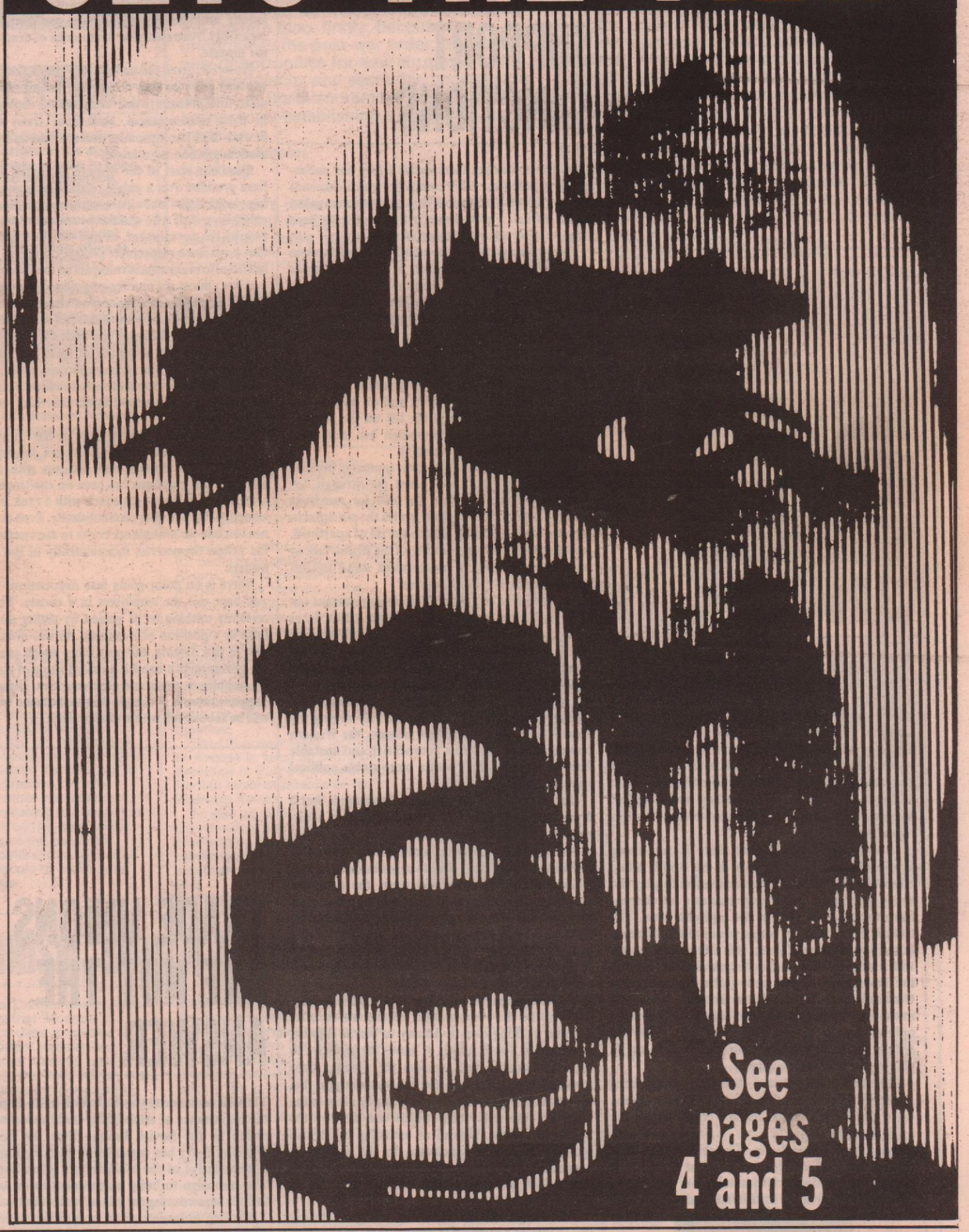
the next step
Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 23 February 1990 • No 7 • 40p

SOUTH AFRICA

DE KLERK SETS THE TRAP



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23 February • No 7

Editor: Joan Phillips

THATCHER PLAYS THE NATIONALIST CARD

MARGARET THATCHER has once again been accused of isolating Britain. Her go-it-alone approach to foreign policy matters has been condemned almost universally as a major blunder by commentators of the right and left. The prime minister's abrasive calls to put a brake on the reunification process in Germany; her unilateral intention to abandon investment sanctions against South Africa; and her opposition to monetary and political integration in Europe have all come in for criticism in recent weeks.

It is widely assumed that there is something irrational about the behaviour of the British prime minister. Yet Thatcher's determination to play the tough guy on the world stage makes a lot of sense from the point of view of the capitalist class. The truth is that Britain no longer wields much influence in any international forum. It is a third-rate power which is being left behind by the march of history and the emergence of the new global superpowers, Germany and Japan. Given Britain's increasing irrelevance in the new balance of power, Thatcher's opinion counts for very little these days. What her critics fail to appreciate, however, is that she is playing to a domestic audience.

Thatcher's international diatribes are intended primarily for consumption at home. By banging the drum for Britain in the foreign policy arena, the prime minister hopes to shore up her government's prestige here. Instinctively, Thatcher realises that there is an audience for her populist espousal of British nationalism. Ultimately, her aim is to construct a chauvinist, British nationalist consensus behind the government.

Of course, there is always a possibility that Thatcher's chauvinist tirades could blow up in her face. After all, West Germany's chancellor Helmut Kohl does not take kindly to being bullied by the senile British bulldog. But Thatcher appreciates that her class has very few options left: that is why she is unperturbed about being isolated in Nato, the EC and the Commonwealth.

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WHY WE DON'T SUPPORT SANCTIONS

THE Revolutionary Communist Party has consistently opposed the left's campaign which demands that the British government impose sanctions against South Africa. Furthermore, we have always been right to reject this reactionary strategy.

Five years ago, when the sanctions campaign was at its height, we condemned it as a retrograde approach, which hands control of the struggle against apartheid to the imperialist powers. Today, when the left is crowing about the success of sanctions in forcing change in South Africa and clamouring for their maintenance, we reiterate our opposition to this focus of radical activity. We disagree that sanctions are responsible for recent developments in South Africa; and we believe that the continued emphasis of the left on the positive results of the sanctions campaign has dangerous consequences (see pages 4 and 5).

We are opposed to the sanctions campaign because we believe that it cannot assist the struggle for freedom in South Africa. The call for sanctions wrongly credits the British state with the potential to help the black working class to get rid of apartheid. And it evades the responsibility of the British labour movement to take an independent stand against apartheid and its British backers.

The British or any other Western government can never be a force for progress in South Africa. In so far as they have taken token steps to sanction South Africa, the sole preoccupation of Western governments is to safeguard imperialist interests in the region. Their aim is not to eliminate the exploitation and oppression of the black masses, but to make the system safe for foreign investment. By urging the apartheid regime to introduce reforms, the Western powers hope to replace a provocative and unstable form of capitalist rule with a more stable political system.

Our objection to the sanctions campaign is that it drags genuine opponents of apartheid into a discussion of the best strategy for ensuring the survival of the capitalist system in South Africa. Instead of mobilising the working class to organise independent action against the apartheid state, the sanctions campaign channels activists into talking about how they can make Western governments and companies fight apartheid. But these forces are part of the problem, not part of the solution. How can an imperialist power such as Britain be expected to play a progressive role in South Africa?

The campaign for sanctions represents an abandonment of the responsibility of the left to offer genuine working class solidarity to blacks fighting apartheid in South Africa. It hands the initiative to the establishment and excludes the working class from playing any role in the freedom struggle. Yet the working class in South Africa and its allies in the West are the only force which can destroy the apartheid system. Instead of lobbying the British state to implement sanctions, the left should be organising working class action against the British state which has substantial interests at stake in South Africa.

The danger of the sanctions lobby confusing opponents of apartheid is greater than ever today, now that the regime has embarked on a process of reform. A dire consequence of the sanctions campaign is that it gives imperialism more room for manoeuvre and more leverage in South Africa. This is illustrated given that the only objective of Western interference in South Africa would be to reconcile the masses to the continuation of imperialist domination in a modified form.

The left's uncritical support for Britain's role in Zimbabwe helped to ensure the transition to a stable pro-capitalist regime at the expense of the black masses who are still paying the price. Let's hope the left does not make the same mistake over South Africa.

NEGOTIATIONS WILL WIN NOTHING

AS WE go to press, leaders of the ambulance workers are locked in talks with health service managers at the conciliation service Acas. This unexpected move has raised hopes of a breakthrough among ambulance workers who are growing increasingly frustrated after six months of deadlock in the dispute.

However, given the malaise into which the dispute has sunk since the start of the year, the employers are under little pressure to deliver significant concessions. In these circumstances, ambulance crews should beware of any compromise deal stitched up by their moderate union negotiators.

Since the start of the dispute the union leaders have presided over a public relations exercise. They have insisted that ambulance workers are professional emergency staff who should be treated as a special case by the government. In line with this approach they have run a respectable protest campaign which has failed to make a decisive impact on the government.

After almost six months of going along with this useless strategy, ambulance crews have reached the end of their tether. Most workers just want the whole thing to be over: the result has been a fragmentation of the dispute into a myriad of local and regional struggles. Given the demoralisation which now prevails there is a danger that crews will settle for any compromise settlement foisted on them by the union leaders.

From the start of this struggle we have argued in *the next step* that ambulance crews should take control of the dispute and link up with health workers. Our emphasis has been on challenging the sectional special case approach with a rank and file campaign for working class solidarity. Even now it is not too late for ambulance crews to start organising the action themselves, independently of the union leaders.

There is no point going into negotiations unless you have got the employers in a corner. There is certainly nothing to be gained by sitting down to talks in a position of weakness. As was always the case in this dispute, the only thing which can force the government's hand is a united show of strength by ambulance crews and other workers. Unless this happens there is a danger that ambulance workers will be fobbed off with a shabby deal.

TRADE UNIONS ARE NOT THE ANSWER

THERE is a tendency on the British left to emphasise the importance of establishing trade union organisation in the Soviet Union. Thus the Socialist Workers Party has organised a speaking tour by a representative of the independent union Sotsprof. The campaign to build independent union organisations began during the miners' strikes last summer. According to leaders of the new union movement, their organisations have been set up to fill the gap left by the official state unions.

However, it is perverse to put the emphasis on forming trade unions given what is happening today in the Soviet Union. We have no objection to workers joining trade unions in order to defend their living standards. But in the context of shortages and other problems facing the working class, forming trade unions hardly seems the most relevant course of action to pursue. By their very nature, trade unions are concerned with bread-and-butter economic matters. But above all else, the crisis of the Stalinist system demands a political response from the working class.

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March's *Living Marxism* is on sale in your newsagent now.
This month's magazine has a special focus on events in Eastern Europe and on the German question.

WHO RULES BEHIND THE WALL?
We explain why Eastern Europe still awaits its revolution: while the old Communist parties might have cracked, the Stalinist states are still standing.

AN ANSWER TO THE GERMAN QUESTION
We ask who's afraid of German reunification?

DEUTSCHMARK UBER ALLES?
Whatever dates and conditions the politicians might set, the German economy is already reunifying.

IS GORBACHEV GOING?
We suggest that it wouldn't make much difference even if he did.

PLUS
The Mandela myth; After the Guildford Four: the Irish are still in the frame; Asian taxi drivers on mean streets; Embryo experimentation; Wage rises don't cause inflation; Hollywood and Vietnam; *A Clockwork Orange;* New Realism and the novel; The myths of eco-doom; and much more.

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LETTERS

Write to *the next step*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or fax (01) 377 0346. Deadline for letters for the next issue: Friday 23 February.

STALINISTS AND MARKETEERS

WHILST editorials and articles in *the next step* have correctly noted that the events in Eastern Europe do not constitute a workers' revolution, there has been a strong tendency towards denying that anything profound has occurred, and that the biggest problem facing the working class is that the Stalinists are still in power.

This may be the case in Bulgaria and Romania, but can it be said about the other countries in Eastern Europe? The danger facing the working class in most East European states is not that the Stalinists are still in power, as *the next step* somewhat formally puts it, but rather that substantial sections of the collapsing Stalinist apparatuses are equally as pro-market as the newly emerging social democrats, liberals and conservatives, and are finding common cause with them in attempting to reintroduce capitalism. New ruling elites, nascent capitalist classes, are rapidly being formed.

There will no doubt be a few personnel changes in the state machine, as those unable to cope with the shift to capitalism are pensioned off, but who can deny that the police and the armed forces will club and shoot striking workers as enthusiastically on behalf of the new ruling elites as they did previously for the Stalinists?

The real problems facing the working class in countries where the disintegration of Stalinism has gone furthest are the austerity measures being introduced by the new administrations, and the fact that the state machines are being wielded by the new elites for their own purposes. Old-style Stalinism is dead, and its scattered remains are of little consequence. It's not the ghosts of the old Stalinists that the workers have to worry about, but the very much alive Havels and Mazowieckis.
Paul Flewers
Kingston

HONGKONG ACTION

ROBERT Leader asks whether the RCP is scared of raising the issue of Hongkong immigration (letters, 2 February). In Manchester, the RCP recently organised a protest outside Gerald Kaufman's surgery in Gorton, making the point that all Hongkong people are welcome here. Kaufman, shadow foreign secretary, makes no apology for his racism. He says Britain should democratise Hongkong otherwise we may have 50 000 families flooding into the UK. His fears of this country being swamped are in tune with Norman Tebbit's call to tighten immigration controls.

We on the other hand make no apology for refusing to accept that foreigners should be blamed for the problems of the capitalist system. We defend the right of all Hongkong people to come here.
Pam Lawrence
Manchester

ODDS STACCED AGAINST WOMEN'S RIGHTS

AT the Polytechnic of Central London a STAC (Stop the Abortion Amendment Campaign) group has been formed in response to the government's latest attack on abortion rights. The problem with this approach is that it narrowly focuses on opposing the amendment to the Embryo Research Bill without tackling the main arguments that are being used to reduce the time-limits on abortion. Supporters of STAC's approach claim that many pro-abortion women support restricting embryo experiments, and would be excluded from a campaign that opposes the bill. We must point out to them why the embryology bill (by bestowing imaginary rights on fetuses) has direct implications for women's abortion rights.
Vicky
Camden

UPDATING 'WHAT WE FIGHT FOR'

'WHAT we fight for' is aimed at the first time reader. New problems we face since the column was written are increasing depoliticisation and an increase in anti-communist sentiment.

'Why are you doing this?' or 'What has this to do with me?' are common responses from people who are curious, but new to left-wing politics. This reflects a complete discrediting of collective strategies. I think the column needs to go right back to basics and assert the *need* for collective action to fight for working class interests, in particular control of ordinary people (rather than the Roger Pooles of this world). In other words, what we mean by class interests, and why moderation is counter-productive.

To counter the increase in anti-communist sentiment we need to explain positively that we welcome the collapse of the Eastern bloc: firstly, because it undermines the post-war order, providing new opportunities for new struggles with new leadership; and secondly, because the decline of Stalinism removes the biggest barrier to re-establishing a Marxist tradition.
Toby Anderson
Hackney

IN Kayode's letter requesting the updating of the 'What we fight for' column, he suggests a more positive, affirmative approach to answer those who ask what socialism is (9 February). My experience, however, is quite different. Most people I meet presume they already know what socialism is, invariably confusing it with Labourism or Stalinism.

In the short term, therefore, I feel it is still imperative to express our politics in a critical form, exposing the inherited traditions of false socialism, rather than detailing our own alternatives. It is worthwhile to note, however, that since those traditions are so rapidly discrediting themselves the time for Kayode's more positive approach can hardly be far away.
Phil Irwell
Hackney

• **From the letters editor:**
Do you have any ideas about the 'What we fight for' column? We need suggestions from our readers and supporters to help us rewrite it. 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.

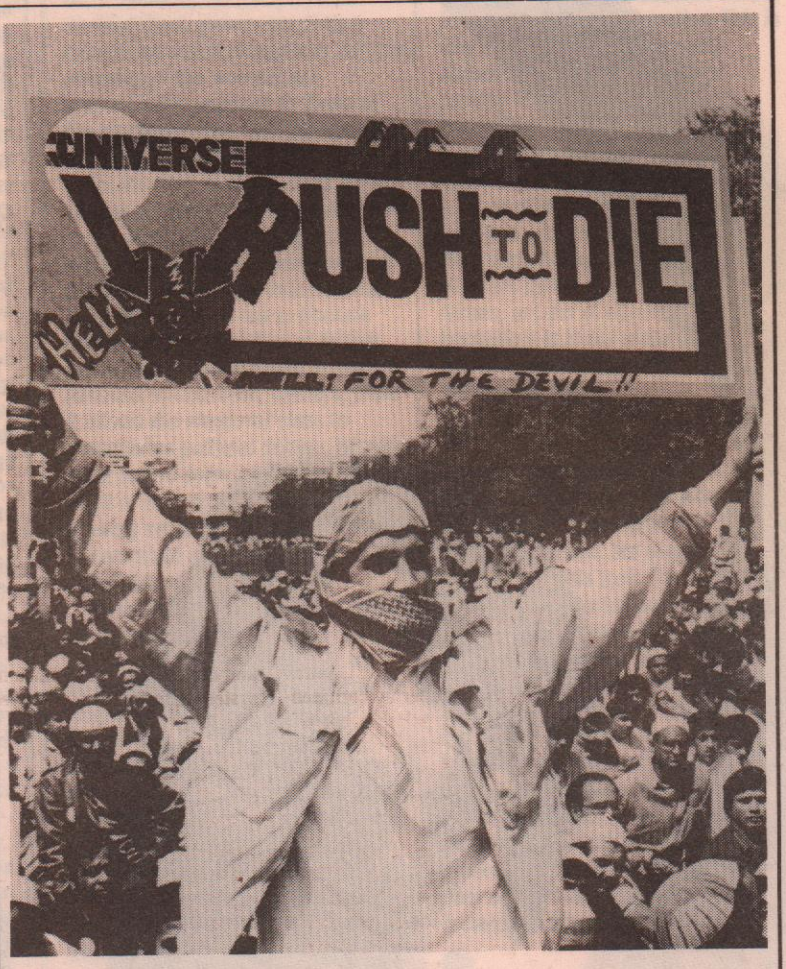
RUSHDIE: THE ISSUE IS RACISM

LAST week's editorial put the wrong stress on its comments on the re-emergence of the Rushdie affair. This time around the main issue is not censorship, but racism.

Penguin's refusal to set a date for paperback publication of *The Satanic Verses* comes in the context of the renewal of the ayatollah's *fatwa* against Rushdie and the eleventh anniversary of the Iranian revolution. The British government has responded by deporting nine Iranians and David Howell, the chair of the foreign affairs committee, has said that 'fundamentalist Mohammedanism' is the 'chief fear and threat of the nineties'.

The US government, looking for an excuse to keep up its military presence in Europe, has warned of Iranian terrorist attacks on its interests there.

As well as defending the right to be offensive, we should be challenging the racist anti-Islamic consensus which the establishment is trying to build up.
Phil
Nottingham



STALINISM, SOUTH AFRICA AND SANCTIONS

IN the article 'Danger ahead', Kim Monks states that 'Moscow's foreign policy used to involve supporting client regimes and movements that were up against imperialism in the third world', and seems to contrast this favourably to Gorbachev's present diplomatic stance towards the West (*the next step*, 9 February).

It is important to emphasise, however, that the Soviet Union's support for anti-imperialist movements has never reflected an ideological commitment to opposing imperialism or encouraging working class revolutions. The Stalinist bureaucracy's attitude to the third world has always been characterised by cynical manipulation of isolated nationalist struggles to increase its world influence and gain a position in which it can bargain with the West.

Gorbachev's current diplomatic offensive reflects the continuity of the Soviet bureaucracy's strategy. What has changed is simply the means by which the Soviet Union pursues its specific interests. Its priorities have always been to secure the survival of the Soviet system.

I agree with Monks' point in *the next step* that despite the short-term disorientation of the anti-apartheid movement we must welcome the decline of Moscow's influence over the South African masses (2 February). This will not, however, be achieved by presenting the Soviet Union's past behaviour in the third world as in any way preferable to that of Gorbachev.
Debbie Warner
Camden

ARGUING the politics of *the next step* on South Africa to people celebrating Nelson Mandela's release outside South Africa house posed a few problems.

A common question asked was 'how can the ANC be isolated when they are coming together in negotiation with De Klerk and supported by the world?'. We must point out the Gorbachev connection: that the ANC has less support from the Soviet Union which has made deals with the South African government. It has pressurised the ANC to reject armed struggle, praised De Klerk's initiatives and negotiated with other African governments about the removal of ANC bases outside South Africa, increasing divisions within the movement.

'So do you advocate an end to sanctions?' seems to be the most difficult question to answer. Appealing to the British government to increase sanctions lends legitimacy to the idea that the state has an interest in ending black oppression. This ignores the record of a succession of British governments in supporting immigration laws.

We are not against sanctions on principle but who is implementing sanctions and the half-hearted sanctions that have been formally agreed to. The only people who have a real interest in fighting against an oppressive system are the working class. In supporting the South African people we must be able to explain why present economic sanctions have not caused the reforms. To free South Africans economic sanctions must be implemented effectively by organising working class action to stop the production of goods for South Africa. We must show that the working class in this country has opposing interests to their management and the British government has no interest in fighting apartheid.
Tessa Myers
Camden

SOUTH AFRICA

THE DANGERS OF A KENY

The unfolding situation in South Africa calls for vigilance, argues Kim Mor

Why was Nelson Mandela set free after 27 years of captivity under the apartheid regime? Like all opponents of the apartheid system, the Revolutionary Communist Party welcomes the release of the leader of the African National Congress. However, unlike most other commentators on the left, we have a very different interpretation of *why* he was released. This is not an irrelevant consideration: the answer to this question provides the key to the likely direction of political developments in South Africa.

The predominant view on the left is that sanctions have been the major factor in forcing change on the South African regime. In all the discussion about the momentous events of recent weeks, it is taken as given that international pressure finally persuaded Pretoria to pursue the path of reform and release Mandela. This is hardly surprising when you consider that the campaign for sanctions has monopolised party conferences, trade union meetings and gatherings of left wingers and anti-apartheid activists for so long. But the left is making a serious mistake in attaching so much significance to the sanctions campaign.

By talking up the role of international sanctions, the left downplays the impact of the internal black struggle.

It is an insult to the millions of black workers who have fought for their rights to suggest that sanctions have been the key to change in South Africa. Throughout the history of the struggle against apartheid, any significant change has come about as a result of working class action. The apartheid regime has only ever made concessions in response to the power of the black masses mobilised in township revolts, strikes, boycotts and demonstrations.

Nobody should be in any doubt that it was the emergence of violent mass opposition in the townships from the late seventies which forced the apartheid regime to contemplate reform. Even when the struggle has been at a low ebb, it has counted for a lot more than the sanctions campaign. It should be obvious to anybody that Mike Gatting's rebel cricket tour was not abandoned because international opinion was against it; it was called off in the face of sustained opposition from black protesters, which the regime feared could get out of control. Ultimately, it is the strength or weakness of the black struggle which will determine the course of events at any particular time in South Africa.

Shifting

By elevating the role of sanctions, the left ignores the significance of other negative factors which have influenced president FW de Klerk. His government's decision to embark on a process of transition has been shaped by two vital considerations. The first is the success of the regime in fracturing the black opposition; the second is the impact of the collapse of the Stalinist model on opponents of the regime. These two factors have been decisive in shifting the balance of forces in favour of the government.

Since the introduction of the state of emergency in 1985, the apartheid regime has pursued a policy of splintering the black opposition movement. It has implemented a classic divide and rule strategy against its opponents in order to undermine resistance to its rule.

Zulu chief Gatsha Buthelezi's Inkatha movement has been the government's biggest success in its strategy of using black stooges to replace the police and the army in and around the townships.

The violence in Natal between Inkatha and supporters of the United Democratic Front has left nearly 3000 blacks dead and well over 100 000 homeless since the mid-eighties. Inkatha supporters have terrorised the local townships with the aim of driving out rival followers of the UDF. On numerous occasions the state police and army have stood by and allowed Inkatha thugs to wreak death and destruction.

Strike-bashing

In the squatter camps, Inkatha chiefs lord over their own fiefdoms with fearsome private armies. Inkatha leaders have also encouraged anti-Indian feeling among their followers, resulting in a spate of attacks on Asians. Meanwhile, Inkatha's front organisation Uwusa has been involved in smashing black unions, and is notorious for its strike-bashing and union-busting activities. Far from abating, the conflict appears to be spreading even further afield, and peace talks have been suspended.

Inkatha's role in Natal is just one example of how the apartheid regime has tried to fragment black resistance. With varying degrees of success, the government has sought to create a layer of black mediators with which it can do business. It set out to establish an elite leadership in the homelands and a black middle class in the townships. These attempts to cultivate a compliant black elite have been repudiated by the vast majority of blacks. Concerted attacks by the comrades on black collaborators in the townships confirmed the difficulties facing the government.

At the same time, there can be no doubt that this divide and rule strategy has had a debilitating effect on the black movement. In homelands such as Transkei and Ciskei, the stooge leaders established by the regime have been at the forefront of attacks on the trade union movement. Meanwhile, in the townships black councillors have mobilised private armies and vigilante squads in collusion with the state police in a backlash against the comrades. This pattern of inter-black conflict has been promoted by the regime in every possible situation.

By its very nature, apartheid institutionalises ethnic and regional divisions within the black community itself. In large part, this explains the regionalised, spontaneous and inchoate character of the resistance movement. It has never established a unified political organisation: even an apparently national force like the UDF only ever existed as a federation of local and regional organisations. The apartheid regime has taken advantage of the incoherence of the movement to entrench divisions even further.

Having successfully fomented strife among its opponents, the government now hopes to exploit the confusion that prevails.

It is well aware of the tensions within the black movement: these are rife even among groups which have much in common politically, from the ANC, the UDF and the Mass Democratic Movement to the Pan Africanist Movement and the Black Consciousness Movement. For some time, the government has consciously promoted those black leaders who espouse a more moderate approach against those who favour more militant tactics. By inviting a weakened black opposition to enter negotiations now, it hopes to strengthen the cause of moderation.

Convulsions

The second decisive factor in causing the government to embark on reform has been the collapse of Stalinism. The convulsions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have played a big part in bringing about the change of heart in Pretoria. Indeed, De Klerk made this explicit in his speech outlining the government's reform strategy at the state opening of parliament last month.

Mikhail Gorbachev appreciates that establishing good relations with the West is vital to his future leadership of the Soviet Union. Thus he has done everything possible to facilitate a rapprochement with formerly hostile imperialist powers. The Kremlin has made major concessions to the West by agreeing to withdraw from former spheres of influence. As well as pulling its own and allied troops out of Afghanistan, Angola and Kampuchea, Moscow has qualified its support for old allies in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

ATTA SOLUTION

ks

The Soviet Union's support for third world liberation movements was never motivated by a commitment to world revolution. In the past, Moscow's sponsorship of various third world regimes and movements reflected a concern to overcome its own isolation. Any setback for the West in the third world provided the Soviet Union with a bargaining counter at the international conference tables. The attitude of the Stalinists to any third world conflict was always dictated by a cynical concern with their own survival in a hostile world.

Today, the Soviet Union's approach to third world struggles is still motivated entirely by its own narrow interests. The only difference is that Gorbachev now believes that the Soviet Union can best overcome its isolation through forging closer diplomatic relations with the West. In keeping with the new thinking in foreign policy, he has been ingratiating himself with the imperialist powers by doing their bidding in the third world.

Conservative

The consequences of the new thinking have been felt most acutely in Namibia. Moscow's disengagement from the region isolated the national liberation movement and allowed the imperialists to make a killing. Swapo was the victim of a sordid deal worked out between the South African regime, the Soviet Union and the imperialist powers under the auspices of the United Nations. The sham independence settlement in Namibia amounted to a perpetuation of the status quo: continued domination by South Africa under a neo-colonial framework.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the impact of Moscow's global retreat on third world liberation struggles. The overall effect of the new diplomacy between East and West has been to isolate any movement fighting imperialism.

In a situation where the overall global balance has shifted in favour of imperialism, it becomes incredibly difficult for any liberation force to sustain itself.

In these circumstances most third world movements have become more conservative in their outlook. It is not a coincidence that the Palestine Liberation Organisation has become predisposed towards more moderate solutions since the onset of the new thinking. In line with the new mood in Moscow, the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua has adopted a more conciliatory stance in its relations with the USA.

The pressures of isolation have also made their mark on the liberation movements in Africa. To those worried about the old state socialist programme of the ANC, some commentators have pointed out how quickly Sam Nujoma and Swapo are moving away from any commitment to a policy of nationalisation. The collapse of the Stalinist model has discredited the very idea of an anti-capitalist alternative and made it more difficult for radical forces to gain a hearing.

It seems clear that if talks begin soon, the ANC would enter them in a state of confusion and weakness. Not only has the movement been weakened as a result of the regime's divide and rule strategy; but the collapse of its traditional backer in the Soviet Union has pulled the rug from under its feet, ideologically and militarily. If the black opposition does decide to sit down to negotiations with the government, it will be at a severe psychological disadvantage.

Given the new global balance that has been established, the apartheid regime can afford to be more relaxed about introducing reforms. As long as they are confident that their socio-economic system is not threatened from within or without, apartheid's rulers are prepared to make concessions to the black opposition. Especially since the settlement in Namibia, the regime has been much more amenable to pursuing a radical reform strategy.

Unstable

Obviously nothing decisive has yet been resolved in South Africa. The liberation struggle is far from being smashed and continued black resistance is expressed in strikes, protests and demonstrations. The political situation is still highly unstable, with neither side having been defeated.

Yet the overall balance has shifted significantly against the black resistance movement as a result of the two factors outlined above.

In this situation the issue of reform becomes a purely political question for the government. As long as the capitalist class believes that its system is not threatened, it is prepared to contemplate significant reforms. Of course, fundamental reforms are not likely to happen all at once. The transition to a stable new order will involve a process of gradual, piecemeal change which will take some time to evolve.

However, given the overall background, the chances of some sort of Zimbabwe-style settlement being worked out are not inconceivable. Indeed, in a recent television interview, De Klerk confessed that his government was very conscious of the mistakes made in Rhodesia: 'They waited too long before engaging in fundamental negotiation and dialogue...we are determined not to repeat that mistake.' (*Financial Times*, 12 February 1990) Although the reform process will be more difficult in South Africa, it is even within the bounds of possibility that the regime could grant one man, one vote.

The major obstacle to the reform process is the fear and resistance of the white population. The concessions announced so far by the government have already galvanised a furious reaction from the far right. The Conservative Party has pledged to mobilise a million whites against the government: it has threatened protest marches and strikes which could cripple essential services. However, while the prospect of a white backlash is very real, the ruling class consensus in favour of drastic reform is considerable.

Given the parallels which are already being made with Rhodesia, it needs to be emphasised that the settlement in Zimbabwe was a defeat for the black masses. From the early seventies, Zimbabwe's national liberation war posed a serious threat to imperialism. The British government's sole concern was to establish a stable political framework for continued imperialist domination. It set out to cultivate a group of malleable black leaders and eliminate any opposition which posed a threat to the capitalist system.

Losers

The 1979 Lancaster House agreement was a victory for imperialism over the masses of Zimbabwe. It was won through the collusion of the black leadership in Africa and the acquiescence of the labour movement in Britain. Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, the leaders of the two wings of the Patriotic Front, conceded to virtually every point of the restrictive constitution imposed under the independence settlement. Meanwhile, sections of the British left hailed the compromises made at Lancaster House as a victory for the liberation struggle.

The record of the black elite which came to power in the new Zimbabwe confirms that the real victors were the imperialists and the losers were the black masses.

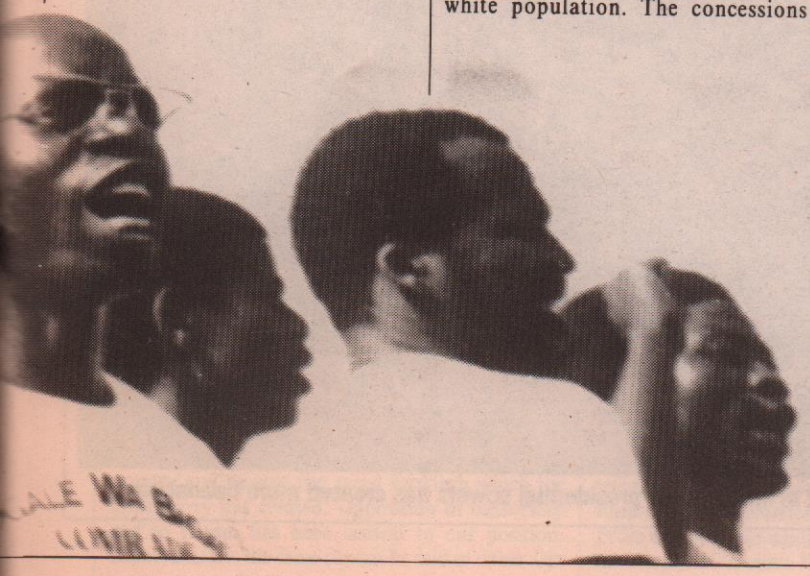
Unfortunately, the left appears to have learned nothing from the outcome of the struggle in Zimbabwe. It is overestimating the positive impact of the sanctions campaign and underestimating the dangers posed by the new situation in South Africa. Among most sections of the left there has been very little questioning of the moderate strategy being pursued by the black nationalist leadership. Indeed, the drift towards negotiations is seen in a positive light by most radicals in Britain.

Compromise

Yet the dangers of a Kenyatta solution being imposed on the South African masses should be obvious. Jomo Kenyatta established his nationalist credentials as a prisoner of the British colonial regime in Kenya. On his release from prison, he assumed the leadership of the moderate wing of the national liberation movement and became a key figure in the transition to independence.

Britain's success in engineering a controlled process of decolonisation depended to a large degree on the moderating influence of Kenyatta. The consolidation of a conservative nationalist movement around Kenyatta enabled the colonial administration to isolate and destroy the radical nationalist challenge to imperialism.

It is too early to say whether Nelson Mandela will turn out to be another Jomo Kenyatta. But there can be little doubt that the South African regime is banking on him playing a similar role. Already, Mandela's stated readiness to compromise has aroused uneasiness among the younger and more militant sections of the liberation movement. Given the eagerness of moderate black leaders to enter talks with the regime, there is a possibility that the black masses will be demobilised and drawn into an institutionalised process of negotiation. These dangers demand the utmost vigilance from the black working class in the months ahead.



NEW READERS START HERE

***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.

SOVIET UNION

GORBACHEV'S SURVIVAL STRATEGY

Mikhail Gorbachev's Bonapartist survival strategy is running into trouble, explains Rob Knight

Mikhail Gorbachev has got only one solution to the crisis facing the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. His survival strategy depends on elevating the status of the presidency above that of the party. If all goes to plan, Gorbachev would become a Bonapartist figure standing above society and acting as the conduit through which the transition to a market system would be effected.

Gorbachev's attempt to enhance his presidential powers received a blow last week. The supreme soviet refused to call an emergency session of the congress of people's deputies. A meeting of the congress is necessary to ratify the decision taken at the Communist Party's recent central committee meeting to increase the powers of the president.

Time is running out for Gorbachev. He is under pressure to rush through these changes to the presidency because of the accelerating crisis of the party. In many regions large local demonstrations are forcing the resignation of party bosses.

The increasingly vocal calls for the party's power to be dismantled are reminiscent of the pattern of events in Eastern Europe.

It looks like local party bosses will suffer an even worse fate in the local elections this spring than they did last year in the elections for the congress. Then they were rejected by voters across the USSR; this time they will get an even bigger hiding at the polls. Indeed, many of them are refusing to submit themselves to election for this reason, in a move which can only undermine their credibility even further.

Power vacuum

Gorbachev's plan is to transfer power to the presidency to fill the political vacuum created by the collapse of the party's authority. In this way, he hopes that the bureaucracy can continue to rule through its control of the institutions of the state, while political power is formally exercised through the presidency and the supreme soviet.

The biggest danger facing Gorbachev is that the congress will refuse to endorse greater powers for an unelected president. If the congress insisted on the presidency being contested in an election, Gorbachev would not automatically win. Boris Yeltsin would gather a lot of support from those who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the reform process.

Yeltsin has one big advantage over Gorbachev. He moved much earlier and much further to distance himself from the party machine. Although Yeltsin has no alternative programme to that espoused by Gorbachev, he is held in some esteem for having attacked the party bosses who are now being ejected from office throughout the Soviet Union. As an anti-bureaucrat bureaucrat, Yeltsin won overwhelming support from his Moscow constituency in last year's elections.

While Yeltsin remains popular, Gorbachev is being blamed increasingly for the failures of perestroika.

It is therefore very much in Gorbachev's interests to delay an open election for as long as possible. In the meantime, he could use his enhanced powers to entrench himself as the nation's leader.

Struggle for Russia

Earlier this year, Gorbachev had himself appointed president of the Russian Federation. This was a deliberate move to prevent the post going to Yeltsin. But now there are calls for the Russian post to be put to the popular vote in an election. If this happens, Yeltsin is strongly placed to win.

The Russian presidency will be a key position in the future. Half the population of the Soviet Union lives in Russia. Given the continuing fragmentation of the USSR, whoever controls Russia will control whatever is left of the union.

Recently there have been moves to establish a Russian Communist Party. At present Russia is the only republic which does not have its own separate party. This is a significant development because it shows that the bureaucracy in Russia, as elsewhere in the USSR, is trying to consolidate a territorial base for itself.

In response to the fragmentation of their system, sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy have pursued regional survival strategies.

Increasingly, this has led local party bureaucrats to manipulate latent national and ethnic rivalries. In the republics party bosses have even gone so far as to organise pogroms against ethnic minorities. There is now plenty of evidence to suggest that the attacks on Armenians in Azerbaijan were initiated by the party leadership, in an attempt to promote its nationalist credentials before the forthcoming republican and local elections.

The fact that the Russian bureaucracy now feels it has to follow the same path indicates how far the crisis has gone. As the Leningrad party boss Boris Gidaspov put it, the speed of events is forcing the bureaucracy's hand:

'A few months ago, I considered this would be very bad for the Soviet Union in general and the Soviet Communist Party in particular. The Communist Party united the Soviet Union and was the only party. After the events in Estonia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan and Armenia, I think that Russia needs its separate party.' (*Financial Times*, 14 February 1990)

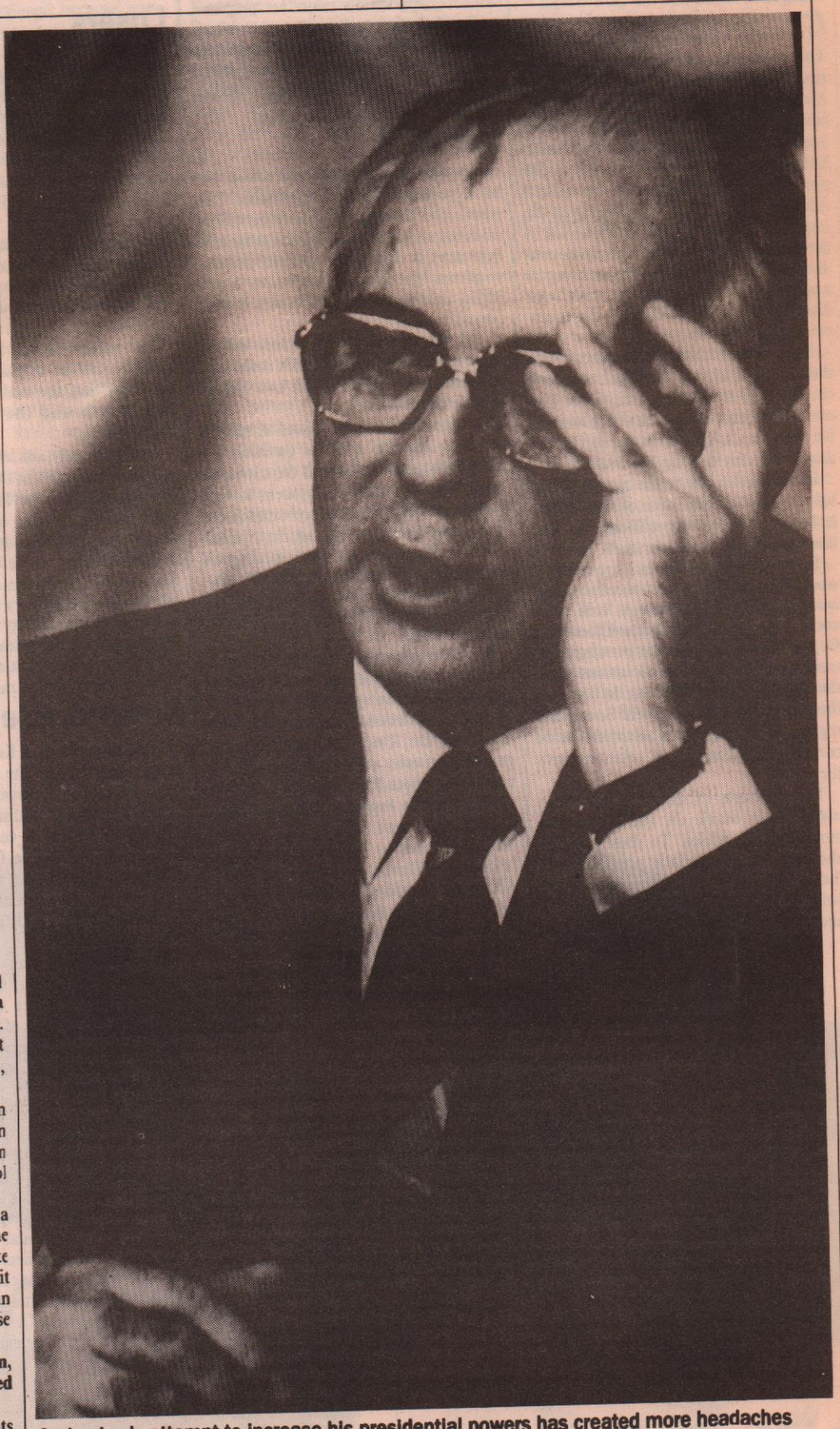
The move to establish a Russian Communist Party is a striking illustration of how the bureaucracy is fragmenting along territorial lines.

Russian nationalism takes a different form than national feeling in the other republics. Whereas nationalism in the republics tends to loosen the ties with the centre, Russian nationalism wants to strengthen them. Russian nationalism is organised through the United Council of Russia, which brings together the Russian trade unions, the anti-reform United Workers Fronts and the international fronts based on Russians living in the other republics. It also has the unofficial support of the Leningrad party machine.

Russian nationalism is both coercive and anti-Western in character. Nationalists in the republics tend to be pro-market, whereas in Russia they are more concerned about preserving Soviet power by any means. One Russian nationalist leader explained that the United Council of Russia is for 'stopping the barbarian pillaging of the natural wealth of Russia and its transformation into a raw material appendage and waste dump for developed capitalist countries' (*Report on the USSR*, 26 January 1990).

Most strikingly, Russian nationalism is fiercely anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic. This explains why Gorbachev's tirades against 'Islamic extremists' have received a sympathetic hearing in Russia. At the same time, the Russian nationalist organisation Pamyat has been involved in increasing attacks on Jews in Russia.

The ugly chauvinism encouraged by the bureaucracy is a menace to the Soviet working class. In a situation of shortages and rationing, and in the absence of any alternative political focus, there is a grave danger that Russian workers will find the calls for stability and strength attractive. If workers are pulled behind the banner of Russian nationalism, the already deep divisions in Soviet society will become entrenched.



Gorbachev's attempt to increase his presidential powers has created more headaches

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Supporting the struggle of Muslims for equal treatment means opposing calls for censorship

THE RUSHDIE AFFAIR

AGAINST CENSORSHIP, FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

Kenan Malik takes issue with Salman Rushdie and his critics

A year after Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* condemning Salman Rushdie to death, the controversy over *The Satanic Verses* is once again on our front pages. Two weeks ago, Iran's current spiritual leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, renewed the *fatwa*. And in an article in the *Guardian,* Keith Vaz, the Labour MP for Leicester East and a prominent critic of Rushdie, pinned the blame for the controversy solely on the author. He called on Penguin to withdraw the book and drop plans for a paperback edition.

Rushdie remains in hiding. But in a major essay in the *Independent on Sunday* and in the annual Herbert Read lecture, delivered on his behalf by playwright Harold Pinter, he hit back at his critics. Rushdie defended his novel and called for the immediate publication of the paperback.

Confused debate

The ensuing debate has created more confusion than clarity. For most people the controversy seems to be about 'whether traditional liberal attitudes about freedom of speech and artistic liberty...should give way to the religious passions of a growing Muslim community', as one commentator put it. But such a viewpoint misses completely the essence of the debate.

What is at stake is not freedom of speech and religious passions, but *state censorship* and *racism.*

From the start the Revolutionary Communist Party has taken an unequivocal stand on the Rushdie affair. We oppose all attempts to censor *The Satanic Verses* and demand the immediate publication of the paperback. At the same time we support the fight of the Muslim community for equal treatment in this country and oppose the racist backlash which the controversy has created. Opposition to censorship *and* to racism has been central to our position. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of either side in the current debate.

In both his *Independent on Sunday* essay and the Herbert Read lecture, Rushdie defended *The Satanic Verses* on the grounds that the novel should occupy 'a privileged arena' in society. The novel, writes Rushdie, claims *'the right to be the stage upon which the great debates of society can be conducted'.* He argues that 'it is important that we understand how profoundly we all feel the needs that religion, down the ages, has satisfied'. Today, however, says Rushdie, only literature, not religion, can satisfy such needs and provide what he calls 'a secular definition of transcendence'. 'The reason for ensuring that that privileged arena is preserved', says Rushdie, is to allow literature to continue playing that role.

Rushdie's demand that novelists be treated differently from anyone else is the narrow viewpoint of a Western intellectual who wants to defend his own privileged position. But literature is no more privileged than any other expression of cultural or political opinion. It does not occupy a sort of holy ground outside of and above society which requires special protection.

Dangerous waters

As Marxists we stand for the widest possible extension of artistic and intellectual freedom. But our opposition to censorship has nothing to do with protecting literature's special role in society or with defending an abstract freedom of speech.

We take an uncompromising stand against censorship because we recognise the need to reject any form of state interference in our lives.

As the central agency for preserving the power and privilege of the capitalist class, the state defines the boundaries of freedom according to the needs of the system. Today, as Britain slips into economic and social decline, the authorities are particularly keen to suppress any expression of dissent or opposition. From the campaign against *Spycatcher* to the ban on the blasphemous video *Visions of Ecstasy,* the Tories have created a culture of censorship. In this repressive climate it is particularly important that we take a stand against censorship of any sort. That is why we would be as opposed to censorship of the Koran or *Mein Kampf* as we are to that of *The Satanic Verses.*

Rushdie's desire to defend the special nature of *The Satanic Verses,* rather than oppose government censorship in general, leads him into dangerous waters. 'In writing *The Satanic Verses',* says Rushdie, 'I wrote from the assumption that I was, and am, a free man'. He goes on to demand of Muslim leaders, 'They should make their position clear: are they democratic citizens of a free society or not?'.

In what way does Rushdie consider black people to be free? Free perhaps, like Julius Alexander, to be excluded from this country because of his colour? Free, like Germain Alexander, to be murdered in Brixton prison? Or, like Asian school students in east London, free to be beaten up by racist thugs? Rushdie's newfound affection for British freedom and democracy has no bearing on the reality of racial oppression which is the lot of the black community.

Unlike Rushdie, Labour's Keith Vaz argues that the controversy over *The Satanic Verses* has 'less to do with religion than it has to do with race and power'. He points out that the British government has no principled opposition to limiting freedom of speech: 'Society invokes laws to protect those who may be attacked because of their sex and colour.' He notes too that what has turned Muslim protests into a national controversy is less to do with book-burning or militant demonstrations than the fact that 'for the first time a section of the Asian community decided to put its rights to the test'.

No credibility

Vaz argues that *The Satanic Verses* has created grave offence within the Muslim community and incited a racist backlash. The only way to defend the rights of Muslims, he concludes, is by 'non-publication of the paperback and refusal to print further copies of the book'.

Vaz is right to highlight the racism at the heart of much of the discussion about the Rushdie affair. From the *Sunday Telegraph's* Peregrine Worsthorne to the *Guardian's* Hugo Young, commentators have used the controversy to create a climate of anti-Muslim hysteria. Vaz's comments would have more credibility, however, if he did not represent in parliament a party that has itself played a major part in enforcing the oppression of black people. Vaz himself has endorsed Labour's support for immigration controls.

Vaz is right too in his contention that there is no such thing as free speech in capitalist society. But his support for even greater restrictions on freedom of expression can only increase the burden of oppression on black people. All limitations on democratic rights will be used sooner or later against the working class and the oppressed.

The left has a long tradition of looking to the state to ban or proscribe views it finds offensive—from fascist marches to pornographic literature.

But any powers of censorship the state possesses will inevitably be used against its real enemies—all those fighting for their rights. This is as true of laws that were introduced for ostensibly 'progressive' reasons—such as the Race Relations Act—as of openly reactionary laws such as the Official Secrets Act. It is a mistake to imagine that the state could be persuaded to use its laws only against the enemies of the working class movement.

'Is he really saying that there should be no laws to prevent people inciting racial hatred?', asks Vaz. 'Are minority groups to be unprotected?' But how can we look to the state which is responsible for enforcing racism in the first place to protect the black community? The struggle for democratic rights involves not a campaign to extend the powers of the state, but a battle *against* the state which enforces oppression.

No contradiction

In the end, as much unites Rushdie and Vaz as divides them. Both believe in the values of British democracy and freedom. Both believe that the state plays a crucial role in defending that freedom. Rushdie agrees with Vaz on the need for laws to limit racist, pornographic and other kinds of offensive literature. They differ only in where they would draw the line. Rushdie wants to protect his privileged space and deny the state the right to touch his novel. Vaz considers *The Satanic Verses* offensive and hence a legitimate target for state censorship. Neither view can oppose censorship or defend the rights of black people.

The Rushdie affair has exposed the failure of the left either to fight racism or to oppose censorship. Because the left looks to the state to defend black rights, it is caught in a seeming contradiction between the two. In the end the debate boils down to on what issue and at which point the left will compromise.

For the Revolutionary Communist Party there is no contradiction between fighting racism and opposing all forms of state censorship. Any power the state possesses to limit democratic rights will inevitably be used to curtail the rights of the working class and the oppressed. That is why the struggle against racism demands uncompromising opposition to any form of state censorship.

This does not mean that we should tolerate racist and anti-working class ideas. But it does mean that we have to deal with these problems in our own way, by politically, and if necessary physically, confronting them ourselves. The advance in recent years of state coercion on the one hand and of racism on the other shows the necessity of being absolutely clear on where our interest lies on both issues.

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