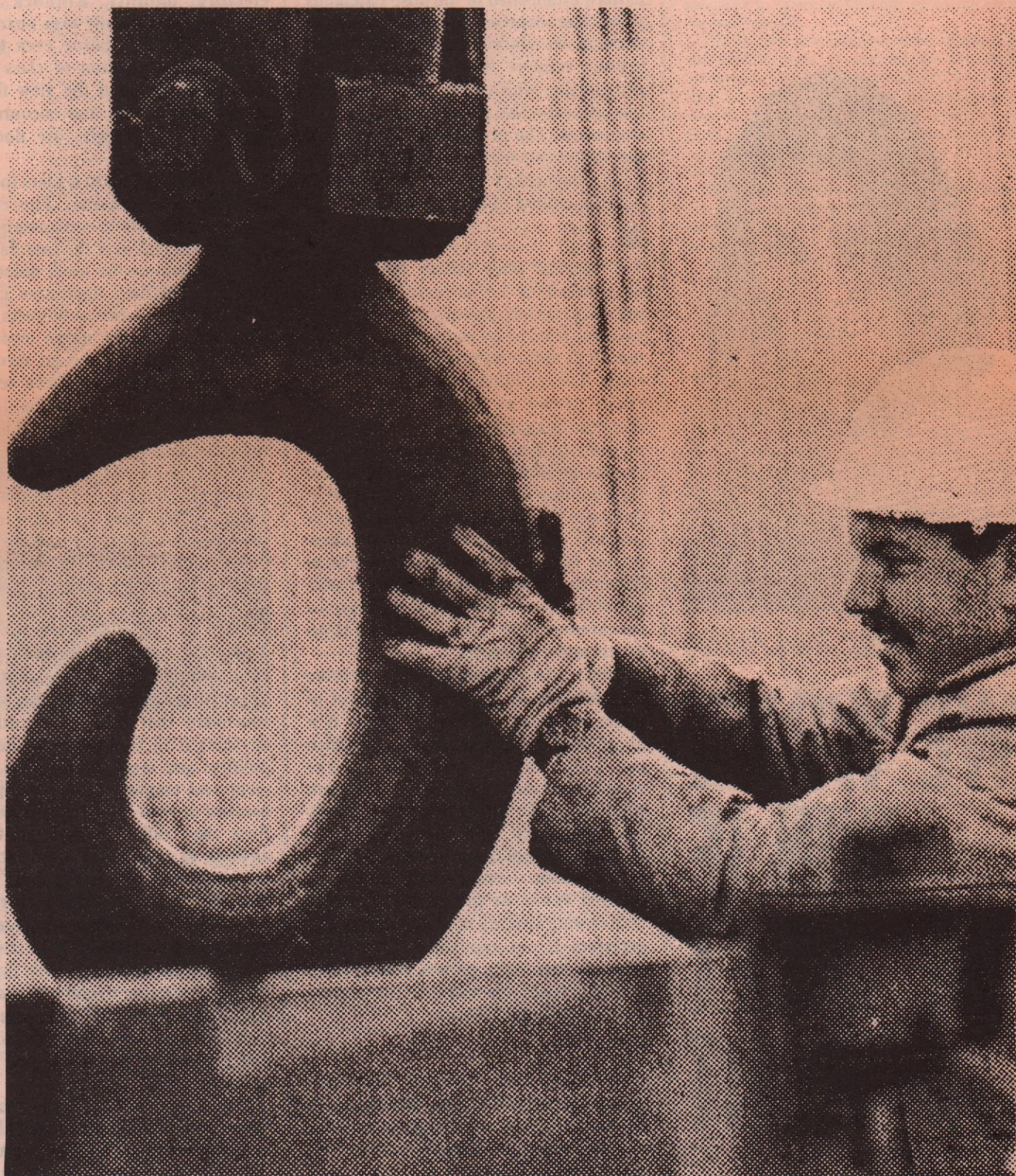


the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly 14 April 1989 No 11 40p

NATIONAL STRIKE NEEDED

WHAT HAVE DOCKERS GOT TO LOSE?



Everybody from Margaret Thatcher to *News at 10* to Ron Todd is telling the dockers that it is not possible to fight and win today. But if the dockers do not fight they are guaranteed to go down to certain defeat. See page 2

**ECONOMY: MYTHS
OF AN ECONOMIC
MIRACLE**
Pages 4 & 5



**GEORGIA: NO
GLASNOST
HERE**
Page 3



**NAMIBIA: HOW
THE UN SET
UP SWAPO**
Page 6

14 April • No 11



Editor: Joan Phillips

WE WON'T WIN IF WE DON'T FIGHT

There is nothing arbitrary about the timing of the dock dispute. Margaret Thatcher has been carrying around a blueprint for abolishing the national dock labour scheme in her back pocket for years. She has pulled it out and put it into practice at a time when her government's policies on the poll tax, the health service, water privatisation and other issues have made it highly unpopular. Thatcher knows that there is nothing like a political confrontation with the labour movement to give her government the opportunity to prostrate the opposition. The provocation on the docks was politically inspired and carefully timed to coincide with the approach of the local council elections in May.

In times of trouble the Tories always

turn to their strongest political card. Once again the Thatcher regime has brought the Falklands Factor to bear on British politics, by turning the dock dispute into a test of political will. In the seven years since Britain's military victory against Argentina in the South Atlantic War, the Falklands Factor has become part of the political furniture in Thatcher's Downing Street residence. As a political metaphor it has come to mean Thatcher throwing her weight around, not only against General Galtieri and the Argentinians, but against anybody from striking workers to black youth, who dares to challenge her government.

Thatcher's formidable reputation as an invincible leader has been won by raising the stakes in every conflict and facing down her opponents. Her approach to the dock dispute has followed the familiar pattern established in the post-Falklands years. The surprise announcement of the decision to abolish the national dock labour scheme was a classic act of provocation which gave the propaganda initiative to the government and the employers. The propaganda war against the dockers played on themes which have been prominent in every important political contest of recent years.

The national dock labour scheme was denounced as an archaic restrictive practice which operates against the national interest by undermining British industry's ability to compete with foreign rivals. Tory politicians declared that any strike aimed at defending it would therefore be against the public interest and would not have public support. The employers warned that a strike to defeat the abolition of the scheme would be in defiance of parliament and therefore political. The media reminded the dock unions that any strike would be illegal under the government's multifarious anti-union laws, and they would therefore be threatened with fines, sequestration orders and bankruptcy.

This confrontational style has become the hallmark of the Thatcher school of managing class relations. What is new about the dock dispute is the way in which the Tories have summoned up the working class experience of past defeats to put forward the argument that it is simply not possible to fight today. From the moment the dock dispute became an issue, the television news carried footage of massed ranks of paramilitary police confronting striking miners, printers and seafarers. It was impossible to avoid the message that if the miners, printers and seafarers could not win, then the dockers would not stand a chance.

Over the years the Falklands factor has become a powerful weapon in the hands of the establishment, creating the impression that the Tories are indeed invincible. The first thing that needs to be said is that there is nothing inevitable about the success of the Falklands Factor. It can only have a guarantee of success against opponents who are not prepared to challenge it. The Falklands Factor has become a magic wand in Thatcher's hand because the opposition has fallen under its spell. Perhaps even more than the Tories, the leaders of the official labour movement believe that Thatcher cannot be beaten.

Neil Kinnock's wholesale adoption of Thatcherism has been of vital importance in perpetuating the myth of Tory omnipotence and in discrediting the idea of fighting. The Labour Party helped create the Falklands Factor in the first place by cheering Thatcher's every aggression against Argentina. Ever since, Neil Kinnock has helped to ensure the

Thatcherite ascendancy by remaking the Labour Party in Thatcher's image. His current relaunch of the party is a celebration of the success of the policy review team in rewriting policy to incorporate the values espoused by the Tories. This can only sow the conviction among many people that there is no alternative to Thatcher.

Labour's attempt to project itself as a respectable party of government has involved distancing the party from the trade unions and the working class. As Kinnock's response to the dock dispute demonstrated, the Labour Party's reflex reaction to any whiff of a strike is to run for cover. Any action by the working class is viewed with discomfort by a party which regards any kind of militant protest as an electoral liability. Kinnock and his colleagues continually urge restraint and actively seek to destroy even the most elementary expression of class instinct. They have accepted the view that only moderation works, and encouraged the idea that all struggles are doomed to defeat.

For the trade union leaders the idea of fighting is anathema. The effect of successive defeats in confrontations with the government over the past decade has been to paralyse the trade unions in the face of Thatcher's aggressive class war approach. In a series of disputes over the past five years, the union leaders have simply been content to go through the motions of organising token resistance. Ron Todd, the leader of the Transport and General Workers Union, personifies this approach. In the disputes at Wapping and Dover, Todd made gestures of solidarity, but refused to organise effective action. This sort of play-acting at providing assistance to striking workers has done much to discredit the unions and deter workers from going on strike.

Today the union leaders have given up even going through the motions of organising token resistance, and have concluded that it is not worth doing anything at all. In the face of a barrage of political and legal threats from government and employers, the union leaders baulked at even calling a national ballot. First they called in their professional advisers to ensure that any ballot would be conducted with scrupulous legality; then they announced that if there was to be a ballot it would exempt non-registered dockers to avoid breaking the law against secondary action; when they finally got round to agreeing to call a partial ballot, Ron Todd argued that it was madness to think of doing battle with the government and announced that he would veto the ballot call.

It has got to the stage where the government does not even have to despatch the riot police, the sequestration orders and the scabs. Today it only has to talk about doing it and to show pictures of it on television to bring the union leaders to their knees. It is not surprising that in this situation many people have despaired

of ever beating the government and given up on the possibility of fighting back.

It is imperative that we challenge the idea that it is no longer possible or feasible to fight. The logic of accepting this argument is that we accept exploitation, oppression and degradation as inevitable facts of life about which we can do nothing. For the dockers it means accepting a return to the barbaric conditions that prevailed in the industry in the early decades of the century, when workers fought among each other on the quayside in the competition to get work when a ship came in.

Those whose memories extend beyond the Thatcher years will know that the working class has gained nothing worthwhile without fighting for it. If workers had not been prepared to struggle long and hard they would still not have the right to organise. It required an arduous and militant campaign before the whole of the working class won the right to vote. Every civil right, every real reform, had to be wrested from the grasp of a reluctant capitalist class.

The history of the class struggle should tell us that our exploiters do not reward moderation. For the capitalist class a passive workforce is an invitation to institute more intensive exploitation. The centrality of the class struggle in enforcing change and ensuring progress is incontrovertible. So how has it come about that the class struggle has become so discredited as the agency of change? How is it possible that people have forgotten that if we do not fight we will not win anything? And what can be done to change this state of affairs?

The responsibility for discrediting the tradition of struggle rests with the official labour movement, whose craven capitulation to the government has paralysed the class struggle. The starting point for challenging the defeatist mood that prevails in the working class is to recognise that the problem is not with fighting but with how to fight.

If we are to fight we have to be clear about what we are fighting for. It is obvious that struggles which are pre-occupied with the need to win respectability will not pose a threat to anyone. And struggles which do not threaten the capitalist class will inevitably be defeated. Even worse, such struggles call into question the legitimacy of appealing to class interests. All dockers have an interest in fighting for jobs, for guaranteed work for all and for decent employment conditions for all workers regardless of whether they are covered by the dock labour scheme or not. These demands provide the basis for uniting all dock workers behind a campaign of national strike action.

If the dockers are to guarantee their livelihoods and a future free from further degradation they have no choice but to fight. But they do have a choice about how to conduct their struggle. The lesson of the past decade is that we have to raise the stakes and politicise the fight ourselves. When Thatcher says that a dock strike is a threat to the national interest, we have to say that it is a threat to the interests of the bosses, which lie in exploiting workers more intensively to secure their profits. When the employers say that a dock strike is a threat to the rule of law, we have to say that it is a challenge to a legal system which defends the exploiters against the exploited. When Tory politicians say that a dock strike is political, we have to say that it is political in the sense that it calls into question a system that can only survive by degrading the working class.

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 14 April 1989. Registered as a newspaper at
the Post Office.



letters

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

ARGUMENTS CAN'T FIGHT RACISM

SINCE the deportation of Viraj Mendis in January, the next step has carried a series of attacks on the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign. These attacks must be countered because they damage the example of the VMDC and obscure the lessons that can be learned from it. In your issue of 17 March, the article on Julius Alexander raised three questions about the VMDC.

How did Viraj Mendis fight his case in the courts? Viraj's legal case was fought on two grounds: his 15-year residence in this country and the situation in Sri Lanka. Your article states this latter point was mistakenly 'made the centre of the argument'. This emphasis was not mistaken at all. As the situation deteriorated it was quite correctly made central to Viraj's legal case, because it was the weakest aspect of the home office's case for deporting him. As the campaign spread more news about the situation in Sri Lanka, so the home office's lies were exposed, and their real motive for deporting Viraj became clear: the fact that he is a black communist. In this way, what you call the legalities of the case can be used both in the courts and the campaign, to fight the legal case, to win popular support and to show in practice the racism of immigration laws.

What was Viraj Mendis resisting? You say this orientation led to the appearance that Viraj was resisting 'a third world regime...rather than Britain's racist immigration legislation'. Viraj is a communist who resists all forms of oppression, and campaigned against

racism in Britain and Sri Lanka. As a result he became a target not only of the British government, but also of reactionary forces in Sri Lanka. His campaign against deportation exposed the collaboration between the two regimes; Britain maintaining that Sri Lanka was a 'democracy', safe for refugees, in order to protect its interests in Sri Lanka. This sort of collaboration is central to immigration laws.

How did the home office succeed in deporting Viraj? The home office did not succeed by winning the argument as you suggest. In fact, for four and a half years the home office failed to win the argument, or drive away the support for Viraj that prevented his deportation. In the end, the home office could deport Viraj only by force. It sent 100 police in a dawn raid to kidnap him, flew him handcuffed to Colombo, and arrested 30 of his supporters. Then began a major smear campaign in the

media. This also failed: two weeks later 3000 people marched in protest against Viraj's deportation and all other deportations.

You suggest that the critical weapon for campaigning work is the right argument. Black people are not going to win with arguments. They will only win through political organisation that allows all those opposed to deportations and racism to participate in the fight. The VMDC demonstrated this method. Britain's immigration laws were put at the centre of the political stage. This was achieved not by starting with the right argument. We achieved this by starting with the practical question: how can we unite the biggest force in support of Viraj? This must be the question with which all anti-deportation campaigns begin. The VMDC stands as an example of this approach. **Sarah Ricca**
Secretary VMDC
Manchester



SIMON NORFOLK

NUS: ANTI-POLITICAL POLITICS

THE new president of Cardiff University students union, Julian Slade, won his position by running a homophobic, anti-left campaign. Only a quarter of all students voted, but Slade won more than half the votes cast. His argument that NUS should restrict its concerns to student affairs, ignoring politics, seemed quite popular.

This year the Labour-run NUS has witch-hunted the left. It has tried to appeal to respectable opinion to persuade the government not to withdraw student union funds. Its quest for respectability led it to obstruct political debate by lopping motions on Ireland off agendas and denying left wingers speaking time in union meetings.

The executive tried to censure Slade in the same way, because of his objectionable views, but they backed down under threat of court action. Now the right wing has won a majority on the executive, despite Labour's attempts to match any display of left-baiting. While the Labour bureaucrats were trying to persuade bank managers to back the anti-loans campaign, Slade was busy mopping up votes. **Chris**
University College Cardiff

POLL TAX SCABS

A READER asks when does a council worker implementing the poll tax cease to be a worker thrown into a quandary, and become a scab? Obviously the hired snoopers are scabs. They may have the choice of snooping or the dole, but then so do soldiers, police officers and prison warders. These people are scabs by definition—they are coercive agents of the state regardless of their motives for joining, and however naive they may be, their role will soon become apparent to them.

Beyond this it is impossible, and not very helpful, to try and

draw up hard and fast rules for what makes a scab. People will scab, sit on the fence, or actively oppose any anti-working class measures they are ordered to implement. They shouldn't be branded scabs by the position they are placed in, but by their actions. Nor should the task of having the political arguments out be evaded by hurling abuse at people in a confusing situation. Those who come down unequivocally on the side of management are scabs, and should be treated as such.

David Lane
London

CENSORSHIP AND REPRESSION

LABOUR MP Keith Vaz has tried to justify his appalling call for *The Satanic Verses* to be withdrawn by arguing that there cannot be absolute freedom of speech because this would mean giving a platform to people who insult the black community. He says that if everyone was allowed to say whatever they wanted, the Public Order Act, which restricts the activities of racists like the National Front, would have to be abolished! His support for the most

draconian piece of legislation on the statute books draws out the reactionary consequences of calling for censorship of any sort. In the cause of persuading the state to suppress the views of the far right, left wingers like Vaz have given the authorities a law which has been used more than any other to terrorise, criminalise and imprison black youth. **Carl Johnson**
Bristol

Soviet Union

NATIONALISM IN THE CAUCASUS

AFTER ARMENIA, NOW GEORGIA

Jackie Reynolds argues that the massacre in Georgia exposes the limits of glasnost

On Sunday thousands of protesters in the Soviet republic of Georgia were savagely attacked by shovel-wielding KGB troops and dozens were killed and injured in the mêlée that ensued. In Britain Mikhail Gorbachev had just been toasted as the Soviet Union's best hope for democracy and justice. But after the Tbilisi massacre he had to despatch foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, the Georgian boss from 1972 to 1985, to sort out the latest of many nationalist uprisings to have tarnished the image of glasnost.

Georgian unrest was sparked by Abkhazian demands for secession, which in turn had been inspired by developments in the troubled Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabagh. The Black Sea holiday resort of Abkhazia is an autonomous republic inside Soviet Georgia. But the mainly-Muslim Abkhazians form only 20 per cent of the population of their province, the remainder being Christian Georgians. According to Alexei Gogua, the Abkhazian deputy to the new Soviet parliament, there is great resentment among the Abkhazian minority against Georgian attempts to take away their rights.

This resentment has been given a focus by recent events in another region plagued by nationalist tension: Nagorno-Karabagh.

In January Moscow decided that it would rule the Armenian enclave directly, while allowing Azerbaijan to retain formal sovereignty over the disputed territory. Then, on his tour of the Ukraine at the end of February, Gorbachev suggested that autonomous zones like Nagorno-Karabagh could become national regions under Moscow's supervision. Within weeks of this pronouncement the first Abkhazian demonstration calling for secession from Georgia and for republican status inside the Soviet Union was held in the village of Lykhny.

The Georgian majority in Abkhazia quickly responded with their own demonstrations. They were reacting to the prospect of being discriminated against in any future Abkhazian republic. They demanded the abolition of Abkhazia's autonomous status and its full integration into Soviet Georgia. Georgians in the republican capital of Tbilisi began to organise solidarity protests as well. The first violence broke out a fortnight ago when Abkhazian snipers fired on a Georgian demonstration in Leselidze in Abkhazia.

The upsurge of nationalism in Abkhazia has coincided with rising nationalism in Georgia itself. Indeed, it was the mobilisation of a 200 000-strong demonstration in Tbilisi in November that persuaded Moscow to drop its controversial plan to remove the right of the Soviet republics to self-

determination. Ever since there have been demonstrations, rallies and hunger-strikes demanding more autonomy for Georgia. The local Communist Party has split as it has struggled to cope with this upsurge. In the recent elections to the Soviet parliament, all the nationalist movements swung behind Aki Bakhradze, the only Georgian Communist Party candidate to campaign for more autonomy for all national republics.

The Georgian nationalist movement responded to the Abkhazian crisis by accusing the Kremlin of encouraging Abkhazian secessionism. When they took to the streets of Tbilisi last Sunday in solidarity with their compatriots in Abkhazia, many of the demonstrators were ready to give a hearing to those who call for Georgia to secede from the Soviet Union.

This is a development that no Moscow regime will ever tolerate, and the KGB were sent in as an object lesson to any who imagine that glasnost really means freedom.

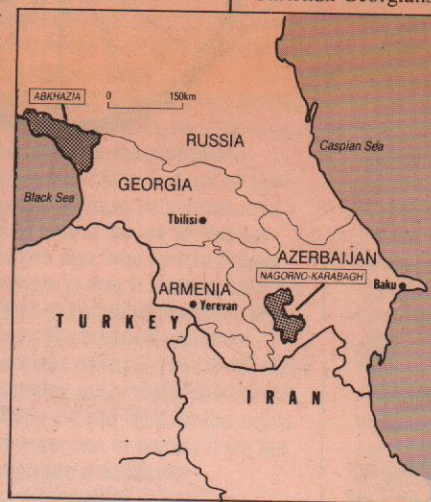
Apart from in neighbouring Armenia, the Kremlin has rarely had to reveal its iron fist in the national republics. Because they are so preoccupied with fighting each other, they present little threat to Soviet rule. It has long counted in Moscow's favour that Christian Georgians hate Christian Armenians and

local Muslims even more than they hate the Russians. The conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians stands in a long tradition in the Caucasus.

Another factor in Moscow's favour is that the Georgian republic is one of the most prosperous in the Soviet Union. For the inhabitants of austere Leningrad and Moscow, life in sunny Georgia seems to be one long holiday. The Kremlin has manipulated the suspicions many Soviet workers have about the Georgian traders they buy their vegetables from to stimulate fears of

exploitation by southern 'millionaires'. By making out that hoarding Georgian speculators are to blame for the empty shelves in shops, Moscow has created a scapegoat for the failure of the system to satisfy the basic needs of the working class.

The Tbilisi massacre will undoubtedly strengthen anti-Russian sentiment in Georgia. But there is little evidence to suggest that this will take a consistently anti-Soviet form. The xenophobia of the Georgian nationalists makes them a soft touch for a sophisticated operator like Shevardnadze. They have already fallen into Moscow's trap by directing their anger against the Abkhazians rather than the Kremlin. If Georgians are to achieve true freedom and justice they must link up with their Abkhazian and Armenian neighbours in a Caucasian alliance against Moscow oppression.





COMMUNISM AFTER GLASNOST

Revolutionary Communist Party
Regional Dayschools

The Western media are gloating over recent developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The message behind glasnost seems to be 'bring back the market—communism does not work'.

We are organising discussions around the country to counter this celebration of capitalism. The aim is to provide a forum for a critical assessment of developments in the East, and their consequences for us in the West.

Discussions on: Marx and communism
Soviet Union • Eastern Europe
Third world • Is a revolution possible today?

For further details ring (01) 375 1102.

Birmingham Region	Saturday 29 April, 11am	New Imperial Hotel, Temple St (off New St)
London Region	Sunday 7 May, 10am	University of London Union, Malet St, WC1
Nottingham Region	Saturday 13 May, 10.30am	International Community Centre, Mansfield Rd
South West Region	Sunday 14 May, 10.30am	Old Market St, Bristol
Newcastle Region	Saturday 20 May, 1pm	Tyneside Cinema, 10 Pilgrim St
Northern Region	Saturday 27 May, 11am	Manchester Poly, Mandela Building, Oxford Rd, Manchester



MYTHS OF AN ECONOMIC MIRACLE

John Gibson exposes some of the myths about the British economy in chancellor Nigel Lawson's budget speech

MYTH 1 AN INVESTOR'S PARADISE

'Over the past seven years, investment has grown more than twice as fast as consumption, creating the increased capacity needed to meet future demand.'

At first sight the figures appear impressive (unless stated otherwise, all figures in this article represent real changes after allowing for inflation). Gross domestic product is increasing at 3.5 per cent at the moment, and gross investment in manufacturing went up by 11.3 per cent last year, while it is forecast to grow by 11 per cent this year.

However, this growth is from a low starting point. Investment levels are still

below the 1979 figures, and this is despite the fact that they include the growth in investments by foreign multinationals. In addition, investments are falling as a share of the money capital available to the capitalist class. Clearly anything but investment in manufacturing is preferred by those with money capital.

Figures for investment in buildings and works confirm that there is no manufacturing revival underway in Britain. Last year Britain's building stock rose by 7.3 per cent. Yet investment in new building

for industrial purposes fell by 1.5 per cent in 1988 (*Financial Times*, 17 February). While a handful of high-profile projects, like the Chunnel and the Canary Wharf enterprise zone in London's docklands, have created an image of vitality in business-oriented construction, the real boom has been in private, residential property. Investment in private dwellings rose by 22 per cent last year.

It is a strange quirk of official statistics that the building of houses is classified as 'capital investment'. Such assets are consumed by individuals and add nothing

to the longer-term profit-making potential of the capitalist class. In fact, 'investment' in housing merely highlights the temporary character of Britain's economic boom. Housing construction has been stimulated by a speculative and credit-led surge in house prices—one which is now set for a sharp reversal as high interest rates and a rising incidence of mortgage defaults saturate the housing market with unsold properties.

British manufacturers have tried to take advantage of the boom in consumer spending by expanding output. This has taken the form of slightly more investment at the existing level of technology and within the existing plant size. It is limited by the length of the consumer boom the government is now trying to bring to an end.

Another way in which employers have tried to take advantage of the consumer boom is exemplified by the growth of takeover activity.

Far from being a sign of dynamism, the takeover boom is evidence of the battle for survival being fought by British industry. In manufacturing there were 283 takeovers in 1984, with a total value of

£3.6 billion; in 1987 there were 609 to the value of £6.8 billion; and in the first nine months of 1988, there were 429 to the value of £7.6 billion. According to the office of fair trading, about two thirds of the acquisitions they have considered in the past three years involved a company taking a larger share of the output in its existing markets (*Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*, February 1989).

British manufacturing is still in steep decline. Total employment is still falling: there were 40 000 fewer manufacturing jobs in 1988. The deficit on non-oil trade was £6 billion in the third quarter of 1988 alone. Since 1979, imports of manufacturing goods have risen 12 times faster than domestic production. This has meant that in the key areas of world growth, Britain imports a substantial proportion of its goods: 93 per cent in office machinery and data processing; 58 per cent in instrument engineering (CSO, *Monthly Digest of Statistics*, January 1989). The only areas which have fared reasonably well have been those connected with the state-protected defence industry, and even here the squeeze is on.

MYTH 2 BOOMING PROFITS

'We have seen a dramatic and long overdue improvement in company profits.'

According to the latest figures for the whole economy, excluding North Sea oil, the pre-tax mass of profits rose by about 15 per cent last year. It sounds impressive but a number of factors show that such a jump is unlikely to encourage capitalists into major new investment.

First, the rise has only a marginal effect on the rate of profit on capital. For instance, the investment bank Phillips & Drew estimates that the mass of profits will increase a further 12 per cent this



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 to 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; Ten 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.

LIVING MARXISM costs £1.50, or £15 for a 12-month subscription. Available from all good newsagents or from Junius Publications Ltd (T11), BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd. Phone (01) 375 1485.

**LIVING
MARXISM**

year. Yet, this adds only 0.2 per cent to the pre-tax rate of return on capital. In other words, such developments have only a marginal effect in improving the rate of profit available in Britain and very little effect in improving British industry's profitability relative to other countries.

Other factors suggest that the recent improvement in profits is not sustainable. In the past few years, the highest rates of return have been realised in the home market. These have largely been the result of the credit-based market boom which has allowed capitalists to mark-up prices without endangering sales levels. The government itself, however, admits that the inflationary environment underpinning the profit improvement is unsustainable. Lawson's tight monetary policies are set to squeeze returns drastically.

The other major source of profits for British capital lies in its overseas interests. More than one third of profits accruing to British capitalists originate abroad. Yet, restrictive economic policies, similar to those in Britain, are being introduced abroad. Even if the leading powers manage to stave off the recessionary tendencies for the rest of this year, British capitalists face a squeeze on their returns from abroad.

The most detailed estimates circulating in the City show that, even if nothing happens to undermine the coherence of the world economy, the tendency towards a declining rate of profitability on capital is set to reassert itself by the end of this year.

The growth of credit and spending has boosted output and profits, but this situation cannot last. In the absence of major investment, the result has been rising imports leading to a serious deterioration in Britain's balance of payments, and the return of inflation. The government's return to a tight counter-inflationary strategy is an admission that

The problem at the heart of Britain's economic malaise, low productivity of productive investments, is here to stay

the problem at the heart of Britain's economic malaise, low profitability of productive investments, is here to stay.

MYTH 3 CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS

'It appears that the main constraints to output growth are capacity, and shortages of skilled labour, which are an increasingly acute problem.'

With regard to the supposed constraints posed by shortages of equipment, we have shown that, contrary to the chancellor's claims, there is little growth in new buildings and machinery. But if this really is a problem and there is so much free money capital floating about, the obvious question is why is it not being invested in new capital stock? The answer is that in reality there is no such thing as capacity constraints.

From the point of view of the individual capitalist, the experience is indeed one of too little capacity. In a desperate bid to increase output in the face of stiff competition, and with the end of the consumer boom in sight, the individual capitalist feels the limitations of his existing capital stock acutely. But why does he not simply build more factories and employ new technology? Because production is not sufficiently profitable and he is unable to compete with superior foreign competition. The true constraint is not capacity but profitability.

As for the myth of a shortage of skilled labour, what the employers are really talking about is the lack of a flexible workforce. Here myth and reality met on

Margaret Thatcher's recent visit to Liverpool.

While Thatcher launched her new training initiative as an answer to the problem of a lack of skilled labour, Bird's Eye announced the closure of its frozen foods plant in Kirkby after workers there refused to accept a punitive flexibility package.

If skills shortages were truly a problem the state would be playing a leading role in taking steps to overcome it. As it is, the government's new training initiative will be organised by the private sector with no more funding than before. The detailed measures under consideration by the government—from abolishing trade union restrictive practices such as the closed shop to removing all restrictions on the hours of work of women and young people—are clearly nothing to do with training and everything to do with increasing labour flexibility.

As well as using the idea of skills shortages as a cover for the intensification of the work process, this myth is central to the government's attempt to restrict wage rises. The Tories blame skills shortages for wage rises at or above the rate of inflation. What's more, they are trying to blame inflation and other economic problems on rising unit labour costs.

Even if we accept the government's argument that real wages rose by 24 per cent between 1980 and 1988, as a share of the total output wages have remained stagnant for the economy as a whole. For manufacturing industry alone, output per worker rose by 43.7 per cent; in other words unit labour costs fell by 16.5 per cent (*Employment Gazette*, September 1988).

In recent months much has been made of new figures from the labour force survey which show that there are half a million more people in work than had previously been thought. The government claims that this alters the situation with regard to changes in labour productivity. But it is still the case that after inflation, wages per unit of output are stagnant, and declining rapidly in manufacturing, as a result of an intensification of labour across industry.

MYTH 4 WE'RE PAYING OUR WAY

'When we first took office the public sector borrowing requirement was over five per cent of GDP—equivalent to £25 billion in today's terms. This we steadily reduced as a deliberate act of policy, until, by 1987/88, the PSBR had been eliminated and we started to repay the public debt.'

Is reducing the national debt an important sign of a healthy economy? The switch from a deficit to surplus has not been achieved through a reduction in state spending. It is the result of a tax system which ensures that tax receipts rise faster than economic growth. As we have seen the sources of growth are temporary and prone to a sharp reversal. In any case the national debt is not an important indicator of the state of the economy.

The national debt represents accumulated government borrowing from banks and other financial institutions. Today it stands at around half of domestic output. The government can reduce the overall debt by paying back those liabilities that fall due while not incurring new debts to the same level. In doing so money capital resources are released to areas other than trading in paper assets issued by the government. Existing economic trends provide a telling indicator as to where the money will end up—in private sector financial assets, overseas speculation, anywhere but productive investment.

MYTH 5 WE'VE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD

'In Britain today we have more people in work than ever before in our history; they are better motivated than ever before and their living standards have improved beyond recognition.'

According to the official figures, unemployment is at its lowest point for eight years: 1.95m. And no matter how they are measured, real wages have risen by about 25 per cent under the Tories. Yet this picture of declining unemployment and rising living standards jars with the experience of most working class people in the Thatcher years.

The official unemployment tally has become progressively more meaningless as fiddling the figures has become part of the government's job description. In contrast to the official rollcall of the unemployed, Dr John MacInnes of Glasgow University has measured unemployment at 3.5m by measuring the difference between the total workforce and those in work.

There are other factors to be taken into consideration as well. Many of the new jobs the government claims to have created have been part-time and low-paid. In addition, the government is harassing people on to schemes and off the unemployment register. We will soon have a situation where there is little unemployment but lots of poorly-paid, temporary workers of one sort or another.

As for the government's boasts about booming living standards, there is an ever-growing number of people living at or below supplementary benefit levels.

In 1979 there were 6m such people; in 1988 the figure was 11m (*Low Pay Review*, No 33, Spring 1988). Even for those who are earning an average wage, the reality is that they are worse off. This is partly a consequence of the way the retail price index is rigged to exclude house prices, for example.

More fundamentally it is a consequence of the intensification of the work process. The discrepancy between the official figures and the lived experience arises because real wages and living standards are not the same. As Marx explained, the former may rise while the latter may fall:

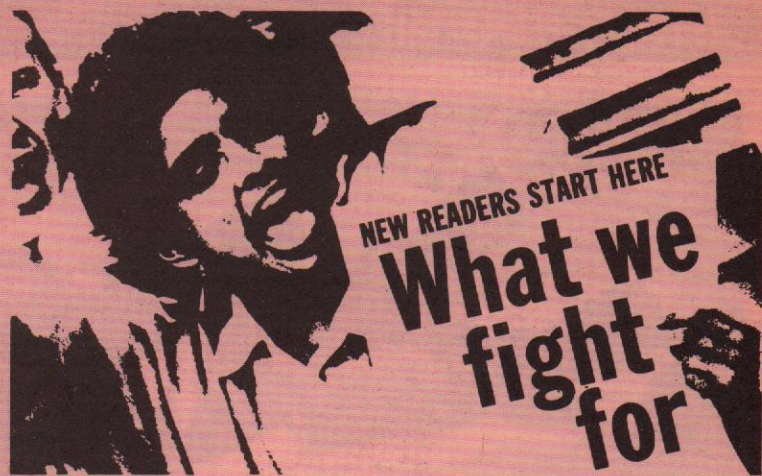
'When the working day is prolonged, the price of labour-power may fall below its value although that price be nominally unchanged or even rise. The value of a day's labour-power is, as will be remembered, estimated from its normal average duration, or from the normal duration of life amongst labourers, and from corresponding normal transformations of organised bodily matter into motion, in conformity with the nature of man.' (*Capital* Volume 1, p493)

We can expect the intensity of work to increase and the working day to lengthen

What Marx had to say about the lengthening of the working day also holds for the intensification of labour.

The worker who works more intensively needs a greater number of goods to maintain an existing standard of living. For instance, he might put the car in for servicing rather than repair it himself because he is too tired. Brian Hemingway, the British Rail engineer who was scapegoated for the Clapham rail disaster, revealed the reality of this process in Thatcher's Britain. As he told the inquiry into the crash, prior to doing the wiring which led to the crash, he had done a 12-hour shift on a Sunday. He went on to say that this was typical as he often worked a seven-day week in order to keep up his mortgage payments and maintain a reasonable standard of living.

As a counter to the recession, we can expect the intensity of work to increase and the working day to lengthen. Both of these measures can offset a fall in profit rates and will further lower the living standards of the working class. Because attacking money wages is such an obvious attack on the working class, we can expect our exploiters to keep this alternative open until they have exhausted all the other options.



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.

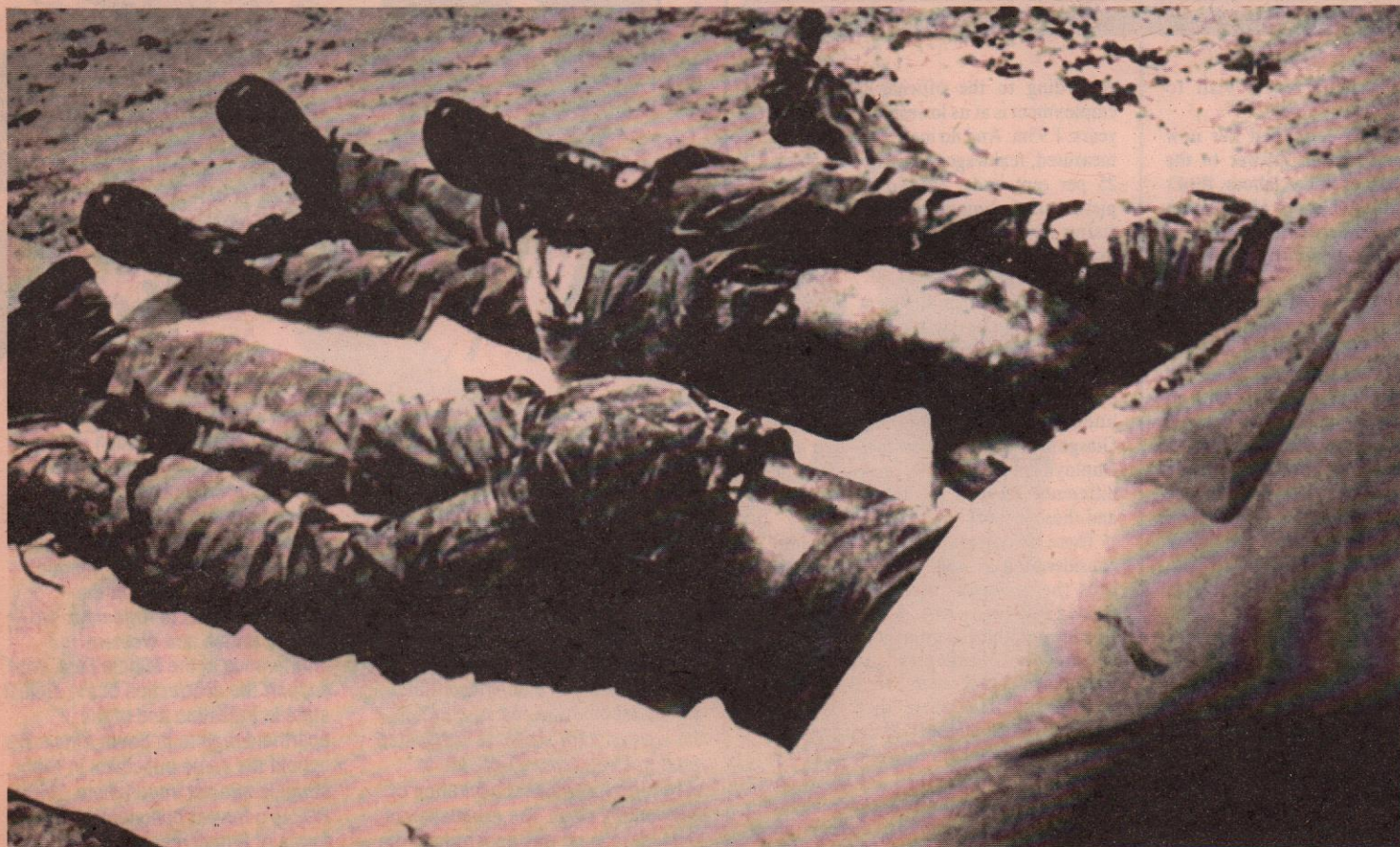
The RCP believes that the fight against oppression is central to the construction of an independent working class movement. Workers must defend the oppressed if we are to fight for our own liberation. This is why the RCP is wholeheartedly committed to the fight against racism. The struggle for the emancipation 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.



Namibian freedom fighters have been massacred for returning to their own country

NAMIBIA

HOW THE UN SET UP SWAPO

Andy Clarkson describes how the UN destroyed the Namibian independence struggle

Most criticisms of the United Nations' role in the debacle in Namibia have stressed that it did 'too little, too late'. In fact the UN is an agent of imperialism and has sabotaged Swapo's liberation struggle from the start.

STAGE 1 A PAWN FOR IMPERIALISM

In December 1973 the toothless talking shop of the UN general assembly recognised Swapo as 'the authentic representative of the Namibian people'. Three years later Namibia was given observer status at the UN, and promised that any negotiations for Namibian independence 'must be between South Africa and Swapo under UN auspices'. The UN was prepared to make Swapo the world's only officially recognised liberation struggle because the West needed a pawn to put pressure on South Africa. While Swapo was fighting the apartheid regime, Pretoria could not realise its ambition to expand further north into black Africa.

At the same time as the general assembly was making meaningless concessions to Swapo, UN security council members America, Britain and France were vetoing a resolution calling for an arms embargo against South Africa for illegally occupying Namibia.

Together with West Germany and Canada, they set up a Contact Group in April 1977 to open talks with Pretoria over Namibia. This was sufficient to undermine the left's campaign to impose immediate sanctions against South Africa.

In August 1977 the apartheid regime unilaterally transferred the deep-water harbour of Walvis Bay, which had been under Namibian jurisdiction since 1922, to its own Cape Province. While the UN made half-hearted complaints, the Contact Group accepted that none of the provisions of any deal it agreed with South Africa would be applied to Walvis Bay, the only port capable of handling Namibia's vital exports.

By April 1978 the Contact Group had secured South Africa's approval for a worthless Namibian independence plan. The essence of this initiative was that the South African administration and its police force would remain in place throughout the transition period leading up to elections. Swapo refused to countenance this deal, until 700 Namibians were butchered by South African troops in a raid at Kassinga refugee camp in southern Angola. In September 1978 this dirty deal between

the Contact Group and Pretoria became the much-celebrated UN resolution 435. From the start UN resolution 435 was soaked in Namibian blood.

STAGE 2 TARGET ANGOLA

In November 1979 the UN security council agreed that a 50km demilitarised zone should be established on the border between Namibia and Angola. This permitted the presence of five South African bases, but banned Swapo guerrillas from operating in the demilitarised zone. In May 1980 Pretoria accepted the proposal on condition that it could have 20 bases in the DMZ. In conceding this demand UN secretary-general Kurt Waldheim reassured the South Africans that 'the question of Swapo bases in Namibia would no longer arise' (*Namibia the Facts*, International Defence and Aid Fund for South Africa, 1980).

From 1981 US president Ronald Reagan instituted a policy of linking the future of Namibia with that of Angola, stipulating that Washington would only contemplate supporting Namibian independence once Cuban troops were withdrawn from Angola.

This strategy took Namibia off the international agenda for the next seven years. During this time South Africa sought to consolidate its grip on Namibia and to expand into Angola by instigating a series of invasions against the radical regime there, using the presence of Swapo bases as an excuse.

STAGE 3 QUID PRO QUO

By 1987 the willingness of Mikhail Gorbachev and the battered Angolan regime to make concessions persuaded the West that the time was ripe to check South African interference in Angola. State department official Wayne Smith spelled out this change of emphasis in US policy: 'For the past seven years the Reagan administration has been putting Angolan policy on the wrong foot, seeing the obstacle as the Cuban troops. Now it is prepared to see that the main obstacle is the South Africans' unwillingness to give up Namibia.' (*Financial Times*, 24 June 1988) Smith hinted that Cuba's pay-off for co-operating would be the abandonment of the US blockade of the Caribbean island.

THE UN'S BLOODY RECORD

CONGO MASSACRE

Namibia is not the first time that the United Nations has sabotaged an African independence movement. In 1960 the UN's blue beret brigade was responsible for crushing the liberation struggle in the former Belgian colony of the Congo. Imperialist intervention in the Congo became necessary because of the failure of the attempts by the former colonial power Belgium to establish a stable pro-Western regime. The secession of the copper-rich Katanga (Shaba) province was the pretext for the interference of UN troops to restore imperialist control.

● Patrice Lumumba, the Congo's first prime minister, called in the United Nations when European settlers and their black stooges, together with Belgian paratroops and South African mercenaries, declared

that Katanga had seceded in July 1960. But when the UN forces arrived they began to fraternise with the secessionists. When Lumumba complained, he was denounced as 'a potential dictator bent on wrecking our operations' by top UN officials.

The UN encouraged president Joseph Kasavubu to oust Lumumba from his post as prime minister. According to American academic Stephen Weissman, 'evidence of UN complicity in the Kasavubu coup appears overwhelming'. In January 1961 the UN authorities agreed to Lumumba being handed over to the secessionists, and he was murdered soon after. It took the combined efforts of the UN, Belgian troops and Katangan mercenaries several bloody years to crush the masses. In this peace-keeping operation tens of thousands of Africans were slaughtered.

The South African military and its Unita stooges were still firmly entrenched in southern Angola. The Cuban-led May 1988 offensive inflicted a severe defeat on the South African Defence Force at Cuito Cuanavale. This was very much appreciated in Washington and London because it succeeded in forcing Pretoria to the negotiating table. At the Moscow summit between Reagan and Gorbachev in June 1988, a date was set for implementing the 10-year old UN resolution 435 on Namibia.

The aim of the negotiations was not to force South Africa out of Namibia, but to guarantee Pretoria's continued presence in the country in return for its loss of any influence over Angola.

The talks were pursued on the understanding that a 'free' Namibia would have much the same relationship to Pretoria as the 'independent' homelands of Transkei and Bophuthatswana. The Western plan for Namibia had the advantage of offering UN ratification for what was a perpetuation of the status quo.

STAGE 4: STITCH UP SWAPO

In Geneva in August 1988, the USA, the Soviet Union, Cuba, Angola and South Africa agreed to a scheme requiring Swapo to pull back to the 16th parallel in Angola by 1 April 1989. By telling Swapo it had no choice but to accept this ultimatum, the Soviet Union, Cuba and Angola made explicit their support for South Africa over Namibia.

On 23 September, during a joint press conference with South African president PW Botha in Johannesburg, UN secretary-general Javier Perez de Cuellar dismissed the 1973 UN commitment to Swapo, arguing that UN resolution 435 required that 'there will be no privileges, no differences, no discrimination against any political parties' (*Independent*, 24 September 1988). In fact discrimination in favour of South Africa is built into resolution 435.

In the months leading up to the implementation of the sham independence plan, the imperialist powers set out to renege on even the biased commitments made in UN 435.

The UN transitional assistance group (Untag), the UN monitoring force for Namibia, was cut back from 7500 to 4650 (only 1000 troops were in Namibia by 1 April). The UN chose to ignore the integration of South Africa's Koevoet death squads into the local police force. It refused to listen to Swapo protests when South Africa's administrator-general in Namibia, Louis Pienaar, raised the voting age in November's independence election from 18 to 21. Finally, Perez de Cuellar cut all UN funding for Swapo.

'My people
are being butchered
under the flag of the
United Nations.'

South Africa justified its military strike against Swapo on the day the independence plan was supposed to come into effect on the grounds that the liberation movement had broken the agreement to stay above the 16th parallel in Angola. But while Swapo had agreed to the ceasefire, it insisted that it had never agreed to this provision of the Geneva Protocol of August 1988. Yet all the parties to the negotiations backed the South African line. Margaret Thatcher was on hand to browbeat the UN special representative for Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari, into giving Pretoria diplomatic cover for its offensive.

The aim of the Western powers now is to persuade the Swapo freedom fighters to withdraw from Namibia entirely. This was the subject under discussion at the Mount Etjo summit attended by the USA, the Soviet Union, Cuba, South Africa and Angola. Once again Swapo was not invited to join in the discussions about the future of its own country. But the imperialists are confident that pressure from the frontline states such as Zimbabwe and Zambia will force the liberation movement to fall into line. If the West and its UN agents do succeed in persuading Swapo to get out of Namibia, the apartheid regime will have secured the victory it has been seeking ever since the first Swapo attack was launched against it in August 1966.

The UN's role in Namibia has been one of bloody complicity in undermining the independence struggle.

By calling for more UN forces to go into Namibia to restore peace and take action against South Africa, the British left accepts the UN as a benign and neutral mediator. The point is that the Koevoet death squads which have been liquidating the resistance fighters are the UN forces in Namibia. As Swapo foreign minister Theo Ben Gurib put it: 'My people are being butchered under the flag of the United Nations.' The lesson of the Namibian experience is that the UN will always taken the side of imperialism against those who are fighting it.

THE VIEW FROM SOUTHAMPTON DOCKS

NATIONAL ACTION NEEDED

Keith Tompson reports from Southampton on the problems facing dockers as they square up to the Tories

Once the scheme is abolished', said Julian Gologly, 'we will be able to make them work on jobs other than strictly dockers' jobs. One man will be able to do several jobs'. Gologly is the public relations manager at Southampton docks; management makes sure that anyone visiting the docks has to see him first to get their side of the story. And their side of the story is clear: the employers are out to remove all restrictions to making dockers work harder. 'They just want a bloody cheap-labour scheme', said Bill, who has worked in the port for 20 years.

Jobs for sale

The national dock labour scheme was introduced in 1947 and ratified after the 1972 dock strike. It is widely regarded as providing dockers with a job for life. In fact it was a massive redundancy package. In return for the elimination of casual work, the unions agreed to huge job losses. While registered dockers in the declining ports were guaranteed work, the union accepted management's severance terms for thousands of jobs, and allowed the port employers to do as they pleased with the dockers in non-scheme ports like Felixstowe and Dover.

For the 9400 remaining registered dockers, the scheme provides a degree of protection. Dockers are employed by the National Docks Labour Board, which in turn is contracted by the private firms which

run the ports to carry out specific work. A set number of dockers are assigned to a job according to agreed manning levels. By scrapping the scheme the bosses aim to set manning levels as they see fit and impose the kind of high-productivity, flexible working conditions that already exist in the non-scheme ports.

The Transport and General Workers Union, the main union on the docks, has already accepted the need for greater flexibility and efficiency.

'We already work flexibly under the scheme', an official on the Southampton dock shop stewards' committee told me. 'Idle men will always do work that needs doing, there's no problem with that at all. In fact we have recently had talks with them offering all kinds of flexibility, there's no problem there at all.' The union leaders have no objection to acceding to management's demands to work more flexibly, only to having their agreements with the employers overturned unilaterally.

Thick and fast

As well as these concessions to the employers, union officials have retreated in the face of management's legal offensive. The threats which have come thick and fast from the employers to take the union to court if it so much as holds a ballot have thrown the union leaders into a panic. But the experience of the miners, printers and seafarers

shows that dockers cannot defend their livelihoods without breaking the law and raising the stakes themselves. A union that is too frightened even to contemplate taking illegal action can hardly be expected to defeat the most ruthless government in living memory.

The union's legal cretinism has already put a damper on the anger of rank and file dockers. At Southampton the men I spoke to were determined to resist the Tory plans. 'We'll fight the bastards, make no mistake', insisted Bill. But the union's craven



Clouds on the skyline at Southampton

attitude has made many pessimistic about the chances of winning. 'We want to fight', said Alan who has spent 35 years working in the port, 'and we want to win. But where's the leadership? You tell me that. There isn't one'.

To stand a chance of winning the rank and file must take control of the dispute and devise a political strategy to take the struggle forward.

The most important problem they face is the question of unity. The national dock labour

scheme has bequeathed a legacy of sectionalism, establishing divisions between those protected by the scheme and those working in non-scheme ports, as well as between registered dockers and other workers in scheme ports. The employers are now exploiting these divisions to the full.

A secret document drafted by the National Association of Port Employers to prepare for the dispute notes that the 'attitudes and actions of non-scheme ports' and 'the support given by non-registered workers' would be key factors in determining the outcome of any strike. The report adds, 'during any strike it will be important to exploit any events likely to demoralise the rank and file, such as cargoes being handled normally in non-scheme ports'. Much of the cargo even in scheme ports is handled by non-registered workers. Oil, gas, coal and most liquid bulk cargoes are excluded from the scheme. The Port of London estimated that only 30 per cent of its trade would be vulnerable to a strike by registered dockers.

Divided we fall

It is apparent that the only way to win the dispute is for dockers to bring out both the non-scheme ports and the non-registered workers in the scheme ports in a national strike. The Southampton men were clear about the need for unity. 'An all-out strike will be crucial to winning', said one. Yet the union has already decided that it will not be balloting non-registered dockers to take action.

In the face of this sabotage strategy by their union leaders, it is vital that activists take the arguments for an all-out strike to non-scheme ports and non-registered workers themselves.

Some people will argue that it is unrealistic to expect to mobilise a nationwide strike. But it is only unrealistic if we attempt to do so on the basis of defending a divisive scheme which was responsible for creating divisions among dockers in the first place. It is a realistic proposition if we argue for united action on the basis of the common interests of all dockers in resisting all redundancies and fighting for decent wages and conditions.

If a ballot is to be organised, registered dockers must demand that it should include all workers in non-scheme ports as well as scheme ports. If effective action is to be organised, it will be organised by rank and file dockers, who need to convince workers at every port that unity is essential to defend jobs and conditions throughout the industry. They need to be clear too that being reasonable won't win any brownie points with the Tories. The dockers will only succeed by being as ruthless as the Tories and taking whatever action is necessary to win.

STRIKING AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT

'THEY'VE PUT WOMEN IN THE DOCK'

This is like Judge Pickles all over again', said Karen, 'except this time it's the council'. Karen is one of more than 70 workers in Leeds city council's education department who are on strike in protest against sexual harassment by management. Last week the council suspended two women in the department's tertiary division for refusing to cooperate with a manager who sexually assaulted women. In December this particularly nasty piece of work was suspended on full pay for sexual harassment and, following a disciplinary hearing, was sacked. Now he has been reinstated after winning an appeal against his dismissal.

A boy's club

The appeal hearing, presided over by a panel of three councillors, was more like a trial of the two women who had been assaulted. They had to attend as witnesses and were forced to sit next to their assailant. One of the assessors, Labour councillor DE Gabb, questioned the women about what they were wearing, whether they wore bras and whether they had led the manager on. 'The women were the ones put in the guilty box and had to prove their innocence', says Sue, another worker on strike. 'It's a boy's club. They were asked intimate questions all about their personal lives and given a real grilling.'

Leeds councillors have always looked after their own and sure enough reinstated their man. On 4 April the manager was back at his desk overseeing a team of women workers. Workers in the tertiary department walked out in disgust for a two-hour stoppage. When they returned management locked them out. The council threatened to suspend any woman who refused to cooperate with the manager. 'He must think he's got a god-given right to assault women now', said Claire. The women are not demanding that he is sacked, but that he is moved to another department.

Two women in the area office refused to work with him and went to Merrion House council offices to ask



These women are on strike against a Labour council which makes Judge Pickles look like a new man

for alternative work. They were met by a management picket which refused to let them enter the building and suspended them without pay. The entire tertiary division came out in support to demand their reinstatement. Many workers from other council departments are now planning to join them.

Far from standing up for their rights, the women's union Nalگو is boasting about its continued support for the manager, who, like many other council bosses, is a union member. 'He should be expelled from the face of the earth, never mind the union' says Karen. The union might not back them, but the women have won support from male workers. 'It's been good getting men involved', said Sue. 'In our division most of them are on strike except management.' Nalگو's equivocation shows that we need a union resolutely on our side, not one with a foot in both camps.

It's a joke

The Labour council's equal opportunity policies haven't done much for the women workers either. 'Equal opportunities? Well, it's a joke isn't it', says Michelle. 'Leeds city council are just a pile of hypocrites.' The women's committee initially backed the assaulted workers, but under pressure from male colleagues in the Labour Party, they've decided they are not sure any more.

This experience proves that we cannot rely on paper equal opportunity policies or on appeals procedures to defend our rights. The interests of councillors are not the same as those of council workers; their first instinct is always to back management. We will only win by taking direct action ourselves. United action by council workers can show management and Labour councillors that women's rights are not negotiable.

Kerry Dean

(The names of the women interviewed have been changed at their request)

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly 14 April 1989 No 11 40p

THE GUILTY PARTIES IN NAMIBIA

BLOOD ON THEIR HANDS

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE for the carnage in Namibia? Under the cover of the United Nations the imperialist powers have conspired to sabotage the Namibian independence struggle and slaughter the liberation movement (for a blow-by-blow account of how they did it, see page 6). Together they have carved up southern Africa, and made sordid deals to secure their own stake in the region. The Soviet Union too has played a major role in destroying the liberation movement by making concessions to imperialism. All of them have the blood of the black masses on their hands.

PW BOTHA'S apartheid state has waged a ruthless war to crush the anti-imperialist struggle in Namibia. It has mobilised the might of its vast military machine against a people who have refused to surrender to apartheid oppression. It has imposed one of the biggest military occupations in the history of the world on the tiny Namibian state, and sent its mercenaries and death squads into Angola to strike against Swapo bases there. It has now secured international approval for its domination of Namibia in return for giving up its stake in Angola.

Using the cover provided by the United Nations, the apartheid regime is hell-bent on destroying the liberation movement altogether and imposing its will against the Namibian people through its puppet administration there. South Africa now has a free hand to sell all Namibian exports openly on the world market. The end of the war in Namibia will secure South Africa's domestic position by further demoralising the ANC. It will also boost South Africa's relations with black Africa. Pretoria can now pose as a friendly neighbour, and open up diplomatic, trade and military agreements with the black African states.

First RONALD REAGAN and now GEORGE BUSH have made America instrumental in subverting the independence struggle in Namibia in the cause of advancing its own imperialist designs in the region. In return for limiting South African influence in Angola, the USA agreed to allow the apartheid regime a free run in Namibia. The desire to increase its influence in southern Africa and weaken its South African rival was the major consideration in the US manoeuvres over Namibia. The USA was determined to stop South Africa reaching the Angola/Zaire/Zambia mineral belt, and was prepared to step over as many black bodies as it took to achieve its ambition.

The ending of apartheid intervention in Angola will give the USA open access to the



Portas Blasius, 13-year old Namibian, tortured by being held against the exhaust of a military vehicle

country's oil, copper and diamonds. It also means that America will establish direct control over the right-wing Unita forces

formerly controlled by Pretoria. Washington hopes to use Unita to extract more concessions from the Angolan regime, and is

blocking Angolan access to the IMF until the departure of the Cuban forces and the start of negotiations with Unita. The USA is also counting on using its influence over South Africa to grab the lion's share of Namibian wealth and free access to all its minerals.

MARGARET THATCHER has been hailed as a peace-broker in the Namibian affair, but she too has the blood of the black masses on her hands. While Britain played only a peripheral role in formulating the sham independence scheme for Namibia, it has backed imperialist interests all the way against the black freedom fighters. When South African forces launched their unprovoked attack on Swapo guerrillas inside Namibia, Thatcher was the first to condemn the liberation movement and congratulate the apartheid regime. Now Thatcher has despatched more British troops to oversee the process of expelling Swapo from Namibia.

Southern Africa is the one place in the world where British imperialism still counts as a significant factor in the balance of power. And, as its domestic position declines even further, Britain is bent on extending its interference in the region. This was the transparent aim of Thatcher's recent tour which encompassed Zimbabwe, Malawi and Namibia. Whether in Namibia or South Africa, Zimbabwe or Mozambique, more British intervention can mean only more suffering for black Africa.

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV'S Soviet Union has played a perfidious role in selling out the Namibian people. The imperialists were given a free hand to do their worst in Namibia as a result of Gorbachev's willingness to reduce the Soviet Union's commitments to its third world allies. Under pressure from Moscow the Cubans, who have been fighting the South African Defence Force and Unita since 1975, agreed to withdraw from Angola. The Angolans were in no position to resist the Soviet Union's diplomatic manoeuvres after years of bloody warfare and economic devastation which have brought the country to its knees.

In return for making concessions to imperialism in Africa (as well as Vietnam, Nicaragua, Afghanistan and the Middle East), Gorbachev hopes to end the isolation of the Soviet Union, secure international arms reductions and gain access to Western technology. He has been prepared to sacrifice the liberty and lives of the black masses to guarantee the survival of the corrupt Soviet system.