the next step
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liberation not negotiation

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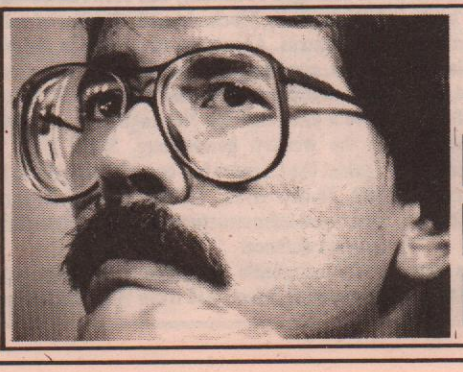

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Action

A WIN FOR JULIUS

Julius Alexander last week won the latest round of his fight to stay in Britain. The high court declared it illegal for immigration officers to sign deportation orders on their own account. The ruling makes a big hole in the government's immigration policy: at least 500 people currently face deportation on the say-so of an immigration officer. The home office is almost certain to appeal against the decision.

Julius Alexander has many reasons for wanting to stay in Britain. His mother has lived here for 30 years; his two brothers are British citizens; his sister was born in this country. Julius has lived here for more than five years. He is married to a British woman, Maureen, and the couple have a son born in this country. However, none of this gives him the right to stay put in Hackney, east London. As far as the authorities are concerned, Julius is black and is therefore a suitable target for deportation.

The Maureen and Julius Campaign, set up with backing from Workers Against Racism, has fought the home office every step of the way. Julius was arrested by immigration police in September 1988. Since then we have taken his case into the local labour

PANDORA ANDERSON

movement, and won support from trade union branches, Labour Party wards, black groups, womens' organisations and students' unions. We have organised pickets and demonstrations and shown the home office that we will not accept its racist laws.

The campaign has argued against *all* deportations because we recognise that all immigration laws are racist. Immigration controls specifically exclude black people from this country. And any black person in Britain is fair game for deportation. Our upfront approach has won wide support and helped put pressure on the authorities. The high court decision is a setback to government plans to deport black people at will.

Julius knows that his battle to stay in this country is not yet over. The decision can be reversed on appeal. And in any case, the home secretary still has virtually unlimited powers to deport people. We welcome the high court decision as one small step in the battle to keep Julius Alexander in Britain. But we recognise that the real victory will only come when every black person has the right to enter this country and live here free from the fear of deportation.

Editorial

2 March • No 8

Editor: Joan Phillips

SOUTH AFRICA: LIBERATION NOT NEGOTIATION

AS WE go to press, leaders of the African National Congress are formulating their response to the government's invitation to open negotiations. The precise timetable for any talks between the apartheid government and the black opposition is not yet clear. However, what is clear is that any negotiations that do take place will be between two unequal parties. If black leaders sit down to talks, they will be negotiating from a position of weakness. Unfortunately, the dangers involved in the impending negotiating process have been all but lost on the left internationally and in Britain.

At first sight, it appears that the black resistance movement is in a strong position. Internationally, the regime in Pretoria is under pressure to grant further concessions to the black opposition. In South Africa, the ANC wields an even greater influence among blacks than ever before. Yet despite all this, the national liberation movement is in a weaker state politically than it has been for a long time. This weakness is the result of two factors which have had an overwhelmingly negative impact on the movement.

Indeed, it is these two factors which have persuaded the authorities to embark on a process of reform. FW de Klerk is prepared to open negotiations because his administration is confident that the black opposition has been seriously weakened. The first factor which has strengthened the government's hand is the impact on the resistance movement of the new thinking in the Soviet Union. The second is the fragmentation of the black opposition as a result of the regime's divide and rule policy.

Commentators have underestimated the effect of the changes in the Soviet bloc on the liberation struggle in South Africa. The disengagement of the Soviet Union from former spheres of influence has allowed the imperialist powers to dictate terms to third world movements. Mikhail Gorbachev's readiness to make major concessions to the Western powers everywhere from Namibia to Nicaragua has had a devastating effect. In Namibia, Swapo's willingness to make compromises is a sign of its political weakness and isolation after the deal stitched up between the imperialists and the Soviets.

Traditionally, the South African Communist Party and the ANC have looked to Moscow for inspiration and leadership. Not surprisingly, they have been badly shaken by the new political thinking emanating from the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's emphasis on building bridges with imperialism has shifted the balance against the resistance forces in South Africa. Furthermore, the discrediting of the Soviet model has pulled the ideological rug from under the feet of the Communist Party and the ANC. In these circumstances, the leaders of the liberation movement have become more defensive and conservative.

Over the past five years the black opposition has also suffered as a result of the internal clampdown under the state of emergency. State repression has been so ferocious that the black revolt which erupted in the townships has been disembowelled. The main political organisations have only just emerged from the wilderness and the trade union movement has been virtually smashed. While black resistance has not been eliminated, it has been contained temporarily.

In addition, the government has been successful in fomenting divisions within the black opposition. It has pursued a divide and rule policy and encouraged strife between rival organisations and communities. The explosion of murderous conflict between Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's Zulu Inkatha movement and the United Democratic Front in Natal; the backlash against the comrades by vigilante groups working for stooge black councillors in the townships; the divisions between youthful radicals and the compliant elite installed by the government in the homelands; and the internecine battles among black political organisations are all the product of the government's divisive strategy.

The combined impact of the international and domestic setbacks for the resistance movement has given the government more room for manoeuvre. Given the problems afflicting the opposition, the regime can afford to be more relaxed on the question of reform. It is clear that the example of what happened to Swapo in Namibia has made the government more confident about pursuing a strategy of managed change. All the cards are stacked in favour of De Klerk: in this situation the government can dictate terms to the opposition leaders in negotiations.

As far as the government is concerned, the only precondition for talks is a further fragmentation of the black opposition. Pretoria will do everything in its power to strengthen the moderate leadership of the ANC and weaken the militant sections of the movement. This has been a consistent imperialist policy in every decolonisation process and every attempt at managed change in the past. From now on, De Klerk will be working overtime to elevate the moderate elements in the leadership of the ANC. The black masses ignore the dangers ahead at their peril.

NICARAGUA: A VICTORY FOR IMPERIALISM

THE DEFEAT of the Sandinista government by the US-backed National Opposition Union in the Nicaraguan elections is a major victory for imperialism. Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's win over Sandinista president Daniel Ortega ends 11 years of rule by the Sandinista National Liberation Front and gives the USA a free hand to do its worst in Central America.

What has happened in Nicaragua is symptomatic of trends throughout the third world. The Soviet Union has retreated from the region and abandoned its former allies in order to curry favour with the imperialists. In doing so, Moscow has forced the Sandinistas on to the defensive and handed the initiative to the USA. Since Gorbachev acknowledged the undisputed right of the USA to intervene in Central America, Washington has become increasingly brazen about dictating terms to Managua.

US imperialism has waged a systematic campaign to destabilise the Sandinista government. The overthrow of the pro-US Somoza dictatorship in 1979 was a severe blow to Washington. Ever since, the USA has striven to settle scores with the radical regime established by the Sandinistas. For most of the eighties, the Sandinistas were depicted as communist demons by US governments under Ronald Reagan and then George Bush. Washington shelled out billions sponsoring the rebel Contra forces to overthrow the regime in Managua. The USA gave $1.8m in campaign funds to Violeta Chamorro, equivalent proportionally to a foreign government giving $2 billion in aid to a US presidential candidate.

Nicaragua's economy has been ruined thanks to a US economic blockade and 10 years of war against the Contras. According to a study in the *New York Times*, consumption has fallen by 70 per cent in the past decade, and income per head is down to just $300 a year, making Nicaragua the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Since 1982, the war against the Contras has cost an estimated $12 billion and 30 000 lives. It has disrupted agriculture, destroyed infrastructure and necessitated high spending on defence.

US economic sanctions have been applied to devastating effect. Aid from Washington was ended in 1981 and a trade embargo was imposed in 1985. This resulted in a decline in exports from $63m in 1984 to $1.3m in 1987, while imports fell from $123m to $3.7m, causing severe shortages. The USA has also leaned on potential Western aid donors to dissuade them from offering help. The result is that the people of Nicaragua have been reduced to impoverishment, ruin and misery.

In these circumstances, the Sandinista regime came to look for sustenance to the Soviet Union. Over the past decade, Moscow provided approximately $3 billion in economic and military aid to Nicaragua. (The USA spent at least as much on overt and covert efforts to overthrow Ortega.) Soviet aid amounted to peanuts: but its political backing counted for a lot given the desperate isolation of the Sandinistas. As a result, Managua looked increasingly to Moscow for support in a hostile world.

However, since his diplomatic turn to the West, Gorbachev began to emphasise that Nicaragua was expected to look after itself. From 1985, Moscow started to put conditions on continued aid to the Sandinistas. Soviet advisers stressed the need for the government to cut its ties with Cuba, seek assistance from Europe and improve relations with the USA. Then they hinted at cuts in credits and weapons, leading Ortega to look for alternative sources of revenue and arms. In 1987, Moscow pushed the Sandinistas to open talks with the Contras.

From February last year, Ortega began to make extensive concessions to the West under pressure from Moscow. That month, Nicaragua signed the Central American peace treaty for a negotiated settlement to the conflict in the region. Ortega brought forward the elections, opened up the media to his opponents, imposed a harsh austerity package and set free about 2000 members of the hated national guard, who tortured thousands under the former dictator Anastasio Somoza. In December, Ortega signed an agreement supporting the US-sponsored regime in El Salvador and condemning guerrilla violence by the FSLN.

The disengagement of the Soviet Union has been decisive in shifting the balance of forces against the government in Managua. For 10 years the USA has been throwing its weight around against the Sandinistas: but it might never have succeeded in defeating them without the assistance of Moscow. The effect of the Soviet Union's fading global influence can only be further to reinforce the subjugation of the region beneath the weight of the USA.

External factors have played the major part in isolating and defeating the Sandinistas. At the same time, the Sandinista regime contributed to its own downfall. For a decade, Nicaragua has been a symbol for the left internationally, alongside the struggle in South Africa. The achievements of the Sandinistas have been celebrated as the most successful radical alternative to the capitalist system and the foremost challenge to the USA. Unfortunately, this image never corresponded to reality.

The Sandinistas fought a heroic struggle against imperialism and earned the support of the masses as a result. But the society which they created meant they were unable to consolidate a strong popular base. While the regime has retained the allegiance of a significant section of the population, it has also alienated substantial numbers of working class people who supported it in the past. Many who looked forward to real liberation after the tyranny of the Somoza years feel they have been cheated by the Sandinistas.

The Sandinistas certainly offered something better than the austerity and repression meted out under Somoza. Their health, education and housing programmes made a real difference to the level of social welfare in the country. But the regime never had any perspective of bringing about significant social change in favour of the masses. It has presided over a mixed economy with a substantial private sector: vested interests continued to thrive under the Sandinistas. Increasingly, the masses have borne the brunt of the austerity measures imposed to appease the imperialists.

The Sandinistas failed to offer a vision of society that could assure them of solid support among the masses. But we should be clear that imperialism is responsible for the rape of Nicaragua. Now, the Soviet Union's global retreat has given the USA even more room for manoeuvre in the region. The defeat of the Sandinistas is a significant victory for imperialism and a major setback for radical forces throughout Central America, especially in El Salvador and Cuba. It may only be a matter of time before the imperialists are celebrating in Havana.

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LETTERS

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PROBLEMS OF GERMAN UNITY

AS the reality of German reunification draws nearer, powers East and West which had previously fought shy of acknowledging its immediacy are making statements about what role a new Germany should play. While those in the West have insisted that a new Germany should be a part of Nato, Moscow has made clear its preference for a neutral Germany.

After the Second World War the Allies were powerful enough to carve up Europe and split a weak Germany in two, thus ensuring the post-war balance that has been the mainstay of European stability. But now 1945's two major players are losing their grip on a major European state.

So the question becomes: is either in any position to place conditions on German unity? Will Germany be allowed to come together on its own terms thus becoming the dominant power in Europe, and will that power ally itself to the West in the form of Nato? As we have seen the old order crumble in the East will the unifying of Germany lead to the crumbling of the capitalist order in the West?

Selena Hutchins
Birmingham

UPDATING 'WHAT WE FIGHT FOR'

I AGREE with Kayode's letter arguing that the 'What we fight for' column needs updating (*the next step*, 9 February). These points should be considered when we restructure the column:

Firstly, we should notice that the column was written some years ago at a time when the Labour Party and the traditional labour movement were seen as a motor for change. Today the British labour movement enjoys no such credentials and I believe the article should put less of an emphasis on this point.

Secondly, I think it would be useful for the column to briefly differentiate between Stalinism and real communism in the light of recent events in the East.

Thirdly, it should explain why capitalism is a barrier to human development, while challenging the common misconception of communism as being synonymous with nationalisation and redistribution of wealth.

Jason Pembroke
Haringey

I THINK Kayode is right to say that the 'What we fight for' column needs revising (*the next step*, 9 February). I think that it should cover four basic points:

Firstly, an analysis of events nationally. Thus the role of the Labour Party and the trade unions in bringing about working class defeat needs to be exposed. Linked with this is the economic crisis in Britain and the futility of individual solutions.

Secondly, we need to explain events in Eastern Europe and the crisis of Stalinism, as well as talking about imperialism. We need to put across the idea of international revolution and state our opposition to both South Africa and Israel and British involvement in Ireland.

Thirdly, I think some explanation of what communism can offer is necessary. Here we could make clear the transient nature of capitalism, the idea of production according to need rather than profit and the fact that for the first time workers can be in control of their own lives.

Fourthly, we need to state how we attempt to put our ideas into practice. Thus the construction of a vanguard which can influence and lead the working class, and examples of our practical work need to be included and discussed.

I feel that all of the above points are areas that are important and need to be included. Whilst there are many other important points, I think the column should aim to be provocative and merely give people an idea of our politics. Rather than being exhaustive it should be the basis of further discussion.

Mark Al Dulaimi
North London

WE need to explain our politics as follows:
What we fight for:
People. We fight for men, women, children, blacks, whites homosexuals, heterosexuals, able bodied and disabled to be free. Not simply to be free from state interference but to be free from poverty, free from homelessness, free from ignorance, free from persecution and, most of all, free from exploitation.

We fight for a world where people will not starve while others burn wheat and slaughter beef to protect profits. A place where people will not be homeless while thousands of square feet of office space are empty because it is not profitable to build houses. A society where five per cent of the population does not own a third of the wealth while 50 per cent of the population are left to scavenge on only a twentieth. We fight for a society where everyone will give according to their needs, where work will be enjoyable and people will have more time to progress and advance.

We fight capitalism in all its manifestations, be it liberal democracy, military dictatorship or fascism. Capitalism unleashes huge productive forces and for the first time in our history we can actually produce more than we need. This surplus of production is not provided amongst those who produce it but is restricted to one class, the ruling class. The ruling class then uses its power to build a state that will protect its interests.

We cannot look to the ruling class to change society as this society is constructed to fulfil its needs. The only class which has an interest in changing society is the working class. It is this working class which bears the brunt of austerity measures while the capitalists' profits remain high. Every penny of profit represents a theft from the working class. It is the working class that produces the wealth, it should be them that benefits from it.

The working class is still a potentially strong social force, despite the claims of various commentators to say it no longer exists. It has been demoralised and depoliticised by the defeats delivered by the old labour institutions. The ruling class has also managed to split the working class. By sponsoring racism, for example, the state has forced workers to fight each other. The RCP is thus dedicated to defeating racism and sees it as a vital battle it must win in order to achieve working class unity.

The RCP has no loyalties to the so-called Communist parties of the East. The Stalinist bloc is not, was not and never has been communist. In the East power has been taken away from the ruling class only to be transferred to the bureaucrats. All developments in the East must be seen in the light of the interests of the bureaucracy. The RCP stands for working class control not bureaucratic control. We argue for workers' revolution in the East as well as in the West.

The labour movement in this country suffers from the same affliction as the Eastern Communist parties. The Labour Party and trade union movement is full of bureaucrats and political careerists. These people have done well out of the capitalist system. When in power the Labour Party always moves to increase the power of the labour bureaucracy; if a firm is nationalised or not, for example, makes little difference to the workers in the industry. It does however increase the power of the labour bureaucrats.

The left also makes a fatal mistake of believing the state can have a soft side which can be used to save society in a positive manner. The state is something that has been created to further the interests of the ruling class and cannot be used to destroy it. As is shown in Northern Ireland, the state will use any means in its power to protect the ruling class.

The RCP is a revolutionary party. The state cannot be used to destroy capitalism. Thus the only way to change the system is to destroy it. We obviously understand that we face a long struggle before a revolution can be achieved. Our first task, therefore, is to politicise the working class. The defeats of the old labour movement mean that many workers believe they can do nothing to change society. We aim to build up a revolutionary vanguard within the working class which will spread the revolutionary movement to the rest of the class.

Only the working class can organise to take society in a positive direction through international social revolution. The RCP will do everything in its power to facilitate this process.

Tom Edwards
Brighton

IN KENYATTA'S FOOTSTEPS?

LAST week's feature in *the next step* warned of the dangers of a Kenyatta solution being implemented by the South African regime now that it has freed Nelson Mandela. It is worth considering Kenyatta's career more closely so we can be prepared if South Africa tries the same trick.

Jomo Kenyatta (1897-1978) joined his first political organisation in 1922. In 1929 he came to Britain to represent the land grievances of his ethnic group, the Kikuyu. He mixed with the British left and, after a brief trip to the Soviet Union, stayed on to study anthropology at the LSE. His study of the Kikuyu, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), received the endorsement of Professor Bronislaw Malinowski. He returned to Kenya in 1946 and became president of the leading nationalist organisation, the Kenyan African Union. From the beginning he exercised a moderating role, condemning a general strike in Nairobi in 1947.

Nevertheless, the rural squatters who came to make up the social base of the Mau Mau guerrilla movement saw him as their national leader. To retain any credibility among them he was obliged to remain ambiguous about his attitude to their struggle for land, while actively seeking to curb their militancy. His hugely successful tour of the Central Highlands in June 1952 provoked considerable concern among the colonial authorities. Kwame Nkrumah had just been made prime minister in the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) and the squatters saw Kenyatta as their candidate for the job in Kenya.

As Mau Mau activists increasingly took over KAU's local branches, the authorities imposed a state of emergency in October 1952 and arrested the KAU leadership including Kenyatta. In April 1953, he was sentenced to seven years' hard labour for organising Mau Mau. In fact, the Mau Mau retained serious reservations about Kenyatta though they never made them public.

The Mau Mau were all but smashed by the British military by 1955, yet persistent disaffection forced the British continually to postpone 'the decolonisation process'. It was only by the early sixties that they managed to construct a sufficiently docile leadership to whom they felt it safe to hand over the reins of power. Kenyatta was brought out of detention in August 1961 to give this moderate leadership credibility in the eyes of the Kenyan masses.

However, the masses remained disgruntled with the land settlement that had been agreed at the Lancaster House 'independence' negotiations before Kenyatta's release and they made several attempts to revive Mau Mau. In August 1963, three months after he was elected Kenya's prime minister, Kenyatta asked his supporters to forget about Mau Mau and 'leave this rubbish that is no good'. At the independence ceremony that December, British high commissioner Malcolm MacDonald was suitably grateful, claiming that Kenyatta was 'the wisest old bird in the whole of Africa'.

In 1967 the land problem had still not succeeded in dispelling grievances and a new round of repression began—this time directed by Kenyans against Kenyans. Kenyatta began taking active measures against land squatters, warning them 'We shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya'. Backed by all the resources of a one-party state, Kenyatta felt safe enough to distance himself completely from the Mau Mau tradition: 'Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again.' (*Suffering Without Bitterness,* 1968)

The establishment of a moderate consensus around the martyr figure of Jomo Kenyatta was the precondition for British decolonisation and the suppression of the Kenyan squatters' struggle for land. Let's hope that the South African masses remember this cautionary lesson now that Mandela is being feted by the white establishment there.

Andy Clarkson
London

THE NEXT STEP

The South African masses must heed the lesson from Kenya

SIMON NORFOLK

WHY THE LEFT IS NOT RIGHT ABOUT EASTERN EUROPE

NEITHER SOCIALIST NOR STATE CAPITALIST

The changing world order has exposed the absurdities of some of the left's most cherished ideas—including the theory of state capitalism in Eastern Europe, argues **Tony Kennedy**

Demonstrators in East Berlin might mistakenly think that Honecker was a socialist, but they know he wasn't a capitalist

The events of the past few months in Eastern Europe have thrown the British and Western left into disarray. Some have joined with the right in looking forward to the smooth introduction of capitalist prosperity and liberal democracy in the East. Others insist that the recent upheavals mark the start of a political revolution which will unseat the Stalinist bureaucrats and set about building fully fledged socialism on the existing foundations of these societies.

What both of these interpretations have in common is wishful thinking. They represent an attempt to squeeze the facts about what is happening in Eastern Europe until they fit into the left's own fantasies about what *should* happen.

In recent weeks *the next step* has taken issue with these ideas. However, there is also another strand of left-wing analysis which fits into this pattern of fantasy-as-theory. This argues that the tumultuous events in Eastern Europe were in reality a revolution against *capitalism*. In Britain the leading exponent of this outlook is the Socialist Workers Party. SWP spokesman Chris Harman recently outlined this view:

'History has been reshaped by the crowds taking over the streets of East Berlin, Sofia and Prague. Yet many of those in the crowds have suffered from a great delusion—that their revolts have been directed against *socialist* regimes. In fact they have been directed against capital, and not any old sort of capital, but capital in its most concentrated form—state capital.' (*Socialist Worker Review*, January 1990)

Harman has half a point; the East European masses have (quite understandably) suffered from the delusion that the Stalinist regimes represented the socialism of Marx and Lenin. But, by suggesting that the Ceausescus and Honeckers were really state capitalists, Harman and his co-thinkers reveal that they are suffering under a delusion at least as great.

The theory of state capitalism was originally a response by elements of the Trotskyist left to the Soviet victory in the Second World War.

The defeat of Germany and the imposition of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe raised major doubts about the traditional Trotskyist understanding of the Soviet Union as a 'degenerated workers' state'. The repressive regimes established in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe belied the idea that there was a liberatory impulse in the Soviet model.

At the same time, the theory was founded on the assumption that the Stalinist system faced impending collapse. Many Trotskyists had predicted that the pressures of war would finally prove the undoing of Stalinism. When these expectations failed to materialise, they were forced to explain the stability and expansion of the Soviet system. Labelling the Soviet Union capitalist provided a means of rationalising its survival.

As the post-war international order took shape around the Cold War rivalries between East and West, exponents of state capitalism extended the theory. The entire world order, they argued, had entered a new stage of capitalist development. The world economy had been reconstituted as a system of state capitalist nations with the state tending to take over from private capital more and more of the economic functions associated with capital accumulation.

At the heart of the thesis was the belief that there was no qualitative difference between the societies in the East and West. Both were merely varieties of state capitalism. It was easy enough for the exponents of the state capitalism theory to assert the similarities between Stalinist states and the West. It was much more difficult for them to demonstrate it. When they did try to draw comparisons between East and West, the results were little short of bizarre.

In an article co-written with Andy Zebrowski, Harman argues that 'if we look at how the Western economies behaved during the First and Second World Wars we see enormous similarities

with the Russian economy since the first five-year plan in 1929' (*International Socialism,* Summer 1988, p11).

For the exponents of the state capitalism theory, the fact that there are similarities between wartime conditions in Britain and the everyday functioning of the Soviet economy shows that the latter must be capitalist. It is true that capitalist nations seek to ensure an effective war effort by imposing central control over industrial resources and imposing rationing and forced labour. But the fact that such methods were integral to the Soviet economy while being largely a wartime consideration in the West, suggests not that the two systems are the same but that they are very different.

Harman and Zebrowski also try to draw an analogy between the way the Soviet bureaucracy controls society and the methods employed by large capitalist firms such as Ford or General Motors. Once more they are trying to pass off a crucial difference between the two systems as evidence for their similarity.

Stretching

Harman and Zebrowski realise that when examined in its totality, Western capitalism looks very different from the system in the East. So, in order to salvage the state capitalism thesis, they are forced to isolate particular facets of capitalist reality in the West which bear some similarity to what goes on under Stalinism, and present these as demonstrating the essence of the system. In any case, to imagine that the complex, multi-layered administrative structure of the Western firm provides a model for the bureaucratic planning mechanisms found in the Soviet Union is stretching even Harman and Zebrowski's method of analysis by comparison to breaking point.

Such crude comparisons are not limited to showing that the Soviet economy has certain features in common with capitalism.

Even Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika was apparently a Western phenomenon originally. Tony Cliff, one of the architects of the state capitalism theory, argued recently that 'Thatcher carried out a perestroika in Britain in 1979-81'. And Thatcher is not the only Western leader to have pre-empted Gorbachev:

'Every capitalist country has perestroika. In Japan capitalists closed factories, they opened new factories, they changed machinery.' (*Socialist Worker Review,* December 1989)

Comparing perestroika to capitalist restructuring on the grounds that both are designed to streamline industry is like comparing a camel to Concorde on the grounds that both are used as forms of transportation. In both East and West, economic failure is forcing rulers to adopt new strategies. The Soviet bureaucracy, like the Japanese government, wants to dispense with inefficient means of production and replace them with new plant and machinery. None of this proves anything about the nature of Soviet society. It merely shows that both economic systems are in dire straits.

Shaky

The theorists of state capitalism sense the absurdity of their own thesis. Conscious that a few simplistic analogies provide a very shaky foundation for a theory which supposedly explains the workings of the world economy, they have tried to firm up their arguments by abandoning Marx's conception of capitalist production itself. In its place they have come up with a new understanding of capitalism which allows them to fit Eastern Europe into the model.

According to another SWP writer, Mike Haynes, those on the left who reject the state capitalist thesis 'misidentify capitalism with the market' and 'fall into the trap of seeing the market as a universal panacea' (*International Socialism,* Winter 1987). In one dismissive sentence, Haynes has effectively dispensed with the very essence of Marx's theory of capitalist production.

For Marx, capitalism differs from previous societies because the economic relations between producers are mediated through the exchange of their products as commodities on the market. The relatively simple form of social organisation characteristic of pre-capitalist societies, such as the extended family or rural community, meant that the distribution of the collective product among the producers took a direct and personal form.

Capitalism is a more developed system in which economic relations are reproduced through the process of commodity exchange.

Economic relations are no longer bound up with kinship, family or other direct ties. The individual producer is now concerned only to sell his product in exchange for money in order to gain access to the products produced by others. The relations among commodity producers thus assume an indirect and impersonal form, being mediated through the market. Any relations other than the strictly economic are a matter of mutual indifference to individuals as commodity producers.

The character of exploitation under capitalism exhibits a singularly impersonal character. Instead of the direct servitude and forced labour involved in the relation between lord and serf, the capital/wage-labour relation appears as one between free agents. Workers own their ability to work and are free to sell it to whoever they like. Capitalists buy labour-power according to the same laws by which they purchase any other commodity, paying a sum of money equal to the cost of producing it.

Marx was never concerned to prove that exploitation exists under capitalism—he saw it as self-evident. His aim was rather to explain the peculiar nature of capitalist exploitation: how an unequal production relation between the capitalist and the worker takes the form of a freely agreed contract between private agents. He shows that the process of commodity exchange and the apparent equality of market relations are, paradoxically, founded on capitalist exploitation itself.

To sustain the claim that the Soviet Union is capitalist the SWP has been forced to reject Marx's analysis of capitalist social relations

For Marx the market is not an optional extra which capitalism can dispense with. The distribution of the social product through the process of commodity exchange is intrinsic to the very nature of capitalist production.

In order to sustain the claim that the Soviet Union is capitalist the SWP has been forced to reject Marx's analysis of the distinct nature of capitalist social relations. Cliff is quite clear on this point:

'If one examines the relations within the Russian economy, abstracting them from their relations with the world economy, one is bound to conclude that the source of the law of value, as the motor and regulator of production, is not to be found in it. In essence, the laws prevailing in the relations between the enterprises and between the labourers and the employer-state would be *no different* if Russia were one big factory managed directly from the centre and if all the labourers received the goods they consumed directly *in kind.*' (*State Capitalism in Russia,* 1974, pp208-9)

In other words, the law of value operating through the medium of commodity exchange, which for Marx was the fundamental law of capitalist production, does not exist in the Soviet Union. And neither does the peculiarly capitalist relation of exploitation, between capital and wage-labour. To insist that the Soviet Union is capitalist is to accept that capitalism can exist without the operation of the law of value or the wage-labour/capital relationship.

Cliff and other exponents of the state capitalism thesis argue that the capitalist character of the Soviet Union becomes clearer once it is examined in relation to the world market. Capitalism supposedly enters the Soviet Union through competition with the rest of the capitalist world.

Why the Soviet Union's relation to the world market should determine the social character of production is not clear. Trade has been taking place on the margins of different societies for thousands of years but this did not make them capitalist. Capitalism requires a thoroughgoing change in the production relations of society such that production for exchange becomes the motive governing the entirety of economic activity. The fact that the Soviet Union may buy and sell on the world market is irrelevant to the analysis of the economic laws characteristic of the system itself.

Specificity

Again, the exponents of state capitalism sense that their assertion that capitalism in the Soviet Union is the result of the impact of the world market is unconvincing. They resolve the dilemma with another swipe at Marx's theory.

Modern capitalism, say state capitalism theorists, is no longer concerned with the creation of value and surplus-value but simply with the production and accumulation of *things.* The production of one type of object in particular—armaments—has sustained the growth of the world economy since the Second World War. The armaments industry has also been the main mechanism through which capitalism finds its way into Eastern Europe—by forcing the Soviet bloc countries to compete with the West in the arms race.

This emphasis on the production of things destroys the last vestige of any understanding of the specificity of capitalist production.

It is obvious that any society must produce objects for use. The real problem is to show the particular way in which capitalism does this; only then can we demonstrate the essence of the capitalist mode of production which differentiates it from other types of societies.

Marx derived an understanding of the specific social mechanism through which the capitalist system reproduces itself and threw light on the contradictory nature of this process. This is lost in the theory of state capitalism. All that is left is a description of exploitation and want that have been the common features of all societies right up to the present.

Antipathy

The claim that arms production has been the main factor sustaining growth in the world capitalist economy since the end of the Second World War is absurd. The fundamental conditions for the post-war boom were the international defeats inflicted on the working class during the thirties, the large-scale restructuring of industry following the war, and the fact that the USA was powerful enough to call an end to the economic rivalries that had characterised the international capitalist system in the twenties and thirties. These factors facilitated a major revival of profitability and allowed the capitalist accumulation process to get under way again.

The theory of state capitalism represented an attempt by the radical left to get to grips with the new balance of power established in the world order after 1945. So long as the basic elements of the post-war settlement—the division of Europe and the tension between America and the Soviet Union—remained intact the theory seemed credible enough. Indeed, reduced to the slogan 'neither Washington nor Moscow', it had a certain appeal on the left given the widespread antipathy towards Stalinism during the sixties and seventies.

However, the collapse of the international order on which the theory of state capitalism was based has thrown the theory itself into disarray. For the exponents of state capitalism, the abandonment of Marx's analysis did not matter much while the theory bore some resemblance to global reality. Now, with the major changes taking place in the political map of Eastern Europe, the confusion at the heart of the theory is likely to surface. Harman's claim that the protests in East European cities were really anti-capitalist revolts is an early sign of how the need to sustain the theory takes precedence over a serious analysis of what is really going on.

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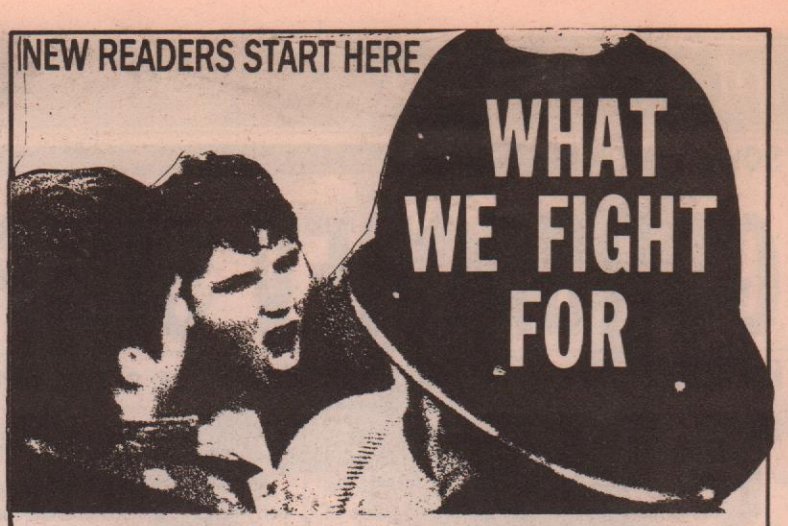

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

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.

SOVIET UNION

GORBACHEV SCAPEGOATS JEWS

Rob Knight explains what lies behind the wave of anti-Semitism sweeping the Soviet Union

The authorities in Moscow last week charged Pamyat, an openly anti-Semitic Russian organisation, with inciting racial hatred. The move came in the wake of a rising tide of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. The official press has published anti-Semitic views. There have been well-documented attacks on Jews and on Jewish-owned premises. And there are widespread rumours about a planned pogrom against Jews in the spring.

The charges against Pamyat are a response to international disquiet about the increasing attacks on Jews. By bringing Pamyat to court, the government hopes to pin the blame for anti-Semitism on a still insignificant fringe group. But anti-Semitism has long been condoned and even encouraged at all levels of the party and the state. The move against Pamyat is simply an attempt to disguise the extent to which the authorities have colluded in whipping up anti-Jewish hysteria.

Anti-Semitism has a long history in Russia. During the last years of the tsarist empire the authorities encouraged ferocious attacks on Jews. It was the time when the Russian word 'pogrom' came into international usage. Today's anti-Semitism is often depicted as a result of racial memory and a throwback to the past. In fact it is the creation of the specific conditions which exist in the Soviet Union now. The new wave of anti-Semitism is the product of the crisis of Stalinism, not of tsarism.

Before the Russian Revolution, and during the early years of the Soviet state, the Bolsheviks fought strenuously against anti-Semitism.

Lenin saw the struggle for Jewish rights as a crucial part of the fight to create a workers' movement that was free from the influence of Russian nationalism. Jews played a leading role in the revolution and in the creation of the new Soviet Union. But by the late twenties, when the Stalinist bureaucracy had usurped power from the working class, the Bolsheviks' resolute stance against anti-Semitism had been reversed.

Stalin rejected the internationalist outlook of the Bolsheviks. His adoption of the policy of socialism in one country led to official backing for Russian nationalism. The Second World War, which the bureaucracy dubbed the 'Great Patriotic War', was particularly important in consolidating the grip of nationalism over the Soviet people.

Under Stalin, Russian nationalism was expressed increasingly in the form of anti-Semitism. Jews were depicted as unRussian and hence potentially disloyal. The Stalinists encouraged and manipulated anti-Jewish feeling in their struggle to gain and keep control of the Soviet Union.

Even at a very early stage of the Stalinist takeover, the new bureaucracy made full use of anti-Semitic propaganda. During Stalin's campaign against Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev in the 1920s, he constantly emphasised the opposition leaders' Jewish backgrounds. During the Moscow trials in the thirties, the Stalinist prosecutor continually referred to Trotsky and other oppositionists as 'people without a fatherland'.

After the Second World War, the Soviet authorities launched a more general anti-Semitic campaign, targeting Jews as 'rootless cosmopolitans'. Jews were denied the civil rights given to other minority groups and were systematically persecuted. After Stalin's death, anti-Semitism continued in a different form. The Soviet Union's anti-Israel foreign policy was used to justify the persecution of Jews and to deny them the right to emigrate.

As a result of this continuous campaign of official persecution, anti-Semitism became endemic to Soviet society. A large section of the Soviet intelligentsia in particular remains to this day openly hostile towards Jews. The intelligentsia has always been able to find official favour through its preparedness to denounce and persecute Jews.

Ironically, the 1989 census has revealed that the number of Jews in the Soviet Union is now only a third of what it was under the tsar. This gives a measure of the scale of the victimisation suffered by Jews under the Stalinist system. The fall in the number of officially registered Jews is partly the result of pogroms and emigration. It is also the result of many Jews being forced to hide their identity. The strength of anti-Semitism in Soviet society means that few people are willing openly to declare themselves Jewish.

In the current atmosphere of crisis and decay in the Soviet Union, anti-Semitism has again come to the surface.

Jews have become the chief scapegoats for a disintegrating system. Russian nationalist intellectuals such as Igor Shafarevich have denounced liberals and advocates of a market economy as part of a Jewish conspiracy to undermine the Soviet Union. Today, Jews are blamed for everything from the high prices charged by cooperatives to the rise of nationalism in the republics.

Useful function

Anti-Semitic organisations like Pamyat have long been encouraged by Communist Party officials. At a time when other organisations were banned from holding meetings and demonstrations, Pamyat activities were given official blessing. Even today the authorities turn a blind eye to anti-Semitic actions. When a group of Pamyat supporters broke up a meeting of the Writers Union, the police stood by and allowed them to leave without arresting anybody.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise in Soviet society. But it has yet to take a focused political form outside of the still embryonic far right and Russian nationalist parties. However, in the current atmosphere of instability, it would not take much for anti-Semitism to spill over into violence on a mass scale.

Scapegoating Jews performs a very useful function for the Soviet authorities. It allows the bureaucracy to point the finger at someone else for the crisis which is engulfing the country. And it helps to deflect attention from the failures of perestroika. The fact that Gorbachev has kept silent about anti-Semitism at a time when Jews are being terrorised indicates that official encouragement for anti-Semites begins at the very top.

Anti-Semitism has become a major obstacle to working class unity in the Soviet Union. Now more than ever, workers need to emulate Lenin and the Bolsheviks and make the struggle against anti-Semitism a central part of the battle to overthrow the old order.

ALL POWER TO THE PRESIDENT

The supreme soviet this week approved plans which would turn Mikhail Gorbachev into a constitutional dictator

Gorbachev, who was elected state president last year, presented the soviet with a draft plan to increase vastly his presidential powers. The law would give the president the power to initiate and approve laws; to appoint and sack the prime minister and other key political figures; to take command of the armed forces; to interpret the constitution as he wished; and to declare a state of emergency which would have the effect of suspending all existing constitutional arrangements.

The draft law is Gorbachev's latest move to win for the president powers that would enable him to preside over the transition to a market economy.

So far, Gorbachev's attempts to restructure the economy have failed. Major changes have been blocked by recalcitrant bureaucrats and by working class opposition to the higher prices and lower living standards which are the inevitable consequences of perestroika. Planned legislation, such as a new bill which would legalise private property, has met with strong resistance.

At the same a time, there is a crisis of political leadership within the Soviet Union. The Communist Party has lost all credibility. Its humiliating defeat in last week's Lithuanian elections was just the latest expression of its plummeting political authority. The collapse of the Communist Party has accelerated the fragmentation of the Soviet Union and created a power vacuum.

Gorbachev wants to solve both problems by concentrating power in his hands. He plans to use the proposed new coercive powers of the president to drive through unpopular reforms. And by moving from one-party rule to one-man rule, Gorbachev hopes to compensate for the party's loss of authority.

No contest

But the plans have already run into trouble. Two weeks ago the supreme soviet turned down Gorbachev's request to convene an emergency session of the congress of people's deputies, the highest constitutional body in the Soviet Union. The approval of the congress is necessary to make constitutional changes.

In order to win over the soviet, Gorbachev was forced to concede that the post would be elected through universal suffrage. However, the Soviet leader recognises that he is unlikely to win in the event of an open electoral contest. Some of his supporters are arguing that since he is already president, Gorbachev does not need to face the electorate for another five years. Others are saying that he should submit himself to indirect elections by the congress of deputies.

Gorbachev would obviously prefer to acquire the enhanced presidential power without putting himself immediately to the electoral test. The longer Gorbachev can delay the election, the better he will be able to use his dictatorial powers to entrench himself as the nation's leader.

It is still unclear whether or not Gorbachev will succeed in transforming himself into a Bonapartist figure. He has less support within the congress than in the supreme soviet. Since even the soviet only accepted his plans reluctantly, it is by no means certain that he will get his way in a reconvened congress. The only thing we can say for sure is that whatever strategy the bureaucracy pursues, the crisis within the Soviet Union can only deepen.

Gorbachev has little to smile about as his plans for one-man rule run into trouble

AMBULANCE DISPUTE

REJECT THE DEAL

Ambulance workers must take matters into their own hands, argues Linda Ryan

The pay deal negotiated by the ambulance unions is a sell-out. Chief union negotiator Roger Poole claimed the settlement had 'driven a coach and horses' through the government's pay policy. But rank and file workers know that the deal gives the government virtually everything it wants and leaves crews no better off than they were at the start of the dispute. Ambulance workers must reject the deal and take matters into their own hands.

Last week's settlement will give crews a one-off payment of between £615 and £915 for the period from April 1989 to March 1990. This is the equivalent of a nine per cent increase, but will not be consolidated into basic pay. There will be an increase of nine per cent from this March, followed by 7.9 per cent in October. In essence this amounts to an increase of nine per cent for the 18 months to October this year followed by a rise of 7.9 per cent over six months.

Not gained an inch

The unions have claimed a victory on the grounds that the average pay packet in April 1991 will be 17.6 per cent higher than it was last April. But because of the way the deal is weighted, the actual increase will be far lower. The NHS pay bill will go up by 13.3 per cent over the two-year period—virtually no change over management's original offer of a 6.5 per cent annual increase which ambulance crews rejected 10 months ago.

Management has not only persuaded the unions to accept what is essentially the original pay offer. It has refused to countenance any form of permanent pay mechanism or comparability scheme, which has been the main union demand throughout the dispute.

The deal allows management to create new divisions among ambulance crews by enforcing differential pay for trained staff and creating a framework for local deals.

Fully trained paramedics will get an extra £500 a year, while some 2500 workers with other skills will get £150 or £230. Local managers will be able to fund further increases of up to two per cent from next October through efficiency savings. This opens the door to local deals and the break-up of the national negotiating machinery.

After six months of struggle and sacrifice, ambulance workers have not gained an inch. What does Roger Poole think that his members have been fighting for? Some ambulance workers have already told Poole what he can do with his settlement. In Liverpool ambulance crews decided to go ahead with an indefinite strike. Crews in other areas, including London, have since joined them. There is widespread resentment at the sell-out.

Ambulance crews should reject the deal. But local strikes are no alternative to the official union strategy. Isolated groups of ambulance workers taking strike action offers no way forward. Such action does not provide a basis for winning and can only lead to the further fragmentation of the dispute. The only way to take the dispute forward is through a coordinated national response organised by the rank and file.

Strategy scuppered

Throughout the dispute the ambulance workers have won overwhelming public support. But the effect of the strategy pursued by the union leadership has, paradoxically, left crews increasingly isolated. The unions argued that ambulance workers are a special case and therefore deserve special treatment. This created divisions between ambulance crews and other workers in the health service. These divisions were exacerbated by the union insistence that ambulance workers should be treated in the same way as emergency services like firefighters and the police.

Poole's reliance on public sympathy has undermined the struggle. The union leaders ruled out any action which might alienate middle class opinion. But, as the last six months have shown, by itself public sympathy counts for little. Once the Tories had decided to see out the dispute, Poole's strategy was scuppered.

Poole might have won the PR war with health secretary Kenneth Clarke, but his members have won sod all.

Activists must now take matters into their own hands and work out a new strategy. First, ambulance workers must establish rank and file control over the dispute. Crews from militant areas such as Liverpool and some London stations must travel to other areas to win the argument for rejection of the deal. This will help establish communication between different stations and regions, essential if rank and file workers are to continue the action. By establishing a national network of activists, crews can begin to arrest the fragmentation of the dispute.

Second, crews must unite with other health workers. A new round of pay negotiations is about to begin in the NHS. The government has already imposed on nurses a pay curb of seven per cent, and is set to do the same for other health workers. The Tories' refusal to accept the pay increases recommended by the pay review body has caused resentment among nurses.

Many NHS staff are worried too about the government's white paper on NHS reform, which threatens to break up national negotiating procedures. All this provides the opportunity to unite workers right across the health service. By making common cause with health workers, ambulance crews would give themselves real clout and the possibility of winning a decent rise.

Health workers in south London are showing the way. The Kings Hospital ambulance support group has convened an open meeting to discuss the implications of the white paper reforms. By bringing together workers from across the NHS, the support group can lay the foundation for a fightback against the Tories. If ambulance crews across the country adopted the same strategy, they could yet teach Kenneth Clarke and Roger Poole a thing or two.

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NHS REFORMS
THE FIGHTBACK STARTS HERE!
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Called by Kings Hospital ambulance support group

SU HODGE

Ambulance crews must get their message over to other health workers

THE LEFT AND SOUTH AFRICA

SOLIDARITY NOT SANCTIONS

The sanctions campaign cannot assist the struggle for liberation in South Africa, argues Kim Monks

The move by the British government to end its entirely token sanctions against South Africa has caused an outcry on the left. The commonplace view among anti-apartheid activists is that international sanctions have forced Pretoria to initiate a process of reform and dialogue with the black opposition. Now, virtually the entire left is united in demanding that the Tories maintain and intensify sanctions in order to keep the pressure on the apartheid regime.

Imperialist interests

Our approach to the question of solidarity is radically different. We have always opposed the left's campaign for government sanctions. We are neither for nor against sanctions as such. We do not demand the imposition of government sanctions, nor do we favour the withdrawal of existing sanctions against the regime in South Africa. However, we vigorously oppose the idea that by *campaigning for sanctions,* the left can make a positive contribution to the cause of liberation in South Africa.

We object to the sanctions campaign, first because it hands the initiative to Western governments which cannot possibly make a positive contribution to the liberation struggle; and second because it thwarts the development of an independent working class movement which can organise effective solidarity with the oppressed in South Africa.

The imperialist powers will impose effective sanctions only when it is in their interests to do so. The only time that Western sanctions have worked is when the Western powers have used them to bring down a popular government which has refused to bow down to their dictates. When the interests of imperialism demand the destabilising of a radical regime such as Salvador Allende's Chile or Fidel Castro's Cuba—sanctions are imposed with devastating effect. The USA's relentless campaign of economic, military and diplomatic sanctions against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua is a case in point.

But the Western powers will never act to destabilise a pro-imperialist dictatorship no matter how reactionary it is. Whenever Western governments have imposed sanctions against right-wing regimes—such as fascist Spain and Italy in the thirties or Ian Smith's Rhodesia in the sixties—these have been calculated to have virtually no effect. This is true of the international sanctions applied against South Africa too.

Sponsoring apartheid

Britain and the USA have always been loath to impose sanctions because they are leading sponsors of the apartheid regime with substantial investments in South Africa. The objective of Western pressure on the Pretoria government is to stabilise the system and safeguard imperialist interests in the region. Those sanctions which have been imposed have been as ineffective as those directed against repressive regimes in the past: they are intended not to destroy apartheid, but to persuade the regime to introduce reforms which will ensure continued capitalist rule.

Our objection to the campaign for sanctions is that it creates the illusion that the British government could be a force for progress in South Africa. But the British state, like all the Western imperialist powers, can never be of assistance to the black liberation struggle. By appealing to the rulers of Western nations to play a progressive role in South Africa, the left legitimises their right to interfere in the region. Given the sordid record of imperialist oppression in Africa, the last thing the left should be calling for is more Western involvement.

Genuine solidarity

The left's campaign for government sanctions has demobilised the working class and diverted activists from genuine solidarity work. The only force in Western society that has any interest in backing the struggle against apartheid is the working class. Instead of appealing to the British government to fight apartheid, our aim should be to mobilise working class opposition against a government that has vested interests in the apartheid system.

Workers should not waste their energy in the futile quest to bolster phoney government sanctions. It is high time that workers in Britain followed the example of the black masses in South Africa. Instead of looking to the state to defend black rights, workers should start to take the initiative themselves. Direct action by British workers against British firms and the British government is the only sort of solidarity action that could make a difference in South Africa.

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