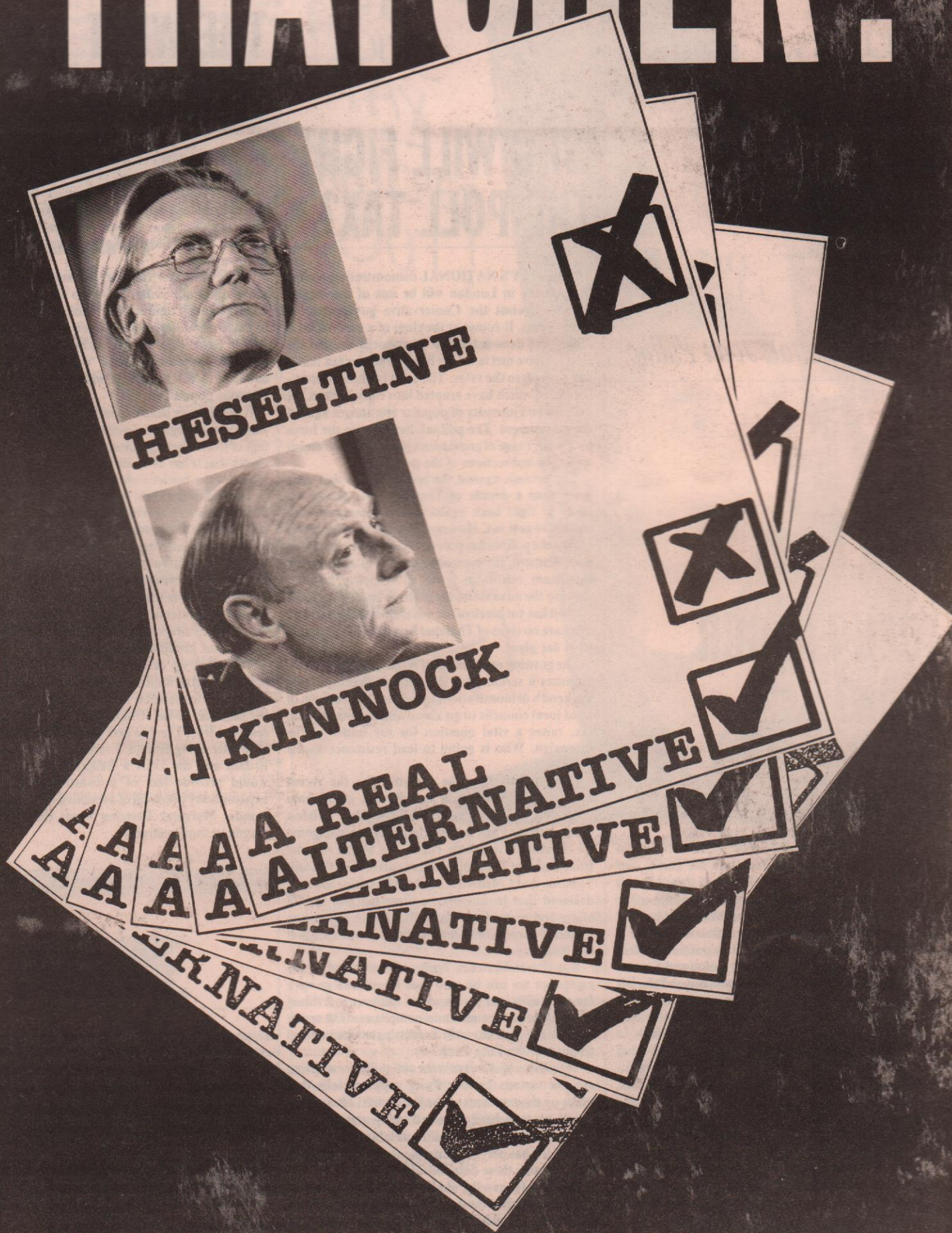


# the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 30 March 1990 • No 11 • 40p

## AFTER THATCHER?



CAN THE TORIES SURVIVE?  
Page 3



LABOUR—THE ELECTABLE  
TORIES?  
Pages 4 and 5

CRISIS IN LITHUANIA  
Page 6

30 March • No 11

taining working class militancy, the party no longer plays the same role for the establishment. Despite all its problems, the Conservative Party still articulates much more coherently the outlook and requirements of the capitalist class.

Sylvia Heal may have won Mid-Staffs for Labour, but judging from her policies and presentation, she could have been running for any of the major parties. Labour's abandonment of any pretence of representing the working class helps to clarify the urgent necessity of building a working class alternative. The message from Mid-Staffs is that though Labour may be alive, Labourism is dead. For the first time since the twenties the field is open to build a revolutionary working class party in Britain.

## WHO WILL FIGHT THE POLL TAX?

SATURDAY'S NATIONAL demonstration against the poll tax in London will be one of the biggest protests against the Conservative government in recent years. It comes at the close of a wave of local rallies and demonstrations as councils around the country have met to set the level of the new tax that is due to replace the rates. The scale of these protests, several of which have erupted into riots, reflects the breadth and intensity of popular resentment against the government. The poll tax has become the focus for a wider range of grievances against the government among broad sections of the population.

The protests against the poll tax show that after more than a decade of Thatcher rule, people are ready to fight back against an undemocratic and regressive new tax. However, though popular revolt against the poll tax has provoked backbench rebellions in parliament, the campaign has yet to achieve any significant results in terms of stopping or even slowing the advance of the plans to levy the tax. No council has yet blocked the government schemes and there are no signs of Thatcher herself being deflected from her plans.

The growing momentum of recent poll tax protests disguises a serious lack of political direction. This weekend's demonstration, following the decisions of most local councils to go ahead and impose the poll tax, raises a vital question for the future of the campaign. Who is going to lead resistance to the poll tax?

It is striking that the initiative for the recent upsurge against the poll tax did not come from Scotland, the Northern cities or central London where Labour Party activists have been campaigning for months to very little effect. The initiative came from dissident Tory councillors in places like Oxford, Taunton and Colchester. Michael Heseltine has now declared that he has been against the poll tax all along and every Tory dissident with an eye on the Thatcher succession is eager to jump on the anti-poll tax bandwagon.

But if anti-Thatcher Tories take the lead in the campaign we can be sure that it will not go very far—certainly not so far as to support individual non-payment or council non-compliance. The revolt against the poll tax will be dissipated in internal disputes in the Tory Party.

The other major forces in the anti-poll tax campaign are the various Labour Party support clubs that make up the remnants of the British left. Though the recent protests have attracted many young people outside the ranks of the traditional labour movement, the old left has played a prominent role in organising and directing these demonstrations.

But how far can the old left take the new spirit of resistance against the Tories? Certainly not so far as to embarrass Neil Kinnock's rising hopes of replacing Thatcher as prime minister. Once the activists of the old left assume their familiar role as flyposters-in-chief by appointment to the Labour leadership, the angry anti-poll tax placards will soon disappear. The left will not step out of line with the Labour leadership to organise the sort of mass defiance of the law that is necessary to defeat the poll tax. In fact, the hard left will not go any further than the Tory wets who are currently out front in the anti-poll tax alliance.

The revolt against the poll tax reveals the urgent need for a new form of political leadership in British politics. It reveals the need for a movement that is not constrained by any stake in the existing system or by

loyalty to any of the obsolete political machines. What is required is a movement which puts the interests of the working class first and is prepared to organise and fight to achieve them. That is the sort of movement the Revolutionary Communist Party has set out to build. Anybody who supports uncompromising resistance to the poll tax is eligible to join us.

## THE WEST AND LITHUANIA

MOSCOW'S MILITARY manoeuvres in Lithuania reveal the Kremlin's fear of the impending break-up of the Soviet Union (see page 6). However, the West's cautious response to the limited Soviet crackdown was even more conspicuous than Gorbachev's attempt to intimidate the Lithuanian nationalist movement.

While Margaret Thatcher has urged both sides to show 'restraint', George Bush has simply kept quiet. The reactionary commentator George Walden, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* attacked what he called the 'selfish impatience of the Balts'. Even the Pope assured Gorbachev that he would use his moral authority to 'calm emotions' within Lithuania's largely Catholic population.

It might have been expected that such a bunch of rabid anti-communists would have taken full advantage of Gorbachev's problems. The West's equivocation shows that it has as much to fear from the fragmentation of the Soviet Union as Gorbachev himself.

The end of the Cold War and the break-up of the old world order has created consternation in Western ranks. While the more dynamic imperialist powers, like Germany and Japan, are taking full advantage of the changing international situation, has-beens such as Britain are trying to hold on to the institutions of the past. That is why Thatcher has become such a fervent supporter of the Warsaw Pact. It is also why the West has adopted such a cautious stance over the question of Lithuanian independence.

The break-up of the Soviet Union would create instability on an unprecedented scale. Hence Western leaders are concerned that Gorbachev succeeds in holding the Soviet Union together. The cautious response from London and Washington also reflects their increasing fear of a resurgent Germany. For Britain and the USA a Balkanised Soviet Union would provide less of a constraint against the expansionary potential of a reunited Germany. Little wonder Margaret Thatcher wants the Lithuanian people to show restraint.

## SOUTH AFRICA: REFORM MEANS REPRESSION

AFTER MONDAY's slaughter of eight people in the South African township of Sebokeng, Western commentators expressed the hope that the upsurge of violent conflict would not prejudice recent moves towards talks between the apartheid regime and the African National Congress. This is a response which fundamentally misunderstands recent developments in South Africa. Savage repression and diplomatic negotiations are not contradictory alternatives; they are two aspects of the same process which the

Pretoria regime has initiated in an attempt to restore stable capitalist rule in South Africa.

Two events separated by only a few days symbolise current trends in southern Africa—the first in Namibia, the second in Sebokeng. Last week the leaders of the Western world, the Soviet Union and the ANC met at Windhoek to celebrate the independence of Namibia. This event was itself the culmination of months of delicate superpower talks—and the mass extermination of Swapo guerrillas as they emerged from the bush. The Namibia settlement is now a model for South Africa.

US secretary of state James Baker, British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd and senior Soviet leader Eduard Shevardnadze all exchanged fraternal greetings, congratulating themselves on their achievements. Behind the scenes they carried on the process of pressing Nelson Mandela and South African premier FW De Klerk into talks on the future of South Africa.

This week in Sebokeng police opened fire on a protest march about rents, killing eight and wounding hundreds. The events in Sebokeng were only the most dramatic incident in a wave of political violence now sweeping South Africa as police crack down on black protests and the carefully cultivated divisions within the black community erupt into inter-communal strife.

The link between the diplomacy of Windhoek and the terror of Sebokeng is that the latter is the condition for the success of the former. The success of the post-colonial solution planned for South Africa by its own government and its Western backers, with the complicity of the Soviet Union, depends on the fragmentation and repression of the black masses. As talks between Mandela, De Klerk and others get underway shortly, we can expect more, not less, terror in the townships.

Last weekend the Revolutionary Communist Party carried its warnings about the dangers of diplomacy in South Africa to the Anti-Apartheid Movement demonstrations in London and Glasgow. Supporters sold more than 1000 copies of Jenny Graham's new pamphlet *The End of Apartheid: South Africa in the 1990s*. The message of this pamphlet, that the real purpose of the current reform programme is to crush the liberation movement, is one we need to carry to a wider audience, in Britain and overseas.

## POLICING THE UNIONS

DENNIS SKINNER and Eric Heffer celebrated this week's victory of the left in the elections to the national executive of the Transport and General Workers Union as a setback for the government's anti-trade union legislation. But Ron Todd, the left-wing general secretary of the TGWU, had already gone much further than the Tories—he had invited the police to investigate allegations of ballot rigging in the elections.

The appearance of thousands of consecutively numbered ballot forms, all from Merseyside, all filled in with the same cross, at the close of voting last February was suspicious. It was so suspicious that it looked more like a crude right-wing scheme to discredit the left than an incompetent left initiative. In the event it backfired and the left emerged from the re-run postal ballot in an even stronger position than it was previously. The result was certainly a setback to Neil Kinnock's attempts to push the unions into an even more subordinate relationship to his public relations managers.

But Todd's invitation to the police to investigate the whole issue was a grotesque surrender of the independence of the labour movement to the forces of the state. At a time when numerous police officers are still facing charges over their brutal assaults on the Wapping picket lines, the leader of Britain's biggest union invites Scotland Yard's serious crimes squad to interfere in the internal affairs of the union!

If the left in the TGWU is serious about keeping the state, in the form of anti-union legislation, out of the unions, then it should make a start by keeping the police out of its offices. If the labour movement considers its internal affairs need to be investigated it should set up its own tribunals, not invite the uniformed representatives of the employers to interfere even further in our business.

## CAN LABOUR WIN?

SYLVIA HEAL's victory in the Mid-Staffordshire by-election has convinced many people that Labour is now capable of winning the next general election. In turning a 14 000 Tory majority into a Labour lead of more than 9000, Heal produced Labour's best by-election result for more than 50 years.

Labour's victory was the result of the defection of a key section of the electorate from the Tories. For the first time in a decade Labour has shown that it can win back the votes of skilled and white-collar workers outside the North and Scotland. Yet the swing to Labour takes place at a time when there is no general shift to the left in British politics. Indeed, as a result of events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, anti-socialist ideas are rampant and the left is in a weaker position than at any time this century.

The transformation of the party wrought by Neil Kinnock over the past seven years appears finally to be bringing results (see pages 4 and 5). By moving away from the unions, rebuilding Labour's organisational structure and adopting Thatcherite policies, Kinnock has created an electable force. But in the process he has abandoned the distinct identity that has given the Labour Party its role in British politics in the twentieth century.

The fact that Labour is once more electable does not necessarily mean that it will win the next election. Having abandoned its traditional function of con-

Publisher Revolutionary Communist Party, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX • c copyright  
Printer Press Link International (UK) Ltd (TU)  
Annual subscription rates (individuals) • Britain and Northern Ireland £26 • Europe and Irish Republic £34 • North Africa and Middle East (airmail) £34 • Americas, Asia, Central and Southern Africa (airmail) £37 • Australasia and Japan (airmail) £40 • Outside Europe—All destinations (surface mail) £44.  
Circulation (01) 375 1485. Newsdesk (01) 375 1485.  
Fax (01) 377 0346. Correspondence to The Editor, the next step, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX  
ISSN 014 350 X 30 March 1990. Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.

## THATCHER UNDER MOUNTING PRESSURE

# CAN THE TORIES SAVE THE DAY?

The government's economic problems have created its political crisis, argues **Tony Kennedy**

**T**he refusal by Michael Heseltine to back the government line on the poll tax has increased the temperature in the Tory leadership tussle. Whether Heseltine, or some other top Tory, will replace Margaret Thatcher remains to be seen. But whoever is at the helm, the government's prospects of reviving the economy before the next election appear bleak.

A number of factors have helped create the Tories' current political crisis. High interest rates have alienated many of the Tories' natural supporters (see below). The government's blunt rejection of public sector pay grievances—such as with the nurses, railworkers and ambulance crews—gave credence to the view that the Tories had gone too far and were not playing fair. The introduction of the poll tax has provided a focus for the simmering dissent to blow up into a major problem of government authority.

All these developments have taken place against the background of an economy moving into recession. The result has been growing insecurity among British capitalists and growing criticism of the government from within the ranks of the establishment itself.

### Unfamiliar position

This has been significant in lending the wider expressions of dissent a certain legitimacy, and thus putting the Tories under more direct pressure. An obvious symptom of this has been the growing divisions within the Conservative Party itself, in parliament and in local government. Another has been the failure of Thatcher's tried and tested device of labelling any opposition as left-wing inspired—witness the failure of the government's attempt to blame extremists for the furore over the poll tax.

The broadening of dissent to erstwhile supporters of Thatcherite policies explains why the government is in such turmoil. At the same time the Tories have no immediate solution to present political problems. In contrast to the past they cannot pin the blame for the prevailing economic and social ills on someone else. Despite the best efforts of party propagandists to whip up the Militant bogey, there is no focus to compare with Arthur Scargill and the miners or Ken Livingstone and the 'loony left' councils. In the mid-eighties such targets provided a useful enemy against which to consolidate middle class support for the government.

**The Tories are in the unfamiliar position of being held responsible by a broad section of opinion for the emerging crisis.**

Tory ministers are placing a lot of hope on an economic revival based on an export boom. They hope that falling consumption at home will create

industrial slack which can be absorbed through rising exports. The government points to an 11 per cent increase in the volume of exports over the past year as showing the potential to realise this objective.

However, even if the Tories managed to achieve such an improvement, it is unlikely to ease their problems. It would have relatively little impact in reducing the trade deficit, without which the Tories could not alleviate the international speculation against the pound. A weaker pound would in turn put more pressure on interest rates.

Over the last year the value of the pound against the other major currencies has fallen by 10 per cent. Hence even an 11 per cent increase in exports would barely keep foreign currency earnings constant. At the same time the decline of the pound also puts up Britain's import bill and hence increases inflationary pressures at home.

### Dirty campaign

The difficulty faced in reducing the trade deficit in conditions of a declining currency is not itself the fundamental economic problem facing British capitalism. However, it is enough of a problem to provoke further bouts of international speculation against the pound. This likelihood is compounded by the fact that there is a strong international trend towards higher interest rates, largely as a result of economic uncertainties arising out of German reunification and inflationary pressures in Japan. Rising international interest rates are also likely to depress economic activity worldwide and thereby limit Britain's ability to expand exports.

The chancellor has made it clear that there is little possibility of reducing interest rates before the end of 1990. He might as well have admitted that the more likely prospect is for further increases in interest rates before the end of the year. British industry is already creaking under a mountain of debt. At the same time sales revenues are falling rapidly as the economy slows.

**Another increase in interest rates is likely to send the economy into a major recession.**

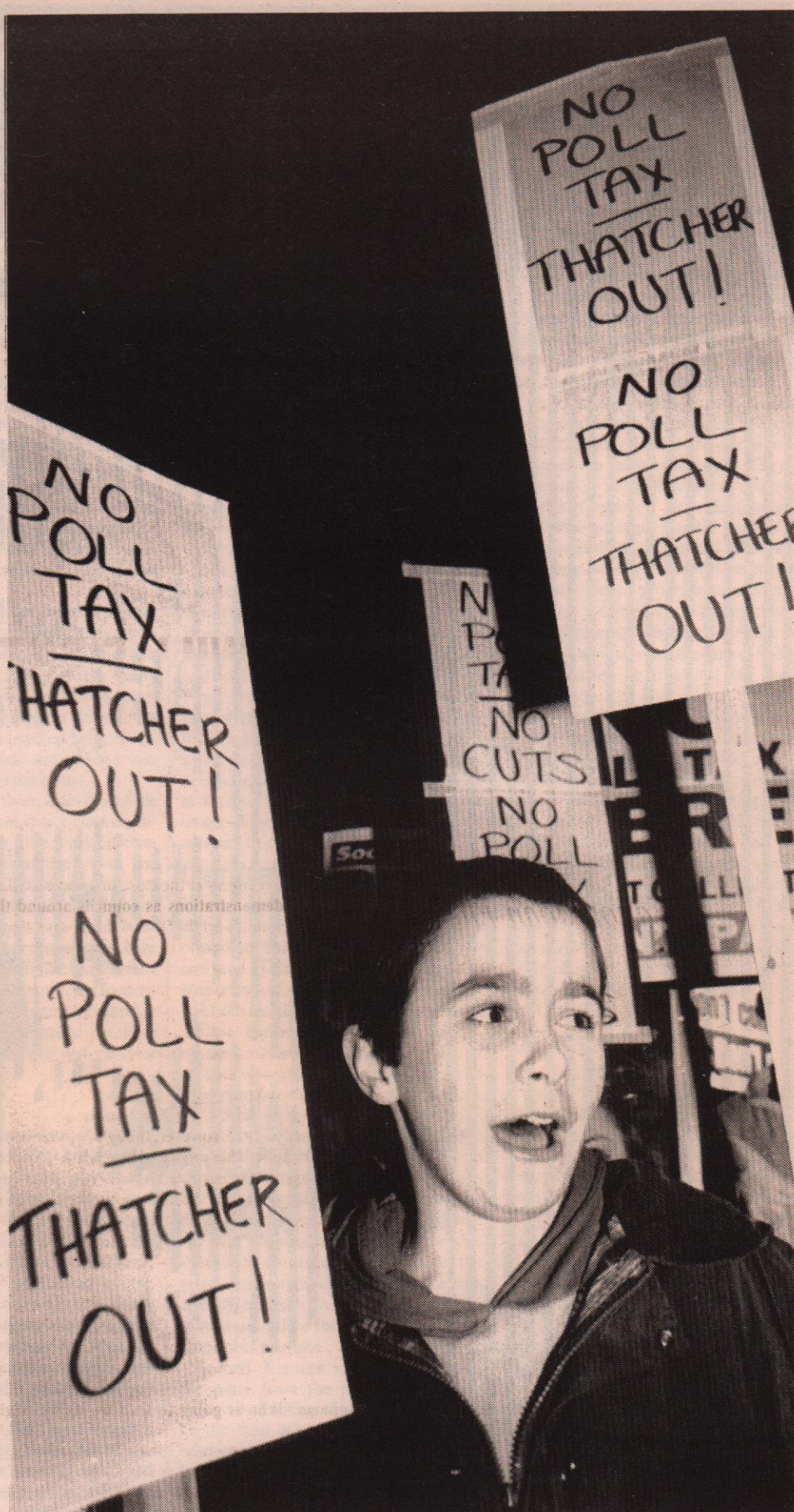
Fortunately for the Tories their chances of winning the next election do not entirely depend on the prospects for the British economy. But the further the economy deteriorates the more they will have to fall back on their political strengths—racism, chauvinism, sexism, militarism and every other reactionary prejudice that has contributed to their past successes. The deepening crisis of British capitalism promises to make the next election the dirtiest ever.

Major could hardly have chosen more inappropriate examples to support his case. Last year may have been a record for foreign investment; it was also a year when British industry—which had barely crawled back to the investment levels of the late seventies—started curtailing investment plans as the economic outlook turned bleaker. The buoyancy of direct investments from abroad simply showed that foreign capitalists tend to be more resilient than their British counterparts when confronted with worsening economic conditions.

### Domestic failure

The improvement in Britain's colour television trade balance is an even bigger indictment of British industry. In 1979 when the Tories set out on their crusade to save British capitalism from ruin little did they envisage that they would be paying tribute a decade later to the likes of Sony and National Panasonic (televisions) or Nissan, Toyota and Honda (cars) for their contribution to the nation's export performance. The Tories' benign attitude towards the many companies from over there doing rather well over here simply exposes the fact that there are no domestic success stories for the government to crow about.

Major outlined an objective of getting inflation



The poll tax has been the focus for wide sections of society to express their dissent

## TORIES PREPARE FOR RECESSION

# A BUDGET FOR DECLINE

**C**hancellor John Major used his first Budget speech last week to mount a rearguard defence of the government's economic policy. But with prices and interest rates rising and the pound continuing to fall, he had great difficulty in maintaining a semblance of continuity or coherence in the government's approach.

Major repeatedly reminded the nation that the battle against inflation continues to be the number one priority. Yet the content of the Budget illustrated a notable softening of Tory will. Traditional Thatcherite dogma appears to have given way to old-fashioned British pragmatism and a desire simply to muddle through present difficulties.

### Foreign resilience

Undaunted by falling output and an inflation rate heading towards double figures Major boasted about 'the permanent improvements in the underlying economy'. He cited as proof the 'record level of foreign direct investment into Britain' last year. He went on to point out that the surge in foreign investment means that Britain already has a trade surplus in colour televisions and by the mid-1990s there will be a dramatic improvement in the trade balance on cars.

down to five per cent by the summer of 1991. Many exasperated commentators noted that a year ago the government set an objective of 4.6 per cent inflation by this summer. With the figure likely to be nearer 10 per cent most saw the budget as a serious setback for the government.

City experts and newspaper leader writers have even less faith in the Tories' ability to achieve their latest economic targets. One influential commentator noted that there are two possible ways to achieve the targets: either a short but extremely sharp recession or a shallow and long one. Major had chosen neither; the chancellor's budget forecast could only mean that 'the priority given to defeating inflation has already been abandoned' (*Sunday Times*, 25 March).

### Soft on inflation

Despite his verbal commitment to a strong pound, Major has refrained from following his predecessor, Nigel Lawson, in pushing up interest rates at the first sign of pressure on the pound. He has been much more willing to let the pound fall against the other major currencies. Since this will put up prices of imports and hence add to inflationary pressures in Britain, most commentators see Major as adopting a softer line on inflation.

The Tories' unwillingness to follow through their stated policy objectives is the result of past failures to bring inflation under control. Around mid-1988 the government recognised that Lawson's credit-fuelled boom, which had won Thatcher a third term in office, had reached its limits. Inflation showed signs of resurgence. At the same time, the current account on

the balance of payments started to record billion pound-plus deficits with alarming regularity.

In June of that year Lawson raised interest rates on four occasions in an attempt to bring down inflation and curtail imports. The measures, however, were insufficient to halt the credit explosion. Lawson used his authority inside the government to maintain his policy of raising interest rates every time fears about inflation provoke speculation against the pound.

### Voices of dissent

Lawson's interest rate moves failed to curtail inflationary pressures. But they helped to undermine the government's claim to have created an economic miracle. Having consolidated much of their support around the promotion of a home ownership and small business ethos, the Tories were vulnerable to the effects of high interest rates on mortgage and borrowing costs. With each hike in interest rates the voices of dissent within the government's supporters grew louder.

In these circumstances Major had no option other than to produce a Budget which amounts to little more than muddling through until the next election. The most significant feature of the Budget was the absence of any clear perspective on priorities coupled with an effort to balance conflicting demands. Thus Major refused the calls from the City for a tough anti-inflation budget by, among other things, not increasing personal tax allowances in line with inflation. At the same time he attempted to go some way to meeting the calls for austerity by playing up the firm line on interest rates and introducing some minor measures to encourage increased savings.

# THE ELECTABLE

Kenan Malik assesses the implications of Labour's n

**'W**ho would sit in Kinnock's cabinet?' asked the *Independent* on Sunday last weekend. Suddenly Labour looks like a party heading for power again and such questions, which only a year ago would have seemed absurd, have assumed new importance. The turmoil in the Tory ranks, Sylvia Heal's stunning victory in

the Mid-Staffordshire by-election and Labour's commanding lead in the national opinion polls have combined to boost the credibility of Neil Kinnock's claim to be leading the next party of government.

Tory fortunes have never been lower in the 10 years that Margaret Thatcher has been in Number 10. The government has fared worse in opinion polls—notably in 1985—but never before has there been such open questioning of the prime minister's authority. At the same time the government's greatest political asset—public confidence in its ability to manage the economy—has suddenly become the Tories' biggest liability. As inflation edges upwards, interest rates reach historic levels and Britain heads towards another recession Tory claims of economic competence look increasingly insecure.

Tory discomfiture has been heightened by the confidence and sure-footedness of Labour's economic spokesmen, John Smith and Gordon Brown.

Labour's victory in Mid-Staffordshire was unprecedented. The Labour Party generally polls poorly in by-elections even when the Tories are in power. In the past Labour has failed to profit from Tory mid-term unpopularity because the protest vote has gone to the centre parties. During the 1970-74 Tory government, for example, Labour's standing in by-elections fell by an average of four per cent in comparison with the 1970 general election result; during the first Thatcher administration it slumped by no less than 11 per cent in the face of the SDP challenge. Last week's swing of 24 per cent from Conservative to Labour was thus truly historic.

Labour's consistent lead in the national opinion polls is also unparalleled. Last

## AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS

# HAWKE GETS

**B**ob Hawke, the longstanding Australian prime minister, has often been referred to as an antipodean Thatcher. In fact, despite his blunt style and hard-hitting approach, Hawke, leader of the Australian Labor Party, bears more comparison to Neil Kinnock. Last week's Australian elections revealed the problems Kinnock will face in pursuing his strategy for reviving Labour (see above)—and the dangers that such a strategy holds for the working class.

On a walkabout in an Adelaide shopping centre, Hawke was approached by an old man who complained that inflation was eating into his pension. Hawke rolled his eyes and turned away growling 'Go away, you silly old bugger'. The press gets the same treatment: 'Ah, have a funny one, sonny', he barked at an interviewer who probed too closely into the workings of his government's economic strategy. 'You asked the wrong questions on the wrong issues. You should *learn*', he snapped at another who had the temerity to quiz him about his friend Rupert Murdoch's dominance of the Australian press.

Hawke's legendary abrasiveness is matched only by his capacity to burst into tears at politically expedient moments. He cried over his drinking habits (before his first election), his daughter's heroin

# TORIES

## new-found popularity

Sunday, the *Independent*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Correspondent* and the *Observer* published opinion poll results which put Labour ahead by 19, 23, 27 and 28 per cent respectively. No comparable lead has been recorded in 40 years of polling.

What does the transformation in Labour fortunes mean for British politics, and for the working class? The Labour Party has become electable again. But the price it has had to pay to regain its electoral credibility is that it has had to ditch its distinct identity as the party of *Labourism*. Over the past seven years Kinnock has rebuilt Labour, abandoning its traditional role and policies and creating in its place a European-style social democratic party aspiring to occupy the centre ground of politics. In the process he has transformed the relationships between the Labour Party and British capitalism on the one hand and between Labour and the working class on the other.

The Labour Party developed its distinct identity through its role as intermediary between the British establishment and the working class. Though the Labour Party has long relied on workers' votes it has never been a mass working class organisation, relying instead on the unions to maintain links with its grass roots. The party itself has always been based in the layer of trade union officials and labour bureaucrats who act as negotiators between workers and employers in the workplace and more broadly in relations between the state and the labour movement. The labour bureaucracy, headed by the TUC and the Labour Party, has allowed the establishment to manage class relations in Britain in a relatively untroubled fashion.

During the post-war years of economic expansion and political stability the labour bureaucracy moved closer and closer to the establishment and further and further away from the working class. However, the Labour Party's role in mediating, and containing, class conflict meant that it still had to be responsive to working class pressure. The three occasions in the post-war period when Labour replaced a Tory

government—1945, 1964 and 1974—were all periods of radicalisation within the working class.

The relationship between the old-style Labour Party and the working class was particularly evident in 1974. A wave of industrial militancy, culminating in the miners' strike and the three-day week, helped bring down Edward Heath's Conservative government. The Labour Party swept back to power. The left's Alternative Economic Strategy became codified in the Labour Party programme. Within two years, however, the government had introduced the social contract which held down wages and savaged living standards. Chancellor Denis Healey implemented the first monetarist budget as part of an International Monetary Fund austerity programme. The effect of the 1974-79 Labour government was to contain working class militancy and to pave the way for Thatcherism.

**In the eighties, the changing needs of the British establishment and the growing disillusionment of the working class made old-style Labourism redundant.**

The ruling class was forced to ditch consensual policies for more direct forms of class domination. Workers became disenchanted with the failure of Labourism to protect their interests, particularly at the time of a renewed capitalist offensive. The labour bureaucracy's role in mediating class conflict became irrelevant. The result was humiliation at the polls in three successive elections for the Labour Party (for a detailed analysis of this process see M. Freeman, 'The decline and fall of British Labourism', *Confrontation* 4, Summer 1988).

### Distanced

Kinnock became Labour leader in 1983, after Michael Foot had led the party to its worst electoral defeat for more than 60 years. His advisers recognised that Labourism was no longer relevant to the needs either of the working class or of the British establishment. If the Labour Party was to survive then it would have to ditch its past and find a new role in British politics. As the academic and close Kinnock ally Geoffrey Hodgson put it:

'If Labour is to regain power in the eighties it must find a method of both maintaining union support and solving the problems of the British economy. Nothing short of a radical transformation of power relations within the entire labour movement will be enough.' (*Labour at the Crossroads*, 1981, p122).

Kinnock was compelled to ditch *Labourism* to save the *Labour Party*. But

in the process he fundamentally changed the relationship between the Labour Party and the working class. In order to gain electoral credibility by making Labour relevant to the needs of the capitalists, Kinnock has distanced the party even further from its traditional constituency. It is in this context that we have to look at Labour's recent ascendancy in the polls. The Labour Party that now hopes to form a government under Kinnock is a very different party from that of Harold Wilson in 1964 or 1974.

Under Kinnock's leadership the Labour Party has been rebuilt in three fundamental ways. First, Kinnock has marginalised both left and right within the party. The left has been liquidated as an effective force inside the party, while the combination of trade union bureaucrats and upper class intellectuals which has traditionally run the party has been replaced by a coterie of professional careerists and media managers. Second, Kinnock has reconstructed the party organisationally. Finally, he has overhauled Labour's policies. Let us look at these three areas in turn.

The relationship between the two wings in the Labour Party was historically determined by Labour's role in mediating class conflict. The right wing of the party provided the link with the British state; the left assured the support of militant workers. Despite the tensions between left and right both played well-defined and essential roles within the party.

Today, however, those roles have little meaning. In an era of direct class domination when there is little working class pressure on the bureaucracy both the traditional right and the reformist left are irrelevant. Kinnock therefore set about realigning the forces within the labour movement and creating a new social base for the party. The 'soft left', organised around the Tribune group in parliament and the Labour Coordinating Committee in the constituencies, became the base from which Kinnock launched the new model Labour Party.

### Crusade

Once Tribune was the radical conscience within the Labour Party, led by such formidable left-wing figures as Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot. Today it is a finishing school for the new party establishment. 'The primary achievement of the first period of Kinnock's leadership', notes a new study of Labour in the Thatcher years, 'was to weld that newly emergent soft-left grouping into an alliance with the right that isolated the hard left and forged a new centrist unity in the party' (C. Hughes and P. Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, 1990, p9).

The key figures in this transformation were David Blunkett, Tom Sawyer and Michael Meacher. In the early eighties all were prominent activists on the left of the party. Blunkett was leader of Sheffield city council and, together with Ken Livingstone, a pioneer of municipal socialism eighties-style. Sawyer was deputy general secretary of Nupe, and a prominent supporter of Tony Benn. Meacher was a member of the Campaign Group of MPs and the left's candidate for deputy leader in 1983.

By the mid-eighties all three had recognised the irrelevance of the old-style left and became an important part of Kinnock's campaign to remould the Labour Party. The unity between the soft left and the right became sealed in the crusade against Militant. Kinnock's denunciation of Militant from the platform at Labour's 1985 conference, the party's investigation into the running of Militant-controlled Liverpool city council and the subsequent witch-hunt of Militant supporters set the tone for the Kinnock style of leadership. The Labour leader, note Hughes and Wintour, 'calculated that its [Militant's] defeat would display to voters his determination to take a grip on the party machine'.

Throughout the eighties, whenever Kinnock has felt the need to assert his authority he has done so by launching an attack on the left.

The extent of Kinnock's success in isolating the left was revealed in 1988 when Tony Benn and Eric Heffer decided to challenge Kinnock and Hattersley in a leadership contest. The leadership battle split the Campaign Group with Clare Short, Jo Richardson, Joan Ruddock

and Margaret Beckett resigning in protest.

Benn won less than 12 per cent of the votes in the election. Just 38 out of the 221 Labour MPs voted for him. Benn's humiliation was greatest in the constituencies, traditionally the bedrock of the left. Benn took just 18.8 per cent of the constituency vote. Heffer earned the nickname '007'—the amount of votes he picked up from the trade unions. When Ken Livingstone was voted off the NEC last year, the left's drubbing was made complete.

The marginalisation of the Labour left has been well recorded. What is less well recognised is the way that the traditional right has also been squeezed out of the Labour Party. The Solidarity group of MPs, once the bastion of the Labour establishment, has been reduced to a rump and has barely more members than the Campaign Group. For a decade no longer an alternative party of government, Labour has lost that layer of Oxbridge upper class intellectuals which once inspired the confidence of the treasury, the foreign office and the City of London.

The party is now run by a new generation of bureaucrats and managers—people like shadow ministers Bryan Gould, Tony Blair and John Smith, publicity director and prospective MP Peter Mandelson and political advisers like Charles Clarke. Few of these figures have any links with the working class. They have made their mark in student politics (Blair and Clarke); at the bar (Smith); in television (Gould); or in advertising (Mandelson). This coterie of faceless technocrats fits perfectly the image of the new Labour Party Kinnock is trying to construct.

### Centralised

Having created a new party establishment, Kinnock set about building a new organisational structure for Labour. The aim was to free the leadership from the constraints of grassroots pressure and to give Kinnock total control over policy-making.

First, Kinnock centralised the policy-making machinery. The old system of executive policy committees was replaced by joint policy teams, which gave Kinnock greater flexibility over policy implementation. He took responsibility for campaigns away from Walworth Road's organisation department and created a new communications and campaigns directorate, which eventually became Mandelson's personal fiefdom. Introduction of one member one vote in the constituencies will reduce the power of activists. And Kinnock has already begun to reorganise conference procedure to free the party further from grassroots pressure.

Second, Kinnock set about distancing the party from the trade unions. The expected abolition of the block vote will be the final acknowledgement that the relationship between the trade union bureaucracy and the Labour Party established at the founding of the Labour Representation Committee is being terminated.

Finally, Kinnock has rewritten the party rulebook to insulate the leadership from grassroots dissent. He responded to the 1988 leadership challenge by raising the threshold of support needed before a candidate could run in the future. Walworth Road now vets all candidates shortlisted for by-elections. Kinnock's insistence on an inquiry into the affairs of the Birkenhead constituency party after the right-wing sitting MP Frank Field was deselected in favour of a left-wing candidate shows the lengths to which the leadership will now go to impose its will on every aspect of party affairs.

**The organisational structure which Kinnock has created is necessary for a party that is responsive, not to working class pressure, but solely to the needs of the capitalist system.**

The main source of power in the new model Labour Party rests not with conference or even the national executive committee, but with ad-hoc groups which Kinnock himself has created and which are accountable only to him. Two in particular are of paramount importance—the shadow communications agency (SCA) and the contact group.

Kinnock and Mandelson created the SCA in 1986. It brings together advertising copywriters, PR consultants, pollsters and Kinnock's political staff. Its aim, according to the document which set it up, is to 'draft strategy, conduct and interpret research, produce advertising and campaign themes

and provide other communications support as necessary'. It is one of the most influential policy-making bodies in the Labour Party—but it is doubtful if most members even know of its existence.

The contact group is an even more shadowy organisation. Its membership consists of trusted trade union bureaucrats, such as John Edmonds, Bill Jordan and Brenda Dean and selected party leaders, like Kinnock, Hattersley and Gould. Its function is to bypass the formal TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee, and to thrash out policies that could otherwise prove controversial. In today's Labour Party even formal notions of democracy have been ditched in favour of ensuring that the right policies are adopted.

The final part of Kinnock's restructuring process came with the ditching of the old Labourist policies and the adoption of a Thatcherite market philosophy. The endorsement of the policy review document *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* at the 1989 conference marked not just the abandonment of the radical Alternative Economic Strategy that had formed the heart of Labour's programme in the early seventies. It signalled too the rejection of the moderate state socialism of Attlee and Morrison which formed the basis of Labour Party policy throughout the post-war period.

*Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* was the product of two years of deliberation in seven policy review groups set up after the 1987 general election defeat. From the start Kinnock set out to create policies suitable for the new-style party. He personally selected the members and convenors of each group. In case this was not sufficient to produce the result he desired, Kinnock also assigned a member of staff from his office to each group to ensure they stayed on track. And as a final check Kinnock's press secretary Patricia Hewitt rewrote the final versions of all the draft reports.

### U-turn

The final reports on defence and the economy illustrate how far Labour has gone in its quest to abandon its past. Defence had always been Labour's Achilles' heel. The policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament had become an article of faith for the Labour left. But Kinnock recognised that so long as Labour was vulnerable to Tory accusations of a lack of patriotism, the party stood no chance of gaining electoral credibility. The abandonment of unilateralism at last year's party conference showed the extent to which Kinnock had won the argument for change.

Labour's U-turn on economic policy was even more dramatic. Support for nationalisation and public welfare has been at the heart of Labour's policy virtually since inception. The espousal of what shadow chancellor John Smith calls 'supply-side socialism'—the Thatcherite belief in the market as the most efficient form of economic regulator—indicated the Labour Party's final abandonment of its Labourist heritage.

The crisis in the Tory Party has provided Labour with a perfect opportunity to capitalise on its new image. John Smith has been assiduously attending City business lunches to present Labour's argument that it could now run the economy better than the Tories. Trade and industry spokesman Gordon Brown has been scouring the Continent for tips about new technology to share with British capitalists. Kinnock must have hoped that British bosses found reassuring his support for John Major's budget last week.

The Labour Party may well be electable again. But Labourism is a spent force. If Kinnock's new model Labour Party does win the next election it will be because it is the more electable of the two Tory parties on offer. However, the fact that Labour can no longer play its traditional mediating role means that it has limited political use for the establishment.

**Despite his party's new-found popularity in the opinion polls, it is still far from certain that Kinnock will be the next prime minister.**

For the working class Labour's explicit renunciation of its Labourist past can only be of benefit. Labour's transformation into an openly pro-capitalist party will help clarify the interests of the working class and pave the way for creating a real alternative.

# HIS WINGS CLIPPED

addiction (before the second) and his marital infidelities (before the third). This week, after a relatively sob-free campaign, the Labor Party was hoping for its fourth successive victory.

So far, the results are unclear, but it looks likely that Labor will scrape a narrow victory over the conservative Liberal Party. But the sudden ascendancy of the Liberals suggests that, as the economy heads towards a slump, Hawke's brand of right-wing Labourism has reached the end of its usefulness for the Australian establishment.

### Sneered

When the Labor Party came to power in 1983, Hawke set about 'modernising' the Australian economy. The Labor government deregulated the banks and financial markets to attract foreign investment and loans. It cobbled together a strategy for neutralising the trade union movement and driving down working class living standards.

The government and the ACTU, the Australian TUC, collaborated to impose a rigid wages policy known as the Accord, which pegged wage rises to inflation. In fact the Accord has driven real wages down by 10 per cent since its introduction.

The Hawke government and the ACTU have rigorously policed the Accord. ACTU

heavies assaulted shop stewards from the tiny Food Preservers Union after a strike in the canneries. Labor Party officials threatened striking gas rig workers with \$10 000 fines, and disbanded the militant Builders Labourers Federation after framing its leaders on corruption charges.

The Australian Federation of Airline Pilots has been the latest victim of Labor's anti-union assault. Last June, domestic pilots demanded a 30 per cent wage rise to compensate for wage cuts and inflation. Hawke went on the offensive, urging the airline companies to sue the union. 'They're only glorified bus-drivers', he sneered, 'I learnt to fly myself in seven hours. There's nothing to it'. After an eight-month dispute, the pilots were finally forced to back down when the Victoria supreme court took Hawke's advice and imposed a \$1.6m fine.

Hawke's attacks on living standards have not resuscitated the Australian economy. Interest rates are a phenomenal 19 per cent; the foreign debt is huge; unemployment and inflation are rising fast. The Australian establishment is calling for more drastic shake-outs in the economy. The only effect of Hawke's strategy has been to pave the way for Andrew Peacock's right-wing Liberal Party coalition which offers an even more ruthless alternative. *Kirsten Cale*

## THE LITHUANIAN CRISIS

# GORBACHEV RATTLES HIS SABRE

The military intervention in Lithuania reveals Moscow's increasing fears about the break-up of the Soviet Union, argues Rob Knight



The Lithuanian campaign for independence has made more difficult Gorbachev's strategy for reform

**T**he determination of nationalist president Vytautas Landsbergis to lead Lithuania to full independence from the Soviet Union is a threat Mikhail Gorbachev can neither accept nor ignore. The events in Lithuania illustrate the accelerating crisis of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

Lithuania's vote to secede from the Soviet Union has come at a bad time for Gorbachev. Following his election as president, Gorbachev is planning to push through a radical programme of reforms designed to open up the Soviet economy to the market. Continuing economic stagnation and shortages of basic consumer goods have forced the Soviet leadership to press ahead with long-delayed market reforms.

The crisis in Lithuania is likely to make it more difficult for the Kremlin to legalise land ownership, introduce a more competitive pricing system and set up financial institutions.

Gorbachev has been encouraged by the progress of similar reforms in Eastern Europe. The old bureaucracies are still in place in Hungary and Poland despite the extension of market forces and the dissolution of the Communist parties. The old bureaucrats are represented in the new governments and the old Stalinist state machinery—the civil service, the armed forces and the police—is still intact. Many former Stalinist managers are simply privatising themselves and re-emerging as capitalist owners of factories and farms.

But there is an important distinction between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself. In Eastern Europe the remaining barriers to the full implementation of the market are largely external; they result from the reluctance of Western capitalists to invest in these backward and unstable societies. Given its huge size and the decay of its basic economic infrastructure, in the Soviet Union these problems are

even more acute. But an additional obstacle to the market arises from the fact that any major change in the way the economy is run threatens the integrity of the Soviet Union as a whole.

Lithuania illustrates this problem. Lithuania and the other Baltic states have been at the forefront of the drive to break away from Moscow because they have developed a closer relationship to the capitalist world than any other part of the Soviet Union. They want greater control over their own resources so that they can develop rapidly into fully fledged Western-style economies. Gorbachev is prepared to tolerate greater autonomy for the Baltic states, but he wants to retain them within the Soviet Union. Up to now the nationalist movements in the Baltic states have also been reluctant to push their demands for independence as far as secession, because they too benefit from their links with the Soviet Union.

The problem that has emerged in Lithuania is that the new government has been carried along on an upsurge of nationalist sentiment into open defiance of the Soviet leadership. Though prominent members of the government have counselled caution, Lithuanian conscripts have been deserting the Soviet army and a nationalist militia has started to enrol recruits. Gorbachev is now faced with a real danger of secession and the first breach in the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union since the Second World War.

### Gorbachev's dilemma

A Lithuanian breakaway would encourage other national republics to follow and undermine the authority of the Soviet leadership. It would also galvanise the growing forces of Russian nationalism within the Soviet Union, forces which are anti-Western, anti-market and hostile to the Gorbachev reforms.

Gorbachev is in a perilous position. If he allows

Lithuania to secede his presidential authority will be weakened and his reform programme put in jeopardy. If he resorts to force to suppress the nationalist movement he will lose Western sympathy and support and all the benefits of glasnost.

Gorbachev fervently hopes that a little sabre-rattling will encourage the Lithuanian leaders to compromise and avoid the need for a military clampdown.

The Lithuanian crisis is a product of the crisis of Stalinism. The local Stalinist bureaucracy first fostered Lithuanian nationalism as a means of winning local popularity. Now the bureaucrats' survival strategy has caused a major conflict which threatens serious clashes within the bureaucracy itself. As the momentum of market forces increases all existing relations within the Soviet Union will be put into question. As the cohesion of Soviet society weakens further, more such conflicts are inevitable.

The most obvious danger of growing national conflict in the Soviet Union is the way in which it pits worker against worker. In Lithuania, indigenous workers are siding with the nationalist government while immigrant workers from Russia are looking to Moscow to uphold their interests. Given the national and ethnic complexity of the Soviet Union, its break-up could lead to scores of similar conflicts. The savage intercommunal strife between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania is only the latest illustration of what could happen across the Soviet Union.

Marxists oppose the break-up of the Soviet Union because of its consequences for the working class. The only solution to the national problem is a federation of self-governing states with equal rights. To achieve this requires the overthrow of the rule of bureaucrats who want to maintain their rule by encouraging conflict between different ethnic and national groups.

## ELECTIONS IN EASTERN EUROPE

# VOTING FOR CAPITALISM

After 40 years of 'communism', Eastern Europe is voting for a return to capitalism

After the first open elections of 1990 in Eastern Europe, in the GDR and in Hungary, a number of themes are already apparent.

### 1. Victory for the right

In the GDR the conservative Alliance for Germany, backed by chancellor Kohl's Christian Democratic Party in the West, won a resounding victory with 48 per cent of the vote. This vote revealed overwhelming support for the rapid reunification of the backward Stalinist GDR with the prosperous capitalist Federal Republic. It was significant that the conservative coalition registered its largest majorities in the big working class cities in the south, such as Leipzig and Dresden.

Though in Hungary the votes of the right were divided, the three largest parties—the Democratic Forum, the Free Democrats and the Independent Smallholders—differed only in the degree of their enthusiasm for the market and the intensity of their hostility to the Soviet system. Throughout Eastern Europe the unmistakable message of the polls is the popular desire to embrace Western capitalism and Western living standards as rapidly as possible.

### 2. Humiliation for the Stalinists

Changes in the names of the Stalinist parties in both the GDR and Hungary could not save them from humiliation at the hands of the electorate. After more than 40 years in power, the Communist party in the GDR could muster only 16 per cent of the vote. The party that has long claimed the allegiance of the proletariat found its strongest support among the middle classes of Berlin and the farming communities of the north.

In Hungary early returns suggested that the re-named Communist party could only retain around 10 per cent of the vote. Extravagant displays of traditional Hungarian culture during the election campaign evidently failed to compensate for the grim record of Stalinism.

### 3. Rejection of the middle ground

East European electors have been unkind to attempts to forge a middle way between Eastern Stalinism and Western capitalism. Social democrats and other radical reformers have been rejected in favour of the genuine pro-capitalist article. In the GDR, the Social Democrats, heavily supported by their colleagues in the West, were widely tipped to win the election at the outset of the campaign. In the final contest they slumped to 22 per cent. The radical Alliance 90, incorporating the New Forum movement that led the opposition to the old Honecker regime up to its collapse in autumn 1989, polled less than three per cent of the vote.

In Hungary, the reforming communist Imre Pozsgay, who personally sponsored the opposition movement in 1988 and 1989, himself lost his seat in last week's election. Radical and social-democratic forces among the plethora of new parties fared badly in the contest against an ascendant right. When given a choice, voters in Eastern Europe are voting resolutely against any movement or individual compromised with the old Stalinist order.

As elections continue through Eastern Europe in the months to come we can anticipate a growing disillusionment among voters. Though people may vote against the Stalinist parties, the Stalinist systems remain largely intact. Though they vote for Western prosperity, they are likely to experience Western unemployment and inflation—as well as traditional Eastern queues and shortages. The demise of Stalinism will inevitably strengthen reaction in the short term. The long-term future of Eastern Europe depends on the emergence of new political forces among workers whose experience of Stalinism is currently driving them into voting for a return to capitalism.

## Party focus

LIVING MARXISM CONFERENCE

# THE REVOLUTIONARY NINETIES

**M**ore than 1000 people attended the 'Revolutionary 90s' weekend conference sponsored by *Living Marxism*. The conference provided a focus for discussion and debate about the break-up of the old world order and what the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and elsewhere mean for Marxists.

The wide range of speakers from Britain and abroad included Adam Novak from the Left Alternative in Czechoslovakia and Hillel Ticktin, editor of the journal *Critique*. The workshops, which ranged from Does Stalinism still exist? to Gorbachev, Mandela and the struggle against apartheid, provoked lively debates and helped clarify many of the issues that Marxists face today.

Opening the conference, Frank Richards argued that the shake-up of international relations has only just begun. While the upheavals in Eastern Europe have attracted most attention, even greater changes are taking place in the West. The unfreezing of history has brought to the surface once more the struggle for dominance among the major imperialist powers.

Richards pointed out that the most significant changes of all are the decline of the power of the Anglo-American ruling class which has enjoyed global hegemony for over a century and the rise of Germany and Japan as the key players in the imperialist order.

In the final plenary, Mike Freeman restated the case for Marxism. The collapse of Stalinism, argued Freeman, brings to a close one cycle in working class history. Now Marxists have to start again to win the case for the revolutionary transformation of society. But conditions have never been better for the Marxist project. The capitalist class has the most to fear from the collapsing world order. The unfreezing of history has thrown into question all the old certainties and created new possibilities for building a revolutionary working class movement.

A collection for *Living Marxism's* East Europe fund, to help take the message of Marxism to East Europe and to improve the magazine's reporting of events over there raised £1500.



## LIVING MARXISM

At a time when Marxism is being pilloried from left and right alike, and is blamed for the crimes of Stalinism, April's issue of *Living Marxism* launches a counter-attack. It shows why capitalism has no future and presents the case for Marxism as the force for progress.

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# the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 30 March 1990 • No 11 • 40p

THE CULTURE OF CHAUVINISM

## RACISME SANS FRONTIERES

Kim Monks reports on the growing wave of 'Euroracism'



For most people, the city of Florence brings to mind the Uffizi gallery, Michelangelo's David and the splendours of Renaissance art. For the local black community Florence has become a city of racist terror, police harassment and apartheid regulations.

Last month 4000 people marched through Florence to protest at the number of black immigrants—largely Senegalese traders—in the city. 'Florence can't support such a large number of immigrants', claimed the mayor Giorgio Morales.

A week later, at the height of the carnival celebrations, a gang of up to 80 white thugs, many of them masked, attacked black traders in the city centre with iron bars and baseball bats. Within a week there were two more such attacks. Graffiti went up on Florentine walls: 'Jobs for the Italians—beatings for the blacks.'

The authorities responded by pinning the blame for the trouble on the city's black community. Morales claimed that immigrants were drug barons and pimps and responsible for the city's crime wave. Police chief Vittorio Parissi banned black traders from the city centre and used helicopters and riot police to enforce the decree. 'As the flame of racism is slowly extinguished in South Africa', said a spokesman for the Senegalese community, 'it is burning again in the heart of the European continent'.

The attack on the black community in Florence highlights the tide of racism sweeping across Western Europe. Amid all the talk about 1992 and a Europe without borders, black people are discovering that what already unites the EC is a culture of chauvinism.

Fifty-four Asian immigrants, dubbed by the Italian press 'the boat people of the Mediterranean' have been shunted for the past month from Italy to Greece and back again. Neither country will allow them to set foot on its soil. The Italian parliament is about

to introduce tough new immigration legislation to curb the number of black people entering the country. All political parties, including the Communists, support tighter controls. The only dissent has come from MPs who think the law is not tough enough.

In France, three black immigrants have been murdered in the past month as a climate of racist violence grips the country. In Marseilles police shot dead an elderly Algerian for allegedly trying to evade arrest. The following day in Saint-Florentin in Burgundy a white restaurateur fired randomly into a group of black youths killing Said Mhanni and paralysing his brother. Hours later in Roanne, near Lyons, a Moroccan student, Magid Labdoui, was killed after being deliberately run over. Two Frenchmen pursued him around a block of flats in a car until they crushed him to death. There have been more than 100 racist murders in the country in the past decade.

In Britain there has been an alarming rise in the number of racist attacks in east London. Asian pupils are facing a concerted campaign of racial abuse and attack. Earlier this month, hundreds of racists marched through the East End demanding 'white rights' and complaining about 'racial' attacks on whites.

The racists have the full backing of the police. For years the authorities have simply stood by as racist thugs have terrorised the



black community. Now the police have launched their own offensive, arresting any black youth who has the temerity to stand up to the racists. The latest victims of the police offensive are the Stepney Four, four young Bengalis arrested for allegedly stabbing a white youth. In reality, they are being victimised for standing up for their rights.

Workers Against Racism has launched a counter-attack against the racists, both in and out of uniform. We are organising physical defence of black families under attack and campaigning against the criminalisation of young blacks. We are taking into the local community the message that racism presents a threat to the whole working class.

WAR's upfront approach is the only way to counter the culture of chauvinism. As Euroracism takes a grip, it's a lesson that workers throughout Europe need to learn.



If you want more details about WAR, or want to get involved in our campaigns, phone (01) 375 1702 or write to WAR, BM WAR, London WC1 3XX.