

Militant

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After Walton

Marxism and the
Labour Party

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Should the Broad Left have stood in Walton? Can the Labour Party be reclaimed for socialism? Clive Heemskerk examines the arguments.



Mike Waddington reviews the highlights of the anti-poll tax struggle to date. Louise James looks at the tasks for the campaign now.

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After Walton — Marxism and the Labour Party



Real Labour candidate, Lesley Mahmood.

FROM THE VANTAGE point of the future, the Walton by-election will come to be seen as a significant turning point in the development of the labour movement in Britain. For the ruling class and the reformist Labour leaders it appears, on the electoral field at least, that Marxism has fallen at the first hurdle. The favourite epithet used to describe the 2,600 votes gained in the campaign was 'derisory', followed by variations on the theme that '*Militant* is dead'.

But behind these forced celebrations of *Militant's* 'demise' lay a nagging fear that the ideas of Marxism championed in the Walton campaign were finding an echo amongst the most combative elements of the working class. As *The Guardian* recorded, "the explosive mixture of Liverpool Labour politics and the unknown strength of the Broad Left challenge made the contest far more fraught than Labour's smooth daily press conferences in the interview room of Everton football club suggested. As one

Were the Broad Left correct to stand? Can the Labour Party be transformed? Clive Heemskerck examines the arguments.

Labour aide put it, 'Walton was a case of walking round a minefield for three weeks and hoping nothing went off.' (*The Guardian*, 6 July 1991)

Some representatives of the capitalist media, who as 'strategists' try to speculate on the 'inner motivation' of the Marxists, argued that the Walton candidacy represented a fundamental departure from *Militant's* entrust tactic'. This insinuation that, as alleged 'entrists', the Marxists are an alien force in the organisations of the labour movement, is completely false. In fact, the real problem to be confronted is 'exitism', of Labour Party members leaving the party repelled by the mentality of the right wing as they embrace the capitalist 'market'. In their attempt to expunge the party's socialist traditions and previous commitments to reforms, the right wing, in the words of Dennis Skinner, have "ruled out dissent. What they want is a party of clones." (*The Daily Telegraph*, 16 July 1991) Our policy is clear. The long-term task to transform the Labour Party into an instrument of socialist change still remains.

It is true that the Walton by-election was not the most favourable terrain on which to conduct this battle. The Labour Party, because it is based on the trade unions, still has a colossal reservoir of support amongst the working class in Britain. The depth of this loyalty to the Labour Party, despite the role of its leaders, was confirmed by the NOP survey published two days before polling day. This was the opinion poll which gave Peter Kilfoyle, the official Labour candidate, 63%, and Lesley Mahmood 10%. (*The Independent*, 2 July 1991). The survey also asked voters responses to other questions. The state of Liverpool in general was



listed as the most important issue in determining how people would vote, followed by the poll tax, unemployment and the NHS. Despite the record of the right-wing Labour council and the silence of Kilfoyle on what a future Labour government would provide for Liverpool, the mass of working class voters were not convinced at this stage that there was any alternative other than a Labour government to solve their problems. While taking note of the warnings of the Real Labour campaign, which was in the main received sympathetically on the doorsteps, most workers will need to go through the experience of a Labour government in office before they reach the conclusion that Real Labour was correct.

Of the official Labour supporters interviewed, 45% either agreed or were unsure whether 'the Labour Party under Neil Kinnock has betrayed its traditional values'. They were voting not in support of the leaders of the day, but out of loyalty to an organisation which they saw as their political voice.

This was not unexpected. We have argued that the mass of the working class will again and again turn first to their traditional organisations for a solution to the conditions that they face. For this reason it is wrong to argue, as in the words of Eric Heffer, that without the left the Labour Party would become 'as extinct as the dodo'. Eric, who devoted his life to the labour movement, was understandably outraged at the stifling of the left. His argument, that the drive of the right wing to free the leadership from accountability to the rank-and-file would reduce the party to a shell without any activists,

is correct. But, as long as the links between the trade unions and the Labour Party are preserved, it is going too far to say that the Labour Party will become 'extinct'.

Since they created the party in 1900, the trade unions have been its main source of strength, politically and financially. The latent reservoir of support that this tie with the unions represents, under different conditions, will renew the Labour Party over and again in the future. Even without today's left the Labour Party, in the turbulent decade ahead, would renew itself again and again. Under the pressure of the working class, it would still generate new and powerful mass left-wing currents within its ranks. Nothing that has transpired in Liverpool would lead the Marxists to abandon this broad perspective.

SO WAS IT wrong for the Broad Left to have stood? Concretely, what was the situation that had developed in Liverpool? The stand of the 47 Liverpool city councillors from 1983-87, along with the heroic battle of the miners, has entered into the consciousness of the working class as an inspiring example of militant struggle. Precisely for this reason the ruling class have a longstanding aim to denigrate and roll back the achievements of the 47.

They have managed to somewhat muddy the record with a sustained campaign of slander which has had an effect. The NOP opinion poll showed that a majority of Walton voters blamed "the old *Militant*-led City council" for Liverpool's "present problems". What is remarkable, when all the forces of established society

**Should the
Broad Left
have stood?**



Heseltine.

including 'socialist' playwrights repeat the same lines, is that 42%, when given the option in the survey, chose not to 'blame' the 47 councillors.

But the media smear campaign could only spice the dish. It could not remove the real achievements of the struggle — the rent freeze, the new homes, nurseries, sports centres, the council jobs, the enhanced position of the council workers' unions and so on. Those gains have been clung onto tenaciously by the Liverpool working class, reflected in their consistent support for Labour against the national trend. Moreover this was often a discerning vote with left wing Labour candidates who stood on the platform of the 47 receiving higher votes than right wingers. The gains won by the 47 could only be prised from their grasp by a different agency — the right wing leaders of the Labour movement, locally and nationally.

This task was readily accepted by the Labour right and their supporters amongst the trade union officialdom. They were as afraid of Liverpool's reputation as the Tory government itself. A persisting 'model of militancy' provided a continual contrast with their generally passive acquiescence with the Tories' programme. The prestige of the councillors and those who continued their tradition would also act as a rallying point in the future when a Labour government carries through attacks on working class living standards. Liverpool had to be dealt with. A combined assault was needed on the gains achieved by the 47 and the internal democracy of the Liverpool Labour Party.

This strategy of the ruling class was revealed in a remarkable interview conducted with Michael Heseltine on BBC Radio during the Walton by-election. Disclosing that "the government has come close to sending in commissioners to take over and run council services in Liverpool... several times in the last three years," Heseltine explains why, on reflection, the Tories had rejected government intervention. He confides that "from the moment we intervened the battle would not be *in the Labour Party between its extreme and moderate wings*. The battle would be between the local Labour Party and central government, and Neil Kinnock would throw the whole resources of the Labour Party behind the more extreme elements of the Labour Party in Liverpool (!) saying it was all central government's fault... the whole of the labour movement would turn on the central government and blame us." (*The Guardian*, 17 June 1991)

"The essence of this," he concluded, "is the elected authority has got to stand firm. We will give them every support from central government in doing so." (*The Independent*, 17 June 1991)

Allowing for the inevitable coded language needed for public consumption, these are still astonishingly frank admissions from an astute

tactician of the ruling class. He tells us that *only* the 'moderate wing' of the Labour Party — Rimmer, Kilfoyle, Kinnock et al — can conduct 'the battle' against the council's past gains. They would meet a rearguard action by the 'extreme wing' — by which he means the Liverpool working class, above all, the combative council workforce, the Broad Left councillors and the *Militant*.

If the government intervened on behalf of the 'moderate wing', there would be an explosion "in the whole of the labour movement" in support of the Liverpool left which Kinnock would not be able to control. So, while wishing them luck from the sidelines — "every support" — Heseltine leaves the field to his more able colleagues.

That is the essence of Kinnock's 'counter-revolution' in Liverpool. Only through the good offices of the Labour Party right wing, resting on the loyalty of the working class to their traditional organisations, could the ruling class carry through their programme. Not surprisingly *The Financial Times* entitled their pre-Walton polling day article 'A Labour Platform for Tory policies', remarking that the "pragmatic solutions" of Kilfoyle and Rimmer — privatisation, compulsory competitive tendering and housing trusts — "were originally honed in Conservative thinktanks." (*Financial Times*, 3 July 1991).

NONETHELESS, WAS IT still correct for the Broad Left to have stood against rival official Labour candidates, firstly in the council elections and then in Walton? Had not the *Militant* argued against such a course in 1985 when faced with the suspension of the Liverpool District Labour Party (DLP) and the likelihood of expulsions?

This discussion is recounted in the book *Liverpool: A City That Dared to Fight*, written by Peter Taaffe, Editor of *Militant*, and Tony Mulhearn, one of the 47 councillors: "Some, including Derek Hatton, believed that the colossal authority enjoyed by the DLP would have enabled it to have defied the disbandment edict of the National Executive Committee. They argued that thousands of workers would have rallied to the DLP despite any 'expulsions' of leading DLP figures..."

"The contrary view was advanced by leading local and national *Militant* figures... An 'independent' DLP would undoubtedly meet with initial success, they argued, in the short term, but would have undermined the long-term struggle to transform the Labour Party in a leftward direction. Through the trade unions, the Labour Party possesses a big reservoir of support..."

"The mass of the working class, so the *Militant* Editorial Board argued, while passively supporting the Labour Party, had not yet

actively moved into its ranks. They argued that for one worker who supported and 'independent' DLP, there would be another five, ten and perhaps 100 at a later stage who would move into the official Labour Party...

"Therefore, despite the heavy blows of the expulsion of Derek Hatton and Tony Mulhearn, together with other *Militant* supporters, it was necessary, argued the *Militant* Editorial Board, to accept the expulsions under protest." (pp352-354)

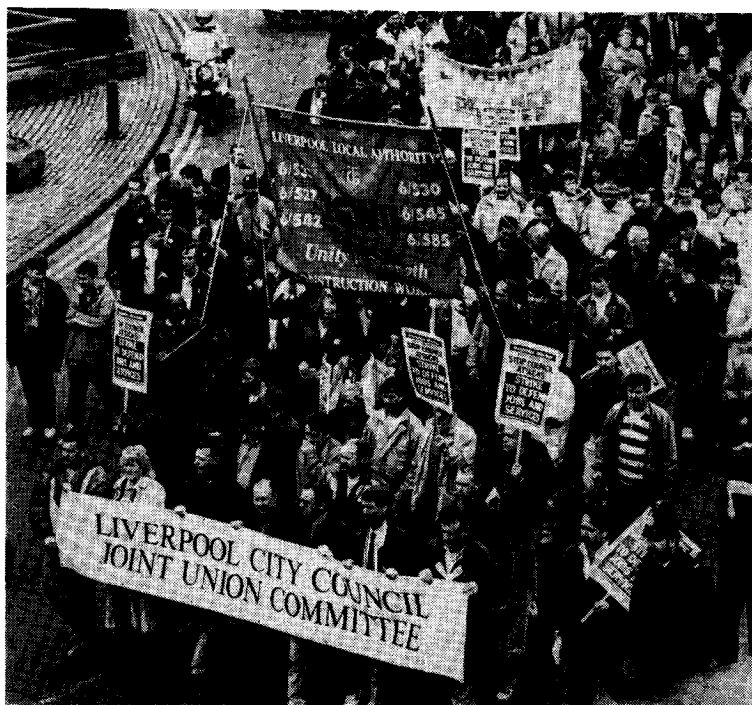
Developments on the council and in the Liverpool Labour Party have taken a *qualitative* turn since these lines were written. The 'counter-revolution' initially had to proceed with caution. In November 1985 the council, left isolated by the Labour leaders, suffered a partial defeat when it was compelled to take out a loan to cover the budget deficit. On cue the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC) then suspended the DLP and set up an inquiry.

But at this stage, the DLP officers could still organise a rally of 700 party members to protest. It was around this time, incidentally, that Kilfoyle, "after a spell in Australia" reading "newspaper reports of the state of his city," returned to Liverpool where he "first worked inside Liverpool Labour Left". (*The Guardian*, 5 July 1991) This was the mighty force that managed to mobilise all of three votes at the 400 strong DLP meeting that rejected the cuts and rate-rises proposed in the notorious *Stonewall Report*!

The first nine Liverpool expulsions were not carried through until mid-1986 and the 47 councillors were not surcharged and finally dismissed from office until 1987. Even then, although the DLP was suspended, the ward and constituency Labour Parties, the Labour Party Young Socialists and the Liverpool Women's Council all functioned normally. In the May 1987 elections many of the surcharged councillors were replaced by new left wing councillors. It was in 1987 that Lesley Mahmood was elected onto the council.

Although the overall balance of the new Labour group shifted to the right, they still had to move carefully. Even as late as the March 1990 budget, rents were frozen for the seventh successive year. It was not until the Labour Party NEC suspended 16 Broad Left councillors for voting against implementation of the poll tax in April 1990 that the right felt confident to move. One month later they deposed Keva Coombes as council leader.

An attempt to push through a rent increase in June was defeated by 29 councillors breaking the Labour whip. In July 1990 the 29 were suspended by the NEC who also closed down the Liverpool Women's Council and the reconstituted DLP. With the 29 suspended the council was being run by a minority rump of right



wingers. But now, with open civil war declared, the assault of the right wing gathered pace.

In the run up to the 1991 council elections, the right took firm control of the local government panel and excluded all left candidates. The question was starkly posed: when would a left wing councillor be elected under the 'official Labour' banner in Liverpool again? There was no short-term possibility of regaining the position that the left held in 1990, let alone that held from 1983-87. In fact, there would have been no left wing councillors by 1994. So what were the alternatives that now faced the Liverpool Broad Left?

THE DISCUSSION IN 1985 was picked up by the tiny handful of sectarians grouped around the *Socialist Organiser* paper. Under the heading 'Why *Militant* is wrong by Peter Taaffe', they reprinted extracts from *Liverpool: A City That Dared to Fight*. Of course this grouplet is of no significance in the life of the working class. Nonetheless their arguments in opposition to the decision of the Broad Left to stand against 'official' candidates are of interest.

They concluded that "things have changed since 1985 when the discussion reported by Taaffe and Mulhearn took place. Every change, both in Britain generally and inside the labour movement, strengthens the arguments against breaking with Labour and speaks to condemn *Militant's* little adventure in Walton.

"The Tories have been in power for five and half additional years. The left in the Labour Party has declined considerably. Strike figures are the lowest for 50 years... The Walton candidacy is not part of an advancing offensive

Council workers demonstrate, June 1991.

Things have changed since 1985.



Tony Mulhearn.

working class movement. It grows out of defeat and weakness..." Nothing can be done.

This is a recipe for passivity and abstentionism. It expresses only the authors' complete disorientation and demoralisation in the face of complex and contradictory processes. For completeness they could have added the prolonged nature of the boom, the move to capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe and the USSR, the crushing military victory of US imperialism in the Gulf and the triumphalism of the capitalist ideologues who proclaim a 'new world order'!

Reality, however, is far more complex. The march of history has two sides. Alongside counter-revolution marches revolution. The real perspectives for the Labour Party, for Britain, the world economy, the collapse of Stalinism and world relations must of course be attentively examined. We can only conclude here that these are exacting but turbulent times requiring of all groups and tendencies not only theoretical foresight but an iron will to act. So frightened are our sectarian critics by one side of history, they forget the tiny detail of the magnificent anti-poll tax struggle and the fall of Thatcher, the international standard-bearer of capitalist reaction!

Nonetheless the *MIR* concedes that the Liverpool candidacies — in the council elections and in Walton — were indeed not part of a generalised 'advancing working class movement'. But does a retreating army preclude the possibility of mounting limited offensives? Napoleon wrote that 'retreats always cost more men and materials than the most bloody engagements.' Could not a stand be made at a point of strength, the better to conduct a rearguard action and prevent a rout? That was the situation facing the Liverpool Broad Left.

It is of course easy for 'generals' without an army to sound the retreat — if only they can find a bugler! But the Liverpool Marxists had a responsibility to the advanced minority of workers and youth who had stood firm through the struggles of the last decade.

The Liverpool Broad Left is over 400 strong. Behind them are thousands of workers and youth. This is not a 'London left' of individual Labour Party ward activists but a predominantly working class left based on the unions. In how many other cities, at this stage, would manual trade union branches organise groups of workers to campaign against official Labour candidates?

Keith Hackett, the former chair of the council's finance and strategy committee, who describes himself as a "vociferous opponent of *Militant*", nonetheless confirms the real social forces involved. "Independent candidates were first advocated in Gilmoor, a solidly working class ward with virtually no *Militant* presence

that faced the prospect of its third imposed councillor in four elections... the independent candidates were gaining the overwhelming support of non-*Militant* Broad Left members... the weight of support that was gathering behind these candidates, led the tendency to get stuck in..." (*The Independent*, 4 July 1991)

We reject Hackett's implication here that *Militant* supporters muscled in to 'takeover' the campaign of the Real Labour council candidates. As the passage from *Liverpool: A City That Dared to Fight* shows, these questions had been discussed within the Broad Left before. The key consideration for *Militant* supporters at each stage was how best to defend the gains made by the 47 and preserve the morale and combativity of the most advanced Liverpool workers.

For the council workforce it was a life or death struggle. The 1,000 redundancies announced were just a beginning. The most determined trade unionists would be rooted out. A glimpse of this was given when redeployment of the first 20 workers facing compulsory redundancy was discussed. *The Guardian*, 29 June 1991, reported that 15 would be redeployed but that "alleged connections with *Militant* has complicated the recruitment" of the others.

The decision to stand in the council elections, vindicated by the results, marked a new stage in the resistance to Kinnock's 'counter-revolution'. But it further accelerated the development of the purge. Six wards were suspended. The Liverpool Labour Councillors group was formed and the 25 councillors immediately expelled. The right wing prepared to push through the first 1,000 redundancies and the council workforce prepared themselves to resist.

At this point Eric Heffer died. This sad loss to the labour movement, unexpected in its timing, confronted the Liverpool Marxists with a new situation. The decision to stand was not taken lightly or without serious debate amongst the supporters of *Militant* and within the Broad Left. But eventually it was felt that to have allowed Kilfoyle a free-run, while not halting the developing assault of the right, would have disarmed and demoralised that advanced minority of Liverpool workers who were coalescing around the Broad Left.

There is no point in disguising the fact that many expected a larger vote — although to have won 11% of the combined Real Labour and official Labour vote would have been considered an achievement for any other force.

A key factor depressing the vote was undoubtedly the defeat on the industrial plane. The NOP survey showed that 32% of all voters disagreed that 'the council could provide decent services with fewer workers', in other

words, opposing Kilfoyle's programme of council cuts and redundancies. Many of these must have been people who had voted Real Labour in the council elections or who had pledged their support to Real Labour canvassers. But, as election day neared, they asked themselves, what are the prospects of a successful campaign by Real Labour to defend the city? If polling day had taken place in the middle of escalating industrial action against cuts and redundancies then the fighting alternative offered by Real Labour might have seemed to have had a real prospect of being achieved.

True, an all-out strike by the council workforce would have raised the spectre of government intervention. Yet 77% of Kilfoyle supporters opposed the suggestion that 'the government should take over the running of Liverpool'. If it was looking that such strike action had the possibility of successfully winning more resources for the city, how would the vote have polarised then?

But, as the by-election campaign progressed, the redundancies were ratified by a special council meeting and the bins service was privatised. There were implicit threats made that if there was a substantial Real Labour vote, the city would be hit further — by the Tories or an incoming Labour government. With the possibility of a fightback by the council workers receding — against a background of opinion polls 'confirming' Real Labour's supposedly modest support — many Real Labour 'promises' just did not go out and vote.

Nonetheless, the Real Labour campaign was received sympathetically. It has strengthened the Liverpool Broad Left and laid the basis of future points of support for the events that will develop under the next Labour government.

THIS WAS AN additional consideration that was also involved in the decision to stand. Lesley Mahmood stood for the election of a Labour government. But her campaign raised in the minds of thousands of workers: what would be the character of the next Labour government?

The conclusion that the ruling class have reached in regard to Liverpool — that only the right wing Labour leaders could carry through the Tories' programme — is once again being drawn for Britain as a whole. The *Financial Times* recently reported how John Smith has literally eaten his way through the City boardrooms to establish the right wing's credentials. "The 'prawn cocktail' offensive launched by the shadow chancellor seems to be taking effect," they wrote. The City viewed with equanimity the prospect of a Labour government because "the party has ruled out a costly 'dash for growth', and promises rigorous controls on public spending." (*Financial Times*, 3 July 1991)

That was precisely the role of the last Labour government of 1974-79 — resting on the loyalty of the working class to 'their' government to force through the dictates of big business. Such was the confidence of the ruling class that capitalism was in safe hands, from 1974-79 the FT All-Share Index rose by 114 per cent in nominal terms, compared to a 76.9 per cent rise in the past five years to June 1991!

It was necessary to warn the working class about the role of a future Labour government, even if this incurred the costs of a further round of expulsions. But the decision to support the Broad Left candidacy did not represent a 'break with Labour' as our critics imagine. We have not changed our attitude to the traditional organisations of the working class. We have not departed from campaigning for a Labour government.

There are some, like Derek Hatton, whose hatred of Kinnock has lead them to the conclusion that there is no difference between a Labour government and a Tory government. That is not the attitude of the vast mass of the working class nor of the Marxists. We want a Labour government, even a right wing Labour government. A Labour government is a government of pressure, resting on the working class.

If Labour comes to power in the next 12 months the aspirations of millions of workers will be raised. In the first period of office a Kinnock government would make some concessions, on pensions and child benefit at least. But very rapidly it would move to carry through counter-reforms, attacks on the living standards and conditions of the working class. This has been the broad experience not just of the last Labour government but of all the Labour and 'socialist' governments of Australia, New Zealand, France, Spain, Greece, Norway and Sweden even in the conditions of capitalist boom which have prevailed during the last decade.

Although the TUC would inevitably reach an 'agreement' with a Labour government to hold down wages for limited concessions, and would therefore co-operate with the bosses to hold back the rank-and-file, unofficial movements would develop from below. One layer after another would be forced into battle to defend their living standards. Under these conditions, there would be a movement of workers to the left, which would find a reflection firstly in the official structures of the trade unions and then in the Labour Party. Under this pressure, even some right wing and 'soft' left trade union leaders could be compelled into taking an oppositional stance towards the measures of a Kinnock government. A new left wing would develop in the Labour Party but this time it would be a working class left, based on the



John Smith.

**When will
Labour move
back to the
left?**

trade unions, with *Militant* supporters to the fore. Then the Marxists who have been expelled today would return.

ONE OF THE considerations behind the decision of the Broad Left to stand candidates this year was that, unless *national* developments in the Labour Party relaxed the iron grip which the right wing have established over the Liverpool party apparatus, there would have been no left wing councillors by 1994. Is it possible to work out a timescale for how these broad perspectives for the next Labour government would unfold?

Trotsky insisted that "every historical prognosis is always conditional, and the more concrete the prognosis, the more conditional it is." It would be complete scholasticism to sit with a calendar in one hand and a directory of future union and Labour Party conferences in the other! The historical law formulated by Marxism, that workers will move to reclaim their traditional organisations, is a *process* in which a complex interplay of different factors are involved. Not the least important are economic developments. The depth of the recession in the British economy has not yet been fully revealed. The timing and the extent of the recovery, effected by developments in the world economy, cannot be precisely determined in advance.

Moreover, changes in the workers' consciousness are inevitably not immediately reflected in their organisations. The right wing in the Labour Party and trade unions will make every effort to further immunise themselves from the pressure of the rank-and-file.

In the Labour Party further constitutional changes would be forced through to restrict the re-selection of MPs, eliminate the policy-making role of the national conference, and fill out the leading bodies of the party with parliamentary and council representatives. Other measures would also be considered to deal with oppositional currents. The militant building workers union, the Building Labourers' Federation, (BLF) was among the first to stand against the Australian 'social contract', the Prices and Incomes Accord between the Labour government and the Australian Congress of Trade Unions (ACTU). Consequently, with the full support of the ACTU, the BLF was deregistered, subjected to systematic repression and effectively broken. As he presented awards to the *Daily Mirror* journalists who had tried to frame Arthur Scargill, it was not impossible to imagine a Kinnock-led Labour government acting in the same fashion as his Australian brethren!

Of course, by the same token, workers who turn to reclaim the Labour Party will do so because they have reached the conclusion from their own experience in the workplace that a

political struggle is necessary. They will consequently not be easily held back by bureaucratic obstacles. Guerilla actions, where local parties under the influence of militant workers refuse to recognise the writ of Walworth Road, are entirely possible.

There will also be important variations in consciousness between different layers of the working class and between different regions. It was not accidental that the Independent Labour Party (ILP), in the first general election it contested against the Labour Party in 1935, won four seats but all of them in Glasgow. There the ILP had built up substantial working class support and had 40 councillors. They based themselves on the living tradition of the struggles in 'Red Clydeside' during and after world war one — "the Petrograd of the British Isles" as the Scottish Marxist, John Maclean, put it — which was ahead of other parts of the labour movement in Britain.

Trotsky, in a discussion with an ILP member after these elections, argued that "a strong militant movement can develop in a strongly bureaucratised trade union organisation, creating a very important minority movement, without being forced out of the trade unions." Such a development would make it entirely possible "that the left wing, which will develop as the crisis deepens — and particularly now, within the trade unions... will be successful in its fight to stay within the Labour Party." The key task for Marxists was to penetrate the trade unions, to build support for Marxism amongst the fresh layers of the working class, while preserving at all times an orientation towards the mass party of the working class.

Militant will not be bound by the bureaucratic regime of the Labour leaders from arguing for a socialist programme. If the Tories win the election, which is not excluded because of the failure of Kinnock to inspire working class voters, there will be ructions in the Labour Party and the trade unions but this would not compel workers to move into activity in the party. New industrial struggles under a Tory government would in time find their reflection in a leftward move in the trade unions and the Labour Party but overall a Tory victory would further prolong the process of transforming the party.

Marxism can not and will not stand still as events unfold. *Militant*, written off time and again, will come to the head of future battles, as we have in the magnificent movement against the poll tax. And Liverpool, under a Labour or a Tory government, will remain an arena of struggle. As it did at the height of the campaign against the government in 1985, once again Liverpool has provided a glimpse, a faint outline, of the stormy but protracted and contradictory processes out of which the mass forces of Marxism will be forged. □

Poll tax victory

Mike Waddington reviews the successes and achievements of the three year struggle against the poll tax.



"THERE IS NO evidence that the collection and enforcement envisaged for the community charge will create major difficulties", said Ian Lang, then, in 1987, a junior minister. Two-and-a-half million Scottish summary warrants and 15 million non-payers later Lang, now Scottish Secretary, is compelled to join the chorus of recantation. "Those who call for the retention of the poll tax... are out of touch and just plain wrong... we are abolishing it. I am sure that that was the right decision." (*Times*, 19 April, 1991).

The abolition of the poll tax was the most dramatic U-turn of this government. As *The Sunday Times* put it, "the only parallel in modern politics... is the Nixon White House which, after spending two years insisting the president was telling the truth about Watergate, finally issued a press release declaring that 'all previous statements are inoperative'." (12 December, 1990).

The Government consultation paper on the 'council tax', *A New Tax for Local Government*, has been published. "The public have not been persuaded that the (community charge) scheme is fair" is the marvellous understatement of introduction. The general idea of the new tax is one bill for a household, 25% discount for the single, and with 100% rebates. This will be introduced in 1993 or 1994. The rebates are a great victory and represent a blow struck for the poorest in society.

The new tax will be based on seven bands of property value. By conceding that the poll tax put "too great a burden... on local taxation" the government have proposed lowering the 'council tax' by putting in more money. But the bands and discounts have been calculated to benefit the rich more. As Bryan Gould said, "why should a millionaire get 25% off his bill while a family or pensioner couple struggling on low income have to pay the full whack?". The new system, with its new and welcome changes, is still not based totally on ability to pay.

The interesting point is why the government is waiting for 1993-94 before actually implementing the new tax. They clearly fear going into another poll tax nightmare in a general election period. The new system works like the poll tax, in that the government sets the level of council expenditure that *they* think is necessary — the Standard Spending Assessment. Anything higher than this will have to be paid for out of an increased council tax. As the council tax nationally only accounts for 14% of revenue, considerable rises will be necessary in the tax to generate the necessary income. Also, if the government cut a council's grant, it has drastic implications. Under the poll tax, for every one per cent cut by the government, the poll tax had to be increased by four per cent. Under the council tax, this 'gearing effect' will be six to one. This is worse than the financial ar-

**The poll tax
was lawful
but
illegitimate**

rangements of the poll tax, and therefore the same dangers are present.

The government's document concedes that: "In practise, sharpened accountability to the electorate has not by itself provided a sufficient restraint on expenditure: at least not during periods of change in the finance system... Capping will be important... when local accountability will inevitably be clouded by the changes in the local government finance system and by the phasing in of new bills. It will avoid the risk of a repeat of the substantial increase in spending which accompanied the transition to the community charge." Allowing for the necessary Tory exaggeration, the fact was that it was the government who were blamed for the increased poll tax bills and not the councils. The same could happen under the council tax.

CONCESSIONS HAVE BEEN wrung from the government, not by parliamentary debates but by a mass movement. The poll tax was lawful but illegitimate; it was rejected as totally unfair by the overwhelming majority and millions demonstrated this by not paying it. Having been shown to be illegitimate, the tax was undermined along with the government that brought it in. Parliamentary procedure cannot legitimise what is rejected by the majority of people, where the opposition becomes organised.

The organisation of anti-poll tax unions on housing estates and schemes, in workplaces and trade unions, is one of the outstanding features of this campaign. The All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation brought all these campaigns together in a unified and effective way. The national demonstrations — especially 31 March 1990 — testified to the growing mood and gave it an organised expression. But that is only part of the story. There are literally hundreds of thousands of instances of local campaigns — meetings, committees, fund raising, protests, occupations, marches, legal briefings and training — the anatomy of the a movement, organised without the support (or resources) of the official labour movement. A book could be written just about the events surrounding Magistrates Courts; the mass demonstrations, the use of 'McKenzie Friends' to give non-payers the confidence to go through the barrier of 'breaking the law', in the process obstructing, delaying and in some cases paralysing the enforcement procedures.

Not only has the campaign won the immediate £140 concession (and now the 100% rebates) but more importantly through non-payment we are directly responsible for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, being spared gas and electricity disconnections, or scrimping on clothes and on food.

It is an old adage of the Marxist movement that reforms are by-products of mass struggle:

and it is the struggle here that most concerns not only the Tories but also the Labour leaders themselves because things will never be the same again; working class people are not prepared to accept the role they have been assigned by the Labour leaders, that of taking a seat in the election waiting room. Many people's horizons have been lifted. A way of fighting back has been demonstrated and the sullen paying up in the name of having no choice has been shattered.

Scandalously, VAT was increased to finance the poll tax reforms. As Dave Nellist, Labour MP for Coventry South East, put it in parliament on 26 March: "He (Heseltine) has said that there was 'no other way' to achieve the reduction other than by raising VAT. I shall suggest another way to him... The right honorable gentleman could have cancelled the debts of all local authorities in this country and relieved them of more than £6,000 million a year in interest charges alone, which could have reduced the poll tax by £200 per person."

He further went on to explain how an amnesty for all non-payers could be financed: "Debt cancellation is a regular tool of this government. In a reply to the hon Member for Glasgow Govan (Mr Sillars) on 13 March, the Minister showed how £15 billion worth of debt was cancelled — £3 billion for British Telecom, £1.7 billion for the new towns, £4 billion for British Steel and £5 billion for the water companies — to ensure that the government's city mates had a better deal on privatisation".

In many areas of Scotland an amnesty may be the only practical way issues will be resolved as enforcement powers have become largely impotent in the face of mass resistance (and mobilisation) to warrant sales — rightly described by the *Glasgow Evening Times* as a tactic based on the experience of the South African townships. Nonetheless, attempts will be made to isolate and intimidate non-payers. A successful campaign for an amnesty depends entirely on the balance of forces — and in particular, the continued activity of the anti-poll tax federations.

In England and Wales the campaign against jailings must go on. Many Labour councils are having to face this question. The Tories have made clear that they expect all debts to be chased up. Labour councils are therefore confronted with a straight choice: either to enforce a discredited and repealed tax including jailing non-payers or to refuse. Councils that go down the road of jailings will face the anger of working class people. This is one of the reasons why the Tories are insisting on it; they hope the odium will fall onto Labour. Whatever happens the consequences of jailings will be explosive. Additionally, reports *The Times*, 17 April, 1991 "Prison governors told the Home Secretary yesterday that staff cutbacks in jails threatened

to cause a further wave of inmate disorder. In an unusual open letter to Kenneth Baker, the Prison Governor's Association said that conditions in some jails had already deteriorated as a result of the economies which many governors believe breach well established agreements on working hours". In other words, the prisons are full to busting.

SURELY THE MOST important aspect of the whole of the last three years was its spectacular culmination; the removal of Thatcher, the icon of unbridled capitalism, around whom an entire ideological industry generated a justification for her fundamental yet simple proposition; to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The 1990 Tory Party Conference reached almost Stalinist peaks of adulation for Thatcher: "The sycophancy displayed towards the prime minister... seems to have grown in inverse proportion to her tumbling ratings in the country at large. Mr Baker managed the hitherto undreamt-of feat of out-sliming himself: 'Prime Minister, when the storm clouds gather, you are there... Your enduring contribution... The crucial role that you have played... Your unwavering commitment... The strong leadership which you, Prime Minister...' All, mark you, in the space of 20 minutes" (*Sunday Times*, 14 October 1990).

Exactly one month later she was gone. November 1 saw Geoffrey Howe resign, November 8 saw Labour victories in Bradford North and Bootle. On November 12 Thatcher announces she will go on and on. On November 13 Howe, the 'unexploded sheep' finally goes off. It is a curious irony that Howe, once likened by Denis Healy to "being savaged by a dead sheep", has been transformed into a hero! November 14, Heseltine challenges Thatcher; November 20, first inconclusive ballot; evening of 21 November, Thatcher offers concessions on the poll tax. November 22, Thatcher resigns.

Thatcher had pile driven her 'radical' programme of class warfare throughout society. Hugo Young in his biography of Thatcher, *One of Us*, describes the crisis within her cabinet in the aftermath of the riots of 1981. Whitelaw warned of "breaking the tolerance of society". Reports Young, "Lord Hailsham's verdict was perhaps the most apocalyptic of all, invoking the memory of Hitler's Germany, in which unemployment gave birth to fascism, and the America of Herbert Hoover, whose restrictive policies, Hailsham said, had destroyed the Republican Party for thirty years" (p219).

Thatcher survived that crisis; unemployment rocketed, cuts bore down, the miners were attacked, all contributing to the steady accumulation of bitterness, frustration and anger throughout society. *Militant* identified this streak in society whereas others saw only



Thatcher's so-called successes and sought to make an accommodation with the 'market' themselves. We warned that big movements were coming.

After the 1987 Tory election victory, the poll tax was announced and christened the flagship. Many Tories now feared that this new 'poll tax' would become the catalyst for upheaval with dire consequences. These warnings are worth looking at in detail.

Heseltine, opposing the tax (but having voted for its Scottish predecessor) said on 16 December 1987: "In the summer of 1981, riots swept through eight or nine of our inner cities. Some of us became deeply involved in the brittle fragility of the societies that live there. Nobody disputes the conditions in which they live. One does not need a set of statistics. Just go and have a look. I could not be more in support of the Government's determination to do something about the inner cities, but doing something for them cannot mean making the poor pay more for the worst services in the land...

"If we start with the suggestion that every authority is going to behave like Lambeth, Camden or Liverpool then far and away the best solution is to get rid of local government altogether... The rigour of tax collection will become more difficult as urban stress becomes more acute... the poll tax will bring more tax

The Demo -
31 March, 1990.



Norman Tebbit.

collectors and more evasion. More evasion will bring more resentment and the growing scale of rent arrears should be a warning of what lies ahead".

The MP Timothy Raison twenty years earlier had written the heretical (for the time) essay *Conflict and Conservatism*, (1965), complaining that the Tories had tried to run "a largely capitalist economy without a capitalist ideology... We must now accept that life was largely about conflict and there *are* two sides in industry" (quoted in Young, op cit p57). However, by December 1987, he had changed his tune: "I am not saying that revolution will be produced as a result of the scheme, but I am genuinely concerned that in some inner city areas we will see disorder and have great difficulty in compiling the register and collecting the tax. I fear we will see disorder or possibly no-go areas. I cannot believe that anybody could be happy about that".

During the same debate, which had been introduced by Nicholas Ridley, the Tory Anthony Beaumont-Dark had opposed the Bill: "surely the ability to pay must play some part in a just scheme". The point was dismissed by Ridley. Dennis Skinner interjected: "On a point of order... The Tory hon member for Birmingham Selly Oak (Mr Beaumont-Dark) said that this Tory minister is mad."

Millions have subsequently 'broken the law' on an unprecedented scale. In fact their worst fears have been borne out. Instead of the angry negative outbursts of rioting, we had instead an organised movement, a deliberate movement to challenge the legitimacy of a law.

The Tory Party is now 'a party at war with itself'. Robert Harris writing in *The Sunday Times*, 31 March, 1991, reported on tensions amongst the Tories: "The 'Keepers of the Flame' reserve their real scorn for the men who supplanted Mrs Thatcher. Some say privately they would rather see Mr Kinnock in power than Mr Heseltine". In response Tebbit weighed in to denounce this "tiny but extremely pessimistic group" who want "the Conservatives to lose the election and regroup around new policies of greater strength and attraction, as they did after the defeat of the disastrous Heath government in 1974". This refers to how Thatcher captured the Tory leadership.

All of these tensions and splits represent the beginning of the fragmentation of the Tory Party. The anti-poll tax movement punched a hole in their confidence and now the prospect of further social storms is making itself felt within the Tory ranks. There is no doubt that had the Labour leaders campaigned for non-payment, instead of 15 million there would have been 25-30 million. It was the blind obedience to 'the law', worse the craven acceptance of an illegitimate law, that prevented a determined lead being given. Even

now, this refusal to mobilise the extra-parliamentary movement by the Labour leaders prevents the delivery of a knock-out blow to the government.

Labour's alternative 'Fair Rates' proposal is based on no increase in government spending, no increase in council spending, and no cut in VAT. 'Fair Rates' are a better way of doing things than the disastrous two taxes policy of two years ago. However, that is only one side of the equation. The government cuts have bitten deeply, not only reducing jobs but also destroying services that are paid for through shut facilities, less social services spending and tragedies like the case of Stephanie Fox in Wandsworth: a three-year old who was shaken to death by her father. The Stevenson Inquiry argued that cash cuts 'played a part in her death', revealing that "more than ten children at risk in the borough had no social worker, because of staff shortages... (and) that Wandsworth, whose £148 poll tax was the lowest in England, was operating a cash saving programme of filling only two in five nursery staff posts... finding a day nursery place for Stephanie was a crucial part of her 'protection plan' and (the Inquiry) condemned the time it took." (*The Independent*, 21 June, 1990)

The Labour leaders are terrified of spending more money, on economic grounds. Fundamentally the Labour leaders are constrained by their embrace of the market, that is, capitalism, and all its works. 'Putting the economy right', as the Labour leaders put it, in reality means austerity for working people, more cuts in services and consequent job losses.

The Labour leaders have performed dismally over the poll tax; attacking the non-payment movement which in fact boosted Labour's electoral standing. Labour advances when the working class advances. If Labour just won the support of the non-payment movement alone a massive majority could be won.

The attacks made on the Federation will cut no ice with ordinary people because they have experienced first hand what this battle is about. What the non-payment campaign has shown is that there is a way of fighting back against the attacks of the Tories.

Millions have moved, hundreds of thousands have organised and thousands more have had their outlook changed. An important minority have gone even further and have questioned capitalism itself. The very best of these have joined with *Militant* in the fight for socialism. The battle against the poll tax, although far from over, has been a laboratory experiment in which all views and trends have been tested. It is the Marxists around *Militant* who have led this mass movement; we continue the fight for a new order, a socialist society. □

The battle for amnesty

*Louise James looks at
the tasks facing the
anti-poll tax movement
now.*



IS THE ANTI-POLL TAX campaign over? Following the abolition announcement in March, Ken Livingstone and most other left Labour MPs paid up their arrears. The Scottish National Party (SNP), at a special conference in March, voted to end support for non-payment. Jim Sillars, SNP MP for Govan, argued that "the major trouble with some people... is they don't know a victory when it's staring them in the face." (*Scotland on Sunday*, 24 March 1991) Now, according to the *Municipal Journal*, only five MPs are still not paying. (*The Times*, 19 July 1991)

But before declaring victory and leaving the battlefield, there has to be an assessment of how far the aims of the struggle have been met and what remaining tasks there may be.

The Tories have been forced into an unprecedented series of retreats over the poll tax, the most spectacular being those since the removal of Thatcher. The £4.3 billion conceded to reduce poll tax bills by £140 – with the £1.3 billion community charge reduction scheme – were last ditch-attempts to keep the 'everybody pays' element of the poll tax. Yet one month later the government were forced into a further retreat and these 'principles' abandoned.

True, the decision not to introduce the council tax immediately has left the option open for the Tories to launch a new offensive at a later stage. In reality, they have deferred the question of how local authorities will be financed – ie how to attack local government – until after a general election.

Meanwhile, new bills have been sent out and the government has made it clear to councils that enforcement procedures must continue against non-payers. The jailing of Terry Fields, the MP for Liverpool Broadgreen who has stood by the millions of people who cannot afford to pay off their arrears, has highlighted that this battle must still be fought. The task of the campaign to defend non-payers remains.

Nonetheless, the effect of abolition has been to defuse the issue of the poll tax. There is a general feeling that the battle is over.

This is reflected in the general winding down of the structures of the campaign. Estate-based anti-poll tax unions have tended to fold, with the remaining activists grouping themselves together in borough or city-wide structures. The issuing of new bills was not greeted in the same way as last year when local anti-poll tax groups organised bill-burnings and public meetings to launch a mass non-payment cam-



What does
Sillars say now?

paign. The lobbies outside the town halls when the poll tax levels were set were smaller. The activities of the local anti-poll tax campaigns now largely concentrate on defending non-payers. The campaign has shifted from organising activity around the demand, 'Scrap the Poll Tax', to a defensive campaign for an amnesty.

Does abolition and this shift in the campaign mean that mass non-payment as a tactic is no longer effective?

Not at all. Underlying the campaigning activity that will be needed to paralyse the enforcement procedures — which would be a *de facto* amnesty — must be continued mass non-payment of last year's and this year's bills. It has been the *combination* of an organised campaign and the sheer scale of non-payment that has created the enormous problems councils face in carrying out enforcement procedures.

According to the Audit Commission, reported in *The Guardian* on 30 May, 2.2 million people had been summonsed to court. Around 100,000 of these have turned up to contest their case. They estimate that a total 7 million people will be summonsed for non-payment of 1990 bills. If people continue to turn up at the same rate it would mean a further 200,000 people contesting their cases! The time taken to deal with liability orders has already impinged on the court time allocated to councils to deal with committal hearings for non-payment. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA) have reported that court actions leading to imprisonment take a lot of time and, as courts were clogged, councils were finding that they were unable to get magistrates to issue committal summonses against people for last year's poll tax. Continued non-payment of the new bills would make the councils' job even harder.

Clearly, then, those who advocate paying up now because they believe the struggle is over, are relaxing the pressure on the councils and allowing them a free hand to continue to pursue those who cannot afford to pay off their arrears. Anti-poll tax organisations have a duty to continue advocating non-payment.

Early indications are that non-payment this year is increasing, in Scotland but also in England and Wales. A *Municipal Journal* survey, covering 39 of the 366 councils in England, found that the proportion of the population which had not made a payment this year was 3.4 per cent higher than at the same time last year, rising from 22.7 per cent to 26.1 per cent. (*The Times*, 13 July 1991)

Nonetheless, success in maintaining non-payment levels will be determined by a number of factors. A major consideration for many will be, of course, the size of their bills. In Lambeth new bills were sent out for £800, with last year's arrears being included. The government's concessions will do little to convince people to pay up there!

But what about those areas where the new bills are so low that the majority of families are better off than they were under the rates? Should anti-poll tax unions in those circumstances abandon the tactic of non-payment?

There may be those who choose to pay the new reduced bills, mistakenly thinking that they will not be pursued for their 1990 arrears. However, all this will do is ease the burden on the council and free them to pursue those non-payers who cannot afford to pay off their arrears. Non-payment cannot be argued here simply on the basis of 'can't pay'. APTUs may find it harder to gain an echo but they could convince many non-payers to stand firm by linking the question of continued non-payment to the withdrawal of enforcement procedures, especially jailings, against those with arrears for 1990 bills.

Indeed, the success of local campaigns against the various methods of enforcement — liability orders, wage and benefit arrestments, bailiffs etc — is also an important factor in maintaining non-payment levels.

In Scotland the campaign has successfully defended those threatened with warrant sales. Around 250 attempts by the sheriffs to conduct these sales have been met by 250 mobilisations of non-payers to drive off the sheriffs. Incredibly, 2.3 million warrants have been issued, yet there are only 3.7 million people on the poll tax register in Scotland! While an 'amnesty' has not been declared, enforcement is collapsing and non-payment is increasing. Poll tax payments for 1991-92, according to Jean MacFadden, president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), are "only trickling into council coffers". (*The Guardian*, 2 July, 1991)

In England and Wales a victory is being scored over the bailiffs. With the bailiffs enjoying no right of entry in England and Wales, the struggle against them has been less intense than in Scotland. Victories have been won merely through the anti-poll tax unions penetrating the community with information regarding non-payers' rights. Now the struggle is moving into the decisive stage in England and Wales, the battle against imprisonment.

Where imprisonment has been threatened by councils it has so far proved an unsuccessful frightener. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has conceded that even "those cases which had resulted in prison sentences had not yet produced an incentive to non-payers." (*The Guardian*, 30 May 1991)

According to figures collated by the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation an estimated 50 out of the 400 local authorities in England and Wales have summonsed around 700 people. Only 35 of these have resulted in jailings, which falls far below the average 400-a-year jailed for non-payment of the rates. According

to government figures, of those summonsed about 50% turn up. Of those who turn up, apart from the 35 jailed, the councils have come to some agreement over terms to pay. Only 15 of the 50 local authorities have jailed anyone.

So why have councils at this stage retreated from the threat of widescale imprisonment? Simply because of the local resistance generated by the threat of jailings. In fact half of those imprisoned were in areas where no campaign was mounted prior to the committal hearing. If campaigns had been launched then probably the numbers jailed would be even lower.

In fact, during local campaigns against committals some councillors, having unleashed a movement they had not expected, have offered more than just a withdrawal of the cases.

In Bradford, after jailing an anti-poll tax activist, the council retreated to a position of setting up a debt counselling committee to which every case would be referred, to examine ability to pay. In Thanet, Kent, the campaign against the jailing of Ruby Haddow, the first woman to be imprisoned for non-payment, drew a verbal assurance from the Tory leader of the council that he would move a resolution to stop all future committal hearings. This represented a complete climbdown from the council's previous threat to jail 30 people! In Manchester, 48 councillors have signed a motion opposing poll tax committal hearings. These are just glimpses of how local 'amnesties' may be brought into effect.

One line of retreat that councils could be forced down is writing off the poll tax arrears of those who receive 80% rebates. Recovering this money is financially not worth their while and is seen as a purely punitive measure. This demand could be achieved on a local basis as enforcement becomes more difficult with increased resistance to jailings.

AS SUCH LOCAL 'undeclared amnesties' are achieved, would there be a point when the anti-poll tax campaign ceases to advocate non-payment?

This must be considered carefully. Local and national factors would have to be taken into account. At the height of a campaign against a particular threat of jailing, local councillors may well offer to retreat. But how would they respond at a later stage when faced, for example, with a threat from the district auditor of surcharge if they refused to implement the full recovery procedure? The balance of contending forces, both locally and nationally, will be the decisive factor in determining which way they shift.

The conduct of the district auditor during the events in Liverpool in 1985-86 — even the timing of the move to surcharge the councillors — shows clearly that the network of district



auditors, through the national Audit Commission, act largely in concert with central government. If non-payment did start to crumble, locally or nationally, at a certain stage pressure would be exerted on district auditors to take action. What makes the small minority of non-payers who actively participate in battles against enforcement a contending force, is the weight of the more inert forces behind them. This includes the possibilities for industrial action, for example, taken to prevent a non-payer being sacked. But above all, at this stage, it means the *scale* of non-payment.

Nonetheless, continued non-payment under the present circumstances does pose some difficult tactical questions for the anti-poll tax campaign. During the course of the struggle for amnesty there will be many people, particularly local leaders of the campaign, who will refuse to pay on principle whether or not they are offered a compromise by the council. Some have argued in the movement, especially since the announcement of abolition, that it is a futile gesture to 'invite' imprisonment in this way, because for many workers imprisonment will mean the double penalty of losing their job.

Andy Walsh, an executive member of the bankworkers' union BIFU, and chair of the Trafford Federation, was the first trade unionist to be threatened with imprisonment for non-payment. Andy was also threatened with losing his job. A campaign was launched on two fronts. In the local area it centred on the demand for the council to drop the committal proceedings. In his workplace the key demand was for the union to campaign to protect workers from the sack if imprisoned for non-payment.

Greeting the Sheriff's Officers.



**Terry Fields
has stood by
his class.**

Initially, the campaign launched in the local area failed to force the council to retreat. They were determined to imprison Andy. They rejected an offer made by Andy to provide the information to enable them to begin the procedure for a wage arrestment. If this had been accepted it would have shifted the battle onto stronger ground. The union had already secured an agreement with management that wage arrestments would not lead to disciplinary action.

Once it became clear that the only choice was to pay up or go to prison, the campaign was escalated. The North West TUC and NALGO North West and Wales District, passed resolutions stating their opposition to jailings. Days before Andy was due to be imprisoned, the BIFU national executive committee, under pressure, held an emergency meeting at the BIFU conference. The union agreed that if any of their members were imprisoned for non-payment of the poll tax, the union nationally would demand their earliest possible release. They would contact the TUC and their retained MPs and demand that they do the same. They would ensure that all NEC members were informed of the whereabouts of those imprisoned and inform the local area union. The general secretary also agreed to approach the Prison Officers Association to relay the union position.

This is the most advanced position to date that a national union holds in relation to imprisonment for poll tax debt, although it stops short of calling for industrial action in the event of sackings. However the campaign succeeded in forcing the management to retreat and Andy still holds his job. A precedent has

now been set.

Moreover, Trafford council, in the face of mounting opposition to jailings, has indicated that they would not apply for committal hearings for the next nine months. The courageous stand that Andy took inspired and built the non-payment campaign.

Andy was first threatened with imprisonment before the abolition announcement, although he was finally imprisoned in May. Even though abolition has changed the mood and nature of the campaign, with a correct approach an imprisonment can strengthen the resolve of the non-payers to stand firm. However anti-poll tax unions have to be extremely sensitive as to what it is possible to achieve during this stage of the campaign.

There is a growing opposition to jailings. Unions such as COHSE, BIFU and NUPE have all adopted positions calling for an end to jailings at their recent conferences. The Tories are not confident of launching an offensive such as mass jailings at this stage. In the run up to a general election they fear re-opening the issue of the poll tax.

In fact they are still working out their line of retreat. It is significant that the Lord Chancellor agreed to meet the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation in June to discuss legal aid for representation in court for committal hearings. In Scotland the Federation met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss agreements around the conduct of the sheriff's officers. Reports have been produced by a number of bodies, including the Audit Commission, arguing that it is unrealistic for people on the full 80% rebate to pay as they can not afford it.

Under pressure the Labour leaders also have made it clear that will not pursue those in this 20% bracket. Charles Gray, the Labour leader of Strathclyde Regional Council, has conceded that "thousands of poor people must have their poll tax debts written off", adding that "£50 fines for failing to register could be overlooked." (*Glasgow Evening Times*, 2 April 1991)

The general election will have an important impact on the course of the campaign. The election of a Labour government, despite the protestations to the contrary by Neil Kinnock, would raise the expectation in the minds of millions of non-payers of a full amnesty. Having failed to enforce the poll tax in the face of fierce resistance, Labour councils would in turn exert enormous pressure on a Labour government for help to alleviate the immediate financial crises they will face.

The campaign is far from over. The nature of the battle has changed but for now the tactic of mass non-payment is still the key weapon in fighting for the victorious conclusion of this historic struggle. □

Arguing for socialism in Poland

We print here extracts from a document which has been circulated in Poland – in conditions where the crimes of Stalinism have built up enormous illusions in capitalism.



POLISH WORKERS AND YOUTH face an economic and social disaster. Rising unemployment, poverty and crime: this is the economic Frankenstein's monster created by the policies of Balcerowicz, Bielecki and Walesa. It's true, the government inherited a desperate economic crisis from Jaruzelski's Stalinist regime. But like doctors whose 'cure' for a sick patient is to amputate all his limbs, Balcerowicz and the other 'free market' economists want to chop away whole branches of the economy to make it 'healthier'.

In 1990 production fell by 25%. In light industry, sales fell by 37%. When Walesa says that a capitalist Poland can be like the USA he must mean the USA of 1929, at the time of the Wall Street crash and the depression! Working people have suffered a massive 40% fall in living standards since January 1990, while prices rose by nearly 700%. The Bielecki and Mazowiecki governments have produced the worst of all worlds: eastern European wages with western European prices! While the new ministers exchange their old Fiats for government limousines, working people, peasants, the unemployed and pensioners are paying a terrible price for this experiment in capitalism. At least 350,000 are now homeless in Poland. This includes 60,000 young people in Warsaw. Factories cutting back on employees have also closed workers' hostels. 700 sleep in the underground sewers of Warsaw every night in order to stay warm and stay alive. What kind of system is it that treats human beings like rats?

Polish workers don't want Stalinism. But the experience of the last two years shows us that capitalism is not the solution either. Unemployment has risen from 20,000 to 1.2 million during 1990. This is not an accident or a natural catastrophe. This is the famous 'plan' of Balcerowicz, although his plan only foresaw unemployment of 500,000 by the end of 1990. In fact the government have been so successful at destroying jobs and production, that more than twice as many people have been thrown on the unemployment scrap heap. Unemployment is expected, according to the same official forecasts, to reach 2 million this year.

Faced with no prospects here, is it any wonder that polls show 40% of young people want to emigrate! A similar 40% believe the government's economic programme will turn most Poles into paupers! Even if emigration is a temporary solution for some, only a tiny number will succeed in going abroad. With growing unemployment in the west, there is less demand for cheap Polish labour. While a million are working illegally in western Europe, only a very few have a legal right to stay. The crime rate has doubled in Poland in the last 12 months. Burglaries are up 176%. Many young people are among this new generation of thieves – forced to try to solve their own problems at the expense of others. But who are the real criminals? – a government and system which wastes the abilities of its people, especially the young! 250,000 of the unemployed have completed at least a secondary education. This means the most precious asset



Jacek Kuron.

of any society — the talent and enthusiasm of its young people — is being thrown away.

The never-ending round of price increases has become unbearable for most ordinary working class families. Rents doubled again in January 1991. Train fares increased by 50%. In 1990, bread rose 13-fold, tea 14-fold and pasta 22-fold in price. Heating costs and food prices will rise again soon. Meanwhile the government are trying to hold down wages even further! They say all Poles must make sacrifices. But who is making the sacrifices? Not the rich few — they are actually profiting from the crisis. It is estimated that 5 million new dwellings are needed to solve the terrible housing crisis. Yet housebuilding was 11.2% lower in 1990 than in 1989. While few new homes are being built at affordable prices or rents, private developers are building \$600-a-month luxury apartments for those with the money. BMWs and Mercedes are imported to satisfy the tastes of the new *economic* nomenklatura who have replaced the old *political* nomenklatura — in reality, a new class of capitalists in the making.

Most of the members of this new exclusive club come precisely from the old nomenklatura or former black marketeers and speculators. Like the old bureaucrats at the Gdansk shipyard — Solidarity's birthplace — who have, under the 'Solidarity' government, set up 70 private companies which feed like parasites off the yard. They use the yard's workforce, equipment and facilities — all paid for with public money — to line their own pockets! Or, like the former Stalinist Industry Minister, Mieczyslaw Wilczek, who wanted the closure of the Gdansk shipyard in 1988. This former 'communist', one of the richest men in Poland, has now launched a profitable joint-venture with a Japanese business. Like hundreds of former bureaucrats, Wilczek has exchanged his 'communist' credentials for capitalist ones with the ease of a man exchanging one library book for another. These are the people who have benefited from the policies of Balcerowicz, Walesa and co.

Protests against this terrible injustice are rarely heard over the deafening roar of propaganda in favour of the 'free market'. In what is now supposed to be a democracy, the government are monopolising the press and TV in the same way as the Stalinists before them. When the TV programme *Obserwator* dared to show the miners' protests outside Belweder (Walesa's presidential palace — Editor) — which no other TV programme showed — its producer was dismissed and its news reporters were 'offered' jobs in other areas by the directorate.

Workers will struggle to hear any alternative. All that can be heard on TV, radio and the press are professors and economists telling us there's no alternative to the market. The sackings, the factory closures, the price rises and the grinn-

ing ex-bureaucrats who are now getting away with the national wealth in the form of new 'private businesses' — all these things are 'unavoidable', 'it's the market', 'there's no alternative'. All the parties and groupings in the Sejm sing a similar tune. This includes the old Stalinist PUWP leaders who as the 'Democratic Left' have also been converted to the market.

MANY WORKERS STILL hope against hope that by the great sacrifices they are making today, a capitalist market will somehow lead to an improvement in the long-term. Although this view is changing fast: 82% supported Mazowiecki's government in January 1990, but 10 months later Mazowiecki could only get a humiliating 19% to come third in the presidential election. Bielecki took over with support at the level of Mazowiecki when he left! Those workers who still have illusions in the market are mistaken and will come to realise this through the bitter experience of further betrayals and disappointment.

Then, increasingly, they will demand that their trade unions, strike committees and workplace organisations fight to defend them. Polish workers — potentially a mighty force, as was shown in the mass movement against Stalinism in 1980 — will not accept these attacks on their jobs, wages and their very livelihood without a fight. But we must also learn the lessons of the defeats in the past. If the future struggles of working people are to succeed, we need a clear programme and a fighting leadership. This programme must spell out an alternative to both Stalinism and capitalism — an alternative developed from the standpoint of the workers and their interests.

Unfortunately, the fact must be faced, at this stage the leaders of the trade unions are offering no alternative. NSZZ (Solidarity) has lost members and aroused anger and opposition in many areas because the union's leadership has taken sides completely with the government against the workers. It has allowed itself to be used as a shield to protect Balcerowicz and co from the anger of the workers. Jacek Kuron stated this bluntly: "Balcerowicz and I have agreed to work as a team. I'd be responsible for social security, social policy, trade unions — persuading people to accept the (Balcerowicz) plan."

OPZZ opposes some aspects of government policy in words but does not put forward an alternative policy. Consequently, the leaders of OPZZ have not organised an effective national campaign to defend jobs and living standards. They were pushed from below into supporting the strikes against *popiwek*. (A tax on state owned companies which increase wages beyond government pay limits — Editor) Their leaders' association with the old Stalinist regime



means many workers distrust OPZZ — an obstacle to building a strong and united workers' opposition to the government's attacks. There is therefore a need for a clear fighting alternative, a policy and programme of action to guide the struggle of workers throughout the country, which must be fought for in every factory, shop, office and every workers' organisation. A policy for the defence of jobs, decent wages and real democratic rights is needed. Only a society of *workers' democracy* can guarantee these things.

Workers' democracy doesn't mean the horrific dictatorial regime that existed between 1949-1989 in the name of 'socialism'. The Stalinists twisted and misused the ideas of Marx, and the experience, ideas and literature of the international workers' movement, in an attempt to justify their mafia rule. Real workers' democracy — genuine socialism — is completely different. It is a society where socialised industry, the government and the state are controlled by workers themselves, and managed democratically by elected representatives who earn no more than a worker's wage, get no privileges and can be recalled at any time. All parties can freely organise and governments are decided by free elections. In this way we put an end to the greedy, parasitic bureaucrats who climbed up on the backs of the working class in the past. At the same time, workers' democracy means defending state ownership of Polish industry — which was built up by the sweat and toil of workers — against attempts to sell it to capitalists and ex-nomenklatura.

1. Privatisation: who gains and loses? *Walesa, then and now.*

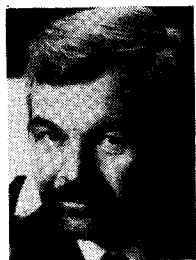
"THE STORY OF the first five companies now being sold shows that this is not the way to expand private ownership" — Janusz Lewandowski, Ministry for Ownership Transformation, February 1991.

The plan to privatize most of the economy is central to the government's programme. Bielecki claims that 80% of the economy will be in private hands in five years' time. Again working people have been surrounded by propaganda arguing that privatization is in everyone's interests and will make the economy more efficient. Many workers have accepted the arguments for privatization because of the terrible mismanagement of state enterprises by the Stalinist nomenklatura. They say 'anything must be better!'. But the recent experience of privatization in Poland, as well as international experience, demonstrates that workers have nothing to gain and a lot to lose.

But here too, we see the enormous problems the government faces in its attempts to reintroduce capitalism. The sale of the first five big companies (Exbud, Slaska Fabryka Kabli SA, Prochnik SA, Krosno and Tonsil) in January 1991 was a near-disaster. Despite spending \$1 million on advertising telling people to 'realise the power of your money', three of the companies couldn't find enough buyers and the deadlines had to be extended again and again. In the end, the state insurance company Weste bought 20% of Prochnik shares. As with Krosno

and Tonsil, the state is left holding most of the shares. Former Privatization Minister, Krzysztof Lis, tried to present the sale as a success saying 'Over 100,000 people used their money to vote for capitalism' by buying shares. But this is just 0.25% of the population. So much for spreading ownership among the people!

These companies were chosen to start the privatization process because, as Lis himself said, they were 'the best'. What problems are they likely to face selling the rest? The fundamental problem facing the privatization programme is who to sell to, especially if the 'best' five attracted hardly any foreign buyers. Clearly Poles can't afford to buy. According to *Warsaw Voice*, the value of all the money resources of the country's population, in the form of bank deposits and other savings at the end of 1990 was worth only 5 to 10% of all state assets.



**Premier
Beilecki.**

In an attempt to get around this problem, some of the Government's economic 'experts' have come forward with the idea of vouchers, given free to every citizen, to be exchanged for a certain amount of shares. During the presidential election campaign when votes were needed, Walesa said everyone should get a voucher worth ZL100m! However, this idea was quickly dropped. The Ministry for Ownership Transformation are talking of a maximum value of ZL870,000!

The voucher scheme is a confidence trick! It is an attempt to overcome resistance to privatization. Despite all the government's propaganda, polls show that 60% of workers prefer to work in state enterprise. Vouchers will probably only be valid for shares in 'high-risk' companies which the government cannot sell for real cash. These companies, without state support, would probably then collapse leaving 'share holders' with a ZL870,000 share in... nothing! It is unclear how the scheme will be administered, but it's possible that a black market for the vouchers will develop long before they can be exchanged for shares — with families tempted to sell their vouchers at below their official value just to get some immediate cash. If this happens it will mean that again the ex-nomenklatura and black marketeers are the only ones to profit from privatization.

Whatever form this scheme eventually takes, one thing is absolutely certain — vouchers do not represent real wealth. They will not make possible the massive investment needed to re-equip Polish industry. This is the Achilles heel of the whole privatization programme: it does not solve the desperate need for investment and new technology. Even when the companies are sold for hard cash, the revenue goes not to the enterprise concerned but to the Treasury. It does not generate a single extra zloty for investment.

Neither will it advance workers' rights. On

the contrary, it means the replacement of one gang of parasites with another. In most cases the same cheats and swindlers who were in charge yesterday stay in charge today. In some cases criminal activities may be involved.

IS WORKERS' SHARE ownership a solution? Supporters of workers' share ownership argue that this can give workers the control of their workplace that was denied under Stalinism. This view is mistaken. Unfortunately these ideas only confuse the issue, and by giving the impression that workers too can gain from privatization, actually help the government get through its anti-working class privatization policies. The government have made clear their total opposition to anything more than a token shareholding of no more than 20% to be sold to employees.

Behind the government's attitude stands the IMF and all their economic advisers. The capitalists have made it clear they will be even less prepared to invest in Poland if such schemes are tolerated. This doesn't mean that employee share schemes represent an alternative to capitalism. Even if a group of workers were successful in buying their company, this would not give them real control. The question of who controls the wider economy would determine this. Within a capitalist dominated economy they would be forced to manage their affairs in much the same way as other capitalist companies. They would be at the mercy of capitalist banks and the capitalist 'market' — over which they would have no control or influence.

Some workers in relatively successful enterprises may be attracted to this idea, but this is short-sighted. Splits within the working class between those in profitable and non-profitable industries will only assist the government and the employers to divide workers, all the more easily to isolate opposition to their policies. This of course, is assuming that the government would agree to majority employee shareholdings in the first place. Given their opposition so far, it would require a massive campaign of pressure — of strikes, occupations and a virtual uprising — to force the government to change.

Such a campaign could achieve much more than win the mere 'right' for workers to get a majority shareholding. Workers don't need shares to prove their ownership of a company. The working class as a whole *already own all of Polish industry*. These enterprises were built up by the labour of working people over decades. Privatization represents the theft of every worker's birthright. The problem has been that for forty years the exact nature of the ownership of Polish industry has been obscured by the wrecking role of the nomenklatura. While the economy belonged to working peo-

ple, with capitalist ownership eliminated, control and management was hijacked by the bureaucracy. Therefore, rather than looking to private share ownership as a means to wrest control of their workplaces from the old bureaucrats, the working class needs to fight to establish democratic workers' control and management throughout the economy, while at the same time fighting to defend social ownership.

It is understandable given the lack of any real workers' rights under Stalinism, never mind workers' control, that some workers now look to co-operative forms of ownership as an alternative. With a democratically planned economy under the control of the working class, co-operative enterprises would be possible where a clear majority of workers wanted this, although in practice this would probably be an exception. But such co-operative ventures could only fully develop under conditions of workers' democracy — where the economy is geared to the needs of the working class — not in a capitalist economy geared towards private profit or a totalitarian Stalinist-run economy.

2. Why bureaucratic 'planning' failed

THE 1970s AND especially the 1980s saw a long drawn-out decay of the Polish economy and the other economies of the Stalinist world. This is especially true of eastern Europe, and was a critical factor behind the revolutionary movements of 1989 which led to the collapse of Stalinism in the region. This process must be studied by the workers' movement east and west. It holds enormous lessons for workers' struggles during the next decade and beyond.

For the mass of workers and peasants, the smashing of eastern Europe's dictatorial Stalinist regimes was a huge step forward. The working class has begun to organise and press for the democratic rights which it was denied for decades. But another side of these events has had a confusing and contradictory effect on the newly emerging workers' movement in the east. For many, it has led to a rejection, not just of Stalinism, but of the very idea of the planned economy as well. Because the old nomenklatura fraudulently dressed their privileged bureaucratic rule in the clothes of 'marxism', 'socialism', 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' — these ideas have been rejected too. This is another crime to add to the long list of crimes committed by the Stalinists.

Years of economic stagnation and even absolute decline in the east European 'planned' economies seems to be proof that planning doesn't work. In the 1980s, this situation became so acute that the creaking economies of eastern Europe were clearly outstripped by



capitalism in the west. This despite the fact that capitalism itself has entered a period of crisis and slow growth. On the surface, it seems that capitalism is a more dynamic and viable system. After all, who can argue with the sharp difference in living standards that now exists between eastern and western Europe? For many, the arguments of the pro-capitalist politicians appear an inescapable truth: 'the market works — planning doesn't!'

But the reason for the protracted economic crisis in Poland was not the unviability of a plan of production, but the bungled bureaucratic way in which 'planning' was carried out. The nomenklatura's perversion of 'planning' has nothing in common with the real Marxist idea of an economy democratically controlled by the working class. Fearing the workers like death, the ruling bureaucracy jealously protected their exclusive right to decide and to manage. The trademarks of bureaucracy are mismanagement, waste and corruption. Increasingly the potential of the planned economies was drowned in a sea of bureaucracy.

However, in the early years, these economies made big strides forward despite the bureaucracy. Poland achieved an economic growth rate of 8.6% per year between 1951-55. From 1956-60 the economy grew by 6.5% per year. This was a faster rate of growth than the capitalist economies. Between 1951 and 1972 national income grew at an annual average of 7%, compared with a world average of 5%.

Compare this with pre-war capitalist Poland. In 1931, only 29.4% of the Polish labour force were industrial or white collar workers. 60.7% were private farmers. By 1980, industrial and white collar workers accounted for 70.1% of the labour force while only 23.7% were private

**Share vouchers
will not create
new
investment.**

**A planned
economy
needs a
democracy of
producers
and
consumers**

farmers. By abolishing capitalism and introducing planning, even in the distorted and inefficient manner of the bureaucracy, Poland was transformed from a backward, mainly rural, economy to an industrialized society.

This progress is especially significant because of the devastation caused to industry during the war, in which one-fifth of the population died. In addition, the post-war reconstruction of the economy was greatly hindered by Stalin's 'fraternal' pillaging of important industrial plant which was transported to the USSR. Such actions, against the interests of the Polish workers, demonstrate how far removed the Stalinist bureaucracy are from genuine Marxism and international working class solidarity.

Of course not all the figures produced by the Stalinist regime are reliable. Statistics were compiled inaccurately and every bureaucracy has a tendency to exaggerate its own achievements. But there is no denying that the economy grew rapidly in this period. Workers undoubtedly felt a change in their own living standards. According to official figures, real wages rose by 24.2% from 1949-55 and by 29% from 1956-60. Even if we halve this increase to take account of the regime's manipulation of the figures, it means a growth of real wages of over 25% during the decade. Compare this, not just with the collapse in living standards in Poland today, but also with the fall in real wages or standstill experienced by most workers in the west during the 1980s!

However, wages are not the whole story. There was a dramatic improvement in social services. In 1950 138,000 were employed in health and social care. This rose to 226,000 in 1955 — a 64% increase! Similarly in education and culture 228,000 were employed in 1950, rising to 344,000 in 1955 — an increase of 50%. In 1958, 3.8% of the workforce were university graduates. By 1981 this had risen to 8.3%. In the same period the number of technical high school graduates in the workforce rose from 6.9% to 21.5% and vocational school graduates from 8.2% to 24.8%.

These achievements show the possibilities arising from the nationalisation of the economy and a plan of production — even though its full potential could not be realised by the bureaucracy. This is just a fraction of what could have been achieved if the working class was directly involved in the management of industry and in democratically drawing up the plan...

In the 1950s and 1960s when industrialisation was concentrated on heavy industries like steel, coal, heavy engineering and the arms industry, the bureaucracy's wrecking role was not so obvious. But as the modern economy has become more complex, especially in the era of computerisation and new technology, the bungling of the bureaucrats is plain for all to see.

This process was explained by Trotsky in 1936. "It is possible to build gigantic factories according to a ready-made Western pattern by bureaucratic command — although, to be sure, at triple the normal cost. But the further you go, the more the economy runs into problems of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bureaucrat like a shadow..."

"Under a nationalized economy, quality demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative — conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery." (*Revolution Betrayed*, p276).

This has been the painful experience of Stalinist 'planning' in Poland especially during the late 1970s and 1980s. This period saw a jamming up of the entire economy. Whereas (according to the regime's figures) 1971-75 saw an average annual growth rate of 9.8%, this had slumped to 1.2% between 1976-80. In 1979 national income declined by 2.3% and then by 6% in 1980. In 1981 national income plummeted by 12%, industrial output fell by 16% and coal production by 14.8%. Martial law couldn't arrest the economic decline. In 1982 real wages slumped by 25.1% as the military regime pushed through huge price rises. By 1985 industry was only working at 60% of capacity.

In addition, because of their slavish reliance on delapidated heavy industries and their inability to adapt and develop new technique, the Stalinists have created one of the worst ecological graveyards in the world. One-third of all Poland's population live in areas designated as 'ecological disaster areas'. These are areas so contaminated that the inhabitants should be moved...

This is the Stalinists' miserable record of sabotage and needless waste. Capitalism will only bring more anarchy and make this disastrous situation worse. Only the working class can rectify this nightmare by establishing its own democratic control and management of the economy. It is impossible to organise a large and complex economy by bureaucratic or administrative methods. For the planned economy to succeed it needs to fully involve the talent, ideas, initiative and creativity of the mass of the population. Bureaucratism by its nature terrorises and destroys these things and seeks in their place 'agreement' and conformity.

For the Stalinists 'the plan', drawn up in finished form in an office or ministry, was an infallible blueprint. Reality was never allowed to interfere with it. But real socialist planning requires the interaction of living forces. It needs to be studied and discussed at every level of industry, involving all the interested forces and all the workers' organisations. It needs to be altered and amended as necessary, taking into account the views of workers, consumers

and specialists. Trotsky explained...

"In a planned economy it is necessary to foresee all the necessary proportions. It is not possible to foresee by abstractions. It is necessary to foresee, correct and perfect the plan by the opinion of the people, by the degree of satisfaction of their needs..." (*The Case of Leon Trotsky*, p248)

Today the pro-capitalist economists argue that capitalism is a more efficient system because the market leads to competition and greater decentralisation. But the capitalist economies are increasingly dominated by a few powerful monopolies which manipulate the market and eliminate real competition. In Britain, 200 companies control 85% of production. The Swedish economy is dominated by 20 companies. One family — the Wallenbergs — control seven of the ten biggest companies. In other words, the concentration and centralization of economic power is an inevitable process which occurs under capitalism. But under capitalism this enormous economic power is wielded by a handful of unelected directors. Through the democratic involvement of the people, real socialist planning would enable the full resources of the economy to be directed in the most effective way, to raise the level of production and meet peoples' needs.

Moreover, social ownership and planning must be *international*. An important factor holding back the east European economies was the bureaucracy's failure to integrate and harmonise the economy in an east European plan. More integration was achieved in the capitalist European Community — carried through in the interests of the 500 big companies which dominate western Europe — than in 'socialist' COMECON. Each economy in eastern Europe followed its own 'socialist' road, meaning a wasteful duplication of tasks. Each built their own heavy industries instead of establishing a division of labour. This was because of the national limitations of each bureaucracy — jealously guarding its 'own' territory. A federation of east and west European workers' democracies and a European plan of production would release an immense unused economic potential which could transform Europe, raising living standards east and west.

Management, which is inseparably connected with planning, should not be the preserve of a handful of greedy nomenklatura. Under a system of workers' control and management, the managing boards would be elected. The privileges enjoyed by top managers under Stalinism would be stripped away. All managers should receive no more than a skilled workers' wage. Any additional expenses that they need to perform their tasks would be under strict supervision from the workers themselves.

The boards of national industries should consist one-third of representatives elected by



the workers in that industry, one-third from the entire working class elected by the trade unions, pensioners' organisations, the peasants' organisations and all genuine representative organisations, and one-third from the government. All these elected representatives would be accountable to those who elected them and subject to recall. This is what Lenin's and Trotsky's ideas would mean in today's situation.

On the basis of a dramatic increase in production, which could be realised quickly through a democratic plan of production, the working week could be reduced and education opened to all workers young and old. It would be possible to raise the technical level of the entire workforce and provide growing numbers of workers with managerial or specialist training. This would make the rotation of all official positions a concrete practicality and thereby prevent the formation of a permanent bureaucratic structure.

Not only would democratic socialist planning and a workers' democracy open up the full potential of the Polish economy and the skilled Polish workforce, it would be an inspiration to workers internationally. By linking with the workers' movement internationally and appealing to them to take power and introduce similar measures, the framework would be built for the integration of the economies of Europe and the world and an international plan of production. This is the new horizon opened by the possibilities of a democratically planned economy which neither capitalism or Stalinism can realise.

Mazowiecki — started with 82% support, ended with 19%.

Social ownership and planning must be international

Whose Choice? Readers respond



*Last November, following the government's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, **Fortress Books** published an important new book by Vivien Seal, **Whose Choice?** Below are some comments received from readers and a brief survey by **Margaret Creear** of developments since.*

Dr Anna Livingstone, an East London GP:

THIS BOOK SUCCEEDS in what it tries to do, that is to situate the politics of women's reproduction within the context of socialism and provide a campaigning manual for *Militant* supporters and the labour movement. Vivien Seal, while an active member of Manchester Labour Women's Council, clearly has an academic background of critical appraisal of the relationship between research and development in reproductive science and the needs of capitalism.

Her book, taking the controversy over the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 as its starting point, discusses fertility control through abortion and contraception, to infertility management, and the whole area of embryo research and

prenatal screening, in the context of the aim of a woman's choice. She highlights the material obstacles, particularly for working class women, and underlines the essential nature of the fight for reproductive rights in the class struggle.

The historic aspects of her book attempt to be global but are at times too vague, and the central role over the last twenty years in Britain of organisations such as the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign and then the National Abortion Campaign are ignored in a dismissive paragraph on page 47 berating single issue campaigns. She forgets the role they played on the few occasions when the labour movement mobilised around abortion rights, particularly the big anti-Corrie demonstration supported by the Women's TUC in 1980.

Politically this connects with a problem with the book as a whole, which while correctly situating fertility control within class politics, in terms of the strategy offered, presents a series of transitional demands, from a minimum wage of £150 to public ownership of the pharmaceutical industry, piggybacked rather clumsily onto specific demands about choice, child care and reproductive rights, in an effort to tie the struggle into the work of the labour movement as a whole. And Seal describes in detail the reactionary and diffident stand of much of the Labour Party over the years. What is good about the book is the very clear explanation of what socialist fertility control is about. Women need the right to contraception and abortion, for safe and enjoyable sex, access to prenatal screening and infertility treatment and so on. Embryo

Whose Choice?
Available from
World Socialist
Books, 3-13
Hepscott Rd.
London E9 5HB
for a special
offer price of
£3.50,
including
postage.

research is needed to improve knowledge and available care. But socialised child care arrangements, adequate housing, safe well paid employment with parental leave rights are among the prerequisites for a real right to choose.

The book discusses the difference between apparent legal rights and what is really available. Tory policy has been to progressively underfund the NHS, housing and other public services, and industrial investment is in what is profitable in drugs or technologies, not what is safe or needed. Private doctors provide for the rich for money, and meanwhile the NHS fails to provide women in much of the country with abortions, and there is no access to free condoms, which would prevent much infertility and disease, in GP surgeries, and *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) is in most areas impossible to get on the NHS. Meanwhile arms expenditure explodes.

Ms Seal is right in saying that the issue of women's rights in reproduction is a political and a class question, and as a health worker and longstanding campaigner around these rights, I hope it will bring more socialists into this struggle, and provide useful detail for use in argument.

Sue Atkins:

WHOSE CHOICE? IS a very readable book — it is no dry old tome full of technical data beyond the grasp of us ordinary mortals. It does deal with technical details and complex issues, but explains them in a clear and uncomplicated way. It discusses sensitive matters that are used by some such as the anti-abortion lobby in an emotive and hysterical way, but this book does not moralise or lecture.

Using the approach in the book, I have found that discussions organised around it have proved lively and sometimes take on the aspect of a 'confessional' — like the admission of a husband that he has never been able to discuss contraception with his wife; or the mother who has never been able to get over the

adoption of her baby over ten years ago.

After all, sex and the control of fertility are of great interest and concern to us all — everyone has a tale to tell about the shortcomings of the NHS, the advertising ploys of the drug companies, the treatment we get at the hands of the medical profession and so on. Fertility control is therefore a very live issue, and this book makes a much needed contribution to fill a gap that exists in this area of socialist literature.

Whose Choice? explains the reality of parenthood in Tory Britain and the need to campaign not only for legal rights, "but for the practical means to realise them" — again, everyone has experience of the difficulty of getting a council house or of paying the mortgage, the lack of good and affordable childcare, the impact of unemployment and poverty on family life.

Above all, this is a practical book. Many authors would not concern themselves with placing this subject in its social and political context and would therefore see no need, apart from a moral lecture perhaps, to point a way ahead in terms of the practical steps needed to give us real choices and control over the decisions that shape our lives. *Whose Choice?* has brought home to me how important the control of fertility is to the overall quality of life that we as socialists struggle to improve. It deserves to be widely read.

Professor Marilyn Strathern, Manchester University Department of Social Anthropology:

I HAVE JUST been reading your book *Whose Choice?*. It is presumptuous of me to say since I have become interested in these issues only very recently, but I did want to say how impressed I was by your account. It is one of the most balanced, humane and challenging statements on the topic that I have read.

Kim Waddington:

WHOSE CHOICE? HIGHLIGHTS the Tories' base hypocrisy,

showing that their 'concern' over the sanctity of life and the rights of the embryo doesn't extend to the care of the baby once it is born. It also exposes the ideology they use to convince women of their duty to their families, which flows from how they see the family as an arm of control.

The chapter on abortion explains how the 1967 Abortion Act decriminalised what women had been doing for centuries. However, whilst the Act was a step in the right direction, we still need the signatures of two doctors for consent which, of course, causes delays. In fact, 30% of late abortions are due to administrative delays within the NHS. Women must not be held responsible for NHS cutbacks. In Sweden where abortion is available on request up to 18 weeks, the result is that 95% of abortions are carried out before 12 weeks.

The section of the book dealing with the Embryo Act is very illuminating. The introduction of this Act in 1990 made donor children legitimate — until now the 1,700 babies born as a result of Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID) have been illegitimate. Since the birth of Louise Brown in 1978, private sector *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) clinics have flourished.

In the USA surrogacy is big business, with agents receiving \$10,000 a time for every surrogate mother they successfully market. But when Vivien Seal talks about every couples' right to a child, I don't think she can appreciate the anguish and despair childless women can go through. Having been a victim myself (and still am) I can understand and empathise with women who will do anything to get a baby, including trying surrogacy or trying to adopt a foreign baby. I still believe it is mainly working class women who are affected. What about all the couples who get into debt, remortgaging their houses to try and find the money in their desperate bid? What the author does show is how capitalism is prepared to exploit the most vulnerable in their drive for profits (hence

the baby trades etc).

While adoption agencies are taking a more realistic approach by allowing single people to adopt children, the Embryo Act says "a woman may be refused treatment unless account has been taken of the welfare of the child, including the need of a child for a father."

One in ten couples are infertile yet research into the causes is drastically underfunded. Couples can wait up to four years for treatment (I waited eight) and clinics are often held in ante natal clinics! Research is vital not just to try to prevent inherited diseases, but also to develop IVF programmes and try and prevent the 100,000 a year spontaneous abortions.

On the whole, *Whose Choice?* is very informative, exposing the Tory right-wingers and Pro-Life groups and reminding us that it was the struggle of working class women that achieved better health care, abortion rights and birth control. Women have no real right to choose unless linked to decent housing, expansion of NHS and research facilities and a minimum wage — as long as poverty conditions exist there is no choice.

Margaret Creear:

EARLIER THIS YEAR, anticipating heavy casualties as the Gulf crisis intensified, Oxford Area Health Authority announced its intention to halt all 'non-urgent' operations. They included in this category NHS abortions. This graphically underlines the point made in *Whose Choice?* about how little importance capitalism attaches to the health and well being of working class women.

Every year in the third world alone, approximately 80 million illegal abortions are carried out. Fifteen per cent of them result in the death of the woman. A further half a million die during pregnancy and childbirth. Yet this 'epidemic' produced no campaign to promote the use of condoms. That had to wait for AIDS, which the ruling class feared would affect themselves more directly. Even

so they made use of AIDS to propagate their own ideology, to whip up discrimination against gays through the use of highly misleading and dangerous propaganda. They also ensured, through cuts in family planning, the increased profitability of some private companies manufacturing condoms.

One of the features of Thatcher's years as prime minister was the encouragement she gave to right wing groups to launch campaigns against the right to abortion. The continuous introduction of private members bills by MPs aligned to these groups has meant that for over ten years the debate on abortion, and more recently embryology and infertility treatment, has centred on legislation. The new time limit of 24 weeks for abortion is likely to stick for the time being.

Yet there has been an enormous swing in support for the right of women to make their own decisions evidenced in recent social attitude surveys. This reflects the greater involvement of women in the workforce and the increased self confidence they have gained as a result.

Such a shift in attitudes provides the basis for an assault on the need for two doctors signatures for an abortion, a restriction which makes a mockery of the right to choose. This provision, a major factor in delays leading to late abortions, will also hamper any improvements which might be made from the imminent introduction of RU486, the abortion pill, which is most effective before seven weeks. No other medical treatment is accompanied by such moralising and the granting of free rein to consultants to exercise their personal prejudices as abortion is.

The hypocrisy of the government towards women in Northern Ireland is quite staggering. In the recent debate on Embryology and the abortion amendment, Ian Paisley said there was no interest in abortion in the North. Yet between 1968 and 1986, 20,957 women came

from the North to England for an abortion, with a further 41,548 from the South. The government has refused to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. Yet it intends, through an Order in Council, to extend the Single Parents and Maintenance Act. Through this Act it hopes to reduce social security payments to single parents by replacing them with payments by the absent parent, usually the father. Attempts to curtail public expenditure are one of the main motives for its ceaseless attacks on single parents. Attacking single parents also allows the Tories to blame them for all the social problems which are in fact a product of the decline of their own system.

The controversy concerning so called 'virgin births' — the provision of AID (artificial insemination by donor) to some women who didn't have or wish to have male partners — is an extension of the right practised by doctors and counsellors now in relation to abortion to decide who is and isn't 'suitable' for treatment.

Their main criteria is not the wishes of the women concerned but the personal opinions and judgement of doctors, who are advised to take into account the 'need for a father.' In effect the woman has to convince them that she conforms to what the Tories and much of the medical profession regard as socially acceptable. Such interference would be seen as outrageous if it were applied to parents in general. It is also an insult to single parents who now are responsible for the upbringing of 14% of children.

One of the unfortunate side effects of this concentration on legislation is that it has detracted from the other key element in the right to infertility treatment, contraception and particularly abortion — the material means, the facilities to make use of legal rights.

The lack of mandatory provision of facilities has always been the Achilles Heel of the 1967 Act. The British Pregnancy Advice Service have pointed out that it is almost impossible in some areas to



get an NHS abortion after 12 weeks — when increased supervision and facilities are necessary — in spite of the legal limit of 24 weeks. The number of abortions done in the NHS has fallen. In some cases this may be due to obstruction by consultants but more generally it is the result of cuts in the NHS itself, in spite of increased demand.

In other words the announcement by Oxford Area Health Authority was no more than a carrying to extremes of a policy which already dominates provision of infertility treatment — the privatisation of this area of the health service.

Today, 53% of abortions in England and Wales are carried out privately, costing women between £240 and £350. From 1985 to 1989, NHS abortions increased by 8.5%, compared with 31.4% outside the NHS. Only two regions, Yorkshire and Trent, showed a larger increase in NHS abortions.

According to a senior London counsellor for the Brook Advisory Service, the cuts in the NHS mean that she is seeing increasing numbers of 'distressed and desperate' women. She gives the example of a 21 year-old woman, who already had four children under five and "was only just coping with living on state benefits." She had been refused an NHS abortion because she was ten to eleven weeks pregnant.

Similarly a single parent with two children with special needs was also refused an abortion. She cites the case of "one woman who was told she would have to wait three weeks for an NHS consultancy and was so distressed she attempted suicide." Women who have to pay try to find the money increasingly by not paying their rent and poll tax and, in some cases, by stealing.

As if declining NHS provision was not sufficiently damaging, the first person to be refused treatment under the new opting out proposals was a woman requiring sterilisation. She was referred by her GP to Guy's hospital, London, since South East Kent Area Health Authority had a policy of not carrying out female or male



sterilisation for 'social' reasons, rather than medical. Guy's agreed to do the operation but South East Kent refused to pay. The woman consequently was refused the operation. If this is extended to NHS abortions, where women often travel outside their own health authority area, the consequences could be very serious.

Obviously we are now approaching the situation which generations of campaigners, particularly women, thought they had put an end to with the passing of the 1967 Act: the re-emergence of back-street abortions and self inducement.

What should be absolutely clear now to both women's groups and the labour and trade union movement is that there is no guaranteed right to abortion when the NHS is being dismantled and starved of finances. At the same time the fact that in 1987 the median age of women giving birth within marriage had risen to 27 (22 outside marriage) is a testimony to the financial hardship, the cost of housing, unemployment and the other problems which confront millions of people in Britain who would like to have children.

Whilst such issues as reproductive rights are of direct importance to women, both to protect their health

and well being and to enable them to control their own lives, it is the responsibility of the labour and trade union movement to fight to defend legal rights and to ensure the facilities to make those rights realisable for working class women. Socialism does not just mean the physical control of the means of production providing us with the resources to secure such facilities. It also means the dismantling of all the authoritarian structures based on the domination by one class, the minority, over the rest of us and the genuine democratisation of decision making in both industry and the welfare state, by bringing both under the control of the working class.

In spite of their propaganda war society is moving against the ideas of the Tories.

According to the latest social trends survey:

★ **One in four of all households were one person households in 1988 compared with one in eight in 1961. This includes a rise both amongst the elderly and the young.**

★ **In 1987 14% of dependent children lived in lone parent families, double the 1971 figures. In 1989 17% of all families with dependent children were lone parents.**

★ **The percentage of women of 18 to 49 years cohabiting doubled between 1981 and 1988 from 3.3% to 7.7%.**

★ **25% of children are born outside marriage.**

★ **52% of families with children have both parents working.**

Red is the colour of our flag

Peter Taaffe reviews the recently published autobiography of Oskar Hippe, a fighter in the German workers' movement for over six years.



Spartacists on the barricades, 1919.

OSKAR HIPPE JOINED the pre-first world war German Social Democratic Party (SPD) under the influence of his radical elder brother. He swung over in support of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht's Spartacists League in 1916 in protest against the support of the war by the SPD leaders. Following the German revolution of 1918, he joined the newly formed German Communist Party (KPD) and participated in all the major battles of the German working class from 1918 to 1923.



Rosa Luxemburg.

His revulsion at the increasingly bureaucratised KPD, under the pressure of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, led him into the ranks of the 'Trotskyists' and eventual expulsion for his consistent internationalism from the KPD. He fought against the rise of Nazism, was arrested and tortured after Hitler came to power, and when released worked in the underground against the fascists. Following the occupation by the 'allied' forces and Red Army of Germany, Hippe took an independent class position.

This led once more to his arrest, this time by the East German Stalinist regime. He was imprisoned for eight years, his jailers very often being the same Nazis who had supervised communists and socialists under the old Nazi regime. Following his release from an East German jail he travelled to the West, there to fight for his Marxist beliefs in the ranks of the newly re-constituted SPD.

Oskar Hippe tells his story in *And Red is the Colour of Our Flag* and it is a very interesting story, not just from a personal point of view (although that is very inspiring) but in giving a picture of all the major struggles of the German working class over sixty years. This is done not from the standpoint of a 'general', a leader of a mass organisation, but through the eyes of 'the

poor bloody infantry', a combatant, a militant, stubbornly and heroically defending his beliefs come what may.

He was first introduced to the ideas of socialism and Marxism by his radicalised elder brother. He secretly revelled in the verbal trouncing this brother gave to his conservative and rather tyrannical father. Although he had joined the Social Democracy, he honestly recounts succumbing to the pro-war mood that developed with the outbreak of the first world war. He writes, "the books and pamphlets which I read up to then were not enough to fortify me against the prevailing atmosphere. And so I too finally lapsed into the jingoism which reigned supreme".

However, when he arrived in Berlin in April 1916 his pro-war tie was ripped from his neck by his sister who threw it under a train. Working in a metal factory he soon imbibed the radicalised atmosphere of the Berlin working class. He recounts the inspiring anti-war stand of Karl Liebknecht: "On the eve of 1 May 1916 my brother-in-law told me we would not go to work on the next day since the workforce would all be joining an anti-war demonstration at the Potsdampplatz. We went there at the specified time. Ten thousand workers had gathered in the square, and Karl Liebknecht spoke to them from platform at the Potsdam local station."

He met Richard Muller, the leader of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, who "embodied for me the very image of a militant socialist". Learning rapidly, he joined the Spartacist League in October 1916. When the SPD split in 1917, with the formation of the Independent SPD (USPD), the Spartacists sought to work within this newly created mass organisation. Retrospectively, after he had become a member of

the newly formed Communist Party, he and his comrades were "in unanimous agreement that Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht did not split from social democratic policies early enough, as the left wing of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party had done in 1903. In the last years before the war at the latest, when reformism had shown itself more clearly, that was when the left wing in the SPD should have decided to split. Even if it had not been possible to prevent the war, at least the outcome of the November revolution would have been different."

This view of Hippe, which we believe to be mistaken, was common amongst the cadres of the young KPD at that time. It is also a widely held view amongst ultra-left sects on the outskirts of the labour movement. The mistake of Rosa Luxemburg was not that she did not split from the Social Democracy. Contrary to Hippe's assertion, Lenin did not split from the RSDLP in 1903 but remained as a faction, the Bolsheviks (Majority), of this party right up to 1912. Only when Lenin had the support of four-fifths of the organised workers did he carry through an organisational break with the Mensheviks.

Rosa Luxemburg's mistake was that while she politically combated the opportunist leaders of the SPD, including its 'left-wing' led by Kautsky, she did not, unlike Lenin, organise a tendency, or faction, which both politically and organisationally fought the opportunist leaders of the party. Part of her reluctance to do so flowed from her revulsion at the bureaucratically centralised character of the German SPD. She was therefore hesitant in drawing 'organisational' conclusions which smacked of the same methods as the leaders of the SPD.

HIPPE GIVES A glimpse of the colossal effect of the Russian revolution on the German proletariat. This resulted in a split in the USPD, with the left fusing with the Communist Party to form the Unified Communist Party (VKPD) with an initial membership of 500,000. This had more votes in the industrial belts than all the other parties put together, including the SPD. For instance, "in the Maansfeld district, as well as in the Harz foothills, the party had won considerable support amongst the small farmers and peasants. In many communities, the VKPD dominated. Any communal policies made there were always in the interests of the working population. But in the factories as well, working conditions and wages were improved with the aid of strikes".

The author shows in a quite gripping fashion the state of virtual civil war which raged throughout Germany. He deals with the Kapp putsch of 1921 which was met with a general strike and a complete paralysis of the forces of the bourgeois. 1923, an opportunity for the

working class of Germany to have taken power, is also recounted in some excellent detail.

The failure of the leadership of the VKPD to seize this opportunity resulted in huge upheavals within its ranks. Hippe participated in all the debates, eventually finding a road to the forces of the Left Opposition. At the same time he fulfilled all the necessary requirements of a good KPD member: "I had set up a stand to sell the *Rote Fahne* at the railway station. I started with three newspapers, and after a few months I built up sales of over 100 papers, some 30 *Workers Illustrated* and a few copies of *The Evening World*." The Left Opposition was quite substantial within the KPD, above all in Berlin. The inner-party conflict lasted for over three years and only in 1929 did the Stalinist fraction succeed in gaining general control of the party.

Even when expelled, the forces of the Left Opposition orientated towards the party, "conducting house-to-house propaganda, the Opposition comrades and those expelled from the party were always there". He points out that "house-to-house and 'courtyard' propaganda was primarily conducted in workers' districts... It began with a song of struggle, and then a comrade made a short speech highlighting the social distress of the working population. Then the comrades split up and called at the apartments to discuss current problems with the tenants. It was rare that we were denied entry. On the contrary, we were often invited in for a cup of coffee as it was easier to talk like that."

Nevertheless the 'juggernaut' of expulsions rolled on. Hippe himself was expelled from the KPD in January 1929. The Trotskyists still fought against the ultra-left madness of 'Third Period' Stalinism. They faced attacks not only from the Nazi SA Stormtroopers but also from the thugs of the KPD itself.

One consequence of the Stalinists 'Third Periodism' was that the influence of the KPD had sunk to virtually zero within the factories, with more than 75 per cent of factory workers following the advice of the SPD and trade unions not to participate in demonstrations of the Communists. Nevertheless, the collapse in the German economy, with a colossal increase in unemployment, led to a huge radicalisation of the proletariat, resulting in a 500,000 loss of votes for the SPD and a KPD gain of 1.25 million in the elections of 1930. Hippe met Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov, at this time and at the end of 1932 participated in discussions with Trotsky in Copenhagen.

THE MAIN AGITATIONAL slogan of the Trotskyists was for a united front of the mass workers' organisations to repel fascism. This activity led Hippe to paint outside the big factories in Berlin, "in capital letters two feet



KPD leader
Thalmann.



**The Nazis
 come to power.**

high... the slogan 'Trotsky demands: A Workers' United Front between the SPD and KPD'."

The small forces of the Left Opposition were not able to prevent the coming to power of Hitler. Like tens of thousands of others, Hippe was arrested after a period of underground work against the Nazis. He behaved heroically in the face of intimidation and torture, eventually facing a period of imprisonment. He points out that in the building where he was first tortured, "in the six days that I was there, six people were carried out dead. The people in the neighbouring buildings could hear the continual cries of pain from those tortured."

The Nazis could not break them despite the fact that "our comrades, in contrast to the members of the KPD, openly admitted their actions." He was incarcerated in Plötzensee prison. His cell was right next door to 'death row', "where those condemned to death waited, including a good friend of mine, Richard Hutig, who was arrested for murder after a fight between some workers and the SA in January 1933." Hippe points out that "when he was beheaded, so friends who later came... told me, he died as an upstanding fighter."

Eventually finding work as a fitter, he points out that the mood in Germany amongst the proletariat was not at all enthusiastic for the war: "the troops in Berlin marched through the Kampfstrasse on the way to board the trains at Charlottenburg station. In contrast to the first world war, when the soldiers were enthusiastically cheered on by the crowds, people stood detachedly on the pavements."

"Only after the campaign against France in 1940, when the German army succeeded in less than five weeks in defeating the combined armies of the Western powers, was there a change in the mood of the populace. A tidal wave of chauvinism swept through Germany, sweeping with it large sections of the working population."

During the war, the forces of Trotskyism were scattered, caught up in the Nazi war machine. Hippe points out "very few of our younger comrades remained in Berlin — all of them had been called up to the military, and the 35 to 45 year olds had been sent to fight the partisans in the Balkans. Not one of them returned. We learned that one of them had been court-martialled and shot for collaborating with the partisans."

For those who were not called up, "it was becoming increasingly difficult to do any propaganda work, but all of us were convinced of the necessity of keeping up all possible contacts and of establishing new ones." The main task of the Trotskyists at this stage was to assemble and train cadres for the future upheavals which would follow the war.

Following the defeat of the Nazis, Hippe participated in the painful process of reassembl-

ing the scattered forces of Trotskyism: "our organisation had lost more to the military campaigns than to the Gestapo and their arrests." He courageously fought for an independent class position, criticising those who collaborated either with the imperialist occupiers or with the Stalinists.

His stubborn opposition to the Stalinists led to his arrest with the establishment of the East German Stalinist regime in 1948. Hippe points out that in one prison "my superintending officer was always the same one. He had been with the Nazis in the concentration camps." Another, "a new chief warder, was a one-time Hitler youth leader." In a masterly understatement Hippe comments, "in the eight years of imprisonment I never had the feeling that I was in a prison of a socialist state."

With his release in 1956 he travelled to West Germany and recommenced his political activity by work within the left wing of the German SPD. It is not possible to recount here the lessons of that intervention of Hippe and others who shared his political standpoint. He did have an influence on a layer of the youth in the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) which developed in the 1960s. Some of these youth subsequently moved in the direction of terrorism and the Bader-Meinhof organisation. He was eventually forced out of the SPD but retained his unwavering support for Marxism.

Undoubtedly in this period Hippe ended in a sectarian cul-de-sac. Nevertheless, taken in total, this book is an invaluable record of the struggles of the German working class during this century. At the same time, it shows the unvanquishable spirit of the proletariat which, despite savage defeats and inadequate leadership, nevertheless throws up magnificent fighters like those such as Oskar Hippe. □

Available from World Socialist Books:

And Red is the colour of our flag — by Oskar Hippe. £8.95.

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Marxism, Anarchism and the State

During the battle against the poll tax small groups calling themselves anarchists gained a certain notoriety. More seriously, in Eastern Europe anarchist ideas have found an echo amongst some workers and youth. Could anarchism see a renaissance? Nick Wrack looks at what anarchism is and what it represents.

ANARCHISM COMES FROM the Greek word, 'anarchos', meaning 'without government'. The general ideology of anarchism is absolute opposition to all government, reflected in a complete hostility to 'the state' in any form.

Anarchists see the state as the root cause of all that is wrong in society — oppression, poverty, the denial of individual liberty. They see the state as giving rise to the power of the capitalists. They stand for the immediate and complete destruction of the state, replacing it not with any other system of government, but immediately arriving at a stateless society.

To the anarchists any 'state' means 'authority' which signifies a suppression of individual freedom. The antipathy of anarchism to the state is carried over into an antipathy to politics in general. Anarchists argue that having anything to do with the state will inevitably affect those involved in the struggle and lead to corruption or 'authoritarianism'.

Thus anarchism rejects all participation in any form of parliamentary activity and opposes workers belonging to political parties which fight for political change through the state.

There is much in common in their opposition to the state between anarchism and Marxism. Marxism completely opposes the brutal domination of the capitalist state which enslaves and exploits the workers and peasants of the world. Marx saw a future in which there would be no state but "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all". There would be no coercive power of the state but only a free, self-governing people. But the question is: how to achieve this? Whereas anarchism sees the state as the fount of all the problems in society — which would be resolved by removing *the state* — Marxism sees the state as an expression of class society which is itself the cause of the problems. The aim is not only to abolish the existing state, but to destroy *class*

The state
enables the
ruling class
to dominate



Trotsky.

society which gives rise to the state.

The state is the instrument through which the ruling class maintains its domination over the rest of society. The capitalist state can take many different forms: monarchy, republic, military dictatorship. But its purpose is the same in each case — to enable a minority to exploit the majority. For a minority to maintain its dominant position it must have an instrument of coercion. That instrument is the state with its control of religion, education, the media, the law and most importantly, the police and the armed forces, which will be used if the class rule of the minority is ever threatened. That is why any challenge to the state has to be taken seriously, not in the light-minded fashion of the anarchists.

The state first developed in society with the creation of private property and the emergence of classes. Ever since, the state has served as the instrument of the minority class in society to protect their control over the surplus produced. So long as there is class society there will be the need for a state. It can not be otherwise. The state will only disappear when there are no classes. When there are no classes there will be no need for a state.

This can only be achieved by the socialist revolution, that is by the working class conquering state power, by the political destruction of the capitalist state and its replacement by a democratic workers' state.

Having destroyed the capitalist state it will be necessary for the victorious working class to constitute themselves as a new state, to prevent the defeated bourgeois from organising counter-revolution. The capitalists will do everything possible to destroy the gains of the revolution. Unless the working class takes the practical step of organising its own state, that is an instrument of its own class rule, then the working class will be defeated by the violent action of the capitalists and capitalism will be restored.

In *The State and Revolution* Lenin answers the arguments of both the reformists and the anarchists: "The proletariat needs the state only temporarily. We do not at all disagree with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as the aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources and methods of state power against the exploiters..."

Similarly, Trotsky in *Stalinism and Bolshevism* writes that "Marxists are wholly in agreement with the anarchists in regard to the final goal: the liquidation of the state. Marxists are 'statist' only to the extent that one cannot achieve the liquidation of the state simply by ignoring it."

There will be however a fundamental difference between the state immediately after the socialist revolution and the previous capitalist state. Whereas the capitalist state is the instru-

ment of rule by the minority class in society, the workers' state will be for the first time in history the instrument of the majority class rule — over the defeated minority. In all previous revolutionary transitions from one form of society to another, from slave-owning to feudalism, from feudalism to capitalism, the new ruling class has taken over and adapted the old state and used it for its own purposes. The experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 led Marx and Engels to conclude that the working class could not simply take hold of the ready made state apparatus from the bourgeois but would have to completely replace it with a different *form* of state, one to serve the interests of the majority in society and to lay the basis for the building of a socialist society.

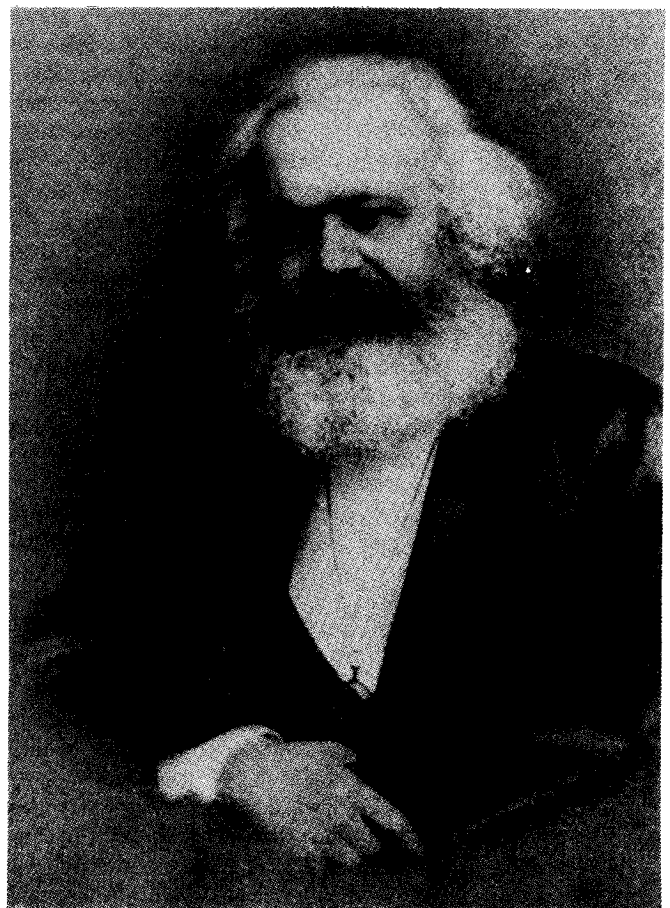
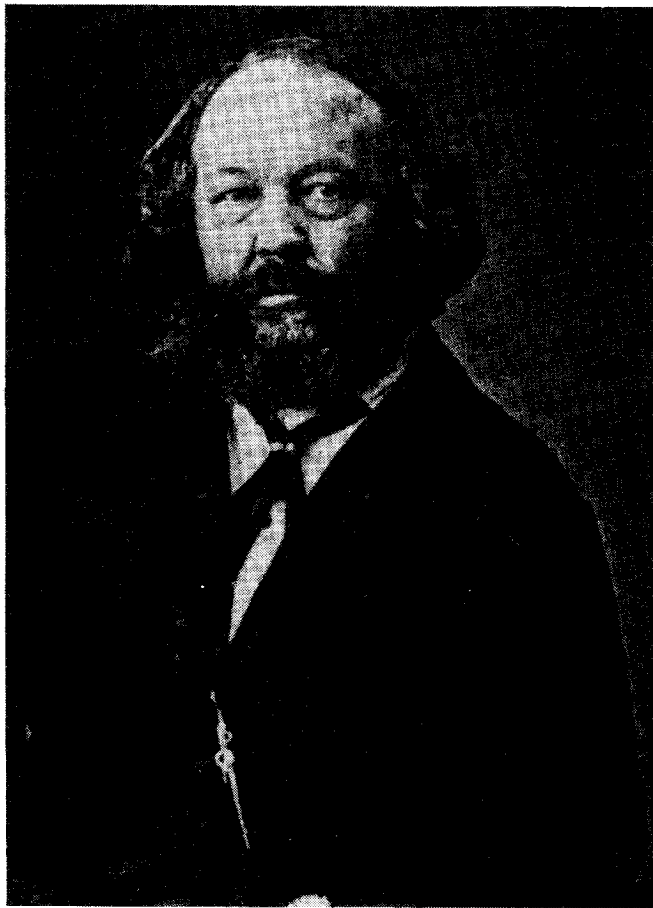
Thus, where the anarchists see the state as giving power to the bourgeois they are only seeing a part of the whole picture. While the ruling class derives its power from its control of the state, this ultimately rests on the class nature of society under capitalism. That is why the tasks of the revolution lie not simply in 'abolition of the state' but in laying the basis for the eradication of class society itself. The socialist revolution will 'abolish' or destroy the capitalist state but temporarily will have to replace it with a workers' state.

To ensure that the working class maintains control over its own state, so establishing the basis for its ultimate disappearance, Lenin advocated the election of all officials, paid no more than the wages of a skilled worker, and subject to the right of immediate recall so that nobody could abuse their position. All bureaucratic tasks were to be rotated to prevent power resting too long in the hands of one person or group. There was to be no standing army apart from the people which could be used against the people. To these conditions we add that all parties, except fascists, be allowed to organise and conduct political activity.

This state will be needed only so long as the minority, the defeated capitalist class, poses a threat to the new socialist society. With the introduction of a socialist plan of production — replacing the profit nature of capitalism — it will be possible to increase production greatly. As production increases so will poverty, starvation, disease and material want of any kind disappear. New technology will be used to limit the working day.

So long as there are shortages, so long as there is want, there is a necessity to regulate society — to govern. As production increases and want disappears there will be less and less need to govern society. The danger of counter-revolution will begin to disappear as the new form of society shows its huge advantages over capitalism.

Side by side with the development of socialist production, classes begin to disappear and so will the state. The state will be needed less and



less until eventually, as Engels put it, the state 'withers away'. The government of people is replaced by the administration of things and a society without government is achieved.

As Lenin argues in *The State and Revolution*, "only communism makes the state completely unnecessary, for there is nobody to be suppressed — 'nobody' in the sense of a class, in the sense of a systematic struggle against a definite section of the population. We are not utopians, and do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses by individual persons, or the need to suppress such excesses. But in the first place, no special machine, no special apparatus of suppression is needed for this; it will be done by the armed people itself, as simply and as readily as any crowd of civilised people, even in modern society, interferes to put a stop to a scuffle or to prevent a woman from being assaulted. And, secondly, we know that the fundamental social cause of excesses, which consist in the violation of the rules of community life, is the exploitation of the masses, their want and their poverty. With the removal of this chief cause, excesses will inevitably begin to 'wither away'."

Anarchism, with its simplistic and utopian calls to abolish the state overnight, has neither the understanding nor programme to achieve its own goal. Without an understanding of the nature of the state and how it arose it is not possible to show how it can be destroyed.

ANARCHISM DEVELOPED AS a philosophy in the 19th century with the growth of the big capitalists and the domination of the bourgeois state. It represented the rebellion of a section of the petit bourgeois at the loss of their position in society to the capitalist class which came to dominate them more and more.

Anarchist ideas did not stop at rejection of the state. Anarchism also rejected political action and saw in political parties an authoritarianism which mirrored that of the state itself.

This position was argued by the anarchist Bakunin and his supporters within the ranks of the First International. Their ideas were clearly stated at an anarchist conference held at Saint-Imier in 1872: "The aspirations of the proletariat can have no other aim than the creation of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation based on work and equality and wholly independent of any political government, and such an organisation can only come into being through the spontaneous actions of the proletariat itself, through trade societies and through self-governing communes... no political organisation can be anything but the organisation of rule in the interests of a class and to the detriment of the masses... the proletariat, should it seize power, would become a ruling, and exploiting, class."

Here the anti-political stance of anarchism is clearly shown as a recipe for do-nothingness, inaction and disaster. Also revealed is the

**Mikhail
Bakunin and
Marx.**



*CEDA leader
Gil Robles.*

complete lack of understanding about the role of the working class in capitalist society. As Marx explained, capitalism creates its own gravedigger in the form of the working class. Because of its place in the productive processes of society the working class is the only really revolutionary force in society. When it moves it swings behind it the peasantry and the petit-bourgeois.

Anarchism could only make gains inside the working class in its early days. That these ideas gained any following is a reflection of the immaturity of the proletariat in the 19th century. Even then anarchism never really attracted wide support, winning most support and lingering longest in those countries with a rural population or large petit-bourgeois. In the course of events the reality of working class struggle dealt a series of death blows to anarchism as a serious force. In each country workers came to realise that political activity was a vital and essential part of their struggle against capital.

Bakunin and his followers, like the anarchists today, opposed participation in parliamentary elections, campaigns for social reforms and all attempts to win influence and power in the state. He condemned such activity as a 'betrayal of the revolution' since it gave rise to illusions among workers that they could be emancipated by means other than revolution. He proclaimed that the International Alliance of Social Democracy, the anarchist international, "rejected all political action not having as its immediate and direct objective the triumph of the workers over capitalism, and as a consequence, the abolition of the state". Thus the only action allowable is a revolutionary assault to overthrow the capitalist state — anything short of this is a betrayal.

Marxism sets its goal as the conquest of political power and the organising of a socialist society under which the state will eventually wither away. But until the working class is powerful enough and armed with a programme to change society completely is it to refrain from political activity? Of course not. Marxists advocate a continuous struggle for all political gains that can be made, even including utilising elements of the state, for example, parliamentary elections, to strengthen the working class against the state.

The anarchists' ultra-left rejection of political activity is only able to gain any credence at all because of the hostility aroused by the betrayals of the reformist labour leaders who, while engaged in political activity, limit themselves only to reforms without linking the day-to-day struggles to the need to change society completely.

Marxists fight hard for all reforms possible but do not limit the struggle to this, explaining that any reforms can only be made permanent and improved under socialism which means the

revolutionary transformation of society. Political activity leads to a growing awareness and confidence of the working class of its own power and ability to carry out the socialist revolution.

THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE of anarchism in the course of the Spanish revolution demonstrated not only its bankruptcy but its counter-revolutionary nature when it came to the decisive moment of carrying out the revolution it had all along proclaimed as its aim.

Spain was one of the few places where anarchism lasted as a significant force beyond the 1920s. Its roots were established in the days of the First International and there were strong anarchist traditions amongst the peasants in the rural communities. In Barcelona they had a base within the working class. The anarchist union, the CNT, claimed 600,000 members in June 1931, 250,000 of them in Catalonia. Trotsky wrote that "in the ranks of this organisation (the CNT) are concentrated the elite of the Spanish proletariat".

In 1933 the right-Republicans (a capitalist party) under Lerroux won the elections and in October 1934 invited CEDA (the extreme right wing) into the government. The Socialist party called a general strike and there were insurrectionary movements in Asturias and Catalonia. In Madrid and Catalonia the anarchist CNT stood to one side, arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and did not concern the workers even though this was a strike against a move to incorporate fascism into the government.

In Asturias the anarchist militants participated under the pressure of the masses and because of the traditions of unity in that area. However, because of their abstentionist stupidity, the anarchists elsewhere continued to work, even working the trains which brought the Moorish troops under Franco to suppress the Asturias insurrection with the consequent death of thousands.

In the elections of 1936 the anarchists did not at first participate. But at the last minute they encouraged their members to vote for the Popular Front even though this was a Front containing bourgeois parties. Such support could only have the effect of placing the Spanish workers under the leadership of their enemy, the bourgeois.

Here we see the anarchists revealing the ugliness of both sides of their face, ultra-leftism and opportunism. Firstly they reject any participation in the elections because they reject participation in political activity. Then they advise their supporters to vote for the Popular Front which contained bourgeois as well as workers' parties, but not the anarchists.

In fact, their advocacy of abstention was utilised by the right. In Cadiz for example, the right realised the importance of anarchist abs-

tentions and offered substantial sums of money to the anarchist leaders in return for anti-electoral propaganda.

Worse was to come. Faced with the Fascist uprising of 17 July 1936 against the Popular Front government the workers instinctively moved into action. Workers with arms in hand controlled whole cities. In Republican Spain the forces of the state had collapsed. The only decisive armed force was the working class. A situation of dual power developed which, had it been utilised by the working class organisations, could have led to the victorious socialist revolution.

Neither the 'Communist' nor the Socialist leaders wanted revolution. And now the anarchists revealed in practice the true nature of their 'revolutionary' theory. They had a strong position in Catalonia amongst the workers and elsewhere among the rural workers. Yet, instead of calling for the organisation of soviets through which the workers and peasants could have taken control and organised a new society, the anarchists did nothing to consolidate the gains the workers had won. Augustin Souchey was an anarchist who supported their entry into the government. Between 1936-39 he was in charge of the foreign propaganda of the CNT-FAI. He wrote: "The workers of Barcelona, under the leadership of the anarchists, succeeded in smashing the fascist rising within two and a half days. The anarchists did not want to conquer power for themselves, nor did the unions seek to establish a dictatorship. As in all other parts of Spain, an anti-fascist united front was formed. It ranged all the way from the various republican tendencies of the bourgeois to the most extreme tendencies of the proletariat — the anarchists".

Thus the anarchists led the workers into a popular front to fight fascism. Such an alliance with bourgeois parties can only weaken the struggle. A fight against fascism has to be a fight to destroy the power of the bourgeois which gives rise to fascism.

But they took this popular frontism even further. These opponents of the state, antagonists of government, entered the Popular Front government! They joined a government that was not a workers' government but a bourgeois government whose aim was to destroy the incipient socialist revolution, instinctively sought by the masses, and to maintain the bourgeois state.

All that would have been necessary was for the workers to have organised their own state, and society would have been transformed. But faced with the actual test of carrying through the tasks of the revolution the anarchist leaders found their theory wanting and joined the state they had spent their lives denouncing.

This episode was repeated in 'the May Days' in Barcelona in 1937. The Stalinists in the government in Catalonia, the Generalidad, at-



tempted forcibly to wrest control of the Barcelona telephone exchange from the anarchist militants who had occupied it from the first days of the revolution. Barricades were erected to protect this element of workers' control and when the government troops refused to move against the workers, power was in their hands. Once again the anarchist leaders appealed for restraint. The anarchist ministers (!) Garcia Oliver and Federica Montseny broadcast an appeal to their followers to lay down their arms and return to work.

Souchey admits that "the entire movement (of the government) was organised to destroy the CNT and the Federation of Iberian Anarchists (FAI) and, with them, the revolutionary achievements of 19 July". Yet, rather than mobilise their forces against this counter-revolution the anarchists advocated restraint.

In a diary of the events, Souchey notes that on 5 May, "reports came in from all parts of Barcelona and from the provinces of Catalonia that the overwhelming majority of the population were with the CNT and that most towns and villages were in the hands of our organisations. It would have been easy to attack the centre of the city had the responsible committees so decided. They only had to appeal to the defence committees of the outlying districts. But the regional committee of the CNT was opposed to it. Every proposal of attack was unanimously rejected by them and by the FAI".

Troops sympathetic to the anarchists were prepared to join them. On 6 May he writes: "Under-Secretary of State Juanel Molina, even

'Sons of the barricades'. A Spanish civil war poster.

though he was a member of the FAI, did everything to keep the troops from entering the struggle. Had the FAI really gone into action, the entire military force would have been on their side and victory would have been certain... The anarchists could also have called in their columns from the Aragon front, as well as armed forces from other parts of Catalonia, and there is no doubt that they could have been victorious within 24 hours".

Instead the anarchist leaders continued to participate in the Catalan government that was dispatching troops against the workers. A CNT manifesto broadcast on 6 May stated, "The CNT and FAI continue to collaborate loyally, as in the past, with all political and trade union sectors of the anti-fascist front. The best proof of this is that the CNT continues to collaborate with the central government, the government of the Generalidad and all the municipalities... Further proof that the CNT of Catalonia did not want to break, and did not break, the anti-fascist front, is that when the new government of the Generalidad was formed, on 5 May, the representatives of the CNT of Catalonia offered it every facility, and the secretary of the CNT was a member of the government".

This collaboration served only to disarm the workers in the face of armed counter-revolution. The movement was betrayed. Yet what was to have stopped the anarchist leaders from carrying through the revolution if they had wanted it? In April 1937 the CNT claimed over one million members in Catalonia.

In the course of these events the most militant sections of the anarchists, the anarchist youth and a group known as 'The Friends of Durruti' (after the anarchist leader Buenaventura Durruti who had been killed in the defence of Madrid) came over to the ideas of Marxism. The small Trotskyist group, the Bolshevik-Leninists, called for the seizure of power by the workers through the establishment of 'committees of defence' or soviets. This perspective was adopted by the anarchist left and the youth. The Friends of Durruti called for 'a revolutionary junta'. Thus in the course of events the best sections of the anarchists were drawn to the same conclusions as the Marxists — that what

was needed was the revolutionary seizure of power by the workers themselves. There is no doubt that this could have been achieved in Catalonia had this position been taken up widely by the workers' organisations.

The May Days revealed a gulf between the leaders, the theoreticians of anarchism, and the youth and worker militants of the CNT. Of course, the anarchist ranks were horrified by the betrayal of their leaders. Copies of the anarchist paper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, were ripped up in disgust by the workers on the barricades. But the whole preceding period of anarchist schooling had miseducated the masses. Only a Marxist party armed with a revolutionary programme for seizing power through the creation of soviets and establishing a workers' state could have shown what was necessary.

Unfortunately, the genuine Marxists were too weak to counter the influence of the Stalinist, socialist reformists and anarchist leaders. The revolution was lost and fascism triumphed. Franco was to rule for forty years.

Commenting on the counter-revolutionary nature of anarchism as demonstrated by the events in Spain, Trotsky wrote: "To renounce the conquest of power is voluntarily to leave the power with those who wield it, the exploiters. The essence of every revolution consisted and consists in putting a new class in power, thus enabling it to realise its own programme in life. It is impossible to wage war and to reject victory. It is impossible to lead the masses towards insurrection without preparing for the conquest of power.

"No one could have prevented the Anarchists after the conquest of power from establishing the sort of regime they deem necessary, assuming, of course, that their programme is realisable. But the Anarchist leaders themselves lost faith in it".

The entry of the anarchists into the government and the betrayal of the revolution spelt the death of anarchism as a historic force. It revealed itself as a useless weapon in the hands of the workers.

However, there are some who are incapable of learning anything from history. Jose Peirats was an active anarchist during the events in Spain who opposed the entry of the anarchists into the government. But what was the alternative? In *The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* he writes: "From a distance of more than twenty years, I believe that those of us who consistently opposed collaboration with the government had as our only alternative a principled, heroic defeat". What sort of revolutionary theory is it whose best hope is defeat, however 'principled' and 'heroic'?

UNDERSTANDABLY, ONE OF the main arguments used by anarchists against Marxism is the nature of the state in the Stalinist countries.



Anarchist leader Durruti.

"We have already heard from some Anarchist theoreticians that at the time of such 'exceptional' circumstances as war and revolution, it is necessary to renounce the principles of one's own programme.

"Such revolutionists bear a close resemblance to raincoats that leak only when it rains, ie in 'exceptional' circumstances, but during dry weather they remain waterproof with complete success."

Leon Trotsky, January 27, 1938.

Here we see, not the withering away of the state but the growth of monstrous dictatorships in the name of 'Marxism'. 'Bigger sticks and bigger cages,' as some anarchists put it.

Trotsky long ago answered those capitalist opponents of the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917, as well as anarchists, who equated Stalinism with Bolshevism. In fact, in the course of the Russian revolution many anarchists joined the ranks of the Bolsheviks who showed in practice how to make a revolution and change society. Not all, however. Peter Kropotkin, the communist anarchist who had suffered tremendously at the hands of the state for his ideas, ended up supporting the Provisional government and urged workers to enlist in the Russian army to help win the war!

The reasons why the new-born workers' state grew into a dictatorship rather than withering away into communism are rooted in the isolation of the nascent workers' state and the cultural and economic level of the working class at that time. The civil war, the demands of the economy and the prevailing level of literacy and general education forced the new regime to rely heavily on elements from the old Tsarist state apparatus. Together with the isolation of the Russian revolution, this allowed a bureaucratic clique, with Stalin at its centre, to accrue more and more power to itself. Their aim became to maintain the privileges of the bureaucracy rather than to protect and develop the gains of the revolution.

The only consistent criticism of the Stalinist regimes has come not from the anarchists but from Trotsky and the adherents of genuine Marxism. All the leaders of the Bolsheviks saw the Russian revolution as a prelude to a European revolution which would raise the economic and cultural level of Russia and thus lay the basis for socialism to develop. This did not happen. The subsequent development of the Stalinist state is not an argument either for anarchism or against the carrying out of the revolution. The alternative was not the anarchist society of free communes or free soviets but the triumph of reaction, the restoration of autocracy as shown by the Kornilov assault against the Provisional government.

The argument that organising a workers' state inevitably leads to dictatorship is simply an argument for inertia, for nowhere do the anarchists explain how we are to 'jump' from the capitalist state to the stateless society overnight.

The demise of the Stalinist regimes throughout Eastern Europe and the crisis inside the Soviet Union has given birth to a multitude of different ideas as to the best way forward. Decades of Stalinist rule have served to set back the consciousness of the working class in these countries. All sorts of different ideas will be studied, tested and discarded as the working class makes its way through the myriad of false

"Society, which will reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole machinery of state where it will belong: into the museum of antiquities by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe."

Friedrich Engels.

turnings before arriving at the ideas of Marxism.

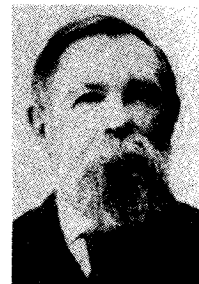
It is not surprising, in view of the way the state has developed under Stalinism, that anarchist ideas have found an echo amongst some workers and youth. That these regimes claimed to be based on Marxism has led many to reject, for the time being, any form of socialism and seek alternatives. But these regimes have nothing in common with Marxism, just as the Communist Parties of the world have nothing to do with communism. They are both monstrous perversions of the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. An ocean of blood separates these regimes from the genuine adherents of Marxism.

Only on the basis of rejecting the market and by carrying out the political revolution, that is by removing the bureaucracy and establishing workers' democracy resting on the planned economy, can the working class establish the basis for socialism under which the state will begin to disappear and a genuine communist society be achieved.

In Britain today there are very few active anarchists. However a layer of unemployed and homeless youth are attracted to anarchism with its attacks on the power of the state, the rich and anyone else in authority. But how many of those who march behind the red and black flags of anarchism on the anti-poll tax demonstrations would have read anything more than *Class War*? What draws them to anarchism is their position at the bottom of society where those in authority, including the labour leaders, have abandoned them.

For the past twelve years the Tory attacks have gone unanswered by the labour leaders, who are now hated by many of this layer of society. Anarchism is thus a payment for the inability of reformism to chart a way forward. Once the organised working class does begin to move, however, and demonstrates its power, the influence of anarchism, even on this layer of youth, will begin to decline.

A mass Marxist youth organisation could win this layer for the socialist revolution by showing in practice how to fight for jobs, for homes and a decent life, linking this to the fight to change society completely. That is the only programme that can offer a hope of any future for them or for mankind in general. Our goal, a form of society with no state, is the same but only Marxism offers a way of achieving it. □



Engels.

Book Reviews

*About Turn — The
Communist Party and the
Outbreak of the Second
World War*

**Edited by King and
Matthews**

*Published by Laurence
and Wishart, 1990*

**Reviewed by
David Turner**

WAR IS ONE of the severest tests of any organisation claiming to be revolutionary. This was clearly illustrated in 1939 by the impact of the outbreak of war on the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

During the late 1930s, Stalin answered the threat to the Soviet Union from Nazi Germany by proposing a 'Peace Front' with British and French imperialism. They, of course, were not interested, seeking through their policy of appeasing Hitler, to encourage Nazi aggression against the USSR.

In the summer of 1939, Stalin opened negotiations with Germany, aiming to exploit Hitler's reluctance to fight a war on two fronts. In August 1939 a Nazi-Soviet 'Non-Aggression Pact' was concluded, with a secret agreement to carve up Poland. Days later the German army marched into western Poland while the Red Army took the eastern half. Britain and France, clear about the threat posed to their own interests by Hitler, declared war on 3 September.

The Communist Party's reaction was to support Britain's declaration of war, seeing it as the realisation of Moscow's previous policy. However, the Soviet Union, far from supporting Britain and France's 'anti-fascist' war, denounced them as 'aggressors', fighting an 'imperialist war'.

Dave Springhall, the CPGB representative at the Communist International's headquarters, was dispatched back to London to 'explain' the new line. On his return, the new position was embraced by the majority of the

central committee (CC), yet resisted by Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the CPGB, JR Campbell, editor of *The Daily Worker*, and Willie Gallacher, the CP's only MP.

A verbatim report was made of these CC meetings for immediate transmission to Moscow, where it has lain inaccessible in the archives for half a century. The CPGB finally obtained a copy of the document last year and it is this which is now published.

The transcript shows that, while the CC members awaited Springhall's return from Moscow, Pollitt told them that "we are all like a lot of rabbits in front of a snake". The comparison is apt.

Springhall simply informs the CC that Moscow has decreed that all Communist Parties must oppose the war as 'imperialist'. After a week's adjournment, the CC reconvenes. Pollitt, unable to accept the new line, has been replaced as General Secretary. Demanding adherence to Moscow's new line, the party's chief 'theoretician', Rajani Palme Dutt, argues that "fundamentally Nazi Germany has been weakened by the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact", concluding that "the one thing that they (the Nazis-DT) are desperately searching for is peace"! The way to end the war is by campaigning for British imperialism to negotiate with the "peace-hungry" Nazis.

In a spluttering tirade, Willie Gallacher explodes at this "unscrupulous and opportunist speech", accusing Dutt of "mean and despicable disloyalty" in

pretending that he had no responsibility for the old line. Campbell, for his part, warns that the new line will make the CPGB "indistinguishable in a very short time from the filthy rabble of Trotskyists..."

Moscow's policy, of course, bore no relation to the attitude to the war adopted by the Trotskyists, the genuine Marxists. They consistently opposed the imperialist war being waged by the ruling class, arguing that workers must continue to fight the class enemy at home. They fought for a Labour government with a socialist programme against Chamberlain's 'National government', explaining that a socialist Britain, with workers' control of industry and the armed forces, would be able to wage a revolutionary war against fascism, making a class appeal to the German workers.

Within two years the wheel had turned full circle. In June 1941 Hitler invaded the USSR. Overnight the Comintern proclaimed the war aims of British imperialism as 'anti-fascist'. The CPGB then embarked on one of the most reactionary periods in its history, giving full support to Churchill, breaking strikes and opposing freedom for the colonies.

The Trotskyists, whilst supporting the gains of the revolution, maintained their implacable opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy and to British imperialism. They alone can truthfully claim to have stuck steadfastly to the ideas of Marxism throughout world war two.

*The Longest War: The
Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*
By Dilip Hiro

*Published by Paladin Books,
1991, at £6.99*

**Reviewed by
Dave Carr**

ON THE EVENING of 22 September 1980 Iraqi jet aircraft pound-

ed ten Iranian air bases. Later that night Iraqi divisions rolled over the Iranian border. The longest conventional war this century had begun.

Eight years later when a ceasefire was signed, over one million people had been killed or injured. In conducting the war Iran had spent \$91bn and Iraq \$112bn. When the cost of lost oil revenues

and war damage is included the total figure is estimated at a staggering \$627bn to Iran and \$561bn to Iraq. These mind-numbing statistics are revealed in Dilip Hiro's book which catalogues the cynical interventions of the world's superpowers and their junior partners in sustaining the conflict.

The military imports bill for Iraq was \$42bn and \$11.2bn for Iran. Little wonder every armaments manufacturer, trader and government were involved in breaking arms embargoes in order to reap huge profits.

The most infamous case came to light with the Irangate arms-for-hostages affair. Reagan had secretly used National Security Agency officials — notably Vice-Admiral Poindexter and Lt. Col Oliver North — to negotiate the release of US hostages (held in the Lebanon by Islamic Jihad) and also to secure influence with a section of the Tehran leadership by bartering arms.

Using Israel as an intermediary and several bogus end-user countries, the US shipped thousands of TOW anti-tank missiles and Hawk anti-aircraft batteries to Iran. According to the Dutch Seamen's Union, the Dutch ship *Else-HT* carried at least 3,600 tonnes of military materials in four journeys in 1986 from the Israeli port of Eilat to Bandar Abbas in Iran.

Washington was less coy about backing Iraq. To the US, the threat to its imperialist interests from the Iranian revolution remained para-



mount. In late 1987 the US offered a record \$961m to Iraq in agricultural commodity credits — vital to propping up Iraq's blistered economy. This came just months after two Iraqi exocet missiles hit the *USS Stark* killing 37 crew! Washington's Eximbank guaranteed \$485m as part of the \$570m cost of constructing an Iraqi pipeline through Jordan; and the US also supplied, via Saudi Arabia, intelligence information on Iranian troop movements using AWACS and spy satellites. All this when officially the US remained 'neutral'.

Britain had been quick off the mark in servicing for Iraq 50 Chieftain tanks captured from the Iranians in the early part of the war. By 1986 British exports amounted to \$665m.

Yet Britain's military sales were a snip compared to France, which loaned Iraq \$7bn! According to press reports in November 1987 officials in the ruling Socialist Party government received commissions of four per cent on \$120m of illegal sales of artillery shells to Iraq between 1983 and 1986!

Iraq emerged from the war a financially crippled country. It owed \$25bn to the West and \$6-\$9bn to the USSR. Its debts to the Gulf states were colossal. Even if the loans were converted to grants Iraq would still have had to pay \$34bn, equal to its 1986 Gross Domestic Product! Kuwait, as one of its largest creditor countries among the Gulf states, was to become an irresistible prize to Saddam just one year later.

The US backed Iraq against Iran.

Notre Ami Le Roi — (Our Friend the King)

By Gilles Perrault

Published by Gallimard, 1990

**Reviewed by
Clive Parry**

THE PUBLICATION IN France of Gilles Perrault's *Notre Ami Le Roi* last summer was greeted with uproar from the establishment. There were calls for the book to be withdrawn and its author prosecuted. Why the furore?

The book describes how an Arab ruler, seeking to boost his failing domestic popularity and seize huge mineral deposits giving him control of more than two-thirds of world reserves, marches south into a neighbouring country, artificially severed from his own by imperialism in the nine-

teenth century, and annexes it against the wishes of its inhabitants. He has built up a formidable army and security apparatus with Western aid, absorbing up to 40 per cent of state expenditure, and presents himself as 'Commander of the Faithful'.

But this was not a book about Saddam Hussein, but Sultan Hassan II of Morocco, Western Sahara not Kuwait, phosphates not oil, and it all happened in 1975! Although the annexation directly contravened UN decisions for a referendum on self-determination, no multi-national force was assembled to impose them, no blitzkrieg unleashed. Western Sahara is still under occupation.

But then imperialism has always found in the King of Morocco a faithful friend. During the Gulf crisis he obediently dispatched

1,300 troops to Saudi Arabia. Yet such was the anger of the Moroccan masses after the bombing of Baghdad that Hassan II and his government were forced to support a general strike called in protest against the war. This was barely two months after a one-day general strike on 14 December demanding the doubling of the minimum wage. Then the army killed over 100 people, provoking riots in Fez. Not surprisingly, Hassan II himself led the assault on Perrault's 'slanders'.

As far as content is concerned, *Notre Ami Le Roi* promises much but doesn't quite deliver. On the French Protectorate in Morocco and on independence in 1956, Perrault is admirably succinct. However, from there on, the book is mostly taken up with a catalogue of human rights abuses.

There is some mention, in passing, of the economic situation of the country — foreign debt equal to 90 per cent of GDP, ten million Moroccans out of 22 million living on less than 35 pence a day, one in five malnourished, 60 per cent of land held by five per cent of land-owners and so on. But once Perrault has warmed to his theme of the personal repugnance of Hassan II this all fades into the back-

ground.

In consequence the book fails to answer properly the question posed implicitly in its title. Sultan Hassan is a friend of imperialism because he prevented the vast mineral wealth of the Western Sahara from falling under a possible Polisario-led deformed workers' state. He also ensures access to cheap labour and functions as a debt collector for Western banks.

Nonetheless, readers should watch out for the translation, for *Notre Ami Le Roi* is enjoyable and easy to read. At the very least, the furore its publication generated, amidst the shock waves of an Arab defeat unrivalled since 1948, shows that the '100 years of calm' promised by Hassan II after the annexation of Western Sahara will be shattered a thousand times over.

Wolfe Tone
By Marianne Elliott

Published by Yale University Press, at £16.95

Reviewed by
Anton McCabe

THEOBALD WOLFE TONE (1763-98) was a great Irish revolutionary, the 'father of Irish Republicanism'. Marianne Elliott's biography is well researched, but conveys no sense of what made tens of thousands join a revolutionary organisation to bring a French-style republic to Ireland.

In the late eighteenth century, a few great landed families controlled Irish politics. In Belfast, centre of the most energetic capitalist development, the Mayor and twelve burgesses were the electors; even the wealthiest merchants and manufacturers lacked the vote. Eighty per cent of the people were Catholics, legally shut out from political power.

The Irish capitalists wanted their own state, to provide political conditions for capitalist development. To this end, Tone was one of the founders of the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast in 1791.

Tone was the son of a wealthy Dublin coachmaker, a member of

the Established Church and a lawyer. Moves to parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation met with government clamp-downs. The government forced Tone to leave the country or face trial for treason. He was driven to revolution as the only way to achieve reform.

In 1795 Tone went to France to seek help. But after Thermidor in 1794, when the Committee of Public Safety was overthrown, a more conservative section of the French bourgeois had come to power, less keen on exporting revolution. Tone was given the run-around for three years.

The United Irish leadership were the most radical section of the bourgeoisie, not supported by most of their own class. The ranks were artisans, labourers and peasants. Elliott wrongly writes that "squabbling sectarian divisions...decimated the United Irish movement" before the 1798 rebellion. In fact as a social movement the United Irishmen stopped much of the sectarian violence whipped up by the government and landlords in rural Ulster. Only after the defeat would this re-assert itself.

Ireland's tragedy was that even this most radical section of the bourgeoisie, with some except-

ions, were not prepared to mobilise the Irish masses to make the necessary revolution, fearing them more than they did the British government. They were 'foreign-aid men' — wanting France to take power for them. The Northern ranks, largely artisans and Presbyterians and reflecting the stronger development of capitalism there, pushed for action — without France if necessary.

1797 was a year of smothered revolt. Elliott ignores the extent to which the United Irishmen controlled large areas such as Mid-Ulster. But the hesitation of the leaders dissipated the movement.

Tone in France felt a 'great lack of spirit' in the leaders at home. Like Robespierre in the Great French Revolution, he was prepared to go beyond the bounds of bourgeois property to ensure the victory of the bourgeoisie. He wrote: "If the men of property will not support us, they must fall; we can support ourselves by the aid of that numerous and respectable class in the community — the men of no property."

Elliott dismisses the heroic rebellion of 1798 as 'bloody and sectarian'. The lack of Tone's spirit among most leaders meant it was partial. Between May and August there were ten separate unco-ordinated risings across three provinces. In Wexford the rebels held power for almost four weeks. They set up a Committee of Public Safety, with ordinary working men serving on sub-committees dealing with supplies.

The French help which came was 'too little, too late'; 1,000 men on the West Coast in late August, a month after the last rebels in the east had surrendered.

The Irish bourgeois then preferred servility to following the revolutionary Tone. Consistent in their fear of revolution they ignore or distort him today.

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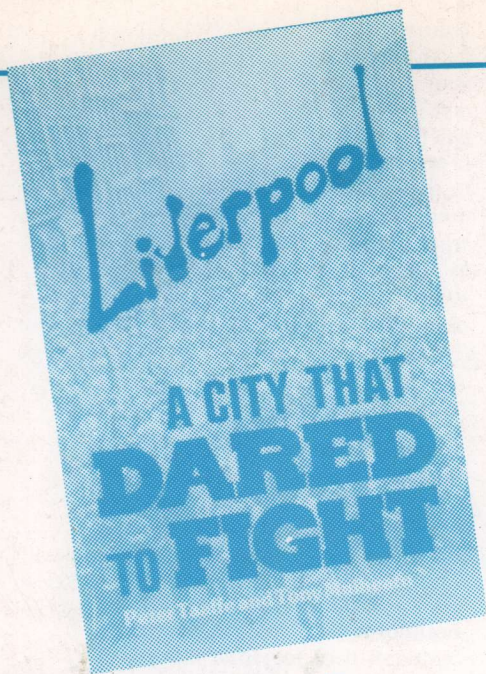
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