

A SOCIALIST ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM



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on the stock market crash



STOP ALTON'S BILL!

Join the national action on 21 January 1988

DAVID ALTON's Private Member's Bill to reduce the upper time limits for legal abortion by 10 weeks — from 28 to 18 — is the most serious attack yet on women's access to safe abortion under the 1967 Act. If passed his proposal would hit abortion rights for up to 23,000 women a year and indirectly threaten many more.

But Alton has chosen his ground carefully. Previous anti-abortion bills such as Benyon's, White's and Corrie's, attacked head-on women's access to abortion. These bills were openly anti-abortion bills aimed at severely restricting the gains of the 1967 Act.

Alton however has avoided this direct ideological confrontation over women's access to abortion. He has made his fight that of stopping 'late abortion' — posing the issue as one of lowering time limits in line with foetal viability. He has added to this an apparent concern for those with disabilities, attacking

the pro-choice lobby for wanting to 'abort deformity'.

Alton asks us to ignore the facts that:

- no birth at anywhere near 18 weeks has ever survived
- those who defend and want to extend the '67 Act support the right of *choice* for women — including choice for women when the foetus is severely impaired which 18 weeks would disallow
- although the right to late abortions will always be necessary, the way to reduce them to the minimum is to remove the obstacles under the present laws, improve NHS facilities, improve sex education, and support international campaigns to extend women's fertility control.
- doctors allow a margin of error of up to four weeks — an 18 week limit would affect women from 14 weeks pregnancy onwards.

Alton ignores these facts because his concern for 'late abortions' is a fake. His stated opinion is that the

'post-conception child's right to life' must *always* take precedence. As the *Guardian* correctly pointed out, his Bill is simply a Trojan horse to secure that for which Benyon, White, Corrie and many others have fought — a substantial restriction in the access of all women to legal abortion.

The labour movement must act now to defeat this anti-abortion, anti-woman Bill and to defend the '67 Act and support the right of women to decide. Both the Labour Party and TUC have clear policy on this issue.

The Fight Alton's Bill campaign (FAB) has been established by the pro-choice organisations and others to coordinate resistance to Alton. Immediate priorities are:

- ★ 16 January — **Regional Day of Action**
- ★ 21 January — **National Day of Protest, including a lobby of parliament, a rally in Westminster Central Hall, and an all-women torchlight demonstration.**

Socialist ACTION

Seventy years on

THE PRESS is having a field day analysing the speech of Mikhail Gorbachev commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. But seventy years on what balance sheet should socialists make of the revolution — and by that we mean not just the historical revolution, the classical reality of the workers seizing power, but its actual result, the Soviet Union of today?

It is unnecessary to recount here the crimes committed in the names of that revolution since it occurred. Stalin wrote what is still, in its scope, the blackest pages in the history of the socialist movement — although Stalin was no different in nature, only in scale, from the social democrats who in 1918 in Germany combined with the fascists to crush the revolution, or the hallowed leaders of British Labour who were prepared to preside over the domain of the 'King Emperor'. Soviet repression in Eastern Europe continues and no one need have any sympathy with the regime which exists. We believe that Gorbachev is the most right wing leader the Soviet Union has ever had — prepared to do spectacular deals with imperialism over such issues such as Central America and South Africa. But some other home truths need to be said about the Soviet Union and its real history in regard to the world working class.

First the USSR was the force which crushed fascism. The 'war in the west', between Germany, Britain and the United States, was a pathetic affair — a sideshow. Nor was the West European working class capable of overthrowing fascism. It was the Soviet Union that smashed Nazi Germany — nobody else.

Second, without the existence of the Soviet Union, and its victory in World War II, the great wave of post-war colonial liberation would never have taken place. Without the existence of the Soviet Union the Chinese revolution would not have survived, the Vietnamese revolution could not have survived, the Cuban revolution could not have survived, and a country such as Nicaragua would have no chance of survival today. The fall out from these struggles, played a crucial part in dismantling the old colonial empires.

Thirdly the Soviet Union is today, almost the single greatest force in the world for peace — only the international working class as a whole exceeds it. Have no illusions, if it were not for fear of the Soviet Union, and the belief that a Third World War would lead to the overthrow of capitalism throughout the world, the inter-imperialist conflicts of today would be resolved by war. We would today see a nuclear arms race between the imperialist powers — a situation present threats of nuclear annihilation look like a haven of security.

These facts, decisive ones of twentieth century history, are why, half a century after it was made, it is still only Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union which accounts for what has happened and remains the only balanced one.

No one has ever denounced or opposed the crimes of Stalinism more bitterly or clearly than Trotsky — and gave his life for it. And no one has ever remained more firm that the Soviet Union had to be defended against anything that capitalism could throw against it.

It may be unpopular to say it but it needs to be said on its 70th anniversary that the Russian Revolution is not just an historical idea. Whatever the crimes, whatever Stalin and his successors made of it, the existence of the Russian revolution, and the survival of the Soviet Union, made, and continues to make, the lives of billions of people in the world infinitely better than they would have been if that revolution had not taken place and if the state that it created did not exist.

Trotsky who, after Lenin, made the greatest contribution of anyone to creating and defending that state, never let anyone forget it. And the fact that Mikhail Gorbachev went out of his way to attack Trotsky in his speech does not alter that reality one bit.

Seventy years ago in Russia a new epoch in human history opened. One which continues to dominate the world not just in ideas but in material reality. Even the crimes of Stalin could not erase that.



ON TUESDAY 27 October, Liberal MP for Liverpool-Mossley Hill, David Alton, introduced a Private Members Bill for parliament, which represents yet another attack on the 1967 Abortion Act. Alton's legislation proposes to reduce the time limit for abortions from its current 28 weeks to 18. Anti-abortionist organisations like Life and the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) have already thrown their weight behind him. But FAB — the Fight Alton's Bill campaign — called into existence by pro-choice organisations like the National Abortion Campaign (NAC), the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA), Co-ord and others, has already held its first national action. Meanwhile FAB groups are springing up across the country. ANNE KANE and CAROL TURNER report.

NAC conference plans for the fight ahead

TWO HUNDRED AND fifty women attended the National Abortion Campaign's 'Twentieth Anniversary of the 1967 Act' annual conference on 31 October and 1 November, in the London Women's Centre. It was NAC's twelfth national conference, and though doubtless many were attracted by the impressive range of discussions planned, many others rallied to the conference in the light of the latest attack on the 1967 Act from David Alton. As Jo Richardson pointed out in opening Saturday's session, given that a disproportionate amount of her parliamentary time since the Act was passed has been spent fighting such attacks, it was a not unusual irony to open NAC's celebratory conference in the context of yet another assault. Neither, of course, given the fate of all the others, will it be unusual if we defeat this one.

Jo Richardson explained that although the tactical issue he has chosen to fight on is a variation on previous attacks, Alton's aim is identical. Whether it is his preferred 18 week limit, or the 24 week limit even now being mooted as a so-called, compromise, Alton aims to win the first successful attack on the '67 Act.

His Bill is a step on the way to severely limiting and eventually reversing the '67 Act. Jo Richardson explained the position all Labour MPs should take: that the way to fight this Bill and to really begin to make it easier for more women to have earlier (and therefore safer) abortions was by defending the 28 week limit against any reductions.

Christine McAnea, women's officer of NALGO, added to this the crucial role the trade unions had to play in defeating Alton. While John Corrie's anti-

abortion Bill had passed its second reading for instance, the strength of opposition shown by the massive campaign against it, in particular by the TUC-called demonstration, ensured that the Corrie Bill was finally defeated at its third reading a few months later.

Corrie's fate was proof that the situation now, although difficult, was far from impossible. Like Alton, Corrie also put his bill forward under a Thatcher administration, with a safe Tory majority. The TUC had become the first trade union federation to call such action on this issue. As Christine McAnea said, TUC and Labour Party policy gave a clear path to repeating this example and defeating Alton.

The history and hypocrisy of the present attack was illustrated from almost every angle. By Sheila Rowbotham who chronicled Stella Browne's

heroic struggle for contraception and abortion rights in the 1920s and '30s. By Rosie Newbiggings from the London Health Emergency who explained that health authorities like City and Hackney are already implementing a 12 week limit by automatically referring all women who require abortions after that date to the private sector. And by Sharon Atkin who pointed to the very different experience of black women who are often offered abortions with the qualification that they submit to sterilisations.

The consequences of banning abortion, including late abortion, was brought home most forcibly by Sunday's international panel.

In Ireland, for example, where not only is abortion constitutionally prohibited, but women are also legally denied access to information about it, over 3000 women are forced to make the lonely and expensive journey to Britain for abortions every year. Many, of course, require much later abortions than would otherwise be necessary.

Sunday concluded with an important discussion on NAC's particular role in the campaign against Alton. It was agreed that not only was NAC's continued existence basic to the speed at which campaigns like FAB (Fight Alton's Bill) could get off the ground, but also NAC had a specific contribution to make in this broader struggle as a labour move-



ment campaign.

Specifically, in the labour movement policy has been won very widely both to defend the 1967 Act and support the right of women to choose.

The campaign against Alton must be built on the broadest basis of defending the present laws against attack, so as to group together the maximum number of people against any limitation. But in the labour movement, and indeed the student movement, present policy is more advanced than this. In many respects the cutting edge of actually defending the present laws in the labour movement is the argument that the choice should be left to women.

Indeed there is such a close association of the two ideas that the Corrie campaign — although set up in similarly broad way to FAB, to simply oppose Corrie's attack on the 1967 Act — had both defence of the act and a woman's right to choose as central demands.

The importance of this is more than just looking for the right slogans. There is every indication that, notwithstanding recent *Guardian* polls, any proposal to allow greater decision making, self-referral, or the right to choose, and therefore an advance on the present law (within which, despite Alton's propaganda, not one single woman has the right to choose) would have huge popular support.

One of the roles of NAC is to help turn both these into action — to defeat Alton's Bill, and also to begin to take forward the campaign for better legislation to give women the right to choose: by making the conditions of the law less restrictive, by extending self-referral and by passively improving all NHS facilities. All of these, if David Alton was interested, would help reduce though never remove the need for late abortions.

Local round-up

Manchester

MORE than 250 people attended a hastily-convened meeting in City Hall in Manchester recently, called by women from the District Labour Party in conjunction with the Manchester area National Union of Students women's officer and Manchester University student union women's officer. The meeting was addressed by Anni Marjoram of the Labour Women's Action Committee and others.

Plans are already underway to meet regularly and to organise a mass leafletting and petitioning in the city centre. For more information ring Cath on 061-223 4479 or write to

Manchester FAB, c/o PO Box 16 (South PDO) Manchester M14 5DD.

Lambeth

LAMBETH Against Alton is now in its third week of existence after women from the local Labour Parties called a meeting on Friday 17 October to organise a local campaign. Plans are underway for a regular Saturday stall in Brixton market which will be the stepping off point for local activities. To help get things off the ground Vauxhall Labour Party women's section is also organising a meeting to

publicly launch the campaign.

LAA meets every Tuesday in Brixton town hall at 7.30. Further information from Joan on 01-582 2955 (ansaphone) or Carol on 01-254 0261.

Hackney

A LAUNCH meeting for Hackney FAB is planned for Tuesday 24 November. This will take place in the town hall from 7.30pm onwards and speakers include Doctors for A Woman's Right to Choose and FAB, as well as local MP Diane Abbott.

The campaign is initiated by Hackney South Labour Party women's section and supported by Hackney South Labour Party. For more information contact Anne on 01-241 5626.

Nottingham

NOTTINGHAM FAB is already in an advanced stage of organisation and has made contact with women's organisations, black and white. Nottingham FAB was set up in mid-October from a nucleus of the local group of the National Abortion Campaign.

It has already made links with local Labour Parties and trade union branches. NUPE women's committee has now passed a resolution of support and pledged practical help to the local campaign.

The East Midlands Labour women's conference also met on Saturday 24 October and opposed Alton's Bill. A resolution of support for Nottingham FAB is also on its way to the Polytechnic students union.

A public meeting has been organised for Monday 30 November in the Mandela Lecture Theatre of the Polytechnic. Jo Richardson MP has been invited to speak, together with Mel Read of the TUC women's committee and Gwen McLeod of the hosiery and knitwear union.

Nottingham FAB meets every Thursday at 7.30pm, but venues vary. More information is available from Mary on 0602 623246.

Greenwich

A LOCAL Fight Alton's Bill group is in the throes of being set up in Greenwich by women from the local Labour Parties and trade unions. The first meeting takes place on Tuesday 3 November and

anti-abortion bill

Time limits bill introduced

AROUND 300 protestors joined the first national action called by the Fight Alton's Bill (FAB) campaign on Tuesday 27 October: a picket outside Central Hall, Westminster. Inside SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) and Life were rallying to mark the twentieth anniversary of the 1967 Abortion Act. Pride of place at that rally was afforded Liberal MP David Alton. That same afternoon saw him introduce his Private Members Bill to reduce the upper time limit on abortion from its present 28 weeks to 18, which is designed as an attack on the '67 Act.

Throughout the afternoon small groups of anti-abortionists left the Methodist centre for Parliament Square to lobby their MPs.

Inside Central Hall, Alton and other anti-choice speakers were making it clear that the Private Members Bill was simply another way of attempting to claw back the gains of the 1967 Act.

Provisions

Since the passage of the 1967 Act there have been no less than 14 attempts to roll back its provisions. Most have never seen the light of day. But three — all private members bills, introduced by MPs James White, John Benyon and John Corrie — have been debated in parliament. On each occasion thousands of women took to the streets to defend the limited abortion rights that the 1967 Act gives us. Backed up by the labour movement, the pro-choice movement has successfully repulsed each of these onslaughts.

David Alton's Bill is the fourth to get an airing. Having learned from past failures, this Bill does not attempt to tackle head-on the right to abortion under the '67 Act. Instead, Alton claims to be concerned about preventing 'late abortions'.

But the facts speak for themselves. First off, in reality Alton's Bill would cut abortions over 14, not 18 weeks. Under the present legislation, doctors tend to err on the safe side to avoid prosecution and add an extra four weeks onto the estimated length of a pregnancy.

Of the 172,000 abor-

tions carried out in this country last year, fewer than 6000 were carried out after 18 weeks. The biggest cause of delays in obtaining an abortion is the lack of NHS facilities and unsympathetic doctors.

According to veteran pro-choice campaigner Jo Richardson MP: 'Where a woman lives, significantly influences her chance of obtaining an NHS abortion — a better than 90 per cent chance in the North East for example, but worse than 15 per cent in the West Midlands.'

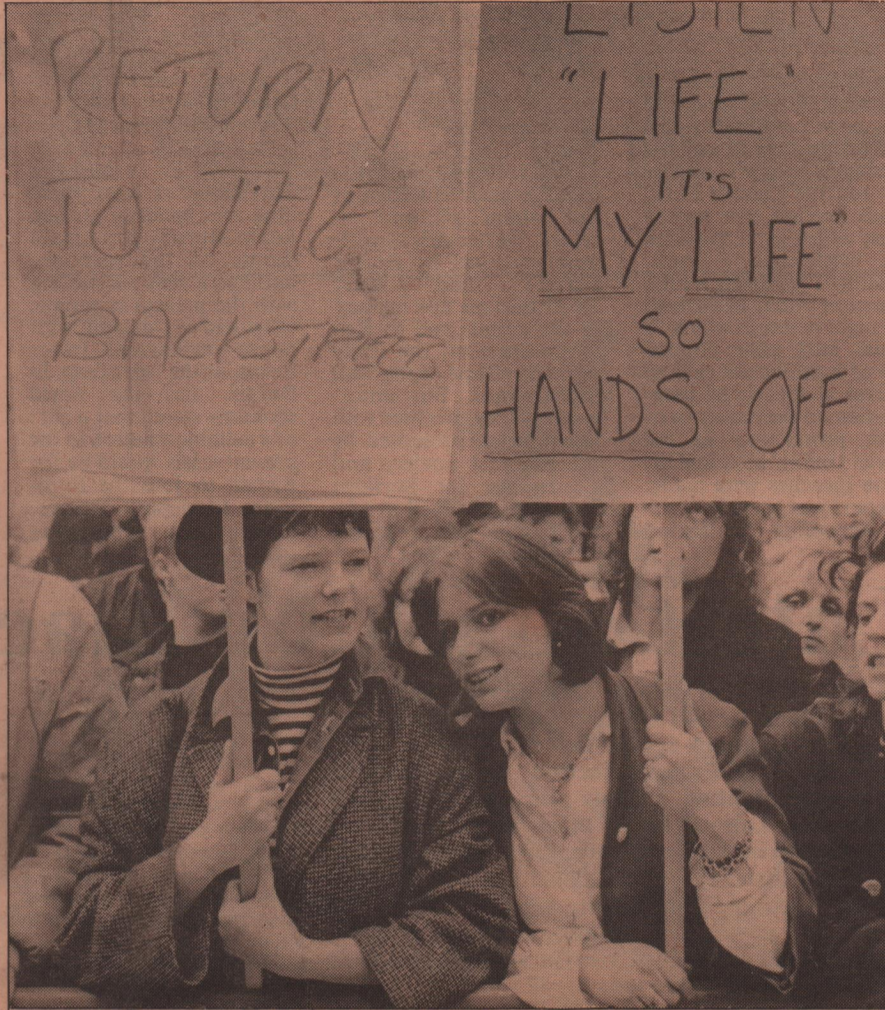
More than one-fifth of the women who have abortions after 20 weeks first visit their doctor before the twelfth week of their pregnancy. If David Alton genuinely wanted to reduce the time taken to carry out abortions, he would introduce a Bill that improved NHS facilities.

Facts

Four main categories of women seeking abortions would be denied them under Alton's proposed legislation. Arguably they are among the women most in need: young women, older women, women whose tests reveal they are carrying foetuses with a severely disabling condition, and women from abroad.

Alton and his backers don't give a damn about the situation which these women would find themselves in if the 1967 Act were amended.

Speaking at a press conference organised by the FAB campaign on Tuesday 27 October, Jo Richardson said: 'We believe (the Alton Bill) is the first step in a series of moves to dismantle the Abortion Act altogether.'



Pro-choice supporters at FAB's 27 October picket demand the right to choose

Speaking at the Central Hall rally, the chair of Life organisation, John Scarisbrick, said that three million 'unborn children' had been 'put to death' since the 1967 Act reached the statute book. That situation had to be turned around. Many speakers at the SPUC-Life rally pointed out that Alton's Bill was 'just the first step'.

First step

Alton himself appeared at the rally with a scan picture of an 18 week foetus, which has already appeared in several daily papers. It is a picture which has been doing the anti-choice rounds for almost 20 years now. Life and SPUC have thrown their resources behind Alton and are about to

turn it into one million postcards to be mailed to MPs.

Lobbies

Anti-choice campaigners are also reported to be devoting their energies to organising a national lobby of parliament by people with disabilities early in the new year. Anti-abortion activists across the country are being asked to contact local organisations for the physically and mentally disabled for support.

However, in response to this proposed lobby, three charities associated with disabilities have come out on the side of the pro-choice supporters.

According to the *Sunday Times* of 1 November: 'Mencap, the Down's Syndrome Association and the

Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus said the abortion of a faulty foetus could only be for parents to decide.'

After the introduction into parliament of David Alton's Private Members Bill, the anti-abortionists are geared up for another round of their obnoxious and phoney emotion-wrenching campaigning. But pro-choice supporters are also setting their campaigning wheels in motion — as the growth of local FAB campaigns up and down the country demonstrates.

Attitude

It is vital that all the pro-choice forces are mobilised by the time of the Alton Bill's second reading on Friday 22 January 1988.

FAB campaign gears up for 21 January action

THE DATE has now been set for the crucial second reading of Alton's private Abortion (Amendment) Bill: 22 January 1988. The Fight Alton's Bill campaign is going full steam ahead with plans for a national day of action on Thursday 21 January.

The second reading in the House of Commons will decide whether or not Alton's pernicious legislation goes into committee stage when, for example, the lower time limit he is attempting to set can be adjusted to attract more votes.

There is speculation that if Alton's 18 week limit were amended to 22 or 24 weeks, more MPs would accept the Bill. Alton and his supporters have now indicated their willingness to consider such a deal.

The day before the second reading, Thursday 21 January, will be FAB's day of national action. There will be a rally during that afternoon at Central Hall, Westminster from 1.30pm to around 6pm.

Progress is already underway on this. Speakers from across the whole spectrum of pro-choice support — from political parties to the entertainment world — are being invited.

At the same time, FAB will be organising mass lobbying of MPs across the square at the Houses of Parliament.

When darkness falls, an all-women torchlight march will cross the capital. Details of the route are yet to be finalised. But FAB groups should start mobilising now for this and other activities on that day.

Leading up to the national day of action on Thursday 21 January 1988, FAB is calling for a week of local and regional activity. Local groups are encouraged to stage public events throughout that week.

On the Saturday before the second reading, 16 January, FAB is calling for regional actions such as demonstrations. Liverpool would be one such excellent focus, because that is where Alton's own parliamentary seat is.

Literally dozens of FAB groups are already off the ground — as the brief round-up below illustrates.

The production of the FAB national petition

(reproduced below) is underway. FAB groups should also begin to organise a letter-writing campaign both to the newspapers and to their local members of parliament.

NALGO has already decided to organise a post-card campaign supporting women's abortion rights.

The national Fight Alton's Bill campaign is now planning production of badges and posters, as well as more leaflets and bulletins for use by supporters. The National Union of Students too is producing a poster for use in the colleges. It is organising a fringe meeting at NUS conference with FAB, and a speaker at its women's aggregate on 14-15 November.

Labour movement support is a crucial element in a successful defence of the 1967 Abortion Act — as the Corrie campaign has already shown. Many MPs and leading trade unionists have already sponsored the FAB campaign.

Resolutions of support for FAB are on their way through trade union and Labour Party branches. FAB supporters should also be targeting the forthcoming round of regional Labour Party and trade union conferences for building support for the campaign.

Labour women will be asked to lend their support to the FAB campaign at the National Labour Women's Conference on 14-15 November.

The Fight Alton's Bill campaign continues to meet weekly to hammer out the details of the hard round of campaigning for the coming months. Keep the campaign informed of activities in your area.

● More information from FAB, c/o NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2 5AU (01-405 4801). Copies of the petition and FAB bulletins with suggested model resolutions are available on request.

will be organising a public meeting to launch the campaign.

Greenwich council Labour Party workplace branch has donated £50 to set the local campaign on its way. Greenwich NALGO has agreed to sponsor the Fight Alton's Bill national campaign and to make a £50 donation.

Many women from this NALGO branch have expressed an interest in local activity to stop Alton's anti-abortion legislation. For more information contact Rona on 01-856 0296 ext 261.

Birmingham

A BIRMINGHAM branch of the FAB campaign held its first meeting recently, set up by women from NALGO, ASTMS and the Birmingham Trades

Council. They have been eagerly joined by the local NAC branch and the Birmingham University Students Union.

A launch meeting is planned for Wednesday 11 November at Key Books, Digbeth at 7.30pm. That meeting will be discussing plans for a public meeting with local MP Clare Short as well as regular efforts to lobby MPs and to petition on the streets of the city.

Pro-choice activists have already been out on the city centre streets. On Tuesday 27 October, the day Alton introduced his Bill into parliament, a picket was held in Chamberlain Square and leaflets explaining Alton's attack on women's rights were distributed.

For more information on Birmingham FAB's activities, contact Bridget on

021-440 0173 (evenings) or Jane on 021-449 5938 (evenings) or Bernie on 021-236 8323 (daytime); or write to Birmingham FAB, c/o Geraldine Egan, Birmingham Trades Council, 7 Frederick Street, Hockley Birmingham B1 3HE.

Islington

WOMEN from Islington Labour Parties are preparing to launch a local FAB group. A meeting date has been set for Thursday 26 November, at 7.30pm, Islington Central Library. For more information contact Liz Phillipson on 01-263 9454.

Scotland

WOMEN from the Scottish Abortion Campaign (SAC) are busy organising opposition to Alton's Bill

in Scotland. FAB groups are already underway in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Both groups are organising public launch meetings for 9 November.

The Scottish TUC women's advisory committee has also been quick to react to the Alton threat. It has called a special delegate meeting for 16 November through an extensive mailing aimed primarily at women in the trade union movement. The Scottish TUC was prominent in supporting the Corrie campaign.

For more information about FAB in Scotland, contact SAC convenor, Liz Armstrong on 041-945 3943 (evenings), or write c/o SAC, PO Box 105, Glasgow G1. Details of the Scottish TUC initiative are available from Ms Ronnie McDonald, Scottish TUC,

16 Woodland Terrace, Glasgow G3 (041-332 2045).

Sheffield

A Sheffield FAB campaign will be launched soon, at a meeting on Wednesday 11 November. The launch has been jointly organised by the women's committee of the Labour council and by Sheffield NAC. More information is available via the women's committee, Sheffield town hall.

Haringey

HARINGEY is launching a local FAB campaign at a meeting on Monday 16 November. This will be held at the Community Centre, Brabant Road, Wood Green.

FAB's national petition

FAB has produced a national petition for use by all local groups. As in the past, this petition against proposed anti-abortion legislation is drawn up in a House of Commons language that allows it to be used by pro-choice MPs in parliament. For the same reason, the 'top copy' of any petition you circulate must be handwritten.

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Parliament assembled, the humble Petition of UK residents sheweth that the Abortion (Amendment) Bill which proposes to reduce the upper limit for abortion will, if enacted, restrict women's choices, endanger their health and open the door to further attacks on the 1967 Abortion Act. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House do vote against the Abortion (Amendment) Bill and your Petitioners as in duty bound do ever pray etc.



Nicaragua protest

NICARAGUA supporters picketed the Royal Institute for International Affairs where contra leader Adolfo Calero was meeting with his British supporters.

Calero had been invited to Britain by an organisation associated with some Tory MPs. Expressing his

opposition to the visit on the picket, Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn said 'Calero is a representative of a terrorist organisation financed by Reagan. He is here to drum up support for the destruction of democracy in Nicaragua'.

The demonstration took place on Friday 30 October.

Second police attack on Trevor Monerville

IN the early hours of Saturday 31 October police rearrested Trevor Monerville together with his brother and a family friend.

Monerville sustained further head injuries for which he received medical treatment. Readers will recall that he suffered brain damage 11 months ago while in the custody of Stoke Newington police.

Despite his injuries, Monerville was held at Hackney Police Station over the weekend of 31 October - 1 November, together with the two others arrested. All three appeared at Old Street magistrates court on Monday morning.

The family friend was released on bail, but Monerville and his brother Peter Thomas are still being held in custody despite pleas

from their barrister that he feared for their safety.

Around 100 demonstrated outside Hackney Police Station on the Saturday. Monerville was arrested. A picket of the magistrates court was also held on Monday.

Another picket was organised for Wednesday outside the Crown Court, when Monerville's barrister appeals against the bail refusal. Another picket of Hackney Police Station in Lower Clapton Road has been called for Saturday 7 November, starting at 12 noon. Labour Party Black Section has pointed out that this is yet another example of black youth being framed. Black Section is calling on all Labour MPs to join the picket and has made a special plea for support from the Campaign Group.

WINNING THE MAJORITY

Labour's policies for women

A conference organised by the Labour Women's Action Committee

Saturday 21 November

Speakers include:

Diane Abbott MP,
Diana Jeuda NEC/USDAW,
Rose Lambie TUC/COHSE,
Ann Pettifor, Jo Richardson MP,
Audrey Wise MP

Lambeth Town Hall
Brixton Hill
London SW4

10.30am-5.30pm
Registration: £3 and £1.50

The Socialist Conference

THE Socialist Conference held in Chesterfield on 24-25 October was a huge organisational success. Over 2000 people attended. It was a tremendous opportunity to discuss socialist policies.

Since the conference the Labour right has gone out of its way to attack it. In particular Sarah Benton in the *New Statesman*, who has previously spent her time attacking the Labour Women's Action Committee and the Labour Party Black Section, was turned loose with a remit to attack the conference — contrasting it adversely with a *Marxism Today* event held the night before in which: 'a Lenin look alike popped out of a cardboard cake to deliver a speech in para-Russian on the problems of bran production in the Soviet Union; witty and urbane speeches were made; the port was passed'.

According to Benton

the Chesterfield conference, unlike the *Marxism Today* gathering, lacked 'new ideas'.

By John Ross

In fact many of the speeches made by leaders of the Labour left were excellent. Particularly notable were speeches by Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield on 'new realism' in the unions and by Ken Livingstone on the likely political effects of the Wall Street crash. But unfortunately they coexisted with key policies, promoted by the Socialist Society and Conference for Socialist Economists, aimed to take the Labour left far to the

right of its previous positions.

The Socialist Society, in particular, promoted three positions — all of which are interconnected. These were support for the EEC — couched in terms of rejecting withdrawal, support for proportional representation, and an attack on 'traditional forms of nationalisation'.

In the economics workshops at least these ideas were taken far further. Robin Murray, in the main debate on the economy, outlined a view for dealing with the present economic crisis without dealing with public ownership. Trevor Evans, at the workshop on Britain and the world economy stated that a part of a suitable solution to the present crisis would be for Britain to join the European Monetary System. Undoubtedly these views

were way to the right of anything which most of the Labour Party members present had ever considered adopting. At least in the workshop the present author attended such views were taken to task.

Aims

Unfortunately if there is a printed record of the conference, which is likely, it will give a greatly distorted version of what really took place. Benton was in fact full of praise for the papers prepared for the conference: 'This (the absence of 'new ideas') is not what the conference papers produced to set the tone of the conference, had promised. Here, thoughts on reality did peep above ground. Ironically, had those who wrote, for instance, the section on public ownership, peppered with passages

such as: "The public sector has, by and large, stifled initiative, eg, in health care. The major innovations have largely come from the private and voluntary cottage economy," put these thoughts to the conference they would have been howled down as New Realists'.

In reality most of those outside the Labour Party at the conference were politically far to the right of those inside it. Arthur Scargill rightly took them up very sharply in his contribution on Saturday night.

A recall conference is promised for May. That is welcome — getting socialists together is valuable in itself. But some of these political issues must be ironed out or the conference will take on a different dynamic to the one its organisers intended.

Latest attack on Black Section

IN THE WAKE of Labour Party annual conference former Black Section activist Paul Sharma has launched a public attack against that organisation, branding as the 'Mujahedin faction' those whom he claims are fighting a 'holy war' with the party leadership. Labour Party black members should drop their demand for constitutional recognition, he says, and instead go for the affiliated status that groups such as Poale Zion enjoy. But Sharma neglects to mention that this solution has already been mooted and failed to win support. CAROL TURNER looks at the issues.

PAUL Sharma recently used the pages of *Tribune* to launch an attack on the Labour Party Black Section. That attack was greeted with delight by a hostile media.

The *Guardian* of Wednesday 14 October, which appeared before *Tribune* itself hit the streets, reported that Black Sections 'have been hijacked' according to Paul Sharma.

Like many before him, Sharma failed to recognise the interconnection between the movement of black members for con-

stitutional rights in the party and headway in the labour movement on the political issues held to be most important within the black communities. Instead Sharma offers the two as an either-or choice.

In *Tribune* Sharma concludes that: 'The demand for constitutional change and official recognition should not be dropped until it is won but Black Sections must turn their energies to bigger concerns — the real issues of politics. Their influence must now be re-directed at Labour's councils in

power and at the next manifesto on which the national power will win power.'

As an ex-activist in the Black Section movement, Sharma simply cannot fail to be aware that the rise of support for the Black Section coincided with, and was the decisive factor in helping promote, the tremendous increase in the number of black Labour councillors elected and the historic return to parliament of four black Labour MPs, including Diane Abbott, the first-ever black woman to win a seat. It is a simple fact that the increasing (although still depressingly inadequate) attention to anti-racism in the Labour Party is in direct relation to the growth of the Labour Party Black Section.

To launch an attack on the Black Section is, in practice, to lend support to the opponents of Black Section within the Labour Party. That is why newspapers like the *Guar-*

dian are more than willing to air views like Sharma's.

Furthermore, Sharma is just as disingenuous when it comes to advocating tactics. The compromise solution that Black Sections should become a Labour Party affiliated organisation was put to the NEC by Eric Heffer. It was voted down.

Among those voting against it was Neil Kinnock. According to Sharma it is Black Section which has declared 'holy war' on Kinnock. In fact it is Kinnock who has declared holy war on black self-organisation.

The war against the Black Section was cojoined in the following issue of *Tribune*. Prominent LCC supporter Lesley Smith welcomed Sharma's article.

The black press, however, didn't support him, despite Sharma's claims that 'the black community has watched with amazement' the Black Sec-

tion battle. The *Voice* reported Bernie Grant's response that Sharma was an 'opportunist' and a 'dodgy character'.

Debate about how to further the constitutional aims of the party is, of course, valid. Naturally, Paul Sharma could propose as a tactic that the issue of affiliation should be reopened if it was now believed there was any movement on the issue by the NEC.

But provocative language like 'Mujahedin faction' and 'holy war' was not designed to influence the Black Section but to discredit it. It was not intended as part of the debate on how to take forward the struggle for a Labour Party Black Section but as part of the moves to derail it.

In so doing Sharma tries to weaken the campaign out of which others have gained success — and the only beneficiaries of that are white racists.

75,000 march against apartheid

BLACK DEMONSTRATORS, including those pictured here, joined the SWAPO and ANC contingents at the head of the Anti-Apartheid Movement national march through London on Saturday 24 October.

They were told: 'We've got to make it absolutely crystal clear that we will not tolerate any attempts by Mrs Thatcher to bring the Botha regime in from the cold' by Bernie Grant MP.

A massive 75,000 people showed, by joining the demonstration, that they want 'sanctions now'. A further 4000 marched in a parallel demonstration in Cardiff.

The previous weeks had been marked by Thatcher at the Vancouver Commonwealth summit openly opposing sanctions, and then a new Thatcher offensive to brand the African National Congress as 'terrorist'. The icing on the

cake came a few days before the demonstration when three people arrested for plotting to kidnap top ANC leaders, suddenly had the charges against them dropped.

SWAPO president Sam Nujoma, and ANC international department head Johnstone Makatini were joined on the rally platform by NUS president Vicki Phillips, Joan Lester representing Labour's national executive, TUC general secretary, Norman Willis and transport union leader Ron Toddas well as AAM president, Bishop Trevor Huddleston.

A major part of the demonstration was made up of young people, particularly students. Significantly the trade union contingents were stronger and broader than at the last national Anti-Apartheid demonstration in June last year.

A contingent was organised by the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, under the slogan 'Boycott South Africa not Nicaragua'.



Why the stock market crashed

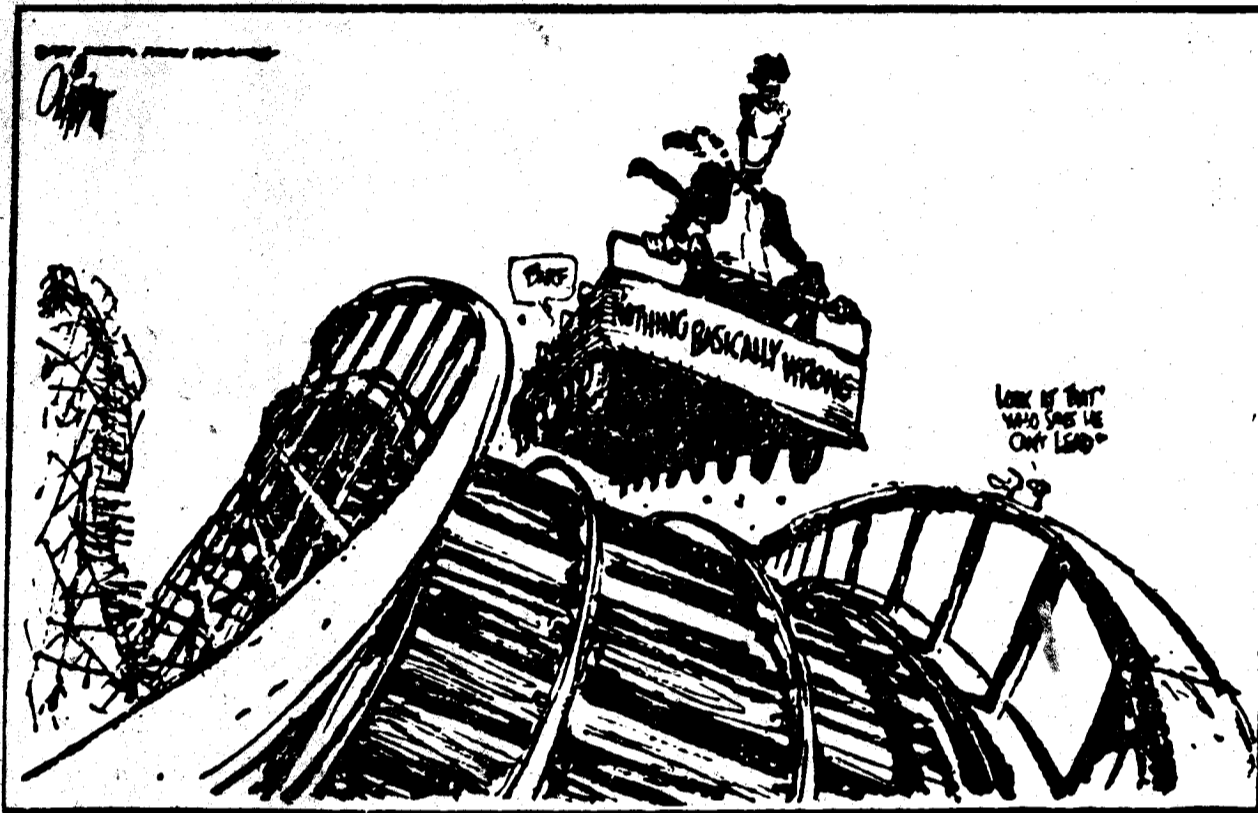
THE STOCK market crash of 1987 has been presented in the press as some sort of 'act of god' arriving for inexplicable reasons. Alternatively it has been portrayed as something solely concerning share prices which will not affect the 'real economy'. But this is profoundly misleading. The signs of deep disequilibrium in the capitalist economy *always* show up first in the monetary sphere or in the stock markets — for these are the most sensitive indicators in the economy. In a special four page supplement on the stock market crash JOHN ROSS looks at its driving forces, its likely outcome, and how its development is analysed within Marxist economic theory.

The immediate trigger of the 1987 stock market crash was inter-imperialist competition — itself reflecting vast imbalances in the world capitalist economy which have been deepening since the economic recession of 1973-75. Underlying this inter-imperialist competition, however, are movements in the rate of profit. If we wish to understand the crash, and its probable consequences, we must therefore start with these basic developments.

Although the rate of profit in the main imperialist countries has recovered since the intense depression of the mid-1970s it still remains at a historically low level. The net rate of return on fixed capital in manufacturing in the United States was 39 per cent in 1965 and only 9 per cent in 1985. In West Germany it was 22 per cent in 1965 and 13 per cent in 1984. In the UK it was 12 per cent in 1965 and 8 per cent in 1985.

Recovery from the depressed profit rates of the mid-1970s has been accompanied by deepening imbalances in the world economy — of which by far the most important is the long term decline of the United States compared to its imperialist rivals. The fundamental features of that decline, prior to Reagan being elected president, are shown in Table 1.

As may be seen the United States



position in the world economy declined on every major index during the post-war period. Its share of world exports declined from 22 per cent to 11 per cent between 1945 and 1980. Its share of the export of manufactures fell from 20 per cent in 1958 to 13 per cent in 1980. Its share of value added in manufacturing fell from 55 per cent in 1955 to 21 per cent in 1980.

Productivity

By the most serious index, the productivity of its economy, the US has continued to stagnate compared to its rivals. From 1973 to 1980 output per labour hour in the US economy grew at only 1 per cent a year compared to 4.2 per cent a year in West Germany and 6.3 per cent a year in Japan.

This situation has not substantially improved since. Under Reagan's presidency US productivity has grown at less than half the rate of West Germany and less than a third the rate of Japan.

Throughout the post-war period, continuing under Reagan, it has been the least competitive and productive sectors of the US economy that have boomed. The 'post-industrial society', the subject of propaganda by apologists for Reagan and Thatcher, is a rationalisation of that economic failure. As Anatole Kaletsky and Guy de Jonquieres put it in a recent study of the US economy: 'Manufacturing employment (in the US) has shrunk from 34 per cent of the non-agricultural total in 1950 to 19 per cent in 1986, while service jobs have expanded from 59 per cent to 75 per cent... the steady shift from manufacturing to service employment has been largely responsible for the long term stagnation of US income levels... The service industries have shown miserably low productivity growth for many years.'

However under Reagan the rate of growth of the US economy has performed in a way that seems, on the face of it, to defy the economic laws of gravity. With an economy becoming

steadily less competitive than its rivals US growth has been more rapid than its major West European rivals and has cut back the lead enjoyed by the Japanese economy.

Last year, for example, the US economy grew by 2.4 per cent — compared to 2.2 per cent in Italy, 1.5 per cent in France and 0.8 per cent in West Germany. Only Japan, growing at 2.8 per cent a year — and Britain, still recovering from the catastrophic slump of 1979-81 — grew more rapidly than the United States.

Understanding how Reagan brought about this result is the core of the present crash and why inter-imperialist competition has become sharply exacerbated.

There is no technical mystery as to why the US economy has grown rapidly under Reagan. It is a system that might be called 'military Keynesianism'.

Growth

The driving force of US economic growth has been the huge government budget deficit — the amount by which US government spending exceeds in-

come. This rose from \$70 billion in 1980 to \$200 billion in 1986, is due to run at \$147 billion this year, and is scheduled to rise to \$170 billion next year. Under Keynesian 'demand management', reduced to its essentials, government spending increases pull output upwards. The US system may be termed 'military Keynesianism' because the driving force of the government spending has been armaments — real US military spending has increased by 40 per cent since 1980. The US military budget this year is \$300 billion. As the budget deficit is the motor of the economic expansion the economic growth of the US has been pushed upwards by armaments.

Reagan

What makes US economic policy under Reagan specific is the way the budget deficit has been financed. Under most Keynesian expansions, as seen in Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s for example, the government covers the difference between expenditure and income by creating — if necessary literally printing — money.

The results are inflationary — the amount of money in the economy increases more rapidly than the supply of goods and services and inflationary tendencies result.

The US government under Reagan, fearing inflation after the experience of the 1970s, set about financing the budget deficit by different means — by vast borrowing from abroad. Between 1980 and 1986 the United States turned from a country with net foreign assets of \$140 billion to a country with foreign debts of \$260 billion — the largest debtor state in the world. If the US balance of trade deficit continues at its present rate the US will owe \$900 billion abroad by 1990 — eight times the international debt of a country such as Brazil.

Borrowing

As the gap between government expenditure and income was covered by foreign borrowing there has been no need for the US government to create money and the inflationary consequences of Keynesianism were avoided. It was this foreign borrowing which allowed the specific features of US economic policy under Reagan — a combination of a loose budgetary (fiscal) policy and a tight monetary policy. The result was that the US economy grew rapidly — under the impact of the budget deficit, while at the same time inflation was kept down — helped by the tight monetary policy.

The combination of rapid growth and low inflation was claimed by apologists for Reagan as 'getting the best of both worlds', and as 'a masterpiece of economic management'. In reality the mechanism was simple. If an economy borrows more than \$400 billion from abroad then, before it has to start repaying the loans, it will enjoy prosperity. Propelled by gigantic inflows of capital — primarily from Japan but also from Western Europe — the US economy boomed. Japan and Western Europe financed the rapid growth of the US economy.

Rivals

It cannot be said that the United States' rivals were exactly enthralled by this situation. In Western Europe, in particular, there have been complaints for years that the US was sucking capital out of Europe and holding back the growth of the West European economies. Indeed throughout the Reagan years the US economy has grown more rapidly than its West European allies despite the fact that the latter were more rapidly increasing the productivity of their economies. However for a period the United States rivals were prepared to accept this situation — first because they had no choice and secondly because of its side effects on the US balance of payments.

High interest rates necessary to suck loans into the United States drastically raised the exchange rate of the dollar. This mechanism was even for a time self-reinforcing as funds moved into the dollar in the expectation that it would increase further in value. The years 1980-84 saw the greatest overvaluation of the dollar in history.

However as the dollar exchange rate increased so US goods became less competitive on international markets and imports into the United States became cheaper compared to domestic production. The high exchange rate of the dollar therefore produced the second great imbalance in the US economy alongside the budget deficit — a balance of payments deficit now running at \$170 billion a year. West European and Japanese goods were, consequently, highly competitive in the US and the expansion of their exports led to growth in their own economies. Last year, for example the British economy ran a \$1,900 million export trade surplus to the United States. West Germany and Japan had vastly greater surpluses.

Continued on page 6



Table 1
US share of exports and world manufacturing value added

Year	US share of world exports	US share of world export of manufactures	US share of world manufacturing value added
1945	22	na	57
1953	19	na	55
1958	16	20	34
1963	15	17	33
1970	14	15	25*
1975	12	14	22*
1980	11	13	21*

*Constant prices

Source: Tim Congdon, 'The dollar standard is doomed'. *The Times* 26 September 1984

'The market had reasserted itself as an impersonal force and while that is the way markets are supposed to operate'

In a sense the capital flows functioned as export subsidies. The flow of capital into the United States kept up the value of the dollar and this sucked exports from the countries lending funds to the United States into the US economy. This was a system which operated to the advantage of the United States, allowing it to expand its own economy, but was tolerable for the capital exporting countries.

The problem is that this mechanism could not last. Even the most substantial imports of capital could not compensate indefinitely for the stagnation of productivity in the United States. In order to bring capital into the US interest rates had to be raised to higher and higher levels - threatening a US recession. The continuous trade deficit could not be sustained indefinitely. At some point, as with any system based on borrowing, the mechanism would have to stop.

Rivals

The decisive threat for the United States rivals was a devaluation of the dollar — which would devalue the dollar holdings of Japan and West Germany and make their goods less competitive in the US market. Devaluation of the dollar, in essence, would rob the capital exporting states of a large part of their loans to the US while simultaneously putting the trade squeeze on them.

Stella Shamoon in the *Observer* described very accurately the mechanism that began to operate as the dollar slid — over the last two years it has lost 40 per cent of its value against other currencies: 'interest rates world wide were waxing because the American authorities were finding it difficult to attract the \$20 billion or so per month at their bill and

bond auctions (to finance the budget deficit).

'Participants at previous auctions, including the Japanese, were tired of seeing their contributions depreciate under a weak dollar, so the prospects for interest rates were also bleak. Interest rates were rising, pivoting around American rates so as to disguise the fact that the US dollar was under the microscope.'

Recession

Fear of rising interest rates, which would spark a recession, was one of the chief mechanisms which ignited the Wall Street crash. The other was the fact that the United States was not getting its own way over how to escape from the situation it found itself in — for the United States, naturally, has no intention of picking up the bill for its policies over the last seven years. On the contrary it is intent that as much as possible of the bill will be picked up by its rivals.

The way the United States wanted the crisis resolved was clear. It demanded Japan and West Germany, its main rivals, expand their economies by interest rate cuts, tax reductions, and removal of tariffs in areas such as agriculture and finance. If this is done US exports will be sucked into the West German and Japanese economies and the US balance of payments crisis will be overcome at the expense of its rivals. Needless to say the Japan and West Germany do not want this. It would mean they would finance the United States out of its crisis and the international relation of forces would shift in favour of the United States.

Furthermore such a development would be politically destabilising in both Western Europe and Japan. The United States, in particular, wants Japan and the

EEC to ease agricultural protectionism to aid its balance of payments. As US agriculture is far more efficient than its Japanese and European rivals this would result in a vast expansion of US farm exports and major farm closures in Western Europe and Japan. This would undermine the main electoral base of the West European and Japanese conservative parties.

Japan and West Germany instead want the United States to overcome the crisis by the US cutting its budget deficit via increased taxes — that is through cutting the living standards of US workers. That way the US working class, not the Japanese and West German imperialists, would pay for the crisis.

Problem

The political problem is that this would be as deeply politically destabilising in the United States as would recession and crushing the farmers be in Western Europe and Japan. Unpaid imports into the United States are at present averaging \$600 for every person in the country. Eliminating the balance of payments deficit exclusively at the cost of the US working class would mean cutting their real expenditure by that much — a drastic fall in the US standard of living guaranteed to result in electoral disaster for any politician attempting it.

What took place therefore was a fight between the imperialists over who is going to pick up the bill for the last seven years — Japan and West Germany demanding that the United States pay and the United States demanding West Germany and Japan pay. Whoever wins this fight will see the international balance of economic forces shift in its favour.

Until 19 October it looked as though West Germany and Japan were winning. Far from lowering interest rates West Germany was increasing them — in essence stating that it was not going to fund the US out of its crisis by expanding the West German market and sucking in United States imports. But West German imperialism's action in defending itself sparked off a drastic crisis which sharply altered the situation — the entire development getting out of hand and the most fundamental mechanisms of the capitalist economy asserting themselves in the most spectacular single days events since the great crash of 1929.

The sequence of events is clear. On 14 October disastrous US monthly trade figures were announced — a deficit of \$15.7 billion, equivalent to an annual deficit of \$184 billion, and the second worst figure in US history. It was clear the US balance of payments deficit could not be sustained. The United States made its normal demand that West Germany cut its interest rates, expand its economy, and therefore finance the US way out of the crisis. West Germany replied by raising interest rates.

Panic

At this point sheer panic took hold in the United States. For if West Germany and Japan would not expand their economies to suck in US exports then there was only one other way the US balance of payments could be corrected — by a direct cut of imports into the United States. And all economic history shows that — short of overt protectionism which would have plunged the world into a 1930s style depression — there is only one way for a country to drastically cut back imports. This is to drastically deflate its own economy — experience shows that devaluation by itself will not suffice. In other words West Germany's interest rate cut spelt recession in the United States. On Thursday 15 August US share prices began to slide rapidly on a wave of domestic selling.

Over the same weekend US Treasury Secretary Baker made a miscalculation which worsened the situation. He openly threatened devaluation of the dollar to



Panic on the New York stock exchange on 19 October

hit back at West Germany. Foreign investors began to rapidly remove their funds from the United States before the dollar devalued. The combination of domestic and foreign selling in the US on Monday 19 October, when the markets opened after the weekend, produced what the chair of the New York Stock Exchange, John Phelan, described as 'financial meltdown'. International stockmarkets fell both to parallel falls in internationally traded stock and in fear of a world recession. Within a few days the dollar was falling rapidly.

Devaluation

This dollar devaluation was what the United States rivals had feared. Kazuaki Harada, chief economist of the Sanwa bank of Japan put the likely consequences clearly: 'a sudden fall in the dollar below its range of Y(yen) 140-150 could result "in chaos" ... because many Japanese investors still believed in the stability of the Louvre agreement — the commitment by leading industrialised countries to maintain current exchange rates. If the dollar fell the value of equities and of bonds would once again have to be reassessed.'

'A further fall in the stock markets could lead to a downward spiral of falling

prices and diminishing economic prospects ... The ... effect of this earthquake would be stronger than investor faith in the recovery of the Japanese economy.'

In addition to the effect on Japanese assets either a US recession or a dollar devaluation has knock on effects on Japanese trade. Approximately 15 per cent of Japanese GDP is accounted for by exports — 5 per cent of the Japanese economy alone is accounted for by exports to the United States. The collapse in the Tokyo stock market following Wall Street was therefore particularly concentrated among large Japanese export firms — a US recession or devaluation of the dollar would squeeze Japanese exporters hard.

Chaos

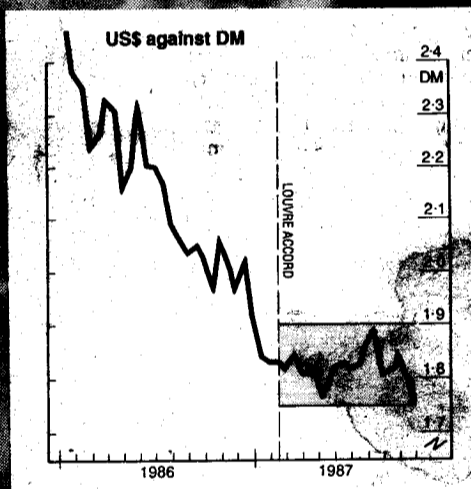
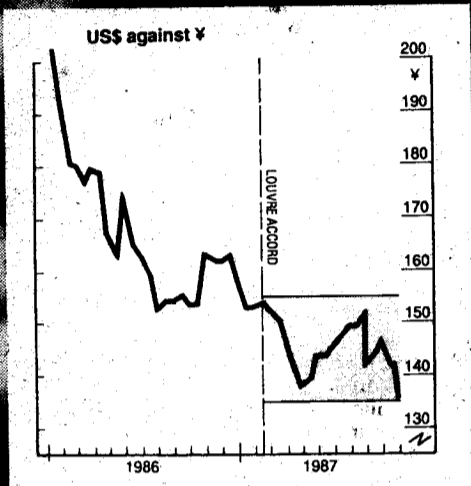
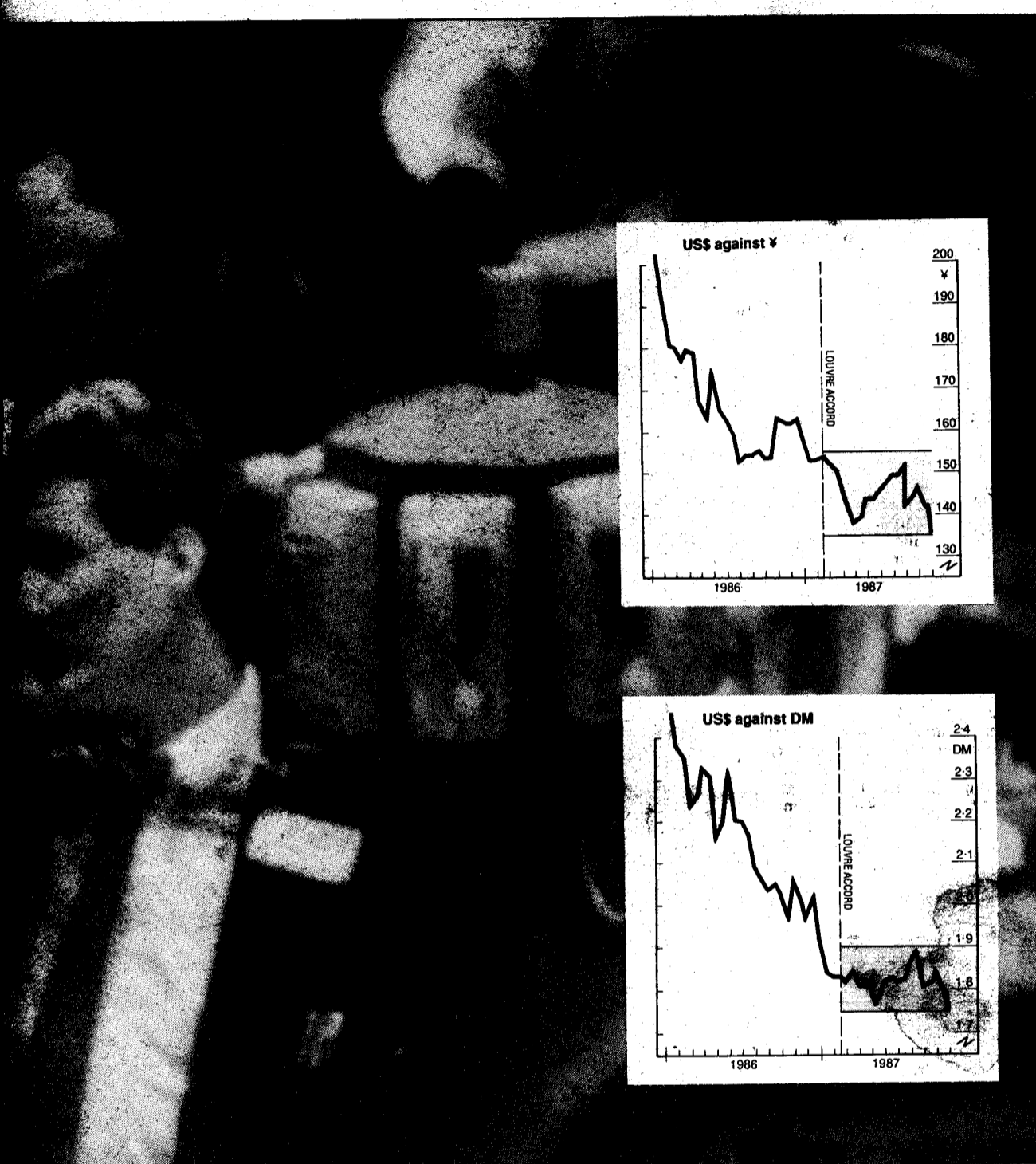
The same fears also explained the extraordinary fury from EEC governments at last week's announcement by the president of the EEC Commission, Jacques Delors, that the United States intended to let the exchange rate of the dollar fall. Delors stated: 'Let us have no illusions. The Americans are prepared to let the dollar fall.'

The *Financial Times* noted 'chaos followed: A West German Firm

THE CRASH OF 87

1900 ...
Yesterday:
down 22.6%
1700 ...

force beyond the power of any person to control, be, it was horrible' — J K Galbraith



devalue rapidly — losing 5 per cent of its value in a week. Interest rates began to fall not simply in the United States but in West Germany. As the *Financial Times* put it the dollar devaluation, in particular, was a bitter pill for the US's economic rivals to swallow: 'The relevant fact is that the dollar has, indeed, started to fall ... The decision appears to have been not so much that a fall is desirable as that the costs of averting that fall exceed the foreseeable benefits.'

But this, so far, is only fiddling at the edges. The really gigantic test is going to come over the next two years. To turn round the US balance of payments deficit, whether through dollar devaluation or, less likely, straight forward protectionism, means reducing export markets for other countries by anything from \$100-\$170 billion. And without reflation in West Germany and Japan, which would weaken them confronted with the United States, this means recession in these two rivals of the United States. If the US trade deficit is not reduced however, by Japan and West Germany sucking in its goods, this will deepen the recession in the United States itself — which can have a knock on effect of pulling West Germany and Japan into recession anyway. A huge test of strength will now take place between the imperialist states over who is to bear the cost of the recession.

One final question, the key to the whole situation, is worth dealing with. Why do West Germany and Japan accept these type of policies from the United States? Because whatever their policy decisions the US enjoys mechanisms whereby it imposes disadvantages on them. For example at present, in order to try to halt the speed of the decline of the dollar, the West German central bank is buying huge quantities of dollars. This means creating Deutsche Marks and expanding the West German money supply — itself reflating the West German economy and securing some of the United States goals. Why does West Germany, for example, not simply cut loose from the whole system and abandon the 'dollar standard'?

Answer

The answer is because the United States has been the lynch pin which has kept the post-war capitalist economy together. There is no other alternative as a central pivot of the world capitalist economy. The United States ultimate argument has always been 'if not us then chaos'. After 19 October the United States rivals know that this is no empty threat. While the United States will undoubtedly now be forced to rein back on some of its policies, by cutting back the budget deficit, it will also be able to impose some of its burdens on its 'allies'. That is the privilege it gains from being the centre of the world capitalist system.

What are likely to be the political consequences of the crash? Very great. Firstly the crash already means, even if nothing further occurs, an economic recession in the United States. The only issue is how deep it is going to be — which in turn depends on how much the United States can put the squeeze on West Germany and Japan. They will resist the US' to the best of their ability. To the degree that they do so they will deepen the recession in the United States — and at the same time slow the growth of their own economies. We are, without doubt, heading into a new international recession. In Britain Thatcher's 'economic miracle', which saw even unemployment falling, is going to come to an abrupt halt.

The consequences in the 'third world' will be still deeper. There is no chance of third world debtors repaying their debts under conditions of an international recession and where one of their chief export markets, the United States, will be reducing its balance of payments deficit. The debt crisis was in fact already tightening again prior to the crash — the most important single debtor country,

Brazil, has refused to make any service payments on international debt since February. International banks throughout the year have been increasingly writing down the nominal value of their third world debts in anticipation of substantial defaults or reductions in payment.

But something still more fundamental has happened than a new recession. We have seen the most violent inter-imperialist economic conflicts since the inter-war depression. And this has profound consequences for world politics.

First it means a new wave of attacks on the working class. But it will also increase the forces breaking up the coherence of the ruling classes themselves — because the various imperialist ruling classes are striking increasing blows against each other.

It has been one of the great strengths of capitalism in the post-war period that it has not suffered from deep inter-imperialist conflicts. Imperialism was able to face both the political crisis of 1968-73 and the economic crisis after 1973 in a relatively united way. Such trade restrictions, frictions in the 'Atlantic Alliance' etc, as did appear were extremely small compared to the protectionism, trade wars, expansion and destruction of colonial empires, which characterised the inter-war period. This ability to maintain the fundamental mechanisms of post-war imperialist collaboration intact — the system of relatively free international trade, the international monetary system based on the dollar, NATO — strengthened all the imperialist powers against the working class.

The reason for is simple. The ability of the working class to advance depends not only on its own strength but on that of its enemy. It remains one of the most important realities that, in Lenin's words: 'for a revolution to take place it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to realise the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes ... it is essential that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way.'

And what applies to revolution applies also to any working class struggle. The greatest advances of the working class in this century took place around violent inter-imperialist conflicts — above all, of course, the two world wars. Inter-imperialist conflicts both break up the coherence of the ruling classes and weaken them — as the individual capitalist classes are forced to attack one another. The ability of imperialism to maintain a relative coherence and equilibrium during the post-war period was one of its greatest strengths. That coherence is now visibly under strain.

Whatever the immediate developments the situation in the imperialist states will be significantly shifted. Political weakness in the United States as it turns to attack its own working class, political destabilisation in West Germany and Japan as they are forced to bear at least some of the brunt of the US economic crisis, is inevitable. And new chapter in the relation between the imperialist states is being ushered in.

Strengths

The 19 October 1987, in short was not about a stock market crash. It was about deep economic collisions between the most powerful imperialist centres in world capitalism — the United States, Japan and Western Europe. And when that tree trunk begins to shake the leaves in the rest of the world economy will tremble.

It was summarised in a famous quote of J K Galbraith on the crash of 1929: 'The market had asserted itself as an impersonal force beyond the power of any person to control, and while that is the way markets are supposed to be, it was horrible.' While we still have some way to go to those years the events of October 1987 were a reminder of just how ferocious a capitalist crisis can be.

Whatever the form and tempo the worst is still to come.

Ministry official called Mr Delors remarks "entirely incorrect," while the French finance ministry insisted that the remarks did not reflect the views of the Louvre signatory nations or of the French monetary authorities.

'The president of the Dutch central bank, Mr Wim Duisenberg, also criticised Mr Delors saying that those responsible for monetary policy should "in principle refrain from remarks about the preferred level for the dollar or interest rates".'

Impact

'The Bonn Finance Ministry spokesman echoed this view: "the government expects individuals who do not take part in the consultations to refrain from making improvised public statements which send false signals ... The truth is that the major industrial countries have agreed to continue their cooperation to stabilise currency rates" European Commission officials moved within minutes to try to limit the telephoning news agencies to them extracts of Delors prepared which did not contain the remark. They said only the official text was to be included in the parliament's record of the debate.

'But yesterday the assembly's president, Lord Plumb of Britain, blocked distribution of the official record and ordered it reprinted so that it included Mr Delors' exact words.'

Stella Shamoon in the *Observer* rightly noted: 'The suspicion is that the dollar was "allowed" to fall and will be "managed" lower in a bid to improve the United States trade deficit ... a free fall could trigger a flight of foreign capital, with further stock market collapse, and force up US interest rates.

'Given the current fears of a recession, the classic defence of the dollar, by raising interest rates, would appear inappropriate. Rather the reverse. There is pressure on the UK, West Germany and Japan to cut their respective interest rates in order to stimulate their economies and help stabilise the dollar.'

While the US threat to devalue the dollar is a potent one it however also suffers from internal contradictions — the problem of how to attract sufficient foreign funds to continue to finance the budget deficit.

Crash

This issue is going to come to a crunch during this month. On 5 November, the US government is auctioning its next major tranche of govern-

ment debt. On the last occasion in May, the Japanese institutions were only just persuaded to take up 40 per cent by fierce pressure from the Japanese Ministry of Finance. This time they will be more hesitant. Yet if they don't American interest rates will again be under upward pressure and the dollar will be under renewed pressure.

After the crash intense pressure was being applied by the US and Japanese governments for Japanese institutions to continue funding the US debt — otherwise economic chaos was feared.

Respite

What will take place now? The first is that a temporary respite set in because, as the *Financial Times* put it a certain 'balance of terror' had been established. West Germany found that if it tried to avoid bearing the costs of the US crisis it might precipitate a collapse of the US economy that would bring West Germany down with it. At the same time the United States found that if it tried to escape from its dilemma simply by dollar devaluation it risked an exodus of foreign funds that would bring its economy down.

The initial days following the crisis undoubtedly saw some gaining of points by the United States. The dollar began to

WHY HAS inter-imperialist competition broken out more violently now when profits are recovering from the deep economic depressions of 1973-75 and 1979-81? The answer lies in the way different capitals survive the slump and then seek to 'redivide the world' in order to reflect the new relation of forces between them. **JOHN ROSS** looks at the Marxist analysis of inter-imperialist competition.

INTER-imperialist competition is an issue frequently not integrated into the body of Marxist economic analysis. The latter is seen as relating to the study of the workplace or to national capitalism and inter-imperialist competition is seen as running 'parallel' to this. This is radically wrong.

The starting point of Marx's analysis is the development of 'capital in general' or 'the capital of the whole society'.¹ This is sometimes taken to be the capital in a nation state, but this is wrong.² Capitalism is an international system in which the world economy is dominant — as the events of the last two weeks have rather convincingly demonstrated. The decline in the rate of profit throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, from which capital has still not fully recovered and which is the driving force of the present crisis, was an international decline working itself out in all countries.

But capital as it actually exists is not 'capital in general'. As Marx put it: 'In their actual movement capitals confront each other in certain concrete forms.'³ Capital exists as different firms, and different nations with different companies and trusts, in competition with each other. It exists, as Marx put it, as 'many capitals'. Competition between these capitals is the 'essential locomotive force of the bourgeois economy'.⁴ Competition is the mechanism by which the fundamental laws of the capitalist economy work themselves out.

There is a clear relation between the development of capital in general and the decline in the rate of profit. A decline in the rate of profit leads to stagnation in the entire capitalist economy: 'the rate of profit, is the spur to capitalist production ... a fall in this rate ... appears as a threat to the capitalist production process; it promotes overproduction, speculation and crises, and leads to the existence of excess capital alongside a surplus population (unemployment).'⁵

Profit

The reason is simple: 'It is the rate of profit that is the driving force of capitalist production, and nothing is produced save what can be produced at a profit.'⁶ Therefore: 'Production comes to a standstill not at the point where needs are satisfied, but rather where the production and realisation of profit impose this.'⁷ The stagnation and unemployment in the capitalist economy since 1973-75, and the vastly greater depression of the 1930s, is a product of a decline in the rate of profit.

A crucial effect of this decline, however, is to dramatically intensify inter-capitalist competition. Confronted with a decline in the rate of profit the bourgeoisie as a whole can only

overcome it by attacking the working class — or, a marginal case today, through gaining profit from a pre-capitalist system of production. But this is *not* the only way out for an individual capitalist. An individual capitalist can increase their rate of profit by competing with, or attacking, another capitalist. Indeed attacks on other capitalists can be a way to avoid the necessity of so severely attacking their own workers. This is the mechanism used by the most powerful imperialist powers to maintain reformist control over their working class — they attack other capitals in order to limit the necessity to so severely attack their own working class and thereby destabilise their internal political situation.

Competition

As Marx put it: 'which section (of capital) is particularly to be affected by this idling (of production) ... is decided in the course of the competitive struggle. As long as everything goes well, competition acts ... as a practical freemasonry of the capitalist class, so that they all share in the common body ... But as soon as it is no longer a question of division of profit, but rather of loss, each seeks as far as he can to restrict his own share of this loss and pass it on to someone else.'

'For the class as a whole, the loss is unavoidable. But how much each individual member has to bear, the extent to which he has to participate in it, now becomes a question of strength and cunning, and competition now becomes a struggle of enemy brothers. The opposition between the interest of each individual capitalist and that of the capitalist class as a whole now comes into its own, in the same way as competition was previously the instrument through which the identity of the capitalists' interests was asserted ...

'Loss is by no means uniformly distributed amongst all the particular individual capitalists ... the distribution being decided instead by a competitive struggle in which the loss is decided very unevenly and in very different forms according to the particular advantages or positions that have already been won ... one capital lies

idle, another is destroyed, a third experiences only a relative loss or simply a temporary devaluation, and so on.'⁸

Thus, during the period of prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s it was relatively easy for capital to ameliorate the effects of inter-capitalist and inter-imperialist competition — the relations between the imperialist powers were relatively harmonious. With the decline in the rate of profit in the 1970s much sharper inter-imperialist conflicts began to appear.

It appears to the capitalists that it is competition which is producing a decline in the rate of profit. But in fact it is a decline in the rate of profit which is producing the increased competition: 'the fall in the profit rate ... necessarily gives rise to a competitive struggle. Compensation for the fall in the profit rate by an increase in the mass of profit is possible only for total social capital and for the big capitalists who are already established ... it is the fall in the profit rate that provokes the competitive struggle between capitals, and not the reverse.'⁹

Monopoly

Falling profit rates also lead to increasing trends to monopoly — one example being the wave of takeovers and mergers of the last decade — and simultaneously to speculation and fraud: 'As the profit rate falls ... concentration grows at the same time, since beyond certain limits a large capital with a lower rate of growth accumulates more quickly than a small capital with a higher growth rate ... The mass of small fragmented capitals are thereby forced onto adventurous paths: speculation, credit swindles, share swindles, crises.'¹⁰ Decline of the profit rate therefore gives rise to the 'casino economy' we see today — but it is the decline in the profit rate, the economic crisis, that produces the 'casino economy', not the speculation which gives rise to the crisis.

Alongside swindles and fraud, however, a decline in the profit rate also gives rise to revolutionary breakthroughs in technology to attempt to increase profit — the rapid development of new technology alongside City frauds of the present period is quite

typical: 'If the rate of profit falls, on the one hand we see exertions by capital, in that the individual capitalist drives down the individual value of his own particular commodities below their average social value, by using better methods, etc, and thus makes a surplus profit at the given price; on the other hand we have swindling and general promotion of swindling, through desperate attempts in the way of new methods of production, new capital investment and new adventures, to secure some kind of extra profit, which will be independent of the general average and superior to it.'¹¹ That the 'casino economy' and the computer revolution exist side by side is a logical product of the capitalist crisis.

Crisis

The crisis itself, however, is neither illogical nor irrational. It is the *only* means capitalism possesses, as it lacks central planning, for overcoming crisis and relaunching a capitalist upswing. As Marx noted: 'Stagnation in production makes part of the working class idle and hence places the employed workers in conditions where they have to accept a fall in wages ... The fall in prices and the competitive struggle, on the other hand, impel each capitalist to reduce the individual value of his total product below its general value by employing new means of machinery, new and improved methods of labour and new forms of combination. That is, they impel him to raise the productivity of a given quantity of labour ... and ... to dismiss workers ... The stagnation in production that has intervened prepares the ground for a later expansion of production — within capitalist limits.'¹²

This process, including the competitive struggle, works itself through not just in attacks on workers within individual countries but in tremendous conflicts between the imperialist states — as they attempt to determine, through competition, which will experience the situation whereby, in Marx's words: 'one capital lies idle, another is destroyed, a third experiences only a relative loss'.

The relative stagnation in production is therefore accompanied by not

only sharp attacks on the working class but by increased conflicts between the imperialists. As Trotsky put it: 'Capitalism produces ... equilibrium, disrupts it, restores it anew in order to disrupt it anew, concurrently extending the limits of its domination. In the economic sphere these constant disruptions and restorations of the equilibrium assumes the form of strikes, lockouts, revolutionary struggle. In the sphere of inter-state relations the disruption of equilibrium means war or — in a weaker form — tariff war, economic war, or blockade.'¹³

The economic conflicts between the imperialist states are given particular weight because these powers attempt to use *political* means to maintain their control over sections of the world economy. Previously this has taken the form of wars, the creation of empires etc. But it can equally take the form of competitive devaluations, military threats etc.

The most extreme expression of inter-imperialist competition is of course war. Thus Trotsky noted during the 1930s that the international weight and empires of the old European states, Britain and France, was totally out of line with their real weight in the world economy compared to the rising power of the United States. He prophetically noted: 'The United States is heading inevitably towards an imperialist explosion such as the world has never seen ... A new partition of the world is on the order of the day.'¹⁴

This 'new partition of the world', as well as attacks on national working classes was the preparation for a new upswing. As Trotsky had noted earlier, in the 1920s: 'If we grant — and let us grant it for the moment — that the working class fails to rise in revolutionary struggle, but allows the bourgeoisie the opportunity to rule the world's destiny for a long number of years, say two or three decades, then assuredly some sort of new equilibrium will be established. Europe will be thrown into reverse gear. Millions of European workers will die from unemployment and malnutrition ... Afterwards, after a new world division of labour is thus established in agony for 15 or 20 or 25 years, a new epoch of capitalist upswing might perhaps ensue.'¹⁵

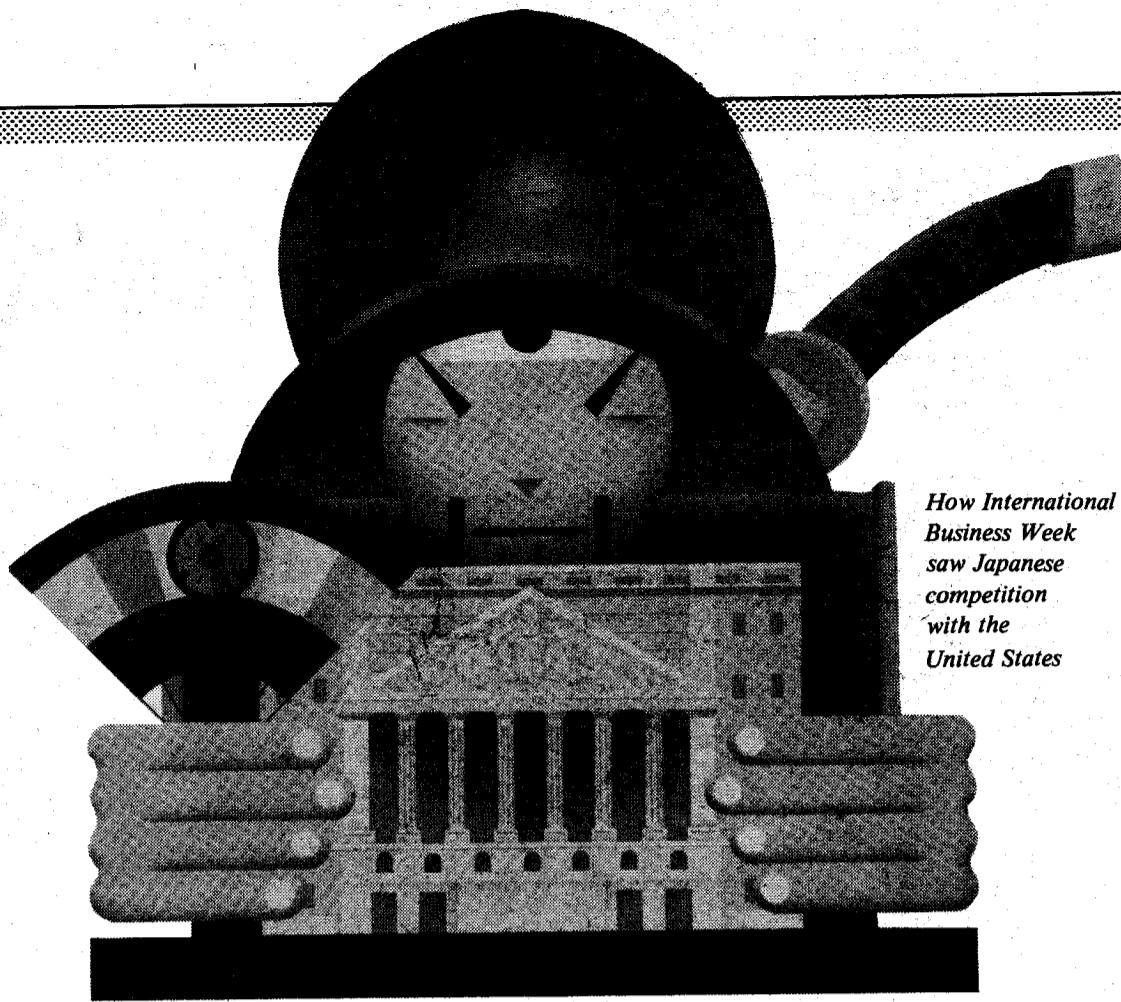
War

This was not 'catastrophism' but literally what happened. Tens of millions of European, and Asian, workers and peasant died amid fascism and world war. The consequence was that a 'new (capitalist) world division of labour', under the leadership of the United States was established in 1945. At the cost of 100 million dead in the World Wars the centre of world capitalism passed from Europe to the United States. But in the 1980s that 'new international division of labour' has itself been undermined by the decline of the United States and a new wave of inter-imperialist competition is breaking out.

Imperialism must again create a 'new international division of labour' — one that corresponds to the real, economic weights of the different imperialist powers. Just what that division of labour will be will be decided not by any pre-arranged plan but by a real competitive struggle between the imperialists — in which those who will lose will fight by all political means to hold onto what they have possessed in the past, and the rising capitalist powers will have not option but to assault their old dominant rivals.

The crash of 1987 is an announcement that this struggle is breaking out with a new force.

1. Marx, *Grundrisse* p346
2. This is, for example, the typical mistake made by David Yaffe.
3. Marx, *Capital* Vol 3 p117
4. *Grundrisse* p440
5. *Capital* Vol 3 p350
6. *Capital* Vol 3 p368
7. *Capital* Vol 3 p367
8. *Capital* Vol 3 p362
9. *Capital* Vol 3 p365
10. *Capital* Vol 3 p359
11. *Capital* Vol 3 p367
12. *Capital* Vol 3 p364
13. Trotsky, *Report on the World Economic Crisis and the New Tasks of the Communist International*.
14. Trotsky, *A fresh lesson the character of the coming war*.
15. Trotsky, *Report on the World Economic Crisis and the New Tasks of the Communist International*.



How International Business Week saw Japanese competition with the United States

Marxism and inter-imperialist competition



Adams speaks at Sinn Fein Ard Fheis

'Our people deserve nothing less than complete independence'

SINN Fein held its eighty-third Ard Fheis (annual conference) in Dublin over the weekend 30 October-1 November. Fifteen hundred people — 500 delegates and 1000 observers — attended. Discussions centred on the ongoing conflict in the six counties and the colossal attacks on living standards, jobs and welfare provision by the Fianna Fail government in the south. The keynote speech to the conference was GERRY ADAMS presidential address. We reproduce here edited extracts from it.



TWENTY years ago this year, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was formed. The basic demands of that organisation were moderate, reasonable and just. They were, in the sexist language of that time:

- One man — one vote;
- An end to gerrymandering;
- An end to discrimination;
- Fair allocation of housing;
- The repeal of the Special Powers Act; and
- The disbanding of the B-Specials.

The civil rights campaign and its reasonable, just and moderate demands for minimum and basic reforms hit at the very core of the British colonial state, and the loyalist and British reaction against the campaign led directly into a struggle which continues uninterrupted 20 years later. The price that has been paid in that struggle by all those involved has been a terrible one.

The actions of British crown forces — supported by a civil administration — their oppression, governmental violence and social injustice have been borne in the main by Irish nationalists in that area.

Campaign

The peaceful campaign for reform of the six counties encountered the brutal violence of the British state on 5 October 1968 and, although the campaign for civil rights continued, it was becoming increasingly obvious that civil rights were unobtainable within a British colony. Subsequent events proved this position to be correct.

The rest is history. A terrible, tragic and unnecessarily cruel history dictated by British interference which has condemned the majority of citizens of that state to a bloody and deprived existence.

In the course of that history, one of the most significant victories for the democratic forces came with the toppling of the Stormont parliament.

Since then, the key objective of British strategy has been to resurrect that system, albeit in different forms and with a changed composition.

When the Hillsborough treaty was signed, Sinn Fein warned that one of its main objectives was, once again, the resurrection of a partitionist arrangement and administration.

It is long since time for a rethink by the protestant people of the six counties and I would like to address myself to this section of the Irish people. Your political leaders are divided, some have deserted you, others are insisting on playing the same old sterile 'no surrender' nonsense.

You deserve better than that. We demand better than that.

British

The British don't want you and, anyway, what influence do the people of the six counties have within the United Kingdom — one-and-a-half million people out of 55 million — compared to the political and social weight they could have in an all-Ireland state where those living in the North would constitute at least a third of the population?

Sinn Fein does not wish to ignore the economic challenge which reunification presents, nor minimise the extent of the problem or the great trauma that will be experienced by the unionist population. Neither do we intend to turn back the pages of history, nor to dispossess the loyalists and foolishly attempt to reverse the Plantation.

We offer them a settlement based on their throwing in their lot with the rest of the Irish people and ending sectarianism. We offer them peace.

It is only through the process of decolonisation that a peaceful stable Ireland will emerge. It is only when independence is restored that Ireland will prosper.

The Hillsborough treaty and the processes it involves seek merely to camouflage the fact that the six-county state is a failed social, economic and political entity.

Earlier this year, Sinn Fein published its own proposals in the document *A Scenario for Peace*. We are seeking to create conditions which will lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities, an end to our long war and development of a peaceful, united and independent Irish society. Such objectives will only be achieved when a British government adopts a strategy for decolonisation.



The above poster is part of Sinn Fein's campaign against ratification of the extradition treaty between Britain and the 26 County state. This week, the Birmingham Six started their appeal at the Old Bailey. Convicted 13 years ago of the Birmingham pub bombing the six are widely recognised to have been framed.

Lord Gifford QC said that their conviction was perhaps the greatest injustice in British legal history. It is a mark of the deeply anti-

Irish character of the British state that the Six have had to go through the charade of an appeal at all. They should have been freed, exonerated and compensated for the travesty of justice inflicted upon them. Continuing protests on their behalf, and in support of other similar victims such as the Guildford Four are vital; and a major campaign against the extradition treaty as part of a fight against more Birmingham Sixes and Guildford fours equally so.

It must begin by repealing the Government of Ireland Act and publicly declaring that the 'Northern Ireland' statelet is no longer part of the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, it must declare that its military forces and its system of political administration will remain only as long as it takes to arrange their permanent withdrawal.

Such an irreversible declaration of intent would minimise any loyalist backlash and would go a long way towards bringing round to reality most loyalists and those of their representatives genuinely interested in peace and negotiation to set the constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state through a constitutional conference.

Free elections to an all-Ireland constitutional conference would be arranged. The conference would consist of the elected representatives of the Irish people and would be open to submissions from all significant organisations in Ireland (eg the trade union movement, the women's movement, the churches) and would draw up a new constitution and organise a national system of government.

Withdraw

While this conference could have no influence on the decision by Britain to withdraw, it would play an important role in organis-

ing the transition to a new governmental system. Should we find agreement on a new constitution, or on any other matter, a British withdrawal would proceed anyway within the fixed time period.

Liberties

Republicans have consistently asserted that the loyalist people, in common with all other citizens, must be given firm guarantees of their religious and civil liberties and we repeat our belief that, faced with a British withdrawal and the removal of partition, a considerable body of loyalist opinion would accept the wisdom of negotiating for the type of society which would reflect their needs and interests.

As part of the military withdrawal, the RUC and UDR would be disarmed and disbanded.

The constitutional conference would be responsible for determining the nature and composition of an emergent national police service and the judiciary. There is absolutely no doubt in our minds that, if Britain were to be sincere about disengaging and was committed to an orderly transference of power, this could be achieved with a minimum of disorder.

All political prisoners would be unconditionally released.

A cessation of all offensive military actions by

all organisations would create the climate necessary for a peaceful transition to a negotiated settlement.

As part of this settlement, the British government must accept the responsibility for providing financial support by agreeing by treaty with the national government to provide economic subvention for an agreed period.

The onus is on the British government to ensure a peaceful transition to a united and independent Ireland. The shape of that society is a matter for the Irish people. Only when Britain recognises that right and initiates a strategy of decolonisation along these lines will peace and reconciliation be established between Irish people and between Britain and Ireland.

Democratic

This is the kind of democratic programme for peace and reconciliation which all Irish political parties professing a united Ireland objective should pursue. It is a national disgrace that no other party has requested or appealed or demanded that the British abandon the Government of Ireland Act.

Sinn Fein is not only committed to pursuing the democratic programme outlined in our documents, we are committed to implementing it. Our people deserve nothing less than complete independence and we will settle for nothing less than this.

Sinn Fein conference

THIS YEAR'S Sinn Fein Ard Fheis was a sober affair. The overwhelmingly working class delegates set to work to address the nuts and bolts of the task agreed at the historic 1986 Ard Fheis: 'We must develop a 32-county wide political struggle. This is the most important task facing us at present. While consolidating our base in the six counties we must develop a popular struggle here in the 26 counties to complement the struggle in the six-county area.' (Gerry Adams presidential address).

The general elections in Ireland and Britain this year allowed this task to be quantified. In the north, Sinn Fein has consolidated more than 30 per cent of the nationalist vote. Gerry Adams won a great victory in West Belfast in the general election and, just the week before the Ard Fheis on 22 October, Sinn Fein won spectacular victories in two Belfast city council by-elections. Sinn Fein is now the largest nationalist group on Belfast City Council with nine councillors.

In the 26 Counties, however, Sinn Fein polled 1.9 per cent overall, and averaged 3.2 per cent in the seats it contested, in the February general election. This shows the scale of the task Sinn Fein has set itself.

Sinn Fein, is banned from appearing on TV or radio in the south by Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act. Fighting for the repeal of this censorship which goes further even than British law, and for journalist to make it unworkable, will be a central campaign of the party.

Secondly, the Fianna Fail government has launched a series of draconian attacks on the health service, welfare, jobs and living standards. It presides over, and, makes a virtue of the grotesque situation where 100,000 young people — literally two per cent of the total population of Ireland — have been forced, by unemployment and poverty, to emigrate since 1981. The Dublin government debt is one of the highest per capita in the world and the interest payments alone amount to the entire annual 'Pay As You Earn' income tax returns.

The Ard Fheis decided to 'immerse' Sinn Fein in every facet of resistance to these attacks. It called for the repudiation of the Dublin government's foreign debt. It rejected the pact between the government, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the employers. It demanded urgent measures to create jobs, to end emigration and to shift the burden of taxation onto the rich. It called for special measures to help the low paid, women, and working farmers.

Women's rights have also come under savage attack north and south of the border: abortion is illegal north and south; divorce and contraception are illegal in the south. The Ard Fheis condemned the recent high court ruling making even 'non-directive pregnancy counselling' illegal in the 26 counties and it called for such counselling to be freely available. But it rejected the proposal that Sinn Fein should participate in the campaign to defend the clinics which have provided such counselling. Women played a big role in the Ard Fheis however and resolutions were passed setting up an annual Sinn Fein women's conference and for more women candidates for Sinn Fein.

The Ard Fheis called for vigorous support for the campaign to repeal the Extradition Act scheduled for ratification by Dublin on 1 December. It called for an intensification of the campaign against strip searching of prisoners and for release dates to be given for prisoners serving life terms.

Overall, in spite of every form of repression which is being used against it, Sinn Fein is step by step proceeding along the road of creating a mass revolutionary republican alternative to British domination of Ireland north and south of the border.

Labour Committee on Ireland
and the Labour Party Irish Section

PUBLIC MEETING
**CIVIL RIGHTS
JUSTICE
EXTRADITION**

7.30pm, Tuesday 17 November
Friends' Meeting House, Euston Road, London
(opposite Euston station)

Chair: **Clare Short MP**
Speakers

Ken Livingstone MP
Michael Farrell

and other Northern Ireland Orange State
Speakers from the Birmingham
6 and Guildford 4 relatives
campaigns
Slobahn Crozier

(Labour Party Irish Section)

Organised by the Labour Committee on Ireland (London) and Irish Section
Sponsored by the Irish in British Representation Group, the Troops Out Movement

ANC considers suing kidnap plotters

THE African National Congress is considering legal action against four men who were accused of kidnapping its leaders, including the chief ANC representative in the UK, Solly Smith, and Frene Ginwala. The four men — Evan Evans, Frank Larsen, John Larsen and Hans Christian Dahl — were discharged by Lambeth magistrates court when the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) offered no evidence.

The dropping of charges followed DPP consultations with MI5 on 12 October. According to David Leigh, writing in *The Observer* on 25 October, 'A long list of reasons was produced: there was no evidence that the kidnap conspiracy had been active; the defendants were "publicity-seekers" and "lived in a world of their own"; the Crown would look "ridiculous" during the trial; and the lesser charges — of forgery and impersonation — were not serious enough for the Anti-Terrorist Squad to waste its time with.'

But Leigh adds 'The Anti-Terrorist Squad clearly disagreed: as late as 15 October, its officers were pressing on with inquiries, in the hope of reversing the decision'.

In fact no one seriously believes the official story. Rather the evidence suggests direct involvement by the British state which the dropping of charges was designed to cover up. Solicitor Stephen Fiddler who acted for three of the four men claimed that they had been working for a British government agency, though declined to say which agency.

By Jon Silberman

Another lawyer, Ben Conlan, who represents Frank and John Larsen said on Independent Radio News that Frank Larsen had worked for MI5 in the past. 'Frank Larsen was the active deputy head of intelligence services in Rhodesia responsible for setting up a group in a psychological research unit. He was approached in 1981 by Sir Michael Hanley, the head of MI5, with a view that when the war ended Larsen should work in the UK.' Larsen had accepted the offer, according to Conlan.

This contradicts a statement made in the House of Commons by Sir Patrick Mayhew who said that he'd been 'advised' that none of the accused had been employed in any capacity by the security forces'. Mayhew's statement drew the comment from Labour MP, Dennis Skinner that the affair was 'a squalid cover up between the government and the DPP protecting the prime minister's back because of her known hatred of the ANC'.

Because of the dropping of charges, thousands of sensitive documents which, it has been alleged would be 'of great embarrassment' to the British government would not see the light of day. In fact, the Lambeth magistrates hearing was for similar reasons held in camera — quite unusual for a magistrates court.

Collaboration

In addition to possible direct British state activity against the ANC, another issue which the trial could have disclosed was collaboration between British and South African intelligence services. Larsen, whose real name is Viggo Oerbak, would have undoubtedly had contact with apartheid activity when he was in what was then Rhodesia. He and Evan Evans, a British ex-officer who had served in the apartheid army had contact last year with South African 'businessman' Johann Niemoller. Niemoller, a former member of the South African military, has confirmed that he discussed plots against the ANC with Evans.

David Leigh of *The Observer* says that Niemoller was the second South African businessman to appear in London in 1986, in what he describes as a 'classic South African intelligence operation'. He goes on to say that 'MI5 knew for certain that Pretoria was mounting another London operation. It did nothing to stop it'.

James Phillips 1919-87



SOUTH African liberation fighter, James Madhlope Phillips sadly passed away last week. Phillips played an important role in organising unions — including during the 1946 miners strike, organising garment and rail workers in the 50s and in Britain as a member of SACTU. He will be additionally remembered by many for his marvellous singing of liberation songs.

Eye witness from Burkina

OPPOSITION to the military coup in the West African country of Burkina Faso, in which president Thomas Sankara and 15 of his supporters were shot, continues. TREVOR SHELDON, who was in the country at the time of the coup, reports.

MOST Burkinabès, from all walks of life, were stunned by the coup. Thousands of people made their way in sweltering heat to the cemetery on the outskirts of the capital where Sankara and the other dead had been hastily buried in a mass grave with their names written on scraps of paper.

Popular support for Sankara was so great that the intensive propaganda campaign against him on the radio has had little success in placating people's anger. The regular broadcasts put out by the 'Popular Front' accused Sankara of being 'a fascist, a misogynist, an autocrat' and said that he 'was a petty bourgeois who consorted with bourgeois potentates' and that he was a 'traitor'.

Captain Blaise Compaoré, the new president and formerly a close collaborator of Sankara, had to tone down the calumny and declare in his speech to the nation that despite his errors Sankara had increasingly isolated himself from his colleagues, concentrating power in his own hands. The killing, he alleged, was provoked by the uncovering of an assassination plot led by Sankara against himself (Compaoré) and two other officers who had helped Sankara lead the revolution in August 1983.

Very few people believe the official version. The two appeals for the people to come out and demonstrate in support of the 'Popular Front' were ignored and counter demonstrations in the country's second town of Bobo-Dialouso were dispersed by the military.

This reflects the wide support for the revolution of August 1983 and the popularity of Sankara's leadership.

Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta, was a French colony until 1960. Since then it has been ruled by a

series of neo-colonial regimes taking their orders from France. This left the country one of the poorest and most underdeveloped in the world.

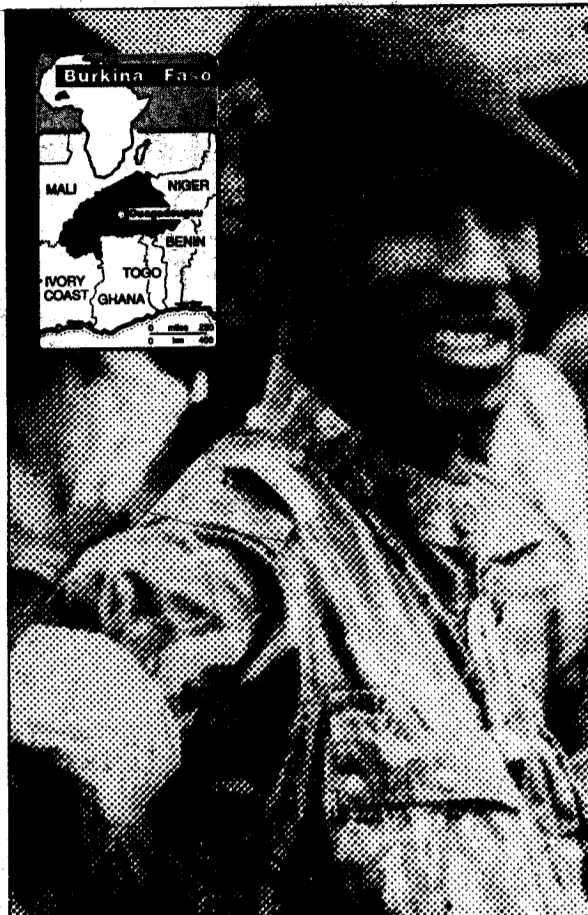
The revolution was defined as 'democratic and popular'. Its primary task was to liquidate imperialist domination and to remove obstacles to social and cultural development particularly in the countryside where 90 per cent of the population live.

It was a popular revolution in that it based itself on the support and mobilisation of the people, particularly through the local grassroots Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs).

In the last four years, the revolution resulted in major gains for the toilers in the country. Irrigation schemes, dams, health clinics were built; mass literacy and vaccination programmes were established based on unleashing and harnessing the energies of the people.

Women, who had been particularly oppressed and isolated from political life, organised through the CDRs and the Women's Union of Burkina. They demanded, and got, a ban on forced marriages and female circumcisions, and a major sex education drive. They fought for the right to have their own land and to equal pay. By this year there were five women cabinet ministers.

Sankara also gained an international reputation as a 'democratic' anti-imperialist fighter. Just one week before he was killed he hosted a major international anti-apartheid conference which followed months of a major educational campaign in the country on apartheid, including the setting up of a national anti-apartheid movement, MOBAP.



Thomas Sankara

All this brought him into conflict with France and other imperialist countries, along with neighbouring conservative African governments who were scared of the popularity of the revolution amongst African youth, who looked to Sankara for a lead.

The main support for the coup has come from the Union of Communists of Burkina (UCB) a small but well-placed hard line faction based originally in the military. This was set up by Compaoré and other officers in 1985. The UCB had come increasingly into conflict with Sankara over the last six months.

This group called for a tougher line against internal dissenters and a more administrative approach to the revolution. This was in direct conflict with Sankara who was trying to integrate

people into the revolutionary process by means of discussion, organisation and education, by political consent as opposed to administrative force.

Since the coup, supporters of the UCB and smaller Union of Communist Struggle (UCL-B) have been placed in senior ministerial positions and put in charge of national and local organisations. This has confirmed early suspicions that this was a UCB-backed coup.

The new president's efforts to gain support by sending his men round to address meetings of the local popular organisations have been frustrated by a mixture of poor attendance and widespread incredulity and rejection.

School students at one of the capital's largest schools physically ejected

the Popular Front speaker amid chants of 'Sankara or no one'. A few hours later it was announced that the schools would be shut down for a week.

In the countryside, peasants showed their opposition in many areas by suspending markets. Well known radio commentators who broadcast in the various local languages refused to translate the official communiques and several former ministers have been arrested or are in hiding.

This poses a deep problem for the military leadership who for two weeks had still not been able to announce a government. Opposition has also come from outside the country where Sankara was internationally respected for his bold anti-imperialist stance. In neighbouring Ghana, for example, Jerry Rawlings refused to see the envoys sent from Burkina, and declared a week of mourning.

The 'Popular Front' says it will continue implementing the programme of the revolution — though in a different way. However, since the coup the few policy measures announced mark a move away from the peasantry and in favour of the more privileged layers in the towns.

The use of the brutal methods of the coup to resolve political differences followed by the lies and propaganda campaign afterwards to cover these up indicate that they put their own interests before that of the revolution. Fidel Castro put this clearly when condemning the killing of Maurice Bishop in Grenada when he said 'no crime can be committed in the name of the revolution'.

As one high-ranking administrator told me: 'Sankara's support is widespread in the popular organisations, but their power is diffuse, it is not organised.' When asked about the future of the revolution he shook his head and said that 'perhaps it is dead too'.

Euromissiles treaty date set

A US-USSR TREATY abandoning intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in Europe will now be signed by the end of this year. On Monday 7 December Soviet general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev will begin a summit meeting with Ronald Reagan in the United States for exactly that purpose. Such a treaty will get rid of more than 1000 nuclear warheads from Europe, including cruise missiles from Greenham Common in this country.

On Friday 24 October, nuclear arms talks in Moscow between Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze and US secretary of state George Schultz ended with a refusal by the USSR to set a date for signing the treaty. As on previous occasions this round of talks had faltered because the USA refused to budge on its Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI).

There then followed a week of intense media speculation that the

chances of concluding a Euromissiles treaty this year were at an end.

By Carol Turner

However, just one week later, on Friday 30 October, Shevardnadze and Reagan announced from the White House that the two premiers had agreed to meet on 7 December to sign the INF deal.

A joint communique issued after the meeting of

Shevardnadze-Reagan announced that: 'president Reagan and general secretary Gorbachev have agreed to meet in the United States beginning on 7 December 1987. The president and the general secretary attach the highest importance to holding a substantive meeting which covers the full range of issues between the two countries — arms reduction, human rights and humanitarian issues, settlement of regional conflicts and bilateral relations — and which makes significant headway over the full range of these issues.'

The joint announcement went on to explain that the December meeting would also consider 'a future treaty on 50 per cent reductions in US and Soviet strategic offensive arms and on the obser-

vance of and non-withdrawal from the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) treaty for an agreed period'.

In the midst of the disastrous Wall Street crash, Reagan was evidently relieved at the prospect of recouping even a little lost ground, which is what signing the INF treaty represents for him domestically. But the joint announcement does not signal any fundamental change in the US administration's determination to continue the Star Wars project.

Clearly Gorbachev wanted to use the opportunity of a successful treaty to reopen the issue of SDI which Reagan has consistently refused to discuss. He has called on the USA to agree to a 10-year adherence to the ABM treaty, which would limit

the development of space weapons. But Reagan is only prepared to consider discussing seven years.

Undoubtedly, the signing of the December treaty will be of considerable political importance. But it only raises more sharply the fundamental demand Gorbachev has advanced — for the elimination of all nuclear weapons.

Twelve thousand nuclear weapons will remain in Europe alone.

The 1986 Iceland summit exposed the fundamental pro-nuclear stance of the United States administration. Signing and INF treaty at the end of this year signals no alteration in that. The political gain that the INF treaty represents must be used to insert a larger wedge in the crack that has now appeared in the nuclear door.

Yorks miners in new pit closures fight

THE COAL board is pushing ahead with its pit closure programme and job cuts. The closure of the Ireland colliery in North Derbyshire last week saw 400 jobs lost. Earlier in the month British Coal announced its intention of closing Redbrook and Woolley collieries in Yorkshire threatening 1300 jobs. But miners are fighting back. At Renishaw Park in Derbyshire a campaign has been started and the closure proposal there submitted to the colliery review procedure. In Yorkshire there has been a speedy response to the threats to Redbrook and Woolley. NUR member, RAY VARNES, a signalman at Woolley coal sidings, reports.

AT least 300 miners packed into West Gawber miners welfare on Sunday 29 October. They were meeting to discuss how to fight the threatened closure of Woolley and Redbrooke pits, and the possible closure of the Woolley coal preparation plant.

If these closures went through it would add 1500 jobs to the 7647 already lost in the immediate Barnsley area since 1983. It brings to nine the number of pits threatened locally.

Platform

On the platform were the four local MPs, representatives from the Yorkshire area NUM executive, Marsha Marshall of the Barnsley Miners Wives Action Group, Jack Taylor Yorks area president and Arthur Scargill. The meeting was chaired by Eric Richardson from Redbrook.

The mood of the meeting was militant. Scargill told the meeting that the target of British Coal is to reduce production to the 'three sevens' - 70 pits, 70 million tonnes, 70,000 jobs. Scargill urged the miners to fight. He warned against being tempted by a £5000 redundancy hand-out on offer until March. Not only was the money useless without work but none has the

right to sell their job, Scargill said.

British Coal has told the NUM that only pits which produce at less than £36 per tonne had any future and that no new shafts would be sunk unless production costs could be less than £25 per tonne.

In order to carry through this aim British Coal are prepared to close down pits with massive reserves and which have seen recent massive investment. Woolley and Redbrooke demonstrate this very clearly. Their life expectancy at present extraction rates is 32 years and 35 years respectively.

Both pits feed their coal into the newly-completed Woolley preparation plant where it is washed and blended. The two pits account for 80 per cent of the plant's — among the most modern in Europe — intake, hence the fears for its future should the pit closures go through.

Plant

In the last few years British Coal has spent in excess of £200 million on the preparation plant and a new pit head complex and shaft at Redbrook. Should the board be successful in closing the pits, these costs would be transferred to the surrounding pits which, as a result,



could find themselves in turn unprofitable.

Jack Taylor told the meeting that the fight against pit closures had to be turned around. He felt that the fight to defend Woolley and Redbrook would have an important role to play in that. The most important thing, he said, was to learn from the lessons of the past.

The first task of the campaign was to build solid support in the pits themselves. This was well underway given the size and spirit of the meeting.

Campaign

Second, the campaign would need to get out into the mining community. Third, it must reach out to

other unions, particularly the mining-associated ones such as electricity supply, rail, steel and engineering. This should be done at all levels, Taylor said, and we should not let any problems at the top of the unions prevent us from reaching out to the ranks who share the same interests as miners.

Meeting

At the end of the meeting Eric Richardson called for those interested in being part of the campaigning to attend an organising meeting that evening.

It was attended by miners from Redbrook and Woolley, as well as from miners from other local pits under threat.

The Barnsley Miners Wives Action Group was also there in force and Marsha Marshall was elected secretary of the campaign with Eric Richardson chair.

Solidarity

As a result of the meeting, leaflets and petitions have been produced and a speakers panel set up. It is also planned in the near future to hold a solidarity concert for the Woolley and Redbrook communities.

• Messages of support etc and information on the campaign from Marsha Marshall, 17 Rimington Road, Wombwell, Barnsley.

New Tory anti-union laws

THE idea that Tory government anti-union legislation has anything to do with 'popularity' received a knock with a publication of a Gallup poll that 71 per cent of the population considering trade unions 'a good thing'.

The real objective of the laws has been to weaken the unions. Its new set of proposals — first drawn up in the pre-election Green Paper and now the subject of the 1987 Employment Bill — is a straight scabs charter. Strikebreakers will be legally protected against union disciplinary action even if the strike was decided by a pre-strike secret ballot.

Election of union officials by workplace ballots is to be outlawed and replaced by postal voting. A new commissioner for the unions will be empowered to issue statutory codes of practice on union balloting and elections, and requiring unions planning industrial

action to ballot each workplace separately — aimed at hitting selective action.

Workers refusing to join a union in a closed shop establishment — even if the closed shop is the result of the legally-required 80 per cent ballot vote — will have full job protection and defence under the law. The Bill also includes the proposal to withdraw state benefits from young people refusing government training schemes.

• A new Labour Party trade union policy has been forecast by shadow employment spokesperson, Michael Meacher.

Speaking on 20 October, Meacher said that previous policy suffered from the lack of an 'enforcement mechanism' to back up its support for pre-strike ballots, suggesting that a special industrial court empowered to impose fines would be included in the current policy review.

Earnings gap 'markedly wider'

THE official government *New Earnings Survey* shows inequalities in earnings have grown 'markedly wider' over the last decade. The lowest ten per cent of men have seen their wage packets fall from 68.1 per cent of the median in 1977 to 59.4 per cent today. Over the same period, earnings of the best-paid ten per cent have risen from 157.7 per cent of

the median to 176.2 per cent.

The same trend is evident amongst women though the spread of women's earnings is narrower — with the lowest ten per cent falling from 68.6 to 64.2 per cent of the median, and the highest rising from 108.6 to 111.4 per cent over the same ten year period. The figures are based on gross earnings.

Engineers crunch vote

LEADERS of engineering unions will be voting on the employers proposed flexibility deal at the executive committee meeting of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU) on Thursday 5 November. The only union

leadership openly committed to support for the deal is the AEU and there is strong opposition in this, the major engineering union. A meeting of the 130-strong CSEU council is planned for 27 November to finally vote on the package.



JAYABEN Desai, leader of the historic Grunwick strike, will be one of the main speakers at a tenth anniversary commemoration conference. The conference, called by Brent Trades Council, is on 14 November; credentials from 389 Willesden High Road, London NW6.

Stoppages at Scott Lithgow and Pilkington's

THREATS to more than 500 jobs at the Scott Lithgow shipyard on the lower Clyde were met with a 24-hour stoppage, on 30 October. Unemployment in the area stands at 30 per cent.

Workers at the Pilkington glass firm in St Helens walked out on 2 November for 24 hours in pursuance of a wage

claim. They have rejected company offers of 5.94 per cent over 12 months or 8.1 per cent over two years.

Earlier this year, the union had mobilised in opposition to a take-over of Pilkington's by the British-based multinational, BTR. The company has cut its workforce from 12,000 to 6000 since 1980.

NUM rise withheld

IN a new move against the miners overtime ban, British Coal last week decided to withhold a pay rise at pits where the NUM is in a majority. The 4.3 per cent rise is the second phase of a two-year agreement with the UDM. NUM members had the first installment imposed upon them following the union not getting an agreement with the board.

NUM members will receive the rise, British Coal announced, from the date when the current industrial action against the board's new code of discipline is called off. The overtime ban is costing £3 million per week in lost production and has now been going on for six weeks. British Coal says that net losses in the first four weeks of the ban amounted to £6 million.

In another anti-NUM move, British Coal announced on Friday 23 October that it was transferring management of the new Asfordby mine in Leicestershire to its Nottinghamshire area. The pit is scheduled to open in the early 1990s when, the board claims,

it will employ a 1400-strong workforce largely recruited from the Leicestershire, south Derbyshire and Notts coalfields.

The announcement of the shift in the pit management from the Central area — which encompasses Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Derbyshire — is tied to coal board intentions for six-day working at the mine. The UDM has indicated that it will accept flexible working. Speaking in South Wales on Friday 30 October Arthur Scargill strongly denounced six-day working proposals — defended by South Wales NUM leaders — which could destroy as many as 40,000 jobs.

He condemned 'new realists' who, he said, were neither 'new nor realistic' both for their support for flexible working and for seeking a rapprochement with leaders of the UDM. Scargill emphasised that the key to real political victory lay in the mobilisation of those most oppressed within society, not collaborating with the employing class.

Ford threat to trade unionism

ONLY TWO votes were cast at the TUC general council against a wide-ranging review of single-union no-strike deals. The TUC congress in Blackpool then went on to overwhelmingly endorse the proposal. Opposing it, Arthur Scargill explained that no-strike deals struck at the heart of trade unionism and warned that whilst the review was proceeding, further deals would be struck.

Now, in a major challenge to trade unionism in what has traditionally been a relatively well-organised sector — the Ford motor corporation — the company has offered a single union deal at its proposed new 'greenfield' site in Dundee. The AEU leaders have taken the bait. JON SILBERMAN reports.

THE £40 million plant in Dundee's Technology Park will, it is claimed, employ 450 people when full production is started between 1991-2. In justifying the deal, AEU executive member for Scotland Jimmy Airlie said that 'as a union our main objective is, and will continue to be, to attract manufacturing industry into our country'.

The AEU leaders have had to contravene existing TUC procedure to sign the agreement with Ford. The current procedure provides that 'no union shall enter into a sole negotiating agreement, union membership agreement or any other form of agreement in any circumstance, including a take-over, change of ownership or some reason where another union would be deprived of their existing rights of negotiation... ex-

cept by prior consultation or agreement with the other union concerned'.

Ford has an agreement with many unions and its negotiating procedures are codified in the famous 'Blue book'. The T&G has a majority of the shop floor membership and ASTMS and TASS the bulk of the unionised staff.

The AEU leadership's unilateral action comes at a time when Ford is proposing radical changes in working practices, job flexibility, and further job loss, and a wage deal lasting for three years, already the cause of two walk-outs at Dagenham and Halewood. At a meeting of the national negotiating body, the FNJNC, a censure motion against Jimmy Airlie was avoided only when chairperson Mick Murphy of the TGWU ruled it not

be voted.

The AEU leaders claim that the Dundee agreement does not affect current arrangements because the Scottish plant will not be part of Ford UK. But behind such legal niceties lies a policy judgement that was spelt out by the union's general secretary, Gavin Laird, in the current issue of the *AEU Journal*.

The choice, Laird claims, is not between traditional agreements and single-union no-strike deals. 'I only wish this were the case. The real choice, all too often, is one union or no union'.

This was the same argument used by the AEU leadership when it concluded the no-strike agreement with Nissan at its plant in Washington in the north-east over two years ago. Today, union membership at the plant stands at just 17 per cent. A union built on membership forms and cosy agreements with companies rather than on defending workers' rights turns out to be no union at all.

A meeting called by TUC general secretary Norman Willis to discuss the Dundee situation will be boycotted by the AEU leadership. Now other unions at Ford have announced their intention to boycott components produced at Dundee.

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

The third annual *Alliance for Socialism* weekend of debate, discussion and agitation sponsored by Socialist Action

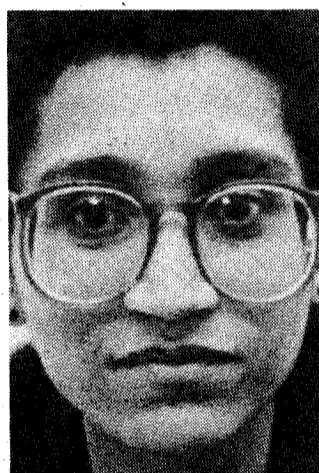
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7-8 November

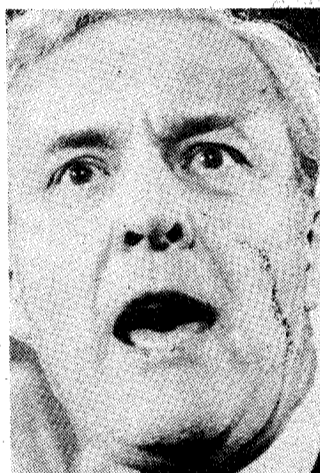
SPEAKERS INCLUDE



Diane Abbott



Linda Bellos



Tony Benn



Bernie Grant



Peter Heathfield



Ken Livingstone



Ann Pettifor

Registration from 10am Saturday
Sessions: 11-6pm Saturday
10.30-5pm Sunday
Saturday evening social



Marc Wadsworth

WORKSHOPS INCLUDE

- After the Wall Street crash
 - Fighting racism — Broadwater Farm to Dewsbury
 - The strategy of the ANC
 - Defend abortion rights
 - Ireland — a scenario for peace
 - The Coal Board's assault on the NUM
 - Nicaragua must survive
 - The changing working class — what policies for women?
 - Which way for students?
 - Glasnost and detente
 - Employment discrimination in the North of Ireland
 - The EEC — for or against?
 - For a democratic, secular Palestine
 - After the AES — a new economic strategy for Labour
 - The Iran-Iraq war
 - Defending unilateralism
- And two plenary sessions:
- Campaigning for socialism
 - The way forward