

Workers Power

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ZEEBRUGGE, KINGS CROSS PIPER ALPHA

BOSSSES KILL FOR PROFIT

THE LOSS of 166 lives on Piper Alpha was a terrible tragedy. BUT IT NEED NEVER HAVE HAPPENED.

That fact expresses the hollowness of the grief being shown by Tories like Cecil Parkinson. It shows the £1 million donation to the families by the government for what it was—conscience money.

The Tories, through the Department of Energy, were directly responsible for safety on Piper Alpha. They treated the safety of the workers with callous disregard. The Tories and the bosses they represent are guilty of sacrificing the lives of working class people at the altar of profit and greed.

The truth about Piper Alpha's terrible safety record is clear. Workers had been complaining about poor safety for years. The Cullen report on Piper Alpha after an explosion in 1984 remains suppressed, and will probably only be released after it has been heavily censored. In the week before the tragedy there were three fires on the rig. And yet when workers complained of the smell of gas and resultant headaches, management fobbed them off with pain-killing tablets.

All of the signs pointed to an accident just waiting to happen. Yet nothing was done. The reason is simple. The oil industry has been a major source of profit for Britain's bosses. Maintaining that flow of profit was always more important than maintaining safety. This is why the bosses tolerate a death-rate in the oil industry

that is ten times higher than the rate in coal mining, one of the most dangerous onshore industries. And the rate of serious accidents rose by 80% between 1985 and 1987. As exploitation increased so did the cost in terms of human lives and limbs.

Piper Alpha has brought home to every oil worker the hazards they face in their daily work. Every worker in Britain needs to be alerted to the decline in safety standards in industry that has occurred during the Thatcher years. The evidence compiled by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) bears this out.

The building industry is a dramatic example. As cowboy contractors and working on the lump escalate, the cost in human life is massive. Between 1981 and 1985 739 deaths occurred on the sites. Of these the HSE says 70% could have been prevented if management had improved safety regulations. They didn't, and the HSE was powerless to act against them.

In London, where there is a high concentration of building workers, the industry claimed 37 lives in 1987, the highest

death toll in more than 20 years. As of May 1988 another 12 building workers had lost their lives in 'accidents' on London sites. And the fatalities make up only a small part of the story. As a consultant surgeon from Barts Hospital testified:

'Almost daily I've got to treat men whose lives and their families have been shattered by occupational injuries.'

The rate of serious accidents in the oil industry rose by 80% between 1985 and 1987

In the past year factory inspectors have issued more than 1,500 prohibition notices against building contractors for a variety of dangerous practices pursued to cut costs. Again, however, Tory cuts have further eroded the numbers and powers of health and safety inspectors. The government slashed the total force of inspectors from 1,098 to 915 in April 1984, leaving each remaining individual 'responsible' for an average of 700 workplaces. On an optimistic reckoning that ratio translates

into one visit every six to seven years. And in construction there are 90 inspectors available to cover 200,000 building sites.

The effects of these cuts throughout all industry are staggering. The inspectorate has been cut by 20% since 1980. In the same period—the Thatcher years—the serious accident rate rose by 40%. In particular, deaths and serious

accidents have hit hard at the totally unprotected youth on the YTS slave labour schemes.

Workers in every industry face a daily threat to their health, and often, their lives. The capitalists' efficiency and productivity offensive over the last nine years has increased these risks dramatically. But the tragedies on the Zeebrugge ferry and in the Kings Cross underground fire show that the bosses disregard for safety threatens workers when they are off the job as well. Yet despite the scale of these trage-

dies the bosses are courting further disasters. London Regional Transport—penny-pinching in court to avoid paying victims—has slashed its budget. Cuts at every level have meant more fires (twice in one week at one station) and more accidents.

P&O, the men responsible for Zeebrugge, have sacked their Dover workforce and recruited untrained scabs to run their ferries. The result has been a series of fires on board ships.

Nor are the skies an alternative to workers going on holiday abroad. The current air traffic control dispute and the series of near misses in the winter has highlighted the chronic overcrowding of the airways and the appalling stress air traffic controllers are working under. In the first half of 1988 British air traffic controllers—with no new recruits and no improvement in technology—had to handle 12% more traffic than in the same period last year. It is a grim thought, but a Zeebrugge in the sky is waiting to happen. Yet again the bosses do not care. Their outfit, the British Air Transport Association, has attacked the controllers and their union, the IPCS,

for restricting the volume of traffic for safety reasons. Such considerations do not enter their calculations—money is all that matters to them.

Clearly safety at work, and when travelling, is a class issue. It cannot be left to over-worked, government appointed and, ultimately, powerless factory inspectors to improve standards and minimise the dangers. The scale of the tragedies on Piper Alpha, the Zeebrugge ferry and Kings Cross should spur every worker into action on the safety issue.

The only guarantee of eliminating needless hazards on the job lies in truly socialised production under workers' control. Rank and file activists must establish workers' safety commissions, with the right of veto against the bosses' plans. We must impose our safety standards on them. We must fight for workers' enquiries into major accidents such as Piper Alpha, with compensation levels to victims and their families set by such enquiries. We must say clearly in every job, in every industry, in every field of transport and public entertainment: our safety must come before their profits!■



editorial

Now break with Hammond

BY A majority of five to one, the membership of EETPU have voted to defy the TUC's instruction to withdraw from single union no-strike deals at Orion Electrics and Christian Salvesen. The union's suspension from the TUC is now almost certain to be followed with expulsion at Congress in September.

Workers Power is 100% in favour of the TUC expelling EETPU. But our reasons are very different from those of the TUC leadership. Willis and co have bent over backwards to keep the scabberder Hammond inside the TUC for the last three years. Only now that Hammond and the EETPU have breached the rules of the bureaucratic club are they being punished. After all, single-union deals—supposedly at the heart of the row—are now the stock-in-trade of Hammond's major opponents within the TUC. Todd, Edmonds and Gill all have rotten records in making their own sweetheart deals with the bosses.

In calling for the expulsion of EETPU, therefore we, unlike these bureaucrats, are calling for its record of systematic scabbing to be punished. The TUC's rules are entirely besides the point. Since its shameful role in training, recruiting and organising scabs at Wapping in 1985-86 the EETPU has been operating as a company union. It has been working hand in glove with the bosses to undermine the strength of independent trade unionism.

The question facing militants inside the EETPU is what to do when the union is expelled, as seems likely, in September. The Stalinist-influenced left around the journal *Flashlight* are arguing that militants should leave the EETPU, form holding sections in other unions and, eventually, regroup as a TUC affiliated electricians union.

We agree that a split with the EETPU is necessary. Scabbing and defending workers' interests are incompatible. But *Flashlight's* conversion to a split perspective begs a number of questions about that organisation. Under Communist Party guidance the left has operated purely as an electoral alternative to Hammond. Now while the EETPU's rules—which are grossly undemocratic—make organising difficult, opposition to the right on a systematic basis could and should have been built. Instead *Flashlight* have avoided a fight. Indeed in 1971 they supported Hammond's presidential campaign. Now they are proposing a split but have not prepared for it with a vigorous campaign amongst the membership around the slogan—down with scab unionism!

Of course militants should not stay in the EETPU after the expulsion. But how they leave is vital if we are to have a chance to weaken the EETPU and increase the number of workers prepared to abandon Hammond. We say, use the impending expulsion to rally the opposition to Hammond and prepare it in a matter of months, not years, to break from the scab union. Nobody should feel that such a perspective violates the principle of workers' unity—Hammond in his countless acts of treachery has shown himself to be the real splitter. Far from abandoning the struggle against the reactionary EETPU leadership, such a perspective seeks to free as many rank and file members as possible from its strangulating control.

As part of this perspective we demand massive assistance and resources from the TUC for the campaign to break up the EETPU. Every member of the EETPU should be showered with TUC financed leaflets explaining the dangers of scab unionism. Every plant where the EETPU organises should be addressed by speakers from the EETPU opposition—with expenses paid for and facilities provided by the TUC and affiliated unions. Full support for those who break from Hammond—including offers of representation immediately following a split—must be pledged. All of this must be linked to a vigorous campaign inside the AEU to stop the proposed merger with the EETPU taking place.

A campaign along these lines can set back Hammond's plans if not, in the short term, thwart them altogether. They can provide a base from which an assault on the scab union can, in the longer term, prove victorious. Failure to embrace such a perspective means, in effect, leaving the EETPU opposition imprisoned, at Hammond's pleasure.

Yet *Militant*, the SWP and *Socialist Organiser* are all guilty of this failure. They all elevate an abstract 'unity' of the unions to an absolute principle—a principle that will ensure really disastrous disunity. *Militant*, for example, quote Lenin's insistence on the need to work in reactionary unions rather than leave the workers under the influence of agents of the capitalist class. But alternatives exist to continued membership of EETPU. Electricians span a variety of industries and must now be organised alongside their fellow workers as far as possible on an industrial rather than a craft basis. Of course, in many cases this cannot be done right away but having learnt the lessons of EETPU, electricians who join the AEU, for example, can be vanguard fighters for trade union democracy and industrial unions against Jordan and Laird. *Militant* et al, overawed by the legacy of years of trade union unity in Britain, in fact have no perspective for the revolutionary renovation of the union movement.

Marxists cannot afford to be sentimental about trade union structures. We recognise them as a means to an end, not ends in themselves. For militant electricians this means organising a decisive break with Hammond as soon as the expulsion takes place.

• See letters page 10

LABOUR PARTY

LEFT GO SOFT ON PRESCOTT

by Julian Scholefield

NEIL KINNOCK'S misfortunes have continued. Last month he did a two-step on disarmament that outraged right and left alike. This month his attempt to cultivate the image of a world statesman fell foul of a Zimbabwean corporal who didn't know Kinnock from Adam.

While Kinnock broke the first rule of bourgeois diplomacy by fuming publicly at his would-be captors, Roy Hattersley was stealing the show in Westminster by running verbal rings round Thatcher, a feat that generally eludes Kinnock.

But whilst Kinnock's antics do little to inspire confidence among Labour's leading ranks, few are prepared to countenance a serious challenge to his leadership. Only the Campaign Group have taken up the fight, with Tony Benn promoting his alternative 'socialist' principles. There has been little support for Benn's project from any Labour or union leaders.

Attention has been focused instead on the battle for Deputy. On the right wing John Smith clearly had doubts about Kinnock ever being acceptable to the ruling class. Ditching unilateralism is a key aim of this wing of the Party, but they have to recognise the strong support in the unions for this policy.

So rather than a direct challenge to Kinnock, they hope that a victory for Hattersley will reinforce their influence on the leadership line. They hope to find a way of dropping unilateralism without taking on the soft left unions such as NUPE (which has already declared its support for Prescott) and the TGWU.

The soft left new realists like David Blunkett and the *Tribune* MPs are also against a direct challenge to the leadership, since on fundamentals they agree with Kinnock. But support for unilateralism is one of the few policies with which they distinguish themselves from the right. Defence of unilateralism was also one of the unwritten conditions which the soft left placed on Kinnock in 1983.

They fear that under pressure from Hattersley and the right, Kinnock will eventually be forced to ditch unilateralism altogether. Therefore they have decided to go for the Kinnock-Prescott ticket in the hope that a unilateralist deputy will strengthen Kinnock's resolve against the right wing. Even sections of the 'hard' left are advocating a vote for Prescott if it gets to a second round.

But what credentials does Prescott have as a 'left' of any kind? *Tribune* believe that Prescott and Hattersley are poles apart:

'But it remains the case that here are two traditions within the labour movement. One seeks the amelioration of conditions in a society where social power rests in the hands of the owners and managers of capital, and the other seeks to transform that society, by peaceful and democratic means, to one where power rests in the hands of the people.' (*Tribune* Editorial 15 July 1988)

They argue that *Tribune* and Prescott stand for the latter tradition. Presumably Kinnock too, since they advocate voting for him whilst arguing that *Tribune* MPs who support Hattersley 'will step outside the *Tribune* tradition'. Prescott is running primarily on the basis of party building and organisational reform, not on fundamental political differences with the Hattersley line. He wants a deputy leader who campaigns throughout the country and isn't confined to being for the most part a parliamentary spokesman.

His appeal to the wider membership is to increase their say on policy, to improve internal debate. But Labour Party members should view such promises with suspicion, coming as they do from someone who supported the expulsion of socialists from the Party.

On the question of the economy Prescott has written in *Tribune* (3 June) that:

'It is not credible for Labour to suggest that our policies for full employment or our policies for investing in the Health Service... can be financed

on a programme of low taxation. It can't and the electorate knows it can't.'

This is ambiguous—deliberately so. If Prescott stood for the bosses having to pay for Labour's social programme he could afford to raise the clear demand for a tax on wealth. He doesn't. Instead the implication is that higher income tax and VAT should be introduced, hitting the working class the hardest of all.

The real reason Prescott has won the support of the soft left, of unions such as NUPE and potentially the TGWU, is on the single issue of disarmament. Ex-hard left Ken Livingstone argues:

'I think the left have to work in the party with everyone who wants to defend unilateralism'. (*Socialist Action* July 1988)

And on the same grounds:

'*Socialist Action* has no doubt that in the second round of voting Prescott should be supported against Hattersley'. (*Socialist Action* July 1988)

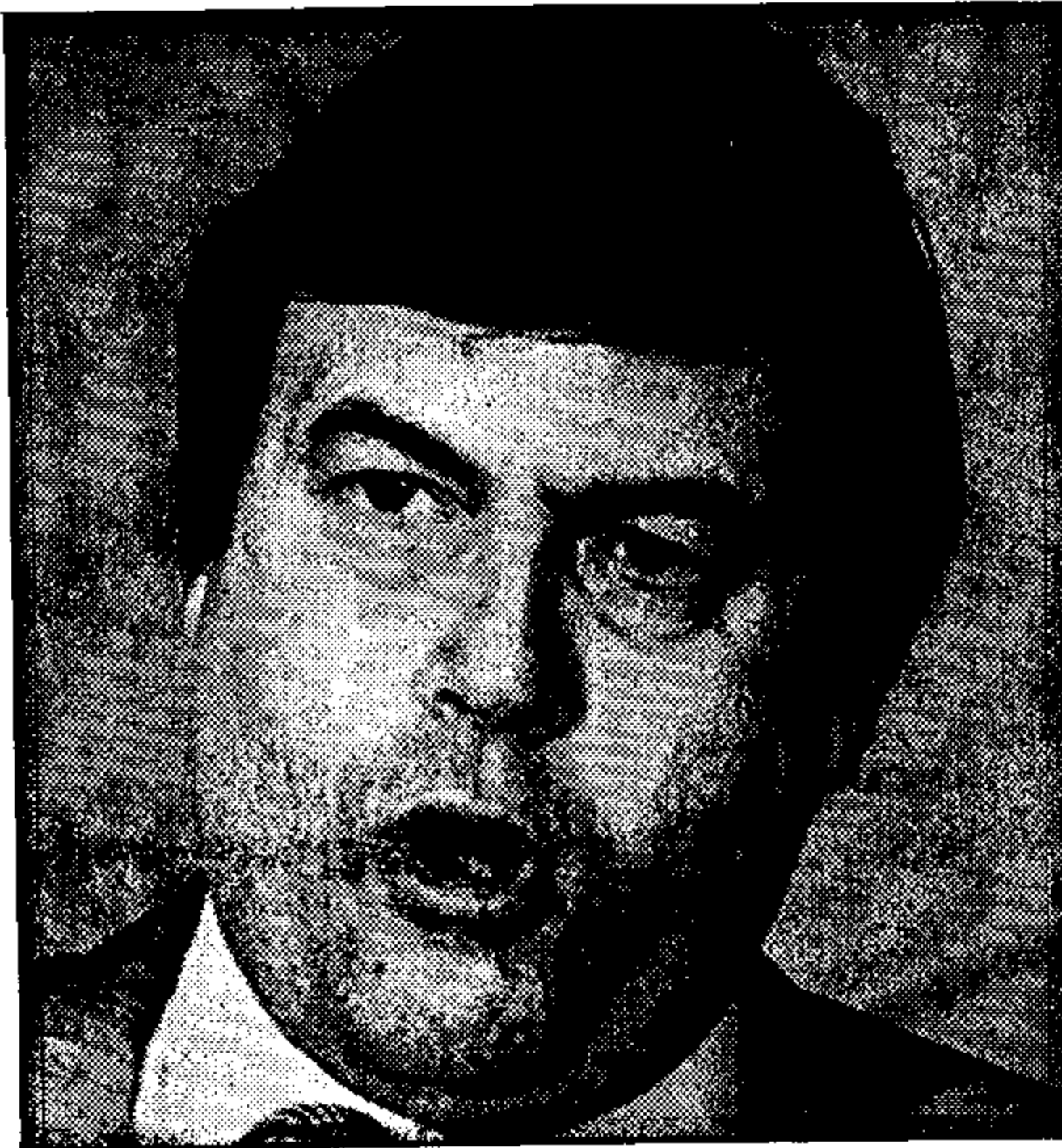
Raising the issue of unilateral nuclear disarmament to the point of principle is wrong. It will mislead workers into having illusions in the thoroughly pro-capitalist Labour politicians around Kinnock.

We support Labour's unilateral disarmament policy only because it could potentially destabilise the ruling class and its military strategy. But in the context of a leadership committed to attacking the living standards of the working class and pursuing vicious military campaigns by non-nuclear means, it cannot be the litmus test for supporting anyone in this election.

Prescott's complicity in Kinnock's denunciation of miners' violence in the Great Strike, his support for witch-hunts, condemnation of Liverpool City Council for trying to defend jobs and his support for Kinnock in 1983 and ever since, show his real positions. On key issues of the class struggle, such as the seafarers dispute, he argues not for militant class action, but for a future Labour Government to repeal the 'unfair' anti-union laws and replace them with new ones.

In the leadership elections Workers Power is arguing for a vote for Benn and Heffer. If Heffer is defeated and there is a second round we will abstain—no principled difference exists between a Kinnock-Hattersley or a Kinnock-Prescott ticket. Both are a rejection of the class struggle and of party democracy.

Don't vote for Prescott! Support Benn-Heffer!



Birmingham Labour splits

RECENT EVENTS in Birmingham have been a perfect example of the 'too little too late' approach of the Labour left. The city boasts one of the most right wing Labour councils in the country—so right wing in fact that the Tories and SLD have been forced to launch an opportunist attack on it from the left!

In early June the Tories took a motion to the council opposing the ruling Labour group's closure of a seaside holiday home for disabled children called Martineau House.

Twenty Labour councillors, including one newly elected *Militant* supporter, decided to abstain which resulted in the Labour group losing the vote, despite the imposition of a three line whip. The Labour right used the opportunity to attack the left on what was a comparatively minor, if emotive issue, and suspended them.

At last, after years of self-imposed impotence, the left had made a stand. But they claimed their abstention was a response merely to the right wing's foreshortening of the debate. They failed to go onto the offensive against all cuts in jobs and services.

Workers Power supporters in Birmingham Labour Party argued that a principled stand should have been taken and the councillors should have voted against the closure, not just abstained.

Preserving working class living standards takes priority for us over preserving the prestige and power of a reactionary and anti-working class Labour council. But some, including *Militant* and *Labour Briefing* have claimed that abstaining enabled the left to unite around the issue of the closure. Such unity is an illusion.

The Birmingham left cannot be united as a campaigning force if it cannot take a clear and consistent line in opposition to the cuts. 'Hard-left' councillors like Richard Evans of *Militant* and the 'Summerfield Group' should give a lead rather than adapt to the lowest common denominator.

The crisis has boosted the left, who recently gained all the positions on the District Labour Party by clear majorities. The current ferment must be used to build a consistent opposition to all cuts and support for strike action against the council where necessary.

In short a revolutionary tendency must be built in the party which is not tied to the 'unity mongers' of the soft left and can therefore carry the fight against Dick Knowles and the right wing through to the bitter end. ■

by Pauline Atienza

Dewsbury: A victory for racism

KIRKLEES LABOUR Council handed racist parents everywhere a victory last month. They withdrew from a High Court action aimed at preventing white parents from boycotting Headfield C of E school in Dewsbury where 85% of pupils are of Asian origin.

The parents had conducted a thinly veiled racist campaign, with the help of right-wing bigots like Ray Honeyford. For nine months they had preferred sending their 26 children to be educated by tin-pot Tories in a pub to exposing them to the 'alien culture' of their black fellow workers and neighbours.

SMOKESCREEN

The parents had fought their campaign behind the smokescreen of the 1944 Education Act, which provides for a 'daily Christian act of worship' in state schools. They claimed this could not be done properly because the children were predominantly Muslim.

In the best traditions of 'municipal socialism' Kirklees combined incompetence with cowardice. They had failed to publish details of their schools' admissions policy, giving the judge a legal technicality on which to support the parents and award them legal costs. As the council did an about turn in fear of breaking the law the racists popped champagne corks.

Because the Dewsbury parents won on a minor technical point it is doubtful that the case sets a legal precedent for racial segregation in schools. It doesn't need to. Within weeks Kenneth Baker's Education Bill becomes law. Embodied in this Bill are provisions for 'parental choice' and opting out of the Local Education Authority which will give

the green light to racists.

Although Baker himself, like the rest of 'respectable' opinion, disowned the Dewsbury parents, his Bill will allow the establishment of black only schools by white parents' who will be able to exercise 'choice'. It will also allow the racists unlikely allies in the Muslim clergy and some Afro-Caribbean church communities to establish their own racially segregated, repressively religious schools.

Revolutionary communists stand for equal democratic rights for all religions. But we stand four-square against all religious education in state schools and for the separation of church and state. We stand for secular, co-educational, state run schools. We fight for students' and teachers' control of the curriculum, and for students and teachers to fight for control over all aspects of educational policy. We cannot leave the defence of racial integration in schools to councils which 'forget' to publish their admissions policy and which give in to racists at the first sign of legal trouble.

BELATEDLY

Up and down the country there will now be groups of racists planning to remove their children from schools with large numbers of black pupils. The NUT, which in Kirklees belatedly mobilised against the parents and which has condemned the council's latest act, should call official national strike action to protest against the court decision.

Teachers, students and parents alike must organise to defend anti-racist education, mother-tongue teaching and every aspect of the school curriculum which challenges the racism which clogs every pore of society.

Kenneth Baker's Education Bill is soon to become law. Paul Mason looks at the meaning of 'parental choice' as embodied in this bill in the light of the recent events at Headfield School



Racist attack: Victims charged

by Leicester Workers Power supporters

ON 13 MARCH Jit Singh and his two sons were cleaning their chip shop in Leicester's Melton Road, when they were attacked by two white youths and a white man. The attackers smashed the shop window, screaming death threats and racial abuse at the Singhs.

Then they kicked and punched Jagtar, the elder son, to the ground. He had gone out to confront the attackers after the family had called the police. Jit and his sons chased off their attackers. In the course of a fracas one of the youths was injured. The police arrived, fifteen minutes after they were called.

At this point in one of the many fictitious police serials that have mushroomed on TV, the racists would be arrested and a friendly community policeman would calm the victims. The reality in Leicester, as for every black community, was different.

As the Singhs tried to explain what had happened the police silenced them, asking the white attackers for their story. The Singhs were arrested, held separately for nine hours, denied food, drink and toilet facilities. Then they were charged with GBH and possession of offensive weapons. The one white youth charged with criminal



Jit Singh and his sons face GBH charge

damage has already received a conditional discharge.

Over 200 people attended a meeting to set up the Singh Defence Campaign the weekend after the attack. After a successful picket of the magistrates court in June all charges against one son were dropped. But Jit and Jagtar still face GBH charges.

So far the defence campaign has been run from the council funded Racial Attacks Monitoring Project. But what is needed is mass action. In 1985 police swept the Highfields area of Leicester, arresting 40 black youth on suspicion of theft, after white football fans had caused trouble in the area. In

response hundreds of black youth organised an angry picket of the police station. That time the councillors, lawyers and MPs were nowhere to be seen.

The Singhs appear in court again on 2 August. There should be the widest support for the picket called to demand the dropping of all charges. But we should use the opportunity of the Singh case to renew the fight for organised self-defence in the black community, and labour movement support for such action.

Information from: Singh defence Campaign, c/o 6 Seymour St, Leicester

Free Kuomba Balogun

by Laura Williams

KUOMBA BALOGUN is the south west organiser for Labour Party Black Sections. During the 1980 uprising in the St Paul's district of Bristol he was arrested and charged with throwing a petrol bomb at a police station. Later, a further charge of assault was added. For this the court imposed a two year suspended sentence on him, putting severe restrictions on his political activities.

Today Kuomba is again locked away in prison awaiting a court appearance. His 'crime' this time was for daring to intervene during police harassment of a young black motorist.

Black people who stand up for black rights are thorns in the side of the British establishment. That's why the state has launched a campaign to put Kuomba Balogun behind bars. The Tories were looking for revenge after he exposed their scheme to impose a third-rate community centre on black people in Bristol following the 1980 uprising. Then he spoke out against police harassment of the St Paul's community in 'Operation Delivery'. They were angered even more when he dared to go to Northern Ireland as part of a Labour Party Black section delegation in September 1987.

Home Office ministers Douglas Hurd and John Patten ganged up with their friends in the media to orchestrate a hate campaign against Kuomba. In this climate the Bristol activist who'd

come to national prominence with his outspoken defence of the black communities was witch-hunted out of his job as head of St Paul's Development Agency. The government withdrew part funding more than six months after seeing how well Kuomba did the job. Then they changed the rules giving themselves a veto over all such future appointments in the black voluntary sector.

On his birthday, two months after the Ireland 'fact finding' trip, police mounted a provocative purge on black motorists who'd parked their cars outside the popular Mozart's wine bar in Bristol. When Kuomba intervened to stop harassment of the youth he was arrested and charged with 'assaulting' a police officer. Later shotgun rounds were produced by the police and he was charged with illegally possessing them.

The whole affair reeks of a frame-up. Earlier Kuomba was almost murdered by a knifeman known to the police. The man was let off by the court despite not turning up to the final hearing.

The state wants to put Kuomba behind bars like they have the Broadwater Farm three. WE MUST UNITE TO STOP THEM!

pp Kuomba Balogun Defence Campaign, c/o Rupert Daniel, 63b Ashley Road, Montpellier, Bristol.



Freeman's workers celebrate Law Lords equal pay ruling

WOMEN WORKERS are 45% of the workforce. They work 36% of the hours worked. They receive 28% of employment income.

These calculations from the GMB show just how far women are from receiving equal pay. It is now 18 years since the Equal Pay Act was passed, yet women's earnings remain only 66% of men's.

Two recent rulings in the House of Lords have strengthened the legal rights of women through closing some of the loopholes which allowed employers to refuse equal pay claims. In May, Julie Hayward, an assistant cook at Cammell Laird's, finally won her claim for equal pay with male joiners, painters and engineers, worth £30 per week. She began her claim four and a half years previously as one of the first test cases of an amendment to the Equal Pay Act which the government passed in 1983 in line with a directive from the European Court of Justice. This amendment allowed for equal pay for work of equal value, not just identical jobs. Hayward's case was based on the argument that her work was of equal value to the men in other jobs with similar skills and responsibilities.

She had to take her case through the Industrial Tribunal, the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT), the Court of Appeal and finally to the House of Lords before she won it. Cammell Laird's, recognising their responsibility to fight the case on behalf of the bosses, fought every inch of the way.

LOOPHOLE

The second legal victory was in June, when five women from Freeman's Mail Order company successfully appealed to the House of Lords in their claim for equal pay. They had previously been ruled against by an industrial tribunal and EAT on the basis that since there was a man on their grade, they couldn't claim equal pay with any other section of workers. This was a very important loophole for the bosses who have been employing 'token' men to work the same grades as a mainly female workforce in order to get round the EPA.

Rene Pickstone and the other warehouse operatives who brought the case will get an extra £4.22 per week up to £81.88, but this test case could herald many other claims. Freeman's boss Mr Evelyn Cribb complained:

'It's a pity that the House of Lords have come to this decision as it will have unfortunate consequences for employers in general'.

The miserly barons of the CBI reacted to the Law Lord's ruling by

warning that this could result in 'substantial disruption to pay structures' and prove damaging to 'competitiveness and job opportunities'. Now they have gone running to Employment Secretary, Norman Fowler, asking for an amendment to the law, so they can avoid paying more to women workers.

DELAYS

The two test cases have taken years to be settled, despite the clear nature of the EC directives on equal pay. And whilst these decisions were awaited, hundreds of other cases have been held up at the industrial tribunal stage. Similar cases at Alvis, Dunlop, GEC, Massey Ferguson, Rolls Royce and others have been waiting for the Freeman verdict. But there could still be lengthy delays—average waiting times for tribunal decisions are running at 18 months. In the meantime industry bosses have the government's ear.

Unfortunately the overall impact of legislation on women's pay has been very limited. Whilst some groups of women have won substantial rises, women's pay continues to fall well behind that of men. In 1975 when the 1970 Equal Pay Act was enacted (the bosses had been given five years to work out ways round it), women manual workers had average weekly earnings of 56% of men's. For non-manual workers the figure was 58%. The latest figures for 1988 show those figures to be 62% for manual and 59% for non-manual, indicating little general improvement in the relative position of women. One of the reasons for women having lower earnings is that they tend to work fewer hours—many are part-timers and few women do overtime. But even taking such factors into account, by looking at the hourly pay of women, it has fallen relative to men's since a peak in 1978.

At that point women's hourly earnings were 75.5% of men's. In 1987 it had fallen to 73.6%.

The major reason why legislation has failed to improve women's pay is that women remain in highly segregated jobs and have increasingly become part of the flexible, part-time or temporary sector of the workforce who have few rights at work and are frequently badly organised and thus with little bargaining power. In the health

service sector 80% of employees are women, in footwear and clothing 73%. In these sectors pay is low and women are concentrated in the lowest grades. Almost half of women workers are part-time, some due to domestic responsibilities, but increasingly because they cannot get full time jobs. The bosses prefer part timers since they have few rights (holiday pay, sickness benefits and employment protection) and are easy to sack if they start demanding higher pay or better conditions.

Women's concentration in such sections of the workforce is not accidental. It is because of the role of women in the home where they are responsible for the family welfare and raising of children. When women also work for wages outside the home, as they are increasingly doing, their domestic responsibilities put certain limitations either on the jobs they are able to do (they often have to fit in with child-care arrangements, have breaks in order to have children etc) or the jobs that the bosses recognise as suitable for women. These restrictions have also affected women workers' ability to organise to fight for higher wages, especially as the trade union movement has historically failed to respond to women workers' particular circumstances, and failed to organise them effectively. It is these factors, stemming from women's position in society, that lead to the gross inequalities in pay, not simply bosses paying women lower wages for the same job. In addition the new ruling that allows equal pay for work of equal value raises many questions about what skills are valued. The skills of a qualified nurse, or a shorthand typist have traditionally been undervalued, compared to jobs which men do which may in fact involve similar training time, dexterity and responsibility.

Legislation will not eradicate these fundamental inequalities between

men and women workers under capitalism. But that does not mean we should ignore the laws. The recent rulings should be used as an incentive by women to claim equal pay with men doing work of equal value in their industry. But relying on tribunals and the courts will not convince the bosses to quickly and substantially alter pay rates. Their reactions to the Law Lords shows the kind of opposition women can expect. The only effective way for women to press their equal pay claims is through organisation and industrial action. Famous equal pay struggles such as at Trico show that when women take such action they can force the bosses to pay up.

The problem of recent years has been that the unions have not given a lead to women over pay. Equal pay is only one aspect of the low pay which women generally face. But rather than a campaign to unionise women workers, to demand big pay increases and back them up with industrial action, the unions have sat back and relied on legal test cases, industrial tribunals and generally trying to persuade the bosses to agree. The result of this strategy is seen in the very low levels of women's pay. In 1987 31% of women earned a gross weekly wage of less than £110.

GRUDGING

It is no accident that when women had their highest hourly pay relative to men in 1978, it followed a period when women themselves waged militant fights over low pay, equal pay and unionisation, at Trico, SFIs, Grunwicks, Hoovers and many others. But women workers frequently found themselves up against the opposition of the union leaders who were fearful of women's militant action getting out of hand. Even where women had the union leadership's grudging support, they had to rely on their own strength.

The Ford sewing machinists, who started off the whole movement for equal pay with their strike in 1968, had to wait 17 years before they finally won—and that only after failing to win through the tribunal system and taking strike action themselves. Nowadays the union leaderships are more welcoming to women, but just as hostile to militant action.

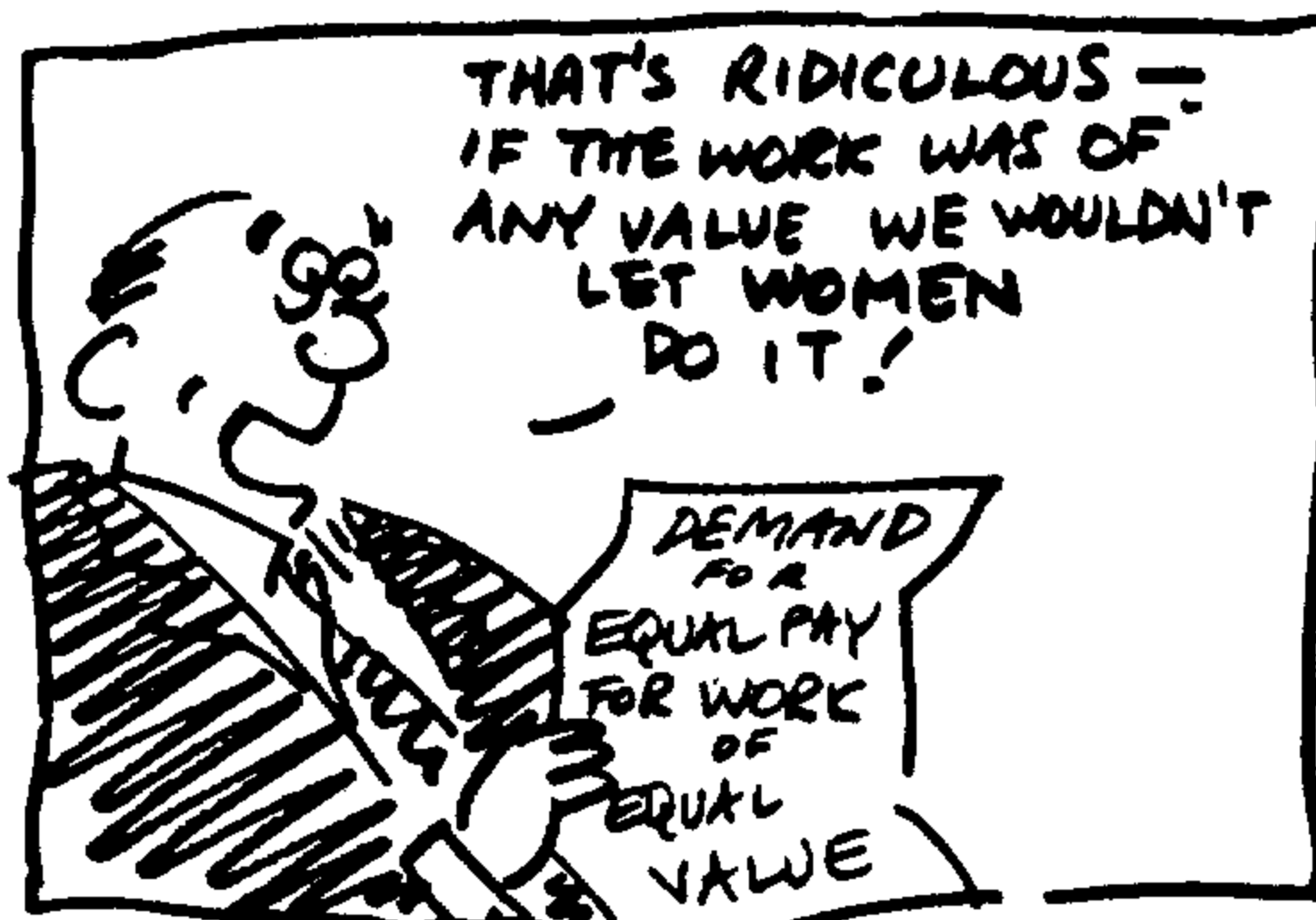
The only real answer to women's low and unequal pay is or-

ganisation and a fight with the bosses. The courts and laws may grant some formal rights but there will be new loopholes found, different ways to deny women their demands. The bosses' organisations like the CBI, backed by the government (and the courts when necessary) will obstruct moves to dramatically increase women's earnings, since it would threaten their profits. So women workers often need the strength of industrial action to 'persuade' the bosses even to comply with the law. It is not only male workers who have industrial muscle. Women textile workers, manufacturing workers, health workers have all shown that strikes can be effective.

In the fight for equal pay the first task is to build strong organisations of women in the workplace. All women workers, including part timers and temporary workers, should be recruited to the relevant union. Workplace meetings should be held to elect stewards and keep everyone involved in the activity of the union. Glossy newsletters from head offices plus cheap shopping deals which many unions are now pushing are no substitute for workplace organisation. Claims for equal pay should be put to tribunals, where relevant, but the workers themselves should decide what constitutes work of equal value. Presently there are bogus management job evaluation schemes which decide who is valued equal to whom. Committees of workers in each industry should make their own assessment and press their claims directly on the bosses backed by industrial action. Women and men should join together in such initiatives in order to overcome the dangerous divisions which can arise from equal pay disputes. Male workers will benefit if women win better wages, and their own strength is increased by improving the organisation of the unions and the shop-floor workers.

Through women and men workers taking control over such issues they can begin to challenge the very power of the bosses within the workplace. By imposing workers' control the potential strength and ability of workers to organise production and society in general will be seen.

The poverty that so many women live in under Thatcher's 'booming' Britain shows the urgency of these tasks. Four and a half years waiting for the courts to settle a dispute is hopeless. Women must organise now to fight for better pay, for control over their conditions of work and ultimately for the abolition of capitalism which forces women to live as second class citizens at home, at work and in society. ■





Lawson: The trade gap's this big

The boom: fact or fiction?

Thatcher and Lawson fall out over exchange rates; interest rates rise six times in as many weeks; building societies slap £30 a month on the average mortgage. 'The economy' is in the news again. Is the economic boom fact or fiction? What lies behind the row in the cabinet? Keith Hassell and Colin Lloyd explain.

THE OFFICIAL Tory line is that Britain's economy is booming. To the three million unemployed, the millions of low paid workers and the record number of homeless people this must seem like pure propaganda. However, it is not. The economy as it matters to the bosses—growth, profit, productivity—is at the height of a boom.

Britain's economy grew by 4.5% in 1987 and has continued at this rate for the first half of 1988. This is not just growth in the service sector. Manufacturing output is now 2% above its last peak in 1979. This summer it is set to pass its all-time high of 1974.

How has Thatcher worked this 'miracle'? The simple answer is by defeating section after section of workers, taming the union bureaucracy and paving the way for the shut down of unprofitable plants, throwing millions on the dole and making those with a job work harder.

The profits the employers have reaped are considerable. The most immediate gain was in productivity. Unit labour costs (the proportion of the cost of a product taken up by wages) were rising at only 1% by 1986—the lowest in Europe. By July this year, output per worker in manufacturing industry was 6.6% higher than the year before. Although initially based on tougher discipline, line speed-ups etc, this productivity increase has been sustained by new investment in the mid-1980s.

Productivity gains worked their way through to profits. The mass of profits began to revive in 1982. Last year they rose by 20% to 25% depending on sector. The rate of profit, roughly measured by the rate of return on investment, rose to 11% in 1987, the highest level since the late 1960s. The share of profits in the national income, compared to wages and rent, is now at the highest level since the 50s.

The recovery then is a real one. Those who suggest it is just a 'speculative' boom (i.e. based in stock market gambling, not investment in production) are kidding themselves. The figures show a sharp revival of investment in plant and machinery in 1983/84. This was dented by the miners' strike, but recovered again in 1986/87. A recent CBI survey showed that only 32% of firms were working below full capacity; the lowest figure since the survey began.

If the bosses have succeeded to a degree in restoring the conditions for profitable production at our expense, they have also created the conditions for sustaining demand for the commodities they produce. After all, if you can't sell the goods then you can't realise the profits. The key has been a consumer credit boom and a rise in real wages.

Of course the Thatcher years have seen the living standards of the unemployed fall through the floor. The poorest third of those in work have had almost no real wage rise. Meanwhile the yuppies' salaries have gone through the roof. The important thing for the Tory economists however is that real wages (wages after taking inflation into account) have gone up: sufficient to keep us all buying the goods produced, but not enough, yet, to eat into the growing rate of profit.

Spending power has been boosted by tax cuts, especially for the rich, and by a massive expansion of consumer credit. There is hardly a high street store without its 'borrow £1,000 now' signs. The tabloid papers are full of adverts luring workers to 'pay off all

your debts at once'... by borrowing more money!

But this is where the capitalists' problems start. They have to compete in a world economy. Their success in raising productivity has to be measured against that of foreign bosses. Despite their victories over the unions, Britain's bosses still can't compete with low wage economies such as Korea and Taiwan in a whole range of consumer goods. As British spending power increases, so do imports. In addition changes in exchange rates can have positive and negative effects on a country's competitive position. The row between Thatcher and Lawson has to be seen in the context of these factors, as do the prospects for British capitalism itself.

The British employers' success in restoring profitable production was bound to attract the attention of the world's financial markets. A stronger and growing British economy in 1986 created a strong demand for sterling, both to pay for an increasing volume of British exports and because many investors were counting on continued growth pushing the pound even

higher.

Faced with this, the Tories decided to manoeuvre between conflicting interests for most of the last year. Through keeping interest rates relatively low, Lawson wanted to peg sterling to a definite level to stop it rising too much against the German mark and to a lesser extent against the US dollar. Too great a rise would make British goods less competitive. The mark is more important for British exporters because 57% of Britain's trade goes to western Europe, where Germany dominates and is Britain's chief rival. In this way Lawson hoped to keep the CBI (the industrial employers' association) happy.

Thatcher disagreed. She wanted sterling to go as high as the markets would take it. She feared that the chosen mechanism for keeping the pound in line with the mark, lowering interest rates, would encourage inflation. The bosses hate the threat of inflation because it spurs wages struggles, makes investment decisions difficult and erodes profit margins. Inflation is like a string of garlic to a vampire where Thatcher is concerned. The political consequences for her, given she sees her main achievement as beating inflation, would be disastrous.

Thatcher is also a vigorous opponent of a common European currency. This reflects a much wider debate within the ruling class about the depth of Britain's involvement in the EEC. Thatcher fears the pound/deutschmark link as a dangerous precedent for Britain entering the European Monetary System.

By the middle of May this row had emerged in public after a series of interest rate cuts. Lawson won, and cut interest rates further, to 7.5%.

But the capitalist economy, like life, is full of contradictions. In June one particular contradiction hit Lawson smack in the face. The consumer spending spree, fuelled by his tax cuts and lower interest rates (cheaper credit) began to suck in imports at an alarming rate. Official figures revealed an 11% increase in imports and a record £1.2 billion balance of payments deficit. The 'country' is spending massively more than it earns; a poor achievement for Thatcher, the disciple of 'balanced books'. And far from pushing the pound upwards as Thatcher wanted, this deficit would tend to devalue the pound, adding to the inflationary pressures, unless the government intervened.

So having 'won' in May, Lawson did a U-turn in June. He has forced interest rates up from 7.5% to 10.5%, and hasn't stopped yet. This will dampen down inflation and slow down the boom. Mortgage rate increases have already wiped out the tax cuts Lawson gave to the middle classes in the budget. Lawson hopes that this will

steady the economy and that the Thatcher miracle will continue, albeit at a slower pace.

Can he do it? Here the outlook becomes bleaker for the employers.

First, Lawson's plan relies on the continued strength of British exports. But high interest rates have already pushed the pound up, making British exports less attractive.

Second, there are signs that the productivity increases have started to level off. Unit labour costs have started to rise again and are set to increase by 5% this year. In turn this makes real wage rises more of a problem for the bosses.

Further, damping down consumer spending is a dangerous game. By far the bulk of British industry's increased output has been in consumer goods, as opposed to machinery etc. So a big cut in consumer spending could throw the boom into reverse. Coming at the end of a period of new investment this could produce a classic 'overproduction' crisis. The result would be falling prices, profits and a collapse in investment.

Looming above all this is the uncertain direction of the world economy. Ever since the October 1987 crash, economists have been predicting a world recession. There is no doubt that many of the problems which led to the crash have been put on ice for the duration of the US presidential election, in particular the falling dollar. After November they are likely to assert themselves with renewed force. In turn this would deepen divisions within the ruling class over Europe.

All of this demonstrates the crisis ridden nature of capitalism. Even at the height of a boom the British capitalists are faced with impossible choices. Attack inflation and risk ending the boom; sustain the boom and risk uncontrolled inflation. Either way they are forced to keep attacking the working class.

For this reason it is futile for workers to take sides between Lawson and Thatcher over interest rates, Europe, or anything else. Nor is it useful to talk up their disagreement into a governmental crisis. Their differences are minor compared to their agreement on the strategy of making the working class pay for capitalism's problems.

The task remains to reorganise our fighting strength in the workplaces. Boom conditions provided half a dozen missed opportunities to score victories over wages this year, from Ford to the NHS. When the recession comes, all the no-strike and non-union workplaces that have flourished under Thatcherism will be easy meat for the employers. We have to use what's left of the boom to rebuild the unions as fighting organisations from the shop floor up. ■

FROM THE next issue Workers Power will be moving to a sixteen page paper, printed on newsprint. This expansion marks an important step forward in the development of our paper. It is a step not only towards a bigger paper but also towards a more frequent one.

This move flows from two considerations—one is political, the other technical. We recognise that, in the context of Thatcher's third term there is both a willingness to fight and a confusion about how to do so. This was revealed in the strike wave last February and March. Car workers, health workers and seafarers all said, 'enough is enough'. Yet, despite the militancy of these workers the leaderships of the unions and the Labour Party were able to demobilise or sabotage these struggles.

The militant minority were not armed with the political answers that could have enabled them to rally rank and file resistance to these sell-outs. The resulting disorientation has allowed the new realists to make headway in nearly every union and in the Labour Party.

Our paper provides these political answers. Our paper presented in clear terms the policies needed to win the strikes and oust the faint-hearted leaders.

But we need to get more of these ideas across to more and more workers. Expansion will help us arm the growing number of militants who read our paper, discuss our ideas and rec-

Workers Power expands

ognise those ideas chart a course for winning.

At the same time our paper plays a vital role within the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI). In analysing key events in the international class struggle, in expressing solidarity with the struggles of workers the world over, in seeking to develop the communist programme in a truly internationalist fashion our paper is a weapon in building the MRCI. And, as the MRCI develops, building firm links with our comrades in Peru and Bolivia, the need for more extensive coverage of the international class struggle can be fulfilled by the expansion of our paper.

Last, but by no means least, our paper carries propaganda for revolutionary socialism. In the face of the new

realists' abandonment of even the pretence of socialist politics, in the face of the muddled and dangerous reformist socialism peddled by Benn, and in the face of the distortions of Marxism by the parade of centrist pretenders to the heritage of Lenin and Trotsky—the SWP, Militant, Socialist Organiser, the RCP etc—such propaganda is invaluable.

Our new column, 'In Defence of Marxism', which aims to explain and defend genuine Marxist politics as they are posed in the course of topical political events, our regular polemics and our features on the history of the class struggle and revolutionary programme are examples of such propaganda. A bigger paper will help us to produce a broader range of such articles, appealing to an ever broader range of read-

ers.

All of these political considerations impel us forward. But in addition to these factors, the money we have raised over the last six months, thanks to the generous support of our readers, has enabled us to acquire the new technology that is vital to the production of a modern newspaper.

But to build on this progress, to move towards a more frequent as well as a bigger paper, we still need money. This month our new fund drive has received: £480 from supporters in Birmingham; £52 from a reader in France; £70 from East London; £16.28 from Reading; £12 from Sheffield—a total of £630.28. In addition at a central London public meeting of Workers Power a collection raised £37.50 for the work of the MRCI.

The new sixteen page paper will carry regular fund drives to help expand the work of both Workers Power and the MRCI. The move to a bigger paper by Workers Power is, to be sure, only a small step along that road. But it is a step nearer to our goal. And in a world ruled by the greed and brutality so typical of capitalism, we are certain that every reader will welcome our progress and do everything they can to help us take it further.

Please send donations, cheques/POs payable to WORKERS POWER to BCM BOX 7750, LONDON WC1 3XX.

THE NINETEENTH conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) has been hailed the world over as a dramatic departure from the Kremlin's bureaucratic norms. Certainly, as the first such emergency conference for 47 years, the event clearly indicated the seriousness of the crisis gripping the USSR.

by John Hunt

But despite the democratic window-dressing that delighted and dazzled the West's political reporters, the conference significantly failed to resolve the problems Gorbachev faces in pushing through his much vaunted *perestroika*. On the contrary, it highlighted the manifold difficulties that beset Gorbachev's restructuring project.

The conference was convened in order to isolate bureaucratic resistance to Gorbachev's reform plans. He repeatedly insisted before and during the conference, its purpose was to make the *perestroika* irreversible. In fact it revealed very deep rifts within the party leadership and has, in all probability, served to exacerbate those rifts.

What is more, the differences were argued out in public to a degree unprecedented in the USSR since the 1920s. At that time Stalin and his henchmen finally succeeded in shrouding all political decision making in total secrecy. The partial break from this tradition has served to intensify the debate that is gripping ever larger sections of Soviet society as to the goals and purpose of the reform project.

Conservative

In its very preparation the conference failed to live up to the requirements of any of the principal poles within the bureaucracy. The most inert and conservative sections amongst the regional party secretaries has wanted to conduct the debate behind closed doors. The old Victorian maxim of 'not in front of the servants' amply sums up their attitude to political debate.

The most ardent advocates of 'openness' (*glasnost*) had wanted the entire conference to be televised. The outcome was a compromise. There were televised highlights but they were skewed against the more 'radical' and critical views expressed on the conference floor. But at the same time there was full publication of all the speeches in the Soviet press.

The most ardent advocates of *glasnost* had wanted to put no limit on the length of the conference's discussions. The more conservative opponents had urged a strict limit on the duration of the conference. The result was a conference that overran by four hours, but which was curtailed right at the point when some of the gloves were coming off amongst the bureaucratic participants in the debate.

The actual decisions of the conference resolved none of the issues that are dividing the bureaucracy. In fact they ensure that the contradictions in the ranks of the bureaucracy will become more, rather than less, percussive.

The divisions within the bureaucracy are centred on two principal issues. Firstly there is the question of the nature of the economic programme of *perestroika*. By the early 1980s few of the leading and up and coming party functionaries could deny the need for major economic change. The economy was stagnating. Oil prices had fallen on the world market choking off a major source of revenue. Food and consumer goods shortages permanently

risked provoking an explosion of proletarian discontent. While many time servers may express private disagreement, the official orthodoxy of the bureaucracy, from the short rule of KGB chief Andropov onwards, has been that a major restructuring of the Soviet economy is desperately needed.

At this point though the unanimity breaks down. There is a strong wing of the bureaucracy which is set on a programme of dramatic marketisation of the Soviet economy. Shmelev and Aganbegyan are the most notable and enthusiastic proponents of this line. They want an end to food subsidies and the job security most Soviet workers enjoy. By 1986 food subsidies amounted to 57 billion rubles out of a state budget of 430 billion rubles.

Wages

The marketeers in the party want to end this subsidy to working class living standards as well as to tie the wages of workers to the profitability, or otherwise of their workplace. Shmelev has, for example, described social provision as a 'survival of feudalism'. (See B. Kagarlitsky: 'The Dialectics of Reform', *New Left Review* 169).

They want to unleash a regime of technocratic western style management on the working class and the meddlesome hierarchy of the party apparatus itself. The road they wish to travel would strengthen capitalist mechanisms and tendencies in the USSR and eventually pave the way for a full blown counter-revolutionary restoration of capitalism.

At the other end of the political spectrum within the bureaucracy are those who have found a spokesman in Ligachev. They are not opposed to a limited marketisation of the Soviet economy. But they see the *perestroika* more in terms of cleansing the party and state apparatus of that which is corrupt and inefficient. Centralised discipline, exhortation and a campaign for old fashioned morality are the hallmarks of the *perestroika* that this wing wish to put in place of the stagnation and corruption of the Brezhnev era.

Democratisation

The second main issue of the debate concerns the role of democratisation and *glasnost* in the process of *perestroika*. It will come as little surprise to Western workers that many of the more rabid marketeers have little time for many of the demands for democratisation that have been raised as part of the current debate in the USSR. They want to free the new Soviet technocratic, entrepreneurial manager not only from party control but also, from any potential restrictions that can be placed upon them by the working class. That is why some of the marketeers respond to and positively support Ligachev's calls for discipline and leadership over the working class.

The conference reflected a sharp divide on precisely this issue. A speaker who lauded the old ways and condemned criticism of the past was slow hand clapped. The leaden rump of the

bureaucracy will need to use other means than conference oratory to get their way! Many speakers called for greater openness and democratisation. Their main refrain was that the party and state apparatus should be separated, that there should be no taboos in re-examining Soviet history and no limits on what can and cannot be printed in the USSR.

One of the sharpest moments of the conference came during the speech of V. I. Melnikov, first secretary of the Koma regional committee of the CPSU. He demanded the ousting of those who had been complicit in the Brezhnev years of corruption and stagnation. When asked by Gorbachev to name names he demanded the removal of Politburo member Solomentsev, the President of the USSR Gromyko, *Pravda* editor Afanasyev and Gorbachev's adviser on foreign affairs Arbatov. The conference protocol records applause at this point.

Privileges

Ousted Moscow chief Boris Yeltsin raised the conference's temperature on its last day. Most significant was his criticism of the privileges of the party bosses which he described as shaming him whenever representatives of foreign parties visited the USSR. He then proceeded to demand his own political rehabilitation as if he were on a par with the Bolshevik leadership that Stalin liquidated in the 1930s.

The call for ever more *glasnost* has a real resonance amongst the youth and intelligentsia of the USSR. Attacks on the disguised privileges of the bureaucracy have a considerable resonance amongst the long suffering Soviet working class. They threaten the cushioned world of the top bureaucrats politically as well as materially. To that extent, whatever quarter they may come from, they raise the potential of a left threat to the ruling bureaucracy developing amongst the Soviet masses.

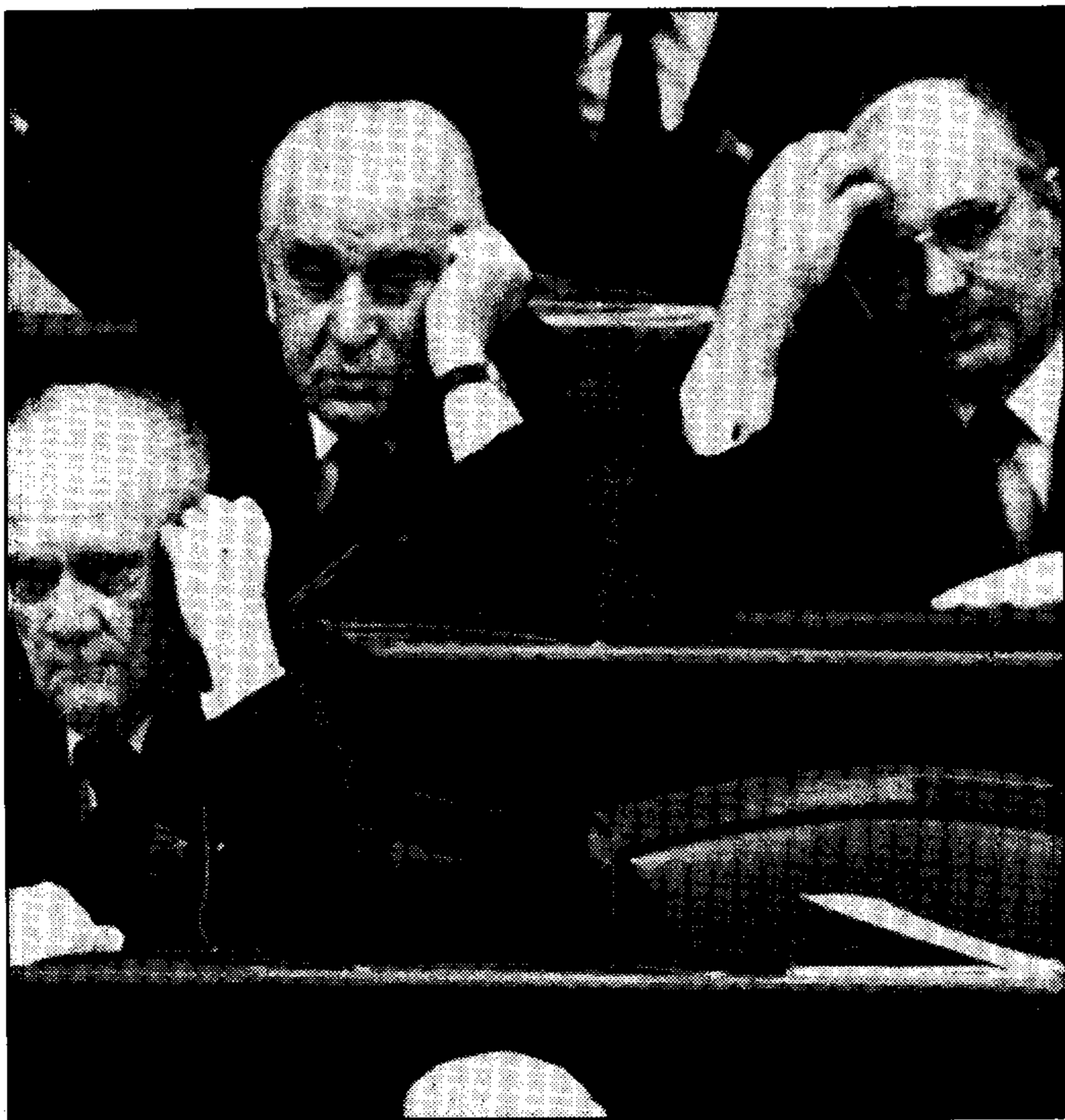
Increased democratic scrutiny may be called for by right wingers and marketeers for their own reasons. But if it is even only partially implemented it will alert the Soviet masses to the reality of the bureaucracy's corrupt and parasitic role. It will fan the flames of proletarian discontent.

Bureaucracy

Little wonder then that the more conservative wing of the bureaucracy found common voice against this threat, and Ligachev was once again its mouthpiece. Ligachev has been trying to hold the line against creeping *glasnost* and calls for democratisation for a good while now. He is widely thought to have been behind a March

After the Party Conference

THE KREMLIN CRISIS DEE



letter published in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* purporting to come from a Leningrad teacher. Its call was for more discipline and self-sacrifice and less concern with democratisation and the questioning of the history of the party. It was more over successful in silencing critical voices in the Soviet media for over two months until *Pravda* launched a Politburo sanctioned riposte.

Sanctioned

This episode revealed quite how tenuous the gains chalked up by the 'radicals' actually were. Until sanctioned from on high the Soviet press was incapable of responding to a resurgence of apologias for Stalin's reign of terror. The enthusiastic support of section of the Soviet intelligentsia for *glasnost* counts for little on the political scales compared with the weight of the party apparatus itself.

At the conference Ligachev made a speech in which he clearly identified himself as the voice of the party apparatus chiefs. In a reply to Melnikov that contained a veiled threat to Gorbachev he described how, at the death of Chernenko, it was KGB chief Chebrikov, Gromyko and Solomentsev along with a majority of the first secretaries of the regional committees who carried the day for Gorbachev.

He denied the existence of special privileges for the party tops. And he denounced features of the current Soviet

media. Most importantly he attacked *Moscow News* for publishing evidence of widespread hostility to party privileges.

He insisted that such privileges did not exist, demanded the publication of that 'fact' and bemoaned the fact that in the meantime: 'we are being nourished by ersatz newspapers, the notorious newspaper—and I would like to say something different—*Moscow News*!' Of equal significance, he attacked those who implied that there are serious rifts in the ranks of the party: 'we do not have reformist and conservative factions'. This was a bid to stem the divisions in the bureaucracy's ranks and doubtless with a clear understanding that the more divided the party bureaucracy becomes the more ripe an object for overthrow it becomes.

Coalition

Where does Gorbachev stand in all of this? We must remember that the coalition that brought him to power comprised the KGB, the major party bosses and the likes of Gromyko and Ligachev. He is a child of the party apparatus itself. However he has fashioned a degree of independence from that apparatus. He has done so partly hand in hand with Reagan and Thatcher. On arms control and in the global Soviet retreat he has portrayed himself as a peace maker and time winner for the USSR. This has strengthened him against the Brezhnevites within the party

machine. He has also secured some independence for himself, encouraging them to support his reforms in exchange for the major cultural relaxation that has taken place. As a result the Soviet press is once again a standard bearer for reconstruction.

Controlled

However his project is distinct in that he periodically attempts, from above, to conjure up various forms of controlled mobilisation from below against the most entrenched and conservative bureaucratic interests. He sees 'deepening and extending democratisation'—as he likes to call it—as a means by which he can mobilise forms of grass roots pressure on sections of the party/state apparatus. To this end there is an extent to which he is actually prepared to orchestrate and preside over debate and conflict within the party leadership both as a means of goading the party's conservative functionaries and as a means of carving out a special power base for himself. Hence his interventions within the conference which both encouraged critical speakers to go further and at the same time, roundly slapped down Boris Yeltsin. He actively encouraged a range of debate within which he could play a balancing role between the different sections of the bureaucracy.

Similarly Gorbachev has been prepared to look to non-

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party organisations as a means of controlling the state and managerial apparatus. Winning the intelligentsia to his side, and encouraging workers to elect their plant management are both examples of the manoeuvre. But important sections of the party bureaucracy view it with intense suspicion, worried, as indeed they should be, that such mobilisation from above, whatever its initial aims, can all too easily spill over into working class self-organisation from below. However while Gorbachev may have left the conference with his actual authority in the Party intact for the time being, there is little sign in the conference resolutions that he had it all his own way.

Apparatus

He wanted to establish a counterweight to the party machine by increasing the independence of the state administrative apparatus. To his more 'radical' supporters such a separation of powers is a burning necessity. To his most conservative opponents it is a complete anathema. The outcome was a fudge that no wing positively espoused. The local party secretaries will have to be local chairs of their Soviets and 'accountable' through the dubious mechanisms of Soviet 'democracy'. Despite Gorbachev's talk of 'all power to the Soviets' the party hierarchy will maintain an essential monopoly over the state apparatus. All the same disgruntled local secretaries will doubtless bridle at the idea of even a slightly increased measure of accountability to their local citizens.

In a bid to assert the independence and authority of the state apparatus Gorbachev wanted to create an authoritative Presidency in the USSR. He would like to greet Reagan and his successors as a formal equal rather than as a humble Mr General Secretary. His own appetite would be to use that post as a further counterweight to the more conservative echelons of the party apparatus.

Project

Some of his most 'radical' supporters wanted this to take the form of a universal suffrage elected President along French lines. This was Burlatsky's project for developing a plebiscitary device that could appeal over the heads of the party bosses. For the conservatives any such plan to boot out President Gromyko and establish a publicly authoritative rival to the party chiefs was untenable.

Once again the outcome was one that no-one intended or really wanted. The USSR will now have a President elected by an extended membership of the Supreme Soviet. But its extended membership will ensure

that the most entrenched bureaucratic interest groups—the ministries, the unions, the army and the KGB—will all have a voice in choosing the President.

This was yet another attempt by Gorbachev to build a compromise between the wings of the bureaucracy that could serve to secure his own authority against them both. Gorbachev used the conference both to encourage 'radical' critics and at the same time to oppose those journalists who exploited the potential of *glasnost*. He attempted to perform a Bonapartist balancing role both between the rival wings of the bureaucracy.

Herein lies the greatest danger to his rule. He may now be the man of the moment. The party conservatives have no alternative to him. The imperialists are supporting him. Most critical elements in the USSR—from whichever political direction—consider themselves to be some form of supporters of Gorbachev.

Yet the means by which Gorbachev's opponents can resist him remain virtually untouched by the *perestroika*. Those fearful of change still have the negative veto of the party apparatus to daily thwart Gorbachev, let alone his more radical supporters. And should this prove insufficient Ligachev has reminded them that they have the power to make or break general secretaries.

Ousted

It was they who ousted Khrushchev in 1964 and who brought Gorbachev to power in 1986. Nothing suggests they have lost the power to oust him. Gorbachev knows this all too well—hence his attempt to balance between the various wings of the bureaucracy and play them off against each other. Hence his manoeuvres to become President with a more

independent power base.

Gorbachev's *perestroika* guarantees there will be further convulsions in the period ahead. As the central planning and ministerial system is relaxed the economy will become even less organised and coherent than it is at present. Thousands of enterprises will face urgent problems of supplies as well as outlets. Throughout the USSR there will be conflicts between the local party chiefs and the formally independent managers.

For Soviet workers immediate material prospects are bleak. One voice at the conference spoke of mounting impatience in the ranks of the working class. All round they hear of the need for change, yet no substantial achievements have been chalked up by the *perestroika*. Shortages and queues continue. Even the press is alive with complaints about social amenities in the cities and villages. The Soviet working class is rightly looking for improvements in living standards but is finding none.

Enterprise

On the contrary, some self-financing firms have run out of funds to pay their workers. And elsewhere enterprise independence has meant cuts in bonus payments. A month ago in the Lithuanian town of Klaipeda bus workers went on strike with public support after management tried to cut their bonus payments. Similar reports are emerging throughout the USSR.

The relaxation of repression, the mounting confidence of those fighting oppression as well as conflicts between the component national bureaucracies of the USSR is priming the pump of national struggles. The pointed refusal of the regime to allow for any changed status for Nagorno-Karabakh highlights another of Gorbachev's dilemmas.

Slogans

The Armenian demonstrations were initially pro-Gorbachev and *pro-perestroika*. They carried his picture, chanted his slogans and called off protests at his request. That they have now been slapped in the face will not please the most conservative bureaucrats. From their point of view events should never have been allowed to reach the stage of demonstrations and strikes. And the rebuttal of Nagorno-Karabakh's demands will disillusion millions in the Caucasus with Mikhail Gorbachev and his *perestroika*.

In its own way the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh shows that the tight-rope Gorbachev is balancing on is already very frayed. What section of Soviet society is he actually able to please? True the intelligentsia have been let off the leash and are enjoying that fact. But Gorbachev himself has failed to reassure the mass of the Soviet working class that *perestroika* is not a threat to them. He has helped awaken the oppressed nationalities only to spurn their demands. And the party and KGB apparatus retain the power to eject him and destroy his proposals.

Opportunity

One thing is for sure. The working class can and must use the current crisis in the bureaucracy's ranks as an opportunity to organise itself as a conscious and independent force. In their efforts to win the argument for *perestroika*, Gorbachev's supporters have gone far further than their forebears in the Khrushchev period in denouncing Stalin and his crimes. Not only have Bukharin, Zinoviev and Kamenev been rehabilitated, but lies about Trotsky at the Moscow trial are being debunked in the Soviet press. The Gorbachevites are no fans of Trotsky. On the contrary, they look for their inspiration in the right opposition to Stalin from Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsky. Nevertheless they are opening the possibilities for Soviet workers to once again discover the history of the degeneration of the USSR and the platforms of those who opposed it. Herein lies an increased potential for building the nucleus of a Leninist-Trotskyist party from within the ranks of the leftist independent clubs that exist today. The building of such a party is the key to self emancipation of the working class.

With the bureaucracy in crisis and divided it would be all too tempting to seek out one of its wings as a saviour. Such a course would be fatal for the working class. The bureaucracy as a whole retains its counter-revolutionary character. For all Gorbachev's preparedness to condemn Stalin's reign, his politics remain those of Stalinism, based on the reactionary creed of socialism in one country. Nor do the radicals or the conservatives offer anything other than variations on bureaucratic rule. The whole caste stands as an obstacle to the transition to socialism.

Reawaken

For these reasons while the working class can and must use every opportunity *glasnost* provides to learn, debate and politically reawaken and rearm themselves, they must not become footsoldiers for one bureaucratic faction against another. They must strike out on an independent road.

Against privilege and repression the working class must organise to take power directly into its own hands through a political revolution that breaks the power of the bureaucracy forever. By creating new genuine workers' soviets, built in struggle against the bureaucracy, once again the Leninist slogan 'All power to the Soviets' will be made a reality. Privileges for the parasites will be abolished. And the planned economy can at last be taken into the hands of those whose productive skills and democratic organisation can alone ensure that it works for the benefit of all—the Soviet working class. ■

In Defence of Marxism

What is the Soviet bureaucracy?

MUCH OF Gorbachev's *perestroika* campaign consists of attacks on bureaucratism. He has talked of shedding around 15 million administrative jobs by the year 2000. This figure alone reveals the huge scale of officialdom in Soviet society. The apparatus exists to administer virtually every aspect of Soviet economic, social and political life.

This all embracing administrative apparatus is itself rigidly hierarchical. Its lower ranks have relatively meagre wages and little real authority. But at its head are the all powerful bureaucratic chiefs who wield the real power in the USSR. This inner bureaucratic core occupies the posts in what is called the *nomenklatura*—top party, state and industrial jobs that are handed out by the highest ranks of the bureaucracy alone.

A place in the *nomenklatura* does not only bring real power to direct the bureaucratic machine. It also brings with it considerable social and economic privileges. It opens the door to the pampered world of limousines, special shops, special hospitals and rest homes. The power of the *nomenklatura* frees its members from many of the legal obstacles that formally prevent bribery, nepotism and the embezzlement of state funds. The Brezhnev era showed that all too well, with corruption at the top absolutely rife.

The origins of this pyramid of bureaucratic power lie in the political counter-revolution carried out by Stalin in the late 1920s. The Soviet working class and its political representatives—the Trotskyist opposition—the Soviets or workers' councils that had come to power in the October Revolution of 1917—were robbed of any real political power, any real say in the vital control of the economy. The Communist Party itself was transformed from a democratic centralist organisation of revolutionary fighters, into a monolithic edifice. Membership of the party had less and less to do with revolutionary commitment and more and more to do with furthering your career within Soviet society.

Stalin carried out this counter-revolution in the name of building 'socialism in one country'. This reactionary and utopian creed explicitly rejected the need for the international spread of the revolution as the means of its survival and of its forward march to communism.

The reason why Stalin carried through this bureaucratic political counter-revolution, and the reason why he was successful in doing so, was that the Russian Revolution was paying the price for the failure in the years 1918 to 23, of the European revolution. In particular the failure of the German revolution left backward Russia isolated. The resultant economic pressure and the physical exhaustion of the working class after the civil war, paved the way for the development of a bureaucracy. This bureaucracy acted like a policeman regulating a queue of people. It developed its own interests separate from the people it administered and, increasingly free from their control, Stalin was the representative of this bureaucracy.

In a bid to create a centrally planned industrialising society Stalin drove the peasantry into

rigidly policed collective farms. Workers were forced into an industrial regime that tried to tie them to their workplace and ruthlessly force up their productivity. Above all this stood a central bureaucratic apparatus that attempted to control and order society and the economy. An indispensable adjunct of this was a massive apparatus of terror.

The privileges and power of this bureaucracy stemmed not from their class position as such, but from their political control of a society in which capitalism had been overthrown.

The ruling caste are parasitic on the planned economy for their own gross privileges. And they mismanage the plan through the gross inefficiency of their administrative hierarchy. That the bureaucracy itself is an impediment to the development of planned property relations has become ever more clear over the years. In the 1930s and 1940s they were able to achieve high growth rates at a relatively primitive level of industrialisation.

But as the economy became more sophisticated, as growth needed to be more intensive rather than extensive, so the bureaucracy was less and less able to maintain the dynamism of the Soviet economy. This is at the root of the progressive slow down of Soviet growth in the 1970s and 1980s. It was already evident in the most advanced economy modeled on Stalinist planning—Czechoslovakia—in the early 1960s.

The bureaucracy, unlike a new class, is historically illegitimate. Capitalism as a system of production needs, by its very nature, the capitalist class. It is their creation. But the bureaucracy is not needed to administer the planned economy. It impedes it.

In its own peculiar way the bureaucracy acknowledges daily its role as an illegitimate parasitic caste. Unlike the capitalist class or feudal landlords few of its privileges are codified in law. They are enjoyed behind a wall of utmost secrecy. Their special shops are unsigned and their country homes are carefully guarded from the public gaze. Ligachev even denies they exist.

Its inability to gel and transform itself into a coherent ruling class is shown by its political history. Its natural tendency is to fragment. It is indolent and susceptible to self-indulgent corruption.

This bureaucracy cannot be reformed into a roughly adequate instrument to meet working class needs. Its current crisis and fragmentation testifies to its transitory nature. The working class must overthrow the bureaucratic caste with its *nomenklatura* monopoly of power. In the hands of rebuilt workers' councils the administrative apparatus must be overhauled from top to bottom.

Workers' democracy, the key to revitalising and unleashing the socialist potential of planned property relations, must be fought for and maintained. The slogan of 'socialism in one country' must be replaced by the call for international revolution. These are the tasks of the political revolution which alone can open the road to the realisation of the potential of October's property relations for an internationalist onslaught on capitalism and the transition to socialism. ■



Pro-*glasnost* demonstration in Moscow

IRAN'S ACCEPTANCE of UN resolution 598 has raised the possibility that the Iran/Iraq war will come to an end. The resolution—accepted a year ago by Iraq—calls for an immediate ceasefire and the establishment of a commission to determine which was the aggressor nation.

The Iranian acceptance of the resolution marks a major policy reversal in Tehran. Only a few weeks before the announcement of this new position, Iranian newspapers were warning Iraq that they could 'take to the grave with them any idea of a compromise with President Saddam Hussein'. So what has prompted such an abrupt about-face?

On the military front, Iran had lost the initiative and suffered a number of key defeats, including the loss of the Faw Peninsula. It was fast approaching the point where it was militarily incapable of carrying on the war, suffering chronic arms shortage and an absence of air cover, all of which contributed to war weariness among the troops—even among the Revolutionary Guards. US imperialism had dealt further blows with its attacks on oil installations, shipping and the shooting down of the airbus.

The economy was increasingly incapable of withstanding the pressures. The war machine consumes 30% of the government budget, and the oil revenues which have paid for it were themselves being threatened by the tanker war and the attacks on oil installations.

The human costs of the war have provoked growing discontent among the Iranian masses. The eight year bloodbath has left one million dead and many more maimed, with Iran suffering the higher casualties and losing out in the 'war of the cities'. The discontent was set to explode.

These pressures—military, economic and political—provoked a split within the Islamic ruling elite.

Pragmatic

One faction of the Iranian leadership around the Majlis (parliament) speaker and millionaire cleric, Hashemi Rafsanjani, set about bringing an end to the war before it brought an end to the Islamic Republic. Having won Khomeini's support for a so-called 'pragmatic' approach and having got control of the war by taking over as Commander-in-Chief, Rafsanjani set about stitching up a deal with US imperialism in order to get a ceasefire.

Rafsanjani has been building links with the imperialists for years. He was the regime's frontman in the dealings with the USA to secure arms in return for hostages. His faction have kept open the trade links with Britain (which supplied Iran with £308 million worth of goods last year), Japan which buys much of Iran's oil and, latterly, France.

Over the last four months he has renewed Iran's links with the USA through a series of secret meetings. The last one, in Amsterdam just after the airbus was shot down, put the finishing touches on a deal. This explains the moderate tone of both countries in the UN debate on the tragedy.

If peace does follow the ceasefire, the manner

in which Rafsanjani has secured it will ensure that neither the Iranian nor the Iraqi masses will gain from it. The prospect of a cessation of the slaughter should not blind any revolutionary to this fact. The war will end with reactionary regimes in Baghdad and Tehran intact. Repression and intensified exploitation of the masses will be their immediate programme for the period of 'reconstruction'. What is more, imperialism will make important gains from a UN sponsored peace deal. For the USA the possibility of regional stability is a godsend. Not only can it be presented as a Reagan foreign policy victory, it reopens the possibility of the USA rebuilding its influence in Iran. This explains why they are keen to see an 'equitable' peace treaty signed.

Balance of power

The *Economist* well expressed the rationale for this approach:

'... the West's job now is to ensure that Iran obtains a peace its people can live with... Better, in the 1990s, to concentrate on a durable balance of power between Iran, Iraq and the Gulf Arabs to Iraq's south. Both Iran and Iraq are exhausted; both can be encouraged to restraint.'

Clearly such a new balance of power will favour imperialism strategically. In terms of hard cash the imperialist vultures are also set to gain. They are already queuing up to secure the reconstruction period contracts. The *Independent* noted:

'The Japanese, the Italians, the West Germans, the South Koreans and, if only by proxy, the Americans, are already there in force.'

traced and ultimately fruitless negotiations. In the process they were able to wring concessions from Managua which would allow the press (*La Prensa*) and the radio (*Radio Catolica*) to carry on organising and inciting a counter-revolutionary movement within Nicaragua.

Reagan used the virulently anti-Sandinista ambassador Melton and the US embassy 'diplomats' to organise and finance the Nicaraguan counter-revolution. Melton himself attended an opposition rally in Estel on 3 July and two US diplomats and several US Congressmen headed a 2,000 strong march in Nandaime that ended in fighting with the police.

The Sandinista National Directorate with its nine commandantes is clearly divided. Up to July, President Daniel Ortega and those favouring concessions to the capitalist class, the counter-revolutionary political forces and the church, had the upper hand. Only last month Ortega promised the scrapping of price controls and limits on salaries and a general turn towards free market policies. The unilateral 'ceasefire' by the Nicaraguan forces was extended to 30 August, despite the renewal of the murderous Contra raids.

The reward for the 'moderate' faction was for the US Embassy to step up its blatant interference in Nicaragua's internal political affairs. The harder line faction within the Directorate headed by Tomas Borge, who controls the Interior Ministry won the day for counter-measures—the expulsion of the US ambassador and the closing of *La Prensa* for 15 days and the catholic radio indefinitely. In addition Jaime Wheelock, Minister of Agriculture announced the confiscation of Nicaragua Sugar Estates Limited, the property of

the country's richest family, the Pellas.

Daniel Ortega's policy of concessions is clearly unpopular. During a rally to celebrate the ninth anniversary of the revolution the *Independent's* Nicaraguan correspondent reports that Ortega's speech was 'halting, confused and apologetic'—half aimed at the ten thousand demonstrators, half at the foreign correspondents and received with enthusiasm by neither:

'He did receive a cheer when he declared the Sandinistas to be "socialists". But the cheers gave way to puzzled silence as Mr Ortega rapidly made clear that he meant socialism more akin to the Spanish and British rather than to the Cuban variety—with ample space provided for an efficient, honest, private sector.'

It is no wonder that the Nicaraguan masses evince little enthusiasm for a Neil Kinnock or Felipe Gonzalez road to socialism by way of a strengthening of 'market forces'.

But, justified as the clampdown on the counter-revolutionaries within the country is, Tomas Borge and the 'hardliners' influenced by Cuban Stalinism have no real alternative strategy beyond the maintenance of the Sandinista regime. This regime is essentially a Bonapartist one—one whose hold on state power is based on its control of the army whose commandantes form the effective government. The elections for the Congress and the President are scarcely any more than 'pluralist' window dressing. Of course it is a left Bonapartist regime, one resting on the support of the workers and peasants who helped the FSLN to overthrow Somoza. But despite its anti-imperialist stance, its repressive powers are aimed not only at the foreign and domestic counter-revolu-

tionaries, but also at the working class.

It denies the right to strike, it enforces austerity, and it protects private property. It is in short a regime defending capitalism despite the sharpness of its conflicts with imperialism and with the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie.

The necessary resistance to the United States' fomenting of internal counter-revolution may well allow Reagan to mobilise Congressional support for refunding the Contras. Even if Dukakis wins the presidency in November, his Vice-President, Lloyd Bentsen, is an ardent Contra supporter. Democratic Presidents have proved not a shred more liberal than Republicans when it comes to revolutions in the USA's 'backyard'.

In Europe and North America the labour movement must rally to the aid of the Nicaraguans. We must fight for an end to aid to the Contras, the withdrawal of all US forces from Central America, an end to the economic blockade and the granting of massive economic aid without strings to Nicaragua. These are elementary duties for all working class militants and indeed for all sincere democrats.

For revolutionary communists there is a further duty to expose the dead end of the Sandinista strategy and its 'left' Stalinist and 'Trotskyist' apologists. Unless the Nicaraguan proletariat goes forward to install its own dictatorship in alliance with the poor peasants and uses all means to spread the revolution throughout Central America and beyond, sooner or later counter-revolution will face the people of Nicaragua with the loss of all the gains made since the overthrow of Somoza. ■

by Dave Stocking

Iran/Iraq

DOWN WITH KHOMEINI! DOWN WITH HUSSEIN!

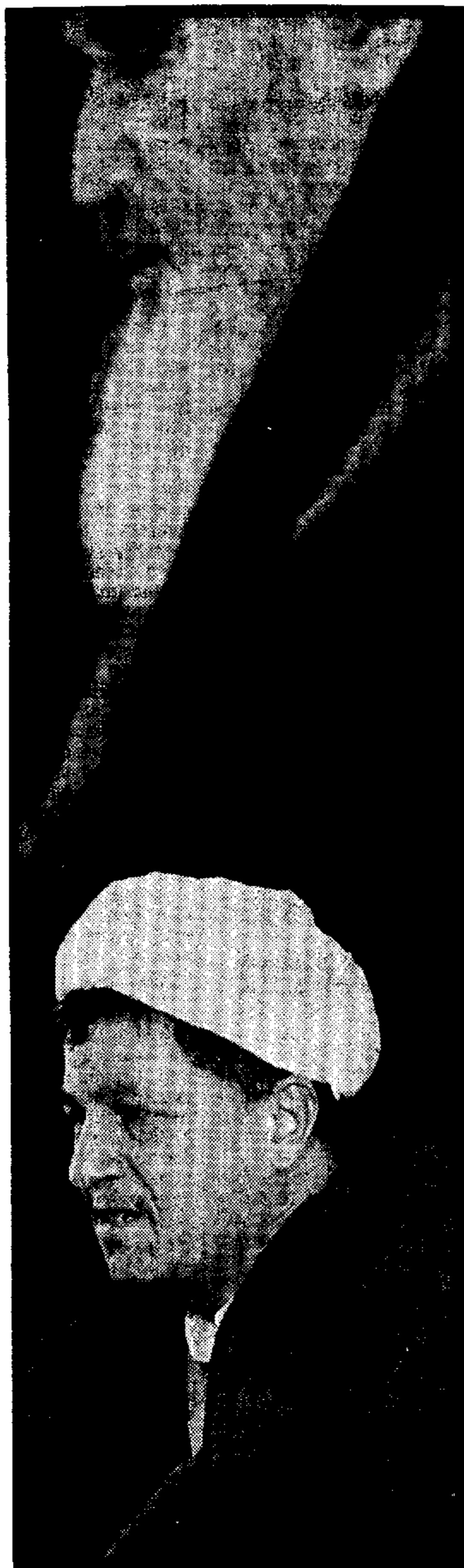
Iran has now accepted a UN proposed ceasefire. Peace is now being talked about after eight years of carnage. Yet a UN sponsored peace will not free the masses of the region from increased misery, nor free them from imperialist exploitation, writes Mark Hoskisson.

The alternative to Rafsanjani's pro-imperialist peace policy, however, is not to continue the war 'to the end'. This is the rallying cry of the so-called 'radicals' in Tehran. These radicals are fundamentalist extremists, based on the petit bourgeoisie and urban poor, who are striving to spread the counter-revolutionary consequences of the Iranian revolution. They offer the masses of Iran and Iraq nothing but the prospect of misery dressed up as martyrdom.

As the two sides continue fighting throughout the ceasefire process—in a bid to improve their bargaining position in the eventual peace negotiations—the masses of Iran and Iraq must chart an independent course. They must utilise the present situation to rid themselves of the Ba'athist butcher of Baghdad, the Islamic torturer of Tehran and the threat of intensified imperialist exploitation.

Both countries are exhausted by the war. Both regimes are beleaguered and prone to internal strife. Economic difficulties will inflame the anger of the masses who have endured eight years of war only to be repaid with further calls to sacrifice. Both countries are, therefore, pregnant with the potential for revolutionary crises. Revolutionaries should seek to realise this potential in the coming months around the slogans:

- No to an imperialist-sponsored peace!
- While the fighting continues for revolutionary defeatism in Iran and Iraq!
- Imperialism out of the Gulf!
- Down with Saddam! Down with Khomeini!
- For socialist revolution in Iran and Iraq—the only guarantee for lasting peace in the Gulf!



Rafsanjani: a friend of imperialism in the Islamic camp

Nicaragua: Reagan steps up the pressure

THE DYING months of the Reagan administration have shown that this particular wasp still has a sting in its tail. On monetarist economic policies and on relations with the 'Evil Empire' he has done a complete about face, but on Nicaragua the 'Chief Contra' is unrelenting.

Congress, enraged by Irangate and made a complete fool of by the USA's rogue puppet in Panama, Noriega, forced Reagan and the CIA to abandon military support and even covert funding for the Contra rebels. But Reagan decided that there was more than one way to get the Sandinistas. Nicaragua is staggering under the impact of nearly nine years of economic blockade from outside and economic sabotage from the enemy within—the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. Add to this the pressure of the Contra raids, especially on the northern front, and the military mobilisation this makes necessary, and you have the basis for serious discontent within Nicaragua.

Obviously the bourgeoisie and the middle classes are discontented with the loss of the spoils of office and with the restrictions on their profits and salaries that the US inspired squeeze imposes on them. But also the workers and the peasantry are increasingly alienated by a regime that denies them the right to strike and unloads the chief burden of maintaining the 'mixed economy' (i.e. capitalism) onto their shoulders.

Reagan and the Contras—being forced temporarily to give up their campaign of murder and pillage, turned to the 'democratic' road: to the destabilisation and overthrow of the Sandinistas. Using the peace talks and the Contadora Peace Process, they engaged the Sandinistas in pro-

HUGE LEVELS of repression have allowed Botha to stabilise the South African economy. In 1987, profits and manufacturing output were up despite an unprecedented nine million days of strike action. At present Botha is hoping to advance by strengthening the collaborators in the black townships and weakening the black trade unions. He is pinning his hopes on black participation in elections to the ethnic Regional Management Committees in October, and on the success of the Labour Relations Amendment Bill (LRAB) in curbing union solidarity.

At present there is no guarantee he will succeed. Many township organisations are still able to mount preparations for a boycott of the October elections. The three day stay away called against the LRAB was a huge success, proving the potential for workers' action to prevent the bill taking effect.

But the black opposition is as yet unable to clear a path to victory. The revolutionary upsurge in the townships of 1985/6; the huge strike wave of 1987; the increase in armed struggle during 1988: none have succeeded in toppling Botha.

In the trade unions, in the partially underground youth and township organisations, in the exile organisations, debate is flourishing about perspectives and strategy for the liberation movement and the working class. Must there be a revolutionary overthrow of the apartheid regime? If so, what will be its aims, its nature, its leaders? How long or short term is the perspective of revolution? Should the ANC talk to the bosses? Is armed struggle appropriate at present? The impetus for the debate comes not only from the experience of struggle but also from the effects that the 'new thinking' at the highest bureaucratic levels in the Soviet Union is having on the SACP and the ANC.

Throughout the revolutionary upsurge, the ANC called on the youth to 'Make South Africa ungovernable'. Although it followed this with the slogans 'Forward to people's power' and 'Forward to people's war', it never succeeded in charting a course to the overthrow of the Nationalist Party government. The township resistance was driven back by Botha's state repression. And although the ANC laid increasing stress on the 'leading role of the working class' it failed in the crucial moments, in particular in June 1986, to call for the trade unions to deliver general strike action against the regime's State of Emergency. The ANC's strategy led to failure for the mass movement.

UPSURGE

This was because it was based on a programme of forcing the regime to the negotiating table, not on its revolutionary overthrow. Even at the height of the upsurge, ANC spokesman Thabo Mbeki was reassuring western journalists:

'We are not talking of overthrowing the government but of turning so many against it that it will be forced to do what Ian Smith did.'

This strategy in turn was rooted in the long held commitment of the ANC and the SACP (with whom it has an 'unbreakable alliance') to the idea of the 'national democratic revolution' against apartheid. Socialism is for later. The programme for the 'democratic revolution' is encapsulated in the Freedom Charter, with its unspecific democratic demands uniting a broad cross-class alliance. However militant the actions endorsed by the ANC—and they have included mass defiance, sabotage and the armed struggle—these are all seen as running parallel to isolating apartheid and forcing negotiations. The ANC looks to 'progressive' sections of the bourgeoisie in South Africa and internationally to help in this process.

But hugely different interpretations of this programme and strategy have always been possible. At one extreme, an ANC supporter could stand for armed insurrection to destroy apartheid followed by 'uninterrupted prog-

ANC/SACP debate

Two roads to defeat



Black workers demonstrate against anti-union laws

In the face of the continued emergency, repression and censorship, South Africa's black working class is still mounting significant resistance. The apartheid regime has not been able to deliver a decisive blow to the mass movement. But neither have black workers been able to break the deadlock. This situation is producing a crisis of direction in the workers' movement as a whole. Sue Thomas explains how this is reflected in debates within the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

ress' from the national democratic revolution through to socialism. Indeed Joe Slovo, one of the leaders of the SACP and until recently Chief of Staff of Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK)—the ANC's armed wing—came close to that interpretation in his essay 'No middle road' in the 1970s. But just as easily, the ANC strategy and SACP programme could be interpreted to mean that armed struggle is merely a tactic to force negotiations, or propaganda of the deed to ensure the ANC was visible to the South African masses.

All variants of these interpretations can be seen in the current debates. Of course in the true Stalinist tradition of debate, nowhere do we find a proper accounting for past positions, despite calls for *perestroika* and *glasnost* in discussions!

On the one hand, a pro-militarist wing continues to argue for the primacy of armed struggle. For them, the tactics of the last phase have been successful, the country is ungovernable and the ANC must move forward to 'people's war'. The attempt by MK militants to remain in the vanguard of struggle is shown by the rash of military actions in the last year and the call by MK leader Chris Hani to consider individuals within the civilian apartheid structures as legitimate targets. An even more radical interpretation of the armed struggle tactic was presented by Prodigal Hondo in the SACP's journal:

'Only through the armed overthrow of the racist regime can the revolutionary forces led by the working class attain victory.' (*African Communist* 109)

Calling for the armed struggle to be based on the 'people's communes' Hondo criticised the limited actions which:

'... encourage those who believe that military operations are designed to bring pressure upon the enemy to negotiate.'

But that, of course, is precisely how the majority of the ANC leadership do view the armed struggle. Even at the height of the revolutionary upsurge of 1986, Slovo was defending the continuation of the armed struggle on the grounds that the ANC should not 'give up what is forcing people to talk' ('Speech on the SACP's 65th anniversary').

However, the sea change in the So-

viet Union's foreign policy has brought even further retreat on the question of armed struggle. An early sign came in February 1987, when Joe Slovo, on becoming General Secretary of the SACP, relinquished his post on the MK High Command. In an interview with the *Observer*, Slovo distanced himself from his position of the mid-70s arguing that there was then no chance of negotiation, whereas now the regime was 'in such trouble that with meaningful international intervention they might come forward'. Of course what is missing in all of this is any further development of the ideas put forward by Prodigal Hondo of combining armed struggle with mass action.

POWER

The programme of revolutionary communism sees the military struggle as rooted in the working class' need, first to defend itself, and subsequently to seize state power. But both the ANC and SACP are moving in the other direction, not only away from armed struggle but away from 'leftist' interpretations of the strategy of the 'national democratic revolution'. Pro-Gorbachev Soviet commentators have made it clear that 'socialism' should not be on the agenda in South Africa. At the end of 1986, USSR academician Gleb Starushenko was telling the ANC that they should 'not advance plans for a broad nationalisation of property' (*Western Mail* January 1987). Starushenko went on to call for 'guarantees' to the white population. This was going too far for most SACP and ANC militants but fellow academician Goncharov, whilst withdrawing the idea of the veto, underlined the need to limit the existing struggle to 'liberation'. Chastising left errors from some ANC members he argued:

'If they will insist on putting forward the ideas and principles of the socialist revolution before the settlement of the problems of national liberation, they will lose their allies in the population, they will lose potential allies.' (*Work in Progress* No 48, July 1987)

These Soviet advisors have made it perfectly clear why they want struggle reined in, both in South Africa and in the Angolan war, where they are striving might and main for a settlement that will allow Cuba and the USSR to

disengage (See WP 106). The Soviet Union, argued Goncharov, has no desire 'to interrupt the traditional ties between some countries of South Africa and some western powers' (*Work in Progress* 48). The implication of the 'new thinking' for the USSR's allies, the ANC, is that the Soviet Union doesn't want things to get out of hand! The ANC is asked to consider the 'global consequences' of upsetting the applecart in South Africa. The message is clear, if you can't negotiate an end to apartheid, don't rely on us.

This theme has been taken up in the debates in the ANC journal *Sechaba*. Brenda Stalker, for instance, argued in the May 1988 edition that the South African 'national democratic revolution' cannot pass through to a socialist revolution (as she considers it did in Vietnam and Cuba), without 'serious dangers, not simply for regional, but also for international peace'. Stalker is then left advocating the piecemeal dismantling of apartheid, agreed in advance with the ruling class, and achieved by persuading the imperialists to 'disentangle' from the apartheid regime.

This position is not to the taste of all. Not only have there been replies to Stalker, but the SACP has gone so far as to publicly hint at differences with Gorbachevite foreign policy. In a review of Gorbachev's *Perestroika—new thinking for our country and the world*, in the *African Communist* No 113, Sisa Majola argues against Gorbachev's abandonment of the definition of peaceful coexistence as a 'specific form of class struggle' and his call for 'humanitarian' questions to have over-riding importance. Majola points out:

'It is all very well to insist on humanitarian values, but the main question is whether the forces of imperialism will join us in the new thinking.'

Worried that the Soviet Union is going to leave the ANC in the lurch and thus destroy the 'special relationship', the SACP told Gorbachev last November:

'Political settlements and negotiation cannot be elevated to a fetish... there are certain regional conflicts—and our own struggle is one of them—where the prospect of political settlement or real negotiations does not yet depend on diplomatic manoeuvre but rather on the building up of the lib-

eration forces and escalating blows against the apartheid regime' (*African Communist* 113).

At the same time, the SACP theoreticians have been gnawing over the problem of the national democratic revolution. Not only do they have to fend off attacks from the Gorbachevite right, which seeks to postpone all ideas of socialism to never never land, but they have to deal with the growth of socialist ideas in the black working class. Over and over again, the SACP writers have reiterated their theme of the 'uninterrupted revolution', trying at one and the same time, to limit the existing struggle to democratic goals, but to keep working class support by stressing that there is 'no Chinese Wall' between the two stages of the revolution.

Thus we find Toussaint in the most recent *African Communist* arguing:

'The communist concept, then, is of an unbroken path from where we are now, through the way-station of national liberation, to socialism'.

There is a problem with all strategies which divide the revolution into stages—even with the promise of 'uninterrupted transition' from one stage to the next. The first 'democratic' stage is never reached. Or it is achieved only in a reactionary form which guarantees there can be no transition to socialism. The example of Zimbabwe under Mugabe is proof of this.

In South Africa only the working class organised at the point of production has the power to destroy apartheid root and branch. Even the mass uprising of township dwellers was not enough to defeat repression, in the absence of generalised strike action.

The general strike, workers' and township councils of action and an armed workers' militia are the weapons needed to smash the Apartheid state.

The working class cannot enter this fight promising not to 'go beyond' democracy and an alliance with the 'liberal' bourgeoisie. Will the general strike exempt Anglo-American, for example, the massive mining firm whose bosses have pushed for negotiations with the ANC? Will Anglo's workers seize their mines for 'democracy' yet leave intact the massive inequalities in pay and the murderous conditions which are the source of their bosses' profit? To win victory, such concessions are unthinkable.

Yet the only alliance for 'democracy' the white liberal bosses will contemplate is one which leaves their property intact and the masses disarmed and on the sidelines.

'Make the democratic revolution with the liberal bosses, then advance to socialism' is a schema that can only exist on paper. In reality it has led its advocates into the arms of bourgeois 'democratic' reaction or full blooded counter-revolution.

Only the programme of Permanent Revolution, which combines at every stage the democratic and working class socialist tasks, can guarantee victory over apartheid. Unlike the strategy of either the 'armed struggle' or the 'negotiating' wing of the ANC/SACP, Permanent Revolution offers a clear road from today's struggles to the seizure of power.

REGROUP

Through strike action against the LRAB, rebuilding cross-union locals, forging links between unions and township organisations, boycotting the October elections the working class can regroup. It can prepare defence squads in the workplace and in the townships against government/bosses repression. Then another opportunity like the miners' strike can be seized, to turn defensive action into a general strike, linking the economic struggle with the struggle for power.

But for this to succeed, South African workers must forge a revolutionary party which breaks from the politics of the ANC, the SACP and the equally useless roads of economism and black nationalism. Built openly where possible, illegally where necessary, a revolutionary communist party can and must lead the masses to power. ■

Dear Comrades,

An MRCI response to a 'Leninist' attack on Workers Power over the Iran-Iraq war is a rather surprising way to make clear, for the first time, the MRCI's attitude to the Irish Workers Group's unequivocal condemnation of the Enniskillen bombing (*Workers Power* June 1988). Better late than never, perhaps—except that it merely compounds the political problems.

The MRCI argues that: '... There is a difference between communists' duty in Britain and Ireland.' If that were just a difference of emphasis and presentation in the relationship between defence and criticism of the republican movement there would be no problem. However, that does not seem to be what the MRCI means, nor could it be. While *Workers Power* (December 1987) declared that: 'We unconditionally support them in that struggle (to destroy the six counties state) ... they are freedom fighters,' the editorial in the IWG's *Class Struggle* 3 starts by telling us in its boldest type that it 'unequivocally condemns' the Enniskillen bombing. So that there can be no mistake, the editorial repeats the condemnation a further three times.

Unconditional support and unequivocal condemnation would sound to most people not just like different positions, but diametrically opposed positions. Is this really a difference in 'Communists' duty'?

The *Class Struggle* editorial recognised that there was a bourgeois hysteria in Ireland. It was pro-imperialist in Ireland as well as in Britain. Its immediate purpose was to create a climate in which the Fianna Fail government could get away with the Extradition Act. In this context, with the whole bourgeois apparatus bearing down on the nationalist struggle and on the consciousness of the working class, 'communist duty' was to defend the republican movement against these attacks, to expose and oppose the role of the 'Free State' bourgeoisie and to fight against extradition.

Republicanism & Communism

The last two points being those which would have a greater prominence in Ireland than in Britain.

If defence of the republican movement means anything it has to be precisely when it is under the greatest attacks—regardless of how republican tactics have helped bourgeois propaganda. Only in that context is there any value to criticism of the republicans petit bourgeois guerilla oriented politics.

Instead the IWG saw the moment of the bourgeoisie's greatest attacks on the republicans' armed struggle as the moment to stress how different they are from the republicans. Lectures about 'armed insurrection' notwithstanding, the message was: 'We are the legal Marxists'.

The MRCI claims that *Class Struggle* 3 'Made clear its...support for the IRA in its struggle against British imperialism ...' In fact there was not one word to that effect in the editorial—nor in the report of the Sinn Fein *Ard Fheis*, nor in the article on extradition. Only in the final paragraph of a centre spread piece on guerilla warfare was there a single sentence of 'support' and this was sandwiched between lengthy elaborations of the 'condemnation'.

What we have here is an abstract sectarian attitude to the national struggle leading the IWG to fail the 'communists' duty' in Ireland, and the MRCI developing this sectarianism in order to rationalise the manifest differences between the IWG and Workers Power's principled response to Enniskillen.

It would seem that the MRCI—a long-term federation rather than a democratic centralist international tendency—is on the road to what all such federations

become, a mutual non-aggression pact.

Nick Davies

For the Revolutionary Internationalist League,
British Section of the International Trotskyist Committee

THE RIL'S letter reveals the inability of that organisation and its democratic centralist international tendency, the ITC, to approach the Irish question from a genuinely internationalist perspective.

The difference in the duties of communists in Ireland and in Britain is, in effect, buried by the RIL altogether. They do not tell us how their emphasis would differ. Let us spell out exactly what we mean by a difference of duty. In Britain we need to win the working-class to the task of providing real solidarity with the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland, and combatting chauvinism in its own ranks.

This means in the context of armed actions, that while we do not endorse the tactics or strategy of the IRA, we emphasise our unconditional support for

that organisation's fight against the British state.

In Ireland the comrades, north and south, are faced with the key task of defeating the influence of republicanism inside the working class. It is key, because unless the republicans' influence is broken the Irish working class will not free itself from the stranglehold of imperialism.

Contrary to the implication of the RIL's letter, it is not just the Provos' tactics which 'help bourgeois propaganda'. Their entire strategy—non-proletarian to the core—is ultimately ineffective in defeating the hold of imperialism, north and south.

The IWG will not flinch from the task of condemning actions by the Republicans that obstruct the building of a proletarian anti-imperialist movement in Ireland. And Enniskillen did that without a shadow of a doubt. Even Sinn Fein recognised it was a serious mistake. Nor will the IWG shrink from solidarity with the IRA against Britain and the southern state.

Class Struggle 3 made clear the IWG's support for the IRA in their military conflict with Britain. What they rightly did not feel was necessary was to repeat this point in each article touching on the struggle in the six counties.

The failure of the RIL to understand the real difference of duty reveals not only their national-centredness (they approach the problems of the Irish revolution from a purely British solidarity ori-

ented perspective). It also reveals that they have no proletarian alternative to republicanism in Ireland, no perspective for permanent revolution. That is why the leading section of the ITC, the US RWL, have as a key slogan of their programme for Ireland, 'an independent united Ireland'. (Fighting Worker Vol2 No2) The workers' republic, it seems, will follow this stage of the revolution. This, comrades, is a capitulation to petit bourgeois nationalism. It does not transcend the democratic programme.

As far as our comrades' record on standing against anti-republican hysteria is concerned, the RIL need only note the regular reportage in *Class Struggle* which reflects their deep involvement in the campaign against Extradition. If the RIL think it is 'legal Marxism' to stand against guerillism in Ireland at the present time, we ask them: do they support the strategy of the IRA as an effective means of liberating Ireland from the yoke of imperialism?

As for the RIL's jibe about our federalism, the comrades would do well to look at the accumulated series of theses and resolutions of the MRCI. They embody a developing common political method, one that will enable us to make the transition from fraternal relations to democratic centralism in a manner that will guarantee the stability of our international tendency and its far reaching success. The MRCI is fully committed by a decision of its last delegate meeting to this transition.

Fighting scab unionism

Dear Workers Power,

I read David Green's article 'Expel EETPU' in *Workers Power* 107 and was left wondering where the comrade obtained his evidence for the assertion that the Flashlight campaign for a 'no vote' on the EETPU ballot '... is a last ditch attempt to rally opposition to the Hammond scab leadership'.

I attended the Manchester Flashlight meeting and it was clear to me that (a) a proper campaign and fight had not been organised over the ballot issue, (b) plans were well underway to remain in the TUC as an organised block of loyal TUC electricians if Hammond pulled EETPU out of the TUC.

Given the decades of right wing control it is understandable that many Flashlight supporters have become tired and demoralised. For many the 'vote' was a foregone conclusion and they were wanting out.

The problem facing militants in EETPU is that they are not politically armed to fightback. Nor can they be, given Flashlight's electoralist approach to change in the union. Therefore, rather than simply uncritically tail the Flashlight executive as comrade Green's article does in its conclusions, *Workers Power* should have mapped out a way to fightback—yes—in the most adverse circumstances.

Militants in EETPU need to be armed on how to lead a real struggle over issues like the ballot on continuing membership of the TUC, on single union no strike deals, on proposed amalgamation with the AEU just for starters.

It is precisely struggles on issues like these that will undoubtedly lead to conflict with Hammond and his scabby leadership. Such struggles will be decisive as to when and where—if at all—electricians leave the EETPU.

Dear Comrades,

Dave Green's article on the EETPU in *Workers Power* 107 put forward a position which is incorrect. It failed to argue what is necessary for the militant minority in the struggle against Hammond. In using the term 'a last ditch attempt to rally opposition to the scab leadership being absolutely correct' it accepts the policies of Flashlight, who in the last twenty years have failed to fight the right wing in the EETPU.

In fact in 1971 it gave critical support to Hammond when he stood for president. They have never led any real campaign against Hammond's break with the TUC. Rather than fight in the EETPU, Flashlight's intention is to leave the EETPU and set up a new union come September. Where does that leave the majority of EETPU members who surely cannot all be scabs?

Comrades it is only through struggle that terms like 'last ditch attempts' are put forward.

The proposed merger between the AEU and the EETPU in March is a matter that concerns militants in both unions and the trade union movement in general. If the left in the EETPU leave without a real fight to change the ballot decision or at least to win the largest possible force for a split, where does it leave those militants in the AEU. Are they going to take a similar course?

What is needed between now and March is a programme of action linking militants in both unions in a campaign:

1. To reverse the ballot decision on the relation with the TUC.
 2. Against single union/no strike agreements.
 3. Against bosses' unionism.
 4. Against the merger.
 5. For industrial class struggle unions.
- In the end militants will have to split from the EETPU, but not before a real fight has been fought.

Yours in comradeship,
P Leyden
Birmingham 4 AEU
(In personal capacity)

See the editorial on page 2



The guerilla struggle: a blind alley for Irish workers

A SERIOUS DEBATE

Dear Comrades,

G R McColl's review of *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics* (published by Verso, not Virgo) gave a misleading impression of the book's focus and content. The book set out to examine two principal trade union strategies in the class struggle: one based on the mobilisation of workers in strikes, the other based on attempts to encroach on capitalist power through 'industrial democracy' and 'corporatism'.

I argue that Luxemburg's concept of the 'mass strike' provided crucial insights into the development of political class consciousness. Above all Luxemburg identified the key role played by the actions of the capitalist state in helping

to transform economic struggles into overtly political ones.

Luxemburg's analysis of this issue is considerably clearer than Trotsky's, who failed to provide a convincing account of the precise mechanism by which capitalist refusal to meet transitional demands would lead the mass of workers to revolutionary socialist conclusions.

Most of McColl's review is taken up with an unconvincing and dogmatic attack on trade union bureaucracy. Ignoring the weight of historical and contemporary empirical evidence in *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics*, McColl attacks the trade union bureaucracy with fifty year old quotes from Lenin and Trotsky, and merely asserts that the views of the classical Marxists remain true today. Appealing to the authority of Marxist texts may be proof of doctrinal orthodoxy, but it is a singularly unimpressive way to conduct a serious debate.

Yours sincerely,
John Kelly

We invite comments from other readers on this important topic

REVERSING THE CHARGES?

Dear Comrades,

Management at British Telecom have a slogan at the moment: 'There are no problems, only opportunities'.

To demonstrate this philosophy, consider the Poll Tax. To you and me, the fact that it will cost local authorities some £430 million to collect—two or three times more than the rates—might seem to be a problem. No. It is an opportunity for BT to 'assist them in collecting the community charge in the most cost-effective manner'.

In other words, BT would like to set about sending out Poll Tax bills with the same ruthless inefficiency and inaccuracy for which phone bills have become famous.

But what are they going to do to those who can't or won't pay? Cut off their heads?

Yours in trepidation,
A BT worker

Yes, Norman Tebbit does sit on the board of BT.

Evolution: 2 God: 0

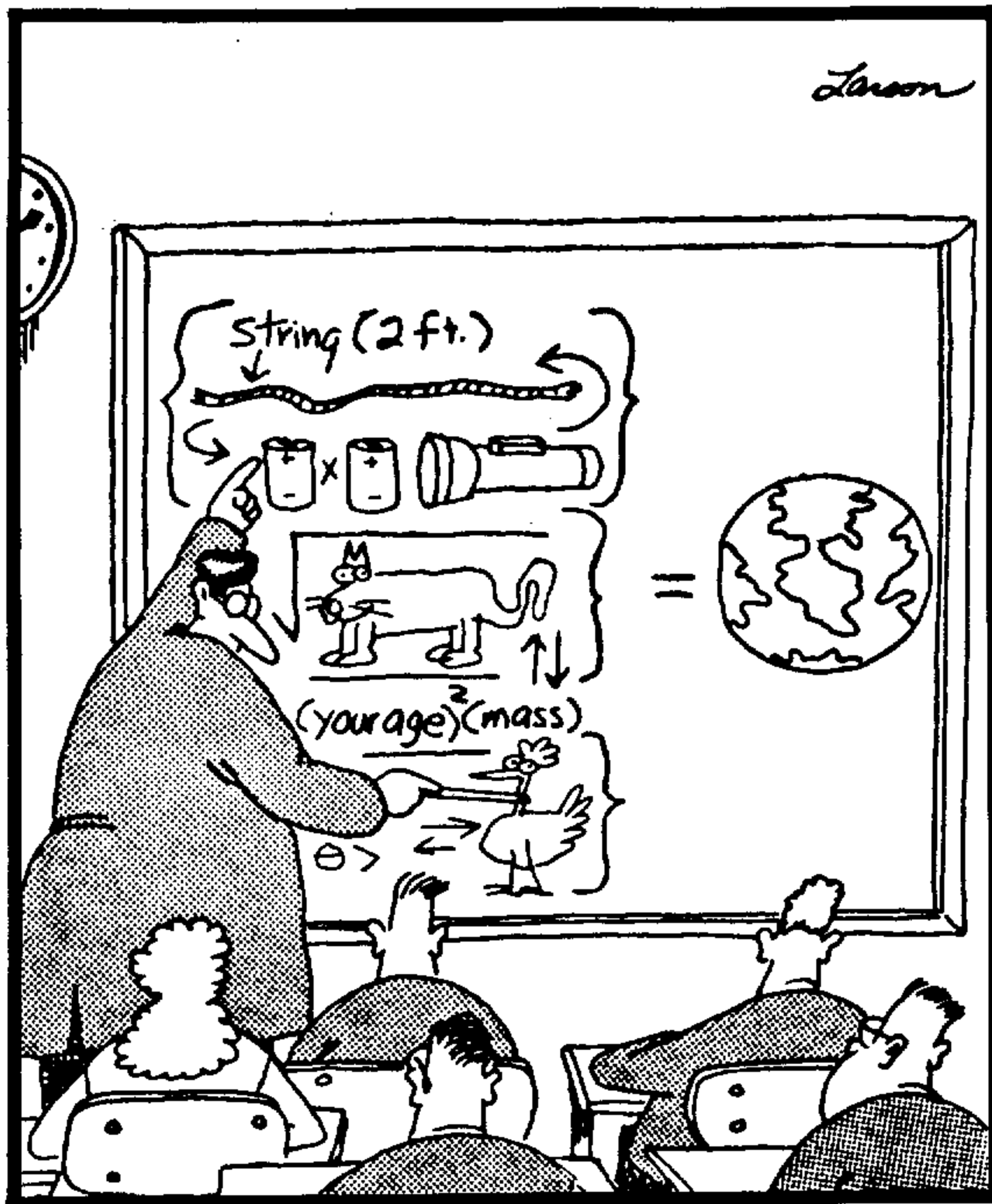
Jack Tully reviews two new books on evolution:

The Flamingo's Smile
by Stephen Jay Gould
(Pelican 1988 £4.95 476pp)
and
The Blind Watchmaker
by Richard Dawkins
(Penguin 1988 £4.95 332pp)

REVOLUTIONARIES HAVE always taken a close interest in scientific developments, and in evolution in particular. One of the reasons why the great Marxists paid such close attention to Darwin's theory of evolution was that it provided them with an important weapon in the battle against superstition and religious obscurantism. Just as Marx laid bare the inner workings of capitalist society, so Darwin revealed how all life on the planet had developed, without the existence of god.

In the 1980s this particular battle against religious crankery—now going under the name of 'creationism'—has had to be fought again. With the rise of the reactionary 'moral majority' in the USA, there has been a massive onslaught on the scientific understanding of evolution, with dangerous religious fanatics insisting on equal schooltime for the hawking of their particular brand of mumbo-jumbo. Thankfully this attack has not been ignored by biologists, who have entered into the fray with gusto and telling effect.

Stephen Jay Gould has been one of the most consistent fighters in defence of Darwinian theory against the creationists in the USA. As well as carrying out his own scientific research, he is an extremely articulate populariser of evolutionary theory. In a series of books, all available in paperback, Gould has written on virtually all aspects of Darwinian theory, in a style and tone that is easily ac-



Creationism Explained

cessible to the non-specialist. Each of his short pieces not only provides an important insight into evolutionary theory, it also draws on a wide culture and vividly conveys the experience of scientific research.

Richard Dawkins is a British zoologist who rose to infamy in the mid-1970s with his book *The Selfish Gene* in which he popularised the idea that interactions between organisms were controlled on the basis of their genetic similarity or kinship. At its best this theory—now generally known as 'sociobiology'—provides a powerful tool for understanding the develop-

ment of social behaviour, especially in ants and bees.

At its worst, it tries to explain human society as a system under genetic control. This nonsense (which Darwin and Marx had to put up with as well) is thankfully almost entirely absent from Dawkins' latest book, which is a passionate defence of evolution against the classic arguments of religious bigots.

The whole aim of Dawkins' book is to show how complex structures like the human eye have evolved in a series of small steps. In doing so, he takes as his starting point the creationist argument that such organs are so complicated that they must have been created by god—the 'watchmaker'. Dawkins explains clearly that the real source of the marvellous variety and complexity we see in the world is not god but natural selection: the 'blind watchmaker' of the book's title.

This process has no 'aims', but is simply the result of the existence of

life as we know it. Organisms that are better adapted to their environment will tend to leave more offspring. As the environment changes, so the 'optimal' form changes, and natural selection tends to eliminate less well adapted forms. Dawkins takes the reader through this argument with a series of telling examples and analogies that will provide the reader with some excellent ammunition for dealing with that religious dope peddler at work or in the family.

There are two notable differences between Gould's and Dawkins' approach which make their books particularly interesting for revolutionaries. Gould is refreshing because he explicitly searches for examples of dialectics in nature, and particularly in evolution. Dialectical materialism is the Marxist way of understanding how things change.

Small quantitative changes can result in a huge qualitative leap.

In one of his more quirky pieces he uses the changes in Mickey Mouse's face over the last sixty years as an example of natural selection (Disney was trying to make him 'cuter', and therefore made him look more and more like a human baby and less and less like a rodent).

Although there are some 'Marxist' philosophers—and even groups like the SWP—who deny that dialectics has any place in interpreting the natural world, virtually every page of Gould's books proves them wrong.

Whilst Gould revels in the dialectic and generally uses it to great effect, Dawkins wouldn't know a qualitative leap if it bit him in the leg.

Dawkins' work generally tends to underestimate the importance of qualitative leaps in the evolutionary process. He can see how a series of small steps can produce a new species, but not the decisive point of change. On the other hand Gould has developed a whole theory of 'punctuated equilibrium' based on the misapplication of dialectics. Basically this sees the periods of quantitative change as equilibrium (no change at all) and characterises evolution as working in concentrated bursts (in fact the qualitative leaps resulting from accumulated contradictions).

Despite this, in their different ways, these two books show quite how important dialectics are in understanding all aspects of the world, and give the reader an important insight into the scientific process. They are also both great fun to read. ■

Ian Hassell reviews
Radical Records
edited by Bob Cant and Susan Hemmings
(Routledge 1988 £7.95 266pp)

RADICAL RECORDS is, according to its introduction 'a history book'. Certainly from the twenty-four contributions, ranging from Alan Horsfalls 'Battling for Wolfenden', which looks at pressure for reform in the fifties and sixties to, Jan Parker's 'No Going Back', which deals with more recent developments, the reader gets a sense of the real changes that have taken place over the last thirty years in the fight for lesbian and gay rights.

And yet many of the articles are simply personal recollections of events and their authors' role in them, with few attempting to draw a balance sheet of the lessons to be learnt from recent history.

The message of most contributions is that autonomous organisation is the key to overcoming our problems. The role of the working class and the organised labour movement hardly gets a look in. Worse still, where class is mentioned it is sometimes as an 'ism' that has to be fought.

An exception to this is Bob Cant's piece which provides a glimpse of the difficulties he faced as a gay member of the International Socialists in the early 1970s. He faced indifference at best, and persecution at worst, from an economic leadership desperate not to raise any aspects of sexual politics which 'we have not found . . . to cause any concern among the working class members of the IS'. The article also goes on to give an account of campaigning for lesbian and gay rights in NATFHE.

Radical Records

Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History

Edited by Bob Cant & Susan Hemmings

Gen. Amers
C.A. Br
Karl B. Bin
Bob Cant
Va. Carpenter
Janet Dixon
Jan Dun
Anne Faraday
Lynda Haine
Kirsten Heath
Susan Hemmings
Alan Horsfall
V. H.
Andrew Lumsden
Eris Mhara
Felix Ortolu
Jan Parker
Andrea Pate
Lynn P. P.
Lise Power
Terry Sarberson
John Stevens
Mike Stevens
B. Thompson
A. T.
Dennis Weeks
Elizabeth Wilson

Although it provides no overall strategy it does highlight problems that exist in raising the issue of oppression inside the unions. Ultimately the real disdain that was shown by sections of the left for the concerns of lesbians and gay men has led Cant and others to 'decentralist', 'alternative' and 'autonomous' forms of organisation. These downplay and even deny the dangers of allying ourselves with ruling class elements. Jan Parker's account of the recent legislation conference is particularly misleading, ignoring the fact that it was wrecked by separatists and divided along class lines.

It is this refusal to face reality and the determination to take solace in 'autonomous' isolation that threatens to prevent us winning over the forces that really count.

This book is worth reading, for all its faults. But unless we come to terms with all the past errors we will not be able to take forward the fight for real sexual liberation. ■

Revolutionary History

THE SECOND issue of *Revolutionary History* is devoted entirely to the hidden history of the Spanish Civil War. It charts and analyses the struggle of the Spanish left against the Stalinist and bourgeois republican repressive machine that was ultimately to drown the insurgent workers' movement in blood.

This timely publication contains articles from authors of differing backgrounds within the Trotskyist tradition, as well as a substantial section reproducing the propaganda of Spanish oppositionists from the commencement of the war to the events of May 1937, including documents of the centrist POUM and the Bolshevik-Leninists.

The issues confronted are of burning relevance today. Throughout the world, Stalinism and the strategy of the popular front remain all too influential. From Latin America through to South Africa and Ireland, the historical example of Spain must be presented as a warning of the dire consequences for the working class

of strategic alliances with sections of the capitalist class, in which the independent interests of the working class are sacrificed.

The counter-revolutionary aims of the Kremlin bureaucracy are clear to see in the material published. The articles on the POUM serve to remind the reader of the dangerous role centrist parties can play in preventing spontaneous working class opposition to the official reformist parties being transformed into a conscious and consistently revolutionary challenge to reformism.

The consequence of centrist misleadership can have tragic consequences for the working class and peasantry.

Workers Power has assisted in the production of this journal. We shall continue to do so. At a time when the SWP(US) run Pathfinder Press is withdrawing many of Trotsky's works from publication, the development of a genuine and non-sectarian archive service for the Trotskyist movement is an urgent necessity.

Up

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workers power

INSIDE

Women workers and equal pay

The state of the British economy

Expel EETPU!

ROVER: STOP THE CLOSURES!

WITH THE sale of Rover to British Aerospace, Industry Secretary Lord Young of Graffham handed over £547 million to the City and its new owners. He simultaneously ensured the sacking of 4,900 workers.

The five year Corporate Plan, announced by Rover Chairman Graham Day just after the sell-off was agreed, means the closing of Cowley south plant at Oxford and within two years the pressings factory at Llanelli where unemployment is already running at 14%.

Only a few weeks before, the advocates of the Rover privatisation were arguing it would be the turning point leading to a new and booming future. It now becomes clear that this meant a booming future for the bosses: a new motor industry study 'The Rover Group—Progress and Prospects' predicts profits of between £200 and £300 million a year by the mid-1990s.

The final details of the rationalisation were imposed after the European Commission made clear it would only give approval to the BAE takeover if the Corporate Plan proposals for job cuts were implemented. Capacity is to be cut back by 200,000 units from 750,000 units per year. Production of small and medium cars is to be centralised at Longbridge, and of executive cars at Cowley.

The European Commissioners have a policy of elimination of 'surplus' production facilities. Even in the present boom, European car manufacturers are only operating at 80% capacity. Acting for the capitalists of Europe as a whole, the Commission is seeking a European wide rationalisation of car manufacturing, to repeat its 'achievement' in securing a reduction of 500,000 jobs out of 900,000 in the steel industry.



This is not to suggest that the European intervention can be 'blamed' for the job cuts. The idea that the problem is villainous 'foreign' bosses is nonsense. British capitalism is every bit as vindictive as its European cohorts and 'little England' nationalism won't help us beat any of them. Thatcher and Young have made abundantly clear their intention to rationalise volume car production and put profits before jobs. Their henchman Graham Day boasted after announcing his job-slashing plans:

'I'm just the latest of a long list of guys who have tried to do something with this business. There were a queue of people before me who tinkered. As far as I am concerned, no-one else has produced black numbers here since a long way off.'

The Tories and the bosses are perfectly clear about their priorities and intentions. They understand the interests of their own class all too well. Typically this is not true of the cowardly leaders of our side. Union leaders reacted to the closure announcement with a lot of angry bluster, but no plans for fighting back were outlined.

Jack Adams, TGWU national officer for the motor industry, and Todd Sullivan, the TGWU Clerical Workers' Secretary, declared:

'Our worst fears have been confirmed. The government and Rover bosses do not have the best in-

terests of British car manufacturing at heart.'

This illustrates the total bankruptcy of the union leaders' strategy. Did they really hope to persuade the class warriors heading the Tory government and Rover management to be concerned about anything but their own interests? The idea that there is a *common interest* between British workers and bosses in the car industry has to be firmly rejected. Rover workers need a strategy to defend their own interests *against* their own bosses. The concessions and retreats over pay and conditions in the last period have, far from appeasing the employers, made them hungry for more.

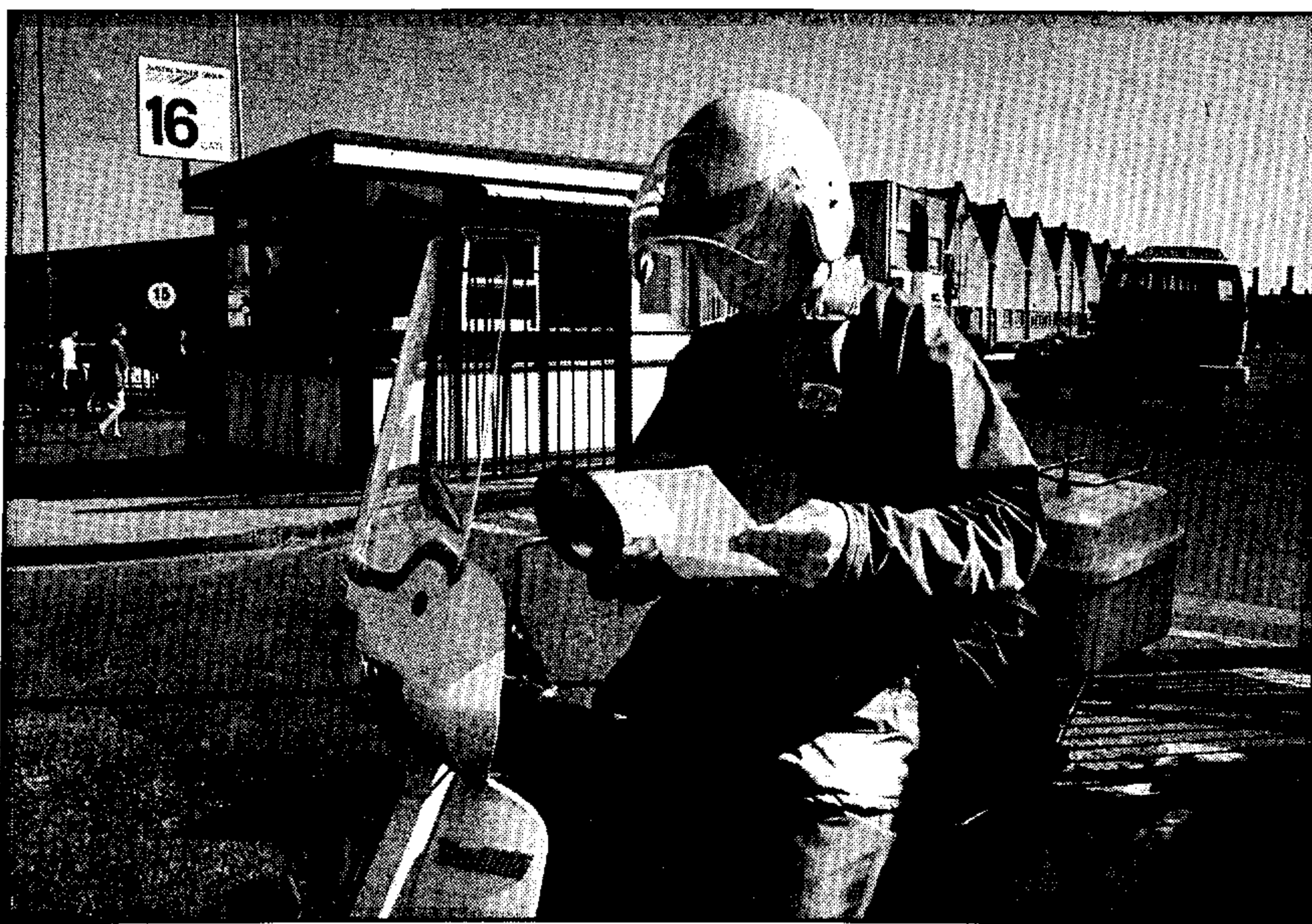
The existing leadership at plant level also fails to understand this. A despairing Alec Morton, TGWU convenor at Cowley complained:

'After all we have done in terms of efficiency and co-operation, now we have been betrayed.'

Workers in all the Rover plants must demand an end to the policies of collaboration with the management. They must demand of the leaders a programme of action to stop the closures and the job cuts. Whether BAE's intention is to wind down volume car production and go entirely 'up market', or to abandon Cowley altogether in a few more years, it is clear that in the long term nobody's job is safe. And no management promise should be believed. Only militant action can stop the management's onslaught, the callous destruction of jobs and with them, people's livelihoods. Workers must demand the opening of the company's books to workers' inspection. The Corporate Plan must be made available to all workers.

Shop stewards' committees in the plants and a national combine meeting across the plants must be convened now to organise action against the bosses' attacks. This action must immediately involve a firm commitment by every stewards' committee to stopping the transfer of work from Llanelli to Swindon, and from Cowley to Longbridge. If management persist with their plans, the plants must be occupied to prevent the transfer of machinery, and to rally all-out strike action throughout the company.

With the pay review coming up in November it should be possible to link the issue of jobs to that of wages and conditions. And workers in Rover must forge links with those in Ford, Vauxhall and Talbot to fight for real rationalisation of the motor and component industry under workers' control, as the only way of safeguarding their jobs and wages. ■



Reading a redundancy notice outside Rover's Cowley South plant

NURSES' PAY

TORY LIES!

WHEN THE government announced a pay rise of 15.3% for nurses back in April, it was hailed as a victory. Now the truth about the rotten deal is being revealed, nurses' leaders are up in arms about Thatcher's broken promise.

The first row broke out when it was discovered that the 'full funding' of the pay increases which was part of the deal will be based on the *estimated* cost rather than the *real* cost of implementation. Health authorities have been given extra cash based on their current wage bill, and many now argue that it will not be enough. The Labour Party has estimated the underfunding to be between £140 and £360 million. Even with the lower figure it would be equivalent to cutting 7,000 beds if it had to be found from existing NHS funds. The Tories have refused to commit themselves to fund any shortfall, so health authorities are now searching for ways to work within the cash limits.

This means that the much praised (by the RCN) 'regrading process' is not being based on skills, responsibilities and specialisation as the Pay Review Body claimed. Posts are being regraded according to available money.

Even before the news about underfunding was leaked, it was clear to many nurses that regrading was going to be a divisive con, robbing many of them of the promised 15.3%. Far from the 30% increase which many sisters

believed they would get by being put on the 'G' grade, many have been given as little as 4.2%. And rather than allocate grades on the basis of current responsibilities many managers are rewriting job descriptions in order to avoid big pay rises.

From the start Workers Power argued that the new grades would be used to deepen divisions in the health service. They are part of the process of developing a small core of highly skilled, trained and relatively well paid nurse specialists, and a large periphery of untrained, low paid, semi-skilled nursing assistants.

This attempt to divide nurses must be resisted, starting with a renewed fight for a decent pay increase for all health workers. Currently the unions are content with negotiating regrading on an individual basis where a person feels they have been wrongly graded. This is totally inadequate. The struggle should not be left to individual cases or indeed at regional/local levels. National bargaining should be re-introduced demanding the maximum increases for all grades. This means breaking with the 'independent' Pay Review Body.

The unions should call emergency conferences on pay to formulate a claim and organise the fight against the divisive regrading. They must fight for a minimum wage of £185 per week (the average industrial wage) for all health

workers.

Nurses need to link up with ancillary staff who have been offered only 4.8%. As we go to press the results of the ancillary pay ballots are not known, but the signs are that only where rank and file workers organised a fight early this year have ancillaries voted to reject the offer. A renewed fight over nurses pay could reverse this situation with the emergency conferences organising a united struggle between nurses and ancillaries.

At a local level the regrading process must meet with a collective response which doesn't set nurse against nurse in a fight *within* cash limits. Union committees of rank and file nurses should resist all downgrading of staff and reject all rewritten job descriptions.

They should fight for every nurse to be placed on the highest grade which their basic qualification allows, sabotaging the division of the workforce into 'high' and 'low' level nursing.

The unions have not shown any evidence of leading such a campaign, preferring to hang on to the coat-tails of Clay and the RCN as they beg Thatcher to reconsider. NUPE and COHSE members should revive the strike committees, and campaign for industrial action. Rank and file organisation of health workers to build joint action is the only way to overcome the Tories' divisive plans. ■