

The heirs of Stalin face the workers

In China, in Yugoslavia, in Poland, in the USSR, the working class is becoming an independent force for the first time in many decades.

The strike wave that swept the USSR in July 1989, from Siberia to the Ukraine, is one of the most important events in recent history. To understand its significance we have to look at the origins and nature of the Eastern Bloc systems.

Central to the rise of Stalinism, everywhere it has taken power, was the absence of a strong, militant, organised workers' movement. In the USSR, the working class exploded with tremendous revolutionary energy in 1917 and, led by the Bolshevik party, took power. But in the subsequent civil war and the war to beat the foreign interventionist armies — no fewer than 14 of them! — the Soviet Union's economy was wrecked.

The most class-conscious and self-sacrificing workers were killed in the fighting or absorbed into the new state machine. Vast numbers of workers went back to the villages from the starving towns, where industry had ground to a halt except to service the war effort.

The Russian working class was driven off the stage of history in the course of its own immense and heroic struggle to defend its revolution. The section of the state bureaucracy led by Stalin gained power and privilege; defeated the genuine Bolsheviks, the Trotskyists and Zinovievites; balanced between the working class and the new bourgeoisie that had been allowed to grow up after 1921; and then in 1928 and after destroyed that bourgeoisie, destroyed all remnants of working-class rule, and (in Trotsky's words) made itself sole master of the surplus product.

In Yugoslavia, where local Stalinists won state power without the aid of the Russian army, the working class was tiny. Its own communist organisation had, under Josip Tito's leadership, transformed itself into a military force based mainly in the peasantry. That army/party took power in a war against the German and Italian invaders and, simultaneously, in a civil war with the Yugoslav monarchists.

They confronted the working class as a conquering — though popular — force; and they imposed on the working class, and on all Yugoslav society, a rigid Stalinist police state. The regime was modified in the years after Stalin's 1948 break with Tito, but the police-state framework remained intact.

In China events were similar to Yugoslavia. The tremendous energy displayed by the Chinese working class in the '20s, and especially in 1925-7, proves that the Chinese working class, at the head of the hundreds of millions of peasants, could have led a great revolution, the true continuator of the Russian Revolution. But the Chinese working class was grotesquely misled by the Chinese Communist Party, acting under Stalin's direct orders, into a terrible catastrophe. Then a section of the Communist Party deserted the towns, organised a peasant army, won



Soviet miner on strike

control of parts of China, gained power and authority fighting the Japanese invaders, and then conquered all mainland China. Even more than the Yugoslavs, the Chinese Stalinists confronted the workers in the towns as conquerors, though most of the workers probably welcomed the Stalinist armies.

In the areas of Eastern Europe occupied by the Stalinist Russian army at the end of World War 2, the working class was often tiny and in any case overwhelmed by the conquering force. The main partial exception was Czechoslovakia, where a mass Communist Party retained some vitality from before the war.

The Stalinist party in Czechoslovakia mobilised the working class to help it into full power, and then, after 1948, imprisoned the workers in an iron grip that was not loosened until 1968, when it took a Warsaw Pact invasion to force the Czechoslovakian workers back into the iron cage of Stalinism.

In East Germany (a relatively backward part of Germany, but very advanced compared to most of Eastern Europe), the working class had been pulverised by the Nazis since 1933, and then suffered conquest by the plundering, rampaging armies of Stalin, which treated the Germans as an enemy nation.

Men and women of the Stalinist party came out of Hitler's camps — Erich Honecker, for example, had spent 12 years in the Hitlerite camps — and formed an apparatus for Stalinist rule. Their ideas and conceptions were entirely derived from the USSR model. The working class went from one totalitarian state system to another: it is a sobering thought that the East German working class has now lived under totalitarian regimes for 56 years!

Everywhere the Stalinists took power independently, without USSR military help, they did so at the head of broad national movements for liberation and reconstruction, with a mass peasant, and at best a peripheral working-class, base. The result was a degree of nationalist legitimacy which has lasted in some cases (like China), backed up by police states, for decades.

The Stalinist organisations carried through revolutions against the old ruling classes, wiping them out as classes and sometimes wiping them out physically too. Usually, the bourgeois segment of the old order — in China, for example — was feeble and incapable of establishing its own full rule. The Stalinists replaced it, assuming the historic responsibility for developing the economy. The goal of socialism, which the Stalinist parties still emptily proclaimed, was displaced in practice by the goal and the ideology of 'developmentalism'.

The working class was also usually weak numerically, repressed by the old order, and betrayed by the Stalinists who claimed to be its class party. Instead of the feebleness of the bourgeoisie leading to working-class power through permanent revolution, with the working class at the head of the oppressed rural petty bourgeoisie, the weakness of both bourgeoisie and proletariat opened the way for a new ruling elite to emerge from the old middle classes, to take power, and to stamp its own pattern on the whole of society.

At the same time as they made their revolutions against the old ruling classes, the Stalinists carried through counter-revolutions against the working class. They denied that class even whatever residual openings for independent development there were under the old order. They deprived the working class of everything in the way of civil rights it needed to become a class for itself.

Individual workers were clawed into the bureaucracy in about the same way at the Turkish state of old recruited its janissaries from young slaves.

Everywhere the Stalinist regimes have been even more savage and implacable in their repression of any stirrings of working-class activity than they have been against other sections of society. In many countries of Eastern Europe, intellectuals have long had some degree of freedom — but not the working class.

The record shows that working-class mass strike action is the most potent weapon of struggle against the state-monopoly systems. Given an opening, it can spread like a great fire, without prior organisation. Thus it was in Germany in 1953, in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and in Poland in 1980.

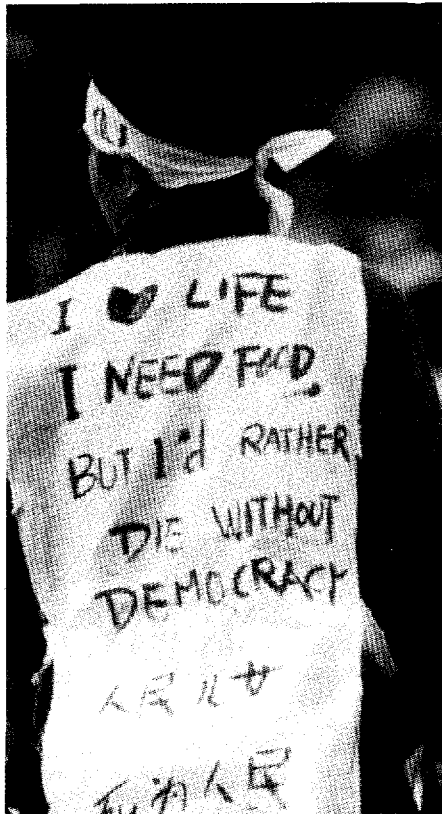
Poland and, marginally, Hungary,

remain the only Eastern Bloc countries in which trade unions independent of the state are allowed. But we can see, even in the USSR itself, the stirrings that will certainly produce a mass *Solidarnosc* there too.

In China, workers have organised independent trade unions. According to the accounts published by surviving participants in the student occupation of Tienanmen Square, the workers there were the most resolute in facing the army and its tanks when the slaughter began on 4 June. The free trade union activists have been jailed; the nascent free trade union organisations have been smashed, for now.

Why have the workers begun to move after so long, and why now?

Lenin argued that three conditions were needed for a revolution: that the old ruling class could not go on ruling in the old way; that the subordinate classes refused to go on being ruled in the old



Student in Beijing

way; and that the subordinate classes were organised and ready to make a revolution.

Plainly the immediate impulse to act has come to the working class from the crisis, indeed panic, of the Stalinist rulers. The same people who for decades proclaimed the omnipotence and omniscience of the ruling Stalinist supermen are now loudly condemning the system. They have stopped lying about their achievements, and admit that under state-monopoly rule their societies have rotted and stagnated.

Has there ever before been such a collapse of the morale, confidence, and coherence of a ruling class? Has any other ruling class, prepared as these state-monopoly ruling classes have been for so long to wade through rivers of blood to

stay in power, ever been so candid in admitting that it does not deserve power even according to the standards it sets for itself?

Of course they will still fight to hang on to power — as the butchers of Beijing did in June, as Gorbachev will do if he 'has' to. But their political panic, and the shake-ups produced by their economic resort to market measures to try to revive their systems, have stirred up the working class as never before.

In Poland the labour movement is in a position to demand that it should form the government, though it has left state power for now to the Stalinists. Indeed, Poland shows us the strange spectacle of a mass labour movement whose leaders hob-nob with the US President, the elected king of the foul gang of US plutocrats, and propose to replace the state-monopoly system with a full-scale restoration of capitalism!

Yet it should be only momentarily surprising. Just as we had labour movements in the West enthusiastic for what they thought existed in the state-monopoly systems, because they identified them as the negation of the horrors that they knew in the private-profit systems, so too in Poland, a labour movement pitted in bitter struggle against the particular horrors of the state-monopoly system idealises the West — not only the limited political democracy we have won here, but the whole filthy exploitative capitalist system.

In fact the big majority of Polish workers do not know what would flow from their market-oriented economic programme — the basic direction of which they share with both Jaruzelski and the powerful Polish Catholic Church.

Other workers in the state-monopoly societies will oppose the consequences of perestroika — and of *Solidarnosc*'s programme in Poland, if it goes through — by harking back to the 'good old days' of security under the centralised state system, as marchers in China harked back to Mao.

In the USSR, the striking miners had confidence in Gorbachev; they said they wanted him to succeed with his 'restructuring' and 'openness'.

Everywhere the workers, though beginning to stir, are politically subordinate to sections of the bureaucracy or the middle class. But workers learn in struggle.

In 1970, after hundreds of strikers were shot down at the Gdansk shipyard, the Polish workers had confidence in the new party leader, Gierek, who went to the shipyards and talked to them 'as a worker, as an ex-miner'. They believed Gierek. How did Gierek's rule end? When *Solidarnosc* erupted in 1980.

In Poland, the working class is *politically* in thrall to the petty bourgeois intellectuals who take West European democracy and capitalism as their model and goal. Public ownership of the means of production seems to be the programme of the discredited bureaucrats; market economics is the alternative.

The workers have, as yet, no political independence. Politically and ideologically, they are (though *negatively*) still under the heel of the bureaucracy.

They are shepherded along by the Catholic Church and the liberal intelligentsia. It is as if, in Tsarist Russia, the working class had followed the programme of the liberal-capitalist intelligentsia against the autocracy, and failed to generate an independent policy of its own.

What made the difference in Russia was the struggle of the Marxists to organise a force to lead the working class for its own goals — even within what was considered by Lenin until 1917 to be a *bourgeois-democratic* revolution. That is what stopped the Russian labour movement becoming an appendage of the bourgeoisie.

That is what is lacking now in the Eastern Bloc — a revolutionary socialist movement able to compete with bureaucratic demagogues and capitalist-oriented intellectuals for the leadership of the working class. That is what is lacking for the fulfilment of Lenin's third condition for revolution — that the subordinate classes are ready and able to assume power.

In the Eastern Bloc, Stalinism has massively discredited Marxism and socialism; and so we have Solidarnosc in tow to the liberals, and Walesa, like a mirror image of the pro-Stalinist Arthur Scargill, adopting policies that go flatly against the interests of his members.

In the unfolding crisis of the Stalinist systems, the outcome will be determined by whether or not Marxist organisations can be built to help the rising working class shape its future as an independent force.

Workers learn from experience. In the West, liberal or Catholic unions have become socialist (the once-Catholic union federation in France, the CFDT, became the left of the mass labour movement in 1968 and after, and linked up with the Socialist Party). So also the members of Solidarnosc can learn from the socialist minority in that organisation.

It would be foolish to try to predict in any detail the future course of the revival of the working class in the Stalinist third of the globe; foolish too to be disconcerted by strange events like the political evolution of Solidarnosc. When tens of millions of people awaken to political and trade union life for the first time all sorts of unexpected things will happen.

Whoever benefits now, or seems to benefit, from the eruption into politics of the working class, the ultimate beneficiary will be the working class itself. The working class will learn from its own experience. That is why we can dare to predict that the ultimate beneficiary will be neither the pro-capitalist liberal intelligentsia of Eastern Europe and China, nor any section of the bureaucracy, but unfalsified working-class socialism.

Our cover illustration

Our cover illustration is an adaptation by Fleet Graphics of a painting by the Soviet artist Pyotr Aleksandrovich. Aleksandrovich's painting 'Hour Glass' (1987) shows Stalin in place of Deng.



Salman Rushdie

Rushdie and the labour movement

In London, National Front skinheads, the sort of thugs who terrorise Asians, demonstrate ostensibly in defence of free speech against Muslims trying to root a little bit of Islamic intolerance in Britain.

Muslims must be defended from racists, the thuggish and the more subtle alike. But there is no way that the left can side with or endorse the current demands of the Muslim zealots without betraying itself completely.

Muslims are offended by Salman Rushdie's 'blasphemous' book. But the right of free speech and writing has to be the right of *offensive* speech and writing, for if no-one were offended or outraged by the speech or writing no-one would want to challenge it.

It is not so long ago that the Christian equivalents of the Muslim zealots did to their critics what some Muslims want to do to Rushdie. The Christian zealots' legal power to repress has fallen into disuse, but the blasphemy laws which the Muslims want extended to their own faith still exist and could be used again.

If there are to be blasphemy laws, then logic is on the side of the Muslims. And likewise with their demand for state subsidies for Muslim schools: why should Anglicans, Catholics, and Jews have their schools subsidised and not Muslims?

The Tories want to refuse the Muslim demands and be blatantly discriminatory. Some Labour MPs want to bow to the Muslim demands. Labour should stand against the demands of the Muslim zealots — but on a consistent and honest basis.

That can only be a vigorous Labour opposition to all blasphemy laws, a commitment to disestablish the Church of England, and a commitment to end all subsidies to religious schools.

For a democratic united Europe!

It is unlikely that Mrs Thatcher's differences with the other states in the European Community (EC) will lead to any fundamental rupturing of Britain's links with the EC, despite Mitterrand's half-threats that the EC may proceed to full monetary union without Britain.

The integration of the EC — or at least of its core nations — is such that more and more moves towards the creation of a European federal state are a certainty in the years ahead. It is inconceivable that, after 17 years in the EC, the British ruling class will exclude itself, or let itself be excluded, from these moves.

But the left is put in a dilemma by Mrs Thatcher's strident anti-Europeanism. Hostility to the EC has been a mainly left-wing cause for over twenty years now. Mrs Thatcher is stealing some of the left's clothes. Thatcher, not Kinnock, has picked up the left's long-championed cause of British sovereignty. It is Thatcher who denounces the left's traditional bogeys, the 'faceless bureaucrats' of Brussels.

True, what Mrs Thatcher objects to is the 'socialism' she sees in the EC and in such EC documents as the Social Charter, whereas the left has long campaigned against the EC on the grounds that it copper-fastens capitalism. True, Thatcher fears (relatively) pro-working-class interference by the EC, whereas leftists like Tony Benn have denounced the EC as a force that would thwart and hinder a genuinely socialist government at Westminster.

The list of neat inversions could be extended; nevertheless, Thatcher has stolen the left's anti-EC flag.

The flag which Thatcher has 'stolen' always belonged to Tories more than the left. There could never be socialism in Britain without the European working class (at least) also making a socialist society. All the smug and complacent assumptions embedded in the idea that a capitalist EC would stop social change in progressive Britain have been shown up for what they are by Thatcher's discovery that 'sovereign' Britain is so far to the right that the EC's social legislation is 'socialist' by comparison.

There never was any other sensible policy for the left and the working class than a drive to get the maximum Europe-

wide unity of the working class against the Europe-wide coordination of the capitalist classes. The idea of breaking up the limited and piecemeal economic unity the bourgeoisie has created in Western Europe, and retreating to nationalist protectionism as before World War 2, was always both reactionary and utopian.

The socialist criticism of the EC as 'a bosses' club' is valid, but British withdrawal was always a wrong and nonsensical answer. It is nonsense, however, that has lasted on the left for nearly 30 years. For nearly 30 years, sections of the left, and sometimes nearly all the left, have stood for little Britain against internationalism, for the implicit idea of socialism in one small island, for the breaking-up of the limited economic unification of Europe achieved by the bourgeoisie since World War 2.

How could such a thing happen? When the EC was formed in the '50s, the British ruling class chose to stay out. They had the Commonwealth (ex-Empire) as their international association.

But the Commonwealth rapidly faded away as an economic force, as the EC burgeoned. By 1961 the Tory government decided to seek admission. They failed. Big sections of the ruling class continued to look to the Commonwealth. The Labour Party (including many of its right wing) supported them.

But the Commonwealth orientation was hopelessly outdated, and gave way, in 1967, to a feeble Labour government attempt to get into the EC.

The CP and the reformist left opposed the attempt to put Britain into the EC from the beginning. The CP simply played its usual British nationalist card, and followed through Stalin's late-'40s decision to exploit divisions in the ranks of Western capitalism. The reformist left looked to the Commonwealth, and were also romantic British nationalists. Some, Michael Foot for example, had links with the anti-EC bourgeoisie, like the press baron Beaverbrook.

At first the revolutionary left was unanimous in denouncing the CP and the reformist left as chauvinist and retrogressive, and in calling for European workers' unity.

But then the CP and the reformist left generated a broad hostility to the EC in the labour movement. They were aided by trade union leaders who prized the cosy relationship they had with Downing Street — the seats on quangos, nationalised industry boards, and Economic Development Councils — and feared it might be disrupted by the EC.

So most of the would-be Trotskyist groups, one after the other, changed their position in the late '60s! The reasons given varied, but the result was always the same: to get in line with the dominant opinion on the broad left.

The definitive changeover of the British SWP (then IS) to being a tightly-controlled and bureaucratic sect occurred as a result of the ructions generated within the organisation in 1971 when it belatedly followed the other far-left groups. It is a sad story. Our tendency has been almost alone in sticking to the Marxist line of the early '60s.

The sight of Mrs Thatcher as the

champion of 'British sovereignty' and the scourge of the EC for its allegedly 'socialist' legislation is already hastening a shift of opinion on the left away from anti-EC nationalism. The TGWU conference this year dropped the union's anti-EC policy with scarcely a murmur.

But it is not enough to drop the old policy in embarrassment. The left should boldly slough off nationalist prejudice, learn the lessons of the last 30 years, and start fighting for a positive working-class response to the growing West European integration of capitalism.

We should fight for cross-Europe workers' unity on all levels, and for fully accountable democracy in the EC — that is, for a sovereign European parliament. That is the way towards a socialist United States of Europe.

Industrial gangsters

The docks dispute of summer 1989 encapsulates the whole history of worker-capitalist relations in Thatcher's Britain.

First the boss-controlled Tory politicians decide to do what the employers want, and scrap the Dock Labour Scheme. The protective structures the workers have won are brutally ripped down by people who behave as a conquering class pushing those they have beaten into 'their place'.

The union tries to keep within the law so that its assets will not be seized. The law forbids the workers to strike in defence of the Dock Labour Scheme, for that would be a political strike. So the union goes through the motions of trying to negotiate conditions to replace the Dock Labour Scheme with the employers — those same employers who have just lobbied the Government into abolishing the scheme.

Meanwhile militancy is being banked down and bled off. Redundancy payments are made attractive. It's a small price for the employers to pay for the profits they expect after they have smashed trade unionism in the ports.

The bosses refuse even to consider a national agreement to replace the Dock Labour Scheme. So the union ballots its dock members.

A big majority vote to strike. The bosses go to court. Their lawyers argue that the Dock Labour Scheme includes a ban on strikes which nobody has noticed in 40 years! The judge says that there may be something to the argument, and since the damage to 'the nation' of a docks strike must outweigh the damage to the dockers of postponing their strike, he grants an injunction. The union is held down for weeks, while the strike mandate expires.

There is unofficial strike action, called by the Port Shop Stewards' Committee, but it peters out. The dockers eventually accept union leader Ron Todd's decision to try to protect the union from Mrs Thatcher's skinhead judges itching to tear it apart. Rumours begin to circulate of dockers' shop stewards and other union activists meeting secretly — as in other industries — to discuss what can be done to get round the law. *They are the underground activists of a partly illegal labour movement.*

The appeal to a higher court goes in favour of the dockers' right to strike; and a new ballot establishes that the big majority of dockers want to strike for a liveable nationally negotiated agreement with the employers. They strike.

By now, quite a number of dockers, older men, those who despair of winning any concessions, have taken the money offered and left the industry. Still, outside of Wales, the strike is fairly solid.

But it is hamstrung too. 'Secondary' picketing is outlawed, and so is everything that would have helped the dockers, even at this late stage, to mount a challenging, militant confrontation. Thatcher's Britain has the most restrictive, illiberal, and employer-helping labour laws this side of the line dividing neo-Stalinist from bourgeois-democratic Europe.

The legal obstacles depress and isolate the striking dockers. The Tory propaganda mills denounce dockers who are defending their jobs, their conditions, and their trade union organisation as the 'jobs for life' boys.

As if the exploiters and parasites don't have their robbed or inherited wealth 'for life'!

By this stage, in late July, the politicians, the judges, and the media have been kicking the dockers around for months on the bosses' behalf. Now the brave port employers move in, brandishing the big stick.

After much to-ing and fro-ing, the courts have conceded, grudgingly, that the dockers have a right to strike. 'Not so', say the employers, taking the Thatcherite anti-union legislation to its ultimate conclusion. 'You don't have the right to strike. We'll sack you if you do'.

They send out threatening letters. They sack 16 shop stewards at Tilbury. Some hundreds of Tilbury dockers are then black-jacked into reporting for work, with dock trade unionism in tatters. The majority fight on. The national docks delegate conference on 28 July decides to fight on.

More threats of sackings follow. More dockers go back to work. On Tuesday 1 August the TGWU calls off the strike.

Ron Todd put it well when he said that the behaviour of the Tory government and the employers was the behaviour of gangsters. That's what the Tories and the class they serve are — pin-striped thugs and gangsters who happen to have the law courts and the state in their hands, and the right to make up the law and decide what is legal and illegal according to what they need to beat down the workers.

The limited upsurge of wages militancy shows that the British working class is reviving. But the gangsters have won this round.



A Siberian miner addresses his comrades on strike

Towards a Soviet Solidarnosc

Out of the bowels of the earth came the worst nightmare of Mikhail Gorbachev: a strike by Soviet miners. Beginning in the Kuznetsk basin of Western Siberia just in time to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the French revolution, the strikes quickly spread 2,000 miles to the Donbass coalfield in Ukraine.

The miners were joined by others — transport workers, air traffic controllers, and even some police — in the largest workers' struggle the USSR has known since the 1920s, creating the greatest crisis since Gorbachev embarked upon 'perestroika'.

Previously, strikes had been easily repressed in the Soviet Union: kept isolated by total lack of news coverage, their leaders dumped in lunatic asylums and, if necessary, physically repressed. Within 'glasnost', superficial as it may be, none of that is possible. The strikers can be seen on Soviet TV, other workers can hear their demands. And so, as the bureaucracy has stumbled along trying to regain the initiative, the political scope of the strikes has increased.

In the new Assembly (a sort of parliamentary forum, still rather toothless), both the leadership in the Kremlin and the official state unions have come in for sharp criticism. The muttered comparison being made, by government and strikers alike, is Poland in 1980, the birth of Solidarnosc.

One of the demands in Ukraine is, indeed, for the establishment of an independent trade union — under the

name of 'Solidarity'.

There can be no doubt that these events are of immense importance.

The original focus of the miners' demands in Siberia — the strike wave began in the town of Mezhdurechensk — were on pay and conditions. Although miners earn on average twice the national wage, conditions are incredibly bad. Pit villages are beset by dreadful levels of pollution, and there is an appalling lack of basic necessities, such as soap.

An additional demand was for an end to central government control over the mines.

Very quickly, new political demands were being advanced. By Saturday 15 July the big demands coming from the Kuzbass was for a new constitution, to enshrine the various glasnost promises Gorbachev has made over the last few years — and for an end to the elite's privileges.

The strikes in Siberia were brought to an end on Tuesday, 19th, by a deal that promised better wages, more meat, sugar and soap, and improved housing: many miners live in squalid South African-style barrack huts. There is some indication that many miners felt more could have been won.

The Ukrainian strikes, however, have proved much harder to end. By Friday 21 July, over 100 pits were idle in the Donbass. Strike committees issued a list of demands that ran to 37 points.

These include: wage increases of up to 40% for night shifts; travel time to work to be paid; more holidays; special provision for underground workers who use unhealthy machinery; recognition of various diseases as work-

related; retirement after 20 years; all miners to be provided with their own flat within 10 years (a demand that those who say everybody has somewhere to live in the USSR should take note of); soap; a reduction of the official union staff by 50%; maternity leave of three years; holiday pay; a wage increase of 60% for women working in dangerous conditions; no reprisals; no work on Sundays; a ban on punitive transfers.

This list of demands give some indication of how bad conditions are for miners.

Strikers at Chervonohrad added these demands: pre-term elections to the city council; the dismissal of the city party secretary, the chief of police, the head of the KGB, three judges and the editor of Chervonohrad Miner; the establishment of an independent union to be called 'Solidarity'; the removal of the First Secretary of the 'Communist Party' in Ukraine. Other reports have mentioned demands against environmental destruction. At the time of writing, the Ukrainian miners are returning to work, their demands met, but industrial unrest is still spreading.

Central to the strikes has been the formation of strike committees which aim to continue after their demands have been won. In Siberia, it has changed its name to the Workers' Committee and has demanded that the government recognise it as the representative of the workers.

These committees, which do indeed represent tens of thousands of workers (180,000 in Kuznetsk) pose a fundamental challenge to the system of power in the USSR. They are embryonic 'soviets'. The question arises, can the system allow them to survive for very long? Gorbachev has been quick, while saying that the strikes are in support of 'perestroika' to say that they also endanger it. And he means it.

Even if Gorbachev were to balk at repressive moves, and he goes for consensus instead, there are others in the hierarchy who talk about a 'Deng option' — meaning an imitation of the Chinese leadership's butchery in Tiananmen Square. The similarity with recent events in China is all too obvious to the Kremlin, and seems to be obvious to the miners, who gather in meetings in town squares, like little Tiananmens. That Gorbachev now makes promises does not mean he won't use the 'Deng option' if the promises don't satisfy the workers.

The quick political focus of the strike wave is a necessary result of the state-monopoly system: any 'unofficial' industrial or political activity immediately becomes a challenge to the government and the bureaucratic order.

Official statistics put the number of strikes over the last year at 100; they don't say how long they were or how many workers were involved. But the openness the bureaucracy needs to restructure its rule together with the shake up which that involves for the working class, is also the signal to the working class to act and organise in self-defence to push its demands. The

bureaucracy knows that by its concessions to the miners, in full public view, it guarantees the inevitable consequence which will be that other workers will realise they too can follow the miners' example.

Clive Bradley

Industry

Almost like Old Times

This time it's for real: after several false dawns over the last few years, industrial militancy is now back with a vengeance.

As we go to press the Port Shop Stewards' Committee has decided to battle on against a government and employers intent on nothing less than the destruction of trade unionism in the ports. The dockers have been bound hand and foot by the Tory anti-union laws; so the fight to defend the conditions of the Dock Labour Scheme was slow to start, and the odds are now weighted heavily in favour of the port bosses.

But other battles are going better.

The Tories' 'de facto' seven per cent pay ceiling has been decisively smashed by a whole series of workers, some of whom did not even have to take strike action, but merely threaten it (like the power workers who settled for 9.2% in May, after balloting in favour of industrial action). Indeed, two watershed pay deals earlier this year were reached without even the threat of industrial action: at Ford, the second stage of a two-year pay deal triggered a 8.9% increase, while at Nissan a spectacular 15% was achieved in January as the first part of a two-year deal.

Settlements like these, combined with the steady rise to 8% and beyond of the price index, the increase in mortgage payments of up to £200 per month for many workers, and the well-publicised six figure salary increases of bosses like Lord King of British Aerospace and Jeffrey Sterling of P&O, have fuelled the present upsurge of wages militancy.

Meanwhile, workers' self-confidence has been boosted by the continuing decline in unemployment and the advent of a 'skills shortage' in engineering and manufacturing.

This explosive cocktail has been completed by a drive by several key employers for the restructuring of established bargaining machinery. In local government and on the railways, moves towards localised bargaining coincided with the upsurge in wages militancy to produce remarkably solid rank and file support for official disputes.

500,000 local government workers began a programme of 'rolling' strikes in early July demanding a 12% pay rise

with no strings. This resulted from a 60% ballot vote in favour of action — the first time their union NALGO, had ever called national strike action.

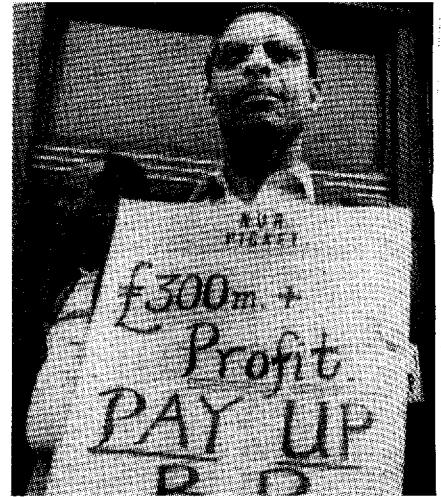
At the same time, railworkers embarked upon a series of highly effective one-day strikes in protest at an imposed 7% pay increase and the break up of their national negotiating machinery. The BR Board's 'tough guy' tactics soon collapsed in the face of railworkers' solidarity and the Board was forced to up their pay offer to 8.8% and withdraw at least some of the strings, in a humiliating climbdown. ASLEF and the staff union TSSA have now accepted this deal, and as we go to press it looks like NUR will also accept.

Socialists are rightly enthusiastic about the present upsurge in militancy and serious revolutionary organisations are, of course, making a priority of relating to it. Workplace and picket line bulletins arguing the case for the basics of industrial militancy (eg the need to build on limited weekly action, all-out strikes) are now essential. But we need to go further and give a political lead.

It is ironic that the new militancy coincides with Neil Kinnock's drive to make Labour a 'safe' alternative government for the British ruling class and to distance the party from extra-parliamentary struggle. After weeks of equivocation on the rail strike, Kinnock publicly called upon the NUR to accept the 8.8% offer. And the fact is that many strikers probably approve of Kinnock's leadership, seeing it as the best hope of ousting the Tories at the next general election and establishing a government that will not be so 'ideological' in its hostility to the working class. But what is required is a positive, working-class alternative, to both Kinnock's class collaborationist leadership in the Labour Party and the 'new realism' of trade union leaders of both left and right.

Within the unions this means laying the foundations of a rank and file movement capable of linking up struggles, placing demands upon the existing leaders and — where necessary — organising independently of them. It must be a rank and file movement that avoids the twin dangers of becoming simply an electoral machine and stage army for 'left bureaucrats' (like the CP dominated Broad Lefts of the 70s) and the syndicalist error of attempting simply to bypass the existing leaderships without placing demands upon them or challenging them politically.

The latter danger is probably the more immediate one at the moment. Given the employers' increasing readiness to use the courts and the Tories' anti-union legislation to outlaw official action and threaten union funds, many militants are looking towards 'pure' rank and file unofficial action as a way of circumventing the law and the timidity of official leaderships. The effectiveness of the unofficial London Underground strikes (especially when compared with the sorry spectacle of Ron Todd's capitulation to the courts during the dock dispute) has added to the attraction of 'pure' rank and file amongst many militants. But it is an approach that will lead to a dead end for all but the most tightly knit and well-organised groups of



Railworkers forced BR to break the Tories' unofficial 7% limit

workers. Paradoxically, the approach of totally by-passing official union structures can quite often suit the bureaucrats, allowing them to stand back from the action and evade their responsibility to provide leadership and support to the strikers.

Two demands are increasingly relevant in the present situation: the sliding scale of wages (the demand that wage agreements contain a clause guaranteeing automatic rises in line with inflation) and a charter of positive rights for workers. Both must be campaigned for within the unions and the Labour Party.

The workers' charter would include legally enforceable rights to strike and picket effectively; for unions to gain access to workplaces in order to organise; the right to stop the job whenever health and safety are in doubt; the right of unions to determine their own internal democracy free from control by the courts; and the right to employment free from racial or sexual discrimination.

Such a positive approach would directly challenge Kinnock's strategy of distancing a future Labour government from the unions and from militant union action. And it is an approach that has an obvious and immediate relevance to sections of workers aroused by the present wave of industrial struggle. Cheering from the sidelines is not enough. Socialists need to present a positive, political way forward.

Jim Denham

Abortion rights

Setback in the USA

A demonstration in Washington on 9 April this year attracted over 300,000 people from right across the USA. They were demonstrating about one of the most divisive political issues in the US, an issue likely to stay divisive in the years

ahead — the right to legal abortion.

The April demonstration was held on the eve of a Supreme Court ruling — 'Webster v Reproductive Health Services' — which undermines and threatens American women's rights to freedom of abortion.

Abortion is a constitutional right for women in the USA. It was guaranteed in a 1973 Supreme Court ruling on the case 'Roe v Wade'. An average of 1.5 million American women use their right to abortion every year, a high proportion of them young women getting early terminations (under 12 weeks). The average cost of such an abortion is \$213 (about £133), and most operations are performed in private clinics rather than big, multi-purpose hospitals.

Since the 1973 ruling the number of women dying from illegal abortions has dropped dramatically. According to a recent *Newsweek* survey, 58% of Americans would like the 1973 ruling to remain in force.

The Supreme Court ruled on 'Webster v Reproductive Health Services', a case which originated in the state of Missouri. Missouri is one of several American states which have attempted to legislate to either ban or restrict access to abortion. Of the nine Supreme Court judges (including the first ever woman Supreme Court judge, Sandra Day O'Connor), five agreed with the Missouri state's attempt to restrict access to abortion; but 'Roe v Wade' still stands, so that abortion is still a woman's constitutional right.

The new judgement means that the state of Missouri is acting within the constitution when it restricts publicly funded abortion services, and requires doctors to test for foetal viability at 20 weeks and over.

Other states have similar legislation 'on the books' and there will probably be moves soon to use them. The Supreme Court has also agreed to consider three other abortion cases over the next 12 months, and anti-abortion activists are hoping that judgements on these cases will further erode the 1973 decision. At the same time, they will be running state-by-state campaigns to take advantage of the current changes and any new ones. They are hoping that 'Roe v Wade' will be overturned altogether, and that abortion will be made totally illegal.

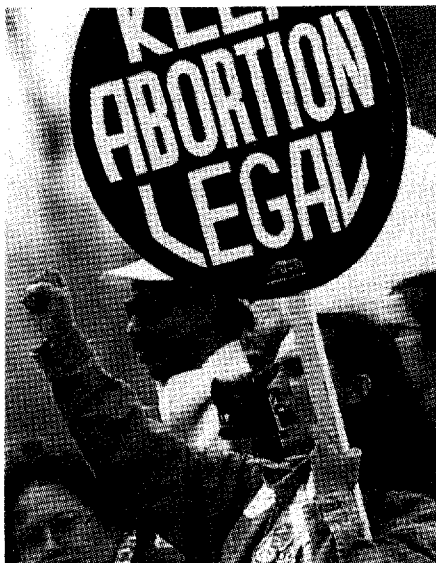
The anti-abortion movement in the US is very strong. Its supporters include ex-president Ronald Reagan and current president George Bush. Reagan replaced liberal Supreme Court judges appointed in the 1960s and '70s with right-wingers, and this encouraged the anti-abortionists as well as groups wanting to overturn 'affirmative action' and other civil rights legislation. It is likely that as other liberal judges retire (two are in their eighties), President Bush will replace them by 'pro-life' right-wingers. The probability is that attacks on women's right to choose will continue, and that those attacks will be successful.

The first people to be hit by restrictive new legislation will be poor and young women. The anti-abortionists appear to think that an all-out attack on the right

to abortion would fail right now. So they wage a war of attrition aimed at making abortion more difficult and the choice for individual women harder to make.

Anti-abortionists regularly picket abortion clinics. Women seeking abortion, or even just information, have had to fight their way through crowds of shouting and sometimes violent pickets. Some abortion clinics have even been bombed. This violent campaign has naturally made it harder for individual women to use the clinics. Some doctors have stopped performing abortions because of the constant abuse. Some clinics have closed, which means that some women have to travel further, at greater cost, to get the service they need.

If clinics and hospitals are prevented from using public money for any part of abortion services the cost will again rise. Only a few states provide public funds for abortion. Missouri and other states have recently passed laws which mean public funds can only be used when the life of the mother is in danger. Out of



300,000 marched for a woman's right to choose

17,382 abortions carried out in Missouri last year, only 90 were carried out by doctors in public facilities — and more than 1,000 women from Missouri went out of state for abortions. Missouri has also banned the use of public funds to 'encourage or counsel' a woman to have an abortion. Other states may well follow Missouri's example.

The women who rely on public hospitals are, of course, the young and the poor. They will find it hardest to raise the necessary cash to go out of the state for abortions. With no public funds, many clinics will have to raise prices, thus making abortion harder still for poor women. The restriction of access to information is even more worrying. Doctors not wishing to run foul of the law will simply have to refuse information to women who can't afford to pay for it! Now the Supreme Court's decision makes Missouri's actions legal, and there is every likelihood that other states with a strong anti-abortion movement will follow suit.

The Supreme Court has also made

mandatory viability testing (as in Missouri) legal. While it is accepted by most doctors that a foetus is only 'viable' (ie. capable of sustaining life outside the womb) at 24 weeks and above, the pro-lifers want testing to begin at 20 weeks. Ostensibly this is to allow for any mistakes in detecting the beginning of a pregnancy, but at the same time it is one more attempt to push down the age of viability as close as possible to the date of conception.

This has the effect of giving the state an alarming new role in the doctor/patient relationship, and again placing doctors at the mercy of legislation dealing with absolutes in an uncertain situation. Many may simply choose to opt out.

Viability testing too will put up the cost of abortion — for no real purpose. The main tests which a doctor can use — ultrasound and amniocentesis — are both expensive (from \$125-\$450) and extremely unreliable at 20 weeks. So the requirement to test for viability may have the effect of delaying the abortion for up to four weeks and tripling the cost. *Newsweek* estimates the cost of a 24-week abortion at \$1,200.

In fact, in 1983, only 0.8% of all abortions occurred after 21 weeks, the vast majority for therapeutic reasons. Anti-abortionists however have convinced enough people that America is full of women having late abortions for frivolous reasons, and that the age of foetal viability is dropping all the time. Both these assertions are myths, but it is the myths rather than the facts which are currently influencing legislation. The result will be more suffering for women in an already difficult position.

The anti-abortion movement is pressing for three other main changes: that all young women must have the consent of both their parents before abortion; that private abortion clinics should be as fully equipped as a general hospital operating theatre; and that women must give 'informed consent' to abortion.

All these changes are unnecessary and intrusive. 'Informed consent' basically means that women should be shown pictures of the foetus in the womb, and aborted foetuses, possibly with a mandatory waiting period as well. Women would also be told of the supposed 'risks' of abortion. Essentially, the screaming 'pro-life' pickets would move from the gates of the abortion clinic to the doctor's surgery — with the doctor forcing medically suspect information on a patient to guilt-trip her. It is an attempt to make the decision more painful for women, and to drive doctors away from abortion.

Parental consent may seem more reasonable, especially if you believe young women should have no rights over their own bodies. But in many cases it is simply impossible — if parents are separated, living away from the young woman, and so on. Girls between 15 and 17 account for 11% of all US abortions. At the moment girls must have parental consent, but they

may see a judge to 'by-pass' this law. It is this judicial by-pass which is under threat. A young woman who does not want to tell her parents that she is seeking abortion is unlikely to get much support from those parents if she has an unwanted child — but it is precisely those young women who will be denied abortion.

Finally, the anti-abortionists are pushing for new standards in abortion clinics. This will mean clinics will have to buy entirely unnecessary medical technology and pass the costs on to their patients. Up to 12 or 14 weeks, abortions are extremely safe and easy to perform. They often take place under local anaesthetic. There is simply no general need for upgraded facilities. Their goal is to ensure that at the same time as abortions are being banned from public hospitals, abortion clinics which now offer cheap facilities will be forced to raise prices beyond the capacity of many women to pay. Average abortion costs could rise from \$213 to \$750 — for no medical reason at all.

All the legislation, current or impending, is designed to reduce women's access to choices in reproduction. While the constitutional right to abortion may well remain, the price in both financial and emotional terms is being made impossibly high for many poor and young women. And thus, in practice, the poor and the young will no longer have an effective right to abortion.

Elizabeth Millward

World economy

Is it really slump-proof?

World capitalism has shrugged off the October 1987 stock market crash.

Private capitalist investment in the advanced (OECD) economies rose 11% between 1987 and 1988, after a much smaller rise in 1986-7 and virtual stagnation in 1985-6. The trend is still broadly upwards, though the US economy has dipped a little in recent months. Profit rates in the US were higher in 1988 than in 1987. Unemployment has fallen slightly in most major capitalist countries.

It's all the more remarkable since the current upswing, an upswing with continuing mass unemployment and bleak depression in many areas but an upswing nonetheless, has now continued for six years, since 1983. Four or five years has been the typical length of an upswing in recent years.

Capitalism owes its easy passage through the stock market crash to the

fraudulence of the Tories' programme of a 'share-owning democracy'. In the US in 1929 a lot of company shares were owned by middle-class individuals. The crash wiped out their wealth. They stopped spending, defaulted on debts, made panic sales of property, and thus cut demand for industry.

Today most shares in most countries, including Thatcherite Britain, are owned by pension funds, insurance companies and the like, not by individuals. These huge financial enterprises don't like losing millions on the stock market, but they aren't going to go bust, and their losses have no effect on industrial demand.

Another classic mechanism for a stock market crash to work through into an industrial slump is by cutting industrial investment. If the price of a company's shares falls, that doesn't hurt the company *directly* at all. But it does reduce its ability to raise money for expansion by issuing new shares. Also, stock market crashes generally go with high interest rates, which make it more expensive for companies to borrow money from banks for expansion.

The bulk of capitalist investment in today's economies seems to suffer these effects very little. The investment is mostly done by huge corporations which plan their outlays for years ahead and have a dozen and one ways of raising money. *Long-term* interest rates have risen much less than *short-term* rates over the last year and a half.

A stock market crash can produce a slump more directly by a domino effect. The crash brings down dodgy enterprises which have over-extended their credit, and the collapse of those dodgy enterprises, in turn, ruins sounder enterprises. This sort of effect is always unpredictable. It's a bit surprising that it has not developed this time — plenty of shady quick-buck men were chancing their arms in the stock market boom before October 1987 — but, anyway, it hasn't.

One conclusion from all this is that the whole stock market business is utterly parasitic. If the production of goods and services can advance undisturbed when the stock market collapses, then what purpose can the stock market serve except to give a few thousand rip-off merchants a chance to enrich themselves?

The system that serves those rip-off merchants has shown new flexibility and resilience. But what did we say at the time of the stock market crash? 'Behind the Great Crash of 1987 lies the fact that in the 1980s the world capitalist system has moved into uncharted waters. Various forms of international credit, only minimally controllable by national governments, have expanded hugely. As with credit generally, this expansion has given capitalism **more flexibility — and a greater risk of sudden slumps.**' (*Workers' Liberty* No.9, emphasis added).

That problem remains. And the imbalance in the world money-moving system which caused the stock market crash remains. It could cause other crashes.

The stock market crash was triggered by fear of the dollar's value slumping in relation to other currencies, and by

perception of high interest rates remaining high (hence more gains to be made from bonds than from shares). Those developments, in turn, were generated by the US's huge trade deficit.

The capitalist upswing since 1983 has been powered by an expansion of demand in the US. The US government, US companies, and US consumers have been straining their credit to the limit to buy things, many of them imported from other countries. Now the US has lost its lead in productivity in many sectors, an increase in demand there pulls in a lot of imports.

Since 1983 the US has run huge current-account deficits — \$139 billion in 1986, \$154 billion in 1987, \$135 billion in 1988. The deficit is now decreasing slightly, but very slightly. The latest OECD estimate is that the deficit will be \$123 billion in 1989 and \$116 billion in 1990.

How can the US spend so much more than it earns? Either capitalists from other countries *lend* it the money (ie. invest in the US), or it prints more dollars — and the dollar correspondingly loses value.

Capitalists from other countries *have* invested a lot in the US. But from 1985 the dollar's value slid against the yen and the deutschmark. In October 1987 capitalists panicked from fear that the slide would turn into a collapse.

The dollar did indeed lose value in the last two months of 1987. But since then it has been remarkably stable.

No-one knows how long the US can continue to live on credit without the bailiffs knocking at the door. We do know that there are three major factors for instability in the world system today. World trade is still based on dollars — IOUs repayable in US-produced goods — at a time when the US's advantage in productivity is disappearing. International credit has expanded hugely and in an uncontrolled way, and credit systems can collapse. And there are major imbalances — the US trade deficit and the Third World debt crisis — with no prospect of being cured.

I do not know how long these three factors for instability can be kept quiet. But if I were a capitalist I wouldn't be complacent.

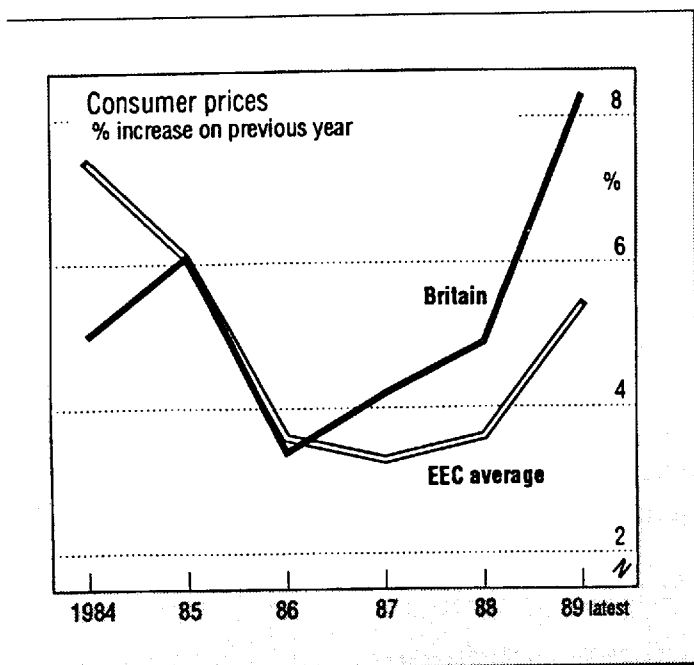
Chris Reynolds

Britain

More a mess than a miracle

Prices in Britain are rising at an average of about eight per cent a year. This new surge of inflation has embarrassed the Tory government and helped to generate a wave of industrial militancy.

Increased costs for housing make up a big part of this inflation. Mortgage



payments rose by about 50 per cent in 1988, and rents rose over 8 per cent, thanks to central government pressure on local authorities, while food prices, for example, rose only 4 per cent.

The hardest-hit, therefore, have been people who are paying off mortgages and for whom those mortgage payments are a big part of their expenditure — in other words, better-off workers rather than the rich or the very poorest. A household in the middle 60 per cent of the income range, with a mortgage, suffered an effective inflation rate of 13 per cent in 1988.

The mortgage payment increases are caused by higher rates of interest, which in turn are caused by the Tory government trying to handle Britain's trade deficit.

In 1986 Britain's trade was in balance. By 1988 its exports covered only 70 per cent of its imports. The reason is the long-term decline of British manufacturing.

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, Britain has exported more manufactured goods than it imported, while importing more raw materials and farm produce. Over the 1980s Britain has lurched into importing more manufactured goods than it exports. For a while, oil exports from the North Sea covered over the problem and kept trade in balance overall; but now those oil exports are dwindling.

The Tory government says that high interest rates will induce capitalists to place money in Britain — i.e. lend money to cover the trade deficit — in the short term; meanwhile, many of the goods being imported are machines which will set British manufacturing up for a comeback.

It is true that Britain's capitalists have been investing more in machinery and buildings. Private fixed capital formation increased 14 per cent between 1986 and 1987, and 17 per cent between 1987 and 1988. But British investment still remains low compared to investment in other advanced capitalist countries; as both effect and cause of that fact, the rate of return on capital in Britain,

though much increased in recent years, is still substantially lower than in the US, Japan, West Germany, France or Italy.

In the slump of the early 1980s, some sectors of industry *disappeared* from Britain, and they are not being rebuilt. The chances of British manufacturing making a comeback in world competition seem poor.

So the future spells slump. Interest rates cannot be pushed up much higher for much longer; and the only other way of handling the trade deficit is for the economy to slump sufficiently so that people cannot afford to buy so many imports any longer.

Colin Foster

Scotland

Stalemate on the left

The achievement of an Assembly remains top of the political agenda for most left-wing activists in Scotland, and political currents continue to eddy and flow around that issue.

Discussion now is focused on the question of whether a future Assembly should be elected by means of proportional representation (PR). The recent meeting of the 'constitutional convention' in Inverness indicated that this will be another sticking point in terms of a unified approach to the Assembly campaign.

PR is an elementary demand which socialists should have no difficulty in supporting. Yet, although it enjoys the backing of Liberals, Democrats and Greens, the Labour Party remains doubtful on the issue and has promised

to initiate an internal discussion on it.

Sceptical observers, however, may be of the opinion that this is only a delaying tactic to put off further a vigorous campaign for an Assembly.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Nationalists continue their boycott of the convention, convinced that the adamant refusal of Thatcher to tamper with the Union will rebound in their faces, leading to maximum popular support for their campaign of parliamentary disruption and civil disobedience to gain independence.

The recent victory of Labour in the Glasgow Central by-election has, however, been a blow to the Nationalists, registering a failure to repeat their Govan success.

The Labour win can give little succour to socialists, strengthening as it does the further swing of the party to the right. The virtual imposition of the Labour candidate, Mike Watson, by the NEC symbolised the problems facing socialists in the Labour Party.

Watson, a leading figure in the LCC, swung from unilateralism to multilateralism, and from a non-payer to a 'reluctant payer' of the Poll Tax to gain Kinnock's blessing. Campaigning for a Labour victory may have kept the Nationalists out, but it also reinforces the creation of a Kinnock-Gould type Labour Party in Scotland. That presents a dilemma which the left remains too weak and divided to address effectively.

Of the forces on the left, the Militant presents the most contradictory image. Jubilant at the recent success of its anti-Poll Tax Federation in terms of large rallies and demonstrations, Militant appears to be almost oblivious to the expulsion/proposed expulsion from the Labour Party of about 30 members accused of being supporters of the tendency. Whether this suggests a new trajectory for Militant remains to be seen.

Support for a vigorous campaign for an Assembly and for non-payment and non-collection of the Poll Tax remain vital ingredients of the Scottish political scene. Yet the Labour leadership, well ahead of the other parties in the opinion polls, remains complacent and somnolent. In that context, socialists are stymied and frustrated. Creating an organisational framework which gives political expression to their demands remains the major task.

As yet, both Scottish Labour Action and the Socialist Conference/Movement lack a sufficient degree of credibility, the former being regarded as potentially an LCC Mark II and the latter as a London-oriented talking shop. Clearly, both of these descriptions are so schematic as to be bordering on caricature. Both bodies are hopefully capable of further political evolution. By responding more politically to the initiatives of both organisations, Socialist Organiser may be enabled both to make a contribution to Scottish socialist politics and, by the same token, enrich its own development.

Ian McCalman

Documents

How Beijing workers organised their own union

The Workers' Autonomous Federation emerged in May 1989 as a prototype for a future independent trade union movement in China.

It arose alongside the student demonstrations which began in April 1989 calling for greater democracy, an end to corruption, a more open and accountable government and autonomous student unions.

Under the red banner of the Workers' Autonomous Federation and fluttering slogans calling for democracy and freedom of association, between fifty and one hundred workers erected a tented headquarters on the outskirts of the students' tents at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing in mid-May.

Members of the union were mostly production workers, service sector workers and worker intellectuals. Among the core members, there were steel-workers, railway workers, aviation workers, restaurant cooks, students and lawyers. Apart from Beijing, workers at the camp also came from other areas such as Tianjin, Shanxi, the north-eastern cities, Jiangsu, and they ranged in age from early 20s to late 40s. Their action was the first open attempt by workers to set up an autonomous organisation outside the official-run All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU).

The organisers launched their action by issuing pamphlets and leaflets to publicise criticisms of the present labour policies and union structure and to spread their call for a genuine and democratic workers' movement. They set up a public address system in Tiananmen Square to explain their demands.

The organisers worked in harsh conditions, staging round-the-clock pickets in the Square under flimsy tent roofs, in the blazing heat, rain and cold, lacking sufficient food and sleep. They were bombarded from two directions by the competing loudspeakers. On the one side, their own broadcasts continued to repeat their calls, punctuated by the Internationale and other songs. On the other side, the central government public

address system blared official propaganda, repeating martial law regulations and issuing warnings to the demonstrators.

At any time during the day, hundreds and sometimes thousands of workers and residents crowded around the Federation's loudspeakers, listening to the speeches. Whenever the union managed to print some handouts (which was sporadically, due to a lack of printing facilities), the crowds rushed up to grab a copy. The demand always outstripped the supply many-fold.

Amidst the students' campaign for democracy and liberty, workers set up the union in mid-May. The founders reckoned that the fight for democracy and liberty bore relevance to their immediate interests, allowing the workers to aspire to have independent and genuine representation in policy making as well as improving their own economic position.

Members and correspondents were recruited at the campsite; several hundred workers had already signed up and received membership cards.

Before the massacre, the situation in Tiananmen Square was already growing tense. Three of the Federation's leaders had been detained by the Public Security Bureau earlier in the week. Although they were later released they knew they were under close surveillance and so remained in hiding. The other leaders were also pursued by the security agents and therefore could only appear at odd times.

During our meetings we discussed the issues and problems the union founders were addressing, their needs, and their future plans. They said they felt that their priorities were to build up their network among the grassroots workers, to consolidate the organisation internally, to propagate their ideas further, to recruit members and to develop the resources, leadership, skills and infrastructure needed for the new federation.

They saw their main obstacle as the clearly expressed antagonism coming from the government, and the government-run union movement, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. The authorities were labelling them an unlawful body comprised of unruly elements. They were concerned that there was resistance from some demonstrating students towards workers' involvement in the democracy campaign. Some students apparently felt a need to restrict their campaign purely to students and intellectuals.

The Federation was addressing the problem of the corrupt bureaucracy and the existence of a privileged elite in China. The wide wage discrepancy between the workers and plant managers, the lack of workplace democracy, the lack of genuine workers' representation in the policy-making process, poor labour protection and working conditions and the deterioration of workers' living standards in recent years — these were among their main grievances.

On 3 June, the Federation's leaders were still talking of finding ways to legalise their organisation, by liaising with some of the relatively sympathetic

sections within the official ACFTU, and by gathering support from the democratic political parties. They insisted that they wanted to organise their Autonomous Federation through constitutional and legal means and stated that they did not oppose the rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Autonomous Federation camp was sited towards the north-east of the Square. On the evening before the massacre, troops were massing at that end of the Square, and it was clear that a confrontation of some sort was about to occur. The members of the union were among the most courageous of the demonstrators. Holding their union banner high, they marched to the front of the crowds facing the waiting troops. It was from this corner of Tiananmen Square that the massacre began.

Students who survived the massacre told us in the following hours that most of the representatives of the Autonomous Workers' Federation were killed as the troops attacked.

On the 8th of June, three days after the massacre, the regime announced that the Workers' Autonomous Federation, as well as the Student Autonomous Federation, were counter-revolutionary organisations. Organisers and activists in these groups would be rounded up and arrested. The government set up a special telephone hotline for informers to assist with the process of hunting down the members of these groups.

On Friday 9 June, demonstrators numbering more than 100,000 rallied in Shanghai. Among the protestors' banners were those from the Shanghai Workers' Autonomous Federation. It was reported that there were at least one thousand workers rallying behind this particular banner.

There were also reports that similar independent trade union banners were raised in Guangzhou following the Beijing massacre.

After the massacre by tanks and machine guns of the peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations held by students and workers in Beijing on the morning of 4 June, the next ten days saw a reign of terror in the Chinese capital as well as in many other Chinese cities.

On 12 June the Chinese Central Television (CCTV) showed a badly beaten leader of the Shanghai Autonomous Workers' Federation. On the same day, through the official media, the Chinese government called on official unions to mobilise workers to demolish independent workers' federations all over the country. It was reported that 80 people had already been rounded up in Beijing over the previous few days for their involvement in the independent students' and workers' federations. The military and police forces were also given orders to shoot and kill in their arrests of the so-called 'counter-revolutionary activists'.

Initially the ACFTU showed support for the students' pro-democracy movement in the capital city but, shortly before the violent crackdown, they backtracked on their position. On 2 June, the ACFTU issued a statement in the Beijing

Daily, denouncing the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation as unlawful, and calling on the government to crush the pickets and other activities organised by the Federation. In the statement, the ACFTU also called on workers to rally behind the government's efforts to attack and eliminate the Autonomous Federation.

At this moment, the Chinese authorities are waging a massive and brutal witch-hunt of the pro-democracy student and labour leaders. From our discussions with the organisers and workers, it is clear they were simply organising for a democratic and autonomous workers' body.

Before the massacre, one of their main objectives was to seek ways to legalise their organisation through peaceful means. They were also planning for grassroots mobilising throughout the country. When asked if they wanted to push for the right to strike (which was taken away from the Chinese people in the constitutional amendments in 1982), their reply was no, for the reason that they really just wanted to organise within the laws and constitution of China.

These workers made a historic and heroic move by raising the banner of the autonomous workers' federations in Beijing, Shanghai, Xian, Hangzhou, Guangzhou and other cities of China. Their actions marked the first open attempt by Chinese workers to fight for their right to organise independently since 1949. Their goals were radical, their will was genuine, their act courageous and their means peaceful. They certainly did not deserve to be brutally murdered, beaten and detained by the Chinese authorities.

From a report by Trini Leung (Hong Kong Trade Union Education Centre), 15 June 1989.

'Workers' inspectors must run the city'

The Permanent Secretariat of the Beijing Independent Workers' Association is calling an urgent meeting for this afternoon. In the present situation, the mission that we are going to carry out demands an especially urgent meeting. In the present situation, the members of the secretariat have perfected the leadership of the teams. They have created cells, a General Secretariat, a Propaganda Committee, a Supply Committee and a Contact Committee.

In the first place, the Association is a spontaneous organisation of workers in the capital, responding to the present situation. Its aim, along the lines of democracy and legality, is to correctly lead this patriotic and democratic movement. It welcomes every worker in the capital and each union in the *danwei* [production units] of the factories and mines into active membership in our union organisation.

Secondly, as a result of what has happened, the general assembly has decided specifically that:

1. The task of the moment is for the teams of workers' inspectors to act in coordination with the autonomous associations of the students' union in order to protect and defend the lives of the student comrades, and the stability of the social order in Beijing city.

2. While maintaining political and social peace, they will guarantee the despatch and transport of necessary products for the civil life of Beijing city, including vegetables and grain as well as everyday manufactured goods.

Special statement published by the Plenary Assembly of the Standing Committee of the Beijing Independent Workers' Association, May 21, 1989

'The working class must be the shock troops of the democratic movement'

The working class is the most advanced class; we must be the shock troops of the democratic movement.

The People's Republic of China is under the leadership of the working class, and we have the right to drive out every tyrant.

The workers have understood perfectly the need for knowledge and technology in production. This is why we absolutely reject the outrages suffered by the students and educated people.

We must not flinch from our duty to destroy tyranny and dictatorship and promote the democratisation of the state.

Unity is our strength; our unshakable conviction is the guarantee of our success.

In the democratic movement "We have nothing to lose but our chains, and a world to win."

Provisional Committee of the Beijing Independent Workers' Union, May 21, 1989

'Ensure that the workers are really the masters of the firms'

Since the middle of April, in the democratic movement of all the nationalities led by the students, many Chinese workers have shown their desire to participate in political life, while recognising that, until now, they have lacked a truly representative workers' organisation to express their opinions. For this reason we believe it necessary to set up an independent organisation to speak in the name of the workers and take up the issues that concern them. To this end, we are preparing to organise an Independent Workers' Union in Beijing and are putting forward the following proposals for a programme.

1. This organisation must be totally independent and it must be set up as the result of a democratic process in which workers take part of their own free will. It must not be under the control of other organisations and must have equal status

with other mass organisations.

2. The basic aim of this organisation must be to put forward the views of the greatest number of workers on political and economic questions, and not to be merely a welfare organisation.

3. This organisation must have a monitoring role over the Communist Party.

4. In firms and businesses which are the property of the whole people or under collective ownership, this organisation must have the right to use all the appropriate and legal means to monitor the legal representatives and to ensure that the workers are really the masters of the firms. In other firms and businesses, it must uphold the workers' interests through negotiation with the enterprise directors or through other legal means.

5. This organisation must guarantee all the legal rights of its members in the constitutional and legal spheres.

Provisional Committee of the Beijing Independent Workers' Union, May 21, 1989

Preamble to the union rules

Provisional Memorandum

Based on the initial guiding principles, prepared by the preparatory committee of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation, issued on 25 May 1989

Preamble

In the entire people's patriotic democracy movement, led by the students since mid-April, the majority of the Chinese workers have demonstrated a strong wish to take part in politics. At the same time, they also realise that there is not yet an organisation which can truly represent the wishes expressed by the working masses. Therefore, we recognise that there is a need to set up an autonomous organisation which will speak for the workers and which will organise the realisation of workers' participation and consultation in political affairs. For this purpose, we put forward the following preparatory guiding principles.

1. The organisation should be an entirely independent, autonomous organisation, built up by the workers on a voluntary basis, through democratic processes and should not be controlled by other organisations.

2. The fundamental principle of the organisation should be to address political and economic demands, based on the wishes of the majority of the workers, and should not remain just a welfare organisation.

3. The organisation should possess the function of monitoring the party of the proletariat — the Chinese Communist Party.

4. The organisation should have the power, through every legal and effective means, to monitor the legal representatives of all state and collective enterprises, guaranteeing that the workers become the real masters of the enterprise. In other enterprises, through negotiation with the owners and other legal means, the organisation should be able to safeguard the rights of the workers.

5. Within the bounds of the constitution and the law, the organisation should be able to safeguard all legal rights of its members.

6. Membership of the organisation should come from individuals on a voluntary basis, and also group or collective membership in branches of various enterprises.