alton to amend his bill to 22 or 23 weeks on those grounds, but given that there are very few abortions at 22 weeks, and that the 1929 act effectively allows for advances in technology covered by the question of viability, this would not achieve what Alton and other hard-liners want — to reduce the total number of abortions done.

Alton says, correctly, that Britain is one of the few countries allowing abortions so late. Most countries in Europe, however, and many outside with legal abortion have more liberal laws than ours, which means that women can get earlier abortions. Moreover, cutbacks in the NHS mean that it is becoming harder for women to get earlier abortions — a significant number of late abortions are due to NHS delays, often due to anti-abortion doctors and others.

FAB opposes any reduction in time limits, on the grounds that it is the most effective way of minimising the numbers of women who will be in the position of having abortions in the future. Fifty per cent of those having abortions after 20 weeks are 20 or under; young women who find it harder to acknowledge they are pregnant and to find out what to do. Many come from Ireland and Spain.

Others who will be affected in smaller numbers are those who have been unable to access abortion facilities that delay women and mean that they have to find the money for a private abortion (and in the case of those coming from, for example, Ireland, to find the fare and other expenses as well), the fact that the doctor’s permission has to be sought, leading to further delays; especially if they come across anti-abortion doctors or agencies, such as “Life”. There are all sorts of ways by which women could be helped to get abortions early — this bill is not going to help one bit.

You can help by becoming a supporter of FAB and setting up local FAB groups and by helping to raise money — very urgent, especially if we are to get a national-sized FAB office.

A mass lobby of parliament is planned for 21 January and we are urging supporters to get trade unions, MPs and women’s organisations to support this. The ultimate goal is to get a cross-party demo around the time of the third reading.

FAB naturally meets at Wesley House, on Mondays at 6.30. All supporters welcome.

LEONORA LLOYD

For details, contact FAB at Wesley House, 1 Wild Court, London WC2N 7AS, or on 07-810 4001 (NMC), 01 580 3848 (Co-ord) and 01 243 8338 (NMC).

Support the MASS LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT
21 January 1988
Fight Alton’s Bill meets every Monday
6.30pm, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2
Meltdown — the crash of '87

They always said that it couldn't happen. Year after year right wing politicians and economists would claim that the western world had 'learned the lesson' of 1929, and that another stock market crash on that scale was impossible. Well it has happened, and socialists must grasp the sheer scale and enormity of it. In many ways it is going to change both the international and national political context in which we operate. For socialists it will open up both big opportunities but also important dangers. That will still be true even if the stock markets are temporarily rising by the time this is published.

Here we want to give provisional answers to three questions. Why did the crash occur? What will be the consequences for the world and British economy? What will be the political consequences, particularly in Britain?

In order to understand the background to the crash it is necessary to locate it within the framework of the historical development of the world capitalist economy. The long post-war boom began to wind down towards the end of the 1960s. Since then, the world capitalist economy has been caught in a long period of recession, which shows no sign of ending. But within the long recession there have been temporary upswings and downswings: the most dramatic downswing was in the 1974-5 recession.

Over the past five years, the US government has abandoned tight financial constraints and boosted its economy by a simple device — running a huge budget deficit. Part of the deficit was used to finance the huge military build up, itself a product of the new period of capitalist crisis and cold war. But the vast levels of government spending all round boosted demand and made the US economy expand rapidly. Hand in hand with the budget deficit, the US began to run a massive balance of trade deficit as the expanding economy sucked in foreign imports, especially from Japan and Europe.

The budget deficit had two important effects: first the United States has had to borrow huge amounts of money, making it the world's biggest debtor nation. Second, it has been under pressure to keep its interest rates high, to ensure that funds flowed into New York, rather than going to Germany or elsewhere, where money could have been made out of higher interest rates. But herein lies the problem. In order to keep funds flowing into the US, they were under pressure to maintain high interest rates which made it difficult for capitalists in the United States itself to borrow money at cheap rates from the banks to invest, thus threatening a recession in the US.

In other words, the United States economy and military kept expanding by means of deficit financing, building up huge debts. But like all deficit financing, the bill has to be paid sometime. It became increasingly clear that to prevent a complete collapse in financial confidence in the dollar, it was going to be necessary to cut government spending, raise taxes, raise interest rates and in general go for economic deflation. A fall in the stock market was only a matter of time.

There is a second major reason for the crash. During the period of relative expansion of the US and world economy, financed by the US budget deficit, share prices have risen rapidly in a massive speculative boom. Now the value of shares on the stock exchange is in the first instance simply determined by the price other people are prepared to pay for them, and this involves a lot of subjective elements, especially during a wild boom or a big crash. But in the end, the real value of shares must be related to the dividend they are likely to pay — the income that can be received from holding them. Once it becomes clear that a boom in share prices has gotten completely out of hand, and that the price of shares bears no relation to the amount of dividend that can be made from holding them, prices start to go down and in a period of general economic instability, panic can become panic and 'free fall'.

Simply summed up, the crash is a product of the financial crisis caused by the US trying to get out of the recession by reckless borrowing, thus undermining international confidence in the world's leading capitalist economy; and the closely related phenomenon of the speculative stock market boom, itself fuelled by US economic expansion. To put it another way, the crash is a typical result of the anarchy of capitalist production and finance. It is typical of the anarchic functioning of capitalism that in finding a short term palliative for recession the US government prepared the ground for an even bigger recession.

The second question to be answered is the likely economic effect of the stock market crash. There is now no way that the capitalist class in Britain or internationally can avoid a new world slump as a result of the crash. Recently both Reagan and Chancellor Lawson have said that 'nothing has changed in the real economy'. That is nonsense and they know it. The stock market crash will lead to lower investment and hence a slowdown in the growth of the capitalist world economy. To try to bridge the deficit, the US government must deflate the US economy, including trying to claw back money from the US working class. A new recession will lead to heightened competition between firms in the fight for profits; attempts to raise the rate of exploitation of the working class; and increased inter-imperialist competition, including the possibility of a drift towards protectionism and new trade wars.

One thing which cannot be predicted
and the coming world slump

with accuracy of course is the timescale and duration of the slump. There may be soon a temporary rise in the stock market — we should remember it took three years after 1929 for Wall Street to reach its eventual low point, and there were several temporary risers. It will take some months for the full effects of the investment downsizing to work their way through the system. Equally, we have no way of knowing whether the stock market crash will lead to the kind of banking crisis which occurred in the US after 1929. The evidence we have so far — of central banks pumping money into the financial institutions to shore them up — seems to suggest that we won’t see a banking collapse of this sort.

Whatever the timescale and precise form that the slump takes, the fact that it is coming cannot be denied. In the end, slump and recession can only be got out of by making the working class pay — through lower wages and a higher rate of exploitation, and by a smaller ‘social wage’ — a cutback in the welfare state. In other words, a new and ferocious attack on working class living standards is inevitable.

How is all this going to change politics? The political consequences are going to be many-layered and complex, but the outlines can be sketched. The crash is a blow to all the myths of ‘popular capitalism’ and a ‘share-owning democracy’. Thus it is a massive blow to Thatcherism ideologically. Millions of people, including those who bought shares, are going to get a swift, salutary lesson in some of the realities of capitalism. At the same time, Bryan Gould and Neil Kinnoch have been made to look pretty stupid in their headlong pursuit of sub-Thatcherite share-owning mythology. Indeed what has happened is going to make millions of people question the rationality of a financial system which puts the world economic order, and the livelihood and well-being of millions of people, in the hands of a tiny handful of immensely rich financiers. It will make anti-capitalist propaganda and explanations much more credible and popular; and of course this will have its biggest impact in the labour movement.

Will the left gain from this? There is no automatic rule which says that financial crash means automatic growth and victory of the left. After all, the crash of 1929 led, indirectly, to fascism in Germany and another non-socialist solution — the ‘new deal’ — in the United States. But Britain in 1987, the left has a massive opportunity to ensure that it is a major beneficiary of the political fallout of the crash.

Overcoming the anarchy of the capitalist market is absolutely impossible without nationalising the banks and major financial institutions; nationalising the major firms and monopolies; instituting a national, and hopefully international, socialist economic plan; and fighting for workers’ control over production as the only way of ensuring the implementation of a socialist economic plan.

These are the kind of programmatic demands which need to be raised in the labour movement, both in struggles and in the political and ideological debates. Such socialist perspectives are a million miles away from the right wing economic thinking of the Labour leadership. But they are also some way removed from the kind of fashionable and confused ideas on the left. Indeed in recent years — like the notion that ‘local plans’, small co-operatives, and ‘new forms of social ownership’ were the answer. To be frank, all such ideas are fiddling around the edges in comparison with the scale of this crisis. You can’t have local enterprise initiatives or local co-ops without finance, and in a slump you won’t get it. Period.

Nothing could more justify the idea of socialist planning, on a national and international scale, as what has happened over the past few weeks in the world’s financial markets. The crisis has shown that those who stand against the irrationality of capitalism are right.

The Chinese written character for the word ‘crisis’ is a combination of those for ‘danger’ and ‘opportunity’. Socialists now have it in their hands to strengthen the movement in a qualitative way if they seize the opportunity. If not, then the horizon is clouded with dangers for socialism and the working class.
After the TUC and Labour Party conference

Will the left fight back?

The TUC and the Labour Party conference were followed by the 2000-strong Socialist Conference in Chesterfield. While the Labour Party conference saw a huge attack by the right wing, Chesterfield shows the basis is there for a new surge of the left. PETE FIRMIN reports.

Ken Livingstone and Sharon Atkin address fringe meetings at Labour Party conference - but Ramada Man dominates the proceedings

'SUB-THATCHERISM' — that is the apt phrase used by the left at the Labour Party conference to describe the new policies and principles which Kinnock and Gould are trying to instil on the party. Bryan Gould's speech extolling the virtues of share ownership, and Neil Kinnock's gem about the necessity to appeal to the (mythical) 1400-a-week shocker, were only the tip of the iceberg of the leadership's operation.

In effect, they plan to roll back all the policy and organisational gains made by the left since 1979. The ferocity of the right wing's attack and the boldness and scope of their proposed policy changes caught some people by surprise. It aims at nothing less than crushing the left and all traces of its influence. A simple list of the leadership's objectives will show what is involved:

* To progressively redefine a 'non-nuclear defence policy' away from anything to do with unilateralism and to make it a simple multi-lateralism. In this endeavour, it must be said, they are receiving some assistance from the soft left, from the likes of Joan Ruddock.

* To abandon any commitment to extension of public ownership, and indeed any pledge of even renationalisation of privatised industries, to replace clause 11 with talk of 'new forms of social ownership'. What the new forms of social ownership are was clearly elaborated by Bryan Gould when he supported wider share ownership as a means of 'spread power more widely' — a faduous notion at the best of times, but looking distinctly sick after the collapse of the stock market.

* To overthrow the democratic reforms made in the party, especially those relating to the reelection of MPs, via the introduction of the electoral college version of 'one member, one vote'.

* To seize control of every aspect of the party structure by attacking the LPS, Labour Party women's conference, closing down Labour Weekly and so on.

This operation will be consummated by the policy review which will be undertaken in the next two years. Its aim, to quote trade and industry spokesperson John Smith, is to 'review the whole stance of the party' — in other words move fundamentally to the right and accept some of the basics of Thatcherite philosophy.

There is no doubt that this is one of the most profound debates inside the party since the attempt by Gaitskell to abandon Clause 1 in the early 1960s. Indeed, the present situation has some interesting parallels with that debate. Kinnock is saying, as Gaitskell did, that the working class is now, in its majority, an 'affluent' working class, and that we have therefore to shift our appeal away from the poor and the dispossessed, who are a 'minority'.

Kinnock is using half-baked pop sociology about the 'destruction of the working class', which was rubbish when Gaitskell floated it and is still rubbish when much more lightweight figures like Kinnock and Gould spout it.

The hissing and booing which greeted the new-famous 'Gould'sowning' speech is indicative of a general
mood of resentment and unrest among many at the conference at what was being done by the leadership. On the other hand, there is also no doubt that sections of the conference, even those generally opposed to the leadership’s operation, felt genuine doubts as to whether there might be some truth in it.

The left is going to have to fight hard in an ideological battle to explain how Kinneke and Gould were wrong. The debate is likely to be informed by the effects of the shake-up in the board in a period of economic depression and declining share ownership. It is going to be harder to talk about an increasingly affluent working class and the marvels of a “shareowning democracy.” Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the determination of the party leadership to push through their policy review, which despite being presented to conference in a single report, will have policy implications right across the board.

While this year’s TUC was not nearly as dramatic as the Labour Party conference, it represented a continuation of the drift towards the right. But the union bureaucracy did not have it all their own way. The continued willingness of the working class to fight back against attacks on jobs and conditions was reflected in the defeat of the conference platform’s opposition to the new round of anti-union laws — and indeed in the fight taken onto the floor of congress by Scargill and Macrae.

In looking at the prospects for the left, in the light of the deepening attacks on the Labour leadership, it is necessary to
look at the resistance at the Labour Party conference and at what happened at the subsequent Chesterfield Socialist Conference.

Before the Labour conference some members of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) steering committee and of the Labour Left Liaison put out a joint fourteen-point statement reaffirming left wing policies. Prominent among the signatories were Ken Livingstone, Ann Fenech, Joan Ruddock, Vladimir Detor and Peter Hain. This statement was a good initiative, which infuriated the right wing of the LCC and led the editor of Marxism Today 'pronouncedly depressed'. Its main weakness was that it remained simply at the level of demands on a future Labour government, and the consequences here and now for labour movement action were not immediately obvious.

At the Labour Party conference itself the response of the left, and especially the soft left, was very weak. The key questions of the economy and defence of nationalisation were barely addressed at all by the main left leaders.

Just as in 1985, the sections of the Labour Party least willing to lie down and be brushed by the rightward-moving steamroller were the most oppressed sections of the class - women and black people. Women showed their resistance by refusing to be hobbled off several times during conference and continuing their protests right up to the singing of the 'Red Flag'. It must be said that there was developing process of political differentiation within black sections and among women in the party.

The conference of two thousand socialists in Chesterfield in October was a boost for the left. A large proportion of the conference were rank and file trade union and Labour Party members. The conference revealed a deep hostility to the moves of the Labour leadership to push the party to the right. As one delegate said: 'this conference has drawn a line across the left' - a line of those who are in the last analysis prepared to fight back against Kinnockism as against those who in the end are prepared to go along with it.

The big turnout at the conference, despite the clash with the national anti-apartheid demonstration, revealed a new mood of wanting to organise for a fightback and to reassert basic socialist principles. One of the reasons for the success of the conference was the fact that the organisers sought to bring together militants from inside the Labour Party, together with those from the trade unions, campaigns - and indeed socialist activists not in the Labour Party.

This was a correct approach; and it is one which needs to be countered by any approach on the left which sticks obsessively to internal Labour Party structures and caucuses.

One of the things which dominated the second half of the conference was an understanding that the stock market crash heralded important changes in the political situation in which the left operates and will tend to undermine the credibility of Kinnockism.

Another positive aspect of the conference was the feeling that the co-ordination of socialists which was beginning there ought to be continued. A further conference is to be held in May, and regional and local reportbacks and conferences will be held in many areas before then.

One final point about Chesterfield needs mentioning - the major speech by Ken Livingstone. In his speech he rejected the notion, often put forward by Tony Benn and others, that the flight in the Labour movement is just about policies, not personalities. 'How can you have socialist policies?', asked Livingstone, 'if you are led by someone like Ramsay MacDonald?'

This sounded to many like a declaration of war against Kinnock and Kinnockism. Whether it was or not, such a war clearly needs waging before next year's conference considers the leadership's policies review.

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**Ramada Man: fact or fiction?**

Decades ago, experts and commentators were taken in by a skillful fake. The discovery of the supposed prehistoric remains of 'Piltdown Man' generated all kinds of wild theories on evolution.

Now, years after Piltdown Man was exposed, the Kinnock leadership is attempting to palm off a new myth. We can call this 'Ramada Man', after Brighton's luxurious Ramada Renaissance Hotel, at which Kinnock and his camp followers held court during this year's party conference.

Descriptions of this new species vary. According to Ron Todd, he is a docker on £400 a week. (rumours that Todd was referring to Brian Nicholas have not been denied) and has a holiday home in Marbella.

But by common consent Ramada Man is male, owns a house, a few shares, and feels well-off.

How many Ramada Men are there? We know there are not many dockers left. Latest government figures show that average weekly pay for the top ten per cent of manual workers is only £261! If Ron Todd is right about the £400 a week figures, there can't be many votes to be won there.

Even the top ten per cent of all male workers fall £50 a week short of Todd's docker.

Of course some manual workers are known to earn £400 a week or more - most well-known have been a Fleet Street printer-workers. But national newspaper jobs have been axed, provincial newspapers are boosting up unionised printer-workers. And thousands of S&GAT and MG members are learning how flimsy has been their prosperity, which rested on trade union strength.

Ramada Man also owns a house; after Tory policies have shifted council housebuilding he probably has little choice. Do mortgages stop workers challenging capitalism? Thousands of miners with mortgages joined a year-long strike to defend their communities and the industry they depend upon: millions of Labour votes have always come from owner-occupiers appalled by Tory policies.

Ramada Man owns a few shares - maybe £509 worth. If so, he has gotten a year's equivalent of £10 a week at the bookies; his return on that investment may equal one good win on an outsider. His shareholding is insignificant in relation to the stakes of the banks and trusts - and he gets no voice in company policies. His shareholding is worse insignificant in relation to the risks of the banks and trusts.

Behind the defeatist mythology of Ramada Man lies an uncomfortable fact: there has always been a non-socialist, even Tory-voting section of the working class, particularly its more privileged layers. Old-style union bureaucrats like Eric Hammond have always reflected their prejudices. But now the greedy Labour line is to allow this backward ramp to dictate policy.

At least Piltdown Man's creator produced a bag of bones to back up the prank: Ramada Man carries as much conviction as Cinderella's coach at five past midnight.
Share-owning democracy?

BRYAN GOULD'S Labour Party conference speech calling for a re-evaluation of Labour's attitude to share ownership by workers was rightly met with considerable hostility. But in fact the Labour leadership was testing this idea before the election. John Smith and David Blunkett included worker share ownership as a major part of their official proposals for 'new forms of social ownership' in 1985, and it was an important element of the Greater London Enterprise Board's policy before that.

Lacking any clear economic strategy, even sections of the hard left have fallen for this tune. On the same day as Gould's speech, campaign group MP Brian Sedgemore proposed that a third of public companies' shares should be transferred to a workers' trust, with the supposed result that 'some workers would become millionaires overnight'.

Gould's proposal was characteristically vague, and muddled together different forms of worker share ownership: ownership of shares in general, and ownership of shares in the worker's own firm. The first of these has been promoted by the government through the marketing of shares in privatised industries on an unprecedented scale. This way of selling shares has had the aim of making privatisation more 'democratic' and for the Thatcher (and British capital) have been willing to pay a huge bill: the give-away prices necessary to ensure a wide take-up have been scarcely half the companies' real value. On BT and British Gas alone, the government has forecast a profit of over £5 billion.

With these lavish handouts, and the low threshold set for minimum share applications, it is only surprising that many people have not bought the shares. Only twenty per cent of adults in adult firms, compared with seven per cent in 1979.

Clearly most shares have been bought by the middle class and a comparatively small number of better-off workers. As of last year only four per cent of share owners were unskilled and semi-skilled workers. There is little indication that these completely exceptional share sales have whetted the appetite of many of the new share owners for normal speculation in shares, despite the steadily rising prices on the stock exchange of the last few years.

Moreover, having doubled their money, many people have cashed their shares in. Of the initial shareholders in British Airways, for example, 65 per cent have sold out. In British Gas a third sold out in the first four months in spite of voucher and share offer incentives to retain shares.

The large number of shareholders in the privatised companies, including among their own workers, does not in any way enhance 'democracy'. The majority of shares are already in the hands of the financial institutions: in the privatised half of BT only 24 per cent of shares are now held by small shareholders, while 64 per cent are held by 500 owner institutions and firms. Even if the shares were equally distributed throughout the entire population, there are no mechanisms for debating and determining company policy.

A member of the rank and filo-fax?

JAMIE GOUGH looks at the inconsistencies of Bryan Gould's 'share-owning democracy'.

What effect does share ownership have on the new share owners? Contrary to Marxism Today's contention, and contrary to the suggestion in Kinneke's conference speech, buying shares in privatised industries does not necessarily either require or encourage a conversion to ' Thatcherite' values. All that is necessary is £100 of savings and a desire to double it.

Where workers have retained their shares this is essentially an alternative form of saving to the building society. It is a way of keeping the value of money for future use, not the accumulation of capital. Saving has been undermined by the better-off parts of the British working class for the last 150 years and is hardly an invention of Thatcher. For the average new shareholder, the profit, in the form of dividend income, is small, £25-100 a year.

A potentially much more important form of share ownership from a political point of view, and the one Labour has tended to highlight, is ownership of shares in the workers' own company.

This is often used as a step to push through damaging restructuring measures against relatively well-organised workers. The shares issued on favourable terms to the workers in privatised industries are one example. Another is the issue of shares in 'exchange for' massive cuts in pay which have been negotiated by less-making US corporations such as TWA and Chrysler. Your pay is cut now, but the corporation will recover its profitability and eventually you'll do well out of it is the message. In these cases, worker share ownership is a short-term expedient for the employer.

Worker share ownership or profit sharing schemes can also help management in the long term, by flexibly linking wages to profits and by creating an atmosphere of cooperation in the firm. A cooperative policy may seem a far cry from the present government's policy of junking cooperation with trade union leaders and smashing union organisations. But a policy of management-labour cooperation — on management's terms — can have big advantages for capital, lowering labour turnover and absenteeism and increasing the quality of production and productivity.

This can be very attractive to the Labour and trade union leadership since it offers a new excuse for class collaboration: they can appear as representatives of 'enlightened' management and the mixtures of new, harmonious industrial relations.

While share-ownership schemes are always a risky option, they may appear attractive to workers in particular firms. But they are a danger for the working class as a whole.

Share ownership tends to increase divisions between workers within industries by weakening the role of national collective bargaining and struggle. It tends to increase divisions within firms, with long standing, often skilled male workers benefiting disproportionately.

The degree of influence on management that may accompany worker share ownership (especially if exercised through a pooled trust) tends to draw workers more strongly into helping their firm to compete, deepening the competitive anxiety of capitalist organisations. It is not a weak form of industrial planning. It is the opposite of planning. There is no democracy in share ownership.
The 1967 abortion act was a major breakthrough for women. By the twentieth anniversary of its coming into effect, some three million will have had legal abortions. Those twenty years have seen many attempts of the anti-abortion lobby to curb, and of the women’s movement to fight for, a woman’s right to control her own fertility. The Alton bill and the campaign against it have once more brought the issue to the fore.

**Leonora Lloyd** argues that the struggle for a woman’s right of control over her own body involves much more than defending the ’67 act. Like other legislative advances of the sixties, such as on homosexuality, it was seriously flawed.

**David Steel’s bill,** introduced in 1966, received the royal assent on October 27 1967, coming into effect six months later. The delay was in order to give the NHS more time to gear up for the expected demand for newly legal abortions. This the NHS singularly failed to do.

In April 1966 the Family Planning Association’s conference on abortion usually underestimated the demand there would be for legal abortion. It was estimated that there were some 80,000–100,000 illegal abortions, based on surveys, numbers of women who died or suffered serious long-term effects, and police prosecutions.

In fact, numbers of deaths had been dropping steadily, for a variety of reasons. It had been possible for some time to get legal abortions. A Doctor Brough performed an abortion in 1938 on a fourteen year old victim of multiple rape, and the subsequent court case decided that ‘danger to life’ included severe mental and physical harm to the woman. This meant that doctors performing abortions in good faith, usually after getting the opinions of two psychiatrists, were safe from prosecution. As the moral climate changed, more abortions were performed in this way.

In addition, ‘D and C’ (scraping the womb, usually to relieve menstrual problems) became a euphemism under which semi-legal abortions were done, often privately. Other women escaped to the more liberal countries, such as Sweden and Switzerland, for abortions, but this was only for the wealthy.

For the poor, Friday, pay day, continued to be the day that gynaecologists cleared the ward of all those who could be sent home in anticipation of the flood of those who did it themselves or went around the corner to the neighbourhood abortionist. Improved treatment of sepsis meant that deaths from illegal abortion dropped before 1968, even in these cases. Death rates in countries like Sweden dropped from still.

The implementation of the ’67 act depended on a medical establishment.

**Abortion: twenty years**

The existence of NAG, born of the women’s movement, changed the terms of the debate.

The FPA conference believed that there would still be a considerable number of illegal abortions under any change in the law that they could envisage. One speaker estimated that only 20,000 of the supposed 100,000 would be carried out in hospitals post-legislation. Chief amongst the reasons for his pessimism was the anti-abortion attitude of doctors and nurses. He also estimated that the chances of dying from an abortion were twice those of dying from childbirth. Another speaker saw concern about safety as the major reason for control of abortion.

It should be remembered that, until fairly recently, abortion liberalisation raised very little concern about the result of popular agriculture — it has been pressured from medical personnel and others concerned about the folk on women’s health who have been in the forefront of change. Although working class women’s organisations took up the issue in this country, they never succeeded in taking it to the broader labour movement. It was not until abortion seaweed rights were under threat that women became involved in the issue in large numbers.

This explains why the act took the form it did. It did not repeal the section of the 1861 offences against the person act, making abortion illegal. It created exceptions to that act, leaving the decision in the hands of one, not two, doctors.

The doctors had no right to give ‘permissions’ for granting an abortion, and those reflected what were seen as the major problems confronting women seeking them. First came health, and abortion was allowed when it would be more dangerous to continue the pregnancy. What happened, in fact, was that with the tremendous increase in legal abortion, and with the development of new techniques, doctors increased their skills to the point where abortion was almost always going to be safer than continuing a pregnancy in term. Abortionists manage both to work in
whose starting point was not always the interests and wishes of women

ears since the '67 act

magnify the dangers of legal abortion, and to argue that this clause allows 'abortion on demand', especially when coupled with the requirement in the act for the doctor to take into account the present and foreseeable conditions of the woman — the well-known so-called 'social clause'.

Other grounds for abortion include the current or foreseeable effect on any other children the mother may have now or in the future (for example, where a child is handicapped and another child would overburden the mother), or where there is a risk of the child being born handicapped. The grounds do not, for example, specify abortion after rape, perhaps because it was assumed that pregnancy in that situation would affect the woman's mental health enough to be covered already; but what of the case of the woman who is strong enough to cope with the rape, but still does not want to carry a rapist's child?

Overall, the act turned out to be totally useless — women who needed abortions were seen as essentially unable to make important decisions in their own interests, proved by the fact that they had managed to 'let themselves' pregnant in the first place. It is perhaps significant that, in practice, the most often cited ground is the mental health of the woman, with 'depression' the single most used diagnosis. We have not moved very far from the pre-1967 days when a woman with an unwanted pregnancy was viewed as mentally unable to cope with her situation. Certainly that is enough to make anyone depressed.

As well as these inherent flaws, the act, as history has shown, was wide open for amendment and attacks. There had been a lot of argument during its passage, for example, about how seriously if the woman had 'wealthy women escaped to more liberal countries for abortions' to be and how high the risk of malformation of the fetus. These sorts of debates were repeated each time an attempt was made to amend the bill. Even more important, there was no provision in the act for health authorities to be obliged to provide facilities.

When the act came into operation on April 27, 1968 the hospitals soon became overwhelmed. Charities, run by those who had worked for years to get the act, and private clinics, run by those with rather less pure motives, soon came into being, the latter especially being a target of media abuse.

Until June 1975, when the first National Abortion Campaign (NAC) demonstration was held, public discussion of abortion was very low key. Even so, a poll conducted by the anti-abortionists as part of their lead-up to the James White bill in February 1975, showed that those supporting abortion on demand (thirteen percent) were greater than those who opposed it entirely (nine percent), with the majority supporting abortion in a wide variety of cases (with handicap the highest, as it still remains, alongside rape).

The existence of NAC, born of the women's movement, changed the terms of the debate, because for the first time the issue was taken squarely into the labour movement. Originally the anti pro-'67 act policy of a woman's right to choose, culminating in the TUC accepting abortion rights in 1977, when they were written into a revised version of its aims for women at work.

The first mass campaign organised by NAC was against a bill proposed by Glasgow Labour MP James White. By the time of the William Benyon bill, in 1976, NAC's arms had gone far beyond the '67 act, as its shortcomings became clear. An umbrella, united front campaign was therefore set up, specifically to fight the Benyon bill, and this name was repeated, with even greater success, with the campaign against Gericke. Recently, NAC has been instrumental in setting up the campaign to fight the latest attack — Alton's bill.

What benefits has the act brought women? Why are we working so hard to defend such a flawed act against this latest attack?

By the twentieth anniversary of the act some three million women will have had an abortion. With few deaths and a low rate of illness, this represents a huge gain for women's health.

Women have borne all gains from being able to plan their lives. The insistence that we have the right of control over our own bodies has had repercussions for those fighting for freedom to express their own autonomy, and for women wanting more control over the process of giving birth.

For young women, the availability of abortion has had most effect. Fewer 'shaggy' marriages or 'seven month babies' now occur. Women no longer feel compelled to marry because they are pregnant. They can now make a choice between abortion, or keeping the baby or adoption.

Legal abortion is not the same thing as sexual equality or freedom for women. But it is a necessary prerequisite. Women do not use abortion as a form of contraception and the increased use of contraception does not prevent abortion, far from it. Once women accept the idea that they can control their fertility if contraception lets them down, they are far less ready to turn to abortion as a back up.

It is this feeling of wanting to maintain control that is behind the massive response from women each time the right to abortion is attacked. What has become taken for granted becomes threatened. Anti-abortionists know that the single question is, will those abortions be safe and legal, or will they be illegal? Women know that legal abortion is worth fighting for.
The massive wave of cutbacks hitting health authorities all over the country are no accident or coincidence. Tory ministers have deliberately engineered a financial crisis designed to undermine confidence in the future of the NHS. JOHN LISTER argues that the labour movement must develop a fighting response.

SINCE JUNE, the same health service which Tory ministers insisted was ‘safe in our hands’ has come under a barrage of cuts. Health authorities have been closing beds, wards, casualty units and clinics, cancelling developments and even cutting nursing staff in a mad scramble to meet cash limits.

As the cash has run out, general managers, politicians and academics have abandoned any pretence of commitment to the old egalitarian ideals of a health service funded from taxation and free to all at time of need.

The financial disasters are the direct outcome of conscious Tory policies since 1979:

- Health authorities’ real spending power has each year been held down despite the growing costs of caring for an increasingly elderly population. The cumulative resources gap 1981-85 has been estimated by an all-party commons committee at £1,325 billion.
- Arbitrary demands for ‘cost improvements’ have cut another 1.5 per cent each year from budgets.
- This year’s electioneering 19 per cent pay award to nurses and subsequent pay devaluation by local authorities have lumbered health authorities with unpaid bills.
- Health authorities have been allocated only 3.75 per cent extra to cover price inflation, yet NHS prices are expected to rise by 7.5 per cent; underfunding this year is likely to total some £300m.

Every one of these policies has been quite deliberate, in particular the decisions not to fund inflation and pay awards were taken earlier this year in the knowledge that it would create a major crisis by autumn — after the election votes were counted.

Thatcher knows that had she campaigned on her real policies — cutbacks and major increases by private medicine into NHS hospitals — she would have been trounced at the polls. So she has been forced to adopt a more devised approach.

The key has been creating a major funding crisis. The common assumption of management and now punishes is that the old NHS is finished; it will never again be possible to fund it adequately from taxation. This defeatist assumption is used to justify dragging privatization plans out of the closet which even Thatcher’s ‘barmy right’ previously hesitated to spell out.

After weeks of the election result, the institute of health service management commissioned a study of the various ways in which private health firms or charges for health care could inject extra cash into our existing hospitals. These managers, together with the bordering academics of the King’s fund who are conducting a similar survey, will now be the first to float a whole succession of controversial ideas, such as insurance schemes; charging patients for admissions, consultations and even GP visits; ‘voucher’ schemes; and all kinds of linkups with private health care firms.

Some health authorities (including Oxford, City & Hackney, and Lewisham & North Southwark) are already carrying out some of these types of schemes for linkups with the private sector — which were first proposed in the Thatcherite Adam Smith
HEALTH

Worse, the wholesale 'rethink' of Labour's policies has so far centred on querying traditional opposition to privatisation, and renouncing any pledge to spend more 'taxpayers' money'.

Kennock's front bench has neither the commitment nor the budge to wage a real and branch defence of this, the most popular public service.

Since June 11 a totally new agenda for the NIS was set by the Thatcherites. For instance, in the absence of an alternative in place to hear and most assertions that demand for health care is somehow 'unsuitable' (John Moore) or 'infinite', whilst the taxpayer's willingness to finance the NIS is 'finite'.

What nonsense! There is a finite - albeit unmeasured - need for acute services. If the waiting lists were cleared tomorrow, few would be back for more of the same treatment the next day. Cheaper preventative medicine might even hope to reduce some demand.

The 'rebellious taxpayer' (always presumed young and healthy) is as much a fiction as the 'infinite demand'. All the 'alternative' systems are more expensive than the NIS, and worse. Labour should be warning that it will organise and lead a real rebellion when the first patients arrive for treatment to face a £1 fee for a GP appointment, or a £100-plus weekly 'hotel charge' for a hospital bed.

Indeed, despite all the media hype, private medicine is still profoundly unpopular. Less than nine per cent of the population are covered by private medical insurance - mostly through company schemes which end at retirement - when health care is most needed. Though Thatcher's strategy to outflank the NHS may press-gang some patients in chronic pain into an Edna Henley-style compromise, it does not mean the public will buy private medicine.

The Tories should not be having things all their own way. Millions of people are still loyal to NIS and its original values: they would support a crusading fight for increased funds and democratic control of the NIS, linked to the legislation and enforcement of a basic minimum provision of health care and a right to treatment.

Arguments in defence of a property-fund- ed NHS lead naturally to the need to nationalise the drug monopolies, and other NIS suppliers, and to develop health services as part of a socialist economy planned on the basis of needs rather than profits.

The problem is that neither the Kennocks nor the health unions are offering such a lead. They appear oblivious to the threat. The ground is being conceded to Thatcherism without even a fight.

Yet local campaigns are emerging once again in response to the new wave of cuts, confirming the loyalty of health workers and many Labour movement activists to the NHS.

Such campaigns are vital for the workers' movement. The flame of loyalty to the old ideals is allowed to flicker and fade, next year's 40th anniversary of the NHS could bring a two-year celebration with the beginnings of a wake.

Institute's 'omega report' back in 1984.

Tory health secretary John Moore will be able to stand back and gauge public reactions before he acts. This is surely the 'no-risk' approach to the most emotionally charged attempt yet at privatisation.

Where is the outcry from the Labour leaders? There was no hint from Brighton that Kennock's team are aware of the pace of scale of the threat.

Letters

Seriously one-sided

The ARTICLE by Dashi Abens and Judith Path (SO 1103) on child abuse was a serious attempt to go behind the headlines and explain the causes of child abuse. But in my view some of its arguments were seriously one-sided, giving the impression that the authors consider doctors and social workers as much a part of the problem as parents who abuse children.

In the limited space available I will just make three basic objections. First, the authors argue that the solution to child abuse is to 'empower children'. They interpret this as meaning that the abused child must have the right to make all the basic decisions — whether to prosecute, whether to go into care, and so on. This is surely utopian. Many children abused are far too young to have any rational comprehension of what a 'prosecution' is, or what it will entail for them — let's remember that many abuse victims are under ten, and many much younger. The inevitable conclusion is that society as a whole has to provide agencies, like social workers, capable of intervening, defending children — and in some cases, together with other agencies, making decisions on their behalf.

Of course, it is quite right for the authors to argue for the maximisation of the autonomy and right to make choices of children, and against the myth of the omnipotence of all-knowing 'experts'. But that autonomy cannot for very young children be absolute, since very young children do not possess the capacity for total autonomy; they remain dependent, to a greater or lesser extent, on adults.

So let us by all means argue about the goals and objectives of doctors and social workers, but let us not pretend they can be dispensed with in the name of 'empowering children'.

My second objection is the account which the authors give of the causes of child abuse. They argue that child abuse is about the assertion of power by a father figure, and not about sexual desire; nor is it caused by poverty, bad housing, etc. Again, I think their argument is one-sided. Of course it is right to reject SWP-type arguments which put rape and sexual abuse of children simply down to poverty and 'capitalism'.

But can we say that poverty and the demoralisation which very poor families suffer has nothing to do with child abuse? Equally, the 'abuse of power by a father figure' argument is not at all countered by saying that child sexual abuse has got a lot to do with sexual desire, and some of the powerlessness this is manipulated in a society like ours, in which there is a subconscious obsession with 'Lolita'-type figures in popular culture going back many years.
Economism, functionalism and covert liberalism

Dani Abreham’s and Judith Hall’s article avoids the errors of most of the left press in that it confronts the problems of analysing the family in terms of both capitalism and patriarchy, which is a pre-condition of an adequate Marxist explanation.

Unfortunately, it suffers from a degree of economism and functionalism on the one hand and a covert liberalism on the other. It also tends to slide into an essentialist and therefore anti-materialist view of the family, and importantly, of sexuality.

It is certainly the case that the family is ‘functional’ for capital in ways pointed out by Dani and Judith. Such an analysis, however, ignores the complexities of power relations within families and the diversity of family forms within which male dominance has historically been exercised.

We are told ‘child sexual abuse has existed as long as the family has existed’. What is meant by this? It sounds as if the family has been in existence in some essential form since the beginning of time. Family forms, as well as the position of children within households and within society at large, have been subject to considerable historical change. Nonetheless, historical evidence demonstrates that child sexual abuse did exist prior to the rise of modern bourgeois family forms and the emergence of the modern institution of childhood. Of course, patriarchy in our society cannot be understood without reference to class (and vice versa), but Dani and Judith’s premise reduces patriarchy to a side-effect of class which fails to account either for its pervasiveness and persistence, or for the changes it has undergone.

It is ironic that Dani and Judith take a moralistic and radical feminism when their perspective so clearly echoes that of Shulamith Firestone in The Dialectics of Sex. Firestone in effect argues for a formally equal status for children, also implied in Dani and Judith’s legalistic recognition of ‘empowerment’. But children, especially abused children, are singularly ill-equipped to step into the role of sovereign, individual citizens exercising their legally guaranteed ‘human rights’.

Of course children should be encouraged to make choices and decisions, but we must appreciate that a statutory right to do so would fail to counter their docile, powerless status. How can a child who has been subject to adult authority all her life, who has deferred to adults, had decisions made for her, be expected to make her life in her own hands at a moment of crisis? Survivors of all forms of child abuse are likely to be in a state of confusion and guilt and self-hate, especially in the case of sexual abuse, where the perpetrator will often have involved emotional ties as one way of quelling the child’s resistance. Other fears engendered in survivors include those of breaking up the family and hurting the mother. All these feelings cannot be laid at the door of incompetence or hostile reactions to ‘obscurers’ by the state, nor can they be blown away by a quick psychological repair job. Lacking them is the work of years.

Moreover, any empowerment of children will always be partial. Of course childhood is socially constructed, but this does not mean there is an inherent difference between the capacities of a five-year-old and a fifteen-year-old to understand the world and make decisions accordingly.

On a wider scale, Dani and Judith say ‘empowering children would destroy the power structure of the nuclear family in capitalism’. It is not that simple. Are we to believe that, with the ‘empowerment’ of children as the entire material basis for the family and the subordination of women and children will crumble?

A further problem with the article is that it fails to deal with the issue of masculinity and male sexuality. Recognition that sexual abuse, rape, is an expression of power does not mean that it has nothing to do with sexuality. We need to ask why sex in particular should be used as weapon of domination. Failure to raise such questions implies that it is taken for granted that this is how men naturally behave sexually given the power to do so.

At another level, reactions to child sexual abuse are shaped by a historically specific configuration of attitudes to childhood and sexuality, so that the sexual abuse of children is treated qualitatively different from other forms of strict. The disbelief surrounding it is greatest. Some of the guilt survivors feel may be due to the belief that they have transgressed against the social sexual expectations of innocence in children. The secrecy and shame surrounding sexual abuse can make possible the rise of silence imposed on the claim.

It is true that the state and the ‘women’s professionals’ have not on the whole helped the position of the victims of sexual abuse. But a different analysis leads to different demands. In our view, it is in cases of suspected sexual abuse, perpetrators could be removed from the home as easily as children can be now. It would be much more significant if staff of power towards children than putting the burden of proof onto the man if a prosecution is made worthwhile in itself. The necessary therapy for victims should emphasize work with groups of abused children—surely the first step in any growth of a consciousness of collective resistance.

Finally, the power of men in families will not be broken by granting children an empty autonomy, but by the establishment by adults of democratic, collective responsibility for the care and protection of which children require, and be becoming the association in men between power and sex, and constructing new forms of male sexuality.

Stevi Jackson & Julian Wilson
The Russian Revolution

Seventy years after the October revolution, the Soviet Union and the international class struggle have evolved very differently from the political programme of Bolshevism and the hopes of Lenin and Trotsky.

The official communist parties may still celebrate the anniversary of the October revolution, but they have turned their backs on every one of the political and theoretical strengths which made that revolution possible.

It falls to trotskystas, today's consistent revolutionary marxists, to uphold the principles and methods of Bolshevism.

To celebrate our revolution, JOHN LISTER looks at some of the key events and political issues that laid the basis for the great October victory.
The Bolshevik Party

The 1917 October revolution which brought the working class to power in Russia 7 years ago was the product of events and struggles beginning for earlier than 1917 and reaching far wider than Russia itself.

Indispensible to the eventual overthrow of capitalism and consolidation of working class power was the role of the Bolshevik Party, a unique development translating the economic and political analysis of Marxism into a practical programme and leadership for the working class.

Bolshevism emerged from the sharp political battles within the framework of social democracy, beginning at the turn of the century.

The Second International, just eleven years old, still officially professed adherence to the theories and policies of Marxism. However its larger parties—notably in France and Germany—had developed their own bureaucratic apparatuses, and adapted themselves to purely parliamentary and trade union forms of work, seeking only reforms within capitalism.

Emerging comparatively late (1903) and weak (only eight people at its founding congress), which was raided by police in a climate of brutal repression, the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) developed under very different political pressures.

Opportunism certainly had its impact but Russian opportunities were not so easily dazzled by parliamentary illusions. Given the small size of the industrial working class, the backwardness of the country, and the absence of elementary democratic rights, they tended rather to overlook the working class as a revolutionary force, and instead looked to “liberal” elements of the capitalist class to lead the fight for social democracy against the Tsar.

As the working class began to develop as a significant force in Russia from 1870 onwards, the most radical political currents on the scene were the Narodniki, who based themselves on the mass peasantry (60% of the population). Though early Narodniki had fought courageously against tsarism, they too, later looked increasingly towards the liberal bourgeoisie to fight for democracy.

Against this trend, Plekhanov in 1889 boldly proclaimed at the First Congress of the Second International that: “The Russian revolution will either triumph as a revolution of the working class, or it will not triumph at all.”

By the mid-1890s a massive strike movement involving over half a million workers gave a big boost to the organisation of workers’ circles. One of these, the St Petersburg Notebooks for the Liberation of the Working Class, involved Lenin.

Plekhanov, as well as later Stalin, the author in 1898 of the manifesto from the First Russian Social Democratic congress, and many other early figures of the movement later defected to the camp of the liberal bourgeoisie. Lenin, however, not only remained committed to building a working class leadership, and his party: he also developed and strengthened the programme of the working class, and the theoretical foundation for this in polemics against the reformists current gaining sway within the Second International.

Perhaps the most decisive of these polemics was contained in the pamphlet What Is To Be Done? (1902), which was a frontal attack on the opportunism of the leadership of the large French parties, and the theoretical criteria by Edward Bernstein in Germany.

The terms of the argument appear strikingly familiar to us in today’s distorted labour movement. The officially “mature” Bernstein and others used the slogans “freedom of criticism” as their equivalent of today’s “new realism” and “policy review” – to cover their shift to the right. Lenin summed up:

“What this new trend, which adopts a “critical” attitude towards “bourgeois dogmatism”, represents has with sufficient precision been stated by Bernstein, and demonstrated by [Friedrich] Mielck. [It] was denied that there is new counter-distinction in principle be-
between liberalism and socialism. The theory of the class struggle was rejected on the grounds that it could not be applied to a strictly democratic society governed according to the will of the majority, etc.

"Thus the demand for a resolute turn from revolutionary socialism to bourgeois reformism was accompanied by a no less resolute turn towards a propaganda instead of direct action, of the fundamental ideas of Marxism.

Denouncing Millerand for joining a French bourgeois cabinet which connived in the repression of workers' struggles, Lenin concludes:

"Freedom of criticism" means freedom for an opportunistic trend in social democracy, the freedom to convert social democracy into a democratic party of reform, and freedom to introduce bourgeois elements into socialism.

"Lenin came into conflict with the "economist" wing of the movement, which was preoccupied with trade union struggles and did not build a vanguard party."
Russia, building huge, state-of-the-art production plants from modern industrial economies to the most backward peasant economy.

The new revolution of Russian workers was given no decades or centuries of gradual industrialization, no democratic space to organize, a sprawling, bureaucratic and trade union to control them with illusions in class collaboration, Savage, capitalists, and a lack of rapid transition from village to factory confronted workers with a choice of passivity or mass struggle.

The mid-1906 strike wave was followed by massive strikes in 1905 in the city of St. Petersburg, led by trotskists. Political meetings attracted crowds of forty thousand, and showed the potential for revolutionary development.

By 1905 more sections of the working class had been radicalized, linking their economic demands with grievances to the political demands for an elected constituent assembly, the removal of the Tsar and a provisional government.

In January 1905 a political strike by one hundred thousand St. Petersburg workers brought the city to a standstill. On 29 January, a mass demonstration of workers dressed in their Sunday best and headed by a priest marched to the Winter Palace to present a petition to the Tsar. Decrees were brutally gunned down by riot police officers but with the workers persisted many illusions of peaceful reforms to the autocratic regime. Barricades were thrown up in the working class districts, and street fighting broke out.

When the first wave of fighting subsided, towards the end of February 1905, the liberal capitalists and academics held conferences and banquets to publicly press tsarist demand for the Tsar to establish a constituent assembly. They were ignored.

While the Mensheviks were cautious not to upset the capitalists, convinced that the democratic revolution in Russia would be led by those with significant influence, Lenin, and the Bolsheviks took a very different, more aggressive line.

From exile in Geneva. Lenin insisted that the bourgeois could not be begetted with the task of the democratic revolution — and that only a revolutionary provisional government brought to power by the workers and peasants could establish a genuine democratic and functioning constituent assembly. He expressed this in his call for the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.'

In Lenin's view, this would still be a bourgeois government, but the workers and peasants would be the driving force of the revolution. The workers would need to continue their independent struggles and build their own class leadership after the establishment of the 'democratic dictatorship.' The Mensheviks, in contrast, looked forward to collaboration with the capitalist class in a prolonged period of capitalist development.

Trotsky, however, returning from exile, was the first to translate Plekhanov's 1889 insistence on the working-class character of the revolution, and Karl Marx's post-marxism of the 1848 revolutions, into a direct call to working class power in Russia.

He argued for the rejection of dogmatic notions of 'stages of development,' and for a recognition of the international character and uneven development of capitalism, as well as the importance of the Russian bourgeoisie and the aspirations of the peasantry.

Trotsky argued that the only consistent revolutionary class was the proletariat, which had to take the leadership of the democratic revolution, and to carry it through as part of the final, socialist revolution — establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

For this analysis, Trotsky revised Marx's terminology of the 'permanent' (uninterrupted, unbroken) revolution. It was to be the key to the October events of 1917.

These events were far from abstract exchanges. The relative calm of the summer of 1905 broke down with a new wave of strikes in October. Type-setters in St. Petersburg came out demanding wage increases, triggering stoppages in other industries. Political demands for constitutional rights were added. On 7 October Moscow Russian railway workers joined the struggle and within a week the rail network was paralyzed. Postal and telegraph workers walked out, schools and universities closed and commerce collapsed.

As Cossack troops were sent out to repress the strikers, barricades went up and workers rioted in gun shops.

Most significantly, the events saw on 13 October the birth of the St. Petersburg Soviet from the printers' strike committee. Though it began with delegates from only one district, soon 500 delegates from across the country were attending, and an executive including three Bolsheviks, three Mensheviks and three Social Revolutionaries was elected. The Soviet launched a newspaper Tretia (Tretia) on 17 October.

At this point the Tsar, in a change of tactics, picked a new prime minister and issued a manifest granting a constitution, civil liberties, and universal suffrage.

While the liberals took all this at face value and celebrated, Trotsky, speaking at a huge rally at the university, hailed the developments as the first great victory of the working class, but warned: 'Do not have the enthusiasm of victory; it is not yet complete. Does the provisional government mean as much as pure gold? Are the gates of our prison open?"

'The Tsar's manifesto is not, and only a song of paper. Today it has been given to us, and tomorrow it will be taken away and torn into pieces; I am now tearing it to pieces, this paper-liberty, before your very eyes.'

Though the general strike was called off, the Soviet continued to organize, raising each major point. In turn to force them to print Rosbom, edited by Trotsky. The Soviets threw down the challenge to the East and on the censorship issue, deciding that:

'Only those newspapers may be published whose editors ignore the censorship committee, refuse to submit their issues for censorship, and generally act in the same way as the Soviet in publishing its own newspaper. Newspapers which fail to comply, the present resolution will be confiscated from their sellers.'

Trotsky arrives at the Finland station, Petrograd, 4 May 1917

S O C I A L I S T  O U T L O O K  10.4 November/December 1987
In this way the soviets had gone far beyond their original task of strike coordination. It was now championing political demands and voicing workers' control in defiance of the central state apparatus. The Tsar could not even find a commercial printer for his manifesto. There was a dual power in the land: the power of the soviets challenging the authority of the state machinery.

Two weeks after the general strike ended, another massive general strike showed the power of the movement. The demands were for an end to the Tsar's imposition of martial law on Poland; and against the court martial and execution of munition workers at the Krinitsa fortress. A five-day strike brought total victory for the workers and the two issues which not even the most blinkered 'emancipists' could have claimed were trade union concerns.

This politicisation of the working class alarmed the liberal bourgeoisie as much as the Tsar. They began to swing back behind the government, creating conditions for a new state crackdown.

"In January 1905 a political strike of one hundred thousand workers brought St. Petersburg to a standstill!"

At the end of November the president of the Petrograd soviet was arrested. Trotsky was exiled to his estate. On 25 December he and the other officers of the soviet were also arrested. Uprisings led by the Moscow soviet and by St. Petersburg were left isolated from peasant support and most of the army; they were ruthlessly repressed.

The experiences and political lessons of 1905 proved a vital source of strength to sustain and turn the revolutionary movement as well as a telling confirmation of Trotsky's warning of the limitations of "paper-liberty".

In the dark years of reaction from 1905-1910 the Bolsheviks and the workers' movement had to battle against the defeatists and opportunist pressures until a fresh revival of the class struggle began, as described by Nadezhda Krupskaya, a leading Bolshevik and companion of Lenin:

"Every month saw an increase in the strength of the labour movement. But this movement was now growing under conditions entirely different from those in which the labour movement grew before 1905. It was developing on the basis of the experiences of the 1905 revolution."

The revival by 1912 enabled the Bolsheviks to launch Povest' as a daily newspaper, summoned by, and leading sections of the working class.

WITH THE outbreak of world war in August 1914, the opportunities and reformist evolutions of the majority of social democratic parties gave way to the collapse of internationalism in the Second International.

Lenin in September cut through the waffle and spelled out the harsh reality of the war:

"The struggle for markets and for plundering foreign lands: the eagerness to head off the revolutionary movement of the proletarian and to crush democracy within each country... the urge to deceive, divide and crush the proletarians of all countries, to incite the wage slaves of one nation against the wage slaves of another nation for the profits of the bourgeoisie - that is the real content and meaning of the war."

Under these conditions, where capitalised proclamations and national boundaries served only to better rather than advance the development of the productive force, and war-time imperialists fought to reduce the markets and colonies, the politics of reformist social democracy, wedded to capitalism, could only play the most reactionary role, reinforcing chauvinism and lining up workers against worker in the service of the bosses.

The Bolshevik line on the war flowed from this internationalist, class analysis. The opportunity of the war should be exploited by the workers - to turn their guns on their own ruling class, and turn the imperialist war into a civil war.

The war was both a disgrace and a catastrophe by any terms. Out of fifteen million Russians mobilised, two and a half million were killed, and another three million taken prisoner or wounded.

Most of those conscripted for the army were peasants, and the wartime crisis coincided with a new twist in the problem of the agrarian revolution in Russia.

A wave of peasant rebellion took shape alongside the encroachment of the numerically small but economically powerful working class. While Russian capitalism sought to exploit the war as a chance to make fabulous profits, the workers quickly rejected the patriotic propaganda and had begun to fight back by the summer of 1915.

The autumn of 1915 saw growing agitation and mobilisation in factories, increasing Bolshevik propaganda; political strikes and demonstrations, frustration between workers and soldiers, and revolutionary activity among the sailors of the Baltic fleet.

Suffering against the Tsar developed at all levels. The "Trunk and file nobility", the grand duke, showed their irritation in December by ordering the murder of Rasputin, the mystic who had exercised a hypnotic power over all aspects of royal policy.

By January 1917, 375,000 workers were out on political strikes, and the onset of bread rationing provoked mass resistance on February 19. On 21 February workers in the giant Potelov works in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) were locked out after demanding a fifty per cent pay increase.

But it was women textile workers, defying Bolshevik advice and walking out on strike on International Woman's Day (23 February) who triggered the events of the February Revolution. Jolted by the vast bread queues who had been told there would be no bread that day, they marched on the Petrograd municipal duma (assembly) demanding food. Next day 240,000 workers were on strike, with
The women workers in their actions far ahead of most revolutionary groups also played a key role in winning over and breaking the resistance of the workers. On 27 February the first company of troops mutinied and shot their commander. They swiftly approached other barracks, and began to disarm police, distribute arms and free jailed political prisoners. The same day saw the Petrograd soviet once again, setting up at the Tauride palace, where the duma sat.

The soviet leadership was at this stage firmly in the hands of the Mensheviks and (peasant-based) Social Revolutionaries; but the leadership of the new daily paper Izvestia went to a Bolshevik, Bench-Breuxvich, capable to mobilise forces to contain the Petrograd rebellion, and begged by his generals to abdicate, the Tauride did so on 2 March. The Mensheviks and the capitalist Kadet party were still both terrified of a revival of terrorism — and even more fearful of the awakening working class. Though the workers and soldiers called upon them to take power, they would not do so.

The workers and soldiers controlled Petrograd, holding the state bank, the treasury, the mint and the post office; only the soviet was recognised as the authority. Yet the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary leaders of the soviet promptly dropped all of the demands for which workers had been fighting — the eight-hour day, land reform, peace and the republic. Instead they merely sought freedom for political parties and an elected constituent assembly some time in the future.

It was on this false basis that the leaders of the soviet gave their endorsement to a bourgeois provisional government which included the Social Revolutionary Kerensky as minister of justice. The contradictions were glaring: the soviet’s main base was the peasantry, yet they made a coalition with the landlords, and while the Mensheviks rested on workers’ votes, they lined up with the employers, rather than take power in their hands.

Only fifteen out of nine hundred votes at the soviet were cast against the provisional government, but as Trotsky pointed out, “In voting for such leaders, the proletariat and peasantry erected a partition wall between themselves and their own aims. They could not move forward at all without knocking into this wall erected by themselves, knocking it over.”

This began quickly, when military soldiers marched to the soviet demanding support for political rights — and the right of army units to elect their own officers. Under pressure, and against their own wishes, the soviet leaders were obliged to agree and endorse this in general order no. 1, which also asserted Soviet control over all troop movements in Petrograd. It was published in Izvestia and distributed far and wide.

The workers were not to challenge the line of the provisional government, refusing to return to work without pay increases and an eight-hour day. They stayed on strike another three days after the soviet had urged them to return to work, forcing the soviet to negotiate with the employers on their behalf, and winning their demands.

The Bolshevik forces, however, were seriously disconcerted. Some veered towards a defeatedist position on the war; others appeared on the ultra-left, calling for an immediate new uprising. Matters worsened with the return from exile of Stalin and Kamenev, who immediately took over control of the Mensheviks. The paper promptly dropped the line of opposition to the war. Instead it appealed for the provisional government to “make an attempt to induce the warring countries to open immediate negotiations,” promising that “until then every man remains at his fighting post.”

Lenin’s telegram response on March 6 was to insist: “Our tactics: absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; support Kerensky especially; immediate elections to the Petrograd duma; no rapprochement with other parties.”

This was ignored: the Bolshevik line became under Stalin less and less distinguishable from the Menshevik line, in many areas the two parties began operating as one.

When Lenin returned on April 3, his first words were of the inimicability of revolutionary socialism. He went on to fight for this line on the central committee, spelling out his views in the pamphlet, the April Theses.

The democratic gains of February could only be defended and completed by socialist revolution with the working class taking the lead in resolving the question of dual power by establishing its own dictatorship, he argued. “The rising clamour for an end to the war could only be satisfied if the capitalists and their state were overthrown.”

It is impossible to make a democratic peace, one that is not imposed by force, without destroying the power of capitalism… In order to bring a permanent end to the war it is essential that the proletariat take power.”

 shortly after a single leading Bolshevik supported Lenin on any of these questions, though his views echoed the earlier analysis of Trotsky in 1905. Only the day before, with Stalin and Kamenev, an all-Russian Bolshevik congress had endorsed a quite opposite line.

The party had to be won over at the eleventh hour. This is no historical exception. Trotsky later explained: “The fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party. On the basis of our experience — being only one year, from February 1917 to February 1918 — and on the basis of the supplementary experience in Finland, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, and Germany, we can post as almost an undeniable law that a party crisis is inevitable in the transition from the preparatory revolutionary activity to the immediate struggle for power.”

Lenin was able however to rely on support from rank and file Bolshevik workers and soldiers in his campaign to reverse the leadership’s policy. By the time of the next all-Russian conference on 24 April, the majority of 150 delegates representing 70,000 members had swung behind most of his positions.

The successful revolution opposed union with the Mensheviks and denounced the provisional government as a government of landlords and capitalists: “it called for working class power in the belligerent countries as the way to end the war, and the Bolsheviks began to raise the slogan of ‘all power to the soviets’.”

Lenin however lost on his demand for a break from the public Zimmerwald grouping of social democrats, and his call for the party to change its name to the Communist Party.

Sporadically anti-war demonstrations in Petrograd in April exposed again the precarious balance of dual power between the soviet and the state. Military commander General Kornilov wanted to mobilise armoured vehicles against the workers; but the soviet asserted its authority under general order no. 1 to stop this.

The provisional government was destabilised — and restructured with
The revolutionary line of the compromisers was exposed to ridicule on 24 June, when the Bolsheviks intervened in a demonstration called by the congress of soviets — and the vast majority of banners carried the bold Bolshevik demand: "Down with the ten capitalist ministers of war! All power to the soviets!"

But the forces of counter-revolution were also attempting to mobilise. Military factories were closed down; union members were locked out; divisions at the front were disbanded for disobedience; and top army officers, protected by the capitalist Kadets and funded by bankers and alien embassies, began to prepare for a crackdown.

On 2 July, four Kadet ministers pulled out of the provisional government claiming that the 'socialist' ministers would not act against the workers. The workers and soldiers for their part, were pushing forward — but at an uneven pace. The end of June and beginning of July saw the Bolsheviks struggling in vain to restrain the spontaneous military uprising of the Petrograd garrison, which had developed far faster than workers in the provinces or the troops at the front. Bolshevik leaders feared that a premature confrontation could give the government an excuse for a crackdown in which Petrograd could be isolated.

However, when the workers of the Pavlov Works and soldiers of the machine gun regiment voted solidly for an armed demonstration on 3 July, the Bolsheviks had no choice but to lend support. The march went to the provisional government and the executive of the soviet, both of which sat in the Tauride palace. Their demands were for the removal of the ten capitalist ministers, all power to the soviets, a halt to the offensive, confiscation of bourgeois newspapers and printing plants, nationalisation of the land and state control of production. While the Mensheviks and SRs prevantrated, hoping that loyal troops would return from the front to rescue them from the workers, the Kronstadt soldiers and sailors just down the river decided to march to Petrograd the next day. "Loyal" army units called in by the frightened ministers turned out to be already marching to Petrograd — to join the demonstration!

When the SR minister of agriculture, Chernov, came up to the government headquarters and declared 'good riddance' to the Kadets who had left the government, he was greeted with anger: "Take the power (...) when they give it to you!" yelled one angry worker.

According to the French ambassador, the government actually required that afternoon, only to be forestalled by the soviet executive, who refused to accept their resignation, and gave them a vote of confidence:

'Overnight, the war was a catastrophe — out of fifteen million Russians mobilised, two and a half million were killed'.

The state, meanwhile, still had reserves of repressive strength, and the compromisers were still determined to prevent revolution. The demonstration came to an end, on Bolshevik advice: but early next morning, the first reliable troops, hand-picked from the most reactionary guard battalions, arrived in Petrograd and began arresting males of the revolution which was possible in April, May, June and up to July 29, i.e. up to the time when actual power passed into the hands of the military dictatorship.

"This slogan is no longer correct, for it does not take into account that power has changed hands and that the revolution has in fact been completely betrayed by the SRs and the Mensheviks."

Let us gather forces, re-establish them, and proceed to prepare for the armed uprising, if the course of the crisis permits it on a really mass, country-wide scale... The aim of the insurrection can only be to transfer power to the proletariat, supported by the poor peasants, with a view to putting our programme into effect."

A sign that despite the witch-hunt, the Bolsheviks were gathering forces, came early in August when 400,000 Moscow workers responded to Bolshevik calls for a strike on the day of a 'state conference' convened by Kerensky to consolidate his coalition with the capitalists.

But it was the attempts of the extreme right of the soviet to topple Kerensky that were the real cause of the soviet's internal divisions.

Kerensky's fellow ministers resigned en bloc on August 26, leaving him confronted with Kornilov, who demanded that the provisional government surrender all power to him as commander in chief. The workers, however, moved swiftly to prepare their own armed self-defense.

This was the period of rapid growth of the military forces of the Red Guards, a rival to the armed forces of the capitalist state — and trained by military officers. The Red Guards announced that they could mobilise 40,000 workers with rifles to combat Kornilov's threats.

Meanwhile, rail and telegraph workers developed their own style of workers' control, brilliantly sabotaging Kornilov's troop movements and communications. Workers fraternised with troops from across Kerensky's most feared divisions — who then began arresting their officers, and holding mass meetings.

The episode ended when Kerensky 'arrested' Kornilov to save him from a revolutionary firing squad. These events had brought the Bolsheviks back to the forefront; they had encouraged new layers of workers to arm and organise themselves, and they had totally discredited the compromising leaders of the provisional government, who were seen as having opened the door for Kornilov...
ROCKED by the failed Kornilov revolt, Kerensky's provisional government had collapsed. Worse from his point of view was the new instance from his own social revolutionary party that he should not lead another government containing capitalist ministers. He was reduced to a directorate of five. Meantime from his hiding place, Lenin wrote two letters to the Bolshevik central committee urging the leadership to prepare the seizure of power. While the objective conditions had not existed in July, the situation had changed in September:

'The point is to make the task clear to the party. The present task must be an armed uprising in Petrograd and Moscow (with its region), the seizing of power and overthrow of the government.'

The vanguard of the working class had now swung behind the Bolsheviks, as demonstrated by their dominant positions in the main soviets (they had won control in Petrograd, Moscow, Kursk, Odessa, and other key cities); a revolutionary upsurge was developing throughout the countryside; the once united 'allies' were now wavering between a war to the victorious finish and a separate peace aimed against Russia; while the petty bourgeoisie, under the pressure of the masses, had begun to move politically. The Mensheviks and SRs, however, still fought tooth and nail to hold back developments. Through their hold on the executive of the all-Russia soviet, they convened a democratic conference, which in turn voted to set up a new talking shop, known as the pre-parliament. Meanwhile, fearing that the Bolsheviks could win a clear majority, they postponed the already overdue recall all Russian congress of soviets.

Lenin argued for a boycott of the pre-parliament, winning the support of Trotsky, who had now been released from jail and reelected president of the Petrograd soviet — this time as a Bolshevik. He led the Bolshevik faction out of the pre-parliament amidst cries from the Mensheviks about 'German gold'. But the Kadet Milliukov commented: 'They (the Bolsheviks) spoke and acted like people feeling a power behind them, knowing that the narrow belonged to them.'

The Baltic fleet in the meantime sent a telegram to the central executive committee calling for the removal of Kerensky, and began holding up the movement of government freight.

As one state of affairs was also developing within the army, where factionism began again after the witch-hunting of July, and more and more of the most hated officers were arrested or murdered.

The Bolsheviks stepped up their agitation throughout the country; the question was increasingly starkly put — which class was to rule?

Workers in the armaments factories established a special centre to study methods of transition from munitions manufacture to peaceful production. The Moscow conference of factory and shop committees declared that in future all strikes should be settled by a decree of the local soviet, thus establishing soviet power over the capitalists.

The soldiers in return campaigned for the workers to be armed. The compromisers in the government — Kerensky and his associates — who had wittingly helped this process along, when they suggested to the soviet a resolution for setting up a 'committee of revolutionary defence', supposed to protect the capital against the advancing German army.

To their surprise the Bolsheviks accepted the proposal, and they had often discussed setting up an armed organization of the soviet to lead the insurrection — now the Mensheviks themselves had proposed to set up a body that could do just that!

The central committee met on October 19, with Lenin secretly in attendance. He moved a resolution calling on party organizations to turn their attention to the practical question involved in the armed insurrection. Unity, Kamenev and Zinoviev voted against. Lenin had until this point been isolated on the question of insurrection, now the leadership had swung in his direction.

The same meeting set October 25 as the target date for the insurrection, but this proved impossible. On October 20, at Lenin's insistence, the central committee met again. Kamenev and Zinoviev again opposed fixing any date for the insurrection, while Kerensky argued that it was not too soon to set a date because events were still developing favourably and 'the thing is already begun'.

Lenin pressed a new resolution calling all organizations and all workers and soldiers to an all-sided and most vigorous preparation of armed insurrection. It was adopted, to the two of Kamenev and Zinoviev, with three abstentions.

The next day, the soviet executive committee — appalled by the massive victory of the Bolsheviks in the Petrograd soviet (the Bolshevik list of candidates won 415 votes, to the left 586-192 and a mere 44 for the Mensheviks) — postponed the opening of the congress of soviets, to October 25.

These five extra days were to be usefully employed by the Bolsheviks in preparing the insurrection, but on the same day, Kamenev and Zinoviev broke ranks and denounced the Bolshevik plans in the non-party press. Though Lenin branded them strike-breakers of the revolution and demanded their expulsion, the central committee would not agree.

Meanwhile the committee of revolutionary defence (now renamed the military revolutionary committee) had gone about its work with a will, setting up departments of defense, supplies, communications and intelligence. One regiment after another

Nadezhda Krupskaya, organizer of contacts between the exiles and the Russian underground

Day by day the rival government of the soviet grew, strengthened as capitalists began themselves to sabotage the war effort in an attempt to discredit the revolution — only to be usurped by factory committees which stepped in and took control of production.

The enormous growth of support for the Bolsheviks, and their success in forcing the executive committee to convene the congress of soviets for October 20 made Lenin even more impatient to begin the insurrection.

Events leap forward when the government issued an order for the reorganisation of the Petrograd garrison units in preparation for a new offensive.

The response was immediate. Ignoring the capitalist accusations that the Petrograd soldiers had grown fat in idleness, the workers insisted that the garrison remain intact.

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A poster by Victor Doni depicts Trotsky as Saint George slaying the counterrevolutionary dragon.

Stalin—when he and Kamenets returned from exile and took over control of Pravda its line became less and less distinguishable from that of the Mensheviks.

The satirical magazine Red Pepper introduces its readers to the Soviet United football team.
A patrol of Red Guards from the Putlovo factory, Petrograd 1917

was placing itself under the committee’s command, refusing to go to the front unless ordered by the soviet.

The prolonged period of dual power was giving way to the power of the soviets. The provisional government found itself more and more isolated, with ever fewer dependable troops.

On October 21, the Petrograd garrison conference called on the all-Russian Congress of Soviets to take the power in its hands, and guarantee to the people peace, land and bread.

The next day the Petrograd soviet had called a peaceful review of its forces. It was a huge success with every single unit being held. With workers and soldiers demanding down with Kerensky! Down with war! All power to the soviets!

The high command asked for talks with the military revolutionary committee, the committee agreed — in order to reorganize the army’s headquarters, but warned that the committees as representatives of the soviet, are inviolable.

Trotsky pointed out that in this period the military revolutionary committee was “crowing out the government with the pressure of the masses, with the weight of the garrison. It is taking all that it can without a battle. It is advancing its positions without firing.”

It was the provisional government itself which gave the pretext for launching the insurrection, when it dispatched troops to close down the Bolsheviks’ printing press and shut off the phone to the Smolny institute, which was headquarters to the soviet as well as the Bolshevik party. The military revolutionary committee responded by fortifying Smolny with machine guns, and armoured vehicles. The insurrectionary forces were now ready for action.

In the early hours of October 25, Red Guard detachments occupied all of the strategic points in the capital, with hardly a shot fired. At seven am the telephone exchange fell, and communications to the Winter palace, where the provisional government was still in permanent session, were cut off.

When the second congress of the all-Russian soviet of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ deputies eventually opened at 10.40pm everything had gone according to plan except that the Winter palace had still not fallen — and the Mensheviks and SRs raised against the Bolsheviks for attacking it.

However, the elections for the presiding council saw the Bolshevik’s fourteen seats to the SR’s seven, the Mensheviks three and the Internationalists only one. Seeing that they were a minority, the compromisers denounced the Bolsheviks and marched angrily out of the soviet.

John Reed, the American journalist sympathetic to the Bolsheviks describes Trotsky:

“I was standing up with a pale, cruel face, letting out his rich voice in cool contempt. ‘All these so-called socialist compromisers, these frightened Mensheviks, social revolutionaries. Bust — let them go! They are just so much refuse which will be swept away into the garbage heap of history.’”

Papers appeared on the streets carrying the proclamation of the military revolutionary committee and the Petrograd soviet:

‘To the citizens of Russia!
The provisional government is deposed. The state power has passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies, the military revolutionary committee, which stands at the head of the Petrograd proletariat and bourgeois.

The cause for which the people were fighting, immediate approval of a democratic peace, abolition of landed property rights over the land, labour control over production, creation of a soviet government — that cause is securely achieved. Long live the revolution of workers, soldiers and peasants!’

By the early hours of October 26, the Winter palace had surrendered and the ministers of the provisional government were placed under arrest. Kerensky was not among them, he had fled in order to be among loyal troops to ensure the government’s safety.

At 8.40 in the evening of October 26, the proclamations of the congress of soviets, headed by Lenin, came in to the congress, greeted by thunderous applause. Lenin mounted the rostrum, and when the cheering had died down he announced:

“We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order!”

He went on to outline the soviet terms for peace — no annexations, no indemnities, and the right of peoples to self-determination.

He then read out the proclamation to the peoples and governments of all the belligerent nations which was adopted unanimously by the congress.

Next Lenin read the decree on land. All private ownership of land was abolished. All landowners’ estates were transferred to land committees and peasants’ soviets. The land decree was debated and passed with only one vote against the working class. The soviet had honored its commitment to the agrarian revolution, and the peasant delegates were overjoyed.

The Bolsheviks made clear they were prepared to share power with any socialist party which was prepared to accept the legitimate transfer of the power to the soviets. Only the left SRs were prepared to join the government on this basis — and the Bolsheviks welcomed them into the council of people’s committees.

The capital had been conquered. Now it had to be defended against whatever forces Kerensky could muster, and the rest of Russia had to be won over to the revolution. This was the daunting task that confronted the Bolsheviks on the third day of the revolution.

But whatever material and political problems later beset the revolution, the conquest of power by the armed working class and its revolutionary party stood as a turning point in history. This was, and 20 years later still is, our revolution.”

Thanks to David King for the use of photographs from his collection.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK no 4 November/December 1947
There was a time when the bourgeois press would contrast the gerontocracy in the Soviet Union with the apparent dynamism of the West. Now it looks a lot like the other way round. But what is really going on behind the rhetoric of glasnost and perestroika? In a challenging article OLIVER MACDONALD asks ‘should socialists support Gorbachevism against Brezhnevism?’

Gorbachev and the left

Mikhail Gorbachev — should socialists support ‘Gorbachevism’ against ‘Brezhnevism’?

Solidarnosc — ‘we cannot expect the rise of a similar movement within the Soviet working class in the present situation’

The left is still very far from achieving a consensus on the Gorbachev leadership. It would be easy and half-true to say that this is because of deep differences of analysis and programme in relation to the Soviet Union. Yet this cannot be the whole story; tendencies which share the same programmatic tradition on the USSR differ sharply on their appreciation of what is happening there. Indeed, there are differences within this or that tendency on this question.

Such differences must at least partly derive from genuine problems in our thinking about the USSR. The events unfolding there genuinely surprise us, don’t fit neatly into our established categories for pigeon-holing the behaviour of the Soviet government. We tend to fall into superficial, descriptive approaches on the one hand. Gorbachev should be praised for doing X on Monday, but he should be denounced for Y on Tuesday; who knows what he will do on Wednesday? We haven’t penetrated
beneath the surface of events to the inner logic of the Gorbachev tendency.

If this is the state of our thinking then there is only one solution: an open discussion in which we use a clash of opinions to reach a higher understanding, grasping the process in the Soviet Union as a whole and grasping its contradictions. If we look at the debate which the Trotskyist movement had in the late 1940s over what was happening then in Eastern Europe, we will have a model for how we should proceed.

Continuity or discontinuity?
Perhaps one of the main roots of our intellectual anxieties about Soviet events derives from the following puzzle: there seems to be a dramatic break between the policies of the Brezhnev era and the present policies, especially in Soviet domestic politics, yet there has been no political upheaval. Is there a genuine break with the past, or is it all cosmetic?

There is a clear break with the Brezhnev heritage if we define that heritage in terms of three key ideas:

- The idea that the USSR had for the first time in its history achieved a decisive and irreversible degree of security through its strategic arsenal and its relations with the USA.
- The idea that the USSR was an 'advanced socialist society' requiring only minor adjustments and quantitative improvements in order to progress uninterrupted towards communism.
- The idea that the existing socio-economic mechanism and the corresponding political regime was the correct model for any socialist society. It may need reforms, especially economic reforms to generate greater economic dynamism, but such reforms would improve the performance of the existing mechanism, not scrap it.

The first idea came crashing down while Brezhnev was still in office. He had presided over the achievement of strategic parity with the USA — Soviet forces could guarantee an overwhelming second strike in the wake of a US attack, and this will continue to give the Soviet Union a measure of military security into the 1990s. But military preparedness is only one aspect of the political security of a state. The real core of Brezhnev's security policy was the political goal of achieving a stable, co-operative relationship with the USA through armed control, mutual recognition of each other's vital interests, and co-operation in managing regional wars and revolutions.

In this drive, the Brezhnev leadership ignored any serious active policy towards China, Western Europe, Japan or the third world: everything was subordinated to the drive for a strategic equal deal with Washington, to a craving for recognition and acceptance by Washington. In 1979, Washington opened its jaws and sank its teeth into Brezhnev's dithering hand of superpower friendship. Suddenly the political impotence of the Brezhnev strategy was exposed; Western Europe, Japan and China all seemed to be swinging into a new anti-Soviet alliance led by the USA and Washington was laying siege to a number of Soviet allies in the third world.

What had been hailed by the Brezhnev leadership as the USSR's irreversible escape from external threat had turned into something like a new entombment in the 1980s. This was a terrible shock to the Soviet leadership. By 1983 there was a mood close to panic within the Kremlin: a belief that Washington was hell-bent on a course of trying to destroy the Soviet bloc, possibly even by military means, through the star wars project.

This collapse of Brezhnev's foreign strategy exposed the hollowness of talk about the USSR being an 'advanced socialist society'. The explosive crisis in Poland burst forth in 1980 dramatically exposing the fundamental weakness and backwardness of the USSR. Its cultural influence in Poland was non-existent, its ideological influence negative and the attractive pull of the Soviet economy on the Polish economy infinitely weaker than that of the West. In terms of sheer quantitative weight, the productive power of the Soviet economy is less than that of Japan and only about a fifth that of the OECD countries. Technologically the picture is almost as grim, in terms of living standards it is worse still.

Social relations within the USSR are marked by a gap between town and country far greater than in most of Western Europe north of the Mediterranean, by a fierce and in large part illegal struggle for scarce goods and services, by corruption, drunkenness, insane relations between the sexes with great strains placed upon women.

There are still backward welfare services outside the main cities, an only semi-predictable legal system and a brutally primitive, authoritarian political style in relations between the regime and individual citizens — worse, of course, for critical elements. And all these tensions, scarcely masked by the bland official ideological code, expressed themselves in the frequent growth of chauvinistic, mystical, authoritarian and obscurantist ideologies as well as in the cruder fascinations for the latest fads and gadgets of our capitalist culture industries.

It is possible to view this Soviet world of the 1980s as in many ways a great advance on what had existed before in that vast ocean of Russian rural backwardness. There is no doubt that very many Russians do view Soviet life in this way. It is also the case that this catalogue of problems is not the same as the problems faced in the capitalist world — and it is by no means the case that the life of Soviet workers is, in a qualitative sense, 'worse' than that of workers in the West — we will return to this important issue later. The point is that Soviet society's present form is not only not advanced socialism: it is not even a secure basis for the Soviet state's efforts into the 1990s, leave alone the next century: it cannot secure a genuinely organic relationship with Eastern Europe, or exert a pull on the imagination of working people in the advanced capitalist countries. And even in the third world today, the USSR is admired by progressive movements much more for its foreign policy posture than as a model of an advanced social order. It remains in world terms a backward, primitive state in transition to socialism, still isolated within a far stronger capitalist world system.

All this led a group within the Soviet leadership to challenge the ideas of the Brezhnev period, an idea to which the Brezhnev generation of leaders had been committed all their adult lives. Perestroika involves a real attempt to remodel the entire system as it was established over the last fifty years since the Stalin period. It is a real break in continuity with the orthodoxy of Stalinism. It is a break which we have not been adequately prepared for.

Stalinism or Trotskyism, bureaucratic rule or working class power?
TROTSKY'S GREAT contribution to the Marxist theory of the transition to socialism was his insistence that it is possible to have a proletarian state which is very far from being paradise on earth. Such is and has been the situation in
the USSR. Yet many who claim to subscribe to Trotsky's theoretical legacy find it hard to defend or even explain the proletarian character of the Soviet state. Some give an idealist version: it's to do with the continuing ideological roots of the Soviet state in the October revolution; others say it simply means a formal characteristic of the economy -- stagnation of the means of production -- which involves no real benefit for the workers except full employment, and even that, they often argue, is more a product of chronic labour shortages deriving from over-investment than a consequence of the nature of the state.

Ultra-reactionaries like the late Leonard Schapiro are closer to the mark when they wrote that the working class is the most privileged class in the USSR and that the reason for so few strikes has been less to do with the police than with the sense of security and well-being among key groups of industrial workers. The Shachtmanites also got it right in their polemics with Trotsky when they wrote that they would accept his analysis if it demonstrated two trends: an end to the terror and a reversal of the growing inequalities between managers and workers. In the 1960s, both these trends appeared and developed; they continued to do so up to the last years of Brezhnev.

What about the atrocious behaviour of the KGB in arresting and imprisoned dissidents for no more than perfectly legitimate political activity? And what about the psychiatric hospitals and the appalling conditions in places like Vladimir prison or the Mordovian camps? Absolutely, but all of this demonstrates that the USSR has been a very authoritarian and inhuman state given to treating certain kinds of dissent very brutally. But it doesn't mean the USSR is a terrorist state as it was in a large degree under Stalin. As Trotsky argued, you can have brutally authoritarian proletarian states.

But how can one say that the working class is the most privileged class when you look at the privileges of the bureaucracy? But which bureaucracy: the top party and government officials? Their privileges are indeed enormous -- one is tempted to say: they live in communism, with the complete satisfaction of every need and want without any mediation of money. But what about plant managers, what about the Soviet equivalent of what we would call 'professionals', or what about workers, teachers, academics? These groups in general (leaving aside the political chiefs amongst them) earn very little more than a skilled worker -- some of them considerably less.

Furthermore they earn their living: there is no rentier class, no bourgeoisie of private property owners. Where in the capitalist world could you find plant managers earning only fifty per cent more than skilled workers in the plant? And under Khruzhchev and Brezhnev great efforts were made to make the industrial workers in a real sense better off and more secure than surrounding social groups. This does not need to be explained in terms of socialist ideals: it is product of the growing power of the working class within the Soviet socio-economic system.

Does this mean that Soviet industrial workers were happy and contented, without grievances or problems? No. The Soviet workers are discontented about many aspects of their lives and in many ways deeply frustrated. The indices of alcoholism tell a terrible story of the barrenness and boredom of the lives of many. There is evidence of yearning for a free society and for much greater democratic control among Soviet workers. The huge and corrupt privileges of the political elite have been causing great anger. All this is true. But the point we are making is a different one: namely that the Soviet working class has felt itself to be much better off and far more influential in every sphere of life than any other social class in the Soviet Union. Qualitatively they are far worse off than employed industrial workers in Germany or France; qualitatively their lives are far more secure and their influence on public policy is far greater.

A political caste of bureaucrats dominates the Soviet state.

For SACHA ROUX, no doubt, what we have said above seems to contradict the idea that the Soviet state is dominated by a bureaucracy. I don't consider that what we have said in the slightest negates the idea that the USSR is governed by a political caste of bureaucrats. The problem lies elsewhere: in the replacement of Trotsky's conception of bureaucracy by that of Weber -- a reaction-ary German imperialist theorist whose thought has been a staple diet in the academic system of the advanced capitalist world for decades.

For Weber the bureaucracy is the administrative system for running modern organizations and the bureaucrats are simply the desk workers in the hierarchy. They are concerned only with means, oblivious of ends, they are timid, narrow-minded, obsessed with status, petty privileges, with increasing their own power and consumption resources.

On this view of bureaucracy, everybody in enterprise administration, in local and central government administration, indeed every desk worker in the USSR belongs to the bureaucratic 'class'.

Trotsky's concept of bureaucracy in the USSR was utterly different from Weber's bourgeois sociology. It had nothing to do with work processes or the psychological characteristics of desk workers. It was a self-reproducing caste, like the officer caste in the Prussian army. And it operated in the sphere of politics: it was a form of political rule whose central meaning was the political expropriation of the working people. In short, the suppression of democracy and as replacement by an authoritarian form of state.

Gorbachev: for liberal bureaucratic rule and against the state bureaucrats.

THERE IS NO GREAT MYSTERY about the Gorbachev programme. It involves what might be called the 'Soviet road to Hungarian communism'. In other words a swing to 'Soviet Liberalism'. We can summarise the main elements as follows. As far as the economy is concerned there is a 'NEP' element: ending nationalised property relations in some spheres and replacing them with both petty commodity production and various co-operative forms of property. The actual scope of such changes is extremely narrow in comparison, say, with the GDR, never mind Hungary or Poland. But it is likely to expand considerably, especially in agriculture.

Second there is the development of market relations within the state sector of the economy. This will go much further down the road of decentralising economic decision-making to the market and enterprises than the Kogevin reforms of the 1960s and it will be combined with an element of enterprise self-management. But it will not go so far as a capitalist-type of labour market plus significant unemployment; nor will it be allowed to generate anything approaching the social differentiation and inequalities in the capitalist system. But it will be a
qualitative shock to the economic and social system.

In the field of social policy, the intelligentsia and managers will be significant gainers, sections of the working class that were previously privileged will be substantial losers. On the other hand the peasant population, hitherto the protest section of at any rate the Russian population, will very likely gain.

There is a lot of nonsense being talked in the West about Gorbachev adopting “Thatcherite” principles; this is partly the result of picking up the writings of radical marketisers within the Soviet intelligentsia whose views are not reflected in the party leadership and partly the result of an inability to distinguish form from content. Thus, if people have to pay a lot for certain grades of social service this is not egalitarian but it is also not Thatcherism for the simple reason that Soviet workers are not, on the whole short of cash; their position is the reverse of that of workers here.

The problem for British workers is that there is a vast array of goods and services in front of their noses but they don’t happen to have enough money to buy them. The problem for Soviet workers is that they have plenty of cash but can’t use it to acquire goods and services they want.

Getting such things has to be via the mediation either of politics, or via the black market and bribes. But there is no doubt about it: Gorbachev, like the Dubcekites in Czechoslovakia, is combating “leveling egalitarianism” as it is called.

The profound worry in the leadership concerns hostility from the working class. The lower level bureaucrats you can fire; Gorbachev did it to thousands of them in the agro complex in the autumn of 1985. He suddenly presented them with two weeks notice, and off they had to go! He can be very “anti-bureaucratist”. But he can’t fire the working class!

It is important to realise that perestroika involves very real and not simply cosmetic changes in the political system. The old political system did entail a lot of vertical political communication upwards as well as downwards between the smallest political unit and the Moscow centre. (This is something that bourgeois theorists simply cannot grasp because they cannot conceive of vertical political communication being possible except via collective elections and the operations of ‘autonomous’ pressure groups.)

This is not to say that such vertical communication was pure — of course there was a lot of noise and static but at both ends people can become very skilled at screening that out. But what the old system absolutely did not allow was horizontal political communications for example, workers in one plant or intellectuals in one local organisation communicating across society to their colleagues political ideas, via a demonstration, a public petition, an open conflict in the local soviet or party organisation.

Gorbachev would like to reverse this; greatly increase horizontal communication — that’s what he means when he says that without democracy we cannot breathe. But he also wants to create some barriers to vertical communication towards the Moscow centre. He wants to end the situation where the workers’ economic or social or political problem automatically take that problem upwards first to the party executive, then to the regional party executive, then up to obstol and finally to the central committee. That had created an enormous weight of political overload on the central political authorities and one which always presented huge potential risks: when things go wrong the party leadership is ultimately always seen as responsible, whether it’s a shortage of tomatoes or a rise in the price of coffee. Let them turn to enterprise management, to the local soviets etc., thereby facing the party leadership with responsibility for people’s daily problems.

Along with this there must be the development of the great liberal ideas of freedom and the rights of the individual, equality before the law and so on. Of course glasnost is popular in wide circles, especially amongst workers who, unlike intellectuals, can’t get the information they want from sources apart from the mass media.

As the rule changes in the 27th party congress made clear, the Communist Party is no longer to be seen as the core of all state institutions with the state itself as simply an appendage of the party. Instead the state is to be understood as a constitutional, legal system to which the party itself is subordinated. It will be a slimmer, downgraded party — for the first time since 1953 the post-Stalin trend to greatly enlarge the party and especially to enlarge its working class component was reversed at the 27th party congress.

But the key point is that there is no question of undermining the party’s ‘leading role’. It will be the representative of the people, but it will be the sole representative, rather like a Lockeian oligarchy at 18th century Britain. In short, Soviet politics will continue to be controlled by a small caste of professional politicians (what Trotsky called a bureaucracy). These people are very far from the psychological type of Weber’s bureaucrats: they are very tough, energetic types with a formidable capacity for political struggle. Nor are they necessarily obsessed with consumption privileges; many of them are rather ascetic types, puritans, in fact. Others of course are rather given to luxury, but in any case, this is
neither here nor there as far as the analysis of the Soviet system is concerned. They are committed to a type of authoritarian state, though a very different one from the Brezhnevite ideal.

This brings us finally to the new conception of the relationship between the Soviet state and the world. The new leadership has in one stroke thoroughly rejected the idea of socialism in one country. They are completely subscribing to the notion that the USSR can develop economically and without internal contradictions in isolation from the world capitalist economy. Attack is on. There is a determination to participate in the world market and let its pressure openly appear within the Soviet system, attempting to develop economic, technological, ideological and cultural muscles strong enough to withstand the state among others in a single world, without the enormous shield that has screened the Soviet population from the capitalist world.

The break from Stalinist austerity does not in any way mean a turn towards socialization/internationalism. Ultimately, as Trotsky pointed out, the internal contradictions of the Soviet state cannot be resolved only on the plane of the international class struggle, only through the victory of socialism in some of the advanced capitalist countries. Thus historically, there must be a dialectical resolution: on the one hand the Soviet state must indeed operate within the existing relationships of states and economies in the world; yet on the other hand the socialist workers and intellectuals of the Soviet Union must be politically organizing their links with the international socialist forces to overthrow this capitalist domination of the world.

No such dialectical conception seems to the slightest degree to motivate the new Soviet leadership. More than ever before the past horizons seem to be bounded by their own purely state-diplomatic interests. Their interest in a

revival of the "international communist movement" seems less than Brezhnev's, far less than Khrushchev's.

What does the future hold?

There is a very great political hostility to the activities of the Gorbachev leadership within the Soviet political elite and also a wide degree of hostility to his programmatic aims. Surveys of working class opinion indicate strong support for glasnost but deep suspicion of the basic programmatic reforms. The reform minded intelligentsia is only half mobilized behind Gorbachev's drive — there is still a strong wait-and-see-if-he-can-pull-it-off attitude despite the strong sympathy. There is an emerging socialist left-wing of the Gorbachevite reform movement, giving critical support to the Gorbachev group against its enemies within the party elite. And there is the growth of a small, but important and potent bloc of hundreds of Solidarnosc-type of current seeking popular base against the reform and "the Jews".

It would be a big mistake to expect the rise of a Solidarnosc-type movement within the Soviet working class in the present situation. In the first place, the authority of the CPSU is infinitely greater amongst Soviet workers than that of the 1970s — the Polish-type has never been in Poland. Furthermore as a result of this fact, the workers are hardly likely to feel the need to take the enormous risks of creating such an autonomous movement when there are evidently so many potential levels for sabotaging the reform within the CPSU itself.

Thirdly, it is very possible that the bulk of the Soviet working class would be prepared to remain neutral on the economic and social changes or even go along with them in exchange for what they considered a real and substantial measure of political freedom — what happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968, for example. The working class throughout the world has shown itself over and over again to be prepared to pay an astonishingly high economic price for greater political freedom — far more than any bourgeois would dream of doing. The time when a Solidarnosc-type of movement could appear on the agenda would be in the subsequent historical phase after the working class and their militant leaders in the party have helped their "Czechs," Gorbachev, to victory, have put their faith in him and then have bitterly learnt through a decade of experience that the hope and the vision has turned to ashes — to a new type of corruption, a resurgent society awash with dollars and Swiss bank accounts and totally oblivious of the disgusting inequalities and injustices of daily social life.

Against this background, two questions remain: does Gorbachevism represent, in distorted form, the only possible next step for the development of the production forces in the USSR — only via the victory of Gorbachevism over Brezhnevism will the transformation of the Soviet future establish itself as a genuine force? Or once our comrades in the Moscow socialist clubs are right, we should be the left wing of the Gorbachevites, critically supporting its leaders today, unconditionally exposing its enemies in the bureaucracy and preparing to transcend Gorbachevism tomorrow.

Secondly, is soviet democracy — a formal structure of political pluralism — the only possible key to advancement towards socialism in the USSR and in other words the bottom line when we consider anything to do with critically supporting political currents in the workers' states?
The TUC and Ireland: the story of a betrayal

The 1920 carpenters' dispute in Belfast is one of the most remarkable episodes in Irish labour history: a story of how one British trade union waged a brave struggle against sectarianism and how the leadership of the TUC sabotaged that struggle and, in the end, sided with the separatists. Here, GEOFF BELL gives the first detailed account of these events which we publish to coincide with the conference, Ireland: the cause of labour, which sixty-seven years on is trying to raise within the trade union movement the question of employment discrimination in the north of Ireland.

SPEAKING at the annual July 12Orange rally in 1920, Edward Carson, former Cabinet member and by then the undisputed leader of Ireland's loyalists, made a speech which by even his inflammatory standards was extraordinary. Addressing his supporters in Belfast he said, 'We must proclaim today clearly that, come what may, we in Ulster will tolerate no Sinn Fein—no Sinn Fein organisation, no Sinn Fein methods.' We tell you (the government) this—that if, having offered you our help, you are yourselves unable to protect us, we tell you that we will take the matter into our own hands... And these are not mere words. I have words without action'.

The 'actions' followed quickly. It was initiated by a group called the Belfast Protestant Association in one of the smaller Belfast shipyards. A few days after Carson's statement its members produced revolvers at a shipyard meeting and declared their intention of driving from their workplace every 'Sinn Feiner' they could find. 'Sinn Feiner' proved a very elastic term. Those attacked were not just supporters of Sinn Fein but every known Catholic, trade union militant and socialist. The violent sectarianism soon spread to other shipyards and workplaces. By the end of it the loyalist mobs had driven 15,000 Catholic men and 1,000 Catholic women from their place of work. The mass majority were never allowed to return.

Among those victimised in the shipyards were several hundred members of the Anti-Secession Society of Carpenters, Cabinet-makers and Joiners. The leaders of the carpenters' union, as the ASJC was known, had only recently been in trouble with some of their loyalist members. Their May executive meeting had passed a resolution on Ireland, then in the throes of the way of independence. That issue had been linked with British intervention against the Russian revolution with the resolution declaring, 'that the British government is refusing to allow Ireland the form of government chosen by the Irish people, and in asserting Poland in her attack on the Russian republic, is betraying all the principles for which our nation fought (in the first world war), and that the most effective way in which protest can be made is for the organised workers to refuse to manufacture or transport munitions of war for Ireland or Poland'.

Two Belfast branches of the carpenters voiced their disapproval of this motion. One voted fourteen to two to 'strongly protest'—
The Harland and Wolff shipyard — scene of sectarian mass expulsions of Catholic workers.

out of a membership of 105 — the other by twenty two to zero in 'strongly object' — out of a membership of 288. A mass meeting of the carpenters' union membership in one of the smaller shipyards stated that the executive should 'leave politics aside' otherwise it could 'cause dissension in our ranks'.

The person who chaired that meeting was William Barclay, a member of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, a body set up by the Unionist Party to wean away any erring unionists from labour to unionism. Barclay's concern about causing 'dissension in our ranks' was illustrated the following month when he chaired a further meeting in the shipyard which resolved: 'that we, the unionists and protestant workers, declare that we will not work with disloyal workers... Also that in future applications for employment we respectfully suggest that the first consideration be given to loyal ex-servicemen and protestant unionists'.

Members of the carpenters' union were then, both being expelled from and expelled in the shipyards, but the union itself was not the only one discussing the event in Ireland. Indeed a special congress of the TUC was held on 13 July 1920 to discuss that very topic. One of the resolutions passed condemned 'British military domination of Ireland' and even recommended general strike action to secure British troops withdrawn from the country. Although this was a good deal less radical than it sounds — the resolution recommended that unions ballot their members on such a general strike knowing full well that such a course of action would not be followed — the resolution was a fair reflection of where the political sympathy of trade unionists in Britain were: with the 70 per cent who had voted Sinn Fein in the 1918 general election.

For the loyalist working class of Belfast, neither the popular support for Sinn Fein or the divisions of their 'British' TUC cut much ice. The month of August saw the attacks on Catholic and Catholic owned property reach new depths. A British newspaper described it as 'five weeks of ruthless persecution by boycott, fire, plunder and assault, culminating in a week's wholesale violence'. A loyalist shipyard worker boasted at the start of August that 'they had gained a great victory and they had shot Sinn Fein and red flag socialism the worst blow it had received in Belfast for thirty years', while another claimed that 'since the Sinn Feinen were chased out of the shipyard over five hundred loyalists had been taken on', and again it can be stressed that 'Sinn Feiner' was a euphemism for Catholic.

What this last quotation suggests is that the loyalist workers and the management were now working hand in glove to recruit protestants to the jobs from which the Catholics had been chased. The loyalists organized themselves into vigilance committees in the shipyards and elsewhere and it was those who operated a rather twisted form of 'workers control' in terms of who was employed.

Such was the rather difficult situation into which the carpenters' union decided to intervene. On 24 August members of the executive committee went to Belfast and met the management of the largest shipyard, Harland and Wolff. The union made a series of proposals. These included remuneration of all the expelled workers, the outlawing of religious or political discrimination in employment in the shipyards and protection for all the expelled workers on their return to the yard. In response the employers claimed they 'deplored the troubles' but would promise only to consider the union's proposals at some future date. The union judged this
as previously and decided to call a mass meeting of all their members to decide on their next course of action. The meeting was to be private and held indoors. At this point the British army and government intervened. The meeting was banned. According to one member-general, E.J.T. Bannerman of the British army's 1st division in Ireland, it was done on the grounds that the meeting would "give rise to grave disorder." In the next two weeks further expulsions occurred. Among the victims this time was DA Boll, an executive member of the carpenters' union, a Protestant and 'moderate labour man.' The leadership of the union which had attempted to do something about the expulsions thus themselves because the latest target of the looters.

Such was the challenge facing the TUC when it met at the start of September in Portsmoutth for its annual congress. Predictably not one union had paid any attention to the motion recommending a ballot on strike action passed at the special congress in July. But the expulsions affected the unions directly and a deputation of the expelled workers met the standing orders committee of the TUC on the eve of the congress. It agreed to table an emergency resolution. This was moved by J.H. Thomas, the railway workers' leader and president of the TUC. Members of his own union in Ireland had recently taken industrial action over the transportation of British army munitions. This had not pleased Thomas and when he moved the emergency motion there was a suggestion of mixed feelings. 'Men are being prevented from working,' he explained, 'because of their religious or political opinions,' but he linked this to a "declaration of loyalty to the British empire" which he thought was "in the interest of the trade union movement in Belfast".

The resolution instructed the parliamentary committee to fight against the expulsions and to obtain from the postmaster general a guarantee that there would be no further expulsions from the work in the Belfast area. Despite the protests of a delegation from the Ship, Construction and Shipwrights Association, Mr. Swan of Sunderland, who wanted to leave the situation to the workers of Belfast, the motion was easily carried. However, given that the situation had been developing for two months it could not be asked whether the parliamentary committee had not acted sooner. Or why did the resolution not suggest what sort of action could be taken?

Meanwhile in Belfast, the employers finally replied to the carpenters' union proposals made at the meeting of 24 August. The response came in a letter of 12 September. No specific reference was made to the carpenters' demands. Instead, a further meeting was proposed between Harland and Wolff's management and all the unions involved. The vigilance committee was also invited. It made its position clear when it said that any expelled worker who wanted to return to work would have to sign a declaration of loyalty to the British empire. It was a courageous move to make, but it was one informed by trade union principles so basic that for anyone who respected those principles there was little alternative.

The union could be criticized for condemning management when it was their workers who had offended. But if its management's involvement in the sectarianism came, at the meeting suggested in Harold and Wolff's letter of 12 September, at the vigilance committee initially agreed to drop its demands that any returning victimized worker should sign a declaration of loyalty to the Empire and Ireland of Sinn Fein. But they reserved the right to ask for the 'word of honour' of any returning worker that 'they were not connected with Sinn Fein.'

More significantly, Harland and Wolff agreed to the preposterous suggestion that if future the vigilance committee would be given the role of 'defending' any oath-taker in the yard from assault. The vigilance committee had overseen the assaults in the first place; the transformation from pr naked to gang-keeper was rather rapid. The crux of the matter is that by these actions—inviting the vigilance committee to become involved in the fight against it—negotiating with them on the return to work of those victimized, and giving them a future role at the shipyard—the management had officially recognized this sectarian grouping, entrusting it to operate in the yard. Henceforth the management permitted the vigilance committee to hold meetings, in the workplace and even set aside rooms for them where they could conduct their business.

So the strike did not have the desired effect. On Hartland and Wolff, although one engineering firm, McLaughlin and Harvey, did agree to ensure that all religious or political tests on employment were withdrawn. For the rest of the companies in the yard the effect on the redaction committee's union is certain. How many would follow the lead of that company? It could hardly have surprised the executive that only a minority of their members came out. Only six hundred obeyed the strike call, two thousand did not. The strike-breakers were promptly expelled from the union.
had 'taken up the only possible position to reserve the union of our organisation'. They added, 'we deeply regret that the other unions whose members have been killed on the streets have not yet thought fit to stand by us in this important struggle. In our judgement the trade union movement, if it will act boldly, can, by firmly resisting on the observance of its own principles, end the internecine strife in Ireland which is fostered and fostered by unscrupulous employers for their own political and industrial purposes'.

At first the committee seemed to be taking their instructions seriously. At their September meeting three of their members were appointed 'with plenary powers' to go to Belfast with a view of bringing about such a change in the situation as would at least be helpful to the strikers in Belfast involved in the present conflict'. After this initial burst of energy things slowed down. The December meeting of the I.C. was told that 'it had not yet been found convenient' to go to Belfast, and it was not until 6 December, nearly five months after the first victimisations that the I.C. delegation arrived there.

To recap, its brief, given to it by the 1921 conference was to formulate a line of action to win back the jobs of the victimised workers. However, as the three-person delegation went about their work that became a very subsidiary issue. As one of their number, A. Pugh, was later to say, 'we came to the conclusion that there was one problem that had to be overcome in view of the general situation', which was not the winning back of the jobs of the victimised workers, but was rather the dispute which existed between the executive of the woodworkers' (carpenters') union and their people in Belfast. So the major issue the delegation dealt with was not the victimisation of 10,000 trade unionists, the fact that many of them had been physically assaulted, even killed or driven not just from their jobs but homes as well; no, the chief issue was, according to Pugh, to 'clear up the situation' between the carpenters' executive and those they had expelled for strike-breaking.

Some of those the delegation decided to
meet in Belfast reflected this priority. They included the district committee of the carpenters and two committees representing the victimage workers. Both the TLC and the union management were divided on the formation of two shipyards, the unions: Lord Mayor, a representative of government, a group representing the strike-breakers, the loyalist inclined district committee of the engineering and shipbuilding trades, and the joint vigilance committee of the shipyards. The TLC met them twice.

When the delegation submitted their report to the 1921 congress it reflected the fact that the majority had met were either unsympathetic the victimage workers, or actively hostile to them. In a section of their report entitled ‘causes of the trouble’ the delegation mention, three reasons. First, that during the war ‘there was an influx of men from the south and west of Ireland into the shipyards, and that of these a number were either active Sinn Feiners or were strongly sympthetic to the Sinn Fein movement’. Just how big this ‘number’ was, was not estimated. But the delegation did say that it was alleged that many workers had openly opposed the inter-conflict union movement in Belfast, although not one specific instance of ‘open opposition’ was provided. Instead another allegation is reported ‘that a number of Sinn Fein supporters carried arms.’

Thus, the presence of Sinn Fein supporters was the first reason given for the expulsions. The second was the ‘murder at Coitt, on 17 July, of ordered Smyth, BSO, an electrician who had served in the war’, the third that ‘on 22 August district inspector Swarze was killed in the streets of Antrim’ and the fourth that ‘on 29 September two policemen on duty in Falls Road, Broadwas, shot’. These were the limits of the TLC’s explanation of the expulsions. No mention was made of Carson’s incitement speech, no reference was made to the presence of organisations such as the Belfast Protestant association, and there is no listing of the scale the proportion of the pro-Irish families suffered. It was about as if the TLC were justifying the expulsions and that in reporting ‘representative bodies of workers were emphatic in their declaration against working with adherents of the Sinn Fein’, were deciding not to challenge such attitudes.

Similar prejudice features elsewhere in the report. The point of view of business management’ was delayed without comment that ‘the present position under which firms have in fact concurred to the vigilance committee the right of deciding on the question of reinstatement of their workers... is but the least of two evils’.

Those victimized by the expulsions is underestimated by the TLC — 5,000 as opposed to 10,000 — but perhaps most breathtaking of all is the account of the vigilance committee meetings. The delegation recorded that ‘we found men with strong prejudices but claiming intense loyalty to the British flag and empire’. The TLC’s overall view of the vigilance committee was that the existence of such a body and the methods employed in regard to suspect workers ‘was a constant be regards as constitutional machinery of law and order, but in view of the fact that constitutional government has broken down in Ireland generally, its reflex in Belfast need not occasion any surprise’. With such a generosity of tolerance it is hardly surprising that the TLC could further report that its meeting with the vigilance committee was conducted in a perfectly friendly spirit.

Nor was it surprising that the delegation did not see the need to contest the secu

the strike-breakers were promptly expelled from the union

‘the presence of Sinn Fein supporters was the first reason given for the expulsions’

‘the strike-breakers were promptly expelled from the union’

A subsequent mass meeting the former members of the union declared to withdraw. The remaining expelled from the union, and although the TLC made further attempts to persuade the leadership of the union to take their ex-members the union stood firm on the principles of the freedom of our members and the solidarity of our organisation first mentioned when the strike call was made.

In September 1921 the TLC again met in congress and the sad history of what had happened in Belfast and of the role of the TLC in those events was recalled. A delegate from Belfast, although not a member of the carpenters, offered a fitting judgment. Referring to those who were victimised he said:

We thought that the great English trade unions would come to our assistance. We looked with confidence to the action we hoped they would take, but the joiners’ union (carpenters) and joiners’ union alone, took strong action... Had the other trade unions taken similar action... had they then, if the Belfast trade unions did not, to go on and do what was necessary, preserved goods and raw materials going to Belfast, and coal and steel and other things required for their industries, I fearfully assert that one fortnight of that action would have settled entirely the trouble in the north of Ireland.

It is difficult to disagree with this argument. It is hard to imagine, if British trade unions had organised a blockade of Belfast until those victimised were allowed to return to work, that the situation would not have changed, or that employers would not have made sure they caved in. And who knows what the consequences would have been of such action. Certainly the apparent intransigence and sectionalism of the British trade union movement had challenged and detracted such attitudes that it would have been one less powerful argument in favour of the partitionists.

The TLC opted for a different course. Two small incidents sum up what that was. The first was reported in the minutes of the parliamentary committee of the TLC of June 13 1921:

‘It was decided to comply with a request from Mr Girvan, secretary of the vigilance committee, that he be supplied with a copy of the report of the delegation to Belfast as a confidential communication’.

And then, a few months later at another meeting of the parliamentary committee, which by then had become the general council, arrangements for a special congress, on unemployment and the international situation, were being discussed when it was reported that a delegate had applied for permission to take a collection in the hall in aid of the Catholic workers expelled from Belfast. The minutes of the general council record: ‘resolved that no collection of any kind be taken in the hall’. **
The people's flag

H. Pala

It is not often that you come across a documentary series that is both informative and moving. I can promise anyone who takes the time to watch this strong, suggestive history of twentieth century British working class politics a real treat.

Including interviews with rank and file militants, the series does not pull its punches. Indeed, it attempts to suggest that the history of the British working class includes not only the struggle against the ruling class but also against the leaderships of the working class organisations; that the class collaborationists policies of the Labour and trade union leaderships opened the way for the Tories and that capitalism as an economic system has a logic of its own and that those who attempt to manage it always end up having to abide by its laws.

Such conclusions are nothing new to socialists, of course, but the important thing about this series is that there is sufficient archive material included to substantiate and give depth to such a perspective.

The first programme dealt with the great betrayal of 1914 and the momentous events during and immediately after the Russian revolution. Others have examined the rise of fascism, the coronation of 'third period' Stalinism and the effects that having the Soviet Union as a close ally had on the policies pursued by the Communist Party. If you have missed these don't despair! You can always contact Channel Four for copies of the video tapes or borrow them from someone wise enough to have ignored the restrictions regarding illegal copying.

To come we have the politics of consensus during the post-war boom, the breathing space that led to the establishment of the welfare state, leading us into the fourth episode (who runs the country?) and the clashes that accompanied the end of the capitalist boom. Finally, we arrive in the present: mass unemployment, the miners' strike, Thatcher's second term.

The programmes stress that socialist politics should be about changing capitalism, not attempting to run it more efficiently or cover over the cracks. Whether you agree with every point it makes or not, it is certainly worth making an effort to see and could well be utilised as a starting point for discussion and education about the history of the British working class.

The People's Flag, Channel Four, Mondays, 11.00pm from October 26 for five weeks.

Socialist Outlook, No. 4, November/December 1997
UNCOVERING WOMEN'S ROLE IN UNION STRUGGLES

Needs must when the devil drives

One of the highlights of the events to celebrate the centenary of Oxford trades council in October was the premiere of a specially made video Needs Must When the Devil Drives, looking at women’s role in the fight for trade union rights.

Made by an all-women crew, the thirty-five minute video uses interviews, archive news photographs and a previously undiscovered photographic collection to recapture four largely forgotten episodes of women’s struggles in Oxfordshire.

Socialist Outlook spoke to the film’s director ANNE MARIE SWEEENEY.

Tell us about the earliest events the film covers.

AMS: We had heard that a number of women from the village of Ascott had been sent to prison for picketing during the 1873 farm labourers’ strike.

We were very lucky to obtain a rare copy of a book by Reg Groves, called Spring Year’s Work, on the history of the National Agricultural Labourers’ Union. That told us about the significance of the Ascott case.

There were almost no records or ephemera to work with, so we set out to find women in Ascott who knew anything about the sixteen Ascott martyrs themselves. The last of them died in the 1930s, so anyone remembering them would be very old, and have only childhood memories.

We were fortunate. Mrs Weston not only remembered the Ascott women, but had been a field worker herself. It is hard to convey the incredible burden these women endured. They not only worked in intolerable conditions and all weather for long hours in the fields, but they had large families – some had fifteen children – and often did night work in the evenings.

We also found Rebecca Evans, who had researched the national implications of the Ascott case. She told us how the national outcry against the jail sentences helped lose Gladstone the next election – and David then repealed the criminal law amendment act which had made picketing illegal.

Unions had only become legal in 1872. Joseph Arch then formed the SACU in Warwickshire, and a few years later joined. Ascott is right on the Warwickshire border. The women had picked a field in support of the strike. They were not even members of the union and were expecting to be fined. They walked over to the court with their children, laughing and joking.

There was a NALU representative in the court with fine money in his hand. But when the women were jailed the union did not lodge an appeal.

Instead within a day Joseph Arch had organized a campaign hitting national press headlines. Three days later there was a huge demonstration of three thousand in Chipping Norton; but the demands for repeal of the criminal law amendment act and an end to clerical magistrates – not for the release of the women!

Of course Joseph Arch has a good reputation. But it does seem that there was a lot of mileage to be made out of the Ascott women going to jail.

The case helped change the law and even changed the government, but it had been almost forgotten.

What made you look at the Bliss mill strike?

AMS: We knew that a woman textile worker had been sent to prison for picketing the dyes mill in Chipping Norton in 1914.

We met David Fildeshow, formerly a history teacher in Chipping Norton, who filled us in about details of what was a huge eight-month strike. Then we went on a detective trail to find out about the strike from the elderly people of Chipping Norton. We went in to see most of the strikers were dead.

The strike was predominantly women. We found a huge collection of photographs and kept all in place. Mr. Wakeley (of the Wakeley collection) showed us the photographs.

We took you back and got forty printed up. They were put out to be a unique collection in trade union, and women’s history, showing rows of women in Edwardian outfits confronting police on picket lines. They showed Mrs Cooper’s release from prison and we found the speeches from that rally reported in the Oxford Chronicle.

By today’s standards it is extraordinary to see such straight reporting; and the speeches themselves were exciting. Without exception they were about the strength and contribution of women in the fight, and really class conscious. They opposed imperialist and parasitic thrives such as the ‘Red Flag’ when Mrs Cooper was released.

We discovered a link with the suffragette movement. Emily Pankhurst was based in Oxford in this period. We heard records of thirty suffragettes on motor bikes riding round and round Chipping Norton police station shouting “Votes for women”.

A key figure was Miss Valley, the first woman full-time official for the Workers’ Union at a time when officials really did organise and build strikes instead of blocking them. She had just come from organising a strike of Cumberland miners.

You discovered women’s role in winning Coopers’ workers rights?

AMS: Yes, but again we were handicapped. We know women were involved in the 1913 strike which first won union recognition in what is today’s Austin Rover body plant, but we couldn’t find any women still alive who had taken part.

Prowse’s book, Engineering Struggle, in the Midlands, gives a vivid account of the strike and mentions the role of women in the press shop. We found newspaper articles headlined ‘Four women elected to strike committee’. I don’t think they can ever
There were no health and safety protection, just the pressure to work harder while the factory owners were making profits.

What is unusual about the video?
AMS: It focuses on women's struggles, and shows how women who are not seen as they are exceptional can do exceptional things. Yet their contribution is not recognised at the time or even afterwards, by the labour movement.

There are some films about women's union struggles in the USA, but very few about British women. There is Look Back at Grunwick, and more recently some on women and the miners' strike, but there is very little compared to the number of women's struggles.

Glynis Evans from Merthyr women's support group, said that she felt 'humbled' by the video. Before she had believed that what they had done as women in the miners' strike had been extraordinary and new, but they had done nothing new. Women have always struggled with similar determination and against similar odds.

We have found this much in Oxfordshire, which is not seen as a bastion of union power. If you multiply this on a national scale, just think how much working class women's history is hidden or forgotten by the labour movement.

How did the activists want to contribute to the union's success?
AMS: The whole story is told through older women, who are normally regarded as having nothing to say for themselves, and are ignored even by the women's movement. We were able to show that many have a wealth of experience, views and comments. Maureen Elders, the interviewee, was ideal. She is a nurse working with elderly people at Chipping Norton hospital. It was fascinating to watch her interview these older women. She talked to them without patronising, and really wanted to listen to them.

To achieve the impossible, and complete the whole project in just two and a half minutes for only £800, we had tremendous support from other women's groups in Oxfordshire who gave us help free because they were excited by the project.

Peggy Seeger did the sound track; but even that we had to rewrite new songs because there were so few about women and unions in Britain.

We hope the film will help counter pessimism in today's trade union struggles, and expose those union leaders who still suggest that women members are a block to militancy.

And there is much more of this history to be found in Oxfordshire! It is not unique! 

To obtain a copy of this video, contact:
Oxford Film & Video Makers
The Stables
North Parade
Headington OX3 9HY
0885 60174
Tales of 'Nam

The Vietnamese war has become big box-office business. *Platoon, Full Metal Jacket* and *Hamburger Hill* are packing local cinemas. Newsagents report high demand for the serialised story of the war, *Nam*. And all of this is a pale British reflection of the appetite of the US public for tales of the apocalypse.

Here, STEVE ROBERTS examines the 'Vietnam syndrome' and its cultural representations.

*The raw statistics of US cots in the war form the basis of the 'Vietnam syndrome'. Twenty years ago there were 464,000 US troops on combat duty in Indochina. Of those who fought, 57,000 died and 154,000 were wounded, many with the most appalling disabilities. These brutal figures underlay the political impact of the anti-war movement and the passive support it received from an eventual majority of US people.*

But the 'syndrome' also applies to the succession of defeats suffered by US imperialism following the fall of Saigon and the reunification of the country, as well as directed by the US, but by the victorious Vietnamese.

Aid provided to UNITA forces in Angola was smashed by the audacious military intervention of Cuba. This breakdown of the idea of 'linkage' — that the USSR would restrain its allies in exchange for detente, was further undermined by the military assistance provided both by Cuba and the USSR to Ethiopia to ward off the invasion of the Ogaden by Somalia in 1978.

Defeat piled on defeat for the Carter administration. In April 1978 and January 1979 there were the reversals in Afghanistan and Iran respectively, transforming the situation in the Middle East. The year culminated with the Nicaraguan and Grenadian revolutions.

The defence policies initiated by Nixon and Kissinger, and continued by Carter and Brzezinski until 1979, were based not only on a faulty analysis — that the USSR could control its assumed allies — but also on the new relation of forces created by Vietnam.

The new doctrine as the Carter administration moved into the '80s was out-producing the USSR militarily and economically, in an attempt to explode contradictions that were assumed to be ready to ripen within Soviet society.

But the remilitarisation drive launched by Carter was doomed by the initiatives of the Reagan administration. Arms expenditure was humped up immediately by thirteen per cent in 1982, with a nearly ten per cent rise projected for the next five years.

Twenty-five years after Kennedy sent his 'advisory' teams to beef up the military capacity of the Dien Bien, Reagan sent similar missions to provide logistics and training for his Honduran proxies. The ultimate use of direct intervention was witnessed in the first roll-back — against
Grenada.

To be sure the policy has met with internal opposition. The movement against intervention in Central America is not insignificant. But has Reagan succeeded in vividly the spirit against new Vietnam?

Part of the answer can be found in the way in which the history of the Vietnamese intervention has been treated in recent years. The wave of films about the experience itself is not a new phenomenon.

During the build up of the American presence the 'light at the end of the tunnel' was kept burning by John Wayne and the Green Berets. Despite was marked by films portraying the bitter and often psychopathic veterans returning home, played by new actors like Dennis Hopper and Jon Voigt.

However, attempts to come to grips with the war itself found themselves taking cover in demologoy (the sadistic and twisted 'I-I soldiers of The Deer Hunter') or in the magical realism of Apocalypse Now.

The need of interventionism utilised the familiar and emotive theme of US foreign policy – the American captive. Starting from real Life campaigns around those missing in action from the Vietnamese war on to the reasons for denying aid to Vietnam, to the US embassy hostage in Tehran, to the 'possible danger' to the US students at the Grenadian medical school, to the string of films narrated with Sylvester Stallone and Chuck Connors-ranging the jungles of the Far East in search of those enslaved by communism.

The reaction to those films was swift, frequently seen in the debate of what memorial should be erected to the US victims of the war in Washington. As against the Pentagon who pressed for a conventional commemoration to the valor of those who died for a greater good, veteran associations pushed the other way. The commemorating was a single monumental slab engraved simply with the names of the soldiers who died. This is the spirit which informs the current crop of films — the exaltation of the common soldier.

The theme of the 'poor bloody infantry' has always been contradictory. It simultaneously carries an implied or explicit condemnation of the motives and strategy of governments and military high commands, while celebrating the bravery of those who fight. It can allow a portion of either left or right to see a film like Platoon and applaud it.

Likewise with Stanley Kubrick's film Full Metal Jacket, currently creating great popularity on general release, with a record from its sound track riding high in the charts. The film is split into two parts. In the first half you accompany a raw squad of recruits through their training as marines. They are brutalised. You are brutalised. A human conversation does not occur until twenty minutes into the film. Sex becomes something you do with your rifle. Kubrick preys his audience in the chest asking: 'would you have been able to resist this conditioning?'

The bulk-headed 'grunts' then find themselves hustled into the Tet offensive of 1968. But it is a curiously one-dimensional war. There is no drug-taking among soldiers, no 'fragg'ing' of officers, the rise of The peace movement in the USA and internationally is never mentioned.

Major contradictions are only hinted at with one of the characters wearing a peace button on his lapel and 'Born to Kill' on his helmet. He is asked by a colonel the meaning of his peace badge. 'You know it's the Jungian thing,' he replies, 'the duality of life, love and death'. The colonel does not buy this, but Kubrick clearly does.

His soldiers, schooled to kill, are swept towards their bloody end, with only the strongest surviving. Those who hesitate are lost. It is a bleak and pessimistic view not only of war, but of humanity in general, with its strong implication that we are unable to resist the pressures which push towards the Holocaust.

It would be nice to think that films like Kubrick's marked an anti-war reaction to the glorification of the Rambo-type barbarian warrior. In fact Platoon, Full Metal Jacket and Full Metal Jacket mark an impasse. The combination of the scorn resilience of the Sandinista and the remnants of the Vietnam syndrome prevent an invasion of Nicaragua. If that resilience collapses, as it did in Grenada, domestic pressure is not sufficient. Neither is it sufficient to halt US adventures in the Gulf.

The rebuilding of a truly mass anti-war movement not just in the USA but around the world will be signalled by new films which can give both a realistic account of war and at the same time, provoke a real examination of its mechanisms.

All Quiet on the Western Front provided such a critique of the First World War, seen through the eyes of a German soldier. A similar account remains to be made of Vietnam.
£10,000 for a monthly SOCIALIST OUTLOOK!

In the first few months of Thatcher's third term an onslaught has been unleashed against the working class and oppressed which makes the efforts of previous Tory administrations pale by comparison.

The response of the official leadership of the labour movement has been utterly bankrupt. The approach of Kinnock and Gould at the Labour Party conference, and from most trade union leaderships at the TUC, has been rightly dubbed 'sub-Thatcherism', because of its acceptance of the economic and social framework set by the Tories for the eighties and nineties.

The crash in the stock markets in the major capitalist centres, coming in the context of a deep and profound crisis of capitalism, points up the complete inadequacy of 'sub-Thatcherism' as a strategy for the labour movement.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK is committed to the development of a real socialist alternative both to the ravages of Thatcherism and to the grey tide of Kinnockism and 'new realism'.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK rejects the view that the fundamentals of socialism are out-dated or irrelevant in the changed conditions of the nineteen eighties. We defend the central role of the working class in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism, the fight for a democratically planned economy, the fight for workers' control, for internationalism and against racial and sexual oppression.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK has in its first four issues provided in-depth analysis and debate on developments in the unions, the struggle in the Labour Party, the recomposition of British politics and many international issues of crucial importance for socialists.

We believe that moving to a monthly production schedule is urgent given the development of the political situation and the speed of events. Our aim is now to begin monthly production from March '88. But to do this we need money. Money for full time staff, money for typesetting and printing equipment. Money to improve the quality of our design and production and the range of our coverage.

Since our launch in May we have had an excellent response to our drive for subscriptions, sales and donations. But we are still only half way towards achieving our target of £10,000 for a monthly SOCIALIST OUTLOOK.

We are asking all our supporters, and all those who sympathise with our objectives, to help us achieve our goal. You can do three things immediately:

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