

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 12 January 1990 • No 1 • 40p

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WAYS TO WIN—
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Nowhere has the old order been decisively defeated. Indeed, in most places the ruling bureaucracy has had a hand in overseeing the process of transition. Everywhere, oppositionists have acted as a brake on the popular mobilisations. The emphasis has been on putting pressure on the Stalinist leadership to purge itself. Lesser known bureaucrats posing as reformers have been installed alongside respectable opposition leaders. Even in Romania which experienced the greatest upheaval, old guard Stalinists are the mainstay of the new regime.

However, if they have not been revolutionary, at least the changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe have been historic, and are to be welcomed on several counts. The collapse of Stalinism signals the end of the old order in the East and West. It has rocked the very foundations of the post-war order which are built on the division of Germany and of Europe. Above all it has called into question the present balance of power and pointed the way towards a new struggle to redivide the world.

The disintegration of the Stalinist system also removes a major obstacle in the way of the struggle for human liberation. As long as Stalinism appeared to be the only alternative to capitalism, the task of building a revolutionary movement could make only limited progress. Stalinism provided a powerful ideological argument against proletarian revolution and a powerful endorsement for capitalism. The demise of Stalinism will at least make it easier to clarify the issues at stake in the class struggle.

1989 may not have been a year of revolution, but the historic events of the past 12 months have at least created the conditions for world revolution in the 1990s.

BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

MANY WORKING class people who have welcomed the events in Romania have expressed worry at the violence employed. Mindful of the suffering and losses incurred by the Romanian workers we have no wish to glorify bloodshed and the loss of life. At the same time, we must be clear that to win control over any society demands the greatest mobilisation and exertion of the working class and the masses. In circumstances of acute social conflict against a ruthless enemy, only the most determined will succeed. Neither should we expect that the working class should not mete out summary justice to the agents of state repression.

Many Western commentators who have welcomed the events in Romania have objected to the violence and retribution which have supposedly besmirched these heady days. But it ill behoves the politicians and media pundits who have accepted the murder and carnage unleashed by the USA on the working class barrios of Panama City to take issue with the struggle of Romanian workers to win their freedom by any means necessary. The intervention of the Romanian masses has again demonstrated the boundless potential of the working class to organise society. The problem is that they did not take things far enough.

The real concern of these critics of mass violence is not with violence as such, but with who is using it and for what ends. When John Lloyd of the *Financial Times* records his distaste at being stopped on the streets and ordered about by armed Romanian youth he is not advancing the cause of the new man against machismo. Lloyd is expressing the fear and loathing of the petit-bourgeois apologist of the established order for the armed power of the working class. It is a familiar refrain of our century that has accompanied and justified countless massacres of our class from Amritsar to Soweto.

We have seen only a presentiment of the power of the working class in Romania. As a result the struggle there succeeded only in replacing one set of murderers with another. The new ruling elite is so close to its predecessor that it has cynically removed the death penalty from the constitution in order to let its old

mates in the securitate off the hook. When its time comes, and let it be soon, let nobody accuse the people of aimless violence. Let the aim be sure.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

IT IS difficult to believe that commentators are seriously suggesting that the invasion of Panama has been a success story for US president George Bush. If this is supposed to be a success for US foreign policy then the White House strategists must be praying that they never have a failure. Panama is the most striking confirmation of the decline of American power.

The fact that Washington had to invade in the first place is a sign of US weakness not strength. In the past the president would have needed to do no more than whisper in somebody's ear to get his way in his own backyard. Today, even former pet dictators like Panama's General Manuel Noriega feel able to snub the White House.

To its frustration, the USA finds more and more that economic power alone will not ensure the pre-eminence of American capitalism at home or abroad. Thus the state has to step in with political and military props to protect its position as the leading power. This has been the pattern of US foreign policy throughout the eighties.

As the problems facing American capitalism intensify, the overriding trend in US foreign policy into the nineties will be towards more militaristic policies and more interference in the third world. The desperate lengths to which the authorities went to demonise Noriega will become part and parcel of US foreign policy from now on.

TORIES IN NO WIN FIGHT

THE TORIES are really in a mess over the ambulance dispute. Having nailed his colours firmly to the mast and insisted that there will be no concessions on pay, Kenneth Clarke cannot very well back down now without it being seen as a major defeat for the government. Appreciating the political price to be paid for making such a U-turn, the entire cabinet has rallied round the beleaguered minister. If the government is defeated neither Clarke nor his health service reforms will have much of a political future, and the damage to the government would be inestimable.

Even if the government is seen to win the dispute, it will accrue no glory as a result. The vast majority of people are opposed to the Falklands Factor offensive which the government has pursued against the ambulance workers. It has been impossible for the Tories to smear ambulance crews as enemies within or Roger Poole as another General Galtieri. Clarke's jibes about taxi drivers and attacks on the professional status of the ambulance workers have simply hardened opinion against the government. The hostility their stance has provoked highlights the dangers for the Tories of politicising disputes of this sort.

The ambulance dispute could turn out to be one of the most significant disputes of the past decade. It has assumed such importance in spite of itself: its place at the centre of British politics has less to do with the cringing and moderate approach of the union leaders and more to do with the political context in which it is taking place. Given the growing anti-Tory mood it is no exaggeration to say that a victory for the ambulance workers could transform the British political scene. Such an outcome could reverse the psychology of defeat that has overtaken the working class during the past 10 years. There is a lot to fight for in the ambulance dispute: that is why rank and file activists should really go for it (see opposite).

FREE THE BIRMINGHAM SIX

PRESSURE IS growing for the government to reopen the case of the Birmingham Six, the Irishmen jailed for the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings. The cases against the six have long been seen as suspect by anybody who has looked critically at the evidence. They were convicted on the basis of confessions that were beaten out of them and forensic evidence that was discredited long ago. Over the years compelling evidence has been amassed showing that the six are the victims of a monstrous miscarriage of justice. Now the release of the Guildford Four and the controversy over the disbanding of the West Midlands serious crimes squad have increased the pressure on the authorities.

The Birmingham Six have spent 15 years behind bars because of the British state's determination to criminalise the Irish people. Ever since the start of the latest phase of the Irish War in 1969, the British authorities have sought to discredit those fighting for Irish freedom by branding them as criminals. In the atmosphere of hatred and revenge following the Birmingham bombings, the British government introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act which has been used ever since to terrorise and criminalise every Irish person in Britain. The Birmingham Six were among its first victims.

We demand the immediate release of the Birmingham Six and all the other Irish people who have been framed by the British judicial system. We will also continue campaigning for the release of every Irish republican incarcerated in a British jail for acts of war against the British Crown. As far as we are concerned, none of them are guilty: they are all victims of a political conspiracy by the British state to deny the Irish people their democratic right to self-determination. Irish republican prisoners have committed no crime: they are in jail for playing their part in the struggle to free Ireland from British rule. As supporters of Irish freedom, we demand their release too.

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PLUS

Kraut-bashing makes a comeback; The bigger issues behind the Lord Aldington libel trial; More CND vicar?; Royal family fortunes; Punk meets ballet: an interview with Michael Clark; Monster hits, mad scientists and psychos; Ireland's identity crisis; Theatre of complexity: Howard Barker gets serious; and much more.

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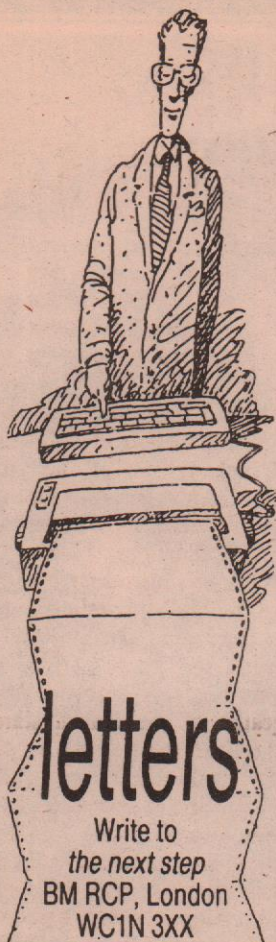
Editor: Joan Phillips

YEAR OF REVOLUTION?

A CONSENSUS seems to have emerged on the right and left that 1989 was a year of revolution in Eastern Europe. The upheavals in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania have indeed been momentous. But the changes that have swept across the Stalinist bloc are not the stuff of social revolutions.

For a start, there has been no fundamental challenge to the Stalinist system itself. These regimes are falling apart as a result of the internal crisis of the ruling bureaucracy. Often it has been the bureaucracy which has initiated changes as in Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. And in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania, the scale of the popular protest movements have been far smaller than those in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968.

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WHY THE STATE NEEDS ABORTION

IN reply to Hilary Savage (letters, 24 November), the state certainly has an interest in allowing a limited abortion service.

Generally speaking, it will be in the state's interest to encourage women to have children—the future generation of workers—but in some cases the state may be keen to limit women's reproduction. For example, the 1967 Act was introduced specifically to deal with 'problem families', eg, where a working class woman already

has more children than she can cope with. Obviously in these situations it is cheaper for the establishment to provide an abortion service than to give women the facilities they need, such as 24-hour childcare. Also, the ruling class may wish to limit reproduction by 'undesirables', eg, black women and lesbians.

So long as the final say rests with the respectable medical profession, the establishment is happy. The 1967 Act, designed to meet the needs of the ruling class, allows the control and patrolling of abortion, which is usually limited but sometimes encouraged.

This is why we must fight for abortion on demand, rather than defending the divisive 1967 Act.

Helen
North London

LABOUR: NOT DEAD YET

YOUR article 'Last of the dinosaurs' (1 December 1989) suggests that the Labour Party 'no longer exists'. As a credible socialist force with real strength on the ground, that is clearly true. But hasn't

that always been the case since 1918 when the modern Labour Party was founded? Indeed, if we look at the Labourist ideology of the party, surely such ideas were seen to be bankrupt even in the 1860s?

But a central paradox bothers me. If these points are correct, how can we explain Labour's continuing lead in the polls? We can't ignore the real world. J Donovan
New Southgate

PANDORA ANDERSON



Kinnock: if Labourism is dead why is he ahead in the polls?

QUESTIONS ON THE COLLAPSE OF STALINISM

THERE are two points I would like clarified from the 'Theses on the collapse of Stalinism' (1 December 1989).

Thesis 4 noted the 'tremendous opportunities for the growth of right-wing capitalist ideas' in the masses' hatred of their 'communist' systems. But Gorbachev's and Solidarity's attempts to implement austerity policies against the working class look unlikely to succeed. East European workers' aspirations for change cannot take the form of Thatcherite free-market individualism, whatever the media may hope, because there is no economic basis for sustaining it. The East German workers chanting support for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht as they tore down the wall may well provide a taste of the working class potential only now being unleashed.

More importantly, while the financial press sees the Soviet Union as the 'Korea of the nineties', the next step has yet to analyse the worrying possibility of the West opening up the Eastern bloc as a new market and a pool of cheap labour. Could

international credit overcome the internal barriers to the creation of a consumer goods market in the East? Could the collapse of Stalinism boost

world trade giving the leading imperialists a new lease of life in the nineties? Dave Chandler
Newcastle

LE PEN MAKES A COMEBACK

THE 'affair of the headscarves' has brought to the surface the latent racism pervading French society (see the next step, 10 November). Originally a controversy about Muslim girls wearing headscarves in the classroom, it has since taken on a more openly political dimension. The bigotry whipped up against immigrants by liberal and left elements, self-appointed champions of France's lay school system, has predictably boosted the Front National.

Two parliamentary by-elections in late November dramatically confirmed the resonance that exists for the anti-immigrant message of the racist Front National. In Dreux, near Paris, where the FN made its first big

breakthrough in 1983, the racist candidate polled a staggering 42.5 per cent of the first-round vote, up from 16 per cent in the 1988 parliamentary elections. In Marseilles, the FN vote rose from 20 to 33 per cent.

The bigotry stirred up by the 'affair of the headscarves', coupled with the dramatic comeback of the FN after a period in the doldrums, has demonstrated yet again that racism remains the central issue in French politics. Any revolutionary movement in France must therefore take as its point of departure an uncompromising opposition to racism in whatever form it takes.

Louis Dutoix
Paris

News focus

AMBULANCE DISPUTE

CREWS SHOULD TAKE CONTROL

Linda Ryan argues that the key to winning the ambulance dispute lies with rank and file workers

DESPITE attempts by union leaders to limit the ambulance dispute to a public relations exercise, it has become a major test of the government's resolve. The Tories are on the rack over their handling of the dispute and deeply divided over the government's strategy. Meanwhile, ambulance workers enjoy overwhelming support and are united in their determination to battle on.

Given the tremendous potential that exists for winning the dispute, the strategy being pursued by the union leaders is a disaster. Instead of harnessing the anger and frustration of their members behind a campaign of direct action, the union chiefs have tried to restrain crews from taking action and pursued tactics that are divisive and counterproductive.

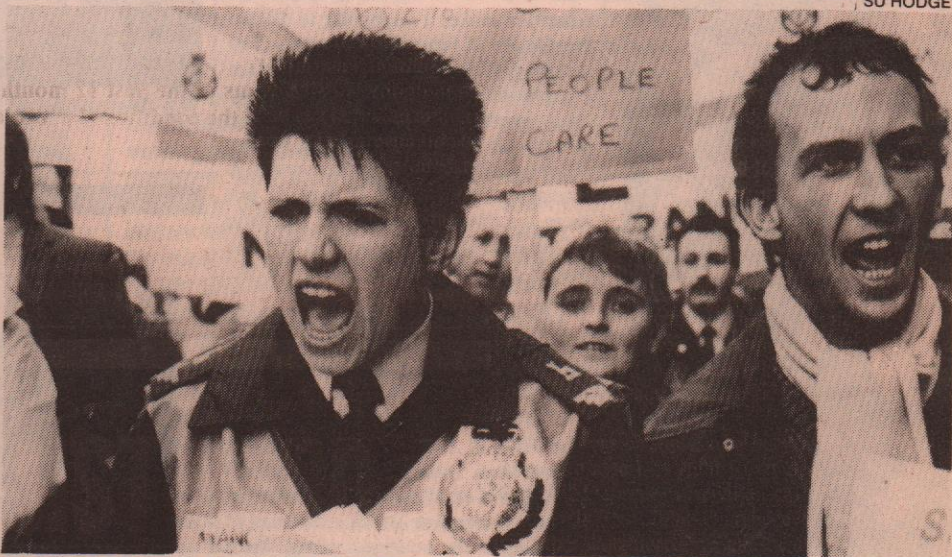
Throughout the dispute the unions have argued that ambulance workers are a special case. Chief

of the Tories, who have long sought to privatise the ambulance service. The council strategy not only undermines national unity among ambulance crews, it can only help the Tories break up the national service along regional lines.

The union leaders are also responsible for demobilising the massive support that exists for their members. The proposed 15-minute national stoppage on 30 January, cooked up by the bureaucrats to head off pressure for more action, is a pathetic stunt. Union leaders are too meek to call it a strike in case they get accused of inciting secondary action, and have instructed workers not to do anything without asking their employers for permission first.

The health unions have also done their best to demobilise this Saturday's national demonstration in London. Union leaders have insisted that only

SU HODGE



If activists seize the initiative, we can make the Tories pay

negotiator Roger Poole has said that ambulance crews should not be regarded as health workers but compared with members of the other emergency services. By insisting that ambulance workers are professionals akin to firefighters or police officers, the union leaders hope to establish that they deserve parity on pay.

This approach emphasises the divisions between health workers rather than what unites them.

But ambulance workers face the same problems as every other group of health workers—low pay, lousy conditions, low morale. If all 800 000 health workers were united they could address these problems together and mount a major challenge to the Tories. By singling out one group as a special case, the unions have entrenched divisions and undermined the possibility of united action.

At the same time, the union emphasis on professionalism is creating divisions within the ranks of ambulance workers themselves. Clarke has made it clear that he is prepared to give preferential treatment to paramedics. But why should unqualified staff be forced to live on starvation wages any more than paramedics?

The nurses' dispute of two years ago showed the dangers of the special case approach. The union leaders' stress on the caring qualities and professional status of nurses allowed the Tories to foist on them a divisive pay settlement under which student and less qualified nurses lost out. Ambulance workers cannot afford to fall into the same trap. They must build a campaign that unites all health workers behind the fight for decent pay.

The unions have hailed the initiative by a number of Labour-controlled West Midlands councils to establish an alternative ambulance service as a major breakthrough. In fact it is a retrograde step which provides no solution to the dispute. Ambulance workers cannot rely on anybody but themselves to win their fight for them. And they certainly cannot rely on a bunch of local authority employers to do them any favours.

By allowing councils to run accident and emergency services, ambulance crews are surrendering control of emergency cover.

The only people who should determine emergency cover are crews themselves, not ambulance managers or local authority chiefs. And by establishing local council services, the union is playing into the hands

members of the emergency services and their families can take part in the demonstration. Everybody else is supposed to be a spectator in Trafalgar Square. The unions cancelled coaches and trains from around the country and tried to restrict transport to ambulance crews only. This was sabotage of the first order.

It is about time ambulance crews began to take matters into their own hands. Increasing numbers of workers are becoming frustrated with the spoiling tactics of the union leaders. It is up to these activists to take control of the conduct of the dispute and step up the action. Ambulance crews themselves are in the best position to determine what action is necessary to bring the Tories to their knees. They should agree on a programme of direct action which can dramatise the dispute and bring a speedy victory:

• Blockade Whitehall

Blocking the centre of London with ambulances for an afternoon was a good idea that should be repeated every day and in other towns and cities. This is a dramatic and effective protest that would draw attention to the dispute and give the authorities a real headache.

• Occupy control rooms

One way to establish control of the dispute is to occupy ambulance control rooms. This would give ambulance workers direct control over the provision of accident and emergency cover. In the meantime we should publicise the direct numbers for ambulance stations as widely as possible, through a campaign of flyposting, sending delegations to hospitals, surgeries, etc.

• Unite all health workers

Ambulance crews should hold mass meetings in hospitals to involve all workers—nurses, ancillary staff, laboratory technicians—and all the unions in the dispute. There are many ways hospital staff can back the dispute. For example if nurses refuse to process the paperwork for patients brought in by the police or military, this would gum up the administrative system without harming patients. The police and army should be treated as scabs: hospital workers should send them to Coventry.

If activists take the initiative and raise the stakes along these lines they can win, and fast.

Feature

Despite the fast pace of events the general analysis of the underlying trends put forward at our last conference still holds. Although we may have overestimated the speed with which recessionary trends would manifest themselves, the capitalist system has not experienced any qualitative renewal in the growth of productive forces, nor has it overcome its crisis tendencies.

The main reason why the recession has been postponed is the ability of the world capitalist system to continue to extend credit. This expansion of credit was made possible by the high level of international collaboration among imperialist powers. The extent of such collaboration was underlined during the October 1989 stock market panic, when the governments of the key imperialist players worked hand in glove to prevent the situation from getting out of hand.

The extension of credit can continue in principle until the present phase of international collaboration comes to an end. The collaboration of imperialist

in this period, it will not be possible to carry on with the old forms of international cooperation—especially because new political realities have developed in a situation where the management of capitalism in Britain and the USA is fraught with more and more difficulties.

We can project two possible scenarios for British capitalism. If international cooperation continues to hold in the medium term, then Britain can expect to experience a recession which could fall short of a depression. At the very least this would mean stagnation of output, rising unemployment and a squeeze on public spending. If, on the other hand, the British recession coincides with a more general slowdown of growth internationally, or with a reduction of imperialist cooperation, then the effects of the recessionary trends will be more far-reaching.

Sensational

Such an international slowdown could have a disproportionately major impact on the City, and, by implication, on the British economy. This projection is not based upon any calculation that there will be a sudden crisis of bourgeois confidence resulting in a stock market crash or a breakdown in the banking system. The possibility of such sensational events is of course very real, but we cannot base our perspectives on them. The unresolved character of the present phase of transition makes it impossible to discern the pattern of future developments. The disintegration of the Stalinist system complicates matters, since it is not yet clear whether its destabilising political effects can be compensated for by any boost it may give to the world economy. A recession as such cannot be avoided, but there is a difference between a recession on the scale of the early eighties and one that is more widespread and thoroughgoing.

The superficial foundation on which bourgeois rule rests can be judged from the mood and reaction of the capitalist class.

Despite all the talk of the prosperous eighties and economic miracles, the bourgeoisie internationally remains subdued and exudes a sense of pessimism. There is a manifest lack of vision and of direction in the bourgeois camp. Their uncertainties are well-captured by their intelligentsia, which is distinguished by its irrationalism and its fear of the future.

Unfortunately, in the absence of a working class alternative and with the dramatic demise of the Stalinist model, the bourgeois outlook on the world is likely to influence society as a whole. In these circumstances it will be impossible to benefit directly from the bourgeois crisis. In Britain we can already see that the crisis of the Tories does not automatically give an impetus to radical impulses. It will first be necessary to recreate a Marxist tradition based on contemporary experience.

The paradox of British politics at the end of the eighties is that the Conservative Party is likely to maintain its pre-eminence despite growing economic instability. This is the result of the commanding position it has established over the past decade and the parallel process of depoliticisation that has resulted from the defeats experienced by the labour movement.

Individualism

While the popularity of the ideology of Thatcherism has been greatly exaggerated, there can be no doubt of Thatcher's success in discrediting the policies and institutions of the traditional labour movement. Few people now believe that taking collective action through the unions can achieve much; since the miners' strike, Wapping, Dover, etc, they fear that such actions can risk a great deal. If many now believe that greater public spending on infrastructure is necessary as a pragmatic response to transport and environmental problems, few are prepared to oppose privatisation, even in the health and social services, on ideological grounds.

The triumph of Tory individualism over Labour collectivism reflects and reinforces the passivity of the working class. It means that growing hostility to government policy on issues such as the poll tax fails to take a political form. Or at



The destruction of the Berlin Wall symbolises the demise of the old order



The City: heading for a recession

rivals requires that the benefits of cooperation outweigh the differential interests of national capitals. Once the existing international equilibrium becomes difficult to sustain, the reconciliation of national interests gives way to conflict. In these circumstances, credit can no longer postpone the development of a full-blown recession. From this perspective it is not economic factors but the maintenance of the existing balance of power through political means which is decisive in sustaining stability.

It is ironic that the main catalyst behind the present break-up of the post-war international order is the disintegration of the Stalinist order.

This calls into question the relevance of a global balance of power under US domination. The division of Germany and Europe, with its traditional Nato-Warsaw Pact framework, has lost its relevance, and the weakness of US imperialism stands exposed.

The changing contours of international politics heighten the potential for conflict between the ascending and descending imperialist powers. As the balance shifts

least it fails to take a collective form, as workers are assimilated into amorphous petit-bourgeois forms of protest in the mould of the traditional 'angry ratepayers'.

The dominance of the Tories over British society is reinforced by their success, with the help of the media, in defining and redefining what are the important political issues.

We are familiar with the process of the construction of moral panics around issues such as Aids, child abuse and drugs. In many ways the Green phenomenon can be seen as similar: the publicity given to Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth initiatives, campaigns against nuclear waste dumping, the Chunnel row, etc, reflects an official willingness to tolerate these forms of political activity, not to mention the saturation media coverage of wider issues of nature conservation, rainforests, etc. In the absence of any real challenge to its authority from below, the ruling class has enjoyed unprecedented freedom—and constantly advancing technology—to promote its ideas throughout society.

Boasting

The depoliticisation of the working class over the past decade overshadows the growing resentment at and resistance to the consequences of continuing Tory domination. This is the context in which the new mood evident in the industrial disputes of summer 1989 has emerged. Workers, particularly in public services, are angry at having to work harder in worse conditions for stagnating real wages, especially at a time when the govern-

ment has been boasting of its economic achievements and companies have recorded rising profits and rewarded executives with big salary increases. Yet the same workers have no confidence in familiar trade union tactics and strategies. Hence they accept modest objectives and pursue highly defensive methods in the hope that they can get something, or at least save face. There is a new mood of resistance, but no new methods or institutions to replace those that have been discredited.

Careerists

The most dramatic testimony to the domination of the Tories over British politics is the fact that, though their programme is now obsolete, they can still force the major opposition party to adopt its key elements. The endorsement of *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* at the 1989 Labour conference signals the abandonment not only of the reformist 'Alternative Economic Strategy' of the seventies, but also the Lib-Lab programme of Keynes/Beveridge/Atlee which formed the basis of Labour Party policy throughout the post-war period.

The reconstruction of the Labour Party has been one of the most significant developments of the Thatcher years.

We commented on the demise of the traditional right of the Labour leadership after the 1987 election. The combination of moderate trade union bureaucrats and upper class intellectuals which ran the Labour Party since its foundation has been replaced by a new generation of professional careerists and media managers.



Gould and Kinnock: new-look Labour

PARTY PERSPECTIVES FOR 1990

MARXISM FOR OUR

The Revolutionary Communist Party held its conference to discuss perspectives for party work in 1990 and elect the new leadership. Here we reprint edited extracts from the Political Committee report of the conference, assessing the political character of the present period.

TIMES

In December to party leadership. nittee report to esent period

Over the past couple of years the left has been effectively liquidated as a force in the Labour Party; the elimination of Livingstone from the NEC at the 1989 conference completed the process which began with Healey's victory over Benn in 1981. The Labour left exists only as increasingly isolated and eccentric individuals, with no roots among rank and file union activists or in any social grouping outside of the party.

Proletarian

The social and political transformation of the Labour Party has been accompanied by similar trends in the unions. The combined effect of strike defeats, declining membership and the shift from consensus to confrontational styles of workplace management and collective bargaining have made the union leaders much more insecure and more remote from the working class. In the unions too middle class professionals play an increasingly prominent role in place of the traditional officials with roots in the workplace. It is striking that in controversies around PR and the block vote at the 1989 Labour conference, traditional left-right alignments gave way to positions taken up according to more pragmatic assessments of the tactical options open to the labour bureaucracy.

The paradox of Labour's position is that though it now presents itself as more classless than ever before, its electoral base is more narrowly proletarian today than at any time since the twenties. Though there is certainly growing voter alienation from the Tory Party, there are few indicators of mounting enthusiasm

for Labour among the middle classes, or even among the electorally crucial sectors of the working class in the South and Midlands. While it remains unclear whether Labour can succeed in broadening its appeal, it is also uncertain whether it still has enough ties to the working class to enable it to respond in a more traditional reformist manner should working class pressure mount.

Domineering

More and more remote from the unions and the working class, the Labour Party is increasingly a non-Thatcherite Conservative Party, a Tory Party Mark II offering its services to run the system. In the short term, the growing unpopularity of the government, the economic crisis and the collapse of the centre parties create new scope for Kinnock's Labour Party. All things being equal, however, when it comes to the election voters may well opt for the Tory Party Mark I, in preference to Kinnock's imitation. In the event of accidents and a continuing Tory slide, the Labour Party could win by default on its Mark II programme.

In the two to three years before the election, current trends are likely to be reinforced.

Kinnock will keep his head down and keep crushing the left in the hope that Thatcher's unpopularity will finally bring him to power. Meanwhile, the Tories will increasingly dominate British politics as tensions within Conservative ranks over issues like Europe assume growing significance as the main axis of political conflict. The result is likely to be the continuation of middle class protests, such as the Chunnel and BMA campaign. It is quite likely that the Greens could manage to consolidate a section of disillusioned middle class opinion, though the scale remains unpredictable. Working class protests are likely to follow a similar form—as in the ambulance dispute and the engineers' campaign for a 35-hour week. The lack of political representation of the working class in the electoral sphere and in the broader class struggle is certain to become increasingly evident as the major challenge facing the revolutionary movement.

British politics is already overshadowed by the prospect of the 1991-92 general election. The Conservative Party has entered its third term in a state of programmatic exhaustion and its policies are increasingly irrational and unpopular across wide sections of society. Excessively reliant on the domineering figure of Thatcher, now reaching the end of her political career, the Tories are likely to face mounting opposition from diverse groups in society in the run-up to the next election.

Ready-made

There is a general recognition that Thatcher is riding for a fall and much discussion about possible replacements, either before or after the general election. This is certainly a problem for the Conservative Party, but its general significance is widely exaggerated, not least on the left, as a result of the cult of Thatcherism. The very fact that the cabinet, the government, the Tory Party (and the Labour Party) have been remodelled around the prime minister reflects the wider reliance of the British establishment on the sort of hype of which the Thatcher personality is the most consummate expression. The unprecedented instability of British politics over the next period is certain to create greater dangers as well opening new opportunities.

The political situation in Britain is also influenced by the demise of Stalinism. Coming on top of a series of working class defeats, this represents a further blow to the traditional left. There is as yet no new audience for left-wing politics in Britain. Those who are angry and possess the right instincts do not constitute a ready-made left constituency. They need first to be won to the ideas of working class politics and of collective action. We will be able to measure our ability to develop Marxism by the extent to which we can transform those with anti-capitalist instincts into an audience for revolutionary communism.

Until now we have emphasised the dangers inherent in the period ahead. But to gain a balanced perspective it is also necessary to underline the opportunities.

In a sense the past decade can be seen as a graveyard for burying the traditional alternatives that have misled the working class.

The collapse of Labourism and Stalinism has disoriented the working class but at least it has cleared the decks for the projection of other alternatives.

As we noted previously, it is fairly clear from the experience of history that Stalinism had to disappear before there could be a qualitative transformation of working class politics. The dangers of a blind reaction against Stalinism in Eastern Europe are in terms of history outweighed by the opportunities for influencing the working class without the terrible distraction of the Kremlin.

Most sections of the left unconsciously see in the disintegration of Stalinism the end of Marxism as a political project. A minority of dogmatists pretend that nothing has changed and expect the return of past patterns of class conflict. Both sections of the left are doomed to irrelevance by their failure to grasp the essentials of contemporary reality. In

SIMON NORFOLK



Ambulance dispute: lack of faith in collective action

contrast the Revolutionary Communist Party does not depend on the past for its future. Nor do we see in the period ahead the end of Marxism; rather we interpret the present phase of transition as a necessary prelude to putting communism back on the political agenda.

Our party's intellectual tradition and theory are our most precious assets in the period ahead. We do not carry the baggage of irrelevant traditions. Paraphrasing Gibbon, our imperfections flow from the contagion of the time but our virtues are our own. Through our theory we can not only become relevant as against the left, but also sound convincing against the ideas of the bourgeoisie. This is particularly important at a time when the bourgeoisie is able directly to influence the working class. Our arguments from the German question to abortion can become a point of reference—if we can organisationally back up our ideas. All the work we have put in to publish *Living Marxism* has been worthwhile because the party has begun to learn to give a contemporary meaning to Marxism.

NEW READERS START HERE



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.

PANAMA

GUN-BARREL DEMOCRACY

James Malone and Stefanie Boston argue that America's rape of Panama was not the success it has been made out to be

Every morning in Panama City, Guillermo Endara has a meeting with US ambassador Arthur Davis. Davis informs him of the decisions that have been taken in his name on the previous day by US general Maxwell Thurman. Endara is the new president of Panama, but he is as much a prisoner of the US authorities as is former dictator General Noriega, now languishing in a Miami jail. 'The US army did not come to Panama to obey other people's laws', declared Thurman.

'Operation Just Cause'—the US army's codename for the invasion—involved 26 000 troops and the biggest US paratroop operation since the Allied attempt to seize the Rhine bridges in 1944. The White House has defended the operation as necessary to restore democracy, defend US citizens and bring Noriega to justice for his drug trafficking. In fact the invasion was the latest in a long line of American attempts to establish control over what it considers its 'backyard'.

Operation Just Cause shows the lengths to which the USA will go to impose its authority on the region and the increasing difficulty it faces in doing so.

The very existence of Panama is testament to US interference in the region. In 1903 US president Theodore Roosevelt established the state of Panama, which was then part of Colombia, in order to protect the planned Panama Canal. Washington installed a

client government which leased the Canal Zone back to the USA in perpetuity. Since then Washington has maintained a permanent military presence and ensured that only stooge governments achieve power.

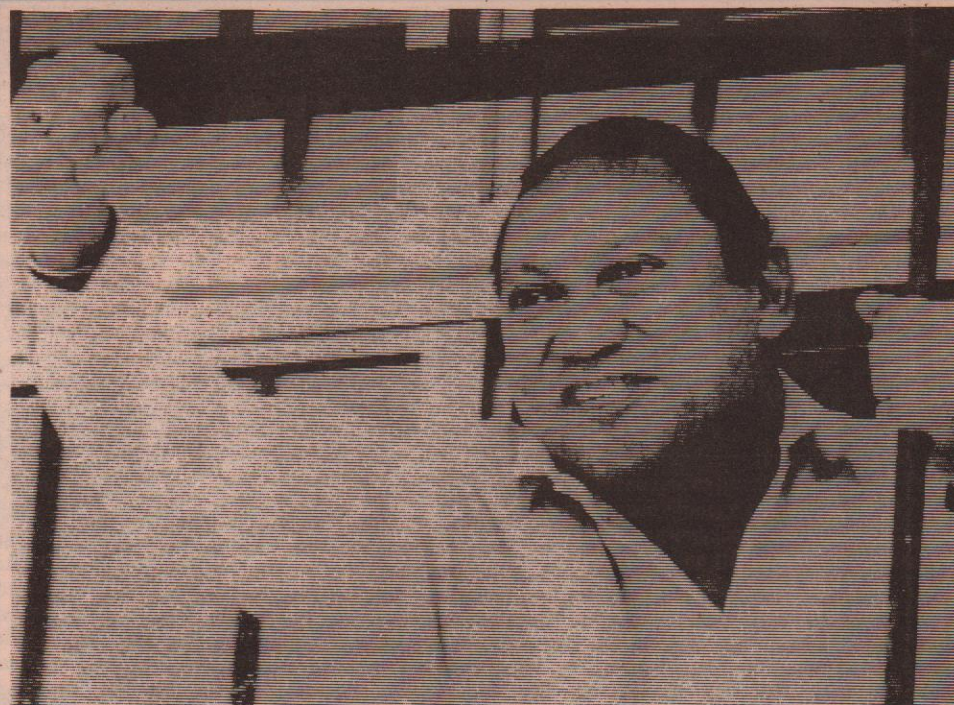
The US treatment of Panama set the tone for its relationship with other countries in the region. December's invasion was the forty-second time this century that America has sent troops into Central America. During the Reagan years, as Washington felt its loss of authority around the world, the USA took an even more belligerent attitude. The invasion of Grenada in 1983 was the most dramatic expression of the new attitude.

Sex, drugs and underpants

For much of the post-war period the USA has used the bogey of the Soviet threat to justify armed interference in Central America. With the thaw in the Cold War, Washington has discovered a new enemy—drugs. From Peru to Colombia to Panama, the war against drugs has become the latest excuse for US military adventure.

Over the past two years the US media have presented Noriega as an evil drugs baron who needs to be brought to justice.

Since the invasion the US media have invented new charges against the general—he has been smeared as a womaniser, a drugs fiend and a drunkard who



Noriega: the CIA drug-runner who got up Washington's nose

indulged in pornography and practised witchcraft. General Thurman exposed Noriega's supposed penchant for wearing red underpants as evidence of his depravity.

The demonisation of Noriega by the US authorities was designed to set him up as a uniquely evil dictator whom America had a moral duty to deliver to justice. In fact Noriega was a typical third world dictator who until recently had a very warm relationship with Washington. He came to the CIA's attention in the early sixties when, as a student at a Peruvian military academy, he began selling to the US information on fellow students. In 1966 Noriega was recruited by the CIA.

In the seventies the CIA, under the leadership of George Bush, established Noriega as the agency's drug-runner and money launderer on a salary of \$200 000 a year. After the death of Panamanian

leader General Torrijos in a mysterious plane crash in 1981, the CIA helped Noriega consolidate his power. This included helping to rig the 1984 presidential elections in favour of Noriega's candidate.

Washington had no qualms about Noriega's illicit activities—until the dictator started freelancing, buying and selling drugs from all corners, including Nicaragua and Cuba, and taking a larger cut than middlemen are supposed to do. Once Noriega began to branch out on his own, Washington decided to cut him down to size, and replace him with a more pliant stooge.

Washington's failure to topple Noriega over the past two years has been a source of deep embarrassment.

So long as Noriega remained in power, he was a constant reminder that the USA was unable to get its way in what was supposed to be its backyard. As Larry Birns, director of the think-tank the Council for Hemispheric Affairs pointed out, Operation Just Cause 'has more to do with White House fears of "wimpdom" than any realistic threat to US national security'.

The invasion shows how far Washington is willing to go to assert its right to lay down the law in the region. Estimates of civilian casualty figures range from 1000 to 7000—maybe even more than the number slaughtered by Ceausescu's Securitate during the fighting in Romania. Most died when the US airforce used its top-secret F-117 stealth bomber to raze working class districts in Panama City. Up to 20 000 Panamanians were made homeless as a result of the devastation.

America alone

But despite the enormous firepower employed by Washington, the invasion was a military and political shambles. George Bush boasted that all resistance would be mopped up within 24 hours. Yet US troops did not even manage to seize the national radio station within that time; Radio Nacional continued to broadcast anti-US propaganda and organise resistance.

Despite the presence of 26 000 troops and sophisticated surveillance technology, Noriega eluded the US military and managed to gain sanctuary in the Papal Nuncio. Ordinary Panamanians put up even greater resistance; fierce fighting erupted in working class districts, such as San Miguelito in Panama City and in the Caribbean port of Colon.

On the world stage the invasion has isolated Washington. Both the United Nations and the Organisation of American States condemned the invasion. Even Latin American states normally friendly to the USA, such as Costa Rica, denounced the action. Peru and Bolivia pulled out of a planned drugs summit in February; Peru also ordered the US-backed anti-drugs operation in the Upper Hualaga valley to be suspended.

Colombia has given a frosty response to the arrival of two US warships off its coast this week, ostensibly on an anti-drugs mission.

President Endara is widely regarded as a US stooge. The United Nations refused to accept Endara's representative when someone noticed that the request for his accreditation had been faxed directly from the US army HQ. Apart from Britain and the USA, only a handful of other countries have so far recognised the new government. Within Panama itself there is widespread resentment at the US-imposed gun-barrel democracy.

The biggest headache for Washington could be Noriega himself. Having invaded Panama to put Noriega out of action, the US authorities are now lumbered with a potentially embarrassing and incriminating trial. Far from imposing America's stamp on Central America, the invasion of Panama has shown again that the USA cannot even prevail decisively against a tiny country in its own backyard.

SOVIET UNION

GORBACHEV PLAYS THE RACIST CARD

Events in Eastern Europe over Christmas have accelerated the nationality crisis in the Soviet Union. The Lithuanian Communist Party decided to split from the Soviet Communist Party, and there were disturbances in Azerbaijan on the Soviet border with Iran. The contrasting response of Mikhail Gorbachev to the two crises was striking. The Soviet leader ruled out the use of force against the secessionist Lithuanians; but he immediately ordered troops to be deployed against the demonstrating Muslims.

By stirring up antagonism against Muslims among Soviet Europeans, the bureaucracy hopes to shore up its position and prevent the disintegration of the Union. The Tass report of the Azerbaijan incident was reminiscent of the hysterical denunciations of popular unrest put out by the dictators of Beijing and Bucharest. The official condemnations accused drunken and drug-crazed rioters of rampaging along the border and wrecking military installations. The authorities made no attempt to disguise the racist overtones of their pronouncements.

Hungry for land

Nachichevan, the centre of the disturbances, has a lot in common with the notorious district of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is a former region of Armenia handed over to Azerbaijan in 1921 to forestall an invasion of Armenia by Kemal Ataturk's Turkey. Unlike Nagorno-Karabakh, however, Nachichevan's population is 90 per cent Muslim. Cut off from Azerbaijan by a narrow wedge of Armenian territory, it is vulnerable to Armenian pressure and has not been involved in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. Even so, Nachichevan has not escaped the mass unemployment and falling living standards that afflict the rest of the Soviet Union.

Inspired by the breaching of the Berlin Wall, Nachichevan's hungry masses looked longingly towards the vast stretches of fertile land occupied by border fortifications and tore them down. The idea that they are keen to unite with Iran's five million Azeris across the border does not stand up. Soviet Azeris pity their compatriots who suffer under Tehran's oppressive rule. Why should Soviet Azeris want to live under a regime that outlaws the teaching of their own language?

Ignoring the underlying economic causes of the unrest, the Kremlin painted a picture of nationalist subversion by crazed Muslims. Moscow seized the



opportunity to foster anti-Muslim sentiment as a means of consolidating a reactionary base among Russians who have been demonstrating in cities like Sverdlovsk in the Urals against the food shortages caused by perestroika. Muslim fundamentalism is increasingly being presented as the threat against which every Soviet European must unite.

In contrast, Gorbachev has consistently treated Baltic nationalists with kid gloves. Their region escaped sovietisation in the thirties and bourgeois social relations are deeply entrenched there. Baltic nationalists have often demonstrated that they share the Kremlin's antipathy towards the Soviet working class. And beneath their rhetoric about democracy

lies a rich seam of reactionary prejudice against Jews, Muslims and any non-European foreigners.

The nationalist movements in the Soviet Muslim republics lack a similar base of support, except among a local bureaucracy weakened by the collapse of its system. In such circumstances, the Soviet Muslim masses can more easily dictate events there. So far, the Kremlin has successfully manipulated Muslim grievances by redirecting them against their Christian Armenian neighbours over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. If Gorbachev continues to use the Soviet Muslim people as a punchbag, however, he could provoke a jihad against Moscow.

Andy Clarkson

NO TIME-LIMITS ON OUR RIGHTS

Sara Hardy argues against making any concessions to those who are attempting to curtail access to abortion

On 7 December 1989 the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill received its second reading in the house of lords. The bill, which is a government-sponsored measure, aims to tighten up state control of embryo experimentation and research, by licensing research centres and clinics administering in-vitro fertilisation and artificial insemination.

It offers parliament the choice between banning all experiments on embryos outright, or allowing experimentation up to 14 days under tight control. The bill will therefore grant legal protection to



November's protest against the embryology bill showed how to organise for abortion rights

embryos, recognising them as special forms of human tissue which need special treatment.

It has dangerous implications for women seeking artificial insemination, especially single women and lesbians who may not be regarded as suitable parents

by the government.

The granting of legal status to embryos has dangerous implications too for the fight for abortion rights. The anti-abortionists are already claiming a moral victory, on the grounds that embryo rights are being recognised even if experiments are allowed up to 14 days.

Sir Bernard Braine, chair of the all-party parliamentary pro-life group, has noted that it would 'not only be morally repugnant but ludicrous if parliament decided to give protection to the human embryo...but denied any protection to a child at a later stage of life when it has become a recognisable and sentient human being and can recognise its mother's voice'. In other words, further restrictions on abortion are the logical corollary of any move to limit research on human embryos.

In addition to the anti-abortion consequences of the embryology bill itself, anti-abortionists are planning to add an amendment to it which will reduce the legal time-limit on abortion from 28 weeks to 22, 20 or even 18 weeks. To stop this development, dozens of Stop the Amendment campaigns are being set up around the country.

Thousands of women are worried about the possibility of further attacks on an already pitifully inadequate abortion service, and are prepared to come out and fight against any attempts to undermine it further. Some 500 women from London and the south-east alone demonstrated against the embryo bill last November on a protest organised by the London Abortion Rights Committee.

Veteran campaigner

In this context it is worrying that many activists think that the focus of the campaign against the amendment should be restricted to parliamentary manoeuvring. Many veteran abortion rights campaigners, including Alison Frater of the Coordinating Committee in Defence of the 1967 Act, believe that we should accept the bill introduced to the house of lords by Lord Houghton as the basis for campaigning against the anti-abortion amendment.

Houghton's Abortion Amendment Bill would remove the time-limit altogether in cases of severe fetal handicap, while lowering it from 28 to 24 weeks in all other cases.

This would prevent any abortions on social grounds (that is, abortions based on the health and happiness of the woman) after 24 weeks. Pro-abortion activists are claiming that the bill represents an effective way of filibustering anti-abortion amendments to the embryo bill as such amendments cannot be moved so long as the Houghton Bill is being discussed.

Many veteran women's rights campaigners are also claiming that the bill represents a positive step in itself. Alison Frater argues that the bill 'may also open up the possibility for significant improvements in abortion legislation' and that it is time to 'concede the argument on 24 weeks for social abortion'. She concludes that 'Houghton's initiative represents an important step forward' (*Guardian*, 12 December 1989).

Houghton's bill is getting a hearing among pro-abortionists for several reasons. Developments in technology have meant that fetuses born earlier and earlier are capable of surviving. This has led to a consensus in parliament and among the medical profession that the abortion time-limit should be reduced; Thatcher herself is said to prefer a 24-week limit. Yet this does not alter the reasons many women have for presenting for late abortions.

In a recent *Observer* article, British Pregnancy Advisory Service records revealed that 30 per cent of women presenting for late abortions were victims of bureaucratic delays in the health service, 17 per cent had been misdiagnosed by doctors despite their own suspicions of being pregnant, and 12 per cent had changed circumstances, the majority due to being deserted by their partners.

Others had had contraceptive failure or were afraid to admit to being pregnant (10 December 1989). However, the pro-abortion movement has always been hesitant about arguing for abortion for women in these circumstances, and has preferred to concentrate on women in particularly difficult situations; victims of rape and incest, or those who are carrying a handicapped fetus.

Ancient member

We should be clear that developments in fetal viability do not affect the need of women for abortion. The potential viability of the fetus is irrelevant to a woman who has decided to terminate a pregnancy, for whatever reason, and it should be irrelevant to those fighting for abortion rights.

Whatever the state of the legal provision at present, some women will always need the right to abortion at any stage in pregnancy. The fact that late abortions are only permitted at the moment due to fetal handicap is no reason for not fighting for the right to abortion in the later stages of pregnancy.

The only reason for the 91-year old peer's sudden popularity is that many activists do not believe that the anti-abortionists can be beaten by arguing for women's rights.

They do not believe that our arguments can beat those of the anti-abortionists and can convince working class people of the need to fight for women's rights through a campaign outside parliament. From this perspective the only option appears to be a parliamentary campaign.

We can accept no further reductions in time-limits through amendments to the embryo bill. But we should recognise the dangerous implications the bill will have even if it is not amended by the anti-abortionists. We should also recognise that parliamentary tactics have proved ineffective in defending even the limited provision we have today. The Alton Bill was filibustered in parliament without pro-abortionists winning the argument for abortion rights and 18 months later we face yet another assault on our rights.

We should stop relying on ancient members of the aristocracy to fight our battles for us, and take the arguments for women's rights on to the streets. Thousands of women want to fight. We should be giving them the arguments to fight with.



Irish Freedom Movement EIGHTEEN YEARS AFTER BLOODY SUNDAY Troops out of Ireland now

Wilford, the commander that day, the Order of the British Empire.

Bloody Sunday was the most brutal lesson Irish nationalists were to learn in their struggle against British rule. But rather than cower in submission, they fought back with greater defiance. The ruthless calculation of the British establishment in carrying out the Bloody Sunday killings revealed that it will stop at nothing to crush resistance to its rule in Ireland. But the resistance of the nationalist people in the 18 years since Bloody Sunday shows that even sheer unadulterated murder cannot crush their desire for freedom.

SCOTTISH RALLY

Tuesday 30 January, 7.30pm
City Halls
Canterigg
Glasgow
Admission £1

LONDON RALLY

Tuesday 30 January, 7pm
McNamara Hall
Irish Centre
Murray Street
(off Camden Road)
NW1

Rally to be followed by social • music by the B&I Ferryman • hot food available
Admission £5

For further details ring (01) 375 1702

On 30 January 1972 British paratroopers opened fire on an anti-internment demonstration in Derry City. When the firing stopped 13 Irish nationalists lay dead and 70 injured, one of whom died later. The Army insisted that it had been fired on, although every independent witness rejected this version of events. The Derry coroner described the killings as 'sheer unadulterated murder'. However, Lord Widgery, appointed by the government to head a commission of inquiry, absolved the Army of any blame. To drive home the point, the Queen awarded Colonel Derek

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 12 January 1990 • No 1 • 40p

ROMANIA

UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN BUCHAREST

THE fall of the Ceausescu regime in Romania has been hailed by reactionary commentators everywhere as the final nail in the coffin of communism. As revolutionary communists, our view is that things have not gone nearly far enough in Romania. The hated dictators Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu have been toppled, but the Stalinists still hold on to the levers of power. As in every other capital city

in Eastern Europe, there is much unfinished business in Bucharest.

Nobody could fail to have been inspired by the events in Romania. The courage of ordinary people who took to the streets and defied the guns of the army and Securitate was breathtaking. The heroism of workers and students who formed themselves into armed militias and confronted the Securitate

was impressive. The desire of men and women, old and young, for bloody retribution against supporters of the old regime was positive. But after all the pain and sacrifice they suffered, what are the people of Romania left with?

The recent demonstrations by students and others ought to tell us that there is much dissatisfaction at the results. The truth is that there has been no significant social change in Romania and there has certainly not been a revolution. There is no question of the state having been destroyed: the army and the central administration remain intact. The changeover that has taken place resembles a palace coup or a purge not a social revolution. A few faces have changed at the top and a few tinkering reforms have been implemented. But there has been no fundamental challenge to the system or those who have a stake in perpetuating it.

The majority of those who constitute the National Salvation Front are former Communist Party members, some of whom held high-ranking party and state positions under the Ceausescu regime. Ion Iliescu was at one stage a key figure in the old order: he was a former youth minister under Ceausescu and a member of the central committee until he fell from grace. Silviu Brucan was a former ambassador to the United Nations and editor of the party paper *Scinteia*. The new prime minister Petre Roman held a privileged position under the old regime and was a party member. The army also has a strong influence over the interim government appointed by the front, controlling the ministry

of national economy as well as the ministry of defence.

A debate has begun about whether a revolution took place at all and about the origins of the National Salvation Front. Sensitive to criticisms that many of them are simply Stalinists who fell out with the old dictator, members of the front have insisted that the organisation was forged in the fire of recent events. But in a video of the first meeting of the leaders of the front after the toppling of Ceausescu on 22 December, the new defence minister General Nicolae Militaru says that the front had been in existence for six months. From this and other evidence it seems likely that a clique of anti-Ceausescu Stalinists in the upper echelons of the party and the army had been plotting to take power when the time was right.

However, the real issue in this debate is not whether these people really did plan to stage a coup in the past: the important point is that they are in power *now*. From the point of view of the working class and the youth of Romania, the problem is that the stalwarts of the old order survive substantially in the new order. They are manning the central administration, issuing governmental decrees and running the army. In practice, all that has happened is that the rule of one man and his wife and family has been replaced by the rule of an enlarged clique of Stalinists. And no matter how keen they are to distance themselves from the crimes of Ceausescu, they too are responsible for the regime of terror that has prevailed for 40 years in Romania.

It is this unpalatable fact that accounts for the widespread resentment against the new government among ordinary Romanians. Already, people are protesting about the composition of the new unelected leadership, about the limited character of the reforms and about the organisation of the forthcoming elections. Students have warned that unless they get some satisfaction they will take to the streets again. In this unstable political situation it is no exaggeration to say that anything could happen.

Events in Romania illustrate in a particularly stark form trends which are common throughout Eastern Europe. In Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, popular aspirations for fundamental change have been suppressed, as they have been in Romania. Instead, there have been attempts to negotiate a stable transition: everywhere Stalinists remain in power together with compliant oppositionists. This pattern looks set to be repeated in Romania, unless there is another popular mobilisation to confront the power of the bureaucracy.

If things carry on like this the potential of the mass movements throughout Eastern Europe will be squandered. Until now the power and creativity of the masses have been harnessed behind a strategy of piecemeal reform by the middle class leadership of the opposition movements. But nothing positive can come out of any strategy which looks to sections of the bureaucracy to undertake a process of carefully managed reform.

The bureaucracy and the system it supports are the problem, not the solution. Western commentators fearful of things getting out of control might recoil from the proletarian power which we caught a glimpse of in Romania—but this is the only thing that can give the masses of Eastern Europe what they want.

