

the next step

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THEY NEED SOLIDARITY

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BRITISH TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND!

THE LATEST developments in the Stalker affair confirm what we have known all along: that the British authorities will go to extraordinary lengths to cover up the truth about their colonial war in Ireland. The government was willing to sacrifice a senior police officer and destroy a Thatcherite businessman just to keep the lid on its shoot-to-kill policy against Irish nationalists.

The collapse of the fraud trial against Manchester businessman Kevin Taylor now threatens to expose the sordid details of the state's attempts to suppress the truth. In 1984, John Stalker, then the assistant chief constable of Greater Manchester, was put in charge of an inquiry into the activities of the Royal Ulster Constabulary after the murder of six nationalists in Armagh. Before he could complete the inquiry he was suspended for allegedly accepting dubious hospitality from Taylor.

Stalker was set up because he got too close to the truth about Britain's war in Ireland. On 11 November 1982 three IRA volunteers Gervais McKerr, Eugene Toman and Sean Burns were lured into an RUC roadblock and shot 109 times at close range. Two weeks later 17-year old Michael Tighe was shot dead in a hayshed; Martin McCauley was maimed. The following month two unarmed Irish National Liberation Army volunteers Seamus Grew and Roddy Carroll were shot through the head at point-blank range.

The authorities tried to bury the facts about the killings. First, the RUC issued lying statements about what happened. Then four of the RUC killers were acquitted of murder in a sham trial. When these court cases revealed the extent of illegal undercover RUC activities, the authorities brought in Stalker to run a mock investigation. Afraid that Stalker was sticking his nose in too far, the authorities cooked up the accusation about his links with Taylor and suspended him.

Eighteen years after Bloody Sunday when 14 nationalists were shot dead in Derry and two weeks after undercover soldiers gunned down three petty criminals in Belfast, the Stalker affair proves that shoot-to-kill is official state policy in Ireland. It also proves the futility of calling on the authorities to launch inquiries into the murderous activities of the state security forces in Ireland.

Over the years, official inquiries have become another means of hiding the truth. After the huge public outcry over the Bloody Sunday killings, Lord Widgery's inquiry absolved the Army of any blame. No doubt any official investigation into the brutal killing of the three unarmed nationalists two weeks ago will deliver a similar verdict.

The only way to end British terror is not by calling for a public inquiry but by building a movement that can help force British troops out of Ireland. If you want to help build that movement, make a start at the Irish Freedom Movement's Bloody Sunday commemoration rallies in London and Glasgow.

IRISH FREEDOM MOVEMENT EIGHTEEN YEARS AFTER BLOODY SUNDAY TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND NOW

Tuesday 30 January, 7.30pm

SCOTTISH RALLY

City Halls
Candleriggs
Glasgow
Admission £1

LONDON RALLY

McNamara Hall
Irish Centre
Murray Street (off Camden Road)
NW1

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

For further details ring (01) 375 1702

Editorial

26 January • No 3

Editor: Joan Phillips

BALKANISATION

BALKANISATION is one of the biggest dangers arising from the events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The danger is that the process of disintegration could acquire a geographical and therefore a national focus. Whether it is Yugoslavia which has at least 24 nationalities or the Soviet Union which has over 100, the prospect of entire regions fragmenting along ethnic lines is frightening.

If the Eastern bloc did begin to disintegrate along these lines, the first victims to be engulfed by the fall-out would be the working class. Balkanisation would lead to an explosion of national rivalries as each ethnic group asserted its territorial claims and national rights against another. The working class would be even more divided than it is today: class lines would be blurred by the intensification of national sentiment.

Once such a process was unleashed there would be no solution to the problem. Each demand for secession would inevitably raise a new demand for secession. In Yugoslavia, for example, once Slovenia staked its claim to independence from Belgrade, it would not be long before the other five republics followed suit. But matters would not end there; the Albanians of Kosovo and the Hungarians of Vojvodina would assert their right to secede from Serbia and so on and so forth. This nightmare would be repeated across the vast expanse of Eastern Europe.

STALINIST SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

IN THE face of all the claims being made about revolution sweeping Eastern Europe, it is necessary to emphasise the unfinished character of the changes there.

To a greater or lesser extent according to the weight of popular pressure in different countries, all that has changed is the faces of those who are

fronting the regimes. In most places, prime ministers, state presidents, party leaders and security chiefs have been replaced. In Poland the government is dominated by Solidarity and elsewhere the opposition is involved in round-table talks with the regimes.

But none of this matters as long as the institutions of the state survive intact as they have everywhere. Solidarity ministers might have a majority in parliament: but the administration and the army still belong to the Stalinists. Across Eastern Europe all the old structures of authority have yet to be dismantled. Until there is an attempt to smash the state machine it is not possible to speak of revolution.

On this score the official opposition movements have a lot to answer for. The success of the survival strategies pursued by the Stalinists is largely due to the compliant behaviour of the opposition. Their willingness to cooperate with the regimes in round-table talks and coalition governments has given the Stalinists some room for manoeuvre.

In Poland, Solidarity has come to Jaruzelski's rescue by taking responsibility for imposing a harsh austerity package. In Czechoslovakia, the Civic Forum's participation in government has taken the heat off the regime. In Romania, the opposition groups have rallied round the National Salvation Front. In East Germany, the New Forum joined the Stalinists in condemning the attack on the Stasi headquarters and is now considering forming a coalition.

In the main these groups are led by petit-bourgeois intellectuals and artists. Although they have a deep hatred for the Stalinists, they despise the working class even more. In every situation their concern has been to hold back the movement for change and come to some arrangement with the Stalinists. As a result, the potential of the mass movements has been wasted. Instead of an explosion of change from below, there has been a stage-managed process of piecemeal change from above.

OUT OF THE IMPASSE

EVERYBODY AGREES that the ambulance dispute has reached an impasse. This is a pity because this struggle still has the potential to do the government a lot of damage. The ambulance workers have a lot going for them: they have most of the country behind them in a struggle against an enemy which is besieged by problems on all sides. The political climate of intense hostility to the Tories definitely favours the ambulance workers.

However, the political strategy being pursued by the union leaders is a definite disadvantage. Roger Poole is captaining his team as if they were playing a game of cricket and appealing to Kenneth Clarke's sense of fair play. After five months of unBritish behaviour by the health minister it is obvious that this approach is getting the ambulance workers nowhere. The government is fighting a class war, but the union leaders are still trying to play cricket.

A sense of fatalism has begun to grip the ambulance workers. Many express the opinion that the dispute is going nowhere and things need to be brought to a head. This sentiment underpins the growing demands for a national strike. Behind the bravado about having a final fling, the call for a strike ballot represents a call for a return to work. It is a desperate attempt to find a way out of the impasse, but one which does not attempt to address the problems of the dispute or work out an alternative strategy.

Yet there is a way out of the impasse which offers the possibility of winning. The first step is for ambulance workers to take control of the action themselves. This means establishing rank and file committees to escalate the action and coordinate the dispute on a national basis. There is no possibility of extending the action unless ambulance crews themselves start to see themselves as the leaders of the struggle.

The second step is for ambulance workers to break with the go-it-alone approach of seeing themselves as a special case. They will not win by fighting as an elite section of the emergency services, but only by lining up alongside other health workers in the battle for decent pay and conditions. Organising protest action across the health service and solidarity action from other workers with some industrial muscle will be decisive in winning the dispute. The ambulance workers have the support: it's up to them to mobilise it against the Tories.

THE STATE SHOULD PAY

WHY HAVE the Tories launched a major campaign against absent fathers who refuse to pay maintenance to their children? It is certainly not out of any concern with the welfare of single mothers, whom they have long castigated as an evil of modern society. Nor is it simply because they want to save some money on the social security bill, although this is a not inconsiderable advantage of making fathers pay. The gusto which has gone into the crackdown on errant fathers can only be understood in the context of this government's moral offensive.

It was not coincidental that Margaret Thatcher should have made the attack on feckless men the centrepiece of her latest speech on the state of the nation. In it she called for a moral crusade to restore the family to its former glory and bring fathers who shirk their responsibilities to book. The prime minister declared that the breakdown of the family was a product of the permissive sixties which now threatens our whole way of life. She blamed the scourge of single parenthood for all the evils of the age, from an explosion of child abuse to an epidemic of teenage homelessness.

The offensive against runaway fathers is a classic case of a moral panic. Unfortunately, many people who would not normally support the government have fallen for this one. There have even been calls of *hear, hear* from feminists and left wingers. Sue Slipman, a former member of the Communist Party and present director of the National Council for One Parent Families, thinks that the crackdown is overdue. Even the Tory social security minister Tony Newton was shocked to find her nodding her head in response to every word he uttered on a television discussion.

We oppose the campaign to make absent fathers pay maintenance for their children and the broader moral offensive which lies behind it. Anything which the state does to reinforce women's economic dependence on men should be rejected. In this case, the move to strengthen the system for recovering maintenance will make women dependent on men with whom they no longer even have a relationship. Our view is that society should take responsibility for ensuring that women can stand on their own feet: that means that the state should pay not the fathers.

STAND UP FOR GAY RIGHTS

THERE ARE plenty of reasons why it would be good to see some leading members of the judiciary forced out of public life. But their alleged homosexuality is certainly not one of them. Since the resignation of Lord Dervaird after allegations of homosexual behaviour it has been revealed that four more of Scotland's 24 high court judges have also been under investigation. They stand accused of entertaining young men in a country cottage and frequenting pubs and clubs known to be haunts of the homosexual community. These revelations have been given full and lurid exposure in the pages of the gutter press.

The judges' scandal confirms that to be a homosexual is a crime which can destroy even those in high places who have the protection that power and privilege affords. It also reveals that the backlash against homosexuality is gathering steam in the wake of the government-sponsored panic about Aids. It demands that we take an unequivocal stand against all instances of anti-gay bigotry no matter who is the target. Whether the *Sun* is smearing a high court judge as a homosexual or anybody else, the consequences are the same in terms of the spread of reactionary ideas. These ideas must be challenged through a campaign for the complete decriminalisation of homosexuality.

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THE
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FOR AN ALL-OUT AMBULANCE STRIKE!

the next step argues the ambulance workers should take control of emergency cover. This approach fails to tackle the issue that is most inhibitive of further action.

Many ambulance workers perceive themselves not only as workers but as people who have a responsibility to provide a public service. This strengthens the idea that ambulance workers are a special case in terms of pay. It also strengthens the idea that they should rely on public sympathy to win the dispute. If it is accepted that

responsibility for the provision of the service rests at least partly with the workers, the implication is that they share responsibility for any disruption caused, thus undermining their ability to take whatever action is necessary to win.

Arguing for all-out strike action forces these issues to be taken up and defeated, while arguing for control of emergency cover strengthens the notion that workers are responsible for the service.
**Mike Gibson
Camden**

PANAMA: DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE

PANAMANIANs did not show overwhelming support for the US invasion, as Sue Thompson and others have suggested (letters, 19 January). The USA says that 92 per cent of Panamanians welcomed the invasion—but should we believe the same people who still claim that they killed only 150, when more reliable sources have indicated that the figure is probably closer to 1000?

A few of the journalists who were able to evade the US army's attempts to control media coverage reported that most demonstrators were middle class. Martin Walker in the *Guardian* told of how he travelled on the back of a truck that was calling on people in a working class district to join an anti-Noriega demonstration, and saw workers look the other way.

I'm sure that there was a minority of workers who might have out of desperation hoped that ousting Noriega would bring something better. But more of them made up the core of support for Panama's nationalist groups. After nationalists who had little to do with Noriega himself were rounded up during the invasion, and after the defence forces were defeated, it was not surprising that ordinary workers who opposed the invasion kept their heads down.

Thompson is also mistaken to think that the invasion brought democracy to Panama. The USA claims that El Salvador and Guatemala are models of democracy, yet informed people know that they hold sham elections and that they are really ruled by death squads. But there isn't even the pretence of bogus democracy in Panama—it's a case of virtual colonial rule by the USA, the direct negation of democracy. The US proconsul is the guy who really calls the shots in Panama—even Doonesbury knows that.
**James Malone
London**



SIMON NORFOLK

FREE LITHUANIA!

ROB KNIGHT does not clarify what our attitude to Lithuanian secession should be (*the next step*, 19 January). He only asserts that 'the future of these states is bound up with broader global developments'. The Baltic nationalist movements have been upfront in advocating the extension of the market into the Baltic republics—and therefore their desire to attack the working class. Yet the rise of these movements is a consequence of the decay of

the Stalinist economic system as its fragmentation accelerates. Regardless of the reactionary character of these movements we should support their right to self-determination and their right to secede from the Soviet Union. As Rob points out, the Baltic states were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in the forties.

The Soviet working class cannot gain unity through continuing this forcible incorporation but only

through recognising the oppression of the national republics. The unity of the Soviet working class can only be achieved through voluntary union. On the other hand, the reactionary character of the nationalist movements will only be exposed by secession. Otherwise their sole opponents will be the intelligentsia and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

**Frank
Peterborough**

ROMANIA: NOT READY FOR REVOLUTION?

THE editorial, 'Romania: still waiting for the revolution', appears to be arguing for further risings by the people against the Stalinists who have taken over from Ceausescu (*the next step*, 19 January). In the absence of an organised, revolutionary working class movement, and in the atmosphere of anti-communism created by the popular backlash against

Stalinism, surely such a rising would be no more of a revolution than the overthrow of Ceausescu was.

It seems to me that the overthrow of Ceausescu achieved the main thing: a complete renunciation by the state of any pretensions to have been a progressive socialist state in the past, and an end to the identification of the programme of the

Romanian government with communism.

To call for further risings against the state before the working class has developed the revolutionary organisation or direction to take control of the state appears to advocate 'a squandering of the potential of the mass movement' (*the next step*, 12 January).

**Alastair
South London**

Focus on the left

FROM THE GORBACHEV CULT TO THE GERMAN QUESTION

EVADING REALITY

The traditional left has been unable to make sense of events in Eastern Europe, argues Kim Monks

Since the Stalinist bloc started to disintegrate, the left's analysis of developments has become increasingly unstable. The left's superficial theories were never up to explaining the nature of these societies even at the best of times. As the pace of events in Eastern Europe has accelerated, it is anybody's guess what the left will be saying from one month to the next.

Most sections of the left were initially extremely supportive of Mikhail Gorbachev. Everybody from Tony Benn to Tariq Ali greeted glasnost as a positive example of the possibility of socialist renewal East and West. Trotskyist theoretician Ernest Mandel argued that the process begun by Gorbachev represented an advanced stage of destalinisation. Others said his reforms signalled a return to the revolutionary traditions of 1917.

All this was nonsense of course, and lately the left has had to qualify its tributes to Gorbachev. These days it is hard to ignore the fact that his reform project is nothing more than a survival strategy for the bureaucracy. It is also clear that people in the Soviet Union do not see eye to eye with the British left on the virtues of Gorbachev. After five years of glasnost and perestroika, they are more discontented than ever.

The left has also failed to grasp the real character of the struggles in Eastern Europe. In fact it has tended to impose its own vision of what it would like to happen on to the situation: invariably this has

order in Romania, it is clear that little of substance has changed. Everywhere from Warsaw to Bucharest the wheels of the state machine are still oiled by the old Stalinist functionaries. This has become so transparent that some on the left have had to admit that the status quo is intact, while nevertheless insisting on talking about revolution.

The left has been just as inconsistent on the reunification question in East Germany. When the mass demonstrations first erupted against the Honecker regime, the left argued that there was no manifest support for reunification. They cited dubious polls indicating that most East Germans were opposed to ending the division of the two countries. Stretching credulity to the limits, some on the left stated that people preferred life behind the Berlin Wall.

These claims were soon revealed to be cretinous, as demands for unity were raised on every demonstration. There is a consensus among all informed commentators today that the reunification bandwagon is unstoppable. In the light of these developments the left has had to modify its position to bring it into line with reality.

Everything the left has had to say about the events in Eastern Europe is an evasion of reality.

Next it will probably latch on to the notion of a fascist resurgence in East Germany. Already the left in West Germany is going along with the idea of a neo-Nazi revival in East Germany in order to avoid



The left's evasion of reality is a bigger problem than the GDR's 2000 fascists

been at odds with what is happening in the real world. Thus orthodox Trotskyist groups such as the Militant Tendency have welcomed the upheavals in Eastern Europe as the start of a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy and finish the transition to socialism. Other organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party have concluded that this is the start of an anti-capitalist revolt.

All this is simply wishful thinking by the left: the truth is the opposite of what they are arguing.

Far from fighting for socialism or against capitalism, people are struggling against what they see as socialism and for the better life which they believe is available under capitalism. Having sampled the shortages, repression and misery that is on offer in so-called socialist societies, most people in Eastern Europe are drawn towards the apparent abundance of the capitalist West.

As well as giving the struggles in Eastern Europe a positive socialist gloss, the left has overestimated the impact they have made. Thus every section of the left has referred to the upheavals that have taken place as revolutions. From the rise of the Solidarity government in Poland to the fall of the Ceausescu regime in Romania, the left has conflated a change of personnel with a collapse of state power.

The events of the past year have certainly been exciting, but it is a gross exaggeration to say that they have been revolutionary. Now that the dust has settled after the most extensive challenge to the old

confronting the reunification question.

Many on the British left will follow suit. The Eurocommunist weekly *7 Days* says the rise of the far right has been underestimated: 'It is an attempt to recreate the full-blown version of Nazism (down to SS ranks), with anti-Semitism and anti-foreigner sentiments being key.' (13 January) Articles in *Searchlight* and *New Statesman and Society* have also made a meal out of the fascist threat. In effect, the left is repeating the arguments of the Stalinists in East Germany.

Fears of a return to the days of the Third Reich have been kindled by the East German Stalinists in an attempt to create a breathing space for the regime. Appreciating the residual strength of the anti-fascist tradition in East Germany, the Modrow government has summoned up the spectre of a neo-Nazi backlash. By inflating the threat of instability from the right, the Stalinists hope to persuade people that it would be wrong to dismantle the present system too fast. It is nothing more than a cynical ploy by the bureaucracy to help it hold on to power.

the next step has long pointed to the prospect of a rise of reaction as the old order collapses in Eastern Europe. But there is a distinction to be made between the growth of reaction and the growth of fascism in these societies. There is no need for a neo-Nazi movement to foster a resurgence of reaction in Eastern Europe: 40-odd years of Stalinism have done that.

ASSESSING THE AMBULANCE DISPUTE

Linda Ryan draws up a balance sheet of the positive and negative features of the ambulance dispute and suggests a winning strategy

THE POTENTIAL

Given the present political climate of deep antagonism towards the Tories, the ambulance dispute has the potential to inflict a decisive defeat on the government.

New mood

The most positive feature of the ambulance dispute is the way it has provided a focus for people to express their hostility to the Tories. Most people in Britain are broadly sympathetic to the ambulance crews and wholly opposed to the government's attempt to grind them down. The groundswell of public support for the ambulance workers expresses the resentment of vast swathes of the population at the consequences of a decade of rule by Thatcher. In this sense the passions aroused by the dispute are symptomatic of a growing mood of opposition to the Tories.

Since the spring of last year, public sector workers in particular have demonstrated their anger at having to work harder in worse conditions for stagnating real wages. First tube and rail workers went on strike for a better deal and were soon followed by council staff, oil rig workers and others. Their bitterness in the face of falling living standards was compounded by the government boasting about economic miracles and record profits and companies rewarding senior executives with substantial salary increases.

The experience of ambulance crews is fairly typical of other public service workers. The majority of workers earn less than £10 000 a year; to make a living wage they have to work literally around the clock. Many ambulance workers regularly do double shifts of 16 hours and put in 50 hours of overtime a month; few manage a rest day. The cumulative impact of working long hours in stressful conditions for low wages has seriously undermined morale in the service.

When the employers offered ambulance crews a wage increase of 6.5 per cent, the entire workforce was incensed.

For five months the ambulance workers have refused to submit to the Tories. Their determination indicates that after a decade of defeats, the working class is still prepared to fight. There may be serious problems with the political strategy being

pursued, but at least the dispute has given expression to the basic class instincts of these workers. The level of hostility towards the government which the dispute has engendered reveals that a healthy us and them attitude still prevails among ordinary people.

Tories in trouble

Given the overall political climate, the ambulance dispute has forced the government into a corner. Tory health minister Kenneth Clarke decided to go on the offensive right from the start. Underestimating the extent of public sympathy for the ambulance workers, Clarke made the mistake of setting them up as public enemy number one. In the confrontational style that the Tories have made their own over the past decade, he hurled one insult after another at the ambulance workers.

It soon became apparent that this approach was only embittering ambulance crews and alienating public opinion. An NOP poll for the BBC's *Newsnight* programme showed that 80 per cent of the British people supported the ambulance workers and only 10 per cent backed the government. Many in the Conservative Party and the government began to voice their concern at the hardline stance adopted by Clarke. It appeared that the health minister was completely isolated within the government and even within the cabinet.

However, the Tories realised that having raised the stakes in the dispute, they could not afford to back down without it being seen as a major defeat.

Appreciating the political price to be paid for making such a U-turn, the entire cabinet rallied round the beleaguered minister. Even backbench criticism of Clarke's handling of the dispute has become much more muted. It seems that everybody now agrees that the political damage has been done: there is no alternative therefore except to dig in and win the dispute.

The problem for the Tories is that they are now stuck in a no-win situation. Whether they are seen to win or lose the dispute, either way they will accrue no glory as a result. If the Tories are forced to back down it will probably finish off Clarke's political career and the govern-

ment's health service reforms. Beyond this, it would be a rare defeat for the Tories in a major industrial dispute and would thus cause inestimable damage to the government's standing.

If the Tories are successful in forcing the ambulance workers to back down, the dispute will still have damaged the government. Inflicting a humiliating pay deal on ambulance crews is not quite the same as vanquishing the Argentinians in terms of the political rewards. The Tories have already made themselves deeply unpopular in the course of this dispute: beating the ambulance workers will only make them more unpopular. In this sense, there is no way they can win whatever they do.

Taking control

The ambulance dispute has given some expression to the desire of workers to take control of the service. At an early stage ambulance crews attempted to take over organising the emergency service themselves. Every time management has made moves to restrict rank and file control, ambulance workers have tried to work out new ways of taking over.

Although it has not been done entirely systematically, crews have publicised their own station numbers in an effort to maintain control of emergency cover. Instinctively, most workers recognise that establishing control over the service is the precondition for getting anywhere. The employers also appreciate the importance of maintaining their grip on the service, and have gone out of their way to stop a breakdown of control. After workers blockaded central London in a fleet of ambulances, management removed keys and rotor arms to prevent a repeat performance.

All these aspects of the ambulance dispute are positive examples of how it could potentially change the shape of British politics.

If ambulance crews really began to take control of the service and mobilised the massive public support that exists, they could really do the government a lot of damage. A victory for the ambulance workers would challenge the idea that the Tories are invincible and begin to reverse the psychology of defeat that has held back the class struggle.



To realise the potential of the dispute, ambulance crews need to take control of the service.

THE PROBLEMS

Unfortunately the tremendous potential of the ambulance dispute is being wasted because of the hopeless strategy being pursued by the union leaders.

Special cases

The paramount political problem with the dispute is the idea that ambulance workers should be treated as a special case. Chief union negotiator Roger Poole has always insisted that ambulance crews are not ordinary health workers, but members of an emergency service just like firefighters or the police. By maintaining that ambulance workers are professional public servants, the union chiefs hope to establish that they deserve special attention when it comes to pay. The substance of this argument has not been challenged by any significant section of ambulance workers.

However, from this perspective there is

no basis for uniting ambulance crews with others in the health service. If ambulance workers really are a case apart, why should other health workers have any interest in supporting them? The answer of course is none at all. The special case approach is inherently divisive: it immediately puts ambulance crews in competition with other health workers, as well as opening up divisions between paramedics and other ambulance staff.

Two years after they pursued a similar approach in relation to their pay claim, the nurses are still suffering the consequences.

Their union leaders made out a special case for why nurses should be treated differently from others in the health service. They emphasised that the special relationship between nursing staff and patients should be taken into account when assessing what they should be paid. Not only did this isolate nurses from other

THE SOLUTION

There is still everything left to fight for in the ambulance dispute. The key to winning is for ambulance workers to take control of the action and link up with health workers and others in a co-ordinated campaign of direct action.

Rank and file control

It is clear that most ambulance workers are dissatisfied with how their officials are running the dispute. But they have yet to issue a clear challenge to the leadership strategy. Even those workers who are most critical of their leaders do not see it as their responsibility to change this state of affairs.

Let's face it: unless the rank and file start organising things nothing is going to happen. It is up to activists to start running the dispute themselves, establishing rank and file committees and coordinating a campaign of direct action. Taking control of the dispute is the precondition for moving out of the impasse in a positive direction.

Unity with other workers

It has been clear from the start that the ambulance workers were never going to win by themselves. It follows that the first thing they must do is challenge the special case approach of their union leaders and link up with their natural allies in the health service.

Ambulance crews cannot win by comparing themselves to other emergency services, but only by linking up with other health workers. They face the same problems of low pay, lousy conditions and low morale as any other group of workers in the health service. If all 800 000 workers were united they could set about solving these problems together. Instead of demanding special treatment for themselves, ambulance crews should be fighting for decent pay and conditions for all health workers.

There are plenty of workers who would be prepared to get involved in protest action in support of a fight for decent pay and conditions throughout the health service. Ambulance crews need to start organising mass meetings which can bring together nurses, ancillary staff, laboratory technicians and others to discuss the way forward. For instance, nurses could refuse to process the paperwork for patients brought in by the police or military. This would mess up the administrative system without harming patients. Other health workers can play a role in

extending the scope of the action.

Ambulance workers also need to fight for solidarity action from other workers.

Like any group of health workers they lack the industrial muscle to make a decisive impression on the government. But what they can rely on is the overwhelming support of working class people in their battle against the government.

Ambulance workers have got to start arguing for solidarity action on the basis that all workers have an interest in helping them win their fight for decent pay and conditions. For example, they should appeal to British Telecom workers to connect all emergency calls directly to stations under the control of ambulance workers. A dramatic display of solidarity from workers with some real clout is worth more than a million petitions to the government.

Coordinated national action

It is a matter of urgency that ambulance workers take steps to counter the fragmentation of the dispute into a myriad of local struggles. As well as fighting for a uniform political strategy, they need to establish some mechanism for coordinating the action on a national basis.

All ambulance workers should be instructed to do everything possible to establish control over emergency cover. From flyposting the telephone numbers of ambulance stations to occupying control centres, there are obvious ways and means of asserting control over the operation of the service. Crews should not surrender control of emergency cover to council employers as they have in the West Midlands. All alternative services and local deals should be avoided on the grounds that they undermine national unity.

At the same time, ambulance workers could do more to make a national impact themselves. Organising regular blockades of busy city centres with fleets of ambulances would be effective in dramatising the dispute.

Any action which allows the ambulance workers to embarrass the authorities should be repeated throughout the country.

If activists start to raise the stakes by uniting as many workers as possible in a campaign of disruption and sabotage they can quickly force the government to surrender.

dispute into their own hands

health workers, it also allowed the government to impose a divisive pay formula on the nurses according to their professional qualifications.

Far from benefiting the ambulance workers, the special case argument can only do them harm. Before ambulance crews can begin to move forward they need to confront this political problem.

Special pleading

The corollary of the special case argument is the special pleading approach of the union leaders who are running the dispute. Having promoted ambulance workers as caring professionals committed to serving the public, the union officials have been careful to run a moderate and respectable campaign. Instead of organising a battle-plan of direct and dramatic action, they have conducted the dispute as a public

relations exercise. The priority has been to emphasise the reasonableness of their demands and to plead with the employers to negotiate.

This has involved union leaders stifling attempts by their members to escalate the action. Instead of encouraging ambulance workers to extend the dispute, they have tried to restrict its scope. Poole and others have stated that if the unions go too far they will endanger public support for the dispute. When crews have gone beyond the limits of the action sanctioned by the union leaders they have been pulled up by their union officials.

At the same time, the union leaders have made no attempt to mobilise the enormous public support for their members.

They have studiously avoided appealing for active support from other health workers and have even argued against other workers taking solidarity action.

The call for a 15-minute national stoppage on 30 January was cooked up by the bureaucrats in an attempt to head off pressure for more drastic action. It is a pathetic stunt which is designed to avoid any confrontation with the law. The union leaders even tried to demobilise support for the national demonstration in London.

After five months of Roger Poole playing Mr Nice Guy it is obvious that this is no way to beat the Tories. The precondition for raising the stakes against the government is for ambulance workers to take control of the dispute away from the union leaders.

Falling apart

As a result of the hopeless strategy of the union leaders, the ambulance dispute has reached an impasse. In the absence of a coordinated strategy, it was bound to

fragment sooner or later. Ambulance workers in different regions and even in neighbouring stations are doing entirely contradictory things. In parts of the West Midlands, for example, ambulance workers are establishing an alternative service; in Buckinghamshire they are setting up a stand-by service; in Nottingham there is talk of employers offering a local deal; in West Sussex ambulance crews are on strike.

It is in the context of this disarray that we should locate the increasing calls for a national strike. Many ambulance workers are becoming more and more frustrated with the deadlock in the dispute and most can see that the present strategy is getting them nowhere fast. This explains the growing mood among many workers of wanting to have done with the dispute one way or another. The call for a ballot over strike action reflects a desire to bring things to a head. If the dispute continues

to stagnate over the next few weeks, demands for a ballot will become more insistent.

The argument for strike action smacks of desperation: nobody is calling for a ballot out of the conviction that this is the way forward.

There is no sense of euphoria among these ambulance workers that finally they have hit upon a way to win the dispute. On the contrary, the underlying sentiment now is that the dispute is going nowhere and this is the way to finish it off. In this sense the call for a ballot represents a call for a return to work.

There is nothing wrong with workers wanting to escalate the action. But if ambulance workers in one station do not even know what those in the next station are doing there is no possibility of doing so. In the absence of a coordinated strategy, calls for national action are meaningless.

FOR OR AGAINST SECESSION?

Rob Knight explains the Marxist view on the calls for secession from the Soviet Union

The Kremlin's assault on Azerbaijan is the latest and most dramatic demonstration of the way the national question has become the most explosive issue inside the Soviet Union. Following president Mikhail Gorbachev's concessions to Lithuanian nationalists, and growing separatist movements in other republics, the fighting in the Caucasus shows the increasing tendency towards fragmentation within the Soviet Union. The crisis raises the question of what our attitude should be to the demands for self-determination coming from the national movements within the Soviet republics.

For Marxists, the right to national self-determination is not an absolute one. It is not an abstract principle which must be upheld in all circumstances. The question of support for the right to self-determination cannot be considered separately from the interests of the working class. For example, in India we have always opposed the Sikh demand for the separation of Khalistan because it would entrench divisive privileges.

The basic Marxist position on the national question was spelled out by Lenin in the period during and after the First World War. Lenin recognised that national struggles against imperialism were in general progressive because they weakened the imperialist order, and therefore improved conditions for the class struggle internationally.

Lenin also recognised that fighting for the right to self-determination was an important part of winning the working class away from the influence of bourgeois ideas. The working class in an oppressed nation would inevitably be drawn towards bourgeois nationalist movements. By leading the fight for national self-determination, revolutionaries could challenge the hold of the bourgeoisie over the working class and win workers to proletarian politics. In oppressor nations, revolutionaries had a duty to fight for the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination in order to challenge the hold of imperialism over its own working class.

In Russia after the 1917 revolution, Lenin argued

that the principle of self-determination should be applied by the victorious workers' government to the various nationalities that had formed the old Tsarist empire. He appreciated that the peoples in these countries would be suspicious of the newly formed workers' state if it continued the Tsarist policy of denying national rights. He argued that they would see the revolutionary government as 'Great Russian chauvinism under the name of communism'. A stronger union would be created among workers in the various nationalities if the Russians were shown to be respecting the rights of those oppressed under Tsarism.

At the same time, Lenin argued that the nationalities should not exercise their right to secede but should stay within a federation of soviet states to enhance economic and social development. This was entirely consistent with his support for the right to self-government. Lenin pointed out that the nationalities would not need to secede because they would be granted complete equality within what was to become the Soviet Union.

Lenin's policy on self-determination was not rhetorical. In 1920 the Bolsheviks allowed the bourgeois governments of the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania complete independence from Moscow. Lenin hoped that such an approach would promote friendly relations with these states and increase the influence of proletarian ideas within the working class movement.

Stalin's rise to power brought about a radical break with the Leninist tradition on the national question.

As in all aspects of Soviet policy, Stalin put the narrow interests of the Soviet bureaucracy first. This included maintaining the borders of the union whatever the wishes of the nationalities. Thus under the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939, Moscow reoccupied the Baltic states and forcibly incorporated them into the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the weakness of the bureaucracy led Stalin to make great concessions to national movements at the level of language rights and cultural customs in order to pacify the nationalities

and stabilise relations with Moscow. For this reason it is wrong to think that the nationalities have always suffered oppression at the hands of the Kremlin. Indeed, living conditions in the republics have often been better than in Russia itself. However, since people's aspirations for independence were nevertheless thwarted, the national question remained alive in many of the Soviet republics.

The inability of the bureaucracy to exert any real control over society has meant that the national question in the Soviet Union has taken a peculiar form. Central control by the bureaucracy over the republics is more apparent than real. In the Baltic states, for example, private enterprise has been allowed to flourish, and has led to the development of extensive economic relations with the West. The advent of perestroika has encouraged the growth within all three Baltic states of political movements which call for separation from the Soviet Union and for closer ties with the West. The call for independence is given greater credibility by the real economic separation which is already well established.

In the republics, nationalist sentiment has often been manipulated by the local Stalinist bureaucracies in an attempt to cohere a base of support for themselves. The discrediting of Stalinism has undermined the standing of local Communist parties. As a consequence, they have turned to nationalism in the search for a survival strategy. Gorbachev's reform programme has given new impetus to this strategy. In many republics the Communist parties are linked to the more hardline nationalists, as is the case in Azerbaijan; in others, such as the Ukraine, Stalinist bureaucrats have been instrumental in getting national movements off the ground.

Increasingly, the local Stalinist bureaucracies are trying to use the question of national identity in order to create a basis for their continued existence.

From Lithuania to Azerbaijan, Stalinist bureaucrats have fomented nationalist strife to save their own necks. Local Communist parties have deliberately incited hatred against other national

minorities as a means of winning support.

It is in this context that we have to examine the national question in the Soviet Union today. The key question Marxists have to answer is: would the break up of the Soviet Union assist the unity of the working class in today's conditions? The answer has to be no.

If the Soviet Union were to fragment into its constituent nationalities, it would create a situation far worse than that which presently exists. Each of the republics contains more than one nationality. In Georgia alone, there are Azeris, Armenians, Georgians, Russians, Jews, Ossetians, Abkhazians, Meskhetians, etc. Other republics have an equally bewildering mix of ethnic groups. Hence separation would not resolve the national question; in fact it would intensify ethnic conflicts. The result would be a working class that is even more divided.

The fragmentation of the Soviet Union would lead to a process of Balkanisation. This refers to the experience of the Balkans after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The destabilisation which ensued led to the region becoming prey to competing national and ethnic rivalries. There was a rapid growth of reactionary movements.

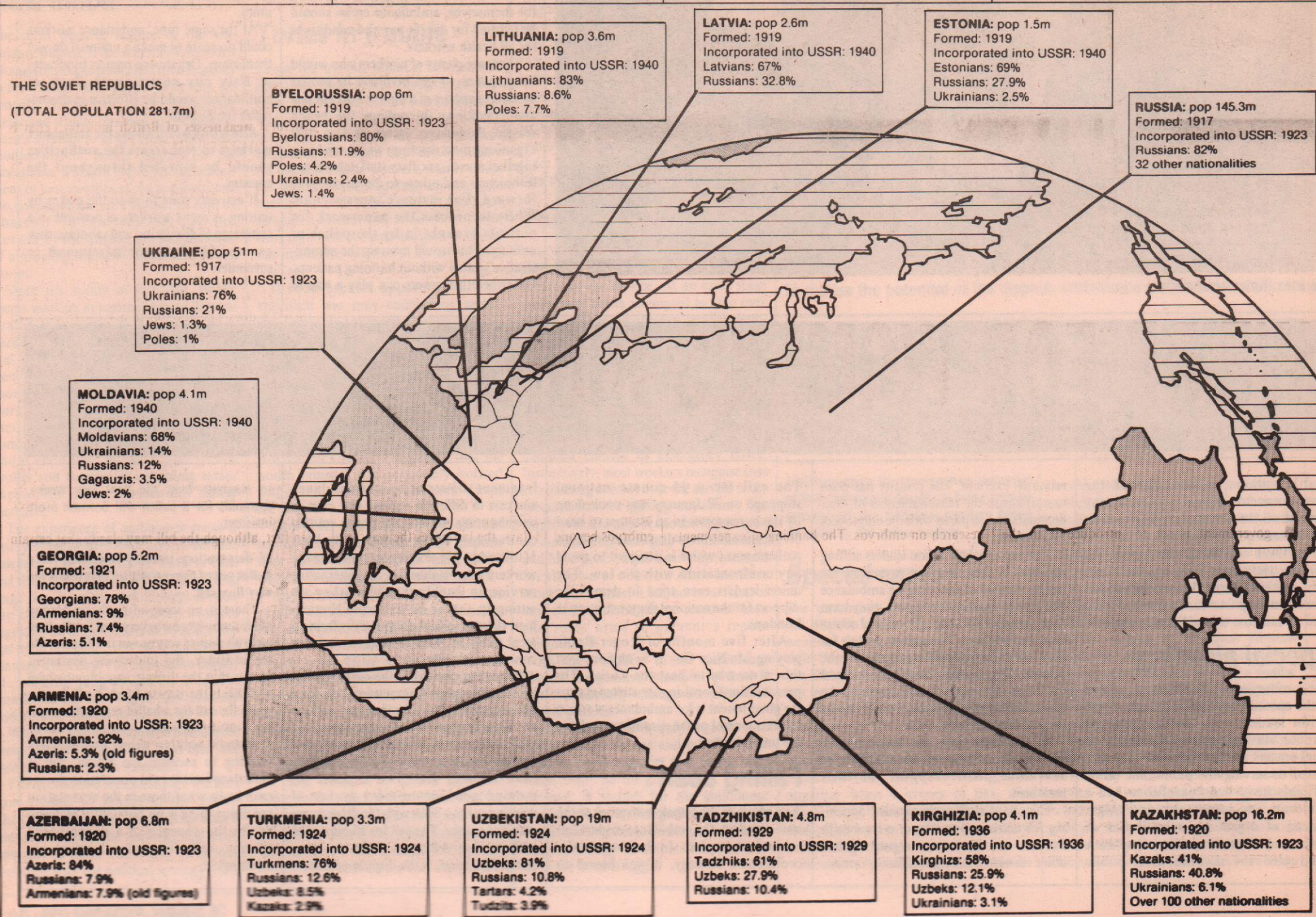
As a result of this experience, the term Balkanisation has come to express a situation of chronic instability and an explosion of national and ethnic rivalries.

The Soviet Union has 15 national republics, with a combined population of 280m, within which there are over 100 ethnic groups. The fragmentation of the union into these constituent parts would lead to a situation of total chaos in a vast area of the world.

We are opposed to the dismemberment of the Soviet Union because it would unleash a process of Balkanisation and confuse the class struggle even further.

However, we would qualify our opposition to secession were the Kremlin to deny civil rights to any of the republics. In this case the interests of the working class might lead us to support the right of republics to self-determination. We also oppose the use of force by the bureaucracy against any of the republics. The Soviet assault on Azerbaijan can only have entirely reactionary consequences and further encourage the growth of nationalist sentiment.

The solution to the national question in the Soviet Union lies in the creation of a federation of autonomous, self-governing republics, with equal rights in all aspects of political and cultural life. Such a federation can only be forged through a battle against the bureaucracy which continues to manipulate nationalist feeling in an effort to maintain its hold over the Soviet system.



INFLATION WORRIES

DON'T BLAME THE WORKERS

Tony Kennedy explains why wage rises do not cause inflation

The Tories have launched a campaign to curb the level of wage demands, claiming that greedy workers are responsible for runaway inflation. The government insists that inflation is caused by wages rising faster than output. On the face of it, the argument seems to make sense. If the cost of an input (wages) entering the production process rises, then so must the price of the product emerging from the other end. The very simplicity of the argument, however, exposes its spurious nature.

For a start, it is puzzling why the Tories should

focus solely on wages and ignore other sources of inflation. For example, the decline of the pound since mid-1988 has pushed up the cost of imported goods entering the production process. Over the past year import costs have accelerated faster than wages. Nor have the Tories explained why they believe that wage rises cause inflation but not that inflated prices push up wages.

One of the ironies of the government's campaign to blame workers for inflation is that it contradicts the basic tenets of monetarism which supposedly underpin the government's economic policy.

According to monetarists, inflation is rooted in government attempts to stimulate output through increasing the supply of money; such a policy, they argue, leads to higher prices rather than increased output. Rising wage demands are simply a way that workers compensate for higher prices.

The government's recent pronouncements on pay recall the dispute among Keynesian economists in the seventies over the relative importance of 'demand-pull' factors (too much money chasing too few goods) and 'cost-push' influences (the financial demands of organised interest groups) in explaining

inflation. By blaming inflation on rising pay, the Tories have adopted the cost-push stance. In doing so, they have at least exposed the fierce controversies between monetarists and Keynesians as entirely spurious. Both outlooks lead to the conclusion that lower wages mean lower inflation.

The argument that wage rises, or any other price increase, lead to inflation is a tautology. It amounts to saying that rising prices are caused by rising prices. Inflation can only be understood as a symptom of the general economic tendencies within the capitalist system, a system which is governed by the criterion of profitability.

Inflationary pressures result from a crisis of profitability. Falling profitability depresses investment and leads to industrial stagnation as capitalists lose confidence in future prosperity. Rather than undertake a large-scale restructuring of industry entailing widespread economic and social instability, capitalists look for ways of compensating for economic decline. One of the most significant compensating mechanisms over the past decade has been the extension of credit on a global scale.

Capitalists have tried to maintain profitability by indulging in profit-taking—raising sale prices faster than production costs. Credit has sustained profit-taking by ensuring that inflated prices do not depress sales.

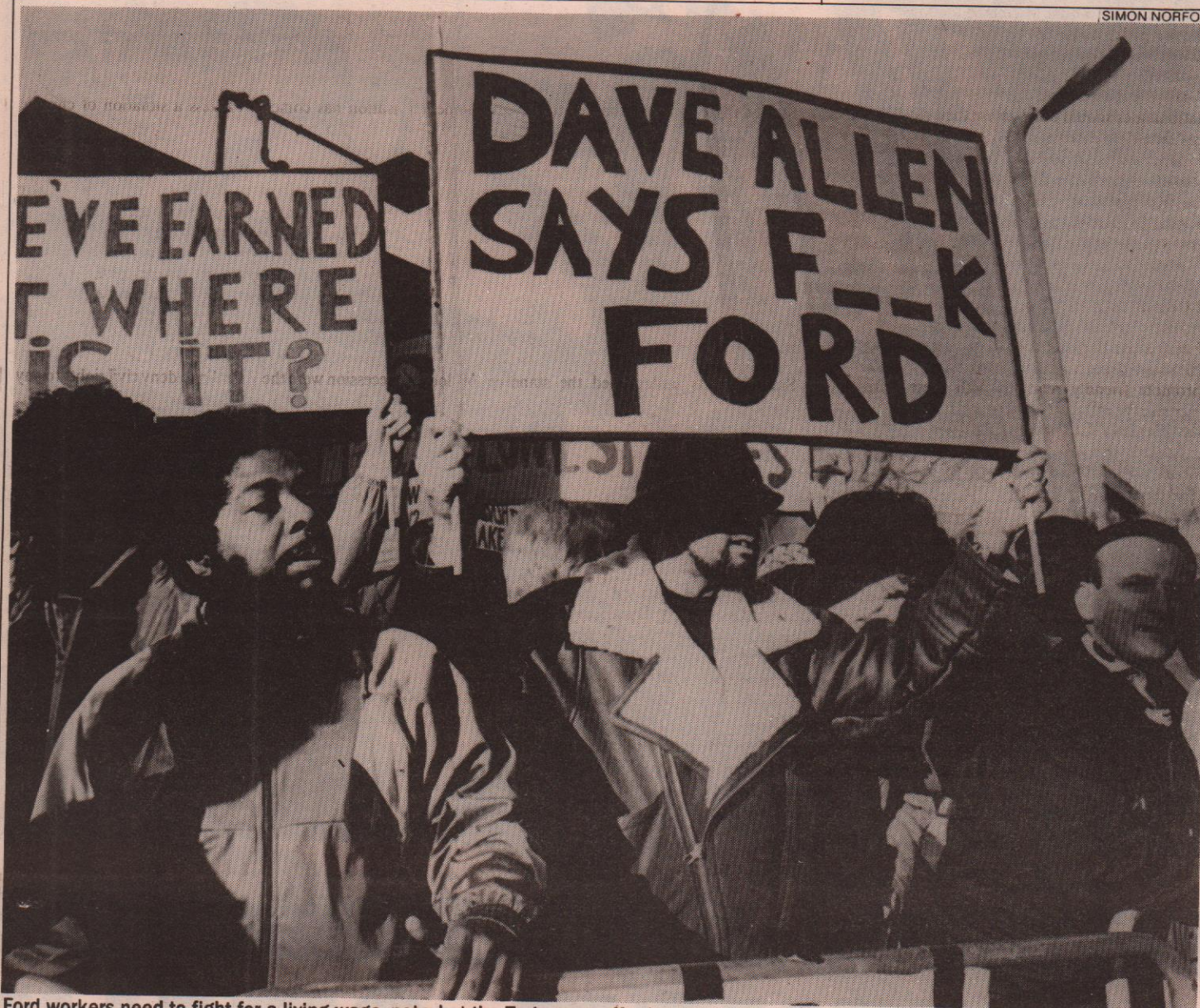
The importance of credit-based inflation in sustaining profitability is illustrated by the different attitudes the Tories take to various types of inflation. While condemning wage inflation as an evil, the government takes a far more benign view of inflated share and property prices. The preference of capitalists for speculating on the prices of existing assets, rather than investing in new production, confirms the underlying stagnation of British industry. Yet inflated share and property prices are celebrated because they register as increased profits in company balance sheets.

No option left

The fallacy of wage inflation also becomes apparent when we compare the performance of various economies. There tends to be a close correlation between high levels of inflation and economic weakness. The most dynamic economies, Japan and West Germany, have the lowest inflation rates of all the major powers. With some life left in their industrial base, there is less pressure to boost profits through expansionary monetary policy. Both countries have operated restrictive monetary policies without sacrificing economic growth. In third world countries inflation runs into three or four figures. But far from being greedy, third world workers have barely enough on which to survive.

Inflation is caused not by greedy workers but by capitalists trying to make up for depressed profits. But it can only provide a temporary brake on falling profits. The limits of the Tories' credit policies are apparent in the shakiness of the stock market and the collapse of the housing market. Excessive profit-taking has threatened the competitiveness of British industry and increased overseas suspicions of the underlying weakness of the British economy.

The Tories are being forced to confront the structural weaknesses of British industry. That is why the government is targeting workers as the cause of inflation—the Tories are preparing for a new assault on working class living standards. We should be clear that the working class is not demanding too much: the real problem is that the profit system cannot deliver what we need.



Ford workers need to fight for a living wage, not what the Tories can afford

WE'RE AGAINST THE EMBRYO BILL BECAUSE...

WE'RE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Anne Burton explains our attitude towards the embryology bill

The government-sponsored Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is currently being debated in the house of lords. The government is set to introduce it in the commons after Easter. The Tories are already boasting that they will whip it through parliament.

The bill has caused considerable confusion among women's rights activists. Most are solid in opposing any attempt to amend the bill so as to lower the time-limit on abortion. Many people, however, are uncertain as to how to respond to the bill itself.

The Revolutionary Communist Party is unequivocally opposed to the embryology bill. The bill's main aim is to formalise restrictions on the research that can be carried out on human embryos.

Some people argue that the bill is positive in the sense that it will allow doctors and scientists to do work that is currently illegal. But there is nothing positive about a bill which aims to impose legal restrictions on such work for the first time. MPs will vote to decide an upper time-limit for embryo experimentation (14 days is the most liberal option).

The bill outlines particular experiments which the government wants to outlaw.

These restrictions serve to mystify the issue of research on embryos. The banning of experiments after 14 days implies that there is something different about embryos after that date which necessitates their protection.

The 14-day limit has been chosen because it is regarded as the beginning of the individual development of the embryo.

But if we accept that this point has some moral significance in the development of human life, where does that leave us in relation to abortion? Anti-abortion MPs are already pointing out that it is inconsistent to protect a 15-day embryo from experimentation but allow a doctor to abort a 15-week old fetus. The implications of the bill could be devastating for women's rights to abortion.

We do not believe that an embryo needs more or less protection than any other human tissue, such as a heart or a liver. Furthermore, it is in our interests to promote medical research for the benefits it can

bring humanity rather than constrain such research because of mystical preoccupations about when life begins. And by establishing a special status in law for embryos beyond 14 days, the bill paves the way for anti-abortion campaigners to establish a case for the right to life of fetuses and embryos.

We also oppose the bill's intention to set up a statutory licensing body to police scientists and monitor clinics which provide fertility treatment. This effectively allows government ministers to decide who can receive such treatment. Currently there are no strict guidelines on who can or cannot receive sperm. But the government has recently expressed concern about the number of lesbians and single women requesting artificial insemination. If such services are brought under government control such women could be deemed unfit to be mothers.

Many people who are suspicious and unhappy about these aspects of the bill have decided to support it on the grounds that scientists need to be controlled by parliament.

We need to ask them: why? Whatever distrust we

have of scientists, do we really trust the current government more than the voluntary licensing bodies which currently monitor research work?

Science does not develop in a vacuum and will always be shaped by the dominant interests in society. It is not the case that at present science is free from the dominance of Tory values and cash economics. But bringing research under the censorship of the government will make matters worse, not better.

Some activists argue that they will support the bill despite its restrictions because it will clarify that scientists will have a legal right to do limited research. They believe this will head off attempts by pro-life campaigners to impose even tighter restrictions.

In fact, although the bill may clarify that certain aspects of research are within the law, we will have to pay a high price for such clarification. Certain scientific practices, such as the creation of hybrids, cloning and some forms of genetic manipulation, will be outlawed. And in future research will be approved or not approved according to the moral preoccupations of the establishment rather than the needs of science.

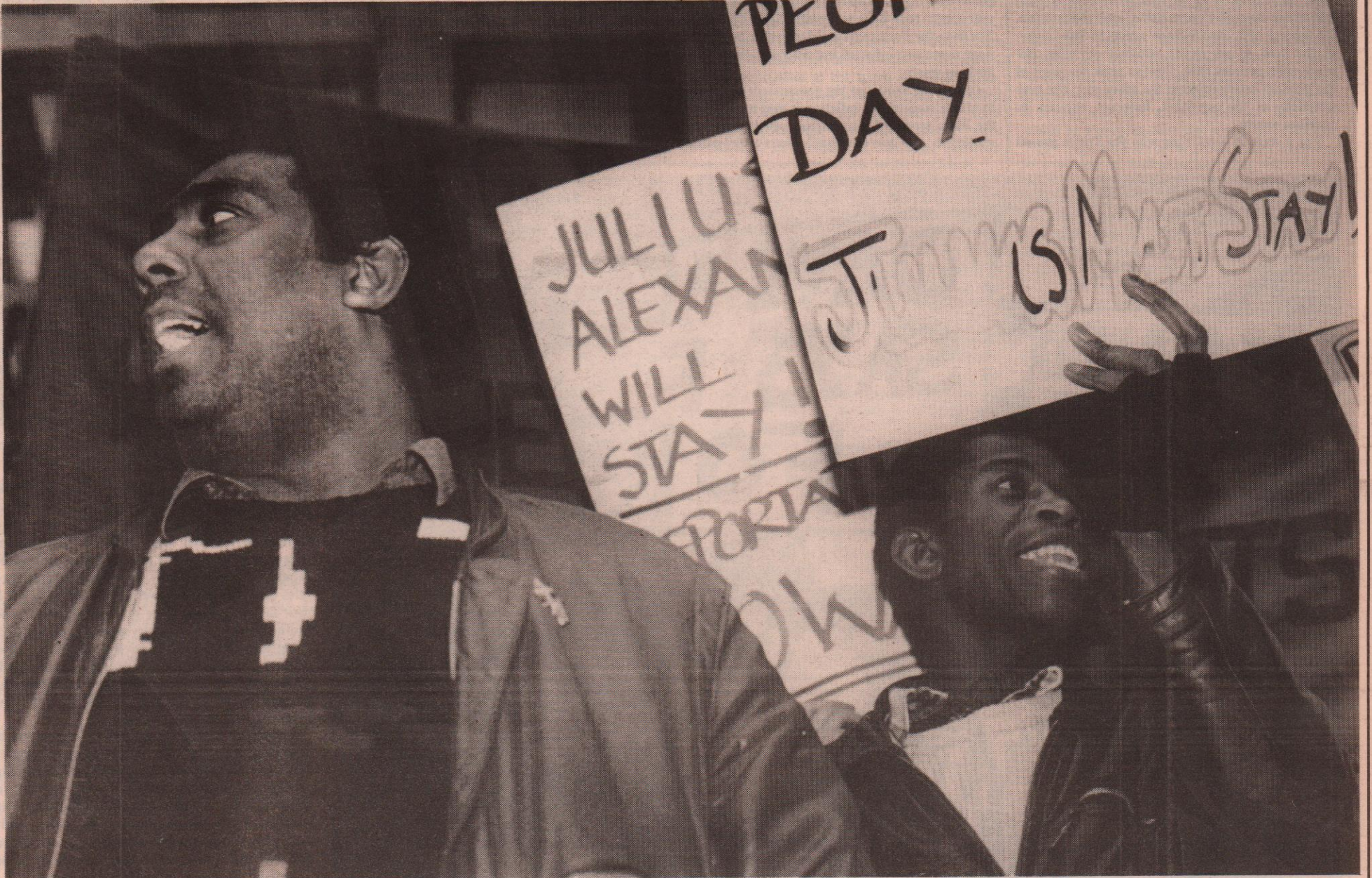
More importantly the passing of this bill will give confidence to the anti-abortionists. There is nothing that would encourage their case more than the creation of a consensus around the idea that embryos need protection.

The embryo bill has nothing to offer women or the working class. It is simply an attempt to bring scientific research and medical practice under establishment control. We have no hesitation in opposing it.

the next step

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SIMON NORFOLK



Julius (left) leads demonstrators at a picket of the home office in December

OPPOSE BRITAIN'S RACIST LAWS

JULIUS MUST STAY!

THE CAMPAIGN to defend the right of Julius Alexander to stay in Britain has reached a critical stage. Last May an immigration appeals tribunal confirmed the deportation order against Julius. On Monday 29 January Julius takes his case to a judicial review. It is essential that anti-racists join the lobby outside the hearing to show their opposition to his deportation.

Julius' case shows how the British authorities treat all black people as second class citizens. Julius was born in St Vincent, in the West Indies, and came to Britain in 1984. His mother has lived in this country for more than 30 years. His two brothers are British citizens. His sister was born in this country. But under Britain's racist immigration laws, Julius had no right to live in Britain and could only come to this country as a 'visitor'.

Originally here for two months, Julius got an extension of his visa to six months. During

that time he fell in love and decided to stay. His partner became pregnant and in 1985 they had a daughter, Jannicka. Although the relationship has now ended, Julius still sees Jannicka every week and remains on good terms with her mother.

Julius now has a settled relationship with Maureen, whom he married last June. They have a one-year old child, Julius, who was born in December 1988. Maureen also has two daughters from a previous marriage which broke up after the home office refused to allow her previous husband the right to come to Britain. Now the British government is set on destroying Maureen's marriage for the second time.

According to the home office, Julius is an illegal immigrant who has overstayed his welcome in this country. For more than three years the secret immigration police tracked him down like a common criminal. He was arrested in September 1988 while working

as a cook at the North Middlesex Hospital. For the past 15 months Julius has fought a desperate battle to stay in this country.

In November 1988 the Maureen and Julius Campaign was launched, with backing from Workers Against Racism, to fight the deportation. We have taken the case into the local labour movement, and won support from trade union branches, Labour Party wards, black groups, women's organisations and students' unions.

The campaign has argued against *all* deportations, because we recognise that Britain's immigration laws are racist and divisive. Immigration laws are racist because they specifically target black people and exclude them from Britain. They are divisive because they scapegoat one section of the working class for social problems like unemployment and poor housing which can only be solved by uniting against the capitalist system.

A victory for Julius would help the cause of all black people fighting deportations. A defeat would be a setback for all anti-racists. It is essential that Julius wins his case at the judicial review. The hundreds of people who have picketed previous appeal hearings show the extent of support for Julius. We need to ensure an even bigger turnout on Monday 29 January. For further information on how you can help the campaign phone Keith Tompson on (01) 375 1702.

**JULIUS MUST STAY!
NO MORE DEPORTATIONS!**

Picket outside the judicial review
Royal courts of justice
The Strand, London WC1
Monday 29 January, 9.30am