After Soviet coup
WHAT NEXT?

INSIDE: ● 4 pages on the USSR ● plus CUBA ● ●
● TUC ● Labour witch-hunt ● DID David Owen fail?
Heating is on for Green AGM

By Sam Heman

The Green Party AGM next week seems certain to be hot with debate over the party's future. Jonathan Forrit and other party heavyweights have been lobbying heavily to get this AGM to adopt a document known as 'Green 2000'. This seeks to centralise and restructure the Green Party in order to make it 'serious and electorally viable'.

These debates are nothing new. In fact, throughout recent Green 2000 have been pushing similar ideas for the last three years or so. But the tone of the debate has recently come very close to a possible general election. It will be the first major election since the 1989 Euro-elections where the Greens won a surprising 2.5 million votes. It will be seen as an important test by the more radical and left-wing sections of the party.

Radicalism

However, many activists at the grassroots of the party see Green 2000 as a threat to the radicalism at the heart of green politics. The Green Party has always been driven by decentralisation and participation - from feminist and anarchist currents. It has shied away from the conventional use of individualistic 'star leaders'.

Far from weakening green politics, opponents of Green 2000 argue that the methods strengthen it. The fear is that if the Forrit current get their way at the AGM the Green Party will look more like the Liberal Democrats than a true green alternative to the world.

Clearly this has always been a debate just waiting to happen. Most activists certainly that Green 2000 will get the necessary two-thirds majority for it to become policy. There is even a possibility, because of an expensive conference levy, that the AGM may not be quorate. This would also defer the decision.

For socialists in the Green Party this may result in a breathing space. The left have not organised at all since the Association of Green Greens disbanded a year ago. And the debate will keep coming back.

Ideally, this is the kind of debate that should be had in the Socialist Movement - where socialists could re-examine the left's role so that left green politics can be organised, both in the Green Party and the labour movement. But socialists outside the Greens have only just started to wake up a bit before this can happen.
Did David Owen fail?

By Paul Clarke

The NEWS that David Owen is resigning down at the next election is just a footnote to the death of the SDP.

The time when the SDP-Liberal Alliance was way ahead in the opinion polls, and Roy Jenkins won a spectacular victory in the Hilbrow by-election, seems light years away.

All those claims about "breaking the mould" of British politics appear defunct; the Liberal Democrats are no more significant than the Liberals before the SDP was formed.

So was David Owen's whole project a failure, just another attempt to form a new party, a new major party, as insignificant as Oswald Mosley's "New Party" in the early 1930s? In fact, David Owen's political project was highly successful in helping to shape British politics in the 1980s.

Gang of Four

The SDP was formed as a right-wing split from Labour in 1981; the Gang of Four - Owen, Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins and William Rodgers - formed the SDP as a direct reply to the growing surge of the Berenice left. Their plan was that the polarization between a Thatcherite Tory party and a radical left Labour Party would create the space for a powerful centre party. But it was not to be.

The plans of leading politicians are one thing, the plans of the opinion formers in the ruling class are another. So long as Labour appeared to have turned left for a whole historical period, important sections of bourgeois opinion accepted the need for a revamped three-party system.

This ensured the prescrip-

tion of keeping Labour out of government, since the "normal" alternation of the Tories or a right-wing Labour in power could not be relied on. But even the Labour left was defeated, a very strong centre party was no longer so immediately indispensable for the ruling class.

What in the end defeated the "three-party" plan for British politics was the complete victory of Kinockism in the Labour Party. The Kinock-Hattersley "dream ticket" was elected.

Union chiefs

Behind their victory, and behind each successive rightward Labour move since, has stood the power of the trade union bureaucracy, desperate to prove to the ruling class that Labour was "fit to govern."

While Benazret swept the constituencies until the middle of the 1980s, the union block vote ensured Kinockite control of the conference and NEC.

At a superficial level it seems that labour movement politics is back to the situation of the late 1950s. Right-wing trade union barons dominate the key NEC and the Labour Party has a strong right-wing leadership and the left is marginalised.

But the general political context is completely different. The crisis of British capitalism is much deeper, and so is the crisis of Labour.

David Owen is part responsible for Kinockism, but it is a very fragile outgrowth. Politically it is virtually devoid of ideas and incapable of distinguishing itself from Major's Tories. The one idea it does have is to get into power.

Right wing

In this situation it has two possible futures. Either it will succeed in getting into power and result in the most right-wing Labour government ever, or it will lose the next election, and eventually Kinock will go.

Either way, the many Labour and union activists who have kept their heads down, convinced that compliance with Kinockism was the only practical policy, are going to be sorely disappointed.

The next British government will result in Tory policies applied by Major or Tory policies applied by Kinnock. That will create a situation in which the apparent log-jam of British politics will be broken.

The dominance of Kinockism and its union "new realism" counterpart is based on the defeat suffered by the unions in the NHS, the trade union movement is paying the terrible price for the union leaders, the miners, the printers, the dockers and other groups of workers. While the immediate aftermath of an election will begin to produce a political reconfiguration inside the labour movement, a break with the basic dominance of the right can only be the result of a recovery in the class struggle.

Nobody can predict exactly how and when that will come, but come it will. New struggles will unlock the situation in the Labour Party.

Kinockism is a product of defeat and can only sustain itself on defeat and quietism. That is why it is an episode and not a major historical trend in British politics; the basic historical trend is towards a deepening of the crisis and thus major new class conflicts.

David Owen is retreating to the side-lines, but the ruling class still has the Liberal Democrats as a reserve force in the wings. Stable two-party politics in Britain was the result of relative social and political stability, and that has gone for ever. The SDP is defunct, but multi-party ruling class politics has not.

NALGO pay defeat

By Brian Gardner

(Branch secretary, Islington NALGO)

NALGO's half-million strong local government membership has voted down industrial action against the employers' 6.4 per cent pay offer by a 2-1 majority.

The union had claimed 17 per cent and a minimum of 93000 - the Council of Europe 'decency benchmark'. Once again, the hundreds of thousands of low-paid white collar workers in local government will lose out.

In the sapping of the workforce's morale through the sustained attack on local government, and the passivity of the union leadership.

The union's local government committee was banking on a "reasonable" compromise with the employers: the campaign for a yet higher vote for industrial action was too late and half-hearted. It was a campaign the leadership did not want to win.

In the end the NALGO leadership was not manoeuvred by the employers, who have been preparing for industrial action since their defeat during NALGO's 1990 pay campaign.

Representatives of local government Provincial Councils who might have backed a higher settlement were thrown off the employers' negotiating body.

The significance of the defeat goes beyond the immediate issue of pay. NALGO members are facing a combined attack over the next year which will pose a major challenge to employment levels and negotiating rights.

The 1990-91 financial year will see dozens of employers imposing massive cuts. Tens of thousands of jobs will go.

So far NALGO's leadership has responded piecemeal to cuts and job losses. While formally backing an industrial action strategy, in reality local branches have been left to negotiate job losses through voluntary redundancy, early retirement or supplemented payments for compulsory redundancies.

This 'roll with the punches' approach has left local branches isolated and unable to respond with effective industrial action.

On top of the job loss and service cuts crisis, the employers are hammering up for a possible break-up of the national negotiating structure.

More than 40 local government branches, especially in the South East, have negotiated local pay bargaining or personal contract deals. The defeat on pay can only encourage employers locally to push for worse redundancies and restricting plans.

NALGO's June conference voted for a special conference on strategy to resist cuts. This has been organised as a four-hour conference in Brighton on a September afternoon - ensuring minimal attendance from round the country.

NALGO members have been told the idea that merger with NUPE and COHSE is the answer to all their ills. But NUPE for this year overwhelmingly rejected strike action on a similar 6.4 per cent offer.

A merged union will still face the basic problem of fighting against cuts, redundancies and all the pay in local government and all the public service.

NALGO local government members now face an uphill fight. Only sustained and nationally-coordinated industrial action will push back the employers' offensive, and prepare for victory on pay next year.

No. 7 Sept. 14, 1991 Page 3
Labour executive elections - defend Benn and Skinner!

by Pete Firmin

The Labour right wing are hoping that the first year of individual ballots (COMOY) will see their strawhedge on the party's executive strengthened. They hope to see Tony Benn or Dennis Skinner removed, the only consistent voices against Kinoshita left on the leadership.

Though COMOY has been heralded as the new dawn of party democracy, the procedure is almost designed to produce a low turn out and no discussion. Rather than voting at branch meetings with a postal ballot for those unable to attend, there is one central meeting for most constituencies.

Left unable to agree

In addition, these meetings are not to discuss the candidates - members are referred to biographical details in Labour Party News (LPN). Unfortunately, due to the shambles of the national membership scheme, many do not receive LPN.

This is compounded by the left's inability to agree on one slate of candidates.

The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs discussed and drew up their slate in isolation from the rest of the left. Audrey Wise MP is not standing, and the Campaign Group (correctly) decided not to support Roy Jenkins because of her support for the witch-hunt and the Gulf War.

Fair weather friends

So they decided to replace them with two white men (Jeremy Corbyn MP and Dave Nellist MP) on the grounds that no other women or black people in the Campaign Group wanted to stand. However, if they had raised their sights beyond Parliament, they would have realised that there are credible black and women candidates outside.

This put the extra-parliamentary left in the unenviable position of either accepting the MPs' slate, and dwching positive action, or drawing up alternative slates and inevitably causing confusion.

To have endorsed the Campaign Group slate would have exposed the rest of the left as "fair weather" supporters of positive action. To its credit, most of the left has rejected the slate. Kanta Patel, a Greenwich Councillor and a national vice-chair of the Black Section, is standing and Black Sections drew up a slate replacing Dave Nellist MP with her.

This is far from ideal, particularly when Nellist is facing a major witch-hunt. But to draw up another slate would discredit the left even further.

Socialist Outlook supporters and Labour Party Socialists are therefore calling for a vote on the Black Section slate (see below). This makes it even more important that emergency resolutions opposing the witch-hunt of Nellist and Fields are submitted to the conference (see above).

Disillusioned members

The left will not make any progress in these elections, but by mobilising the vote we can ensure that Benn and Skinner retain their places and other, lesser-known candidates are established as real contenders for future years. Disillusioned, inactive members need to be encouraged to cast their votes in this election.

The left also needs to increase pressure on the Campaign Group to ensure this year's debacle is not repeated. A democratic method for discussing and deciding on the left slate for future years must be found.

Conference against the witch hunt

September 21st
Manchester Town Hall
1pm-5pm
For further information contact 10b Windsor Road, London N7
Vote to accept anti-union laws

TUC runs up the white flag

By Alan Thorne

ANY HINT of militancy will give votes to the Tories. That was the message from TUC leaders throughout last week's TUC Congress. It is a disgraceful argument.

Even if it were true, it would be wrong to subordinate the right of millions of workers to defend their interests to the electoral needs of Labour—ever since the implosion of the Labour Party. It is in defending the interests of the working class that support for Labour is consolidated. If it were true, the real beneficiaries of militancy benefits the Tories. Normally Labour's support actually goes up, not down during periods of industrial militancy.

Miners' strike

For example, during the miner's strike, Labour was regularly 10-12 per cent ahead in the polls. High levels of class struggle under a Tory government strengthen the miners' movement and the Labour vote. It is a lesson the TUC should learn.

Norman Willis and the TUC General Council, however, are not interested in such facts. This year's Congress was not just a pre-election rally, it was 'new realism' in action.

TUC leaders talked about the need for a 'social partnership at work' and for cooperation with 'efficient management'. You would hardly have known that there was a vicious employers' offensive in progress. Or that workers were facing mass redundancies, victimisations, derecognition, de-unionisation, single union deals, invididual contracts, speed-up, team leaders, quality circles and all the other weapons of modern crisis-proofing in the industry to increase the exploitation of those represented by the TUC.

Last year the TUC, in a major step backwards, voted to the Labour leadership line and accept that the TUC and the TUC leaders are all currently in the same boat. So the miners' stand under the shadow of the 1984 Act, which is in many ways the worst yet. It shows that they intend to continue with their full scale attack on the unions.

'Cooling off'

The new Act requires a seven days 'cooling off' period before strikes, giving individuals the right to sue unions over strike action; brings the possibility of legally binding agreements; and introduces an attack on the deduction of union dues at source, which would seriously damage unions' finances.

These realities were reflected on the floor of the Congress and produced the best debate of a disastrous conference.

The big betrayal—and victory for Kinncok—was from the left wing leadership of the TGWU, which not only repealed last year's support for the anti-union laws but also, by the very shape of Ron Todd, actually reversed the pro-union laws resolution.

Both ways

Todd managed to get the TGWU to vote both ways at an open conference in June—for the repeal of the laws, and in favour of Labour leadership policy—but this week he left no doubt which of those decisions will be implemented.

Opposing Todd was Arthur Scargill, moving the resolution for the repeal of the laws by a future Labour Government.

He quoted Todd's own speech in 1988, before his collapse into Kinncok's line, when he called upon Labour to: 'sweep away all Tory laws lock, stock and barrel'. Scargill said the unions were entitled to be free of state interference, 'that is the difference between these two resolutions'.

While the hard right trooped up to support Ron Todd, Roger Lyons of MSF told the Congress that he was amazed that 'any delegate here today can have a mandate to support union legislation and keep penal measures on the statute book'. Quite so.

Minority

In the vote there was a substantial minority—2,257,000, on a card vote—in favour of the Scargill motion. These votes included the print union, the Graphical Print and Media Union, NALGO and MSF as well as the NUM.

The TGWU was crucial to the success of the new realist line. Had it voted the other way, it would have attracted other votes, split the Congress down the middle, and opened a new stage in the debate on the issue.

Neil Kinncok was naturally delighted with the outcome. He told reporters that the decision would 'improve the chances of a Labour government'.

He said the decision signified 'an attitude towards constructive industrial relations which is reciprocated by managers around Britain'.

Anyone who can believe that nonsense can vote for keeping the anti-union laws with a clear conscience.

Eating for socialism?

By HARRY SLOAN

WHICH is the party of the gluten-free? No marks if you guessed the Tories: that's the amazing outcome by Neil Kinncok's new-model Labour Party as it turns its back decisively on the working class.

Farewell totes, jumble sales and community: today's Labour Party is the US Democrats and Republicans, raising money at astrologically priced 'Red Rose Campaign' dinners.

Perhaps your invitation got lost in the post? We can inform you that this summer's $500-a-head bash is to be followed by a relative bargain—$175 tickets to the Star and幥's Restaurant in Bingley, supposedly 'mark Labour's commitment to London'.

Discounts are available (a table for ten goes for $800), but this is clearly not an evening at which socialist ideals and listening to the voting supporters—working class handouts from the industrial and inner city heartlands—would be welcome.

Those with sufficient madness and a strong enough stomach can cancel with Labour's affluent, ostentatious elite, ala Lord Ashley or Jack Straw. Ken Hill and Ruth Rendell as they flaunt their wealth and help pick out the clothing back the val- ues.

The diet is not enough of an insult to Labour's homeless, unemployed and poverty-sticker sufferers, the political implications of this new twin are even worse.

The Scargill-Labour program for nothing: they expect at least a quick pro- pose if Labour ever should take office. In targeting the minute and ever-prolonged section of the middle class who might be drawn to such events, Kinnock and co have already abandoned any hint of radical economic policy and professed promises to limit the sale of council housing. Hopefully, the death of the great i.C.S. is the end of the city.

Build the campaign to free Sara Thornton!

By Kate Ahrens

SARA THORNTON, Kiran- jit Ahluwalia and Amelija Rossiter have now suffered not only years of abuse and violence silently condoned by the state, but are also condemned for fighting back. Domestic violence is the real crime. What is needed is not to put women in jail, but to pro- vide sufficient resources that they no longer have to resort to this sort of desperate act.

Amelija Rossiter has been granted leave to appeal, Kiranjit Ahluwalia is still awaiting news of her appeal. All three women need sup- port and solidarity to maintain their struggle against the injustice that has been done to them. There will be demonstra- tions outside the Home Office every other Wednesday from 11 September 9 to 11am, and until 2pm, calling for the imme- diate release of Sara Thornton, Amelija Rossiter and Kiranjit Ahluwalia. The campaign is calling on people to lobby their MPs to support the cases of the three women and to make representations to the Home Office and Lord Chan- cellor, for an urgent reform of the law of personal injuries.

For further information on how to get involved or to send letters or messages of support contact Southall Black Sisters 22 New- wood Road, Southall, Mid- dlesex, UB1 4DW tel: 081 571 9595
Organising women in the unions
Glossy leaflets are not enough!

The bosses call it 'Opportunity 2000'. Getting more women into the boardroom and making some cosmetic changes to equal opportunity legislation looks likely to sit alongside the 'Citizen's Charter' in the Tory election manifesto. Meanwhile, however, workers are under attack, as the Tories and the employers try and strip away the few gains made in pay, conditions and union rights.

It has never been more important for women trade unionists to come together to develop strategies to defend and extend their rights. The 'Women in the Unions' national meeting in November (see advert), organised by Women for Socialism and the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, is the best opportunity to do just that.

In the run up to this meeting VALERIE COULTAS kicks off a series of articles on women's role in the unions.

ENORMOUS changes have taken place in the composition of the labour force since the Second World War. 48 per cent of the workforce in 1951 was female. The economic crisis has not meant the exit of women from the workforce. Their labour is sufficiently cheap, flexible and semi-skilled for women workers to be difficult to replace.

Since the war the proportion of women trade unionists has almost doubled. In 1940 women formed 18 per cent of all trade unionists. In 1990 they formed 34 per cent of the membership of TUC affiliated unions. But the response of the trade unions to this influx of women can be divided into two phases: the late 1960s/early 1970s and post-1979.

Initiative

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, women at the base of the unions clearly had the initiative to organise for trade unionism and self-organisation was immense. Struggles around Equal Pay and the Equal Opportunities Act led to government legislation. The National Joint Action Committee for Women's Rights (NJACWR) was launched in 1970. The first and popular version of the demands of the WLM. It was this campaign, backed by several trade unions, that called the national pro- abortive rally against the James White anti-abortion Bill. This was an attack was a huge victory.

The labour movement was run for by women workers in low-paid and clerical jobs, combined with low levels of combative and self-organisation, has made it difficult for women to make real economic gains in a period of austerity and a ruthless employers' offensive. Without strong unions women will face the sack or if they are not able to pay them low wages, or employers will just subtract by minimum wage legislation brought in by a future Labour government. Repression of women in the trade unions has improved with special measures. But there is no cause for complacency. One in three trade unions are still run by men. They make up only four out of 75 general secretaries. The Confederation of Health Service Employees (COSBE) has a 75 per cent female membership, but at its 1990 conference only 34 per cent of delegates were women.

The ideological and political offensive of the Tory government has also not left women untaught. Whilst a small layer of professional women may have benefited from the Thatcher years, the vast majority of professional women have got poorer. This is while a media campaign that makes it clear women's lives are judged by ever more impossible standards. Their love, their perfect mother/wife/career or glamour girl.

Fundamentals

Although the Labour Party manifesto does have a commitment on low pay, it does not address the fundamental economic counter to the dual burden of work and domestic labour - that women face. The new realists do not encourage the kind of self-organisation of women that really can challenge the bosses' profits, win improved childcare facilities and protect the most oppressed workers.

Women workers are clearly better off in a union than out of it. A recent Labour Research survey showed a difference of 33 per cent between women's pay in unorganised and non-unionised workplaces. But the last two decades show that women will only get what they want from the unions when they themselves organise themselves to fight for their rights. Glossy leaflets produced by a union without a fight, will not be enough to protect women workers from the ruthless exploitation of the bosses.

Women's hospital under the axe

Save the EGA!

by John Lister

The Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital (EGA), London's last remaining specialist hospital for women, is facing a new fight for survival.

Management want to close Aldrich Blake Ward, with the loss of 11 nurses and support staff - to save just £600,000 by April.

This new cutback would reduce the hospital to just 28 in-patient beds and 8 day care beds, and restrict the numbers of women who can choose the special type of care offered by a women's hospital.

Now women's groups in Bloomsbury and Islington health authority are keen to save the EGA altogether, and sell off its prime site near Euston station.

Fighting for its life

The threat is not new: for over 15 years the EGA has been fighting for its life against repeated closure threats. For over three years from 1975 the hospital was 'occupied' by staff who were determined to prevent closure and treat patients in the hospital 'working in'.

This successful fight made the EGA a household name among those defending the NHS against cuts and closures and in the women's movement. The hospital was saved and upgraded, and despite recent cuts which forced the introduction of some male doctors, it still offers a very special type of care and support for women all over London and elsewhere.

Assets stripped

Management admit that the EGA is an early casualty of the Tory government's unpopular NHS reforms, which have deprived doctors from referring women to hospitals outside their local districts. And asset-stripping local health chiefs are moving in for the kill.

They were defeated in the 1970s, and they can be defeated now.

Already staff at the EGA, members of COSBE and NUPE are blocking the building, using the law, holding for strike action to fight these cuts; but they need support in building a broad campaign to save the EGA, and to stop these Tory cuts.

Contact the unions at the hospital at the St Paget (COSBE) or Helen Cotter (NUPE) (071- 387-2501). Leaflets are available from COSBE, 112, Greenhowe Lane, London SW6.

Fighting the privateers

Domestic staff employed by contractors RCO at the Maidstone Hospital on Denmark Hill in south London have staged what appears to be the first full-scale strike over pay by privatised workers in the NHS.

A solid majority voted for all-out action in a ballot organised by COSBE at the end of August.

Meanwhile in South Wales, 350 nursing staff at Gwladys Elis Hospital have threatened strike action over back-door cleaning standards after contractors Hospital Cleaning Services took over.

NUPE, COSBE and GMB members have united to challenge the new, low standards, and warned that the dispute could spread to involve other hospitals served by the same cut-price contractors.
Editorial

Which way after the defeat of the Soviet coup?

Towards capitalism or workers' power?

THE DEFEAT of the attempted Stalinist coup is a tremendous victory for the workers throughout the Soviet Union. If the coup had been successful, the democratic gains won during the years of glasnost would have been savagely eliminated.

The coup finally crumbled because of divisions within the army and KGB leadership. These divisions were in part a product of the defiance by politicians like Yeltsin, but above all because of the mass mobilisations to defend democracy.

Perhaps the workers' mobilisations were not large enough to be absolutely decisive; but they showed what would have been necessary to make the coup stick: mass slaughter, new rebellions, probably civil war. All that was needed was strength for more far-sighted leaders of the army high command.

The defeat of the plotters creates a massive potential for deepening democracy and getting working class interests. But there are formidable obstacles to realising that potential.

The mass, political victors at this stage are the leadership team around Yeltsin, and those fighting for independence in the republics. Yeltsin has the whip hand against Gorbachev, who is increasingly a spent force. But the Yeltsin team is openly pro-capitalist, and the restoration of capitalism is rapidly as possible. As this is pursued, in the Russian and other republics, it will involve harsh measures against working class interests. A key factor in combatting reactionism must be the fight to deepen democracy.

Constituent Assembly

The demand that encapsulates this is the demand for a constituent assembly. A constituent assembly should be elected in each republic with full powers to decide the type of state, government and economy which best serves the interests of the masses.

Yeltsin and his supporters are, at best, supporters of Western-style parliamentary democracy. Socialists should fight for the widest possible elections to public office, with no reserved places for the Communist Party. But they should also argue for going beyond this and putting direct power in the hands of the workers.

During the coup, elements of workers control emerged in some factories, as workers either went on strike or continued production of necessities under their own control. This shows the potential in the situation which must be built on; indeed it is only the basis of deepening mass mobilisations that a new working class leadership can be built on.

In a situation of shortages and economic dislocation, the small minority of socialists in the Soviet Union must be a focus for workers control of food distribution, and the development of a workers' plan for rebuilding the economy with genuine, as opposed to bureaucratic and corrupt, planning. Even if such proposals find only a small echo at first, they will pay enormous dividends as the attempt to marketise the economy produces further chaos and disillusionment.

Oppose ban

Socialists should oppose the suspension of the Communist Party and the suppression of its newspapers. Of course, the measures taken against the CPSU reflect the hatred of large sections of the masses for this party, whose bosses are seen as criminals complicit in the coup.

The working class in the territories of the former Soviet Union has yet to conquer political independence. The CPSU and the official trade unions did not represent the working class. Their demise leaves a situation in which there is no mass working class party, and in which independent trade unions are at best emerging.

The unorganised working class can assert its interests in spontaneous struggles which pressure employers and governments. However it cannot assert its historic interests without mass organisations that politically represent it. Only anarchists could believe that the working class could conquer direct political power without the anti-Stalinist consciousness of the masses being crystallized in independent mass organisation and leadership.

This does not mean that the present leaderships fighting to restore capitalism will have a free hand. Marketisation will worsen the already appalling living standards of the working class. Resistance to this, and defence of the remaining social gains of the masses, creates the basis for huge struggles to come.

The West does not have the surplus capital for the so-called "Small Plan" to rapidly capitalise the Soviet Union. This means that a hybrid situation of a decaying nationalised economy, with islands of privatisation, is likely to linger for a prolonged period. This creates a massive danger. Desperation in the impoverished republics outside the Soviet Union can create the basis for attempts to impose marketisation through renewed forms of authoritarian rule. Unless a working class alternative is built, reactionary currents will gain mass support.

Contradictory

Internationally, the death agony of the Soviet Union will create contradictory effects. The coup was part of the final death rattle of exasperated Stalinism, on which the Cold War is now being finally nailed. Socialists can only welcome the fact that the working class in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has contributed so much to finishing it off.

Simultaneously, imperialism now has a much freer hand, which will in the short and medium-term enable it to make substantial inroads. The first spectacular demonstration of this was the Gulf war which was largely made possible because of the weakening of the Soviet Union. The Cuban revolution is now in grave danger: the overthrow of the Castro regime and its replacement by a pro-capitalist regime would be a grave blow to the workers in Latin America and beyond. Third world liberation struggles will be bereft of the limited support which they were able to obtain from the Soviet Union.

A wider problem exists. The events since 1989 have discredited Stalinism, not the project of a socialist future for humanity. But that is not the way it is presented by bourgeois ideologues, nor the way it is seen by millions of workers internationally.

Confidence in a socialist future must be rebuilt on the basis of what the attempt to restore capitalism actually means, and on the basis of the huge struggles internationally which economic crisis in the West, the East and the third world will now inevitably bring.
Workers must complete the unfinished revolution

AUGUST 1991 was the month when the democratic revolution, having swept through eastern Europe in 1989-90, finally came home to the Soviet Union, birthplace - now graveyard - of the Stalinist system. The collapse of the Soviet state amid the mobilisation of millions on the streets is a welcome development. The key question now is what will emerge to replace it?

It is too early to draw definitive conclusions about the possible consequences of the August events. But one thing is clear: they were the beginning rather than the end of the democratic revolution, which remains in many respects unfinished.

The future now depends on the emergence of independent working class politics and organisation - the development of a mass workers' movement able to complete the anti-Stalinist democratic revolution.

Meanwhile the immediate political victors are the neo-liberals around Russian President Boris Yeltsin whose project is the more or less rapid restoration of capitalism. Notwithstanding their strident 'anti-communism', these forces (most, like Yeltsin, with their origins in the CPSU) represent a wing of the bureaucracy, anxious to hang on to political power and ensure its own future as part of a new capitalist class.

Their stand against the attempted rightwing coup was important, but in the light of the coup's defeat their successful move to capture the political initiative (the counter-coup) is a negative development. They now represent a barrier to the successful completion of the democratic revolution.

**Pro-capitalist**

Paradoxically the existence of a much more enthusiastically pro-capitalist political leadership may not bring the restoration of capitalism any closer. As the Financial Times notes, 'the revolution that has made an economically successful reform (i.e. the restoration of capitalism) politically conceivable has also made it technically still more difficult.'

One reason for this is that the democratic revolution has been bound up with the struggle of the oppressed nations of the USSR for independence, and the collapse of the Soviet state has made independence a possibility. But the restoration of capitalism requires close economic coordination between at least the major republics. Without a centralised Soviet state this becomes much more difficult.

This is why the western powers, while belatedly supporting independence for the Baltics, are so strongly opposed to the break-up of the rest of the former USSR and why they are backing Gorbachev so strongly as a counterweight to separatist tendencies.

Anyone who thinks that, with the defeat of the coup and the rise of the Yeltsinites, Gorbachev no longer has any 'political base' is looking in the wrong places. He has a 'base' in Washington and Bonn, and it is one that Yeltsin ignores at his peril.

Another reason why the August events cannot be seen in any simplistic way as expediting the restoration of capitalism can be gleaned from a leading article in the Economist which said: 'The best thing about this extraordinary August has been the power on the streets.'

The Economist's comment echoes the celebration of 'people power' by such unlikely figures as Margaret Thatcher and George Bush. This journal of liberal capitalism found it expedient to forget its own considerations earlier in the year about the possibility of a '舷co' option for the transition to capitalism in the USSR.
strengthening of democracy are incompatible with serious pro-capitalist economic reform.

In the end of the Soviet Union in a historic sense a defeat for socialism and a victory for capitalism. In order to answer this question fully it is necessary to go beyond the scope of this article and to take a long-term historical view of the role of the USSR in the world and its relationship to the rest of the world. But in order to begin to answer the question it is also necessary to examine the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet state. Various arguments have been put forward on this score.

Was the collapse due to the pressure exerted by imperialism, culminating in the massive arms buildup of the early to mid 1980's? Or was it the result of a crisis-prone system implicating under the weight of its own contradictions? Might it have been caused by millions of working people living in the old way? Clearly each of these factors was important. But which, if any, was decisive?

It would be quite wrong, and politically suicidal, for the left to prioritise the imperialist offensive as the main reason for the Soviet crisis. This argument gives imperialism the credit for ending the oppressive regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe. It lets western leaders get away with arguing that the events of 1989 were the direct result of their 'standing firm' against 'Soviet aggression'. The cold war of the Reagan-Thatcher years.

Destabilising

There is no doubt that the imperialist offensive in all of its forms (from the arms race to the GATT restrictions on the export to the Soviet bloc of high tech arms) provided a powerful destabilising influence on the Soviet economy. But it would be quite wrong to argue that the crisis of Stalinism was reducible to that offensive. For one thing the roots of the challenge to the political legitimacy of Stalinist regimes go back well beyond the 1980's, to the struggles of 1953, 1966, 1968, 1970-71, 1976 and 1980-81. You could hardly argue that the rise of Solidarity in Poland (a key development in the unavailing of the Stalinist system internationally) was somehow the result of the Reagan-Thatcher arms race.

A similar argument applies in relation to those who argue that the Soviet state collapsed "under the weight of its own contradictions". Such an argument implies a process of decay and deintegration which necessarily stems from within and without to cause the system's destruction. According to this view (for example) the collapse was not because of the relationship of social forces and mass movements and the state's strength but because the army leadership was split, the coup plotters were incompetent and so on.

Like the view that it was primarily the imperialist offensive that was responsible for the end of Stalinism, this position also has the effect of minimising the active role of the working class and the movements in the system's collapse.

In addition it begs a number of questions - such as why was the army unable to act? And why were the coup leaders incompetent? In other words the argument is one of tautology: the reason for the Soviet crisis was the collapse of the system (i.e. the army). The question becomes clearer if we look a little more detail into the reasons for the failure of the coup, of which it is possible to identify at least five. They are not given in any order of priority.

First, the complete ideological disintegration of the bureaucracy and the lack of any coherent programme for social development other than pro-capitalist marketisation. Thus the coup's plotters in the defence and security establishments and the military-industrial complex, made no mention of 'communism' or 'socialism' in their public statement announcing their attempted seizure of power.

No significant section of the bureaucracy (left or right) had faith in or stage any even residual faith in the basic tenets of the ideology that has sustained the bureaucracy since the days of Stalin. An appeal for a return to 'Marxist-Leninist' orthodoxy was impossible in circumstances where nobody any longer believes in any such thing.

Half-hearted

The second reason is related to the failure to build well organised and devastating clampdown in Poland in 1981 is instructive, particularly since it was supervised by KGB chief Konstantin Shche

This would tend to indicate that the obvious disinterested and incompetent with which the coup was carried out and which enabled opposition to be organised in the crucial first few hours were not explicable by any supposed innate ineptitude on the part of the plotters. Rather they were the result of the depth of the political crisis of Stalinist rule and the overall relationship of forces in society.

The third reason for the failure of the coup was the existence of an organised centre of opposition, in the form of the Yeltsin and the Russian parliament, which, basing itself on the masses, defined the authority of the new regime and called for mass defiance and a general strike.

The fourth reason was the defection to the Yeltsin camp of a number of key figures within the bureaucracy and security establishment (especially General Polyakov of the KGB, General Kovalchuk of the Soviet chief staff and air force commander Shaposhnikov). In this way the preconditions for the Yeltsin counter-coup were assembled.

This basking on itself for the mass resistance to the coup, Yeltsin simultaneously attempted to ensure that no support emerged from the defeated coup was a political regime able to impose an 'orderly' transition to a post-Stalinist system in which the neo-liberal sections of the bureaucracy can flourish. In many sections of the political and military establishment the Yeltsin option looked like a better bet than being in their lot with the hapless coup planners.

The final, but by no means least important, reason for the defeat of the coup was the active resistance of important sections of the masses, especially in Moscow and Leningrad, but also in the industrial regions of Siberia and Vorotka and in the Baltic republics, Moldova, Ukraine and so on.

The response to Yeltsin's strike call was uneven and the mobilisation which once during the coup attempt were smaller than the demonstrations which took place much earlier in the year. However, the mass response to the calls for resistance was sufficiently strong to discourage the coup leaders and to encourage other sections of the bureaucracy to remain neutral (if one can use that word) or to go over to the side of the mass movement. The mass movement was therefore crucial.

In the light of the coup's defeat, the observations became much fewer until the masses were persuaded to demand a new leadership and set the system on a different path. The question becomes clearer if we look a little more detail into the reasons for the international circumstances. This does not make them any less revolutionary.

First phase

August in the Soviet Union witnessed the emergence of the masses onto the political stage in the first phase of a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the political rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The struggle to complete this revolution is in the same times a fight against the neo-liberal project of the Yeltsin wing of the post-Stalinist bureaucracy, that is, against capitalist restoration and the authoritarian populism. The outcome of this fight is not predetermined: every thing is left to play for. In the context the most urgent task for socialists is the development of an independent working class politics based on the greatest possible working class self-organisation - through independent trade unions, workplace committees and so on.

Such forms of organisation are required for a thoroughgoing democratisation of society of a kind which cannot be achieved by Yeltsin's populist presidential decrees. The destruction of the Communist Party's links to the state apparatus - an essential democratic task - should be achieved through the creation of mass, participatory democratic structures to replace the old repressive ones.

The fact that the leaderships of some republics leave the Communist Party and declare for independence does not mean they can be succeeded. There should be a conscious role of the bureaucracy to act in the interests of the workers.

The task of really finishing off the old regime through thoroughgoing democratisation and workers' self-organisation is vital from the point of view of preparing for the post-capitalist offensive. But it is also necessary if inter-ethnic strife - of the kind currently gripping Yugoslavia - is to be avoided.

It is certainly possible that an authoritarian-populism in Russia and in the other republics might seek to whip up ethnic antagonisms and border disputes as a means of hanging on to power in conditions of economic catastrophe and political instability.

Support should be given to the demands for independence of the oppressed nationalities of the former USSR - but that is not the same thing as supporting the current political leaderships of the Russian republics. Democratic rights of self-determination should be extended beyond the existing fifteen republics to nationalities and national minorities within those republics.

The central democratic principle here is that the limit on the right of self-determination is reached when such self-determination impinges on the rights of other nationalities or national minorities.

Self-determination

The resolution of border disputes, inter-ethnic conflicts and so on is only possible in the context of the fullest possible democratic self-determination for the various groups involved. Only genuine mass participatory democratic structures can provide the institutional and political context in which real negotiation and compromise on the myriad issues of national-democratic rights can be reached.

The only way terrible inter-republican and inter-ethnic strife can be avoided is through finishing off the democratic revolution against bureaucratic rule. It is vital that the national-democratic rights of all the nations and national minorities that any deep and lasting working class unity can be built.

"The most urgent task is the development of an independent working class politics, based on independent trade unions, workplace committees and so on."
Now the danger could be Yeltsin

by Catherine Verla

THE BREAK UP OF THE SOVIET SYSTEM has accelerated since the beginning of the 1990s with the discredit of perestroika as a project for the modernisation and humanisation of the system. The deterioration of the economy implied 'radical' remedies and there were already rumours of a coup d'etat during a visit to the USA of a reform party before the break-up.

Significant divisions appeared in the state apparatus, in the first place the army and the party. They reflected the movements from below which have shaken the system to its roots. It also reflected the weakening of the powers of the centre in relation to the republics summed up in the new union treaty. In addition, the loss of power by the party/state, and the loss of control of the economy, contributed to its downfall. The coup was announced before the coup by the political reorganisation of liberals and Communist reformers led by Shevardnadze and Yakovlev.

This explains the extreme fragility of the putschists. But what was the political logic of the coup?

The coup was generally characterised as a coup as 'conservative' or 'right wing', led against a left supposedly incarnated by Yeltsin. But there are several views of the so-called 'conservative' and several right wings.

The putschists made no appeal for mobilisation. Evidently they were counting on the passivity of a population profoundly discontented by the degradation of everyday life. They appealed to this sentiment by announcing lower taxes and threatening the dangers of famine linked to the reforms.

International Policy

Their main stated aim was the maintenance of a Union, with a powerful centre, and a strong law and order policy. But they did not disassociate themselves from the liberal market projects.

The only international 'policy' put forward by the putschists was a contempt for western aid and a 'patriotic' point of view. For example, the participation of General Kryuchkov (head of the KGB), who had denounced the plot by foreign services 'seeking to destabilise the Soviet Union' last winter, supports this view.

The coup did not represent an 'anti-imperialist' turn, nor was it conservative in the sense of the old system.

The putschists seem to be 'mutatis mutandis' between the old form of non-capitalist dictatorship, of which the administrative machinery has collapsed, and the new pro-capitalist dictatorship that is emerging.

This underlines the real ambiguities of the coup, linked to the cleavages running across the elites, with those who have opted for reconversion in the 'market economy' strengthened.

The putschists are dramatically led by the defence of their material interests. The putschists represent those who have put off their central state apparatus on the internal and international levels.

Second, they represented those who saw the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and the new sovereignty of the republics, plus the drastic reduction in the central budget and arms expenditure, as a threat to their jobs and privileges.

This 'conservatism' of a part of the state apparatus could find a resonance with a part of the neo-Stalinist apparatus of the Communist Party (CPSU) and the trade unions. These layers feel threatened by the economic and political reforms such as Yeltsin's decrees against the Party organisations in the workplaces.

Conservatives

The Russian Communist Party, created by the conservatives, the United Front of Toilers of Leningrad, and the interests based mainly in the non-Russian republics, were, in this respect, potential allies of the putschists.

They could support them, with their rhetoric of pseudo 'defence of the interests of the workers' and of the USSR. But they were not the obvious initiators of the coup and do not seem to have been mobilised to defend it either.

They have nonetheless been held responsible and are suffering in full from the effects of the coup's defeat.

The ambiguity of the putschists reflected the common ground between market socialism and state capitalism in the current period. The state apparatus is one of the essential tools for the capitalist restoration underway.

The fact that Yeltsin and the liberals in power in Moscow and Leningrad were not arrested could express the uncertain orientation of the putschists. Or perhaps it was a假如 they wanted to have a door open to negotiations with supporters of the liberal market, rather than a reflection of amateurishness.

The coup leaders were favourable to market reforms, but at the level of the Union and controlled by the strong state, without counting too much on foreign capital.

There is probably no difference on goals, but simply on strategy, between Kryuchkov and Sidnev or Pavlov and Shatalin.

The tide of capitalist restoration does not have the political, social or economic strength to be completed, except in Germany.

Now the danger could be Yeltsin

LIBERTY GUIDING THE PEOPLE (or Boris the Big Russian Takes Over)

The Russian Communist Party, created by the conservatives, the United Front of Toilers of Leningrad, and the interests based mainly in the non-Russian republics, were, in this respect, potential allies of the putschists. They could support them, with their rhetoric of pseudo 'defence of the interests of the workers' and of the USSR. But they were not the obvious initiators of the coup and do not seem to have been mobilised to defend it either.

They have nonetheless been held responsible and are suffering in full from the effects of the coup's defeat.

The ambiguity of the putschists reflected the common ground between market socialism and state capitalism in the current period. The state apparatus is one of the essential tools for the capitalist restoration underway.

The fact that Yeltsin and the liberals in power in Moscow and Leningrad were not arrested could express the uncertain orientation of the putschists. Or perhaps it was a假如 they wanted to have a door open to negotiations with supporters of the liberal market, rather than a reflection of amateurishness.

The coup leaders were favourable to market reforms, but at the level of the Union and controlled by the strong state, without counting too much on foreign capital.

There is probably no difference on goals, but simply on strategy, between Kryuchkov and Sidnev or Pavlov and Shatalin.

The tide of capitalist restoration does not have the political, social or economic strength to be completed, except in Germany.

There are different currents, some advocating a national capitalism protected from foreign investments, others the reconstruction into the world capitalist market.

Slogans for a rapid privatisation at no matter what cost and whoever benefits, others a slow privatisation controlled by the state. But who will control the state?

One of the difficulties of capitalist restoration is the lack of new personnel. Although state capitalism appears the logical solution from the point of view of the restoration projects faced with the lack of private capital, any reinforcement of the state based on the same apparatus will be seen as 'conservative'.

Liberal market offensive

Those who are most able to advance a restoratorist project are those who originate from a break or a struggle against the old system. Thus in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia it is those who were explicit opponents of the government Party even if they are a product of it and new layers of the technocratic intelligentsia who are in power.

Thanks to his previous break with the CPSU and his role in opposing the coup, Yeltsin has prepared the way for a liberal market offensive, but not the conditions of its success. This offensive will not have any doubt benefit, as in Poland, from a brief period of economic crisis period and increased foreign aid.

But crisis and political uncertainty mean that foreign capital (and US economic support) is still reticent. And the honeymoon will be shorter than in Poland and made more problematic by the breadth of the national question.

There exist both between the Union republics and within the Russian federation itself. The USSR as a 'prison house of nations' is no more and cannot be revived.

The defeat of the coup and the offensive led against the CPSU and its instruments of repression marks a declarative of independence, but also new forms of union, more likely.

The consolidation of a powerful Russia with a powerful leader and the declaration by Yeltsin that the frontiers of the separatist republics, and the large numbers of Russians nominated to governmental posts, have alarmed the other republics.

At the same time, Yeltsin's power in Russia facilitates the bypassing or weakening of the centre. Several factors mitigate against the simple disappearance of the central state, in spite of the growth of direct relations between the republics.

These include fear of the dispersion of nuclear weapons, the search by certain nationalities for federal protection, and the need for common management of a currency and infrastructure.

This is compatible with the sovereignty of the republics in several domains. The Soviet as in Yugoslavia, will be at the heart of the negotiations and conflicts to come. In international policy, the republics want to have their own representatives in world bodies alongside the Union (as is formally the case with the Ukraine, and as is envisaged with Yugoslavia).

Effects of 500 day reform

As for the armed forces, each republic wants to be able to protect itself and the right of its conscripts to serve where they wish. Finally, there is the question of the economy – what degree of independence each republic has, and what monetary space it operates in. The defeat of the coup accelerates the change and break up of the USSR on these levels. The Union, the Party, the State, the nationalities, which were still the driving force behind Yeltsin against the coup immediately. But it is also necessary to point out what the effects of the 500 day reform that he supports would be.

The development of political pluralism and freedom of speech are the only guarantees of democracy. They are the real defence against future coups, wherever they come from.

Such self-organisation and such liberties should be respected in the workplace and the localities. This is why we are against the decree forbidding the workplace cells of the CP, but for the generalisation of the right of organisational and political debate.

We are for the nationalisation of the property of the CP and the official trade unions. But we are for their redistribution under the democratic control of the different political organisations, including the CP.

In the same way, we do not accept the banning of the CP because we reject the confusion between the necessary struggle against the Party/state and its monopoly, and the forbidding of the expression of ideas or limits on the right of organisation and those who still adhere to Communism.

It is an accident that Yeltsin is seen by the socialist and pre-socialist left in the Soviet Union as a potential danger.
Trotskyists visit Cuba...

Cuban leader Fidel Castro has pledged to continue the fight for socialism. But the revolution is now under threat, given the situation in the Soviet Union.

Alain Krivine and Jeanette Habel, leaders of the French Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire, visited Cuba in July. The following interview, translated from 'Rouge', the LCR's newspaper, records their impressions. The translation is by Patrick Baker.

Q: How did you come to visit Cuba?

AK: We were invited by the Communist Party after discussions with Cuban comrades in Paris. A Trotskyist delegation officially received in Cuba is quite a first – it shows how things have changed.

We visited factories, building sites, universities, barracks and held political discussions at all levels. These covered many subjects very frantically: economic reforms, relations with the US, Stalinism, democracy and pluralism. We explained our analysis of Stalinism and the politics of the Fourth International.

At the end of the visit, we met Carlos Aldana, secretary to the Central Committee. Outside of the official meetings, we were able to meet people from other milieus, giving us a broader picture of the problems of the revolution.

Q: Alain, this was your first visit to Cuba. What were your impressions?

AK: I know a number of third world countries and some in eastern Europe. Other than a few points, no comparison is possible – there were no beggars, no shantytowns, no unemployed.

A second striking thing is the economic crisis, particularly relating to food, which seems to have hit the population very rapidly. You have to queue for more than an hour for buses – old Hungarian buses which are about to give up the ghost, which you can’t get up stairs for. You have to queue to get rationed products, without any certainty that the rice or the meat have actually arrived.

A part from that, there are hardly any shops or newspapers left in Havana, which is serious. Food with this sudden poverty, the egalitarian traditions of the revolution remain nonetheless. As for the leaders, the situation is more contradictory.

Together, it seems they are reassuring to sit down to dinner with a vice-minister at his home and hear him say, terribly put out ‘You know, with my ration book, I only have the strict minimum and can’t invite people round. But a few hundred metres away, a senior official was sleeping above his garage containing six cars.

Q: Alain speaks of a lack of food. What effects does this have?

AH: When you get to Havana, it’s true that you are surprised by the length of the queues. They are longer and more numerous than before. Difficulties with supplies are made worse by transport problems, so daily life has become very hard.

Food has been rationed for a long time, and Cubans have bought basic goods in state shops. This system was complemented previously by parallel state markets which supplied goods unavailable elsewhere and, up to 1986, by free peasant markets. These were relatively expensive, but provided a wider variety of foods, particularly fruit and vegetables.

Nowadays neither exists. The latter were shut down by the Communist Party because they made it too easy for private peasants to enrich themselves. And the middlemen who transported the goods from to the cities found it easier to use their own state transport for their own ends. This was made worse by the lack of social control.

So there has been an increase in inequality and corruption, as well as in the enrichment of some small farmers. There were protests, and finally, free markets were banned by Fidel Castro. This is strongly questioned nowadays, because while the speculators have been abolished, the free markets have been replaced by black markets. Now every thing is rationed – only four eggs per week, meat is only available irregularly, and the bread ration has just been set at 80 grams a day.

Q: What are the real causes of this terrible situation?

JH: I will outline five. First, you can’t understand what’s happening without taking into account the food blockade, implemented by the US for the last 30 years. It even includes medicines and could be extended soon, given that Bush has been considering an amendment penalising American companies that trade with Cuba via a third country.

Second, the consequences of events in eastern Europe. The USSR is only respecting one point of the 1990 agreement – oil. So whole food systems like powdered milk and wheat no longer come through in this, of course, the most serious consequence of the whole regime that was established the last 30 years – has failed.

The threats of military intervention have in fact had the opposite effect from that intended – popular mobilisation has strengthened. This explains the current tactics, which involve trying to aggravate internal tensions to strengthen the popular base of the regime.

They have tried to create a brothel in Cuba, a base of support for supposedly democratic elections with the idea of containing the financial aid – the USA. The idea is that if thecreated conflict would provide an excuse for intervention.

It is a dangerous situation – in the aftermath of the Gulf war, the US government is convinced that it can destroy the Cuban revolution by snapping its fingers. This is why withdrawing aid from Cuba has been put forward as a potential precondition of US aid to the Soviet Union. Cuban leaders are asking themselves how much they were sold for...

Q: Given the situation, you must have discussed something connected with the fall of Stalinism, democracy and pluralism with the Cuban leaders...

AK: The events in eastern Europe have made Cuba people in Cuba. ‘We depend on trade with these countries for 85% of our supplies. This Wall fell and we want with it’, a revolutionary commander told us. Some of our contacts have never accepted Stalinism, are developing an analysis similar to ours.

But most people we met believed in the revolution, that it could be saved, even if they’d never liked it much.

In particular, they say that they don’t receive foreign aid any more. Moreover, all of the leaders we met regretted having to copy the USSR, and say so voluntarily, others when pushed. So the 1986 invasion of Czechoslovakia is no longer in place.

The feeling of having been betrayed by the ‘socialist camp’ is being reinforced. The official argument consists of hiding behind the new campaign, started in 1986, as a struggle against bureaucrcy.

Part Two of this interview will appear in Socialist Outlook No 8

No.7 Sept. 14, 1991 Page 11
The left and G.B.H: defending or betraying Trotsky?

In SO No.3 Julia Stevens reviewed G.B.H. This brought criticism from some who saw it as one-sided and premature. Here STEVE TAYLOR looks for historical parallels to analyse how the left has responded to questions of culture.

The most depressing aspect of the criticism levelled at G.B.H was not the uniform hostility with which it was greeted by all sections of the left. It was the political assumptions and perspectives which lay at the heart of this criticism. That the left should have universally condemned a seven-part drama on the basis of one screened episode, two at most, is an act of supreme and thoughtless arrogance.

Standing room only in this bed, folks!

And the little one said...

In Bed With Madonna
Reviewed by Gill Lee
If the sight of a grown adult pulling a wine bottle or sticking her hand in her crotch while fully clothed excites or shocks you then you'll enjoy this film more than I did. The main shock of 'In Bed with Madonna' is how tame it is.

As a role model women can do worse. Madonna is sexually assertive, controls her own business empire, likes women and is anti-homophobic. She also stands up to the Moral Right, refusing to self-censor her show in Canada and Italy.

But, as the movie shows, she has achieved her power to project this image by leaving behind her aging father, alcoholic brother, first 'finger-fucking' woman friend and recasting herself as Madonna the star.

The role model of Madonna is one of individual escape from oppression. Madonna has made it, why can't we?

The 'real life' of the story behind the Blond Ambition Tour is filmed in grainy black and white, while colour and light are reserved for the pulsed concert scenes. Unlike a real documentary, 'real life' here is being acted out for the camera.

As Warren Beatty says 'She doesn't want to live off camera. When there's no saying it's not said in front of the camera.' Madonna has reshaped her past to make it 'shocking' while denying those from her past who have not similarly reshaped their lives, dignity and earning power. Her oversized childhood friend asks Madonna how it feels to be famous and is told 'I'll get back to you' - which Madonna never does.

Her father comes on stage to hear 'Happy Birthday' sung by 20,000 fans while in 'real life' Madonna didn't get time to shop for a present for him.

The Donna's attitude to her entourage of dancers is one of control and patronage. 'All my dancers are emotionally crippled in some way or another.' That's part of why I choose them. I like to mother them,' she says. Five out of six are gay, the majority are black. Only one of the dancers, a heterosexual, is developed as a character in the film, with Madonna defending him from the bitchy queens who make up the rest of the group.

When the young woman make-up artist people have been drugged and raped, Madonna laughs. Below each concert Madonna holds a short prayer meeting for the dancers and prays for a 'good voice' and to berate them for in-lights.

Madonna on stage is energetic, exciting and on top. Off-stage she seems too busy creating herself as a star to do any living.
Return of the reprogrammed revolutionary

Terminator 2

starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton
Reviewed by Jodley Patton

TERMINATOR 2 is the most expensive film ever made, and has been a box-office blockbuster. Its star, Arnold Schwarzenegger, is fondly called the "Republican" by George Bush. With its emphasis on weapons and violence, Terminator 2 seems an unlikely candidate for subversive interpretation.

But if you travel back in time to the first Terminator movie you can see its sequel's radical roots. In it, revolutionaries inhabit a future post-nuclear landscape. Led by John Connor, they long to overthrow the tyrants of robots. The robots send a cyborg back to the future to kill John Connor's future mother.

Some saw the film as a profound analogy for the 'people against the corporate machine'. For whatever reason, the film was a success and eventually there had to be a sequel.

Jump forward in time to 1991. Arnold Connor, as he now calls himself, again plays the cyborg, this time reprogrammed to protect the young John Connor. His enemy is an advanced liquid metal robot that can assume many shapes (and do many special effects). Like Terminator 1, there are many references to the future nuclear war. But unlike the first film this has become merely a dramatic device with little radical content.

In contrast to the mid-eighties, people think the nuclear age is over, and that worry about it is irrational. In this context emotive and horrific scenes of nuclear fires become hopelessly high. With renewed confidence that this is pure fantasy, the audience is allowed to forget that they ever felt nuclear war was possible.

Established institutions come in for a bit of a pasting and it's good to see Sarah Connor and the resistance fight a few more of the battles. Arnie and Linda take on an oppressive psychiatric institution, rampant technology and the cops -- and win!

The film cleverly taps in to genuine fears of technology and the power of massive industries, but this doesn't make the film better. Terminator 2, which uses technology to benefit one class over another, technology itself is seen as the enemy and so the film has an ultimately backward message.

Victory of the revolution depends on the salvation of one person in both Terminator movies. This is where any Marxist Arnie fan has to admit the film's failings. The film lacks any concept of solidarity, let alone class. The course of history can be changed by killing the inventor of the cyborg.

Despite these problems with what, after all, is a Hollywood movie, Terminator 2 is well worth seeing. When Arnie says 'I'll be back' he means it!

In truth, the film has simply moved its old set of goals.

Georg Lukacs condemned the work of Joyce and Eliot as pessimistic and contrasted this with the earlier generation of healthy realistic bourgeois art. Undoubtedly much cultural work at the present time may be linked to irrationalism, although Tennyson's view that this starts with Nietzsche perhaps overstates the development of philosophy, rather than the rise of irrationalism as a defence of class divided societies.

Such an admission should not be welcomed with the quite separate issue of which phase of capitalism (if indeed capitalism has distinct phases), which is the essence of the debate about postmodernism, being justified by the said irrationalism.

Tennant says that: "The claims of postmodernism are not viable. This is not a period of advance for the working class, it's just a dead end in the major capitalist countries." As a mode of argument in cultural analysis this is suspect, but new Substitute relativity theory, or Tractarianism or Catholicism is anything you like for postmodernism, and see if you don't begin to feel it's almost double yourself.

Then suppose Tennyson is correct. This line of argument becomes the dominant theme of the Socialist Outlook. There is no escape from cultural analysis. In that case, why not dispense with the whole of industrial struggles section for another couple of pages?

Terry Murphy

Editor's note: Owing to a typographical error the article criticized by Terry Murphy was incorrectly attributed to Sean Tunney. It was wrongly signed by Paul Clarke. Clarke will reply to this letter in the next issue. Murphy is being impulsive and作 a large contribution on this debate in a forthcoming issue.

Not so much simple as superficial

Sean Tunney's article on postmodernism (SO 6) was superficial and muddled. Tunney's need for 'simplicity' (why should cultural analysis need this anyway?) allows him to analyse the contents of David Harvey's The Condition of Postmodernism and pass this off as the orthodoxy on postmodernism. He is forced to admit that there is no agreed orthodoxy on postmodernism.

But he quickly goes on to say there is a certain unity to those who have become 'postmodernists', namely that there is no basis for the theory that has no meaning or subject. But it is not clear what labels say that the 'postmodernists' theories and artistic styles which dominated through much of this century have represented 'confidence on the part of the bourgeoisie and the working class. Really? Darkhelm and the concept of anomy? Weber and bureaucratization? Can anyone really describe TS Eliot's The Waste Land as confident in tone? There are many other similar examples.

Feedback

We welcome letters on any subject but please keep them brief. Letters over 350 words will be cut. Send your letters to: Socialist Outlook PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UU

Rake off, not rip off?

Your article in issue 5 on the collapse of BCCI misleads. Under the headline 'Banking means fraud' you argue that 'finance capital, by definition, is based on usury and fraud', and 'fraud is at the heart of the capitalist system'. Not so.

Banking is another means of circulating profit made in one sphere to investment in another. It enables the mobility which is a fundamental feature of capital. The profit made by banking capital is normal capitalist profit: capital is necessary to run a bank, and banks are entitled to an average rate of return on this capital. Competition in banking moderates this return. There is nothing fraudulent about this at all.

Nor is capitalist banking 'usurious', if that means arbitrary or monopolistic profit. The interest rates of the 1980s, which you cite, were indeed high by historical standards, but this was due to strong demand from firms, consumers, and states -- the market in money capital. Moreover, interest is limited by productive profit, from which it is derived. In the 1980s this was perhaps 3%-4% per annum out of 15-25% productive profit.

High interest rates are anyway not the same thing as high bank profit, which is a marginal difference in interest rates. You do not describe either interest rates or bank profits as 'usurious'.

BCCI was involved in fraud, both in conniving in the illegal activities of its customers and in ripping off its depositors. But this fraud is against capitalist rules of capitalist states. States regulate banking in order to stop capitalists ripping off each other, and in order to head-off disruptive collapses, that is, in the interests of capital as a whole.

Certainly the nature of capital valuation as fictitious capital gives opportunities for fraud. And certainly, competition for deposits has increased state regulation, which is why the Bank of England ignored BCCI for so long. But the rip offs and instability that arises are a problem for capital. You ignore all these contradictions.

Populists have always portrayed profit, especially bank profit, as deriving from trickery. One of Marx's main arguments in Capital is that this is not so. Our paper should present populist Marxism, not populist rhetoric.

Jamie Gough
London WC1
Falling out over the united front

By Paul Lawson

Communists had to reorganise and recreate the existing labour movement and that meant competing and contesting with the reformist leaders over the allegiance of the working class. This in turn implied encouraging and supporting every move to the left, rather than passively denouncing it as impure and inadequate.

Trotsky in particular fought to urge the small Marxist organisations of the 1930s, when the Communist International had been conquered by Stalinism, to turn towards every manifestation of opposition to the right wing leadership in the unions and mass working class parties.

Militant

The communist leaders who elaborated the united front approach did not regard it as a trick or manoeuvre to win over the base of the social democrats. Rather it served a dual purpose, on the one hand responding to the need for the maximum unity of the working class in struggle, and at the same time creating the preconditions for winning over the most militant and determined reformist workers.

To carry through the united front the method of making demands on the reformist leaders was developed. Trotsky described this process as "dragging the reformists from their asylums".

It meant instead of just criticising the social democratic leaders, proposing concrete campaigns and demands to them, to test out their willingness to fight in practice.

Stalin

This had two effects. The leadership of the social democratic SPD isolated the communists by blaming them for working class disunity. This of course was hypocritical because the SPD leaders didn't want unity either; but the communists gave them a perfect get-out.

At the same time, the fight against the Nazis was severely damaged. Only in a few localities did communist and social democrats defy their leaders and fight shoulder-to-shoulder against the Nazis.

The debacle in Germany, when Hitler came to power in 1933, led to a huge lurch by Stalin - not towards the united front but the popular front. This mean Communist parties building government and election alliances not just with social democrats but bourgeois parties as well.

The united front policy of the Communist International in its revolutionary period meant not just attempting to build unity of the whole labour movement where possible, but actively building alliances between the communist and non-communist left against the right wing workers leadership.

This was most successfully applied in Britain during the mid-1920s when the Communist Party built the Minority Movement in the unions and the National Left Wing Movement in the Labour Party.

Both won support from hundreds of thousands of workers, but were closed down by the CP and followed Stalin's orders and turned towards 'third period' ultra-leftism.

United Left

In today's conditions the united front had to be posed in a new way. Mass revolutionary parties no longer exist; direct proposals from small revolutionary groups to reformist leaders lack credibility.

Moreover, social democracy itself has changed. In the 1920s and '30s reformist leaders claimed to be fighting for socialism, albeit by piecemeal and gradual methods.

Social democratic leaders like Kinnock, Mitterrand and Gonzalez, this is hardly true; socialism is barely mentioned by these people. While socialists condemn that these reformist leaders should break with pro-capitalist policies, this kind of demand serves a purely propaganda function. It is not a serious proposal for immediate joint action.

Today the primary axis of the united front is towards creating the maximum unity in workers struggles, the struggle of the oppressed and political campaigns.

It is here that the dispute about the united front is most acute among the left. Because of their formal adherence to many of Trotsky's ideas, political currents like the SWP and Militant tendency pay lip-service to the united front.

Propagandism

But in practice their activity is often guided not by the strategic guidance of fighting to advance the objective interests of the working class and oppressed, nor by maximising the impact of left opposition to right wing leaders, but of simply the needs of selling more papers and recruiting more members.

Sectarian abstentionism and propagandism is generally the result. A genuine united front policy today must stress the need to build the maximum unity in support of struggles, and the maximum unity of the left, in support of class struggle policies, within the labour movement.

Far too often in recent years we have seen the Militant and SWP determined to take over the united campaigning bodies and utilise them as "front" organisations.

Militant's ham-fisted insistence on organisational domination in the Anti-Poll Tax Federation and the SWP's November 1984 coup to take over the NALGO Broad Left are typical examples.

Such antics are effectively a policy of division, of putting the interests of particular left organisations against the interests of the working class and united united militant action by the left.

They have nothing in common with Lenin and Trotsky's conception of the united front.

Because of their formal adherence to many of Trotsky's ideas, political currents like the SWP and Militant tendency pay lip-service to the united front.

But in practice their activity is often guided not by the strategic guidance of fighting to advance the objective interests of the working class and oppressed, nor by maximising the impact of left opposition to right wing leaders, but of simply the needs of selling more papers and recruiting more members.

Sectarian abstentionism and propagandism is generally the result. A genuine united front policy today must stress the need to build the maximum unity in support of struggles, and the maximum unity of the left, in support of class struggle policies, within the labour movement.

Far too often in recent years we have seen the Militant and SWP determined to take over the united campaigning bodies and utilise them as "front" organisations.

Militant's ham-fisted insistence on organisational domination in the Anti-Poll Tax Federation and the SWP's November 1984 coup to take over the NALGO Broad Left are typical examples.

Such antics are effectively a policy of division, of putting the interests of particular left organisations against the interests of the working class and united militant action by the left.

They have nothing in common with Lenin and Trotsky's conception of the united front.

Become a Socialist Outlook Supporter

Yes! I want to become a Socialist Outlook supporter

I want more information about Socialist Outlook

I want to take an order of .... copies of Socialist Outlook to sell

Name: ................................................
Address: ................................................
Tel: ................................................

Please return to: Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UU

---

Page 14 Sept 14, 1991 No. 7
Summer School success
NEARLY one hundred people attended the week-long Socialist Outlook residential summer school, held in North Wales, immediately after the defeat of the attempted Stalinist coup in the USSR. Participants debated about the character of the coup and the future of Stalinism was a central feature of the school.
In fact, the main theme of the event, the history of the Trotskyist movement since World War 2, rarely deviated with the discussions on the possibility of an opportunity for the many younger comrades present - and some not so young - to familiarise themselves with how the issue of Stalinism had been dealt with in the movement in previous years.
Plenaries and workshops dealt with issues such as the post-war defeat of capitalism in Eastern Europe, the Chinese revolution and the nature of the Vietnamese Communist Party. In addition there were workshops on such diverse topics as women’s liberation, class struggle, sexuality and the work of Marxists in the trade union movement. Each session of basic Marxism was well attended.
Three things particularly contributed to the success of the school. Firstly, the effective organisation by Socialist Outlook’s education commission, and secondly the fact that the school should mark a break with the primitive educational techniques (long lecture followed by discussion) characteristic of so much of the movement.
Discussion at the school was also aided considerably by the presence of a delegation from the Latin American Organisation People’s Democracy, who made several presentations and ran some of the workshops.
The success of the school means that Outlook is determined to make it an annual event. We hope to advertise the date and venue of the 1992 school in the near future.

TUC clumbsdown on Trades Councils
TUC leaders have been forced into a dramatic climbdown over Trades Councils. After abandoning the Trades Councils’ annual conference and their co-ordinating body last October, the TUC General Council have been forced to back down.
The about-face was the result of a sustained campaign by the Trades Councils to win back their national support, including an unofficial national conference in May. By July the TUC leaders had sent out a circular rescinding their withdrawal of support.
The mood of Congress delegates was overwhelmingly in support of the Trades Councils’ campaign. Willie O’Brien of the train drivers’ union ASLEP said: We are tellling Congress House: Hands off Trades Councils. We are pleased to see the move to reverse the dictatorial and anti-democratic decision on Trades Councils and related issues. Now we want that diktat chucked away.

Consultation
The only opposition to the move came from the right wing president of the engineers union AEU, Bill Jordan. Now that the coordinating body and the annual conference have been reinstated, there will now be a one year consultation process on the future role of trades councils.

Nottingham fights back against fascists
by Gail Squires
While ministers from all over Europe meet behind closed doors to discuss immigration controls alongside drug trafficking and terrorism in preparation for Fortress Europe, fascist activity and racist attacks are increasing.
In Nottingham, where both the British National Party (BNP) and the National Front (NF) are present, local communities are organising to drive them out.
Incidents of racist violence have been reported in a number of inner city areas, particularly Forest Fields, which has a large black community. In April, the Madini Madjdi mosque was attacked while worshippers were inside. There have also been broken windows and damage.
Young black people in the area have been subjected to racist abuse and harassment. A young Asian man was stabbed by a gang of white youths. BNP attempts to isloate the area shortly after were quickly halted.
A meeting called by local people from Forest Fields in response attracted over 250 people, who established the Forest Fields Anti-Racist Action Group (FFARAG). The group unit the Mansfield Defence Committee, black community groups, local residents associations and socialists. A demonstration organised by the group attracted over 500 people.

BBC – the gathering storm
by Dominic Mallard
Industrial relations at the BBC are now at a stage where you could build a dinosaur skeleton from the bones that the unions have to pick with management.
National management are trying to impose the "Pay in the 1960's" package – Roger Bannin, the main BBC union BECTU, said this offers a 5% increase, but requires the almost complete control of our lives. Pay in the 1960's would mean that any employee could be called in on a day off, or endure a shift change at very short notice. Many workers are mothers with young children, and they feel particularly angry. Members of BECTU and the journalists' union NUJ are being battled on the unions' response.
Both are calling for rejection of the proposals. A NUJ member wrote in to a further letter was held on to identify industrial action. BECTU members are being urged to vote 'yes' to four proposals - to reject 'Pay in the 1960s', to take industrial action, to support a general strike, and to support victimised colleagues.
At the BBC at Caversham, the picture is stormier. Management gave employees one month's notice of a 'two week' plan - a month's notice - because the had serious Repatriation Scheme. The victimised employee has been temporarily transferred, but feelings are still running high.

Advertisement

Workers Power
Memorial Meeting
Dave Hughes 1948-1991
Founder member of Workers Power
Power Sunday 15th September 3pm
Large Lecture Theatre, Polytechnic of Central London
155 New Cavendish Street
Admission £1
Nearest tubes: Goodge St, Warren St, Oxford Circus

No. 7 Sept. 14, 1991 Page 15
Blackbird Leys

Cops make a crisis, then a drama

By Harry Sloan

THOUGH sensationalised out of all proportion, the recent relatively small-scale clashes with police on Oxford’s Blackbird Leys estate do have some common features with inner-city uprisings of the 1980s.

Blackbird Leys is not an inner-city area, but it is isolated and socially deprived, a pool of poverty and unemployment, with families overcrowded in housing from which they can’t afford to escape.

Only a small minority of the 10,000 residents of Blackbird Leys who belong to the estate are regarded as a kind of ghetto by the police, who display their innate racism by terming it ‘the jungle’ in their radio messages.

Beaten in cells

A focal point in the escalation of the Blackbird Leys affair was the arrest of a random vandal of black youth, and later beat them up in cells at the police station.

As in several inner-city rebellions, blacks and white youth joined forces to fight back against harassment, showing their hatred and contempt for the police and for a society that offers them no sense of purpose, hope or achievement.

Local and the three-hundred list of council-funded ‘amenities’ on the estate, it offers no music or entertainment, and little but boredom to most teenage youth, especially on hot summer evenings.

The youth provided a source of illicit excitement, and immediately became a focus of attention.

They are not politically enlightened vanguard—the young car thieves are among the best proponents of Thatcher’s anti-social pronouncement that ‘There is such no thing as society, just individuals and their families’.

Stunts

Having snatched a high-performance car, they threw it in a series of reckless stunts in front of an audience, before frequenting it all. Their activities have left a trail of ‘auto-crime’ behind. Oxford, with at least 20 reported incidents each month, the police have not considered to be a problem.

18 months the police concerned about a solidly working class estate—largely ignored these problems, making no effort to investigate them or publicly declaring they would not pursue inquiries for fear of accidents. The police did not arrest these first victims were black youth, arrested and beaten up simply for being there.

As the crowds became bigger and angrier, with militant youth mingling with adults hostile to the police invasion, the police brought in riot gear. Again predictably their main fear was directed against the joyriders but at the innocent onlookers.

Several people were arrested for the ‘crime’ of crossing the road for a Chinese takeaway.

A pattern of victimisation and repression: police picking on black youth in London’s giant Thamesside estate.

Others were beaten with batons where they stood or sat in their own doorways. Sensationalised press coverage reached saturation point whenever a woman—who has herself been charged for an alleged stabbing—came off worst in the black and white media.

Within a few days the police had gone from inactivity to creating a riot, grabbing front-page silly season press coverage, and offering the Tories some extra ‘law and order’ propaganda. Since then, heavy-handed policing has continued to provoke anger and hostility on the estate.

Labour’s leaders have pinned hands with the Tories to demand that youth be arrested wholesale and jailed.

Withdrawal

In contrast to this, the left must demand the immediate withdrawal of the riot squad from Blackbird Leys: as always, they have primarily victimised the innocent.

There should be a full public inquiry into the police beatings of black youth which helped spark off a series of Saturday night rioting.

The local community knows who many of the joyriders and rioters are and the local community organises to deal with them: but this must be organised in a way that gives no scope to racists who would be ‘victimized’ to blame the problems on black families.

Roy Hattersley’s ignorant outbursts confirm that today’s Labour Party has no time or space for working class youth, whose elemental, anti-social revolt is the result of frustration and an unchallenged diet of Thatcherite individualism.

The big issue facing the left of the workers’ movement is to find ways in which the pinprick rebellion of these young people can be turned into more productive, concerted action against the system that degrades us all.

A response to the open letter published weekly in Socialist Worker

The worst time to split from Labour

There can be no doubt that many socialists have left the Labour Party in disgust at Kinnoch’s policies—probably the vast majority of the 25% of party members who have left in recent years.

But is the appeal for an ‘independence of socialist withdrawal’ from Labour a retrograde step?

Subscribe to the new Socialist Outlook

Yes! I want to subscribe to Socialist Outlook. Please send me:

1 year (24 issues): £13 + £6 months (12 issues): £7

Europe £18 + £6 months £10

Rest of the World: 1 year £22 + 6 months £12

I include a donation of £

I’d like to know more about Socialist Outlook

Name

Address

Please return to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2LU

Printed by Trident Press, Edendorpse, Kent, Published by idolore Ltd, 337 City Road, London EC1V

In such a period, the left needs an alliance that can bring together socialists inside and outside the Labour Party—which can respond to struggles such as the anti-Poll Tax movement, and organise in the Labour Party and the unions.

Such an alliance exists—albeit on a small scale—in the Socialist Movement, launched by Tony Benn MP at Chesterfield in 1987. With its different wings organising amongst women, socialist greens, trade unions, and among Labour Party members, it can bring together the left in a way that no SWP open letter can.

Unfortunately, it takes more than an open letter or a by-election campaign to replace Labour with a fighting socialist alternative. Unless they represent real, mass workers’ struggles they will be doomed to remain a tiny minority, as with Lee-ley Mahindroo’s Liverpool campaign.