

the next step

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Editor: Joan Phillips

THINGS FALL APART

AS WE go to press, it is not yet clear what is really going on in the Caucasus. The only thing that is certain is that Moscow felt it had no option but to send in the troops in order to maintain law and order. From the point of view of the bureaucracy, a decisive military intervention was necessary to preserve the credibility of the central government.

The possibility of a descent into civil war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis posed an immediate threat to the integrity of the ruling bureaucracy. Unless Moscow is seen to impose its will in the face of a direct physical challenge to its rule, the prospect of the fragmentation of the Soviet Union cannot be far away.

The crisis over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh has been simmering for a long time. In February 1988 tensions exploded in the Caspian town of Sumgait, in a pogrom which left scores of Armenians dead. Ever since, shooting and sabotage have become commonplace throughout the region and the conflict has settled into something of a routine.

As long as Moscow's lack of control over the region did not become too obvious, the bureaucracy felt able to tolerate the situation. But now that things have erupted in a way which makes manifest its powerlessness, Moscow has no choice but to launch a crackdown. Unfortunately for the bureaucracy, the problem of the national republics is not going to go away. This is just the start of a long nightmare over the national question.

THE CULT OF GORBACHEV

AS THE crisis in the Soviet Union intensifies, the gap between the cult of Gorbachev in the West and the Soviet leader's unpopularity in the East is getting bigger.

As far as the West is concerned, Mikhail Gorbachev is the first Soviet leader who can do no wrong. On all his visits to Western capitals he is mobbed by ecstatic crowds and feted as a hero of our times. Western politicians constantly sing his praises and newspaper leader writers urge their governments to give him moral support. *Time* magazine has just named Gorbachev man of the decade.

At home the Soviet leader does not enjoy the same prestige. When Gorbachev goes walk-about among his own people he is assured of a

hostile reception from angry crowds complaining about one thing or another. Soviet newspapers carry critical articles pointing out that after five years of perestroika ordinary people have precious little to show for it. In one domestic opinion poll after another, Gorbachev comes way down the list of popular politicians.

It is not difficult to account for Gorbachev's differing status East and West. For the leaders of the Western world, Gorbachev is somebody they have come to depend upon. He represents some guarantee of stability in a world that is spinning out of their control. At a time when the balance of power is being shaken up by the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe, the West desperately wants Gorbachev to survive. This explains why there has not been a murmur of opposition to the military crackdown in the Caucasus.

For the people of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev is a bureaucrat like any other. He may have gone further than any of his predecessors in attempting to reform the stagnant Soviet system. But the whole object of the exercise has been to preserve the power and privileges of the ruling bureaucracy. The economic reforms initiated by Gorbachev have brought no benefits to the working class, which is still suffering shortages and privations under perestroika. Indeed, the process of restructuring has made life even more miserable for many people. As his piecemeal reforms fail to arrest the stagnation of the economy, Gorbachev is likely to become ever more unpopular at home.

There is a tendency on the British left to underestimate the depth of popular hatred for the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Indeed, sections of the left have themselves become ardent admirers of the Soviet leader. Five years after Gorbachev came to power, there are still some on the left who believe that he is a force for progress. They consider that his reform programme can provide a model for socialist renewal in the West. The left's support for the Soviet leader only reveals its lack of an independent perspective and its abandonment of the goal of revolutionary change.

Our opinion of Gorbachev is that he is the leader of a corrupt system that has got to be overthrown by the working class. As a representative of the Stalinist bureaucracy, Gorbachev can never be a force for progress. By endorsing the idea of reform from above, the left reveals its contempt for the working class. Our view is that no genuine change can come from above and that the working class is the sole agency of social transformation and progress. Unlike the Western powers and the left, we have invested no hope in Gorbachev. Our only concern is that the working class in the Soviet Union survives to fight another day and to settle scores with the Stalinist bureaucracy (Gorbachev included).

ROMANIA: STILL WAITING FOR THE REVOLUTION

TODAY IT is clearer than ever that the events which led to the fall of the Ceausescu regime in Romania did not constitute a revolution.

Angry demonstrations by tens of thousands of people throughout the country have drawn attention to the fact that little of substance has changed. The mass revolt which spread from Timisoara to Bucharest was enough to see off the hated dictator and his immediate entourage. But the message of the recent demonstrations is that things did not go far enough: Ceausescu's former stooges still control the government, the administration, the media, the army and the security services.

All the leaders of the National Salvation Front served under Ceausescu and most of the body's 145 members were former officials in the regime. The new police force is headed by a former commander of the militia: lieutenant general Jean Moldoveanu was also a member of the special commission in charge of destroying villages and historic buildings. The new regime has retained the services of Ceausescu's network of spies and continued to maintain the secret police. Television has become a mouthpiece for the government.

So far, events in Romania have followed the same pattern as elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The most despised members of the bureaucracy have been deposed, but the Stalinist order has not been destroyed. The only difference is that in Romania ordinary people have paid a higher price for the modest changes that have taken place. As a result, they are less likely to put up with the same old bureaucrats trying to pass themselves off as reformers. It is apparent that people are incensed at the continuity between the old and the new regimes. Let's hope that they don't let them get away with it.

EAST GERMANY USES FASCIST THREAT

IN EAST Germany the beleaguered government of Hans Modrow is inflating the threat from the fascists in order to create a breathing space for the regime.

Over the past few weeks, the Stalinist-dominated government in East Berlin has issued stern warnings about the dangers posed by the growth of fascism. There have been reports of anti-Semitic slogans appearing and a number of attacks on Jews. The regime has complained about West Germany's Republican Party stirring up trouble on demonstrations in Leipzig and elsewhere. Last week, leading Stalinists joined tens of thousands of people at an anti-fascist rally in East Berlin.

Much of this is simply scaremongering by the authorities. They are stirring up fears about a return to the dark days of Weimar Germany, when economic collapse, popular anger and political malaise provided fertile ground for the rise of the far right. By exaggerating the threat from the fascists, the crisis-torn regime hopes to take the heat off itself.

While there is obviously an audience for the ideas of the extreme right, there can only be a handful of organised fascists in East Germany. The reality of the situation is that there is a popular backlash growing in the country: but it is anti-Stalinist and pro-nationalist rather than neo-Nazi. Since the demise of the Honecker regime last September, ordinary people have become increasingly impatient with the slow pace of change. Having forced the removal of Egon Krenz, the mass movement is now exerting strong pressure on Hans Modrow.

Aware that it enjoys absolutely no support among ordinary people, the Modrow regime is desperately looking for a way out. By focusing attention on the supposed threat from the far right, the government hopes to distract

attention from itself. At the same time, by arousing fears about instability, Modrow hopes to convince people that it would be a mistake to move too fast towards dismantling the old order. This strategy is unlikely to persuade people to support the present regime. Under siege from all sides, the government could go at any time.

WHAT HAPPENED TO NORIEGA?

A FEW weeks ago you could not turn on the television or pick up a newspaper without hearing or seeing the name Noriega. For the first time since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 10 years ago, the Christmas and New Year break was dominated by a major international news story. The USA had gone to war against Panama and it was big news: the countdown to the capture of Noriega became a regular item on every news bulletin.

Now you are lucky if you hear or read anything about Noriega and the invasion has been all but forgotten. At the time, the US authorities wanted to get saturation coverage for their lies about why they had to send the troops into Panama. Now that they have made a point of showing the rest of the continent who is boss, they would like everybody to forget about how many people they killed in the process.

It is important that we do not allow the imperialists to get away with burying what they did in Panama. The issue may have disappeared from the news, but US imperialism is still a menace to the people of Latin America.

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LET THE R S

ON THE COLLAPSE OF STALINISM

LIKE many of our supporters, Dave Chandler raises doubts about our views on the collapse of Stalinism (letters, 12 January). We should not deny that there are serious problems thrown up by the disintegration of the Eastern bloc. At the same time, we should be clear that the potential benefits far outweigh the disadvantages.

The destruction of Stalinism is a precondition for building a mass working class movement internationally. As we argued in the theses, Stalinism was one of the most powerful props of the world order: it has helped to maintain the status quo and to undermine the revolutionary movement.

On Dave's specific points, the growth of right-wing ideas in Eastern Europe is unlikely to take the form of Thatcherite free market individualism. Workers in Poland, for example, are in the process of being savaged by a reform

programme, implemented in the name of the market, which will boost unemployment, increase prices on staple goods and slash wages. Much more of a problem is the growth of nationalism, chauvinism and anti-Semitism.

The scenario of imperialism getting a substantial boost from the opening of Eastern Europe is fairly remote. There are a wide range of problems facing Western investment, including poor infrastructure, working class resistance and the differential ability of the Western powers to take advantage of the opportunities. The exploitation of Eastern Europe would inevitably upset the world balance of power by favouring the more dynamic imperialist powers at the expense of the others.

Unfortunately the unfolding of history is never a straightforward process. The emergence of opportunities, even the welcome news of the collapse of Stalinism, will always raise new problems.
**Daniel Nassim
Hammersmith**

LABOUR: DEAD AND KICKING

J DONOVAN asks how, despite its clapped-out ideas and lack of real roots in the working class, the Labour Party can still lead in the opinion polls (letters, 12 January). Is this a case of the RCP trying to square the circle or ignoring reality?

The thing about the Labour Party is that it is a capitalist party which relies upon working class support. Its programme has always been pragmatically adapted to the changing needs of British capitalism. Beyond this, it has never really had an ideology to speak of: once it championed the cause of state intervention, today it is all for the market.

But the Labour Party is still attempting to play the same role: managing British capitalism and reconciling the working class to the system. What has changed is that the Labour Party's influence has waned along with the demise of British capitalism. The capitalists can no longer afford the luxury of Labour's consensus politics.

That's why Labour itself has become more obviously anti-working class. This has helped Neil Kinnock to persuade the British establishment that Labour is a responsible, respectable party. It has even enabled it to make short-term gains at the expense of the Tories. By cleaning up its act, Labour has become a Tory Party mark II.

But in the long term, what future is there for a pale imitation of the real thing? If the Tories make a real mess of things, then maybe Labour might win the next election: but to all intents and purposes *Labourism* is dead.
**John Lynn
Birmingham**

FROM TORY PARTY MARK II TO TORY PARTY MARK I

BRADFORD Labour councillor Mohammed Riaz has joined the Tory Party. Only 24 hours after pledging his loyalty to the Labour Party, Riaz was signing his Conservative Party membership card. Wasn't it Harold Wilson who used to say that a week is a long time in politics?

After being reselected to stand for the University ward in 1989, Riaz was quoted as saying: 'I will continue fighting Conservative policies and promoting socialism.' Now Riaz claims he has been living a lie.

Whether Riaz believes that he is a natural Tory or whether he is just a cynical careerist makes little difference. Since Kinnock's party is full of career politicians we should not be surprised when one of them decides the grass is greener on the Tory side. Find it so easy to switch sides it only goes to show how similar are Labour and Tory policies today.

**David Burroughs
Bradford**

News focus

TORY HYPOCRISY ON PAY

WAGES, PRICES AND PROFITS

Tony Kennedy thinks the bosses have got a cheek lecturing workers about wage rises

For years the Tories have been telling us that Britain is booming thanks to their free market policies. But now it seems that everyone from ambulance crews to carworkers must tighten their belts and accept lower pay to ensure the survival of the market economy.

Chancellor John Major has warned that workers will price themselves out of jobs unless they keep wage rises in line with productivity increases. Margaret Thatcher has gone further, telling parliament that the benefits of increased productivity belong solely to the capitalists. The *Financial Times* agrees, stressing that 'higher growth of productivity in particularly successful forms must not be absorbed in the wages of those lucky enough to be employed within them' (12 January).

Lining their pockets

The government's arguments about the need for wage restraint are steeped in hypocrisy. A 10.2 per cent wage rise is apparently too high for Ford workers—but not for MPs who have just awarded themselves a 10.8 per cent increase. And it seems there is one law for the employers and another for their workers. After spending almost five months trying to force ambulance workers to accept starvation wages, NHS chief executive Duncan Nichol is about to receive a £4000 pay rise, taking his annual salary to £66 000.

The Tories want to drive down wage settlements as part of their attempt to make the working class pay for their economic crisis.

At the same time, the government is making a lot of noise about wage levels for political reasons. According to *Sunday Times* columnist David Smith, in private government ministers are pleasantly surprised by the modest level of wage settlements, most of which are between 7.5 and 9.5 per cent. In public their protestations of outrage are largely politically motivated. The Tories want to create the impression that wage demands are the main source of Britain's economic ills.

The argument that pay rises should not exceed rises in productivity amounts to saying that we should accept a cut in living standards. The annual increase in productivity in manufacturing is now running at around three per cent. It is even lower in the service sectors. A pay rise of three per cent, at a time when inflation is more than double that figure, means a sizeable cut in real wages. In effect, workers are being asked to produce even more than they did the previous year while accepting a cut in living standards.

The sacrifices the Tories want us to make are even greater than the official figures imply. The impact of the rise in mortgage rates has meant that for many working class people the cost of living has gone up even faster. The introduction of the poll tax adds another huge financial burden to the cost of living of the working class.

Credit-happy

Perhaps the most hypocritical aspect of the government's strictures is the contention that wage rises fuel inflation. The real cause of inflation has been the government's own economic policies, and in particular the use of credit to keep the economy afloat.

The main beneficiaries of easier credit have been not working class people but company bosses. While nominal wages have been increasing at around eight to nine per cent over the past few years, company profits have been growing at more than double that.

And whatever Thatcher might say, increased profitability has not resulted from new capital investment. All that has happened is that a large chunk of the extra money that the Tories have pumped into the economy has found its way straight into the profit columns of company balance sheets.

The main reasons for roaring profits have been the government's success in keeping real wage increases under control on the one hand; and the determination of employers to boost profits by ensuring that prices rise faster than productivity on the other. Not surprisingly, Tory ministers have not lectured company bosses about the inflationary effects of lining their own pockets in this way.

Company executives have used the excuse of rising profits to bump up their own pay packets.

Increases of 20 or 30 per cent or even more have become commonplace over the past few years. These have been justified on the grounds of commercial success. Of course, the same argument does not hold for Ford workers whose company is enjoying record profits. After all, they only make the cars.

Paper money

Huge chunks of the increase in profits have also been used to increase dividend payouts on company shares. None of this has anything to do with the bosses working harder, improving productivity or raising investment. The financial giants which dominate the stock market, as well as the executives who hold sizeable portfolios in their companies, have simply been rewarded for holding bits of paper.

Britain's economic ills have nothing to do with wage rises. Thatcher's Britain is bankrupt because the foundations of British capitalism are not sturdy enough to support the drive for profit. The option of surviving on the never-never basis of credit expansion has now been exhausted. The only course left to the Tories is to bleed the working class dry.

We should reject the idea that the working class should make sacrifices in order to prop up the capitalists' rotten system. Workers should fight for the wages they need to lead a decent life. And in Thatcher's Britain that means going for as much as we can possibly squeeze out of the bosses.

| SIMON NORFOLK



Thatcher's Britain is no picnic for the working class

Noriega: corrupt dictator who got his dues?

PANAMA: YANKEE GO HOME?

LAST week the next step claimed that 'within Panama itself there is widespread resentment at the US-imposed gun-barrel democracy'. This seems to be at odds with what actually happened after the invasion. Thousands took to the streets to welcome the troops. When Noriega took refuge in the Vatican embassy, there were huge

demonstrations opposing him. Noriega's recognition of his unpopularity was one of the reasons that he eventually gave himself up. When he was taken to the USA there was jubilation on the streets of both Panama and Miami.

We may feel queasy at the thought of yet another demonstration of US force, but this should not blind us to the facts. Noriega was a corrupt, violent dictator who was hated by most people in his own country. Panamanians were pleased to welcome anyone who could help them overthrow him. After all democracy, even if it is imposed from the barrel of a gun, is better than no democracy at all.
**Sue Thompson
Reading**

It is no exaggeration to say that the left has been completely thrown by the upheavals in Eastern Europe. This is hardly surprising in the case of the official Communist parties, which are paying the price for their direct association with the Stalinist tradition. But even the non-Stalinist left has been devastated by the disintegration of the Eastern bloc and is incapable of making sense of what is going on there.

It is a supreme irony that the relics of the Trotskyist movement do not know what to make of the upheavals in Eastern Europe. Having spent the entire post-war period endlessly debating the nature of the Soviet system, they are now proving that they have learned absolutely nothing about it. Because it never got to grips with the Soviet Union or Stalinism in the first place, the left finds it impossible to make sense of the changes that are now taking place.

For 40-odd years the left has squabbled about which label to stick on the Soviet Union. Instead of analysing it as a social system governed by laws which are specific to it, the left has played the labels game and applied superficial comparisons and analogies.

Assumption

The Trotskyist left has come up with two concepts which are supposed to explain the dynamics of Soviet society. One is the theory of state capitalism which emerged on the non-Stalinist left after the Second World War and which is still espoused by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) today. Another is the theory of the degenerated workers' state: the prefixes deformed or bureaucratised will serve equally as well as degenerated. This has been the orthodox Trotskyist position since the thirties and is expounded today, for example, by the Militant Tendency.

The supporters of the state capitalist line try to explain Soviet society by comparing it to capitalism. They start from the assumption that any modern class society must be ruled by either the capitalist class or the working class. Since the working class is not in control in the Soviet Union, the SWP concludes that it must be a capitalist society, but one in which the state bureaucracy assumes the role traditionally played by the capitalist class.

In the crudest possible way, the SWP identifies declining growth rates in the Soviet economy as proof that this society is capitalist. In a recent article in *Socialist Worker Review*, Tony Cliff argues that the Soviet economy is suffering from the same problems as any capitalist economy: 'The emphasis on capital accumulation explains both the massive rate of growth and the impediments to future growth.' (December 1989)

According to the theory of state capitalism, all societies are essentially the same.

For the theorists of the degenerated workers' state, the Soviet Union is neither capitalist nor socialist but something in between. The starting point of this dogma is that socialism is defined by the abolition of capitalist property relations and the nationalisation of the means of production under the control of the working class. The Soviet Union and the East European regimes are societies in transition between capitalism and socialism because not all these criteria have been fulfilled.

Progressive

According to Trotskyist guru Ernest Mandel, these societies are not capitalist because the productive forces have been collectivised under the control of the state. But they are not socialist because the dictatorship of the proletariat has been supplanted by the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. From this perspective, state management of the economy is considered to be inherently progressive: all that is required to complete the transition to socialism is a political revolution to sweep aside the parasitic state bureaucracy.

Given that it has always been more interested in swapping labels than in a serious study of these societies, it is hardly surprising that the left has been flummoxed by recent developments in Eastern Europe. Indeed, the analyses being put forward by all sections of the left bear absolutely no relation to reality.

In order to make things conform to their own theories, the various left groups have simply ignored what is really going on, and imposed their own vision of what they would like to happen on to the situation.

The orthodox Trotskyist groups have hailed the upheavals in Eastern Europe as the start of the political revolution they have been waiting for since the thirties. According to John Lister in *Socialist Outlook*, the only thing that is lacking is a leadership which can advance, spread and complete the political revolution:

'The urgent need is for a wholesale political revolution in which the working class organises to defend the nationalised economy by driving out the Stalinist bureaucracy and taking power in its own hands. This central feature of the Trotskyist political programme since the 1930s is now not only posed as a general truth but emerging as a material possibility in what promises to be an exciting new decade.' (December-January 1989-90)

In fact, this material possibility exists only in the fertile imaginations of the left. Everything that is happening in Eastern Europe contradicts this assessment.

In order to support the idea that political revolution is on the march in Eastern Europe, the orthodox Trotskyists set out to show that the working class is striving not for capitalist solutions but for socialist democracy.

Socialist Outlook contends that 'East German workers have demonstrated a political commitment to socialist values' (December-January 1989-90). As proof, it cites calls for solidarity with the African National Congress and the Nicaraguan people at the mass rallies in Leipzig.

Delights

This view is echoed by *Militant*, which argues that illusions in the restoration of capitalism are negligible: 'The repeated rendering of the "Internationale" and other workers' songs illustrates what they want: an end to bureaucratic repression, corruption and mismanagement.' (27 October 1989) In other words, according to *Militant*, what we are witnessing is a socialist awakening among the masses of Eastern Europe.

Explicit in these assessments is the notion that there is something progressive about the East European regimes which leads the working class to reject the alternative of capitalism. According to *Militant*, most East Germans compare their standard of living with that of West Germany:

'But the memory of the capitalists' collaboration with the fascists, together with the benefits derived from the planned economy, combine to arouse bitter opposition to the idea of restoring capitalism. Even under Honecker massive house-building and improved social services signified important gains for workers.' (27 October 1989)

Now, having sampled the delights of the planned economy, workers are rebelling against a corrupt bureaucracy which can no longer take society forward! The editorial board of *Militant* must be living on another planet if it thinks that the East German economy is planned in any meaningful sense or that it has benefited the working class in any way.

According to others on the left, it is the commitment of workers to the idea of a planned economy which explains why so few have gone to the West:

'In fact, the distaste of many East German workers at the inequalities and ruthless exploitation of West German capitalism—resulting in all but a handful of those who crossed the Wall returning to East Berlin—showed their real longing for socialist, collectivist values, at the same time as their recognition that socialism is far from having been built, after decades of austerity and repression in East Germany.' (*Socialist Outlook*, December-January 1989-90)

The left concludes from this that there is little pro-capitalist sentiment in East Germany; on the contrary, the movement there is highly class conscious and

WHAT FUTURE FOR LEFT?



Can the old left survive the collapse of Stalinism?
Linda Ryan does not rate its chances

committed to achieving real socialism.

In order to sustain this line of argument, the left has had to shut its eyes to the groundswell of support for reunification in East Germany.

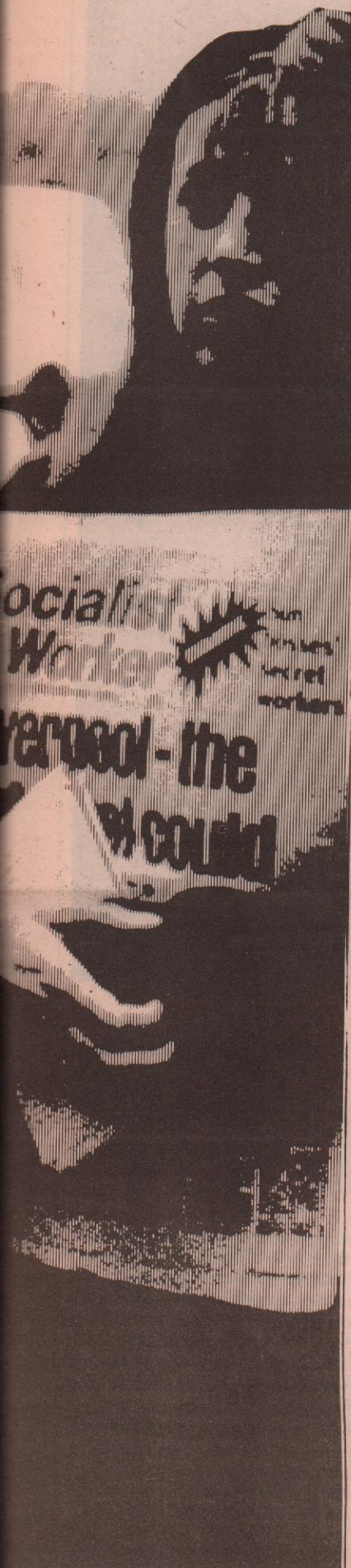
When the protests there were at their height, most left commentators went along with opinion polls showing that most people were against reunification.

After a visit to East Germany in November, Ernest Mandel argued that there was no resonance for reunification among the masses: 'During the big demonstrations of November 4-6, not a single placard called for reunification' (*International Viewpoint*, 27 November 1989). The problem was not Mandel's eyesight, but his refusal to see anything

that might contradict his analysis. His opinion was soon exposed as wishful thinking, as demands for reunification became more visible and more vocal.

The left's fantastic interpretation of what is going on in Eastern Europe can only be described as cretinous. Only an idiot or an orthodox Trotskyist could seriously argue that the masses in Eastern

R THE



communism: 'socialism with a human face' (what they really want is a benign capitalism without calling it capitalism). But ordinary people are not interested: any mention of socialism however it is dressed up with a human face or a democratic prefix is immediately tainted by association with Stalinism.

What we are witnessing in Eastern Europe is not a socialist awakening, but a popular backlash against Stalinism.

It would be difficult to find anybody outside of the bureaucracy in Eastern Europe who would agree with the left's assessment that there is something progressive about the society they live in. As far as they are concerned, state management of the economy has brought no benefits: only shortages, shoddy goods, low living standards and misery. The idea that the state provides a comprehensive health and welfare service to anybody except the bureaucracy is a sick joke. And the advantages of a system which provides full employment, but which cannot provide the goods to satisfy people's basic needs are lost on most East Europeans.

Inevitably, people who have had to put up with the indignities of life under Stalinism are going to think: if this is socialism, who needs it? They are bound to be attracted by what they see on offer in the prosperous shopping boulevards of West Berlin: when it comes to a choice between the reality of what passes for socialism in the East and the reality of capitalism in the West, most people are going to go for the latter.

The early opinion polls showing a large majority against reunification simply reflected people's unwillingness to speak their mind for fear of state retribution. Now that people have become more confident that the Stasi's days are numbered, they have become much more upfront in their demands for an end to the partition of Germany. Contrary to the wish fulfilment that informs the left's analysis, the vast majority of ordinary people in East Germany desire fervently the restoration of capitalism that reunification would bring.

Nonsense

The state capitalist school has also presented a version of events that bears no relation to reality. The Socialist Workers Party has trumpeted that developments in Eastern Europe are a vindication of the theory of state capitalism without making any attempt to justify this assertion. Thus John Molyneux states bluntly that 'the collapse of Stalinism is not the collapse of socialism but of its extreme opposite, the most concentrated form of capitalism' (*Socialist Worker*, 9 December 1989).

Nowhere has the Socialist Workers Party attempted to square its state capitalist analysis with what is really going on. Following the distorted logic that is the hallmark of this theory, we can only surmise that the argument goes something like this. The fact that the working class is engaged in mass struggles against their rulers is conclusive proof that these regimes are not socialist. Following on from this, since these societies are in fact concentrated forms of capitalism, the movements opposing them must have a revolutionary content.

In a similar fashion to the orthodox Trotskyists, the SWP ends up imposing its own formulas on events in order to make its theory stand up.

The main consequence of this approach is that it ends up overestimating the challenge posed by the mass movements to the Stalinist order. In common with most bourgeois newspapers, *Socialist Worker* argues that Eastern Europe is in the throes of revolution: 'The wave of revolutions in Eastern Europe seems to have dramatically swept away the old political structures.' (6 January)

In reality, it is clear that what is collapsing in Eastern Europe is not capitalism, but the bureaucratic social system established under Stalinism. These societies are disintegrating as a result of the crisis of the ruling bureaucracy, which no longer believes in the viability of its own system. The SWP's attempt to equate the crisis of Stalinism with the crisis of capitalism only reveals that it has never undertaken a serious investigation of Soviet society.

The idea that the working class is in

revolt against capitalism in Eastern Europe is plainly nonsense. The masses are in revolt against what has passed for socialism under Stalinism. In the absence of a revolutionary communist alternative, their struggle will almost inevitably assume a pro-capitalist form. The SWP's concern to bolster its theory leads it to underestimate the right-wing character of the mass movements.

Bizarre

At the same time, the SWP overestimates the extent to which these movements have challenged the status quo. It is ridiculous to talk about revolutionary movements sweeping Eastern Europe. In Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, there were no mass movements and changes were initiated by the bureaucracy. Elsewhere, in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, mass protest movements emerged only after the bureaucracy itself made the first move. And even in places where mass action has gone furthest such as Romania, the changes have been piecemeal. It is bizarre to speak of revolution, when the old order has not been overthrown.

Surveying the left's response to the momentous events in Eastern Europe, it is hard to accept that they really believe in what they are arguing.

If they faced facts they would have to admit that their ideas of the sort of societies that existed there never made any sense in the first place. Instead, they have distorted reality to make recent events conform to their discredited theories. Ultimately, the left will be devastated as the reality of what is happening destroys the last shreds of credibility in their arguments. This cannot fail to have a major demoralising impact on the entire left.

Our attitude towards the upheavals in the Eastern Europe is extremely positive. We have no reservations whatsoever about celebrating the collapse of the Stalinist system. For some time now it has been clear that a revolutionary working class movement could make little headway as long as Stalinism survived. The existence of the Soviet Union and its satellite regimes in Eastern Europe provided the capitalist class with a powerful argument against the whole project of working class revolution. Once the diversion of Stalinism has been removed, the capitalist class will have to justify its system on its own merits. In this situation it should be easier for revolutionaries to win a hearing for the ideas of communism.

Compelling

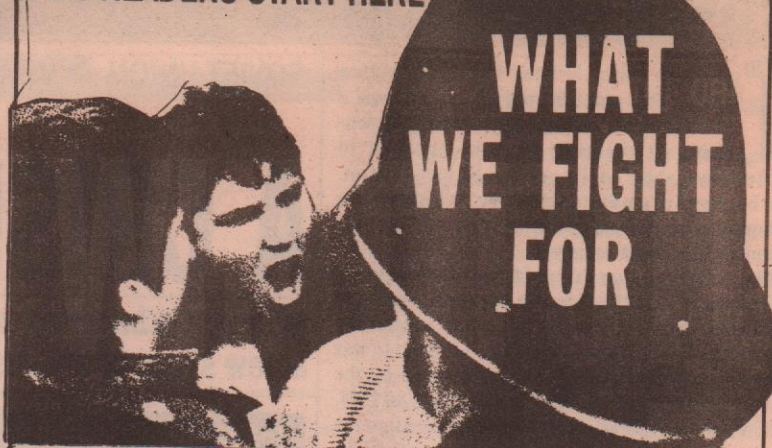
The disintegration of the Stalinist bloc is to be welcomed also because of the immense problems this poses for imperialism. For the whole of the post-war period, the Soviet Union has collaborated with the Western powers in preserving the status quo. Today, the crisis of Stalinism has put to question the present balance of power: above all it threatens the division of Germany on which the entire post-war order has been built.

As the world starts to slip out of the control of the imperialist powers, the prospects for building a revolutionary movement are better than ever.

While there is plenty to be positive about, it is also necessary to be realistic about the problems posed by events in Eastern Europe. Perhaps the biggest problem facing revolutionaries is how to confront the strengthening of anti-communist prejudice. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the crisis of Stalinism will be advanced as an irrefutable argument against any attempt to transcend the capitalist system. These arguments demand a convincing response.

There is no point minimising the difficulties of dealing with these doubts and prejudices. But it is only an insurmountable problem for those who never developed a coherent understanding of the Soviet system or a compelling critique of Stalinism. Our unique analysis of both puts us in a good position to go out and argue for communist politics. The challenge is to make our ideas relevant to the changing times in which we find ourselves. If we start to confront this problem there is no reason why we cannot reconstruct the communist tradition.

NEW READERS START HERE



WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

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.

Europe are committed to socialist values. They want nothing to do with socialism, which they identify with the corrupt and bureaucratic system spawned by Stalinism.

The middle class leaders of opposition groups such as New Forum in East Germany may favour the idea of a socialist third way between capitalism and

The Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev agreed last week to grant the people of Lithuania a referendum on whether they wanted independence. At the same time, he appealed to Lithuanians not to leave the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's dramatic concession to Lithuanian nationalists shows the gathering pace of fragmentation within Soviet society.

The underlying problem facing Gorbachev in Lithuania is that the Kremlin enjoys no political legitimacy in any of the Baltic states, which only joined the Soviet Union by force. Lithuania was invaded by Stalin in 1940 and reoccupied by the Soviet Union before the defeat of Germany in 1944.

The late incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union meant that the process of collectivisation was less intensive than elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Compared to other regions of the Soviet Union, the Baltic economies have flourished. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia all produce manufactured goods and export them to the West. As a result the Baltic states have close economic links with Scandinavian countries.

Just the beginning

The middle classes which have benefited from this economic prosperity form the backbone of the Lithuanian nationalist movement, Sajudis. As a tiny country, Lithuania was unable to resist domination by Moscow. However, the onset of the perestroika process has encouraged demands for political independence to surface.

Until the events in Azerbaijan this week, the reform process had entailed the virtual renunciation of the use of force against internal opponents.

The bureaucracy has tried to create a new legitimacy for its rule based on consent. Under Gorbachev, the Kremlin has only rarely resorted to force to deal with political problems. But without the threat of armed intervention Moscow is powerless to impose its will on the national republics. In Eastern Europe the withdrawal of the threat of Soviet invasion has led to the disintegration of the Stalinist regimes.

In one important respect the situation in Lithuania differs from that in Eastern Europe. The national republics are more closely integrated into the Soviet economy than are the Eastern bloc countries. This is true even of the Baltic states which most resemble Western-style economies. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are entirely dependent on the Soviet Union for their energy and raw material requirements.

This economic dependence on Moscow may temper demands for complete secession and encourage some form of federal solution, at least in the short term. Beyond this consideration, fears about securing their borders and controlling the working class, for both of which they have relied on Moscow until now, may also hold back precipitate moves towards secession in the Baltic states. Ultimately, the future of these states is bound up with broader global developments.

Whatever the outcome of the Lithuanian crisis, it is clear that Gorbachev's problems over the national question have only just begun. In every republic national movements are growing in strength. The Soviet leadership is now engaged in a continuous process of damage limitation.

Commentators in the West often ponder over Gorbachev's real long-term aims. Often the Soviet leader seems to change his stated objectives. Before Christmas, for example, Gorbachev ruled out the idea of independence for the Baltic states; now he seems to be holding out the possibility of such an eventuality. The U-turn over Lithuanian independence is just the latest example of the way that Gorbachev has changed the criterion of what is acceptable under the reform process.

Playing with fire

In fact Gorbachev has only one strategic objective: to ensure that the Stalinist bureaucracy which elevated him to power sustains its grip over Soviet society. This in turn requires that the Soviet Union survives in some form, and in a stable condition.

Gorbachev enjoys the support of all sections of the Soviet bureaucracy for this strategy. Whatever their misgivings on specific aspects of the reform programme, or on the speed of change, all sections of the bureaucracy are united on the need to preserve power. In any case, nobody within the Soviet leadership has a credible alternative strategy.

Hence, despite his difficulties, Gorbachev's own position is unassailable. Only a dramatic deterioration in the political situation could threaten his leadership.

But the Gorbachev strategy too is doomed to failure. Given the intractable crisis of the Soviet economy, the process of reform has been one of constant retreat on the part of the bureaucracy. Gorbachev is like a chess player who knows he has no chance of winning but is playing for a stalemate, while one by one his pieces are taken out of the game.

By giving in to popular demands, the Kremlin hopes to gain greater legitimacy for itself. The Lithuanian Communist Party was facing extinction in the local elections this spring at the hands of Sajudis. Through its open break with Moscow, the local party has given itself a greater chance of

A CRISIS WITH NO END

Mikhail Gorbachev's concessions to Lithuanian nationalists mark a new stage of the crisis in the Soviet Union, argues Rob Knight



Gorbachev: while troubles mount up at home, Western leaders pray for his survival

survival, at least in the short term.

But in looking to nationalism as a means of sustaining the influence of local communist parties, Moscow is playing with fire. Gorbachev has referred to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as the cement holding the Soviet Union together. In harnessing popular nationalism, the CPSU threatens to pull itself apart and hence undermine the cohesion of Soviet society itself.

The CPSU, like the Soviet Union itself, is a product of Stalinism and of the system it created. As Stalinism has become discredited, so there is less and less to bind the party together. The nationalism of the Lithuanian Communist Party is at odds with Russian nationalism. Gorbachev uses anti-Muslim feeling to cohere support amongst Russians, but this fuels the hostility to Moscow from the Azerbaijanis and other Muslim republics. Gorbachev's survival strategy can only further threaten the cohesion of the Soviet Union.

Fragmented party

Gorbachev's dilemma over the national question means that the current attempts to manage the crisis are doomed to failure. In trying to give itself greater legitimacy by adapting to nationalism, the CPSU is strengthening the forces that are pulling it apart. The more the party fragments the less it will be able to act in a united fashion to contain opposition and the weaker it will become.

It is now only a matter of time before the scenes we have witnessed in Eastern Europe are repeated in the Soviet Union.

In this context Gorbachev's trip to Lithuania and his appeal to the Lithuanian people was significant

for two reasons. It was designed as a gigantic public relations exercise for the benefit of the Soviet people in general. By revealing himself as a beleaguered but understanding leader, Gorbachev hopes to regain some of the sympathy and respect he has forfeited over the past year as the Soviet Union has lurched from one crisis to another.

But equally, Gorbachev's mission revealed just how desperate the situation has become for Moscow. The Soviet leader made it clear that anything short of complete secession is now acceptable.

Western headache

The national question in the Soviet Union has not simply created headaches for the Soviet authorities. Gorbachev's problems pose difficulties for the Western establishment as well. So far the developments in the Eastern bloc have given a great boost to the West. The collapse of Stalinism has given capitalism greater legitimacy. Gorbachev's acknowledgement of the superiority of the Western system and his attempts to reform the East have won him much more support in the West than he enjoys at home.

Now, however, the West faces an acute dilemma. It is now faced with the possibility that the Soviet Union might collapse and leave behind it nothing but anarchy. This would destabilise a huge part of the world and destabilise the imperialist order in the process. This unfolding scenario strikes fear into the hearts of Western leaders like Thatcher, Bush and Kohl. The *Daily Telegraph* recently summed up Western worries about the Soviet situation:

'The Soviet leader deserves the West's support at this stage: a self-governing federation is deeply to be preferred to one disintegrating into ethnic conflict.

As the peoples of Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan, in particular, move towards possible conflict, those in the West who gleefully welcome the Soviet Union's demise would do well to retain a sense of responsibility.' (13 January 1990)

The message is clear: the West has an interest in doing everything possible to help Gorbachev keep control.

At the same time Western experts are becoming less and less sanguine about Gorbachev's chances of stabilising the Soviet Union. The Kremlin's economic reforms have more or less ground to a halt. The West is finding it almost impossible to break into the Soviet economy and open it up to market forces.

A recent survey of Western investment in the Soviet Union indicated that in the crucial area of manufacturing, capitalist firms are finding it almost impossible to operate given the bureaucratised nature of society (*Financial Times*, 11 January 1990). Foreign companies have only been able to operate on the margins of the economy. And without a major improvement in the economy, Gorbachev will find it impossible to contain the tide of political and social grievances.

The West's dilemma is that it is stuck with Gorbachev and can see no alternative source of stability in the region.

Thus Western leaders are tempted to bolster his regime in any way they can. At the same time, they recognise that in the longer term there is almost nothing that can be done to transform the decrepit Soviet economy short of its total transformation into a market economy. And such a transformation would involve the dismantling of the Soviet bureaucracy and a massive crackdown on the working class.

The working class

AMBULANCE DISPUTE

SOLIDARITY CAN WIN

Solidarity action among workers in the health service and other sectors is the key to winning the ambulance dispute

Over the past week the position of both sides in the ambulance dispute has become clearer. Tory health secretary Kenneth Clarke's decision to throw down the gauntlet a week ago has been effective in rallying the government around his position. Forced into a corner over the dispute, the Tories realised they had no option but to come out fighting. The government's strategy is to hold fast to the line that there will be no concessions

and hope that the dispute crumbles.

As for the leaders of the ambulance unions, they have persisted with their soft focus approach. In the face of the government's get tough offensive, chief negotiator Roger Poole has pleaded for an end to hostilities. Instead of conducting the dispute as a trial of strength between avowed enemies, the union leaders have tried to turn it into a public relations contest. Their strategy is to emphasise the

reasonableness of their demands and hope that public opinion will sway the Tories.

After almost five months of soft-soaping the Tories, where has Poole's strategy got the ambulance workers? If it was not obvious at the start of this struggle, it is crystal clear now that being reasonable will cut no ice with Clarke. It is plain to everybody involved that the dispute has become deadlocked: if the ambulance workers are to win they have to make

SIMON NORFOLK



Ambulance crews need to take matters into their own hands and argue for solidarity from other health workers

IN THE HOSPITALS

'PEOPLE WANT TO DO SOMETHING'

Beth Smith is a nurse at Dulwich hospital in south London and the convenor of the King's College hospital ambulance support group. She told the next step how they have gone about building solidarity for the ambulance workers.

'The first thing I did was to talk to people around the hospital to see what they felt. It was clear that there was widespread support for the ambulance workers. I contacted the union to see what they could do but they weren't interested. So I just put some notices up around the hospital which said "Action to support ambulance workers—if you are interested in doing something come to a meeting".

'We held a meeting just before Christmas and about 10 people turned up. At first we weren't clear about what we wanted to do. Most people wanted to do something that was visual, had a lot of impact and meant we could involve other people as well. So we decided to hold a daytime rally outside the hospital. About 50 people came and we had speeches, collected money, handed out the direct line telephone numbers and talked to lots of people.

'It was a great success, especially as other health workers heard about it. The unions were embarrassed because it showed that they'd been doing nothing at all. So the unions, and especially Cohse, then stepped in and financed the support group,

booked rooms and so on. But they still haven't actually done anything.

'We decided that we needed to make links with other workers, so we began visiting local fire stations, bus garages, the Maudsley hospital. It meant that our next meeting was much bigger and had a much broader cross-section of people.

'We held a second rally which was double the size of the first one. It was so big that the police turned up and tried to move us from the road and stop us collecting. That got everyone's backs up. What right did the police have to stop us having a protest outside our own workplace? Everyone started booing and hissing and started anti-police and anti-army chants.

Being effective

'At our last meeting we decided we wanted to take things further. It's clear that the TUC's 15-minute stoppage on 30 January will be a complete flop. So we're calling for a joint union meeting on Monday, involving all the unions and all the workers, to discuss what industrial action we can take that would be really effective. Nupe porters at the medical school have already decided to come out on strike all day. Now we want to get others to support them.

'We've found that it is easy to get support from health workers and people want to do something.

There are reservations though, especially among nurses, about going out and taking industrial action. It's partly because nurses wouldn't strike without leaving emergency cover—and most times in most wards we are so short staffed that we're only just providing emergency cover as it is.

'But there's also the question of professionalism. One thing we could do to back the ambulance workers is to refuse to process the paperwork whenever the police or army bring in a patient. This would disrupt the hospital admin without harming the patients. But many nurses are reluctant to do it because it looks unprofessional.

'When we had our own pay dispute, the unions glorified the professional aspect of nursing as an argument for more money. It's very divisive. There's still bitterness between auxiliary nurses and qualified nurses as a result. But people still haven't drawn the lessons from our dispute if you look at the way the unions are still pushing the professional aspect of ambulance work.

'What's been most useful about the support group is that it's shown that people do want to do something to back the ambulance workers. It's also brought together different sections of health workers and allowed us to talk to other workers about what action we could take.'

a decisive break with the useless strategy being pursued by their leaders.

The precondition for upping the stakes against the Tories is ambulance crews taking control of the action.

Many ambulance workers are becoming bitterly frustrated with the impasse the dispute has reached. This is reflected in the increasing calls for a strike and the unofficial action being taken in some areas. Many workers feel that they are working harder than ever before collecting money, manning stations and working shifts in a dispute which is going nowhere. This explains the growing mood among many workers of wanting to have done with the dispute: support for strike action suggests a desire to go out with a bang.

In this sense the argument for strike action is a sign of increasing desperation among ambulance workers rather than a strategy for winning. Indeed, it represents the fragmentation of the dispute, as one group of workers after another becomes disenchanted with the leadership strategy. The call for strike action is an evasion of the problems that need to be confronted in the dispute. It is one thing to want to have a go before bowing out: it is another thing entirely to challenge the political direction of the dispute and fight for an alternative.

Dangerous approach

Underneath the bravado, the strike call betrays a lack of confidence among ambulance crews in their ability to win. Yet there is still everything to fight for in the dispute. Ambulance crews can win if they reject the special case approach of their union leaders and emphasise the importance of unity with health workers and others. This is the only political basis on which it is possible to organise the solidarity action that will be decisive in defeating the Tories.

From the start of the dispute union leaders have argued for the pay claim on the basis that ambulance workers should be treated as a special case. They have stressed that they are not just ordinary health workers, but members of an emergency service just like firefighters or the police. By insisting that ambulance workers are professionals, the union leaders hope to establish that they deserve a better pay award than others in the health service.

This approach is completely divisive: it immediately sets ambulance workers apart from other health workers, as well as creating divisions between paramedics and others in the ambulance service itself.

The dangers of the special case approach became clear in the nurses' pay dispute two years ago. The union leaders stressed the uniquely caring contribution of nurses to the health service: this opened up divisions between them and other health workers as well as in the nursing hierarchy itself. Having walked into the special case trap, the nurses ended up with a completely divisive pay formula.

Ambulance crews will not win by comparing themselves to other emergency services, but only by lining up alongside other health workers. They face the same problems of low pay, lousy conditions and low morale as every other group of workers in the health service. If all 800 000 workers were united they could start to address these problems together; but if ambulance workers insist on seeing themselves as a special case they have no chance. Instead of demanding special treatment, ambulance crews need to fight for decent pay and conditions for all health workers.

Take control

If they are to win a decisive victory, ambulance crews need active support. For a start they need to link up with other workers in the health service who will be prepared to take protest action in support of their claim. They should organise mass meetings in hospitals to involve all workers—nurses, ancillary staff, laboratory technicians, etc—in discussing what action to take. There are plenty of people who are willing to take protest action and there is no shortage of ideas about what could be done (see left).

Ambulance workers have to involve other workers in solidarity action too. There is no doubt that public opinion is overwhelmingly on the side of the crews. But public sympathy is not the same thing as working class solidarity. As long as support for the ambulance workers remains passive, the Tories can afford to ride out the dispute. However, a dramatic display of solidarity from other workers would put the screws on the government. For example, British Telecom workers could connect emergency calls directly to ambulance stations. At the moment this is being done on a random basis by a few workers: ambulance crews should be arguing for it to be done systematically.

Finally, it is up to ambulance crews themselves to make all this happen. They have to get across the message that they have something in common with all workers—the need for decent pay and conditions—and all workers have an interest in helping them win. It is up to them to start running the dispute themselves, establishing rank and file committees, stepping up the action and coordinating solidarity activity. If this happens there will be nothing stopping a major victory against the Tories.

the next step

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BEHIND ALL THE recent talk about finding a political solution to the Irish War, the brutal killing of three Irish nationalists in West Belfast exposes the reality of British rule in Ireland.

The men were shot dead by two plain-clothes soldiers after they tried to rob a betting shop in the republican Falls Road. It is still not clear whether the soldiers were part of a big surveillance operation in the area or whether they were staking out the bookie's. What is clear is that they gave their victims no warning and were shooting to kill.

First they shot dead the unarmed driver of the getaway car. Then, as the other two members of the gang left the shop, they sprayed them with machine gun fire. Finally, as the two men lay on the ground the soldiers pulled out their handguns and shot them in the head. They were then whisked away before the police arrived.

The killings came just six days after the high-profile arrest of Danny Morrison, Sinn Féin's publicity director. Morrison was arrested by the Royal Ulster Constabulary on Sunday night and charged with conspiracy to murder, false imprisonment and membership of the IRA. The police then raided Sinn Féin offices in Andersonstown.

The father of Morrison's supposed victim, Joseph Lynch, denied that his son had been kidnapped at all. He told the press that the security forces had tried to blackmail his son into becoming an informer. He contacted Sinn Féin for help. The RUC swooped the night before Morrison was due to hold a press conference to make the charges public.

The arrest of Danny Morrison on Sunday and the cold-blooded killings on the Falls Road six days later put into context the speech by Northern Ireland secretary Peter Brooke on Tuesday. Brooke held out the possibility of a new devolved assembly in the Six Counties. He urged Unionists to end their internal exile and to begin talks with other constitutional parties in Northern Ireland as a step towards devolved government.

Brooke's proposals were consistent with Britain's strategy of trying to find alternative means of control in Ireland. Ever since the war exploded after British troops reoccupied the streets of Belfast and Derry in August 1969, the British recognised that repression alone was not enough to subdue the nationalist community. The authorities have attempted to involve local politicians in one scheme after another in order to give their rule a semblance of legitimacy.

The latest stage in Britain's attempt to give its military occupation a political gloss began with the signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement in November 1985 between London and Dublin. Britain looked to the accord as a way of isolating Sinn Féin and bolstering support for the pro-British Catholic Social Democratic and Labour Party.

The Anglo-Irish agreement enraged the Unionists, who resented the involvement of Dublin in Northern Irish affairs. Ever since, they have stubbornly refused to take part in any new political initiatives. Brooke's conciliatory comments about the accord with Dublin were another attempt by the government to persuade the Unionists to drop their boycott.

But apart from appearing to make concessions on the Anglo-Irish agreement, the British appreciate that the precondition for any move towards devolution is a

crackdown against the nationalist community. The arrest of Morrison just two days before Brooke's speech was part of the bait to entice the Unionists back into negotiations.

Brooke's devolution plan has no more chance of success than any of Britain's previous political initiatives. So long as Britain denies the Irish people their right to

self-determination, the war to liberate Ireland from British rule will continue. And no amount of political varnish can cover up this fundamental conflict between the British state and the Irish people.

The lesson of last Saturday's killings is that military terror remains the only guarantor of British rule in Ireland. Eighteen years after British paratroops shot dead 14

unarmed Catholics on Bloody Sunday, shoot-to-kill is still British state policy against Irish nationalists. The only solution to the Irish War is to build a movement that can help force British troops out of Ireland. If you want to help build that movement, come along to the Irish Freedom Movement's Bloody Sunday commemoration rallies.



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

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 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
Canterriggs
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