

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 7 April 1989 • No 10 • 40p

Mikhail Gorbachev

A SOVIET TORY



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Editor: Joan Phillips

THE CULT OF GORBACHEV

'A Soviet Tory? Mikhail Gorbachev? Yes. If Gorbachev can sweep the most sceptical anti-communist in the capitalist world off her feet, then what else are we supposed to call him? When a capitalist outfit such as Investors in Industry uses the leader of the communist world to sell itself as a force for change in a media advertising campaign we should be questioning what is going on. As the advert says: 'If you think it's a strange idea for a capitalist company to praise a communist leader then think again.'

Everyone is a fan of Mikhail Gorbachev these days. Since he became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 the Western media have not stopped singing the praises of Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. At first Gorbachev's reforming style was treated with suspicion in the West. Today he is hailed as a hero who is out to civilise the communist world. The Soviet chief's success in winning friends and influence among the most reactionary of politicians is truly astounding.

The 10 million dollar question is why? It is evident that Gorbachev has a great aptitude for public relations and international diplomacy, skills which have always been in short supply among Soviet leaders. He even looks, talks and behaves like a human being and even a little like a Western politician. He has won hands down in the battle to influence world opinion, launching one international initiative after another, and invariably

upstaging Western diplomats at every turn. Yet charisma cannot explain why Gorbachev has been such a hit in the West.

Gorbachev is the West's man of the moment because he has made major concessions to the capitalist order on a number of key issues. In the sphere of international relations, Gorbachev has been prepared to make significant compromises to ease East-West tensions. His unilateral commitment to cut Soviet conventional forces by 500 000 was a major diplomatic coup, a sign of good faith to the West that the Soviet Union is prepared to disarm in the cause of world peace. The Soviet disengagement from Afghanistan, the prospect of some kind of settlement in Kampuchea and Gorbachev's willingness to do deals with South Africa over Angola and Israel over the Middle East, have earned him accolades in Western political circles.

For Gorbachev, these initiatives are vital to secure the future of his regime. Ultimately, the success of his political reforms depends on what happens to the economy. And since the scope for economic reform is limited by the nature of the Soviet system, progress in this sphere hinges on developments in the international arena. Gorbachev's diplomatic dealings are intended to eliminate the arms race, which is a substantial drain on Soviet resources. If the bureaucracy could redirect resources devoted to defence to other sectors, it could have the effect of boosting the economy. Easing international tensions could also aid the Soviet Union in gaining access to foreign technology and alleviating the effects of economic stagnation.

It is in the sphere of ideology that Gorbachev has made the most breathtaking concessions to the capitalist world. A major development of the past year is that communism has been officially disowned. It is becoming almost obligatory for reformers of the Gorbachev school not only to criticise the mistaken policies of past leaders, but to call the whole system into question. There is nothing new about Gorbachev blaming his problems on the crimes of the Brezhnev and Stalin eras, but it is unprecedented for a Soviet leader to admit that the project of communism has been an unmitigated failure. In short, the party is making an open confession of economic and ideological bankruptcy.

A corollary of this repudiation of communism as a viable form of social organisation is a headlong rush to embrace the capitalist market. There is now a consensus that the market is preferable to the command economy, and a vital mechanism for establishing economic efficiency. At the moment these discussions are taking place purely at the level of ideas, and all the talk is of market socialism and a mixed economy rather than the restoration of capitalism. Yet the logic of development is towards the restoration of the market and capitalism.

Gorbachev's preparedness to discard the sacred tenets of official communism is an admission that the system established under Stalin has come to the end of its days. The ideological ferment which has been unleashed shows that the Stalinists in the Kremlin are conscious of the fact that their time has come. The issue at stake for the bureaucracy is how is the Soviet Union going to survive. This is the backdrop to the changes which are taking place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe today.

If Gorbachev's concessions to capitalist ideology have endeared him to erstwhile Cold Warriors of the calibre of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the popularity of his *glasnost* policy has become a source of inspiration for the Western left. Support for *glasnost* thus provides a point of convergence between right and left. In the past the Soviet Union was nothing but an embarrassment for the left as an advertisement against socialism and communism. Today the left has jumped on the Gorbachev bandwagon, portraying the process of liberalisation under *glasnost* as a positive example of the possibility for democratic renewal.

Gorbachev's triumphs in the battle for world opinion have helped to shape the left's attitude towards *glasnost*. The Soviet regime's new-found respectability in the West has transformed what was once a source of chagrin into a positive asset. Supporting *glasnost* has become a safe bet for the left. By falling into line behind official Gorbachymania the left has revealed its subservience to middle class public opinion. The left has joined the Gorbachev fan club because in *glasnost* it has found a model which even diehard reactionaries can enthuse about.

The left's support for *glasnost* betrays its lack of an independent perspective and its abandonment of the goal of revolutionary change. The first problem with the left's attitude towards developments in the Soviet Union is the idea that Gorbachev could ever be a force for progress. The process of political reform undertaken by Gorbachev is an experiment in controlled democratisation which is designed to perpetuate the rule of the Soviet bureaucracy. The Soviet bureaucracy perpetuates its power through excluding the working class from influence. Gorbachev is just as much a representative of that political order as was Stalin.

By endorsing the idea of reform from above, the left reveals its contempt for the working class as a force for change. The left's enthusiasm for bureaucratic reform from above in the Soviet Union is paralleled by its support for reform through the agency of the state in the West. The logic of this outlook is that it is the job of bureaucrats and politicians to engineer change, and the role of the working class to act as a pressure group from below.

The notion that genuine change could come from above has no place in the Marxist tradition, which sees the working class as the agency of social transformation and progress. Neither the Soviet bureaucracy nor its individual representatives, Gorbachev included, is capable of reforming Soviet society. The aim of Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy is simply to modify the way in which the bureaucracy exercises its domination.

The second problem with the left's attitude towards *glasnost* is the idea that Gorbachev has made it easier to argue for socialism in the West. The left's contention is that by burying the myth of the Soviet threat, Gorbachev has deprived the right of an important propaganda weapon, and made it more difficult to discredit the left by association with the 'Evil Empire'. It is true that Gorbachev's diplomatic achievements have neutralised anti-Soviet propaganda, and Cold War ideology has lost its edge. Yet all this ignores the extent to which the changes taking place under *glasnost* have discredited communism even further.

Gorbachev's denunciations of communism and tributes to capitalism are all so much grist to the mill of right-wing propagandists. All his admissions of human rights abuses, his homages to the market and his political reforms are being paraded with glee by capitalist ideologues as proof that communism does not work and that capitalism is a superior form of social organisation. Far from making it easier for socialists to popularise their ideas, Gorbachev is providing the apologists for the system with ammunition to use against the left.

It is ironic that the left should use the term 'socialist renewal' to describe a process which would be better described as capitalist renewal. Ever since the Stalinist bureaucracy usurped power from the working class after the Bolshevik Revolution the Soviet Union has provided a negative model for any kind of working class action. Today Stalinism's potential to play a destructive role in holding back the working class is at its high-point. When Soviet ideologists embrace the capitalist market, admit that their system is bankrupt and argue that Marxism was a mistake, this can only have a profoundly destructive effect on working class politics. That is why we have to settle scores with Stalinism, not to iconise the heir to Stalin's system.

NATO AT 40

Nato is 40 years old this week, but it is suffering a mid-life crisis, and does not feel like celebrating. When it was formed in 1949 the West sold this imperialist club as a bulwark of freedom against Soviet expansion. For 40 years the imperialist powers cited the Soviet threat as Nato's *raison d'être*. But since Mikhail Gorbachev embarked on his diplomatic offensive all the old shibboleths about the dangers of a Russian invasion of Western Europe have become increasingly difficult to sustain.

As old-fashioned red-baiting loses its force, Nato finds itself without a focus. Conflict within the imperialist camp can no longer be resolved through American calls for unity against the 'Evil Empire'. As Lord Carrington commented before leaving Nato, 'it's much easier to hold the alliance together when they are frightened than when they're not'. Thus instead of a rousing birthday celebration, its fortieth anniversary finds Nato casting around for new variations on the myth of the Soviet bogey.

At a Nato anniversary meeting Robert Gates, the US deputy assistant for national security affairs, put the new line from the White House. This is that Gorbachev's reforms have set in motion a power struggle, which means the West cannot possibly make long-term decisions that depend 'on the continued political survival of one man'. The upshot is that a forceful Nato is still necessary, because the question is not really whether there is a threat now, but whether there will be a threat in the future.

It is ironic that the easing of East-West tensions should represent not a step towards peace, but a point of departure for a new era of militarism. The escalation of the arms race by leading Nato powers at a time when Gorbachev is making concession after concession on disarmament suggests that the militarisation of international relations cannot be understood by focusing on East-West affairs. The resurgence of militarism in every Western citadel is the outcome of rising tensions and conflicts within the Western Alliance.

The existence of Nato presupposes that the USA is still the undisputed economic superpower and military colossus. It also presumes that Japan and West Germany are prepared to continue being excluded from influence in the international arena without complaint. As a deal which ratified the USA's stature as global supremo over a host of nonentity vassal states, Nato made sense in 1949. In 1989 it is a nonsense. The changing balance of forces among the imperialist powers has fragmented the Western Alliance and strengthened trends towards militarism.

After 40 years of operating as a united front for the world's warmongers, it is good that the Western Alliance is crumbling. But we need to be vigilant against the militaristic methods which America, Britain and the rest will adopt to pursue their global interests. The way to counter the culture of militarism is to popularise an internationalist outlook in the working class, which identifies a common interest among peoples from all nations in opposing the imperialist powers which benefit from military adventures.

Publisher Revolutionary Communist Party, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX ©copyright
Printer Morning Litho Printers Ltd (TU), 439 North Woolwich Road, London E16
Annual subscription rates (individuals) ★ Britain and Northern Ireland £26 ★ Europe and Irish Republic £34 ★ North Africa and Middle East (airmail) £34 ★ Americas, Asia, Central and Southern Africa (airmail) £37 ★ Australasia and Japan (airmail) £40 ★ Outside Europe — all destinations (surface mail) £44
Circulation 01-375 1485. Newsdesk 01-375 1485.
Correspondence to The Editor, the next step, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX
ISSN 014 350 X 7 April 1989. Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.

letters



Write to the next step,
BM RCP,
London WC1N 3XX

WHEN IS A SCAB NOT A SCAB?

YOUR article on the poll tax (17 March) was excellent, and useful to English anti-poll tax activists as an account of the lessons of Scotland's experience.

What I would like clarified is why snoopers (who I agree are scabs) are different from other sections of the council workforce who are responsible for implementing the poll tax. The snoopers merely take scabbing to its conclusion. I suppose you could argue that council workers drafted into the poll tax department had little choice, and did not consciously decide to scab. But you could say snoopers themselves face a choice between snooping and the dole, and ET is used to

conscript poll tax snoopers.

My own view is that there are always some people who put their own immediate interests before those of their class, the classic example being scabs in a strike. There are always some individuals who undermine collective action because 'I want to keep a roof over my family's head', etc: this is entirely understandable but should not alter our attitude to scabs.

Can you clarify this distinction between snoopers and other council workers implementing the poll tax? the next step reader Manchester

NEWS FOCUS

THE RELAUNCH OF LABOUR

A PARTY ONCE AGAIN?

Neil Kinnock, we are told, is a man reborn. And his party, too, is about to be resurrected. According to party officials, Labour is to be relaunched through a 10 week-long campaign costing some £400 000, and opening with Kinnock's 'Red Rose Rally' in Birmingham this Sunday. We are promised a new anthem (Eddie Bayliss singing 'Meet the challenge, make the change') to accompany the new party. And somewhere along the line we are also promised a set of new policies. Both party and leader, say Labour officials, (and presumably anthem and policies as well) will gatecrash Her Indoors' tenth birthday celebrations in May.

The resurrection of the Labour Party has been a long time coming. It is five and half years since Kinnock took over as party leader, and two since he launched the policy review. Ever since Kinnock astonished observers by asking a straightforward one-line question during prime minister's question time six weeks ago, the pundits have been predicting that Labour is about to be a party once again. But, to paraphrase the Bishop of Durham, will Labour's second coming be anything more than just a conjuring trick with old bones?

Kinnock's aim is to create a modern technocratic Labour Party which could appeal to the middle class voters in whose hands he believes lies the

Labour government would bail out capitalists by providing them with cash for investment.

If all this sounds familiar, that's probably because the Tories have already implemented most of it in the past 10 years. The problem with Labour's shiny new baggage is that it looks decidedly second-hand. Of the 200 new ideas which Kinnock's policy review maestros have reportedly come up with, probably the only original one is the proposal that members of parliament will no longer have to wear a collapsible opera hat when raising a point of order during a division.

To make up for the lack of substance the new-look Labour Party has gone in for gloss and PR.

Campaign managers are considering cutting the Eddie Bayliss song as a single and promoting it with a Live Aid-type video. Labour also wants to promote Kinnock's frontbench team as a 'cabinet in waiting'. Given its performance during last week's party political broadcast—when shadow chancellor John Smith informed us that North Korea was one of Britain's major competitors—it might be waiting a long time.

Kinnock has managed to cut the Labour Party's links with the past, but is unable to find a role for it in the present. In the post-war years Labour appeared the natural party of government because it provided a strategy for managing capitalism by

THERE IS A SCOTTISH SOLUTION

ALAN HARDING makes numerous disparaging references to the Scottish National Party and the Scottish working class (the next step, 17 March). But whilst he describes the SNP as being 'all things to all people', he barely mentions the most important point of the SNP, namely, economic and political independence

from England and 'Great' Britain.

A recent opinion poll suggests that over half the Scottish electorate would vote for the 'utopian' policy of independence within Europe. Would Alan Harding have us believe that a small, inherently rich nation such as Scotland would fail to survive within

Europe, or that the European community would renege on the democratically expressed wishes of the Scottish people? Or does he believe that the Scottish working class has no right to make its own democratic choice?

I would contend that the struggle for Scottish independence is the most revolutionary force in British politics today. The establishment of an independent Scotland would deal a death blow to neo-Thatcherism, a moribund Labourism, and lead to the rapid resolution of the Irish War. Furthermore it would lead to a renaissance in English politics, so long bedevilled by narrow-minded imperialism.

Sadly, it would appear that the RCP has once again found common ground with the Tories, Labour, Liberals, Communists etc and has firmly nailed its unionist colours to the mast.

J Gardner
Edinburgh



NO BANS ON ISLAM

THE National Union of Students at Imperial College London has set a precedent of interfering in the political affairs of student societies. It met to discuss a proposal to put an ultimatum to the Islamic Society: either disown the ayatollah's death threat against Salman Rushdie or face being disbanded.

This move must be fervently opposed because

it leaves foreign students wide open to victimisation. It must also be opposed because it could be extended to include left-wing groups, for refusing to condemn the actions of Irish republicans, for example. NUS is not merely ineffectual as a defensive organisation; it is now attacking students itself.

Floyd
South London

NUCLEAR POWER & WORKERS' CONTROL

JOHN GIBSON (letters, 10 March) is correct not to indulge in a debate about whether we should be for or against the closure of nuclear power stations.

But saying we must examine the situation and decide whether nuclear power is qualitatively more or less dangerous than other forms of energy production is (i) to tell people to do no more than they are already doing (ie read and protest, which the anti-nuclear lobby does); and (ii) to presume that such a decision can be made objectively this side of workers' control of society.

Even if we had total access to the nuclear industry's secrets, the information gleaned would indicate simply that the technology had been developed for profit (and its defence) and not for social need. The issue is: who controls society? Anything else is to encourage people to devote their energies to Greenpeace-type activities, which I am sure is not John Gibson's intention.

Nigel Niles
Brixton

SPRAY ON?

IN the context of wider issues such as famine and war it is fair to say that there are more pressing concerns than the ozone layer and the environment (the next step, 10 March). Nevertheless, exhorting people to 'spray on' regardless risks offending people unnecessarily.

It might be wise to assume that there are people who are genuinely concerned about the environment and who are motivated to do something. Some will have enough intuition to realise the inadequacy of the Green perspective in today's conditions.

The RCP should acknowledge that there is a problem, be sensitive to it and be careful not to underestimate ecological dangers. The most important point is to

convince the Greens of the necessity for a coherent anti-capitalist alternative.

Communist society is based on need: people need to breathe clean air, drink unpolluted water etc. Workers' democracy and the free flow of information would ensure open discussion in the interests of society as a whole. Most environmental problems would be eradicated by long-term conscious planning.

Urging people to spray on today will only aggravate a problem we will inherit and then have to solve. Wouldn't it be sensible for the RCP to form an organisation, like Workers Against Racism or the Irish Freedom Movement, to attract left-wing environment-conscious people?

Charles Wood
London



Singing the blues: born-again Kinnock is a pint-size Thatcher

future of Labour. To achieve this Kinnock has ditched both the personnel and the policies which have traditionally been identified with Labourism.

All the old right-wing bureaucrats such as Denis Healey and James Callaghan, who used to run the party in its heyday, have had their day, while left-wing activists like Tony Benn and Eric Heffer have both been relegated to the margins of the party. Kinnock has replaced them with identikit technocrats who have risen silently through the ranks into the shadow cabinet.

Jack Straw, Bryan Gould, Tony Blair, John Smith, Gordon Brown—if someone swapped them around it is unlikely that anyone would notice.

Kinnock has also dumped the ideological baggage which the Labour Party had tramped around with in the post-war years. Policies such as nationalisation, redistribution, state intervention—all are deemed to have died with the dinosaurs. To decide what shiny new luggage Labour should carry, Kinnock set up seven policy review groups in 1987.

The review groups will produce their final reports in May and these will be debated at the party conference in the autumn. But the main arguments of the reports have already been given ample airing. The key themes in the new policies are the promotion of the market as an economic regulator, of efficiency as the yardstick of progress and of the individual as the centre of political attention. The reviews back privatisation and share ownership, Employment Training and 'supply-side socialism'—a Kinnockism for saying that a future

reconciling the needs of the system with the aspirations of workers through the mediation of the labour bureaucracy.

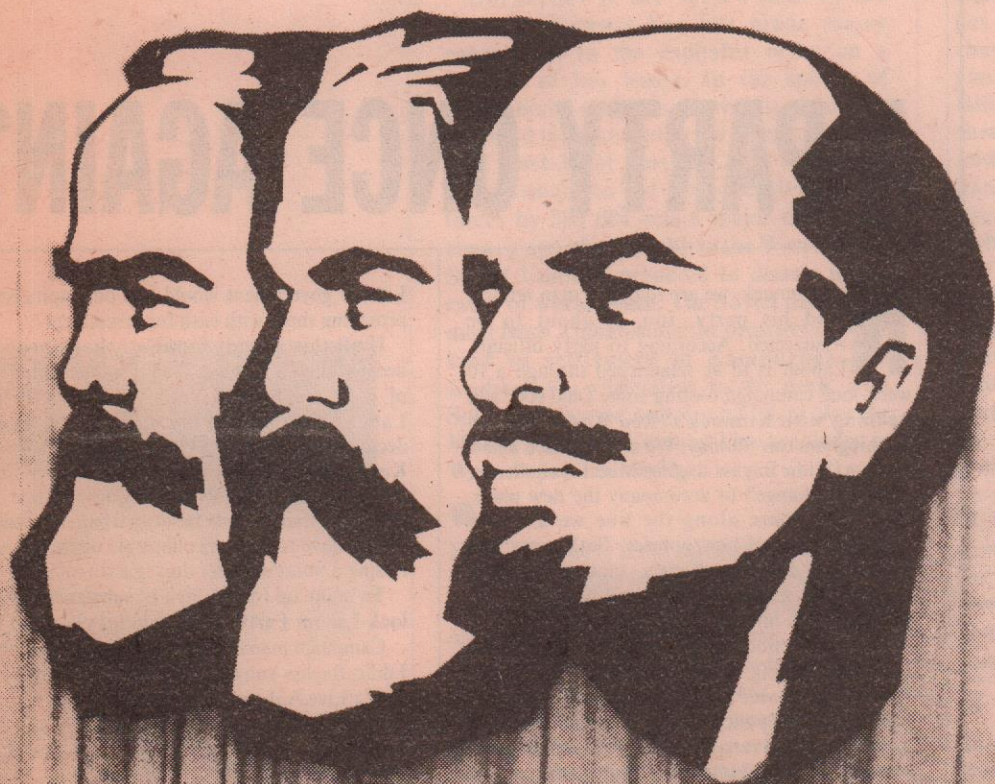
In the Thatcher era, the capitalist class has discarded the institutions and conventions of consensus politics, and opted for the methods of direct class domination. It no longer has any use for a party whose main function in life was to act as a mediating force between capital and labour.

The born-again Labour Party is an attempt to come to terms with these changing conditions. But why should a watered down version of Thatcherism be any more relevant than old-fashioned Labourism? From the recent by-election results and opinion poll surveys there is little evidence to suggest that Kinnock has made any headway in wooing middle class voters. In any case, if middle class voters do get disenchanted with Thatcher, why should they turn to a weaker solution of the same medicine?

While Kinnock has so far failed to create a new middle class constituency, he risks alienating the Labour Party's working class supporters by cutting off all links with its past and embracing Thatcherite policies with such fervour. The danger for Kinnock is that the Labour Party will end up without a distinctive programme and without a solid social base. His party is threatening to end up like the faces in the shadow cabinet—lightweight, anonymous, directionless. Born again the Labour Party might be, but it is little more than a conjuring trick with some very old ideas.

SOVIET UNION

THE GORBACHEV REVOLUTION



GRAVEDIGGER OF COMMUNISM?



The outcome of the recent elections in the Soviet Union sent a shock wave through the Soviet bureaucracy. It took three days for the leadership to work out a coherent response. A defensive Mikhail Gorbachev accepted that the results showed that people felt things were changing too slowly: 'It is those who are restructuring too slowly that lost.'

In the West the results have been judged by the criterion of whether they are good or bad for Gorbachev. The concern about Gorbachev's future unites commentators on the left and right of the political spectrum here. This common outlook stems from the assumption that Gorbachev holds out the only hope for change, not just for the Soviet Union but for the world order. The question being asked in the aftermath of the election is whether the results have strengthened or weakened Gorbachev's drive for reform.

To appreciate the significance of the election results we must look at them in the light of recent developments in the Soviet Union. The elections came at a time when Gorbachev's reform programme was running into serious difficulties.

Gamble

The elections to the Congress of People's Deputies fitted into the Soviet leadership's strategy of controlled liberalisation of society. The Gorbachev leadership has been working on the theory that the economic changes needed in the Soviet Union cannot take place without political changes.

By opening up the election process, Gorbachev took a gamble that political reform would win legitimacy for the bureaucracy and give him the means to tackle the problem of economic stagnation.

Economic stagnation in the eighties has meant that material incentives in the form of consumer goods are not available to stimulate people to work more efficiently. Instead, the supporters of *perestroika* wanted to give people more of a political stake in the system. Gorbachev hopes that this will encourage them to work harder and to put pressure on their local bosses to implement changes.

Over the past four years there have been major changes in social and political life. There has been a general lifting of censorship, so that books have been published and plays performed which would previously have been banned. The media, and particularly the press, have become openly critical of the shortcomings of Soviet society. Campaigns which have been waged through the press against corrupt and inefficient local officials have often ended in their replacement.

The authorities have been prepared to tolerate limited political discussion in the form of various clubs which discuss political and social problems. The KGB has become less prominent and has not arrested anybody for directly political reasons since 1986, with the exception of the troubled southern republics.

Toothpaste

Last year there was a choice of candidates in local elections for the first time, although only in one per cent of local constituencies. There is no doubt that the more liberal climate has encouraged people to voice their criticisms of society more openly. Newspapers and magazines are full of signed letters of complaint about every aspect of Soviet life.

Through this process of liberalisation the Soviet leadership has managed to win the support of a key section of society: the intelligentsia.

The intellectuals have the most to gain and the least to lose from a more relaxed political regime. By winning favour with this stratum, Gorbachev has managed to incorporate much of the dissident movement into the reform process. Prominent dissidents like Andrei Sakharov and Roy Medvedev have come out in support of the Gorbachev regime.

If the mobilisation of the intelligentsia can be counted as Gorbachev's biggest domestic success, his biggest failure is in the economic sphere. Most of the complaints in the press centre on the dire state of the economy.

After four years of supposed restructuring of the economy, shortages of many basic consumer goods, such as fresh food, toothpaste, soap and sugar have worsened. Last year's grain harvest was

way down on the previous year's. Gorbachev's dramatic announcement of unilateral cuts in conventional forces and the defence budget was largely a response to snowballing criticism of food shortages. The leadership had to promise a rapid switch from military to food production in an attempt to head off the rising tide of dissatisfaction.

So far every attempt at economic reform has fallen foul of the central weakness of the Soviet system: the lack of an effective mechanism to regulate the labour-time of society. Economic measures such as the attempt to make individual enterprises self-financing have failed because of the impossibility of creating competitive pressures in the absence of market conditions.

Far from experiencing a renaissance argues Rob Knight, the Soviet system has reached the end of the road

A consensus now exists within the party intelligentsia on the need to introduce a form of market into the economy. Soviet economists hope to introduce some movement into the economy through such measures as the introduction of private farming, a private service sector, the abolition of price subsidies on basic consumer goods and the devaluation of the rouble. However, attempts to introduce these and other radical measures have come up against the entrenched interests of the bureaucracy and the opposition of the working class to changes which would lower living standards even more. As a result reform measures have been either delayed or implemented in a piecemeal fashion.

The pressures of coping with a declining economy have created tensions in the bureaucracy which have manifested themselves in a number of ways.

At the leadership level there is a division over how fast to introduce changes. In the central committee elections for the Congress of People's Deputies the politburo members most publicly identified for and against reform, Alexander Yakovlev and Yegor Ligachev, both lost a substantial number of votes, indicating a process of differentiation in the leadership. When Boris Yeltsin lost his position as Moscow party chief in 1987 he was an early victim of this emerging conflict within the bureaucracy.

Ethnic

These tensions are reflected throughout the party. In his post-election statement Gorbachev revealed that in the past three years two thirds of the leaders of party and state organs, collective farms and enterprises have been replaced. He has since dropped non-too-subtle hints that party candidates defeated in the elections should do the decent thing and resign their positions before they are replaced. After the Leonid Brezhnev years, which marked the heyday of bureaucratic inertia, these purges have introduced a process of fragmentation into the ranks of the bureaucracy.

The election results show how this fragmentation of interests is working itself out. The biggest voter reaction was against local or national party bosses who are most closely identified with a slow pace of change. Party members who espoused the need for change often got very high levels of support. The results indicate that large numbers of people were casting a protest vote against the present system. There is some evidence to show that the party has begun to lose its cohesiveness under the pressure of events.

In the Baltic states party leaders who identified themselves with the nationalist cause got 90 per cent of the vote in some instances. In Latvia the party has split along ethnic lines between the Latvian minority and the immigrant Russian majority. The fact that the Latvian nationalist candidates also got significant support from ethnic Russian voters shows

that the rise of nationalism is not based on a desire to dress up in national costume and sing folk songs. It is rather a more parochial form of the general discontent with the system that exists throughout the Soviet Union.

The depth of hostility towards the old guard was best exemplified by the vote in Leningrad, where despite the success of the party bosses in keeping reformers off the ballot paper, the party candidates were defeated by a mass rejection of the single candidates on offer. This trend was repeated in most of the major urban centres.

Hero

In Moscow, the victory of Boris Yeltsin followed a two-year campaign against him by the party old guard. The more intense the campaign against him became, the more of a popular folk hero he became in the eyes of ordinary people. When the party announced an investigation into statements Yeltsin made about the desirability of a multi-party system there were mass protest demonstrations on the streets of Moscow.

What the election results do not show is any mass enthusiasm for a specific alternative to the present system.

If Screaming Lord Sutch had stood against the party boss in Leningrad he would have been elected. The market solutions being proposed by more radical reformers are not greeted with any enthusiasm by the working class. Indeed, price controls had to be introduced in the fledgling private cooperative sector after mass protests against the exorbitant prices being charged for scarce services. Attempts to change the pricing structure by removing subsidies have been delayed indefinitely in the face of general hostility.

As with other developments in the Soviet Union today there is an ambiguous character to the election results. The vote was emphatically against the system and as such represents both a problem and an opportunity for the leadership.

Frantic

The leadership recognises the need to politicise society as a precondition for introducing change. But the politicisation process could get out of hand given that the leadership itself has more questions than answers. Once people start questioning the system openly then the danger is that they will come to conclusions which exclude the bureaucracy entirely. But for the present there is no clear alternative emerging to the party, which remains firmly in control of the Congress of People's Deputies.

The election results have given a mandate for change. The question is

whether the party can stay in control of this process.

At the moment the debate inside the party intelligentsia is being conducted at a frantic pace. Having begun by linking economic change to political change some are now beginning to argue that political change is not possible without economic change. Increasingly the market is being seen as the only alternative to the present system, as top economist Nikolai Shmel'yev implied in a devastating critique of the command economy:

'Attempts to establish 100 per cent control over everything lead to such spontaneity, to such an uncontrollable situation that all anarchy becomes a paragon of order by comparison.' (*Problems of Economics*, February 1988)

Debate

Shmel'yev and others are calling for a more open assault on the working class through the abolition of food subsidies and the introduction of unemployment. The leadership has so far balked at undertaking such an all-out offensive against the working class.

The election results, along with the intensifying crisis of the economy and the growing disparity of views within the bureaucracy, are likely to hasten the process of inner-party fragmentation in the short term. In the week after the election some economists reiterated the need to introduce price reform. Whether the party can maintain its cohesion in these circumstances is increasingly open for debate.

Unlike others on the left, we do not begin with the question of what is good or bad for Gorbachev, but with what is in the interests of the working class.

While the bureaucracy stays in control of Soviet society it remains a barrier to progress. Gorbachev's aim is not to end the control of the bureaucracy, but to reproduce it in a modified form.

Dissidents

We welcome the growing climate of liberalisation in the Soviet Union. In conditions of greater freedom it is more likely that a broader debate can emerge about the future. However, we do not agree that the process of revolution from above contains positive elements as some on the left have argued.

In his book *Revolution From Above*, Tariq Ali argues that the reformers are aiming at a revival of working class power. On the contrary, all the evidence confirms that the intelligentsia hates and fears the working class. The fact that dissidents like Medvedev are reapplying to join the party indicates they have more in common with the party bureaucracy

which has persecuted them than with the working class which has the potential to bring down the bureaucracy.

Freedom

Those on the left who argue that Gorbachev's reforms make the job of socialists easier are making a fundamental mistake. They are deluding themselves about the nature of the changes in the Soviet Union. The trend is towards a rejection not just of the Stalinist system, but of the whole project of communism. Some party members are now arguing openly that it is not possible to have freedom or democracy without a capitalist market system.

In just about every socialist or communist party in the world today, the arguments of the capitalist exploiters about the need for a market economy have been taken on board.

This is a concession to capitalism on a grand historical scale, and one which the apologists for the system have been quick to seize on. British journalist Brian Walden summed up the view from the right:

'The future that awaits socialism is becoming clearer. Everywhere, though at a varying pace, it is going to surrender its most cherished tenets to the practical necessity of accommodating the human preference for social and economic freedom. It will survive, but as a pale, attenuated shadow of the arrogant dogma that was going to remake the world and all the people in it.' (*Sunday Times*, 2 April)

Far from making the job of socialists any easier, Gorbachev has made it easier for the enemies of the working class to discredit communism by conceding all the arguments.

Voice

Those parties and social formations brought into existence by the Stalinist regime have reached the end of the road. All they can do now is to act as an obstacle to the development of working class politics. Those on the left who have nothing but praise for Gorbachev are contributing to the sabotage of the future.

For 65 years the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has discredited Marxism in the international working class. That process of dragging the name of communism through the mud has now reached its final phase. Having created a model of socialism which nobody in their right mind would want to follow, the Stalinists are now admitting that it was all a big mistake. Let us hope that the fragmentation of the Soviet bureaucracy will continue apace, and that the working class can find a new voice based upon its own collective interests.



THE WORKING CLASS in Britain and throughout the West has suffered a series of setbacks in recent years. These setbacks have strengthened those who argue for moderation, 'realism' and a strategy of defensiveness. The Revolutionary Communist Party takes a different view.

We believe that these setbacks are the responsibility of the old parties and union machines of the official labour movement. In Britain the Labourist tradition has exhausted itself and can no longer relate to even the most modest aspiration of the working class. The exhaustion of Labourism in no way undermines the potential of the working class to change the world.

The RCP is committed to the construction of an independent working class movement. Only a movement which recognises that the interests of the workers are irreconcilably opposed to those of the employers can fight effectively in the struggles ahead.

For the RCP, working class politics cannot be reduced to trade unionism or the affairs of the workplace. Workers must take a stand on every issue and express an independent point of view if we are to liberate ourselves. The fatal flaw of British Labourism is that it restricts workers' horizons to economic matters, while it allows the employer class to monopolise political debate. Workers must define every problem from our point of view and fight for the rights of every section of society if we are to constitute a politically independent class.

While the RCP supports the fight for real reform or improvements in the lives of the working class, we believe that no durable gains can be won within capitalism. The RCP argues that the overthrow of capitalism provides the necessary precondition for the liberation of the working class and of society as a whole.

The British state exists to protect the wealth and privilege of the capitalist class. The RCP aims to destroy the state, which maintains the conditions for exploitation. We believe that the state cannot be used for progressive ends. Any attempt to use the 'soft' side of the state, such as local government, inner-city partnership, or police authorities, lends legitimacy to the entire state apparatus. It can only strengthen the authority of the capitalists' coercive machine.

The RCP believes that workers have no nation. British workers share the same interests as the exploited in other countries. British workers have nothing in common with the employers and must resist the appeals of patriotism and chauvinism. As internationalists we recognise that the enemy is at home. Since Britain remains an imperialist power around the world, the only international role it can play is that of the oppressor.

The class struggle is inextricably linked to the struggle against imperialism. The RCP supports all anti-imperialist struggles. Workers who live in the imperialist heartland

have a special duty to back those fighting against the British oppressor. Thus we fight for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and for Irish self-determination. We opposed Britain's colonial war in the South Atlantic, and support the return of the Malvinas islands to Argentina. We oppose British and Western interference in the Middle East. We support the destruction of the Zionist state in Palestine and of the apartheid regime in South Africa. We uphold the same principles in every struggle against imperialism. The RCP is a fervent opponent of all forms of British militarism, nuclear, and 'non-nuclear' alike.

The RCP believes that the fight against oppression is central to the construction of an independent working class movement. Workers must defend the oppressed if we are to fight for our own liberation. This is why the RCP is wholeheartedly committed to the fight against racism. The struggle for the emancipation of women is another fundamental issue for the working class. We unreservedly oppose any form of discrimination against lesbians and gays and call for the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Workers must take a stand on these issues, not out of altruism, but because it is in our class interest to fight for the fullest extension of democratic rights.

Workers need combat organisations capable of defending our interests. The existing organisations of the labour movement are singularly unsuited for this task. The RCP believes that the Labour Party is a bosses' organisation that should be fought and exposed. Despite its working class constituency the Labour Party has always followed the dictates of the capitalists. Whenever Labour has been in office, it has always betrayed the hopes of workers. The RCP is against giving any electoral support to Labour. Workers need a party that is 100 per cent our own and only responsive to proletarian interests.

The existing trade unions are heavily bureaucratised and incapable of representing the aspirations of their members. The RCP argues that rank and file trade unionists should fight to take control of the movement. Trade unionists should organise across the workplace and industry and demand that we run our own affairs. Rank and file committees organised on an industry-wide basis could ensure that the unions truly belong to their members.

The RCP's aim is social revolution in Britain and internationally. We believe that this perspective is no less essential in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union than in the West. Only the working class has the capacity to liberate humanity. Our job is to contribute practically to the realisation of this objective.

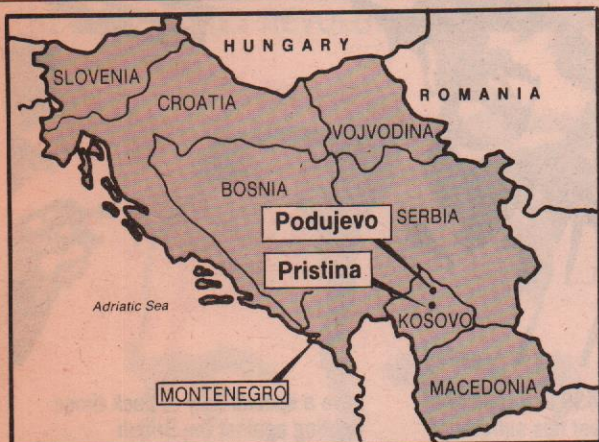
If you would like to discuss these issues further, please write to: RCP, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or phone (01) 375 1702.

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YUGOSLAVIA

BLOODBATH IN KOSOVO

Serbia celebrates as Kosovo erupts: Russell Osborne reports on the bloody uprisings in the Yugoslav province

Scores of people have died in fierce clashes between ethnic Albanians and Serbian riot police in the southern Yugoslav province of Kosovo. The region is now cut off from the outside world with a dusk-to-dawn curfew, military roadblocks, random identity checks and a ban on gatherings of more than three people. The majority Albanian population are in revolt over the ending of their autonomous status in the Yugoslav federation, after local Communist Party officials voted for constitutional changes giving control of Kosovo back to Serbia.

Downtrodden nationalities

It is a time of triumph for Serbians. In the capital city of Belgrade, street celebrations marked the ending of Kosovo's autonomy and the reunification of Serbia. When he created the federal system, Yugoslavia's post-war president Josef Tito divided Serbia to end its dominant role in the region. For Serbian nationalists and their demagogic leader Slobodan Milosevic, the reassertion of Serbian control in Kosovo has finally put an end to Tito's three-way split of the republic. The autonomous province of Vojvodina has already been forced back under Serbian control.

It is a time of mourning for Albanians, who have suffered grievously as the most downtrodden of Yugoslavia's nationalities, and who are now burying their dead.

As the military imposes an iron-fist policy to deal with the ethnic unrest, Albanians fear a return to the dark days of the fifties and sixties, when the Serbian-dominated secret police under Aleksander

who try to leave the province to seek work encounter vicious discrimination. Commonly referred to by the derogatory term 'Siptari', Albanians suffer social ostracism and ghettoisation. Outside Kosovo they are offered only the lowest-status, lowest-paying jobs.

Although they make up more than 20 per cent of the population of the republic of Macedonia, Albanians face discrimination there too. The capital of Skopje has undergone a process of Lebanonisation in the past two years. A district locally known as 'the wild colony' is inhabited by 12 000 newcomers of Albanian origin. Another 13 000 families who migrated from the countryside are homeless and living in makeshift shelters or with relatives. Macedonia's Albanians are routinely scapegoated for the collapse of social services in the republic as well as being blamed for a local crime wave. Their traditional farming methods have been attacked for 'impeding progress'.

Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic hopes to take advantage of anti-Albanian feeling among

Serbs to build his own power base at a federal level. His chauvinist tirades have unleashed a pogrom against Albanians. In March a Serbian nationalist shot dead two Turkish workers whom he mistook for Albanians, and many Albanians have been forced to Serbianise their names to avoid trouble.

Going underground

On top of these accumulated indignities the capitulation of the Kosovo Party to the restoration of Serbian control was the last straw for many Albanians. Miners stayed underground for eight days in protest and forced the Kosovo leadership to resign. When the federal government refused to accept the resignations, Albanian protesters took to the streets. The bloody uprising that is now sweeping the province is the result.

The implications of the Kosovo uprising go far beyond Kosovo itself. The strengthening of Milosevic's position at the head of a reunified Serbia seriously worries the other republics in the

Yugoslav federation. Croats and Slovenes fear that Milosevic is intent on creating a greater Serbia which would dominate the Yugoslav federation.

As the country's economic decline continues unabated, growing political and ethnic tensions could blow Tito's carefully constructed post-war federation apart.

The last shots have not yet been fired in what has been the most bloody uprising in the history of modern Yugoslavia. However the current violence ends, Albanian resistance will continue. Albanians have until now demanded equal rights within the federation, but after all the bloodshed their demands could well become more extreme. Whatever form future Albanian resistance takes, it is clear that their demands for equal rights in the Yugoslav federation are justified. It is equally clear that the Serbian bureaucracy led by Slobodan Milosevic is to blame for the bloodshed in Kosovo. The right of Albanians to full autonomy must be defended.

The right of
Albanians to full
autonomy
must be defended



As the Yugoslav federation disintegrates Serbian leaders are using anti-Albanian feeling to build a power base

NAMIBIA

STATUS QUO

The fierce fighting instigated by South African security forces against Swapo guerrillas in northern Namibia reveals that all the talk of independence for Namibia is a sham.

The independence plan for the territory was presented as an attempt to impose a solution to the Namibian problem on the basis of negotiations between two equal partners. Yet there is no relationship of equality between the South African regime, which has imposed its will on the region through force of arms, and the Namibian people, who have been given no say in the future of their country. Under these circumstances the peace settlement implies a perpetuation of the status quo. The battles which are now raging in the north of the country confirm this.

South Africa had formally accepted moves towards Namibian independence under United Nations Resolution 435. After lengthy talks

involving the apartheid regime, Angola, Cuba, the USA, Britain and the Soviet Union, Pretoria agreed to a phased withdrawal of its military forces before elections to be held in November. It was supposed to pull out its own troops, and confine its locally-raised South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) to barracks. These forces have been the backbone of South Africa's occupation of Namibia, and in the frontline of Pretoria's attempts to undermine the Cuban-backed MPLA regime in Angola. South Africa has also used Namibia as a base for its Angolan stooges in the pro-Western Unita guerrilla movement.

It has been apparent all along that South Africa was not prepared to grant genuine independence to Namibia because of its strategic importance to apartheid militarism in southern Africa. In the talks leading up to the peace agreement, Namibia

was always a pawn in a great power game of imperialist rivalry, and was given no say over the terms of the independence plan. Washington and London, motivated by a concern to prevent further South African expansion up the continent, insisted that South Africa must get out of Angola, but indicated that they were prepared to accept its continuing presence in Namibia and its role in overseeing any elections there. The West appears to have accepted that South Africa is in Namibia for good.

Apartheid rearms

Hence the Western powers have turned a blind eye to the way in which South Africa has persistently flouted the terms of the peace plan. The plan stipulated that South Africa demobilise Koevoet, its elite military unit in Namibia. But it was members of Koevoet which ambushed Swapo guerrillas and precipitated the fighting on the day. Hence the Western powers have turned a blind effect. Pretoria blamed the violence on Swapo and announced that troops demobilised under the peace deal were being brought back into service. A military spokesman said that the 101 battalion of SWATF was being reassembled.

Even if the peace plan does not collapse in the upsurge of violence there is little doubt that Namibia has gained a phoney independence and South Africa is determined to maintain its stranglehold on the territory. Pretoria is in Namibia to stay until the people themselves throw it out.

Jackie Reynolds

THE WEEK IN POLITICS

Ten years after Scotland voted for devolution, Scottish politicians sat down at the inaugural meeting of the Convention for a Scottish Assembly. In the Church of Scotland's debating chamber just below Edinburgh Castle, 150 MPs, councillors, trade unionists, churchmen and businessmen gathered last week to proclaim Scotland's right to self-government.

Organised by the cross-party Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, the Convention's aim is to agree a scheme for a self-governing assembly. While Canon Kenyon Wright of the Scottish Churches Council stole the show at the inaugural jamboree, the driving force behind the convention is the Labour Party. For Labour the Convention for a Scottish Assembly is a compensation for its decline as a national party, and an antidote to the erosion of its support in Scotland by the Scottish National Party.

Sinister plot

While delegates agreed that it was the most important political forum since the Scottish parliament voted itself out of existence in 1707, the convention was significant as much for its absentees as its attendees. The Tories, against whose Westminster diktat it is pitched, and the Scottish National Party, whose Govan by-election win put the assembly back on the agenda, are boycotting the convention.

It is not surprising that the Tories, the party of the union, did not turn up. But, initially committed to participating in the forum, the Scottish National Party is now boycotting the convention on the grounds that it is a sinister plot by the Labour Party to undermine the nationalist cause. 'The convention has been deliberately rigged by Labour which has used its numerical muscle to block real and representative constitutional change', declared SNP chairman Gordon Wilson.

Labour's latest turn to Scottish nationalism was indeed intended to head off the threat from the SNP. A confidential Scottish TUC document on the lessons of the Govan by-election called for 'efforts to ensure that the SNP advance in Scotland is resisted', and proposed that 'Labour must lead and direct the constitutional convention'.

By basing representation on the 1987 general election results, Labour ensured that the SNP's recent electoral success was not reflected in the convention.

Govan MP Jim Sillars has justified his party's boycott by arguing that it would be a gross deception to pretend that devolution could be delivered when Margaret Thatcher has made it clear that she will veto it. The SNP claims that the way forward is through independence within Europe under the Crown, with a written constitution for Scotland and a bill of rights.

Taking control?

It is true that the convention's plans for an assembly are a non-starter since it could be introduced only after the electoral defeat of the Thatcher government. Yet this is the least of the problems posed by the campaign for a Scottish assembly. Even if these obstacles to establishing an assembly did not exist, what good would such a forum do the Scottish working class?

A dominant theme in the pro-devolution discussion is that an assembly would allow Scottish people to control their own lives. The idea that an assembly could give ordinary people the power to

SCOTTISH CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

WHO NEEDS AN ASSEMBLY?

Carol Taggart wonders would the working class benefit from having another tier of government in Scotland?



A Scottish assembly will allow the British state more control over Scottish workers' lives.

take decisions for themselves has undoubted popular appeal. The desire to challenge the Tory government and take control over working class affairs expresses a positive sentiment.

But a devolved Scottish assembly would not offer any such control and it would not be under the influence of the working class. It would simply be a reorganised department of the British state.

The state is the administrative machine of the British capitalist class. It incorporates many different bodies, from the police force and parliament to local councils and the welfare services. The various departments of the state have different functions, but they all ultimately serve the interests of the establishment. A Scottish assembly would be one more official institution presiding over the system.

Labour lies

The parliamentary bill which the Labour Party presented in November 1987 makes clear that a Scottish assembly could not interfere with the power of central government. And Labour's Scottish spokesman Donald Dewar stated unequivocally that the aim of the convention was to seek self-government for Scotland under the jurisdiction of the Crown. It would be another layer of local government within the structures of the state. It would be run by the same civil service which administers the rest of the system, and would be as unresponsive to people's needs as any of the bureaucratic state agencies that already exist.

No matter which parties occupied the seats in an Edinburgh assembly, such an arm of the state

could not challenge the interests of the British establishment. Scottish people have learned that, whoever has a majority in the house of commons, the profit system grinds on regardless. Some of the most devastating acts of deindustrialisation in Scotland took place under past Labour governments. A Scottish talking shop under Labour control in Edinburgh would be no more likely than any past Labour government at Westminster to take on the capitalist system.

The poll tax is the most striking example of why we should not believe Labour's claims about what an assembly could do.

The Labour Party argues that an assembly would abolish the poll tax. Yet while the assembly exists only in the fantasies of Labour politicians, in practice Labour-run regional councils like Strathclyde have unleashed an army of snoopers and bailiffs on working class people, to raise the taxes and revenues that Dewar anticipates will be a primary function of an assembly.

Real control

A Scottish assembly holds out no hope for the future of the working class. Yet while many left wingers admit that devolution provides no solutions to our problems, they claim that an assembly could inspire the working class and help weaken British capitalism. One argument which is popular on the left is that the creation of a Scottish assembly would be a threat to the British state. This is to ignore what the campaign is demanding.

The call for an assembly simply proposes the

extension of the existing system of parliamentary government from London to Edinburgh. The existing machinery of the British state in Scotland would remain intact. The monarchy, the legal system, the police and the military would still rule Scotland under any devolution scheme. In fact adding another parliamentary tier in Scotland could only strengthen the British state and give it greater legitimacy in a part of the realm where popular respect for Westminster is at its lowest ebb, by promoting the illusion of democratic involvement and local accountability.

There is a positive side to the popular demand for devolution. It expresses the aspirations of working class people to take control over their own affairs. This is an important sentiment without which no progress is possible. But to make such a desire mean anything, it has to be extricated from the redundant approach of the assembly campaign. Instead of tailing the assembly campaign, the left should be arguing against it, with the aim of establishing the political basis for real working class control through the total destruction of the capitalist state.

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PARLIAMENTARY BLACK CAUCUS

NO POLITICS PLEASE, WE'RE BLACK MPS

In the past campaigning for black rights meant organising against deportations, racist attacks and police harassment and fighting for equal rights in employment, housing and education. The election of four black MPs has changed all that.

As the inaugural launch of the parliamentary black caucus last weekend showed, standing up for black rights now involves dusting off your Giorgio Armani suit, hobnobbing with international businessmen over Chablis and smoked salmon and winning sponsorship from such progressive concerns as Allied Lyons, Pryor, Govan, Counts & Co (Investment Bankers). Most of all, it means never mentioning the infamous R word: racism.

The weekend razzmatazz was the official launch of Bernie Grant, Diane Abbott, Keith Vaz and Lord Pitt as the parliamentary black caucus (Paul Boateng refused to attend: surely not because he would have felt under-dressed in such august

company?). It showed how complete has been the destruction of anti-racist politics in Britain.

The election of four black MPs in June 1987 was hailed as an historic breakthrough for black people in Britain. In fact it was a triumph for the establishment; it showed that the British authorities had learned the lessons from America on how to contain black revolt. The US authorities responded to the riots of the sixties by drawing black people into mainstream politics, electing black mayors, appointing black judges, encouraging black businesses. Jesse Jackson's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination was the culmination of this process.

National success

The riots of the early eighties prompted the British state to embark on a similar course. Black activists were given local authority jobs and some became councillors. The election of four black

MPs showed that blacks could achieve political success nationally. For Bernie Grant, the presence of the MPs 'raises the self-esteem' of blacks and makes them less likely 'to find other means of expressing their frustrations'.

By making the election of black people to political office the touchstone of equality, the anti-racist movement depoliticised the struggle for black rights. If what really matters is having black faces in public arenas, what they say or do matters little. The result has been the collapse of black militancy and the disintegration of the anti-racist movement.

The conference made explicit the Americanisation of British anti-racism. The black caucus invited three black congressmen from the USA, a number of black mayors and a host of black businessmen. The weekend opened with a 'black business and corporate brunch' attended by businessmen and politicians from both sides of the

Atlantic. Congressman George Crockett told the audience that black politicians are important because 'we are one of the family': 'If, as a black businessman, I want to get something done I know I'll get more help from someone in my family than from a stranger.'

No mention

Everyone then trooped off to a plenary on 'Agendas for black advancement'. In his keynote address, Ron Dellums, chair of the congressional black caucus, spelled out the main issues for black people—the budget, nuclear power, South Africa and the environment. And never a mention of the R word. As they were leaving the plenary to go to the afternoon workshops, one delegate asked another if she was going to the session on politics. 'No', came the reply, 'I've had enough of politics'. It summed up the day.

Kenan Malik

the next step

THATCHER IN AFRICA

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

MARGARET THATCHER'S trip to southern Africa has been promoted as helping to bring peace and stability to a long-troubled region of the world. But Britain's past record in Africa is one bloody atrocity after another. And its present policy, which Thatcher's royal tour of Zimbabwe, Malawi and Namibia aimed to further, represents a revival of British interference in the continent.

Whether under the Empire or after decolonisation, the British have not been squeamish about using any means necessary to terrorise the African peoples. At the turn of the century, Britain secured its African empire with the judicious use of field artillery and the Maxim machine gun. One counter-insurgency expert notes that the technology of the First World War changed all this: 'Military aviation dramatically lengthened the arm of the law, and the southern Sudan became a testbed for the effect of air action on undeveloped peoples.' (C Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counter-insurgency in the Twentieth Century*, p195)

The RAF was regularly deployed to bomb Nuer villages as a collective punishment for cattle-raiding. Popular resistance to paying taxes became another excuse for the British to destroy entire African villages. After one such incident in northern Nigeria in 1925, district officer Charles Arden-Clarke spelled out imperial policy in all its brutality:

'As far as I'm concerned there is no such thing as neutrality; a man is either an active friend of the administration or he is an enemy. If an enemy, his compound is levelled to the ground and the grass roof burnt...I shall of course go on walloping them until they surrender. It's rather a piteous sight watching a village being knocked to pieces and I wish

there was some other way but unfortunately there isn't.' (D Rooney, *Sir Charles Arden-Clarke*, pp30-1)

After the Second World War, Arden-Clarke was thought to be such a good chap that he was appointed by the colonial office to supervise the decolonisation of Ghana.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the continent, insurrection had broken out in Kenya, and the RAF subjected what the British designated 'prohibited areas' to saturation bombing. Altogether 12 000 Mau Mau insurgents were butchered by British troops and 73 000 'suspects' were thrown into concentration camps like Hola, where 11 were beaten to death by their guards in 1958.

In southern Africa, throughout the sixties and seventies, Britain paid lip-service to United Nations sanctions against white-ruled Rhodesia, and then flouted them by arranging for BP and Shell to organise oil shipments via Portuguese Mozambique and then via South Africa itself.

Further north, according to MI6 whistleblowers Jonathan Bloch and Patrick Fitzgerald, the Labour government authorised the CIA to recruit British mercenaries to try to crush the radical regime that took power in Angola after the Portuguese withdrew in 1975. Indeed: 'MI6 agents were also fighting in the south with [South African-backed] Unita.' (*British Intelligence and Covert Action*, p195)

In 1980 Thatcher's envoy Lord Christopher Soames enforced the Lancaster House 'peace' settlement for Zimbabwe by threatening air-

strikes and encouraging Rhodesian military death squads like the Selous Scouts to round up thousands of guerrillas who refused to knuckle under (*ZIG Bulletin*, February/March 1980, p11).

In South Africa itself, British arms traders have for many years evaded UN sanctions and supplied military equipment to the Pretoria regime by simply reclassifying their products as 'for exclusively civilian use'. In this way, BL has supplied landrovers and trucks; ICI, ammunition and explosives; Cementation, artillery shells; ICL, computers; Plessey, radar; and GEC-Marconi, communications equipment (C Longford, *Black Blood on British Hands*, p54). All these logistics were used by the apartheid regime to put down the 1985 township revolts and, of course, in Namibia itself.

Thatcher's southern African tour encompassed Zimbabwe, Malawi and Namibia. It was essential for her to visit the two former British colonies before she made her unscheduled stopover at Windhoek. Southern Africa is the one place in the world where British imperialism still counts as a significant factor in the balance of power. In Zimbabwe, the world's most prominent defender of the apartheid regime was greeted as 'Comrade Thatcher' as she watched, together with Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and Mozambique's president Joaquim Chissano, Mozambique's British-trained troops manoeuvre on exercises. In Malawi, Thatcher commiserated in front of the world's media with Mozambican refugees who had fled from South African-backed Renamo death squads.

Having trumpeted the extent of British influence in the frontline states, Thatcher then paid her visit to Namibia, which was the point of the whole exercise. She was determined to crown her southern African tour by being the senior world leader present during the inauguration of the United Nations deal with South Africa over Namibia.

But when South African forces launched an unprovoked assault on Swapo liberation forces inside Namibia, Thatcher's phoney peace-mask slipped. She pressurised the UN authorities into approving the South African attack and condemned Swapo for breaching an agreement the West had seen fit to exclude it from. A Swapo spokesman summed up the upshot of the imperialist scheme which has been paraded as a peaceful resolution to the Namibian problem: 'My people are being butchered under the UN flag.'

As an imperialist power with a decrepit economy, Britain must seek foreign solutions to its domestic problems. Southern Africa has been targeted by Britain as a base from which to project itself as a significant world power. Behind the image of Thatcher as peacemaker stands a regime that is prepared to scramble over any amount of African bodies to secure its stake in the world.

Andy Clarkson

LIVING MARXISM



The theme of the April issue of *Living Marxism* is militarism. As conflicts among the capitalist powers intensify, a new generation of gung-ho governments arises. This month's *Living Marxism* focuses on their drive to rearm and reinforce militarist ideology. Articles on the culture of militarism: Origins of the Third World War; The making of Star Wars; Desertion and mutiny in the British army; Japan's rising sun; Britain's little Empire; The war economy; National security. Plus: Swapo on freedom for Namibia; 10 years beyond the fragments—Sheila Rowbotham and Hilary Wainwright talk to Anne Burton; Hitler's birthday; Food scares; An interview with CLR James; The return of Easterhouse; Benjamin Zephaniah on black politics and poetry; Leonardo da Vinci and much more.

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