

A Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

Sanctions against South Africa now!

see pages 6 and 7



A NEW

MONDAY 19 October a huge blow to the ideology and economy of Thatcherism. In one day 13 per cent was knocked off the value of the London stock market — 23 per cent off the value of shares in the United States. It was the single greatest collapse of the stock markets in one day in history.

Yet this is only four months after a general election was fought on the basis that Britain was sweeping to prosperity on a wave of share ownership. And only a month after Bryan Gould assured us at the Labour Party conference that a fundamental issue Labour had to face was to become a party of shareholders.

The real truth is the following. The crash on Wall Street means a new recession of the US economy even if shares should recover. The only issue is how deep and how long that recession will be. A US economic recession will send its effects throughout the world.

In that the issue of share ownership for workers will be seen for what it is — completely and totally irrelevant compared to their basic

1929?

issues of jobs, wages, conditions, and the survival of the welfare state.

As Tony Benn told Socialist Action: 'The Wall Street collapse, the panic in London, and the closure of the markets in other centres is the coming home to roost of policies which subordinate political, economic and social conditions to the play of market forces.'

'It explains why the election had to be held in June. It has established much more quickly than many people expected the total absurdity of basing Labour Party policy on share purchases by workers.'

And this is regardless of whether the stockmarkets continue a downward plunge or whether they are turned around. What is clear is that the carefully built up confidence in the 'Thatcher revolution' will not recover.

Monday 19 October was a major turning point in both British and world politics.

Socialist ACTION



The US attack on Iran

THE FEAR emanating from the world's financial markets almost overshadowed a second important event on Monday 19 October — the United States Navy's military attack on Iran with the bombardment of Iranian oil platforms in the Gulf. This was accurately characterised by the *Financial Times* as 'the most serious US move so far' in its undeclared war on Iran in the Gulf.

The Thatcher government immediately gave total support to the US attack — about which it had been informed in advance. The Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe indicated that British naval forces in the Gulf might take similar action when he said that any country with naval forces in the area might be called upon to take 'action in self-defence' similar to that of the US.

America's other imperialist allies in the Gulf rapidly followed the British example. The French Navy has begun live bombing practice in the area, Dutch and Belgian warships are on their way to back up Britain, France and the US. Even West Germany has agreed to send warships — in direct violation of its own constitution.

Within the US the Reagan administration's action has met the full support in the Democratic Party controlled Congress.

The US escalation of military action against Iran shows once more that its presence in the Gulf is nothing to do with its claim to 'defend freedom of navigation'. Iraq is continuing to step up its attacks on international shipping carrying Iranian oil with complete impunity.

The US intervention in the Gulf is aimed at dealing blows against Iran and propping up Iraq in the Gulf war — with the aim of stabilising US domination of the whole area.

In these circumstances socialists must defend Iran against imperialist attack — and demand that the British and other imperialist fleets are pulled out of the Gulf.

The latest US action shows once more that the campaign for an arms embargo against Iran is purely a proposal to disarm Iran whilst the US deploys gigantic military forces against it and must be opposed. The latest events should convince all socialists of this. The demand for an arms embargo must be dropped. Instead demands must be stepped up for immediate withdrawal of the US and British fleets from the Gulf and an immediate end to the attacks on Iran.

As of this issue the price of *Socialist Action* is increasing to 40p. We have managed to maintain the price at 30p since our launch in 1983. But with this issue we are overwhelmed, like the world economy, by uncontrollable price movements. We hope you will agree *Socialist Action* still represents better value than all its competitors.

The crash of '29

BY CLOSE of dealing on 19 October 1987 shares on the New York Stock Exchange had fallen 22.6 per cent in a single day. This surpassed the crash of 1929 when, on 28 October, shares fell by 12.9 per cent — and by 11.7 per cent the next day. History never repeats itself. The 1929 crash started a three-year slide which brought share prices down to just 15 per cent of their 1929 peak. No one can yet say how long the present slide will last. But the crash of '29 is the only thing this century which compares with what has just happened. What brought it on, what course did it take, and what followed it? Answers to these questions can give some insight into what is taking place today. ALAN FREEMAN reports.

LIKE all recessions in the history of capitalism, the basic cause of 1929 was a single, simple fact: decisions to invest, to buy, to sell, and to produce in a free market are taken by private individuals and companies. No one therefore decides what is going on. It is outside the control of any human agency.

As JK Galbraith summed it up: 'On the evening of the 28th (of October 1929) no one any longer could feel "secure in the knowledge that the most powerful banks stood ready to prevent a recurrence" of panic. The market had reasserted itself as an impersonal force beyond the power of any person to control, and while this is the way markets are supposed to be, it was horrible.'

Market

The market may be uncontrollable but it still has its laws. One is the cycle of boom and slump which has recurred unfailingly every five to ten years since the early nineteenth century — a cycle endemic to capitalism.

This law was at work in 1929 and determined that, as night follows day, the slump of 1921, and the boom years of the roaring '20s, were to be followed by the recession of the 1930s.

But 1929 surpassed all previous slumps in intensity — still swarming what has taken place so far in 1987. What explained it?

Like the crash we have just seen, 1929 came at the end of a prolonged 'bull' (rising) market in share prices which, by 1929, was fuelled by speculation. Share prices depended not on dividends paid out, or even expected dividends, but on the fact that investors expected prices to keep on rising.

Madhouse

They bought in order to sell. An economic madhouse in which share prices were expected to go on rising indefinitely had been created.

There is an element of speculation in every boom — which always tips it into a slump. However the expectations of 1929 were not just ill-founded. They were wild.

The months before the crash saw superlatives tripping off every tongue. 'Led by those mighty knights of the automobile industry, the steel industry, the radio industry... enthused one respected authority with a classical bent, "the market has gone forward like the phalanxes of Cyrus,

parasang upon parasang and again parasang upon parasang.'

As Walter Baghot wrote 50 years earlier: 'No one is so credulous as when they are happy.' No one who wants to understand the frenzy around Thatcher's privatisation proposals need look any further than 1928-29.

Then as now, even as it became obvious the market was built on air, no one could come out and admit it even as the world collapsed around them.

On the Friday before the really big crash on Wall Street, *The Times* told its breathless audience

that the financial community stood 'secure in the knowledge that the most powerful banks in the country stood ready to prevent a recurrence of panic.' Walter Teagle, the oil baron, said his business had known no fundamental change to justify concern.

The air resounded to 'fundamentals' — rather like Nigel Lawson in fact. Charles M Swab, the steel baron, said steel was making 'fundamental progress' towards stability. Samuel Vauclain, chair of the Baldwin Locomotive works explained that 'the fundamentals were sound'. President Hoover spelled this out for the hard of thinking: 'the fundamental business of the country, that is production and distribution of commodities, is on a sound and prosperous basis.'

Broken

'Fundamentally', the world was on the verge of its biggest recession of the century. The entire equilibrium of the world economy was broken up.

Though Britain had won World War I, its status as world economic leader was fast ending. And the USA of 1929 had not yet secured, through the recession and the war that followed, its position as world capital's new ruler.

The 1929 crash produced chaos, in large part, because no capitalist state could act as stabiliser of the system. 1929 divided the capitalist world into protectionist trading blocs which eventually resolved their differences on the battlefield.

Leader

Out of this chaos, the United States emerged as undisputed leader of world capitalism. One hundred million people died in World Wars I and II so that the centre of gravity of world capitalism would shift from Western Europe to the United States.

It has taken a further 40 years for the United States to exhaust these reserves and become incapable, again, of stabilising the world economy.

After 1929 the circle of

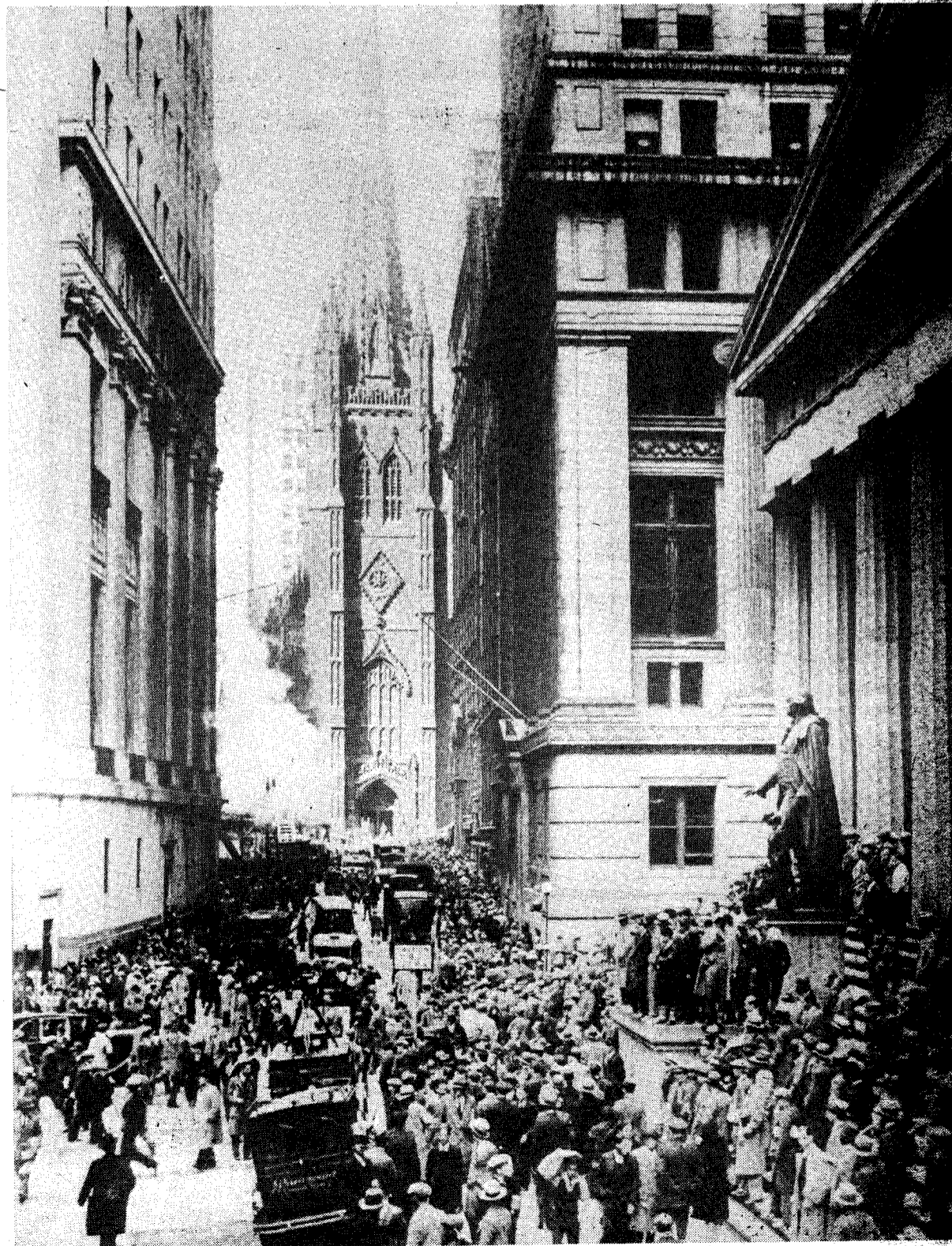
decline was clear. The stock market crash left individuals and firms unable to repay loans to banks — because they had borrowed money from the banks against the value of shares which had now been drastically devalued. So the stock market crash was followed by a banking crash.

Crash

And as the banks collapsed credit in the economy dried up and the US economy was dragged into slump. Then, to try to stabilise its domestic economy, the United States, like every other capitalist state in the world, turned to protectionism. And with protectionism the world economy collapsed into uncontrollable slump.

It is pointless to try to speculate what will happen now, in 1987. History never repeats itself and we can be absolutely sure that there will be no mechanical repeat of 1929.

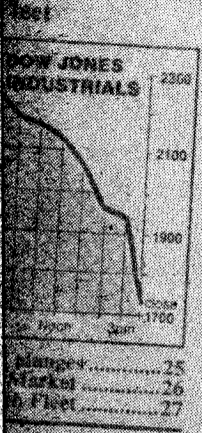
But one thing is certain. As after 1929, the world will never be the same again.



Street's blackest hours

The dollar dropped sharply. Mr James Baker, Treasury Secretary, went into urgent talks with the West German Finance Minister.

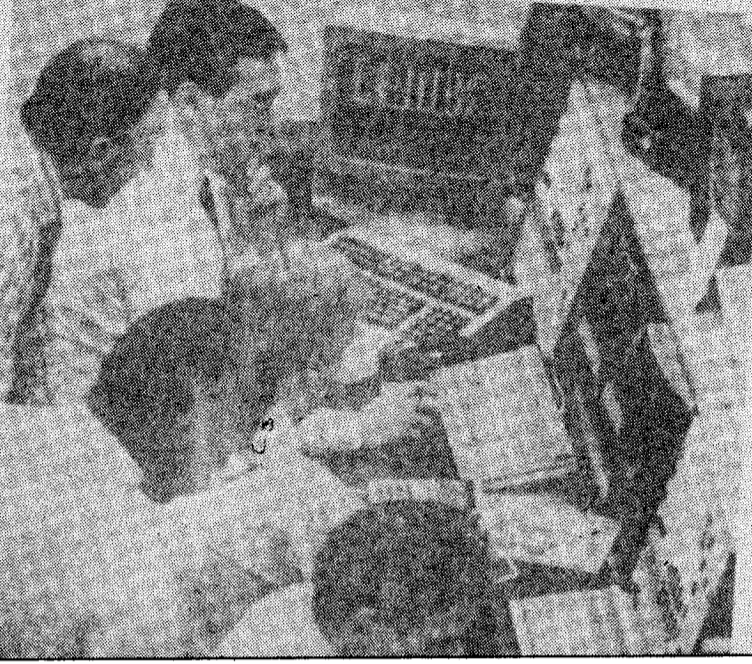
Oil and Petroleum shares plunged 34p down at the Government's offer price is 330p, but Treasury said the sale would go ahead.



In the foreign exchange markets the dollar wilted before the West German mark, while the pound remained firm but largely on the sidelines.

At the weekend the Germans seemed determined to raise their interest rates. This provoked a panicked reaction from Mr James Baker, the US Secretary of the Treasury, who declared that this was 'not in keeping with the spirit of what we agreed in Washington three weeks ago'.

The West German Finance Minister, Herr Gerhard Stoltenberg, seemed yesterday to step back from the brink. 'I assume', he said, 'that monetary co-operation with the US will continue.' Mr Baker has decided to visit Europe to bolster the Louvre accord, and last night said a surprise



Yuppies aghast at end of boom

From Charles Bremner New York

Crowds of dazed young brokers milled around Wall Street yesterday evening trying to come to terms with the unthinkable — the roaring Eighties, the years of easy prosperity, could be over.

As Mr John Pheasant, chairman of the Stock Exchange, sat in the ornate boardroom putting a brave face on the day's massacre, tireless young operators stood in the street and agreed: 'Maybe this is the big melt-down.'

'I've lost my shirt today as well as the money of a lot of

What now after the crash?

AFTER THE stock market crash what will happen next? That, of course, depends on whether the decline continues or is turned around.

On Tuesday 20 October, the day after the crash, the US and West German monetary authorities replied in textbook fashion. Every major capitalist economist claims to have learnt from the great crash of 1929 that the United States government made a catastrophic mistake, following the stock market crash, of allowing the US money supply to tighten.

The result was a great wave of bankruptcies and bank crashes which deepened the recession still further.

As official US economic theory, propounded by Milton Friedman and others, advocates a stock market crash should be met by expanding the money supply. This will allow those plunged into debt by the stock market crash to repay their debts and prevent a bank crash — or at least that is the theory.

On Tuesday morning the United States and West German monetary authorities therefore lowered interest rates — expanding the supply of money in the economy. The short term effect was to stabilise the situation. The New York stock market closed on Tuesday five per cent higher than Monday. But it was still a quarter lower than a week earlier.

But the reality is that such economic events as last Monday are not turned around by technicalities. They will force a fundamental reevaluation of the US economic situation and test the real reserves of the world capitalist economy.

What is absurd in this situation is for representatives of the British government, such as Lawson, to announce that the British economy is 'fundamentally sound'. It is literally absolutely irrelevant what the British economy does, or even what its underlying 'soundness' is. The fate of the British economy will now be totally decided by what happens in the United States. The present British government has no power to alter the situation whatever.

What is now taking place is that the United States has been informed by its competitors that they can no longer accept, or finance, the USA living above its means. It must seek a way out of its crisis at the expense of its own working class — not at the expense of other capitalist classes.

Theoretically US capitalism has two ways out of this situation — both of which will affect Britain drastically. And in practice, of course, the US will adopt a combination of both.

The first is that the US launches a new offensive against its rivals — a new trade and financial

war, to attempt to force them to submit. The second is that it drastically steps up its attacks on the working class inside the United States — and risks the political turmoil this might provoke. Certain trends are already clear.

The first is that there is going to be a sharp increase in transatlantic trade wars. It is the deficit in the United States balance of payments crisis that is unsustainable.

To turn that around greatly increased strains are going to be placed on its competitors in Western Europe and elsewhere — either by further devaluation of the dollar or by straightforward protectionism. A side effect will be an increase in militarism in Europe, as the West European capitals fear a breakdown in their relations with the United States — and of the US's ability to finance the 'defence' of Europe.

The weight of austerity attacks on the working class will increase as the European capitalist powers try to fight back against the United States.

Second the US is going to enter a recession — and a United States recession means a world recession.

Third all this is going to lead to vastly greater explosions in 'third world' economies. The United States will be forced to cut down its imports from all countries in the world — including 'third world' economies.

The West European states will inevitably attempt to off-load some of the consequences of increased US competition with the economies of the semi-colonial economies.

Already before the Wall Street crash there was increasing instability in countries such as the Philippines and South Korea. This is going to get worse.

Finally, it goes without saying, the crash means still greater austerity on both sides of the Atlantic. The US ruling class will turn to still sharper attacks on its working class. The British and West European capitalist classes will turn to attack their own working classes in order to fight back.

All this will be a product simply of what has taken place in the US economy so far. Even if, the US stock market were to bounce back, the loss of confidence and capacity for crisis shown would itself mark a turning point in the world economy.

What is going to take place will become rapidly clear over the next weeks. There is no point speculating — simply watch. Nonetheless a major turning point in world politics has just taken place.

Its consequence will be a sharp increase in attacks on the working class throughout the world — and greatly stepped-up crises in a whole series of countries.

Why the crash occurred

MONDAY 19 OCTOBER saw the greatest crash in share prices in a single day in history. The New York Stock Exchange fell by 23 per cent in one day — almost double the 13 per cent fall on 'Black Monday' 28 October 1929. As the *Financial Times* put it: 'Every word in the lexicon of fear was used to describe the mood on Wall Street as the market tried to open in the morning.' But why did the market collapse when it did? And what are going to be the consequences?

The collapse on Monday reflected the accumulated effects of the fundamental imbalances that have been growing in the world economy for more than a decade. In particular they reflect the still longer term decline in US supremacy in the world capitalist economy.

Since the 'oil shock' of 1973, and the worldwide recession which followed it, international capital has made some recovery in profit rates from the deep falls of the late 1960s and early 1970s. But this recovery is both insufficient, and in particular, it has occurred in a way that is fundamentally out of line with the real relation of forces between the capitalist states.

Growth

The real beneficiary in economic growth since 1973 has been the United States. From World War II until the early 1970s Western Europe grew more rapidly than the United States. Since 1973 Western European growth has fallen behind the US. The US has even reduced the gap between its rate of growth and Japan.

But this relative recovery of the United States has not been brought about by a real rise in the productivity of the US economy or its competitiveness. It has been brought about by the United States using its domination of the world economy, and its political leverage, to manipulate commodity, financial and virtually every other market to its advantage. Last Monday the real rela-

tions of forces in the world economy took a terrifying revenge on the United States.

Cheat

The first way the US attempted to cheat this process during the 1970s was through manipulating the international price of oil. The US economy is more self-sufficient in oil than its competitors. By increasing the world price of oil, which the US aided the Arab states to do in 1973, the United States could put strain on its competitors balance of payments and drastically slow their rate of growth.

This was temporarily extremely successful. Following 1973 the rate of growth of the EEC states fell behind that of the United States. The growth rate of the Japanese economy fell from 10 per cent a year to three per cent.

Recession

But this policy dramatically deepened the recession into which the world was in any case heading. The world economic recession after 1973 inevitably slowed down the growth of demand for, and price of, oil. Since a second oil price explosion in 1979 the real world price of oil has fallen drastically. This both devastated the oil producing states of the US and, once again, has taken the competitive pressure off Western Europe and Japan. The first manoeuvre of the US to avoid the consequences of its stagnation in productivity failed.

The second great shift

was US manipulation of the world monetary system. Immediately after Reagan was elected president in 1980 US interest rates were raised sky high.

Foreign money flooded into the United States — attracted by the high rate of interest and by the consequent increases in the exchange rate of the dollar. As the dollar soared in value against the Deutsche mark, yen and pound, anyone holding dollars made a fortune, and funds therefore flowed into the United States. This in turn financed the domestic expansion of the US economy — in particular it funded the huge US government budget deficit.

But one inevitable side effect was that the US economy became less and less competitive. With the dollar overvalued US goods could not compete on world markets and simultaneously imports into the United States became extremely cheap. The result was a gigantic United States balance of payments deficit. By 1987 this had reached \$150 billion a year.

Funds

The inflow of funds into the US also meant the United States rapidly became the chief debtor nation in the world. By 1990, it is estimated, US debts abroad would exceed its assets by \$750 billion — five times that of a country such as Brazil.

When it became clear that US economy could not compete the dollar began to slide. This indeed, by lowering the price of US goods abroad, would be the normal way the United States balance of payments would be corrected. A lower exchange rate of the dollar would cheapen US exports, make imports more expensive, and thereby close the trade gap.

But, given previous US policy, a dollar devaluation is in fact a gigantic robbery of the rest of the world. First it is a gigantic fraud, in effect a tax,

against those countries which had lent money to the United States. A fall in the value of the dollar by 30 per cent means that anyone who had bought assets, including government or private debt, in the United States sees the value of that holding fall by 30 per cent. The US in effect is only repaying 70 cents for every dollar it has borrowed. This means the US is literally robbing competitors such as Japan of tens of billions of dollars.

Reason

The second reason is that a devaluation of the dollar means that it will be the United States trade competitors, above all West Germany and Japan, that will have to absorb the stream of US exports needed to cover its trade gap and repay the loans it has taken in from abroad. The United States has been consistently urging Japan and West Germany to expand their own economies, worsen their own competitive position, and suck in US exports.

It is this last issue that brought matters to a head. Japan and West Germany, whose economies are in a stronger competitive position than the US, have no intention of taking in exports from United States just to help it out of its problems and at the expense of their own economies. Capitalism does not work like that!

Problems

Japan and West Germany regard the United States' problems as of its own making. It has been living above its means, and manipulating markets to its advantage, without sorting out the problems of its domestic economy. West Germany and Japan both were unwilling, and unable, to finance the US to sort out its problems. 'Put your own house in order' was their response.

This has a very precise meaning. The United States is running a vast

government budget deficit because it is not prepared, or more exactly is not able, in the existing political relation of forces, to tax its own working class enough to finance US government expenditure. The US military build up of the last eight years has been financed, and US politicians have bought their popularity, at the expense of the United States trade rivals, not its own working class. 'Clobber your own workers, not us' is the response of the United States trading partners. The economic pain the US was causing them was also increasing their own domestic political problems. As it is the United States which is now in debt to Japan and West Germany, they have the economic leverage to hit back.

Deficit

Last week they did so. On Wednesday monthly United States balance of payments figures showed a huge deficit — indicating no turn around of the US trading position was in sight. The United States replied, as usual, by urging West Germany to cut its own interest rates and expand its economy to pull in US exports. West Germany responded by threatening to put up its interest rates — which threatens an increase in interest rates world wide and which would probably plunge the already faltering US economy into recession.

On Thursday US share prices began to slide. On Friday they tumbled by five per cent in a single day. Then on Monday came the great crash — with shares in uncontrollable free fall. The United States competitors had pulled the plug and the US stock market went into paroxysm. It was, as the Secretary of the US stock exchange put it, 'financial meltdown'. The real relation of forces in the world economy had asserted itself. The only question now is what will happen next.

New attack launched on Black Section

FORMER regional organiser for the Labour Party Black Section Paul Sharma has launched an attack on Black Section through the pages of a recent *Tribune*.

Writing in the pages of the 16 October issue, Sharma calls for Black Section to 'come in from the cold' and apply for affiliate status to the Labour Party.

He attacks in advance those who he believes won't agree with him as the 'Mojahaden faction' who are 'involved in a holy war against the leadership and any talk of compromise is heresy'. The inflammatory language in which the article is couched makes clear that this is no comradely dialogue.

In fact, as Sharma

himself must perfectly well know, far from denouncing it as 'a sell-out of principle' — which he claims some Black Section members will do — this idea has already been put forward at the Labour national executive — and firmly voted down. It is not the Black Section but the party leadership which has already ruled this tactical 'compromise' out.

Not surprisingly, the article has already been picked up by the anti-labour movement, anti-black national press. The *Guardian* published a story based on it before the original article hit the streets.

The political issues raised are important ones for the Black Section and for the Labour Party as a whole. Socialist Action will be returning to this question in the pages of its future issues.

ASTMS delegation to Labour conference

ASTMS delegates to Labour Party conference took two major, contradictory, decisions.

Firstly, having decided not to support the EETPU nominations for the NEC, a delegate meeting arranged on the Monday of conference was pressured into reversing this decision. It was argued that EETPU support would probably get ASTMS president Doug Hoyle elected to

the NEC.

The result of this reversal of the decision cost Margaret Beckett her NEC seat. Hoyle failed to get elected.

Secondly, following the appeal against expulsion of Felicity Dowling of Liverpool, the ASTMS delegation voted 14:12 in favour of Dowling remaining a member of the party. Being the only union to support her, this vote accounts for the majority of the 400,000 votes she received.

Conference greetings

At Blackpool and Brighton we all did hear,
The state of the nation was made quite clear.
Maggie's Britain is a wonderful place
Poverty has vanished without a trace.
Even Neil is a bit obsessed,
The docker, £400 a week possessed.
Should he get more whilst others get less?
When many do not even a home possess.
The realities of life they have a sting,
A divided nation is a rotten thing.
You have ten and I've got one
Leaves, I think, a lot to be done
Ere we reach the Promised Land
Where all will be a happy band.
I listen and look whilst leaders talk
Then go outside and take a walk,
Come home again and write these notes.
We deserve more than rhetoric for our votes.

John P. Mathieson, October 1987

WINNING THE MAJORITY

Labour's policies for women

A conference organised by the Labour Women's Action Committee

Saturday 21 November

Speakers include:

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

Lambeth Town Hall
Brixton Hill
London SW4

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

Attempt to ban Sinn Fein

ON 12 October Northern Ireland secretary Tom King announced proposals designed to exclude Sinn Fein from local government and any future Assembly in the north of Ireland. It is a further and serious attack of democratic rights there.

King's proposal is that in future candidates will be required to sign an oath not to 'support nor assist the activities of any organisation proscribed by law in Northern Ireland'. It proposes that breach of the declaration would result in offending councillors being disqualified from office and possibly fined or jailed.

The government's intention is straightforward: to disenfranchise the substantial minority, 30-35 per cent, of the nationalist community in the six counties who vote for Sinn Fein.

The Thatcher government has spent the two years since the signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement trying to politically defeat Sinn Fein and build up the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP). Gerry Adams' victory in West Belfast in the June general election showed that this strategy had basically failed.

So now the Northern Ireland office is moving to simply deny electors in the north of Ireland the right to elect candidates of their choice to public office.

This is an attack on democratic rights of the most blatant kind — one which the British labour movement would tolerate at its own peril. It certainly involves the north of Ireland but sets wider precedents. If Sinn Fein can be disqualified from public office for supporting a 'proscribed organisation', then why not exclude Dennis Skinner or other MPs for supporting the miners, or the hundreds of Labour councillors who have broken Tory laws? The issue is yet another illustration of the fact that where the Tories are unable to win the vote they try to abolish the electorate.

King's proposal strikes at the very core of democracy — that electors have the right to elect whoever they want to represent them. It is the people who decide who will be the government — not the government that decides who can be elected. The people of the north of Ireland have the absolute right to elect whomever they wish to represent them. That is why every trade union and Labour Party organisation should be united in demanding that Tom King's loyalty oath is abandoned.

For Sinn Fein's response we reproduce here an edited version of the front page article from the 15 October *An Phoblacht* — *Republican News*, the paper supported by Sinn Fein.

BOBBY Sands was elected MP for Fermanagh/South Tyrone in April 1981. A year later, the British amended the Representation of the People Act to disqualify people convicted of political offences from standing for election for a period of five years.

In October 1982, Sinn Fein had its first electoral successes. Two years later, new identification laws were introduced which made voting more difficult for the unemployed and the less-well-off.

In May 1985, Sinn Fein entered the council chambers of the Six Counties, causing much furore among unionists whose rule had hitherto never been seriously challenged. Today, the British government is proposing to change the law once again in the hope of preventing Sinn Fein from standing for election at all.

British

What the British are demanding is that republican candidates renounce all public expression of support for the IRA: the new law would require candidates in local elections to 'declare and undertake that if elected they will neither support nor assist the activities of any organisation proscribed in Northern Ireland'.

The British government's proposals are obviously directed at Sinn Fein and in particular at those forums from which Sinn Fein does not abstain: the local councils. Among the different options examined, the British have ruled out, for the time being, the idea

of proscribing Sinn Fein as the banning of a political party would be difficult for them to defend.

They also appear reluctant to bring in an oath of allegiance similar to that required of Westminster MPs.

The British government is in favour of an extension of the present five-year disqualification period in order to exclude former republican prisoners from local councils. But the emphasis is on the declaration.

The enforcement of such legislation could be on either 'civil or criminal' grounds. Criminal cases are dealt with in criminal courts, with the British crown as the prosecutor. This may bring on the British government accusations of disbarring duly-elected candidates and of disenfranchising part of the electorate.

Beliefs

Civil cases, on the other hand, can be brought by any member of the public.

Well may the British government deny that what is at issue is a person's beliefs. People are elected to give a voice to those who voted for them. A significant fraction of the Six-County electorate supports, condones, or at least does not object to the methods used by the IRA — even though they may on occasion be critical of certain operations. The reason for this support is simple, but it will have to be repeated again and again in months to come: Northern nationalists were undemocratically deprived of political power in 1922, and the IRA has always represented the only political muscle of the those 600,000 nationalists. In time of pogroms and attacks by loyalists, the IRA is also their last line of

defence.

The British government proposals therefore amount to a declaration of war on the 80,000 to 100,000 nationalists who, while they do not support everything the IRA does, recognise the right of the Irish to take up arms to establish democracy and sovereignty in their own country. By proposing to bring people to court for voicing opinions as they were elected to do, the British government is, in effect, setting itself up as a thought police.

Aims

The proposals have two aims: in the long-term, to completely exclude Sinn Fein from elected office; in the short-term, to soften up loyalist politicians who started their council disruption tactics in 1985 over the presence of Sinn Fein councillors. The new law, the British hope, may bring loyalists back into the councils and help 'normalise' the situation.

Unionist reaction to the new proposals was, on the whole, favourable. A spokesperson for the Association of OUP councillors 'welcomed' some form of legislation. 'At last!' exclaimed the Alliance Party. Paisley predictably muttered that the whole thing was a whitewash. The DUP preferred (and declared) a ban on Sinn Fein. The declaration incidentally, does not make it unlawful to support the UDA's attacks of nationalist homes and its random assassination campaign.

Attitude

The SDLP's attitude was an example of unprincipled hypocrisy. It did not object to the proposals in principle, but because it



would make a 'bad law' which would be difficult to enforce.

A more principled objection came from British Labour spokesperson Kevin McNamara. Identifying the proposals as a 'sop' to unionists, McNamara asked the British government: 'Why don't they prosecute if they have evidence?' Indeed the arsenal of laws already in existence to prosecute people for expressing opinions already includes the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Public Order Act.

The new proposals, furthermore, would constitute a breach of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act of 1973 which makes it unlawful 'for an authority or body to require people to take an oath, make an undertaking or as declaration' as a 'condition of their being appointed'. The clause had been introduced

to allow hitherto debarred nationalists from taking office. Fourteen years later, the British definition of democracy has seemingly been amended on the contrary.

'If such a declaration — abjuring the use of force for political ends — was a stipulation of membership of parliament, the House of Commons would be empty and there would have been no Falklands war.'

The battle is now on to defend the civil rights of Northern nationalists, and in particular their right to express support for those who take up arms to defend or free our country. It will also be a battle against hypocrisy. As Gerry Adams said:

'We will not allow the British government to disenfranchise the large section of the nationalist community which votes for Sinn Féin.'

Labour Committee on Ireland and the Labour Party Irish Section PUBLIC MEETING CIVIL RIGHTS JUSTICE EXTRADITION

7.30pm, Tuesday 17 November
Friends' Meeting House, Easton Road, London
(opposite Easton Station)

Chair: **Clare Short MP**

Speakers

Ken Livingstone MP

Michael Farrell

(author 'Northern Ireland: the Orange State')

**Speakers from the Birmingham
6 and Guildford 4 relatives'**

**campaigns
Siobahn Crozier**

(Labour Party Irish Section)

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

Defeat Alton's anti-abortion bill

Why time limits limit women's choice

THE LOBBY in favour of David Alton's proposals to severely restrict women's access to abortion, by cutting time limits from the present 28 to 18 weeks, has been sharply built up over the last week. Alton's exact terms will be clear when his bill is presented to parliament on 28 October, ironically coinciding with the twentieth anniversary of the 1967 Abortion Act which it attacks, itself introduced into parliament by a Liberal MP, David Steel.

With the main aim being the 10 week cut in time limits, Alton represents one of the most serious attacks to date on the terms and intention of that act. If carried through it would in effect make legal abortion impossible for women more than 14 weeks pregnant, immediately affecting 17,000 women every year, create a climate where all abortions were more difficult to obtain, would ensure a rise in illegal abortion and their accompanying injuries and deaths to women, and a rise in unwanted children and misery.

for an 18 week limit, though possibly allowing for exceptions for women carrying a handicapped foetus, but that he was not 'iconoclast' and had not set himself in advance against a 24 week amendment.

By Anne Kane

By now the main shape of the campaign is clear: Alton's 18 week campaign will continue, meanwhile a great lobby of support is being built for 24 weeks — with arguments that this is in line with foetal viability and in any case it is a necessary compromise to defeat Alton.

In reality either of these changes would immediately affect thousands of women as well as transform the atmosphere around the right to abortion. Although the differences over 18 weeks or 24 weeks are serious, in reality they are about what steps are possible now in the fight against all rights to abortions, not about foetal viability, caring for disabled children, ensuring early abortions or anything else.

Alton has spelled this out: 'Post-conception a child has begun its developments as a unique new individual and this overriding right to life must always take precedence before any other claimed right.'

Limits

A cut in the time limits to 18 weeks would be a very big step towards preventing all abortions. In 1986 5,645 women had abortion over 18 weeks. Of these 2,694 were women not resident in this country — in other words women forced to come to Britain and pay for



private abortions because abortion (and often contraception) is either illegal or very restricted in their countries. Many of these women are from Ireland and Spain. Such restrictions themselves lead to these women suffering the additional strain of late abortions.

Margin

However, the margin of error which doctors leave, of up to 4 weeks, means that actually many more women than this would be affected. This was spelled out in July 1985 in a DHSS ruling applied to private clinics prohibiting abortions over 24 weeks. So in reality all women having abortions at 15 weeks and later would be likely to be refused.

Those most affected if this limit was introduced would overwhelmingly be young women, older women, women carrying a severely handicapped foetus, and women coming to Britain from other coun-

tries. As with all other such bills, Alton's ignores the reasons which compel women such as these to have late abortions: that young women often do not recognise the signs, that older women may mistake them for the menopause, that the results of tests for severe disabilities are not known until after 20 weeks, and the many obstacles that confront all women from the lack of sex education through obstructive GPs to NHS waiting lists. Alton has made the rights of the disabled foetus his particular crusade — arguing against abortion as 'eugenics' and ignoring that women demand that the choice be their individual right, not doctors'.

Alternative

Next to this, 24 weeks is being presented as a reasonable alternative. Only 29 abortions took place over 24 weeks last year. This time limit would at the very least affect women needing abortions after 20 weeks —

2,723 women last year. Many women waiting for results of disability tests would still be affected, with many others having to take difficult decisions under great pressure.

Viability

The key argument being used in favour of the 24 weeks limit, however, is foetal viability. Alton peddles a straightforward deception when he claims 'By 18 weeks a child has sentience, and it is no different except in size and weight from the child at 28 weeks. By 20 weeks ... its heart is pumping 50 pints of blood daily.' In truth and even with the advances of new technology the earliest premature birth where a baby was kept live has been 23 weeks.

Two separate issues are deliberately confused. First ensuring early abortions will not be helped by restricting the upper time limits — the reverse is true. To cut time limits in line with changing estimates of foetal viability, which is what

these are — over 75 per cent of births at 26 weeks and over die or are severely handicapped — opens the possibility of constantly lowering the limits. Which is of course the aim.

Second, no woman would opt for a late abortion out of choice. Lowering their necessity is very much in our hands — improving sex education, NHS facilities, rights of self referral, removing the right of doctors to impose their moral views on women, and research into early detection of severe disabilities. As his fellow liberal Clement Freud has commented, if Alton had chosen his private members to deal with any of these issues, we could take his concern for women and children more seriously.

Support

Despite the chorus of media support for Alton's and others' proposals, they are in essence the same as all the other bills brought forward to limit the 1967

Act, all of which have been defeated.

The policy of the Labour Party and TUC are very clearly in support of the 1967 Act and a woman's right to choose. We can make sure that Alton is defeated and sent off into obscurity with Benyon, White and Corrie if we use this policy to mobilise now against this savage attack.

Cut the time, you cut women's choice!
Fight the Alton Bill!

● Labour movement bodies can:

- ★ sponsor the new 'Fight the Alton Bill' campaign, and help set up local groups
- ★ help it financially
- ★ invite speakers and distribute its publicity
- ★ send a delegate to its meetings
- ★ ensure your regional and national policy is against Alton, that your MP votes against the bill and that support is committed now for future demonstrations and action against Alton.

Proposals

The concerted media effort in the last week has gone into making these proposals palatable, and a less severe cut seem positively reasonable. Friday's *Guardian* threw itself firmly into the ring on the side of cutting time limits by making its front page lead the results of a specially commissioned Marplan poll, with alarming findings: that two-thirds of women interviewed were in favour of some cut in time limits, with strong support for an 18 week limit. This, and support from Thatcher and others for a 24 week restriction, was used to argue that 'short of a massive tactical error by Mr Alton and his allies, a change in the 1967 Abortion Act is now beginning to look inevitable'.

Last Sunday's *Observer* followed this with a special colour feature on survival rates of premature babies.

This campaign to make at least a 24 week limit seem both reasonable and humane was capped in Monday's press: Alton explained he would press on

No free votes on abortion

OVER THE last 10 years women have waged a long and successful fight to establish policy in the labour movement in support of the right to legal, safe abortion, and in defence of the 1967 Abortion Act.

The highpoint of this campaign was the decision by the TUC to call a national demonstration against the Corrie Bill in 1979. However, despite the adoption of clear policy by the unions and by the Labour Party conference, the Parliamentary Labour Party has never taken a clear stand on the issue.

The excuse for this failure has been a clause in the standing orders of the PLP which allow MPs the right to a position of 'conscience' on certain issues, and therefore the Labour whip is not applied. These so-called issues of conscience have traditionally included abortion. Indeed it is hard to discover what other issues of significance now claim this dubious honour.

No whips are applied on the issue of capital punishment — apparently the labour movement still thinks it is a matter of personal conscience whether a

Labour MP endorses judicial murder. But in reality only one Labour MP has favoured the return of hanging, and the votes are a foregone conclusion.

By Jude Woodward

Matters of religious observance are usually the subject of free votes, but Sunday trading was the subject of a whip, while pub opening hours in the north of Ireland are of course a matter of conscience.

However the real scandal is that in 1985 the Labour Party conference

voted unambiguously and overwhelmingly that abortion should not be considered a matter of conscience.

Composite 40 to the Bournemouth conference of 1985 called for the 'abandoning of the idea that there can be conscience clauses or free votes' on 'women's fundamental right to decide whether or not to bear children'.

Policy

Betty Boothroyd, replying to the debate for the NEC, called for a vote against the composite explicitly on the grounds that the resolution sought to abolish the traditional 'free vote' for Labour MPs on this issue. Conference decisively rejected the NEC's advice and adopted the resolution by 5,305,000 votes to 611,000.

Moreover conference was not confused, or unclear on what it had

adopted. In addition to the clarification from the platform in Betty Boothroyd's reply, the debate had been fought out on precisely this issue by women in a whole number of the trade union delegation, often against the advice of their general secretaries and full-time officials.

Since 1985 however both the Labour whips and the NEC have simply ignored the conference decision. No whip was applied on the Powell Bill to amend the Infant Life Preservation Act. The NEC's statement on health explicitly mentions the right of an MP to a position of conscience on abortion.

Aim

The 1987 conference statement by the NEC on Alton's Bill also included the issue of the right to a position of conscience. This was not in the original draft drawn up by Jo Richard-

son, shadow women's minister, but was inserted, it appears, at the direct instigation of the leader of the party.

Women in the labour movement have the right to demand that the overwhelming majority of men in the PLP vote in line with party policy on this issue. The Labour whip must be applied in the votes against Alton's Bill.

A model resolution is being circulated in the Labour Party by both the Labour Women's Action Committee and the Fight Alton's Bill (FAB) campaign calling for the imposition of a three line whip for votes against Alton's Bill. This should be adopted by CLPs, women's sections and branches of affiliated unions, and forwarded to the NEC, union executives and to the coming round of regional conferences and national union conferences.

Model resolution for Labour Parties on David Alton's Bill and the 'conscience' vote of MPs.

This CLP/women's section/conference/etc: 1 opposes David Alton's Private Member's Bill to reduce the time limit for legal abortion to 18 weeks, and other proposals to reduce the present time limit for legal abortion;

2 sponsors the Fight Alton's Bill Campaign and will promote its initiatives including the lobby of parliament and proposed national demonstration (and makes a donation of £.....);

3 notes that the 1985 annual party conference agreed, by 5,305,000 votes to 611,000, to abandon 'the idea that there can be conscience clauses or free votes' on matters relating to 'women's fundamental right to decide whether or not to bear children' (Composite 40). And further notes that this decision has not so far been implemented by the Labour whips, nor by the NEC which included the right of Labour MPs to a position of 'conscience' on this issue in the 1987 NEC statement to party conference on Alton's Bill;

4 therefore calls on the NEC to instruct the chief whip to apply a three line whip in line with party policy for all votes against the Alton Bill and any other proposals to limit the present availability of legal abortion.



Why Thatcher and Reagan prop up apartheid

ANYONE WHO had any illusions that the British government had any intention of acting against apartheid should have lost them following last week's Commonwealth prime ministers conference. Not only did Thatcher reject any meaningful sanctions against South Africa, but she deepened her course by describing the African National Congress (ANC) as a 'terrorist' organisation. For this she was greeted in Pretoria, as BBC Radio put it on Monday morning, as 'an honorary citizen of white South Africa'. The British government is now committed to keeping in power the most openly reactionary government in the world.

A report issued last week by Archbishop Trevor Huddleston for the Anti-Apartheid Movement confirmed that throughout the last year the British government has been consistently and consciously breaking even limited existing sanctions against South Africa. The British government has failed to comply with 11 out of 14 sanctions formally agreed at the last Commonwealth summit in Nassau.

- The US State department, in a report submitted to the Congress on 1 April, listed Britain as one of the seven countries still involved in supplying arms to South Africa in defiance of a United Nations embargo.
- The Thatcher government has refused to terminate the no visa entry agreement for South Africans into Britain — which would allow the British government to follow Commonwealth and EEC countries and ban the entry of South African sports competitors.
- Official government backed trade missions to South Africa are continuing — another leaves next month.
- The Thatcher government has neither banned the export of oil, nor of computer equipment capable of being used by the apartheid military, police or security forces.
- There is no embargo on military cooperation between Pretoria and Britain.
- Despite a British government claim, it has imposed a 'voluntary ban' on new investment in South Africa, the

Department of Trade and Industry still advises British companies to set up subsidiaries in that country.

- Thatcher had simply introduced a nonsensical 'voluntary ban' on the promotion of tourism to South Africa.

- Thatcher undertook last year, at the Commonwealth meeting on sanctions in London, to accept and implement any EEC decision to ban the import of col, iron and steel from South Africa. A ban of imports of coal was blocked by the West German government on 16 September 1986. The same day Thatcher flew to Bonn and publicly endorsed Chancellor Kohl's anti-sanctions policy. A ban on the import of iron and steel was agreed by the EEC but 33,000 tonnes of steel products have been imported from South Africa into the UK during the first seven months of this year.

Meanwhile a report from the Starnberger institute in West Germany, commissioned by the West German protestant churches, has made clear that six major Western nations — the United States, Britain, Japan, West Germany, France and Switzerland — could bring the apartheid regime to its knees in a matter of months. It would not even require extensive trade sanctions. It would simply require action through the international finance system to forbid South Africa to extend old loans and to raise new money.

The report concluded that: 'the South African economy is highly vulnerable to targeted international sanctions. By wielding effective sanctions, a small group of only six countries has the power to chop through one of apartheid's most vital supports — its integration into the world economy. As far as these countries are concerned effective sanctions would entail a fairly small package of measures with negligible effects on their own 'economies.'

Action against financial ties of South Africa to the world economy: 'would swiftly push South Africa into international insolvency and provoke

massive capital flight, leading to fiscal crisis of the state, a cessation of investment, and an exodus of business people and experts — in all, to irrecoverable weakening of the apartheid regime.'

This could be: 'backed up by the mandatory cessation of operations by foreign firms in such key areas as mining, energy, capital goods and banking' which would soon bring about 'the complete collapse of the apartheid regime.'

Instead the international banks, with the support of their governments, had been propping up South Africa — notably by allowing the 'rolling over' of its foreign debts in 1986 and 1987.

In other words the major Western states had been deliberately propping up the apartheid regime.

The Starnberger report kills stone dead the idea that the British and US governments refuse to take effective action against South Africa even simply because of its effect on their own economies — we won't even bother to discuss the idea that Thatcher, of all people, refuses to impose sanctions because of the suffering it would involve for the black population of South Africa itself!

Sanctions

Undoubtedly sanctions against South Africa would involve temporary inconveniences for the major Western states — but nothing they do not have the resources to cope with. The picture presented of years of hardship in Britain with little or no effect, is a myth. Financial action alone would rapidly cripple the South African economy.

The reason for propping up apartheid is not primarily economic. It is political. The fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa would unhinge the entire situation in that continent.

The US first increased its covert support for South African action against its neighbours — aiding the

South African backed UNITA invasion of Angola in 1975-76, blocking any international pressure on South Africa over its occupation of Namibia, and then, at a minimum, propping up South African support to the right wing UNITA in Angola and the MNR in Mozambique.

Direct

Simultaneously with direct intervention in Africa the United States stepped up its attempt to pressurise the Soviet Union to end its support to left wing governments and rebel movements in Africa. Kissinger explained in 1975 that: 'our task is to find ways to restrain Soviet power over an historical period ... by balancing off Soviet power around the world through a combination of political, military and economic means.' Part of Carter's reorganisation of US foreign policy, during 'detente', was to establish United States air and naval bases in Kenya and Somalia. Between 1969 and 1980 US investment in South Africa increased nearly tenfold — from \$286 million to \$2,500 million.

Since then the United States and Britain have done everything possible, in practice, to maintain the apartheid state — within the necessity to prevent public embarrassment to 'pro-Western leaders of the black states.' They are providing aid to the frontline states — primarily with the aim of increasing the West's image and leverage. But this aid is absolutely tiny compared to the damage done to its neighbours by the South African incursions and the cost of the havoc created by apartheid backed 'rebel movements' in Mozambique and Angola.

The United States and Britain are perfectly aware that if the South African regime — the 'regional superpower' as its foreign minister put it this week — were to fall the entire situation in Africa would change. It would drastically reinforce the black population of Africa against imperialist in-

terests and powerfully reinforce the left. That is why Britain and the US will take no action to overthrow apartheid. That is why we had the farce at the Commonwealth prime ministers conference last week.

To understand US and British thinking on that it is worth going back to the 'Kissinger report' on United States policy in southern Africa drawn up in 1969. This formed the starting point of contemporary western policy to South Africa and outlined clearly US interest in the region. It noted: 'Racial repression by white minority regimes and the black African opposition to it pose two problems for US interests in the area: 1. Our interests in the white states to the degree they are seen as at least tacit acceptance of racism affect our standing with African and other states. 2. The prospect of increasing violence in the area growing out of black insurgency and white reprisal could jeopardise our interests in the future.'

As noted neither of the 'problems' for the US was the effects on the black population of the racist regime in South Africa.

The Kissinger report noted that: 'The racial problems of southern Africa probably will grow more acute over time, perhaps leading to violent internal upheavals and greater involvement of the communist powers.'

The report noted: 'The US takes the position that force is not an appropriate means to bring about constructive change in southern Africa. We have consistently resisted efforts to exclude South Africa from international bodies and to extend mandatory sanctions or use force on southern African issues. Thus the US has made it clear that we have gone as far as we can in the direction of greater UN pressures on the white regimes. It also stated bluntly that the United States European allies were even more blatant in propping up apartheid: 'The UK and France have adopted an even more



Why Joan Ruddock is wrong

THE DECISION to spend the next two years reviewing party policy dominated Labour's recent annual conference. That review will be part of the leadership's continuing drive to cleanse the party of every last vestige of radicalism. Foreign policy will be a key area for the microscope, in preparation for which attacks on unilateral nuclear disarmament have already been stepped up. NICK BENNETT explains why defending unilateralism — the crucial radical policy the right want to eliminate — is still central to the fight for an internationalist perspective — and replies to an article by Joan Ruddock in the *Guardian*.

'AS the disarmament process gathers momentum, the pro-nuclear fanaticism of Mrs Thatcher will become increasingly out of step with the realities of the world and people's perception of them,' concludes Joan Ruddock writing in the *Guardian* on Friday 16 October. 'Labour has a chance to offer the electorate a defence policy which carries the conviction born of an alternative vision of international relations and which really does fit the needs of a modern Britain in a modern world.'

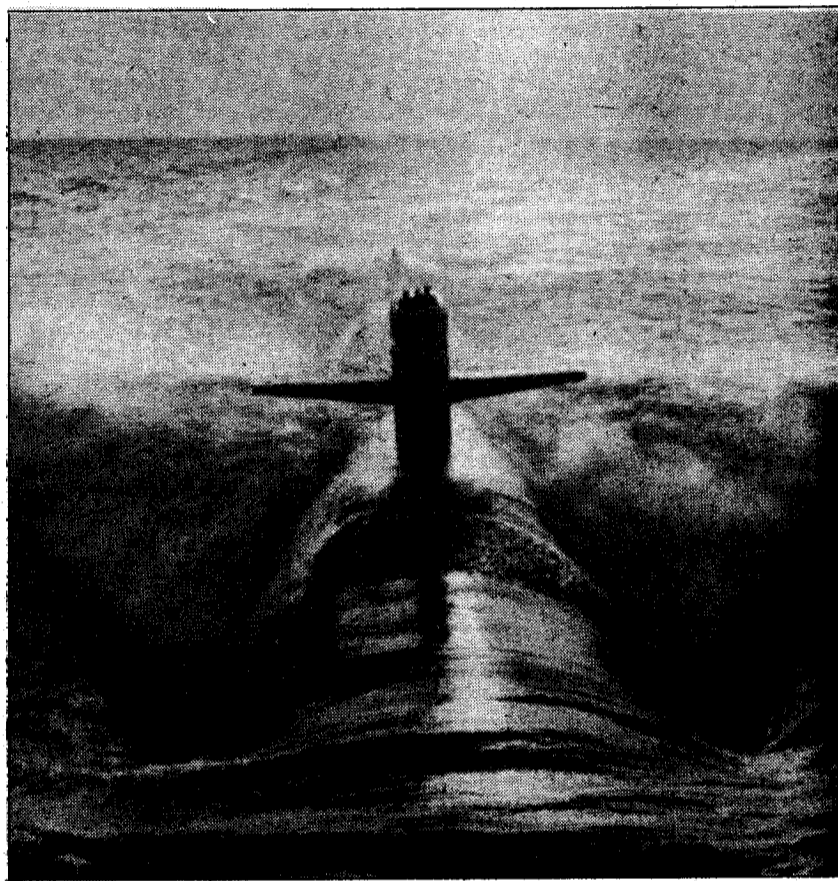
In her article 'Disarming needs of a defence policy review', the Labour MP most publicly associated with the campaign in this country against nuclear weapons argues that the intermediate range nuclear force (INF) treaty, on the verge of being signed by the United States and the Soviet Union, will be 'the cornerstone of that new reality'. Arguing that 'the significance of this agreement lies not in its mode of negotiation but in its objectives — the actual removal and destruction of operational nuclear weapons', Ruddock however goes on to claim that unilateralism becomes *less* important in this context.

Arms

Unilateralism 'was never an exclusive' road to nuclear disarmament, she explains. 'Unilateralists have always argued that independent steps, as well as being valuable in themselves, act as a spur to negotiations. Nevertheless the appeal of the unilateralist position (leaving aside its fundamental morality) proceeded partly from a general and profound disillusionment with multilateral negotiations. Thus the background to the dramatic growth of the European peace movements in the 1980s was nothing less than a cynical mockery of multilateralism, with Western offers to the Soviet Union deliberately designed to invite refusal.'

Not only is this view that unilateralism will play a decreasing role in bringing about nuclear disarmament profoundly wrong, it is also profoundly dangerous.

There is going to be just as much 'cynical mockery of multilateralism' in 1987 as there was in the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s. And that is because the self-styled 'multilateralists' in fact want to keep nuclear weapons. The government of the USA is no more sincere in its claim to want to get rid of nuclear weapons than Britain, France or West Germany, the political leaders of which countries openly argue for maintaining nuclear weapons. That is not to say, of course, that the United States is unwilling to lose *any* nuclear weapons. The INF treaty is certain to be signed — especial-



ly at a time when Reagan could use the domestic political kudos it will attract and because of the concessions on foreign policy he hopes to extract from the Soviet Union through it.

Reagan's fundamental dynamic is no different than Thatcher's, Mitterrand's and Kohl's. He is every bit as committed to *maintaining* nuclear weapons — as the USA's response to the Reykjavik summit and its refusal to reconsider the Star Wars programme demonstrates.

However, the relationship between the United States and West Europe has changed — and not just because of the US-USSR INF treaty. There is less support in West Europe for the foreign policies of the USA than there has been at any time since World War II.

New

That is the fundamental reality underlying what Joan Ruddock calls the 'realities of the world and people's perception of them'. The INF treaty is an *effect* of that reality, not its *cause*. Unless that relationship is understood, the anti-missiles movement and the labour movement will get it wrong on nuclear disarmament.

For example, recognising the tensions between Western Europe and the United States, sections of the anti-missiles and labour movements are flirting with the idea of Europe as a 'third force'. But it is false to assume that greater cooperation in Europe is a radical or 'left' alternative. Essentially it is the view espoused by David Owen and others. In fact the *Guardian* of Monday 19 October carried a long article from Owen on the very subject. What has to be made clear is that *both* these forces represent interests that are alien to real nuclear disarmament — whatever rhetoric either side might indulge in from time to time to suit its particular immediate and sectional interests.

In this context, and especially in the light of a clear and concerted campaign

by the right wing of the party to get rid of Labour's unilateralist policy, it is quite wrong of Joan Ruddock to remain silent on the issue of US nuclear bases.

We have already seen a number of retreats on the clear statement of the 1983 conference which would remove *all* nuclear weapons from British soil and waters.

Moves

The 'Modern Britain' campaign launched last December to fight the general election was one. Nuclear disarmament was firmly placed within the framework of remaining in NATO. Neil Kinnock personally made clear the meaning of the campaign's pro-NATO framework when, on the eve of his ill-fated visit to the White House, he announced on the eve of his ill-fated visit to the White House, what Labour would delay the removal of cruise pending the outcome of any INF talks.

Again, at party conference, there was no mention of the US nuclear bases by the leadership. They attempted to confine the debate to Trident. Furthermore, the instruction in composite 30 to establish a working party was specifically to review timetable and strategy.

There is now a clear strategy by sections of the Labour right. This is to accept the abandoning of Trident — doubtless bargained away as part of a deal with the USSR — but to accept the US 'nuclear umbrella' as part of the NATO alliance. That is why composite 30 at Labour Party conference, so strongly supported by the party leadership, referred only to Trident and not to the US nuclear bases. It is also why Joan Ruddock is totally wrong to ignore this issue in her *Guardian* article.

The position must be clear. Labour must reaffirm its commitment to remove *all* nuclear weapons from British soil and waters including the US nuclear bases. Anything else is an abandonment of Labour's non-nuclear policy.

The US first increased its covert support for South African action against its neighbours — aiding the South African backed UNITA invasion of Angola in 1975-76, blocking any international pressure on South Africa over its occupation of Namibia, and then, at a minimum, up South African support to the right wing UNITA in Angola and the MNR in Mozambique.

Simultaneously with direct intervention in Africa the United States stepped up its attempt to pressurise the Soviet Union to end its support to left wing governments and rebel movements in Africa. Kissinger explained in 1975 that: 'our task is to find ways to restrain Soviet power over an historical period ... by balancing off Soviet power around the world through a combination of political, military and economic means.' Part of Carter's reorganisation of US foreign policy, during 'detente', was to establish United States air and naval bases in Kenya and Somalia. Between 1969 and 1980 US investment in South Africa increased nearly tenfold — from \$286 million to \$2,500 million.

State

Since then the United States and Britain have done everything possible, in practice, to maintain the apartheid state — within the necessity to prevent public embarrassment to 'pro-Western leaders of the black states.' They are providing aid to the frontline states — primarily with the aim of increasing the West's image and leverage. But this aid is absolutely tiny compared to the damage done to its neighbours by the South African incursions and the cost of the have created by apartheid backed 'rebel movements' in Mozambique and Angola.

The United States and Britain are perfectly aware that if the South African regime — the 'regional superpower' as its foreign minister put it this week — were to fall the entire situation in Africa would change. It would drastically reinforce the black population of Africa against imperialist interests and powerfully reinforce the left. That is why Britain and the US will take no action to overthrow apartheid. That is why we had the farce at the Commonwealth prime ministers conference last week.

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strained position on southern African issues, in their abstentions on the UN General Assembly resolution determining that South Africa's mandate over South West Africa has terminated, on which we voted in favour, and the UK's somewhat more persuasive policy on the arms embargo against South Africa, which is virtually a dead letter in the case of France.'

The report also noted that the United States must conceal its attitude to South Africa because: 'There is a serious question whether pro-Western leaders of the black states could continue to justify their stance to their populations if the US officially declared its opposition to current liberation efforts. Radical and communist states would be the beneficiaries.'

The report concluded: 'our interests do not justify consideration of US military intervention in the area. Similarly economic sanctions against South Africa are excluded because they could lead to a US military involvement in their enforcement.' The United States excluded any action to end apartheid.

Overthrow

It is true that at the original Kissinger report made a drastic miscalculation on the likely course of events in southern Africa. It foresaw the continuation of Portuguese rule in Angola and Mozambique, and the Smith regime in Rhodesia, for the indefinite future. But there is no evidence to suggest that the US changed its policies after the collapse of the Portuguese empire in Africa and the establishment of an independent black Zimbabwe. On the contrary the United States began to *increase* its involvement in Africa following the revolutions of the 1970s — the overthrow of Portuguese rule in Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola, the overthrow of Haile Selassie in Ethiopia and the downfall of the Smith regime.



The rehabilitation of Trotsky and Bukharin

ALL REPORTS from the USSR indicate that the Soviet government is considering rehabilitating the leaders of the Russian revolution murdered by Stalin. The most politically important of these are Bukharin — executed following a show trial in 1938, and whose rehabilitation appears probable and Trotsky — murdered in exile

by an agent of Stalin in 1940 and whose rehabilitation appears far less certain. JAMES WHITE looks at the pressure to rehabilitate Bukharin, why the rehabilitation of Trotsky causes much greater problems for the Soviet leadership, and at the contemporary political relevance of the figures involved.

THE first reason every socialist should demand the rehabilitation of Trotsky and Bukharin is elementary truth. The idea leaders of the Russian revolution, who spent years in prison and exile in the fight against Tsarism, who helped lead the overthrow of capitalism on one sixth of the earth's surface, were German spies, agents of the Japanese and guilty of sabotage and attempts to assassinate Soviet leaders — as charged by Stalin — is one of the absurdities of history. Nobody believes it. To defend it distorts the intellect and renders coherent thought impossible. To declare that all criminal charges brought against Trotsky, Bukharin and the others at the purge trials of the 1930s, are without foundation, is an elementary duty to the truth.

Such an action would clear the air of poison that has clouded it for fifty years. It will help restore the conditions for a rational debate amongst socialists. It should be demanded by every socialist.

But the issues associated with Bukharin and Trotsky are not simply historical. Instead their rehabilitation will open the way for a serious discussion of their politics. Trotsky, Bukharin and Stalin together symbolise the most important issues in socialist strategy since Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Even the most important figures of Western Marxism, such as Gramsci, are essentially tributaries of one of these thinkers. Other socialists — for example, Guevara, Castro or Mao-tse Tung — cannot remotely compare in scope with the political issues raised by Trotsky, Stalin and Bukharin.

Modern writers who claim to be embarking on 'new roads' in socialism are generally simply rehearsing in a less intelligent and coherent form, the ideas developed by one of Stalin, Trotsky and Bukharin — even if the first of them did most of his 'thinking' with the GPU.

Debates

The great debates of Russian communism in the 1920s are still the seed bed of all serious discussion of socialist strategy today — and those who do not study them merely reveal their own ignorance. Certainly social democracy has produced nothing of the remotest theoretical or political interest in the intervening fifty years.

The reason Bukharin and Trotsky still command the stage of debate, and why their rehabilitation, or disgrace, is a directly political act, is that the issues they raised are not of simply historical interest. Marxist ideas and categories reflect social realities. The ideas of

Trotsky, Bukharin and Stalin remain relevant because the forces they dealt with are still the dominant forces of the modern world — the world as it has existed since the Russian revolution.

The reason the great debates of the 1920s took place was because the Russian revolution did not develop as its leaders had anticipated. Trotsky, Lenin, Bukharin, Stalin and all leaders of the Bolsheviks had anticipated revolution would spread rapidly into Western Europe. They had underestimated the capacity for resistance of the advanced imperialist states — in particular their ability to sustain strong social democratic bureaucracies successfully defending capitalism. The fact that *nowhere* in Western Europe was a party capable of overthrowing capitalism created — although such parties were to emerge later in the semi-colonial countries — itself reflected the strength of the imperialist states.

Lenin

The Russian Revolution itself had not developed as Lenin had anticipated. He had foreseen in Russia a 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' — a capitalist state led by the working class and peasantry — not a socialist revolution. Not merely did no 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' come into existence in Russia, but it has never existed in any state in the world.

With the socialist revolution successful in backward Russia, but held back in the advanced imperialist states, the vital issue became how revolutionaries in Russia should proceed. Three basic lines developed — each reflecting different social forces.

The first, that of Bukharin, essentially adopted concessions to capitalism. It advocated the theory of 'socialism in one country' — the utopian idea that a developed socialist society could be built in the isolated single country of Russia. It advocated concessions to capital within Russia — most importantly concessions to individual peasants and small traders but, secondarily joint ventures with the West. Internationally Bukharin was a pioneer of the Popular Front — the alliance of Communist and capitalist parties.

This policy introduced capitalist pressures into the USSR itself. As Lenin pointed out the USSR could not be insulated from the capitalist market — the 'international market to which we are subordinated, with which we are connected, and from which we cannot

isolate ourselves.' Either, progressively, socialist revolution would be spread through the international class struggle of the working class, or capitalism would finally break up the economic structure of the USSR preparing the way for a capitalist restoration. Bukharin's policies strengthened capitalist forces both internationally and in the USSR. In 1927-28 they produced an acute crisis in the Soviet economy — concentrated in relations between the peasantry and the working class.

The essential policies adopted by Deng in China, and Gorbachev in the USSR, in the last decade — the introduction of market mechanisms, closer collaboration with the West, concessions to private farming among the peasants, acceptance of deepening social differentiations — were pioneered by Bukharin. Bukharin's classic slogan of the 1920s 'enrich yourselves' — as addressed to the peasants and private traders — was literally raised in China at the height of the Deng period. It led to an acute crisis in China last year — and this approach will inevitably do so in the USSR. In Soviet foreign policy it means closer relations with capitalism despite the welcome relaxation of repression in the USSR itself. Gorbachev signifies not just the agreement on nuclear missiles but shifts rightward in the policy pursued by the USSR in Central America, towards Cuba, in the Middle East and in southern Africa.

Trotsky

The second line in the USSR in the 1920s was Trotsky's. Trotsky pointed out that the internal problems of the Soviet economy could only find a solution on the arena of world politics and economy — a foundation of the theory of permanent revolution: He wrote 'There are two fundamental propositions in the theory of permanent revolution. First, that despite the historical backwardness of Russia, the revolution can transfer the power into the hands of the Russian proletariat before the proletariat of advanced countries is able to attain it. Secondly, that the way out of these contradictions which will befall the proletarian dictatorship in a backward country, surrounded by a world of capitalist enemies, will be found on the arena of world revolution. The first proposition is based upon a correct understanding of the law of uneven development. The second depends upon a correct understanding of the indissolubility of the economic and political ties between capitalist countries.

'The colossal importance of the

Soviet Union lies in that it is the disputed base of the world revolution and not at all in the presumption that it is able to build socialism independently of the world revolution.'

Issue

In this framework the vital issue in the USSR was to maintain the coherence and morale of the Soviet proletariat as a key link in the international class struggle. As the *Platform of the Left Opposition* put it in 1927: 'The decisive factor in appraising the movement of our country forward along the road of socialist construction, must be the growth of our productive forces and the dominance of the socialist elements over the capitalist — together with an improvement of all the conditions of existence of the working class. This improvement ought to be evident in the material sphere (number of workers employed in each industry, level of real wages, character of the workers' budget, housing conditions, medical aid, etc), in the political sphere (party, trade unions, soviets, communist youth organisations), and finally in the cultural sphere (schools, books, newspapers, theatres)'. Trotsky advocated as the most urgent task improving the material conditions of the Soviet workers: 'The striving to push the vital interests of the worker into the background, under the contemptuous epithet of "workshop narrowness", to contrast them with the general historical interests of the working class, is theoretically wrong and politically dangerous.' Trotsky considered the most decisive task was to improve the condition of the Soviet worker — because he saw their confidence and class consciousness as a decisive lever in the international class struggle.

Trotsky characterised Stalin's regime as 'bonapartism' — an administrative apparatus attempting to stand 'above' the policy of concessions to capitalism proposed by Bukharin and the pro-working class line of Trotsky. It is because they represented the two most important class lines that Stalin's attempt to eliminate Bukharin and Trotsky's influence from history simply failed. Their political lines will be the basic choice long after Stalin's has disappeared.

Stalin

The third position was that of Stalin. Stalin, like Bukharin, accepted the theory of socialism in one country. Internationally Stalin sought alliances with capitalist powers and forces. Soviet foreign policy, from 1923, became a series of alliances with foreign imperialisms, and forces within them — in practice making social democracy not Hitler during Nazism's rise to power in Germany in 1929-33, with France from 1934-38, with Hitler from 1939-41, with Britain, France and the United States from 1941-45.

Internally, however, unlike Bukharin, Stalin attempted to overcome the capitalist pressures on the

USSR, and industrialise the country, through violent repressive means. Perceived proto-capitalist forces in Russia, above all the peasantry, were smashed through forcible collectivisation of agriculture. At the same time the working class was savagely repressed.

The beneficiary of this process was the Soviet bureaucracy. In the extreme backwardness and poverty of post-revolutionary Russia the bureaucracy became the route to material privilege.

Stalin's policy was disastrous internationally. In Germany it helped lead to the victory of fascism and thereby the Nazi assault on the USSR. In France and Spain it led to tremendous defeats under the Popular Fronts.

Inside the USSR itself Stalin pursued economic adventurism. He crushed any restorationist trends — but at the expense of setting back Soviet agriculture by half a century and introducing an inflexible 'command economy'.

Economy

The Soviet economy has still not recovered from the calamity suffered by Soviet agriculture in 1928-32. When Hitler invaded in 1941 sections of the Soviet peasantry initially welcomed the Nazi invaders as liberators. Vast sections of the inflexible Soviet economy were characterised by waste.

Trotsky characterised Stalin's regime as 'bonapartism' — an administrative apparatus attempting to stand 'above' the policy of concessions to capitalism proposed by Bukharin and the pro-working class line of Trotsky. It is because they represented the two most important class lines that Stalin's attempt to eliminate Bukharin and Trotsky's influence from history simply failed. Their political lines will be the basic choice long after Stalin's has disappeared.

Stalin's industrialisation of the Soviet Union undoubtedly succeeded for longer than Trotsky had anticipated. But it could not avoid the basic problems. It was and is impossible to build socialism in a single country.

The reason for this is simple. Capitalism itself has outgrown production on the basis of a single state. Socialism required a vastly greater development of the productive forces, and therefore their internationalisation, even than capitalism. As Trotsky wrote: 'To aim at building a nationally isolated socialist society means, in spite of all passing successes, to pull the productive forces backward even as compared to capitalism.'

But from the fact that 'the produc-



tive forces are incompatible with national boundaries' follows 'the economic impossibility of a self-sufficient socialist society. Socialist society ... can be built on the most advanced production forces ... how then can socialism drive the productive forces back into the boundaries of a national state which they have violently sought to break through under capitalism?

'...The building of socialism on a national basis would imply for ...advanced countries a general decline, a wholesale cutting down of productive forces, that is to say, something directly opposed to the tasks of socialism.' And: 'To attempt ... to realise a shut-off proportionality of all the branches of economy within a national framework, means to pursue a reactionary utopia.'

The more the Soviet economy developed the greater became its need for internationalisation: 'The international division of labour and the supranational character of modern productive forces not only retain but will increase twofold and tenfold their significance for the Soviet Union in proportion to the degree of Soviet economic ascent.'

This is precisely what has occurred. Stalin's policy of voluntaristic industrialisation of the USSR succeeded in turning backward Russia into a country with an extensive but inefficient industry. However this was only at the expense of holding back its agricultural development for half a century and creating an industrial sector marked by incredible waste and backwardness. The reforms instituted by Gorbachev precisely indicate that this system can no longer survive. The basic choice, whether to allow increasing capitalist elements to penetrate into the Soviet Union, and to form a still closer alliance with capital internationally, or whether to see the Soviet Union as a decisive link in the chain of international class struggle, comes to the fore again. And with it the two figures who symbolise those lines — Bukharin and Trotsky.

Bukharin

This is why it is far easier for the bureaucracy to rehabilitate Bukharin than Trotsky. The rehabilitation of Bukharin is almost a political necessity. Gorbachev is progressively introducing the policies advocated by Bukharin in the 1920s. The Soviet leadership almost have to rehabilitate Bukharin because without his books they won't know how to run the Soviet economy. But Trotsky's line, one of deepening the in-

ternational class struggle, is a the exact opposite extreme to Gorbachev's. Gorbachev is seeking closer links with international capitalism, not increased struggle against it.

Within the USSR itself Gorbachev's reforms will undoubtedly fail and lead to crisis as did Deng's in China — although the much greater economic development of the USSR, and the greater strength of the working class within it, means that the process can continue for a longer period than in economically backward China. At some point there will be the emergence of overtly pro-capitalist demands which the bureaucracy will not tolerate, and revolt by the working class against the effects of the introduction of capitalist market mechanisms into the economy — the latter has in fact already emerged in a number of strikes. This will be followed by a relapse into a new more 'Stalinist' period in which some of the 'reforms' will be halted or turned back — although, naturally, this will not involve a return to the depth either of a Stalinist repression or hyper-centralisation of the economy. What the soviet bureaucracy will not accept is placing the Soviet Union in the framework of the international class struggle.

Lines

But one thing is clear. *Stalinism* is doomed — although it will be a very long death. The fundamental lines for the Soviet Union, and all the countries in which capitalism has been overthrown, remain those of Bukharin and Trotsky — the strengthening of capitalism and collaboration with capitalist forces, or the international extension of the class struggle. One leads to the restoration of capitalism on a world scale. The other leads to its overthrow. Stalinism itself was a catastrophic, murderous, aberration on a world scale — and in terms of world history half a century, or even a century is a (vile) hiccup. Stalinism is weakening — and that is why other political choices are coming to the fore.

This is why the rehabilitation of two apparently obscure Bolsheviks, whose organised followers on a world scale amount to a few thousand people, still has the capacity to create a major stir in politics.

Because they continue to symbolise the basic choices of our epoch Socialist Action has added its name to the international campaign for the rehabilitation of Trotsky. It naturally also supports the demand for the rehabilitation of Bukharin and all other victims of Stalin's purges.

Indian army's anti-Tamil terror

THE INDIAN government of Rajiv Gandhi has rejected an appeal from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for a ceasefire and negotiations. The 25,000-strong massed forces of the Indian army backed up by the Sri Lankan police are going in for the kill. To date at least 500 'Tigers' and 500 non-combatants have been killed. The Indian army's terror campaign has involved bombings and helicopter gunships firing rockets into towns. At Jaffna university where refugees have gathered Indian troops fired widely into a crowd killing 60 civilians last Friday. To hide its guilt, India not only refuses to provide information on civilian deaths, it has imposed a news blackout and denied journalists access to the area.

A massive refugee problem has been created by Gandhi's anti-Tamil offensive. Tanks advancing towards Jaffna have destroyed houses. Some 375,000 people — half the population of the Jaffna peninsula — have been uprooted. Forced to find shelter wherever they can, people have massed in Hindu temples, schools and churches without sanitation, water or food. There are widespread fears of epidemics. At Kandawamy temple, some 40,000 people could find no indoor shelter as torrential rain lashed the area. There are now 50,000 people on the campus at Jaffna university.

By Jon Silberman

India's claim that its actions are a response to 'terrorist' actions by the Tigers are nothing but a lie fabricated as a cover for the Indian army's own terrorism. The Tamil Tigers have issued a 'categorical denial' in relation to reports that they had been responsible for the deaths of 200 Sinhalese people.

'We are engaged in a people's struggle' a Tigers statement explained. 'As such we never involve ourselves in any attacks on Sinhalese or Tamil civilians. Also there has been no evidence of any killings. If there was any violence, it was perpetrated by the government forces to create conditions which will give them an excuse to attack us.'

As Britain stole land from the Sinhalese Kandyan villagers they found themselves confronted by a succession of Kandyan rebellions. The villagers refused to submit to

becoming rural labourers on the then coffee plantations, so the British brought a million Tamils from India in the decade of the 1840s alone, and stoked up divisions.

The crop changed from coffee to tea but the British policy of divide and rule continued, as the imperial centre reaped super-profits from the consequences. Upper caste Sinhalese landowners were incorporated into the colonial administration.

When independence was 'granted' in 1948, the anti-Tamil government campaigns continued. One of the first acts of the 'independence' government, well-trained by its British masters, was the disenfranchisement of 500,000 Indian Tamils (descendants of Tamils brought from India 100 years before).

When Bandaranaike rode to power in 1956 on the back of some mass struggles his demand for genuine independence was really just a cover for stoking further anti-Tamil discrimination. Sinhala was declared the only official language as opposed to English but the prohibition of the Tamils' language was the real objective. Government anti-Tamil rhetoric soon led to an anti-Tamil program in 1959.

In the years that followed education was segregated, Tamils were systematically discriminated against in employment, religion and culture and governments have encouraged Sinhalese settlements on traditional Tamil lands. In 1963 deportation of Tamils to India was legalised. Anti-Tamil violence exploded in 1977, 1979 and 1981.

Discrimination was ultimately enshrined in the name of the country. Sri Lanka means 'Holy Ceylon' in which, in the majority Buddhist religion, the Sinhalese are seen as the chosen people.

Attempts at creating a united force of workers and peasants have, throughout the country's history, found the Sinhala-Tamil conflict a tremendous obstacle. But the country's rulers and its government have not been paralysed by the same divisions. When the toilers have risen, as they did in the 1971 insurrectionary uprising, the government met the challenge with brutal repression.

Only by the Tamils winning their just demands for self-determination can a real united force of the workers and peasants be forged. That's just what the governments of Sri Lanka and India both fear and why they signed the treaty earlier this year granting Tamils limited regional autonomy in Jaffna and the Eastern districts in return for a surrender of arms. India's decision to crush the resistance is part of the policing of this treaty.

Rajiv Gandhi fears the consequences of a successful struggle by the Tamils not only in Sri Lanka but in India itself where there are 50 million Tamils and where the government is meeting serious opposition.

'We are engaged in a people's struggle. As such we never involve ourselves in any attacks on Sinhalese or Tamil civilians'.

— Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

This terror campaign should be the occasion for the British labour movement to redouble its efforts in supporting the demands of the 2500 Tamils currently seeking asylum in Britain.

Since 1980 when their movement was founded, the Tigers' armed actions have been directed against the police and known torturers of the Sri Lankan security forces and goon squads.

Despite the huge military commitment by the Indian government,



despite the misery inflicted on the population, despite the massive propaganda effort designed to point a finger at the Tigers accusing them of being responsible for the plunder and devastation, the Indian army failed to meet its self-imposed 72-hour deadline for the annihilation of the Tamil Tigers.

The resistance put up by the Tigers 2500 guerillas has been an inspiring demonstration of courage and determination. Their strength lies in the widespread support for their demand for an independent Tamil Eelam, based in the decades long struggle of the Tamils against racist discrimination and violence.

The most recent explosion of anti-Tamil violence hit the news headlines in 1983 when nearly 3000 lost their lives as goon squads backed up by the Sri

Lankan police and armed forces unite unleashed a carnival of violence. The pogrom left 150,000 refugees.

But claims by Jayawardene that what he called 'ethnic conflict' has a four year history are false. Divisions between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils have been fostered ever since the mid-1800s when the British colonial rulers found 'ethnic conflict' a powerful asset in its plunder of the country's resources.

The coup in Burkina Faso

THE government of Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso has been overthrown in a bloody coup, which will have major implications for the entire Sahel region of West Africa and beyond. Sankara was killed along with three other members of the government. A further 100 other people were killed as forces of coup leader Blaise Compaoré advanced on the presidential buildings.

A NIGHT curfew has been imposed and national holiday declared to prevent the possibility of supporters of the Sankara government organising opposition.

Blaise Compaoré — who had been Sankara's deputy in the revolutionary CNR (National Council of the Revolution) government — sought to justify the coup by branding Sankara a 'traitor' and an 'autocrat' who was leading the country back to 'neocolonialism.'

The reality was quite different. Under Sankara's leadership, housing and transport have been improved

through programmes of house, rail and road building and vaccinations.

Women's rights have been promoted. Women won the right to own land, borrow money and choose their method of birth control, and equal pay.

The benefactors of the 1983 revolution have been the country's peasants, the overwhelming majority of the population and the small working class. Infant mortality and illiteracy have been substantially reduced. Land has been protected from the advancing Sahara desert by major tree planting programmes. Agrarian

reform was instigated nationalising the land and beginning its redistribution, and curtailing the rights and privileges of the traditional tribal chiefs.

In the Non-Aligned Movement, Burkina Faso collaborated closely with Cuba. The weekend prior to the coup, the capital, Ouagadougou, was the scene of a major international anti-apartheid conference.

Burkina's anti-imperialist stance brought it into conflict with French imperialism and its regional clients. In 1983, shortly after the revolution, Mali invaded. Last year, France's President Mitterrand publicly criticised Sankara.

The attitude to relations with Mitterrand appear to have been a key point of difference between Sankara and Compaoré, with the coup leader said by *Guardian* writers Lysé, Douset and Paul Webster

to be 'an admirer' of the French president. They also describe Compaoré as 'pro-Soviet'.

One of the first acts of the new regime was to release from prison. Souman Le Touré, a union leader detained in May following a strong attack on the government. Touré is a leading member of Lipad, the Burkinabé organisation with close relations to the French Communist Party.

Another difference appears to have concerned the relation between the government and the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). Whereas Sankara always stressed that the revolutions power was rooted in the CDRs, Compaoré stated as early as 1984 that 'the grassroots level many criticisms and suggestions at us, but it is the top, the leadership which decides and the grassroots have to submit'.

The nature of the Khomeini regime

IN OUR last issue Brian Grogan presented a minority view on the Socialist Action editorial board on Iran. JOHN ROSS replies putting the views of the majority.

BRIAN GROGAN'S article on Iran in the last issue of Socialist Action represents a fantasy regarding the situation in Iran, the nature of the Khomeini regime, and the attitude which socialists should take towards it.

The situation is characterised by Brian Grogan as follows: 'In the wake of the 1979 revolution there were wholesale seizures of land. Mass organisations and the trades unions came out into the open. Oppressed Kurds began to organise. And the US was expelled along with 25,000 US troops. It was denied the use of Iranian territory to organise its military domination of the region.'

'The Iranian government has done its best to contain and roll back the gains of the revolution. It has refused to legalise, let alone extend the land seizures. It has refused to impose a government monopoly of foreign trade. It has viciously attacked democratic rights and forced the trades unions underground.'

'However, the resilience of the Iranian people has been such that it has not found the strength to take on and defeat the masses in a centralised confrontation. Instead, the government has had to adopt to the pressure on it to confront imperialism and tolerate the land seizures and other such gains.'

'It is these gains that the Iranian masses have continuously mobilised to protect over the past eight years, including in the mobilisations to defeat Iraqi aggression in the Gulf war.'

Cloak

Furthermore: 'Islamic fundamentalism is the cloak under which the masses take up their demands and aspirations.'

So, apparently we have in Iran a regime, Khomeini's, which bends to the revolution, Islamic fundamentalism is a 'progressive cloak' under which the masses take up their demands. And mobilisations take place against Iraq as part of this progressive anti-imperialist mobilisations. If this were true then the Khomeini regime, while doubtless having certain regressive features, would essentially be a 'progressive' bourgeois regime of a type which we have seen in a number of semi-colonial countries. How does this equate with reality?

First there are historical cases of regimes which, while thoroughly bourgeois, created a certain space in which the workers and other pro-

gressive movements could develop. Peronism in Argentina was a classic case.

Despite repression Peron's rule was accompanied by a massive development of the trade union movement. Peron sought to maintain the position of the Argentinian bourgeoisie between imperialism and the Argentinian masses through allowing the creation of workers organisations both to 'pressure' imperialism and control the mass movement.

Regimes of the type of the MPLA in Angola, Frelimo in Mozambique, Michael Manley in Jamaica and others play the same role. While remaining bourgeois, and attacking the workers movement if it becomes too powerful, they nevertheless create a space in which the working class movement develops.

Regime

But what was the nature of the Khomeini regime? From its inception in 1979 it sought to crush progressive movements. Its first mobilisation was against Iranian women — introducing more reactionary laws than previously. It launched war against the Kurds — later incidentally diverting troops from the struggle against Iraq to do so. It smashed the independent developments among students. It crushed the development of shoras (councils) by the Iranian workers and has sought to eliminate trade unionism. Far from allowing, or creating, the limited development of a workers movement, as a 'counter-balance' to imperialism, it set out to crush it.

The way Khomeini crushed these movements did have a specific feature. Classic repressive regimes, and even bourgeois nationalist regimes of the type of Peron or Nasser, carried out their repression through the state apparatus. The core of such regimes was, in general, directly the state apparatus: the army.

This path was not open to Khomeini — and this constitutes the 'originality' of the Khomeini regime. Khomeini came to power through a revolution, an insurrection in 1979. The core of the old repressive apparatus of the Shah was both completely discredited and physically shattered. Despite Khomeini doing his best to salvage what was possible from the old state apparatus — including sections of the army whose position has been reinforced through war — it was materially and politically impossible to use these as the central instruments of bourgeois



rule.

Indeed *only* one force in Iran after 1979 was sufficiently powerful to confront the masses and defend bourgeois rule. That was Khomeini himself. He used as a secondary administrative instrument the Islamic clergy, which was the one central institution left intact after the revolution. But above all he relied on his political prestige among the masses.

This is why Khomeini was able to successively smash apparently more economically or politically 'rational' bourgeois factions — for example that of Bani Sadr. The vital things for the Iranian bourgeoisie after 1979 was not to have a conjuncturely more rational economic policy but to maintain its rule. With a weakened state apparatus Khomeini was the only reliable safeguard against any threat from the masses.

Khomeini's regime is the central bulwark of capitalist rule in Iran — and also the central instrument in Iran for *destroying* the revolution.

State

Lacking a powerful centralised state apparatus, it was forced inspired by Khomeini which directly mobilised to crush women's demands, students, national movements and the workers movement.

Khomeini's regime was intent on safeguarding Iranian bourgeois interests — in some cases in conflict with imperialism, but, above all, through confronting the Iranian masses. Its extreme nationalism was a manifestation of that, and Islamic fundamentalism was the reactionary cloak it utilised.

The Khomeini regime is based on a bloc of the Iranian bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie sometimes against imperialism, but, always acting against the masses and

working class. Its historical role is to crush the revolution and prepare the transition to a more normal form of bourgeois rule in Iran — in particular by progressively restoring the state apparatus. While classical fascism is not possible in a semi-colonial country, there are resemblances to fascism in the bourgeois-petty bourgeois bloc represented by Khomeini.

War

What then is the role of the war within this? According to Brian Grogan: 'It is these gains (of the revolution) that the Iranian masses have continuously mobilised to protect over the past eight years, including in the mobilisations to defeat Iraqi aggression in the Gulf war' (our emphasis).

But unfortunately Brian Grogan's view does not fit with the facts. It is true that Iraq initiated the war in 1981 — with the aim to crush an Iranian revolution at that time in a far healthier state than today. Indisputably, at that time, the Iranian masses were right to mobilise against that invasion.

But Iraq lost any chance of winning that war at least five years ago. For at least four, Iraq has demonstratively been attempting to bring the war to an end — on the basis of a return to its pre-war boundaries. It has been *Iran*, not Iraq, that has been prolonging the war.

Why has the Khomeini regime prolonged it when the war could speedily be brought to a halt? Is there some legitimate Iranian national goal which has not been satisfied and it is fighting for?

Territory

For example is Iran attempting to regain some part of its national territory unjustly seized by Iraq? Or is it seeking to expand workers organisations into Iraq against the Hussein dictatorship?

If so then the war itself, even if led by reactionary regime, would be progressive and could be supported. For example when Galtieri attempted to regain the Malvinas this was a progressive goal even though the regime was not — the slogan of the Argentinian masses, 'the Malvinas are Argentinian, the junta is not', clearly summarised a correct political line.

But in reality there is no progressive goal of Iran in this war. There is no section of Iranian territory seized by Iraq which it would not get back by a peace. Far from expanding workers organisation into Iraq, the Khomeini regime has systematically repressed working class organisation in Iran.

The role which continuing the war plays is internal to Iran. It allows Khomeini to rebuild the state apparatus — in particular the army. It is used to justify continuing internal repression.

Masses

The ending of the war would directly bring the Iranian masses into conflict with the Khomeini regime — which is the central prop of capitalism in Iran. Far from the continuation of the war serving progressive goals it directly serves reactionary ones.

The fact that we defend Iran even led by Khomeini against the United States and Britain — whose murderous activities on a world scale make Khomeini look like a petty bandit — does not alter the nature of that regime in Iran itself. Nor does it alter the nature of Hussein's regime in Iraq which murdered 'its' communists more than a decade and a half ago. Khomeini's regime is that of a butcher of the Iranian working class.

To cover over, to prettify that regime as Brian Grogan does is a disgraceful episode for a socialist.

BT 'guilty' of victimisation, political vetting

BT has admitted to an industrial tribunal that its sacking of John Deason in May was victimisation for trade union activities. In admitting guilt, BT's barrister Mr J Griffiths Jones said that the company voluntarily submitted to an order for Deason's reinstatement, but continued to refuse his reinstatement and would therefore pay the legal maximum compensation of £41,856.20. The company did all this without a shred of evidence being presented against them! In fact it is clear that the company took this course of action to forestall such evidence coming to light. NCU City branch member ANN FIANDER reports.

TRIBUNALS are stacked in employers' favour. Less than two per cent of all dismissal cases brought to tribunals result in reinstatement orders. But BT did not even test the tribunal's in-built bias to see whether or not it could get away with its victimisation unscathed.

Its 'pre-emptive strike' drew angry remarks from tribunal chair, Oliver Lodge, who said it was for the tribunal to decide on an order for reinstatement on the basis of evidence. He did not necessarily think that such an order would be granted in this case.

Lodge condemned BT's determination to pay compensation as 'irresponsible behaviour' to its shareholders. The company, he said, had 'fallen on its own sword'. But BT's 'surrender' was only tactical. In the first place, John Deason would still be without a job. If the company can get away with buying out trade union activists — even at the rather expensive price of £40,000 — it will be more than satisfied. BT's profit last year was £2000 million: that could finance an awful lot of victimisations.

Vetting

But more importantly, £40,000 was a small price to pay to keep the lid on the company's political vetting activities. BT was fully aware that if the tribunal had taken its normal course, Deason's lawyers could have requested that highly sensitive documents, crucial to its case, be subpoenaed.

With the *Spycatcher* revelations concerning the involvement of BT's predecessor, the Post Office, with MI5 already gaining wide publicity; and with documents that Deason's



John Deason

solicitors had already seen in preparing the case, the associated political scandal was more than either BT or the state itself could stomach.

But in attempting to keep the lid on the whole affair, BT has paid an enormous moral price already. It has openly admitted that it victimised Deason — nobody can any longer be in any doubt about this — and it has implicitly admitted guilt over political vetting.

The National Communications Union has had evidence concerning BT's political vetting for some time and its national conference in July called for a campaign to get all disciplinary measures imposed on its members as a result of the national strike removed.

Deason's moral victory should now be turned into a springboard for serious union-led action on both questions: for Deason's reinstatement, for the reinstatement of John Treadaway victimised alongside Deason, and for all those who suffered lesser disciplinary measures to be given a clean slate; and for a hue and cry to be launched by the union to expose and defeat BT's political vetting activities.

Postal workers ballot for action

FROM 24 October, branches of the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) will be balloting their members on industrial action in pursuit of a three-hour reduction in the working week with no loss of pay for all grades. The annual conference and executive council are recommending a 'yes' vote, writes UCW member STEVE BELL.

THE basic week for most UCW grades is 43 hours, with counter and clerical staff working 42 and 41 hours. The last reduction in the working week was in 1965, from 45 hours to 43.

The Post Office has offered a one-hour reduction for some grades providing they perform the same amount of work in the reduced time, combining this insult with

unilaterally tearing up discipline and promotion procedures.

While recommending a 'yes' vote the executive council is giving signals that it is considering less than the all-out strike action that will be needed to win. It extended negotiations fruitlessly beyond the conference mandate, frittering away important advantages given the mass of mail building up before Xmas.

There is a strong will to fight, particularly in the sorting offices. Unofficial actions have been common in the last two years. A 'yes' vote in the ballot is probable.

The government is threatening loss of the letter monopoly and a speeded up privatisation programme. The stronger the response of the membership, the more difficult it will be to carry through either of these attacks.

More attacks from British Coal

YORKSHIRE miners leaders were told last Friday 16 October of the coal board's intention to close two more pits with the destruction of 1300 jobs. At a colliery review meeting, the board named Wooley and Redbrook collieries as being for the axe. The closure move follows similar recent closure announcements of Wheldale colliery in Yorkshire, Snowdown in Kent, Renishaw in Derbyshire and Cadely Hill in the Midlands.

A week earlier management had announced its intention to impose changes in technology arrangements which would threaten both the jobs and safety conditions of mineworkers. They are proposing to replace traditional steel tunnel supports by roof bolts. Roof bolts cost £50 to install compared to £100 for steel supports and are widely used in the US coal industry which has different geological conditions in addition to it being notorious for its worse accident rate than Britain.

By Jon Silberman

They can be installed more quickly and with fewer mineworkers and their introduction is seen as another cost-cutting scheme which puts profits before miners' jobs and conditions. Both the NUM and Nacods are opposed

to them as a sole means of supports.

Profits

Another such 'profits first' proposal is British Coal's plan to sell off its remaining housing stock to private landlords threatening the future of thousands of elderly tenants who occupying the 14,500 dwellings. Justifying the move — described as a 'scandal' by the housing organisation Shelter — a British Coal spokesman said on 6 October that the corporation had 'a responsibility to obtain a fair market price' for its assets.

The deepening coal board attacks came as the national executive meeting of the NUM on 8 October voted by 21 votes to one to continue the present limited overtime ban against the board's proposed new disciplinary code. But the same executive

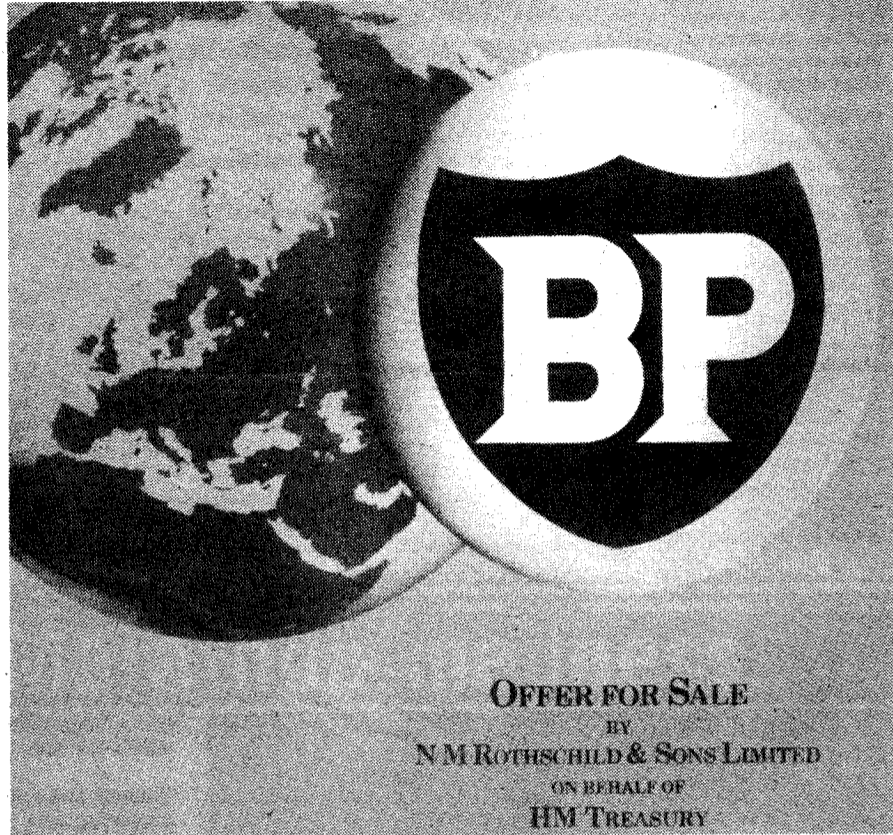
meeting rejected by 14 votes to eight a move to place the question of escalating the action in the hands of the membership through a special delegate conference. The conference move was backed by delegates from Yorkshire, Durham, Kent and Notts.

Following this national executive meeting, the Yorkshire area leaders decided to suspend indefinitely their original intention to unilaterally ballot their members over stepped up action in favour of launching a campaign for a national delegate conference.

Cost

The limited ban had cost 205,000 tonnes in lost production in the first three weeks, British Coal announced. The lost production is worth £8.2m and accounts for less than four per cent of total output.

● An NUM research paper says that privatisation of the electricity supply industry could lead to between 170,000 and 200,000 job losses in electricity, coal, rail and power engineering industries.



Not looking so good ...

THE stock market crash has not only dealt a devastating blow to the 'Thatcher revolution' so-called, it has been a bad day for the right-wing in the labour movement. The stake-in-the-system strategy of Bryan Gould's 'share-owning democracy' combined single union, no-strike deals pioneered by the leaderships of the EETPU and AEU is not looking so good.

Vauxhall

WORKERS at Vauxhall's Luton plant voted by two-to-one for strike action for a £10 improvement in bonus payments. Since August, when car and van production at the plant were separated in Vauxhall's Isuzu link-up, the company has calculated bonuses on a new basis. As a result they have been lowered substantially.

Although the dispute does not directly affect Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port plant, the company has unilaterally suspended national wage negotiations until it is over.

Senior Colman

GENERAL secretary of the NUR, Jimmy Knapp, has sent out a circular to all branches and district councils of the union concerning mobilising support for the striking engineering workers at Senior Colman in Sale near Manchester. The circular explains that after 'nine months on strike, the strikers are in desperate need'. Such national union backing is a real boost to the strikers and can be built on to win wider support for their battle for union rights.

● Messages of support and donations to Senior Colman Strike Committee, AEU House, 43 Crescent, Salford, M5 4PE.

Courtauld's

SHOP stewards from all Courtauld's plants met and decided to oppose draconian company attacks on their conditions.

The company had given notice to the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers (NUHKW) that all their members' contracts are to be terminated at the end of the year. Courtauld's proposals for new contracts for the 6000 mainly female workforce include introducing 24-hour working through continental shifts and night and weekend work; ending the right to tea-breaks; changing holiday conditions; introducing super-intensive time and motion studies using video cameras and split-second timing; ending national negotiating structures in order to negotiate unit by unit.

Pregnant woman sacked

AN apprentice hairdresser sacked from her job because she was pregnant 'won' £2066 compensation at a London industrial tribunal last week. This is the fifth such finding by tribunals in recent months but by no means gives job security to women. The cash award is pitiful and the Court of Appeal ruled in March that a woman selected for redundancy because she was pregnant had not been unfairly dismissed.

Coalfield women meet

LAST Saturday 16 October over 70 women from the coalfields attended a national meeting of Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) in Sheffield. All areas of the coalfield were represented apart from Kent, prevented from arriving by the effects of the weather.

The meeting took the form of an extended meeting of the national committee of WAPC, and was the first opportunity to get together to share experiences and exchange views since last year's highly successful annual conference.

In the 2½ years since the strike ended, the WAPC movement has played a leading role in the Justice for

Mineworkers Campaign (295 miners remain sacked), and the campaign against nuclear power stations, and their voice has been heard in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, international solidarity campaigns, trade union struggles and in campaigns in defence of pit communities against threatened pit closures and other issues.

The meeting represented the beginning of an ongoing discussion about how to consolidate and extend the Women Against Pit Closures Movement. The meeting decided that a national conference will be held in three months time at which this discussion will be concluded.

Birmingham NALGO

EMPLOYEES of Birmingham City Council have voted overwhelmingly for a one-day strike in support of colleagues demanding a living wage. An 1100-strong meeting of NALGO members held 19 October voted to strike on the following day in support of clerks in the city's Housing Department who have been seeking a review of pay levels since August 1986.

According to NALGO officials some clerks take home as little as £60 per week, and those trapped in Scale 1 can take ten years to reach the maximum gross wage of £6246. NALGO organises 7000 of the city's employees.

Scale 1 and 2 clerks — the vast majority whom are under 25 or women — have been on strike since 21 September. Despite this, leaders of Birmingham's Labour group have not moved an inch forward towards meeting their demands.

Workers lobbied the September and October meetings of the District Labour Party but the newly elected right-wing officers never saw fit to let them have a chance to present their case. Strike leader, Nick Hay has described the attitude of Labour councillors as 'shocking' and called on rank and file party activists to give the strikers their full support.

Scargill, Heathfield campaign against code

LAST WEEKEND NUM leaders Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield were in Notts campaigning to build the fight against the new disciplinary code and the deeper attacks on the coal industry that lie behind it. Speaking to an audience of Notts, Derbyshire and South Yorkshire miners and coalfield women at a Justice for Mineworkers social event in Whitwell, Peter Heathfield issued a stirring rallying call to keep up the fight against the coal board. He urged all miners to resist lucrative pay-offs now being offered for voluntary redundancy.

In its latest move to cut back manpower in the industry British Coal is offering an additional £5000 to miners agreeing to take redundancy before next March. Despite these bribes Heathfield explained that young faceworkers would be leaving the industry with the equivalent of one year's wages. This point struck a cord in a village which saw its pit closed shortly after the end of the 1984-85 strike.

By Andy Brooking

Peter Heathfield ended by making it clear that the attacks the board is now making were themselves helping to regenerate unity and militancy within the NUM. Despite the difficulties of the situation 'our time is coming' he said. That is the task that the NUM leadership as a whole must raise itself to be concluded.

Themes

Arthur Scargill expanded on these themes at a meeting organised by the Calverton branch of the NUM on Saturday 17 October. The 100-strong meeting, which included

some half a dozen UDM members, opened with speeches from Helen Arthur, chair of Nottingham Anti-Apartheid and Teodoro Ruizarana, a representative of the FSLN of Nicaragua who is visiting Notts.

Code

Scargill explained the three-fold significance of British Coal's imposition of the new disciplinary code. First, the code is designed to allow the Board 'to sack mineworkers, branch officials, and activists who oppose the policies of British Coal'.

Second, it is aimed 'to weaken resolve and resistance as the Board tries to push through a six-day working week'. Although some people in the industry and in the Labour Party favoured six-day working, Scargill stressed that he would never preside over its introduction. He explained that the sole purpose of six-day working was to force through some 32 further pit closures involving the loss of some 40,000 jobs.

Third, behind both the



offensive on the disciplinary code and six-day working, Scargill said, lies the Tory government's project of privatising both the coal industry and electricity supply. Scargill showed how these seemingly separate issues combine into one attack which is itself linked to broader issues such as the stepping up of the nuclear power programme and the importation of Namibian uranium.

Closures

A further round of pit closures is at the very heart of the Board's plans and it is clear from British Coal's own figures that the Notts coalfield will be right in the firing line whatever the 'sweetheart' UDM might like to believe. Scargill

presented the Board's own figures which, make it quite clear that an overwhelming majority of Notts pits are 'uneconomic' by the Board's standards.

At Calverton itself, for example, coal is produced at over £3 per gigajoule compared with the Board's target of £1.50.

Despite a recurrent reluctance of the majority of the NUM's national executive, Scargill and Heathfield both believe that a majority of the membership stands with them. In reply to a member's question, Scargill said that he favours putting the decision over stepping up the action in the hands of the membership through convening a special delegate conference.

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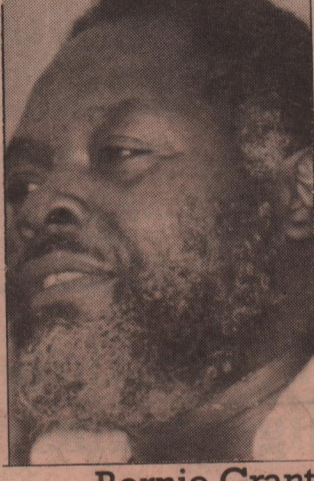
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