the next step
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Still waiting for the revolution

EASTERN EUROPE

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Editorial

2 February • No 4
Editor: Joan Phillips

THE PARTY SUPPORTERS IN CONFERENCE

Supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party attended a conference last weekend to discuss the party's perspectives for the coming year. At a time when many changes are taking place in the world, the conference was an excellent opportunity for supporters to get to grips with the consequences these changes may have for our work.

Discussion was wide-ranging. Whether it focused on the crisis of Stalinism or on recent developments in British politics, the aim was to assess the implications for our work, both in terms of the problems and the opportunities. Throughout the day the emphasis was very much on identifying practical political problems.

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One of the key themes was the impact of the events in the Stalinist world on our audience, and the extent to which anti-communism is a problem for us. Selling *Living Marxism* on the streets has forced most of our supporters to confront anti-communist arguments head on.

While many supporters perceived this to be a problem, their experience showed that there is an audience for our politics among people who are dissatisfied with the status quo but who have yet to be convinced that there is an alternative worth fighting for. Our analysis of events puts us in a good position to influence such people.

Another key area of debate concerned our work around the ambulance dispute. Many supporters have been involved in the dispute, setting up support groups in workplaces and colleges, selling on demonstrations and picket lines.

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A common experience was that it is possible to gain agreement from ambulance workers on the ineffectiveness of the current strategy, but it was much more difficult to convince them of the need to take control of the dispute. Our role of continually clarifying what the problems are, and what is necessary to win, demands sharper arguments with workers on the ground.

The conference underlined the potential for making gains over the coming period. Extending our influence through *Living Marxism*, establishing wider networks of regular readers and raising our local profile through the work of supporters' groups will be our key priorities.

Many of the questions debated at the conference need to be explored further in local supporters' groups if we are to become more sensitive to current trends and developments. *the next step* provides supporters with an excellent forum for pursuing these discussions, raising political problems and assessing our experiences. Let's hope we can use these pages to carry on the discussion started last weekend.

STILL WAITING FOR THE REVOLUTION

ROMANIA PROVIDES the most compelling evidence that the upheavals in Eastern Europe have fallen far short of revolutionary change.

In the country which experienced the greatest popular challenge to the old order, the guardians of the new order have turned the tanks against the people. The leaders of the National Salvation Front are showing their true Stalinist colours in an attempt to hold on to power. Scarcely a month after the tumultuous events which brought down the Ceausescu regime, it is clear that the Romanian revolution has not even begun.

The same goes for every country in Eastern Europe, all of which have experienced major change over the past six months. Everywhere, the extent of the transformation has been exaggerated by commentators of both the left and right. The reality is that the changes which have taken place have been relatively superficial.

In most places the old ruling establishment has been swept aside and a succession of political leaders have come and gone. In Hungary, Poland and East Germany the Stalinist parties have changed their names and everywhere they are undergoing a process of disintegration. Yet behind the rush and tumble the structures of the old state machine stand intact.

In assessing recent developments, many commentators have made the mistake of seeing the Communist parties and the state apparatus as the same thing. But the Stalinist parties and the Stalinist system are not interchangeable. It is true that these parties have surrendered their leading role; some have been forced out of government; and all are about to be defeated in the forthcoming elections.

However, none of this really matters because it is the state which guarantees the survival of the system. As long as the central administration and the security forces continue to function in the same way it is not possible to speak of the end of Stalinism. In most cases the Stalinists are quite happy to drop their commitment to their old party, but they are loath to surrender their control of the state. The demise of the Stalinist parties does not mean the end of the state bureaucracy.

The Stalinists owe their survival in large part to the official opposition movements. Groups such as the Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia or the New Forum in East Germany have been prepared to do business with the bureaucracy. They are representative of the intelligentsia and the petit-bourgeoisie, social forces which are always ready to cooperate with the state if they can get something out of it. In Poland and Czechoslovakia they are running the government and in East Germany and Bulgaria they have entered coalitions with the Stalinists.

The opposition harbours a deep hatred of the Stalinists: it resents their monopoly of political power and control of state institutions. At the same time, it shares with the Stalinists a desire for a stable transition towards the introduction of the market. It fears the threat of instability which a mobilisation of the masses could unleash. This is why it has played such a central role in limiting the scale of popular protest. Only the most moderate and peaceable forms of dissent have been tolerated.

From the Social Democratic Party in East Germany to the National Peasants Party in Romania, the opposition in Eastern Europe is generally far from progressive. Most parties are staunchly in favour of the introduction of the capitalist market; many champion reactionary nationalist causes; most exhibit a profound contempt for the working class.

However, regardless of the growth of these reactionary movements, the faster the Stalinist system goes the better as far as we are concerned. The collapse of Stalinism will inevitably give rise to all sorts of reactionary ideas and forces. Nevertheless, the positive benefits to be gained by the removal of Stalinism far outweigh the immediate problems caused by its demise.

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THE REAL MEANING OF THE ARMS RACE

THE US defence budget confirms that the arms race has got nothing to do with any threat from the Soviet Union. It is all about maintaining the global dominance of the USA.

For 40 years the USA and its Nato allies have justified their vast armament programmes by pointing to the danger of a military invasion of Europe by the Soviet Union. The myth of the Soviet threat has provided the pretext for the stockpiling of nuclear forces, the proliferation of weapons of destruction and a massive escalation of the arms race. It has also kept the Nato alliance in business all these years.

As a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's diplomacy, all the old Cold War arguments have lost their meaning. After the effective demobilisation of Warsaw Pact forces, most people now believe that the threat which supposedly made the arms race necessary is vastly diminished. Many have concluded that the changes in the Soviet bloc herald a new era of peace and disarmament.

The Pentagon's unveiling of a defence budget which will *increase* spending on strategic nuclear weapons must have come as a shock to these people. Despite expectations of substantial reductions in spending, and contrary to all the talk about big cuts emanating from the Pentagon, the USA's gargantuan defence programme has emerged largely unscathed. The same pattern looks set to be repeated in Britain.

In order to justify their refusal to disarm or to disband Nato, the Western powers have had to invent new threats. Thus George Bush and Margaret Thatcher warn continually of the instability that would result from a collapse of the Warsaw Pact or even of the Soviet Union. Instinctively, they equate stability with a high level of militarisation. Their argument is that in a changing world, security is more important than ever. This calls for the maintenance of a high level of military spending.

In reality, the seemingly unstoppable expansion of military spending arises from the need of all the imperialist powers to defend their interests against their competitors. From this perspective, disarmament is simply not an option for the USA or any other leading imperialist nation. Indeed, the emerging new balance of power can only increase the impetus towards *rearmament*. The rise of Germany and Japan foreshadows the emergence of fresh conflicts. At a time when its world status rests not on economic superiority but on military might, the USA has no option but to maintain militarisation come what may.

THE WEST BACKS GORBACHEV

THE WEST's support for the intervention of Soviet troops in Azerbaijan is a striking illustration of its concern for the future of Mikhail Gorbachev.

Washington immediately made plain its sympathetic view of the decision to use troops to put down the unrest in the Caucasus. The White House issued a statement saying that it was the responsibility of any government to maintain order and protect its citizens. US president George Bush congratulated Gorbachev for doing a remarkable job in handling the unrest. He added that the Soviet leader was the best hope for continued peaceful change in the world.

Downing Street also defended the deployment of troops against the Azerbaijanis. Tory foreign minister Douglas Hurd argued that there could have been more bloodshed if the troops had not intervened. He made a distinction between military action taken to prevent one group killing another, and military action taken to suppress people struggling for freedom. The foreign office made it clear that Britain gave full backing to Gorbachev's use of force in the Caucasus.

Both America and Britain went along with the idea that the troops had been sent in to prevent a pogrom against the Armenians. Yet both were fully aware that the aim of the crackdown in Baku was not to defend the Armenians but to restore Soviet power in the region. Indeed, it was the threat to the power of the central bureaucracy which most concerned the imperialists. The possibility of things getting completely out of control in the Soviet Union fills the Western powers with dread.

Gorbachev's survival is a matter of importance to the likes of George Bush and Margaret Thatcher. The Soviet leader is somebody they have come to depend upon as a guarantor of stability in a world that is fast spinning out of their control. The collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the rise of West Germany and Japan are a direct threat to the status of declining powers like the USA and Britain. Hence their concern to put a brake on the momentum of change and to prop up the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. This explains why there has not been a hint of opposition to Gorbachev's crackdown in the Caucasus.

Western support for the military intervention in Azerbaijan also reflects a preoccupation with the problem of Islam. Most of the commentary on the conflict in the Caucasus has been unambiguous in its support for the Armenians. Invariably, the Azeris are depicted as a savage people fired by fundamentalist passions into unleashing a paroxysm of fury against the innocent Christian Armenians.

With few exceptions, media reports alleged that militant Islam imported from Iran was at the source of the conflict. Even serious commentators like Robert Fisk argued that the Islamic revolution has crossed the border into the Soviet Union; he urged Moscow and Washington to find a common response to the threat of Muslim fundamentalism.

Meanwhile, out and out reactionaries like Conor Cruise O'Brien spoke of Islam as if it were a contagion spreading anarchy and barbarism across frontiers. As usual the *Sun* made explicit what was only implicit in the statements of respectable opinion: 'Any sane, civilised person would back Gorbachev because the Iranians and Azerbaijanis are *not* sane and *not* civilised. Led by Iran, they seem determined to conquer the world.'

Thus the West's hostility to fundamentalist movements and regimes in the Middle East also informed its support for a crackdown against the Azeris. The explicit anti-Muslim sentiment contained in much Western commentary reflects the frustration of the imperialist powers at their powerlessness in the Middle East. It is doubtful whether the West would have taken the same attitude in the event of a Soviet military clampdown in the Baltic states. Its commentaries would certainly not have contained the same racist undertones, even if there had been a violent challenge to Soviet power.

STILL WINNING THE ARGUMENTS ON HOOLIGANISM

THE FACT that the Tories have been forced to shelve the football ID card scheme is a serious blow to the government. In particular, it is a big embarrassment for Margaret Thatcher who personally invested so much in the plan. However, this is a setback which the prime minister can live with. The important thing is that the authorities have won all the arguments about the need to combat football hooliganism.

Having won the propaganda war in favour of harsher repression against hooligans, it matters little whether fans end up being forced to carry an identity card, herded into all-seater stadiums or arrested for running on to the pitch. The Taylor report into the Hillsborough tragedy dismisses the idea that a membership scheme is a solution to the problems of the game; but it does not challenge the argument used by the government to justify the scheme. The great success of the Tories has been in establishing a consensus that hooliganism is a problem, even if they have not convinced people that the ID scheme is a solution.

Since the government launched its offensive against football hooliganism, *the next step* has argued consistently that it was creating a panic to justify tougher policing and repression. The paramilitary style policing of football matches was designed to accustom people to the routine use of these methods against wider sections of the working class. In the same way, the government intended that a national membership scheme for football fans would prepare the ground for a national ID card system for everyone.

So far the government has got away with criminalising football fans and treating them like animals. At Hillsborough 95 people paid with their lives for the government's law and order panic. Their deaths are the responsibility of the politicians who branded football fans as scum and demanded the caging of spectators. If we are to prevent any further loss of life or liberty as a result of the hooligan panic then we have to reject the government's scaremongering.

LETTERS

Write to
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HONGKONG EVASION...

OVER the last two months' events the furore over Vietnamese refugees in Hongkong has grown. So too has the row over how many Hongkong citizens can come to Britain. The government has opened the door to a select few of the wealthy and powerful, but closed it against the poor and the working class. Norman Tebbit says that even this is going too far and claims that the people of Britain will not stand for it.

The row over the Hongkong immigration issue has brought the race factor in British politics into sharper focus. This is something that the Tories will use to divide our class and scapegoat foreigners for their own problems. That is what makes the issue so important for us.

And that is why I am so surprised that the first issues of *the next step* in 1990 have not covered the issue. Surely the leaders of the RCP aren't scared of challenging the racists, are they?

Robert Leader
Rothley

...SILENCE ON IRELAND

AS a supporter who was originally attracted to the RCP by its outspoken anti-imperialist stance on the Irish War, I have been worried recently by the apparent lack of emphasis being placed on the struggle for Irish freedom within the party.

I was very impressed by the anti-internment rally organised by the Irish Freedom Movement last summer which showed our ability to mobilise thousands of people under a strong anti-imperialist banner in the face of opposition from the sectarian left who preferred to dilute demands and stand with Labour.

Why then did we not mobilise for the Bloody Sunday demo? I can see why we would not want to be associated with the shambolic left on such an event because of the lack of security at last year's march, combined with the denial of a platform for our politics. But given that we were the major mobilising force, we could have organised an alternative march.

The IFM cannot afford to take second place to the ineffectual left. We must continue the fight for Irish freedom with renewed rigour. Are there not revolutionary gains to be made from bringing revolutionary politics to the current events concerning Ireland?
Tim
Nottingham

SIMON NORFOLK

... SIMPLISTIC ON SECESSION

THE unfreezing of history is reviving religious, ethnic and national tensions from Prague to Ulan Bator. Turks are fleeing from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia is in turmoil and Germans in Poland are demanding better treatment. It is evident that no national territory in Eastern Europe corresponds to the distribution of a large number of distinct nationalities. In this respect, Eastern European states maintain political arrangements that are little different from those in vast areas of Africa and Asia. Modern states rarely correspond to the cultural, religious and linguistic loyalties of the diverse peoples within national territories. Balkanisation is an inherent tendency within the imperialist world order, and far from overcoming it, Stalinism has always exacerbated it.

National tensions and aspirations confront the working class with a bewildering array of specific cases and particular problems. There can be no general line applicable to all circumstances. Our approach to each situation must be motivated by striving for political arrangements and settlements that will enable the working class to establish the maximum unity in its own ranks, and give it the prospect of being able to take over the leadership of society. In some situations this will involve the working class fighting for the leadership of national struggles, in others it will involve promoting implacable hostility towards nationalist movements. It will also involve taking a lot of intermediate positions, and being prepared to shift direction as changes in the balance of forces dictate.

The disintegration of Stalinism in the Soviet Union is now pushing nationalist conflicts to the fore. However, the Soviet Union is not a geographical abstraction. The Soviet *Union* established by the Bolshevik government in the early twenties exists in name only. Nothing, not even its territorial integrity, survived the Stalinist dictatorship. The Soviet Union is a political arrangement held together by privileged elites, police power and force of arms.

The maintenance of the Soviet Union cannot contribute to the unity of the working class among the 150 nationalities and 15 republics ruled by the Kremlin. On the contrary, unity can only be established between these diverse peoples if the working class is able to create the conditions for the establishment of an entirely new voluntary association of peoples. Such an association might include some or all of the peoples at present ruled from Moscow—it might include peoples who are at present outside of the Kremlin's grip—but whatever it was, it would not be the 'Soviet Union'.

Today, Moscow's rule is disintegrating. Nationalism is being provoked by local Stalinist bureaucracies and regional elites. It is also being exacerbated by a combination of manoeuvring and repression sanctioned by the Kremlin leadership. For us to be for or against secession from Moscow would be simplistic to say the least. In some circumstances, secession may well serve the best interests of the working class. In other circumstances, it may not. The tendency towards the Balkanisation of the Soviet Union is a product of Stalinism, and a policy of maintaining existing territorial arrangements will not, in every case, enable the working class to fight for its interests or defeat the venal strategies of nationalist bureaucracies.

Don Milligan
South London

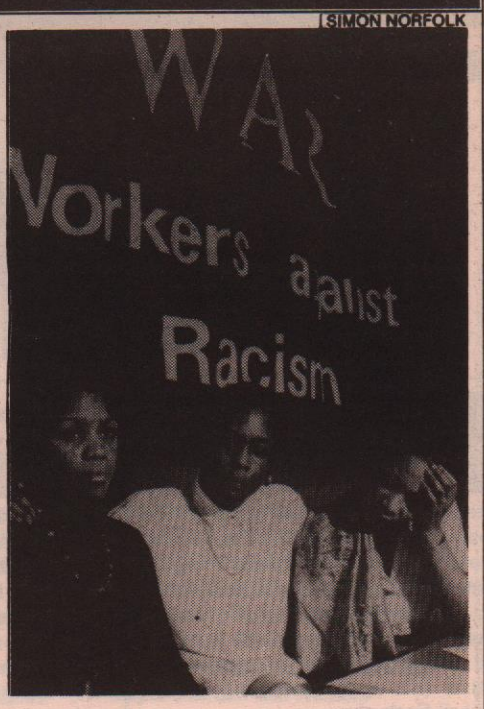
Campaign focus

MURDER IN BRIXTON PRISON

WHO KILLED GERMAIN ALEXANDER?

***Keith Tompson** asks how Germain Alexander came to be the eighth person to die in Brixton prison last year*

SIMON NORFOLK



'Germain was placed in the cell next to me. I recall officers running from the cell, one covered in blood. One officer said to another to go and shower in order to remove blood from himself. I also saw a man in a white coat take a kidney-shaped dish, with at least one syringe in it, into the cell. I also saw Germain's body being removed on a trolley. He looked dead.'

Sarah Cunningham was a remand prisoner in Brixton prison on the night of 6 December 1989. It was the night that Germain Alexander became the eighth person to die in Brixton prison last year. According to the home office, Alexander died from natural causes after suffering from 'breathing difficulties' consistent with a heart attack. Alexander's family believe the official story is a pack of lies.

'Visible injuries'

The police claim that Alexander was arrested in the early hours of 4 December on a charge of assaulting three police officers, after a neighbour supposedly reported a disturbance at a party in Alpha Road in north London. He was released on bail at 4pm. At 5.40pm police say they were called to another disturbance in Linnell Road, north London. Alexander was again arrested and charged with assaulting a policeman.

Alexander was held overnight at Edmonton police station and then moved to Brixton prison. On arrival at Brixton, he was transferred to a medical room in F-wing, where seven prisoners have died since January 1989. The prison authorities say that he was moved to a cell by himself after he started fighting with his cellmate. The home office admits that 'force was used to remove him'. According to officials, prison officers observing Alexander through the peephole noticed he was having breathing difficulties. He was transferred to King's College hospital where he died.

Alexander's family disputes the official version of events. They say that Germain was listening to music at his home in Alpha Road when the police burst in. His room was turned upside down. Alexander's arrest warrant refers to 'visible injuries' on arrival at Brixton, including lacerations to the face, wrists and abdomen. Furthermore, Cunningham's story flatly contradicts the home office claim that officers had to intervene after Alexander attacked his cellmate. She told a press conference last week what she heard and saw in Brixton prison the night Germain died:

'I was awake in my cell in the early hours of 6 December, listening to LBC. I was disturbed by the sound of stomping boots on the stairs. I saw five officers run past my door dressed in riot gear with truncheons and shields. I heard them shout at Germain to get away from his cell door. They eventually manipulated the hinges off the door allowing themselves to get in. I heard noises like a beating, and moaning and the sound of someone being bounced [the practice of dragging an inmate by holding the arms and legs while the body and head are bounced along] down the landing stairs. One officer remarked that Germain looked dead.'

By the time he arrived in hospital, the whole of Alexander's body was covered in injuries; he had two broken ribs and two teeth embedded in the back of his throat.

The official post-mortem report shows Alexander was beaten to a pulp. At least one of the injuries ('a fracture of the transverse process of the 4th lumbar vertebra'—or a broken back) could only have occurred as a result of a 'hard impact, or sudden severe pressure, over a limited area of the small of the back'. This proves conclusively that Alexander was viciously attacked.

Expose the truth

Germain Alexander was the sixth black person to die in London last year at the hands of the police or prison authorities. His family are determined to get to the truth about his death. At a press conference last week the family, together with Workers Against Racism, launched the Justice for Germain Alexander Campaign. The campaign aims to expose the brutal treatment that all black people face from the police and prison authorities and to win the widest possible support for the family.

The campaign intends to hold a public demonstration outside the inquest at Southwark coroners court on 2 April. If you want to stand up to Britain's uniformed racists, then contact the campaign on (01) 375 1702.

SU HODGE

More than 150 people joined the picket of the royal courts of justice this week to show their support for Julius Alexander. Julius (above), who has fought an 18-month battle against deportation, was taking his case to a judicial review. As we go to press, no verdict has been reached

NEW THINKING IN SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

ISOLATING THE STRUGGLE AGA

Kim Monks explains how changes in Soviet fore have undermined the struggle against apartheid in

There has been intense media speculation about the tentative moves towards negotiations between the black resistance movement and the apartheid regime in South Africa. So far most of the discussion has focused on the pivotal role of one man in establishing the framework for talks: the jailed leader of the African National Congress Nelson Mandela. But next to nothing has been said about another key player with a central role in the unfolding drama: Mikhail Gorbachev.

The Soviet leader's international diplomacy has had a devastating impact on the South African Communist Party (SACP), which is a significant force in the resistance movement led by the ANC. Moscow's global retreat has isolated the opposition forces and put them under pressure to negotiate with Pretoria.

Carve-up

For some time the emphasis of Gorbachev's diplomacy has been on cooperating with the Western powers in various international troublespots. From the Middle East to Latin America and Afghanistan to Africa, the Soviet Union has withdrawn its commitment to former allies in order to curry favour with the West. The effect of a number of joint cooperative endeavours has been to force third world movements and regimes to submit to imperialist dictates.

The people of Namibia were among the first victims of the Soviet Union's desire to ingratiate itself with the West. In early 1988, Moscow indicated its willingness to do a deal with South Africa over withdrawing its forces from Angola. From this time forward, Soviet diplomats were heavily involved in the negotiations which led to the nobbling of the independence struggle in Namibia.

Moscow wanted to prove that it was a responsible world power which could do business with the West.

It acquiesced in every aspect of the sordid imperialist plan to trick the independence struggle led by Swapo. It put pressure on Cuba to withdraw its troops from Angola, where they had been fighting apartheid forces since 1975. It used its clout among the black nationalist movements to persuade them to accept the sham independence arrangements in Namibia. The result was a carve-up of southern Africa, carried out under the cover of the United Nations and ratified by the Soviet Union.

Cordial

Swapo's experience reveals the immense difficulties facing any national liberation movement given the overall global balance that exists today. Moscow's withdrawal from key areas of the world has compounded the isolation of anti-imperialist forces in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Most third world liberation movements have become noticeably more conservative as a result of the disengagement of the Soviet Union.

The forces fighting the apartheid regime in South Africa are no exception. Over the past few years the liberation movement has encountered problems trying to sustain a positive momentum. Of course, there has not been a cessation of struggles against the state. Black workers are still striking, marching and protesting despite the continuing state of emergency.

But the effect of the global retreat of Stalinism has been to turn the balance against the resistance movement.

In line with Gorbachev's diplomatic rapprochement with the West, Moscow has been reappraising its policy towards Pretoria. In spring 1989 the Soviet deputy foreign minister Anatoly Adamishin had talks with foreign minister Pik Botha on a secret visit to South Africa. It was the first time that a senior Soviet official had set foot on South African soil since diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed in the fifties. Moscow's dealings with Pretoria have since become almost a matter of routine.

As it has cemented a cordial relationship with the apartheid government in Pretoria, so Moscow has relaxed its ties with the national liberation movement. In the past, the Soviet authorities gave strong backing to the South African Communist Party and the ANC in their struggle against the apartheid regime. Today, however, they urge the merits of a negotiated settlement, reconciliation with the white minority and a mixed economy.

Sanctions

Soviet foreign policy specialists and academics have sent a series of policy signals to the South African Communist Party and the ANC. The new conciliatory line was spelled out at round-table talks in Moscow organised by the Novosti press agency in March last year. Denouncing calls for an intensification of the armed struggle against apartheid, foreign ministry spokesman Yuri Yukalov pointedly urged the movement to strive for negotiations with Pretoria:

'We don't emphasise the need to enhance the armed struggle. There are other means such as trade and economic sanctions. These are very useful tools. It doesn't mean that the South African regime should be talked to using the language of threats and by banging one's fist on the table.' (*Guardian*, 18 March 1989)

Ironically, despite the Stalinist bloc's ostensible support for total international trade sanctions against South Africa, several East European countries are engaged in increasingly open trade with Pretoria.

Extremists

Soviet officials now repudiate openly the idea of a socialist revolution in South Africa. Instead, they emphasise the positive character of the changes that have taken place over the past few years. Writing in *Pravda* in August, Boris Asoyan, a key figure in formulating Soviet policy on South Africa, argued that reforms have had a major impact on political life:

'Botha's reforms opened the way to gradual transformation of purely racial into social barriers. In the black community, stratification is proceeding very fast. A rather substantial middle class is emerging that is interested in stability and peaceful means to resolve the present conflict. Skin colour is losing its meaning as a factor in economic life.' (*Guardian*, 23 November 1989)

Asoyan also argued that extremists in both the black and white communities bore an equal responsibility for the continuing conflict in the country.

The consequence of these changes in Soviet policy has been to undermine the position of its former allies. Whereas previously Moscow talked about isolating the apartheid regime, today its policies are isolating the movements struggling against it.

In this sense, Gorbachev's diplomacy has played straight into the hands of the South African government.

It is against this background that it is possible to appreciate the shift towards greater pragmatism in the SACP and ANC. The first indication that the movement was feeling the pressure came in an initiative from jailed ANC leader Nelson Mandela. In a document written a year ago for a meeting with former premier PW Botha, Mandela called for urgent talks between black leaders and the government to negotiate a political settlement.

Mandela's document was subsequently endorsed by the ANC leadership and formed the basis of the Harare Declaration of August last year. Issued in the name of the Organisation of African Unity but drafted by the ANC, the Harare Declaration was notable for its conciliatory tone as well as its pragmatic content. It set down the usual terms for opening negotiations with the government, but coupled these demands with an offer to suspend hostilities in return for concessions from the government.

The clearest evidence of the new pragmatism came in the outline of a post-apartheid constitution. Beyond asserting the need for adult franchise and an

Gorbachev has pulled the flag from under the black masses

AINST APARTHEID

ign policy South Africa

entrenched bill of rights, the document was astoundingly vague about the shape the constitution should take. As for an outline of economic policy, the declaration simply advocated a system which 'advances the well-being of all South Africans'.

Since the Harare Declaration the momentum towards opening negotiations on constitutional reforms has increased.

The government has taken steps to create a climate in which black leaders will be more amenable to talks. Since taking office in August, president FW de Klerk has allowed protest marches, released prominent political detainees and substantially diminished the impact of the state of emergency. The government is discussing lifting the banning orders against the SACP, the ANC, the UDF and other outlawed organisations. And the release of Nelson Mandela appears to be imminent.

Negotiations

For their part, leaders of the nationalist movement have virtually accepted that talks with the government are inevitable. A few weeks ago the recently released ANC leader Walter Sisulu appealed for negotiations with Pretoria while meeting with the exiled leadership of the organisation in Lusaka. Mandela had sent a 10-point proposal to the meeting on how the negotiations should be handled. The ANC secretary-general Alfred Nzo told the national executive committee that the movement did not have the capacity to intensify the armed struggle and should seize the initiative on negotiations.

The significance of the sea change in the Soviet bloc has not been lost on the South African government. In triumphant fashion, foreign minister Pik Botha recently advised the leaders of the liberation movement to come to terms with their isolation:

'It's time the ANC discovered that their brother comrades, along with their ideologies, in Eastern Europe are gone.' (*Newsweek*, 29 January 1990)

The government has long sought to draw a weakened nationalist movement into some kind of deal. Now it is poised to take advantage of the beleaguered position in which the opposition finds itself.

Influence

In this context the government's continuing attacks on the South African Communist Party are ironic. It has always objected that the ANC is dominated by the SACP and branded black nationalist leaders as agents of Moscow. Even now it is still refusing to have any dealings with the ANC unless it severs its links with the Communist Party.

Yet the SACP is at least partially responsible for the moderate tradition which is now leading the nationalist movement towards an accommodation with Pretoria.

The SACP has been a major influence in the ANC since the 1920s, helping to give political coherence to the national liberation movement. The SACP adapted the familiar Stalinist two-stage strategy of third world development to the situation in South Africa. The first stage was to win national independence and black majority rule; the second was to advance towards socialism. The corollary of this strategy was an emphasis on moderation in order to mobilise the broadest possible alliance of social forces in the first stage of the struggle for democracy.

In 1955 the ANC adopted the basic elements of this strategy in its *Freedom Charter*. With this programme it set about widening its base of popular support through the Congress Alliance. Mandela explained the moderate objectives of the new alliance and the Charter:

'Whilst the Charter proclaims democratic changes of a far-reaching nature it is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state but a programme for the unification of various classes and groupings among the people on a democratic basis.'

Stalinism thus provided the nationalist movement with a programme through which conflicting class interests could be temporarily reconciled.

The ANC has always drawn support from all sections of society, from leading black businessmen to the lowliest residents of the townships. The South African Communist Party has never challenged any of this by putting forward a distinct working class programme.

It has been content to go along with the conservative strategy of the nationalist leadership, which has essentially been about winning a stake in the system for the black middle classes.

Despite its left-wing rhetoric about prioritising the class struggle, the South African Communist Party has been complicit in underestimating the role of the working class and elevating the need for a broad alliance of all classes. It has never challenged the emphasis of the nationalist leaders on using the mass movement to apply pressure on the government for negotiations. Fundamentally its political complexion is no different from the rest of the movement.

Until recently the SACP has drawn its strength from its association with the Soviet Union. Its appeal among black workers has rested on its historical links with the tradition of October 1917 and working class revolution. In the black townships the Soviet flag with the party's acronym has become one of the most credible symbols of resistance to apartheid. The identification of Stalinism with resistance to Western domination has also given the party a mass appeal.

Ideological

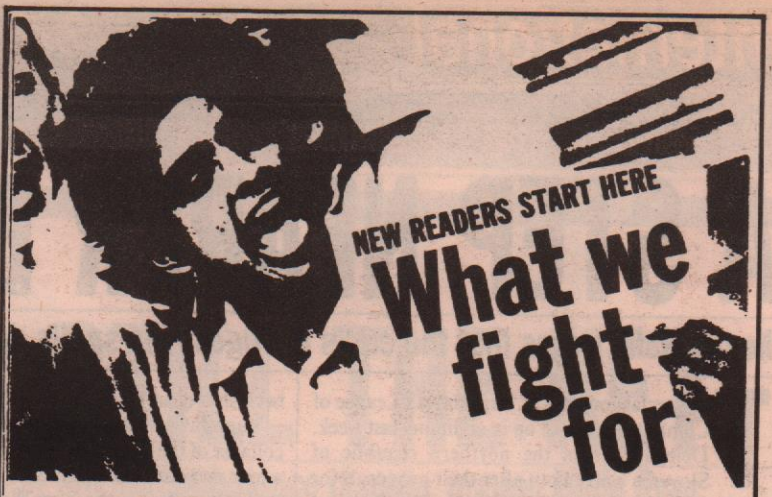
The Soviet Union's global retreat and the collapse of the Stalinist bloc has had a traumatic effect on the SACP. General secretary Joe Slovo recently admitted that the party was reassessing its ideological standpoint in the light of events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe:

'We have to face up to our failure in Eastern Europe. We have to recognise that these were popular revolts against unpopular regimes. It's no good complaining that this was some kind of capitalist conspiracy. We did it all on our own.' (*Observer*, 21 January 1990)

Slovo concluded that the experience of the Eastern bloc had proved that a one party system is incompatible with democracy. He urged the party to embrace political pluralism, a mixed economy and freedom of speech, press and religion.

For decades the Stalinists of the South African Communist Party have exploited the international credentials of the Russian Revolution to win influence among the black masses. They have wielded that influence in the furtherance of a political programme that has had a damaging effect on the struggle for emancipation in South Africa. Let us hope that the collapse of the Stalinist model and the Soviet Union's withdrawal from the third world will help to discredit the SACP. If Gorbachev's collaboration with the West convinces those struggling for liberation in the third world that Stalinism is their enemy and not their ally then some good will have come out of it.

However, in the immediate term these factors are having a debilitating effect on the liberation struggle. It seems that it will only be a matter of time before the pressures of isolation bring the resistance movement to some accommodation with the apa~theid regime. At a time when the overall global balance is going against the resistance forces, the initiative in any negotiations is likely to remain with the government. In this situation there is a danger that a settlement will be agreed at the expense of the black masses.



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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

YUGOSLAVIA

A STEP NEARER BALKANISATION

Kenan Malik warns that the crisis in Yugoslavia spells danger for the working class

The special congress of Yugoslavia's League of Communists broke up in acrimony last week. Delegates from the northern republic of Slovenia walked out after their proposals for local party autonomy were rejected. The Croatian delegates followed them. The Slovene Communist Party has threatened a final breach with Belgrade, while the Croatian party is about to split. In effect the Communist Party of Yugoslavia no longer exists.

The disintegration of the Communist Party calls into question the survival of the Yugoslav federation itself. Separatist movements are gaining ground in both Slovenia and Croatia. Last September the Slovene assembly adopted a constitution confirming the republic's right to secession and establishing the local state as fully sovereign. Recent events bring it a step closer to leaving the federation.

But it is in Kosovo, the former autonomous province inside Serbia, that separatist tendencies are most acute. Within hours of the break-up of the congress, tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of the local population, were demanding free elections, an end to Serbian domination and full republic status for Kosovo. Strikes paralysed the major cities. The area is under army occupation and an unknown number of people have been shot dead by soldiers.

Yugoslavia is a federation of six republics. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire unleashed a wave of ethnic and national rivalries which engulfed the area in the years before the First World War.

The weakness of the local bourgeoisie and its inability to create stable nation states ensured that these tensions became a permanent part of political life in the Balkans.

After the Second World War the Stalinists under Marshall Tito united the six republics into a federation. But far from overcoming ethnic and national differences, the bureaucracy has manipulated these divisions to maintain control. The fragmentation of Yugoslavia today is the result of two factors: the uneven development of the Yugoslav economy; and the attempt by the Stalinist bureaucracy to foment nationalism as a way of clinging on to power.

As in the rest of Eastern Europe, economic decay is well advanced in Yugoslavia. Inflation stands at 3000 per cent; unemployment is over a million. In 1987 Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo declared themselves bankrupt. Economic collapse has exacerbated the uneven development of the different regions of Yugoslavia.

The more prosperous northern republics of Slovenia and Croatia, and the autonomous province of Vojvodina, enjoy living standards more akin to those in Western Europe. The southern republics of Macedonia and Montenegro, and Kosovo, are among the most backward areas in Europe. Many workers earn less than a third of the average wage in the north.

These differences underpin the dispute between the sections of the bureaucracy which exploded at last week's congress. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the Yugoslav regime has embarked on a programme of reform to breathe life into the stagnant economy. All sections of the bureaucracy agree on the need to introduce market forces, cut government subsidies on consumer goods and attract foreign investment. The debate is about how to implement such reform.

In Slovenia and Croatia, bureaucrats demand greater decentralisation. As the most prosperous areas they resent having to subsidise the south. Local party bosses also reckon that they stand a better chance of attracting Western investment if they go it alone. Southern bureaucrats favour old-style centralised planning. They fear that with greater decentralisation they would lose the subsidies they currently receive from the north.

These differences have led to the emergence of party leaderships in the republics which have promoted nationalist sentiment in order to defend their vested interests.

Concerned to protect their own position, the bureaucrats have channelled working class anger in a nationalist direction. The ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of the population of Kosovo, have been particular victims of the nationalist upsurge.

In 1974 Tito, worried by the growing power of Serbia within the federation, carved out of the republic the autonomous province of Kosovo. This created resentment among Serbs. At the same time, ethnic Albanians, long the subject of intense repression, resented the fact that they were not allowed full republic status within the Yugoslav federation. In recent years, the Stalinist bureaucracy, particularly in Serbia, has exploited these tensions for its own ends.

Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian leader, has promoted the idea of a greater Serbia and organised a populist campaign whipping up Serbian chauvinism. In 1988, Milosevic changed the Serbian constitution to deny Kosovo its autonomy and reimpose Serbian control. When the people of Kosovo protested, he declared martial law and sent in the troops. Kosovo is still under effective army rule.

Different strategies

The growth of Serbian nationalism has in turn fuelled separatist movements in Kosovo and in the northern republics of Slovenia and Croatia. Party bosses here have played on the traditional fear of Serbian domination in an attempt to bolster their own positions. These tensions came to a head at last week's party congress.

The congress was convened to push through the kind of changes that have already swept the rest of Eastern Europe. The delegates voted almost unanimously to abolish the Communist Party's monopoly on power. But when Slovene delegates proposed that local parties should be autonomous from the central body, they won no support from Serbian and southern delegates.

The split crystallised the contrasting survival strategies being pursued by different sections of the bureaucracy.

Slovene Stalinists face elections in April and are under intense pressure from local movements. They know that if they accept central control, and support the continued subsidy of the southern republics, the party will be decimated at the polls. In Serbia, on the other hand, the Communist Party depends for its survival on its dominant position within the federation. Serbian delegates refused to accept any arrangement that would weaken this dominance or reduce the economic support the republic gains from the north.

Recent developments presage the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation and an explosion of ethnic and national rivalries. How should Marxists respond to this crisis?

We are opposed to any attempt by Serbia to enforce the oppression of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo or Vojvodina. We support the democratic rights of Albanians, including their right to full republic status within the Yugoslav federation. At the same time, we oppose the break-up of the Yugoslav federation. There is a danger that Slovenia and Croatia could opt for secession in a reaction against Serbia. Such a move would set a precedent for other republics to follow suit.

The dismemberment of Yugoslavia would lead to ethnic and national rivalries far more intense than those which exist today.

Such a process would lead to conflicts between the different republics and between different ethnic groups within each region: Serbs, Montenegrins and Albanians in Kosovo, Croats, Slovenes and Serbs in Serbia, and so on. The intensification of nationalism would have a paralysing effect on the working class.

Only a voluntary federation which respects the full political and cultural rights of all national groups within the Balkans can overcome the divisions which today fragment the working class.

ROMANIA

THE TANKS ARE BACK IN BUCHAREST

The tanks are back on the streets of Bucharest. A month after the bloody fighting which toppled the Ceausescu regime in Romania, tens of thousands of protesters are once again confronting tanks, armoured cars and paratroops. This time the tanks are defending the government of the National Salvation Front, which has been running Romania since December.

The latest unrest in Romania began after the Front decided to field candidates in the May elections. When thousands took to the streets in protest, the Front declared that street demonstrations were banned; people could only hold protests in four specified public parks, and then only after giving 48 hours' notice. Outraged crowds defied the decree and faced down the army.

The events in Romania over the past two weeks have confirmed what *the next step* has argued since the demise of the old regime: the toppling of Ceausescu was less a revolution than a purge of the old regime. The hated dictator may have gone but the old order still remains.

The National Salvation Front assumed power after the revolt in December. It has been elected by no one and is accountable to no one. The majority of its members are former Communist Party stalwarts. These Stalinist bureaucrats had no fundamental disagreement with the old order. They were simply smart enough to realise which way the wind was blowing, and desert Ceausescu before he was toppled.

Since coming to power, the Front has taken control of every aspect of public life. One of its first acts was to abolish the death penalty to protect cronies in the Securitate. After Dumitru Mazilu was forced out of the government last week, he revealed that the new regime still uses Securitate files to spy on its opponents. The Front controls the state TV and most of the press. And most importantly it still controls the military.

The Stalinists may still be in power in Romania, but they are hanging on by their fingertips. They have even resorted to bussing in thousands of supporters from around the country to attend pro-Front rallies in the manner of the former dictator Ceausescu. It is unlikely that stage-managed demonstrations of support will postpone the day of reckoning for long. In December we saw a glimpse of the power of the masses. If the people of Romania are to see real change they must harness that power to overthrow the old order completely. The revolution is still to come.

AMBULANCE DISPUTE

SOLIDARITY IS STILL THE KEY

A united campaign by all health workers can still win the ambulance dispute, argues Linda Ryan

Tuesday's day of action in support of the ambulance workers showed both the positive and negative features of the ambulance dispute. The thousands of workers who took some form of action during the day revealed the extent of support for the ambulance crews. But the strategy of the union leadership has ensured that such support has not been translated into real solidarity.

The union leaders looked to the day of action, not as a springboard to give new impetus to the dispute, but as a way of heading off calls for real action. The TUC called it a 15-minute show of 'dignified protest'. TUC chief Norman Willis insisted that workers were not taking strike action but simply expressing sympathy for ambulance crews. He even told workers to check with their employers before taking action. In place of real solidarity, the bureaucrats organised pathetic stunts like a 'faint-in' in Manchester, a 'white nose day' in the West Midlands and a human chain to link ambulance stations in Hackney.

Where workers tried to take real action the unions did their best to sabotage it.

Teachers in inner London, local government workers in Leeds and civil servants in Leeds and Bristol came under pressure from union officials not to come out on strike. When police banned a march by ambulance crews in Newcastle, union leaders refused to challenge the decision.

Ending the stalemate

The day of action expressed the impasse the dispute has reached. Over the past fortnight, the Tories have hardened their attitude and are trying to bludgeon ambulance workers into submission. Health authorities across the country have been using strong-arm tactics to intimidate crews.

East Surrey health authority took out a high court injunction preventing workers from hindering management, entering stations and using equipment. In South Glamorgan, the health authority has threatened to take the unions to court if crews refuse to take calls from management or controllers. The authority claims that such action is tantamount to a strike and hence illegal since the unions have not held a ballot for strike action.

While the Tories have hardened their stance, the unions have continued their softly-softly approach. Chief negotiator Roger Poole has dismissed out of hand any attempt to escalate the action and condemned crews who have come out on strike.

The failure of the unions to respond to management's provocations has created a feeling of desperation among many members. There have been calls for all-out action as a way out of the stalemate. The call for a strike ballot expresses a desire to bring things to a head. But it does not arise from a conviction that ambulance workers can win.

The call by ambulance crews in Essex for a vote on a return to work after their demands for a strike ballot were frustrated shows the pessimism that lies beneath the call for an all-out strike.

But while there is increasing frustration among the crews, their resolve to continue the dispute has by no means crumbled. Indeed crews in many areas are bracing themselves for a prolonged struggle. It is important that ambulance workers don't simply dig themselves in and hope for the best. In any war of attrition the government will emerge the winner. We need to escalate the dispute and take the fight to the Tories. This means tackling the problems that are holding back the dispute.

SIMON NORFOLK

If we take the battle to the Tories we can still win

The first thing that activists need to do is to take control of the dispute out of the hands of the union leadership. Five months of Roger Poole's Saatchi & Saatchi approach has got the ambulance workers nowhere. It's time the rank and file—the people who are in the frontline of the struggle—decided how to proceed with the dispute.

Equally important is winning solidarity from other workers, especially those in the health service. Ambulance workers will never win on their own. But the 800 000 other workers in the health service are an immense force whose united strength could deliver a decisive blow against the Tories.

Building such solidarity is important, not just to break the impasse in the ambulance dispute, but to meet the new challenges that health workers face. Over the next few months nurses and other health workers will be submitting their own pay claims. Health secretary Kenneth Clarke has made it clear that the principal reason why he is so intransigent over ambulance pay is to ensure there is no knock-on effect throughout the NHS.

If health workers do not unite, the Tories will simply pick off one group after another. The possibilities that exist for building solidarity were demonstrated on Tuesday. In Bart's hospital in east London, the ambulance workers' support group has worked hard to win support from across the health service. As a result the day of action had real bite. More than 1000 people attended the lunchtime rally, including porters from Smithfield market and 250 construction workers as well as nurses and ancillary staff.

Ambulance workers cannot allow Roger Poole to lead them to defeat: they need to link up with other health workers and start organising a mass campaign for decent pay and conditions across the NHS.

IRISH SOLIDARITY WORK

THE IFM AND BLOODY SUNDAY

For the first time since its formation, the Irish Freedom Movement decided not to support this year's Bloody Sunday demonstration organised by the Committee for British Withdrawal from Ireland. Instead we held well-attended rallies in Glasgow and London to commemorate the event. In the spirit of maximising support for the Irish struggle in the future it is worth clarifying why the IFM decided not to attend the Bloody Sunday demonstration.

The organisation of the Bloody Sunday march has always been kept a closely guarded secret. Over the years, attempts by the IFM and other groups to join the organising committee and play a full role in ensuring the success of the march have always been rebuffed. As far as we can tell, the organising committee this year comprised the Troops Out Movement and a faction of the Labour Committee on Ireland. Other organisations were not invited to participate in the real planning of the march.

The last straw

In the past, the IFM has always put up with the sectarian behaviour of the organisers. We did not allow our unexplained and persistent exclusion from the committee to interfere with our mobilisation for the demonstration. However, despite the fact that we have brought more people to the march than any other single organisation in recent years, the organisers consistently refused to grant speaking rights to the IFM.

The 1989 march was the last straw for the IFM: the people we mobilised were treated as marching fodder and the level of disorganisation was exceptional. There was an unexplained lengthy delay in moving off as marchers waited in pouring rain. The route took the marchers on a long hike through largely deserted streets. Without adequate stewarding, most of the march degenerated into an untidy straggle, allowing the police to take over marshalling the demonstrators. At the end, most of our contingent was unable to gain access to the indoor rally.

Our view was that it would sometimes be better if a demonstration never happened if it only serves to put people off. Even experienced members of the IFM were demoralised by their experience, not least because people they had mobilised were so appalled by the level of organisation that they were discouraged from attending any such event again. When the IFM raised criticisms of the march, the organisers made a crass attempt to blame ourselves and other groups who had been excluded from the organising committee for the disorganisation on the day.

The organisers' reaction to our protests confirmed that they were not prepared to change their ways. The IFM therefore decided that it could no longer support this masquerade of a solidarity march. For this decision to be reversed the TOM/LCI clique will have to make a genuine effort to involve the IFM in the organisation of future demonstrations.

Exemplary role

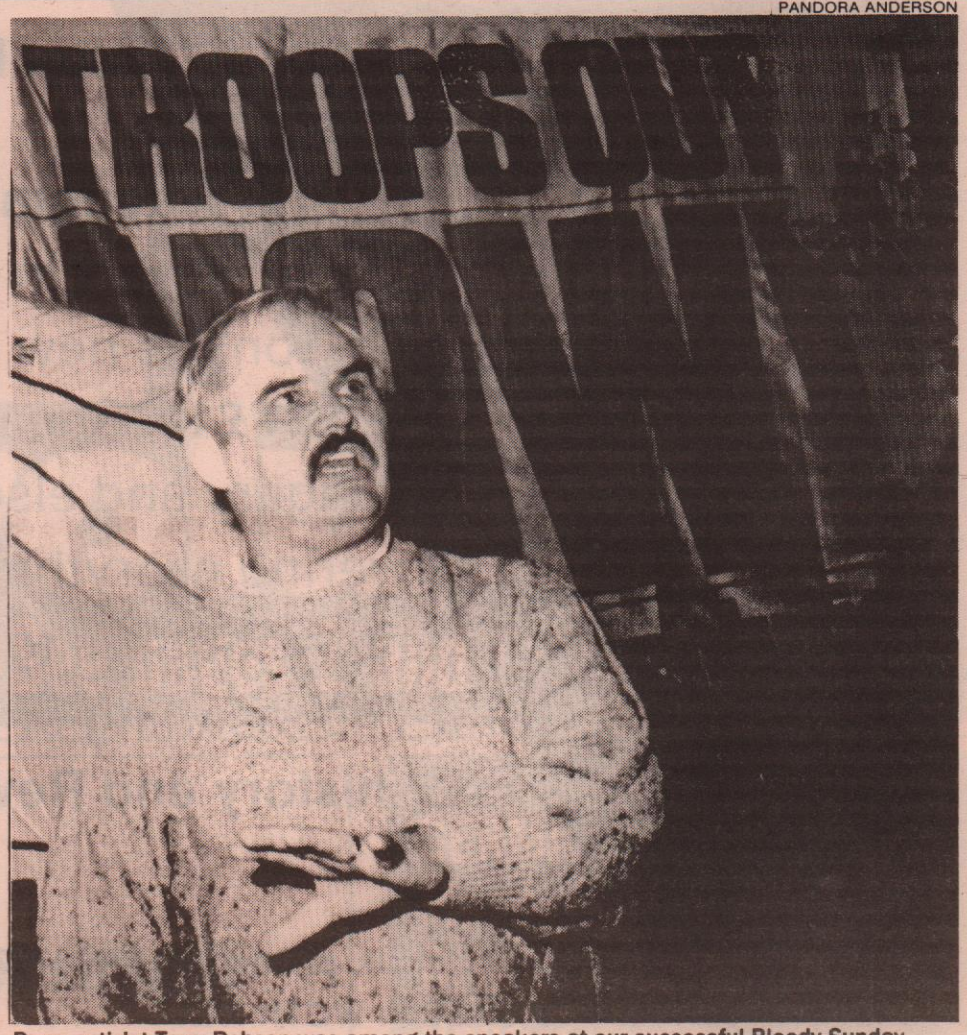
In order to prevent a repetition of this unhealthy state of affairs on future Irish events, the IFM took a decision not to mobilise for any demonstration unless it was granted speaking rights. Given the significant contribution that we make to the success of any event, this represents a minimum recognition of the IFM's leading role in Irish solidarity work today.

This does not amount to a boycottist position, as some have alleged. We have simply spelled out some preconditions which must be met before we decide to commit our resources to building events called by other groups. On this basis, we look forward to doing joint work with others in organising successful events in the future.

If any grouping cannot bring itself to allow us speaking rights then it must be the organisers who take responsibility for events which are smaller than they need be. Either way, the IFM will continue to play its exemplary role in organising Irish solidarity work in this country.

Phil Murphy

PANDORA ANDERSON



Derry activist Terry Robson was among the speakers at our successful Bloody Sunday rally in London

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 2 February 1990 • No 4 • 40p

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