

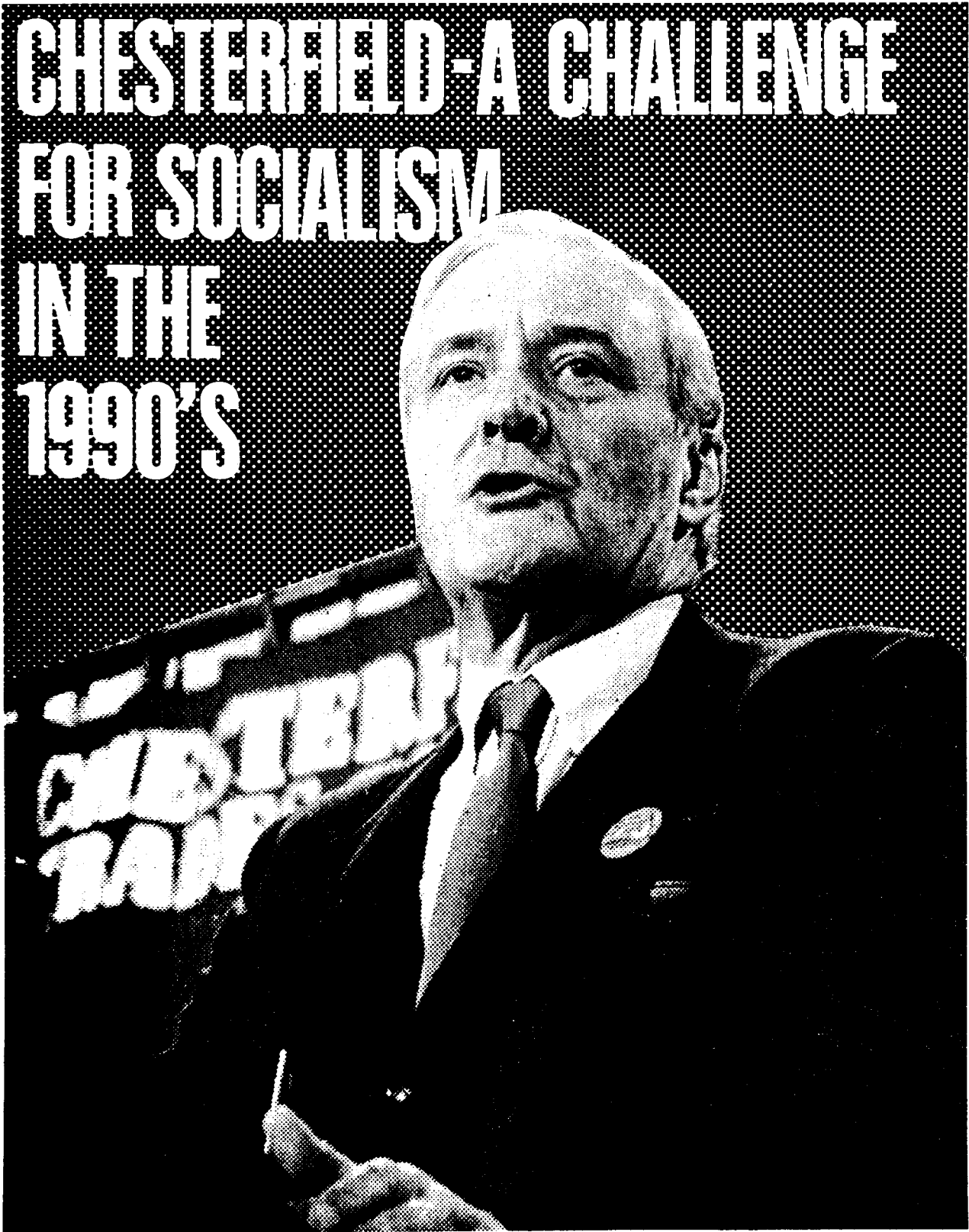
Socialist Newsletter

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CHESTERFIELD - A CHALLENGE FOR SOCIALISM IN THE 1990'S



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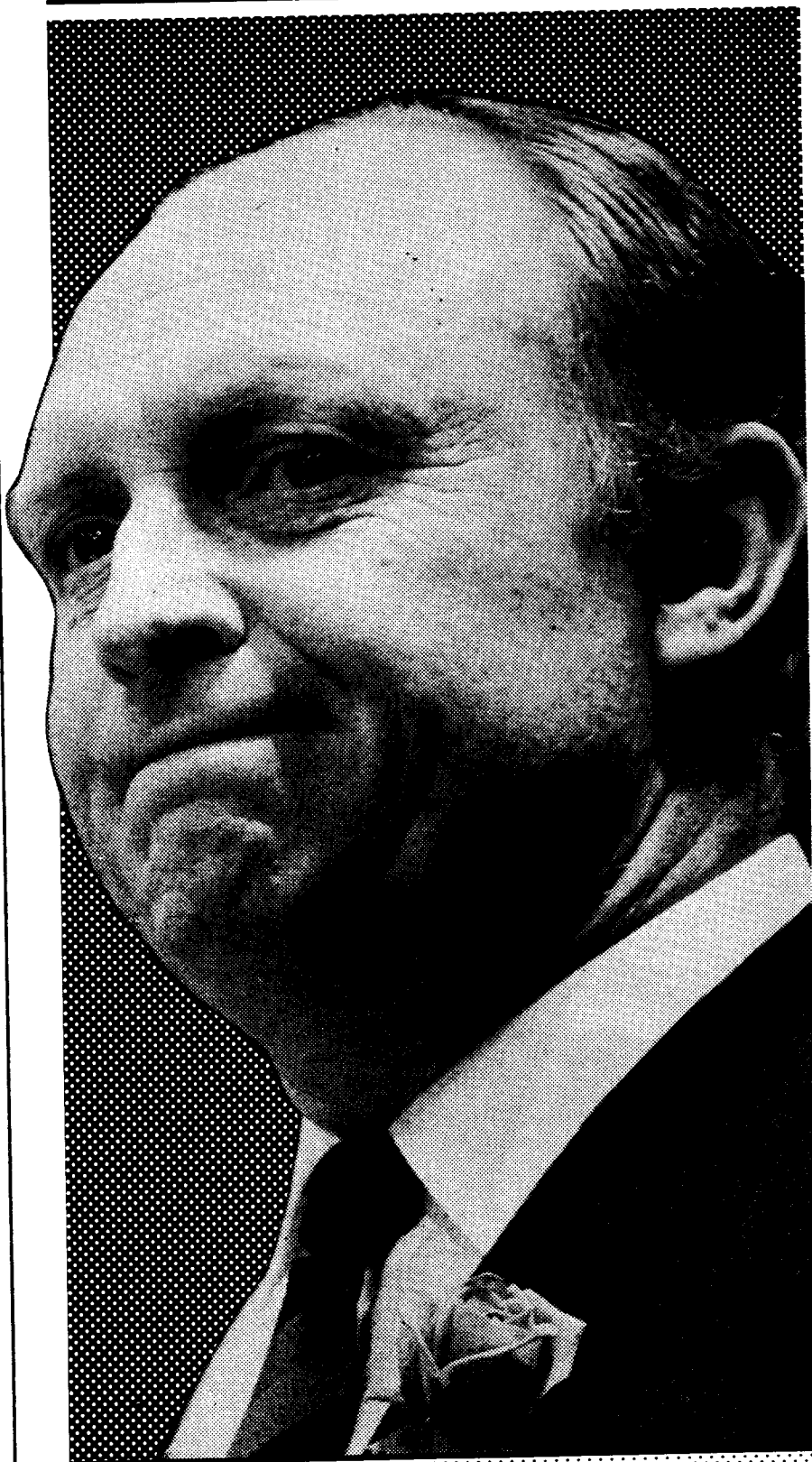
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SOCIALIST NEWSLETTER is a bi-monthly journal of Marxist discussion and analysis, which aims to contribute to the development of a perspective for working class independence and strategy for power. We welcome articles and letters from revolutionaries and socialists and seek to encourage a genuine discussion in this vein. Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the view of the editorial board.

Please write to Box No 26,
136, Kingsland High Road,
London E8.



**Kinnock opens a
campaign on the nature
of the
Labour Party**

IN THE PERIOD leading up to the elections for the French parliament, a strong polarisation developed inside the Socialist Party over its future character. The two Socialist prime ministers from the first Mitterrand administration, Mauroy and Fabius, led the argument from two sides.

Fabius, more directly connected to Mitterrand himself, began to call for the PS to change its nature and orient towards 'the centre', to become more like the American Democratic Party. Mauroy, whilst not opposing a rapprochement with 'the centre', argued that the PS should keep at least a nominal character as a workers' party, with socialist aspirations.

Such a debate, although taking specially French forms, is not unconnected to the battle which is about to unfold within the British Labour Party, and in the Socialist Parties of a number of Western European countries.

One big difference, however, between France and Britain, is that in France the apparatus, the leaders, of the PS, still have a share of power and can govern. In Britain, on the contrary, the Labour Party has been more and more driven from all its real power bases. With the election of Thatcher in 1979, the first step taken was the reduction in the role of the House of Commons in politics - the strong centralisation of powers within the cabinet and the cabals of the Tory Party. This began to reduce the place of Her Majesty's Opposition to that of a shadow. In effect the Labour Party has been rendered impotent in Parliament, having to wait on revolts by Tory wets to play any kind of role.

The second step was the systematic destruction of the 'middle tier' of local government - the GLC, GMC, Merseyside and the like. This not only cut back on the political platforms that career-makers like Ken Livingstone could stand on, it removed vast sums of money from the hands of the Labour Party and destroyed many small reforms and concessions granted on the basis of that money, not to mention the more publicised spinoffs, such as the financing of quangos.

The third step was multiform. In order to break off a wedge of Labour votes, measures were thought up, like the sale of council houses, tax cuts and the sale of shares in denationalised companies, designed to create a layer of Tory-voting workers, if only in the short term. Along with this a further attack was mounted on the bottom tier of local government, slashing its disposable income and narrowing down its scope for independent political initiative.

In combination, these and other measures have massively reduced the accumulated political power of the Labour Party in real terms. By concentrating political life in the Commons, and there, in the hands of the cabinet, a quasi-Bonapartist

structure exists. Except for the changes in local government, the state forms have not been changed as such. But the increased number of Tory seats created through the gerrymander by the first Thatcher government, combined with the lack of internal life in the Tory Party, now brings about a situation in which Thatcher holds the key to political life at all levels, and Kinnock is forced to play the game of trying to create himself as an 'alternative superstar' in the Thatcher mould.

Indeed, even when Labour does well in local elections, as it did in May, regaining control of a number of city councils, it has little or no power to wield. 'Municipal socialism' is reducing itself to discussions about what cuts are kindest, and an endless reshuffling of council leaderships as people politically bankrupt themselves.

independence as a party of the workers, based on the class struggle. He is in fact proposing the opposite course, urging Kinnock to accept all the structural and crypto-constitutional changes which Thatcherism has brought about and work to alter the nature of the Labour Party in line with that.

The pre-election conference of the Labour Party in Blackpool, pink roses and all, was a first, flimsy, response to these imperatives. But something much more thorough-going is needed to win the confidence of the ruling class, and it is this project which Kinnock is working into shape now. This will not be a re-run of the Gaitskell-Bevan debate of the late 1950s. On the level of programme, Kinnock and those grouped around him are set to far surpass what Gaitskell tried to do. We are not saying, as some do, that Kinnock

wants to return to the policies of the Wilson and Callaghan eras. That doesn't go far enough either. Wilson, it must be recalled, enhanced the place of nationalised industry and backed off before the unions over 'In Place of Strife' in 1969. Callaghan, even with Denis Healey as his Chancellor, had his problems with the interests of the City of London, which was pushing for more wage cuts.

Time has moved on. What Thatcher and Tebbit, on behalf of their class, require from Labour, is a total hands-off policy in regard to finance capital and the denationalised industries. They ask Labour to help break what resistance there is from union bosses such as Ron Todd, over single-union no-strike deals (read 'company unions' under another name). They are pushing for Kinnock to get completely back into line on all aspects of military and foreign policy. They want the Labour Party to promise not to change the more centralised government procedures of the Thatcher era.

Kinnock intends to try to do these things. He wants to become prime minister; to do that he must be elected. He can only be elected, in his own perception, if the vice is loosened a little by the Tories.

Bluntly put, the ruling class want the Labour Party to help in the attacks on working people, right now.

Socialists within the Labour Party and trade unions need to grasp that, as of now, it will be increasingly impossible to think in terms of a centre-left bloc against the right. It is no accident that Kinnock, who presents himself as a figure of the centre, stepped in so quickly to give total support to Hattersley in the deputy leadership contest. If left-wingers adopt a 'wait and see'

THE RULING CLASS WANT THE LABOUR PARTY TO HELP ATTACK WORKING PEOPLE RIGHT NOW

With everything so focused on central government, the loss of three general elections in a row creates unavoidable problems for the Labour Party. It is not, at this point, a fully explosive crisis, with splits in the offing. But, not only did Kinnock fail to really improve the performance of Labour in the last election with his media hype, it does not look certain he can win the next election, which in any case Thatcher will not call for another four years.

For political commentators, the crisis in the Labour Party reveals itself in formal terms: they bemoan its inability to act as a serious opposition, as if this were mainly a matter of improving performance; they focus on the relationship with the unions, as if this in itself is an obstacle to achieving power; they probe the relations between factions within the Party, blaming the left - and especially **Militant** - for electoral defeats.

Such music has its admirers in the Labour leadership - not least Kinnock himself.

For the working class, things are posed differently. When Norman Tebbit berates Labour for being such a weak opposition and taunts them by saying that the Tories must be both government and opposition, he is not urging Labour to fight for its

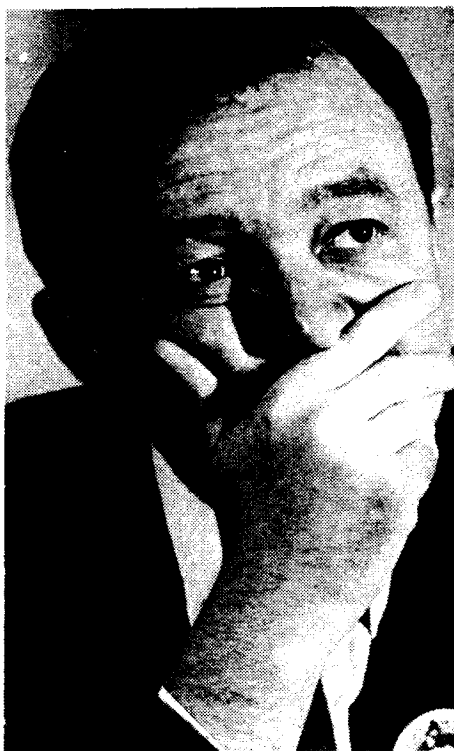
policy, or follow the line that the only important thing to do is to get Labour elected, however that is done, they will be presenting the Labour left, which is not at its strongest, as a hostage to fortune. Deals must not be struck today from which there is no return.

The defence of the interests of working people means above all a fight to prevent a further reduction in the power of the unions and to preserve their historic role in shaping Labour Party policy. This does not, in itself, mean in any way the defence of all the iniquities of the block vote system and above all it does not mean passively endorsing its bureaucratic character. But if the trade unions are turned, so far as the Labour Party is concerned, into a pool of cheapskate individual members, as Kinnock proposes, then a blow will have been struck at the cohesiveness of workers' organisation. Trade unionism in Britain is political. This is an asset for the working class which must be preserved.

Along with this goes the great question of those outside the organised labour movement: youth, the unemployed, ethnic minorities and others who are not only generally not active in the Labour Party, but often do not vote. The Kinnock vision of a party looking to the centre holds no interest for these layers, who in fact are millions strong. Left-wingers can only give an answer to the rightward drift by finding ways to link up with the battles in which these layers are already engaged. They may be outside the Labour Party, but they are not totally unorganised. In this regard, the rise of community and local action groups of various kinds is crucial to note.

NO RETURN TO THE PAST

To defend the need of the working class to have a political party to represent their unique interests, in every way possible, in no way means that Labour should stand still. It is bureaucratic; it has produced generation after generation of corrupt careerists; it has always governed in the interests of capitalism; its foreign policy has been no different from the Tories'. All these things and more are indefensible and no socialist should argue for the preservation of the existing Labour Party. We must argue for the development of a party which expresses the political needs of the poor, the oppressed and their allies, and those needs have changed as Britain approaches the end of the twentieth century. Labour's past is just that, we must call not for a return to 1900, 1906 or 1918, but something much more combative and free of 'liberalism' and illusions in the goodwill of the ruling class.



LIVINGSTONE: ERRATIC

This will mean that principled socialists, not to mention revolutionaries, must spend a period as a minority under heavy attack. It may mean fighting to have a right to be in the Labour Party at all, as the simmering witch-hunt against **Militant** and others constantly reminds us. But being an organised, expressive minority is infinitely preferable to trying to wheel and deal, in tow to those like Ken Livingstone, whose own political trajectory is increasingly erratic.

At this stage, the Labour Party is the only largescale political organisation through which to push for opposition to Thatcher. Such opposition raises the question of how Labour relates to the actual, living struggles which workers are constantly putting up to Tory attacks. The attempt to destroy the NUS, which P&O is spearheading, is an attempt to further destroy the independent organisations of working people. Kinnock is not an unconditional supporter of the activities of the strikers and their supporters. Nor was he of the miners. Such ambiguities can lead to outright betrayal.

If Kinnock takes such a road and takes it in concert with the official structures of the Labour Party, then what will exist will not be a general debate on the nature of that party and its programme, but a major step towards alienating the class support which the most conscious and organised sections of the unions give to Labour. It is essential that this problem, which is pregnant in what Thatcher is pressurising Kinnock to do, is discussed fully within the Chesterfield - Socialist conference current.

The challenge facing socialists

EARLY IN JUNE, an estimated 2,000 activists met in Chesterfield to discuss an alternative socialist agenda. One of the biggest challenges facing the Chesterfield movement is its ability to connect with the existing struggles of the workers against the employers. The workshop on trade union solidarity and beating the Tory legislation attracted a large number of militants keen to discuss these issues.

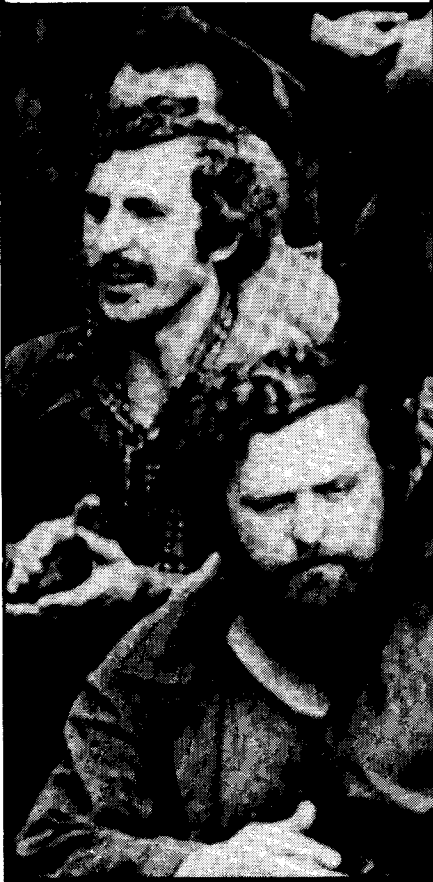
Introducing the session, Betty Heathfield argued that the involvement of entire mining communities, and particularly the work done by Women Against Pit Closures, was central to sustaining the year-long miners' strike. Whilst this is true, it does not mitigate the scale of the miners' defeat however. What was vital to ensure victory was comprehensive solidarity action, whatever its legality. The mobilisation of entire localities and the enduring effect this has had on consciousness in the coalfields is scant compensation for the closure of pits, loss of jobs and destruction of communities subsequently.

These hard realities must be understood by socialists. The Wapping dispute was a rich lesson in bureaucratic betrayal, yet 5,500 printers remain sacked. Some continue to be front-line fighters for trade union solidarity; but at least one of Murdoch's victims committed suicide.

Today activists in the Solidarity Network are campaigning for the sacked seafarers. These workers have been betrayed by NUS leader McCluskey, who has spent over half a million pounds of the union's funds trying to prove his lawfulness in the courts, whilst the members continue on the treadmill of raising a few pounds at labour movement meetings. The seafarers' campaign is impressive, but, as with the miners and printers, it is not enough. Even at this late stage, the key to victory remains solidarity industrial action.

PROCESSES OF SOCIALIST REGROUPMENT

SOME QUESTIONS FOR TROTSKYISTS



ONE OF THE political ideas developed in the Fourth International (International Centre of Reconstruction) and its predecessors, from which the SLG broke in 1987, concerned the tendency in the current epoch for the working class to try to reorganise itself on a new political axis. In the FI(ICR) this concept was increasingly viewed as an abstraction and the central failing of that current was its inability to recognise signs of that process in practice and see the work of Trotskyists inside it.

This tendency towards reorganisation in the workers' movement does not have a uniform expression in all countries. Specific historical and cultural traditions give each national workers' movement a concrete form. On a continental scale, nevertheless, these developments cross national boundaries.

In Latin America, the development of mass trade union federations, independent of the state and collaborationist apparatuses in the workers' movement, is taking place in a number of countries, and notably Brazil and Colombia. Equally, the struggle to form new mass organisations, the highest expression of which is the growth of the Workers Party in Brazil, can be closely related to the crisis of Stalinism on the Latin American continent, and to the collapse of its long-term methods of sacrificing the needs of workers on the altar of bourgeois nationalism.

The political regroupment of the working class has not followed its numerical growth in a mechanical fashion. It develops dialectically, involving slow progress, sudden leaps and many setbacks. Yet it is the enormous growth of the working class in many semi-colonial countries which underpins the sometimes spectacular rise of mass movements, like those in Latin American, southern Africa and parts of south-east Asia.

In Europe, where the Social-Democratic, Stalinist and trade union apparatuses have their deepest roots and weigh most heavily on the working class, the explosion of new organisations is less advanced. But even here, the last decade alone has seen the flowering of Solidarnosc and parallel developments in other East European countries, the rise of the German Greens, and more recently, the open crisis of French Stalinism and a new fragmentation of 'orthodox' Republicanism in Ireland, among other things.

The crystallisation of a new political expression of the working class in Europe is likely to be a complex and drawn-out process. In many countries of Western Europe, a rundown of bedrock industries - mining, steel, engineering, shipbuilding - has occurred, often presided over by social-democratic governments brought to power by workers' votes. In Britain, the make-up of the working class has altered

dramatically since Thatcher came to power. This is borne out by the common themes of defence of industries, jobs and working conditions running through the major industrial battles of the 1980s, in steel, coal, printing and seafaring.

This is not to accept one syllable of the idea peddled in *Marxism Today* and other right-wing journals that the working class no longer exists. This has become Kinnock's rationale for turning his back on the aspirations of workers.

The working class continues to exist and remains organisationally strong. Yet, as a direct result of treacherous union leadership, it is today organically more differentiated and fragmented. The problem of securing the unity of the working class in struggle is the chief strategic question facing socialists today.

The crystallization of a new political expression for the working class

A political recomposition of the workers' movement is in gestation in Britain, albeit in mostly subtle forms. It was only eight years ago that the Social Democrats left the Labour Party to form an alternative capitalist party. In the following year, the strength of the left built up during the Benn challenge for deputy leader was dissipated by the closing down of his campaign organisation. In 1983 the Labour leadership had to be almost completely reconstructed around Kinnock and Hattersley. The work to put in place a solid apparatus in support of this leadership still goes on.

The intense period of political activity which characterised the 1984-5 miners' strike had an effect in sharpening the political contradictions within all working class organisations. Most scandalous, but least important objectively, was the total explosion of the WRP. Less spectacular but more significant is the drawn-out split in the Communist Party. Today we are faced with the interesting situation where many expelled members and *Morning Star* supporters back Tony Benn and the Chestfield movement, whilst the CP and acolytes of *Marxism Today* in the Labour Party are closely aligned to Kinnock.

Such major developments in the class struggle have had an impact on alignments in the Trotskyist left as well. Counterposed perspectives in a battle as crucial as the miners' strike brought the simmering dispute inside the Socialist League to a head. This in turn fuelled new regroupments on the left around **Labour Briefing** which now plays an indispensable role in developing the Labour left despite the fact that many of its original supporters in local government have deserted to the camp of 'New Realism', which has meant endorsing cuts.

These processes are running through all organisations linked to the working class, mainstream and sectarian. The changes in alignment taking place today emphasise the fact that political tradition or historical origin is a secondary factor to agreement on perspectives. In practice, currents which have coalesced into common organisations from diverse beginnings express this. Such developments also confirm the view that no single left organisation can politically express all the needs of the workers and that no one grouping, however large, will be able, by its own linear growth, to transform itself into a new mass political party.

A failure to understand this will lead currents like **Militant** down the same path to Messianic destruction as the WRP. Poised at different moments over recent years to become an objective factor in British politics, whether by dint of their leadership of Liverpool council or the CPSA, the **Militant** at each opportunity has been prevented from making a qualitative development by their own inability to work on a united front basis with other forces.

Recognising that no left grouping in Britain today can single-handedly develop into a revolutionary party, the SLG has for some time been working out a perspective codified as the call for a 'revolutionary workers league'. The idea embodied in this formula is that the next stages in linking the organisation of revolutionaries with the mass movement of the working class in Britain cannot be a fully-fledged party, engaging the mass basis of the Labour Party, but a 'pre-party' or league, resulting from a process of shifts and realignments within the mass movement itself, which produce an effect within all existing currents.

Such an elastic formulation begs many questions about the programme of the 'revolutionary workers league' which cannot be answered in the abstract. Just as such a regroupment will not be brought into existence by the solitary efforts of any one organisation, so its political basis is unlikely to be the existing programme of any one grouping. This does not mean that the qualitative step implied in the 'revolutionary workers league' perspective can result from some accord between existing socialist tendencies either

The problem, rather, centres on how Marxists should work in relation to emergent developments within the mass movement itself.

The defeat of the miners' strike which reinforced the grip of the right-wing trade union apparatus in the trade unions has yet to be challenged by a real opposition movement capable of building on the experience of a number of important but isolated struggles. The secret and bureaucratic Broad Left movements, whether Stalinist or **Militant**-inspired do not provide a sufficiently open framework for the development of such an opposition.

In recent times, the problem of relating the activity of revolutionaries to the internal struggles of the broader movement has therefore focused on the Labour Party. Here too, however, it is necessary to be concrete if we are to avoid a formalistic schema - such as the notion that at the appropriate moment, when internal contradictions are sufficiently intense, the existing labour movement will split cleanly into two distinct camps of socialists and traitors.

Events since Thatcher came to power reveal that the working class works through the internal contradictions of the Labour Party very patiently and with all its complexities. Part of the reason for this is that most of the vehicles for building a left within the Labour Party have themselves foundered on arguments about how far they should go. In 1981, Benn closed down the Rank and File Mobilising Committee, the only framework in existence that

might have defended the left against the impending attacks on it. The Labour Coordinating Committee quickly became a witch-hunting organisation long before its total identification with the Kinnock leadership. In 1983, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, which had grown steadily over the previous decade and had played a key role in securing the electoral college in 1980, virtually blew itself to pieces over its attitude to the witch-hunt.

Today the terrain in the Labour Party is very different. There is no organised coalition of left currents, comparable to the 1981 RFMC, behind the Benn-Heffer leadership bid, although there is considerable autonomous local activity around the campaign.

Parallel to this, however, is the Chesterfield movement. Launched at an open conference in Benn's constituency last year, it has set up a number of working groups to develop a wide range of socialist policies. In addition, Chesterfield has spawned a number of local conferences, which have focused the campaigning activity of the left and enabled it to open a dialogue that extends beyond the existing activists.

Chesterfield's initiators see it very much in terms of connecting the various campaigns and struggles being waged to beat back the Tories' offensive against workers and the oppressed. What's more, Chesterfield has been consciously organised to go beyond the Labour Party, and include revolutionary currents hostile to Labour.



"The aim of the Chesterfield Conference", said Richard Kuper, one of its national organisers, in a recent interview, "is to establish an independent socialist movement in this country." Clearly it is its political and organisational breadth that makes Chesterfield so significant. But these same aims make the whole project intolerable to the Kinnock leadership of the Labour Party. The probable defeat in the autumn of the Benn-Heffer ticket, already labelled by Kinnock as an "inexcusable diversion", will trigger a fresh offensive against any organised attempt to oppose "new realism" and the Labour leadership's rightward lurch. What then for Chesterfield?

Benn has already stated that he wants Chesterfield to be an ongoing movement which continues well after his own leadership campaign. But with one Labour MP already having had the whip withdrawn by the Parliamentary Party - the first time for over two decades - the Labour leaders are clearly in the mood for disciplinary measures. The threat of possible action by the Labour leadership against members, for working alongside independent socialists in the Chesterfield framework, would be a critical test for this movement.

It cannot be ruled out that some of its left Labour luminaries, whose political careers are more tied to the internal life of the Labour Party, would prefer to sever their ties with Chesterfield rather than risk full-scale excommunication.

Revolutionary socialists, on the other hand, recognize that the organisation and strengthening of the left in the mass movement is the only way to respond to the rightwing offensive. Similar contradictions exist within Chesterfield to those in previous left currents which have been formed and 'wound down' in the past.

In current conditions, however, such a perspective is not inevitable. Labour has just lost its third election. The leadership's answer is to reshape policies in the Wilson-Callaghan and even SDP mould. Even left Labour careerists know that being in power rather than in opposition is an essential condition for achieving their ambitions - and there are many who believe that power is just not attainable on the basis of Kinnock's strategy. Hence the priority of Benn and others to organise around alternative policies now.

The elaboration of a socialist perspective for Labour by the Chesterfield movement is crucial, not only in terms of raising the profile of socialism as a cause, but because it implies some creative thinking by socialists to tackle the desolation wreaked by a decade of Thatcherism. But, at the moment, the Thatcher government remains in power, and good arguments and

correct ideas have done little to shake it in the past. Only the class struggle can do that.

The real success of Chesterfield will be measured in its ability to connect its socialist agenda with the material struggles of workers and the oppressed. This requires a little more than an occasional appearance by leading figures on the picket lines. It means stimulating a real input by trade unionists into the formulation of not alone an alternative trade union policy, but a more comprehensive socialist economic strategy. In other words, it means taking policymaking out of the hands of the 'experts' and

making it the subject of the broadest possible dialogue in the Labour and social movements.

A socialist alternative will develop from within the mass movement itself, with Chesterfield politically integrated into it. This approach will also help defend both the mass movement and left activists against the escalating offensive of new realism. Finally, there would be favourable conditions for revolutionary socialists to argue for the development of a real political expression for the working class, able to begin overcoming the long drawn out crisis of workers' leadership in this country.



Ireland - austerity extradition and emigration

By Liam Quigley

THE SOUTHERN IRISH government is locked into a largescale austerity programme which is inflicting savage cuts on the working class. Unemployment is now officially 235,900 or 18.1%, in a population of 3½ million in the 26 counties. In the Six Counties figures are even worse.

Those working in the Republic often find that after all deductions their take-home pay is often only 50% of pre-tax pay. The government is using a huge burden of taxation to pay off the foreign debt to international bankers, which per capita is equal to that of Mexico. Ireland has an estimated 1.3 million people living in poverty.

In the face of this many young people once again see no alternative but to emigrate. Charlie Haughey's government does nothing to stem this exodus. Ever since the British government's enforced famine of 1845-8, emigration has become a traditional response to periodic crises in the economy. Today, most come to London and the South-East of England where they have some chance of employment, especially in the building industry. Estimates range from 30,000 to 60,000 and a similar percentage leave the Six Counties every year.

As well as the penal levels of taxation, the government is making severe cutbacks in all aspects of social welfare, health and education.

In education, 1,000 teachers are to be made redundant. The pupil-teacher ratio, which is one of the highest in Europe, is to be increased in one-teacher schools from 33 to 34 and in eight-teacher schools to 299 pupils. Although the teachers themselves wanted to fight this, Gerry Quigley, General Secretary of one of the teacher's unions, said their strategy had been to limit damage, and that had been achieved. Only a craven bureaucrat could regard 1,000 redundancies as 'limited' damage!

In fact the Irish Congress of Trade Unions have actually agreed an austerity plan with the government under the cynical title of 'Programme for National Recovery'. This plan is also supported by the main opposition party, Fine Gael, who first drew up the economic policy now pursued by the Fianna Fail party.

So the working class faces a very difficult situation, with no real form of political expression. The tiny

Labour Party has been discredited because of its attacks on the working class when in the last coalition government with Fine Gael. The even smaller and openly pro-Moscow Workers Party has also voted for cuts. The 1.9% vote for Sinn Fein in the last election shows that their failure to tackle 26-county governments on domestic policy is a critical weakness in the eyes of the working class.

The strategy of the ICTU leadership is in fact to help the Fianna Fail government carry out Fine Gael austerity plans.

The ICTU has its own internal problems, having expelled one of its



largest affiliates, the Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union (IDATU) from membership. The union was suspended following an interview in *Andersonstown News* last year in which the General Secretary John Mitchell was quoted as referring to the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, which represents shop assistants in the Six Counties as "useless" and as "an Uncle Tom reactionary union."

He also referred to the "trade union mafia", and added that the hostility of members to unions in the North had probably been deserved because the unions had not served them well in the past.

Last month Mitchell found himself in trouble again, this time from his own executive, for allowing a hall at the union's headquarters in Parnell Square, Dublin to be used for a meeting addressed by Gerry Adams. The meeting was organised by the Irish Anti-Extradition Committee.

When it was announced that Adams would be addressing the meeting, the union executive called an emergency meeting to discuss the matter and it was decided to suspend Mitchell from duty. A few days later following a lengthy meeting he was reinstated. But he had to agree to eleven conditions for his future conduct, drawn up by the union executive.

For the many IDATU executive members who lean towards Fianna Fail and Haughey, it is unthinkable to break with the institutions of partition. That is why they need to gag radical figures such as John Mitchell.

Another aspect of the government's austerity drive is its introduction of a £10 charge in the health service. The largest public service union, LGPSU, with 16,000 members, has recommended its members not to collect the payments.

At the LGPSU annual conference, some delegates claimed that the Midlands Health Board are charging £25 a night for allowing a coffin to be left in hospital mortuaries, and £10 for people appealing against Medical Card rejections. These are just a few examples which show the extent to which the government is prepared to go in making the workers pay for the crisis.

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that in November, the third anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Accord, the collaboration with Britain over the Six Counties, will be renewed for a further three years. Tom King made this clear after his recent meeting with Haughey. King expressed confidence that Haughey was committed to the agreement. He stressed the need for increased cooperation against 'the common enemy'.

It is this accord that sanctions Dublin's approval of the killings in Gibraltar. The best that Dublin could come up with was an expression of 'deep concern'. This concern will not in any way hinder the policies of the British government. These policies involve the maintenance of partition,

the isolation of the IRA and Sinn Fein and the subjection of the nationalist community in the Six Counties.

The only slight problem for Haughey was extradition. After initially agreeing to extradition on demand, he found that there might be a rather expensive political price to pay for this act of betrayal. An amendment to the Act was made so that Irish Attorney General John Murray would first have to be satisfied that Britain would provide what he calls sufficient evidence on a case to allow him to decide on the validity of an extradition application. Such was the cosmetic cover-up of treachery!

For six months until this May, a deadlock existed because the British Attorney General Patrick Mayhew refused to comply with the amendment to the Act. After discussions with Murray, Mayhew now seems prepared to accept it, claiming that the Irish side had modified its position. "Agreement has now been reached", reads the statement, "that extradition shall proceed on a case-by-case basis. The Irish have accepted the validity of British concern that there must be no prejudice to the administration of justice in any eventual proceedings in the United Kingdom."

However, the Irish government denied that guarantees of any kind had been given. In any event, the first test case, which may take some years, began when Patrick McVeigh was released from Portlaoise Prison.

Extradition is not simply an Irish problem

The Irish Anti-Extradition Committee has condemned this latest attempt by the government to enforce the extradition laws. The Committee rightly argued that it was a national scandal that McVeigh, having served his sentence in Portlaoise was now facing extradition to the same system that dealt with the Birmingham Six.

The problem of extradition is not simply an Irish problem. It is linked to the increasingly draconian use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act against Irish people in Britain and is designed to create a situation where the rule of British law and the wishes of the British ruling class apply also in the Republic of Ireland.

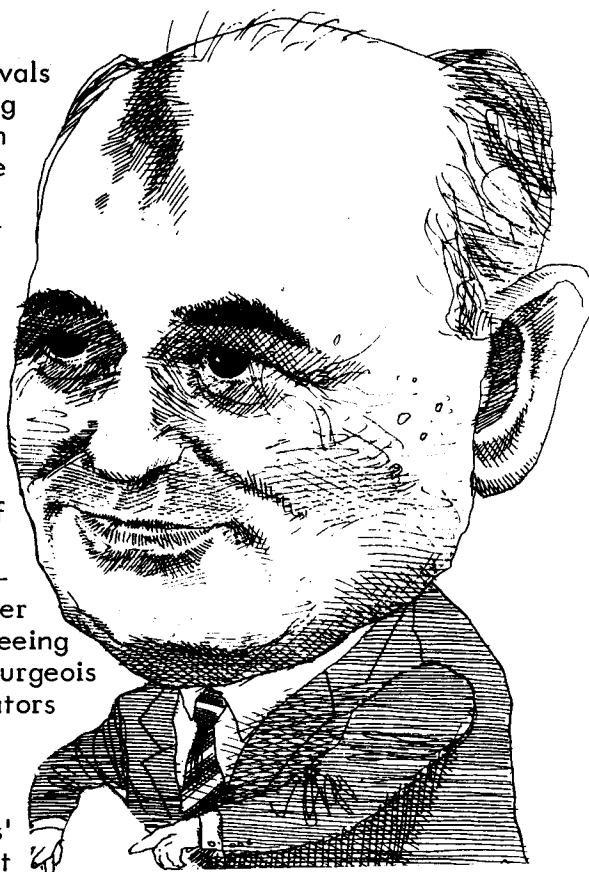
It is essential for those who want a British withdrawal from Ireland to understand the new Extradition Treaty as a step in the opposite direction, which should be opposed in the British labour movement.

Glasnost unleashes mass action in the USSR and East Europe

PROFOUND upheavals have been occurring in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe recently, as the policies of glasnost and perestroika pursued by Mikhail Gorbachev generate conflict and tensions from the top to the bottom of the ruling elite and have brought out the demands of workers, students and national minorities. It is no wonder that the more farseeing elements of the bourgeois political commentators in the West are beginning to voice the fear that the 'controlled reforms' of Gorbachev might

unleash a movement from below which could explode the status quo and thus threaten the practical basis of the 'peaceful coexistence' between capitalism and the Kremlin bosses.

Certainly, the strikes in Poland in May under the banner of Solidarnosc*, give them cause for concern. Whilst that movement has been checked, the economic crisis which provoked it has not been resolved. A greater cause for alarm for the bureaucracy is the eruption of nationalist demands within the Soviet Union itself. In Armenia, this has led to the most prolonged and sustained mass movement in opposit-



ion to the dictates of Moscow and Great Russian chauvinism.

The national question in Soviet Armenia and the neighbouring enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (ethnically 80% Armenian, but administratively part of Azerbaijan since 1923), is a potential powder-keg. The mass protest movement, which is demanding the re-integration of Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia, has not been quelled by promises from Moscow of greater cultural and language freedoms. Rather, the upsurge has grown in intensity, with daily demonstrations of tens and hundreds of thousands of people, developing into a general strike in Nagorno-Karabakh in recent weeks.

A similar movement is affecting the whole of Armenia. Even Pravda,

the official party daily, was forced to admit on June 10th that Armenian unrest was running out of control. Describing the strike in Nagorno-Karabakh, it said:

"The majority of industries and enterprises, all public transport and catering supplies and shops selling consumer goods have closed. Food sales have fallen sharply. Economic and other links with Baku (capital of Azerbaijan) have been halted. Appeals from the party leadership to normalise the situation have met with no response. The party organisations of the Republic have lost control of the situation... For the third week the strike goes on."

Pravda stated that the rule of law had broken down in the disputed region, with the formation of vigilante self-defence groups:

"When night comes, lights twinkle in the sentry-huts of the self-styled 'self-defence' groups who believe they are guarding their families against Azerbaijanis. Although no attacks take place, and there are others who can protect the public, the volunteers on duty stare suspiciously into the night."

Doubtless, the experience of Armenians in Sumgait, where hundreds were massacred under the eyes of the Azerbaijani authorities in February, is a more potent guide to action than the pious incantations of Pravda!

In an attempt to take the steam out of the unrest, Moscow sacked the Communist Party leaders in both Azerbaijan and Armenia. This seems to have backfired, however. The new party secretary in Armenia, Suren Arutunyan, under the pressure of the demonstrations and the general strike, was forced to promise that the Armenian Supreme Soviet would support reunification with Nagorno-Karabakh, which it duly did. This places the Armenian party on a direct collision course with Moscow, which, so far, fearing the repercussions elsewhere in the Soviet Union, has opposed reunification.

DECADES OF PENT-UP ANGER

Instead, the Soviet media have attempted to present the movement as being fomented by the Western press, despite the fact that both Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia have been closed to Western correspondents since the beginning of February. At the same time, leaders of the Karabakh committees, set up to organise the protests, have been arrested and denounced as "former criminals and unscrupulous personalities engaged in spreading deliberate lies."

*In a recent interview published in *East European Reporter*, Vol 3, No 2, Adam Michnik said: "Six years have passed since the introduction of martial law. Six years after the Hungarian Revolution, there was no trace of the revolution. Six years after the invasion of Czechoslovakia there was no trace of the Prague Spring. But six years after the declaration of martial law in this country,

Neither repression, nor the attempted criminalisation of its leaders, nor the concessions in terms of cultural and language freedoms have dented the central demand of the Armenians - for a single nation, with the reintegration of Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia.

The most bruised casualty of the events has been the policy of glasnost. Whilst the bureaucracy perceives events in Armenia in terms of 'reactionary nationalism', they can be better understood as the explosion of decades of pent-up anger and frustration at the denial of national rights, pushed up now through the crevices opened by promises of greater democratisation. But the dynamic of the movement itself challenges the possibility of such a democratisation remaining within the boundaries set by the bureaucracy. As Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland have shown in the past, the demands of the oppressed tend to intrude through whatever openings may be created through any hint of liberalisation.

The mass character of the protests has so far been confined to the national question. This has now extended into the Baltic Republics, with big demonstrations in Latvia. But these developments could affect other sectors, as the proposals for restructuring the economy - perestroika - take shape and provoke a response among Soviet workers.

The focal point of Gorbachev's reforming zeal lies on economic restructuring. This is a response to the deep-going economic crisis faced by the Soviet Union, but also experienced in different ways in every other country of the Soviet bloc.

At the first Central Committee plenum in April 1985 following his nomination as First Secretary, Gorbachev himself outlined some of the economic problems bedeviling the Soviet Union, which demanded new solutions: the backwardness of technology (some 30-40% of machinery with an average life-span of a dozen years, is still in use after two decades), the poor quality of many industrial products, a chronic wastage of energy and raw materials and an abysmally low level of productivity, where a third of the paid work-hours are said to be wasted.

Similar problems plague the agricultural sector. Meat production per capita has stagnated at less than two-thirds that of France, for example. Cereal output has fallen consistently below the targets set by successive five-year plans, with the shortfall having to be made up by imports from the West. Government subsidies to stabilise the price of such staples as bread, milk and meat more than doubled between 1980 and 1984 - from 25 to 52 million roubles.

Gorbachev's solutions to these problems involve the cutting of subsidies to industry and agriculture; an increase in productivity through automation, shift-working and a system of bonuses for exceeding targets; the closure of 'uneconomic' enterprises, and what is described as a more diverse structure of ownership and control.

Precisely what is meant by this 'diversity' is indicated in two recent developments. Firstly, the Supreme Soviet approved in May an unprecedented measure granting cooperatives an equal footing with the state



Solidarity exists along with a civil society. There is an underground press, an underground culture, underground science as well as other underground structures. The people are relaxed, unafraid and their backs are straight. We have educated our Communists and this is the greatest achievement of Solidarity."

sector, placing no limits on their profits or the incomes of their members. This immediately placed the Soviet at odds with the government which was proposing to impose steeply progressive taxes, up to a maximum of 90%, on the profits of cooperatives. This has now been redrafted to reflect the decision of the Supreme Soviet. Prime Minister Ryzhkov, in supporting the proposal for more cooperative development, suggested that it had a crucial role to play in mopping up the unemployment that would follow the future automation of Soviet factories. However, the co-ops in existence are largely confined to providing services, such as restaurants, boutiques and beauty salons.

The second strand of diversity in ownership envisages an increasing role for private enterprise, in particular the opening up of the vast potential market of the Soviet Union to Western capital, albeit in partnership with state planning. The Reagan-Gorbachev summit, for instance, was preceded by the arrival of a group of leading US businessmen to discuss future partnerships. For some time US capitalists have been pressing their administration to relax the curbs on trade with Moscow.

TOWARDS CAPITALISM OR SOCIALISM?

The question is posed: how can such developments occur without an alteration in the social basis of the Soviet regime, founded on the gains of the October Revolution? The kind of partnership envisaged by Gorbachev between the USSR and imperialism is based on the assumption that capitalism is prepared to operate within the framework set by the Soviet bureaucracy. It rests on a continued 'peaceful coexistence' between imperialism and the bureaucracy. But is it not likely that the prospect of such a massive shot in the arm for capitalism, with the extension of its markets into the Soviet Union, might accelerate tendencies towards a restoration of capitalism in the USSR?

Gorbachev faces another problem, namely the response of workers in the USSR to his reforms, which imply an end to the right to full employment, a decline in their living standards and the speed-up of production. The bulk of these measures remain to be implemented. Where changes have been introduced, for example with shift-working, this has provoked resistance among workers.

A strike also occurred among transport workers near Moscow recently, protesting against the linking of wages to productivity. Although news about industrial disputes is difficult to obtain from the Soviet Union, it is clear that opposition from workers is as yet sporadic and unorganised.

REFORMS CREATE TURMOIL



It is in the context of introducing certain measures of appeasement, of mobilising different layers of Soviet society behind economic restructuring, that one can understand the policies of glasnost, or political openness. Elements from the intelligentsia were courted, through a more liberal policy in respect of the arts, literature and some freedom of the press. Hundreds of political prisoners were released from jails and psychiatric hospitals, and one of the foremost dissident voices for decades, Andrei Sakharov, was publicly rehabilitated.

Recently too, the 'excesses' of Stalinist repression have been denounced by Gorbachev supporters. There have also been attacks on the system of privileges enjoyed by those in the bureaucratic hierarchy - access to luxury shops, country houses or dachas, special schools for their children, and special hospitals. Rather

than a real attack on the privileged position of the bureaucracy, this is more a means of attacking those opposed to perestroika. Thus, the Moscow Party secretary, Yeltsin was sacked, in part for his outspoken criticism of the slow pace of the reforms, but also for highlighting the privileged position of Raisa Gorbachev.

PARTY, STATE AND SOCIETY

More fundamental are the proposals put forward by the Central Committee to the special party conference on June 28th, which, however limited, began to change the relationship between the party, state and society. The most important of these include a limitation of the mandate of all Communist Party officials, up to and including the general secretary, to two terms of five years. Only after approval by 75% of the electing committee could the officials then serve for a further five years.

Also proposed is the institution of secret ballots for elections, the restoration of the party Control Commission in charge of discipline with powers to monitor the financial and economic activities of party bodies, and a strengthening of the legal system, with guarantees of individual rights such as the inviolability of the person and home, and the privacy of correspondence.

Such measures are said to amount to a "profound and all-round democratisation of the party and society." Yet when one considers Lenin's proposal to curb the development of the bureaucracy through his insistence on the right of immediate recall, the ten-year limit for party functionaries is scarcely adequate. However, the rotation of official posts, which Khrushchev attempted to introduce in 1961, and the threat it posed to the careers and job security of the party bureaucracy, was a cause of his downfall in 1964.

The latest proposals fall far short of the demands for political plurality being raised in some sections of society. The inaugural meeting of the Democratic Union which seeks the establishment of a "political party dedicated to the principles of free speech, democracy and free association", was forcibly halted by the police, with several participants arrested at the beginning of May. They were intending to put up their own candidates in elections to the national and local soviets.

Already, these political reforms are creating turmoil within the bureaucracy. Even more important than the inter-bureaucratic struggle, however, is the extent to which the commitment to democratisation of Gorbachev and his supporters will be used in practice by the millions excluded from exercising democratic control over their own lives.

Brazilian workers respond to crisis



By Michael Keene

IN NOVEMBER 1988, elections are scheduled for the Brazilian Presidency. The Workers Party, the PT, has decided to field Luis Ignacio de Silva, known as Lula, as its candidate. The PT campaign will receive the support of millions of workers.

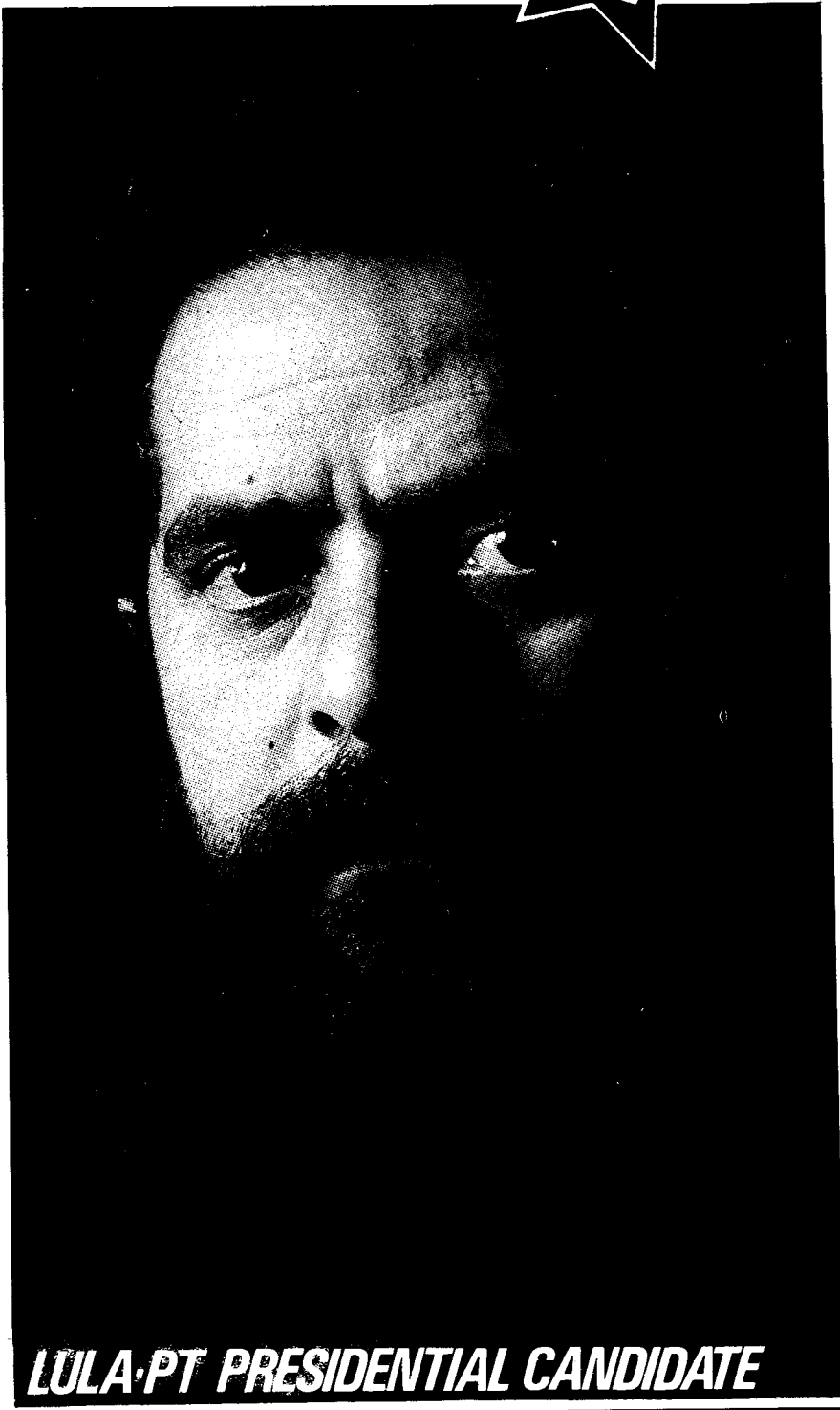
Three features characterise Brazil in the 1980s. Firstly, there is a chronic economic crisis whose roots lie in the distortions created by massive imperialist investment. The enormous foreign debt burden is being placed on the backs of the population by the Sarney government at the behest of the IMF.

Secondly, the masses are fighting this impoverishment by supporting the PT and two large trade union federations, the CUT and CGT, which have emerged in the last decade.

Thirdly, there is a growing instability in the political system. The ruling class has begun to 'reform' its institutions of rule, talking of a 'new republic', replacing the military-dominated governments in place since 1964. Liberalising steps have been taken in order to forestall a social explosion and preserve the rule of a small parasitic layer linked directly to imperialism.

Brazil is a country of nearly 140 million people, at least 40 million of whom live in the most abject poverty. Its gross industrial product ranks tenth in the world, after the 'big seven' imperialist countries, the USSR and China. Its economic growth exploded over the last 30 years, essentially based on foreign investment. Cheap labour made cheaper by the drift to the cities of those expelled from the land by big landowners, abundant natural resources, and state financial enticements, have made Brazil a productive centre for capital accumulation.

The military coup of 1964 brought in a repressive dictatorship, which crushed all attempts at workers' collective resistance to the new industrial superexploitation. The native ruling class was able to increase its share of the gains, by going along with imperialism. Rates of economic growth ran at an annual



average of more than 10% between 1968 and 1973. A huge growth in cars, engineering, chemicals and construction took place on the basis of the needs of the international market and not to fulfil the needs of the Brazilian people. More people are employed in German engineering concerns in the Sao Paulo region, for example, than are similarly employed in the Ruhr in Germany.

Brazil has become the principal exporter of armaments in the Third World and one of the world's major exporters of food products, whilst masses of the Brazilian people suffer from malnutrition.

Brazil is at the top of the world league for the incidence of industrial accidents and deaths.

Tens of millions have no regular means of subsistence and are excluded from the 'economically active' population.

28 million Brazilians can neither read nor write. 8½ million children have no schooling whatsoever.

Infant mortality rates are high and rising. More than 1,000 young children die each day, with thousands of abandoned children forced to live on the city streets.

Last December 65% of wage-earners earned less than \$70 US a month, in conditions where inflation is projected to reach 600% by the end of this year.

The top 20% of incomes are collectively 33 times as great as the bottom 20%. This enormous disproportion is five or six times as great as that in Taiwan, South Korea or Hong Kong.

Amidst luxurious building and office development in the cities, millions are condemned to live in the slums and shanties known as 'favelas', without the most elementary services or sanitation.

The bourgeoisie, supported by a political system based on military dictatorships, accumulated a massive foreign debt of \$110 billion, which grew from \$3.2 billion at the time of the 1964 coup.

The Sarney government, under pressure from immense popular resistance to IMF-imposed austerity, was forced, in February 1987, to declare a moratorium on the debt due to private banks. After nine months this was lifted and a payment of \$350 million made, with an expressed intention to reach an agreement for refinancing with the 800 big banks which Brazil owes money.

The debt has become a central question in Brazilian politics, leading to increased pressure on those already burdened with one round of government austerity measures after another. This is a very delicate problem for Sarney and the ruling party, the PMDB. If they go too far, they risk undermining the support of better-off layers of the population upon whom their political project rests.

At the same time, the elemental reaction of the masses who face the

consequences of austerity, is that it is not their debt. The loans never benefited the workers and the poor, and in any case the debt has been paid many times over in the form of massive super-profits from the exploitation of cheap Brazilian labour.

In the 1930s the dictatorship of Getulio Vargas introduced a framework of labour legislation modelled on Mussolini's Italy, which remains in force today.

Only state unions under the control of the Ministry of Labour were permitted. Statutes prevented rank and file decision-making and allowed the state to impose union officials, known as 'pelegos'.

No national, regional or industrial confederations or coordination could be exercised. Unions had to be local. The state had the right to dismiss union leaders and administer the affairs of unions directly.

A 'union tax', despised by workers, was levied from wages, automatically by the state. Part of this money went to union funds, the remainder going to pay the 'pelegos'.

Thus a whole edifice was created to paralyse organised labour and deprive workers of their own movement, controlled from below.

But the growth of industry in the 1960s and 1970s saw a classic demonstration of what Marx called the bourgeoisie bringing forth its own gravedigger. A new and numerically large proletariat was brought into existence in the large industrial concentrations and developing industries.

FORMATION OF PT

A key turning-point was a mobilisation which broke out between 1978 and 1980, centred on the metalworkers of the industrial concentration around Sao Paulo, known as the 'ABC'.

Initially, the first stirrings occurred in the form of an oppositional movement in the old union framework, taking up the struggle for democratic accountability and independence from the state. The breakthrough came with the Metalworkers' Union of Sao Bernardo under the presidency of Lula. This movement became generalised and led to the creation of the CUT as a national independent union federation in 1983. The CP regenerated its CGT union federation in the same period.

Both these confederations now number millions of members. Neither of them has a fully legal existence, but are kept going through the strength and dynamism of the mass movement. In 1985 alone the CUT led 900 strikes involving 7 million workers.

Parallel with the growth of the unions, and predating the formation of the CUT, the PT was founded in 1980. It was no accident that this party was founded by the same

nucleus of trade unionists which led the break from 'pelegism', around Lula.

The foundation of the PT came two years before the military decided in 1982 to permit the legal existence of various political parties.

The regime was being forced to manoeuvre, eventually conceding direct elections to municipalities and for state governorships and assemblies.

It further conceded direct elections to a national assembly, which was given a mandate to draw up a new constitution, to replace the 1967 constitution imposed by the military.

In 1985, the military authorised a non-direct presidential election by an electoral college of 680. The struggle for direct elections became a focus of mass mobilisation by the PT.

Under this pressure, the new constitution now proposes that November's election be held on the basis of universal direct suffrage.

The 'New Republic' project represents a series of modifications made by the bourgeoisie to forestall a revolutionary explosion. The PT only has 16 deputies in the National Assembly, but its social weight is far greater because of its involvement in the elemental struggles of the masses:

The ruling class is trying to make a certain tactical retreat before the masses. But this is compounded by the unbearable pressure coming from imperialism, driving liberal elements of the ruling class to attack what might have been regarded as part of their own popular base. The ruling party in the Assembly, the PMDB, previously had a reputation as a limited 'official' opposition to the dictatorship. It was this that enabled it to obtain massive electoral support in the Assembly elections.

Yet in April, the Sarney government announced a two-month pay freeze for civil servants, the armed forces and state company employees, despite inflation rising at 20% a month. The response was an instant demonstration by 30,000 government employees in Rio demanding an end to the Sarney government and immediate presidential elections.

UNSTABLE REGIME

On the same day as the freeze was announced, thousands of small-holders and farm-workers armed with hoes and scythes blocked roads and occupied official banks in hundreds of towns in protest at government agricultural policy. Tens of thousands of small-holders are losing their land each year because they cannot afford index-linked repayments.

In Brazilian conditions, any regime which cannot assure itself a stable base amongst state employees and those with some small property

Public services for the favelas

Democratic
rights!



in land is one which is inherently unstable. Its political 'reforms' can only intensify the crisis, opening up internal divisions and new channels for mass protest.

But the new element in politics is the emergent workers movement. The key question is the kind of political leadership and organisation workers need.

Despite its short life, the PT has established a national presence and is able to present itself as the principal force on the Brazilian left. It has about 300,000 members.

Besides 16 deputies in the National Assembly, it has about 40 members of the state assemblies and some 150 municipal councillors. It controls the Town Halls in three cities: Fortaleza (a town of 750,000 to a million people in the north), Diadema (in the ABC region - 500,000 people), and Vila Velha (in the state of Espirito Santo in the south-west - 100,000 people).

The PT is a new force but it is not a blank sheet. Its central leadership is characterised by a rigorous battle to forge a movement independent of the bourgeoisie and the state.

The PT permits an open and democratic debate within its ranks. At the fifth congress of the party, last December, several tendencies presented their positions in a full and open manner. A debate took place concerning the rights and responsibilities of the tendencies within the party. The view of the majority tendency of the party, within which the SLG's cothinkers in Brazil are integrated, was that the PT must develop towards being a more homogenous and effective party. It called on various oppositional

currents to place their first loyalty to building the PT as a party, above secondary or factional interests.

Certainly, the PT is an organisation still to be shaped politically in many respects, and contains strands representing diverse political perspectives and pressures.

But if we look at the PT's own political proposals, addressed to the workers and the poor, a general line of march is clear. It advances a programme of transitional demands, which in the Brazilian context provide the central axes around which the working class can organise to lead the struggle to overthrow the bourgeois regime.

DEMANDS OF THE PT

The following are extracts from the PT's programme:

1. Freedom of Trade Union and Political Organisation

- Total freedom of political organisation; Trade union autonomy and freedom; For a CUT, democratically elected by the workers and independent of the state; Unrestricted right to strike.

2. Dismantle the Organs of Political Repression and End the Exceptional Laws

- Revoke the law of national security; For a general amnesty; Restore political and trade union rights to imprisoned leaders and militants; Free and direct elections at all levels.

3. Wages Policy

- Guaranteed employment; A real minimum wage which will meet the basic needs of workers and their families; Sliding scale of wages; Reduction in the working day without loss of wages.

4. For Better Living Conditions

- Against the privatisation of medicine; Improvement of health services; Basic public services for the popular quarters and the favelas; Public and free education at all levels.

5. The Agrarian Question

- General agrarian reform under workers' control; The land to those who work it and those who have been expelled from it; Equal rights for all rural workers without distinction of age or sex; Guaranteed minimum income for small producers.

6. National independence

- Against imperialist domination; Against the pillage by international capital; Respect for the self-determination of peoples and solidarity with oppressed peoples.

7. Defence of Rights

- Support to the movements in defence of women, Blacks and Indians.

As Trotskyists, we have no hesitation in saying that all of the above are in concordance with the principles on which Leon Trotsky founded the Fourth International. That is why the SLG concurs with our comrades in Brazil who have taken up the fight wholeheartedly to build the PT as a revolutionary party.



The French General Strike 1968

IT IS THE NIGHT OF May 10th. Paris students assemble for the fifth demonstration of the week, against police repression and the closure of the universities. When the march tries to cross the River Seine, it finds every bridge sealed off by the police. Responding by building barricades, the students occupy the Latin Quarter. Pitched battles are fought with the CRS riot police for four hours. Three days later a one-day general strike will take place to protest against state repression. Within a week ten million workers across France will be on strike.

1968 began quietly enough. A steady increase in the level of industrial struggle failed to produce any conclusive victories for the working class. In the universities, a minority of militant students organised protests against the Vietnam war. It was the state's response to these which fuelled the student radicalisation. Brutal policing and the closure of all of Paris's universities provoked larger and more combative student mobilisations. A week before the occupation of the Left Bank, 739 students were injured by police in one demonstration alone.

But the massive social upheaval of May 1968 cannot be explained simply by student revolt 'detonating' the workers into action. Longer-term grievances had built up during ten years of Gaullist rule, which had seen the trades unions straitjacketed, and tight political control over the media and education introduced.

Chris Harman in his recent book *The Fire Last Time* points out that by 1966 France's industrial workers were the second worst paid in the EEC, working the longest hours and paying the highest taxes. In the universities too, the rapidly increasing student population - from 175,000 in 1958 to 500,000 in 1968 - had not been matched by a corresponding increase in facilities. 60% of all students failed to complete their courses.

These material factors, and the inability of de Gaulle's autocratic regime to seriously tackle them, help explain how a growing restiveness in French society developed into outright rebellion in May 1968.

The march called by the union leadership on May 13th after the previous week's street battles was the biggest since the Liberation of Paris. The leaders of the different

union federations staged this one-day action in order to defuse the mounting pressure. But the following day workers refused to return to work. Car and aircraft workers struck and occupied their factories, welding the gates. Two days later an unofficial general strike paralysed France.

The strike spread, drawing different social sectors into an openly political movement of millions. Architects and astronomers occupied: so did professional footballers. TV newscasters declared that they were fed up with reading 'shit' to the people. Conscript soldiers were openly sympathetic. Action committees sprung up everywhere to organise the movement.

STRIKE MEETINGS

Visibly out of control of the situation, the government flailed around for a face-saving solution. On May 24th, President de Gaulle went on TV to offer a 'referendum on participation'. This proposal was greeted with derision. Prime Minister Pompidou organised negotiations with the union leaders and conceded a 35% increase in the minimum wage. But when CGT officials put this deal to mass strike meetings, they were received with boos. De Gaulle disappeared from the public eye,

apparently having decided to resign, but was persuaded to stay on by General Massu, head of the French army in Germany.

Whilst out of Paris, de Gaulle prepared his counter-attack. He returned on May 30th to announce new general elections. Behind the scenes, the Gaullist party apparatus had been preparing for a demonstration in support of the government, which it now 'spontaneously' took onto the streets. Prominent among its slogans were 'France for Frenchmen' and 'Cohn-Bendit to Dachau'. This call for the principal student leader to be sent to the gas chambers was never disowned by the march's organisers.

For the powerful apparatus of France's Communist Party, success in the elections meant ending the strike at all costs. Leaders of the PCF-dominated unions, the CGT, had been pushed along in front of the strike movement in their attempt to stay in control of events. Now they moved to derail it. When students demonstrated against the exclusion from France of Cohn-Bendit the CP called mobilisations against them. Its divisive tactics demoralised students and workers alike. In early June, the police moved heavily against those workers still on strike, and the CRS were deployed in the Latin Quarter for the first time in a month. Pickets and students were killed in the backlash of state repression, and the government took advantage of the demobilisation to ban Trotskyist and Maoist organisations.

'RICH BOURGEOIS'

The pernicious role of the Communist Party in this process should not be underestimated. *Humanite*, the CP daily, originally blamed 'student irresponsibility' for the violence on the Left Bank in early May. On May 3rd Georges Marchais wrote: "These false revolutionaries must be energetically unmasked because, objectively, they are securing the interests of the big capitalist monopolies and Gaullist power... For the most part they are the sons (sic) of rich bourgeois."

Humanite modified its approach as the movement grew, but still kept up a virulent witch-hunt against Cohn-Bendit for his 'international connections', and was particularly vicious in its denunciations of anyone who opposed the CGT's instruction to



return to work at the beginning of June. Cohn-Bendit summarised the PCF's role when he said: "The French bourgeoisie will use the Stalinists like a contraceptive and then... into the toilet."

The Stalinist policy of promoting divisions in the French working class was used throughout the 1960s and beyond. But for one critical month, the masses proved by their own activity that, as Leon Trotsky once

put it, "the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus." The death-knell of Gaullism sounded, and the full impact of the French general strike reverberated around the world, reinforcing the new international political situation and giving an impetus to the emergence of radical anti-capitalist forces in other countries.

By Mike Pearse

