

the next step

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MILLIONS MARCH FOR FREEDOM



CHINA ERUPTS

Millions of workers and students have brought China to a standstill. They have shown the power of the masses to bring down the figureheads of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Mass resistance has exposed the limitations of military force. The protesters in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and in other cities (*continues on page 2*)

**IRELAND: SINN FEIN
ELECTION SUCCESS**
Page 3



**CAN NATO
SURVIVE?**
Pages 4 and 5



**VOTE RCP ON
15 JUNE!**
Page 7

CHINA ERUPTS

throughout China, are a threat to the imperialist order as well as the Stalinist regime. This is why the Western media are so concerned to praise the students' restraint and to counsel them to adopt non-violent tactics. President Bush has even recommended the civil rights movement of the Reverend Martin Luther King as a model for Chinese students to follow.

Over the past 20 years the Western powers have increasingly come to terms with the Chinese leadership. China is now seen as a reliable participant in superpower relations. Any internal upheaval poses a threat to the international order. The collapse of the Stalinist regime in China would inevitably provoke a chain reaction throughout Asia, jeopardising vital capitalist interests in places like Hong Kong and South Korea.

It is not yet clear whether the protesters who have taken to the streets of Beijing and other cities will heed the voices of those counselling caution and moderation. The movement has reached a critical stage. The masses can raise the stakes by taking the offensive now. But if they don't, the protesters risk losing momentum and dissipating the energies they have unleashed.

Only inertia can stop a popular movement of the masses. The Chinese protesters need organisation, leadership and clearly worked out objectives if they are to press home their advantage. Otherwise there is a great danger that the Chinese bureaucracy will regain the initiative in the current stalemate.

However the present phase of the struggle is resolved, the days of Stalinism in China are numbered. The faster that Chinese students and workers reject those calling for restraint and take the future into their own hands, the sooner will be their victory.

LIVING MARXISM

The June issue of our monthly review

LIVING MARXISM is on sale now. The theme of the magazine this month is Gorbomania—and what lies behind it. Despite the current tiff between London and Moscow over the diplomatic expulsions, Mikhail Gorbachev is still very much the man of the moment in the West. Most of this month's LIVING MARXISM is devoted to examining what Gorbachev really represents at home and abroad. As the Stalinist world falls apart, Gorbomania sweeps the West. Find out why in LIVING MARXISM

PLUS: After Hillsborough—we publish our poll on whom you blame for the deaths of 95 Liverpool fans and argue that hooliganism is nothing to panic about. In LIVING: World music, Soviet art, Terry Eagleton on Raymond Williams.

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Editorial



26 May • No 17
Editor: Joan Phillips

GLOBAL TURMOIL

THE WHOLE world is changing. From Beijing to Moscow, from Warsaw to Budapest, the Stalinist bloc is engulfed in a crisis so profound that it can be only a matter of time before it disintegrates. What is less widely recognised is that the West is also undergoing a period of major transformation.

The debate within Nato over the modernisation of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe is symptomatic of the new era. The Western world can no longer rely on the international framework established after the Second World War to regulate its conflicts. The division of Germany between East and West is once more a political issue; the re-emergence of this debate is a direct threat to the USA's role as the dominant imperialist power.

President Bush's demand that Washington be given a say in the future of post-1992 Europe reveals the extent of US insecurity about the growing cohesion of the European Community. For the US president, it would be a 'tragedy' if Nato was to become divided about 'disputes over beef hormones and wars over pasta'.

The end of the post-war order is in sight. Its demise means that the prolonged period of capitalist stability in the West since 1945 is now reaching an end. Marxists need to prepare themselves to face the challenges thrown up by a changing world.

CHINA

THE DRAMATIC rise of the protest movement in China marks an important stage in the disintegration of world Stalinism. At present the mood of the protesters lacks clear focus or direction. Yet the very act of mass defiance has shaken the Chinese state to its foundations. With every day that passes, Chinese students and workers become bolder and more militant.

The political crisis in China is an indictment of the policy known in the Soviet Union as perestroika. The Chinese bureaucracy has gone much further than Gorbachev in implementing economic restructuring. But the introduction of market-oriented policies has only exacerbated China's economic crisis.

Economic reforms have led to a sharp decline in working class living standards. Meanwhile corruption has become endemic and the beneficiaries of perestroika Chinese-style are widely resented by workers, students and peasants.

The spread of market forces has also undermined the cohesion of the Chinese bureaucracy. The result is that the leadership is paralysed before the mass revolt and the state is unable to respond decisively.

The greatest danger of the moment is that the protest movement itself lacks leadership and direction. Hence it can disrupt the system, but it cannot initiate change. Until Chinese workers and students go on the offensive it is always possible for the bureaucracy to play for time and regroup its forces.

Whatever the outcome of the present crisis it is evident that the Chinese bureaucracy

cannot continue to rule in the old way. It can postpone the day of its demise, but it lacks the means to overcome the structural defects of the Stalinist system.

The Chinese bureaucracy has a number of options it can adopt in an attempt to neutralise the opposition. It can allow a liberalising group of bureaucrats under a figure such as Zhao Ziyang to head off the protesters by adapting a reforming programme. Such an approach worked in Poland in 1956 and it could provide a breathing space in 1989 in China.

Another option is to allow the Chinese army to take power. A military junta proclaiming a commitment to reform could ensure a degree of stability, at least in the short term. Whatever option it adopts the Chinese bureaucracy needs to make some concessions to prevent protest from becoming an insurrection.

Marxists must fully support the protest movement regardless of its political character. The overthrow of the Stalinist regime through popular mobilisation would pave the way for the rebirth of a genuine Marxist movement in China. On the other hand, any attempt to stop short of fundamental transformation of the system in favour of piecemeal reforms could only demoralise the masses.

Instead of taking the protesters forward, a dialogue with the authorities would dissipate their energies in futile negotiations. The result would be to make Chinese students and workers cynical about the prospects of achieving social change through collective action.

Despite its anti-communist prejudices, the Western establishment is deeply concerned about events in China. The Beijing bureaucracy has been a loyal ally of imperialism and its economic reforms have been praised to the echo by the Western media. Yet the spectre of social change being achieved through mass popular revolt could destabilise the whole of Asia. If corruption can be cleaned up by mass demonstrations in China, then why not also in Japan?

The Hong Kong stock exchange has already registered capitalist fears about events in Beijing with the biggest fall since the crash of October 1987. Reactionary rulers in Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and elsewhere must be praying that the Chinese bureaucracy will succeed in defeating its opponents.

EXPULSIONS

THE EXPULSION of 11 Soviet diplomats and journalists from Britain is a measure of how far the Conservative government is prepared to go to sustain its Cold War propaganda. The object of this gesture is to stir up a climate of anti-Soviet prejudice in the run-up to this week's Nato summit.

The 'discovery' of large-scale KGB espionage is supposed to prove that Gorbachev's peaceful diplomacy is no more than a disguise for the old-fashioned Soviet drive to subvert Western democracy by any means necessary. It therefore follows that Europe must need even more deadly nuclear weapons.

Britain's amateurish ploy is unlikely to make a major impact on the big power talks in Brussels. It merely shows that a third-rate power can only dream up a third-rate farce in a vain attempt to influence the deliberations in the big league.

BASHING BRUSSELS

MARGARET THATCHER'S crusade against Europe is about as sophisticated as Geoffrey Howe's attempt to manufacture a KGB spy scare. After ten years in office, the Conservative government lacks purpose or direction. In a desperate search for a new Falklands Factor,

the prime minister has cast the Brussels bureaucracy in the role formerly assigned to General Galtieri.

It is unlikely that Thatcher's campaign to save British tobacco companies from standard European warnings that smoking kills will inspire much popular enthusiasm. Nor is her determination to protect British schoolchildren from the horrors of learning foreign languages likely to win many votes at next month's Euro-elections.

Even what Thatcher's advisers seem to regard as her strongest propaganda card—her revelation that the EC wants to smuggle socialism back into Britain where she has vanquished it—lacks plausibility. German chancellor Helmut Kohl has never seemed a very enthusiastic advocate of socialist policies at home. In France and Spain the Socialist premiers Mitterrand and González have pursued hostile anti-union policies to rival those of Norman Tebbit. Yet the reactionary rulers of the major powers in Europe now stand accused of forcing socialist policies on the British.

Instead of stirring a wave of patriotic fervour, Thatcher's attacks on the European Community have succeeded only in splitting the Conservative Party. Europe is Thatcher's own goal. Hard-headed British capitalists know that Britain has no choice but to stay in the European Community. Little Englander flag-waving is simply an admission of Britain's insecurity about facing up to European competition.

THE NEW EUROPEANS

THATCHER'S SPECTRE of a European-inspired socialist revival in Britain may have failed as a scare tactic, but it has certainly caused excitement down in Walworth Road. The Labour leadership has now given up on the idea of implementing its policies through Westminster. In a desperate search for any device to overcome the party's lack of influence in Britain, the Kinnock team now looks to the institutions of Europe.

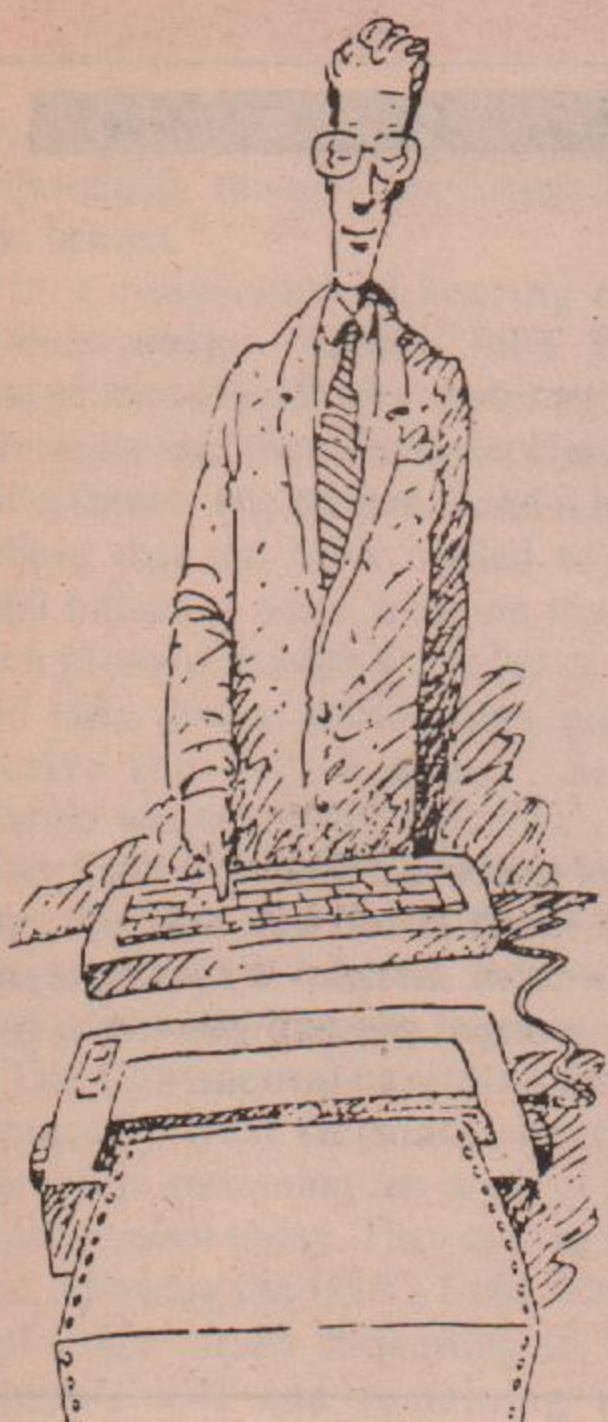
For years opposition to the European Community was a defining position of the British left. The fact that it has suddenly become enthusiastically pro-Europe is more a tribute to the extent of its demoralisation under a decade of Thatcher than a result of serious political reflection.

True to its post-Govan 'tartan Labour' character, the Scottish National Party follows Kinnock down the European road. The SNP now calls for an independent Scotland in the context of Europe. It is a sign of the times that a talking shop in Strasbourg can become an effective instrument for change in the fantasies of the major opposition parties of British politics.

The institutions of the European Community are as progressive as the offices of the Inland Revenue. They are designed to regulate relations among the imperialist powers of Europe and as such are entirely reactionary. The European parliament may appear more radical than the parliament at Westminster for the simple reason that it has very little executive power and member states are free to interpret its decisions as they wish. Paper declarations make Europe appear progressive and provide Labour and the SNP with empty phrases for their manifestos.

For the Revolutionary Communist Party, Europe is a non-issue. It is a matter of indifference to the working class how European capitalists decide to conduct their affairs. However, we resolutely oppose the attempts of Labour and the SNP to divert workers from facing reality by inventing an image of a progressive Europe.

Socialism cannot be introduced by the backdoor or by parliaments or committees—the transformation of society requires the active intervention of the working class. That is the Marxist project for 1992.



letters

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SAY NO TO DOCK SCHEME

MIKE FREEMAN (*the next step*, 12 May) argues that we should 'campaign for the extension of the dock labour scheme to cover all dockers, in the non-registered as well as the registered ports'. But if this were done, we wouldn't be talking about the dock labour scheme. The employers conceded relative security for some dockers so they could press ahead with casualisation and mass redundancies elsewhere.

Many left wingers, noting that current working class struggles are defensive, argue that we should 'defend the dock labour scheme'. This doesn't help us address the employers' ability to exploit sectional divisions among workers to press ahead with the extension of casualisation.

A better position is to organise around the extension of secure wages and conditions to all dockers.



We can organise among non-scheme and scheme workers on this basis, and resist the employers' ability to divide workers. Whether we can limit the erosion of conditions, defend the status quo or win improved conditions depends on the balance of class forces. A political approach which promotes unity points the way to tipping the balance in our favour.

This is the content of Mike's argument. But I think that calling for the extension of the scheme suggests there is something progressive about it, and feeds into the common confusion between defensive struggles and defensive politics. The latter can't even defend the status quo.

Mick Spencer
Cardiff



like animals and behaved like animals...not just football's scum but society's scum'. Since then, hooliganism has been back in the news. This has helped to distract attention from the release of the police video of the Hillsborough disaster, which conclusively refutes the lie that hooliganism caused the crush outside the stadium. It enabled the media to reintroduce the hooliganism issue into their coverage of the Cup final.

Things which are part of the traditional Wembley scene were presented as evil conspiracies. Fans who turned up without tickets were truncheoned by police just yards from charity workers who stood collecting money for the Hillsborough appeal. A turnstile man was arrested for letting in people without tickets—a time-honoured practice at every ground I've ever been to. The BBC 'experts' repeatedly complained about fans running on the pitch, something which 20 years ago was treated as grand fun by the commentators, part and parcel of being 'up for the cup'.

What really upset them, though, was that the entire crowd stood silent for an entire minute in memory of the Hillsborough dead, but shouted and sang 'You'll never walk alone' extra loud during the national anthem. It was obvious that the fans had nothing but contempt for the authorities, and the cynical attempts to criminalise football supporters are becoming more and more widely perceived as the official version of events contradicts reality.

Toby Banks
London

HOOLIGANS AT THE PALACE

THE press reaction to the 'riots' at the Crystal Palace v Birmingham match is a classic example of the manipulation of the hooliganism panic. Mick Hume's remarks (*the next step*, 19 May) about the causes of the 'pitch invasion' were true, and his warnings about an impending backlash have been vindicated by the FA Cup final.

Two hours before last week's Palace game, I was sitting with some other Palace fans in our usual pre-match pub. Normally you'd never see an away fan in there, but this time it was already packed solid with Birmingham fans in fancy dress, and it was the same story in all the other pubs. The streets were full of pirates, clowns,

transvestites...and police vans. It was already obvious that there would not be room to fit them in the visitors' pen, and people were worried about another Hillsborough. Sure enough, there was a terrible crush, and people spilled on to the pitch. There was no 'invasion': all the 'invaders' came from the front of the pen, the rest of the crowd standing still. What fighting there was was negligible, and most of it happened as hoardings were broken up to make stretchers. On the train after the game Birmingham fans were bitterly anticipating the 'Bum scum' headlines of the following week.

Palace chairman Ron Noades blamed 'organised hooligans' who were 'painted

VAUXHALL: FOR AN INDEPENDENT BLACK CANDIDATE

THE behaviour of the Labour Party leadership over the Vauxhall by-election is an insult to the black activists who have struggled in—and for—the party over the years, and the black voters who have remained loyal when so many others were deserting Labour's ship. The failure to allow the appointment of a black candidate in an area where the black community

has kept Labour in power cannot be allowed to go unanswered.

It is now the responsibility of all serious anti-racists to make a show of opposition to this outrageous act. A totally independent black candidate must be found and must be fought for. This will be the way we can teach the middle class white men in charge of the Labour Party a good

lesson. An independent black candidate can worry Labour by taking some votes. Even though Labour will still win in all probability, this will ensure that Neil Kinnock and his people have to take more serious notice of black people's rights and position in the Labour Party.

Rosemary Russell
London

News focus

NORTHERN IRELAND ELECTIONS

BLOW FOR BRITAIN

JOE BOATMAN

There have been two responses in the British media to the results of last week's local elections in Northern Ireland. The first is to ignore them. The second is to pretend that they show the strengthening of moderation against 'extremism' in both communities. The popularity of the first response reflects the difficulty of sustaining the wishful thinking of the second.

The two developments confirmed by the election results are the stability of support for the republican movement and the sharp decline in popularity of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party.

It is important to recall that one of the main aims of the Anglo-Irish agreement signed by Margaret Thatcher and Garret FitzGerald in November 1985 was to halt the rise of Sinn Fein at the expense of the moderate Catholic Social Democratic and Labour Party. In the May 1985 council elections in the North, Sinn Fein had shocked the British establishment by winning more than 50 council seats and 11.8 per cent of the vote.

In its alarm at the republican movement's continuing propaganda successes, the British government banned Sinn Fein from radio and television last November. British troops and their Loyalist paramilitary allies have maintained a campaign of terror and intimidation against Sinn Fein councillors and election workers, particularly in the Border areas. Meanwhile the British government has ploughed money into Catholic Church-sponsored community projects in an attempt to bolster the fortunes of the SDLP, especially in West Belfast.

Thatcher's meagre reward

Despite all the attempts to undermine the republican movement and a relentless barrage of media abuse of the armed struggle, Sinn Fein's vote held up remarkably well. Across the occupied Six Counties, its share of the vote declined by 0.5 per cent to 11.3 per cent, but it still won nearly 70 000 votes.

In Belfast Sinn Fein's vote increased by more than five per cent and it gained one seat from the SDLP. In Enniskillen, site of the Remembrance Day bombing, Sinn Fein's vote declined only slightly, though it lost votes in rural Fermanagh where sectarian harassment has been most intense.

The SDLP increased its share of the vote, from 17.8 to 21.2 per cent, and it made some headway against Sinn Fein in the rural areas. But gaining an extra 3.4 per cent of the vote and 19 councillors is scant reward for the massive political investment Britain has made in the Anglo-Irish agreement.

The SDLP did well in Derry, but still trails Sinn Fein in Belfast, Northern Ireland's major city.

The other casualty of the Anglo-Irish agreement is Paisley's DUP. It lost 6.5 per cent of its vote and some 30 seats. The DUP appears to have suffered



The election posters may be old, but nationalist feelings about John Hume's SDLP haven't changed

from Loyalist abstentions in a poll that was 5 per cent down on that of 1985. James Molyneux's Official Unionist Party increased its share of the vote by 1.9 per cent, much less than the DUP decline.

British commentators have interpreted the decline in Paisley's position as a shift towards moderation in the Protestant community. In fact it reflects disillusionment at Paisley's reconciliation with the OUP and his party's ineffectual posturing against the Anglo-Irish agreement. The moderate Loyalists of the Alliance Party also lost support in the election.

When Loyalist voters lose faith in Loyalist politicians, they are more likely to drift into supporting paramilitary sectarians than moderate Unionists. The shadowy death squads behind the Loyalist arms suppliers recently arrested in Paris are more likely to benefit from the demise of the DUP than the much-vaunted Ulster Conservatives who won a few seats in middle class areas of County Down.

After 20 years of war, last week's council elections reveal that Britain is as far away as ever from winning the consent of the Irish people to its rule.

FIGHTING DEPORTATIONS

JULIUS MUST STAY!

PANDORA ANDERSON



Julius and family: defend them from Britain's racist laws

Over 150 protesters joined Julius Alexander and his fiancée Maureen outside the Immigration Appeals Tribunal last Thursday. Despite the fact that Julius has lived in this country for five years and has two children born in Britain, he is an 'illegal immigrant' according to the home office. After hounding him like a criminal for almost three years, the home office slapped a deportation order on him last September.

At a rally after the hearing Julius stressed that he

was fighting not just for himself but for all black people victimised by Britain's immigration laws. And Workers Against Racism organiser Keith Thompson urged all those present to get fully involved in the campaign. 'We need your support to ensure the home office can't get away with its racist actions', he said.

The campaign meets weekly in London. Phone (01) 375 1702 if you want to get involved.

HIGH NOON IN BRUSSELS

IS THIS THE END OF NATO?

James Malone explains why Nato is having an identity crisis

Is the Western Alliance about to collapse? This is the big question hanging over the Nato summit in Brussels this weekend. Superficially the crisis seems to be about military tactics: arguments rage about whether short-range nuclear missiles should be upgraded or negotiated away. Here the USA, backed by Britain, is pitted against West Germany and most of the European countries.

But, beyond the disputes about military strategy, the real issue is the future of the Western Alliance. Western leaders are asking themselves out loud whether Nato serves their interests today. Set up in 1949 as the USA towered over a Europe just beginning to recover from war, Nato today looks more and more like an anachronism.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has been an exceptionally unusual alliance. Alliances between imperialists prior to the Second World War were usually transient, with realignments among the great powers being common. In the period before the war there was no grouping capable of containing all the major imperialists.

Nato, however, has provided an operating framework that has been able to incorporate the main imperialist players under US hegemony for decades.

Nato could only have arisen in the peculiar circumstances which prevailed after the Second World War, when one imperialist nation achieved global ascendancy over the rest. As the dominant world power the USA set up Nato as a beach-head in Europe, and as the platform for Pax Americana worldwide. Through Nato the USA exercised its global predominance, established the conditions for world capitalism to get back on its feet, and regulated relations between the major nations.

Menace

Both world wars had at their root a disequilibrium in Europe caused by German expansion. Nato was designed to prevent the re-emergence of a strong Germany, and towards this end it oversaw the division of Germany. This is why, to this day, what Germany does is important to the survival of Nato.

The 1949 treaty commits its signatories to common defence against attack from any quarter. It makes no specific mention of a threat from the Soviet Union. Yet Nato's founders justified a united military front among the imperialist powers by inventing the Soviet bogey. The spectre of Soviet expansionism became Nato's *raison d'être*. From its inception Nato has pointed to the Soviet threat to justify its policies.

The existence of the Red menace has given the alliance a semblance of coherence.

The lesser European imperialist powers Britain, France and West Germany—signed up for Washington's anti-communist campaign for their own reasons. At home anti-communism could be used as a propaganda weapon against the Communist parties and trade union activists, and turned against the organisations of the working class.

The ruling classes of France, Italy and Germany, discredited by their wartime association with fascism, needed a new legitimising ideology. Anti-communism, which came quite naturally to them, was given new life through a campaign against the Soviet Union. It quickly became the mainstay of the newly formed Christian Democratic parties in Europe. Membership of Nato gave the European powers the benefits of US reconstruction funds, a measure of stability and insurance against another outbreak of war.

Nato was designed to prevent the re-emergence of a strong Germany, and towards this end oversaw its division

were minimised so that the US-dominated framework itself was not challenged.

The durability of Nato and the other international institutions set up around the same time—the International Monetary Fund, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the World Bank—expressed the USA's untrammelled influence over the rest of the imperialist world.

As long as all their economies were expanding during the post-war boom, all the Western powers could thrive. They had no need to resort to cut-throat economic competition, such as dumping cheap commodities on rival markets or setting up protectionist barriers against foreign imports.

In addition the major powers continued to share a common interest in popularising anti-communism, for both domestic and international purposes. And in lining up behind the USA against the Soviets, the European members of Nato derived the benefits of sharing out the world's resources. A framework based on mutual antagonism towards the Soviet Union helped keep strife within the family. The disputes that arose did not question the widespread view that there was a fundamental divide between East and West.

With every imperialist nation trumpeting anti-Soviet notes, it seemed that East-West tensions had replaced traditional rivalries among the imperialist powers. This view was reinforced by the success of Nato in keeping antagonisms among members to a minimum.

The British left was taken in by this narrow focus on East-West affairs, and Lenin's concept of imperialism came to be

regarded as obsolete. Michael Kidron, a leading theoretician of the International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers Party), spoke for a broad consensus on the left when he declared the end of imperialism in 1962: 'It hardly seems necessary to sum up one's disagreement with Lenin on imperialism...we don't have imperialism but we still have capitalism.'

If the left had cared to look beneath the surface, it would have discovered that inter-imperialist rivalries had not been entirely suppressed during this period. It was also evident that the relative stability between imperialist powers was predicated on the post-war boom and the USA's unchallenged economic strength. In looking through an East-West prism, the left saw world affairs in a bourgeois light.

Today the conflict among Nato members has taken centre stage, as the thaw in East-West relations has coincided with a resurgence of traditional imperialist rivalry. Nato's latent problems, held in check for years, are coming to the surface.

The current disputes in Nato reflect the changing balance of forces internationally.

West Germany and Japan are now economic superpowers in their own right. The idea of an alliance which ensures that the USA has a monopoly on international influence appears more and more like an unnecessary restriction. And global Gorbymania is a testament to the fact that the Soviet threat, Nato's original *raison d'être*, is losing its force by the day.

The preconditions for a stable international order have evaporated. Worsening economic conditions worldwide have turned the friendly competition of the

sixties and early seventies into acrimonious rivalries. It was no coincidence that just when West Germany was challenging the USA over short-range nuclear weapons, it provocatively raised its interest rates to the detriment of the USA and Britain. Trade disputes between the major powers have taken off, with the USA proposing a new set of retaliatory import controls.

Meanwhile the USA's attempt to perpetuate the myth of the Soviet bogey no longer holds much water. The consequence is that the alliance is losing its coherence. In West Germany Mikhail Gorbachev gets an 80 per cent approval rating among the public at large. Even the American public has become sceptical. According to a poll by a bipartisan organisation called Americans Talk Security, a majority of Americans now see the Soviets as a minor threat or no threat at all. In a similar poll taken four



years ago, less than a quarter of the respondents thought the Soviet Union was benign.

In a congressional hearing on the defence budget, senator John Warner told of his difficulty in convincing a high school student that the Soviet Union was still a threat. The student found it hard to believe that the USA needed to spend \$300 billion to deter 'a nation that can't even produce enough sugar for its coffee and cake and a nation that's going to receive the British queen'. Senator Warner was stumped for a reply.

As Cold War anti-Sovietism loses its edge, the idea of a Soviet threat can no longer provide a coherent framework to hold conflicting interests together.

The Continental capitalist nations, especially West Germany, have little interest in sustaining the myth of Soviet expansionism today. They can see clearly that following the USA's Cold War-style diplomacy means submitting to Washington's will and remaining in the shadows.

Nato spokesmen themselves recognise that old-fashioned anti-Sovietism is no longer fashionable. Even Manfred Wornat, the Nato secretary-general, said recently that he would not use the word 'threat' when discussing the Soviet Union: 'Gorbachev does not want to wage a war—he is trying to reform his economy and society.' But without a Soviet threat, why have a Nato?

Dazzling

Many in the US administration appreciate that Gorbachev's concessions to the West have been a mixed blessing. In reducing the perception of a Soviet threat, Gorbachev has dislodged the cornerstone in the foundation of US foreign policy. 'Stalin helped create Nato by his belligerency', says David Abshire, former US ambassador to Nato, 'but now Mikhail Gorbachev, with his dazzling diplomacy, might just dissolve it'.

Abshire correctly identifies Nato's dilemma in trying to justify its existence

without the Soviet threat. But it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that Gorbachev's diplomacy is the main cause of the alliance's problems. Gorbachev is certainly hoping to take advantage of the divisions which exist within the Western Alliance.

But if those divisions among the imperialist powers weren't already present, Gorbachev would have nothing to exploit.

West Germany, in particular, has its own reasons for rebutting US attempts to keep the myth going. It has become clear that West Germany is growing frustrated at having to submit to US tutelage. It is looking for a way to break free from an institution which reflects the days when Germany was in ruins, and which does not give due recognition to what is today the most dynamic economy in Europe.

Many argue that Gorbachev is playing up to Germany to have a go at the USA and ultimately split Nato. But who is really using whom? If we look at it from another angle, the European powers are using Gorbachev as an excuse for asserting their independent interests.

The European powers are using Gorbachev as an excuse for asserting their independent interests

Thus West Germany's chancellor, Helmut Kohl, took Gorbachev's latest arms reduction proposals, which included a unilateral cut in short-range warheads and plans for sweeping reductions in Warsaw Pact conventional forces, as a cue to press forward his own demands. 'It is now very clear', Kohl said, 'that what we Germans are pressing for can't be completely wrong'.

There is no doubt that Gorbachev has been a catalyst for dissension within Nato. But this fact should not blind us to the real nature of the current crisis. All of Gorbachev's clever diplomatic gestures cannot mask the fundamental conflict of interests among the major imperialists.

Without its main props—US supremacy, economic prosperity and the Soviet threat—Nato is coming unstuck.

The flaws in the Nato structure are becoming plain to see. There are no

longer any intrinsic forces holding Nato together. Only the USA is working overtime to keep the old club going. Washington knows only too well that Nato is its main mechanism for remaining on top now that the American economy is in decline.

George Bush turned the modernisation of short-range missiles into a key issue for Nato precisely because he wished to reassert American dominance. Without much economic muscle to rely on, Washington needs to militarise relations to show it is still boss. But this only gives a greater significance to Kohl's decision against modernisation. Kohl's stand indicates that Bonn is no longer willing to accept Washington's bullying tactics, and that it is confident of acting as an imperialist power in its own right.

The American establishment is well aware that there is much more at stake in the current crisis than a disagreement over nuclear strategy. The challenge from a resurgent West Germany has led many to fear that Nato has failed in its mission to prevent a strong Germany destabilising Europe. In an article entitled 'Too soon for a mighty Germany', *New York Times* editor AM Rosenthal conveyed America's deep paranoia:

'It is too early. Too much death, too many horrors that can hardly be uttered; too early. Never mind the public statements; test yourself. Each person can look into himself and answer whether the fear of a Germany unbounded has gone.'

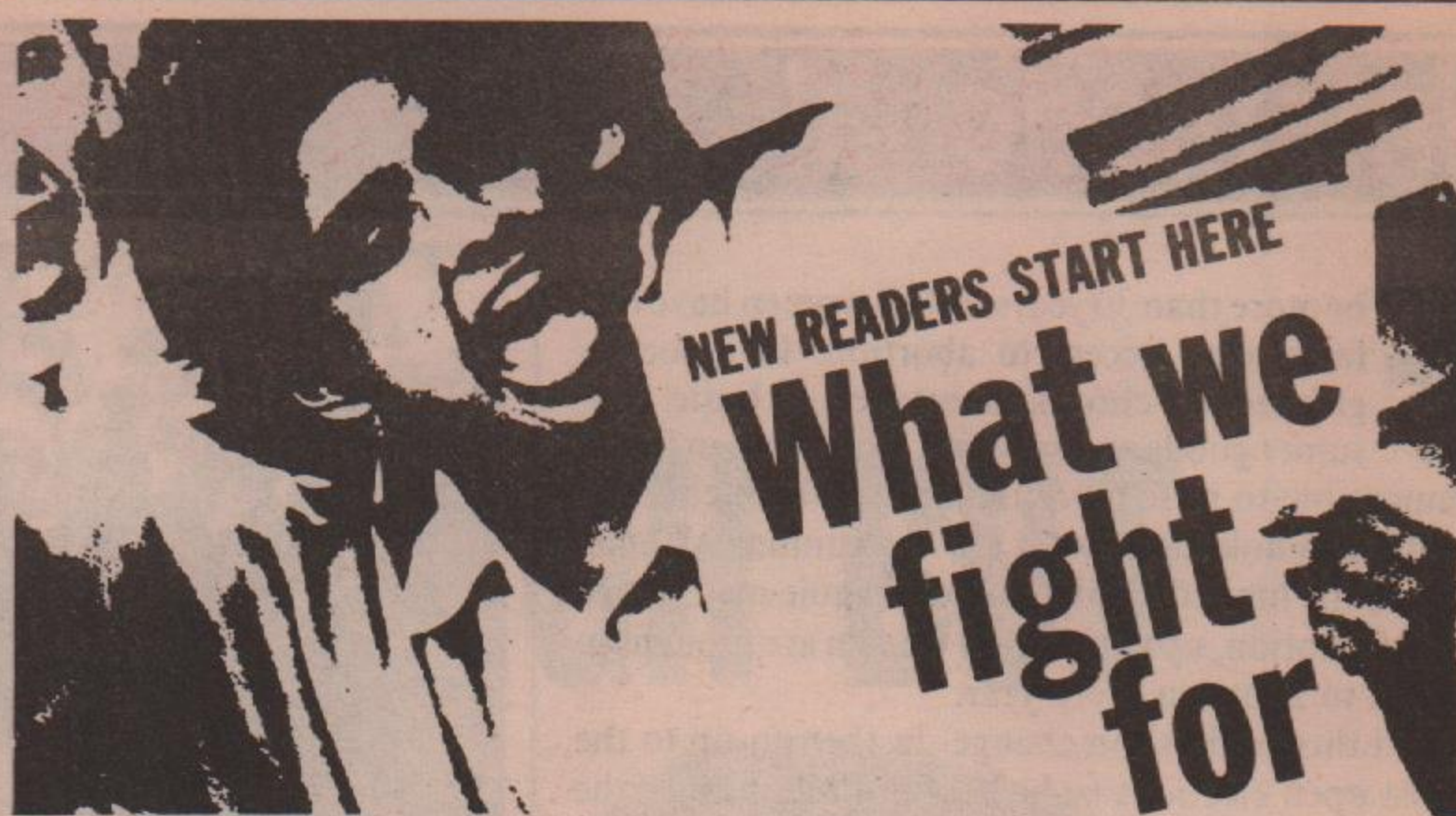
What really worries Washington is that the row over nuclear modernisation is just the start of its troubles.

Nato is not about to collapse this weekend. It is likely that the Western powers will cook up some compromise deal to save face. Nato has become adept at papering over the cracks with worthless communiqués on things like human rights and terrorism. No doubt something similar will emerge from Brussels.

Beyond the summit Nato can go in one of two directions in the short term. It can either fall in line behind US attempts to repackage the Soviet threat, and thus rediscover its raison d'être. Or it can become a forum for the re-emergence of traditional imperialist conflict and militarism.

In the long run the fragmentation of the alliance is unstoppable. Nato's demise will inevitably lead to a fission along national lines and growing chauvinism everywhere.

This is all the more reason to promote an internationalist outlook in the working class. Proletarian internationalism is the only antidote to the culture of militarism.



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.

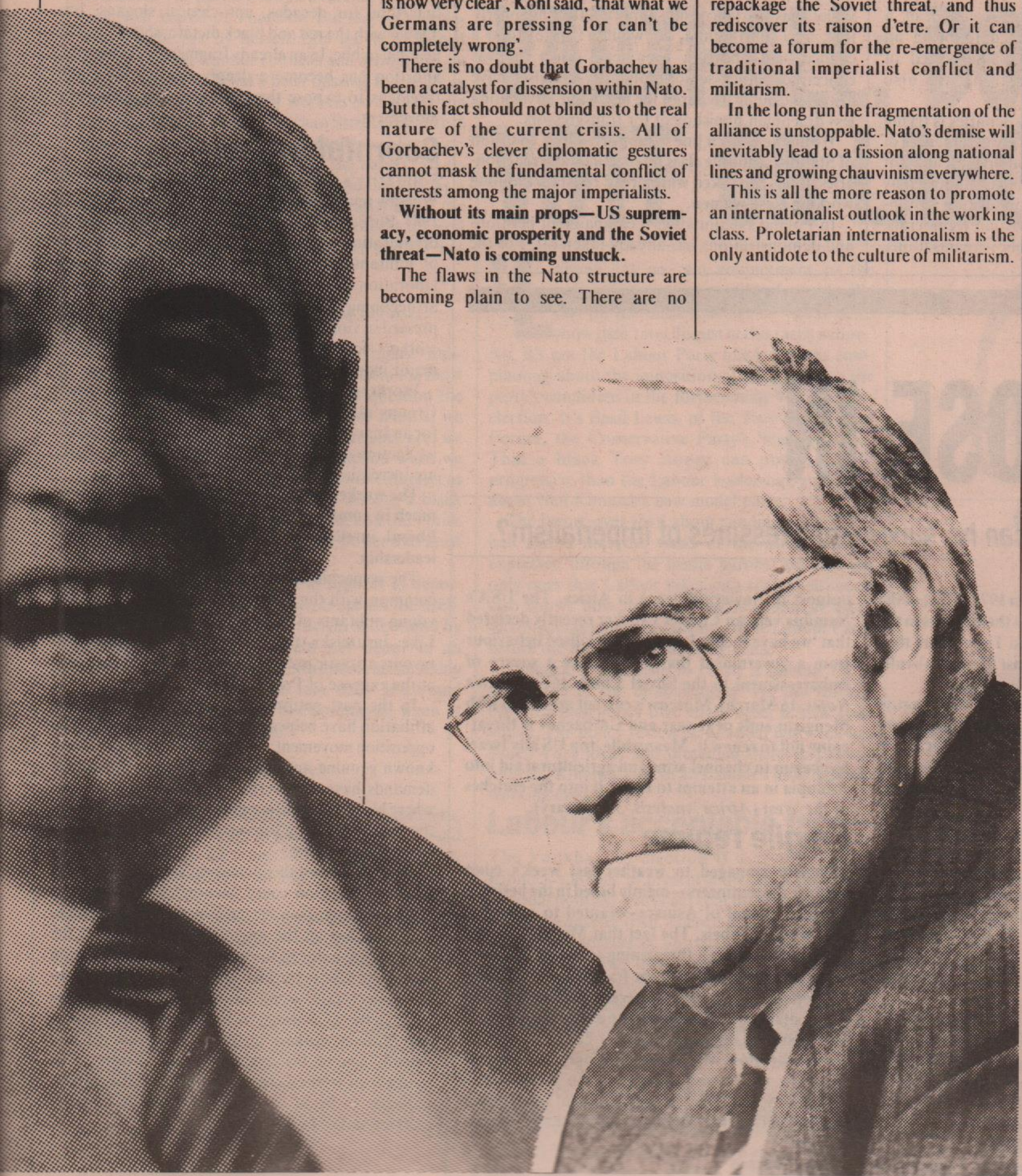
The RCP believes that the fight against oppression is central to the construction of an independent working class movement. Workers must defend the oppressed if we are to fight for our own liberation. This is why the RCP is wholeheartedly committed to the fight against racism. The struggle for the emancipation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



For more than 30 years Polish women have had fairly easy access to abortion. In a society gripped by chronic shortages of basic consumer goods and services, most women find it impossible to raise more than a couple of children while also holding down a job and running a home. Given the limited availability of reliable methods of contraception, up to a million women are thought to resort to abortion every year.

All this could soon change. In the run-up to the most open elections to be held in Poland since the Second World War, the influential Catholic Church is putting pressure on both the Stalinist regime and the opposition to endorse state restrictions on abortion rights.

Significant sections of the opposition have already sided with the clergy against the interests of women and the working class.

The fact that all the major political forces in the country are reduced to promoting clerical reaction reveals how little they have to offer the electorate

Poland's Catholic primate Cardinal Glemp has long played the role of the key mediator between the regime and the opposition. The Communist Party has cultivated ties with the church in a desperate attempt to increase its influence in an overwhelmingly Catholic country. The opposition too maintains close relations with the clergy. Solidarity leader Lech Walesa has a coterie of clerical advisers and when Solidarity was legalised in April his first response was to visit the Pope to offer thanks and prayers.

A sober Walesa

As the June election approaches, the church is cashing in on its influence and demanding that candidates support a ban on all abortions. Few in the regime, or in the official opposition, are willing to resist such pressure.

In rural areas, few of Solidarity's local committees have risked putting up candidates who might offend the local clergy. Candidates are often questioned about whether they have been baptised—a thinly-veiled assertion of the anti-Semitic prejudice which remains influential in Poland. In a town near



Solidarity has bowed to church pressure and sacrificed the interests of women to appease the clergy

GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION BACK THE CHURCH

POLISH CRACKDOWN ON ABORTION RIGHTS

Russell Osborne explains why abortion has become such an explosive issue in the Polish elections

Warsaw local priests forced the rejection of a Solidarity candidate who admitted to being an atheist. Elsewhere a gynaecologist suspected of having performed (legal) abortions was also excluded.

A bloc of 76 Communist Party deputies is trying to push through a bill proposing prison sentences of three years for women having abortions and for doctors who carry them out. The bill is supported by a number of small right-wing opposition groups such as the Monarchists and Christian Democrats, as well as by numerous Catholic organisations.

Walesa has also voiced his support, reflecting soberly that, as a fourth child, he 'wouldn't have stood a chance' had abortion been legal when he was conceived. Other senior Solidarity activists have also come out in favour of the bill, while advocating less draconian punishment for transgressors.

While the church line is supported by a coalition of Stalinists, middle class intellectuals and reactionaries, it has provoked widespread resistance among working class women.

In Poland's major cities a campaign of petitions and demonstrations has already taken off. For the

first time for decades, anti-clerical slogans, like 'Down with the red and black dictatorships!', can be heard in public. In an already fragmented opposition, abortion has become a deeply divisive issue and threatens to expose the class divisions within the movement.

Scornful workers

Solidarity's 100 000-strong Mayday march in Warsaw revived memories of its heyday in 1980 and 1981. But even the union's leadership admits that the organisation is little more than a shell. A new layer of militant activists is scornful of Walesa's collaboration with the Jaruzelski regime. Frustrations at declining living standards are increasingly expressed in violent street protests. On Mayday young workers fought riot police in many of Poland's major industrial cities.

Workers no longer look to Solidarity for a lead. Groups ranging from the far-right Confederation for an Independent Poland through to the 'Trotskyist' faction of the re-founded Polish Socialist Party are increasingly popular with young militants.

The workers who back Solidarity have never had much in common with the conservative priests and liberal intellectuals who dominate the union's leadership.

The respectable opposition leaders have more in common with the Jaruzelski regime than with the young militants of Warsaw, Gdansk or Bydgoszcz. Like Jaruzelski, the clique around Walesa also favours a drastic restructuring of the Polish economy at the expense of Polish workers.

In the past nationalist sentiment and religious affiliation have helped to bridge the class gulf in the opposition movement. Given that Poland has seldom known genuine national independence, nationalist demands have a powerful resonance. In a country where basic democratic rights have been suppressed, the church has long provided an important vehicle for popular protest.

However, given the increasing volatility of young workers, abortion could become one of the most radicalising issues in the current election campaign. The fact that all the major political forces in the country are reduced to promoting clerical reaction reveals how little they have to offer a newly enfranchised electorate. Women are increasingly organising against the anti-abortion bill and activists report that women workers in the cities are almost universally against the repeal of abortion rights. The struggle for women's rights could be just the catalyst required to begin to break the hold of religious reaction in the Polish working class.

ETHIOPIA

IMPERIALISTS CLOSE IN

President Mengistu has defeated an internal revolt, but can he survive the pressures of imperialism?

President Mengistu Haile Mariam was forced to cut short his trip to East Germany last week to suppress an attempted coup by sections of the armed forces. In recent months Mikhail Gorbachev has been cutting his losses in Africa and reducing Moscow's support for the Mengistu regime. As Western pressure on Ethiopia grows, the return of one of the remaining outposts of Soviet influence in the third world to the imperialist camp is drawing menacingly closer.

Except for the brief period from 1936 to 1941, when it was occupied by Mussolini's Italy, remote and mountainous Ethiopia was one of the few African countries to escape Western colonisation. After the Second World War, first Britain and then the USA were obliged to acknowledge the authority of Emperor Haile Selassie while Western capital penetrated Ethiopia.

Selassie, however, faced growing difficulties in controlling Ethiopia's unruly landlord class and in 1974 he was ousted by his US-trained army. But the removal of Selassie precipitated a popular uprising against the landlord class that took three years to quell. The new regime in Addis Ababa adopted an increasing radical image as it strove to contain the insurrection.

Mengistu, a junior officer at the time of the coup, won supreme power when he came out on top in

factional conflict against the left in 1977. Most of the survivors of his purge fled back to their homes in the northern provinces of Eritrea and Tigre where they launched a war of resistance against Mengistu's rule. This civil war still rages a dozen years later.

In 1978 the Carter administration in Washington stepped up its campaign against radical third world regimes. Mengistu's Ethiopia was one target of US destabilisation projects. In response, Mengistu sought an alliance with Moscow to obtain arms and economic aid.

Though Ethiopia adopted the image of a third world Stalinist state, the Moscow connection produced few benefits for the Ethiopian people. Most Soviet aid was in the form of weapons, and the regime made little headway against the backwardness of the economy. By 1985, 80 per cent of the labour force was still on the land, with smallholdings accounting for 90 per cent of the chief export—coffee.

When famine struck Mengistu had little alternative but to turn to the West for relief. In November 1988 the Ethiopian regime formally agreed to abandon its socialist objectives in return for Western aid. Interviewed on Channel 4's *The World This Week*, Mengistu accepted that 'it is impossible to ignore the forces of the market-place' (20 May).

The USA has targeted Ethiopia as a vulnerable

outpost of Soviet influence in Africa. The USA's Namibia veteran Chester Crocker recently declared that 'we have focused on getting civilised behaviour from a government that has become a source of embarrassment to the Soviet Union' (*CSIS Africa Notes*, 16 March). Moscow's current arms deal with Mengistu ends next year and Gorbachev is threatening not to renew it. Meanwhile, top US ally Israel has begun to channel arms and agricultural aid into Ethiopia in an attempt to entice it into the clutches of the West (*Africa Analysis*, 3 February).

Fragile regime

Mengistu managed to weather last week's coup because the mutineers—mainly based in the besieged Eritrean capital of Asmara—wanted to arrange a deal with the rebels. The fact that Mengistu's chief Soviet ally has been threatening to cut off his arms supply has only added to the fragility of his regime. The whole affair is likely to accelerate Mengistu's so far hesitant accommodation towards the West. If the West does regain its grip over Ethiopia, the first to feel the blow will be the seemingly unstoppable northern rebels now advancing on Addis Ababa. Ultimately, however, all the peoples of the Horn of Africa will be the losers as imperialism tightens its grip.

Andy Clarkson

NEITHER LONDON NOR EDINBURGH BUT WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE

the next step spoke to Linda Murdoch, Revolutionary Communist Party candidate in the Glasgow Central by-election, about why she's standing and what's in it for the working class

tns: Why should people vote for you rather than the Labour Party or the Scottish National Party?

Murdoch: Labour thinks it can put up a monkey and people will vote for it. It has never given the working class a voice but now it doesn't even pretend to. Look at its policy review—it's hard to see much difference between Labour and Tory.

The SNP is no better. Thousands of Govanites voted for Jim Sillars because they wanted to fight Thatcher. How did he respond? By holding up Lawson's budget speech for 16 minutes. You don't win battles by making speeches or pulling stunts in parliament. We all know that the working class never won anything without a fight. That's what the RCP offers.

tns: What are the main issues in this campaign?

Murdoch: The poll tax is still a talking point and a source of hatred of Thatcher. But she isn't implementing the tax by herself. She has been helped willingly by the Labour councils and unwillingly by council workers. What's been missing is a strategy for organising the council workers to boycott the tax. The SNP petitions in Buchan Street are a joke. I don't know what they think Thatcher's going to do with them when they hand over the names. I'll do everything I can to avoid paying the tax but, as a council worker, my employers can easily arrest my wages and charge me for the cost. To beat the poll tax we need to fight against the Labour council, not cooperate or plead with it.

tns: What other issues are you going to raise?

Murdoch: Issues such as women's rights, anti-racism or the Irish War don't always seem the most pressing. But it is these issues which question the right of the capitalist class to rule our lives. If we want proof of how important these issues are, we only have to look at Thatcher's reaction when we take a stand on them. Just 400 LSE students elect as their honorary president Winston Silcott, a black man framed for killing a policeman, and the Tories treat it as a direct challenge to their power that must be crushed.

The Labour Party's record in support of deportations and immigration controls speaks for itself. The SNP dodges the issue of racism in Scotland by merely stating that it would not occur in an independent Scotland. This evasion of racism today is an insult to Asians who face daily abuse and harassment and blatant discrimination when it comes to housing and jobs.

tns: What about women's rights?

Murdoch: Although we make up half the population, our rights didn't figure in a recent *Glasgow Herald* opinion poll on the issues in this by-election. But Glasgow women know all about having no control over their lot.

When the RCP held a demonstration outside the Glasgow offices of Life (the anti-abortionists) many working class women supported our call for free abortion on demand. One onlooker asked why it was that older family women were the most sympathetic. It's because they are more likely to have lived through the horror of unwanted pregnancies and lack of proper contraception and nursery facilities. Women have wombs but we do not control them—the state, the church and doctors have more say than us when it comes to having or not having children. Today abortion is illegal unless they say otherwise.

As long as we are denied control over child-bearing and rearing, then we can forget about equality with men. How can we join in the fight against the poll tax unless we have nurseries in which to put the kids? How can we get decent jobs with the threat of unwanted pregnancies hanging over us? That is why the fight for free abortion on demand, 24-hour nurseries and proper contraception is a priority for the RCP.

SNP MPs agree that women should have no control over their lives. All of them voted with David Alton. The SNP is much more concerned to stay on the moral high ground with the Scottish churches than they are about fighting for women's rights.

tns: Isn't Ireland a controversial question to take up?

Murdoch: Yes. That's why we raise it. If Scottish workers can take sides with the Irish, Thatcher will have lost her most potent weapon for dividing us. When this happens, fighting attacks like the poll tax will never be a problem for us again.

Neither the Labour Party nor the SNP dares to question Britain's role in Ireland. To do so would threaten the stability of the system they so dearly desire to run. And that in a nutshell is the difference between the RCP and them. The Labour Party wants to run the British capitalist system. The SNP wants to run a Scottish capitalist system. The RCP wants to overthrow the capitalist system and replace it with something better.

Murdoch: 'Labour and the SNP want to run the system, we want to overthrow it and build a better one.'



HUGH CAMERON

VAUXHALL: DON'T WASTE YOUR VOTE ON LABOUR

Labour has no real commitment to the political advancement of black people. We call on the black electors of Vauxhall to show their total disgust at this racist action.

No, it's not the Labour Party black sections complaining about the imposition of Kate Hoey as the party's candidate in the forthcoming Vauxhall by-election. It's Basil Lewis, of the *Tory* One Nation Forum, the Conservative Party's 'black section'. That a black Tory stooge can pose as more progressive than the Labour leadership, says a lot about Neil Kinnock's new model party.

The furore over the Labour candidate for Vauxhall shows that the views of the establishment, expressed through the media barons, are now the only ones that Labour takes into consideration. It also shows how many on the left, and in black sections, continue to put loyalty to the Labour Party before the needs of the working class.

Kinnock is desperate to create a Labour Party acceptable to the establishment. He has ditched every Labour policy that might upset middle class voters. The policy review he unveiled last week has stolen Tory ideas and presented them as Labour policies. Kinnock has cut all Labour's links with the working class.

Labour's acceptable face

The Vauxhall by-election is a crucial test of Kinnock's ability to present a middle class face in national politics. Thirty per cent of the constituency is black, a quarter Irish. There is a higher proportion of manual workers in Vauxhall than in any other constituency. The local Labour Party has traditionally been dominated by the left and includes one of the strongest black sections in the country. To prove himself to the media barons, Kinnock had to show that he could call the shots in a constituency like Vauxhall.

When the local Labour Party nominated as its candidate Martha Osamor, a left-wing Haringey councillor and black sections activist, Kinnock rejected her out of hand. He also threw out three other black sections members nominated by the

SIMON NORFOLK



Milligan: 'A Labour vote is a wasted vote.'

local party. Instead Labour's National Executive Committee produced its own list of five, including a token black name—*Newsnight* journalist Wesley Kerr, who is not in a black section and whose Harrow and Cambridge background made him acceptable. When the local party refused to accept this shortlist, the NEC imposed its own candidate, Kate Hoey, a loyal Kinnockite.

The row that has ensued has proved a severe embarrassment for Kinnock. The Tories have branded him racist and dictatorial. Margaret Thatcher taunted Kinnock in parliament that 'Mikhail Gorbachev has learnt more about democracy than has the Labour Party'. Far from increasing Kinnock's leadership credentials, the debacle has shown Labour to be run by buffoons who can't even select a candidate without a fuss.

For the left, Vauxhall seemed to provide an opportunity to prove to Kinnock that it can still play a useful role for the party. 'If the Labour Party

wants to retain its support among black voters', ran the argument, 'then it must choose a left-wing black candidate to represent the constituency'. Kinnock's choice of a right-wing white woman has enraged local activists not because of her anti-working class politics but because it undermined the career prospects of Labour's black politicians. 'Why cannot ordinary people get into parliament even when they have passed through the party's system with flying colours?' asked Martha Osamor. The simple answer is that, no matter how hard you try to play by Kinnock's rules, the Labour Party is not interested in representing 'ordinary people'. But the left's abiding loyalty to Labour prevents it from drawing the obvious conclusions.

Be effective!

The left in Vauxhall has responded to the rebuff by refusing to canvass for Hoey. But it has no intention of breaking with the Labour Party. Off the record, black sections activists have told *the next step* that they hope an independent black candidate will run so that 'we can teach Kinnock a lesson' about the benefits of black sections. In other words, every vote an independent black candidate picks up will be another step up the internal Labour ladder for the black activists.

For the people of Vauxhall, there is little to gain in this debate. It matters little whether Labour chooses a white candidate who puts the interests of the Labour Party before that of working class people, or a black candidate who puts the interests of the Labour Party first.

The only candidate in the election who will be fighting for the interests of black people and the working class, is Don Milligan of the Revolutionary Communist Party. In an open letter to Vauxhall voters, Milligan urged people to use the election to help build a fightback against the Tories:

'We should show our disgust at the way we've been treated by both Thatcher and Kinnock. Don't waste your vote on Labour. Use it effectively to build a real opposition to the Tories.'

Kenan Malik

STALEMATE IN BEIJING

MASSES DEFY MARTIAL LAW

ALMOST a week after declaring martial law the Chinese leadership has failed to regain the streets of the capital. Now its own survival is in question.

Humiliated by the student demonstrations and hunger-strikes during last week's state visit of Mikhail Gorbachev, the regime declared martial law on Saturday. But so far it has failed in its attempt to enforce it. Millions of workers have joined the students to prevent the army from restoring the authority of the Chinese bureaucracy.

The failure of the regime to contain the mass revolt has produced a crisis at the highest level of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy. There are now rumours of the imminent demise of veteran Chinese ruler Deng Xiaoping and uncertainty about the fate of hardline prime minister Li Peng and reformist party leader Zhao Ziyang. The future of the Chinese leadership now lies in the hands of an army paralysed by deeply divided loyalties.

The ambivalence of the army is evident in the faces of the young soldiers drafted in to restore order in Tiananmen Square. Confused and uncertain, they appear reluctant to turn their weapons against the sea of protest that engulfs them. Yet they remain fully uniformed and equipped, part of a formidable military machine which is an integral part of the Stalinist order that is now so gravely threatened.

So far the army has held back from tough measures to put down the protests. Only one person—a railway worker—is reported to have been sentenced to death after rioting in the northern provincial city of Xian last month. An uneasy stand-off prevails in Beijing and in other major cities.

The protesters have stolen the international limelight from Gorbachev and they have blocked the authorities' first attempts to restore control of Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Now the Chinese rulers have little choice but to engage in some form of dialogue with the mass protest movement.

Before the imposition of martial law there were already signs that the Chinese leaders were willing to talk. But when chief government negotiator Yang Minfu appealed to the students to leave Tiananmen Square during the Gorbachev visit he was greeted by boos and whistles. Students subsequently stepped up their demands for televised talks, for greater freedom for the press and for independent student unions.

The escalating protests have revealed the confusion and paralysis within the Chinese leadership. Party leader Zhao Ziyang has hinted at the regime's readiness to consider political reforms:

'China will not only push forward with its economic reforms, but will also carry forward political restructuring to allow the two concepts to support each other....Many of the demands voiced by the students are problems that the party and the government are striving to solve.'

However, his central theme—'have patience'—proved unacceptable to the students and his feeble conciliatory gestures have been overtaken by events.

Meanwhile hardliners have been calling for a clampdown on the unrest. A recent *People's Daily* editorial labelled the protesters 'bandits' and accused them of destabilising China.

Some commentators believe that the confusion within the Communist Party leadership will be cleared up at a plenary session of the central committee later this month. Yet if the leadership concedes student demands for independent unions, it could face similar demands from workers, too, with much more far-reaching consequences.

The unrest among China's urban population—including civil servants and teachers as well as students and workers—is the result of rocketing prices for food and other basic consumer goods. Since the government cut subsidies as part of its drive to extend the operation of market forces, prices have soared.

People responded to unpredictable price rises with panic buying, especially of consumer durables—washing machines, refrigerators, televisions. Because the market failed to live up to its early promise, private investment soon dropped and the short-lived surge in demand simply fuelled inflation.

Clarity needed

In March prime minister Li Peng introduced a package of austerity measures in an attempt to slow down the economy. He imposed rationing of basic foodstuffs and further cuts in public spending. The government was forced to cut back on public building projects and on education—a key factor in provoking the student revolt.

Behind the scenes, price reforms are going ahead. A senior economic adviser said last week that 12 adjustments had been made since the worst spate of panic buying last August. The Chinese leadership remains committed to the market: the arguments are

simply about how to extend its influence while curbing its disruptive social effects.

Two years ago when students took to the streets in Shanghai, the authorities waited for the pressure of exams to draw them back to their books. It is clear that the present wave of unrest has spread far beyond the universities. But that does not guarantee its success.

Back in 1978 and 1979 the 'democracy movement' of intellectuals and students embittered by the legacy of Mao Zedong's 'cultural revolution' of the late sixties was crushed after Deng Xiaoping's government cleared the streets by force and tore down the 'democracy wall' posters. Wei Jingsheng, one of the leaders of the 1978-79 movement, is still serving a 15-year hard labour sentence together with some 200 others.

Despite their success so far in defying the regime, today's students are politically more cautious than those of the seventies. As one demonstrator wearing a 'democracy warrior' headband told a Western reporter, 'we don't really have any leaders—I have no idea who's in charge'.

Beyond broad calls for an end to corruption and vague appeals for more democracy, the protesters have yet to clarify their political demands. In these circumstances, time is on the side of the established order. If the mass movement fails to carry forward its threat to overthrow the regime, the Stalinist rulers could yet recover from their temporary disarray as they have in the past and resolve the current stalemate to their advantage.

Sara Llewelyn



Chinese students in Britain demonstrate support for comrades in Beijing