

GORBACHEV JUMPS TO TORY WHIP KINNOCK FOLLOWS SUIT

BY GEOFF PILLING

THE Stalinist bureaucracy assured the Thatcher government last week that it would not push embarrassing questions about the Guildford Four or the Birmingham Six.

The London 'Evening Standard' reported that 'The Soviet Union tried today to take the heat out of a potentially damaging row with Britain over human rights on the eve of Mr Gorbachev's visit.

'Moscow, clearly anxious to avoid a propaganda war, gave an assurance that he (Gorbachev) will not be raising Northern Ireland to score propaganda points on human rights when he visits London next week.'

Mr Gennady Gerassimov, the Soviet spokesman, said last week that he knew of no plans for Mr Gorbachev to meet anyone connected with prisoners serving sentences for the Birmingham and Guildford bombings.

This was later modified when a statement arrived from Moscow which said that Gorbachev would be asking Mrs Thatcher for some 'explanations' about the cases.

As though it is a matter of explanations!

This treacherous talk comes at a time when top circles in the British ruling class are questioning the legality of such sentences.

Two of the most eminent Law Lords, Devlin and Scarman, in a full page article in 'The Times' two weeks ago argued that the actions of the Court of Appeal in these cases was in effect undermining the principle of trial by jury.

In the face of these mounting divisions in a ruling class determined to strip the working class of its every right, the role of Stalinism is becoming clearer and clearer: to collude with imperialism in an increasingly frenzied attack against the rights of the working class.

The Labour leaders were quick to join Gorbachev's defence of British imperialism.

For the first time the Labour Party abstained on the vote to make



Workers Revolutionary Party Central Committee banner on the demonstration outside the national bank of Iran in High street Kensington last week, called to protest the mass murder of Iranian communists and left wingers in Khomeini's jails. See inside for Preparatory Committee statement page 2.

permanent the Prevention of Terrorism Act when it was debated in the House of Commons last week.

Kinnock was above all anxious to show his masters that he is at one with them in the fight against 'terrorism'.

Nearly a fifth of the Parliamentary Labour Party could not stomach this open collaboration with Thatcher and voted against the Bill.

Two front-bench representatives, Clare Short and Andrew Bennett, resigned their positions in protest.

This gross act of treachery by the Kinnock leadership came in the same week that widening divisions in the Conservative Party were more and more evident.

Thatcher last week announced that she will not abide by the European Human Rights court

ruling that IRA terrorists suspects must be brought before a judge within three days. Last week Thatcher was blasted by a Foreign Office diplomat for having double standards on terrorism.

In a letter to 'The Guardian' Patrick John Haseldine, a second secretary in the information department accused Thatcher of 'self-righteous invective' against the Belgian and Irish governments over the Patrick Ryan affair.

He recalled a Tory government decision in 1984 to allow four white South Africans, charged with arms embargo offences, to leave the country unpunished.

It is these divisions that provide the working class with great opportunities to bring down the Thatcher government.

But that task is inseparable from the struggle to rid the movement of its Stalinist and reformist leaderships.

Inside this week:

- Trotsky on the Soviet economy - pages 4 & 5
- Preparatory Committee Statement on the murder of Iranian Communists - page 2



Gorbachev's reforms hit nationalities barrier

GORBACHEV'S reform programme has unleashed a movement for national independence which now threatens to sweep him away altogether.

From the Baltic to the Caspian, from the Ukraine to Kazakhstan, every part of what was once the Tsar's Empire is in ferment. Millions of people, their national aspirations and culture suppressed for decades by the Stalinist bureaucracy, are demonstrating for more freedom from Russian domination.

What must be the attitude of Marxists to this phenomenon? One thing is certain: we must not try to brush the issue aside with a few glib phrases. That is all that can be expected from those who hope that glasnost and perestroika will be a substitute for political revolution.

It was inevitable that, as soon as Gorbachev began to lift the lid from Soviet life, all the tensions previously suppressed and concealed by Stalinist rule would explode.

This includes, not merely the desire of oppressed groups for independence from Moscow, but unresolved conflicts between oppressed nations, like that between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. There are no easy solutions to such problems, which are part of the price exacted by the years of bureaucratic terror.

The Bolsheviks faced these problems even before the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formed at the end of the bitter civil war in the early 1920s.

Of course, it was necessary for economic and military reasons to unite the various national groups which had been conquered by the Tsar into a single state. But they had to be won to this idea. Anything which smacked of Russian domination had to be fought.

As bureaucratism spread from the Soviet state to the Communist Party itself, Marxist principles were abandoned. Lenin's last fight, from 1922 until his death in 1924, was precisely on this issue.

Stalin, as Commissar for Nationalities, had drawn up a plan for relations between the six national republics: Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Byelorussia, Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

It met with powerful opposition from the former Tsarist colonies, where right-wing governments had only recently been defeated by the Red Army. The local communists insisted that the desire for independence had to be respected if popular support for the Union was to be won.

Stalin denounced all such arguments as 'nationalism'. After initially supporting Stalin, Lenin began from his sickbed a bitter struggle against the Georgians Stalin and Ordzhonikidze and the Pole Dzerzhinsky, denouncing them for their 'great-Russian chauvinism'. He blamed himself for not having taken up this fight earlier, and entrusted Trotsky with the task of defending his views against Stalin in the Politburo.

After Lenin's death, the bureaucratisation of the state was completed. Under Stalin, Russian domination over the national minorities became increasingly harsh. In the period of forced collectivisation, whole nations were deported to Siberia. In the years of the purges, the terror was most murderous in the Ukraine.

The relationships between national groups can only find a peaceful form in a socialist world. In Soviet society, characterised by Trotsky as being 'mid-way between capitalism and socialism', such a healthy development is impossible. Only if the bureaucracy is removed and Soviet democracy restored, can the road be opened to socialism.

In the meantime, the national struggles will gain momentum. Will the imperialists make use of the consequent disruption for their own anti-Soviet ends? Of course.

In 1939, referring to Nazi plans to utilise the Ukrainian independence movement, Trotsky wrote: 'But for the rape of Soviet Ukraine by the Stalinist bureaucracy there would be no Hitlerite Ukrainian policy.'

As the Soviet working class gathers strength in the fight to overthrow the bureaucracy, it must make clear its support for the right of all nationalities to self-determination, including the right to secession.

On this basis, the Russian workers will have to convince workers and peasants in the other parts of the USSR to unite and join them on the road to world socialism.

WORKERS PRESS FIGHTING FUND

Total in for November £2,005.54

So far for December £.....

MANY many thanks. Now put Workers Press on your Christmas list! Send a donation to our December Fighting Fund.

We know the going is very tough this Christmas and our readers are feeling the squeeze. But that makes it even more imperative to build Workers Press as the paper leading the fight in the mass movement to bring down the Tory government and defeat their apologists in the labour movement.

Dot Gibson

Send donations to: Workers Press Fighting Fund
PO Box 735 London SW9 7QS

PREPARATORY COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON IRAN

OVER the last weeks fresh news has come from Iran of mass executions of left wing opponents of the Khomeini regime. One group, the Revolutionary Workers' Organisation, has said that the rate of executions has reached such levels in the last four months that prison authorities had resorted to burying the dead in communal graves.

It is estimated that as many as 5,000 people have been slaughtered since the Iran-Iraq cease fire of last August.

Virtually the entire leadership of Iran's imprisoned Communist Party, which initially supported the Khomeini regime, has been wiped out.

We call upon all workers' organisations to join us in denouncing these brutal actions against all these left groups, including the Communist Party.

As Trotskyists we are implacable opponents of Stalinism. But the struggle against Stalinism is a matter for the working class, not for imperialism and its agents.

One aspect of the degeneration of the International Committee and the Workers Revolutionary Party (the WRP is now part of the Preparatory Committee) was the shameful silence we maintained in the face of the Khomeini regime's attempt to exterminate its opponents on the left and in the working class.

We are proud to make this statement as part of the struggle to correct these past crimes and to prepare the movement for its future tasks.

Preparatory Committee International Conference to Rebuild the Fourth International

INTERNATIONAL FUND

In November we received a total of £1,572.60

MANY THANKS for our fund. We are pleased to report that this enabled us to send Simon Pirani to Hungary to attend a conference of oppositionist youth. Other members of the Preparatory Committee for an International Conference of Trotskyists have made journeys to carry out discussions on the work of the Political Centre established to work for the rebuilding of the Fourth International.

Our experience is that the crisis of Stalinism gives us unprecedented opportunities. If you agree with us we ask you to assist us financially.

The Workers Revolutionary Party has pledged that it will provide £1,500 a month as its contribution to this task. We need at least £1,000 of this in banker's orders and we are still some way short of this target. Can you provide a guaranteed sum each month? All such contributions, big or small, will be greatly appreciated.

Send donations to, and obtain details for banker's orders from: Workers Revolutionary Party, PO Box 735, London, SW9 7QS

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TROTSKY MEETING FOR HUNGARIAN YOUTH

THE Trotskyist programme for the Soviet Union and eastern Europe was outlined at a meeting in Hungary last month.

As a result of Hungary's economic crisis, people were asking 'has socialism failed?', said guest speaker Simon Pirani of the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference of Trotskyists. In fact socialism had never been achieved in the USSR or eastern Europe: the present crisis was the result of the disastrous Stalinist policy of attempting to build 'socialism in one country', or a series of countries: it was this perspective that had failed.

The Trotskyists supported workers' movements, and the nationalist risings, against the bureaucracy, said Pirani. We call for the right of working-class parties to organise against the bureaucracy - above all the right of our own party, the Fourth International. He explained the FI's origins in the struggle against Stalinism.

The 20 students at the meeting asked a string of questions. What was the Trotskyist attitude to 'workers' self-management'? How could workers gain control over branches of production under Hungary's stifling bureaucratic dictatorship? What would the Trotskyists do if they took power in a single country to start with? What had Trotsky thought of Lenin's New Economic Policy?

One questioner was especially concerned about the divisions existing in Hungarian industry, between manual workers and the managerial and technical staff whom they felt were a cut above them. How could such divisions be overcome? The point was made that the very existence of such divisions confirmed how far Hungary was from socialism.

How could the bureaucracy be overthrown? Would this not involve an armed struggle? asked one student. In reply the history of previous revolutions was discussed.

The student group which organised the meeting has, over recent years, published a considerable number of Trotsky's articles in their college magazine. The magazine also reproduces material by western liberal writers, Gorbachev-ist and other intellectuals in the USSR, and other political tendencies denied a voice by the Hungarian regime.

The meeting followed the second national congress of the League of Democratic Youth ('Fidesz') which was attended by a delegation from the Preparatory Committee and the International Communist League, an Austrian Trotskyist organisation.

The congress decided to affiliate to the Stalinist-dominated National Youth Council, on condition that it changed its name and structure to that of a federation.

Like the entire opposition, the Democratic youth league is abound with rumours that the Stalinist regime is about to permit certain political parties - on as-yet-undefined conditions. The Com-

munist Party would have to continue fighting for its hegemonic position 'in the event of several parties existing', Communist party central committee secretary Janocs Berecz told the press last month.

There are undoubtedly those within the young Democrats who see themselves as future 'respectable' parliamentary opponents of the bureaucracy.

But equally there are those who are not prepared to compromise with the corrupt Stalinists, who say that 1956 was a counter-revolution and send baton-wielding police squads against student demonstrations. Indeed, the League's congress began with a report

of police assaults on demonstrations - in particular the savage onslaught on a march marking the first anniversary of the uprising in Brasov, Rumania, on November 15 last year.

A leaflet distributed from the Hungarian League of Revolutionary Socialists at the congress underlined that the crisis stricken Stalinist government needed above all an 'official' or 'tame' opposition.

While pulling some opposition organisations into the legal limelight, the bureaucracy would crack down all the more savagely on workers and young people who were not prepared to horse-trade over their demands.

TORY BAN ON FREE SPEECH FOR IRISH

BY HILARY HORROCKS

THE TORY government's ban on free speech for Irish Republicans was an attack on democratic rights in Britain and internationally, warned speakers from Sinn Fein, the trade unions, civil liberties and ethnic groups in Glasgow last weekend.

The rally, organised by the Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland, followed a successful march through two housing schemes in Glasgow, called at short notice after a planned demonstration through the city centre had been banned by Strathclyde regional council on the recommendation of the police.

Opening the meeting, chairperson Derek Owen said the council's claim that the march would provoke 'public disorder' was a cover up for a ban on free speech on Ireland.

Dave Anderson, from Durham Mechanics NUM, compared the state's attack on the republican movement and on the miners during the 1984-1985: 'We are living in a dictatorship masquerading as a democracy,' he said. 'Without freedom of speech, and freedom of the press, there is no democracy.'

Harpal Brar, from the Indian Workers Association, said he was proud to speak in Scotland, the birthplace of revolutionaries John Maclean and James Connolly, who had fought for the emancipation of the working class internationally. 'The liberties of working people are indivisible.'

Brar condemned the government's hypocrisy for claiming that they wanted a dialogue on Ireland, and then closing off every avenue of protest except the armed struggle.

The British ruling class, who considered it their birthright to rule Ireland, were, with US president Reagan, the chief source of terrorism in the world.

'Ninety per cent of Indian workers in this country support British withdrawal from Ireland.'

Brar said. 'We stand on the side of socialist emancipation.'

The latest government measures formed part of a long series of repressive acts, said Sinn Fein councillor Fran McCann, detailing the attacks of Tory and Labour administrations since the birth of the civil rights movement 20 years ago.

The British state had changed the rules on MP's eligibility when Bobby Sands was elected. Then they were changed again to prevent any ex-prisoner standing for five years after his release.

'But the more they put in jail, the more will take their place,' declared McCann, to applause. He condemned the British press for their slavish submission to the requirements of the state. 'The RUC are sealing off large parts of nationalist areas right now,' he said. 'And it is not being reported.'

'This silence must be broken' said McCann. 'What has happened in the six counties today will happen here tomorrow.'

The Scottish Council for Civil Liberties was represented by its chair Alan Miller. 'We will not be muzzled', said Miller, explaining how an interviewer on the radio programme 'Good Morning Scotland' had cautioned him not to say anything which could be construed as being sympathetic towards Sinn Fein.

'We are opposed to this ban because it is part of a consistent campaign to silence opposition to government policies, to impose no-go areas of sanitised discussion,' said Miller.

Joe Eyre, speaking for the organisers of the meeting, condemned the ban on the planned march by the Labourites of the regional council who, he said, were more interested in good relations with the police than in protecting the democratic rights of those who elected them.

Solidarity greetings were sent to the rally from the Scottish Asian Action Committee, the Wolf Tone Society, and the Irish Anti-Extradition Committee in Dublin.

Tory students finger the left

BY ROGER COTTERELL

MEMBERS of the Conservative Party's student section, the CCF, are once more compiling dossiers on left wing students, a source at Exeter University has claimed.

In a taped conversation with another student, Robert Halfon, deputy publicity officer for the university's Conservative Association, boasted that he is gathering information to be sent to Conservative Party central office.

The disclosure of the taped conversation has prompted students, in the Workers Revolutionary Party and Labour Party, to demand the suspension of the Conservative Association, pending an inquiry by the Guild (student union) Executive. It has also led to speculation that other branches of the CCF are engaged in similar activities, in other universities and colleges.

The 'Halfongate' affair, as it has been dubbed by students at Exeter, comes within less than a week of the brutal police attack, on students protesting in London over the Tory's proposals to introduce 'top-up' loans - a further attack on the fundamental, democratic right to education. The police action was heartily defended by bourgeois politicians - including Neil Kinnock.

In the same week a resolution linking the student struggle to the struggle of the working class against attacks on democratic rights was opposed by the Exeter University Guild president who maintained that there was no connection between the two.

Marxism Today gone tomorrow

BY TOM OWEN

MARXISM Today held a symposium in Sheffield on Sunday 4 December. It was a meeting of 18 people. Vicki Seddon, Executive Committee member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the convenor, introduced the session with an appeal for 'open discussion' and urged us to address the future rather than fight old battles.

The format of the meeting, Marxism Today style, was political statement, two questions and, of course, workshops on the details of their programme.

Marxism Today is about political amnesia. When it was pointed out that if they were to face the future they had to come to terms with the past, Bill Innes, the main speaker, claimed that they had done just that! They had done this by 'responding to events' by 'rejecting the notion of a Soviet Britain' and he refuted Lenin's 'State and Revolution' (the state has not to be smashed but 'occupied'). When it was pointed out that these revisions and adaptations came along with the physical destruction of the international cadre that carried through the Russian Revolution and the assassination of Leon Trotsky, Vicki Seddon called for discipline and the meeting broke up into...guess what...workshops.

FROM THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVES

THE SOVIET ECONOMY

LEON TROTSKY assesses the crisis in the Soviet economy in October 1932 at the end of the first five-year plan. He suggests an urgent need for 'capital reconstruction' of both industry and the Soviet organisations themselves.

Although written at a time when the Left Opposition still felt it possible to change the direction of the Soviet Union, it raises many problems still evident in the Soviet economy.

WE accept the workers' state as it is and we assert, 'This is our state.' Despite its heritage of backwardness, despite starvation and sluggishness, despite the bureaucratic mistakes and even abominations, the workers of the entire world must defend tooth and nail their future socialist fatherland which this state represents.

First and foremost we serve the Soviet republic in that we tell the workers the truth about it and thereby teach them to lay the road for a better future...

Light-minded assertions to the effect that the USSR has already entered into socialism are criminal.

The achievements are great. But there still remains a very long and arduous road to actual victory over economic anarchy, to the surmounting of disproportions, to the guarantee of the harmonious character of economic life...

The administrative hue and cry for quantity leads to a frightful lowering of quality; low quality undermines at the next stage the struggle for quantity; the ultimate cost of economically rational 'successes' surpasses as a rule many times the value of these same successes.

Every advanced worker is acquainted with this dialectic, not through the books of the Communist Academy (alas! more inferior goods), but in practice, through experience in their own mines, factories, railroads, fuel stations, etc...

The general growth of the economy, on the one hand, and the sprouting up of new demands and disproportions, on the other, invariably increase the need to link up with the world economy.

The programme of 'independence', that is, of the self-sufficient character of the Soviet economy, discloses more and more its reactionary and utopian character.

Autarchy is the ideal of Hitler, not of Marx and Lenin...

'The reason for the increase in breakdowns, the reason for the fall in labour discipline, the reason for the need to increase the number of workers,' Rakovsky wrote, 'lies in the fact that the worker is physically incapable of bearing up under a load that overtaxes his strength.'

But why are the living conditions bad?...the papers refer to 'the contemptuous (!) attitude to the questions relating to the living conditions of the workers and to providing them with the necessities of life.' (ZI, 24 September)...

A 'contemptuous attitude' to the needs of workers in the workers' state is possible only on the part of an arrogant and uncontrolled bureaucracy...

Malnutrition plus forced exertions - the combination of these two conditions is enough to do away with the equipment and to exhaust the workers themselves.

In consolation, 'Pravda' prints a photograph of a working woman in the act of feeding 'her own private' pig. One cannot believe one's eyes! Once upon a time we learned that private domestic economy depends upon the enslavement of the woman, the most abominable element of social slavery in general.

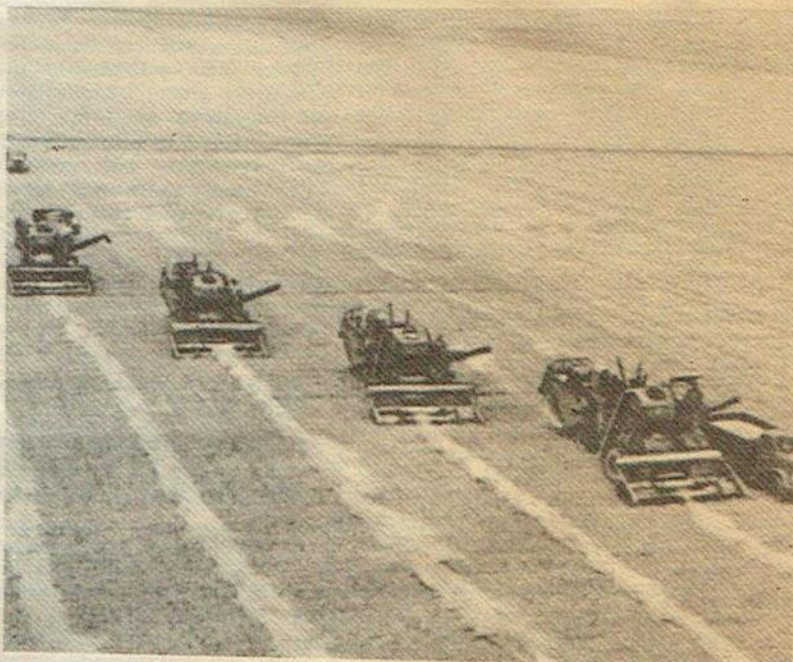
But now it appears that its 'own private' pig attaches the proletariat to socialism. Thus the hypocritical functionaries turn cruel necessity into virtue...

The draft platform (April 1931) of the International Left Opposition proclaims:

'The living standards of the workers and their role in the state are the highest criteria of socialist successes.'...

'Nothing can produce so shocking an impression as the small, quite imperceptible decree issued by the Central Executive Committee on 11 September 1932...

The individual peasant producers are compelled to relinquish, for the needs of the collective farms and at their request, all horses at a set price.



'In order to work well, people must first of all live like human beings and so years after Trotsky wrote, the Soviet economy is still unable to provide for the

The collective farms are in turn obliged to return the horses to their owners in 'good condition.'...

The collective farms, which cultivate 80-90 per cent of the arable lands and which should, in theory, attract the individualists by their achievements, are actually compelled to resort to the legal intervention of the state in order to obtain from individual owners by compulsion the horses for their own needs...

The economic foundation of the dictatorship of the proletariat can be considered fully assured only from that moment when the state is not forced to resort to administrative measures of compulsion against the majority of the peasantry in order to obtain agricultural products; that is, when in return for machines, tools and objects for personal use, the peasants voluntarily supply the state with the necessary quantity of grain and raw material...

These are the most important social and economic questions: the link between the city and the village, that is, the balance between that which industry obtains from agriculture and that which it supplies to it; the interrelation between accumulation and consumption, between the fund for capital construction and the fund for wages, the regulation of wages for various categories of labour (skilled and unskilled workers, government employees, specialists, the managing bureaucracy); and finally the allotment of that share of national income which falls to the village, between the various strata of the

peasantry...

The struggle between living interests, as the fundamental factor of planning, leads us into the domain of politics, which is concentrated economics...

Only through the interreaction of these three elements, state planning, the market and Soviet democracy, can the correct direction of the economy and of the transitional epoch be attained.

Only thus can be assured, not the complete surmounting of contradictions and disproportions within a few years (this is utopian!), but their mitigation, and through that the strengthening of the material bases of the dictatorship of the proletariat until the moment when a new and victorious revolution will widen the arena of socialist planning and will reconstruct the system...

The danger lies not in the slowdown of growth, but in the growing disparity between the various branches of the economy.

Even if all the integral elements of the [first five-year] plan had been fully coordinated a priori, the lowering of the coefficient of growth by 50 per cent would have in itself engendered great difficulties because of the consequences: it is one thing to produce one million pairs of shoes instead of two million, but it is quite another thing to finish building one-half a shoe factory...

The wild leaps in industrialisation have brought the various elements of the plan into dire contradiction with each other...

The laws that govern the transitional society are quite different

IN DANGER



their human needs.' More than 50 years after Trotsky wrote this, the Soviet economy is still unable to provide for the needs of the whole population.

from those that govern capitalism.

But no less do they differ from the future laws of socialism, that is, of a harmonious economy growing on the basis of tried, proven and guaranteed dynamic equilibrium.

The productive advantages of socialism, centralisation, concentration, the unified spirit of management, are incalculable. But under faulty application, particularly under bureaucratic misuse, they may turn into their opposites. And in part they have already become transformed, for the crisis now impends...

The crisis may be mitigated and afterwards overcome not by strident command but by measures of economic regulation. After the adventurist offensive, it is necessary to execute a planned retreat, thought out as fully as possible...

Nineteen thirty-three cannot be a supplementary year of the first five-year plan, nor the first year of the second. It must occupy an independent position between the two, in order to assure the mitigation of the consequences of adventurism and the preparation of the material and moral prerequisites for planned expansion.

The Left Opposition was the first to demand the inauguration of the five-year plan. Now it is duty bound to say: It is necessary to put off the second five-year plan...

Having been knocked off balance, the Soviet economy is in need of serious reconstruction. Under capitalism the disrupted

equilibrium is restored by the blind forces of the crisis.

The socialist republic allows the application of conscious and rational cures...

Improvements in quality must be given first place...

Let there be an end to driving and spurring and establishing records; let the productivity of each enterprise be subject to its own technological rhythm...

Nineteen thirty-three must gain complete mastery over the labour turnover, by bettering the conditions of the workers; that's where the beginning must be made, for herein is to be found the key to everything else. Workers and their families must be assured of food, shelter and clothing. No matter at what cost!

Nineteen thirty-three must serve to bring the collectivised agriculture into line with the technical, economic and cultural resources...

In 1933 the farmers will till the land, the textile workers will produce cloth, the blast furnaces will smelt metal, and the railroads will transport people and the products of labour.

But the highest criterion of this year will lie not in producing as much as possible as fast as possible but in putting the economy in order; in checking over the inventories, separating the healthy from the sick and the good from the bad; in clearing away the rubbish and the mud; in building the needed houses and dining rooms, finishing the roofs, installing sanitary ventilation.

For in order to work well, people must first of all live like human beings and satisfy their human needs.

To set aside a special year of capital reconstruction is a measure which of course solves nothing whatever by itself. It can attain its major significance only by a change in the very approach to the economy, and, first of all, to its living protagonists, the workers and peasants.

The approach to the economy belongs to the domain of politics. The weapon of politics is the party. Our task is to resurrect the party. Here as well we must take an inventory of the onerous inheritance of the post-Lenin period.

We must separate the healthy from the sick, the good from the bad; we must clear away the rubbish and the mud; we must air and disinfect all the offices of the bureaucracy. After the party come the soviets and the trade unions.

Capital reconstruction of all Soviet organisations is the most important and most urgent task of 1933.

LETTERS

The Soviet betrayal of South Africa and Revisionism Revisited

READERS of Workers Press will have seen Cliff Slaughter's comments on the 'new political thinking' of the Soviet Union about the unlikelihood of a 'classical revolution' in South Africa, the unlikelihood of a successful 'popular uprising' there, and indeed the support of Moscow for what they are calling Africa's 'largest and most successful economy'.

This new twist to Stalinism has been widely discussed in the Workers Revolutionary Party. Comrades in South East London proposed this emergency motion at the recent Annual General Meeting of the Greenwich and Bexley Anti-Apartheid Group:

'This AGM of the Greenwich and Bexley AAG notes the moun-

ting working class movement to overthrow apartheid in South Africa, especially the unity of the trade union federations against the Labour Relations Bill, and the biggest strike in South African history.

'We see a great danger to the success of this movement in the public statements from the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow that there will be no revolution in South Africa, and that an accommodation will be reached between the ANC and Botha.

'This AAG agrees to write to the Soviet Ambassador in London, and to the Southern Africa Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow, expressing our dismay and concern.'

Rather to our surprise the only vocal opposition to this proposal came from a group of Socialist Workers Party members who claimed that to single out the Soviet Union as false friends and betrayers of the South African working class proved that the WRP had illusions about the role of the USSR in South Africa.

Despite the SWP's efforts the meeting agreed to send the letters.

John Peters
SE London WRP

Egg on their faces

I WAS sorry to hear about the imprisonment of Cliff Slaughter's son. Please pass on this letter to him.

It seems to me that there was a definite policy, probably devised by ACPO, the chief constables' association, to get tough at football matches.

Following close surveillance, in various parts of Britain a rash of cases came before the courts. Usually these ended up with the police having egg on their faces.

They were shown to have concocted evidence, behaved in an outrageously aggressive manner and charged quite innocent individuals.

I think it would be an excellent idea if Cliff, with his skills as a sociologist, did an in-depth analysis of their conduct.

Should he decide to do so, then what happened at a Sunderland v. Chelsea match would need examination.

The Northumbria Police are in a class of their own. Even so, on this occasion they excelled themselves.

Among those they arrested, beat up and charged, was Oliver Farrer, a close relative of the Queen's solicitor.

After all the charges had been dismissed, he took out a summons against the police. At the trial it was discovered that one policeman, to fake injury, had rubbed a match along his forehead.

Raymond Challinor
Whitley Bay

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'in order to work well, people must first of all live like human beings and satisfy their human needs.' More than 50 years after Trotsky wrote this, the Soviet economy is still unable to provide for the needs of the whole population.

A judgement on our judges

A LEARNED judge decides that a raped teenage hitch-hiker was guilty of 'a great deal of contributory negligence' by hitching a ride late at night, so the driver who raped her is let off with a fine.

A learned judge instructs a jury in a rape case to bear in mind the saying: 'Stop it, I like it.'

A learned judge says to a rapist: 'For goodness' sake, make this the last time. Once you put your hands round a woman's neck in drink, anything can happen. . . . You come from Derby, which is my part of the world. Now off you go and don't come back to this court.'

A learned judge says of a sexual assault against a seven-year-old that it's the sort of accident that could happen to almost anyone.

A learned judge sends a rapist down for 12 months, the minimum possible sentence, because the victim seemed to him 'some-what ever-emotional'.

A learned judge tells a man before him on a charge of attempted rape that he hopes the man's employers will regard his two weeks in prison as a holiday and won't sack him.

A learned judge cuts in half the sentence on a husband who admitted he had twice raped his estranged wife because the rapist 'wasn't a stranger'.

A learned judge puts on probation a man who sexually assaulted his 12-year-old stepdaughter because the man was drunk at the time and the attack was a 'one-off'.

And now a learned judge dares to say that a former London policeman had been driven to sexually assault his 12-year-old stepdaughter because his wife's pregnancy had led to 'a lack of sexual appetite in the lady, and considerable problems for a healthy young husband'.

Judge Sir Harold Cassel, author of those vile remarks, resigned on medical grounds soon after he made them, and soon after being seen by millions of viewers hugely pleased with himself and generally acting the part of an upper-class oaf.

His resignation was no doubt insisted on by the Lord Chancellor, who soon hastened to distance himself from such a Cassel of infamy and infirmity.

But his resignation does not solve, but simply highlights, the problem of our judges: their built-in class, political, and gender bias; their eerie remoteness from the lives and preoccupations of millions of ordinary people; their selection through the old boy network; their total lack of democratic accountability.

This is a political problem. Britain's judges are not impartial holders of the scales of justice, and the rhetoric which claims that they are 'independent' is so much contemptible humbug.

The judicial system has evolved in Britain to serve the needs of the ruling class. To become a judge you first of all have to serve an apprenticeship as a lawyer.

The central function of British law is the defence of capitalist property, the capitalist

system, and the capitalist state. And no lawyer who doesn't prove himself a staunch defender of capitalism stands the slightest chance of being promoted to the bench.

The official who appoints our judges is the Lord Chancellor, who is elected by nobody. The Chancellorship is a political appointment, and no one is going to be raised to this exalted office who doesn't satisfy our rulers that he in turn is going to appoint similarly 'sound' and 'reliable' judges.

So the overwhelming majority of our judges are the products of public schools. Most of them, in fact, come from the top echelon of public schools, those traditionally associated with training the sons of the ruling class to rule - in other words, with reproducing an elite.

The judges' education, upbringing, training, high pay, and social contacts - almost without exception they are members of exclusive West End clubs - combine to make them virtually incapable of understanding the real world in which the rest of us live.

It also crams the minds of most of them with a hodge-podge of social, political, and sexual prejudices based, for the most part, on porcine ignorance.

Hence a specimen like Sir Melford Stevenson, the High Court judge who said that lawyers in an IRA trial should have their fees cut for 'slinging mud' at the police.

Hence, too, that monstrous series of judge-blessed frame-ups of Irish people which has led to a growing awareness, all over the world, that our much-vaunted 'British justice' is an obscene sham.

No Labour government has ever dared to open this can of worms. Serious workers should ask themselves why, and what conclusions follow.

AS I SEE IT

BY TOM OWEN

Osip Mandelstam

Osip Mandelstam, one of the foremost Russian poets of this century perished along with the many other Soviet citizens in the second great wave of purges in the 1930s.

His '2nd class' rehabilitation came about during the brief 'thaw' that followed Krustchev's 20th Congress secret speech. One month before the fall of Krustchev in September 1964, nine poems of Mandelstam appeared in the literary magazine 'Moskova' and his works were published in two volumes that same year in the USA. (These were later expanded to three.)

We learnt more about the tragedy and heroism of the poet's life in his wife's memoirs published in the west in 1972 (Paris) which gives an extraordinary account of their life and times between 1919 and 1938.

One of the criminal aspects of Mandelstam's death is that it is clear that Stalin personally arranged for his destruction for reasons of personal vengeance because the poet had dared to satirise the 'Kremlin Mountaineer' in an unpublished poem.

Mandelstam was born into a Jewish family in Warsaw in 1891.

His formative years were spent in St Petersburg where he attended the exclusive liberal Tenishev school before attending courses at Heidelberg and St Petersburg universities.

He published his first collection of verse - 'Stone' - in 1913 and like most poets of his generation, he was drawn to the tutelage of the previous generation of Symbolist poets.

They had rejected the dominance of civic prose and invested poetry with a thiurgic (religious) mission.

By the period immediately preceding the First World War, Symbolism had fragmented into contesting schools or degenerated into exoticism, obscurantism or cheap mysticism.

Mandelstam belonged to the 'Acmeist' circles which arose, like Futurism, in opposition to Symbolism, but did not survive as a coherent school.

Its self-appointed leader Gurnilev was shot for his part in a sordid anti-Soviet plot in 1921. The main achievement of Acmeism is found in the work of Akhmatova and Mandelstam.

The programmatic aim of the 'movement' was to 'poeticise poetry', that is to say, rid it of its thiurgic pretensions.

Images were to be clear cut, precise and concrete. Language was to organise experience with a rigorous poetic logic. It is these disciplines, discernable in his early work, which allowed Mandelstam to give shape to some of his major preoccupations in the immediate pre-revo-

lutionary period, many of which are concerned with the cumbersome apocalyptic metaphors whose currency had been debased by the decadents and symbolists.

The nocturnal 'black sun', the end of St Petersburg, the corrosive guilt of Phaedra, the death of Ligeia are the constant themes, treated with great poetic reserve in the 'Tristea' collection from that period.

Although fascinated by the decaying facades of pre-revolutionary culture, Mandelstam 'accepted' the Revolution of 1917. Unlike the majority of the old intelligentsia he neither left the Soviet Union nor gleefully awaited its downfall.

His attitude to public life and politics was ambivalent and he had an obsessive fear of power and from the early 1920s had a deep sense of forboding.

Neither the aesthetic prescriptions of Acmeism nor the apocalyptic metaphors provide a satisfactory explanation for the tension that is the well-spring of his verse.

Like his contemporaries, Mayakovsky and Yesenin, his impulse was a deeply lyrical one in an uncongenial age. The Revolution not only abolished tzardom and established new relations of production but seriously challenged the previous division of labour.

For many artists this was read as a challenge to their role, and most under threat was that process of privatisation on which lyric poetry depends so much.

Mayakovsky and Yesenin, who had more plebeian temperaments, attempted to define new roles for themselves, one as a propagandist and tribune, the other as hell-raiser and peasant-turned urban-bohemian.

Mandelstam's deeply conservative instinct allowed him to make no concessions as to his role. His lyrical 'inner voice' was never hidden. He persisted with a single-mindedness, an enviable combination of toughness and sensitivity to present every poetic moment, even the most unfashionable and dangerous.

By 1928 Mandelstam found it virtually impossible to live by writing. The Bolshevik policy for the arts had been supplanted by the 'proletcult' ideologies.

He was protected by the patronage of Bukharin for a period and saved from the literary wolves by being sent on a mission to Armenia. On his return he broke the spell of what had been his 'deaf mute' period and began to write again. In a spirit of what friends called 'self-immolation' he produced the 'Stalin Epigram' or the 'Kremlin Mountaineer'. This sealed his fate. The churlish Ehrenburg declared it 'undistinguished' but it was a poem that would not be suppressed.

The poet was arrested but Bukharin interceded. When Bukharin himself was purged, Mandelstam was rearrested and 'died in transit' on 27 December 1938. His last piece of writing is a note asking for warm clothes and money.

THE PAINTED FACE OF THE POPULAR FRONT

MICK MCGAHEY is no Brutus. His political achievements have fallen far short of tyrannicide in the name of republican virtue. Indeed, like many others, he spent his early political life worshipping at the shrine of the tyrant, Joseph Stalin.

He belongs to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), an organisation which - with his full endorsement - has renounced every vestige of the theory and political weaponry of class struggle.

And this at precisely the time when the Thatcher gin-and- tonic louts are intensifying their attacks on the working class by developing the capitalist state machine into something closer to a collective tyranny than it has been in peacetime Britain since at least 1832.

Yet there were moments on that grey, late-November, Edinburgh day when Maggi Hambling's painting of him was being unveiled at the the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, when McGahey's admirers seemed to be striving for an image of him echoing Mark Antony's obituary on Brutus in Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar':

'His life was gentle; and the elements / So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up, / And say to all the world, "This was a man!"

Certainly an analogy with theatre is appropriate. For this was a well staged occasion; something which happened at a careful distance from reality and yet, consciously or unconsciously (I suspect mainly the latter) provided participants with the possibility of a heightened perception of reality.

Not too far away, at Bilston Glen and Monktonhall collieries, miners were being browbeaten by British Coal management into accepting further massive redundancies not in return for any guarantees on the pits' future, but, as a young functionary told reporters, purely to give the men the opportunity to work harder in the hope that they might have a future!

The mantle of McGahey, both as leader of the Scottish miners and as chairperson of the CPGB, fell, when he retired a couple of years ago, on his rather less considerable protégé, George Bolton.

Bolton, in the week of the McGahey unveiling, was busy in his now familiar role of demonstrating the flexibility of the English language as he sought to persuade his Lothian members that British Coal's job-slashing 'survival plan' was a step to a golden future.

McGahey said nothing about all this as - standing one alcove along from the portraits of Mrs Denis Thatcher (by their assaults on the rights of women shall ye know them!) and our-own-dear-Queen-Mother - he graciously acknowledged the honour done to him. But later he took care to inform a local newsman that his real

thoughts were with the lads fighting for the future of Bilston Glen.

Mixed elements, indeed. McGahey stressed that his honouring came about only because he was the product of the struggles of others: his father, a founder member of the Communist Party; the Moffat brothers, his tutors in political and trade union affairs; the Communist Party itself; the rank-and-file miners.

He stressed the importance of his family, and the television cameras panned round in an effort to capture the wide-eyed pride on the faces of his grandchildren.

But then he had also to thank the Board of Trustees, whose chairman had opened the proceedings - a fat-cat merchant banker clearly resembling the sort of person who would have done well out of Thatcher's 'defeat' of the miners' strike.

He thanked the liberal professor of history who had unveiled the picture, and stated that it was high time the Scottish portrait collection contained more representatives of the working classes, with whose 'muscles and brains' the modern nation had been built.

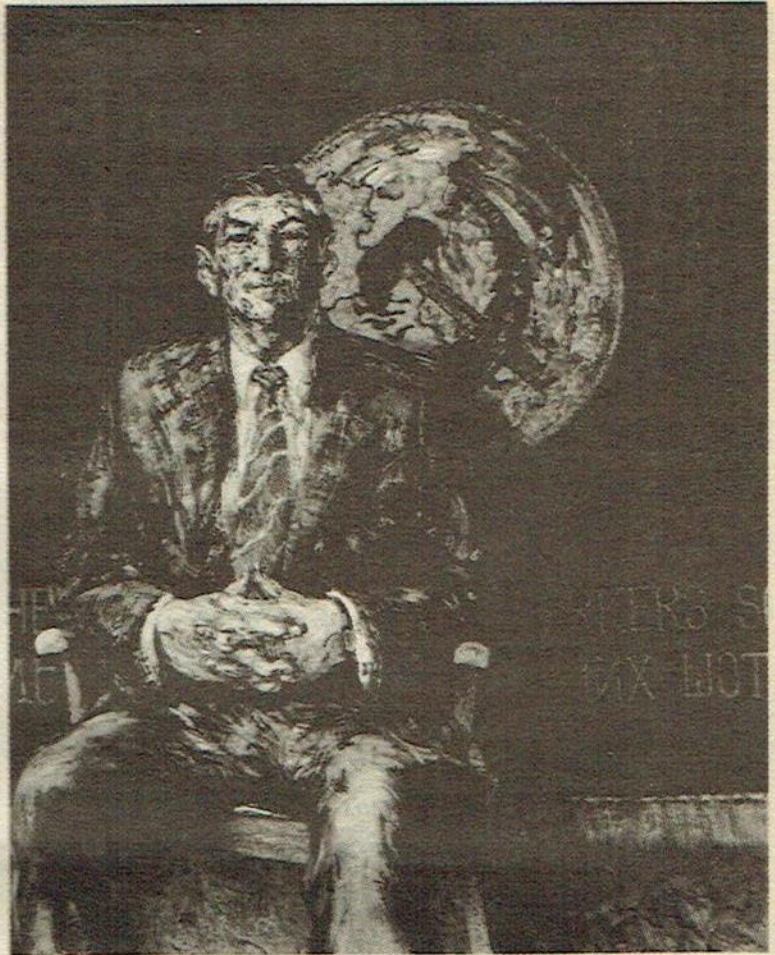
The professor, in the midst of what he insisted was not a political speech, made a thinly veiled attack on the NUM President Arthur Scargill's leadership of the 1984-1985 strike; it was the 'commonly held view', he claimed, that, had McGahey been in charge, 'there would have been a happier outcome'. All this went unchallenged.

Here was the essence of the mixture of elements: the politics of the popular front.

For this was a gathering of 'cultured' Tories, liberals, Labourites, clergymen (at least two dog collars were on view) and others, all ready to express sympathy and admiration for the masses provided they kept their place, stuck to the rules, and confine their political activity to pleading with the capitalist master to be a bit less unjust.

This counter-revolutionary policy has been the CPGB's line since the mid-1930s. Yet, when one looked at the McGahey portrait, it turned out to contain elements as mixed as those which make up its subject's character.

For McGahey chose to be painted in front of a banner donated by the Soviet miners to the United Mineworkers of Scotland, the sectarian breakaway union formed by the Communists in Fife in 1928 during the period of Stalin's 'theory' that a Europe-wide revolution was just around the corner.



So, far beyond his own mortal span, McGahey - the scourge of the Trotskyist 'ultra-left' and embodiment of the 'popular' (i.e. pacifist, middle class) front against proletarian revolution - will stare down from the gallery wall surrounded by a symbol of the disastrous 'left turn', behind which Stalin conducted his murderous, forced collectivisation policy in the Soviet countryside, which comrade (sorry, President) Gorbachev is now disowning.

No wonder, then, that the depiction of such a man by a fine artist should take such a contradictory form.

Hambling, with evident sincerity, spoke of the admiration she had developed for the miners' leader during the week she spent painting the picture in September.

Admiration, no doubt. But, knowledge...? The painting - absolutely legitimately in purely artistic terms - is more of a question than a statement.

The sitting position is just so, to be sure: legs thrust forward, the crotch at a 45 degree angle, the huge hands folded in front of the stomach, as though on guard against an anticipated assault on his dignity.

But the face... In the picture it is of a much younger man than the McGahey who watched its unveiling in the flesh. It is round and alert, rather than oval and

puffed. Yet within the youthfulness, abstracted by the artist from the ageing reality, there is also the immanence of age. Hambling has not done a cosmetic job: this is a truly dialectical piece of art. The other obvious allusion in how the features have been captured is to the coal face itself.

The greys, blues, greens, browns and russet-reds of the earth and the growling, geological layers beneath have gone to compose this thickly painted human face. The elements of nature, indeed.

And here too is an apparently deliberate contradiction. Drawn by a growing awareness of a superficially concealed asymmetry, you discover that the area around the right eye has been done differently from the rest of the face.

Elsewhere the paint has come off the brush in short, thick strokes; but here there is only a thin layer and the bumps in the canvas remain visible.

It is as though a small gap has been left in the psychological outer armour, a pathway to the real being, the real thinking behind the apparently battle-scarred exterior.

A road in to the real history of Stalinism and its devastating impact on the history of the twentieth century...

Terry Brotherstone

News briefs...

Too much trouble

THE TORY government's 'care in the community' policy was blamed last week for an emerging tendency amongst some GPs who are unwilling to have old or mentally ill people on their lists.

The trend, described as 'alarming' by the Association of Community Health Councils, extends to 'informal arrangements' between doctors who agree not to accept their colleagues' ex-patients.

'With the closure of more long-stay institutions there will be more patients who might on occasion prove difficult,' the association said.

Prison reform

'POOR value for money' was how the Adam Smith Institute assessed the British prison system which, it says, costs the taxpayer £14,000 for every inmate.

It recommends in a new report, 'Making Prisons Work', that, instead of sewing mailbags, sweeping the floors, making tea for the screws, and just killing time, prisoners could be gainfully employed doing 'real' work such as 'taking flight reservations, in a brand new facility built with private capital'.

No glasnost here

IN A BID to revive its flagging electoral support and membership, calls for the Portuguese Communist Party to adopt Gorbachev-style reforms were proposed during the final session of its four-day congress in Oporto last week.

But the demands were rejected by the leadership and voted down by the 2,000 delegates who re-elected to another term of office their 75-year-old general secretary, Alvaro Cunhala position he has held for more than 40 years.

Should not do well

SCHOOL reports on young people in trouble with the police very often proved to be 'full character assassinations', a National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders pamphlet published recently states.

A survey of 59 such children showed that reports on almost two-thirds of them contained unsubstantiated negative comments by teachers. In nearly half the number of the case studies a custodial sentence resulted.

'This is unjust in itself,' the association's working group chairman said, 'and puts these juveniles in a worse position than a young adult appearing for a similar offence with no school court report.'

FORD SACKING - THE FIGHT ADJOURNED

BY AN INDUSTRIAL CORRESPONDENT

THE Ford Motor Company has victimised an assembly worker in an attempt to crack down on 'unconstitutional' stoppages in its Paint Trim Assembly plant at Dagenham. The PTA is notorious for its harsh working conditions with 40 workers leaving in despair each week.

Provocative supervision has caused many spontaneous walk-outs with the workforce expressing little confidence in following 'procedure' to raise their grievances.

Mick Gosling, the T&GWU Ford Central branch chairman, was singled out to be sacked, accused of instigating stoppages.

After his union representatives answered all the charges item by item, the management demanded he sign a statement agreeing not to encourage or take part in any unconstitutional action or be instantly dismissed.

Such an undertaking would compel him to be a scab and he refused to sign it, with the support of his union.

His appeal against dismissal has been adjourned until after Christmas.

Behind this sacking are desperate attempts by Ford to cow its workforce in preparation for further speed-ups and attacks on conditions.

A change in Ford's international strategy is concentrating new investment in Britain.

£750m is to be spent developing engine production at Bridgend and £100m at Swansea, while engine plants in Valencia and Cologne are threatened with closure.

This change in investment policy has no doubt been influenced by Britain's anti-union laws and subservient union leaderships.

Fierce competition amongst manufactures in a declining market is forcing the rationalisation of the industry.

When the investment in Bridgend was announced, plant convenor Andy Richards told BBC News that it was 'a victory for New Realism'. Even the reporter asked him if he hadn't given away too much.

The conditions accepted have yet to be made public, but when Ford wanted to build a plant at Dundee they insisted on an AEU single union agreement with wages lower than the UK National Agreement.

They pulled out when other unions objected. The terms of the deal negotiated by AEU leader James Airlie is still a closely guarded secret kept by both company and union.

Recent events point to the com-

pany becoming ultra-sensitive to link-ups between Ford workers internationally.

A Dagenham steward was recently falsely accused of passing secret messages to the convenor of Ford's Genk plant while on a visit. All such visits have now been banned.

These company measures have been aided by right-wing witch hunts within the unions against the left. Ford exploited this situation when they sacked Mick Gosling, cashing in on misinformation spread by right wingers.

The PTA stewards were themselves split after a pay strike in February when the plant leadership struck a deal with management and agreed not to support any 'unconstitutional' stoppages

and to allow the company to re-man lines in dispute, leaving stewards and lineworkers wide open to victimisation.

The no-strike statement the company wanted has forced the unions to back Gosling but the danger remains that officials may try to strike a deal with the company by giving further undertakings to police the workforce more than at present.

Right wingers have started a scare campaign to the effect that Ford is going to repeat its 1962 mass sacking of shop stewards, but the fact is that Ford management is desperate in the face of an unbowed workforce who showed in February what fighting spirit and power it still has when it brought the whole of Ford Europe to a standstill in just two weeks.

Thatcher - pariah of Europe

BY SARAH HANNIGAN

To read sections of the British capitalist press and to listen to MPs and the Prime Minister, one would think that Father Ryan, the Irish priest at the centre of Thatcher's extradition crisis had already been tried and convicted of major crimes.

The 'Sunday Mirror' (4 December) while castigating Tory leader Thatcher for 'hijacking' the Rhodes European summit with her insults, describes Ryan as 'a wicked senior IRA operative'.

However the Belgian anti-terrorist police are reported to have conducted a thorough investigation of their own on Patrick Ryan and established that he had no connection with an IRA killing in Brussels in 1979 that had taken place in a street where he was living at the time of his arrest.

The British applied for his extradition on charges of 'conspiracy' to murder, conspiracy to cause explosions and possession of explosives. Unfortunately vague charges of conspiracy are not acceptable in Belgian law and the explosives charges were rejected.

The rapid succession of these events to the condemnation by the European Court of Human Rights on present detention policy in the north of Ireland, (and implicitly in Britain), is proof that Thatcher and her supporters will not baulk at being the pariahs of Europe.

It is also clear that governments in other European countries, besides Ireland, have no confidence in the British judicial process as applied to Irish people.

In Ireland, public outrage at the continued British witch-hunts has forced the Fianna Fail government of Charles Haughey to demand that the British applications for extradition were correct to the letter.

But the widely-publicised remarks in the House of Commons and in the British press

denouncing Patrick Ryan as a terrorist before any evidence or specific charges had been laid, has caused the green Tories to think again about their stand on extradition. It will be interesting to see which way the decision goes.

JOHN MACLEAN LECTURE

THE third John Maclean memorial lecture held in Glasgow last Sunday was certainly the best attended and liveliest yet. Glasgow Labour council is once again planning to pay reluctant tribute to the great Scottish Marxist who was Bolshevik consul in 1918, reported his daughter Nan Maclean Milton. They are considering erecting a statue to him in the city's centre, George Square, she said, adding to a loud cheer 'Whether they are paying any attention or not to his ideas is a different matter.'

Lecturer Ray Challinor, a distinguished Labour historian, spoke of Maclean's internationalism and his determined adherence to Marxist principles. The lecture compared Maclean with his one-time pupil and political associate Harry McShane, 'The last of the red Clydesiders', who died earlier this year. Challinor's reference to the political contortions which McShane, who was a close friend of his, had had to go through as Daily Worker organiser in Glasgow in the 1930s and 1940s and to his split with the Communist Party in 1953, led to heckling from a CP supporter who subsequently showed some reluctance to make his points in open discussion.

In summing up, Challinor called for a human rights campaign, including the defence of trade union and social freedoms (the right to a home, a job, etc.), as well as the civil rights currently under intensified attack. 'It is not a question of who takes John Maclean's and Harry McShane's mantle' he insisted, 'Their legacy is for everyone.'