

# Workers power

The October  
Revolution  
1917 ★ 1987  
4 page special inside

Monthly paper of the Workers Power Group No. 99 November 1987 ISSN 0263-1121 30p/10p strikers

Solidarity price £1.00

## AS CRASH THREATENS SLUMP...

# Workers must not pay

**THATCHER RODE to power in June on the crest of the biggest stock market boom in living memory. Her victory was loudly and openly hailed as the triumph of 'popular capitalism'.**

Thatcher won the election with a minority of the popular vote, but got an impregnable parliamentary majority for the Tories. Despite not winning a majority of votes, however, Thatcher's victory was total in one sense. Her relentless propaganda for the market, the spirit of enterprise and the supremacy of 'individual choice' (that is, who pays wins) won out all along the line.

### FOOL'S GOULD

Nowhere was her conversion job more complete than amongst Labour's leadership. Kinnock and Gould have done nothing but echo Thatcher's theme that individualism has totally replaced collective values. Gould has been espousing his dream of 'shares for all'. Even Ron Todd talked about his £400 a week dockers as the litmus test for the 'popularity' of labour's policies. The class struggle, socialism, nationalisation — all of these things were simply old fashioned lumber to be thrown out of the party along with 'Trotskyists' and other left wing troublemakers.

But on 16 and 19 October the greatest stock market crash since 1929 took place. An ashen faced Thatcher, interviewed in Dallas, had nothing coherent to say. The brain-dead, jelly bean munching President of the USA, the 'most powerful man in the world' as we are often told by the press, was unable to comment.

When the politicians had gathered their wits they had little to offer beyond blaming each other for what had happened. The Americans blamed the Germans and the Japanese. The Europeans blamed the US budget deficit. They all blamed the stock market computers! Nigel

Lawson simply lied saying that the crash signified nothing and that the Stock Exchange was out of touch with the 'real economy'.

Suddenly Reaganomics and 'popular capitalism' looked pitifully vulnerable. In France Chirac postponed the first big sell-off of public assets. The BP share sell off has become a fiasco as the value of BP shares plummeted. Millions of the new 'small shareholders' watched their profits melting away.

The 'share and home owning democracy' and 'popular capitalism' peddled by Thatcher is simply the other side of her vicious attacks on the working class. If millions had to lose their jobs, their cheap and decent housing, their health and welfare provision in order to boost the profits of the millionaires, then the Tories needed to cultivate some sort of social base of support. Otherwise at the first election she faced the gains she had made for her class might have been threatened.

### BRIBES

To avoid this Thatcher set about cultivating support amongst the professional middle classes and the skilled white collar and blue collar workers. She used tax-cuts, council house sales, sell-offs of publicly owned companies at bargain basement prices and a host of other policies as a way of bribing these layers into supporting her.

It worked for a minority of people for a few years. For Thatcher it was a gamble that seemed to be paying off. The Bank of England bankrolled the markets. Millions bought shares. Many more are tied to the stock market via their pensions and their insurance policies. Employment in the financial services sector had mushroomed.

The Big Bang of 1986 in the City took Thatcher to the peak of her success. The Big Bust of October 1987 could be the beginning of her

rapid and painful downward journey. If the Stock Exchange crash triggers a slump in the world economy then the social base of Thatcher and the Tories will be rapidly eroded. The newly unemployed with 100% mortgages will find home ownership a curse instead of a blessing. The lesson that you can lose on the Stock Exchange as well as win will embitter many middle class first-time investors.

Faced with the complete discomfiture of capitalism's advocates the silence from the Labour Party leaders in the weeks after the crash has been deafening. Perhaps Kinnock and Gould did not wish to say anything that might jangle the nerves of the yuppies they have been busy wooing of late. More likely they were astonished and as much at a loss what to say as Thatcher and Reagan. Certainly they had no intention of 'taking advantage' of this shattering proof of capitalism's chaos and irrationality, and for a very simple reason. They have no alternative to it.

If the Stock Exchange crash leads rapidly into a full scale slump then it will not only be the small investors who lose their nest eggs. Factories will start to close. The financial and commercial institutions will also be obliged to start laying off their workers. As in 1980/81 the choice will be

posed to the workers and their unions—fight or founder. The implications of resisting another major round of offloading the costs of the crisis onto the backs of workers are enormous.

The first question is how to stop the closures that may soon be threatened as a result of the crash? In the short term the answer is to take direct action, occupations of workplaces and solidarity action. Such actions will come up against the law, since they are, to one degree or another, illegal under the anti-union and criminal trespass laws. Such actions will pose at once the need to nationalise the bankrupt or failing enterprises. Thatcher and her crew will resist such a course to the bitter end. For this reason each major struggle will put the government's very existence on the line.

Over the next year and a half, depending on the speed and severity of the onset of the inevitable new recession, the working class movement will be faced with great opportunities and difficult decisions.

With over three million still unemployed even after the 'boom' are we going to pay the price of a new slump? Is the leadership of the organised labour movement going to help Thatcher through another 'difficult period' as it did in 1980/81 or

1984/85? Will the unions and Labour Party stand aside as section after section resists heroically but in isolation?

The task now, facing every militant, is to ring the alarm bells and issue the call to action stations in every workplace and union now. Thatcher's difficulties are our opportunity. Her social base can be sent scurrying for cover if we use our power against her. The ordinary workers in the new technology industries and financial sector can and must be unionised as they are forced to fight to save their own jobs and wages. The public sector and public service workers must be united in struggle with millions of other workers that desperately need these services.

To achieve these ends we have to rebuild the fighting strength of the working class organisations. We have to replace the advocates of 'popular capitalism' within the labour movement with fighters for class struggle socialism. And above all in the period of strife that lies ahead we need to build a new, revolutionary party, one that will fearlessly sweep away every gain the bosses have made courtesy of the 'Thatcher revolution' with a proletarian revolution. ■



John Harris (Report)

## OCTOBER'S LEGACY

Seventy years ago the Russian workers overthrew first the hated Tsar and then the bourgeois government that replaced him. In doing so they changed the face of human history. For the first time state power was taken directly into the hands of working men and women.

The Russian workers showed the world the revolutionary power of the organised working class. Not only could it bring to a complete halt the wheels of industry and paralyse the workings of government, it was also an inherently socialist class as its every act of resistance was expressed in strengthening the bonds of solidarity and collective organisation in its ranks.

The agent of socialism was and remains the working class itself. It was the workers, organised to emancipate themselves, who could smash the power of capital and forge an alternative. The 1917 revolution exposed the uselessness of those who had hoped that bourgeois parliaments or paternalistic municipal schemes would do that job. And it exposed the treachery of those leaders inside the workers' movement who refused to heed that lesson.

The Russian workers rose in conditions of extreme squalor, exploitation and oppression. The reformist socialist intelligentsia sneered at the dark rebelliousness of these 'benighted masses'. Yet out of these struggles a new world was being born. There was a new democracy, no longer beholden to the capitalists who controlled the nation's wealth and its levers of power.

Through the soviets the workers directly elected and controlled their workplace delegates and ensured their every change of mood was registered. In these soviets, together with the armed militia, the workers' Red Guard, the embryo of a state of a completely new sort was emerging. It was to be a state that was the organ of the exploited and oppressed, directly responsible to them within the terms of proletarian democracy. The task of that state was to eliminate all exploitation and oppression.

As the crisis of autumn 1917 deepened the privileged took flight and the intelligentsia cowered. But the working class rallied to its revolutionary banner the millions who suffered the yoke of oppression in the Russian Empire. To the women of the proletariat it held out the hope of emancipation. To the national minorities it offered the chance to destroy the Great Russian chauvinism that stifled and strangled their national cultures.

And most important of all, to the great majority of Russians at that time, to the peasant masses, it guaranteed the defence of their newly won lands against the landlords. For the soldiers—the peasants in uniform—it ensured that the barbaric and humiliating tyranny of the officers was smashed completely. Only under the leadership of the proletariat could the most downtrodden and oppressed have any prospect of liberation.

### REVOLUTIONARY CLASS

1917 shows us all the qualities that make our class the only revolutionary and liberatory class of the epoch. But it also shows that in and of themselves the spontaneous strengths of our class are not enough for victory. What guaranteed the victory of October 1917 was that in the Bolshevik Party the Russian workers had an organised vanguard party, deeply rooted in every section of the masses, that could centralise and lead their struggles politically and organisationally. That lesson of 1917 must not be forgotten as we pay homage to the great Russian Revolution.

Those who made the revolution did so convinced that their's was but the first act in the overthrow of capitalism worldwide. Their's was the first blow of the world revolution. They were taking a sixth of the earth's surface out of the hands of the capitalists. They expected others to follow, and quickly. The workers of Europe did respond to the clarion call of the revolution. Risings throughout Central Europe occurred. But they were aborted and crushed by the reformist 'socialists' of the Second International at the behest of the capitalists and imperialist chiefs of staff. The internationalisation of the 1917 Revolution remains our task today.

The very existence of the USSR is still an affront to world capitalism. It is a serious obstacle in its drive for markets and raw materials. It is even a source of occasional material assistance to those struggling against imperialism. Yet, isolated in backward Russia, the Revolution degenerated. A caste of bureaucrats, led by Joseph Stalin, usurped political power and strangled every last vestige of genuine proletarian democracy in the USSR.

Under the slogan of 'socialism in one country' they treacherously turned their backs on the international revolution. And in the USSR they stood as a real obstacle to the transition to socialism. Mikhail Gorbachev is the latest helmsman of this caste of bureaucratic usurpers.

As the Soviet bureaucracy attempts a painful self-reform it is haunted by the year 1917. It celebrates it in sterile official speeches while quaking in its limousines at the prospect of proletarian action being unleashed once again in the USSR. The Russian workers must, and will, take the road of 1917 again. Only through new workers' councils and new mass struggles to overthrow the bureaucracy in a political revolution will the road to socialism be re-opened.

The very existence of the USSR represents a historic gain for the working class. Despite its degeneration into bureaucratic tyranny the historic task of overthrowing capitalism was pioneered there and has not been, to this day, undone. Against the imperialists we defend the USSR as a gain of October.

We live at a time when Labourite cowards are searching for a new 'socialism' for the 1980s. The organised working class is being relegated to fourth fiddle in the permutations of the rainbow coalition brokers. Let them ponder the lessons of October. It is the working class, and only the working class, that has the ability and interest to destroy capitalism. It did so in 1917. Its struggles since then have proved the point again and again. Its future struggles are the hope of humanity. We exist to speed the day when the settling of accounts with capitalism, begun in October, is completed.

**Long live the October Revolution!**

# THE CASINO ECONOMY

**THE STOCK Exchange is the biggest gambling den in capitalism. Imagine a single casino where on a single day over 200 million bets are placed worth billions of dollars. Wall Street is such a casino.**

It would be wrong, however, to see stock exchanges purely as dens of speculation. Stock exchanges first emerged to help capitalism grow. Individual capitalists themselves did not have enough money to pay for factories large enough to buy the newest inventions and use the most economic techniques of production. They had to pool their capital. The stock exchanges became a means to do so.

New companies were floated on these exchanges. Investors could subscribe to part of the capital of any new venture — a share. It entitled the holder to a part of any future profits — dividends.

The bigger the new venture grew the more its profits tended to grow. As a result the price of their shares also tended to go up because they represented a share of a growing pile of profit. The rise in share prices attracted speculators like moths to a flame. They were not so much interested in the profits these shares earned but in buying and selling them to make a quick buck by anticipating the movement of prices. From institutions necessary to raise capital for companies, stock exchanges became increasingly dens of speculators trying to manipulate prices with scant regard to the real economy of production and consumption.

In the wake of the recovery from the last world recession in 1982 the world's stock market prices began to rise again. They rose steadily to a peak of three times their 1982 level. This rise is called a bull market.

### LOW INVESTMENT

The problem for capitalism was that this 'boom' — whilst a sign of renewed confidence in its prospects — was not based on a lasting and deep recovery in the real economy. Over the last few years the level of profits has increased due to the defeats of workers, but the rate of profit was still low compared to the previous decade. This meant that re-investment of profits in new capacity or machinery remained low — barely three-quarters of its 1970s level.

What was to happen with all these new found profits? If they were not going into investment they could only go into speculation. The stock markets began to boom, as demand bid up prices.

The stock exchange was not the only casino. In the early 1980s the USA's economy expanded faster

than the rest of the world, an expansion based on arms and consumer spending fuelled by credit expansion. It sucked in billions of dollars in imports while export performance remained weak as compared to West Germany and Japan. This resulted in the US dollar being in less demand and foreign currencies being in more demand in order to pay for these imports. Thus, the price of the dollar fell. Speculators were soon drawn into the foreign currency exchange markets. At one time over \$40 billion a day was being spent on foreign exchange as speculators tried to make quick profits out of the currency exchange movements.

In addition, the treasuries of each imperialist nation, fearful of another recession and confident in the defeats of workers, began to provide bank loans for this speculative spree. Money supplies grew at the fastest rate since the Second World War. Savings in the USA fell to under 3%, their lowest recorded level in history. Personal debt rose to 20% of income, also the highest since records began.

Of course, this spiral of debt and rising prices rebounded on the economy. Not only did these speculators 'work hard', they 'played hard'. They needed to be entertained. Cars, videos, compact discs, cameras — all these luxury goods were in great demand. South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan, chief purveyors of these tempting wares, found themselves doing very nicely out of the speculative and consumer boom.

But what of the real economy? Since 1985 investment has tended to fall with the partial exception of the USA. With few new factories being built, there has been little demand for power, steel, raw materials etc. So while South Korea boomed, traditional raw material suppliers like Zambia, Brazil and the Middle East increasingly stagnated. The debt crisis refused to go away.

The low level of investment meant that world capitalist production also faltered. In the last two years industrial production in the major capitalist countries has grown by less than 2% a year. Far below the 1950s and 1960s and only comparable to the recession-racked decade of the 1970s.

This lack of investment, resulting in shallow increases in employment and productivity, has led to poor profit growth since 1985. In Japan profits are down by 30% since the beginning of the year. Germany has also experienced a similar fall. Only in the USA and Britain have profits risen because of their weak currencies. In the USA profits have risen by 7% since January and in Britain (excluding oil) they are up

8.5%. On the whole profits worldwide have hardly grown in the last two years. It is this lack of profit growth that has imperilled the boom in speculation.

Take Wall Street. Since 1982 taxed profits have grown less than 10%. However share prices have jumped 300%. In 1982 shares yielded a 12% return in profits. By the peak, a few weeks ago, each share yielded just over a 4% dividend which is less than the rate of inflation.

In Japan the speculative boom out did every other nation. Over there the growth of speculative holdings grew by nearly one-and-a-half times as fast as all the wealth produced in the economy last year. So high has the Tokyo Stock Exchange risen that its total value exceeds that of Wall Street despite the Japanese economy being less than half the size of the USA's. Little wonder then that shares on Tokyo yield an unbelievably low 1.3%. A crash in Tokyo will dwarf that of Wall Street.

### NERVOUS

With yields getting lower and lower, many speculators began to get cold feet. By the end of the summer holidays in September the markets were getting increasingly nervous. Fewer shares changed hands and the markets became more volatile. The markets began to pay more attention to the real world. What was ignored a year ago now became a horror story. Suddenly fragile markets were seized with fear over the five year old US trade deficit and budget deficit. Interest rates started to rise again in the USA as they must if the government is to find foreign takers for its stock to finance the deficit. But interest rate rises threaten to contract the credit boom which has helped fuel the speculation on prices. So they panicked.

Nor it is over. While yields in Europe and America have improved somewhat, they remain exceedingly low in the Far East, particularly Japan. Most speculators are now resigned to the fact that they are now in an indefinite bear market — a falling market. The crash therefore marks a turning point. It has severely deflated the largest speculative bubble in history and accelerated the tendency leading to recession. Workers do not need to speculate over the future. If the recession bites the world's bosses will try and make us pay. In reply we must fight again, with renewed vigour, for the economy that will grow and grow without fear of crisis, an economy controlled by workers, producing for need not profit — socialism. ■

## SUBSCRIBE

Subscription rates for 10 issues:

Britain £5.00  
Europe £7.00  
Outside Europe £9.00

Make cheques payable to  
**Workers Power** and send to:  
BCM 7750  
LONDON WC1N 3XX

Name.....  
Address.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Fighting Fund

Although we can't say we've lost our shirts on Telecom and British Gas shares it is fairly unlikely the tax inspectors will be jockeying for position to check our bank balance. The fact is our funds, as always, could do with a boost. So rush your donations to our box number without delay.



## Solidarity conference

# RANK & FILE MOVEMENT NEEDED

Support groups have sprung up around a whole series of industrial disputes since the end of the miners' strike. As a conference meets in Leeds this month to discuss turning them into a co-ordinated network *Jane Bruton*, a Nupe militant, asks if this will really confront the political problems leading to the isolation and defeat of so many struggles today

ON 7/8 November in Leeds a 'Solidarity Conference' is being held. It originates from a call by Silentnight strikers for a meeting to discuss organising support for workers in struggle. Its most enthusiastic backers on the left are supporters of *Labour Briefing* and *Socialist Outlook*.

A rival support conference organised by the Gateshead Workers Support Group and several groups of strikers was held in Manchester last July. This one had the backing of the Workers Revolutionary Party (*Workers Press*). Despite this factional clash both the Manchester conference and the forthcoming one in Leeds highlight the crisis of direction that exists among militants and the left inside the unions.

Over the last two years 'support groups' have proliferated. They have existed around national and local strikes. Generally they have not been delegate based bodies, but rather collections of individuals. In many areas these support committees have been maintained even when the particular dispute they were supporting is over, as workers' support committees to respond to any other campaign or dispute that might emerge and that might need support.

The Leeds conference is to bring these various committees together and turn them into a federation of support groups. As Andrea Campbell, of the Tower Hamlets Workers' Support Group, explained:

'The Solidarity Conference is a chance to try to unite these forces to share the common experiences and to develop a network of support which will be able to publicise disputes as they develop and give whatever support to those disputes which we can.' (*Labour Briefing* 14 October)

This whole approach fails to come to terms with the real reason that disputes as big as that of the miners and as small as the many local struggles that have occurred since then, have been defeated. Lack of 'support' was not the reason the miners were defeated. The real problems were the limits of their left reformist leadership's strategy — which failed to make initiating solidarity action a top priority — and the treachery of the TUC, which kept the miners isolated.

### BUREAUCRACY

The principal obstacle facing militants in every struggle is the union bureaucracy. No amount of financial and moral support, even from well-intentioned groups of individuals, will remove that obstacle. For this task a new approach is needed — an organised rank and file opposition movement in the unions committed to a class struggle programme, and dedicated to ousting the bureaucracy and transforming the unions. The Leeds conference is not trying to organise this type of approach at all.

Undoubtedly over the last period there have been groups of workers prepared to take on their boss or the government over a range of issues. Some of these struggles, like Silentnight, Ancoats, Caterpillar, HFW and Hangers have lasted for months. They have demonstrated the determination and resilience of workers in struggle.

Yet in each of these disputes the bureaucracy of the strikers' own unions has either betrayed them

openly or, and it amounts to the same thing, sat on their hands. This has undoubtedly fuelled the frustration of the strikers and ex-strikers (often sacked) in these heroic struggles. But for them to conclude that these problems can be solved by simply relying on the organising of the handful of people already committed to supporting strikes, people not always in unions themselves, would be a mistake. It would be to draw the wrong lessons from the establishment and development of the miners' support committees during the 1984-1985 strike.

There were no support committees prior to the miners' strike. Workers Power supporters were in the forefront of building miners' support committees during the strike. But part of politics is fighting for the right thing at the right time. The miners' strike was a mass national dispute involving a key sector that the Thatcher government wanted to smash. This demanded a mass national response. The support committees provided a much needed lifeline to thousands of striking miners and their families through the tireless collections of food and money, provision of accommodation and so on. However, some were also built to try to deliver the real goods — direct action by other trade unionists in solidarity.

This, we argued, should have been the primary function of the committees. Collecting material aid was vital, but spreading the action was a life or death issue for the fate of the strike. For this reason we argued that the committees had to become labour movement delegate-based bodies, not simply collections of supportive individuals. Only thus could they become committees of action dedicated to spreading the strike. Only thus could they become organising centres for rank and file militants across the unions and workplaces.

### RANK AND FILE

As well as this struggle for the development of support committees there was the central fight for the building of a rank and file organisation within the NUM itself. Only such a movement could have challenged the Executive for the control of the dispute and transformed the struggle into one that could have won. The small steps taken in this direction by a group of militant miners towards the end of the strike were a thousand times more significant than the 'symbolic' mass pickets of power stations — where entertainment by jugglers, fire-eaters and poets took precedence over trying to close the stations — organised by the ridiculously named 'Black Dragon' national support network.

One of the wrong lessons to draw from the strike is that the support committees have a life of their own irrespective of the class struggle. This is the mistake *Briefing* supporters — especially those now grouped around *Socialist Outlook* — have been making since the end of the strike. These people argued, in their old journal *Socialist Viewpoint* that the support committees were:

'... the obvious rank and file basis for an ongoing campaign for the victimised miners given the weakness of the NUM on the issue.'

In effect this was sidestepping the political problem that faced mili-



The Hangers limb-fitters—what strategy do militants like these need?

tants in the NUM. Namely, the continuing hold the bureaucracy had over the union. The support groups conference called sometime after the dispute ended up declaring itself as a movement that supported the NUM — mainly by organising anniversary binges. It was a short-lived movement.

The Leeds conference is in grave danger of carrying on in this vein. It has been called to discuss and learn the lessons of defeats which the conference leaflet indicates arose simply from 'lack of support' from the leadership of the official movement. These lessons can then be taken to other disputes so they don't make the same mistakes.

Lack of support from the leader-

ship and the failure to 'link up' is identified as an organisational question. But what any worker knows is that whenever we are thrown into a dispute the first thing we come up against is the bureaucracy of our own union. They actively try to isolate and sell out out dispute. We have to build the means to combat them politically, the means to sweep them aside. The argument for a support committees movement ducks these issues. The argument runs — if the bureaucracy won't build support we will have to do it through support groups made up of various people prepared to help us. On a national scale the network would provide information on disputes.

We completely understand the frustration, even desperation, felt by groups of striking workers abandoned or betrayed by their leaders and isolated from the rest of the class. But if the hundreds of support committees and the national support committee network could not win the miners' strike, then it will be even less likely to win smaller strikes. Instead, the fighting class spirit shown by the workers in Silentnight, Hangers, HFW and the rest needs to be organised and directed towards the job of building a rank and file movement that can deliver solidarity action — against the bosses and the bureaucrats. Militants at today's conference must get on with that job. ■

FBU

## THE LESSONS OF OCTOBER

IN OCTOBER, firefighters suffered a major setback in the struggle to defend their jobs and services. This was not due to any unwillingness on the part of FBU members to fight.

Twenty brigades throughout the country went on emergency calls only, in response to the sacking of 360 FBU members in West Glamorgan. These men were sacked by a Labour controlled council simply because 82% of them voted in a ballot for one hour strike action against proposed axing of 48 jobs.

For the last few years, national conference has voted overwhelmingly in favour of a recalled conference to organise a national strike if any firefighter was made redundant. Yet the reaction to the 360 sackings by General Secretary Ken Cameron was to fly round the country convincing brigades like Strathclyde and Merseyside to call off immediate strike plans. The rest of his time was spent in talks with ACAS. His intentions there were quite clear:

'My worry is that it could escalate into a national strike over an issue which I am certain could be settled with goodwill on both sides.'

Cameron emerged from ACAS claiming a victory: 'I am very

pleased with the outcome.'

It is true that the 360 firefighters were re-instated, but the issue of the original 48 redundancies remains unresolved. It has been referred to the Home Office for a 'ruling'. At the time of going to press, this 'ruling' has not been made public. However, since it was the Home Office that instigated the whole review of the fire service with the stated aim of making it 'cost-effective', it is hardly likely that this same Home Office will reverse the cuts and job losses. Already, the Cumbrian and West Midlands Brigades have been named as next in line for this 'cost-effectiveness' exercise. In the last year, cost-cutting exercises were carried out in every brigade by the Home Office Inspectorate. It is clear that if we are to repel this national attack on our jobs and services, we must learn the lessons of this dispute — and learn them quickly!

Lesson number one is that rank and file militants must take the initiative! Our national leadership cannot be relied upon to lead any effective action. Indeed, their appeals to reasonableness and

'goodwill on both sides' will only serve to postpone and weaken such action.

Any job losses threatened in one brigade must be met by strike action and occupations of fire stations. Pickets from that brigade must then link up with rank and file militants in other brigades to win solidarity action.

Cameron and others will once again condemn such an attempt to get national strike action as dangerous and divisive. Dangerous because it would be illegal. Divisive because it precedes them organising a ballot or conference.

Every militant should answer this by organising mass meetings of strikers in occupied stations. With action underway a special delegate conference — open to delegates from every striking station — could be called to ratify the action.

The leadership's sabotage last time round and its capitulation to the Home Office now mean that such action can only be guaranteed to take place if rank and file militants organise now. The fight for action — and the fight for solidarity from other workers once it is underway — is intimately bound up with the task of building a rank and file firefighters' movement. ■

EVENTS IN South Africa in the past period have led a number of groups on the British left to a re-assessment of their analysis of the situation in that country. The main features have been a slow but steady recovery of the trade union movement from the repression following the June 1986 State of Emergency.

The mass strike wave in the spring and summer of this year, including the two day general strike protesting the whites only general election in May together with the changes signalled in the Second Congress of Cosatu and the defeat of the South African miners' strike, were all major events in the class struggle. They all require careful and systematic evaluation by revolutionaries.

Unfortunately any South African militants looking for a revolutionary strategy or analysis from the British left, apart from Workers Power, would have been sorely disappointed. They would have found a further retreat into opportunism and reformism.

Leading the field as usual is the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) and its ailing British 'section'. A couple of years ago the Mandelite USFI majority was undecided over which anti-apartheid force to tail in the South African revolution — the ANC/UDF or the Azapo/National Forum (NF). They were somewhat embarrassed at the time by their USA section's embracing of the ANC. The SWP(US) denounced anyone who rejected the stages theory of revolution or thought that the struggle for socialism should be somewhere on the agenda of the South African Revolution.

By 1987 the Mandelites had stopped trying to ride two horses at once and unceremoniously dumped the NF, Azapo and the Cape Action League, in favour of the ANC. In 1985 Charlie Van Gelderen was complaining in the first issue of *International* (British supporters of Mandel) that media coverage ignored the NF and Azapo and in so doing the media suggested that the ANC was 'the only organisation engaged in the fight against apartheid'. Eighteen months later his own international tendency was doing precisely that.

A resolution on South African solidarity work from the USFI's International Executive Committee of June 1986 quietly signalled the change of line. In a several thousand word resolution on solidarity work, the Azapo/NF is not mentioned *once* as worthy of support as one of the organisations fighting apartheid. The ANC becomes the central focus of solidarity work. Thus 'the Fourth International Organisations everywhere should particularly seek to develop links with the ANC'. (*International Viewpoint*, July 1987)

What caused this sudden change of line? It was not, of course, based on any analysis of the programmes and strategies put forward by the various forces fighting apartheid, but rather the changing balance of forces between them. By 1986/87 it was clear that the dominance of the ANC/UDF was firmly entrenched.

Not only in the townships, but increasingly within the trade unions, this was the case. The Azapo/NF and the trade unions emerging from the black consciousness tradition (now Nactu) having isolated themselves from Cosatu and its growing strength within the workers' movement, were rapidly being marginalised. This was sufficient to make the Mandelites jump off the fence and into the arms of the ANC.

While the Jack Barnes led SWP(US) and their British camp followers in the increasingly irregular *Socialist Action*, revel in the two-stage theory of the ANC (the struggle for democracy now and for socialism sometime in the future) the Mandelites fuel the need to search out the 'left' Freedom Charterites in an attempt to prove



Centrists offer these heroic fighters nothing

# CENTRISTS ON SOUTH AFRICA

At the second COSATU Congress the ANC's popular front strategy gained ground. Stuart King looks at the way in which so called 'Trotskyist' groups have responded to this development.

that in fact the ANC/SACP is increasingly dominated by those who want an 'uninterrupted revolution'. Once again the Mandelites are out to discover the 'unconscious Trotskyists' — the South African Sandinistas who will establish yet another 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

The USFI analysis of the second congress of Cosatu reflects its growing accommodation with the ANC and its programme — the *Freedom Charter*. There is no doubt that the Congress which took place in July represented an enormous strengthening of the South African black trade union movement. The growth in membership of Cosatu from 430,000 to 769,000 in eighteen months and the progress in establishing powerful industrial unions are vitally important steps for the South African working class.

However the second congress also signalled the growing dominance of the political perspective and programme (*Freedom Charter*) of the ANC/SACP within the Cosatu leadership. That perspective sees it as necessary to *limit* the present 'stage' of struggle against apartheid to a democratic outcome not a socialist one. The socialist demands of workers must be subordinated to establish and maintain this outcome.

But for the USFI the adoption of this programme and the defeat inflicted on the 'Workers Charter' tendency is little cause for concern. Thus Tony Roux in *International Viewpoint* paints a rosy picture of the congress, since: 'the fight for socialism has now become the focus of Cosatu's discussion' (IV, No 127). He issues not one word of criticism or warning about the role of the *Freedom Charter* or the significance of its adoption.

Brian Heron writing for *Socialist Outlook* adopts a similar line declaring that the congress marked 'a new stage in the ideological maturity of the South African revolu-

tion', that the resolution from the National Union of Miners (S A) on adopting the charter represented 'an immense politicisation of the trade union movement'. Indeed, but a politicisation which subordinates the workers' class interests to the bourgeoisie.

Both Roux and Heron make much of the recognition in the Cosatu congress resolutions that the working class should take the leading role in the struggle against apartheid. But if that leading role is guided by the perspective of the ANC's programme it means little more than the working class leading the struggle for a bourgeois but supposedly 'democratic' South Africa as a politically subordinate partner to the capitalists.

Even Heron cannot conceal that the major debate of the congress involved an enormous political onslaught on the 'Workers Charterists' by the ANC supporters. This led to the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (Numsa) resolution which included a call for a 'Workers Charter' to be developed alongside the *Freedom Charter* — not even receiving a seconder.

Once again the Mandelites have shown that, far from 'defending' the strategy and perspectives of permanent revolution, they do not hesitate to abandon it in practice immediately the 'mass movement' — trade unions in this case — plumps for a democratic and stageist programme.

Their accommodation to the leadership of the trade unions — especially the NUM(SA) — was even more starkly apparent in *Socialist Outlook's* response to the ending of the miners' strike.

Again it was significant that at the point the NUM(SA) leadership was adopting the ANC's programme, it was also eschewing forms of struggle which would indeed have placed the working class in the forefront of the struggle

against apartheid — above all the struggle for a general strike.

The restriction on internal democracy signalled by the abolition of shaft steward councils in the union, followed by a retreat of the leadership, without consulting the rank and file miners involved in a magnificent and tenacious struggle, was a clear sign of the growing reformist perspective of the union leadership.

Charlie Van Gelderen led off in *Labour Briefing* with an article which was little more than a series of justifications for the leadership sell-out. The solidarity of the miners, Van Gelderen tells us, was not enough to force the employers to back down. Does he suggest that the strikers' action should have been extended? That the NUM should have appealed to other unions, to Cosatu, for massive solidarity action, for a general strike? Not at all. 'These were the facts which the union leadership could not ignore. An orderly return to work was preferable to a panic retreat.' (*Labour Briefing* No 48)

*Socialist Outlook* took a different line to its own comrade, making some criticism of the NUM leadership tactics, and correctly pointing out that a strike called off with 30,000 remaining sacked was a 'long way short of an orderly return to work'.

While *Socialist Outlook* could only bring itself to consider the slogan 'supportive action', *Socialist Organiser* had no qualms in its outright rejection of the general strike slogan. Indeed *Socialist Organiser* has managed to put itself to the right of virtually every other centrist current — including *Militant* — with their analysis of the miners' strike and perspective for the South African trade unions.

Ann Mack having declared that a general strike was the only way to avoid isolation, quickly went on to scotch any suggestion that the NUM should have pressed for this.

The 'balance of forces were not favourable for such a revolutionary showdown'. Instead the NUM should have campaigned for 'preparation for solidarity action' before the strike. (*Socialist Organiser* No 326).

After mooting that perhaps the miners 'fought at the wrong time' and that the NUM leadership should have tried to 'postpone the battle a few more years'(!) this fearless revolutionary leader comes to the conclusion that if it is a choice between 'bureaucratic timidity' and the 'wild adventurism' of calling for a general strike, the latter 'can be far more dangerous'.

The fact is that general strikes, like strikes in general, don't necessarily have 'all or nothing characteristics'. There can be partial victories as well as partial defeats. There was no inevitable necessity that such a development would have led to the South African state forces annihilating the NUM or Cosatu.

Indeed it was just as likely that a rolling strike wave developing in the direction of a general strike, threatening a major revolutionary conflagration, would have led Anglo-American and the Chamber of Mines to retreat and make concessions.

The struggle for a general strike did open the possibility of a massive working class offensive against the apartheid regime, paralysing its industrial might, its transport system, occupying the factories and mines. It could have drawn behind it and revived the township struggles, potentially splitting and paralysing the ruling class and its armed forces.

Precisely because such a perspective really would point to the 'leading role of the working class' to its own organs of power, its own militias and to the struggle for a workers' government and socialism, it finds no place in the armoury of the ANC or SACP or the Cosatu leadership. Not surprisingly since it threatens the all class alliance of the popular front.

But all that is far from the timid and reformist perspective now being peddled by *Socialist Organiser*. Pursuing her theme Ann Mack along with Mark Dupont, in a *Workers' Liberty* article eulogises the 'legalist' traditions of Fosatu. The left in the unions, the 'Workers Charterists' failed because they missed 'an opportunity to transfer to the political realm, the lessons learned in the economic, to extend the method of patient organisation through pressing winnable demands on the economy and linking ultimate goals with immediate 'small' reforms'. (*Workers' Liberty* No 8) So the left failed because it did not set about building a reformist Labour Party!

Mack and Dupont end up by giving some examples of the programmatic basis to regenerate the left. This consists of 'combining realistic and winnable demands on management for a real living wage for the best organised' and a campaign 'aimed at the state for legally enforceable minimum wage for the less well organised workers'.

The smashing of apartheid? The struggle for workers' control? For the expropriation of the capitalists? For workers' self-defence? Such 'wild adventurism' has no place in the miserable reformist road for South Africa outlined by *Workers' Liberty*.

South Africa does not need a reformist Labour Party nor right-centrists peddling reformist programmes in the midst of the biggest class struggle it has ever seen, struggles which have shaken the apartheid state to its foundations.

South Africa/Azania needs a revolutionary party leading the working class to power through struggling around transitional demands linked to revolutionary methods of struggle. The MRCI has agreed such a programme with the aim of winning South African militants to precisely that task. ■



In this, the concluding part of our series on the Russian revolution, Dave Hughes and Mark Hoskisson look at the developments in the working class and Bolshevik Party that culminated in the triumph of the October Revolution

## After Kornilov

# The Bolsheviks: party of the Russian working class

The Russian workers, particularly those in Petrograd, had suffered a very real setback after the defeats of the July Days. The Bolshevik leadership was arrested or forced into exile. Circulation of the party press was halved after July with the central organ having a circulation of only 50,000 in August. The mood in the factories was often despondent.

Yet by September and October, the tide had turned decisively in favour of the Bolsheviks. After years in exile or underground, after months as the intransigent left minority in the soviets and after the persecution suffered in July the Bolsheviks at last proved themselves to be the party of the Russian working class. Their undisputed leadership enabled them to transform the spontaneous class consciousness of the working class into a conscious political force. Their methods of achieving that leadership, of defeating the reformist obstacles that stood in the way of victory, are a priceless legacy for revolutionaries today.

Before July the Bolsheviks had established themselves as the leadership in several key fighting units of the working class. In the August city council elections in Petrograd they chalked up majorities in proletarian districts of Peterhof, and Vyborg. Their influence in the factory committees had increased, with 82% of the delegates at the August All-Russian Factory Committee Conference endorsing their call for soviet power. On 11 August the Bolsheviks led a general strike in Moscow against the State Conference. Kerensky had hoped to use this gathering to consolidate his coalition with the bourgeoisie and the military chiefs. That self same strike had been opposed by the conciliator leadership of the Moscow Soviet.

That the workers were not prepared to make their peace with the bourgeoisie or the Provisional Government was demonstrated by a resolution from the young workers of Putilov:

'We, the youths, having learnt from the experience of our fathers how dangerous it is to fraternise with

the bourgeoisie, declare that it will be a fearful hour when we, the youth, for the salvation of the revolution take to the streets to destroy with our young hands those parasites who live off the blood and sweat of the toilers . . .

'[We express] our profound scorn for the Socialist Revolutionaries [SRs] and Mensheviks who continue to cohabit with the bourgeoisie and allow themselves to be led on a leash by Kerensky and Tsereteli.'

Further battles lay ahead and this was patently clear to the most class conscious workers. But after July the workers had learnt the need for discipline and organisation, the need to avoid premature and sporadic struggles.

It was in this context that the bourgeoisie launched its own counter-offensive against both the Provisional Government and the gains of the working class. The July Days had given them the confidence to press home the attack. On 22 July the right wing

that the Provisional Government had still evidently failed to do.

The weakness of Kerensky's government was sharply exposed. He was trying to crack down on the organised workers. On 24 August he closed down the Bolshevik press once again. Yet at the very same time the bourgeoisie were preparing to oust him and his government. Quite simply after July the bosses felt they had no further use for the Provisional Government. In co-ordinated fashion the bourgeois Kadets resigned from the government and General Kornilov announced a march to restore order in the capital on the 27 August. The long depressed stock market soared as the capitalists looked forward to the counter-revolution's victory.

Everything the Bolsheviks had been predicting about the role of the conciliator Mensheviks and Kerensky was being verified by the march of events. These traitors to the working class had been allowing

*'We are changing the form of our struggle against Kerensky. Without in the least relaxing our hostility towards him, without taking back a single word said against him, without renouncing the task of overthrowing him, we say that we must take into account the present situation. We shall not overthrow Kerensky right now. We shall approach the task of fighting against him in a different way'*

General Kornilov was appointed to the supreme command by Kerensky. He declared he would be answerable only to his 'own conscience and the whole people'. He very quickly assumed the mantle of the messiah of the counter-revolution. At the Moscow State Conference he was fawned on by Kerensky and the bourgeois ministers as the 'first soldier of the revolution'.

Kornilov's rise coincided with increasing clamour from the bosses for the complete restoration of their right to hire and fire which had been usurped by the factory committees. There were well hatched plans to establish a military dictatorship to establish the order

the forces of counter-revolution the chance to re-gather their strength and strike back. The Party was now put to the test of fighting the counter-revolution.

Kornilov's march on Petrograd shattered the post-July order in the factories. Meetings vowed to defend the city and demanded arms to do so from the Soviet Executive. The old Baranovskii Machine Construction factory resolved:

'We demand that the Central Executive Committee [TsIK], give arms to the workers, who not sparing their lives, will stand as one in defence of the just rights of revolutionary democracy, and together with our brethren soldiers, will erect an impassable barrier



Kornilov—'the heart of a lion: the brains of a sheep'

to the counter-revolution and will tear out the poisonous fangs from the snake that has dared to poison the great Russian Revolution with its lethal venom'.

Thousands of Petrograd workers threw themselves into the struggle to stop Kornilov, at least 25,000 enlisted for the Red Guards who were co-ordinated by the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. At Putilov 8,000 of the workforce were sent to perform defence and agitation duties. Those who remained behind achieved three weeks output of cannon in three days so as to defend the revolution!

Kerensky cowered behind the proletarian wall defending Red Petrograd. In the short term he had no alternative. Bolshevik leaders were released from jail and Bolshevik propaganda and agitation was in free flow again. Bolshevik militants were prominent in all the mobilisations to halt Kornilov. The problem for the Bolsheviks was how to use these mobilisations to win the mass of the workers away from their trust in the Mensheviks and in the wretched Kerensky, how to intensify the contradictions between the rank and file Mensheviks and SRs and their compromised leaders?

For Lenin the key to this lay in 'indirectly' campaigning against Kerensky 'by demanding a more and more active, truly revolutionary war against Kornilov'. The aroused workers must be mobilised to press partial demands on Kerensky which would develop the militant mood and reawakened confidence of the rank and file while exposing the weakness and vacillation of their leaders. Their demands were to include the arrest of the Kadet leader Mil-iukov and Duma President Rodzianko who were backing Kornilov. They included the legalisation of the transfer of the land to the peasants, and workers' control over grain distribution and the factories. The Bolsheviks also demanded the arming of the Petrograd workers and the summoning of the militant Kronstadt, Vyborg and Helsingfors garrisons to Petrograd. Involving the workers in the fight for their demands in the revolutionary defence of Petrograd was for Lenin, the means of taking them forward politically. That is why he insisted that the demands be presented:

' . . . not only to Kerensky, and not so much to Kerensky as to the workers, soldiers and peasants who have been carried away by the course of the struggle against Kornilov'.

In denying Kornilov the right to overthrow Kerensky Lenin was in fact digging Kerensky's political grave, and the graves of those who sought to compromise with him. As Lenin put it:

'We are changing the form of our struggle against Kerensky. Without in the least relaxing our hostility towards him, without taking back a single word said against him, without renouncing the task of overthrowing him, we say that we must take into account the present situation. We shall not overthrow Kerensky right now. We shall approach the task of fighting against him in a different way'.

This means of waging the struggle against Kornilov and Kerensky proved a resounding success. Kornilov was stopped in his tracks as his army dissolved around him under the pressure of Bolshevik agitators and sabotage by militant railway workers. The political fortunes of the Bolshevik Party increased tremendously in the aftermath of Kornilov's defeat and Kerensky's humiliation. Their use of a united front, addressed to Kerensky and the Mensheviks, and carried into life with thousands of rank and file workers in the committees of struggle, was for the limited goal of defeating Kornilov. But by combining unity in action with a merciless critique of

Continued on page 6



Kerensky (centre) and his counter-revolutionary allies could not halt the Bolshevik advance

Kerensky and the conciliating leadership of the soviets the Bolsheviks proved to thousands of workers that they were the only consistent revolutionaries. The united front was a bridge to the masses and a weapon against their reformist misleaders.

General Kornilov's defeat at the hands of the Petrograd workers opened the final phase of the Russian Revolution. The workers had arms once again. The ranks of the Red Guards had grown dramatically. A new confident tone was to be heard in factory meetings throughout the capital city. Factory after factory replaced their Menshevik or SR delegates to the Soviet with Bolsheviks. Resolution after resolution passed at mass meetings in early September took up the Bolshevik call for all power to pass to the soviets and challenge the Soviet leadership's collaboration with the Kerensky government. The workers of Langezipen typically, told those leaders:

'... we suppose that the Kornilov rebellion has washed your sleepy eyes clear and enabled you to see the situation in its true light.

'We declare that you have long spoken for us, but not our views, and we demand that you begin to speak the language of the proletariat or else we reserve for ourselves freedom of action.'

In fact the Kornilov coup attempt had not washed clear the sleepy eyes of the Menshevik and SR leaders of the TsIK. It had clouded them even further. While Kerensky tried to strengthen his power by establishing a five person directorate the TsIK still continued to support him in exchange for a promise to convene a pre-parliament. The tension between the aspirations of the proletarian mass and the intentions of those they had once delegated to represent them was increasing dramatically.

In September the Petrograd Soviet passed its first distinctively Bolshevik resolution calling for a government of 'the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry'. In opposition the Mensheviks could only muster 15 votes out of 1,000 delegates in support of the Provisional Government! The Moscow Soviet passed a Bolshevik resolution four days later.

The other contenders for proletarian leadership either withered and declined, as was the case with the Mensheviks, or they were gripped by splits and insta-

bility. The SR party split, with the Left SRs supporting the calls for soviet power against their ex-leaders. The bulk of the Petrograd SR organisation backed the Lefts reflecting the mood of Red Petrograd.

It was the growing identification of the most active workers with the Bolshevik Party that marked the most important change in the mood of the working class. Tireless agitation and propaganda to expose the treachery of the Soviet leadership was now beginning to bear fruit. By October Bolshevik Party membership stood at 250,000 compared to around 30,000 at the beginning of the year. In Petrograd the Bolsheviks could count 43,000, members in their ranks of whom 28,250 were workers and 5,800 soldiers. The overwhelming majority of the party was proletarian.

The bulk of the intelligentsia inevitably abandoned the banner of the proletariat as the hour of decision drew close. Those intellectuals—the finest intellects in Russia and much of Europe—that stuck by the working class were party intellectuals. Their talents were at the service of the proletarian party.

The party's proletarian core was chosen by the ma-

*'All these circumstances say clearly that the moment of the last decisive battle which must decide the fate not only of the Russian but of the world revolution has arrived'*

jority of the workers to be their representatives in the soviets and the factory committees. In the Red Guard in October, for example, 44% were Bolshevik Party members. The vanguard party of Lenin now comprised the mass vanguard of the Russian working class. The meteoric rise of the Party was consolidated in September and October. In Moscow district council (duma) elections in September the Bolsheviks secured 52% of the vote and virtually wiped out the Mensheviks. During September and October the Bolsheviks could count on 68% support in the Moscow Soviet while the Mensheviks and SRs were receiving 16% and 4% respectively. The Party was truly becoming the national party of the Russian working class. In Saratov in the Volga it took leadership of the Soviet in September. It was to do the same in the majority of soviets across Russia's far flung industrial centres as the month wore on. These facts, stubborn facts that bourgeois historians have never yet been able to refute, show as a lie and a slander the

charge that when the Bolsheviks took power they were a minority and their action was a coup. On the contrary, as a majority they led a mass revolution. Once the Bolsheviks comprised that layer of workers that the majority of the Russian working class looked to to lead their struggles, the task was to use that position of leadership to mount a final offensive against both the Provisional Government and the conciliator leadership ensconced in the Soviet Executives.

For those workers who had entered the ranks of the Bolsheviks there was no question but that the deepening crisis could only be solved by the seizure of power by the soviets. Yet even after Kornilov the TsIK refused Lenin's offer of loyal opposition within the soviets if they were to take the power. The transfer of power to the soviets could now only take the form of a Bolshevik led and organised seizure of power. Surveying the developing peasant land seizures, the paralysis of Kerensky's government and the new mood in the soviets the third Petrograd city conference of the Bolsheviks resolved in early October that

the moment for decisive action was nigh. The assembled representatives of the leadership of Red Petrograd's proletariat declared:

'All these circumstances say clearly that the moment of the last decisive battle which must decide the fate not only of the Russian but of the world revolution has arrived'.

One last difference existed between the Bolshevik vanguard and the majority of workers. The majority were for soviet power. In Petrograd only one factory mass meeting voted contrary to the call for the impending second All Russian Congress of Soviet Deputies to take the power. That argument had been clinched decisively. However, still only a minority of workers, mainly the younger ones, were prepared for an open 'coming out' (*vystuplenie* in Russian) to achieve that end. The memory of July lingered on. A red guard from the

Petrograd Pipe Factory described his own foreboding as their detachment spent the last pre-October night in the factory:

'But I did not feel like sleeping. Many thoughts raged through my head, much was still not understood that is so clear now. The July Days stood out too vividly before my eyes. The hissing of the philistine crowd shook my certainty'.

But there had been a dramatic change in the balance of class forces since July which should have quelled such nerves. The other industrial centres were far nearer to the mood of Petrograd. The peasantry was in motion, and recognising this the Bolsheviks were prepared to lead the struggle for power. All the conditions existed for the seizure of power by the working class.

In this situation only a decisive move by the vanguard could provide the masses with the final confrontation that the majority wished for, even though many of them shrank from it. As the Vyborg district organiser Latsis expressed it so well:

'In the coming out the organised apparatus must be to the fore, the masses will support. It is totally different from before.'

Having won proletarian leadership the Bolsheviks prepared to seize state power for the soviets. On 22 October the Petrograd workers were rallied in a series of meetings to celebrate the 'Day of the Petrograd Soviet'. Party workers spoke to indoor meetings organised to avoid provocation and confrontation. At the Central People's House 30,000 attended to hear Trotsky electrify his audience with a call to carry the revolution through to the very end. An SR described that at factory meetings at this time 'our speeches seemed doomed to us'. The Menshevik commentator Sukhanov left the People's House with his head in a swim:

'With an unusually heavy heart I watched this truly majestic scene. And all over Petrograd it was the same thing. Everywhere final reviews and final oaths. Strictly speaking, this was already the insurrection. It had already begun.'

Those who were to seize the bridgeheads, the post office and railway stations, those who were to arrest the Provisional Government knew that the mass of the workers stood behind them. That fact gave the Bolsheviks the confidence and the courage to act and the certainty that victory would be theirs.



## Lenin's struggle for the insurrection

The October insurrection, which took power into the hands of the workers and poorest sections of the peasantry, was no historical accident. It flowed from two factors decisive for the victory of any proletarian revolution.

On the one hand it arose inevitably from the deepening crisis that gripped Russian society in the autumn of 1917. The February Revolution, which overthrew the Tsar had ushered in an inherently unstable period of dual power.

The bourgeoisie, through the Provisional Government, held formal control over the state apparatus. But they did so only with the permission of the workers', soldiers' and peasants' soviets—the embryo of another state power.

The bourgeoisie lived, breathed and tried to rule courtesy of the reformist leaders of the soviets, the Mensheviks and the right wing of the peasant based Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs).

The situation of dual power became less and less acceptable as the months wore on, to both the bosses and the working masses. This created crisis after crisis. One way or the other it had to be resolved. Either the bourgeoisie would launch a second Kornilov into action to crush the revolution, or the workers would lead society out of its impasse by establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

By the autumn of 1917 this was the stark choice facing the classes in Russia. It was the objective

precondition for the insurrection. Trotsky later noted:

'A mass uprising is no isolated undertaking which can be conjured up at any time one pleases. It represents an objectively conditioned element in the development of a revolution, as a revolution represents an objectively conditioned process in the development of society.'

Subsequent history has shown all too often however that favourable objective conditions—an acute revolutionary crisis—do not on their own guarantee the victory of the proletariat. This was shown with tragic consequences in Chile, Portugal and Iran. To mobilise the proletariat for the direct struggle for power and weld it into a fighting force capable of destroying the bourgeoisie's state, a conscious leadership is required—a subjective factor.

The October insurrection proved that the revolutionary party, armed with the correct programme, tactics and strategy, and prepared to arm itself and the class with rifles too, is the indispensable pre-requisite for victory.

Immediately after the Kornilov affair Lenin expressed the belief that a peaceful development of the revolution was once again possible. In his article *On Compromises* Lenin explained that if 'All power to the soviets' could be realised forthwith, that is, if the Menshevik and SR leaders in the soviets could be forced by the pressure of the masses to break from the



bourgeoisie then:

'In all probability it could secure the peaceful advance of the whole Russian Revolution, and provide exceptionally good chances for great strides in the world movement towards peace and the victory of socialism.'

The slim chance for this compromise lay in the fact that workers were distrustful in the extreme of the bourgeoisie in the aftermath of Kornilov. Their pressure was a material factor. It could perhaps, be exerted to the point where the Mensheviks and SRs would be forced to make some sort of break—at least formally—with the chief capitalist party, the Kadets.

But before the ink was dry on the article he had written Lenin received news that Kerensky was planning to form a five-person directory, and strengthen his drive to establish a Bonapartist dictatorship for the bourgeoisie. Even now the Mensheviks and SRs refused to consider the proposal for a 'socialist' only government based on the soviets within which the Bolsheviks would accept the role of loyal opposition. Upon receipt of this news Lenin suggested re-titling his article *Belated Thoughts*. He wrote:

'Perhaps the few days in which a peaceful development was still possible have passed too. Yes, to all appearances, they have already passed.'

Henceforth Lenin concentrated his thoughts on how to take the revolution forward under Bolshevik leadership. In less than a fortnight he concluded that the rising was an immediate necessity. Over the following weeks Lenin fought a relentless struggle to win the Bolsheviks to this perspective. He quickly grasped that in a matter of weeks the objective situation had dramatically changed. He fought to change the party accordingly. He struggled to make the subjective factor equal to the tasks of the objective situation.

The crisis of the dual power situation intensified on every front during September and October. In the countryside, as the days of the harvest passed, the peasant masses renewed their ferocious war against the landowners. The agrarian question, which Trotsky called the 'subsoil of the revolution' acquired decisive importance. Traditionally the peasants looked to the SRs as their representatives. Yet the SRs were openly collaborating with the landowners. The Provisional Government, of which the SRs were an integral part declared in September—as instances of violence against the landowners rose from 440 in August, to 958—that: '... all must experience alarm over the disorders which were happening everywhere in the wildest forms.'

The pitchforks that pierced the overfed bellies of the landowners worried the SRs far more than the cruel land hunger that existed. All the SRs could offer the peasants was that on an unspecified day a constituent assembly, which the bourgeoisie were successfully preventing from being convened, would solve the land question. Unimpressed the peasants continued their land war. October saw 42.1% of all instances of land seizure since the fall of the Tsar.

The peasant land war, spurned by the SRs and opposed by the bourgeoisie, had found a natural ally in the proletariat's revolutionary struggle. This in turn immeasurably strengthened the proletariat as the leader of all the oppressed and downtrodden in Russia. As Trotsky put it:

'In order that the peasant might clear and fence his land, the worker had to stand at the head of the state: that is the simplest formula for the October Revolution.'

The land war and the struggle of the proletariat were also increasingly enmeshed with a wave of struggles for autonomy by the nationalities imprisoned within the Tsarist empire. In the east Bashkirs and Kazakhs fought for autonomy as a means of getting land. Throughout the lands of the empire national struggles erupted and were directed against Kerensky's dithering Provisional Government. Moreover, the phenomenal spread of soviets throughout the nationalities increasingly meant that autonomy became identified with soviet power.

Amongst the soldiers, sailors and workers the continuation of the war and the threat of famine increased mass hostility to Kerensky.

The Baltic fleet was dominated by the Bolsheviks. Garrison after garrison followed them. As we saw in the previous article the Soviets began to return ever more convincing Bolshevik majorities as the crisis deepened. This process of radicalisation was well underway by early September. Indeed when some Bolsheviks saw Lenin's *On Compromises* they were indignant that a rightist course was being proposed.

Slutsky, from the Petrograd Committee, argued on 7 September:

'As in the factories, so among the poverty stricken peasants we see movement leftwards. . . For us to consider compromises now is ludicrous. No compromises! . . . Our task is to clarify our position and to prepare unconditionally for a military clash.'

In fact Lenin himself was quickly moving towards the same conclusion. The crisis had matured. Delay

would prove fatal. The Bolsheviks must launch the insurrection.

Lenin's views were communicated to the Central Committee (CC) in a number of letters and discussed on 15 September. Lenin argued that the forthcoming Democratic Conference to which the Bolsheviks were aiming to send a sizeable delegation, would not resolve the problem it was due to debate—the question of the government. He expressed his belief that the Mensheviks and SRs would weight the conference in favour of the petit bourgeoisie. It would deceive the peasants and the workers. At the same time the authority of Bolshevism was increasing all of the time. He wrote:

'We have the advantage of *certain victory*, for the people are already near to exhaustion and after showing them the importance of our leadership in the "Kornilov days", and then offering the bloc members a compromise and *having it refused by them* amidst vacillation on their part which has continued ever since, we are giving the whole people a sure way out.'

That way out was a Bolshevik government which could only be installed by smashing the reformist leadership and the whole bourgeois state apparatus out of the way. All the efforts of the Bolsheviks should be directed towards the factories and barracks, not the Democratic Conference.

He argued that the Democratic Conference should be told that if it does not accept the Bolshevik programme in full then there will be an insurrection. And, anticipating opposition to this course of action from within Bolshevism Lenin opened the struggle with the vacillators by declaring that the waverers should be left 'in the waverers camp'.

Lenin's new course hit the CC like a bombshell. Copies of the letters were destroyed for fear that they might get beyond the CC. Nobody, at that stage, favoured an immediate rising. The Bolshevik plans for the Democratic Conference had been framed along the lines of the *On Compromises* policy. The declaration to the conference called on the conciliators to break with the bourgeoisie and transfer power into the hands of the soviets. It addressed a series of demands to the conciliators but not, as Lenin argued, in the form of an ultimatum.

The Democratic Conference, which opened on 14 September, was itself a factor in winning more Bolsheviks over to Lenin's insurrectionary views. He proved right as to its composition. Delegations were carefully weighted and on the day the Bolsheviks—increasingly a majority in the soviets—were in a tiny minority at the conference. There were 532 SRs (of whom 71 were Lefts), 530 Mensheviks (only 56 Internationalists amongst them) and 134 Bolsheviks. The urban working class areas were grossly under-represented.

With such a composition the conference, not surprisingly, voted for yet another coalition between the Soviet parties and the Kadets who, only a few weeks before, had worked hand in glove with Kornilov. The conference went on to establish a council, a Pre-Parliament, which was there merely to advise the Provisional Government.

This experience convinced Trotsky and Sverdlov

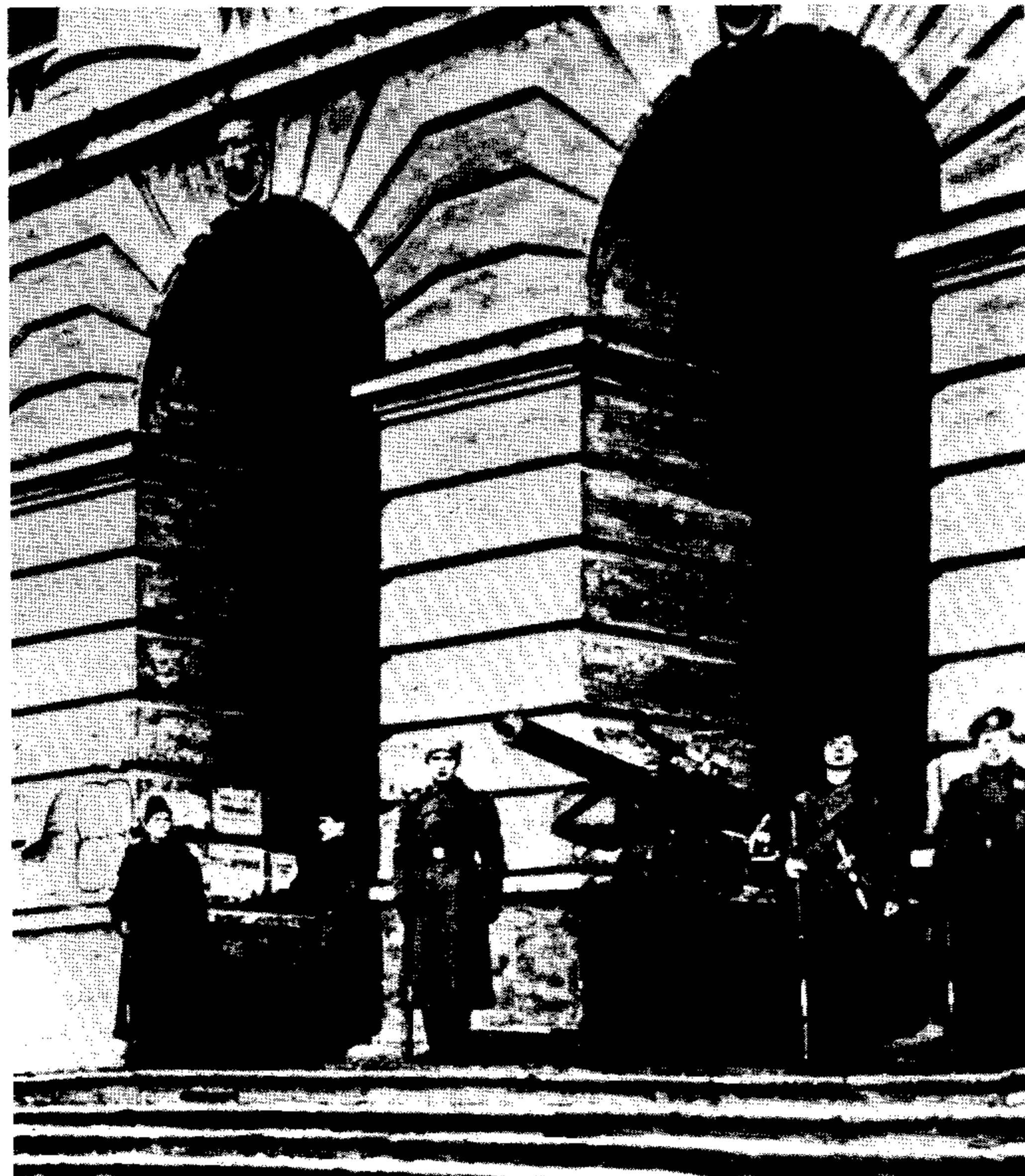
*'In order that the peasant might clear and fence his land, the worker had to stand at the head of the state: that is the simplest formula for the October Revolution.'*

that 'All power to the soviets' could now only be achieved against the conciliators. It became for them a slogan for an uprising. By the middle of the conference they were moving visibly closer to Lenin's position.

The dispute over the rising now took the form of a dispute over whether or not the Bolsheviks should boycott the Pre-Parliament. Trotsky favoured such a boycott and fought for it in the CC. He won 9-8 but the closeness of the vote prompted the CC to consult the Bolshevik delegation at the Democratic Conference. The delegation very much represented the regional and city committee men rather than the party rank and file. They tended to lean to the right. To Trotsky and Lenin's extreme annoyance they voted 77-50 in favour of participating in the Pre-Parliament. Lenin wrote:

'Trotsky was for the boycott. Bravo Comrade Trotsky! Boycottism was defeated in the Bolshevik group at the Democratic Conference. Long live the boycott. We cannot and must not under any circumstances reconcile ourselves to participation. . . There is not the slightest doubt that there are noticeable vacillations at the top of our party that may become ruinous.'

Nevertheless, the tide in the Bolshevik Party was turning in Lenin's favour. His letters had become known about in wider circles of the Party. Fresh forces were elbowing their way into the debate supporting Lenin's line. His impatience—even his threat to resign from the CC—was slowly bearing fruit. The first victory came when the CC, on 5 October, finally decided to boycott the toothless Pre-Parliament. This



Smolny on the eve of the insurrection

act announced Bolshevism's conviction that the future of the revolution now lay exclusively in the struggle for soviet power. As Trotsky wrote:

'We left in order to say that only soviet power can raise up the slogan of peace and toss it over the heads of the international bourgeoisie to the proletariat of the entire world. Long live the direct and open struggle for revolutionary power in the country.'

That walk out received the virtually unanimous endorsement of factory resolutions from throughout Russia. It signalled that the proletariat had seen enough of their leaders' wheeling and dealing with Kerensky and the bourgeoisie. Now was the time for something completely different.

On 10 October the CC met again to consider Lenin's views. This time he had donned his disguise (according to Kollontai he looked like a Lutheran minister) and attended despite the risk of arrest by Kerensky's police. Lenin's resolution added a new dimension to his view of the situation—a rising in Russia could spark a European wide revolt.

So important did Lenin regard news he had heard of disaffection in the German fleet that he began his resolution by noting 'the international situation as it affects the Russian Revolution'. This aspect of Lenin's strategy has been systematically downplayed by the Stalinists whose doctrine of 'socialism in one country' contradicts a vital element of Lenin's Marxism.

The meeting came to a vote on Lenin's resolution. It was clear that the line of divide was between settling the fate of the revolution by staging a rising in the immediate future or the postponement of the rising and the acceptance of the role of 'opposition' in a 'democratic' (i.e. capitalist) Russia. The resolution was clear:

'Recognising that an armed uprising is inevitable, and the time fully ripe, the Central Committee instructs all party organisations to be guided accordingly and to decide all practical questions from this standpoint.'

The resolution was adopted 10-2. The two vacillators were close comrades of Lenin's, Zinoviev and Kamenev.

These two men opposed the rising from the day Lenin first argued for it to the fateful day itself. Kamenev in particular, was a consistent right-winger in the party who had never really been reconciled to Lenin's *April Theses*. As late as August Kamenev was still trying to build bridges to the Second International by speaking openly in favour—that is, against agreed Bolshevik policy—of attendance at a proposed reformist peace conference at Stockholm. In the aftermath of Kornilov's attempted coup he leapt at Lenin's *On Compromises* and proceeded to give it an extremely right-wing and constitutionalist

interpretation. Thus when Lenin changed tack and argued for a rising the CC minutes record that Kamenev proposed:

'After considering Lenin's letters the CC rejects the practical proposals they contain, calls on all organisations to follow CC instructions alone and affirms once again that the CC regards any kind of demonstration in the streets as quite impermissible.'

This proposal was rejected by the CC, which did not yet want to write off Lenin's proposals altogether.

Kamenev was playing on the fear, 'the convulsion of doubt' as Trotsky called it, that lingered in the party after the July defeat. In so doing he was able to enlist wider support than he had ever enjoyed prior to July. In particular he won over Zinoviev.

Zinoviev was wedded to the idea that, with the defeat of Kornilov, Lenin's perspective of peaceful development via 'All Power to the Soviets' had become timeless. And, in the event—not at all certain—that the forthcoming Second National Congress of Soviets took place, then the influence of Bolshevism would grow and grow. Zinoviev's gradualism, centred more on life in the soviets than Kamenev's, expressed itself in an article he wrote on 27 September:

'In our view the all-powerful authority over the Russian land is the Congress of Soviets opening on 20 October. By the time the Congress convenes, if it is able to meet at all, the experience with this new coalition [under Kerensky—WP] will have failed and wavering elements will at long last associate themselves with our slogan, "All power to the soviets". Each day will witness a growth in our force.'

In this perspective key decisions are left to chance and to fate.

Zinoviev and Kamenev, with support from other prominent Bolsheviks like Nogin, Rykov and Riazanov, argued that Lenin's call for a rising was premature. The time was not ripe. The masses were supposedly not yet ready. In particular Kamenev harboured the belief that a coalition of soviet parties including the Bolsheviks (something Lenin vehemently opposed) might emerge from the Democratic Conference.

Thus, while Trotsky was hammering away at the need for soviet power in every address he made to that conference, Kamenev argued:

'The only possible course is for state power to be transferred to the democracy—not to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, but to that democracy which is well enough represented here. We must establish a new government and an institution to which that government must be responsible.'

At a Presidium meeting he went on to assure the Mensheviks and SRs of Bolshevik support for a government that was a 'homogeneous democratic ministry'. He stated:

'We will not overthrow such a government. We

will support it insofar as it pursues a purely democratic policy and leads the country to the Constituent Assembly.'

'Support insofar as' was the rotten old formula he and Stalin used back in March and against which Lenin's *April Theses* were directed. It made its reappearance at the Democratic Conference.

Even the debacle of the Democratic Conference and the Pre-Parliament failed to budge Kamenev. He resisted a boycott right to the end.

The decisive clash with Lenin and Trotsky came a week after the historic 10 October meeting. A much larger CC was held on 16 October with representatives of various other committees also in attendance. It revealed that the vacillators represented a strong current in the party. Although Lenin's resolution for an insurrection was passed once again 19-2, a proposal from Zinoviev, to wait until the Second Congress of Soviets, was defeated 15-6. This resolution—sharply counterposed to Lenin's given that it was not yet certain the Congress would be convened—showed the extent of support for Zinoviev. Those forces were only for a rising in the abstract. Notables such as Kalinin spoke of the rising as a far off event. Nevertheless the die was cast.

Faced with this decision Zinoviev and Kamenev

betrayed the party. They immediately circulated a letter against the decision to the members. More clearly than ever before it revealed the deeply opportunist kernel within their perspective. They asked if Russia was ripe for insurrection and replied 'No, a thousand times no!!!'. They pinned all their hopes on the 'excellent' chances that the Bolsheviks had of becoming the biggest opposition in the Constituent Assembly. And they argued—as did the reformist Rudolf Hilferding some years later—that soviet power and bourgeois democracy should be combined:

'The Constituent Assembly too can only rely on the soviets in its revolutionary work. The Constituent Assembly plus soviets—here is that mixed type of state institution we are going towards.'

In effect they wrote off the crisis that had engulfed Russia as something a yet to be convened Constituent Assembly could solve. As Trotsky later noted this perspective was based on 'fatalist optimism' which binds:

'... the proletarian vanguard hand and foot, and by means of the "democratic" state machinery turns it into an oppositionist shadow of the bourgeoisie bearing the name of Social-Democracy.'

While their action in opposing the rising could be

explained as a mistake and while their campaign to reverse the decision of 16 October in the party was a breach of democratic centralism, their next move was, as Lenin said, strike-breaking. In an article in Gorky's non-party paper, *Novaya Zhizn*, Kamenev publicly declared his opposition to the CC decision for a rising. He did so even though that decision had, obviously, not been published for security reasons. Kamenev was, in effect, giving Kerensky advance notice of the Bolshevik plan.

Lenin was resolute in carrying through the struggle against the vacillators, who had now turned into strike-breakers. Zinoviev had acceded to Kamenev performing this act of treachery and was branded as co-responsible by Lenin. In demanding their expulsion from the party, Lenin wrote:

'It is not easy for me to write this about people who were once close comrades but it would seem to me a crime to hesitate here, for a party of revolutionaries which did not punish prominent strike-breakers would perish.'

There is a lesson for every revolutionist here. The party had set its course towards the insurrection. That decision had been democratically arrived at. Zinoviev and Kamenev had put their case and lost. They went on to betray the party. For Lenin, at this

point, the struggle against vacillation could not be stopped half-way. It could not be suspended because these men were friends and comrades. The good of the revolution, the will to victory demanded that they be expelled.

As it turned out they were not thrown out. Stalin even published an editorial note on the affair criticising Lenin's tone and solidarising with Zinoviev. But, with this action Zinoviev and Kamenev destroyed their chances of reversing the party's decision.

Following the affair Lenin pressed, ever more impatiently, for the attack to be launched. On the eve of October, interpreting every delay as a potential new vacillation, he declared of the CC:

'I don't understand them. What are they afraid of... Just ask them if they have one hundred loyal soldiers or Red Guardsmen with rifles. I don't need anything else.'

In fact he had won. Delays from late October were caused by technical rather than political difficulties. Thus, when he arrived—without CC permission—at the Smolny late on the evening of 24 October, matters were well in hand. Lenin had brought the decisive subjective factor, the revolutionary Bolshevik Party itself, into line with the tasks and potential of the objective situation.

It was Trotsky and Sverdlov who perfected the means of achieving the proletarian seizure of power that Lenin was urging on the Party. That means was to be an armed insurrection organised by the Petrograd Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee timed to coincide with, and therefore pass power to, the Second Congress of Soviets. The remorseless struggle of Lenin and the party rank and file was now set to bear fruit.

Lenin had favoured a rising led by the Northern Region Congress of Soviets in mid-October. His impatience was leading him, if anything, to underestimate the task of preparing for the rising. His major allies against the vacillators—Trotsky, Antonov-Ovseenko, Bubnov and Sokolnikov—stood against him on the question of when and how to stage the rising.

While Lenin had sensed the mood of the workers for a rising and acted on it, those comrades who were in more direct contact with every sector of the masses, grasped the conditions under which the masses would actually stage and support a rising.

Their plan from the outset was to deliver power into the hands of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, through a rising organised in defence of that Congress against the Provisional Government's attempt to crush it and with it the revolution. Their tactics, from 16 October demonstrated the validity of their approach. By subverting the authority and military power of Kerensky from that date until the weekend of 21/22 October, they created the conditions of a certain victory on 24/25 October.

So clear was it that the masses wanted soviet power, and so successful were Sverdlov and Trotsky in their campaign to rally the soviets for the struggle for power, that Lenin was obliged to acknowledge the correctness of their line. The first shots in the campaign for the rising were fired during the garrison crisis which began on 9 October. Kerensky tried to move the bulk of the garrison out of Petrograd since it had largely gone over to the Bolsheviks.

The move, rightly suspected as a means of preparing a counter-revolution, was greeted with outrage. A meeting of the Egorsky Guards Regiment on 12 October resolved that:

'The pulling out of the revolutionary garrison from Petrograd is needed only by the privileged bourgeoisie as a means of stifling the revolution.'

The meeting went on to call for soviet power.

The Bolsheviks utilised this crisis, over the next week, to establish the Soviet's own Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC). Its task was to defend the revolution. The MRC was staffed by Bolsheviks, Left SRs and anarchists. But as the crisis deepened it was obvious that the Bolsheviks, and in particular Trotsky, led it.

The relationship between the Bolsheviks' own Military Organisation and the MRC, was a vital factor in the success of the insurrection. Trotsky effectively won the argument that the MRC was the appropriate organ of insurrection at the Central Committee on 20 October. In relation to the Military Organisation it resolved:

'... all Bolshevik organisations can become part of the revolutionary centre organised by the Soviet.'

Lenin was fearful of the rightist inclinations of the Party Military Organisation. It wanted to delay the rising for two weeks. He supported the view that the MRC should organise the insurrection and set out to convince Bolshevik military leaders Nevsky, Podvolsky and Antonov to accept it.

The party did not liquidate itself into the MRC. A precondition for victory had been Bolshevism's conquest of leadership in the mass organisations of the revolutionary working class. Through Trotsky the party led the MRC.

Once the MRC was established and had consoli-



## The Insurrection

dated its ties with the 25,000 Red Guards and the garrison the Bolsheviks stepped up the action. On 22 October a mass 'Day of the Soviets' was staged in Petrograd. Huge meetings in every proletarian centre in the city rallied to the call for soviet power. In the People's House Trotsky urged the masses on to the last battle after a vote for Soviet Power. 'Let this vote of yours be your vow—with all your strength and at any sacrifice to support the Soviet that has taken on itself the glorious burden of bringing the victory of the revolution to a conclusion and of giving, land, bread and peace!'

A frightened journalist for the reactionary *Rech* newspaper recorded: 'The vast crowd was holding up its hands. It agreed. It vowed...'

On 21 October the MRC declared that no orders to the army were valid unless countersigned by the

*'Slowly from the Red Square ebbed the proletarian tide... I suddenly realised that the devout Russian people no longer needed priests to pray them into heaven. On earth they were building a kingdom more bright than any heaven had to offer and for which it was a glory to die...'*

MRC. This was an act of mutiny that Kerensky, if he was to survive, could not tolerate. Indeed, when the MRC delivered this directive to the military chief in Petrograd he threatened to arrest their commissars.

It was an empty threat. The garrison's units all trusted the MRC. Kerensky had only officers, cadets and the women's battalion under his command.

As the MRC launched this mutiny the Baltic sailors, under the leadership of Bolsheviks like Dybenko, were preparing to back the rising. On the pre-arranged signal of 'Send regulations', battleships laden with revolutionary sailors were to come to Petrograd.

A participant recalls the scene when the order came through on 24 October:

'What did the Gulf of Finland around Kronstadt and Petrograd look like then? This is conveyed well in a song that was popular at the time—

'From the isle of Kronstadt  
Toward the River Neva broad  
There are many boats a-sailing  
They have Bolsheviks aboard...'

Kerensky was well aware that a rising was imminent. Knowing that the Soviet Congress would sound the death knell of his regime he attempted to move into action. On 24 October he ordered the arrest of the MRC and of recently released Bolsheviks and the closure of the Bolshevik press. His few loyal troops were ordered to raise the bridges that separated the government buildings from the workers' districts.

With calm resolution Trotsky ordered the MRC into action. The Bolshevik print shop was re-opened by troops and Red Guards. Smolny, the headquarters of the Soviet and MRC, was turned into an armed camp.

Two figures symbolise the fate of the revolution in this hour. Kerensky, full of bombast, posing incessantly, pleaded for support from yesterday's bourgeois institutions—the Pre-Parliament and the officers 'in charge' of Petrograd. Lenin, still on the run, made his way to the Smolny discussing events with a conductress on a streetcar. A few hours later Lenin was addressing the Congress of Soviets, the new power in the land. Kerensky was on the run.

Beside himself with impatience Lenin had arrived at the Smolny to discover that the insurrection was underway at last. Victory seemed more and more certain as the morning of the 25th wore on. Stations were swiftly occupied. The mere shining of the cruiser Aurora's arc lights across the Nikolaevsky Bridge put its Cadet guards to flight. Two hundred workers and sailors immediately secured it. The telephone exchange, state bank and all key junctions

were taken by the forces of the MRC.

BY 10.00a.m. on 25 October the MRC declared:

'The Provisional Government has been overthrown. State power has passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the Military Revolutionary Committee which stands at the head of the Petrograd proletariat and garrison.'

In fact the government was cowering in the Winter Palace. The remainder of the day was like a tense waiting game. More and more insurgents gathered at the Palace. The Congress of Soviets prepared to open. One last push was necessary. The Winter Palace had to be stormed. Kerensky himself slipped away in search of support outside Petrograd.

After a series of delays—including comical ones such as the forgetting to bring along the red lantern which had been agreed on as the signal for the attack—the Palace was taken with virtually no bloodshed.

A force of Red Guards and sailors stormed the Palace after the Aurora fired her blank shells. The Cadets and junkers gave up without a fight. Revolutionary discipline preventing any looting and a bourgeois reporter was compelled to admit that no members of the women's battalion suffered physical or sexual abuse at the hands of the insurgents.

With the Winter Palace secure the rising was complete in Petrograd. Victory in the whole of Russia followed. That it did so was due to the steadfastness of the Bolsheviks and the decision of the Second Soviet Congress to accept the transfer of power into its hands. It did so in recognition of the fact that the MRC has acted to save the revolution. Its vote was a vindication of Trotsky and Sverdlov's tactics and of Lenin's guiding strategy.

The last of the compromisers, the Menshevik Internationalist leader Martov, declared the rising to be a Bolshevik coup against the soviets. The workers, soldiers and peasants answered him with catcalls and hoots of derision.

Rebutting their claims that the Bolsheviks had usurped power a young soldier jumped to the platform and stated:

'I tell you now, the Lettish soldiers have many times said "No More Resolutions! No More talk! We want deeds" the power must be in our hands! Let these imposter delegates leave this Congress! The Army is not with them.'

With that hundreds of working people began to sense the power they held and the correctness of the Bolshevik proposals.

Above all else, the October events proved beyond doubt the viability of proletarian power. They showed the truth of the maxim that no ruling class ever gives up without a fight. Against today's Kerenskys—the Kinnocks of this world—we assert the absolute right and necessity of all the exploited in Britain and worldwide, to heed the example of the Russian workers. Do not try to tinker with the bosses' system. Do away with it. And in so doing we will open up new horizons for humankind.

As John Reed, a chronicler of the revolution, noted after a huge demonstration of Russian workers in Moscow in the days following victory:

'Slowly from the Red Square ebbed the proletarian tide... I suddenly realised that the devout Russian people no longer needed priests to pray them into heaven. On earth they were building a kingdom more bright than any heaven had to offer and for which it was a glory to die...'

Seventy years on that kingdom has yet to be built. But October 1917 has, more than any other event in history, placed it within our grasp. We must learn its heroic lessons, and act on them.



FOR WELL over three years the Sri Lankan government of President Jayawardene has tried to impose a military 'final solution' on the struggle of the Tamil people. Despite arms from Pakistan, military training from Israel and the support of the Sinhalese majority within his country, he has failed. The grim determination of two to three thousand Tamil Tigers (as the guerrillas of the LTTE are known) had kept the much larger Sri Lankan army at bay.

But what the undisguised foe could not achieve, the treacherous ally threatens to accomplish. In the name of a 'peace' accord Rajiv Gandhi has let loose his dogs of war on the Tamils. Up to 20,000 Indian troops began an offensive on 10 October which aimed to destroy the Tigers' military power once and for all, and clear the way for a political settlement in which provincial autonomy will displace the Tamils' desire for a separate state. How has it come about that Gandhi, who as recently as May this year was hailed as a saviour by the Tamil people for breaking Jayawardene's blockade of the peninsula by airlifting food from India, now seems intent on butchering hundreds of Tamil civilians in order to disarm the LTTE?

To understand the role of Gandhi's diplomacy since 1984 it is first necessary to grasp the cause of the national hatreds in Sri Lanka. The brutal truth is that the pogroms, the 10,000 or more Tamil deaths since 1983 at the hands of the Sinhalese, are a bloody legacy of British imperialist rule of the island from 1802 to 1948. Incapable of policing a huge empire with its own troops or administration, Britain developed a world wide system of turning their colonial slaves against themselves by selecting out a minority, destined to carry out its rule and oversee its exploitation of the majority of the people. To do this it had to extend them privileges in terms of access to jobs, education etc.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka have always been a minority, some 18% of the population. Tamil speakers form a majority in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. These Tamils are descendants of the Tamil Nadu people in south west India. However, more than half of today's Tamils are in fact the tea plantation workers of the southern highlands whose ancestors were forcibly brought to Sri Lanka in the last century by the British.

The northern Tamils were the indigenous elite of Sri Lanka. They held over 60% of the civil service posts, they had better access to education and rooted themselves firmly in commerce. This divide and rule tactic served to foster the hatred of the Sinhalese majority not only for the British but also, and more immediately, for the Tamils.

In 1948 when independence produced universal suffrage, the tables were turned. The period since then has been one of unremitting discrimination against the Tamils by the UNP or SLFP Sinhalese governments of the day, each compet-

As Gandhi's troops seek to wipe out resistance, the Tamils are fighting back. Keith Hassell looks at the background to the conflict.



# INDIA OUT OF SRI LANKA!

ing with the other to summon up the worst excesses of chauvinism in the majority population. This time divide and rule served the pro-imperialist Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and landowners who have fostered this hatred whenever the difficulties of ruling a semi-colonial country, ruthlessly exploited by the tea barons of London, threatened to unify the Sri Lankan workers across the communal divide.

During the last forty years the conditions of the Tamil people have steadily deteriorated. Murderous pogroms have occurred against them in 1958, 1961, 1977, 1981 and 1983. In the latter year over 1,000 were killed. But these have been only the most spectacular forms of oppression. Today the Tamils hold less than 5% of public sector jobs and in education they are forced to endure the humiliation of 'standardisation schemes' in education whereby they must perform better to pass the same exams.

In the 1970's Sinhala was deemed to be the only official language, Tamil representatives in Parliament were banned and Sinhalese colonisation of the Eastern Province was sponsored by the government. Just like the Zionist settlements among the Arab majority in the West Bank such a policy could only serve to inflame the situation. The Tamils' lands, their livelihoods and then their lives were all threatened. Nor did it bring any real security for the Sinhalese settlers as recent events have shown.

Jayawardene's election victory in 1977 coincided with the appearance of the LTTE and other guerrilla groups. They were no longer prepared to accept the unending brutality of Sinhala chauvinism. In addition they were not prepared to accept the passivity of the bourgeois

Tamil organisations like the TULF, still less the servile collaboration of other Tamil leaders, such as the union leaders of the Tamil tea workers, in this oppression. Whereas the Tamils at one time only aspired to achieve language rights and an end to discrimination, the persistent repression had unified the Tamils into a people with a national identity and a belief that only separation from their Sinhalese overlords would bring relief.

In the early 1980's the economic situation of Sri Lanka worsened dramatically with the world recession. Large falls in commodity prices hit export earnings which in turn forced Jayawardene to beg at the table of the IMF. To prevent resistance to austerity cuts in subsidies, services and jobs the government fanned the flames of chauvinism even higher and in addition passed law after law curtailing the powers of the press, the opposition and parliament itself. In 1982 elections were banned for six years.

Jayawardene's contempt for the Tamils was total. After the 1983 pogrom he stated:

'I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people. Now we cannot think of them, not about their lives or their opinion.'

It was because of these sentiments and the pogroms that the Tigers grew in strength after 1983. Full-scale fighting dates from early 1984. Before that there were only sporadic raids. The Tigers' success in hitting the Sri Lankan army, its effect on decimating the tourist industry, and so still further aggravating the economic situation and the growth of the military budget, forced the government to listen to the good offices of the imperialists and their local agents like Gandhi. The imperialists wanted a

political settlement which would 'create a favourable business environment'. Gandhi, himself under some pressure from his supporters in the state of Tamil Nadu, was prepared to act as midwife.

Some form of talks have thus been a permanent feature of the last few years. First it was the All Party Conference throughout 1984 which ended in failure when the reactionary clergy (Sri Lanka's largest landowners) balked at the mildest of concessions to the Tamils. Intensified IMF pressure in the spring of 1985 led to more talks, this time involving India.

The Tamils should not have needed Gandhi to wash his hands in their blood to have realised the reactionary purpose of his intervention. Gandhi's record in denying to the peoples of India the right to self-determination and his party's repeated fanning of the flames of religious and communal antagonisms for electoral gain should have been enough warning. It was impossible that Gandhi would tolerate the idea of a 'socialist' or even independent Tamil Eelam state offshore from Tamil Nadu with all its potential for inflaming the nationalist fervour inside India. Seeking to utilise the Tamil struggle to establish a sort of protectorate over Sri Lanka, he had no intention of allowing the Tamils to freely determine their own future.

Irritated with the Tigers for the failure of the July 1985 talks Gandhi ejected two prominent Tamil leaders from India and gradually placed restrictions on the activities of the Tigers in Tamil Nadu which they used as a base of operations.

Since 1983 over 10,000 Tamils have died. Over 200,000 have been forced to flee for safety to India. Throughout all this Gandhi has

mouthed platitudes, feigned sympathy and actively aided and abetted Jayawardene in trying to force the Tigers to give up on their struggle. Of course, the interests of Sri Lanka and Gandhi are not identical. Jayawardene preferred to crush the Tamils rather than make any concessions. To this end he blockaded the north in January this year and then launched a major offensive in May. But the intercession of India in June brought it home to the government that a purely military victory was not possible without Indian backing.

The UNP were therefore forced to make some concessions regarding 'provincial autonomy' while stopping short of giving the Tamils real power. The accord of late July, however, was made without reference to the LTTE. While not condemning it they did not endorse it. They correctly refused to give up any but the most ancient and ineffective of their arms until the Sri Lankan army was disarmed and removed. Having failed to seduce the LTTE with the shadow of political power the 26,000 Indian troops have decided to impose the solution, if necessary on the bones of the Tigers and the Tamil people, using the 'moderate' TULF figures to sanction the outcome.

As Marxists we do not share the Tigers' goal of a separate Tamil Eelam. A tiny Tamil state based on the most impoverished parts of the island would be at the mercy of imperialism even more than Sri Lanka as a whole is now. Only an integrated workers' republic, based on the restoration of the unity of the working class in Sri Lanka represents a genuinely progressive outcome to the struggle. The Tigers' actions are far from bringing this goal nearer. Their own petit bourgeois nationalism has apparently led them to react against their oppression by calculated acts of terror against Sinhalese workers and peasants not just the army or the goon squads of the settlers. This should warn working class militants — Tamil or Sinhalese — not to espouse any nationalism. Defence of oppressed nationalities is one thing. Adoption of a petit bourgeois ideology is another.

Nevertheless unity behind the relentless and brutal repression of the Tamils is worse, much worse. This is what the reformist political and union leaders of Sri Lanka have committed and it accounts for the present impotence of the labour movement. That is why all socialists should support the right of the Tamils to self-determination up to and including a separate state.

- Halt the Indian massacre of Tamils.
- Indian Troops out of Sri Lanka.
- Tigers, do not give up your arms. Halt all attacks on Sinhalese civilians.
- For the right of Tamils to self-determination, not Indian determination.
- For the unrestricted right of entry of Tamil refugees into Britain.

UNDER PRESSURE from the World Bank and IMF, Poland's General Jaruzelski is preparing a new attack on the working class. He is presenting a package of reforms to a referendum due to be held on 29 November. Following the well worn path of other Bonapartist dictators he hopes that the majority of Poles will back him and thus isolate working class militants.

Jaruzelski is under strict orders to introduce an austerity package to pay off Poland's \$35 billion debt. An austerity package, in a country with the lowest living standards in Eastern Europe outside Romania, will hit workers hard. The government is hinting that it will require 57% price rises next year, with only 49% pay increases in compensation. All

of this will result from ending food subsidies and introducing what the bureaucrats of Warsaw and Moscow call 'market prices'.

The Polish leadership is trying to sugar the pill sufficiently enough to get a 'yes' vote. Along the lines of Gorbachev's *perestroika* their package includes the chopping of several central ministries and the pruning of the central planning mechanisms. It includes greater autonomy for factory managers and less restrictions on private enterprise.

In addition Jaruzelski has hinted at recognising more independent 'social organisations' as well as letting their voice be heard through a

second chamber in the Polish parliament (the *Sejm*).

The referendum on this package is a blatant attempt to rally the most conservative elements of Polish society against the workers who would bear the brunt of the austerity package. It is tailored to win over those most influenced by the Catholic church and the social-democratic intelligentsia. That is why the offer of a second chamber is included. This was one of the demands of the Solidarity era that diverted the workers from challenging for direct power.

The Catholic hierarchy is being appeased by the recognition of its social organisations. Its social base in the mass of Poland's small-holding peasantry is being wooed by promises of greater private enterprise. The technical and managerial intelligentsia are promised greater freedom from central government.

There are already signs that Jaruzelski's package is causing confusion in the ranks of the Polish opposition. Walesa has yet to make a statement. But Jacek Kuron — one time leader of KOR and advisor to *Solidarnosc* — has made positive statements about Jaruzelski's initiative. So too have many Catholic

functionaries and intellectuals.

Polish workers must take no part in Jaruzelski's plebiscite. To vote 'yes' would be to cut their own throats. To vote 'no' would be to give credibility to this whole charade. In 1970, 1976 and 1980 the Polish workers blocked Stalinist austerity plans by their own independent mobilisations. They can and must do so again. In 1981 Jaruzelski broke their organisations in a military coup. The Polish workers must never recognise the regime of this butcher. That is why it is vital for worker militants to organise a campaign to boycott the November referendum. ■

## BOYCOTT JARUZELSKI'S REFERENDUM

by John Hunt

The MacBride Principles, to be discussed at a labour movement conference this month, are aimed at lessening the discrimination catholic workers face in the six counties. In these articles *Breda Concannon* explains why the fight against discrimination must take place in the trade unions and how this can be linked to the struggle to destroy the sectarian Orange State.

# TRADE UNIONS AND IRELAND

ON SATURDAY 28 November 1987 a trade union conference on employment discrimination in Northern Ireland will take place in London. Workers Power calls on all its readers and supporters to build for this important event. It offers a rare opportunity to break the conspiracy of silence and bureaucratic censorship within the trade union movement on the question of Ireland.

Support within the British Labour Movement for Ireland's long struggle for independence has often been muted and at best half-hearted. It reached its high point in 1920 when representatives of British labour attended a special conference of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress which called for 'the British army of occupation [to] be withdrawn'. The report of the conference stated:

'For the first time since 1914, the British and Irish Labour Movement were in true alignment on the great issue of Irish self government.'

Such sentiment did not survive the partition of Ireland in 1921-22. The TUC backed it because the protestant dominated unions favoured it. Although there was some initial support for the demands of the Civil Rights Movement in 1968 among some Labour MPs this was not reflected in the trade unions. They have consistently used their block vote at

Labour Party Conference to defeat Irish motions while vetoing any discussion on the issue of Irish Unity within the unions. They have used the same arguments as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to avoid discussing the issue of partition — claiming that it would split the movement.

At this years Nupe conference supporters of the LCI were forced to cancel a fringe meeting on Ireland under pressure from the executive. The subsequent report of the conference debate on the resolution from Leicester Hospital's branch calling for 'Troops out of Ireland' concentrated exclusively on the speeches opposing the resolution. However, despite these attempts to keep the question of Ireland out of the unions there has been some progress of late. This years NUR and Nalgo conferences passed resolutions in support of a united Ireland. There was also a series of fringe meetings at Natfhe, AEU, NUT, Astms and the T&GWU's conferences to promote the trade union conference on 28 November.

The central aim of the conference is likely to be focused around the adoption and implementation of the MacBride Principles — a set of equal opportunity/affirmative action proposals. As we have made clear elsewhere (see Permanent Revolution No 6) the MacBride principles are flawed responses to anti-Catholic discrimination. But the

obligation of the British trade unions to respond to this discrimination is no less urgent for that.

Delegates to the conference must fight to ensure that every British union that organises in the North pressurises their Northern Ireland branches to fight for equal job opportunities and freedom from harassment at work. This must go alongside the fight for a massive expansion of production and jobs paid for by the bosses and the British state and under workers' control. Each union should set up special committees to monitor pro-loyalist/anti-Catholic discrimination in the workplaces which can bring it to the attention of the union nationally and campaign for it to be fought.

Unfortunately the issue of Britain's presence and arguments for troops out are likely to get little mention if the conference organisers get their way. This is extremely short-sighted. It is essential to put discrimination in its historical and political context. First and foremost it is vital to bring home to delegates that discrimination against the nationalist population is in fact fundamental to the maintenance of the sectarian state that the British presence undermines the (all be it marginal) privileges of the loyalists. As such Britain has no progressive role to play there.

It flows from this that British trade unionists have a responsibility



Loyalist bosses and workers have no interest in fighting discrimination. Only abolition of the sectarian state can resolve the crisis.

to build an anti-imperialist solidarity movement to fight for 'troops out now' and 'self determination for the Irish people as a whole' (TONSD).

Contrary to the views of many of the supporters of the MacBride Principles Workers Power does not see this position as counterposed to the need to struggle for concrete reforms such as equality in employment. In fact any failure to do so will leave Thatcher, Haughey and Hume unchallenged. By taking up this fight we will aim to show in practice why the fight for TONSD

is the only effective way of smashing the sectarian state that breeds discrimination.

As the experience of so many other single issue campaigns on Ireland has shown like plastic bullets, strip searches and the PTA — such struggles around democratic demands do not in themselves automatically grow over into support for TONSD. A conscious struggle must be undertaken to win support for these positions. A renewed attempt must be made on 28 November. ■

# FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION

IN THE eighteenth century, Britain's colonial policy resulted in Ulster becoming an advanced industrial region through its full economic integration with British capitalism while the rest of Ireland stagnated. This industrial development along with famine in the countryside brought large numbers of catholics into the cities, in particular Belfast.

Low wages and periodic depressions made the long established protestant workers see the catholic newcomers as a threat resulting in a series of sectarian riots against catholic workers in 1857, 1864 and 1872.

By 1900 the establishment of systematic discrimination against catholic workers was a reality. In 1901 in Belfast catholics were 24.3% of the population yet in all areas of skilled employment they were under-represented: 15% of carpenters, 11% of plumbers 5% of millwrights,

9% of machine makers and 11% of fitters.

In 1921 the border was carefully drawn to ensure a majority for the protestants. Systematic gerrymandering and continuing discrimination leading to enforced emigration, ensured that it has remained that way, despite the higher birth rate amongst catholics. Discrimination became embodied in government policy.

As late as 1969 only 13 out of 209 professional and technical officers and 23 of the 319 higher admin officers in the Northern Ireland Civil Service were catholics. This was also the case in private employment, particularly in Belfast, where the effects of the expulsions in the 1920s continued to be felt. Even in 1970 there were only 400 catholics among the 10,000 workers in Harland and Wolff's.

Despite the claims of the British government little has changed since direct rule was introduced in 1972.

In fact there is evidence to show that things are getting worse. Between 1971-1981 catholic male unemployment rose 243% while the corresponding figure for protestants was 188%. Things could have been worse except for the historic exclusion of catholics from industries that went into decline in the 1970s. Catholics, not surprisingly, have not benefited from some of the fastest growth areas of employment such as the security forces and the prison service. (The local security services now employ 30,000 people and account for 10% of protestant male employment).

In 1976 the Labour government passed the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act which made discrimination on the grounds of religious beliefs or political opinion illegal. It established the Fair Employment Agency (FEA) to investigate reports of discrimination. This quango has proved even less effective than its counterparts in Britain, the CRE and the EOC in bringing about any real change in the pattern of employment. Its findings have either been ignored or doctored as in the recent report on the NI Civil Service where it covered up findings confirming fundamental inequalities within the service.

The MacBride Principles are a series of anti-discriminatory measures issued under the name of Sean MacBride in November 1984. They were largely drawn up by New York State Council officials sympathetic to the cause of the anti-unionists. They call on companies operating in Northern Ireland to increase employment opportunities

for members of under represented religious groups along with other anti-discriminatory measures. They also include some rather wrong demands calling on employers to provide 'adequate security' and 'ban sectarian emblems' at work. Their real significance is related to the fact that some 25 US firms operate in the North with around \$1.2 billion of capital. These firms account for some 11% of the manufacturing working class.

To date the MacBride Principles have been adopted by five American states: New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Jersey. Six others have legislation pending. These are California, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The Principles have also been endorsed by the American Federation of Labour/Congress of Industrial Unions, the US equivalent of the TUC.

The initial response of the British government to the Principles was to stigmatise them as a 'provo plot' and to claim that they would 'entail unlawful reverse discrimination'. They have appointed a full time career diplomat to lobby against them in Washington. They have also used people like Bob Copper, Head of the FEA and John Hume of the SDLP to campaign against their adoption in the States.

The British government's opposition to the MacBride Principles has now shifted to claiming that if they were imposed they would cause disinvestment in Northern Ireland. At the same time King is trying to outdo the MacBride Principles by promising new legislation with

'even tougher sanctions'. In the meantime, to fend off the growing bandwagon of support in the USA, the government has produced 40,000 copies of their new guidelines on *Religious Equality of Opportunity in Employment*.

These guidelines require employers to make a declaration of intent not to discriminate, otherwise 'the government will not place any government business with a company which is not the holder of a declaration of intent'. This should impress only the faint hearted. After eleven years no action has ever been taken against the 17 (out of 26) city and district councils nor the 185 (out of 415) engineering firms who have refused to sign the existing equal opportunity declaration.

While we have no faith in the Tories' plans to tackle discrimination, neither do we rely on US multinationals whose measures will also be tokenistic, if not optional or avoidable (similar to their support for the Sullivan principles for South Africa). In 1983, when Shorts won a large US airforce contract, they did nothing to implement pledges, extracted by US solidarity movements, to bring more catholics into its 6500, 95% protestant workforce. Moreover, measures such as providing adequate security for minorities at, and to and from, work are not ones we entrust to the British state, nor the RUC/UDR to perform.

We place our reliance on the working class and the methods of class struggle. We will fight to ensure that the trade union conference on 28 November is a step towards taking this fight into the unions. ■

**Class Struggle**  
The Workers' Republic Women's Liberation International Socialism

Imperialism in the Gulf The Russian Revolution 1917 The Marxism of Militant Sandinistas Selling Out?

**STOP HAUGHEY-ICTU SWINDLE**  
Strike Against the Cuts!

30p Irish Workers Group  
MRCI  
October issue

Subscription rates - for 10 copies  
£8 UK & Ireland  
£10 rest of the world

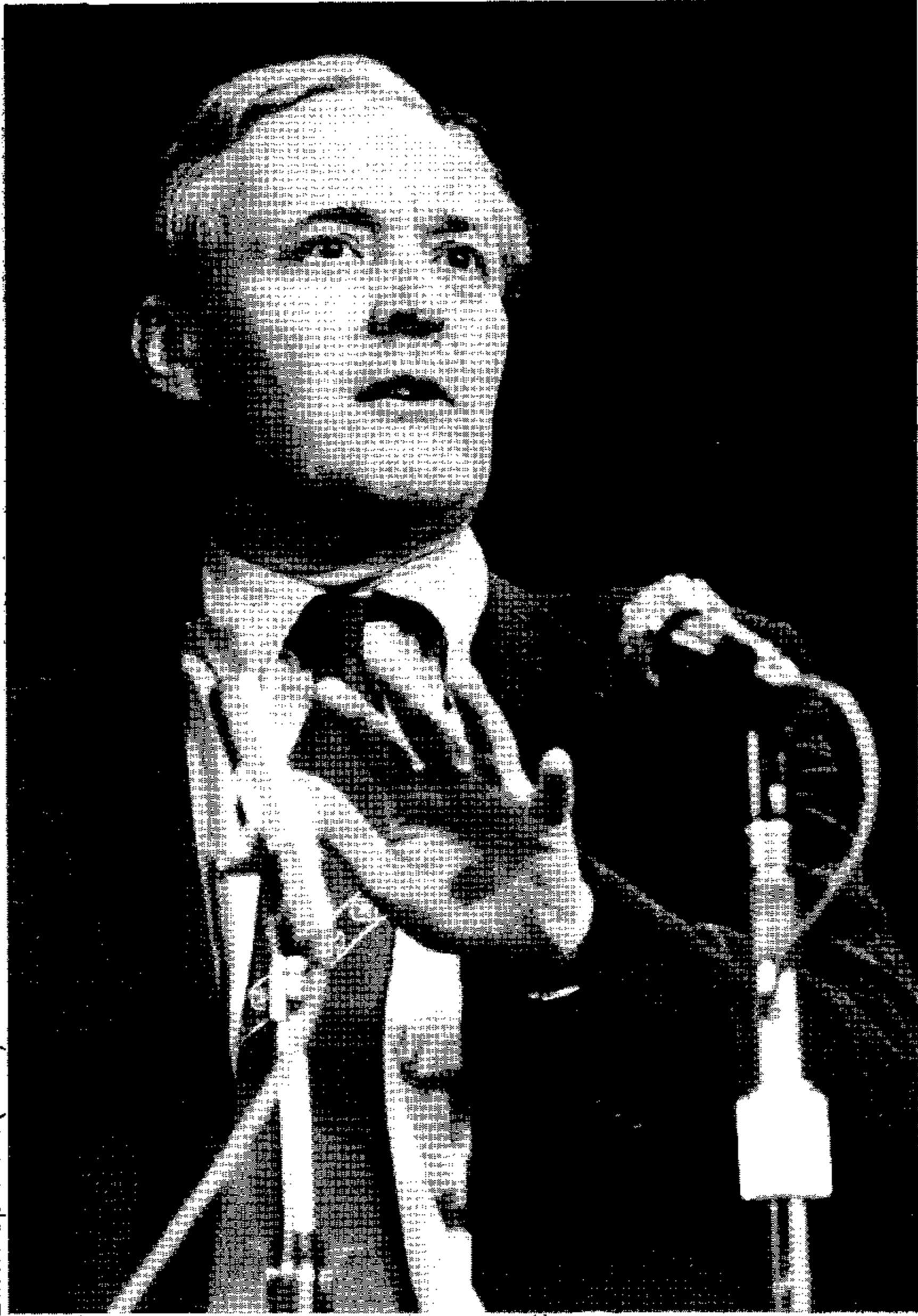
Send to: Class Struggle  
10 Langrishe Place, Dublin 1

**OUT NOW!**



LABOUR  
Party

# AFTER CHESTERFIELD WHERE NEXT?



Laurie Sparrham (I.F.L.)

**THE SOCIALIST conference held in Chesterfield on 24 and 25 October was certainly a success if the numbers attending was anything to go by. Some 2,000 delegates crammed the workshops and plenaries.**

Yet the official answers delegates got from the platform speakers to the questions that were worrying them were woefully inadequate. As in the briefing papers drawn up under the aegis of Tony Benn, the Socialist Society, the Campaign Group of MPs and the Conference of Socialist Economists, there was a heavy emphasis on the need for new thinking. The platform speakers in the majority had a theme. To attack 'individual Labour politicians and trade union officials' as betrayers is a dangerous diversion.

In fact all this is simply a plea to the rank and file of the labour movement not to learn from experience! Tony Benn's indulgence would appear to cover the 1974-79 Labour Government as well as Foot and Kinnock. Under cover of the claim that 'socialism can only be constructed by working people themselves' the leaders are to receive absolution. After all it is our fault because there was not sufficient socialist consciousness in the electorate to keep them on the rails. If the public was socialist then the electoral opportunism of the PLP leaders would keep them to the left automatically.

This semi-anarchist, or at least libertarian, argument thus shores up the bureaucratic elitism of the parliamentarians and the union officialdom. Real Leninism — the much maligned democratic centralism — has a totally different view of political organisation. It openly and unashamedly says that the job of leaders is to lead, to present a strategy and tactics for combat against our enemy and to oversee their implementation. In addition it is based on the absolute accountability of leaders to the rank and file; their regular election and indeed removal if they 'betray' or even if they make serious or systematic mistakes.

Why do the leaders of the Labour left make such heart rending pleas for avoiding personal recrimination? Partly because they are coned by the Kinnock personality cult. They are afraid that they will be accused of 'undermining Neil'

and that in doing so they will be accused of undermining the party and its electoral prospects for 1991. This stance in fact is a capitulation to the proposition that the leader somehow embodies the party and that electoral success is after all the royal road to power.

In the introduction to the Conference briefing papers we are told that 'Electoral politics tends to put tactics above strategy' and to 'inhibit the long term development of programme and ideas'. These formulations are hopelessly evasive. For the Labour Party electoral politics is the strategy. Therefore it has never had a programme or developed any serious ideas. Worse the authors of these papers share this fundamental strategic electoralism. We are told that:

'From the time of the Chartists and the suffragettes it has been accepted that the vote should be used to seek political power through election to parliament, or local authorities.'

Accepted by whom? Not by all of the Chartists, not by all of the suffragettes, not by all of the trade union militants or the rank and file of the Labour Party. A minority — but a strong minority amongst the real fighters of our movement — have never accepted that power can be won or if won held and used by constitutional parliamentary means.

They have argued, and we do today, that the ruling class will first prevent you winning an outright majority by fraud and force and second even if you did win, would, by force and fraud, prevent you from using it to achieve socialism. This Tony Benn calls pessimism. We call it realism.

Even if a Campaign Group dominated PLP could win an election and pack a cabinet, with Tony Benn or his successor as PM, and even if the ruling class played by the rules, the next Tory government would roll the 'socialist' boulder down the hill again.

The search for 'less vulnerable' forms of public ownership (joint municipal ventures, co-ops, user-controlled enterprises) which try to use private ownership against itself indicate the length reformists will go to and the fairy-tale visions and utopias they will dream up to avoid the crucial and simple questions of

which class controls the forces of coercion and which class owns and controls the means of production.

Both must be seized. If you realise this and make it the centre of your strategy, then electioneering falls into place as a tactic — one alongside others.

But how will we persuade millions of workers to take this road, if the left will not stop telling hopeless fairy tales about peaceful, electoral roads? From three to four million are on the dole. The health and educational services are in tatters. They need billions to turn them into decent services. The unemployed need factories, offices, schools, hospitals, building sites to work in and on.

Yet in one week a hundred billion can be wiped out in the City and threaten to add millions more to the dole queue. The massive problems of the late 1980s and 1990s are on a scale which dwarfs not only the wretched 'programmes' of Gould and Kinnock but also those of the Socialist Society, the CSE or the Campaign Group.

A debate on the programme the labour movement needs must not take place in a series of 'think tanks'. It should take place in the trades councils, the union branches, the constituency Labour parties, in specially convened conferences and also in the Councils of Action that it will be necessary to build in the coming struggles.

What is most important in that programme? We believe this must start from debating again the alternative 'Reform or Revolution?'. We do not believe that this was 'decided' in the 1840s in 1900, 1918 or any other time. It is a question that must be answered anew in every generation of struggle.

Clearly the conference organisers want to assume a reformist strategy and fine tune a new 'alternative strategy' to replace the decayed and bankrupt AES. We say that this would be labour lost and ink spilled in vain like the great policy making discussions of the 1971-74 period.

What we need is an action programme for working class power in the late 1980s and an organisation that not only makes propaganda for it but conquers the labour movement with it and wins leadership in the coming struggles — a revolutionary party. ■

## LCLGR TURNS RIGHT

by Chris Brind London Secretary LCLGR (in a personal capacity)

**THE FIRST ever General Members Meeting of the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) took place last month. It debated resolutions on a charter for the campaign, on AIDS, the age of consent, relations with the Liberal-dominated Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action (OLGA), and an emergency call for LCLGR to stop the retreat on lesbian and gay rights that is underway in the labour movement.**

The chance existed to turn LCLGR into a serious, fighting labour movement campaign. Alas that chance was squandered by the centrists of *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook* who dominate the campaign. They blocked with the pro-witch-hunt, pro-cuts reformists from the Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) and the Labour students (NOLS), against Workers Power.

The main issue was over whether LCLGR should have a charter of lesbian and gay rights around which it could mobilise support in the wider labour movement. Fearful of putting their reformist friends to the test, Peter Parton of *Socialist Action* and Jamie Gough of *Socialist Outlook* moved a resolution arguing:

'This GMM resolves not to adopt a charter at this meeting. We do not believe that it would be useful for

LCLGR to campaign around a charter in the labour movement at this time.'

This wrecking resolution, which only appeared on the day, was designed to scupper a resolution proposed by Workers Power supporters that would have committed the LCLGR to actually fighting inside the labour movement. Indeed, after the passing of this resolution 27 to 21, the meeting celebrated its commitment to doing nothing by voting its opposition to: '... adopting a definition of what constitutes fighting for lesbian and gay rights.'

So members of the LCC and other left reformists can say they support equal opportunities — while voting for massive cutbacks and attacks on lesbian and gay rights. Meanwhile LCLGR will take no position on their actions!

On the second day of the GMM the resolutions on AIDS and the age of consent, two of which had been referred from the AGM six months previously, were due to be taken. Amazingly — after a NOLS member introduced six pages of amendments to the AIDS resolution — the matter was yet again referred to the next AGM — six months away. LCLGR still has no position on AIDS. Unions like NUPE have adopted positions on AIDS quicker than this. On the age of consent *Socialist Outlook* moved a resolution stating that although they believed

the age of consent was not used to protect young people some young people believed it was. Therefore we should not take a position. So the other resolutions were referred to the AGM.

These decisions to sit on the fence on key issues has left LCLGR with no agreed policies to fight around in the labour movement. In effect it is a propaganda group with no propaganda!

We saw the logic of this unfold when a resolution was passed on autonomy which further restricts the campaign's capacity to win new forces to participate in our struggle. But the crowning glory of the whole event must go to the resolution submitted by the LCC and amended by *Socialist Outlook* which established LCLGR as the Labour Party section of OLGA — a cross class pressure group dominated by the Liberals (and some Tories) of the old Campaign for Homosexual Equality.

The forces supporting Workers Power positions were a sizeable minority. That minority will carry on a fight to build LCLGR as an action campaign in the labour movement. We will organise to campaign against the retreat on lesbian and gay rights and for a struggle to extend them. Clearly this means we must also fight to overturn the decisions of the GMM. We are committed to both courses of action. ■

## DEFEND LPYS

by a member of Leyton LPYS

**THE LABOUR Party Young Socialists (LPYS) now faces a major crisis. Under the leadership of Militant the LPYS has failed to mobilise against the NEC's attacks. Nothing has been done to stop the implementation of the Sawyer proposals.**

*Socialist Youth* is to be closed down. Membership is to be restricted by a bureaucratically imposed age-limit. And the inadequate decision-making rights of the LPYS are to go.

Yet, at the mention of the word 'fight', the *Militant* leadership break out into a cold sweat. Their fear of being expelled from the Labour Party is far stronger than their will to resist the attacks on the LPYS. All that the Militant leaders propose is a passive propaganda campaign in the labour movement, aimed at restoring the status quo (with all its bureaucratic deformations) at next year's conference. Along with this there is the *Socialist Youth* call to build a strong LPYS of under 23s. If this is not

a refusal to fight then what is? What is required now is an uncompromising fight against the witch-hunters and meddlers, a restoration of the sovereign rights of the LPYS conference — the only body with the right to make decisions about the future of the LPYS.

With a number of the regional LPYS conferences now being cancelled an emergency conference of all LPYS branches that are prepared to fight Kinnock's onslaught needs to be called. Such a conference must press on with defying and fighting the witch-hunting Sawyer proposals, up to and including being prepared to risk the expulsion orders that will be sent down from Walworth Road. Only if such a fight is launched will the prospect of building a real, revolutionary youth movement open up.

- Defiance not compliance!
- Defend the LPYS!
- Build a revolutionary youth movement!

# Workers power

## FIGHT ALTON FREE ABORTION ON DEMAND

**THE ALTON Bill to restrict abortion rights looks set to win widespread support. The tabloids are running a free advertising campaign for Alton, with larger-than-life pictures of fetuses alongside emotive comments about what the foetus 'likes', what it can do, how its brain and heart are functioning.**

The *Guardian*, having published one attack on Alton last month, has now compensated by allowing him the right of reply on at least two occasions and then carried a front page report of an opinion poll showing that 'most women' support a reduction in the time limit.

This press support seems to be matched by the balance of forces in the House of Commons with many MPs from all parties indicating their intention to vote for Alton.

In response to this torrent of anti-abortion lobbying, the activists around the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) and others have formed a new group FAB (Fight the Alton Bill). Based only on opposition to Alton it is a loose alliance of women from previous abortion struggles, left groups and even Liberal Party women.

The Campaign Against Corrie (CAC) in 1979 was the last big fight to defeat an anti-abortion Bill, and the leaders of FAB are looking to that as their model for this campaign. It is true that the Corrie Bill was defeated, and during the course of the campaign the sight of Len Murray leading 50-60,000 people on a TUC demonstration against Corrie must stick in many minds as the pinnacle of success for a women's issue being taken into the labour movement.

### WRONG

At the time Workers Power argued that CAC was wrong to base itself purely on a defensive struggle (to defend the 1967 Act) rather than fight to extend women's rights for free abortion on demand and the facilities to make that a reality for all women. The TUC and many of the large unions had, and still have, policy in support of extending the abortion provision. Yet they were only asked to mobilise to stop the Bill. The net result has been that, whilst Corrie was defeated we have seen abortion provision further eroded without the union leaders raising so much as a whisper in opposition. They felt they had done their bit for women's rights, and now insist they will recruit more women by offering credit and shopping facilities with union

membership rather than fighting to defend the interests of working class women members.

Apart from the Corrie campaign letting the TUC off the hook, it also depended for its success on the pressure of public opinion. Pro-abortion MPs filibustered the Bill in the committee stage — moving hundreds of amendments which didn't have time to be discussed. Eventually the government in refusing to grant the Bill more time allowed it to fall. Public opinion was clearly important, the government feeling it was not a central enough issue to risk uniting opponents from the camps of the unions, the women's movement and the medical profession. But relying on this method of fighting the Bill was always flawed. There was always the danger of it being carried if the government changed its mind.

### PROVISION

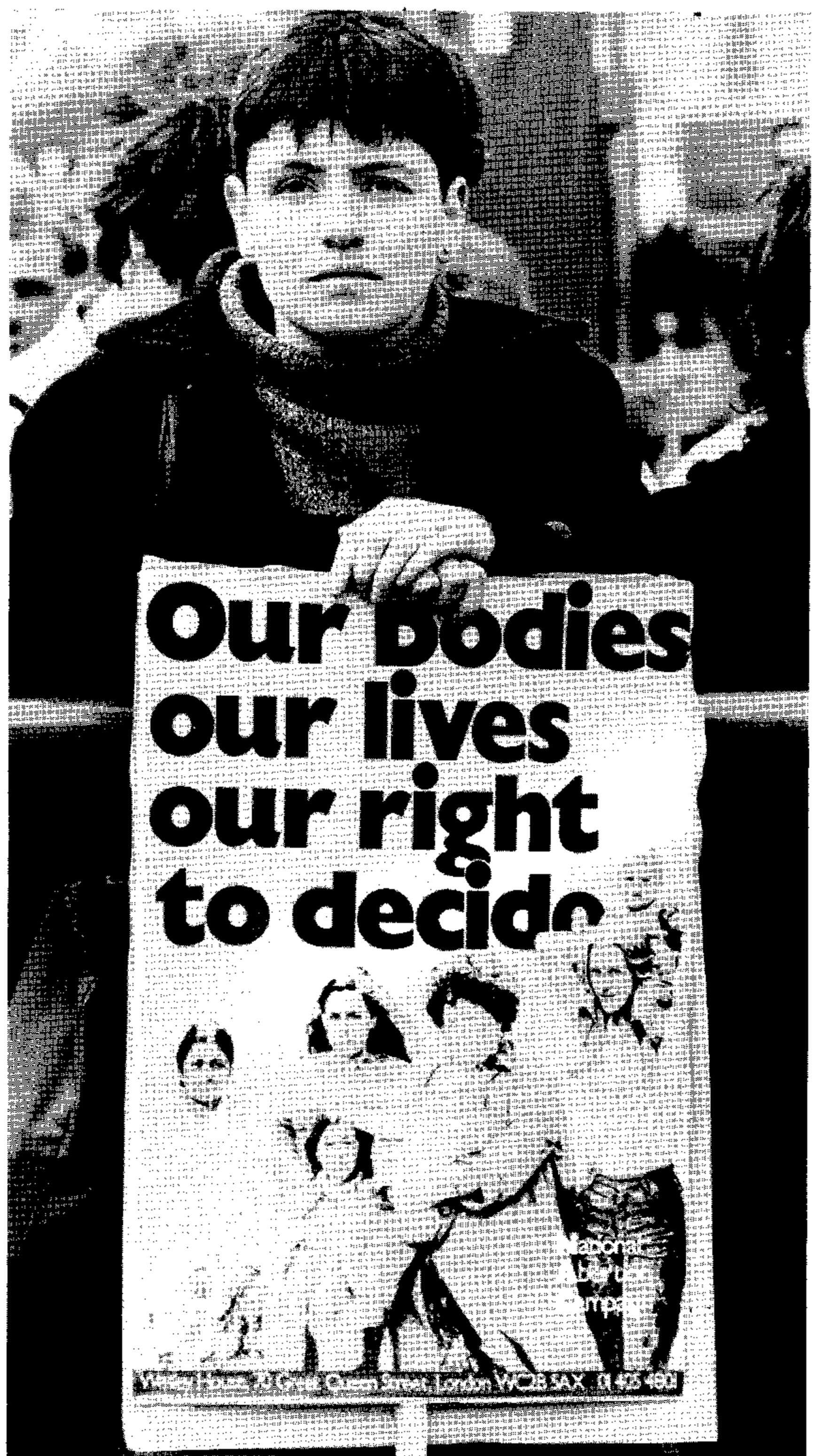
The situation we face now is very different to 1979. 'popular' opinion has been removed after eight years of the Tories in power. Women have been repeatedly told that it is their primary duty to look after children, sick or elderly relatives because there is no state provision or because 'community care' is considered more suitable. Full time jobs for women which require more social provision for children and other dependents have been eroded and replaced with part-time 'flexible' working. Young women have seen their access to sex education and contraceptive provision restricted by both the government and under the influence of reactionaries like Victoria Gillick.

In addition there has been an intense propaganda campaign from the anti-abortion lobby to push the 'rights of the unborn child', attempting to enshrine some protection for all fetuses in law by bringing legal cases such as those by men trying to deny pregnant women the right to abort 'their' baby, and the Powell Bill last year which tried to outlaw research on human embryos. We are constantly told that fetuses can survive from very early on in pregnancy, and colour supplements on Sunday show us how wonderful these scientific advances are, generally ignoring the high rates of disability amongst the children born this way.

This time round we can no longer expect the support of the medical profession for defence of the 1967 Act. Erstwhile pro-abortionists are succumbing to the arguments for a reduction in the time limit.

Now more than ever we must turn to those directly affected to fight the Alton attack. Working class women, young women in particular, will be affected by the Bill. But what are we asking them to fight for? The current leaders of NAC argue, just as they did in 1979, that within FAB we can only fight Alton. They say that if we try to win support for extension of abortion rights we will reduce the support, narrowing the campaign. But who are they afraid of frightening off? The doctors, MPs, Liberals and other middle class would-be supporters.

In reply we are saying that the only real force that can decisively defeat Alton and any other attacks on women's rights is the working class, the women and men whose families and lives will be affected by more unwanted children, more disabled dependents and the horrors of illegal abortions. If we are to mobilise these fighters to our side, to taking action through demonstrations, pickets, lobbies and strike action if necessary, we can't expect them to rush onto the streets in defence of a 'right' which largely applies only to middle class women!



Women must fight for labour movement support for their rights

We must build a working class campaign which fights for extended abortion and contraception facilities, freely available on demand for all women.

FAB groups are being set up around the country. We support these and will be building support for them in the labour movement. We will fight the Alton bill, but we will continue to argue that working class support should be won for a positive campaign for a woman's right to choose, and will take that

argument and calls for action into unions and Labour Party branches. By building such a campaign it will be possible to draw together working class women into the nucleus of a movement to really take the struggle for their rights forward.■

For details of the campaign contact:  
**Fight Alton's Bill Campaign**  
C/o Wesley House  
4 Wild Court  
London WC2B 5AV  
(01 405 4801)

## RANK EXPLOITATION

By Andy Hannaby (four years at Butlins) and Richard Gerrard

**BEHIND THE 'Hi-De-Hi' image of the British holiday camp seasonal workers and staff are forced to put up with appalling conditions — low pay and dilapidated accommodation.**

At Butlins, run by the Rank Organisation since the 1970s, the weekly wage, before tax, for a waitress/waiter is £51.25! This pathetically low sum is supposed to account for the on-site accommodation provided for staff by the company. The staff chalets, known among workers as 'sheds', are 10x10ft prefabs with asbestos roofs built in 1936 when Butlins first opened. Heaters and power points are recent additions though at Minehead they have not yet been installed. Minehead is a winter camp.

Meals are also provided for staff — they often bear an uncanny resemblance to food served up to guests days beforehand! As if this is not bad enough, Butlins' contract of employment prevents workers from gaining any of the basic rights to which full-time employees should be entitled. Sick pay and inclusion in the company pension scheme are denied to the staff for the catch-all reason that their employment is 'seasonal'.

This is little more than a confidence trick played by management. Some so-called 'seasonal' employees work 50 weeks per year! As long as their fixed term contracts expire and are renewed two weeks later they are still not regarded as full time and can never receive

rights to redundancy or unfair dismissal payments.

Management take full advantage of the lack of employment protection. As the dates of expiry of workers' contracts approaches, they will do their best to find a reason to summarily dismiss them. This is to avoid payment of bonuses which otherwise became due on leaving.

Management's reasons for such dismissals are imaginative to say the least. In the 1987 season at Skegness, workers were sacked for being found with two teabags in their shed, eating an ice-cream that a customer did not want and even dropping a plate in the kitchen. Butlins must save thousands of pounds by these vicious tactics.

The trade union movement cannot afford to let this situation go on any longer. If so-called 'seasonal' workers are not organised they can be used to undermine conditions that the labour movement has built up through decades of struggle.

Workers who are effectively full-time need to be treated as such. Decent pay levels must be established in tandem with a massive drive to unionise the camps and the whole catering/entertainments industry. The mainly young workforce is potentially militant but could fall victim to apathy and cynicism if left outside the organisations of the working class for much longer.■