

POLL TAX FURY

"THE CENTRAL WEAKNESS of the poll tax", Lothian Labour councillor David Begg moaned to the bosses magazine The Economist recently, "is that people just realise it is uncollectable".

Nine months after its introduction in England and Wales, and 21 months on in Scotland, that critical weakness is graphically illustrated by the resilience - and growth - of poll tax non-payment levels. Even in official estimates, the national picture is of around one in three non-payers.

In inner-London, and in large major cities around the country, the official figures soar to between 50-60%. More surprisingly, rural areas, including those with lower than average poll tax rates, are high up in the non-payment league table.

Attempts to snarl up the courts through the sheer weight of numbers of those turning up to contest their cases have proved highly successful in many areas.

(In late September, a 57 year old Coventry poll tax protestor, Bob Phelan, collapsed and died of a heart attack after police threw him out of the public gallery for clapping during a case. Police ignored warnings from Bob's wife about his heart condition, as they dragged him down the steps of the court.)

Determined councils have been able to steamroller through thousands of cases, by denying defendants Mackenzie's Friends (amateur legal advisors), refusing to tolerate disruptions, and by sitting until the early hours of the morning when necessary.

Because of this, it's important that we're clear what significance we

attach to 'victories' and 'defeats' in the court-room. We should support every effort to bring the courts to a halt, because every delay the council suffers will multiply their collection headaches. While Militant and their ilk will try and rally support around the demand for 'our democratic right to a fair hearing', we must be clear what's really at stake.

Sooner or later we will lose in the courts, because the law is one of the weapons the ruling class deploys against us when we don't do as we're told. The fact that the courts issue liability orders against us is ultimately irrelevant, because trying to make those 'orders' stick, means shifting the battleground to the terrain of our class: to the streets where we live and the places where we work.

Combativity

The plain fact is that, across the country, a majority of defendants aren't bothering to turn up to contest their cases. The unanswered question as yet is whether their absence from the court room is a result of contempt, or fear or apathy. The resolve of that passive-majority of poll tax non-payers will be put to the test in the weeks ahead, when not-paying becomes more than simply ignoring letters from the council.

But the slowness of court action will be as nothing compared with the obstacles then facing the councils: the pursuit of wage and dole arrestments and the deployment of squads of bailiffs.

In recent weeks there have been a number of highly effective counter-

mobilisations against threatened bailiffs raids in towns and cities in England - inspired by the example of resistance in Scotland, where not one single successful raid by sheriff's officers has yet taken place. A series of lightening raids by a team of bailiffs in the London borough of Wandsworth in October did remove goods from the homes of eight sets of non-payers - but this early set-back has not been repeated elsewhere, and the Wandsworth-raids have galvanised poll tax groups in the area, who are now better prepared for any future attacks.

As anti-bailiff activity moves centre stage in the coming months, it's important that this crucial form of direct action is organised in the most effective way possible. There is a danger of a 'bailiff-busters' mentality developing, where minibus loads of activists play cat-and-mouse games with teams of bailiffs, leaving the mass of non-payers in an area under threat uninvolved. The orientation of poll tax activists should not be to 'take-on' the bailiffs, but on helping draw in local working class people as yet uninvolved, and providing technical support and information, so that together they can take them on. Bailiff busting is not a matter for 'affinity groups', but for angry intimidating mobs.

Resistance

Obviously, where bailiff resistance looks set to be strong, there is room for 'hit squads' to go further on their own. In the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, a gang of anonymous 'outlaws' called at the home of the leader of the local council (run by the Moderate Labour Party) in November to warn him that there would be "tit-for-tat raids" on the homes of councillors if bailiffs visited any non-payers in the Forest. Shaken council leader Mr Cooper told The Independent "I don't know who they are, but they are obviously prepared to use violence and threaten property".

South Yorkshire police stunned local councillors in early November when they announced that they are planning to refuse to arrest poll tax defaulters, even when instructed to do so by the courts. Local police chiefs say they fear that the task "may become physically impossible for the police because of the large numbers of defaulters". Other forces may follow suit, leaving local councils with few

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Protests are disrupting poll tax court cases

ORGANISE!

for class struggle anarchism

SADDAM SAYS:

"Imagine my surprise when I woke up and discovered that, during the night, I had become an *unconscious ally of the proletariat* entirely by accident! And me a tyrant too! Luckily, me and the chief of the secret police both saw the funny side!"

WAR IN THE GULF : WHY CHOOSE BETWEEN BUTCHERS?

Magazine of the
Anarchist Communist Federation

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Issue 21

RUSSIA
IN CRISIS

POLL TAX
WAR
HOTS UP

TROTSKY:
50 YEARS
ON

THE "RIOT"
IN BRIXTON

EURO-SPLIT
IN THE
RULING
CLASS

LETTERS

THE ANARCHIST COMMUNIST Federation is an organisation of class-struggle anarchists. Its structure is based on groups and individual members. We have members in the following areas: Aylesbury, Chesterfield, Coventry, Derry, Essex, Gillingham, Glasgow, Halifax, Leamington Spa, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Northumberland, Nottingham, Oxford, Rugby, Sheffield and Staffordshire.

The ACF promotes the building of a strong and active anarchist movement in Britain and internationally, and has contact with like-minded anarchists in other countries.

PLEASE NOTE NEW ADDRESS: Write to: Nottingham ACF, PO Box 97, West PDO, Nottingham NG7 5LQ.

ORGANISE

ORGANISE! IS THE national magazine of the Anarchist Communist Federation (ACF). Organise! is a quarterly theoretical journal published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to give a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues, and initiate debate on areas not normally covered by agitational journals.

All articles in the magazine are by ACF members unless signed. Some reflect ACF policy and others open up debate in undiscussed areas.

HELP ORGANISE! TO GROW

WE FEEL THAT Organise! has an important role to play in the growth of revolutionary activity and ideas in these exciting times. We know from rising sales that many of our readers feel the same.

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Please sent all feedback, contributions for Organise!, requests for papers and Press Fund money (payable to ACF) to the LONDON address.

duction costs of Organise!.

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PRESS FUND

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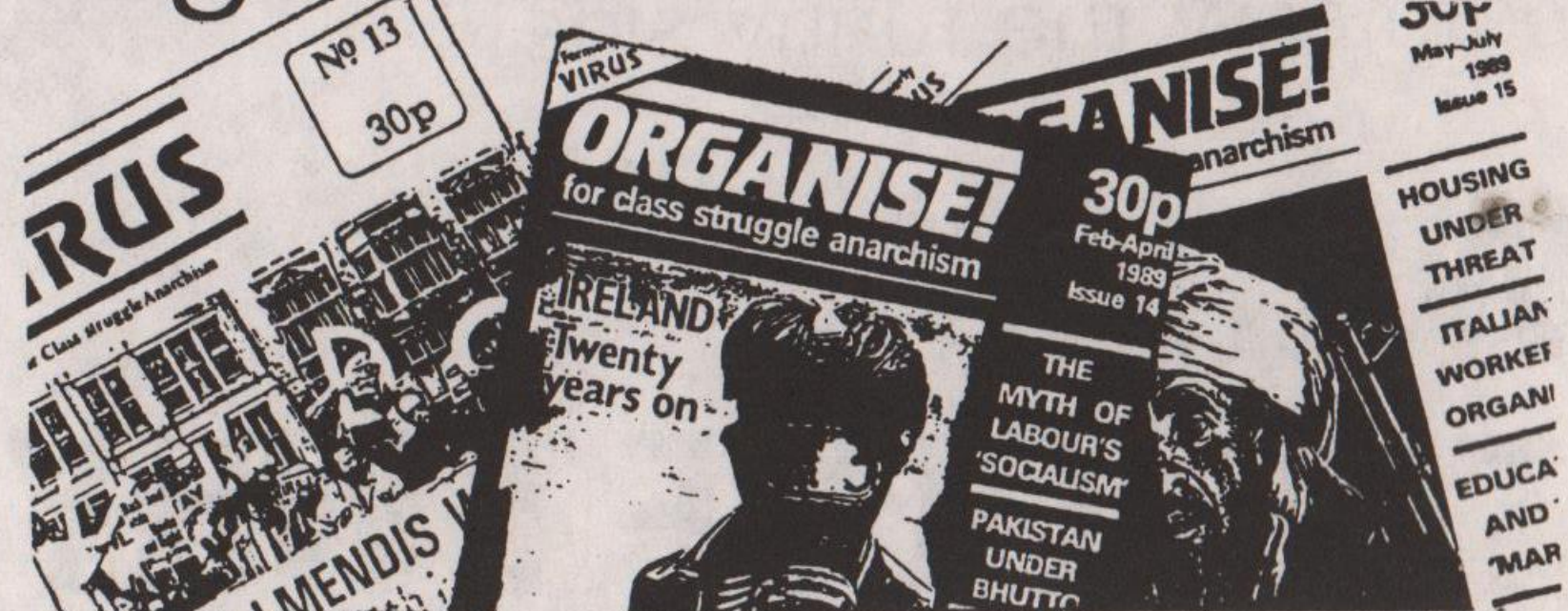
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THE
POLL TAX

Organise! back issues



Back issues of Organise! (from issue 14 to issue 19 inclusive) are still available, from the London group address (as are a few copies of issues of its forerunner - Virus). They cost 40p & sae each and include:

Organise! 17: Anarchy in the Eastern block; Cambodia: what future; Militant and the poll tax. Organise! 18: All change in Eastern Europe?; ambulance crews fight; Gerry Healy's death. Organise! 19: The poll tax and prison riots; the myth of Mandela; ecology and class. Organise! 20: Class Struggle in Ireland; Romania; Poll tax update.

Fighting on the poll tax front

OCTOBER 20TH SAW the first major Poll Tax demonstrations in London since the 'Battle of Trafalgar Square' of March 31st. Anti-Poll Tax activists started early with a picket of Horseferry Road Magistrates Court at 10am, where trials of those arrested on and during the weeks after March 31st are still being heard. A march from the court joined a London 'Militant' Federation organised Anti-Poll Tax march at Kennington Park on to a rally at Brockwell Park in Brixton.

Activists continued on to a pre-arranged picket of Brixton Prison later in the afternoon, holding people sent down after 'Trafalgar Square'. The events which followed near the prison show once more how far the State can and will go to beat working class resistance centred on the Anti-Poll Tax movement off the streets.

Objectives

From the outset, it was clear that the Metropolitan Police had three objectives in attacking the picket. First, revenge for the thrashing they were given on the Trafalgar Square demonstration earlier this year, second the banning of all Anti-Poll Tax marches in Central London, and third the criminalisation of Anti Poll Tax resistance of any kind.

The police plan was simple: provoke the march, attack it at the first opportunity, and then rely on the courts and press to do the usual hatchet job on people defending themselves from state violence - the ways we have seen since 'Trafalgar Square'.

To this end they assembled a massive force of over 2,000 cops, including vans full of tooled up riot police. They were deployed in front of the prison and down side streets leading up to it, so they could surround and attack the picket from all sides.

Provocative

When the demo arrived, they removed the senior officers who had been liaising with the 'Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign', who had so far that day co-ordinated legal support for all the marches and pickets. Next, they provoked the march by verbal abuse, by making random and violent arrests, and by snatching megaphones from TSDC stewards, who from then on were unable to communicate with people on the march.

Then they attacked the march under the guise of "moving it on", despite the fact that this

was an hour before the agreed time that the picket would break up. In the process they also truncheoned TSDC organisers to the ground. Finally, to make sure no one could escape the brutality, they closed Brixton Tube station.

All of this is established fact. Chief Inspector Metcalfe's earlier comment "I will not tolerate my officers treating this as a re-match for the 31st" simply recognised that this is exactly what he and his rank-and-file would be doing. TSDC stewards spent much of the early part of the march witnessing and recording provocative comments from cops policing the march, and Horseferry Road Magistrates Court was already booked up in advance for arrests made on the day. Surely enough, 120 people were arrested to fill the quota.

Demonstrations are an important part of the Poll Tax campaign which show our strength and pull people together. But there are many political issues raised by what happened to us on October 20th. For a start, many people knew in advance the whole thing was going to be a complete set up by the Metropolitan Police, a blatant trap they didn't even bother to disguise.

Knowing this, as revolutionaries, we have to think long and hard about what we can do when confronted with similar set-ups in the future.

One part of the approach should be running such demonstrations effectively. In organisational terms, we have to be as well organised and

conscious of our aims as the State is. We should provide our own stewards for marches, and not accept any Leftie front organisations doing this for us.

The job of these people is to help co-ordinate the march, provide legal information before the march, and legal support in case of arrests on and after the march. These people should not be there to control the demonstration, they should be as much a part of it as every other person.

To their credit, TSDC tried to do exactly this, and by Sunday morning they had the names, circumstances and witness statements of all people arrested the day before immediately to hand. The 'legal hotline' phone number handed out on the day helped greatly in this.

Support

Organised support for demonstrations also allows a co-ordinated approach to dealing with the press and media lies, by people who were actually involved. In the long term it may help fight the State frame-ups of those arrested, by providing active and effective legal co-ordination in the courts. Defendants will remain isolated and disillusioned without such careful and experienced preparation.

When we march through working class areas, we should make sure that people living there know exactly what is going on and why. It was clear that the London Federation had done nothing to inform and agitate in Brixton prior to the march - and

this in one of the areas of London that will be worst hit by the Poll Tax!

More importantly, when and if it is appropriate to take on the police in a residential area, local people will be involved in the decision to do so. At Brixton, no sensible demonstrator or resident was going to start a conflict the police had prepared for weeks in advance. Unlike Trafalgar Square, the police knew exactly how many people would be there in Brixton - they only had to count the march leaving Brockwell Park and sent twice as many cops! There was no way the police would lose this one.

Anyone wishing for, or pushing for, a riot for which the police had their helmets ready for hours in advance, was indulging in adventurist machismo. We don't try and meet the police's challenge in these situations - we should set the time and the place.

In this way we win, to fight another day when it is more appropriate. No amount of legal support can compensate for a failed attack on the police resulting in many arrests and injuries. We are not saying the majority of people thought a riot would be a good idea or that people should not have defended themselves - quite the opposite.

Strength

We are talking about future tactics. These tactics should not be for a small number of activists to organise 'more effectively' in set piece confrontations like armed insurrectionists. Instead we should use our knowledge and strength when we know we have a chance of giving the police a good kicking, like at Trafalgar Square or in the 80's riots when hundreds and thousands of people were prepared to have a go, and local people were involved because they knew they had a chance of winning (or had no choice).

The class struggle takes place on many fronts - the Poll Tax itself will be defeated by solidarity of households, communities and workers in non-payment, mobilisation against bailiffs, and action against wage or benefit arrestments.

A victory like Trafalgar Square is a boost to our confidence and it shows the state we are serious. We must take the lessons learnt back to our local campaigns, so there are no illusions of what we are up against, and so that we can build the solidarity we so desperately need. ●

POLICE LAUNCH HUNT FOR HARD-LEFT RINGLEADERS AS PETROL BOMBS ARE DISCOVERED IN PARK

Anarchists 'sparked riot'



The fate of a European has-been

IT'S AN ISSUE that unites Margaret Thatcher and Tony Benn, Nicholas Ridley and Arthur Scargill: fierce opposition to growing European economic and political integration - and the loss of independence for British capitalism that will go with it.

Divisions over Europe are rife throughout all sections of the British establishment:

The resignation of Geoffrey Howe from the Cabinet has once again exposed the deep divisions within Tory ranks over European strategy. Thatcher's intransigence over the issue may yet get her the sack. Labour and Liberal Democrat front-benches, meanwhile, compete as rival Euro-enthusiasts. Bosses organisations, like the CBI, warn of the dangers for British business of not getting stuck into integration. Ex-Cabinet Ministers attack Britain's hesitancy as scaremongering over a non-existent Euro-monster.

Debate

As the debate rages on, Britain's leaders are becoming increasingly isolated and out-maneuvred by their European counterparts. As the Euro-train picks up speed, they are running out of time to make up their minds. The question all this raises is obvious: Why can't the British ruling class get its act together over Europe?

Their problem boils down to the fact that they're trying to reconcile a clash of economic and political interests.

Economically there is clearly no future for British capitalism outside a European framework. The prospect of an isolated British economy, struggling on the fringes of a integrated European market terrifies British bosses. There is little hope of competing successfully with the US or Japan without a European economic link-up. And, as The Economist magazine notes "by the end of the century, more than 60% of British trade is likely to be with other EC countries".

Moves towards full European Monetary Union (EMU) bring British business a range of trading benefits: currency stability for one.

But there are also serious drawbacks too. With European integration, British capital will lose direct control over many crucial elements of financial policy.

And behind all the talk of the threat to the 'British way of



The Tories celebrate the prospects for Britain of Euro-union

life' that's the concern fueling the Euro-panic currently gripping 'our' ruling class.

After 1945, Britain's position in the post-War world economic order was secured by its 'special relationship' with US capitalism. That relationship helped bolster British ascendancy in Europe. Now, with the collapse of the old Cold War order, the US has broken off that relationship - and another European champion has emerged in the shape of the newly united Germany.

It is Germany that will become the capitalist powerhouse of the new Europe, and it is Germany that is dictating the terms on which that new Europe will be created.

British capitalists (along with other EC members) will soon have to surrender control over much of their national economic independence to a new European banking system - one that will be dominated by the requirements of the German Bundesbank. No longer will British bosses be able to change interest rates or revalue sterling in times of difficulty.

Euro-union will intensify existing tendencies in the economies of its member states: it will make the stronger economies stronger, the weaker ones weaker.

While staying out is not an option open to British capitalism, joining in will mean accepting second-rate status in a business-club run by a more powerful bunch of gangsters. Membership will rob them of many of the economic tools they use to protect their share of the business.

The British ruling class has yet to come to terms with its

demise as a European heavyweight. In vain, Thatcher has tried to re-assert British control over the Euro-agenda. She's suggested inviting the 'new democracies' of Eastern Europe to join (in an attempt to dilute German dominance and loosen the terms of the federation) and introducing a parallel Euro-currency (the 'hard-Ecu' - an attempt to spike full monetary union).

This is just ruling class nostalgia for the days when their European allies were forced to listen to British plans. Now attention is focused on Bonn, not London.

Inevitable

The open contempt with which Thatcher's objections to the course of European union are brushed aside by other leaders, is an illustration of the peripheral importance now attached to the British ruling class's views on Europe. Behind all the crass flag-waving and Little-Englander posturing, Thatcher has capitulated to each successive European initiative so far unveiled. She has had no choice to do otherwise. Economic necessity dictates that sooner rather than later Britain's ruling class will have to bite the bullet and get stuck into Europe plc.

The 'pro-Europe' tendency of the British ruling class divides into two factions. There are those who recognise the inevitability of integration and the lack of any future for an isolated 'independent UK'. They hope that full-blooded British involvement will help restrict

unbridled German power over the alliance.

Then there are those capitalists excited by the prospect of a free-trade zone stretching across the continent. For them, mourning the decline of Britain's status in Europe is a pretty low priority. Their concern is the future health of the wider European-capitalist system within the world market.

There are no prizes for guessing who will be expected to pay the economic costs of joining the Euro-club. Chancellor Majors has already warned that joining the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) means that workers must keep wage-demands down, or risk 'pricing themselves out of job'.

As the Euro-capitalists tie their systems more closely together, they will also unintentionally break down many of the barriers dividing the European working class. The more interconnected the economic system across becomes, the greater the potential the working class has to disrupt its workings across the continent. Given the divisions among the rival factions of the ruling class, it's a potential we could ruthlessly exploit.

There is a crying need for greater working class unity across Europe. It says a lot about the state of proletarian politics in this country that after eleven years of vicious Tory-rule, Thatcher looks set to fall victim - not to an explosion of class struggle - but to a squabble within the ruling class over how best to protect its interests in the changing world pecking order. ●

Oh, oh, oh, what a lovely anti-imperialist war

THERE'S ONE SIMPLE reason why socialists in Iraq haven't joined in the chorus of Left-wing groups in this country who are calling for victory for Saddam Hussein's forces in the event of war in the Gulf.

That's because most of them are dead, or in hiding, or have fled abroad to escape persecution at the hands of this 'objectively anti-imperialist' tyranny.

The Ba'athist regime in Baghdad has ruthlessly liquidated all forms of organised opposition to its rule, in successive bloodbaths since attaining power through a military coup in 1959. Socialists, revolutionaries, dissidents, Communist Party members, militant workers and Kurdish nationalists have all suffered at the hands of the infamous Iraqi secret police. Those that escape the firing squad or hangman's noose are imprisoned indefinitely, or simply disappear without trace.

Adventure

Yet, since Hussein launched his expansionist adventure into Kuwait, whole sections of the British Left have seemed eager to act as unpaid recruiting sergeants for the Iraqi military

machine. They've offered their services as overseas propaganda ministries for his war effort, and condoned his actions against the working class people of Iraq as well as Kuwait.

Quite by chance - we are told - Hussein has landed himself on the side of the working class the world over, by becoming the focus for a massive military mobilisation, headed by the forces of US imperialism. This 'accidentally progressive' position, of which Saddam himself is the unwitting hero, has important implications for the strategy 'revolutionaries' should adopt.

According to the Left, any thoughts of a class struggle between rulers and ruled in the Middle East should be put on the back burner until the more important issue of the imperialist threat to Hussein has been dealt with.

Few groups or publications are stupid enough to put their conclusions in such black and white terms. Most dress up the message in 'anti-imperialist' camouflage. The details of the plot may differ between parties, but the story remains pretty much the same:

* "Neither Washington, nor Moscow, but Baghdad!" It says a lot about the limitations of Leninist logic that genocidal dictators, like the Butcher of

Baghdad, are seen as better allies in the class war than the poll tax rioters of Trafalgar Square. But those same groups who attacked the rioters as hot-heads, hoodlums and "enemies of the working class movement", have welcomed Hussein as a brother in arms.

Status

But Saddam may find his new status as a Left-approved regime all too temporary. In recent years, the Left's idea of who is the number one 'progressive' Middle Eastern state has shifted more often than the desert sands, depending on the 'prevailing circumstances'. The Workers Revolutionary Party's "principled stand against imperialism" had the party swinging back and forth between support for Iran and Iraq - depending on who was picking up the printing-bills for News Line at the time.

Only a few years ago, when war raged between Iran and Iraq, the Socialist Workers Party were denouncing Hussein as a willing stooge of imperialism. In that particular slaughter, claim the SWP, it was the Iranian ruling clique who best guarded the interests of

our class in the region.

The "defeat of Iran" at the end of the war, Socialist Worker told its readers was "a defeat for Iran's workers... for socialists and anti-imperialists around the world" (Socialist Worker June 30 1988).

* "The main enemy is at home!": At the heart of this argument is the belief that Saddam Hussein is somehow less of an enemy to the working class than the leaders of Western powers. This is because Iraq does not have anything like the US's influence, or economic or military power. The 'main enemy', 'the true warmongers' and the 'real threat' to our class, therefore, are to be found in the White House and Downing Street.

In fact, the 'main enemy' is capitalism - an



international system that oppresses our class the world over. In the global league table of capitalist states, certain countries and alliances will always be stronger and more influential in particular periods than others. There will be clashes - sometimes economic, sometimes military - between rival states as their interests conflict.

Previously in the Gulf, Western powers were happy to provide Hussein with arms and money as long as the interests he pursued coincided with Western objectives. Now the Iraqi ruling class's own agenda has brought it into direct conflict with its former allies, and war once again looms.

* "A truce in the class war!": If war breaks out in the Gulf "then for Iraqi revolutionaries insurrection against Saddam Hussein's regime must be subordinated to the tasks of defeating the imperialist onslaught". (Workers Power Sept 90). The message here is clear enough: in times of national crisis the working class should call off the struggle against its rulers, and rally to their defence against a 'common enemy'.

Working class resistance would threaten to disrupt the war effort, so all strikes and struggles should be suspended. The Left should encourage workers and students to enlist for the front, urge them to accept war-austerity and sacrifice, and put in free overtime at the factory, plant and office.

Attacks

It is impossible to offer 'political support' (be it 'critical' or 'unconditional') to Hussein's military forces without also supporting the attacks on the Iraqi working class that must accompany the switch to a war footing.

* "Refusing to take sides amounts to pacifism!": Leftists try to lump together those who oppose the brutal

slaughter of ten of thousands of workers in pursuit of ruling class interests, with 'pacifists' who look to a UN-policed peace settlement.

Anarchist opposition to the Gulf War is not based on an abhorrence of violence, but on a recognition of our class interests. We do not seek a 'peaceful solution' to the crisis (based on a deal between different capitalist players), but on a working class solution which will finally settle the score with those capitalists. The struggle to topple the world order that created the Gulf Crisis will, of necessity, be a violent one fought by, and for, the working class.

A bloody slaughter in the Gulf would only be in the interests of rival capitalist tyrants, locked in a struggle for oil and influence in the Middle East: the United States - a fully fledged but contracting, imperialist power - and Iraq, an aspiring, emergent, imperialist power.

Victory

A victory for the US would see the reinstatement of the feudal oil barons in Kuwait, the probable toppling of Hussein, and the bolstering of US influence in the region, backed up by military might. Victory for Iraq (however unlikely militarily) would clinch Hussein's hold on power, rocket him to prominence in the region, and tighten the stranglehold of the Ba'athist military-political machine.

In either case, the interests of the working class would be nowhere in sight. The struggle of the Arab masses to unite across false divisions and take on their rulers would not be advanced one inch.

To cut through the Leftist smoke-screen, and understand what's really going on in the Gulf, we need to understand the competing objectives of the rival capitalist players involved in it.

The reasons behind Hussein's invasion of Kuwait are clear enough. First to grab Kuwait's oil fields and tanker ports, boosting Iraq's economic clout, and enabling him to more easily fix the price of oil on the international money markets. Second, the Ba'athist regime has aspirations to become the major political player in the region and the seizure of Kuwait has resulted in Hussein's dramatic rise in the pecking order of Middle Eastern powers.

Pushover

Also, war with Iran had left the Iraqi economy exhausted and in debt, and had ground to a halt without Iraq's military objectives being realised. Hussein knew that taking Kuwait would be pushover by comparison. It would provide him with his very own 'Falklands factor': uniting the country once more behind the regime, and allow him a chance to sue for peace with Iran without appearing to be humiliated.

For the United States the threat to some of the West's oil supplies, the loss of the compliant Kuwait royal family, and the sight of Hussein flexing his military muscle are of real concern. But the Iraqi adventure in Kuwait also offers the US opportunities it has not been slow to grasp.

With the thaw of the Cold War, the stable world order in which the two superpowers could carve up the globe into rival spheres of influence has collapsed. With that collapse has gone the unquestioned supremacy in world affairs of Washington. The shape of the new Europe is being decided in Bonn, not in the White House: US influence on world capitalism is in decline.

But the seizure of Kuwait has presented the US with the opportunity, once again, to play the role of world policeman, and reassert its dominance of the United Nations. The ruling elite in

Saudi Arabia has capitulated to US pressure, and allowed the country to become one vast military base for forces headed by Bush's troops. That decision has in turn heightened the divisions in the Arab world, increasing the strength of Bush's hand.

Interests

Even without a shot being fired, there are already plans being laid in Washington for a permanent Western military presence in the Gulf. This would ostensibly be to protect oil interests, but it would also act as a guarantor of wider Western-capitalist political interests in the region: the containment of 'troublesome' regimes, and the protection of, among others, the Israeli state. Such a presence was only a pipe-dream in the minds of Western political analysts, until Saddam's tanks rolled

Hussein and the Kurds

THE KURDISH PEOPLE number 30 million. They are not seen as a nation by those who occupy their homeland: the states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. For over 70 years these states have used every means to crush Kurdish identity, suppressing their language and destroying their culture.

In the Second World War, the British and the Russians jointly occupied Iran because the Shah had opposed the sending of supplies via Iran to the Russian front. In the area occupied by the Red Army a Kurdish autonomous republic was set up. Following a deal with the US in 1946, the Russian army pulled out, and the Kurdish republic was smashed by the Shah's troops and 15,000 people were killed.

Following a republican coup in 1958 in Iraq, Kurds in Iraq under Barzani looked to the help of the Shah in fighting the Iraqi state, at a time when Iranian Kurds were fighting a guerilla war against the Iranian state.

In 1959 the Saddam Hussein clique came to power in Iraq, after the assassination of General Kassem. Saddam participated in the massacre of several thousand Communist Party members in 1963. Of course there was no cry of "atrocities" or "war crime" from the west - this was in the middle of the Cold War. The rulers in Moscow turned a blind eye to the corpses of their "comrades".

Saddam also murdered all the leaders of his own party the Ba'ath, and the massacre of the Shiite muslim minority began, building up the power of the Sunnite Muslims who dominated the country. 15,000 Kurds were forced to

over the Kuwati border, and provided a perfect cover.

If thousands of body-bags start arriving back at American air-fields, the strong domestic support that Bush currently enjoys over his policy in the Gulf, would decline rapidly - endangering his long-term plans. But, for now, the prizes on offer are so great, it's worth risking a 'bring-our-boys-home' backlash in middle-America in the event of war.

For Thatcher, the crisis in the Gulf, has offered a last-ditch chance to rekindle the subservient 'special relationship' with US capitalism that Britain's ruling class had, until recently, enjoyed. As Washington's attention had switched from London to Bonn, it has hastened the decline of Britain's rulers as important players on the world stage.

Thatcher's attempts (ably echoed by Kinnock and Kaufman) to prove her cre-

flee across the border to Turkey following atrocities in the Kurdish area.

During 1987 and 1988 Iraq launched "Operation Anfal" against the resistance in Iraqi Kurdistan. Over 4,000 Kurdish villages were bulldozed, and the population of the mountains were deported to the plains. 5,000 Kurds died following a poison gas attack in March 1988 at Halabja.

This was at the height of the first Gulf War between Iran and Iraq. For its part the Iranian state butchered 27,000 Kurds during this conflict.

This gas for the operation was supplied by West German monopolies, the planes to carry it out by the USSR and France, the financial credit by the Americans and British, and, oh yes, the Kuwaitis and Saudis. Was there any threat of an invasion by the western allies to protect the sovereignty of the Kurdish people - of course not!

The plight of the Kurds raises a number of points. First of all, Kurds in areas occupied by the nation states have sometimes attempted to play one off against the other. This always ended in betrayal. For example the Shah backed Iraqi Kurds, then signed a treaty with the Iraqi government and cut off all aid to Iraqi Kurds. There is a growing realisation that they cannot rely on any state.

Like the Palestinian oppressed, the Kurdish oppressed are one of the forces that can help ignite a social revolution throughout the Middle East. Despite the repression in Iraqi Kurdistan, September saw food riots in the town of Mosul, with 50 killed or wounded. The Kurdish resistance could yet prove to be a major stumbling block for Saddam Hussein. ●

dentials as an unquestioning, docile supporter of US military action in the Gulf, and the presence of (until now) token British forces in the area have been welcome in Washington. Bush has been pleased to be reassured who his allies are "when the going gets tough". But Britain's grovelling performance over the Gulf crisis has now only underlined the dwindling significance of its ruling class in the arena of foreign affairs.

In the not so distant past, Britain itself considered invading Kuwait, to secure its oil interests, and actually playing a part in determining the now disputed border between Iraq and Kuwait. But today, the best that British capitalism can offer is to play a poor second fiddle to America's tune in the Gulf: the days of the British Empire are gone forever.

Put simply, the interests of the British and Americans lie with a drawn out blockade, as both are uncertain what response an all-out military offensive will have 'at home'. Given the poverty and social unrest experienced in these countries, a call to 'rally round' and defend democracy could well fall on deaf ears without a lengthy propaganda campaign. The working class is well aware that the conflict is about defending the oil interests of the rich.

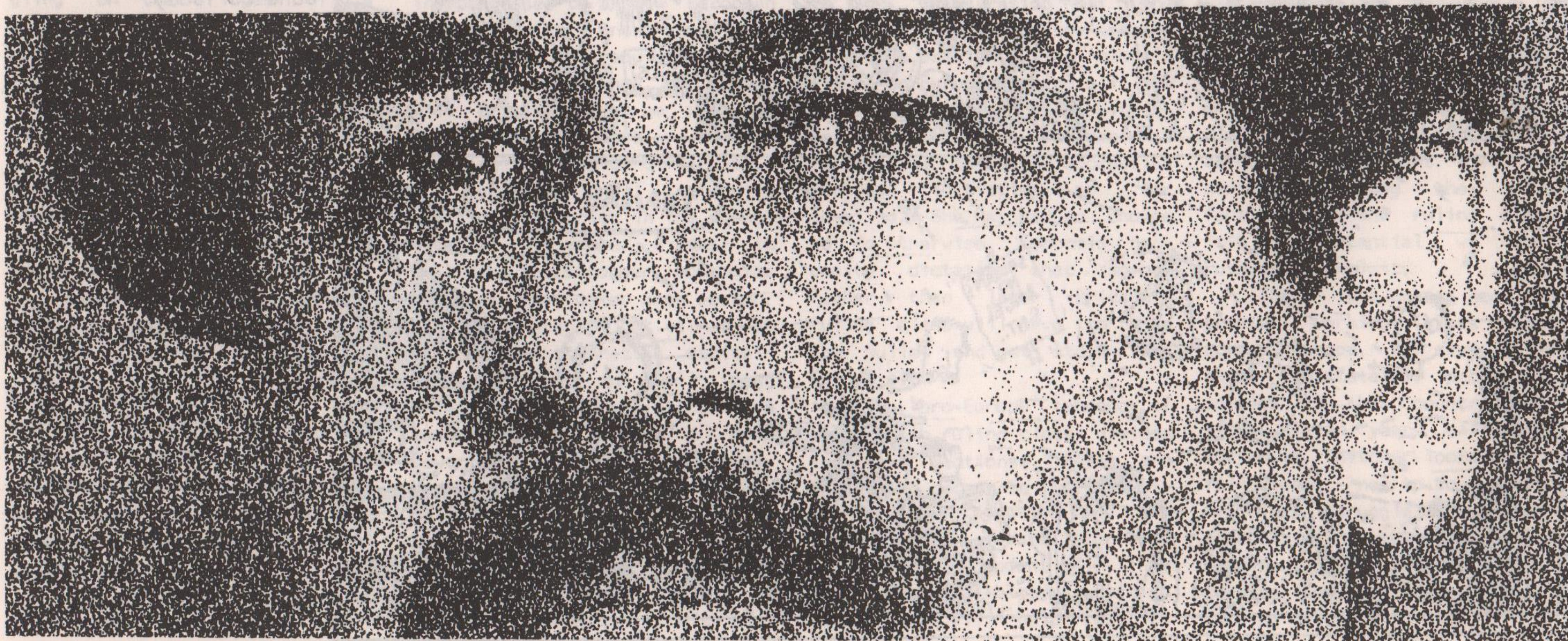
Sanctions

Hussein has stated publicly that 'if' sanctions hit hard he will launch an offensive against Israel. This is actually in order to persuade the US that sanctions are effective, as he would prefer them to keep up that kind of pressure, as opposed to a military strike that Iraq could never withstand. Sanctions would also give him time to rally pan-arab, pro-Islam nations to his cause. Given this, we recognise Leftist calls to "end the sanctions" as purely rhetorical and opportunist. We also oppose muslim fundamentalism as we oppose all religion and nationalism - it's anti imperialist overtones are a sick joke to rally the working class round another set of bosses.

We don't take sides in the Gulf conflict, to do so is to support capitalists against the interests of the working class. The only cause we support is the battle of the working class to free itself: in Iraq, the US, Britain and the world over.

The working class has no country - we support no war but the class war. ●

A "No War but the Class War" group has been set up in London, and has produced leaflets and other materials about the Gulf crisis. They can be contacted at the following address: NWBTCW, BM 8884, London WC1N 3XX.



Another fine mess you've gotten us into Gorby

THE EUPHORIA FELT by most ordinary Russians, as they watched the old Stalinist order begin to collapse, has all but evaporated. For the mass of Russia's poor, the impending winter months look set to be extremely grim - even by Soviet standards. In the endless bread queues outside Moscow shops the talk is not of new found 'freedoms', but of fears of widespread food and fuel shortages, huge price rises, mass scale redundancies and even the possibility of starvation in rural areas if things don't improve.

People are right to be afraid. All Soviet economists agree that the economy has slid into chaos and crisis. The only real debate about the extent of the collapse, is whether the system is teetering on the edge of the abyss, or whether it has already passed the point of no return, and has fallen in.

Industrial output hasn't so much declined in the last twelve months, as crashed through the floor. The shelves are empty, even of basic staple food-stuffs. Denied materials, factories are at a standstill. There have already been riots in some areas over shortages of vodka and cigarettes. In some towns, party officials have even run out of the paper they use to print ration-coupons. Everyone seems agreed that things will get a lot worse. The Mayor of Moscow has already predicted "rioting by huge numbers of people" in the capital in the coming months, over shortages. The bosses paper *The Economist* is warning of a Soviet-style Winter-of-Discontent - with industrial and social unrest sweeping throughout the country.

Worse

The transition that the Russian ruling class is trying to implement is of a type and scale never before attempted. They hope to replace one vast failed capitalist economic system - the centrally planned economy - with another they hope will be more successful - a market economy. But each successive change they introduce seems only to make matters worse.

It's not hard to see why things have got so bad. In essence, the problems stem from the fact that the old Stalinist 'command' economy - in which bureaucrats dictated production targets, and oversaw trade between the different Soviet republics - has fallen apart, but no other system has yet been established to take its place. This, combined with Moscow's growing loss of authority

over the country, has created a generalised crisis of confidence in the economic order that's gripped the whole of industry and agriculture. Industrialists may now feel free of the constraints of centralised planning, but realise there is now a huge vacuum at the centre of the economy: what remains of the old system is now running blind. It's a command economy without a commander. Factory managers may no longer feel the need to comply with Moscow's diktats, but they have no guarantee that their raw materials will ever turn up, or if they'll ever get paid for their goods.

Harvest

The fate of this year's bumper harvest illustrates the problems that now bedevil Russia's rulers. In Stalin's day, workers and students were simply ordered onto the farms for weeks on end to help bring in the crops. This year, despite record yields, food is rotting in the fields, because the Communist Party is unwilling (or now feels unable) to use conscript labour. While shortages of bread in the shops worsen, as much as 83% of the harvest has gone to waste.

As the discredited command-economy falls apart, alternative methods of exchange are flourishing. Before Gorbachov, organised crime in the Soviet Union was an inseparable part of the corrupt party machine. Now, the would-be Mafiosa (seeing the terminal decline of Communist rule) are striking out on their own: and the black economy is booming as never before. The most successful of newly emerging Russian industries are, as a result, in drugs trafficking, pornography and prostitution. But the barons of the informal economy are also dealing in food, clothes and cigarettes too - all at vastly inflated prices.

And from the street-corner deal, to large-scale inter-republic trade, barter is increasingly in use. Factory bosses exchange food for raw materials, televisions for tractor parts. On the streets of Moscow Marlboro cigarettes are becoming a firmer currency than what many now see as the worthless Russian rouble.

For months now, while the economy has been sinking all around them, factions of the ruling Communist Party have been locked in bitter wrangling over rival strategies for pulling the country back from the brink of total social collapse.

Most recently two plans have been under the scrutiny of the Congress of People's Deputies: one proposed by Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, the other by one of Gorbachov's closest economic advisers, Stanislav Shatalin. Western commentators have characterized Ryzhkov's plan as 'conservative' and Shatalin's as 'radical' - in fact, the only thing that really separates the plans is the speed at which change is to be implemented.



Both look to the introduction of a market-economy, an end to subsidies and mass scale privatisation of state industry, both offer greater economic autonomy to the regions, and both demand an immediate full-blooded assault on the social wage of the Soviet working class.

But where Ryzhkov looked to retain (for now) many powers in the hand of the central state, and phase in price rises and redundancies over several years, Shatalin proposed an incredible '500 day' plan, involving immediate privatisation, an end to price control, and the instant creation of a market and stock exchange.

Both men argued that the adoption of the other's plan would lead to social disintegration and economic ruin. Ryzhkov feared that devolving too much power to the republics would accelerate the break up of the Union, and that too fast a shake-down of the economy would lead to a massive working class backlash against austerity measures. Shatalin, meanwhile, feared the consequences of not immediately replacing the now-defunct command-system with a market-system, arguing that to delay would kill the prospect of economic rejuvenation stone-dead, and that that would inspire a revolt amongst the increasingly hungry poor.

For months Russia's leaders dithered, unwilling to plump for either course, yet unable to propose an alternative. One crucial meeting of the Congress had to be abandoned when too few Deputies could even be bothered to turn up to discuss the reforms.

Finally an inevitable compromise was hammered out, and Gorbachov won approval for a new document: *Basic Guidelines*, an unhappy marriage of the rival proposals, that pleased neither 'conservatives' nor 'radicals' but which both were forced by circumstance to grudgingly accept. "The command economy outlived its usefulness decades ago", explained the *Morning Star* greeting the news. "What is being developed for the first time in history is a Socialist market".

Now that the battle plan has been drawn up, the scene is set for a major eruption in the class war in the Soviet Union, as the ruling class attempts to make the Russian working class pay the price for economic reconstruction.

But Russia's rulers do not have a free hand: there are many constraints on their ability to push through a programme of reform.

In the coming months, there are two over-riding priorities for keeping the reform process on the rails: social peace and foreign investment. The problem they face is that it will be hard to get one without the other. Without abundant foreign investment, there is little chance of renewing Soviet capitalism.

Profits

But international investors need to be assured that money lodged in the Soviet economy will be not only secure but profitable. And that means guaranteeing that the country doesn't slide into ungovernability. That means putting an end to strikes and riots and taming the resurgent nationalist movements: it means ensuring social peace.

Yet to achieve that peace, means being able to fill the supermarket

shelves with consumer goods, and offer new jobs to the millions about to be made redundant throughout Soviet industry. And that requires foreign investment.

If he could get his hands on the money now, Gorbachov would stand a better chance of winning the stability that capitalist investors want. The problem that could ultimately topple him, is that would-be entrepreneurs want to wait until the country's stable, before they hand over the cash.

Within Russia itself there are many other forces at work threatening to upset the apple-cart. One crucial test of Gorbachov's new *Basic Guidelines* package is whether the leaders of the Union's republics will take a blind bit of notice of it. Many republics, particularly those with rich natural resources of oil and minerals, are looking to decouple themselves entirely from the Soviet economic system and set out on their own. As shortages and panic have spread, many republics have introduced 'protectionist' measures (such as a ban on the 'export' of scarce resources from the area), and have announced plans to establish their own currencies and stock exchanges. Some have already set up deals with Western firms - bypassing Moscow entirely.

Autonomy

The fact that Gorbachov's proposals 'allow' a degree of local autonomy for the regions, is in reality a recognition by the central bureaucracy of a process that is already well underway, and one that it can do nothing to reverse.

At the height of the harvest, rumours were rife in Moscow that the army was about to launch a coup-attempt. These fears were prompted by suspicious troops movements around Moscow, which the army claimed were the rehearsals for a military parade. Though an immediate coup does seem highly unlikely, it is possible that an alliance of army generals and 'conservative' elements in the Russian CP could be plotting to step into the breach, if the situation in the country gets completely 'out of hand'. It's a possibility Gorbachov can scarcely ignore.

But more significant than the army, the republics, or the reluctant of foreign investors, is the response of the vast Russian working class to what's going on.

At present there are several important factors restraining the ability of Russia's poor to push their interests to the top of the political agenda.

From the Baltic to Siberia, there is mass opposition to Gorbachov's restructuring plans. But the most vocal, organised and influential 'opposition' groups in the Soviet bloc are the nationalist movements in the republics.

In some areas, dissident nationalist forces (including monarchists and far-rightists) are rallying popular support to oust local communist parties who remain too pro-Moscow. Some have already fallen. In other areas, local party officials - who sense the threat - have seized on the nationalist fervour as a means to promote their own regional autonomy from Moscow.

Colonial

These groups argue that poverty and oppression are the result of the Kremlin's semi-colonial domination of the republics. Many command real support amongst the working class.

Even when sections of Russia's proletariat have organised more directly around their own specific interests, their actions have often remained in the shadow of 'dissident' figures like Yeltsin. This was the case in the recent strike wave in Russia's coalfields, when 'wildcat' action (outside and against the state unions and in defiance of Gorbachov's decree to 'work normally') included speeches at the pit-head by strikers in support of 'the Yeltsin alternative'.

It's hardly surprising that decades of brutal, grey Communist Party rule have discredited any notions of 'socialism' or 'anti-capitalist struggle' for so many working class Russians. Despite deep anxiety about the future, and distrust of Gorbachov's agenda, few want to return to the dark days of Stalin, and most see no alternative - as yet - to the pain of 'marketisation'.

Current

In the explosion of political debate that has accompanied glasnost, there has been a public re-emergence of revolutionary ideas. But the numbers of communists, revolutionaries and anarchists are small. The absence of a strong coherent communist current, able to organise effectively within the class, is hindering the development of a truly independent proletarian politic in the Soviet Union.

In the months and years ahead, there are certain to be repeated outbreaks of massive social unrest involving millions of Russia's poor - from strikes in the factories, to riots in the streets. What is less certain is the direction that that unrest will take - there is no guarantee that disenchantment with the 'market' will lead people to revolutionary - rather than reactionary - conclusions.

But unless Russia's vast working class is able to begin defining - and fighting for - its own interests, the misery of this mid-Winter will be but a foretaste of the worse that is to come.●

Fifty years after Trotsky's death: What's left?



LEON TROTSKY, LIKE all Marxists, had a strong sense of history and his role in it. He was exceptionally arrogant and carried out a continual conflict with his political opponents on the far Left throughout his career in order to assert his dominance. This trait is an endemic feature of Marxism, though it has only been matched by Lenin.

It is not surprising then, that up to 1917 when the hatchet between them was buried, their relations were of mutual and unrelenting hostility. It was this ongoing quarrel which later provided Stalin with evidence of Trotsky's anti-Leninism. After Lenin's death Trotsky was at pains to identify himself with the deified former leader, as was Stalin.

Glorified

Trotsky is to a greater or lesser extent glorified by present day Trotskyists and those borne of that tradition. John Rees asserts in the Socialist Worker Party's International Socialism No 47 that "Even his most determined enemies grant Leon Trotsky was a great revolutionary". We anarchists however beg to differ. Perhaps we can assess Trotsky in terms of his contribution to theory and, as an activist and politician.

As regards theory, Trotsky's most important writings relate to the theory of "permanent revolution", his views about Stalinism and the class nature of the Soviet Union. He also wrote works, of uneven quality, on culture, eg Literature and Revolution, history, eg History of the Russian Revolution, philosophy, eg In Defence of Marxism, and of course numerous writings on politics and other subjects.

It is characteristic of Trotsky that he viewed himself sufficiently equipped to write on these issues. However not everyone is inclined to agree;

for example, the philosophical arguments of In Defence of Marxism are, to say the least, basic. To be fair though, despite its Marxism, his History has been kindly received by critics.

The theory of permanent revolution was an attempt by Trotsky to show the relevance of his Marxism to "backward" countries such as Russia following the 1905 revolution. It was later more fully developed after an attack on the theory by Stalinism.

Basically, Trotsky argues that proletarian revolution is possible in peasant dominated countries, even granted that the working class is a small minority of the population. So long as the peasants accept the "political direction of the proletarian vanguard, organised in the Communist Party" then the dictatorship of the proletariat can be established.

The revolution however must not be confined to national boundaries but must become truly internationalised or "permanent" in character. In this way the limited, liberal-democratic stage of capitalism can be overcome even in societies where capitalism has not itself overcome the feudal order.

The first thing to say about the theory is that with the exception of Russia itself, the theory has proved to be irrelevant. Most so-called revolutions in the third world have indeed been led by communist vanguards, but the role of the workers has been minimal. In fact it has been the middle classes or even the armed forces who have adopted a marxist-vanguardist position.

A further problem with Trotsky's theory is, that in overstating the role of the workers, it seriously underestimated the possibilities of the peasants. If they are not to be led by the workers' vanguard they will, he asserts, fall prey to the bourgeoisie. He discounts the role of peasant revolutionary movements which pursued other routes. In the Russian experience, the

peasant insurrectionary army under Makhno springs to mind.

Another practical problem with Trotsky's theory is that the working class is considered to be insufficiently revolutionary. Echoing Lenin's What is to be done? Trotsky requires that the proletariat be led by the Communist Party with its deeper insights and abilities. This conflation of the working class with the Communist Party had unseen and devastating consequences - to which Trotsky remained blind.

As he had correctly argued in 1903, a disciplined hierarchical vanguard of professional revolutionaries, would, if they were able to seize power, end up acting against the interests of those in whose name they claimed to act. It's a pity that he abandoned this position in favour of party dictatorship. As we shall see later, it engulfed the whole of the Soviet Union and claimed Trotsky as one of its victims.

As the whole world is now aware, the Soviet Union under Stalin was the complete antithesis of what socialism was supposed to be about. The Stalinist state was a dictatorship over the proletariat and the peasantry which relied on terror to maintain itself.

Discounting the fact that anarchists had predicted that this would be the inevitable outcome of state socialism, Trotsky attempted to offer his own explanation for the degeneration of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, the Left



was by and large too mesmerised by October 1917 and its Stalinist inheritance, to listen to him.

It was typical of Trotsky that he was incapable of accepting any responsibility for the rise of Stalinism. The fact that both he and Lenin were responsible for creating the conditions which allowed Stalin to act as he did was beyond Trotsky.

Lenin and Trotsky carried out the following measures; banning of all parties both left and right, incorporating unions into the state and giving them management functions, banning factions within the Communist Party, creating a terrorist secret police, suppressing workers' committees, banning strikes, introducing capitalist production methods (eg "Taylorism"), shooting hostages, brutally suppressing the Kronstadt uprising (which had demanded a return to genuine Soviet democracy, without communists), granting special privileges for Communist Party members, creating a bureaucracy, and trying to subject workers to military discipline.

Defeat

There is no doubt that under the Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky an autocratic system was created. This was transformed by Stalin into a totalitarian one, which Trotsky, in defeat, had to explain without implicating himself.

Part of the solution to this problem was consistent with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. The revolution had to be international in scope, otherwise socialism could not survive in a backward country, this is precisely what had happened. The revolution had become isolated, so counter-revolution was the necessary outcome and Trotsky was absolved of all responsibility!

But Trotsky could not let go of the being that he had helped to create. So the USSR, despite its terror and other crimes had to be given a hybrid status. It was not, Trotsky argued, fully socialist - though it was an advance over capitalism since it had socialised industry and agriculture. Yet it was not socialist since the proletariat were still exploited wage slaves.

Trotsky took the view that the USSR was a "degenerated workers' state" whose property relations needed to be defended. This was the position Trotsky held until his murder in 1940. Realistic models such as theories of "state capitalism" and "bureaucratic-collectivism" were rejected as being unmarxist and objectively counter-revolutionary! To be fair, Trotsky did argue for a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucratic

caste which under Stalin had subverted the revolution.

The use of the term "caste" is a curious one and does not fit well into Marxist theory. Surely, since the USSR was not fully socialist, it was not being governed by a dictatorship of the proletariat. To argue that a caste rather than, say, a bureaucratic class ruled is unmarxist. If, in Marxist theory, the state is the instrument of the ruling class, which class did the Soviet state serve?

In the end, Trotsky had to take the position that the Soviet system was left hanging in the air, somewhere between socialism and capitalism, between which there existed a dynamic equilibrium.

Trotsky's theory of the class nature of the Soviet Union, if it had any value, is now being rendered

obsolete by history. In East Germany the bureaucracy has crawled away and market capitalism moved in. Similar developments seem to be taking place in other Eastern European countries, particularly in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In the Soviet Union itself, the Communist Party is in disarray and has lost its sense of direction. It too is toying with the market.

One thing is certain, socialism of the Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin tradition is finished there and no-one seems interested in Trotsky. Until recently Trotskyists had considered their master's works as dangerous propaganda, and indeed they were long banned in the USSR. They are now available but few people seem interested. Trotsky, like Lenin is now nothing more than an historical curiosity. •



Leon "shoot them down like partridges" Trotsky

The Shining Path: A road to disaster

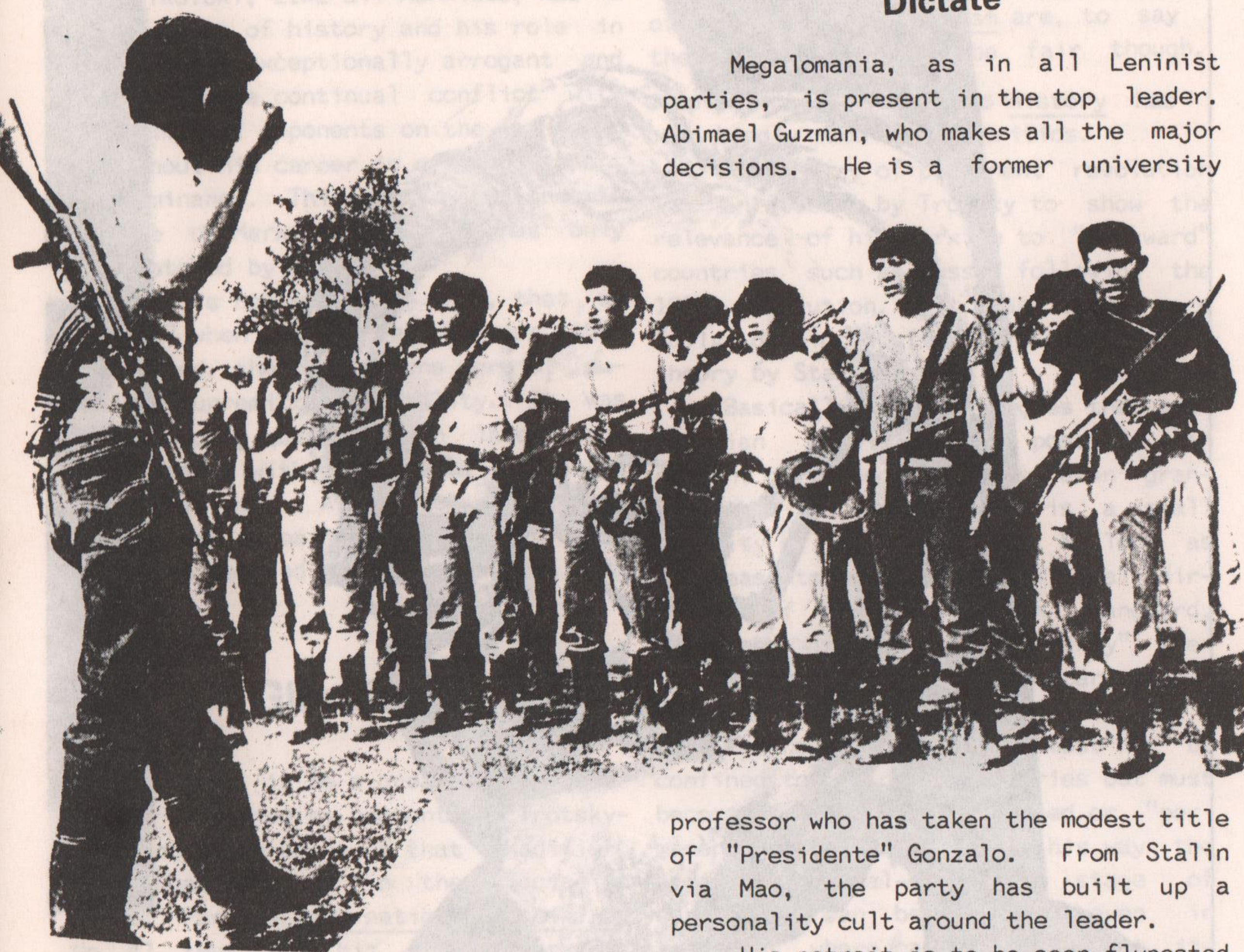
MARXISM HAS PROVED itself capable in the past of the most grotesque manifestations. One particular organisation, Sendero Luminoso, has however proved to be one of the most weird, and deadly. A Maoist Party operating mainly in the highlands of Peru, Sendero Luminoso (or more correctly, The Communist Party of Peru through the Shining Path of the Thought of Jose Carlos Mariategui), has perhaps done as much to wreak havoc on

- a mythological golden "socialist" Inca past, a tradition of rebellion and permanent exploitation, that Sendero Luminoso moved in.

Sendero Luminoso arose out of splits in the Peruvian Communist Party in the 1960s, adopting a Maoist position on most questions. Its leadership is a ruling class in waiting whilst the rank and file, as in all Marxist revolutions, service them. Sendero is organised on a strictly hierarchical basis.

Dictate

Megalomania, as in all Leninist parties, is present in the top leader. Abimael Guzman, who makes all the major decisions. He is a former university



professor who has taken the modest title of "Presidente" Gonzalo. From Stalin via Mao, the party has built up a personality cult around the leader.

His portrait is to be seen flyposted all over the capital, Lima. He has let his followers be aware that he considers himself the "Fourth Sword" of Marxism, the first three being Marx, Lenin and Mao. And to impress his less sophisticated followers his portrait is often surrounded by a halo of sun rays a contemporary Inca-like sun god.

Ideologically, Sendero Luminoso rejects all Marxist governments as revisionist or worse. At one time it tolerated Albania but that country too has now been stamped as revisionist. Sendero's backward looking economic strategy would be laughable if it were not so tragic. Simply, it involves a return by all Peruvians to the land (shades of Pol Pot here) and destruction of the cities and industries.

The whole economy is to be a peasant based collectivised system in

which bartering among communities will be the only permitted form of exchange. The destruction of modern methods is part of the stock-in-trade of Sendero. In a country where malnutrition is rife, especially in the mountains, the Party has systematically destroyed livestock, dairies and co-operative farms. Instead, the peasants are instructed to grow only enough to meet their own needs. The aim is to starve the cities.

Sendero does have support amongst sections of the Peruvian peasantry but their methods, such as assassination of opponents (including other "left" parties) has led to a large degree of alienation.

In the cities, Sendero has much less support and is obliged to resort to urban terrorism. With next to no working class support the Party relies on "armed strikes" eg. threatening transport firms and their employees with liquidation if they take people to work. This intimidation is ceasing to be effective, though the frequent power cuts in Lima are evidence of sabotage.

Sendero Luminoso has in recent years turned to cocaine trafficking in their so-called "liberated zones". In return for protection, drug dealers supply money for arms purchases. In these regions, Sendero rules with an iron fist and a foretaste of life under the Party can be seen here.

Their so-called "Republic of New Democracy" is highly authoritarian and hierarchical. Anyone opposing the Party is executed on the spot and sexual promiscuity carries a death sentence. Labour discipline is very strict and criminals are dealt with by firing squads.

The most dangerous effect of Sendero's activities is that the Peruvian state, never exactly mild mannered, has been given an excuse to act with brutality against the peasants suspected of being subversive. Massacres by the armed forces are not uncommon.

Sendero Luminoso is thoroughly cynical, manipulative, and substitutionist. Genuine opposition to Peruvian capitalism has been largely eliminated in the mountains as both sides seek a purely military solution in a growing civil war between the racist ruling class and the Maoist alternative. Already, since 1980, 1,500 people have been killed in political violence and thousands have been kidnapped and executed by both sides.

The military is adopting a high profile and a coup is likely if the Party looks like having any real success. This latter possibility is part of Sendero Luminoso's strategy since it would lead to an open confrontation with the state. And the sufferers would be the peasants and the rest of the working class.

» Continued from page 16

big sticks left with which to threaten non-payers.

The government's revised Standard Spending Assessment for next year has again been fixed to turn the thumbscrews on authorities not decimating services fast enough. The fixing is nothing if not blunt. Westminster and Wandsworth councils will receive so generous a grant that they'll be able to set poll tax figures of around £44 and £120 respectively, while other Metropolitan authorities will need to slash spending even further to scrape in around £350-400 an avoid being capped.

Further

Labour councillors are already promising there'll be no resistance to Chris Patten's plans. "We are not in a confrontational situation with the government", explains David Bookbinder head of Derbyshire's Labour council. "We will say OK if we have to cut our services we will do so, but we will be quite clear about where the blame for that lies". Bookbinder's 'clobber the poor and blame the Tories' strategy is echoed by Labour councils country wide.

Strathclyde council were all set to deduct unpaid poll tax direct from students' tuition fees, until the Tory

Scottish Secretary stepped in to rule the move illegal. The spectacle of the single most unpopular Scottish Conservative MP rallying to the defence of students under threat from a money-grabbing Labour council, should go some way to dispel the myth that what we're facing is simply a "Tory poll tax".

Industrial action continues to disrupt the workings of many collection offices.

An unofficial one-day strike by local government workers in Liverpool in early October - held in defiance of a union ban - brought 4,500 workers out on the streets, and ground the poll tax and social services departments to a standstill.

As the new year beckons, the situation looks set to hot up on all fronts. The use of bailiffs is certain to become more widespread in England and Wales, testing the level of active anti-poll tax combativity at street-level.

The courts will continue to be clogged. Eventually someone will be jailed for non-payment by a hard-nosed council, and the poll tax will explode back onto the front pages, raising the stakes once again.

As higher poll tax figures are announced for the year ahead - averaging 400+ under latest estimates - the ranks of non-payers will be swelled by those

who realise their council's inability to effectively pursue those defaulting.

As council debts mount, resentment will grow at the savagery of cuts, and anger and bitterness sweep through council workforces. As the thankless task of updating the registration list begins again, unpaid bill will pile on top of unpaid bill.

Debts

At some point, councils' will have to stop "thinking about" writing-off old poll tax debts as unrecoverable, and start actually doing it. Brent council in London has just earmarked 17,000 of this year's bills as "unobtainable" - a drop in the ocean by Scottish standards, where the figures run into hundreds of thousands.

Once one council breaks ranks and announces a mass scale write-off, others will follow suit - and millions of pounds of poll tax debts will be scrapped in a matter of days.

The impact that that will have on the strength of the non-payment campaign is obvious. The numbers refusing to pay will surge upwards, and dismal levels of poll tax receipts will decline even more. At that point, councillor Begg and his allies in town halls across the country will learn the true meaning of the word "uncollectable".

Anarchist Communist Federation Dayschool

Saturday 2nd February 1991

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1 (Holborn Tube).

Timetable

10:00 - 10:30 Registration.
10:30 - 10:45 Introduction.
10:45 - 12:30 Eastern Europe; An analysis of the current situation including the economic crisis, "new" governments, pro-capitalism, and history from 1917.
12:30 - 1:30 Lunch.
1:30 - 3:00 Anarchist Communism; The history of anarchist communism, its ideas and their relation to Marxism, role of the revolutionary organisation, and anarchist communism in practice today.

OR Poll Tax; Examination of events so far, demo's and riots, the Federation and independent initiatives.

3:00 - 3:15 Tea break.
3:15 - 5:00 Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism; What is the relationship between anti-imperialism, nationalism and libertarian communism. Discussion around Iraq and Ireland.

Cost £3 waged / £2 unwaged. Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Please try to book in advance and also send details of creche facilities needed or any other special requirements to; ACF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1.



Class and ecology

CONCERNING YOUR ARTICLE "Ecology and Class" in your May - July issue. As an anarchist and a green activist I agree, of course, that "ecological issues and class struggle are inextricably linked". However I also think that the existence of even a trendy green movement is good and the existence pressure groups such as Greenpeace is essential. I don't deny for one second that they are "flawed by their apolitical stance". Unfortunately if they were a radical class-orientated group they wouldn't have as much support and wouldn't even be recognised by governments.

As it is they are doing excellent work by actually stopping certain ecological disasters from occurring. They are not a solution but certain environmental issues are so urgent that if certain people don't act today it will be too late.

The article also talks about some green activists saying the earth would be better off without people. What would be best is a world with a smaller population. It is estimated that the world population will be 10.4 billion by 2100; this is too many people. Outbreaks of disease (etc.) will occur to contain the number of people. This is part of the natural way.

I, like members of Earth First, think it is good to have diseases which will keep the population smaller. That is not to say I rejoice when I hear of disasters but in the long run the world population cannot afford to expand more.

But long term peace with this planet can only be achieved by people running their own lives and this will only be achieved by anarchism.

FM
Co.Dublin

AUTHOR'S REPLY: OVERPOPULATION is one of the causes of environmental destruction - often it is cited as the main or only one. Also it is talked about in a racist way - "too many blacks (and poor) in the third world, depleting resources", when it is the rich and their system (directly and through colonialism) which use the lion's share of these resources for their profits.

Mass disease and government "population control" programmes are not the answer. A smaller, sustainable population will come about through people collectively seizing control: for example tak-

ing over the land and growing food for themselves (rather than cash crops) and women taking control of their own fertility.

- As the article acknowledges "groups such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace International do some practical work". Their educational work is important too, but it fails to empower people to act together to change things.

Pressure groups are like political parties; they accept the social-political system through their analysis, tactics and hierarchical organisation. Members and supporters are therefore limited to acting as individual consumers (boycotting nasty products and companies, buying green) or as disgruntled voters/citizens (petitions, letters, lobbying). Where pressure groups do undertake direct action - as for example Greenpeace International - it is done by a minority, in order to act morally and ecologically (ignoring why they don't and can't).

What is needed is (A) education which shows the root causes of environmental destruction and makes the theoretical and practical links between different struggles; (B) practical support for grassroots struggles (solidarity); and (C) encouragement for mass direct action combined with libertarian organisation.

This is the only way to achieve short-term victories and build a movement for the large scale social change which will create a human society in harmony with the rest of nature.

There are groups working along these lines: People Against Tinto Zinc and its Subsidiaries (PARTIZANS), Minewatch (information about, and opposition to multinational mining companies, support for native peoples' struggles, making links between environmental, workers and aboriginal struggles), and London Greenpeace, for example.

PARTIZANS and Minewatch, 218 Liverpool Road, London N1. 071-6091852; London Greenpeace, c/o 5 Caledonian Road, London N1.

How do we organise?

I HAVE READ your pamphlet, "The role of the revolutionary organisation" with interest. But I still cannot see any case for having "THE anarchist organisation" in preference to letting the anarchist movement be organised in an anarchistic manner.

The most successful propaganda work is done by autonomous groups

(including some with a membership of only one), who decide what they want to do and organise themselves to do it. They co-operate with other groups, but do not have a mandate, or pretend to have a mandate, from any organisation outside of themselves.

Anarchists working "in all the grassroots organisations of the working class, such as rank and file groups, tenants associations, squatters and unemployed groups as well as women's black and gay groups" should be proper members of those groups, not infiltrators. They should be able to talk against the attempts of Leninists or whoever take over the group, without anyone being able to say "How about your organisation trying to take over?".

Every organisation starts in an informal way, such as a few friends saying "Let's run an anarchist distribution network", or one person announcing "I'm going to start a newspaper and I'd like your help". If the distribution network finds itself with centres in London and New York, or the newspaper grows to a large publishing concern, then it may need to get formal, with bank accounts, designated signatories, computerised records, written agreements. But there is no need to give up autonomy and no advantage, that I can see, in doing so.

If in the light of personal inclination and past experience, you think it is useful to have an Organisation, with a Constitution and Branches, and Delegate Conferences, and a General Secretary in the manner of a political party, then of course that is what you should do. But I personally think it diverts energy away from the struggle for a free society.

An anecdote to illustrate the value of "organisations". In the early 1950s I was a member of a group which ran local meetings, calling itself the Colne and Nelson Libertarian Discussion Group. A local anti-conscription league was started, consisting of our group and the local branches of the Peace Pledge Union, the Independent Labour Party, and the Syndicalist Workers Federation.

It was decided to have a big public meeting, and the local branches of national organisations undertook to ask their headquarters to send experienced, preferably famous speakers. But in the event, to our disappointment, the branches provided their own inexperienced members as the only speakers. We, the autonomous local group, were the only ones with an outside speaker (the late Mat Kavanagh).

It seemed the national organisations existed more on paper

than in practice, and the "branches" were on their own when it came to practical organisation.

DR
Freedom Press
London

TOO OFTEN IT has been argued in what passes for an anarchist "movement" in Britain that the autonomous individual was paramount. This readily translates into freedom to do whatever one wanted with no reference back to a movement. Of course we respect the work of autonomous groups and individuals.

What we argue in our pamphlet is that an anarchist revolutionary organisation is vital if a revolution is to be pushed to its further limits, and if a united anarchist response on the level of propaganda and action is to be successful. This need for a unified, unitary revolutionary organisation was argued from the beginning of the international anarchist movement; Bakunin and his circle in the First International, through Kropotkin, Malatesta, via the "Organisational Platform" of Makhno and Archinov up to the present day.

Of course anarchists working in all the grassroots organisations of the working class should be proper members of these groups. Their activity and behaviour in these groups will prove that an anarchist organisation does not wish to take power for itself, but wants the whole class to come to a classless society.

This is shown through activity and example, and such a question as "How about your organisation trying to take over" will be answered in a practical way. The anarchist revolutionary organisation will gain respect for itself through its activity on the ground (we think we're showing that through our activity in poll tax work).

By the way, we don't have a "general secretary" ie. a leader like the Trotskyist groups (Gerry Healy being the worst British example of this), but just a national secretary who answers enquiries and deals with correspondence.

The anecdote about the value of organisations simply does not stand up. We've seen that the Trotskyist groups (Militant, SWP etc.) can deliver the goods, can provide speakers on a national level. This is one of the reasons why Militant has so successfully got a stranglehold on the anti-poll tax movement.

The point is not whether an organisation functions efficiently, but whether it wants to take power for itself or whether it wants to help bring about a social revolution brought about by, and for the benefit of, the mass of the population, the working class.●

Aims and Principles

1. The Anarchist Communist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class.

Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

3. We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class women and black people as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4. We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide, and political and

economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class.

We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5. As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

6. It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part on its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism.

The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different to ours.

The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise

that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist-communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8. Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9. As anarchist we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called 'socialists' or 'communists' we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.●

SUBSCRIBE:

"What they said about Organise"

"It was with me at Trafalgar Square"

- Poll tax rioter.

"Shit hot theory, not for your armchair anarchist!"

- Class War member

"Not funny" - The Metropolitan Police

"Stop me and buy one" - Organise Editors

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