

World peace
or
uneasy truce?

Militant

International Review

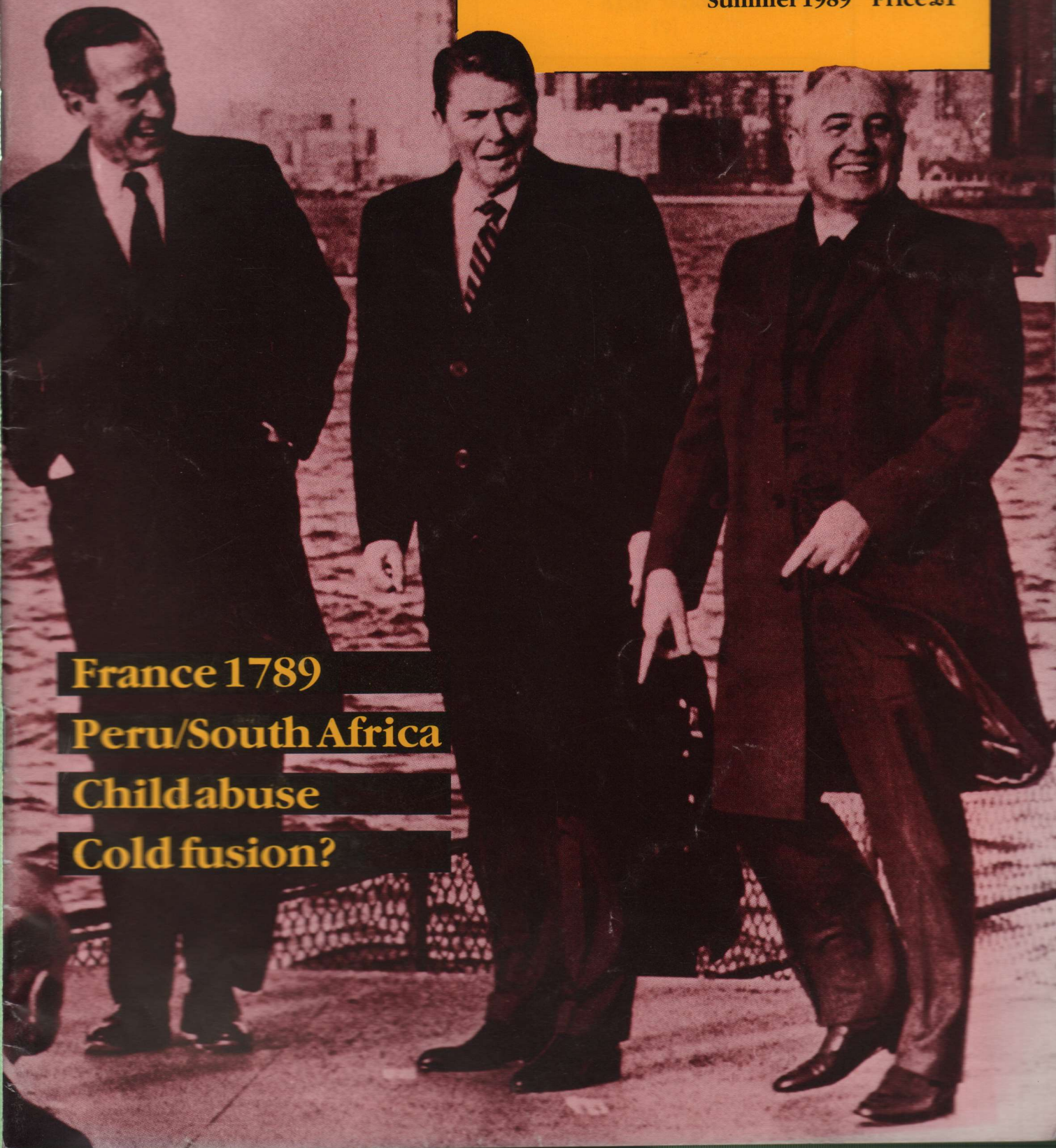
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France 1789

Peru/South Africa

Child abuse

Cold fusion?



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Summer 1989

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MIR 40

The need for theory

The magnificent mass movement of students and workers in China has shaken the ruling bureaucracy to its foundations. At the height of the flood-tide of protest, a political revolution could undoubtedly have been carried through. All the necessary conditions were there – apart from the vital ingredient of a Marxist leadership with a clear programme, strategy and tactics.

Events have once again demonstrated the paramount importance of the subjective factor – of theory and conscious, coherent support for programme and perspectives. "Ideas, too," wrote Marx, "become a material force when they grip the mind of the masses."

That is the importance of the *Militant International Review*, as a theoretical journal which can arm activists with ideas to take to the widest layers of the labour movement – where there is a vast, unsatisfied demand for clear analysis.

It is disappointing, therefore, that because of our present production schedule, we have not been able to include an analysis of China in this issue of the *MIR*. The events have, of course, been covered in the *Militant*, and we will return to them in a later issue. But this gap underlines the importance of building up the resources at our disposal, particularly to publish a more frequent *MIR* to provide more up-to-date coverage of developments. To do this we need more sales, and we hope that recent improvements will only be the start of a steady acceleration.

With Issue 40 we have been able to make a number of improvements in the presentation of the journal, particularly with the cover and the design of the text. This should add to the enthusiasm of our supporters in building up the circulation. Two more issues are planned for 1989, and we hope that bigger sales will allow us to plan further steps forward in 1990.

Issue 40 has to go up to £1, but this is a very modest increase after three years at the old price.

The contents list on page one indicates the issues we are covering. The much publicised NATO agreement on the allies' approach to negotiations with the Warsaw Pact on short-range nuclear weapons and conventional forces makes our lead article even more timely.



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COVER PICTURE

*Gorbachev, President Reagan and
President-elect Bush exploit a photo
opportunity overlooking New York
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Ted Grant explains why recent superpower agreements on arms reductions do not herald a move towards permanent world peace.

World peace or uneasy truce?

Recent negotiations between Russia and the United States and its allies, including the Reagan-Gorbachev summit, are supposed to bring world peace. They bred illusions that peace can be achieved through 'good will' and a genuine desire to reach an agreement. But this is fundamentally false. The boom in the capitalist countries in the last eight years, coupled with the contradictions within imperialism and the crisis in the Stalinist states, have led to a temporary desire by the superpowers to arrive at an agreement. But the underlying reality is of two fundamentally opposed social systems which cannot tolerate indefinitely the existence of the other. Their basic antagonism can be 'softened' only temporarily.

In the West, the productive forces i.e. the means of producing wealth, have grown beyond the limits of private ownership and the nation states. In the East, there is a crisis of bureaucratic control and planning in the countries of proletarian bonapartism. In addition, there is the aggravated crisis of imperialist exploitation of the impoverished countries of the Third World. War and poverty are an inevitable accompaniment to the contradictions of capitalism.

Arms expenditure amounts to \$1000 billion every two years. If this expenditure were used for productive purposes, it could undoubtedly solve all the economic and social problems of the terribly impoverished underdeveloped countries, the capitalist countries and the Soviet Union itself. But to imagine that this could be achieved through 'good will' is to hark back to the ideas of the Utopian socialists who believed that capitalists could be convinc-

ed by appealing to their 'good will' to adopt socialism.

Arms expenditure is a crushing burden on the economies of the West and on the Soviet Union and its satellites. Nevertheless, the imperialist powers are not prepared to cut down the production of armaments too much through any agreement with the Soviet Union. A massive cut would affect the military-industrial complex in the NATO countries. It would reduce a vital market for those capitalist enterprises, which are paid to produce scrap metal by developing new weapons as old ones are made obsolescent. Any substantial cutback would seriously aggravate any developing economic crisis.

On the other hand, the only power which has a light burden of arms, Japan, has succeeded in becoming, within the space of 40 years, the second greatest imperialist power in the world. Japan spends just 1.6 per cent of its GNP on arms, whereas other imperialist powers spend five, six or seven per cent. Japan has demonstrated her superiority in the field of cars, computers and so on, because Japanese capitalists have been able to plough back the surplus which would otherwise have gone on armaments into the productive sectors of the economy.

Japan will not maintain its low arms spending indefinitely. To preserve its markets in any recession, and to enhance its political 'muscle' in the world arena, inevitably Japan will attempt to achieve military as well as economic supremacy by building up a military machine in the air, on the sea and on land. Already the proportion of GNP that Japan



Ted Grant, whose *Unbroken Thread* is reviewed on page 24.

**Gorbachev
aims to
reduce
arms
spending
in order
to provide
consumer
goods for
a restive
Soviet
people.**

spends on arms is greater in absolute terms (\$30bn) than the six per cent of GNP that Britain spends.

These contradictions have forced the imperialist powers into making an attempt at 'compromise'. All the imperialist powers feel the burden of arms and would like, if not drastically, at least to cut the arms bill in some way. In the Soviet Union, particularly during the Brezhnev era, production was ploughed into arms, up to 15 per cent of GNP, slowing growth. This policy contrasts with relatively light arms expenditure of the Soviet state under Lenin and Trotsky who relied on a policy of socialist internationalism and the support of the international working-class to defend its borders. Recognising that developing the productive forces is the key to the stability of any society, Gorbachev aims to reduce the money spent on arms, in order to produce more consumer goods to boost the living standards of the increasingly restive Soviet people. That is why Gorbachev is prepared to concede more in negotiations with imperialism than he is offered in return.

Another reason for temporary detente between imperialism and the Stalinist bureaucracies is the dangerous social consequences of the continued super-exploitation of the neo-colonial countries – more rapacious and more parasitic than ever before in history. The debt of the colonial countries to imperialism has reached \$1300 billion. Rising interest rates and the widening gap between the relatively low price of raw materials and foodstuffs, the dominant form of production for the underdeveloped economies, and the relatively high price of the capital goods and industrial products, which are produced in the metropolitan countries, have exploited the labour of the masses of the Third World.

This remorseless exploitation of the colonial peoples has pushed them down into levels of poverty which are greater than at any time in the last 50 years. This is a formula for explosions and revolutions: guerrilla wars in the Philippines, Peru and El Salvador, social upheavals in Haiti, Venezuela, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and now Jordan.

This has happened during the boom of the 1980s. What is going to happen in the inevitable development of slump conditions in the coming period or even during the course of the next few years?

That the situation has not become totally unmanageable for the imperialist powers already is because of the role of the Stalinist bureaucracies. They have acted as a counter-revolutionary force, both against social revolution in the West and against the national and colonial wars of liberation in the Third World.

In order to arrive at good terms with the West they are prepared to sell out the colonial

peoples. The May events in France 1968 demonstrated that the Soviet bureaucracy is fundamentally opposed to socialist revolution in the developed countries because of the effect this would have on their grip on society in the Soviet Union.

There has been a complete degeneration of the Stalinist parties in the West and in the ex-colonial areas. They are no longer even openly committed to revolution and the transformation of society in the Western countries. Nor are they in favour of the development of the socialist revolution, either through a workers' democracy or even in a deformed way through guerrilla war in the ex-colonial countries. For example, the Philippine 'Communist' party supported Marcos and denounced the NPA guerrillas.

In a desperate attempt to get an agreement with the capitalist powers, the Soviet leadership has openly renounced the strategy of revolution and has denied the relevance of class struggle. This is against everything Marx, Engels and Lenin ever stood for – ideas which were the very basis of the Soviet state.

For example, Honecker, the East German leader, without blinking an eyelid wrote in the *Morning Star* that: "Human beings include people from different, even antagonistic classes in society. They extend from the working class and circles of monopoly capital itself. We are far from reducing international relations to a class struggle stereotype". Similarly, at the time of Gorbachev's visit to Britain (5 April) the *Morning Star* was happy to state that: "new thinking suggests that there are universal human values – peace, security and justice; values that are common to all of us irrespective of our nationality, religion, ideology or class; values that transcend all such differences."

This is absolute utopianism of the worst character. It is going back a century to the Utopian socialists who imagined they could conciliate the capitalists and reconcile them to a movement in the direction of socialism.

Gorbachev claims to have broken with Stalin, on whom he blames all the crimes of the bureaucracy in the past. However, he has adopted the fundamental ideas of Stalinism, of a society in the Soviet Union which is divided between the bureaucracy, on the one hand, and the working class on the other. He accepts Stalin's nonsense that "peaceful co-existence" between the capitalist states and the Soviet Union, a deformed workers' state, can continue indefinitely.

Peaceful co-existence of different economic and social systems was Stalin's, not Lenin's idea. "We live not only in a state but a system of states," Lenin said at the 8th party congress in July 1919, "the existence of the Soviet republic side by side with the imperialist states for

an indeterminate period is unthinkable. In the end either one or the other will conquer". Again, only a year later, after the defeat of the foreign armies of intervention into the Soviet Union, Lenin said: "we have passed from war to peace but we have not forgotten that war will come again. So long as both capitalism and socialism remain we cannot live in peace. Either one or the other, in the long run, will conquer. There will be a funeral chant either for the Soviet Republic or for world capitalism. This is a moratorium in a war." Two



years later, Lenin summarised the relations between the new Soviet state and the imperialists: "we have got a certain equilibrium, although extremely fragile, extremely unstable. Nevertheless, such an equilibrium can exist — of course not for long — in a capitalist environment". And Lenin's prediction was proved right when 'peaceful co-existence' ended in the explosion of the imperialist Second World War.

The idea of peaceful co-existence which was rejected by Lenin has been adopted by Gorbachev. He pretends that the idea is the idea of Lenin and not of Stalin. While Gorbachev has repudiated Stalin and all his crimes, he still maintains the fundamental ideas of Stalin on which the bureaucracy rests.

It is true that for relatively short periods peaceful co-existence can be maintained. But inevitably the contradictions between two conflicting social systems must generate irreconcilable antagonisms.

At the same time, Lenin's idea of the international revolution was distorted by Stalin into the 'theory' of 'socialism in a single country'. As Trotsky explained: "Internationalism is not some abstract principle but an expression of an economic fact. Just as liberalism is the ideology of national capital, so socialism is international. Capitalism started the world-wide division of labour, the task of socialism is to carry the international exchange of goods and services to its highest development". The nationalist idea of socialism in one country reflected the interests of the Russian bureaucracy and is still accepted by Gorbachev. And yet the bankruptcy of 'socialism in a single country' has been revealed by the crisis that exists in Russia today, which Gorbachev himself has admitted.

The once mighty Communist International no longer exists Gorbachev has even suggested (Soviet News 8 May) that there be joint

activities between the Soviet 'Communist' party and the West German Social Democrats to celebrate the anniversary of the Second International! Apparently, there are no differences now between the Soviet bureaucracy and the Western reformist parties.

Those parties that claim to be 'Communist' are now degenerate nationalist organisations. In this sense, they are reformist parties of a different nature to the reformist parties of the Socialist International. They are what Lenin called social-patriotic parties. Their leaders have degenerated completely and have no intention of moving in the direction of the socialist revolution — although the party rank and file may have a different attitude altogether.

All this has had an effect on international relations. The imperialists are no longer terrified of the possibility of revolution in the West, at least not one led by the Communist Parties. They realise that even in the colonial countries the Communist parties are not in favour of the overthrow of imperialism and capitalism.

Gorbachev is desperate to arrive at some sort of an agreement with world imperialism. Consequently, the Soviet bureaucracy is prepared to bring to an end many of the regional conflicts between the superpowers, at the expense of those in struggle.

The latest evidence of this is the attempt to arrive at a compromise to bring 'independence' to Namibia and to solve the question of South Africa through the diplomacy of an agreement between the white ruling class in South Africa and the black majority. This is completely utopian and impossible. The Kremlin bureaucracy is now attempting to restrain the ANC from the 'armed struggle', in reality futile guerrillaism, which they supported in the past. But they do not substitute a policy of arming the black masses, arguing instead for virtual capitulation to the Botha-De Klerk

NATO's short-range nuclear missile, the Lance, which Bush and Thatcher want to modernise.

Gorbachev has openly renounced class struggle and revolution.

**The social
causes
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regional
conflicts
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wished
away.**

regime.

In Namibia the South Africans were forced into negotiation after they suffered a military defeat at CuitoCunaval at the hands of Cuban and Angolan forces. A deal was struck by the Soviet bureaucracy and the Cubans with US imperialism and the South African regime over the heads of SWAPO, the nationalist force in Namibia. 'Independence' was to be granted to Namibia and South Africa would stop its direct attacks on the region. In fact, Namibia will remain subservient to South African interests. South Africa will continue to control most of Namibian industry and its major port at Walvis Bay. But this agreement is inherently unstable because, in reality, as it will become clear, it does not meet the aspirations of the Namibian people for independence from South African control and economic domination.

In Afghanistan, the Soviet bureaucracy, in order to reach an accommodation with imperialism, withdrew from the country in return for a pledge that Pakistan would not continue to supply the Mujaheddin. But no sooner had the agreement been signed in Geneva, than the Pakistani ISI and army generals broke the agreement by stepping up the supply of 'advisors' and weapons for the Mujaheddin guerrillas to launch an attack on the Afghan cities. But contrary to all the boasts of the guerrillas and the predictions of the Western governments, the Najibullah regime has survived. The Soviet bureaucracy has so far maintained military and food supplies to the cities. The Mullah-led guerrilla armies are really just brigands and bandits. They have failed to take even one city and have become bogged down. They are split along regional, ethnic and religious lines and their guerrilla traditions have proved disastrous in front-line assaults on Jalalabad that the CIA and the Pakistani secret service urged them to attempt.

In Nicaragua, the Soviet bureaucracy has exerted massive pressure on the Sandinista government to try for an agreement with US imperialism, by dropping its programme of expropriation and allowing up to 60 per cent private ownership of industry and of sectors of the land. Even though the Contras have been shown to have no popular support within the country, many of their demands are being conceded by the Sandinista government under pressure from US imperialism. But these concessions will not satisfy US imperialism because even the now mangled form that the revolution has taken in Nicaragua can still act as a beacon to the impoverished masses of other Central American states. So the long-term aim of the US government to overthrow the Sandinistas remains. The failure to solve any of the social problems of the Nicaraguan people opens up the possibility of an internal right-wing coup, or alternatively the Sandanistas

may be forced to go further than they intend and expropriate landlordism and capitalism.

In Kampuchea, in an attempt to mollify the Chinese bureaucracy rather than imperialism, the Soviet bureaucracy has pressured the Vietnamese-backed regime to come to an accommodation with pro-capitalist guerrilla armies, and the Khymer Rouge forces of the former Pol Pot regime. The Kampuchean masses would never tolerate the return of Pol Pot who massacred millions and there is no real popular or military basis for the pro-capitalist forces. So even if imperialism, China and the Soviet Union succeeded in imposing a coalition government, the dominant force would still be the present pro-Vietnamese group.

Any analysis of these regional conflicts shows that despite the huge concessions sought by imperialism and agreed to by the Soviet bureaucracy, the social causes underlying these conflicts cannot be wished away. So the agreements are built on weak foundations and can only be temporary.

Capitalism has not solved its problems, nor has Stalinism solved the problems in the Soviet Union. In fact Gorbachev is now talking about 'reforms' proceeding over decades. Long before this, the antagonisms between the West and Russia will have become exacerbated, and social explosions will erupt in the Third World, both in those areas where temporary accommodations have been made and in new areas.

The scrapping of a few nuclear armaments, while 96 per cent of the stockpiles remain, is an indication of the ferocious determination of US imperialism and the other imperialist powers to maintain nuclear arms in reserve. Under conditions of capitalist crisis, when military-police dictatorships could be established in the West, then undoubtedly there would be the possibility of a world nuclear war, which would mean the destruction of mankind and of all life on the planet.

In the past Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky spoke of either the establishment of socialism throughout the world or the inevitable development of barbarism. In this present epoch we can say that the alternative is even more stark, either the establishing of the democratic socialist rule of the working class, or the possibility of annihilation of all life on the planet. This is the choice for the future.

All the sugary talk by the Communist Parties of the world, by the so-called democratic parties, and by the reformist parties of the working class about arriving at an agreement through the so-called United Nations is an illusion. All agreements are subject to veto by the major imperialist powers and the Chinese and Soviet bureaucracies represented on the UN's security council. They all have nuclear arms at their

disposal. The Western powers have no intention of scrapping their vast nuclear stockpiles. They only want to scale down their nuclear and conventional weaponry.

Since the Second World War there have only been 15 days of peace. Wars are continually taking place in the colonial world. This reflects a jockeying for position between the superpowers. World history since 1914 has been the history of attempts to arrive at agreements and compromises which end in further explosions. The temporary agreement between the so-called democratic powers and the Soviet Union during the course of the war against Hitler did not last long after the collapse of the Nazi regime and of Japan.

Towards the end of the war there had been an agreement between the Allied powers for the Soviet Union to enter the war against Japan. But the imperialist powers changed that policy. The Japanese were ready to surrender but President Truman still ordered the dropping of two atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombs were a warning to the Soviet Union of what could happen to it, if it did not do what US imperialism wanted. However, Stalin realised that the troops of imperialism were war weary and were demanding to be sent home as soon as the war was over. Russian troops entered Manchuria and defeated the Japanese army. So the bombs failed in their purpose.

Very rapidly international relations entered the period of the 'cold war'. This in its turn led to the arms race, dwarfing even the massive rearmament programme of Hitler between 1933-39. But the arms race cancelled itself out. One superpower's attempt to gain an advantage in one sphere or another was immediately counteracted by the other. The cold war has been followed by a period of relative 'detente' but this is of a very shaky character and can only prepare the way for a new and even greater arms race.

The arms race also had the purpose, for the West and the Soviet Union, of diverting the mass of people to look for an enemy outside the borders of their own country. Thus American imperialism endeavoured to put all the blame for the explosions in the Third World onto the shoulders of the Soviet Union and the Soviet bureaucracy. On the other hand, the Soviet bureaucracy portrayed itself (with more justification) as a beleaguered fortress threatened by imperialism.

Imperialism has not been able to launch a war against the Soviet Union because the latter has built up an overwhelming superiority in conventional arms and has a strategic dominance on the European continent, while nuclear war would mean mutual suicide. The power of the working-class which is enshrined in bourgeois democracy, trade union rights and the



Soldiers of the Afghan army.

rights of political parties, acts as a deterrent to the ruling-class of the West launching an attack against the Soviet Union. However, unless there is a socialist transformation of society, then eventually the ruling-classes will try to crush the organisations of the working-class. If they succeeded through some form of military-police dictatorship, then it would open up the possibility of a lunatic general resorting to a 'first strike' against the Soviet Union, leading to world war.

On the other hand, the Soviets cannot use their conventional arms superiority, partly because any conventional war in Europe would inevitably lead to the use of nuclear weapons. But most importantly, the Soviet bureaucracy has not invaded because the Red Army could not hold down the masses of Western Europe. If the bureaucracy cannot tame the Polish masses, it can hardly suppress the European working class.

There is another fundamental antagonism which undermines world relations: the divisions between the imperialist powers themselves. Sooner or later the rivalries between Japan and the USA; between the EEC and the USA; and between the EEC and Japan, will surface. These rivalries are already exhibited in embryo in the squabbles over tariffs and restrictions on one another's exports.

US imperialism built up its military might not just for the sake of piling up arms or to maintain a market for its military industrial complex. It needed military might to dominate the colonial world for imperialism. But since 1945

The rivalries between the imperialist powers will also surface.



The Contras have failed but the US still aim to overthrow the Sandinistas.

The fate of the world will not be decided by superpower agreements but by class struggle.

all the old colonial powers have burnt their fingers in colonial wars — in Vietnam, Algeria, Central America and Indonesia. They were forced to abandon direct control in return for a collective economic domination using the force of US arms.

But imperialism is not one homogeneous whole. There are differences between the national capitalist states, even about arms. US and British imperialism wish to modernise short-range nuclear weapons whatever Gorbachev is prepared to concede. West Germany, however, opposes this. While the market of the Soviet Union is only worth 2-3 per cent of West German exports at present, the Germans wish to develop commercial ties with the bureaucracies of Eastern Europe as an important market for the future. Any new escalation in the arms race would jeopardise that.

But the main consideration for Kohl and the West German government is that, in the eyes of the West German people, short-range nuclear weapons make their country the arena for any war. There is massive opposition to the idea of a tactical nuclear war which would destroy the economy and annihilate the West German people, without directly affecting other NATO countries or the Warsaw pact. So Kohl has no intention, when it could cost him the election, of drawing the chestnuts out of the fire for his dear allies.

Thatcher and Bush want to force through this modernisation before the next year's elections in West Germany, after which any elected Social Democratic government would

be under great pressure to scrap this nuclear escalation. Kohl is resisting modernisation prior to the elections, although once they are safely out of the way, and assuming the Christian Democrats are returned to power, then it is possible that he or any new CD leader would then agree to reach a compromise with Bush and Thatcher.

This split in NATO alone shows the strains within imperialism which threaten stable world relations. The growing antagonisms will lead to new convulsions and new revolutions, not only in the colonial countries but in the West as well.

The capitalist West and the bureaucratic workers states of the East are in the grip of a growing crisis. Inevitably they will be at each other's throats in the future. The whole history of capitalism over the last 200 years has demonstrated that any agreements made are not worth the paper on which they are written. As soon as the relations between the powers alters the old agreements are scrapped — as Hitler showed when he systematically broke the terms of the Versailles treaty, imposed on Germany after the First World War and supposedly the guarantee of everlasting peace.

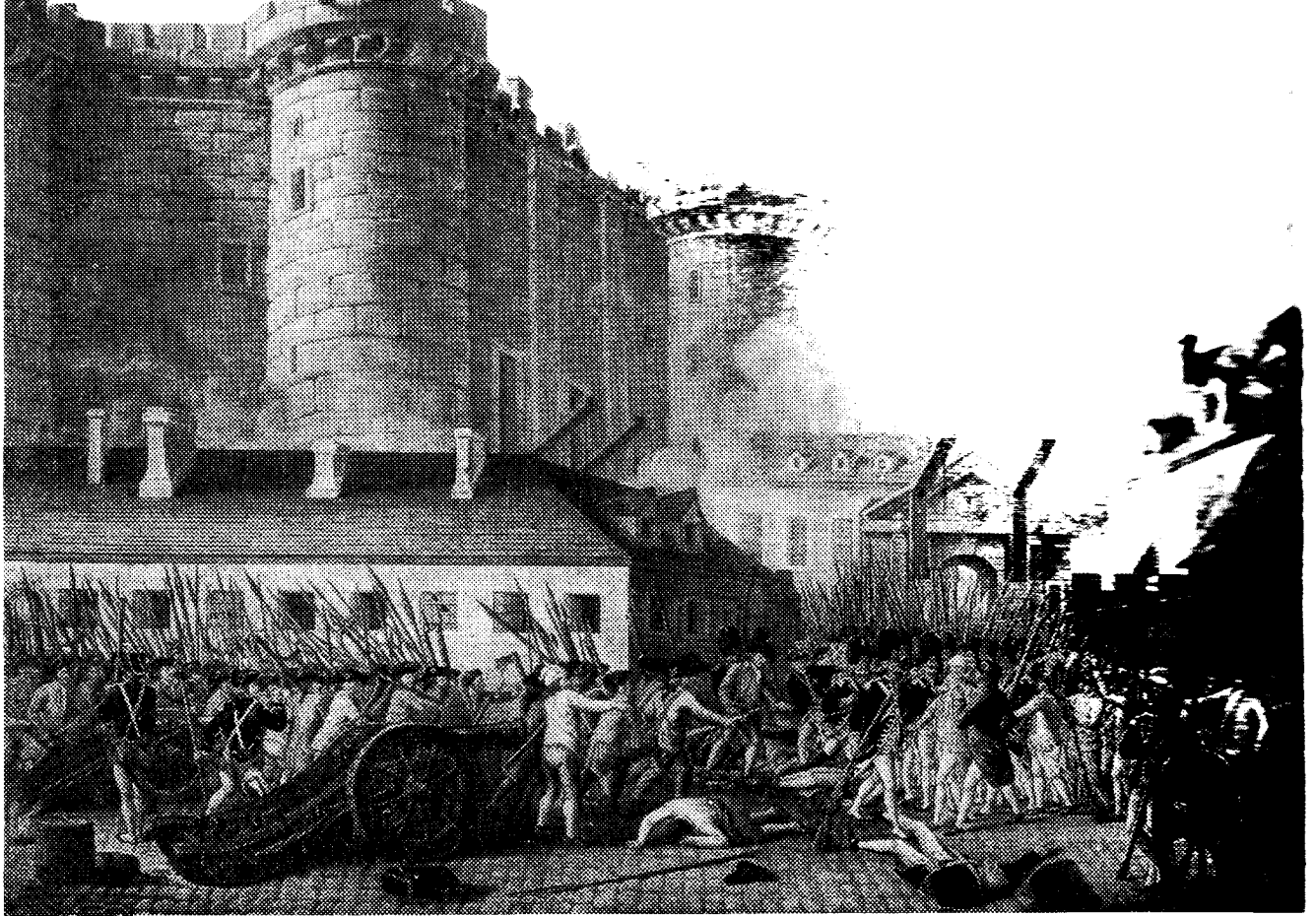
The dialectic of history has increased the mutual dependence of all nations to an immeasurable degree over the last four decades. The world economy is bound together into one interdependent whole. Yet, the Stalinist bureaucracy acts as a fetter on the development of the productive forces in the East and the imperialist powers hold back economic and social progress in the West.

The next epoch will not see continued and permanent collaboration between the Western powers and the Stalinist states. On the contrary, it will be an epoch of growing antagonisms, especially with the end of the present economic boom which has so far lasted for eight years. Inevitably there will be trade wars between nations, as well as struggles between the classes within nations.

These conflicts within imperialism, in their turn, will have an effect in the countries of proletarian bonapartism. This in its turn will lead to new recriminations and to new war preparations between the powers.

The fate of the world will be decided not by agreements between the powers but by the struggle of the classes. Sugary illusions in détente will be exploded by events.

It is on the road of storm and stress, along the road of struggle, that a solution to problems of the world will be achieved. Fraternal relations between the peoples can only be guaranteed by the coming to power of the working class and a collaboration on an international scale of the workers of all countries in a socialist plan of production. □



The 200th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille is the occasion of national celebrations in France, a flood of books, articles and TV programmes, presenting opinions for all tastes.

Yet beneath all the ballyhoo, the ghosts of 1789-93 are beginning to stir uneasily. The modern descendents of that very bourgeoisie which was the principal benefactor of the revolution are experiencing a crisis of identity in their attitude to their own past. As one journalist expressed it, "although all serious politicians in France are republicans, only the left are entirely happy with the founding event."

The suggestion by the Communist mayor of Thionville that a bust of Robespierre be erected in the town square led to a vitriolic argument in which one right wing councillor described the Jacobin leader as "the Ayotallah Khomeini of his day."

While formally "celebrating" the Revolution with lavish parties and speeches, the ruling class and its spokesmen make sure that the real significance of this great event is carefully buried. The most ignorant pundits proclaim that the French Revolution "proves" that revolution always ends in tears. The more refined falsifiers of history re-take the Bastille in the comfort of their studies, demonstrating irrefutably that the Revolution never really occurred and that, even if it did, everything was just the same after it as before.

1789

In the first of a two-part article on the French revolution, Alan Woods analyses the events that led to the fall of the ancien regime 200 years ago.

Fall of the Bastille

**The French
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The French Revolution was, however, one of the greatest events in human history. It is an inexhaustable source of lessons for the labour movement even today. Yet here the first note of caution must be sounded. The French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution, and it would be entirely mistaken to attempt to draw exact parallels between the processes involved and the movement of the modern proletariat. To attempt to do so would end up in all kinds of anachronistic and unscientific conclusions.

In the period with which we are dealing, the proletariat, in the modern sense of the word, hardly existed in France. True, there were already a few large enterprises, like the Van Robais textile mills at Abbeville which employed 12,000 workers or the Mines d'Anzin near the Belgian border with 4,000. But the general picture of industry was one of extreme underdevelopment when compared, for example, to Britain.

In 1789, for example, there were 900 'Spinning Jennies' in France compared to 20,000 in Britain. In the whole of Paris there were only 50 factories employing between 100 and 800 workers. As a rule, industry in France had not yet got beyond the stage of handicraft and cottage-industry, often conducted on semi-feudal lines under the distant supervision of merchant-manufacturers.

Large scale industry, insofar as it existed, was largely due to the role of the state. But the normal development of capitalism was hampered by state interference and feudal restrictions.

In 1789 only 15 per cent of the population lived in towns. Paris, with a population of about half a million, was by far the biggest, permitting it to play a decisive role in the events which were to unfold.

The bulk of the population consisted of peasants, and the agrarian question was central, as always, to the bourgeois revolution. Historians like Alfred Cobban in *The Myth of the French Revolution*, have attempted to show that the

French revolution was not a bourgeois revolution, among other reasons, because feudalism had been abolished before 1789.

It is true that **serfdom** had been abolished for most of the peasants before 1789, although pockets of serfdom still existed in parts of France — Comte and Nivernais. Cobban asserts that "not only had the feudal aristocracy ceased to govern the country, it had even ceased to own a large part of the land." But this presents a very one-sided picture of the real

state of the French countryside before 1789.

Despite the abolition of serfdom, only about one quarter of the peasants owned the land. (See George Rude, *Revolutionary Europe*, p23). More than half were poor share-croppers ('metayers') who owned no capital and shared their product fifty-fifty with the landlord, while about a quarter were landless labourers or rented tiny plots.

As in tsarist Russia, where serfdom was abolished in 1861, this measure in no way alleviated the plight of the peasantry but on the contrary increased the misery and wretchedness of the vast majority while creating favoured conditions for the 'Kulak' minority.

In France too the abolition of serfdom created a class of wealthy peasants, the 'laboureux', which did not alter the miserable conditions of the great majority of even the peasant proprietors, let alone the landless peasants. The parcelling of land created a large number of uneconomical units from which only a bare living could be scratched. The resulting 'rural over-population' meant that by 1777 over one million people were officially classed as beggars.

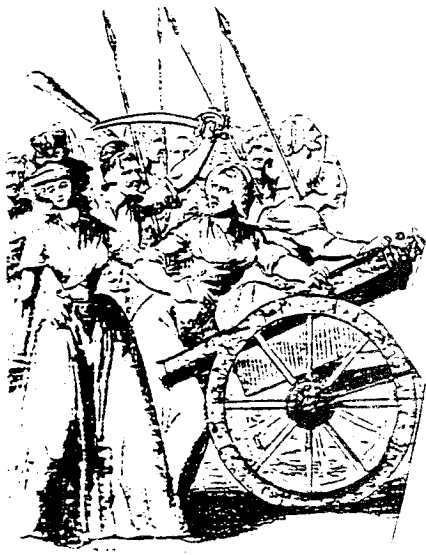
This rural semi-proletariat flocked to the towns, where industry, still in its most primitive stage, could not absorb them. Those who remained in the village existed by begging or doing seasonal work for the landlords or 'laboureux'. In bad seasons they provided plenty of combustible material for riots and banditry.

The abolition of serfdom, moreover, did not mean the abolition of other feudal 'rights', which still existed: the corvée (statutory labour obligation), toll charges for roads, bridges, etc. other duties on fairs, markets and the like, 'lods et ventres' (impost on transfers of land within an estate), quit rents, ground rent and dues in money or in kind, hunting rights, rights to keep rabbits, pigeons, and a further bewildering array of direct and indirect taxes.

Apart from the landowners, the Churches and monasteries had the right to levy similar impositions. In some areas, they even held serfs. The fact, as Alex de Tocqueville explains, that some of these rights had fallen into disuse and they were levied unevenly in certain regions, merely helped to highlight the anachronistic nature of feudal rights and render their existence still more intolerable.

To make matters worse, the state imposed heavy taxes, including a poll tax (the 'taille'), the 'vingtieme' (from which the nobles, clergy and officials were usually exempt) plus a whole battery of indirect taxes. No less than 10 per cent of royal revenue was raised through the salt tax (the 'gabelle'). There were both internal and external customs duties ('traites') plus purchase tax ('aides') and other indirect taxes which weighed heavily on the poor.

The need to raise taxes in turn reflected the



crisis of the absolutist state. A series of disastrous wars, culminating in the French intervention in the American War of Independence (1778-83) emptied the treasury. The royal debt increased from £93 million in 1774 to £300 million in 1789. The Queen became known as 'Madame Deficit'. The regime faced bankruptcy in the most literal sense of the word.

The fall in real wages caused by inflation, plus the increased pressure of taxation, gave rise to a spate of peasant uprisings or 'Jacqueries', which became almost a permanent phenomenon from 1782 right up to the revolution. One province after another was affected — Poitiers, Vizille, the Cervennes, Vivorais, Gevaudan. In 1786, the strike of the silk weavers at Lyons served notice on society that the working class was already beginning to flex its muscles.

It is a dialectical contradiction that revolution always starts at the top. The ruling class, no longer able to push society forward, begins to sense that it has become an obstacle in the path of progress. Fissures and splits begin to appear in the upper layers, as they seek to find a way out of the impasse.

Already in the preceding decades, the wind of change had begun to blow in the ranks of the intelligentsia, that most sensitive barometer of the mood of society. In the writings of Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire, D'Alambert and Rousseau, the ideological basis of the Ancien Regime was subjected to a thoroughgoing criticism. Religion, absolute monarchy, inequality, were all required to give account of themselves before the judgement seat of 'Reason', long before they stood condemned before the revolutionary tribunals.

The revolution in ideas anticipated the real political and social revolution which was silently maturing in the womb of the old society. It provided the rising bourgeoisie with the philosophical premises for its attack on the old order.

By contrast, the impasse of the Ancien Regime was reflected in the spectacle of moral and intellectual decay of the ruling clique. The court of Louis XV resembled nothing so much as a high-class brothel, dominated by the King's favourite mistresses, the Pompadours and Du Barrys. The all-pervading whiff of corruption hung around the court of his successor, Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, the hated 'Austrian woman', herself involved in a scandal, the 'diamond necklace affair', shortly before the outbreak of revolution.

Feeling the earth move under his feet, Louis desperately attempted a reform of the financial system, now teetering on the brink of collapse. Like Gorbachev today, his intention was to effect a partial reform from the top to prevent a revolution from below. A whole series of finan-

cial 'reformers' were appointed: Maupeau under Louis XV; Turgot, Necker and Calonne under his successor. But every one of them stumbled over the principal obstacle: the flat refusal of the aristocracy to accept that they should pay tax.

Here, too, Louis' dilemma resembles that of Gorbachev and a whole series of 'reforming' tsars and Chinese emperors: how to get the ruling aristocracy or bureaucracy to agree to part with some of their privileges in order to save the system as a whole? In other words, how to square the circle.

For a time Necker performed financial 'miracles' which consisted entirely of raising new loans, which made things worse. When he was replaced by Calonne in 1786, the loans had finally run out. There was nothing for it but for Louis to grit his teeth and confront the aristocracy with the facts of life (as seen by the treasury).

However, the nobles replied by pointing out the facts of life, (as seen by them). Their resistance was organised through the 'parlements', not parliaments in the modern sense, but law courts, remnants of the Middle Ages, dominated by the aristocracy which used them to defend its vested interests against both King and Church.

With the conflict between the King and the parlements over taxation, the split within the ruling class became open. It is ironical that the reactionary parlement of Paris for a time became a most unlikely focal point of popular resentment against the Monarchy.

The tax collecting system was beginning to break down, and the loyalty of the army, even the officers, was in doubt. The arrest of key 'parlementaries' and the suspension of the parlement on 8 May 1788 merely raised the agitation to a new level.

The masses began to sit up and take notice, aroused by the open warfare between the Monarchy and the 'parlements'. There were riots in Bordeaux, Dijon, Paris and Toulouse and more serious uprisings in Brittany and Dauphine.

Faced with the prospect of a nation-wide revolt, the King backed down. The parlement of Paris was first recalled, then dismissed, then recalled. An 'Assembly of Notables' was convened in an unsuccessful bid to persuade the nobles to accept taxation, but it merely encouraged the latter to demand further concessions, in the form of the convening of the 'States General', a body representing the Nobility, Clergy and 'Third Estate' (the 'Commons'), which had not met since 1614.

These vacillations and splits revealed the weakness of the Monarchy, which finally agreed to call the 'States General' for 1 May 1789. The breakdown of authority undermined the censorship. Paris was inundated with a



Louis.

The ancien regime was in financial collapse.

**14 July
was not
the end
but the
beginning
of the
revolution.**

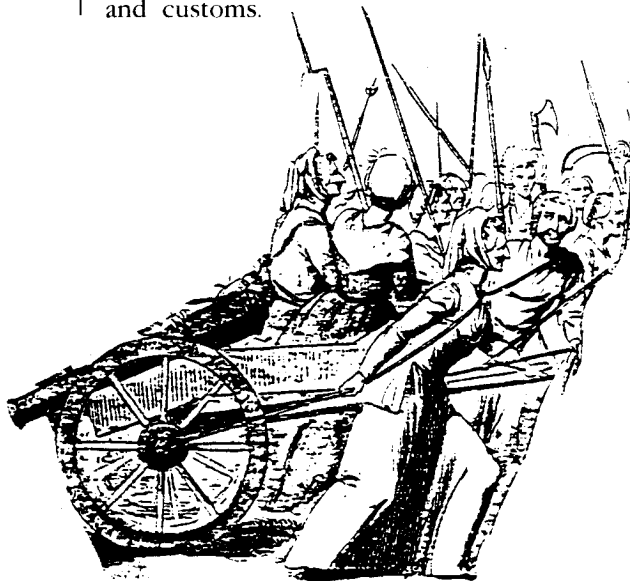
flood of pamphlets. Suddenly the whole of society was caught up in a fever of political ferment.

This in turn reflected a growing mood of discontent in the deepest recesses of society. The early months of 1789 are characterised by a wave of peasant disturbances, directed against taxes and feudal dues. Two bad harvests had caused the price of bread to soar, provoking riots and attacks on grain convoys. The unrest spread to the towns. In April a mob attacked the factory of a manufacturer accused of starving the poor. It was not the only case of its kind. From March on, there were food riots in Paris.

In this context, the 'States General' was convened, and at once revealed itself as a gigantic fraud. There was not a single peasant among the delegates. Worse still, the non-aristocratic component, the 'educated classes' — bourgeois lawyers, manufacturers and teachers, representing 'the people' — were out-voted two-to-one by the nobility and clergy.

The behaviour of these representatives was decisively affected by the mood of the masses. It is impossible to understand the history of the French revolution in parliamentary terms without reference to the movement of the masses, particularly in Paris, which completely determined the evolution of events at every decisive stage.

Anticipating 'glasnost' by two hundred years, all sections of society were encouraged to present their grievances in writing, through the famous 'cahiers de plaintes et doléances' (notebooks of grievances). The 'cahiers' of the 'Third Estate', if taken together, represented a complete programme for the transformation of society. "When I had finished my labours," wrote de Tocqueville, "and made a list of these various proposals I realised with something like consternation that what was being asked for was nothing short of the systematic, simultaneous abolition of **all** existing French laws and customs.



"There was no avoiding the fact that what the authors of these *cahiers* jointly sponsored was one of the vastest, most catastrophic revolutions the world had ever known. Yet the men who were to be its victims had not the least presentiment of this: they nursed the foolish hope that a sudden, radical transformation of a very ancient, highly intricate social system could be effected almost painlessly, under the auspices of reason and by its efficacy alone. Theirs was a rude awakening!" (*The Ancien Regime and the French Revolution*, p165).

The electoral assemblies which met to discuss the 'cahiers' were packed and agitated meetings. In Paris, in particular, the mood of the masses was raised to fever pitch, with attacks on individual 'aristos' as well as strikes, riots and clashes with troops. Kropotkin, in his book on the revolution, describes a typical scene where the Keeper of the Seals and the Archbishop of Paris were "hosted, abused and scoffed at. They were so overwhelmed with shame and rage that apparently the King's secretary Passeret, who was with them, died of shock the next day" (*The Great Revolution*, p56).

The scandalous situation where a tiny minority of wealthy nobles and bishops had more votes than the rest of the French nation put together caused tremendous indignation. Under pressure of the masses, the bourgeois representatives of the Third Estate plucked up enough courage to demand extra representation to cancel out the advantage of the nobility and clergy, and also the right to vote separately.

While the 'States General' debated, Louis, having realised too late the dangers inherent in the situation, was preparing an armed coup to disperse them. The dismissal of Necker, widely seen as a reformist minister, served to bring the Paris masses onto the streets on 12 July. The following day the working people of Paris seized guns and powder and set about arming themselves. The workshops of Paris produced 50,000 pikes in 36 hours. Thus, as Marx explained, the counter-revolution acted as a whip to the revolution itself.

The army now found itself caught up in the general social ferment. Troops disobeyed orders and refused to fire on the people. The generals found their armies melting away. Determined to find arms, the people raided the Hotel des Invalides which surrendered without a fight, yielding 28,000 muskets.

This situation was absolutely characteristic of the French revolution in all its decisive stages: the people's parliamentary 'representatives' talk, debate, move resolutions, while the real issues are decided by the revolutionary direct action of the masses.

Historians have evolved a whole mythology, vaunting the alleged achievements of the parliamentary 'leaders' of the Third Estate, who on

17 June took the title of the National Assembly and three days later, in the famous 'tennis court oath', swore not to disband until a constitution was granted. But the role of the masses was decisive even in this. The galleries of the Assembly hall were constantly packed by thousands of cheering and booing people urging the politicians on. This was a decisive factor in stiffening the resolve of the most radical elements and cowering the forces of reaction.

More decisive still was the spontaneous mass insurrection in Paris which smashed Louis' attempted coup. The workers, artisans and journeymen of the Faubourg St. Antoine joined forces with the bourgeois militia to storm the Bastille held by mercenary Swiss guards on 14 July. This action dealt a death blow to Louis' plans and was the signal for a nationwide insurrection. Nevertheless, the 'official version' which tries to reduce the French revolution to this one event is very far from the truth.

14 July 1789 was not the end but only the beginning of the revolution. This distortion is not at all accidental. The first phase of the revolution placed power in the hands of the most conservative wing of the big bourgeoisie in alliance with the so-called 'reformist' wing of the nobility, much the same as the February revolution in 1917 in Russia initially placed power in the hands of the Cadets and Milyukov.

From a Marxist viewpoint it is quite amusing to read the attempts of 'revisionist' historians like Cobban to 'prove' that the French revolution was not really a bourgeois revolution because the Constituent Assembly which emerged from the July overturn was extremely reluctant even to approve the abolition of the feudal payments and services which weighed heavily on the peasantry.

The bourgeoisie was, as Cobban says, as terrified as the nobility at the peasant uprising which spread like wildfire after July. In the summer of 1789, the chateaux blazed from one end of France to the other. Yet the Assembly dragged its feet with hair-splitting arguments as to which payments were really 'feudal' and which were not, a distinction not really appreciated by peasants who cared little about legal niceties when life and death questions were at stake.

The bourgeoisie in the Assembly clung like grim death to the landowners who had no difficulty in convincing them that the peasant movement represented a challenge to property and order. Armand duc d'Aiguillon, a big landowner, argued that "the rights in question are a form of property **and all property is sacred.**" (AW emphasis).

However, the sheer size of the rebellion made it impossible to put it down by force, especially given the unreliable state of the troops. In the words of Lefebvre: "They liberated themselves and successive Assemblies

only sanctioned what they had accomplished." (*The Coming of the French revolution*, p213)

Feudal rights were thus abolished from below by mass action and in spite of the 'revolutionary bourgeoisie'. In fact, as soon as it could, the Assembly reintroduced them in a disguised form. A law of 3 May 1790 established that the peasant would have to pay for the privilege of abolition, setting redemption rates at a very high amount (20 times the annual fee for dues in money and 25 times for dues in kind) which imposed a crushing burden on the majority of the peasants. This sell-out to the aristocracy represented 'a bitter deception', in the words of Lefebvre, and led to the continuation of the civil war in the countryside.

On 27 August, the Assembly adopted the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' which today is trumpeted as a great achievement. But to the mass of the people, deprived of bread and land, such declarations of abstract 'freedom' were worse than useless.

The new constitution established only a limited franchise based on property and laid down a difference between the so-called 'active' and 'passive' citizens. The latter, the poorest classes, were denied the vote.

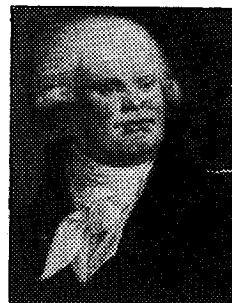
In reality, the 'freedom' of the bourgeois consisted basically in the freedom to pursue their business unhindered by feudal restrictions or the action of the workers. Thus, the guilds were abolished, and at the same time, both strikes and trade unions were banned. The confiscation of church property, which was allegedly 'put at the disposal of the nation', was also a measure in the interest of the bourgeois who bought up the lion's share of the church land. The peasants gained nothing by this measure. There was not even an attempt to set up a republic. The monarchy, now supposedly reconciled to the changed order, was left well alone.

However, despite all the ingratiating flattery, the King remained implacably hostile. The court circle became a hotbed of reaction and conspiracy. A section of the nobility had already gone into foreign exile to organise the counter-revolution from Coblenz. The remainder bided their time and awaited an opportunity.

If matters had been left in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the plans of the reactionaries might have succeeded. But once again the masses intervened. The shortage of bread caused increasing discontent, finding an echo in the numerous 'Clubs' which sprang up like mushrooms after a thunderstorm, and which were the 18th century equivalent of modern political parties. There were strikes, petitions and protests and a rain of pamphlets.

The centre of discontent was the royal veto and the justified fear that the King and Queen might leave the country and join the counter-revolutionaries massing on the borders of

MJR □13
Summer 1989
France



Danton.

**The King
remained
implacably
hostile to
reform.**



Brissot.

France.

On 5 October there was a second insurrection. The women of Paris who bore the brunt of rising inflation and food shortages, and who were awakened to political life, led a march on Versailles, shaming their menfolk into following. This dealt a decisive blow to the counter-revolution. The King and Queen were 'invited' to Paris where the people could keep an eye on them. For a second time the masses had saved the revolution.

In reality, following the victory of 1789, there were two years of reaction within the revolution itself. This, however, merely prepared the next stage of revolutionary upswing which once again came as a consequence of the threat of counter-revolution.

In June 1791, the King and Queen attempted to flee abroad but were detained by the vigilance of the revolutionaries and sent back to Paris. Even then, the cowardly and treacherous Assembly tried to cover up the tracks, claiming incredibly that Louis had been 'kidnapped'.

The increasing polarisation in society had found its reflection inside the National Convention which split into 'left' and 'right', these terms originally describing the seating arrangements of the revolutionary and reactionary parties. On the right were the members of the Feuillants Club, a collection of reactionary nobles, clergy and monarchists. On the left were the members of the Jacobin Club and particularly the radical Parisian Cordeliers Club, dominated by the larger-than-life figure of Danton.

But the main party in the Assembly at this stage was the 'centre' party of Brissot and Vergriand, popularly known as the 'Girondins',

because many of them came from the Gironde in Western France. The Girondin deputies were drawn from the well-to-do classes and professional people: teachers, doctors, but above all, lawyers. Brilliant orators, they represented the backwardness of the provinces which always tended to lag behind revolutionary Paris. They stood first and foremost for the interests of the big mercantile bourgeoisie of towns like Bordeaux.

They stood for the defence of the revolution, but were terrified of the independent movement of the masses. They were the party of order, of property, the restoration of the currency and the rights of the provinces against Paris. They were also the party of war.

For war, at this point, was rapidly becoming the central issue. Austria and Prussia, egged on by royalist exiles and in cahorts with Louis and Marie Antoinette, were clearly seeking a pretext to invade.

On 20 April 1792, the Assembly declared war on Austria. A series of disastrous defeats ensued. The army which had been taken over virtually unchanged from the old regime and hurled into combat without preparation under the leadership of corrupt and treacherous officers, many of whom were only looking for a suitable opportunity to defect, was soon routed.

By Summer 1792, the fall of Paris looked inevitable. The darkest hour for the revolution was the surrender of Verdun which General Dumouriez treacherously handed over to the enemy. The Girondin leaders, despairing of victory, entered into secret negotiations with Louis.

Had it depended on the Assembly and the Girondins all would have been lost. But fortunately, once again the Paris masses took matters into their own hands. On 10 August, about a week before the fall of Verdun, the masses of Paris, together with the revolutionary volunteers or 'federes' from Marseilles and Brittany staged an insurrection which effectively overthrew the monarchy.

This is the way in which the French bourgeois revolution unfolded: at every stage the big bourgeoisie attempted to manoeuvre and compromise with the monarchy, dragging their feet and attempting to preserve as much as possible of the old regime. Only the revolutionary intervention of the plebeian and semi-proletarian masses, above all in Paris, succeeded in clearing aside all the obstacles and pushing the revolution forward. To do so it was obliged to struggle against the very bourgeoisie which would inevitably be the heir to the revolutionary conquests paid for with the blood and sacrifice of the masses. Such was the dialectic of the French revolution. □

Part Two of Alan Woods' article will appear in MIR 41, Autumn 1989.



Armed women from Paris marched on Versailles to detain the King and Queen in October 1789. Women intervened decisively on several occasions to foil counter-revolutionary plots (contemporary drawing).

Peru

Garcia fails

by Alejandro Rojas

At 4am it starts — for rice, bread, oil, meat, postage stamps, and longest and most revealing of all, for passports. Lima lives up to its nickname — the 'city of queues'. Postage stamps ran out because the government could afford only to print half those ordered by the Post Office.

Last year inflation almost reached 3000 per cent and is expected to hit 20,000 per cent by the end of this year. Peru stands on the brink of economic disintegration. 'Normal' society has all but ceased to function. Only the 'black' economy which accounts for over half of industry, 60 per cent of food distribution and nearly all 'public' transport, has prevented a complete collapse.

Living standards have plummeted. Average purchasing power has fallen by 70 per cent in one year. In the cities this is a catastrophe for the workers and unemployed, especially those herded into the 'pueblos juvenes' or shanty towns where over two-fifths of Lima's population live. And for the middle classes it means bankruptcy and ruin.

For over eight million quechua-speaking Indians in the countryside, life expectancy is just 45 years (compared to 58 years in the cities). Life is threatened by malnutrition or more suddenly through death at the hands of the army or sometimes the Maoist-inspired guerrillas, the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). Ayachuco, the birthplace of Sendero Luminoso, is called Huamango in quechua — 'the corner of the dead' — tragically apt for millions of peasants.

The high expectations aroused when President Alan Garcia's APRA party was elected have evaporated, replaced by hatred and antagonism. Austerity package has followed austerity package. Four emergency budgets have been introduced in the last year, while promised reforms have given way to counter reforms.

APRA (Popular Revolutionary American Alliance) was founded in 1929 by Haya de la Torre. It promoted a radical nationalistic demagogic programme which gave it certain base among layers of workers, peasants and the urban intelligentsia. Before it came to power in 1984, APRA's protests against US imperialism, especially Garcia's announcement that he

would not allow more than 10 per cent of GNP to be used to service Peru's crippling foreign debt, won it wide popular support.

But as recent events have shown, APRA's policies were not derived from a concern at the plight of the Peruvian masses but from a desire to establish a stronger and more independent Peruvian capitalism, and to stave off the convulsions in society which the constant drain on the economy was provoking.

APRA's real interests were revealed at last year's congress, when it backed a Thatcher-style austerity package and removed the more radical Garcia from all his positions in the party. APRA's most reactionary wing has formed a 'death squad', the Commando Rodrigo Franco, which has already murdered several trade union leaders.

In response to austerity, a huge strike wave has swept the country. Last July, the largest general strike in Peru's history was called by the Communist CGTP and significantly also by APRA's own trade union federation, the CTP.

Miners have held a 57-day strike. Telephone workers, teachers, civil servants, building workers, doctors have all taken action. Every day Lima is witness to demonstrations by one group or another — recently retired policemen marched to demand that their pensions be paid. Even the judges threatened strike action in April when their pay cheques bounced!

In the countryside a civil war is unfolding, as peasants and youth from the pueblos juvenes and even the universities, desperate for a way out, have joined the guerrillas. Over 13,000 have already died since 1980 in this bloody war with the armed forces.

APRA senator, Javier Riestra, summed up the social situation when he declared: "It is our duty to warn that Peru has all the symptoms of a



Garcia.

A huge strike wave in the cities and civil war in the country

society in a pre-revolutionary stage. There is an institutional, social, moral and economic crisis and the leading class lacks faith in itself."

At present it appears that the Communist-dominated Izquierda Unida (United Left) could win a majority in elections scheduled for 1990. But what are the prospects?

All the objective conditions exist in Peru for the overthrow of landlordism and capitalism. If the IU was to adopt such a programme and introduce a socialist plan of production under democratic workers' management, involving the peasants and middle class layers, then a revolution along classical lines as in Russia in 1917 would be entirely possible. The working class could draw behind it the poor peasants and other exploited layers, overthrow capitalism and landlordism and establish a workers' democracy. A democratic workers Peru could ignite the whole of Latin America, opening the way to the socialist transformation of the continent through international revolution.

However, already the IU and trade union leaders have failed to offer such an alternative which would answer the fears and alleviate the uncertainties gripping middle class layers. The IU leader, an ex-APRAista, Barrientes, has so far simply played the role of Garcia's left arm, rather than explain the need to overthrow capitalism.

This has led to some middle class layers turning to a new right-wing coalition, Fredemo, led by a well-known novelist Vargas Llosa. Fredemo demagogically parades as the defender of the middle-class and democracy. It particularly played on Garcia's clumsy and abortive attempt to nationalise the banks, without offering any guarantee on jobs to the bankworkers or on savings to investors. Fredemo could gain a majority in elections if the middle-classes' fear of the future and revulsion at the instability of life under hyper-inflation and chaos, is coupled with the absence of any alternative from the United Left leaders.

But a victory for the right would solve nothing except to increase austerity and military suppression of workers' struggles. It would only further boost support for the Sandero Luminoso guerrillas.

Nevertheless, victory for the United Left is still a strong possibility. Under pressure from the masses, it may implement more radical policies, including nationalisation, than its leaders intend. But if a United Left government fails to mobilise the workers and exploited layers to end landlordism and capitalism, measures that stop only halfway will provoke reaction in the form of a military coup.

Indeed, a coup is possible prior to elections if it seems that the United Left will win. The military planned such a takeover last January. Only the intervention of US imperialism aborted it. The US government feared that any coup then

would only hasten the movement of the masses into the Sandero Luminoso and produce open warfare at a time when the armed forces are divided and demoralised through fighting an already unwinnable guerrilla war.

The delay in revolution in the cities has strengthened support for Sandero Luminoso. Their armed strength is now estimated as high as 10,000 and growing. To fight them, one-third of the country has been placed under military rule. In Junin province, which produces 30 per cent of Lima's vegetables, the guerrillas are in effective control and threaten to cut off food supplies to the capital.

Hundreds of villages fly the hammer and sickle flag of the Sandero Luminoso – despite their ruthless methods and contempt for the masses. The guerrillas appear to be increasing in strength as the only way out of the economic and social nightmare for the peasant masses. Even in the cities the guerrillas are gaining a base in some trade unions and in the state machine itself. But their main support increasingly comes from the youth of the pueblos juvenes. For them there is nothing to lose.

The government and the armed forces are increasingly demoralised. As Garcia glaringly admitted: "How can we not admire them (Sandero Luminoso)? Imagine if we (APRA) had 10,000 militants with a fanatical faith that these men have who leave everything, who don't have families, who suffer tuberculosis. These are the real militants. What moral authority do we have to combat them when we are surrounded with small pseudo-comforts?"

A guerrilla victory is now entirely possible. As the social crisis intensifies, the army could progressively disintegrate. Many junior officers are forced to live in the pueblos juvenes. Majors live on the roof tops of garages. A Rear Admiral only earns \$71 a month. Forty per cent of conscripts sent to the emergency war regions desert and even five per cent of the officers abandon their posts.

But the guerrillas have no perspective for any conscious movement of the working-class. So the guerrilla struggle may well be very protracted and costly in lives and social destruction. If the guerrillas come to power and consolidate their hold, they would establish a proletarian bonapartist regime ie. the end of landlordism and capitalism and its replacement by a state owned, centrally controlled economy, without workers democracy. It would be a regime in the image of Cuba, China or Vietnam, dominated by a ruling bureaucratic elite.

So the Peruvian revolution is reaching a decisive stage – one which highlights the urgent need for a Marxist leadership at the head of the working-class in order to secure workers' democracy in Peru and in other countries of Latin America. □

**A guerrilla
victory is
entirely
possible**

Brady and the Pope are worried

The US government is worried. Last year the underbelly of US imperialism was threatened when, amid a growing economic crisis, the Mexican people nearly elected a left-wing radical party pledged to measures of nationalisation and to default on Mexico's huge foreign debt. Only fraud and intimidation ensured a sham victory for the friends of US imperialism. The US government was so shocked it immediately granted an unprecedented government-to-government loan to its newly elected friendly IRP government.

A few months later there were riots in Venezuela over price rises and wage cuts imposed by international bankers trying to obtain payments for their loans to the Venezuelan government. Venezuela was regarded as Latin America's most stable regime.

The riots drove the Bush regime into action. The US government realised that the wholesale rape of the resources and labour of peoples of the Third World could not be allowed to continue at the same rate without threatening the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism in what it likes to think of as its own 'backyard'.

One of the major reasons for the length of the present boom in the advanced capitalist economies has been the huge transfer of resources from the Third World approaching \$150bn since 1982 – and reaching \$43bn in just 1988 alone. Imperialism through the international banks is sucking the rest of the world dry like vampires – as one recent excellent book on the Latin American debt burden described it.*

The boom has been at the expense of the lives, living standards and productive wealth of Third World economies. As another study of Third World poverty has graphically shown, living standards in Latin America are now one-tenth what they were in 1982.**

The situation has even provoked the Pope to complain. Having spent much time touring the Third World attacking priests

who have rebelled against governments enforcing these policies of plunder, Pope John Paul exclaimed recently: "how many children die every day in Africa because resources are now being swallowed up in debt repayments?"

The Reagan administration was against any government help to Third World countries to ease the debt burden. Under its Baker Plan, they called on international banks to lend more money to its debtors so that they could pay their old debts! Naturally the banks did not want to throw good money after bad, and instead refused to lend any more money and pressed for their interest and repayments in full.

But the banks' unrelenting pressure now threatens social upheaval which could bring to power movements refusing to pay anything. So now Bush's financial supremo, Nicholas Brady, has proposed a new plan. The Brady Plan wants the governments of the advanced economies to provide funds through the IMF and the World Bank so that Third World debtor nations can pay off some of their debts to the banks; and to subsidise their interest payments. Brady aims to cut the foreign debt of the 39 Third World debtors by 20 per cent over three years.

But there are many weaknesses in the plan. Firstly, it would only reduce the annual transfer of resources by about \$7bn out of \$43bn – the drain would continue if at a slightly lower level. And then who is going to pay for this debt relief? The US government wants the banks to accept repayment of their loans at only 30 per cent of their original value. Naturally the banks are very reluctant to do this, even though

many of them, like the British ones, have reserved a portion of their profits in case some of their loans are defaulted – for this they get tax relief from the government! The banks prefer the idea of government money to subsidise interest payments – that way they hope to get their money without selling off any loans cheaply.

Also some governments like the UK and West Germany are not happy with the Brady Plan because it means that they must provide public money to finance loan repayments by the Third World debtors to the banks. They prefer to do nothing.

But the US government cannot afford to ignore the dangers to their hegemony, especially in Latin America, so they are insisting that the banks agree to discount some of their loans and that other governments provide funds. So far only Japan has been prepared to offer extra money – in return for which it wants to move into second place in the financial pecking order within the IMF above Britain and West Germany.

No doubt the Americans will finally get their way. But little will change. Any Third World government that accepts help from the Brady Plan must also agree to a programme of austerity including price rises and cuts in wages and services.

The Brady Plan offers too little relief too late, and may yet fall apart through squabbles with the bankers. Already the first government to ask for help from the Plan, Mexico, has been told by the bankers that its debt burden would not fall significantly. The financial Shylocks still want their pound of flesh.

** Latin America – Dance of the Millions by the Latin America Bureau, London 1989 price £5.95.*

***Wealth, poverty and starvation by Vic George, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988, price £10.95.*



Brady.

Economic Notes

Child Abuse

Bell's Cleveland witchhunt

Harriet Gill, a London social worker who specialises in family and child-care work, analyses the issues arising from the Butler-Sloss enquiry.

The most immediate questions that arise from the Cleveland child abuse events are: why does child sex abuse happen and how can it be prevented? The main objective of any programme of action to deal with abuse must be to protect the children, above the interests of parents, professional medical or social work staff or political vested interests.

Unfortunately, none of these questions or objectives were properly analysed by the government appointed inquiry conducted by Lord Justice Mrs Butler-Sloss in summer 1987. Debate about what happened in Cleveland will not die down, despite attempts by the government, the press, some opposition MPs and clergymen to convince us that the crisis is over and all is back to normal.

The Butler-Sloss report was very revealing about the agencies and individuals involved but it failed to answer the question: 'how many children were actually abused?' This failure has allowed the press, the Tories and unscrupulous politicians to promote the myth that sexual abuse was all blown out of proportion, allowing innocent families to suffer.

But in February 1989, 11 Cleveland paediatricians spoke out publicly in support of the two paediatricians involved in the original controversy. They were unequivocal: "In our opinion the majority of the children (quite possibly 90 per cent) were abused".

The paediatricians were forced to speak out, rather belatedly, because the main doctor involved in the Cleveland cases, Dr Marietta Higgs, is threatened with dismissal by the local health authority, despite Butler-Sloss recommending no action against the doctors. Higgs

has been refused a High Court hearing to clear her name, as was granted to Wendy Savage in her case, because the judges said that the Inquiry report had cleared her!

The disciplinary action against Higgs implies that the Cleveland cases were the result of bad diagnoses from overzealous doctors and social workers, rather than based on any significant incidence of sexual abuse in Cleveland families.

This is clearly the view of the Labour MP for Middlesbrough, Stuart Bell, in his quickly produced pot boiler on Cleveland, sensationally entitled *When Salem came to the Boro*. Bell has gained notoriety during the events by championing "the cause of the families" against the paediatricians and Cleveland Social Services Department.

Bell clearly aims to vindicate all the parents involved in the enquiry. He wants to prove that Dr. Higgs and Ms. Richardson (Child Abuse Consultant for Cleveland) deliberately entered into a conspiracy to discover sexual abuse of children where none existed as part of an 'anti-male/father' attack which is ultimately an attack on families. For Bell, child sexual abuse at the level discovered in Cleveland was unthinkable and therefore was not happening.

Bell draws a ludicrous comparison between Salem in the 17th century and Cleveland in 1987. "Just as in the middle ages and beyond there were those who believed in witchcraft, so there were those in Cleveland who believed that child sex abuse existed on a hitherto unknown scale".

But in Cleveland the only witch-hunting going on was Bell's. He would have us believe

that child sexual abuse — just as witchcraft — is the product of hysteria or mass neurosis, particularly in women, and of an 'unnatural' attitude to men.

Bell suggests that Dr. Higgs in particular has 'problems' in her attitude and relationships with men. In the best traditions of the gutter press he delves into her private life and family background. Obviously disappointed that she is in fact married and a mother, he points out the 'unnatural' state of affairs where she is the bread-winner and her husband stays at home to look after the children. Bell explains all by the revelation that Dr. Higgs was brought up by her mother who was separated from her father and therefore Dr. Higgs did not have a close relationship with him!

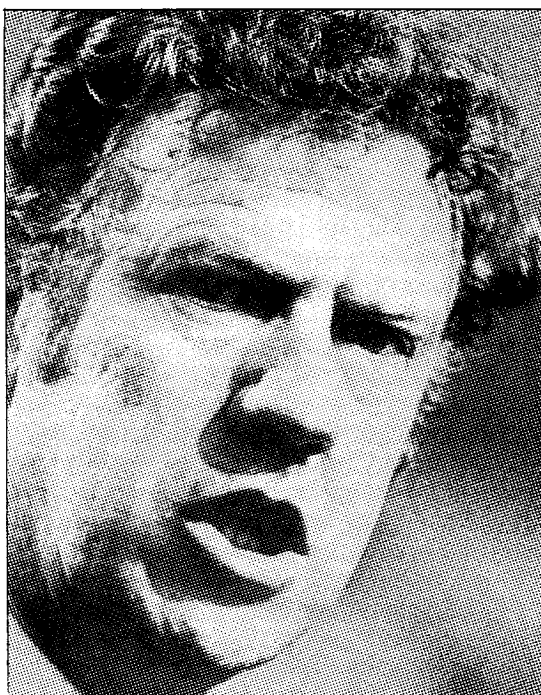
Because Bell cannot label Higgs as an emotional, hysterical woman who over-reacts, he concludes that her 'professionalism' and objective approach to her work — qualities much admired in men — are suspect and sinister in a woman.

What Bell really reveals are his own prejudices. He has a stereotype of women; ie. the good wife and mother supporting and standing by her husband. Anyone who differs is either bad eg. Dr Higgs and Ms Richardson, or misguided and naive. That one of the paediatric consultants, Dr Wyatt, was a man is explained away; he was beguiled by his female colleague.

The Tory press, Stuart Bell and the 'ministers of the cloth' have rallied behind the 'families', demanding the head of Higgs and social workers and denying any abuse takes place within the 'family'.

He argues that where child sex abuse does occur, it is due to the break-up of the family. "More one-parent families, more latchkey children, more divorces, more boyfriends and strangers coming into the house, makes more likely the abuse of children unrelated by blood." In 'proper' family units it just does not happen, although Bell has to admit that "...even among blood relatives the abuse has gone on."

But people in glass houses should not throw stones. Bell's championing of the nuclear family and his attack on one-parent families is hypocrisy of the first order, when we find out that he has been married twice, presumably leaving a one parent family behind. He admits to having an 'open' marriage with his first wife which allowed him to have a mistress, while earning his fortune as a lawyer in Paris in the 1970s. He published a novel (at his own expense presumably because no publisher would take it) which has been attacked as pornographic. In it, the lawyer hero has sex 29 times with seven different people, sometimes with violence involved. As Dr Andrew Croft of the Cleveland Campaign against Child Abuse commented: "I wonder what people would make of Marietta Higgs if it



Stuart Bell.

was discovered that she had written a book like this".

Leaving aside Bell's hypocrisy, the evidence of research proves his assertions wrong. Recent figures from the National Children's Home indicate that the true extent of child sex abuse has been seriously underestimated in government surveys. They found that 15 per cent of children in its residential homes and schools had been sexually abused. They now estimate that 1,600 of the 11,000 youngsters they work with have similar histories. As Lord Romsey, one of the charity's patrons, said: "We are horrified at what our survey brought to light. These are children known to us, and this means there may be a huge amount of hidden abuse and therefore hidden sufferings."

Bell's belief that child sex abuse is the product of the breakdown of the family is also challenged by a survey in Leeds where one-third of the abusers were biological fathers. Much of child sex abuse is contained within the family and shows a preponderance of fathers, then step-fathers, uncles and older brothers.

In May 1989, West Yorkshire police revealed that since they adopted improved links with social services and doctors as recommended by Butler-Sloss, that in the first three months of 1989 they were investigating 332 new cases of child sex abuse. The police chief responsible commented that "the abuse seems fairly commonplace and... could be just the tip of the iceberg."

Behind Bell's 'theory' is the suggestion that child sex abuse is a new phenomenon, the product of the modern disintegration of moral standards, leading to an undermining of family life and the virtues embodied in it. But child sex

Bell believes child sex abuse, like witchcraft, is the product of female hysteria.

**Abuse is
more
prevalent
than
admitted,
committed
mainly by
relatives.**

abuse has been a feature of 'civilised' society for a long time. The 1908 Incest Act was passed as a result of concern expressed about children during the 19th century.

Crimes of incest and sexual assaults upon children within the family have been a regular feature of the criminal lists of the courts for many years. Undoubtedly what is a new feature is the increasing awareness of sexual abuse, particularly in very young children and an increasing willingness on the part of doctors and social workers to look for the evidence.

Most children do not tell anybody that abuse has taken place and often there are no physical signs at all. Children feel confused, think it their own fault and are torn between loving the perpetrator and wanting the abuse to stop. They fear they will not be believed and of the consequences – the break-up of the family, being taken into care etc. Sometimes children are threatened with violence by the abuser, and even killed.

Work with known offenders also supports the view that abuse goes on not only for years but tens of years, involving several children, and in the cases of child porn rings, sometimes whole neighbourhoods of children, before detection takes place. For the sex offender it is seldom the first offence but simply the first time they have been caught.

So the real evidence is: (1) abuse is much more prevalent than admitted. Studies with abusers in prison show that they committed many more offences than they were convicted for. Their victims kept quiet. (2) abuse clearly takes place predominantly in the family by people known to the children, often relatives, and carrying on apparently ordinary lives unsuspected by others. The stereotype of sex fiends and child molesters roaming the streets is the extreme exception.

Bell makes no mention of the first five cases in Cleveland that went to court. They were found to be genuine cases of abuse. One of the men accused had seven previous convictions for sexual assault on children. In order to avoid such inconvenient facts, Bell concentrates in the main on just a few families, where the paediatricians and social workers were apparently wrong.

Unscrupulously using these few cases Bell loudly claims that all the families are 'innocent'. He ignores those parents ie mothers who believed that their children had been abused. When Bell talks about 'families' he really means fathers. He is not at all interested in the position of women or children within the family unit.

The doctors and social workers' conclusions may have been wrong in just a few cases. Beatrix Campbell has pointed out in her book on Cleveland, *Unofficial Secrets* that: "after many months of bitter challenge in the courts,

26 of the children from 121 were deemed by the judges to have been wrongly diagnosed. All the rest were children whose alleged abusers had left their environment or whose parents agreed to protection plans from social services or who were removed from their homes. Contrary to media myth that most cases were 'cleared' up by the courts, most of the children became subjects of some form of state support or protection".

In May 1989 there was further confirmation of the work of the paediatricians and social workers. Cleveland authorities announced that 123 children were originally involved in the Inquiry. Only 28 were sent home by the courts without some supervision, presumably because there was no evidence of abuse. But now five of these 28 children have been referred back to social services by independent agencies because abuse is suspected. Bell's only comment on these latest referrals was to say that sometimes "children are referred because neighbours have seen them playing out in the rain, but that does not mean they are being abused"!

Bell was taken apart by the Butler Sloss report. Virtually all his accusations against the doctors and social workers were thrown out and his conclusions dismissed. Yet he continues in parliament and in the press to deny that any accusations he made against the doctors and social services in Cleveland were refuted by Butler Sloss! Bell accused the doctors of insisting that all children attending hospital should be screened for sexual abuse – not true. Between January and July 1987 Higgs and Wyatt saw 2306 outpatients, and only 77 were diagnosed for sexual abuse, with the remainder of the 121 cases tested because they were siblings of the 77. Bell said that doctors and social workers concluded sexual abuse had taken place solely on evidence of reflex anal dilatation (ie the new physical diagnostic technique). Not true – in only 18 out of 121 cases was dilatation the sole physical sign and in no case was it the sole ground for concluding sexual abuse.

The Butler-Sloss report criticised Bell for his "intemperate and inflammatory remarks made on TV or to newspaper reporters which had a part in exacerbating an already very difficult and sensitive situation". Butler-Sloss said that "he did not have all the facts" and "he was unable, in the light of the further knowledge that he clearly had, to withdraw or modify allegations which could not be substantiated."

The real truth is that right from the start, Bell jumped on the band-wagon of reaction to the horror of child sexual abuse and used it quite cynically to promote his own career.

But whether or not the professionals made some mistakes or not in certain cases, the real issue is: what is the extent of child sexual abuse

and what should be done about it?

Bell has no interest in why it occurs and what might be done about it. While he rails against the doctors and social workers, Bell ignores the lack of resources in his area. From 1980 to 1987, Middlesbrough General lost almost two-thirds of its paediatric beds — 150 to 52. He has nothing to say about the high incidence of failure to thrive in children in his area and the links between this and social deprivation.

He is not interested in the rotten social conditions and lack of support for families in Cleveland and the responsibility of the Tories for this. All he wants to make sure that Dr Higgs in particular carries the responsibility for what went on and to align himself with: 'a coalition of men of the cloth, members of parliament, the legal profession, the media and the police' to get to grips with what was really happening to 'family life'. Bell is not on his own in the Labour Party in wishing to take this line. His evidence to the judicial enquiry had a supporting covering note from Roy Hattersley. When leading Labour politicians choose to see the events as the 'tragedy of innocent parents wronged' they do children a grave injustice by covering up the scale of the actual crisis, not just in Cleveland but national.

Campbell has shown that there was already bad blood between the paediatricians and the NHS management in Cleveland. Both Wyatt and Higgs had prominently campaigned against the NHS cuts and the 'asset stripping' of paediatrics. "In the words of one colleague they had become 'a thorn in the management's side: he (Wyatt) never stopped campaigning to increase services to children. Dr Higgs was the same. So... when the crisis blew up and the administration saw all those children piling up in the wards, it was a golden opportunity for management to get them. The establishment — hospital management and the police — closed ranks against the doctors and the social workers for a variety of personal and political reasons."

The role of the police was one of the most scandalous aspects of the whole affair. Bell has been very silent about them. In spring 1987 the police unilaterally refused to cooperate with the paediatricians and social services. Their action had a critical effect on events. Previously an investigation into possible child sex abuse was instigated either by a disclosure of abuse or through professional recommendation. The police refusal to cooperate left social services in the unenviable position of having no proper investigation evidence to base their conclusions on.

Also the paediatricians, acting true to form for consultants, failed to carry the nursing staff with them. The nurses were dealing with the children in sometimes nightmare conditions, with the doctors simply telling them to take more — no explanations, no joint approach. As one nurse said: "I think she (Higgs) shouldn't have

started something until she had the support. I believe what she is doing is right, but she didn't prepare the ground."

Any proper scientific analysis of the causes of child abuse cannot just look to the 'moral' failings of individuals or see the problem purely in 'personal' terms. Abuse is a social phenomena and requires action by society.

We can expect no action from the Tories. Tory ministers have lined up full square with Stuart Bell and the health authorities in denying that there is a serious problem and looking for scapegoats in Higgs and the social workers.

The Tories provided a measly £7m towards better training for social workers in abuse cases in 1987 — when most professionals in the field called for a minimum of £40m to extend social worker training to three years to increase skills in these extremely difficult cases. Now in London alone there are 400 vacant social worker posts and over 600 unallocated cases where there is evidence of some form of abuse against children.

Without properly staffed and trained social work departments, including staff who can spend time with families, centres for support for mothers and children and treatment centres for victims and abusers, no progress can be made.

After all, our main concern should not be to defend the good name of the 'family' as a social institution: or to defend the reputations of doctors or social and health workers. The main objective must be to protect children from abuse and prevent such abuse taking place.

There must be better procedures for place of safety orders, where the rights of parents are balanced against the need to protect the child. Campbell rightly calls for the removal of the perpetrator from the home rather than the victim. In the USA 70 per cent of abusing fathers leave; and therapy in the home is an alternative to taking children into care.

The dilemma between the rights of the child and parents is partly created by the bureaucratic nature of our welfare agencies: the health services, local authorities, the courts, the police, who are largely unaccountable to ordinary working people. The heart of the solution lies in more resources and training alongside the democratisation of all these bodies with elected and accountable administrators. □

When Salem Came To The Boro by Stuart Bell MP.
Pan Books £3.99.
Unofficial Secrets by Beatrix Campbell.
Virago £4.50.



Marietta Higgs.

Abuse is a social phenomena and requires action by society.

In experimental reactors, nuclear fusion has been produced at 100 million degrees, with the process (up until now) burning up far more energy than it produces. Create a fusion process at everyday temperatures, however, and the possibility of unlimited, cheap energy would be opened up. On 23 March, at a press conference in Utah, two prominent chemists, Martin Fleischmann of Southampton and Stanley Pons of Utah University, announced to the world that they had discovered a simple way of stimulating fusion at room temperature. Using this 'test-tube' method, a gallon of sea water could yield as much energy as 300,000 gallons of petrol, without atmospheric pollution or radioactive waste. This extraordinary claim immediately provoked world-wide controversy. Scientists criticised the use of a press conference, pre-empting the usual course of publishing results in a scientific journal, which involves the scrutiny of papers by other experts. More fundamentally, scientists challenged the validity of the claims made by Fleischmann and Pons. A few researchers claimed to have reproduced the Utah results, though some of these have since retracted their claims. Most nuclear researchers reported that they could not repeat the Utah results, and rejected the audacious theoretical solution offered by the Utah team. Commenting on the controversy, the *New Scientist* (6 May) summarised the experiment of Fleischmann and Pons. They had claimed 'that splitting heavy water, or deuterium oxide, by passing a current through platinum and palladium electrodes had produced such an enormity of

heat that a nuclear rather than a chemical process must be responsible.' The mechanism they proposed was that the electrical potential at the palladium cathode had forced deuterium ions from the heavy water into the crystal lattice of the palladium (the structure of bonds within the element palladium, which is similar to platinum). The confined conditions of the lattice were such as to cause deuterium nuclei to fuse.' Researchers at the British government's nuclear research laboratory at Harwell subjected the Utah results to careful checking, with more sensitive equipment than that available in Utah. Dr David Williams reported (*Sunday Times*, 7 May): 'We have spotted neither heat nor radiation.'

Fleischmann and Pons are sticking to their claim that their experiments produced four times more heat than they consumed. 'In bursts, the energy was much too large to be explained by chemical phenomenon.' (*Independent*, 10 May) Fleischmann admitted, however, that the evidence for fusion was only circumstantial. They had found no conclusive evidence of other possible by-products of a fusion reaction such as neutrons, helium, or tritium. 'I have always been ready to acknowledge that our experiments may be faulty,' said Fleischmann. Why, then, did he and Pons rush to publicise their untested results and speculative explanation? Behind the scientific controversy lie fierce professional rivalries, for instance between the Utah team and Steven Jones, a prominent fusion researcher at the nearby Brigham Young University. There is ruthless competition for multi-million
(continued on p23)

Cold fusion or hot air?

Pete Dickenson explains what nuclear fusion is.

Nuclear fusion has the potential to produce cheap, virtually limitless energy, while eliminating many of the dangers currently linked to nuclear power.

Fusion is the source of the energy of the sun and the stars. In the extremely hot cores of these bodies atoms of the lightest elements (hydrogen, helium, lithium, etc) join to form heavier elements. Some mass is lost in the process and released as energy. If the same process was harnessed in a fusion reactor boundless energy could be produced.

Research up to now has concentrated on fusion reactions using deuterium and tritium and the common metal lithium as being of the most practical interest. If all the deuterium in 1.5 cubic kilometres of sea water was used in a fusion reactor, the energy released could be equal to that in the world's recoverable crude oil. Since there are about one-and-a-half billion cubic kilometres of sea water, the rewards for the successful development of fusion power are huge.

There is a simple logic about the processes which would occur in a fusion reactor. When two deuterium atoms combine, they either form a helium atom and release energy or form one tritium atom and one ordinary hydrogen atom, also releasing energy. The tritium in turn combines with deuterium, again forming an isotope of helium and releasing energy. (Deuterium and tritium

Science Notes

are isotopes, or particular forms, of hydrogen, with slightly different masses and other properties). If lithium is introduced, it is broken down into helium and tritium (a process of nuclear fission) with a release of energy and the tritium fuses with deuterium. All the radioactive components are thus consumed and the final products of the whole reaction are helium, hydrogen and huge amounts of energy.

However, as there is a neutron release during the reaction, the containment vessel and exposed equipment would become radioactive, though probably not to the same extent as in a fission reactor.

Its logical simplicity does not mean that the process is easy to achieve in practice. Fusion can occur only between the nuclei of atoms which are brought into contact with sufficient energy to overcome the extremely high forces with which they repel each other. Such conditions can be created at a temperature of 100 million degrees.

At this temperature substances are not only gaseous, but they exist in a state in which their atoms have been stripped of their electrons. This high energy condition of dissociated nuclei and free electrons which is found in the sun is called a plasma.

Such a plasma cannot be kept in a material container, as it would instantly vapourise the vessel. The only way yet devised of holding a fusion plasma is by containing it within a matrix of very strong magnetic forces. The problems of holding the plasma stable at the correct temperature and extracting energy from it have yet to be solved.

Scientists in the USSR made a significant breakthrough in 1969. They were using a toroidal, or ring shaped machine within which the plasma is confined by magnetic forces, called a Tokomak. Experiments revealed higher temperatures and greater

plasma stability than had been achieved before. The Tokomak approach was adopted by other researchers, it now represents the main line of fusion research. The Joint European Torus (JET) was opened at Culham in the UK in 1983, and a further large Tokomak (JT-60) has been built in Japan. One measure of the progress in fusion research is called the Lawson Product or Lawson Criterion. This computes the relationship between temperature, containment time, and plasma density. These three factors control the problem of containing the plasma in such a condition that it will yield more energy than it requires to raise the temperature (to 100 million degrees) and confine it (within powerful magnetic fields). Experiments to date have given a Lawson Product of only one-tenth of that required for a positive energy yield. If a Tokomak achieves a plasma which satisfies the Lawson Criterion, this will have proved that a fusion power station is practical in principle. In a power generating fusion reactor the neutrons emitted in the reaction would be captured in a blanket surrounding the plasma. Heat from the blanket would be used to raise steam to drive generating turbines. An alternative approach to nuclear fusion emerged in the 1970s. This relied on the focussing of laser beams on tiny pellets of deuterium and tritium in such a way that they are compressed and heated sufficiently for the fusion reaction to occur. The peak rate of power production in laser fusion power plant will be a billion billion watts. This rate is one million times greater than all man made machinery put together and is about 10 times greater than the total radiant power of the sun falling on earth. The technological challenge of laser fusion is to wrap a power plant around micro explosions of these astronomically large peak powers. But con-



Fleischmann and Pons.

structing such a device would require solutions to a whole range of technological problems. The fuel supply for fusion reactors can be regarded as cheap and plentiful, as both deuterium and lithium can be collected from the oceans.

The problems to be solved to make economical fusion possible are not fundamentally scientific but technical. There was great confidence and hope for the development of fusion power in the 1950s and 1960s when capitalism was expanding and self-confident. But since then capitalism has not seriously attempted to harness fusion power. It will not put the resources into this area when coal, gas, and oil are still available and fission power can be used when fossil fuels run out. They are prepared to ignore the dangers of nuclear fission power shown by Chernobyl. Fusion is inherently 'cleaner' than fission because no waste nuclear fuel is left at the end of the reaction. Nevertheless, the power plant itself would be radioactive in a fusion reactor. More research needs to be done to determine the extent of this risk. Neither capitalism nor Stalinism, in a period of social crisis, can be trusted to carry out balanced research into the possibilities and risks of fusion research. They prefer to rely on nuclear fission, regardless of the risks, particularly the long-term dangers of radioactive contamination and waste. Socialists must fight for safe energy production, while making it clear that the harmonious development of energy resources, possibly including fusion energy, will take place only in a socialist society.

(continued from p22)

dollar government research contracts and big business sponsorship. The observation of the writer Goethe, made at the beginning of the capitalist era, has lost none of its bite: 'Questions of science are very frequently career questions. A single discovery may make a

man famous and lay the foundations of his fortune as a citizen... Every newly observed phenomenon is a discovery; every discovery is property. Touch a man's property and his passions are immediately aroused.' (*Conversations with Eckerman*, 1823).



Review article

The Unbroken Thread

Forty years of Marxism



(Photo above)
Ted Grant
(left) and
Jimmy Deane
during the
1945 Neath
by-election.

The aftermath of the second world war threw the international leaders who claimed the legacy of Trotsky into confusion and disarray.

Stalinism emerged from the war strengthened, and through the might of the Red Army new Stalinist regimes were established in Eastern Europe. This extension of Stalinism demanded the further elaboration of the Marxist theory of the state and Trotsky's theory of proletarian bonapartism. In China, the long peasant-based struggle of the Red Army resulted in the formation of another Stalinist-type regime under Mao Zedong. Later, conflicts developed between the national bureaucracies, with a Yugoslav-Russian rift and especially the Sino-Soviet split.

The political consolidation of capitalism in Western Europe and Japan laid the foundations of the phenomenal economic upswing of the post-war period. The working class was immeasurably strengthened by the long boom, but apart from important episodic struggles, was crippled by the lack of a conscious political leadership. To prepare for new mass movements, particularly under conditions of a historic set-back for Trotskyism, Marxism had to grasp the real nature of the capitalist upswing and the new characteristics of the mass organisations of the labour movement. Incapable of understanding these new social trends and class relationships internationally, the would-be leaders who claimed the title of Trotsky's Fourth International manoeuvred themselves into sectarian isolation. Losing their theoretical bearings, they succumbed to the same social pressures which led to the degeneration of the Stalinist and reformist leaders. Alone of the pre-1945 representatives of Trotskyism, Ted Grant was able to apply Trotsky's theoretical principles and methods to the new phenomena

of the post-war world.

In spite of the intense pressures of isolation, and despite the political hostility and often malicious attacks of the opponents of genuine Marxism, Ted Grant tenaciously formulated the ideas and perspectives around which fresh forces of Trotskyism could be assembled.

These ideas represent the vital link between the real ideas of 1917, Trotsky's International Left Opposition, and today's Marxists, which is why this selection of Ted Grant's writings can justly be republished under the title of *The Unbroken Thread*. The collection, which appears on 13 June, is being published by Fortress Books, and is edited and introduced by John Pickard. Here we present an excerpt from his introduction, which records Ted Grant's own political development.

John Pickard writes:

Ted Grant was born in Germiston, near Johannesburg in South Africa. At the age of eleven, he was introduced to the writings of Bernard Shaw, HG Wells, Maxim Gorky, Jack London and others by Ralph Lee, a member of the Communist Party and a friend of the family. Within a short time, the reading material graduated on to the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, so that by the time he was fifteen, Ted Grant was a confirmed Marxist.

His association with Trotskyist ideas began with the critique that Trotsky made of the Fifth Congress of the Communist International. By a bureaucratic oversight, much regretted by the Stalinists later, Trotsky's criticisms were circulated to delegates. Some American Communists smuggled copies out after the Congress and began to organise the distribution of Trotsky's writings, using, among other means, the paper they founded, *Militant*.

**Ted Grant
provides
the vital
link
between
Trotsky's
ideas and
Marxism
today.**

'I think it was in 1928 or 1929', Ted Grant recalls, 'when the American *Militant* was sent to radical bookshops in a number of different parts of the world, and a few were sent to Johannesburg. They published all Trotsky's criticisms of Stalinism, including his analysis of the aborted revolution in China in 1925-27. We used to wait eagerly for the arrival of each new batch of papers. We read them avidly from cover to cover, especially the writing of Trotsky himself. These contributions made an enormous difference to our understanding.'

Within a few years, Ralph Lee was expelled from the Communist Party and he, Grant and another supporter, Murray Gow Purdy, formed the Workers' International League in South Africa. They regarded themselves as a left opposition to the Stalinist leadership within the Communist Party, as did all the newly-formed Trotskyist groups throughout the world. The WIL around this time organised a strike of black laundry workers in Johannesburg.

In this period, however, the black proletariat was far smaller, with less social weight, in comparison to the situation that developed after the war. It was understandable, therefore, that South African Trotskyists should have looked for inspiration to the many-millioned working class movement in Europe, with its mightier organisations and longer traditions. Not long after Hitler came to power in Germany, in mid-1933, Ted Grant left South Africa, as he put it, for 'broader horizons' in Europe.

The small South African group had already corresponded with the Trotskyist movement in Britain, regularly receiving *Red Flag*, its newspaper. Travelling with another supporter of Trotsky, Sid Frost, Ted Grant went by boat, first to France, then on to London. While they stayed in Paris for a week or two, they met and discussed with Leon Sedov, Trotsky's son and a key organiser of the international Trotskyist movement.

In Britain, Ted Grant joined the Independent Labour Party, but only briefly, and then the Labour League of Youth, the youth section of the Labour Party. With other Young Socialists, he was very prominent in the day-to-day struggles against the Mosleyite blackshirts, including the famous battle of Cable Street.

In 1938, Ralph Lee also came to Britain, and with Ted Grant and others formed a Trotskyist group, once again calling it the Workers' International League. Lee was a talented speaker and writer, but within two years returned to South Africa, largely for personal reasons. The continuity of Ted Grant's own political work was saved around this time by 'good fortune': called up in 1940 to serve in the Pioneer Corps, he unfortunately suffered a fractured skull in an accident, and was invalided out of the Forces, without ever having donned the

khaki.

The Workers' International League was a marked success in wartime conditions, its theoretical leadership mainly the work of Ted Grant. By 1944, the WIL took over the remnant of the Revolutionary Socialist League, another smaller group, to form the Revolutionary Communist Party. The RCP continued the success, especially in the recruitment of industrial militants. So much so that the War Cabinet was supplied with a secret memo from the Labour Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, outlining the policies of the RCP, and giving brief biographies of its leaders, including Ted Grant. Although it was not carried through in the end, it is clear that the capitalist class was seriously considering banning the RCP.

Unfortunately, the marvellous momentum of the wartime work was not reflected in the fortunes of the RCP afterwards. This is not the place to give a history of British Trotskyism, but without going into all the background and the causes, it is enough to know that the RCP broke up in 1949-50. Suffice to say that this was in large measure due to bureaucratic interference and outright manoeuvres by the leadership of the Fourth International, of which the RCP was a part.

After the RCP disintegrated, Grant continued to put forward a Marxist view in a variety of journals and magazines. He was editor of the *International Socialist*, a theoretical magazine, and later editor of the paper, *Socialist Fight*. 'When that was coming out duplicated,' he recalls, 'I was doing most of the work for it myself. I wrote most of it. I typed it once, proof-read it and typed it again to justify it (i.e. to adjust the type to fit evenly between the margins). I even had a hand in working the duplicator from time to time.'

In 1964, he was one of the founders of the newspaper *Militant*, still going strong, twenty-five years later, as 'the Marxist voice for Labour and Youth'. As political editor of the *Militant* he has written regularly on all major political questions, as well as contributing to *Militant International Review*, writing pamphlets and documents, and giving countless speeches and lectures. Because of the growth in support for the paper, the leadership of the Labour party began to expel its supporters, beginning with the editorial board, in 1983. After having rejoined the Labour party in 1950, with 33 years continuous membership, Ted Grant was expelled. But to expel the 'head' of a movement is not to expel the movement itself. The political work of half a century cannot be erased by a flash of the block vote. The fruits of 50 years work, of an unrivalled contribution to socialist theory are there to be seen; in the development of a Marxist tendency deeply rooted in and inseparable from the labour movement.

**An
 unrivalled
 contribution
 to socialist
 theory.**

Book Reviews

Uprooting Poverty — The South African Challenge

**By Francis Wilson and
Mamphela Ramphele**

*Published by WW Norton,
1989, £18.95.*

**Reviewed by David
Johnson**

"One of the clearest images of the nature of poverty in the country is the sight of a group of elderly black women each carrying home on her head a load of firewood weighing up to 50kg, passing underneath the high tension cables that carry the electric energy between the towns and farmsteads of the Republic". South Africa produces 60 per cent of the electricity generated in the African continent but if you are an African in South Africa there is a four to one chance that where you live has no electricity.

In the luxurious suburbs of white South Africa there are 18 people to every swimming pool. In the Mhala district of Gazankulu, in the Eastern Transvaal, there are 760 people to every water tap.

These facts come from the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa. Its findings were collected and written up by two academics from the University of Cape

Town, Francis Wilson, a professor of economics, and Dr Mamphela Ramphele, a senior research officer, in their book.

Wilson and Ramphele's book is an awesome indictment of the politics of apartheid and its human costs. South Africa is a colossus of misery: even its cabinet ministers' boast that 'their' blacks have the best living standards in all Africa is no longer true. The infant mortality rate for African children in South Africa is 94-124 per thousand births: considerably worse than the national average in Botswana (72), Zimbabwe and Kenya (76), Congo (77), Tunisia (78), Algeria (81) and Zambia (84).

Poverty in South Africa has clear racial and geographical dimensions. The darker your skin the poorer you are likely to be and in general that poverty increases with distance from the main cities. Whites constitute less than one sixth of the population but earn two thirds of the income, whilst Africans who make up nearly three quarters of the people earn just one quarter of the income.

Mrs Cornelius lives in Calitzdorp, a small agricultural town about one third of the way up the railway line from Cape Town to Johannesburg. She is a widow receiving an old age pension of 83 rands per month (4 rands = £1 approximately). She lives

with her daughter and six grandchildren and is the sole breadwinner. After rent, electricity and water are paid for, each member of the household has a disposable income of seven rands per month for food and household expenses. According to the South African Tourist Board in London seven rands would purchase a Coca Cola and an evening at the cinema in Central Johannesburg.

In the rural reserves of the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei and Venda, which in Kafkaesque terms the South African government have declared 'independent' states, the spectre of starvation haunts everyone. The number in destitution there has grown six-fold since 1960. Between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of the residents of the Transkei never eat meat, milk, eggs or fish. In the Ciskei researchers found "an emaciated old woman confused from her hunger crying out again and again 'I am hungry, I am hungry'." They saw an old man "bludgeoned by poverty into... vacant apathy, alive only because he was not dead; who only said, when asked what was wrong, 'I am hungry'."

The authors argue that the scaffolding used to create this skyscraper of tears has three key elements in its framework: colonialism which dispossessed the indigenous inhabitants of their land; ruthless exploitation of labour through the migrant labour system; and a state machine which brutally suppresses any revolt against these injustices.

The 1913 Land Act restricted black ownership of land to 14 per cent of the surface area of South Africa. 50,000 white farmers now own 14 times as much land as 10 million rural Africans.

The migrant labour system, first developed on the gold and diamond mines, enforces cheap labour. Migrants live away from their families for 11 months of the year in all male hostel compounds. There are at least two million migrant workers out of the five million black workers in the South African economy.

Their lives have been ruthlessly exploited for generation after generation particularly through the hated pass law system, enforced in detail until 1986. Then the pass laws were formally abolished. But from the time when official records began in 1916 to 1986



17 million people were prosecuted for being somewhere without official permission. As the authors note: "This means that one person was arrested every two minutes, day and night, for the entire period from the year before the Russian Revolution until the time of President Reagan's second term of office."

Poverty is a profoundly political issue. South Africa produces more than half of the world's gold and 70 per cent of its platinum. Yet over one third of its black children live in the grip of dire

malnutrition. As Wilson and Ramphela say, "an essential prerequisite for uprooting poverty in South Africa is a redistribution of political power."

But while they gather hope from the blossoming of self-help schemes at a local level for health care, literacy and community development, they are not ivory tower academics: theirs is a masterful presentation of reality. They acknowledge that all the efforts of literacy groups in South Africa in 1980 could only help 25,000 people out of an estimated six

million illiterates.

More pertinent is the quote Wilson and Ramphela draw from Frantz Fanon and his book on the Algerian revolution, *The Wretched of the Earth*: "What counts today, the question which is looming on the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity must reply to this question or be shaken to pieces by it".

This book shows South Africa to be a political time bomb. And the time bomb is ticking.

When the music's over — the story of political pop

by **Robin Denselow**,
published by **Faber and
Faber** at **£14.95**

**Reviewed by
Ken Smith**

The relationship between pop music and politics has always been slightly ambivalent and often misrepresented. The dilemma is quite graphically seen in Robin Denselow's book. The question of how political is pop music, provokes controversy between people who may agree on everything else.

Denselow gives a much clearer insight into this question and shows also how much of the anger and energy of political youth is diverted through pop. Being aimed at youth, pop articulates the fears and aspirations of each generation. One line in a song can unleash a whole torrent of emotions. As Country Joe McDonald says in the book, "pop music is a blank wall on which anything can be written (and probably will)."

Denselow charts the rise of political pop in its broadest form. Original popular music, the folk music of Woody Guthrie and later Pete Seeger, along with rhythm and blues, had an overtly political following. Pop music represents rather than sets the trends of any period. So few artists start off as political but many of them become politicised in reflecting the views of their generation. In the 1960s and early 1970s pop protest took the form of anti-Vietnam and civil rights marches, mainly in Amer-

ica. And, as Denselow shows, from its earliest days, black pop music had to tackle the question of racism.

Denselow shows how successful the mixture of politics and pop can be and also how limited it can be because of the pressure of big business. In the early days of pop many groups were black-listed in the USA because of their politics. Even the relatively innocuous song *If I had a hammer* was banned from radio stations because it was written by Pete Seeger.

Denselow portrays political pop as very naive and mainly single issue. In the 1980s, however, it started to grapple with the problems of a capitalist society, albeit unconsciously. Some stars like Paul Weller moved consciously to the left, in 1985 criticising the Labour party for 'its lack of revolutionary policies.'

Denselow outlines the development of Red Wedge and how the Labour party leadership attempted to use it to try and undercut the influence of the Labour Party Young Socialists and the Youth Trades Union Rights Campaign (YTURC). Denselow credits YTURC with forming the embryo that was to become Red Wedge.

He describes the YTURC demonstration in February 1985 as 'significant' pointing out that it 'attracted a remarkable number of celebrity signatures — apart from Weller and Bragg there was Madness, Alison Moyet and even the best selling sensation of the moment, Frankie Goes To Hollywood. 'Time to storm the Winter Palace,' said Bragg, as his group headed up Downing Street to present the petition at No 10. It wasn't exactly a dramatic ges-



**Billy Bragg
and Neil
Kinnock
launching
'Jobs for
Youth Tour'
in 1985.**

ture but it was included in that evening's television news bulletins."

Unfortunately, as Red Wedge developed, YTURC, far from getting the credit, was sidelined after pressure from Labour's leaders. "At a meeting on 23 October, a Labour Party official told the group (Red Wedge) that Neil Kinnock wouldn't attend the group's official media launch if a member of the YTURC was there (when in fact at least one member of YTURC has been at most Wedge functions)."

Worse was the dilemma that some Red Wedge members felt when they did a show as part of the Red Wedge tour in Liverpool. "The council (facing surcharges-KS) couldn't turn to their party to help, because Neil Kinnock not only disapproved, but was involved in a battle to rid the party of members of *Militant*, to which several councillors allegedly belonged... many of the more left wing Wedgers supported the Liverpool case, but as they were coming to town to urge their audience to become involved with the central Labour party, their position was not easy." Red Wedge had to moderate its politics to suit Walworth Road which eventually was to limit its effectiveness.

*For Labour and
Women; a history of
the League of Women
1906-18*

by Christine Collette.
*Published by Manchester
University Press at £29.95*

**Reviewed by a
member of the
National Committee of
Labour Women**

The Women's Labour League (WLL), the forerunner of the present Labour Women's organisation, was set up in 1906 to support Labour's representation. It was open to women and wives and daughters of members of societies affiliated to the Labour party. Christine Collette's book is a history from its inauguration until it merged with the Labour party in 1918.

Collette regards this pre-war period as a special period of separate women's organisation superior to today's movement. But completely separate organisations emerged at that time not out of choice but because the structures of the labour and trade union movement did not allow women to become members. Women were refused entry to many craft unions and were forced to form their own unions which were not part of the Labour Representation Committee.

These attitudes were transformed after the First World War and probably the best part of the book deals with this period. Unfortunately Collette wrongly concludes that it was a step backwards for the WLL to merge with the Labour party, for this was precisely a time when increased class consciousness and unity were in the air. One delegate to the 1914 WLL conference, Ada Salter, reported its mood: "They noted all over the world signs of the change that was coming and women of the working classes have taken the foremost place in it. A tremendous transformation was going to take place on this earth; and the injustices of the ages, the misery of the oppressed classes and the sorrow of the poor and tyranny of the wealthy were going to be swept away forever. Nothing could stop the movement. When the trades movement fully realised that all

workers, men and women, youths and maidens, were members one of another, then they would hear more than the rumble of revolution in the distance; the revolution would be here."

That conference voted against arms expenditure, conscription and in favour of international action against war. In 1916 the WLL motion to Labour party conference opposed military service and called for agitation against it. The WLL participated in conferences in support of the Russian revolution and intended to send a delegation to the Petrograd Soviet but was refused passports by the government.

The end of the war and the impact of revolutionary movements internationally produced a shift towards socialist ideas. Women's issues did not become secondary but were integrally linked to the class struggle. The conversion of the WLL into a section of the Labour party was seen by most women as a welcome recognition of their place in the labour movement.

Collette concentrates on the WLL leaders who were mostly middle-class. She describes their individual, personal and sometimes political conflicts but gives less detail of local branch activity where working-class women predominated. Individual branches campaigned on infant mortality, producing leaflets refuting the idea that working mothers were

to blame for undernourished sick children. Funds were raised to set up a WLL baby clinic.

Many local WLL branches supported women trade unionists and raised funds for strikers. The biggest campaign was on school meals, urging local authorities to adopt the Education (provision of Meals) Act of 1906. By 1912 131 out of 322 authorities provided meals for school children. In Bradford the district auditor surcharged the council for providing meals in school holidays which exceeded the product of the halfpenny rate. Unfortunately, much of this rich history for women's struggles goes unwritten by Collette who tends to rely on national Labour party records rather than local source material. Now the Labour Women's organisation is in danger of being abandoned by women in the Labour Party who have been taken in by the NEC's offer of 40 per cent quotas for women. A history of the WLL could have been used as a weapon to defend a Labour women's organisation which really represents working-class women, not a mere structure to be tossed aside in exchange for a few more women in leadership positions. Collette's book has some useful information, but it is not a living document of working-class struggles and at £29.95 is not likely to be read by many working-class women or men.

*An injury to all –
the decline of
American unionism*
by Kim Moody.

*Published by Verso at
£9.95*

**Reviewed by
Bill Hopwood**

In *An injury to all*, Kim Moody chronicles and examines the decline in the portion of American workers organised into unions. Undoubtedly, many workers worldwide think that the USA is different from other industrialised countries. Below 20 per cent of the workforce is organised and it is the only developed capitalist country without a mass party based on the working class. It seems, superficially, that American workers are different.

However, beneath the surface, the labour movement has a powerful and militant tradition. After World War II there were 15 million workers organised into unions – 35 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce. This had been achieved by heroic struggles of millions of workers organising in industries like motor vehicles, steel, chemicals, mining and textiles. In a movement that convulsed America, new unions were built and a new structure – the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) – formed.

In spite of the crucial role of militants in these battles, the union leadership remained with those who accepted the rule of capitalism. They believed in 'business unionism' – a philosophy based on the view that what was good for business was good for the workers.

In the long years of the post-war boom it seemed that business unionism was a success. Organised workers won high pay levels – probably the highest in the world – and many other rights such as pensions, lay-off pay and health insurance. Union membership grew by seven million to reach 22 million by 1975, although the percentage of workers unionised had fallen to 29 per cent.

On the surface there was a stable relationship with employers accepting the unions while the unions backed big business at home and abroad. But with a new crisis in US and world capitalism which began in the mid-1970s this cosy relationship ended. Everything changed as big business began a major attack on the unions for which the leadership was totally unprepared.

The onslaught of the last 15 years was made easier by a lack of a party of Labour. In other industrialised countries the capitalists proceeded with caution as any head-on clash with workers could push them into political as well as industrial means to fight back.

Big business used many tactics, including unemployment, union busting and relocation of factories to weaken union power. The union leaders relied on the legal process through ballots to win recognition rather than industrial power, which the employers were able to frustrate through complex delaying and blocking tactics. They even used ballots to decertify unions. Rather than fight the employers, the union tops offered concessions, forcing their members to accept job and pay cuts to keep union contracts.

The decisive reason for the absolute decline in union membership to 17 million and as a share to 18 per cent was the leadership's refusal to use their organised power.

In the last decade companies have moved to new regions in the USA, while manufacturing jobs have declined, even in the economic upturn since 1982. The new service jobs have low union membership – only seven per cent of the 45 million workers in wholesale, retail, financial services are unionised.

This decline is not because unions are unpopular. In opinion polls 60 per cent approved of



unions and 53 per cent of non-union service workers wanted unionisation. This is no surprise as unionised workers continue to enjoy 30 per cent better pay on average.

However, to build unions in the face of determined employer resistance, takes more than opinion polls. It requires the same energetic mass action that characterised the battles of the 1930s. Yet the union leaders spend less per unorganised workers on recruitment that they did in the 1950s and 1960s.

Kim Moody provides many examples of workers fighting back against the twin obstacles of big business and a conservative bureaucratic leadership. But he has illusions in other, less effective, methods of struggle than industrial action. He believes in consumer boycotts, public lobbying, leafletting and publicity aimed at suppliers, customers and bankers of employers in disputes. But these tactics can only be a useful auxiliary but never an alternative to union organisation and industrial action.

The reality is that despite the policies of its leaders, unions are not in terminal decline. In key industrial states of California, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio and Michigan where 40 per cent of the American people live, there is 30 per cent union membership. This is a powerful force. And the 17 million membership overall is still higher than in the 1930s where in during the Great Depression it fell as low as three million. The traditions of American workers are for militant struggle and explosive union action. In the years after 1933 in



American Unions in political action over prices in 1983.

Car workers demonstrate on health care.

the face of brutal repression, through mass strike waves, sit-down occupations and regional general strikes, workers built up organised labour. All the forces exist today for a similar transformation. Most workers are discontented after a decade of declining real incomes. Women, now a major part of the workforce, are a major growth area for unionisation, as are black and latino minorities who make up 20 per cent of the population.

Rather than being in decline, for organised labour the best days are yet to come. □

Letters

Have you a comment about this issue of *MIR*? Let's hear from you.

Dear Comrades,

The recent murder of 'Chico' Mendes, the leader of the Amazon rubber tappers union, by right-wing landlords has highlighted even more the plight of the rainforests. Mendes was murdered because he led a fight against their wanton destruction for profit.

An area roughly the size of Belgium is destroyed every year as huge multinationals cut down millions of acres for timber, cash crops, minerals, or cheap cattle raising for hamburger chains like McDonalds. This is the anarchy of capitalist 'development' and a crime against the future.

It is unbalancing the delicate scales of nature with potentially catastrophic results for the whole planet. The burning of tropical forests and fossil fuels is contributing to the 'greenhouse' effect which is raising global temperatures high enough to melt polar icecaps and threaten to flood major food producing areas.

Chico Mendes had seen this direct link between poverty



The funeral of 'Chico' Mendes.

for local people and ecological destruction. Only the labour movement has the power to defeat the destructive role of capitalism and 'save the environment'. It is an international problem that requires an international solution provided by the labour movement.

The Labour Party and the TUC should show the way

forward by calling a conference on the environment to draw up a labour movement plan of action, and show that ecology is linked indissolubly with the socialist transformation of society. Chico Mendes showed the way, other must follow.

**Yours, Guy Baker
Walthamstow, London**

Dear Comrades,

I found the brilliant analysis of British society in the article *Can Labour Win?* in *MIR* Spring 1989 very relevant when dealing with the latently explosive conditions in the 'soft' South of England.

I was unable to attend the anti-poll tax demo in Glasgow last March. That day I was in the butcher's when the national anthem was being played on the radio before

the Wales-England rugby match. One of the women in the shop burst out that she would never stand for the anthem because all the Royal family and the government did was take money away from her. On the same day, one of my workmates told me that one of the worst things the IRA did was miss Thatcher when they tried to blow her hotel up in Brighton, although I don't

support it.

The majority of workers and their families in the South hate Thatcher but they see no alternative in the Labour Party because it does nothing. But if we get involved in campaigns on the poll tax and other issues, the base for socialist ideas can grow here as well as in other parts of the country.

**Yours, Jimmy Haddow
Ramsgate, Kent**

Dear Comrades,

I was sad to see that Alan Woods' series of articles on the history of Bolshevism has ended, to be continued in a book. While I understand that with the launch of Fortress Books, there is no longer any need to serialise longer articles in the *MIR*, I feel that

they can still play a role.

Firstly, they provide continuity. Many readers look forward to the next copy of *MIR* partly to read the next episode of the history of Bolshevism. I am sure that this has helped sales.

Secondly, and most importantly, being short of

time, most of my reading comes from papers, magazines and pamphlets. Had Alan Woods' series appeared simply as a book then more than likely it would still be unread on the bookshelf.

**Yours, Russell Dawson
Newcastle-upon-Tyne**

Comment

Salman Rushdie is in hiding. But he is in good company. Some of the most illustrious authors in world literature have been condemned by religious hierarchs. The philosophers of the French enlightenment, Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot, who subjected religion to rational criticism, all suffered censorship and persecution.

Charges of blasphemy were often linked with allegations of lewdness, as with *Satanic Verses*. Appearance on the notorious Index, or any list of prohibited books, is no guarantee of literary merit, nor of correctness. But that is not the issue. Freedom of speech, including freedom of literary publication, is a fundamental democratic right. Voltaire's aphorism is justly famous: 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.'

In the 18th and 19th Centuries the radical representatives of the bourgeoisie fought the absolute monarchs, the church, and feudal oligarchies for freedom of expression. In reality, however, bourgeois-democratic rights — freedom of speech and assembly, the right to vote — were secured only by the struggle of the working class, along with the crucial right to strike and form political organisations. Today, these rights are threatened by the power of capital and the bourgeois state. Their defence rests on the labour movement.

Yet in response to the denunciations of Islamic leaders and Khomeini's death threat, some Labour MPs like Max Madden have called on Rushdie and his publishers to withdraw *Satanic Verses*. Others like Jack Straw have even called for the broadening of Britain's archaic blasphemy laws to make it an offence to outrage Islamic as well as Christian dogmas. This smacks of the panicky counting of votes. How on earth could a 'voluntary' ban (in the face of death threats) or tougher blasphemy laws protect the rights or interests of British Asians?

Under the headline 'Labour must repay the loyalty which the Muslim community has shown' (*Tribune* 7 April 1989), Max Madden tried to make a case. "Why," he asks, "is the Labour Party so hooked on Rushdie's freedom of speech to insult Muslims but so uncaring of Muslim distress?" This echoes the general secretary of the Bradford Council of Mosques: "Equality of justice is our right. We are told that one man has the right to write a book, but no one talks about the rights and sentiments of thousands of Muslims in Britain."

But this equation is false. The right to follow a religion, which the labour movement must defend, is not the same thing at all as the right to censor literature on religious grounds. It is not just 'Rushdie's freedom of speech' which we are 'hooked on', but freedom of speech in general. Blasphemy laws are incompatible with democracy. In reality, they are incompatible with religious freedom, as a little thought will show.

Presumably, a 'multi-racial' blasphemy law would have to protect Christian doctrine, Islamic faith, Jewish beliefs, and Hinduism.

And why should Buddhists, Jehova's Witnesses, Shintoists, and other minority cults be denied protection? But there's the rub. One congregation's divine truth is another's Satanic falsehood. How could

they all be protected against heresy or theological denigration — simultaneously?

But "their (British Muslims') taxes were spent in suppressing *Spycatcher*", says Max Madden, raising another of the Muslim leaders' arguments. Unconsciously, he stumbles onto a vital point. Censorship on religious grounds has always been linked to political censorship. In the eyes of the rich and powerful, blasphemy has always been associated with subversion. No doubt Max Madden opposed the suppression of *Spycatcher*. But Muslim leaders who use this argument do not challenge the Tories' exercise of state prerogative to suppress the book.

In Iran it is not possible to publish books or newspapers which oppose the government. Tens of thousands who opposed Khomeini have been tortured and executed. Nor is there unrestricted freedom to publish in Pakistan. In India, there is a long list of books banned on religious, political and 'security' grounds.

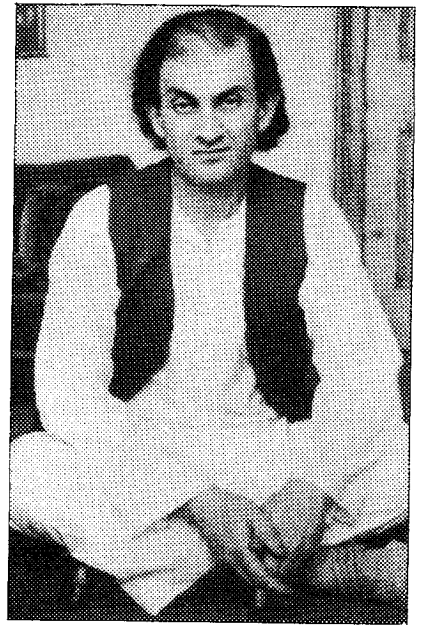
Perhaps different considerations should apply in Britain? British Muslims "feel under communal siege," writes Max Madden. "They look back with anger over the Thatcher years. They are scarred by unemployment, poverty, and discrimination of all types. They see the rubble of their discarded and eroded civil rights."

True. Workers generally have suffered eroded living standards and a loss of rights under Thatcher. Black and Asian workers, among the most exploited workers of all, have especially suffered. But how will the suppression of a 'blasphemous' novel help them?

British Muslims "are entitled to political representation" from the Labour Party, says Max Madden. "If such representation is not forthcoming, it could be very damaging for the Party."

Again, true. But what kind of 'representation'?

The labour movement must organise the defence of the black and Asian community against racist attacks. It must fight discrimination. That means fighting for jobs, a living wage, and decent homes for black workers. Above all, it means fighting for socialist policies to root out the atrocious conditions in which racism breeds. Labour's failure to 'represent' them on these basic issues has led to a bitter disillusionment among many black and Asian workers. Various community organisations, run by the highly-paid professionals of the race relations 'industry', have also failed them.



Salman
Rushdie.

Blasphemy a burning issue?



**'Whenever
books are
burnt, men
also, in
the end,
are burnt.'
Heinrich
Heine**

Unable to see a way forward, some Asian workers and youth have turned back to Islam to search for answers. In contrast to the shifty double-talk of politicians, Islamic fundamentalism may appear to offer reassuring certainties. Instead of passive suffering, it may seem to promise radical action.

Radical currents in Christianity (and other religions too) have often played a similar role among oppressed peoples and classes. But from the stand-point of socialism, what have the mullahs and the imams to offer? On social issues, such as the position of women, education, and the exploitation of Asian workers, the leaders of the mosques in Britain can only be described as reactionary.

As in other European countries, the Islamic leaders in Britain welcome the growth of fundamentalism. New additions to the Islamic community had been reduced to a trickle by diminished opportunities and racist immigration laws (to which Labour governments contributed). The second generation, born in Britain, had begun to adapt to a different society.

The reassertion of fundamentalism allows the Islamic leaders to reassert their control, to combat the growing loss of belief and submissiveness within their communities. When *Satanic Verses* appeared, they seized the opportunity to step up their campaign for separate schools, single-sex teaching, the avoidance of mixed bathing and sex-education, and so on.

The labour movement must defend the interests of Asian workers. But it is not for Labour "to express their anger and resentment at their anguish over *Satanic Verses*." Blasphemy is an issue for religious people, not the labour movement. The labour movement must uphold the rights of all sections of society. This includes the right of people to practise the religion of their choice. But religion is a private matter. The intervention of the state inevitably favours some religious groups and infringes the freedom of others.

Religious freedom also means the right to reject religion altogether. Whether in an Islamic or a Christian

community, children must have access to an education unfettered by religious dogma, the right to question and criticise traditional beliefs, and to adopt ideas of their own. "The Labour Party must come off its secular fence," says Max Madden. But since when has it been the task of socialists to uphold the authority of Ayatollahs and Imams, any more than the authority of priests and bishops?

Max Madden does not support book burning. But his call for the publishers to "stop printing further new editions of the book" is far from being 'a sensible compromise.' It would not stop there. The imams would demand the censorship of other 'blasphemous' books, films, television programmes, and so on.

Already, the book-burning has provoked a reaction. "Our religion is not written on our faces", commented one black

leader in Bradford. "I'm not blaming the Muslims but unfortunately the entire episode will be used by right-wing racists to have a go at black people - Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs... anybody." Only hours after a demonstration in Bradford against Rushdie, the premises of the Council of Mosques was vandalised. Later, an arsonist was arrested trying to attack London's Regent Park mosque with a petrol bomb. Needless to say, those responsible were not acting out of concern for Rushdie's freedom of speech.

The path of the Islamic leaders leads to a dead end, to a beleaguered ghetto. Perhaps the imams imagine that, under a state of Islamic siege, they will have more power within their community. But for their disciples, it will not produce jobs and decent houses, proper health services and education.

Whatever the religious inspiration, in the material world it offers no hope. Worst of all, a turn towards an Islamic ghetto would divide Islamic from non-Islamic Asians, black workers from white workers.

Max Madden wants to return to the "urgent task of electing a Labour government, enjoying the full support of all Britain's ethnic minorities and fully committed to the removal of all discrimination." We all agree. But this aim will not be achieved by short-sighted concessions to the Ayatollah Khomeini or the Bradford imams. No, we must fight to unite all workers, regardless of their religion, around socialist ideas. □

Lynn Walsh

Ted Grant

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