the next step

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POLICE OFF OUR STREETS!

Glen Spencer and Karen Richardson were having a quiet drink in the Mayflower pub in the Manningham district of Bradford. Unfortunately for them, three plainclothes officers from the local vice squad were also drinking there. As the couple left the pub the three officers followed them. One approached Glen.

'He stank of drink and said "You fucking nigger, you black bastard, swing at me" ', said Glen. 'I ignored him and got into the car. He pulled me out and slammed me up against the car and hit me in the mouth a couple of times and kneed me in the groin. The other two men joined in. I didn't get a chance to retaliate. I was hit in the mouth, eye, stomach and ribs.'

When Karen, who is white, protested she was jumped on. 'One of them shouted at me "Shut up you nigger lover" ', said Karen. 'I was dragged over the road and thrown up against another car. They put my arms up my back with one elbow up and one elbow down to handcuff me in that way.'

Karen and Glen were taken to Bridewell police station. By the time they were released Karen could hardly recognise Glen. 'His gums were practically hanging out, his mouth was stitched and his eye closed up. He was bruised all over, they'd given him a

DAVE BURROUGHS

pounding, his clothes were covered in blood.' Karen and Glen were charged with threatening behaviour, assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest. They were cleared on all charges.

That was four years ago. Last week their civil case against the police for false imprisonment and malicious prosecution came to court. But instead of the police being under scrutiny, it seemed that Karen and Glen were back in the dock again. According to the defence counsel anyone who went drinking in Manningham asked for everything they got. The police portrayed Karen as a prostitute and Glen as a junkie. As we go to press the verdict has not been given.

Glen and Karen have been heartened by the amount of support they have received. Karen recalls that at the original trial 'people we didn't know, because we don't live in Bradford, had taken it upon themselves to come to court to support us'. Last week too the court was overflowing with supporters. And outside Workers Against Racism organised a picket. 'Police off our streets' was the slogan. 'If the outcome of the case is good', says Karen, 'perhaps they'll realise they just can't get away with it'.

Editorial

9 February • No 5

Editor: Joan Phillips

GORBACHEV'S BIG CON

WESTERN COMMENTATORS have hailed Mikhail Gorbachev's plans to abandon the Communist Party's monopoly of power as the beginning of the end of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. They have welcomed his blueprint for overhauling the role and structures of the party as evidence of a genuine commitment to democratic reform of the system. But the truth is that this is simply another attempt at a survival strategy by the Soviet leader, and one which will in no way undermine the foundations of Stalinism.

Gorbachev is under increasing pressure as a result of the failure of perestroika. Five years after he came to power, his reform programme has not arrested the precipitate decline of the economy. The problem is that effective reform demands the imposition of stringent economic austerity measures. But every attempt by the bureaucracy to raise prices or allow enterprises and cooperatives to charge market rates has run into fierce working class opposition. Rather than risk provoking major resistance, the bureaucracy has retreated from fundamental reform. The consequence is that the economy is in an even worse state than it was before perestroika.

Events in Eastern Europe have fuelled popular resentment against the bureaucracy. In recent weeks, a spate of corruption scandals and open rebellions have brought the Communist Party into further disrepute. Leningrad party boss Yuri Solovev was expelled for buying himself a Mercedes car. Autocratic party chiefs have been unceremoniously overthrown, along with their party committees, in vast regions like Tyumen in Siberia and Volgograd. The discovery of a party car loaded with sausages and vodka in the Ukrainian city of Chernigov caused a near riot, a mass meeting and the dismissal of the party secretary. The growing local demands for the sacking not just of party bosses but of the entire party hierarchies are reminiscent of what happened in East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Gorbachev's latest proposals to reform the party and move towards a pluralistic political system are designed to create a breathing space for the bureaucracy. By holding out the prospect of fundamental change to the system, the Soviet leader hopes to retain control of the process of managing the transition. In order to encourage the idea that he is advocating drastic changes in political life, Gorbachev has exaggerated the extent of the conservative backlash in his habitual fashion.

The bureaucracy can afford to abandon the leading role of the party without abandoning power. Ultimately, it does not really matter what happens to the Soviet Communist Party because the power of the bureaucracy does not reside here but in the state machine. It is worth emphasising this point because it is obviously not understood by most commentators.

Any significant alteration in the role of the Communist Party would change the form of Stalinist rule but not its substance. It has always been the institutions of the state such as the central administration and the security services which have guaranteed the survival of the Stalinist system. This explains why it is possible for the Stalinist parties to abandon power throughout Eastern Europe without surrendering control of the system. So while it would be an event of enormous symbolism to abandon the leading role of the party in the Soviet Union, it would not signal the end of the Stalinist system in any sense.

GERMANY TRIUMPHANT

ALL OF A sudden everybody is feting the West German chancellor Helmut Kohl as a leading world statesman. Yet there was a time not all that long ago when he was dismissed as a political lightweight and even as something of a dimwit. Nowadays he is widely regarded as a politician of substance with an astute grasp of global realpolitik. In recognition of the chancellor's new-found status as an international statesman, every Western leader has responded favourably to his plans for reunifying Germany.

This transformation in Kohl's stature has got nothing to do with any maturation in his political persona. His progress towards the status of a superpower politician corresponds exactly to the emergence of the Bonn regime as a key player on the world stage. Before 1989, West Germany was characterised as an economic giant but a political dwarf. In the space of 12 months it has become a political giant too: it is no exaggeration to say that Germany now holds the key to the future balance of power in the world. Growing in stature with every accelerating step towards reunification, German imperialism is triumphant.

It is easy enough for Western leaders to give their backing to chancellor Kohl. But it will be much more difficult for them to negotiate the problems raised by the reunification of Germany. Since the start of the upheavals in East Germany, the imperialist powers have been living in fear of the consequences of any move to end the division of Europe. A united Germany would be a formidable economic and political competitor, towering over the rest of Europe and threatening the USA's position as the global superpower. Kohl's reunification plans are thus a challenge to the entire post-war order on which the present balance of power depends.

DEFEND THE ALBANIANS

SCORES OF people have died in fierce clashes between riot police and ethnic Albanians in the southern Yugoslav province of Kosovo. The majority Albanian population is demanding an end to Serbian domination and full republic status for Kosovo. The Revolutionary Communist Party opposes all attempts by Serbia to enforce the oppression of the Albanians. We support the demand for democratic rights for the Albanians, including their right to full republic status within the Yugoslav federation.

The Albanians have always been among the most downtrodden of the nationalities in Yugoslavia. In the fifties, the Serbian-dominated secret police conducted a reign of terror against Albanian nationalists. In the sixties, Kosovo was accorded provincial status and a degree of autonomy. In the seventies, Albanians were granted control over the judiciary, security and economic planning, but they were still denied republic status. An uprising in 1981 was brutally suppressed and martial law was imposed. Ever since the Albanian community has faced economic discrimination, social ostracism and ghettoisation.

In 1988 the Albanians were forced to accept the humiliating reimposition of Serbian control. Led by the populist demagogue Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia amended its constitution and regained control over the province. Ever since, Kosovo has been subject to curfews, military roadblocks, random identity checks and a ban on gatherings of more than three people. Milosevic purged the Communist Party leadership in Kosovo as well as universities and schools. Hundreds of Albanians lost their jobs, scores were arrested and several nationalist leaders have been subjected to showtrials. In Serbia itself, Milosevic has depicted Albanians as criminals out to terrorise the Serbian minority in Kosovo. His chauvinist tirades have unleashed a pogrom against Albanians.

However the current violence ends, Albanian resistance to Serbian domination will continue. Until now Albanians have demanded equal rights within the federation, but after all the bloodshed their demands could well become more extreme. Whatever form their struggle takes in the future, their demands for equal treatment are entirely justified. The democratic rights of the Albanians must be defended.

CONFUSION IN ROMANIA

OVER THE past fortnight the British media have drawn hard and fast distinctions between supporters and opponents of the Stalinist National Salvation Front in Romania. Commentators have classified drunken working class mobs as supporters of the regime and civilised members of the intelligentsia as opponents of the Front. However, this picture of class and political polarisation is not necessarily an accurate representation of the true situation. At the moment the situation is too confused to be able to make definite judgements of this sort about political alignments.

In fact the only thing that can be said with any degree of certainty is that both sides of the political divide are confused about what they ought to do. Thus the ruling National Salvation Front does not appear to know what it stands for beyond the preservation of the status quo. This accounts for all the toing and froing of leading figures in the Front, who are resigning one day and back in their offices the next. It explains the almost schizophrenic behaviour of the regime, which demonises the opposition in one breath and invites it to join a coalition government in the next.

Meanwhile, the opposition lacks any clear idea of what it is fighting for or against. From the start, it overestimated the extent of the changes wrought by the popular uprising against Ceausescu. It took far too long for the opposition to recognise that the Front was dominated by stalwarts of the old order. Even now there is a failure to appreciate that the Stalinists are still in absolute control of the state apparatus. Given the confusion which prevails on both sides there is a possibility that the present unstable configuration could persist for some time.

PUBLISH THE PAPERBACK

THE Revolutionary Communist Party demands the immediate publication of a paperback edition of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*. We reject absolutely any attempts to censor the book for whatever reason, on the grounds that *any* call for censorship can only give the state greater authority to define what is acceptable and greater powers to suppress that which it considers unacceptable. We defend *The Satanic Verses* against all those who call for it to be banned in the knowledge that the state censors, the police chiefs and the judges will always use their powers of censorship to deal with any dissent against their system.

While we are resolute in our defence of Salman Rushie, we do not agree with his new-found sympathy for the government. It is understandable that Rushdie should have lost his former enthusiasm for the Labour Party, given that organisation's equivocal attitude towards the issue of censorship. It only goes to show that he was naive to have ever supported the Labour Party. But by expressing his gratitude to the Tories for the position they have taken, Rushdie only damns himself for a second time. The Tories are not champions of free speech and liberty: they are the leading force for reaction and censorship in British society. Let's have *The Satanic Verses* in paperback; but let's be clear that the most important reason for demanding its publication is to challenge the climate of censorship created by the Tories.

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WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

CAN we have the 'What we fight for' column back—but can it be changed? In its present form it doesn't confront one of the most common questions I encounter from people interested in our politics: 'What on earth is socialism?'

This is hardly surprising in a period when the old Labourist organisations and methods have been discredited, and when the state socialist Stalinist systems in Eastern Europe are collapsing. If we are to use *the next step* most effectively to introduce people to the party, we need a column which goes back a step and really does explain what we fight for.

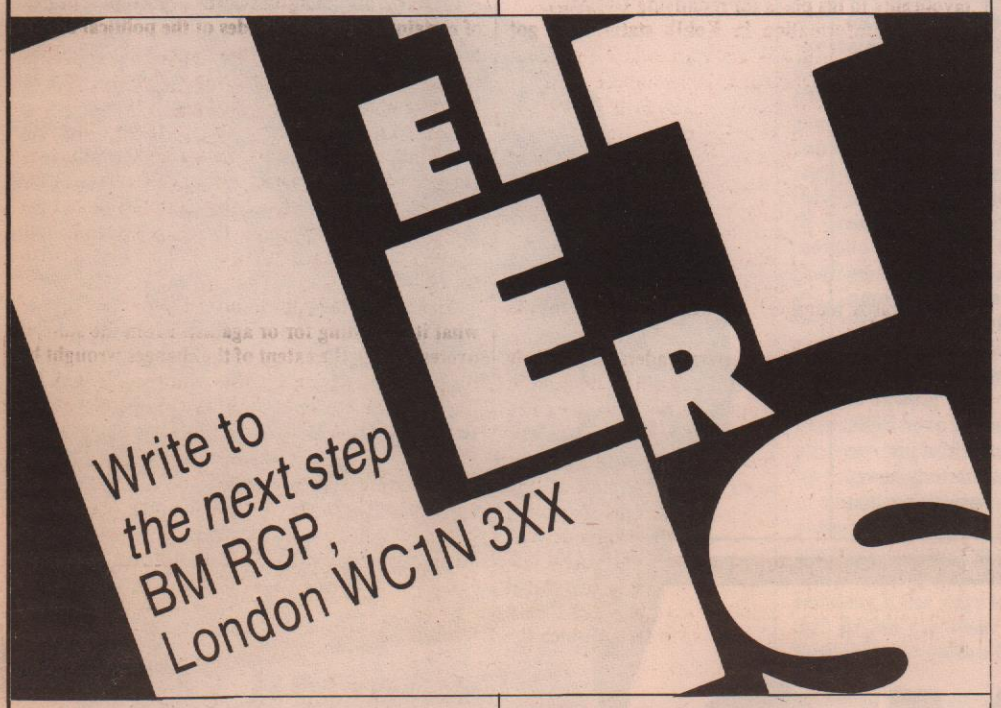
Ideas that socialism is about nationalisation, state planning and the redistribution of wealth (ie, being fair) have not been defeated by a Marxist alternative. We still have to clarify that socialism is a system of consciously planned production under working class control which can increase productivity and give us more free time to develop ourselves and our society.

Once we've explained what socialism is, the column could then examine how to develop an independent working class movement to achieve it—a movement that embodies a social programme which both corresponds to the interests of the majority and coincides with historical progress.

I think that putting our strategy in such a context is necessary when there is so much confusion and a tendency to demoralisation as the old left-wing assumptions are exposed as inadequate and irrelevant. It is not enough for 'What we fight for' to be anti-Labourist, anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist. We must go on the offensive and say what it means to be pro-socialist.

Kayode
South London

• From the Letters editor:
The 'What we fight for' column was first published in April 1988. We do intend to rewrite it: but over the next month we would appreciate suggestions from our supporters and readers about how it should be rewritten. What are the main issues and problems which we need to address in order to key into the preoccupations of those reading *the next step* for the first time? It would be useful if our supporters in particular could formulate the political problems, doubts and questions which they encounter regularly in the course of their work. Write to James Heartfield, *the next step,* BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or fax us on (01) 377 0346.



ORGANISING TO WIN

IT IS possible for ambulance workers to win if we can get the unions organised and fighting in a different way.

Definitely the first thing is the unions have got to get it all together nationally, rather than being different in each county. On the news they should be announcing 'Today the ambulance service is...', rather than 'Sussex is doing this and Durham is doing that...'

There should be mass, joint union meetings at service level to bandy about ideas and work out a strategy. Then the stations decide upon their representative–anyone as long as they take down what the lads want–for a national conference, including the national negotiating team. The motion that is passed is what the whole country does.

There has to be a formula to deal with scabs. There has to be an all-out strike, everybody out. There should be flying pickets to stop voluntary organisations scabbing. The police and the army alone can't cope. Because it is patchy now, the government can deal with it. If it was national, there is nothing they could do about it.

All officers and control-room staff have to be got out. And if they're not they have to be dealt with after the action is over. In places where accident and emergency is already controlled by ambulancemen, they should keep this on but have a board of ambulancemen, not doctors, to distinguish what is an emergency.

If the action was national that would be enough. Control by the members would have to be constant, not just a one-off conference. For the future, we definitely have to get one union in the ambulance service (similar to the fire brigade, where one union makes it strong).

No way is the average man in Britain going to risk his mortgage and job to support us by taking action himself. If the fire brigade men come to us in a few months time and ask me to take action for them I would say no, not after I've just been out for five months myself. To get the whole country to stop work for the ambulancemen would take a revolution. Maybe one day a week, but no way all-out. People will support us indirectly, putting money in the bucket, but that's it. We should make more public displays, like on the 30th, but make it all day next time.

Ray Burns
Ambulance worker
Blenheim Street station
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

EFFECTIVE ACTION?

THE call for a change of tactics in the ambulance dispute (ie, all-out strike), without a fresh political direction (ie, rank and file control, working class solidarity rather than public sympathy and unity with ordinary workers, instead of parity with the police) is a recipe for defeat and a gesture of frustration.

However, I am not sure how strike action fits in with the Revolutionary Communist Party's notion of solidarity action. Mike Gibson doesn't recognise that a strike could be divisive, when there's already a problem of regional splits (letters, 26 January). 'We're carrying the rest of you on our backs' was how one Hertford ambulanceman put it at a rally at Brighton last week. Under the current approach a strike would ensure merely that crews lose by going out with a bang not a whimper.

But doesn't Mike have a point that *the next step,* in arguing for control of emergency services, is strengthening the idea that ambulance workers must take responsibility for patient's welfare? This is further reinforced by your urging a strategy for nurses that would 'mess up the administrative system without harming patients' (*the next step,* 26 January). Would this even harm the government?

At a recent meeting I attended, an RCN nurse justified her scabbing two years ago by saying her members provided a skeleton service which enabled others to 'strike on our behalf'. Is the RCP urging other workers to strike while ambulance crews and nurses carry on caring?

Suzie
Brighton

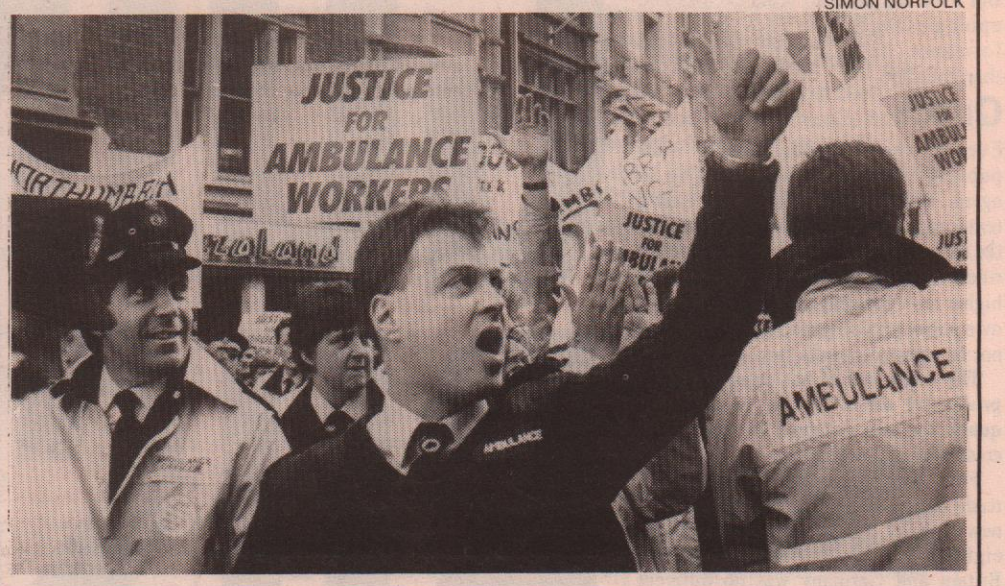
TAKING CONTROL

IN answer to Mike Gibson's letter calling for an all-out strike in the ambulance dispute (letters, 26 January): the task facing ambulance workers is to take control of the dispute out of the hands of the new machine-type bureaucrats, and to organise effective coordinated action themselves.

Ambulance workers could really put the Tories under the cosh if they dictated the forms of action required–from control of what emergency cover they provide to running the control centres themselves. The thought of the working class running a dispute would frighten the establishment. The call for all-out action without emergency cover would endanger working class lives and split the ambulance workers from the wider labour movement.

Brendan
Manchester

SIMON NORFOLK



SECESSION: A SIMPLISTIC FORMULA?...

DON MILLIGAN is quite wrong to argue in response to recent articles on the national question in the Soviet Union that 'in some circumstances, secession may well serve the best interests of the working class' (letters, 2 February). In present circumstances, the success of any of the nationalist movements in the Soviet Union could only consolidate reaction and further weaken and divide the working class.

Don argues that it is 'simplistic' to oppose secession in all cases. But he fails to specify in which cases he would recommend that it should be supported. Would he approve the independence of the Baltic states, where the rise of the nationalist movement has already deepened antagonisms between indigenous Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian workers on the one hand, and immigrant Russian workers on the other? Does he support separatist demands in Armenia and Azerbaijan, where they have already unleashed bloody intercommunal and sectarian strife and threaten to provoke a great deal more? Should we back the nationalist movement in the Ukraine, which has been deliberately fostered by the Kremlin to contain working class militancy since the 1989 miners' strike?

As Rob Knight rightly argues, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union along national lines would unleash a process of Balkanisation and confuse the class struggle still further. Each republic would come under the control of its nationalist movement and become subject to the depredations of rival imperialist powers—a return to the barbarous situation that prevailed in the Balkans for 40 years before the First World War and in much of Eastern Europe after it. The most important consequence of such a development would be that the working class would become even more divided and confused.

Far from being 'simplistic', opposition to this process is essential for the advance of the working class in the Soviet Union. This is not a matter of defending the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union, but of opposing the further fragmentation of the Soviet working class.

Mike Freeman
London

OR A RIGHT?...

I AGREE with Rob Knight that secession would be a backward step for the Soviet republics. It would only further intensify the national and ethnic divisions in the Soviet working class (*the next step,* 26 January).

However, I am unclear what he means by arguing that the solution is 'the creation of a federation of autonomous self-governing republics'. Does this mean that Marxists should be supporting *the right* of each republic to secede? This demand would relate to people's aspiration to get the Soviet bureaucracy off their backs and out of their lives.

Simon
Edgbaston

OR A CHALLENGE TO OPPRESSION?...

IN HIS article Rob Knight argues that we should oppose secession from the Soviet Union unless the Kremlin were to deny civil rights to any of the republics (*the next step,* 26 January).

Yet in an earlier issue, Andy Clarkson argued that Gorbachev had used racism in stirring up resentment against Azeri Muslims (*the next step,* 12 January). Does this not constitute a form of oppression? Gorbachev has used Soviet Muslims as a scapegoat against which to unite the Soviet people behind him. The result is that Kremlin domination of Azerbaijan is intensified and the position of Muslims in other republics is increasingly perilous.

The contrast between Gorbachev's approach to Azerbaijan and to Lithuania exposes his policy as a form of national oppression directed against Muslim republics. It should be answered with the demand for national liberation.

Lenin's policy was that all nationalities should have the right to secede. Let's put this in context. He was advocating this right as a policy of a progressive proletarian dictatorship to win the confidence of the nationalities. We cannot apply the same criteria today. Secession should be favoured if it promotes working class unity. This is not the case in Lithuania where it would promote division. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, is subject to national oppression. Its working class cannot be united while its Muslim population is being attacked by Moscow.

Mike
Camden

OR AN INEVITABILITY?

READING *the next step* over the last couple of weeks I found the question of secession most confusing. The distinction between the break-up of the Stalinist system called for by Joan Phillips and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union argued against by Rob Knight appears contradictory.

I understand that the distinction can be made in principle but I am unsure whether it can be made in practice. Whilst it is true that we no more than Lenin would desire the break-up of the Soviet Union, we must be careful not to project our desires through our analysis.

The RCP recognises that the Stalinist bureaucracy lacks any means of regulating the changes its decline has unleashed. But we recognise that reaction is likely to prevail among the working class. Is not the fragmentation of the Soviet Union coming with equal inevitability as unity is with regard to East and West Germany? Clearly this will present serious problems for the Soviet working class. But it is not without positive consequences.

Firstly it would represent a serious blow to the central bureaucracy and *secondly* it would nullify the ability of local bureaucrats in the republics to whip up nationalism against the control, however tenuous, that the central bureaucracy exerts over these regions. This could have the consequence of leaving the local bureaucrats at the head of social forces beyond their control. It would make more transparent their relationship with the working class they claim to represent. It could as a consequence allow the recognition of a distinct working class interest including the unity we all desire.

Craig King
Cardiff

BRITISH ECONOMY

GOING BUST

The Tories have run out of excuses to explain the failure of their economic policies, argues Tony Kennedy

In a report submitted to the house of commons treasury committee in December, the chief economist for leading City firm Phillips & Drew notes that real interest rates in Britain may turn out higher than at any time since the 1930s. The report goes on to provide a damning assessment of the state of the British economy.

Phillips & Drew point out that even if the most optimistic forecasts for reducing the trade deficit are realised in 1990, Britain will still have a deficit greater in relation to the size of its economy than that of the USA. It urges the government to tackle inflation by reducing consumer and business demand as sharply as it did during the recession of the early eighties.

The report urges the government to take measures—such as bringing down corporation tax on profits—that will alleviate the problems facing employers. On the other hand, income tax reductions, which would benefit the working class, should be shelved. Instead, the best prescription for the British economy would be a good dose of unemployment and wage cuts.

Heady

According to Phillips & Drew, the economy is heading for a hard landing. The only question is what sort of hard landing it will be. Will it be a short sharp shock during which inflation comes down quickly and serious inroads are made into cutting the trade deficit and labour costs? Or will it be a more prolonged period of stagflation, with inflation persisting and growth remaining subdued for years to come?

The report is symptomatic of the rapidly changing perceptions about the state of the economy.

Less than two years ago government ministers and media pundits were heralding the arrival of an economic miracle in Britain. A heady brew of a third Tory election victory, a surge in output and chancellor Nigel Lawson's 1988 tax-cutting budget created a degree of optimism in ruling circles not seen for a long time.

The experts declared the Thatcher revolution complete: with inflation beaten and the unions tamed, entrepreneurship was set to flourish. In its assessment of the 1988 tax cuts the *Economist* told Britain's rulers that there were no longer any obstacles to economic success: their 'last excuse has gone' (19 March 1988). But over the past two years excuses and apologies for Britain's economic performance have grown even faster than inflation.

Quack

Even as the champagne corks were popping inflation had started edging up again. Nigel Lawson described it as a temporary blip. When it kept blipping up, the former chancellor tried to change the rules by arguing that factors such as higher mortgage payments, caused by his own policy of raising interest rates, should not be counted as inflation.

The trade deficit has been the most productive arena for the invention of quack theories designed to sustain the credibility of Tory policy.

First, the government argued that the trade deficit was not a problem. In the new globally integrated economy of the eighties a trade imbalance between Britain and Germany was no different than one between Cornwall and Merseyside. We don't worry about the latter, so why worry about the former was the message.

The government also claimed that the trade deficit was of little consequence because it was 'self-correcting'. It is true that international pressures are now forcing British policy-makers into taking crisis measures to protect the pound and reverse the rot on the balance of payments. But this was hardly the kind of self-correction the government envisaged. According to ministers, market forces would bring trade gently into balance over a number of years with no perceptible damage to the economy.

Tory apologists also argued that the deficit was due to imports of capital goods needed to re-equip British industry. Once installed, the new machinery would improve Britain's export performance and the deficit would disappear. The deficit was a 'growth pain' and a 'problem of success'. The economy was set to emerge fitter and stronger.

Samuel Brittan, leading columnist for the *Financial Times* and a sycophantic admirer of Nigel Lawson, provided the most abject apology for Britain's economic performance. He devoted considerable column space to arguing that the trade deficit is simply a statistical error. Brittan's procedure was simple. Point out the big hole in the balance of payments accounts which suggests that there are huge, but unrecorded, inflows of money into Britain and maintain that it is all due to exports. In other words the trade deficit is a result of the government's inefficiency in recording the export successes of British industry.

Miracle

Brittan's argument was too bizarre even for the pedlars of the Tory economic miracle. It ignored the far more likely explanation that the unrecorded inflow was elusive hot money attracted to Britain by the government's high interest rate policy. Brittan's crusade simply confirmed the impression that he is becoming increasingly eccentric with his advancing years.

By the middle of last year the Tories had begun to temper much of the miracle talk.

Suddenly everybody was talking about a soft landing: a gentle retreat from the growth heights of the previous year while the economy caught its breath in preparation for a new surge. Nigel Lawson conceded that he had overdone the expansion of credit to keep the economy afloat in the aftermath of the October 1987 stock market crash and that this had generated inflation. However, the government continued to deny that there were any deeper problems with the economy.

According to the Tories, industry was in great shape. They maintained that free market Thatcherite policies had fundamentally transformed the supply side of the economy. Investment was supposedly booming and profits were reaching record levels. Low taxes and tightly controlled state spending meant that the public sector was no longer a major burden on the private sector. Employers were in a far stronger position to overcome any problems associated with rising inflation and the trade deficit.

However, even this modification of the official line began to smack of complacency. Lawson was forced into a series of interest rate rises to prevent a run on the pound. By autumn last year, manufacturing output had reached a virtual standstill. Summertime speculation about a turnaround in the trade deficit looked distinctly premature in the light of monthly figures which showed an ever-growing gap. Meanwhile the government faced growing criticism in its own ranks about the effects of high interest rates on mortgage holders and small businesses.

Downbeat

The furore over Lawson's resignation last October became an opportunity for the government to change its tune. The new chancellor John Major issued a more downbeat assessment: 1990 would be a difficult year. The economic remedies the government was being forced to take would inevitably hurt. Commentators praised Major for abandoning the extravagant claims of his predecessor and for introducing a note of realism into the government's official outlook on the economy.

But even the forecasts outlined by Major in last November's autumn statement are beginning to look optimistic.

Within a month, the central statistical office's industrial survey questioned the prediction of four per cent growth in manufacturing investment over 1990, instead estimating an increase of just one per cent. Last week's CBI quarterly survey of business confidence, suggesting that manufacturing investment will fall, gives a flavour of how rapidly the fear of recession is growing among employers.

The Tories still have one excuse to explain the impending collapse of the economy. It's all the fault of greedy workers demanding huge wage rises.

There is a ready hearing for this line of argument inside the establishment. The experts have been poring over the statistics in an effort to show that British business is staggering under the weight of rising labour costs. Newspaper cartoons show how much longer British workers take to to produce a car compared to the Germans or Japanese. Taking his cue from Kenneth 'taxi driver' Clarke, one commentator urged the government to take a harder line with ambulance workers who, supposedly, are paid to sit around playing snooker all day.

It is even possible to detect a sense of relief in establishment circles at the prospect of a concerted offensive against working class living standards. It provides a means of uniting ruling class opinion behind a definite objective at a time when the establishment is divided over all sorts of troublesome issues from interest rate and exchange rate policies to membership of the European Monetary System.

There is no doubt that the government will step up its campaign to blame workers demanding higher wages for all the ills of the economy. And as their stand in the ambulance dispute illustrates, the main message the Tories want to get across is that industrial action does not pay.

The claim that rising labour costs are bringing down the British economy does not stand up to serious analysis.

In 1987 average earnings rose by around eight per cent. Over the course of the next two years they edged slowly

upwards to a level of just over nine per cent where they stand today. In comparison the profits of UK non-oil industrial and commercial companies grew by 22 per cent in 1987, 21.6 per cent in 1988 and 14 per cent last year. Thus while earnings have grown only a point or two above the level of inflation, profit levels have risen much more substantially in real terms.

Government supporters attempt to substantiate the claim that depressed profits are the result of rising wages by pointing out that labour productivity is no longer sufficient to justify higher wages. Whereas productivity rose by between three and four per cent between 1982 and 1988, it has now slipped to barely one per cent. The result is that wage rises are generating large increases in the labour costs contained in each unit of output; workers are no longer earning higher wages through increased output.

However, this begs the question of why productivity increases have slowed. Is it because workers have suddenly adopted an attitude of wanting to get something for nothing out of their bosses? Again the evidence suggests otherwise.

Output per person can be raised by intensifying the labour process in various ways. Speeding up the production line, reducing rest time, breaking down job demarcation and other measures allow employers to gain more output from a given working day. Ultimately, however, increasing productivity depends upon investment in new and more powerful machinery.

A glance at what British employers have done with their record profits over the last few years reveals very little inclination to invest to raise the productiveness of industry.

Between 1987 and 1989 fixed investment by industrial and commercial companies as a proportion of total profits rose from 45 to 51 per cent. However, in addition to these profits companies also raised additional capital from the financial sector—£36 billion in 1987 and £53 billion in 1989. When fixed investment is measured in terms of the total financial resources available to the company sector it has remained stagnant at around 30 per cent.

British industrialists have not re-equipped factories with new machinery. Instead companies have preferred to use their profits to buy each other up at home or to conduct stock market raids abroad. They have also used the money to boost dividend payouts on shares.

One recent study suggests that the government's claims about an investment boom are pure fantasy. It shows that total fixed investment in the nine years to 1988 was three per cent lower than the previous nine years. In other words, levels of investment under the Tories have been lower than in the crisis-ridden seventies.

The picture for net investment (total investment minus that required to replace worn-out plant and machinery) was even worse. In the period 1980-88 it was down 63 per cent compared to 1971-79. In effect, the end result of a decade of Tory economics has been a manufacturing capital stock which has just about regained the levels existing before the industrial collapse of the early eighties (K Coutts and W Godley, 'The British economy under Mrs Thatcher', *Political Quarterly*, Vol 60, No 2, April-June 1989).

Excesses

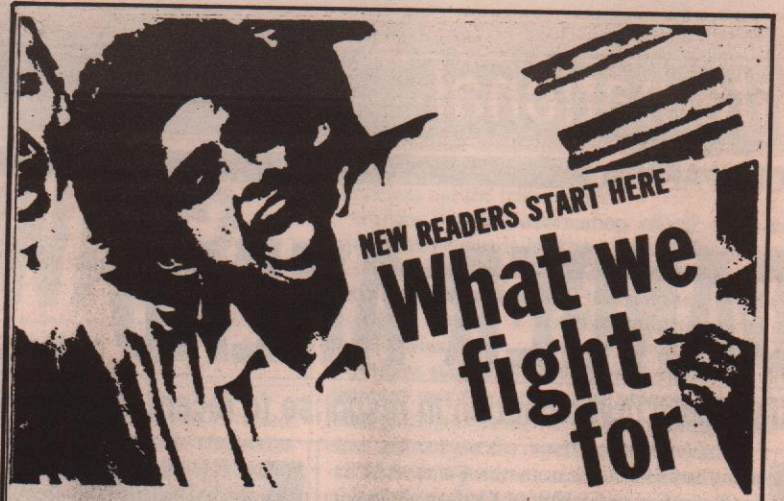
It is little wonder that labour productivity in Britain is stagnating. Instead of providing the tools and machinery necessary to make genuine gains in productivity, employers have relied on forcing workers to work harder in order to improve performance. Raw physical power will always be a poor substitute for advances in technology.

The basic problem with the British economy is not wage levels. It is the fact that British capitalists have no faith in their ability to make a profit from British industry.

Instead they have taken advantage of the international boom in share and property markets and the surge in consumer spending to make a quick buck. Now that the credit mountain which sustained this boom has started to crumble they have been confronted with the awful truth about the state of British industry.

Workers have simply been caught up in the vicious circle of credit expansion generating inflationary pressures within the economy. Faced with a rising cost of living, they have naturally sought to protect their living standards by demanding compensatory pay increases. However, the impending recession means that the employers are looking to target someone else to take the rap for their previous excesses. Their sights are set on the working class.

The Tories have run out of excuses for the failings of the British economy. Our job is to make sure that workers do not become the fall guys for a system that cannot deliver the goods.



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.

SOUTH AFRICA

DANGER AHEAD

Kim Monks urges caution in response to recent developments in South Africa

In his keynote address to the South African parliament, premier FW de Klerk made major concessions to the black opposition and issued a strong invitation to black leaders to enter negotiations. However, it is still not possible to say for certain what the government is really up to. The only thing that is clear is that the apartheid regime is determined to keep control of the process of negotiating a transition to a new order.

Pretoria is in a strong position to dictate terms to the black nationalist movement. Indeed, as De Klerk made clear in his speech at the state opening of parliament, the government's decision to pursue a strategy of negotiation was made in the knowledge that the opposition to apartheid is no longer the force it used to be. Having unveiled a series of measures designed to normalise the political situation, such as the unbanning of the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and other groups, the president listed the factors which had influenced his decision to make these concessions.

Soviet retreat

According to De Klerk, the most decisive factor in influencing the government's attitude towards the resistance movement has been the changes in the Eastern bloc:

'The events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, to which I have referred already, weaken the capability of organisations which were previously supported strongly from those quarters.'

The collapse of the Soviet model has had an especially devastating effect on anti-imperialist forces in the third world. The global retreat of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev has isolated liberation movements everywhere. The anti-apartheid movement in South Africa has been no exception.

Moscow's foreign policy used to involve supporting client regimes and movements which were up against imperialism in the third world. In contrast, Gorbachev has put the emphasis on cultivating diplomatic relations with the West, at the expense of the Soviet Union's former allies.

In Afghanistan, Namibia, Kampuchea and the Middle East, Moscow has been prepared to distance itself from regimes and movements which it had previously supported in order to improve its standing with the West.

The new accent in Soviet foreign policy has had a significant impact on the situation in South Africa. In the past, Moscow has played a pivotal role in sustaining the movements fighting the apartheid regime, directly sponsoring the South African Communist Party and the ANC. However, the new thinking in Soviet foreign policy pioneered by Mikhail Gorbachev has had a debilitating effect on these organisations.

For the past two years, Soviet advisers have put pressure on the SACP and ANC to downplay the armed struggle and seek a negotiated settlement. At the same time, Moscow has moved to improve diplomatic relations with Pretoria; its agreement to withdraw its forces from Angola in order to facilitate a sham independence deal in Namibia marked an important stage in the rapprochement between the two regimes. The effect of this shift in Soviet policy has been to undermine the resistance movement and strengthen the position of the government in Pretoria.

Conciliatory opposition

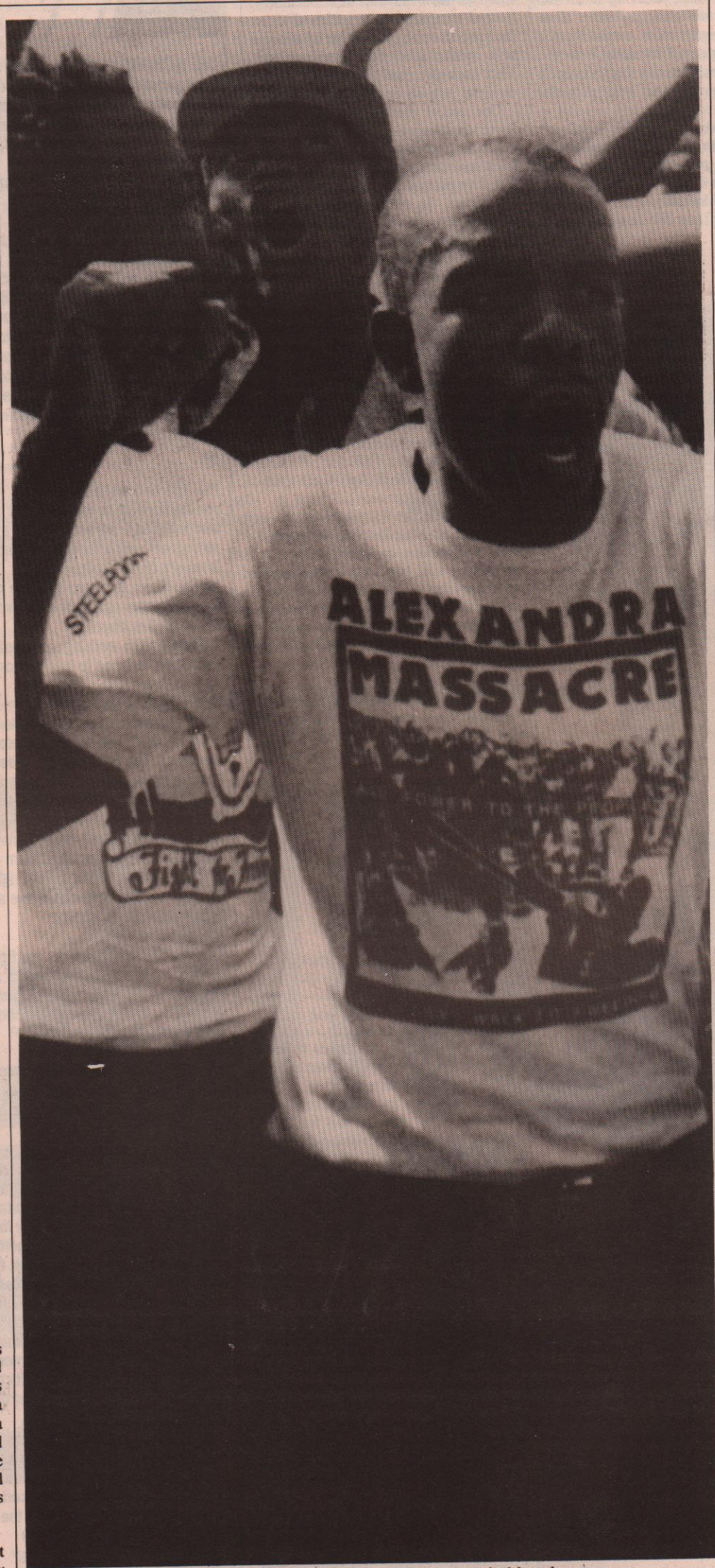
While the mass struggle against apartheid has continued, the nationalist movement has encountered difficulties sustaining a momentum. The ANC has been forced to move its guerrilla bases from Angola and Mozambique and is limited to little more than a diplomatic presence in Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia. At the end of a recent meeting of the national executive committee of the ANC, general secretary Alfred Nzo admitted the movement's military weakness:

'Looking at the situation realistically, we must admit we do not have the capacity within our country to intensify the armed struggle in any meaningful way.'

Superpower détente, the Soviet Union's abandonment of its former allies and the inability of the frontline states to support the armed struggle have created a climate which makes it difficult for the liberation forces to sustain themselves.

This reality has impressed itself upon the apartheid regime. Thus De Klerk's second consideration in lifting the prohibitions against outlawed resistance organisations was that their activities no longer entailed the same threat to internal security. His third consideration was that the pressures of isolation have encouraged a more conciliatory approach from the nationalist movement:

'There have been important shifts of emphasis in the statements and points of view of the most important of the organisations concerned, which indicates a new approach and a preference for peaceful solutions.'



Unless black militants challenge the ANC strategy, the apartheid regime will retain the initiative.

Any reading of De Klerk's speech would indicate that his government is seeking to draw the opposition into negotiations in order to exploit its vulnerable position.

In this situation there is a danger that the government will be allowed to retain the initiative in managing the process of transition.

Although it is not yet clear what will emerge out of any negotiations that do occur, we can be sure that the regime is not about to surrender control. As De Klerk is reported to have told Margaret Thatcher, 'don't expect me to negotiate my way out of power'.

Since De Klerk came to power six months ago, the impetus towards reform has gathered pace. The regime is under pressure from all sides to stabilise the political situation in South Africa. It has had to contend with a business establishment which is worried above all about the impact of continued instability on the economy; an international community which urges reform in order to restore the basis for profitable capital accumulation; and black unrest which will continue in one form or another as long as apartheid exists. The current moves towards negotiated reform of the system are a response to these pressures.

Apartheid remains

However, it should be said that as long as apartheid's rulers are in charge, there is no possibility of them giving up on their system. There is no question of the regime implementing any measures which would seriously undermine apartheid: the government has no desire to institute fundamental change. South African capitalism could not survive without the systematic oppression of blacks which is institutionalised in the apartheid system.

The apartheid establishment may well be prepared to devolve some power to a select stratum of middle class black leaders; but it would never countenance surrendering control to the black masses. In this sense, the government's offer of negotiated reform is part of a calculated strategy aimed at diverting the masses from the struggle against apartheid by giving some black politicians a stake in the system.

While the apartheid regime obviously has problems of its own, so far it has managed to keep the initiative in its hands.

Furthermore, as De Klerk's speech made clear, the government is aware that the overall climate created by the global disengagement of the Soviet Union is an inhospitable one for the black nationalist movement. In this situation, there is a danger that the regime will be able to exercise complete control over the whole process of change.

'Moving too fast'

Unfortunately, it appears that this danger has not been fully understood. It is evident that many black activists have worries and reservations about the direction in which things are going. Even within the movement any mention of talks is anathema for some, especially for younger and more radical supporters. These sentiments have been noted by the more conservative black leaders such as the ANC's Walter Sisulu:

'The problem is that many youngsters are not really interested in negotiations. They have become a little angry. That is why I say that this chap De Klerk is moving too fast and can create problems for us. We want to educate our people. We want time to discuss this matter with them.' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 28 January)

However, while there is plenty of unease about the prospect of negotiations, there is no explicit opposition to the strategy being pursued by the black nationalist leadership.

Indeed, the predominant response of most sections of the movement to the recent concessions is that they are a step in the right direction but do not go far enough. Thus the ANC gave a qualified welcome, saying that the measures go a long way towards creating a climate for negotiations, but demanding further concessions before talks could start.

The United Democratic Front gave a hearty welcome to De Klerk's announcements, saying that the move towards negotiations was the result of pressure from the mass movement. The next phase of the struggle would involve mass mobilisations to keep up the pressure on the government during the talks that lie ahead.

Dangerous talks

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union has responded very positively to the latest developments. Moscow's official response to De Klerk's speech was scarcely distinguishable from some European reactions. It said that the concessions were going in the right direction; now all that is required is some practical action. Immediately after the speech, SACP leader Joe Slovo and ANC leader Alfred Nzo arrived in Moscow for talks about future strategy. Given the Soviet Union's preference for a negotiated settlement, there can be little doubt that the nationalist movement will be under considerable pressure to sit down at the negotiating table.

Even those who are critical of the nationalist leadership have not put forward a coherent alternative.

There is a tendency for more radical sections of the movement to insist on maintaining the armed struggle alongside negotiations. But nobody has yet challenged the very idea of holding negotiations in a situation where the nationalist movement will be at a manifest disadvantage. In these circumstances there is a danger that the masses will be drawn inexorably into an institutionalised process of negotiation. Such a development would be a serious setback for the struggle for black liberation in South Africa.

THE COLIN WALLACE AFFAIR

WHAT ABOUT THE IRISH WAR?

Mick Spencer exposes the hypocrisy behind the British reaction to the Colin Wallace affair

Colin Wallace's revelations about British security forces running a disinformation campaign in Northern Ireland have caused a political furore. Ironically, all the attention has focused on Wallace's claim that during the seventies British intelligence organised a covert operation to discredit Harold Wilson's Labour government and smear politicians such as Merlyn Rees and Edward Heath. But the real significance of the Wallace affair is that it exposes the murderous methods of the British state in the prosecution of its war against the Irish people.

The undercover operations, disinformation campaigns and dirty tricks of the seventies were nothing out of the ordinary. These activities have always been a feature of Britain's colonial war in Ireland. Indeed, it is surprising that nobody has made the connection between these covert operations and more recent episodes such as the shoot-to-kill campaign exposed by the Stalker affair or the SAS killings in Gibraltar.

Far from being victims of undercover intelligence operations, politicians like Wilson, Rees and Heath were responsible for overseeing them on behalf of successive governments. The real victims of the disinformation campaigns and dirty tricks carried out by the state security services are not British politicians but the Irish people.

Wallace was an information officer with the ministry of defence in Northern Ireland. His job was to disseminate black propaganda about the republican movement. In 1975 he was dismissed for allegedly leaking a classified document to a *Times* journalist.

Wallace maintains that the real reason for his dismissal was the fact that he objected when the intelligence service started smearing British politicians and not just the republican movement.

The British government has consistently denied the existence of any dirty tricks campaign in Ireland. Last week, however, defence secretary Tom King admitted that Wallace had indeed been employed as a professional liar and that the security forces systematically spread smears about their opponents. The opposition immediately called for a public inquiry into the case. Rees, a former Labour Northern Ireland minister, complained that his name had been besmirched by Wallace's dirty doings.

The dirtiest deeds

In fact Rees, Heath and Wilson were the *architects* of British policy in Ireland. They are the perpetrators of some of the dirtiest deeds in the Irish War. Wilson, as Labour prime minister, was responsible for sending in British troops in August 1969. Heath, as Tory premier, presided over the Bloody Sunday massacre in January 1972, when British paratroops shot dead 14 unarmed nationalists in Derry. Rees introduced the criminalisation strategy, which portrayed republicans as a bunch of psychopaths, hoodlums and thugs. All of them had a hand in the dirty tricks campaign of which Wallace was an intimate part.

The dirty tricks campaign did not simply consist of people like Wallace telling lies to journalists. It involved a sustained campaign of terror against the nationalist community in Ireland.

In the early seventies the Irish War was threatening to spin out of control. Republicans responded to the introduction of internment without trial in 1971 by upping the conflict to a level not experienced since the 1920s. Nationalists put up barricades in virtually every Catholic quarter and established no-go areas in which the IRA operated as a virtual provisional government.

The British government responded with a campaign of maximum brutality. The dirty tricks offensive was part and parcel of Britain's political and military campaign to try to smash the nationalist resistance. The SAS was introduced into the Six Counties—the first time the unit had operated within the 'United Kingdom'. It set up joint units with republican renegades under the name of the Military Reconnaissance Force and unleashed a reign of terror.

In May 1971, David Seaman announced to startled Dublin journalists that he had defected from the SAS. He told them that he had been used to carry out indiscriminate bombings to provoke a feud between the Provisional and the Official IRA. The following year Seaman's body was found in a ditch in Armagh. In June 1972, captain James MacGregor and sergeant Clive Williams drove a blue Cortina up to three black-taxi drivers in republican Andersonstown in Belfast and let rip with machinegun fire. In court they claimed that they were part of the Military Reconnaissance Force.

Britain's armoury

Covert operations were also employed to gather intelligence. The *Observer* reported in August 1974 that every soldier in Northern Ireland was being trained in routine intelligence work. Up to 20 per cent of any battalion could be involved in full-time intelligence work at any one time.

The British authorities operated a whole network of undercover agencies.

The Gemini Health Studios on the Antrim Road in Belfast offered a 'massage' service. British agents massaged information out of unsuspecting clients who got themselves into compromising positions. The van from the Four Square Laundry was a familiar sight doing its rounds on the Twinbrook estate in Belfast. British intelligence officers analysed the supply of laundry to obtain an insight into the habits and movements of Twinbrook residents. Army reconnaissance officers with video cameras were concealed in a false roof.

Government ministers last week admitted that campaigns such as these had taken place in the seventies, but maintained that they had since ceased. But the Stalker affair—which revealed Britain's attempts to cover up its shoot-to-kill policy—and the Gibraltar killings—when the SAS set up and shot dead three unarmed IRA volunteers—are proof that subterfuge, disinformation and terror are still central components of Britain's war against the Irish people.

For 20 years Britain has prosecuted a dirty war against the Irish people. Lies, torture and terror are part and parcel of Britain's armoury in that war. We should be clear that those British politicians who are now protesting that they were victims of a dirty tricks campaign were in fact the perpetrators of a dirty war against the Irish people.

JOE BOATMAN

Caught in the act: every British soldier is part of Britain's dirty tricks campaign in Ireland

AMBULANCE CREWS, HEALTH WORKERS...

UNITE AGAINST TORY PAY CUTS

Two days after health secretary Kenneth Clarke dismissed the day of action in support of ambulance workers as a pointless exercise and refused to concede any more money, the Tories told hundreds of thousands of other public sector workers that they too would have to settle for a pittance. The government has refused to implement in full the recommendations of the pay review bodies on public sector pay. Instead it will stagger the increases. In effect the government has imposed a pay limit of eight per cent.

The focus on the government response to the pay review body recommendations has pushed to one side the debate over the ambulance dispute. There is a danger that the dispute, which for months has been deadlocked, could become marginalised. On the other hand, the government's insistence on holding down public sector pay presents an opportunity for ambulance workers. If ambulance crews were to unite with other public sector workers, in particular health workers, they would make a formidable force.

The three pay review bodies recommended average increases of between 7.9 per cent for teachers and 11 per cent for top judges and army officers. In most cases the government will award seven per cent this year and the rest next. For top people this still means a hefty pay hike. Duncan Nichol, the chief executive of the NHS, for example, is set to receive an extra £4750 a year. Most public sector workers will receive next to nothing. A teacher on the lowest scale will get just £12 a week more. And with the real rate of inflation running at well above the official figure of 7.7 per cent, most workers are set to take a cut in real wages.

A bloody nose

The government's pay curb has caused resentment among public sector workers. But so long as different groups of workers fight on their own the Tories will be able to steamroller their pay policy.

From the start of the ambulance dispute, *the next step* has argued that the only way to win is for crews to unite with other health workers. The new pay curbs provide the ideal opportunity to argue for united action against the Tories. The Tory response to public sector pay shows that ambulance workers are not a 'special case'. All public sector workers are now in the frontline of the government's assault on our living standards. Like ambulance workers, all public sector employees face lousy wages, appalling conditions and falling living standards.

It is still possible to give the Tories a bloody nose in the ambulance dispute. To do that we need a new strategy. First, rank and file workers must wrest control of the strike from the union bureaucrats who have led us up a blind alley with their softly-softly approach. It is clear that the unions have given up any thought of going out to win the dispute.

Second, ambulance crews need to take the arguments for solidarity action directly to other workers. The government attack on public sector pay provides a new opportunity to argue for united action against the Tories. The new pay curbs make a victory for the ambulance crews even more important. If the ambulance workers won their claim, it would make it that much easier for other public sector workers to win decent rises too. Activists must seize the opportunity to press for real action against the Tory pay cuts.

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east and west

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