

Socialist
Action

No 10
Spring 1991
75p

After the Gulf war

**The new
age of
imperialism**

Comment

Major hits the rocks

With the Gulf war won the media believed the Tory leadership had a perfect formula to win the next election. The government's declaration it intended to abandon the poll tax was to clear away what was believed to be the last major problem the Tories face and allowing them to consider victory in a June general election. Instead it turned into a fiasco.

First, Heseltine was unable to announce any of the details of the replacement to the poll tax, due to differences in the Cabinet. Then a delegation representing 50 Tory MPs went to see Major to argue against the outline proposals. Then Heseltine's plan to abandon a straight poll tax and recreate a property tax was badly received by Tory activists. As a final straw, Lawson gave Labour a propaganda victory by dubbing Heseltine's proposals 'son of poll tax', and accusing the government of dithering and an incapacity to rule.

This debacle reflects the fact that the Tories fundamental problems are not rooted in the poll tax itself — although it a grotesque measure that brutally hits the most poor and most disadvantaged. The 'poll tax' had become a symbol, in the consciousness of the masses, of the overall economic problems they faced. Once moves were made to eliminate it trouble therefore broke out, and was reflected, elsewhere.

The content of Tory divisions on the poll tax is that it involved an especially sharp redistribution of income *within* the working class. Despite well publicised aristocratic poll tax 'winners' — like the Duke of Westminster and other major landowners — the poll tax's most important economic content was to alleviate the tax burden on the 'middle classes' and best off sections of the working class at the expense of the worst-off — who were least touched by the rates.

The Tories were forced to abandon the poll tax due to the rebellion of the worst off. However, shifting back to a property tax means hitting the pockets of those better-off workers and middle layers who were won over to the Tories in the '83 and '87 elections — hence the panic at the prospect of a property tax in the Tory party, especially from Tory MPs in marginal seats.

Norman Lamont's attempt to avoid this dilemma by an increase in VAT — also a regressive taxation policy, as there are no rebates available on VAT — was rapidly seen through and judged as better only in comparison to the poll tax itself. 'Abolition' of the poll tax therefore brought, contrary to their expectations, no substantial improvement of the economic condition of the masses. This allowed Labour to move ahead of the Tories in the polls following the budget and Heseltine's speech — the exact opposite of what the Tories had anticipated.

In reality this debacle precisely summarises the dilemma of the Major government. Major might like to announce the coming of the social market, and a new wave of social reforms — the introduction of a Christian Democrat style government in Britain — but he totally lacks the economic basis to achieve it.

That is why those who argued — such as *Marxism Today* — that the coming of Major opened the way for a new period of consensus and centre ground politics in Britain, are, as usual, totally wrong. The depth of problems of the British economy today means that there is precisely no space for centre politics for any government.

Major might well have liked to introduce a series of reforms to soften the impact of his predecessor. But the problem is that he does not have any economic room for manoeuvre to do so. Major's government therefore did not open a new period of class peace, but marks a new period of greater instability in British politics. The end of the poll tax simply means that new and harsher ways will have to be found on other fields to attack working class living standards.

Naturally the great paroxysm of the Gulf war is not going to be rapidly repeated but there is going to be no 'return to normal' in British domestic politics now it is over.

Inside

No 10
Spring 1991

The Gulf

3-8

The new age of
imperialism
Chris Baker

9-13

The impact of the
Gulf War
James Francis

11

Perspectives for the
Palestinians
Interview with Reem
Abdelhadi

12-13

The politics of the
Iraqi oppositions
Interview with Sabah
Jawad

14-19

The anti-war
movement
Louise Lang

In View

20-22

Cuba next? ● Cholera
in Peru ● El Salvador
election's ● Brazil
crisis deepens
● Attacks on lesbians
and gays ● NUS
election chaos ●

Britain

23-27

The consolidation of
Euro-Thatcherism

Sylvia Ashby

Reviews

28

Steadman's war
paintings ●
Morphine and Dolly
Mixtures ●

International

29-31

From Gorbachev to
the Gulf

Geoffrey Owen

Socialist Action

Building an alliance
for socialism
PO Box 50, London
N1 2XP

Editorial/Business
071-254 0128

Typeset, designed and
printed by Lithoprint
Ltd (TU), 26-28
Shacklewell Lane,
Dalston, London E8.
Phone: 071-249-7560

Published by Cardinal
Enterprises Ltd.

Cover photo:
*Destruction on the
road to Basra*

The new age of imperialism

The Gulf war was not an aberration. Its cause, course and aftermath, were the culmination of trends in world capitalism which have been developing since the beginning of the 1980s. Its roots lie in the changed relation of the imperialist economies, above all that of the US, to the world economy in general and the third world in particular.

From the aftermath of World War II — which can be taken as marked by the overturns of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the victory of the Chinese revolution — to the mid-1970s there existed what might be termed an 'era of reform' in the relation of the imperialist economies to the third world. This does not mean that this period did not see many revolutions — on the contrary it saw revolutions in Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria, Iran, Grenada, Nicaragua and other countries. But it meant that the overall relation of the imperialist economies to the third world stabilised and stimulated the economies of the latter.

The economic basis of this relation was the huge export of capital from the imperialist countries to the semi-colonial ones. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s the US alone pumped out \$30 billion a year, in today's prices, into the world economy. From 1960 to the mid-1970s the imperialist countries as a whole, the OECD area, exported a net annual average of \$52 billion, in today's prices, of capital to the semi-colonial countries. Considering that the entire annual investment of a medium sized third world country such as Iraq is only \$9 billion, the impact of such an immense outflow of funds in providing capital for growth and stabilising the third world economies is clear. Put in economic terms the defeat of the working class in the imperialist countries through fascism and World War II was so great that it generated surplus value on a scale sufficient to produce not only the long post-war boom in the imperialist countries but capital to create a period of reformism in the third world as well.

The result was rapid economic

growth in the semi-colonial countries from the 1950s to the 1970s — growth more rapid even than in the imperialist countries themselves. Naturally this was uneven growth, growth characterised by vast inequality, growth determined by imperialist interests and oriented to sectors that served imperialist interests, growth to extract super-profits, growth which wrecked the environment, but it was, nevertheless, economic growth which brought rises in living standards to the mass of the population of the semi-colonial countries.

By 1960-70 World Bank and IMF figures show that a quarter of the population of the market economies, 25.2 per cent, were in countries catching up the industrialised world in terms of living standards and only 3 per cent in countries suffering a decline in GDP per capita. Declining GDP per capita, for major third world countries, was confined to Afghanistan, Algeria (due to the war of independence) and a small number of African states.

Politically the counterpart of this period of economic reform was the phenomenon, and later the formal movement, of 'non-alignment' — launched organisationally at Bandung. A similar orientation had been pioneered earlier by the PRI in Mexico, Peron in Argentina, and Vargas in Brazil.

The political current of non-alignment combined verbal opposition to imperialism, and certain reforms carried out against it, with actual economic dependence on the flow of capital from the imperialist countries. This political current, bourgeois nationalism, progressively became the dominant tendency in the third world involving, as major figures and movements, Nasser, Nehru, Nyere, Nkrumah, Kaunda, Sukharno, the MNR in Bolivia, Peronism in Argentina, the Ba'ath in Syria and Iraq, and even, in a traditional US quasi-colony, Torrijos in Panama. In most cases, not all, the anti-imperialist rhetoric was given more military and political muscle by tacti-

The Gulf war, the largest military offensive waged by imperialism since Vietnam, is one of those events which is so great in its impact that it clarifies not only immediate events but the entire historical course of which it is a part. The Gulf war both confirmed the analysis of world politics presented by *Socialist Action* in the last years — the new phase of imperialism, the new era of North-South wars, and the emboldening of imperialism due to the events in Eastern Europe — and at the same time, as with every major event, has deepened and extended that analysis. *Socialist Action* was able to play a role in the fight against the war out of all proportion to its circulation because it was *prepared* for it, and the course of world politics of which it is a part. This issue of the magazine is turned over to analysis of the war and its implications. We start with *CHRIS BAKER* on the background and cause of the war — the new expansion of imperialism.

cal alliances with the USSR.

Again in the majority of cases, not all (Vietnam, Algeria, the Portuguese colonies), the colonial empires were dismantled peacefully leaving in place 'non-aligned' regimes. Political reformism, political independence from the colonial powers, thereby accompanied economic reformism. This orientation, on the politico/military level, in large part reflected a fear by the imperialist states that an attempt to resist the demand for decolonisation would lead, at best, to a strong link up between the national liberation movements and the USSR — and that such a combination would emerge victorious — and at worst the anti-imperialist struggle would grow over into a revolution against capitalism — as occurred in Vietnam and Cuba.

The current of open capitulation to imperialism in the third world at that time was a relatively small minority — its classic cases being Saudi Arabia and the other monarchies of the Gulf (and even these displayed anti-imperialist rhetoric in regard to Israel), and regimes such as that of Duvalier in Haiti and Somoza in Nicaragua.

Later, in the late 1960s and 1970s, a new type of pro-imperialist regime emerged in the military dictatorships in Latin America which were created to bloc the combination of social unrest and the impact of the Cuban revolution. But these, and similar, overtly pro-imperialist dictatorships remained confined to Latin America and the 'Newly Industrialising Countries' of Asia — South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. 'Non-alignment' was the dominant current in the third world.

With the onset of the crisis in the world economy after 1973 this situation drastically changed. In the imperialist countries the huge rise in the level of investment necessary to remain competitive with Japan and the most successful industrial states, coupled with the successful erosion by the working class in the imperialist states of many of the consequences of the defeats of the 1930s, led to economic crisis — a crisis deepened, but not created, by the oil price increases of 1973 and 1979. From having a surplus of capital to export to the third world the imperialist economies became desperately short of capital themselves. The US economy in particular — which had suffered relative decline throughout the post-war world due to its low level of investment — had the greatest capital (surplus value) shortage of all. Any attempt to generate extra surplus value/capital to over-

'With the onset of crisis in the world economy after 1973 the relations between imperialism and the "third world" drastically changed'

come this situation through stepped up exploitation of the working class in the imperialist countries would only have deepened the political instability which had set in in the United States (under the impact of the Vietnam war) and in Western Europe (under the impact of the rise of working class struggles) from the late 1960s onwards.

As a result, after the mid 1970s, the entire orientation of the imperialist economies to the third world altered. From being suppliers of capital the imperialist economies began to suck huge quantities of capital out of the third world through international debt and other means. The imperialist states moved from being a supplier of \$50 billion a year of capital to the third world, in the two decades up to the mid-1970s, to extracting \$100 billion a year from third world countries by the beginning of the 1990s. A turn around of \$150 billion dollars a year had taken place in a decade and a half.

This new intensification of imperialist exploitation played a decisive role in stabilising the economy of the imperialist countries themselves. Although the amount that could be extracted from each individual third world country was limited by their small GDPs, the turn round in the capital flows from the third world as a whole was significantly larger than the export of capital from Japan and Germany combined which dominated discussion in the international financial press during the period after 1980. The \$150 billion shift was equivalent to the entire balance of payments deficit of the United States.

The impact of such a scale of extraction of resources in terms of the damage it did to the third world economies must also be clearly grasped. \$150 billion is equal to almost three times the total annual investment of India, 15 times the annual investment of Iraq or Egypt, 35 times the annual investment of Chile, or 150 times that of Tanzania. The extraction of such amounts of capital from the third world literally broke the process of capital accumulation in most semi-colonial countries.

The result, since the mid-1970s, and accelerating after 1980, has been declining GDP per capita in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East and a qualitative rise of world poverty. By 1980-88 countries comprising less than three per cent of the population of the capitalist world were in states catching up the imperialist countries in terms of GDP per capita. Fifty one per cent of the population of the capitalist states were in third world countries

falling further behind the imperialist countries in relative terms, and 24 per cent were suffering declines in GDP per capita. In terms of absolute population figures the number of those in countries catching up the imperialist countries in GDP per capita fell from 601 million in 1960-70 to 90 million in 1980-88, the number of those in countries falling behind in relative terms compared to the imperialist countries rose from 1,030 million to 1,740 million, and the number in countries suffering declines in absolute GDP per capita rose from 71 million to 808 million. The era of reformism towards the third world had ended with a vengeance.

The inevitable result of this new economic situation was the break up of the previous political patterns in the third world. The base no longer existed for regimes which combined rhetoric against imperialism with reforms based on imperialist economic assistance a because there no longer was any such aid.

The military dictatorships created in Latin America during the 1970s were also struck by this crisis. Their economic strategy, that of 'export oriented growth' had relied, just as much as the earlier populist regimes, on imports of capital from the imperialist countries. With the drying up of this stream of imperialist capital the regimes of the 'gorillas' in Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay and Chile progressively collapsed. Beyond this every single 'non-aligned' state was hit by crisis. Only the South East Asian economies (with the exception of the Philippines), which had been the privileged recipients of US and Japanese capital exports, escaped the crisis.

With the end of the base of stable reformism in the third world not merely economic stagnation but political chaos set in. Entire countries — Uganda, Sri Lanka, Liberia — began to disintegrate. The most powerful semi-colonial country, India, became seriously destabilised with the decline of the original pillar of 'non-alignment', the Congress Party, and rising forces of separatism, the left, and, most significantly, Hindu chauvinism organised in the BJP. With rising political instability throughout the third world three currents, of very differing weights, emerged from the disintegration of the previous era.

The first current, by far the strongest, was bourgeois regimes which supinely clung to imperialism hoping that it would solve their problems or, if that could not be achieved, would at least militarily maintain local capital



in power. Thus Nasserism became Sadat and Mubarak — who made peace with Israel and betrayed the Palestinians before participating in the military attack on Iraq. The PRI in Mexico urges a free trade area with the United States which would destroy any remnants of Mexican economic independence and devastate its economy. The inheritor of Peronism, Menem, sunk to attempting to curry favour with the imperialists by sending Argentinian naval vessels to the Gulf — where they were so unsafe they were not allowed into the war zone. 'Neo-liberal' regimes, characterised by savage attacks on the living standards of the masses and supine capitulation to all imperialist demands, were created in Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Ghana and a series of other countries. Syria, even before its participation in the Gulf war, began to reorientate from limited confrontation with Israel and US imperialism to seeking to do deals with them.

If the new economic crisis undermined the 'non-aligned' reformist regimes, and led to the capitulation of major currents to imperialism, a second, minority, bourgeois development was that of maverick regimes, or maverick actions, based chiefly on marginal sections of the bourgeoisie, which attempted to maintain capital's base by not merely rhetorical but actual anti-imperialist actions — usually of a confused, desperate and adventurist type carried out in a bureaucratic and authoritarian form corresponding to the nature of these regimes themselves. The classic examples of this

were Galtieri's attempt to seize back the Malvinas/Falklands from Britain, Noriega's evolution in Panama — which combined drug running with aid to the FSLN government in Nicaragua — and Iraq's attempt to seize Kuwait.

Such regimes, which attempt to maintain their stability by savage repression of the masses but specific actions against imperialism, are incapable of serious struggle — because any such struggle would require a social mobilisation which would inevitably tend to escape bourgeois leadership. Any successes gained by such governments are due to imperialist weakness because, in the last analysis, such regimes are *more concerned* to repress the masses than they are concerned with actions taken against either imperialism as a whole or against some specific imperialism (as with Galtieri and the Malvinas). Imperialism therefore is able to crush such regimes and any of their actions it finds unacceptable — although, as seen with the Malvinas, the invasion of Panama, and the Gulf, they constitute a destabilising element in world politics sometimes capable of utilising in a distorted way, legitimate demands of the masses (for example Noriega's use of the hatred of the way Panama has been colonised by the United States or Saddam Hussein's attempt to appeal to the Arab peoples legitimate hatred of Israel, the role of the United States, and the way the Arab world was carved up by imperialism) and they create instability for the imperialists.

The third current to emerge from the collapse of the previous era — the weakest but still significant — were forces trying to limit or break the destruction wreaked by imperialism on their countries. These range from proletarian revolutionary forces, such as the FMLN in El Salvador, through the liberation movements in Eritrea and Tigre, and national liberation movements such as the PLO and ANC, to self-styled Stalinist forces, such as Sendero Luminoso in Peru.

The Islamic fundamentalists, in the Arab countries (although not always elsewhere), constitute a particular combination of the second and third currents. Their political leaderships, and a series of their demands (notably on women and also on the national question in many cases), are ultra reactionary but in some cases they find themselves in conflict with imperialism and leading mass mobilisations directed against the consequences of imperialism for their countries — around the Gulf war, in the Islamic countries, the lead in the anti-imperialist mobilisations was shared by the left and the

fundamentalists.

While the forces of straightforward bourgeois capitulation are today by far the strongest to emerge from the disintegration of the previous reformist order their problem is that they have nothing to offer the masses outside the small handful of 'Newly Industrialising Countries'. Economic decline, disease and starvation — famine and the reappearance of diseases which disappeared a century ago such as cholera in Peru — characterise the situation. Successive 'stabilisation' plans of the neo-liberals collapse — the latest being Collor's in Brazil. A country such as Argentina, and a whole series in Africa, are actually undergoing decapitalisation — that is their levels of investment are less than the rate at which investment is used up each year.

The result is that no matter how dominant the pro-imperialist regimes superficially appear they are extremely unstable in their social base. No stable regime of capital accumulation can be or has been created. If the 'non-aligned' bourgeois regimes, and the later military dictatorships in Latin America, both had a stable base because of the exports of capital they received from imperialism the new bourgeois regimes have none. Increasing instability, in both a reactionary and a progressive direction, is the dominant feature of the semi-colonial world.

*I*t is from this that the new problems and new military and political drive of imperialism arise. The imperialist states abandoned the direct political control, colonisation, of the third world both because they were compelled to, because of fear of revolution, and because they calculated, in the majority of cases, that they would be leaving behind stable bourgeois regimes that would guarantee imperialist interests and capitalist rule. But today no basis for such reformist regimes exists as the regime of capital accumulation in the third world is thoroughly disrupted. Under these conditions local ruling classes cannot be counted on to be stable enough to guarantee imperialist interests for a prolonged period. With no stable regime of accumulation in the third world the imperialist economies are forced once more in the direction of substituting their own direct military intervention for the reformism, or stable military dictatorships, based on capital exports which had characterised the previous post-war period.

The result is a massive reinforcement of direct imperialist military force in the third world. A process of

'The "neo-liberal" regimes that emerged in many countries of the "third world" were characterised by savage attacks on the working class and supine capitulation to all imperialist demands'

'recolonisation' of the third world has begun. It in fact already started with the massive US military involvement in Honduras in order to confront the FSLN, the establishment in the last five years of US military bases in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia, the invasion of Panama, and now, most dramatically, the Gulf war — and the much greater direct military involvement of the United States in the Middle East that will follow it. These trends are supplemented by acts of imperialist terror such as the bombing of Libya.

But if imperialism is forced to step up its military involvement in the third world, to recommence a process of recolonisation, the opportunity to do so was given by the events in Eastern Europe and the USSR. For the history of the Russian revolution, and its extension, and the rise of decolonisation and the movements against imperialism were inseparable. They are interconnected expressions of the class struggle in the twentieth century.

The Russian revolution was born out of the revolutionary wave which swept Asia and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. The revolution of 1917 was preceded by the Russian revolution of 1905 and the revolutions in Iran in 1905 and China in 1911, and was followed by the second Chinese revolution of 1926-27 and the growing national liberation movements in Vietnam and India before World War II.

After World War II the interrelation of the state created by the Russian revolution and the movement against colonialism and imperialism was even more direct. The Chinese revolution, and fear of the influence of the USSR, that is a non-capitalist state, directly stimulated the wave of decolonisation. The Soviet Union materially aided forces fighting against colonialism and then provided aid to the 'non-aligned' bourgeois regimes which emerged from decolonisation. Without the existence of the Soviet state, reinforced by its spread into Eastern Europe, and then by the Chinese revolution, the entire decolonisation of the post-war period would probably not have taken place.

The overturn of workers states in Eastern Europe in 1989, the huge victory this represented for imperialism, therefore created the basis for a new offensive of capitalism against the third world countries. The upswing of the relation of class forces which had created the movement of decolonisation after 1917, and even more after 1945, was broken. With the fear of anti-capitalist revolution greatly re-

duced by events in Eastern Europe, with Gorbachev leading the Soviet bureaucracy to a new and closer collaboration with imperialism, and the USSR itself apparently collapsing in chaos, imperialism was able to launch a major offensive not simply against Eastern Europe but against the third world. The 1989 events in Eastern Europe were therefore a fundamental turning point in world history not simply for Europe and for the workers states. They were also a fundamental turning point for the relation of the imperialist states to the third world.

By the events in Eastern Europe a rupture was created in the world political situation as it existed since World War II — including the Chinese revolution in the aftermath. From 1949 to 1989, despite the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions, the structure of world politics had remained essentially constant with workers states in Eastern Europe and parts of Asia (plus Cuba) and rising struggle in the semi-colonial countries confronting imperialism — the last major wave of this struggle coming in the Iranian, Nicaraguan and Grenada revolutions of 1978-79. The events of 1989, in contrast, saw a fundamental change in this world situation through the restoration of capitalism in East Germany, the creation of a unified imperialist German state, and the fact that capitalism will clearly be restored in a series of, not necessarily all, countries of Eastern Europe outside the USSR. In 1989 the international working class suffered its greatest defeats since the 1930s.

Newly strengthened by these victories imperialism immediately took the offensive against the third world. The Gulf war was simply the first paroxysm of this. If the break up of capitalist stability in the third world created the need for massively stepped up imperialist intervention, Gorbachev's course and the victories of capitalism in Eastern Europe created the possibility for imperialism to undertake it. The inevitable outcome of Gorbachev and the events of Eastern Europe is a massive new offensive of imperialism against the third world — one which will cost millions of lives.

Confronted with that development the general international line of class struggle, and simple struggle for humanity, which is called for is evident. It requires an alliance of the masses of the semi-colonial countries, plus the workers states, plus the working class and anti-imperialist movement in the imperialist countries against the imperialist bourgeoisies and their projects. Such a line, however, is in direct contradiction with that of Gorbachev

'The overturn of workers' states in Eastern Europe in 1989 created the basis for a new offensive of capitalism against the "third world"'

who, on the contrary, proposes an alliance between the Soviet bureaucracy and the imperialists against the masses of the third world — the Soviet-US alliance in the Gulf war being the most advanced, although not at all exclusive, expression of this collaboration against 'regional conflicts'. Imperialism itself, however, naturally utilises Gorbachev's line not simply to step up its attacks on the third world but to tighten the grip on the USSR itself.

The imperialists themselves, indeed, are divided with one part favouring a deal with Gorbachev against the semi-colonial countries, that is the joint resolution of 'regional conflicts', and another part favouring an attempt to break up the USSR as a means of securing the restoration of capitalism within at least parts of its borders.

This sharp turn in the objective political situation, the most important since the post-war period, and the sharp clash it poses not simply with imperialism but with the line of the Soviet leadership, starting with Gorbachev, necessarily produces the greatest political recomposition of the working class since World War II — in a fundamental historical sense the greatest since 1933 and the coming to power of Hitler (which was the last comparable, though greater, defeat of the international working class).

The starting point and driving force



of this recomposition is that 1989 represented a new historical stage in the bankruptcy of Stalinism. The Soviet leadership was shown to be not merely incapable of *extending* socialist revolution — the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions had all taken place against the line of the Soviet bureaucracy — but incapable of even defending the *existing* workers states. The Soviet bureaucracy had led Eastern Europe into a total impasse.

So great was the demoralisation and disorientation created by Stalinism that in Eastern Europe the working class, even if generally not organised as a class, rose in movements either acquiescing in, at best, or, at worst, actively sanctioning the restoration of capitalism. It was the greatest display of historical bankruptcy in history. In 1933, after the coming to power of Hitler, Trotsky wrote, 'The German proletariat will rise again, Stalinism never', and in 1989 it may be equally written 'The East European proletariat will rise again, Stalinism never.'

While no analogy is exact, an analogy has to be grasped only in order to be discarded again later, the best starting point for the consideration of the international situation of the workers' movement is indeed that following 1933. Then the international working class movement had been given, in the role it played in the rise to power of Hitler, an indelible lesson in the bankruptcy of the Stalinism.

A decade followed in which the international working class movement recomposed itself — most advanced programmatically in the shape of the Fourth International but also in terms of mass currents in the emergence of Mao Tse-Tung's leadership of the Chinese Communist Party against Stalin's representatives, the emergence of what were to become the Tito leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party and the Ho Chi Minh leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party and, it should not be forgotten, the mass Trotskyist LSSP in Sri Lanka and the major influence exercised by Trotskyists in Vietnam in the 1930s. In that decade a new more advanced political programme, that of Trotsky summarised in the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, and eventually a new organisation, the Fourth International itself, were created alongside, in a few cases fusing with, mass currents to the left of the Soviet leadership. That programme and recomposition were forged not abstractly but in reaction to the greatest events of the world class struggle — the rise of Stalinism, its devastating

role in Germany in 1923-33, the defeat of the Chinese revolution of 1926-27, the Spanish civil war, the French popular front, and the Nazi-Soviet pact. Progressively a new understanding of the world working class vanguard, in some cases coherent and systematised (the Fourth International), in other cases (China, Yugoslavia, and Vietnam) reacting primarily to specific national situations, was created.

The new process of reorganisation of the international working class movement after 1989 is necessarily starting in the same way. Some elements of that emerging recomposition and leadership naturally predate the crisis of 1989 — the FSLN, the FMLN, and left currents in the working class movement, left currents in national liberation movements. In a different form and subject to different constraints, because it holds state power, but nevertheless part of a non-Stalinist current, is also the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party. Other new forces have been shaken up by the events of 1989 themselves or by their own national experiences.

Prior to 1989, however, the quasi-totality of such currents looked to the Soviet leadership believing that whatever its crimes and 'inadequacies' the Soviet bureaucracy, in some sense, was on 'their side'. It is Gorbachev's course and the events of 1989 that have radically shaken this up. The most advanced forces of the international proletariat found themselves in total and direct confrontation with the line of Gorbachev on the Gulf, appalled by the events in Eastern Europe (and the tens of millions of deaths they know will follow from the imperialist offensive in the third world which the events in Eastern Europe make possible) and are forced to orientate independently. It is the greatest reorientation of the working class vanguard since 1933, driven by the greatest defeat since this period, and by the most important political events for four decades.

These vanguard forces, however, cannot be brought together, and a new more advanced programme or organisation formed, simply by ideas. It requires, as in the 1930s, huge common experiences. The Gulf war, after the negative experience of 1989 itself, was precisely the first of these events forging a new working class vanguard and new recomposition of the international working class — the contemporary equivalent of the Spanish civil war, the French popular front, or the struggles in China against Japanese imperialism in the 1930s which forged a new working class vanguard after

'The fight against the Gulf war was not simply vital in itself, but was the first step in the international recomposition of the working class vanguard after 1989'

1933. All forces throwing themselves actively into the fight against the Gulf war were going not simply against imperialism but also against Gorbachev. A whole range of forces engaged in that struggle — ranging from left social democrats, nationalists, and left Stalinists through explicit revolutionaries and involving a series of sections of the masses. All forces seriously participating in that struggle are politically interesting. The fight against the Gulf war was not simply vital in its own respect, to counter a crime of imperialist aggression, but also the first step in the international recomposition of the working class vanguard after 1989. The initial splits are evident:

- International social democracy was divided with, naturally, the majority and most parties siding with the imperialists (the Labour Party leadership, the French SP leadership), while a minority of parties took initially an equivocal position (the German SPD at the beginning of the war, to a lesser degree the Chevenement current of the French SP), and other currents violently opposed the war (the Campaign Group and probably the majority of Labour Party members in Britain).

- The Communist Parties divided. Gorbachev made the war possible through his line — culminating in voting for UN resolution 678 authorising the use of force. Other forces in the Communist Parties opposed the war and mobilised against it (the CPB and left wing of the CPGB in Britain). Many Communist Parties were split (the Italian communists). The Arab Communists took radically opposed lines — Jordanians opposing the war and the Egyptians giving it de facto support. The Cubans opposed the war and a number of Latin American Communist Parties issued a declaration after the war condemning it as 'genocide' against the Iraqi people.

- The overwhelming majority of the Greens opposed the war but a right wing minority of the Greens in Britain, more powerful in its leadership than in its membership, either supported the war or were equivocal. The East German Greens were deeply divided.

- The peace movement was divided. The majority of CND in Britain formed the backbone of the struggle against the war. But a small minority did not oppose the war and a somewhat larger part did not want to prioritise the fight against it.

- The 'extreme left' in Britain played in its majority a negative role. None supported the war, or were equivocal on it, but a large part of the British 'extreme left' played a disruptive and ultra-left role, looking not to how most

effectively to oppose the imperialist war but how to pursue some other sectarian goal. Furthermore the British extreme left's analysis was radically bypassed because, having earlier totally misunderstood the events in Eastern Europe, it failed to see how those events facilitated, indeed made inevitable, an imperialist onslaught against the third world. Outside Britain, however, the forces of the Fourth International played an entirely positive, and often central, role in the fight against the war.

● In addition to these already organised currents millions of young people throughout the world took part in action against the war.

In most imperialist countries a combination of left social democrats, left Stalinists, left Greens, and the majority of the peace movement opposed the war in an alliance against the imperialists, Gorbachev supporters, right social democrats, Eurocommunists, right Stalinists, right Greens and right wing of the pacifist movement. In the semi-colonial countries the divisions traversed an even wider range of organisations — taking in nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists.

What was also notable, and clarified further their nature, was that those currents which had emerged leading the events in Eastern Europe fully supported the war. Czechoslovakia under Havel sent troops to the Gulf. Walesa and the Hungarian government declared support — as did chief aides of Yeltsin. Internationally many of those forces which had been most enthusiastic about the events in Eastern Europe played no significant role in the anti-war movement or even supported it. A number of forces which had previously been on the intellectual left supported the war — the most notorious example in Britain being the role of ex-*New Left Review* editorial board member Fred Halliday.

The result was that a massive recomposition of forces took place not primarily on the basis of historical ideological references but, as is always the case, on the basis of the key current problems of the class struggle. The key alliances and political forces were formed accordingly.

Put historically, in the space of two years the international working class vanguard passed through two massive tests which brought it into violent conflict with the Soviet leadership under Gorbachev — the first being the events in Eastern Europe and the second, much more positive in that there was at least an anti-imperialist struggle and an anti-imperialist mass movement, being the Gulf. A major process of

recomposition of the working class was started as its leadership violently collided with Gorbachev.

Naturally one issue, even one as big as the Gulf, is not enough to forge a new working class vanguard. That, as in the 1930s, will require second, third (and more) experiences. It is impossible to foresee exactly what the next such test and benchmark will be — meanwhile the crucial issues of the class struggle are pursued. But what is clear is that in the increasingly unstable state of the world economy, above all the third world but also, to a lesser degree, inside the imperialist countries, developments such as 1989 and the Gulf are inevitable. An enormous historical process has been put in train which will necessarily progressively produce not simply a major shift in the structure of world politics — that has already taken place — but, reflecting that, a major historical recomposition of the international working class movement. The task of socialists is to participate in that movement with every particle of strength they possess.

Finally how does the world stand after the events of Eastern Europe and the Gulf? For those with eyes to see it, capitalism and imperialism have not changed their nature one bit. They retreated from empire, and their open rule of the third world, after 1945 not out of democracy and peace but because they were compelled to — because the international relation of forces moved against them. The strengthening of capitalism through the events in Eastern Europe leads not to democracy and peace but to an ever more violent onslaught by imperialism. As Trotsky wrote the decline of capitalism has turned out to be even more terrible than its rise.

But whatever the short term shifts the outcome of that struggle is not in doubt. Its effect is to produce, as Trotsky put it, a new crisis of working class leadership.

The United States was able to defeat a medium sized semi-colonial country in war only because of the criminal role played by the Soviet leadership under Gorbachev. Despite its apparent overwhelming military strength the US had the greatest political difficulty to assemble its forces for that assault. Because of the economic chaos which grips the third world the US will not be given a respite from such struggles — the Gulf is not the last but merely the first of many wars imperialism will have to fight. A new offensive of imperialist pillage and North-South wars is opening. In carrying out that struggle capitalism confronts the

strongest force in the world — the 3,000 million people condemned to poverty and oppression by imperialism. Against that force not even the United States has or will prevail. What stands between them and victory is the crisis of working class leadership — above all expressed in the role of the Soviet and Chinese bureaucracies.

As regards the overall situation Lenin summarised it perfectly seventy years ago in *Better Fewer, But Better* — itself written on the eve of a wave of imperialist reaction created by Stalin's role in the USSR: 'In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc, account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe... so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome will be.' Those words remained true as the Soviet state, despite the damage wreaked on it by Stalin, crushed Nazi Germany and as the people of China and Yugoslavia defeated both Stalin and the imperialists to create the post-war world. In that historical perspective the role of Gorbachev, and the crimes of Bush, are merely one of histories more contemptible detours.

As regards socialists in the imperialist countries, let alone the people of the third world subject to the most savage attack for half a century, their position is clear. Imperialism would make us all complicit in its crimes. It has many more massacres on the road to Basra in store. In famous words 'for the triumph of evil it is merely necessary that good people should do nothing.' To permit a society which creates what was done to the Iraqi people is to turn ones back on humanity.

Put politically, not morally — although proletarian morality has a deep role to play in the struggle — the consciousness and recomposition of the working class movement lags behind the objective reality. The gain of the Gulf war, in the long history of the crimes of humanity, is that it was not a defeat without powerful resistance — as was 1989 in Eastern Europe. Millions of people mobilised against the war in the third world and the imperialist countries and saw the bloody face of imperialism at first hand.

The fight against the Gulf war was a vital struggle that had to be fought in its own right and for the sake of the people of the Middle East. But it was also a first decisive link in the international recomposition of the working class, and its vanguard, in a new turning point in world politics and world history.

'An enormous historical process has been put in train which will necessarily recompose the international working class movement'

The impact of the Gulf war

On the military level the Gulf war was an overwhelming victory for the United States. In one sense this was inevitable. That the superior armed force of the imperialism, above all US imperialism, cannot be defeated by purely conventional military confrontation was a standard point made during the hey day of the colonial liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s — it was the backbone of the military ideas of Mao-tse Tung, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, the African liberation movements against the Portuguese empire or in the struggle against Ian Smith's 'Rhodesia'. The original idea was that the imperialist enemy could not be defeated on the purely military level but had to be ground down by prolonged social mobilisation to which military action was subordinate — it was no accident that the NLF's major military offensives during the Vietnam war coincided with US presidential election years. Only at the final stage, when the imperialist enemy had been ground down by political and social mobilisation, and localised armed action on that basis, could relatively conventional military struggle be engaged with a chance of success.

This was the strategy which allowed the NLF in Vietnam to defeat the last comparable imperialist military onslaught before the Gulf. It also brought success to the FSLN in Nicaragua, has sustained the struggle of the FMLN in El Salvador, won for Frelimo and the MPLA against the Portuguese, and secured victory for Mugabe's forces in 'Rhodesia'. The Israelis, likewise, won a rapid military victory against the Lebanese army in 1982 but were hard hit by the military resistance of the PLO during the invasion and then ground down by the resistance of the PLO and Islamic forces.

Saddam Hussein's idea of confronting the imperialists in conventional war was a typical fantasy of a bureaucratic military dictator. A regime such

as Saddam Hussein's, first, did not possess the political strategy to win — if it had, as Fidel Castro pointed out, it would never have invaded Kuwait in the first place, giving the imperialists an almost ideal pretext for war. Second Saddam Hussein's dictatorship was incapable of sustained social struggle, inside or outside Iraq, because it was based on crushing the Arab masses and not mobilising or enthusing them.

For that reason Saddam Hussein's appeal even to the masses of the third world, or the Arab people, was, unlike the NLF in Vietnam or the Cubans, essentially negative — that is the masses opposed imperialism, and supported Iraq, and even Saddam, because of the conflict with imperialism but with no enthusiasm for his regime. Given the nature and base of the Iraqi regime, its purely military defeat was inevitable once imperialism was able to gain the political relation of forces, due to Gorbachev's role, allowing it to bring its military machine to bear.

The Gulf war was a bloody crime carried out by imperialism, revealed in its full horror in the final slaughter on the Basra road. It adds to the long list of such slaughters. But it also confirms that only the type of political strategy developed by national liberation struggles, and forces such as the NLF, can defeat imperialist military intervention against third world countries. Bureaucratic military actions by bourgeois semi-colonial regimes cannot.

The military phases of the struggle clearly showed the nature of the regime, and its political and social incapacity. The decision to send the airforce to Iran, rather than inflict what damage could be done on the US and its allies, indicated that from near the beginning Saddam Hussein was looking to preserve his armed forces for after the conflict — not to put up the maximum resistance during the war. Similarly the offer to withdraw from

The Gulf war was an overwhelming military victory for the United States. But what relation of international class forces did it create? And what conclusions flow for the coming class struggles? JAMES FRANCIS examines the political impact of the Gulf.

Kuwait meant Iraqi troops in the ground war faced a ruthless and powerful enemy for territory their government was already pledged to give up — which guaranteed they would not be prepared to fight. By the end of the war it was clear the Iraqi regime was asking its troops to engage in bloody combat simply to maintain the prestige of a dictatorial regime in the Arab world. It is no surprise they were not prepared to do so.

This political and social reality also provides the background to what is undoubtedly a significant military boost for the United States — the success of its sophisticated weaponry. Not simply will the US be more willing to undertake military action against the third world after the Gulf but it will, for example, review the issue of whether it is possible to invade Cuba. Previously the US calculated that an invasion of Cuba would result in a military struggle of such length and fierceness, due to the social mobilisation Castro would create, to have major destabilising political consequences in world politics — as the masses internationally would mobilise to defend Cuba. Now the US is undoubtedly re-estimating whether its hi-tech weaponry would allow it to overwhelm Cuba rapidly and thereby defuse international opposition before it could have time to develop its full scope.

On a more extreme level elements in the Pentagon will also reconsider Star Wars — whether the US military could build on the success of the Patriot missile against the Scud to deal with the Soviet Union's ICBMs. Gorbachev, by acquiescing to the US military action in the Gulf, has undoubtedly significantly increased the military threat to the USSR. As the *Wall Street Journal* gloatingly noted on 20 March: 'America's victory over Iraq leaves not only Saddam Hussein's army in tatters. Without suffering a single casualty, the Soviet military has suffered

its worst psychological defeat... possibly since June 1941.'

But again it is necessary to be very careful. The US faced only small resistance in getting its military apparatus into place because of the role played by Gorbachev. The US confronted Iraqi troops which were clearly not motivated by Saddam Hussein's regime nor, therefore, able to put up the most effective resistance to the US high tech weapons systems. As regards the Soviet Union it, in contrast, possesses a nuclear arsenal capable of destroying the US which no weapons system which can be deployed in the next decade will be capable of blocking. A new nuclear arms race, probably not in numbers but in sophistication of weapons and in tightening the US grip around the USSR, is now almost a certainty. But the most immediate serious threat is of much greater military intervention by the US in the third world and against Cuba.

Having stated the overall gains made by the US from the Gulf war — the direct aspects in the Middle East are considered below — the limits of this must also be understood. While the US popular press is engaging in a bout of triumphalism, believing it will sweep all problems before it, this is not the real situation nor do the most serious representatives of US imperialism believe it to be the case.

The most difficult part of the Gulf conflict for the United States was not fighting the war from January onwards but getting the political forces in place between August and January to make it possible to wage war. Just how narrowly that was achieved should be clear from the fact that the US Senate only authorised the war by 52 votes to 47 and US public opinion was split 50:50 prior to the outbreak of the war. Given that the situation was finely balanced it is clear that without the support given by Gorbachev, above all in the period from August to January, the US would not have been able to go to war or would have been forced to fight in conditions that would have totally destabilised world politics because of the weight of opinion against it. The US was strengthened after the war but it was Gorbachev who played the decisive role in getting it there.

This is indeed the lesson drawn, for example, by Kissinger in *The Guardian* — who ascribed the victory in the Gulf to a specific set of circumstances, and not a new ability of the US to control the world. *Time* magazine, while lavishly praising Bush and the war, finished its balance sheet of the war by quoting the words of General



Patton, that Roman generals who had secured a victory could hold a triumph in Rome with a slave holding a laurel wreath above their head and whispering in their ear that all glory is transient. Most significantly US Secretary of State Baker has gone out of his way to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union after the war and minoritise those forces that wanted a quick confrontation with it.

The US ruling class rightly believes that it has made a significant step forward in the Gulf war. But it has not at all achieved world stability nor do its representatives believe it has.

The elements of that instability which the United States confronts are clear. First, at the military level, the arms build up by the US necessary to win so rapidly — not the immediate conflict but the decade of armament which preceded it — was and is beyond its economic resources. Reagan's military build up, on which the Gulf war was based, was financed by the import of \$800 billion of capital from the rest of the world. This overstrained both the economies of Germany (reflected in the events preceeding the 1987 stock market crash) and Japan (with its own stockmarket crash in February 1990), in addition it created economic chaos in the third world. Furthermore the Gulf conflict strained the US military back up system — it was forced to withdraw forces from Europe and its transport system was greatly stretched. As Dennis Healey wrote in *The Guardian*: 'In the Gulf war it took 75 per cent of of America's tactical aircraft and 40 per cent of its tanks to defeat a country with the national product of Portugal.'

The fantasy, planned by previous US Secretary of Defence Weinber-

ger, that the US should be able to simultaneously fight both a war against the USSR and one in the colonial world was shown to be completely untenable. US military supremacy continues to rest on dividing its enemies — splitting the USSR from China, the USSR from the semi-colonial countries, the semi-colonial countries from each other etc.

Secondly the war itself has been somewhat economically destabilising in the intermediate term because it has reduced the world supply of capital. Even if the US itself receives full financing for the war — and Saudi Arabia and Germany are both trying to get out of paying their full pledges — the surplus capital which Saudi Arabia would normally have exported has instead been spent on the war — and Kuwait's contribution to the world supply of capital has been eliminated. Both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have been turned from international suppliers of capital to international borrowers.

This loss is offset for the imperialist countries themselves by the prospect of lower oil prices due to Saudi subordination to the US, but these low oil prices will tend to destabilise the Middle East itself. The chief imperialist economic gain of the war is the purely negative one that if Iraq had been able to successfully seize Kuwait there would have been far higher world oil prices and other third world countries might have pursued their own interests more vigorously.

Any new economic gains to be made by imperialist directly from the Middle East itself are extremely limited. The GDP of Saudi Arabia, by far the richest state in the area, is only \$75 billion — compared to a US GDP of \$5,500 billion. Only the impact of the third world economies as a whole, not that of any individual state, is significant. The belief, suggested in some sections of the US press, that there could be an international economic boom on the basis of victory in Gulf, or economic reconstruction, is as ridiculous as the earlier theory that capitalism could resolve its problems through surplus value extracted from new capitalisms in Eastern Europe.

Annual capital accumulation in the United States is \$850 billion dollars, in Japan \$950 billion, and in the EEC over \$1,000 billion. The new profits to be directly extracted from the Middle East scarcely contribute to solving the problems of accumulation even in the US economy. The only two developments which could restabilise the situation of the world capitalist economy would be either a devastating defeat of the working class in the imperialist

'The US scored a significant victory in the Gulf, but it is not remotely enough to achieve a new period of capitalist stability'

'The elements of continued instability in the region remain clear'

countries or the restoration of capitalism in the USSR. Neither has taken place.

General instability, in particular instability in the third world, and economic problems inside the imperialist countries will continue to characterise the world situation quite regardless of the outcome of the Gulf war. This remains the fundamental problem confronted by the United States.

Turning from the overall world situation to the Middle East the masses there have, of course, suffered a severe

defeat. Furthermore, unlike following Israel's military victory in 1967, the Soviet Union will not step in to rearm the defeated Arab regime as it did for Nasser. It will take time for the mass movement to recover. But the elements of continued instability in the region are clear — and fed by the general instability in the semi-colonial world.

The first such element of instability is the situation in Iraq itself. As we go to press the outcome of the civil war in Iraq is not decided. However the rebellion against Saddam Hussein is large and, particularly in Kurdistan, has

deep social roots. In addition to the internal consequences a victory of the Shi'ite forces would greatly strengthen Iran against Saudi Arabia and a victory of the Kurds would deeply affect Turkey and Iran. A short term victory of Saddam Hussein would not achieve stability in Iraq.

Second is the crisis in Kuwait. Here the behaviour of the Emir has been so grotesque that it has disgusted not simply the inhabitants of Kuwait but even wide sectors of imperialist public opinion which supported the war. There is clearly major pressure for a more

The prospects for Palestine

REEM ABDELHADI is a member of the NUS executive, a Palestinian, and an active member of the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf from its earliest days. Polly Vittorini discussed with her the impact of the Gulf war and its outcome on the Palestinian people and their struggle.



really care about Palestine. But it is important to the Arab people, because it has been forcibly taken. So the Arab governments have to keep their people happy by selling them empty slogans on Palestine. But whatever solution the Americans impose, it will fail, because they don't understand the relationship between Palestine and the other Arab people.

What do you think of the efforts to create an alternative leadership to the PLO?

The PLO is a whole government, that you cannot delegitimise for any reason. Saying that the PLO does not represent us is racist.

They would like to talk to an alternative leadership to the PLO. But who to? There are 5000 intellectuals, politicians, journalists in prison — everybody who has any political opinion and who can be seen as a leader. They haven't left anybody to talk to! Even Faisal Hussein has been thrown in prison several times, Sari Nusseibeh is currently in detention. You cannot get more moderate than them.

Even someone with the political status of Faisal Hussein couldn't have met Baker last week without PLO approval. And Baker will have heard with what the Palestinians on the West Bank actually want, which is support for the PLO.

They may try what they tried before in the 80s, with the Village League. It was like Inkatha — a few corrupt collaborators who Israel got together as a leadership. But it failed miserably.

I don't know any Palestinian who does not have the PLO as their representative in their heart and mind. In 1988 there was a census in Palestine on who should represent you, 97 per cent of the people said the PLO. So to me the price of peace is the handling of the Palestinian issue without Palestinian consent.

So do you think that the US is going to reward Israel for having ostensibly stayed out of the war?

Israel has already been rewarded. For the Americans to disregard the representation of the PLO is reward enough. For it to suggest individual peace plans between countries is itself a reward. For America to endorse eight Arab countries calling themselves a union, for eight Arab countries to discuss peace, without Iran, Iraq, the PLO or Jordan, is totally unacceptable to the Arab people, and a reward to Israel, because that says that the people who fought against Iraq have the right to talk about peace, and those who didn't have not.

The Israelis do not accept the West Bank is Arab land. They are settling Soviet Jews and other immigrants in the West Bank. They still refuse to accept a peace conference. So peace at what price? If there is no Palestinian state, ruled by the PLO, what are the terms of negotiation? A ceasefire of the unarmed civilian population? Israel to stop killing innocent Palestinians? The lifting of censorship? There is no compatibility or even a decent balance of power. The major military power in the region, supported by the major military power in the world, against an unarmed civilian population without elected official representation.

What are the prospects for the Palestinians in this new situation?

ation?

A new world order is in the making, but I think they have made a massive political mistake. If the US tries to impose a solution that is not acceptable to the Palestinians or the Arab people, they will have revolutions on their hands, from Morocco to Bangladesh. It started with the Gulf crisis. Now, it will probably die out a bit. But the new world order will be in the hands of the people who make these revolutions.

For the moment the prospects for the Palestinians are not good at all. But our aspirations are unchanged. We have been totally consistent since the beginning of our revolution, of our oppression. This will take us through yet another massacre, yet another hardship. But this time we won't be alone. The world community has created a layer of people who accept and assert the rights of the Palestinians. In this country it was the anti-war movement. In the Arab world governments are shaking with fear. It is very significant that Moroccans erupt against their government, because these people are one of the most oppressed in the Arab world.

The intifada did not start because of the war and it will not end because of the war. The intifada doesn't mean throwing stones, it is about creating an infrastructure, taking our future into our own hands.

What keeps me hopeful is that whatever peace solution they may impose, whatever government they want to replace the PLO with, we are rejecting it fighting to the last drop. No solution can be meaningful unless the Palestinians accept it. It's not up to Bush but the 5 year old in Gaza to accept or reject the peace because she's the one paying the price of peace.

What effect has the Gulf war had on the Palestinian national struggle?

The Western victory means the price of peace will be paid by the Palestinians. The word peace has been abused.

The Americans say they need to keep their Arab partners in the coalition happy, but they don't want to break with Israel. They've just destroyed Iraq to keep Israel as the military power in the Middle East.

After the 1967 war, the UN passed resolution 242 calling for a ceasefire and for Israel to withdraw from the Arab territories it has occupied. Implementation of this resolution means that the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and Lebanon would be free of Israel.

The Americans are trying to make a deal with Syria, but Syria wants the Golan Heights back which the Americans will not demand of Israel. And they will most probably keep the south of Lebanon in the hands of the Israelis, as a 'buffer zone' — in other words an occupation.

There is a real threat that Israel will repeat what they did in 1948 and 1967 — say that Jordan is Palestine, and transfer all the Palestinians to Jordan by force or massacre. The appointment of Ze'evi in government means that there is an atmosphere of acceptance of that sort of policy in Israel.

The Arab governments don't

democratic regime in Kuwait.

But despite this there are profound reasons why the Saudis, who will largely determine the issue, are not prepared to see anything except the continuation of the previous form of rule of the Emir. Apart from Yemen every state in the Arabian peninsula is an authoritarian monarchy — Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. If the Kuwaiti monarchy were to be removed, or its powers even significantly reduced, this would provide an example for Saudi Arabia itself. Caught between deep opposition to the Emir and Saudi Arabia's attachment to the absolutist monarchy stability in Kuwait will not be easily achieved.

Third, both Jordan and the Maghreb (Arab north Africa) saw colossal social mobilisations during the war. The regimes in Algeria, Tunisia, and, particularly Morocco — where the king sent troops to the Gulf against the virtually unanimous opposition of the population — have been deeply affected by the war with major consequences for the period ahead.

Fourth Saudi Arabia, due to its direct subordination to the United States, is playing a role in OPEC which destabilises the region. Saudi Arabia expanded oil production during the war from 5.6 to 8.4 million barrels a day to satisfy the demands of the US to keep down world oil prices. Saudi Arabia is now attempting to build output towards 10 million barrels a day and to create the physical capacity to produce 13 million.

Translated into oil prices this means a low international oil price, which meets the demands of the US, but means lower incomes for the other oil producers — notably Iran, Saudi Arabia's chief rival in the Gulf. The new Saudi line, flowing from the demands of the US, will therefore tend to destabilise the situation in the Middle East — the economic crisis in Iraq created by Kuwait's forcing down the international price of oil was one of the chief reasons why Saddam Hussein invaded in the first place.

Fifth it is not clear what direct military role the US will play in the Gulf. Certainly, as it has attempted for years to get permanent bases in the Gulf, the US is going to be very reluctant to disengage — and this would be very difficult even if it wanted to. According to every account the first meeting of the eight Arab states which participated in the war to discuss a new security structure in the Middle East ended in fiasco. Saudi Arabia did not believe in Egypt and Syria's military ability to defend it — nor, after the

financial effort of the Gulf war, was it happy with their huge demands for cash for doing so. But the Saudi regime did not want US forces permanently on its soil because of its destabilising political consequences — it instead generously proposed that a US military base be established in Bahrain! Iran will undoubtedly launch a campaign against a US presence in the Gulf and declare that all who accept it are puppets of US imperialism. Arab opposition to any permanent US ground presence in the Gulf is likely to be considerable. Furthermore under such circumstances Iran could also tilt towards an alliance with the USSR — something which is already possible and which would have major consequences for the region.

Finally, and most importantly, the issue of the Palestinians remains completely unresolved. The US understands that military stability in the

Middle East can only be based on accommodation between Israel and the Arab regimes. At least Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan and Syria (if it got back the Golan heights — which it won't), are prepared in principle to follow Egypt and come to agreement with Israel. The obstacle to that is the Palestinian people — the Arab states, outside Egypt, have always calculated that the Palestinians, and the Palestinian cause, have sufficient weight to destabilise their own countries if they come to agreement with Israel.

The hope of the Arab regimes is that Israel will agree to a 'land for peace' deal in which a Palestinian 'entity' will be set up in at least part of the Occupied Territories. But Israel has no intention of making any such agreement and the US will not compel it. Without this the Arab regimes would

Politics of the

SABAH JAWAD, a founder of Iraqi Democrats Against War in the Gulf and of the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf, spoke to Socialist Action about current politics in Iraq.

What position did you take on the war in the Gulf and why?

I opposed the war from the beginning. It was an unjustified and unnecessary war, which could have been prevented. It made the Iraqi people, the victims of Saddam Hussein for 22 years, into the victims of US and allied aggression.

There were many efforts to find a peaceful solution, but they were sabotaged by some Arab governments at the instigation of the USA. There were also clear signs that the regime was given the wrong signal, that if it carried out an adventure against Kuwait the USA, and probably the Soviet Union, would do nothing about it. We know, for example, of the US ambassador's dialogue with Saddam Hussein to this effect.

The war was not about the occupation of Kuwait, which was used as a pretext. If ending the occupation was the paramount concern, then why has the USA not played a role in ending other occupations in the Middle East? Israel's occupation of Palestine and the Arab lands of Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, for



example.

This war was not about putting an end to dictatorships. It was about controlling the area politically and economically. Saddam Hussein was backed to the hilt by the USA, by Britain and by other West European countries, as well as the Soviet Union. He was armed to the teeth, including the claimed biological and chemical capabilities, by these powers. The entire Iraqi airforce consists of French and Soviet planes.

Western interests in the Middle East have always been antagonistic to the struggle for democracy. We haven't seen any campaign by western governments to end the violation of human

rights in Iraq or Saudi Arabia or Kuwait.

What democratic opposition is there in Iraq and what positions did they take in relation to the war?

Almost all the parties in Iraq oppose the regime, with the exception of one or two minor groupings. The vast majority of political parties whether Kurds or Arab nationalists, secular or Islamic, oppose the dictatorship. As regards their positions on this war, in my opinion the 17 parties which formed the alliance in Damascus last December did not take a clear stand on the war, or the role of the US and its allies and the destruction of Iraq, nor the killing of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. In fact they did not even manage a statement calling for a ceasefire.

What political currents and opinions are represented in those 17 groups?

Arab nationalism, Kurdish nationalism, the Communist Party, and also some Islamic parties and groupings as well as independent personalities and former army officers representing small groups or just themselves. This is not the only democratic alliance. There are other alliances, small parties and groups which exist in London and elsewhere abroad. There is a group of former Iraqi army officers who are based in Saudi Arabia, waiting to have a share in the future of Iraq.

have to openly capitulate to arrive at agreement with Israel.

The inevitable conclusion which the US and Israel will draw from this is that they must crush the Palestinians. The first step in this is the attempt to delegitimise the PLO — to create a fake pliable 'Palestinian' leadership completely subordinate to the Arab states. This is the significance of the current media and political witch hunt against the PLO, and also against Yasser Arafat, and the US and Israeli attempt to create an alternative leadership. If this fails, as it almost certainly will, the next step will be to unleash a new wave of repression against the Palestinians — to attempt to break them, to force them to submit to a reactionary deal at their expense.

The problem for the US is that the Palestinians, unlike Saddam Hussein, are capable of major social mobilisations and enjoy widespread interna-

tional sympathy — as they have shown in a forty year struggle against Israel which includes three years of the intifada. Crushing the Palestinians will be a much more difficult task for the US than defeating the Iraqi army.

The conclusions that flow from the aftermath of the Gulf war are therefore clear. The US has won a significant victory, a significant battle. But the war, which is to crush the third world to create a 'new world order', that is a new phase of the accumulation of capital equivalent to the prolonged post-war boom, has scarcely even begun. Even on the military field the US is dominant only because it can succeed in dividing its enemies — here the role of both the Soviet and Chinese leaderships continues to be criminal. Political instability in the third world will increase. The economic crisis in the imperialist countries is not even remotely resolved by the Gulf war. In

'Even on the military field the US is dominant only because it can succeed in dividing its enemies'

short, despite the US victory, the Gulf, in the actual economic, social and political conditions, opens a deeper period of world turbulence, not one of stability. What it does ensure is that there is a much greater military threat to the third world.

In revising their priorities socialists therefore have to take on board two decisive developments, and the general trend, after the Gulf. The first is the crisis in the Middle East itself. It is therefore excellent news that the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf is to continue its activity around a just peace in the Middle East — taking up first the question of the attack on the Palestinians. The second is the very real threat which now exists to Cuba.

Finally the general trend is that which *Socialist Action* outlined in dealing with the consequences of Gorbachev's policies, and the events in Eastern Europe, in our editorial in March 1990, well before Saddam Hussein ever invaded Kuwait: 'They [Gorbachev's course and the events in Eastern Europe] have emboldened imperialism, and in the first place US imperialism, to launch a new and more aggressive policy internationally. The US invasion of Panama, and its military support to Aquino in the Philippines, were directly aided by its view that it is now free from any serious reaction to its actions from the USSR...

'Events in Eastern Europe will directly cut off aid to liberation struggles... the developments in Eastern Europe will lead to stepping up of the imperialist economic offensive against the third world...

'Imperialism has major problems — in particular whether it can hold together its world economy and whether it has the resources to simultaneously advance into Eastern Europe, mount an intensified attack on the semi-colonial countries, and contain the consequences of the worsening of the position of the West European working class this will create.

'But one thing is clear. Gorbachev has not shifted politics to the left. He has strengthened the hand of reaction.'

The Gulf was the first massive confirmation of that reality. As we have noted several times it was, in the present context of world politics, not the last but the first of the new series of North South Wars. The left must draw all the implications of this for its attitude to the third world, its attitude to Gorbachev, and to its tasks inside the imperialist countries themselves.

oppositions in Iraq

when Saddam Hussein goes.

Some of the opposition parties which formed the alliance in Damascus have a popular following in Iraq. For example, the Islamic parties have been very active in the past in opposing Saddam's dictatorship. The Kurdish resistance historically has been very active in Iraqi Kurdistan. They control the liberated areas. But other opposition parties have no general popular base in Iraq. Saddam was successful in his 22 year reign of terror in singling out Iraqi political parties for repression, and to a large extent rendering them ineffective — parties of exiles. There is no single alliance in Iraq today capable of mobilising the entire Iraqi people in a common democratic front. Only time will tell whether the Iraqi people will be successful in getting rid of Saddam Hussein and building democracy through their own initiative or the political parties which are mainly in exile.

The most disturbing element of the 17-party alliance is that prominent members of it met with reactionary Arab regimes, with the USA and with Britain, participating in discussions with the foreign office etc. These meetings took place when Iraq was facing a massive attack by the UN, the USA and its allied forces. I'm sure that the subject discussed was not the self-determination of the

Iraqi people, their right to choose the political system they desire.

We've seen prominent spokespeople of the parties in the alliance calling this war Saddam's war without any mention of the UN or US role. There are many examples; the Kurdish leadership openly allied themselves with the USA not only against the interests of their own people but the Arab people in Iraq who are struggling for democracy and autonomy for Kurdistan.

And what role has the Communist Party in Iraq played?

The Iraqi Communist Party is one of the oldest CPs in the Middle East. Formed in 1934, it had a very important role to play not only in mobilising the Iraqi working people but also the intelligentsia. It led the struggle against colonial rule and imperialist interests in the area, but that was in the past. The Iraqi CP has suffered many setbacks. They made alliances with Ba'ath party and joined the government in the 70s. These alliances inflicted grave damage on the cause of socialism in Iraq. The CP is still reeling from its past political and ideological mistakes.

The party split in 1968 over many issues, notably whether to ally with petit bourgeois parties of Arab nationalism. This was about whether to pursue an independent internationalist line

or be part of the international manoeuvring and foreign interests in Iraq and the Middle East.

Two Communist Parties came out of the split. One is now in the 17-party front, therefore their role in the politics of Iraq is very limited and marginal. The other is a very small party, and inadequate in many ways, but it has always maintained its independence from the Iraq government. It is important in terms of the ideological struggle that took place in Iraq and because it is not involved in the manoeuvring about the future of Iraq.

Does the alliance play any role in the uprisings that are taking place in Iraq after the war?

Some members participated, particularly in the south of Iraq and Kurdistan. At the same time I think most of the activity was spontaneous by the Iraqi masses. It seems that the struggle for democracy is intensifying. Whether the political parties in opposition, which are basically based abroad, will play a leading role is doubtful.

The USA wants Saddam Hussein to stay in power until they can find an alternative to him — some army general perhaps, able both to keep control of Iraqi society and to prevent democracy developing, but in too weak a position to constitute any future threat to US interests.

The anti-war movement

The scale of the conflict in the Gulf shook every political force in and around the working class in Britain. With the end of the war the bourgeoisie has attempted to prettify the carnage, vilify the anti-war movement, and understate the scale of opposition which existed. Its aim is to obscure the nature of the conflict, cover over the deep political divisions which it wrought, and thereby weaken opposition to future imperialist wars. Despite these attacks the anti-war movement in Britain succeeded in building a united body which brought in every major force opposed to the war — the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf. That campaign was not built spontaneously but involved a constant political struggle. LOUISE LANG outlines the lessons of this campaign and the tactics which made the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf the most effective vehicle for fighting against the Gulf war.

Overwhelmingly the most successful and important organisation in the anti-war movement in Britain was the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf. The Committee organised six national demonstrations against the war. The largest mobilised well over 100,000 people. It held many local days of action and demonstrations, emergency vigils, rallies and other protests, two major fund-raising concerts, encouraged and serviced over 100 local groups and their public meetings, held weekly meetings, produced a wealth of advertising and information leaflets, posters and other literature, involved the talents of a diverse range of individuals, and helped open the eyes of literally thousands of young people to the reality of the western imperialist nations, this specific war, and to encourage them into action and to join and play an ongoing part in the movement against this country's military role.

Even according to the opinion polls the anti-war position, which the Committee led, never enjoyed the support of less than 16 per cent of the population, that is over 8 million people, and on individual issues enjoyed up to 45 per cent support.

The Committee was supported by CND, national trade unions — BETA, FBU, MSF, NUJ, NUM — regions of the TGWU, the London Coop Political Committee, the Campaign Group and other anti-war Labour MPs, Plaid Cymru, the Green Party, all wings of the Communist Party, the National Union of Students (NUS) and a large number of smaller organisations and pressure groups. Well known individuals from the entertainment world — such as Emma Thomson, Anna Raeburn, Billy Bragg — as well as the PLO, Arab democrats, academics such as Stephen Rose, medical experts, representative figures from religious communities including Lord Soper, the Bishop of St Andrews and Pax Christi, Lord Hatch, the President of the NUS, Vietnam veteran leader Bobby Muller, and representatives of the German SPD and the French Greens appeared on its platforms.

Almost no major force against the war was outside the Committee, it extended its range of supporters throughout the conflict, and every attempt to build a rival campaign failed. The Committee organised almost daily press conferences throughout the war, which were regularly reported by the television, on the radio, and in the press, and it was universally regarded by the labour movement and the bourgeoisie as leading the movement against the war.

The Committee to Stop War in the Gulf was, in short, the centre of the anti-war movement and, in its unity and power, a model of how to build one. The lessons of its success, and of the failure of all other attempts to build an alternative, are generally applicable to the fight against imperialist war.

Some aspects of the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf's work and slogans were related to specific circumstances — it faced frequently changing situations during the Gulf crisis and had to adjust tactics accordingly — but fundamentally its success was not empirical but based on the application of two interrelated principles which apply to almost any mass campaign — and in particular a campaign against an imperialist war.

First two basic class forces, leaving aside individual figures, oppose an imperialist war in an imperialist country. Working class political currents — which are opposed to imperialist onslaughts on semi-colonial countries, and pacifists, to use a generic term — that is, petty-bourgeois forces in political terms (and by that is not meant simply that they are not working class but that they are not bourgeois either). The latter force inevitable divides in different proportions in different wars — some failing to condemn the imperialist assault and others actively opposing it.

In order to construct the most powerful movement possible it is the duty of socialists to mobilise both class forces and to construct the political terms and organisational forms under which they can collaborate. Any other position is to limit the resistance to the imperialist war and betray the people of the third world country under attack.

Secondly such an alliance of working class and other forces can only be constructed if the rules of democracy are respected. This is not primarily a formal question of rules but that the majority forces opposing the war must be able to exercise a majority position where they chose to do so. Any attempt of minority groups to impose their views on the movement would inevitably split it and thereby damage the fight against the war.

Minority currents have every right to persuade others to adopt their positions but they must not be in a position to impose organisationally their aims — that is to outvote forces which are more powerful and larger than they are.

It follows from these principles that there are two problems which will

be encountered in any such movement confronting a war. The first, and most powerful, is that of the right wing — failure to oppose the war. The second is ultra-leftism, whose concrete role is to smash the necessary alliance, including a political class alliance, to oppose the war, and thereby weaken the opposition to the bourgeoisie's offensive.

These fundamental principles guided *Socialist Action* in the Committee, and, differently understood, many others who led it. They accounted for its success. Every attempt to violate these principles from any direction ended in fiasco. Their political function was to put every single possible obstacle in the way of imperialism waging the Gulf war.

The concrete starting point the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf faced in opposing the drive to war was that, as the *Observer* put it in January: 'part of the British peace movement's difficulty in garnering widespread support is the virtual hegemony of the establishment in swinging behind the war effort'. The balance of forces in this country in support of the US military action to force Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait was formidable. Furthermore acquiescence in the war was organised on an international level with the decisive assistance of Gorbachev. The first task of those seeking to oppose the war was to estimate correctly the massive initial lobby in support of military action, construct a political framework that could draw together those who recognised and opposed the threat of war, and stand the best chance of cutting into the majority acceptance of possible military action.

'The first task of those seeking to oppose the war was to estimate correctly the massive initial lobby in support of military action'

From the beginning the Tory government, then under Thatcher, made clear its enthusiasm for military action, that it would not be limited by any UN decision simply to impose sanctions, and that it would, if necessary and if it could, carry out military action even outside the UN.

The Labour leadership slavishly backed Thatcher and Bush from the first. Kaufman, in an article in the *Guardian* on 7 August entitled 'A despot who must be defeated', made no pretence of the Labour leadership's understanding of what the conflict was about: 'if allowed to continue he [Saddam Hussein] will dominate a key segment of the world's oil supplies'. The Labour leadership refused to exclude war and in the first parliamentary debate on the Gulf on 6-7 September the Labour front bench voted with the Tories with only 37 MPs voting against the war.

In line with this the TUC General Council agreed a statement on 30 August, endorsed by Congress days later, which signalled that imperialism need fear no resistance from the leadership of the British trade union movement. This condoned the presence of a 'multinational' military force and merely mildly advised against 'unilateral military action' without opposing war.

From the first the CND leadership's response reflected a political struggle within the major pacifist current in Britain which was to continue throughout the war — it was a fulcrum of the anti-war debate during the entire campaign. National CND's initial response to the Gulf crisis, in the form of a statement issued on 9 August, concentrated on condemning the invasion of Kuwait to the exclusion of any opposition to the US threats of military action. While support was given to sanctions there was condemnation of the western military presence in the Gulf only insofar as it included nuclear weapons. This initial statement contrasted sharply with that issued in the names of the Green Party, Plaid Cymru and CND a few days later, which began with the memorable and correct sentence that: 'Recent statements in the British media that there is a complete consensus among UK political parties about the British contribution to military forces are not true'.

The 'left intelligentsia' was divided and in large part colluded in what was going to be a massive imperialist assault on a semi-colonial country. This strata of the intelligentsia found its pretext in the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, ignoring the fact that even Saddam is a repellent local criminal compared to the truly mass murderers of US imperialism (Vietnam, Cambodia) — the rulers of the US have the power to actually do that which Saddam Hussein can merely dream of.

Confusion also gripped those parts of the left which had favourably evaluated the effect of the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe for the world. *New Left Review* printed as its first response an article by Fred Halliday, a former member of its editorial board, who became an apologist for the war and a prominent member of what came to be aptly titled the 'B52 Liberals'. After the war *New Left Review* still did not understand the causal link between the events in Eastern Europe and the Gulf war, and was complaining about the lost opportunity for peace and democracy.

The exception to the confusion amongst the left intelligentsia was the *New Statesman* which, under its acting

editor Steve Platt, throughout gave a major platform for anti-war views and took an increasingly resolute editorial line against the war. Other forces of the intelligentsia who opposed the war were Edward Pearce and Victoria Brittan of the *Guardian*.

The *Independent*, BBC, less frequently ITV, and, increasingly after war began, the *Guardian*, gave relatively objective reporting of the anti-war movement — although very little compared to its objective weight as shown even by opinion polls. The rest of the media exercised silence or abuse.

Public opinion polls throughout this period confirmed that the task of constructing an anti-war movement was going to be an uphill one. An NOP survey reported on 24 August showed 86 per cent approval for sending British forces to the Gulf and 58 per cent, in the event of war, for attacking military bases even if Western hostages were held at them. An ICM poll published on 13 September showed 71 per cent in favour of sending British forces to the Gulf and 19 per cent against.

This, then, was the context into which a movement aimed at opposing and obstructing the imperialist war drive had to insert itself. Account had to be taken, in particular, of the overwhelming capitulation of the labour movement to the war drive and therefore the even more crucial importance that CND could play at the core of the anti-war alliance. To state a point that was far from obvious to the ultra-left, in this country, in this war, pacifists greatly outnumbered anti-imperialist opponents of the war and that reality had to be respected in building the democracy of the movement if success was to be gained. At the same time it is greatly to the credit of the left wing of CND that it tried to do everything possible to create the widest possible opposition to the war and was prepared to work with every single serious force to try to do so. To do so it was prepared to wage a fight with the right wing in its own organisation and to face a witch hunt both in the media and by supporters of Neil Kinnock. The left wing of CND, and the trade unionists and labour movement forces who worked with them, did more than anyone else to practically oppose the barbarous military assault on the people of the Middle East.

The Committee to Stop War in the Gulf came into existence at the initiative of CND — initially of the then chair, Bruce Kent and other national officers, Labour CND, Tony Benn and other left Labour MPs, Ken Cameron

of the FBU, Labour Left Liaison, Labour Action for Peace, the Labour Party Black Section, Lord Jenkins of Putney, the Green Party and others. This represented a very wide range of political views and many different reasons for opposing the war. The crucial decision taken, the one that created the later success, was to found the Committee on the basis of opposition to the threatened war in the Gulf and to adopt other positions by majority vote. This ensured the unity of the many diverse people and forces who were opposing the war for many different reasons and from many different starting points — opposition to the weapons which might be used, likely numbers that would be killed, pacifist views, the environmental consequences, belief no good could come from the West intervening in the Middle East. This basis remained constant. Positions on concrete questions, such as sanctions, were taken by majority votes — some of which *Socialist Action* agreed with and some of which it did not. This basis of an agreed aim of stopping the war and other issues to be decided by majority vote was the key to the success of the entire movement. It allowed democracy to operate and kept the Committee together throughout.

Simultaneously with the formation of the Committee others on the left argued that the demand of the movement must be for all US and British forces out of the Gulf. While, in the end, the only way to guarantee there would be no war in the Gulf was to remove all such military forces, those who attempted to found the anti-war movement on this demand made a radical misreading of the objective situation — a comparison with the Vietnam war which was invalid.

First a US military assault on Iraq was going to be rapid — a matter of months rather than the years of build up which led to the full scale war and the anti-war movement around Vietnam. The movement would, therefore, not have time to go through all the internal stages of differentiation the Vietnam movement did. In such a rapid conflict those who, at the beginning, would support a campaign for withdrawal of US and British forces were evidently small compared to those who were opposed to the threat of war. The task was to unite in mass opposition all those who were opposed to the war *now*, not to wait for some better basis to be constructed.

While those who wanted to found a movement on the basis of withdrawal of US and British troops were wrong that was not necessarily a fatal error. A

current opposed to the presence of the troops could have played a complementary role within the anti-war movement — a left wing. But the actual campaign formed on this basis — the Campaign Against War in the Gulf, led by *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Outlook* — proved itself to be sectarian and destructive because it at once refused to accept the real relation of forces, and democracy, of the movement.

The Campaign put paid to any potential to be a constructive left pressure by producing literature for the first, 15 September, demonstration against the war which, despite direct appeals from Committee members, falsely claimed that it had been jointly called by the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf and the Campaign, and around 'troops out' slogans which, it was known, were unacceptable to CND. The upshot was that national CND disassociated himself from the demonstration and withdrew its support — a blow to opposition to the war. The position of the left in CND arguing, against substantial resistance, for involvement in joint work in an umbrella campaign against the threat of war was made more difficult.

Despite this initial pullout the left in CND continued to fight against the war — with local CND groups backing the demonstration. It was clear that the fraudulent use of CND's name was a unilateral action by the Campaign and had nothing to do with the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf. All sections of CND however from then on made clear that they would have nothing to do with the Campaign. The Campaign to Stop War in the Gulf destroyed itself at the first hurdle.

The second immediate question the Committee faced was the Labour conference — which came nine weeks after the Gulf crisis erupted. The background to this, at the time, was different attitudes to the UN's decisions in the anti-war movement and a distinction in public opinion between action authorised by the UN and unilateral action by the US and others. The NOP survey of 24 August showed 66 per cent would support a UN assault on Iraq if the blockade failed to end the crisis, but only 34 per cent would support a US or British attack without UN support. Thatcher and Bush refused to rule out military action outside the UN. Tony Benn and other key spokespersons of the Committee demanded that no military action be taken outside the UN, supported its decisions up to that point, and supported sanctions not war. This view was expressed in an FBU resolution to Labour Party conference.



Socialist Action opposed the particular UN resolutions on the Gulf as providing a pretext for war and publicly argued this — although this view was at that time a very small minority (that changed, of course, following the adoption of UN resolution 678 authorising the use of force). The overwhelming majority of those opposed to war supported the UN positions — which at that time did not include war. Provided total opposition to the use of force was maintained it was perfectly correct to allow this to express itself.

Ultra left groups who equated sanctions with those who supported war — including by sustained disruption during the Committee's first demonstration on 15 September in trying to howl down Tony Benn's speech — were wrong on two counts — apart from elementary violation of democracy by attempting to disrupt the expression of its views by part of the movement and, in particular, by a political figure who in the public's eyes was strongly identified with opposition to the war.

First, in the context of a rush to war by imperialism a return to sanctions would have been a step forward. Trotsky once said that if one person is about to shoot you with a revolver and another is trying to poison you over a period of some months be careful first: to deal with the person with the revolver, including if necessary making an alliance with the poisoner to achieve it because without that you won't be around to deal with the poisoner. The ultra-left who stood around shouting that support for war was the same as

'The basis of an agreed aim of stopping the war was the key to the success of the movement'



support for sanctions ('one was killing with bombs, and the other was starving to death') were to find out that the difference was very crucial indeed for the Iraqi people when the United States started its murderous assault after 15 January.

Second it was perfectly legitimate to deepen public awareness of the difference between the goals of the US and those officially proclaimed by the UN.

The crunch issue in this became the resolution to support at Labour Party conference — under its standing orders only one could be moved. It was necessary to maximise the expression of opposition to the war. The maximum support which could be gained was around an FBU resolution calling for no military action outside the UN — which, given the line of the Labour leadership, the whole of public opinion took to be opposition to war. The alternative resolution promoted, by supporters of the Campaign Against War in the Gulf, was for US and British withdrawal. This would have minimised the size of opposition — no trade unions whatever would have voted for it. The supporters of the Campaign refused to withdraw their resolutions, although in the event the FBU's was selected for debate by the majority of delegates opposing the war.

The real situation was revealed graphically by the vote. Even the FBU resolution received only just over 400,000 votes out of more than 6 million — although it won some significant trade union support and failed only narrowly in unions such as NUPE. Any other resolution would

have received a few tens of thousands of votes — allowing the Labour leadership to present opposition to the war as essentially irrelevant. To our knowledge no force voting for the FBU resolution later supported the war. It would have been preferable to get a straight 'no war' resolution on the agenda but to vote for the FBU, to maximise the opposition, was entirely correct. Once more the Committee's tactics, to hold together all those opposed to war without other preconditions, had been proved to be correct.

The Committee, having established itself on a basis capable of incorporating all those opposed to military action, from August through to November slowly but steadily built awareness of the real threat of war and expanded its affiliation and support. This led to a 20,000 strong national demonstration on 24 November — well up from the 7,000 in September. This time CND supported the demonstration.

Almost immediately the next turning point came with Gorbachev's collaboration with imperialism in voting for UN resolution 678 authorising the use of force. The path to war was now direct, and with a timetable.

This vote worked its way through the labour movement and in particular the different wings of the Communist Party. While the *Morning Star's* editorial on the day of the Committee's second national demonstration, stated 'one cannot be dogmatic. If all else fails, then very much as a last resort, force may have to be considered', this did not in the end signify the political approach of any component of the *Morning Star* current — who opposed the war throughout. Indeed the *Morning Star* twice carried editorial statements during the war explaining that it had been a mistake for countries to vote for UN resolution 678 — a position clearly to the left of Gorbachev. Other sections of the Communist Party however, notably the CPGB majority, sheered off under the impact of Gorbachev's position.

The first significant example of this was the discussion in mid December around the proposal to have a further national demonstration on 12 January. The UN vote had set 15 January as the deadline after which a military assault could begin. This demanded that the maximum effort be made to mobilise the opposition to war — a national demonstration.

The left of CND, the Labour left, *Socialist Action*, the various currents around the *Morning Star*, including the CPB, argued vehemently in favour of

'The enormous success of the 12 January demonstration — built in less than six weeks — gave the Committee great authority'

the national demonstration. By contrast the representatives of the majority of the Communist Party of Great Britain, both directly and via supporters amongst CND representatives, argued, to the point of a vote at the Committee meeting, against a national demonstration on 12 January and for local events instead — effectively demobilising opposition. The demonstration was a colossal success, bringing over 100,000 onto the streets, and reflecting not simply organisational skills, but above all a determination to do everything possible to prevent war.

With the demonstration on 12 January the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf went from a campaign organising activists to one with a resonance among, and relationship to, a section of the masses. The 'specialist' sections of the campaign began to come into existence at this point.

The enormous success of the demonstration on 12 January, built in less than six weeks including the Christmas break, gave the Committee great authority — and specifically the left within it. In turn the left within CND and the Green Party were strengthened in their support for the Committee and action against the war. Sponsorship, financial support, practical help and enquiries to the Committee, steadily growing in the weeks before this, exploded immediately after the 12 January demonstration. Many new local committees were formed at this point, taking the total to over 100, and the Committee's office was overwhelmed with enquiries.

The next turning point for the campaign was the effect of the outbreak of war itself. The Committee had always anticipated that this would be the hardest point — and it was proved right. With the outbreak of fighting the imperialist propaganda machine went into overdrive. As anticipated the level of support for the anti-war movement dipped. It was a pattern common to all such situations — prior to the outbreak of World War I, for example, there were huge demonstrations across Europe, which then vanished with the outbreak of the war and only later did opposition regain mass momentum.

Following the first air attacks, early on 17 January, the previous political climate changed sharply, the great wave of fear and hope which brought so many on the streets on 12 January being broken by the full impact of war. One reflection of this was in parliament — although 55 MPs had voted against the war immediately prior to its outbreak, by 21 January this fell to 36. However by then a strong core for the anti-war movement — in the form of

the local committees, trade union and labour movement support, the involvement of artists and performers, and the diversifying sub-committees and sectors of the campaign — had been established through the work the Committee had done.

By this time also the tactics adopted by the Committee meant that it was clearly identified as the 'official opposition' to the war by the media — the daily press briefings during the war being dubbed the 'peace cabinet'. Although the outbreak of the war saw a shift in media treatment, including serious attempts to play up every sign of political differences within the anti-war movement, the course followed by the Committee, in particular in responding to both breaks in public sentiment and the real developments in the war, meant that it continued to be seen by the media and the mass movement throughout the war as the only viable opposition movement.

After the initial depressing impact of the outbreak of war, support began to grow again. It was however evident that it would take time, and the emergence of the awful reality of war, to channel feelings of helpless inevitability and defeat into outrage and anger and to build up numbers on demonstrations again to those on the eve of the war.

In this context it was testimony to the extent of public awareness of the real motives for the war and its unpopularity, and the work that the Committee had done, that the emergency demonstration called by the Committee on 19 January, with only 48 hours notice, attracted 17,000 people.

The pressure of the outbreak of war, and the collusion of Gorbachev in this, worked through every sphere. In particular there was a renewed offensive by the right in CND. With the outbreak of war the Committee naturally changed its key slogan, with the support of CND officers on the Committee, from 'stop the war' to an immediate and unconditional ceasefire — that was the next lever to try to bring the war to a halt. The CND right's approach was to blur this. Amidst the most bloody and savage aerial bombardment ever mounted the right wing of CND emphasised the role of Iraq — assisting the emphasis of the imperialists' propaganda line that there would be a ceasefire as soon as Iraq withdrew from Kuwait. (This imperialist position was, of course, a total lie because when Iraq did withdraw from Kuwait, following the Soviet peace plan, the US launched the greatest slaughter of the entire war on the road to Basra).

This interconnected with events around the national demonstration on 2 February. Sections of CND, without discussion with others, decided that this would be the date it would mobilise for as a priority national demonstration. There was no consultation and the Committee had set 26 January as the main mobilisation — because the US had launched a massive air attack, and it was not clear what the timescale for the war would be. However in the interest of stopping the war a united focus was crucial, and the participation of CND and its apparatus was correctly considered central to ensuring the most successful demonstration of opposition to the war. The Committee accordingly reoriented it-



self into promoting 2 February as the main date for a national demonstration, changing 26 January to a day of local actions. More than 40,000 turned out on 2 February — indicating a rebuilding of support after the shock of the outbreak of war. Nonetheless the avoidable confusion cut to some extent into the mobilisations. After 2 February the right wing of CND made clear it would not prioritise further demonstrations against the war.

CND's membership shot up during the Gulf campaign, the only reason possible being association with action to stop the war. By contrast the rallies organised by CND just after the war, which reflected the political line of the right, were tiny.

Meanwhile the government, and Labour front bench, were concerned even in parliament about a danger of revival of opposition to the war. After the first vote in Parliament on 21 January they did not allow a further

'After the initial depressing impact of the outbreak of war, support began to grow again'

vote as they knew it would have shown an increase in opposition. A further resignation from the Labour front bench, Clare Short, took place (following Tony Banks, Maria Fyfe, and John McFall) after the horror of the raid on the air shelter in Baghdad in which around 300 Iraqi women and children were killed. Labour's NEC voted against a ceasefire only 12 hours before Bush called it and while the Basra road massacre was taking place.

The second offensive against the anti-war movement following the outbreak of fighting came from the 'Supper Club' (Joan Ruddock, John Prescott, David Blunkett etc) — who now found that their support for Kinnock included voting for a war killing more than 100,000 people. They were thrown into a panic — not by the loss of life but by the prospect that people, notably Labour Party members, would see that they considered their careers and positions more important than opposing a mass slaughter. They attempted to divert attention from the issue of the war by two means.

First a diversionary campaign was launched by Prescott that the real issue was not to end the war but 'war aims' — that is, concretely, that the war could continue. That this position was completely fake was shown by the fact that when war aims became a real issue, when the US invaded Southern Iraq, those claiming that this had been the decisive question promptly forgot all about it and, in the words of the *Independent*, became 'resigned' to the course of the war.

Second an offensive was launched against the anti-war movement through *Tribune*. Prior to the outbreak of war *Tribune* had opposed armed action. Once war broke out, however *Tribune*'s first editorial on 25 January, argued: 'It would be wrong for CND or the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf to provide a platform or support only for Labour MPs who voted the "right" way on Monday night [the vote on war].' In other words MPs who voted for the war should be participating in the anti-war movement!

Tribune's real goal became clear in a pathetically vicious article, run as the front page on 8 February, entitled 'Doves swooping too low' by Shaun Spiers. Spiers argued that what was needed was not a movement to stop the war but one 'arguing for limited war aims and a non-punitive peace' ie the movement should accept war.

The Committee rightly promoted every single MP who opposed the war, quite regardless of their party membership or internal party affiliation, and on the basis of their latest vote and not the

first one they cast. But evidently it didn't seek to include those who voted for the war! *Tribune* became obsessed not with articles about the Gulf war but with articles attacking the anti-war movement.

If the offensive by the right wing was the chief problem the anti-war movement had to face, one which provided ammunition for the right was the activity of the ultra-left after 12 January. By this time all attempts to build an alternative to the Committee had collapsed (although spasmodic attempts continued to be made to try to revive the Campaign). Having aborted other organisation because of their wrong line *Socialist Organiser*, *Socialist Outlook*, *Labour Briefing*, and, degenerating from their approach in the initial stages of the campaign, the SWP, made an absurd attempt to dominate the Committee.

Because the Committee had operated harmoniously for five months up to January it had an informal structure of one organisation one vote — because it had the more important job of opposing the war than drawing up statutes, and because prior to January everyone had accepted the democratic reality that the largest organisations would decide policy. A series of small overlapping organisations (*Socialist Organiser*, *Socialist Outlook*, *Labour Briefing*, Labour Party Socialists, the Socialist Movement) tried to affiliate — which between them would have had five times the vote of CND or MSF. Unsurprisingly such a takeover was not allowed by the large organisations in the Committee — the Committee finally adopted a weighted voting structure ensuring the majority remained with the large organisations and the various small organisations were proposed, and then allowed, to affiliate under their umbrella of the Socialist Movement. This approach by ultra-left groups was absurd and merely aided the right.

A second example came on the 2 February demonstration, when SWP members attempted to take over the head of the march and dominate the leading sections with SWP placards, slogans etc. The SWP would undoubtedly have been expelled from the Committee as a result of this if, after warnings from left wing stewards, it had not pulled its members back.

What was involved in these episodes were not witch hunts, as with *Tribune*, but the elementary right of a movement to control its activities and to ensure the weight or dominance of the real majority political forces. The attempt by small minorities to dominate the committee, if it had suc-

ceeded, would undoubtedly have split it and drastically weakened the movement against the war.

Following these episodes the majority in the Committee decided that they wanted it reaffirmed that it would be run on their political basis and that attempts to dominate the Committee by minorities would be stopped. For this reason the 'Fifteen points for a just peace in the Middle East', a CND document, was moved as Committee policy — which became honed down to four basic points. A voting structure was agreed which gave weight to organisations on the basis of their membership.

The final act of horror came with the land battle. Iraq accepted the Soviet peace plan including withdrawal from Kuwait — the goal for which the war was allegedly being fought. The US was then forced to come out into the open with its real goals and launched not simply the ground war but a murderous attack on the Iraqi troops who had withdrawn from Kuwait. The carnage the US military had been preparing for during seven months was now finally unleashed in a sickening crime. In one horrific act the entire character of the war — that it was not about liberating Kuwait, that the US had from the beginning goals to which it could not publicly admit, that its aim was to terrorise third world countries that opposed it — came out transparently. Everything that the war represented was symbolised in that last 24 hours — and even some who had supported the war were shocked.

During the Soviet peace proposals a final left swing came from the right wing within CND. Responding to Gorbachev's negotiations with Tariq Aziz on the eve of the ground war it threw itself behind the Committee's emergency actions over the weekend which saw the launching of the land war — indeed helped set them up. As with every other such occasion the Committee responded positively to any display of opposition to the war whatever, holding two London demonstrations and building for its already announced national demonstration on 2 March.

By now somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 Iraqis were dead, Iraq was devastated, Kuwait's environment was wrecked, but the US war machine had proved its power. George Bush could proudly announce that the US had 'kicked the Vietnam syndrome' and the whole world should now tremble before US military might. That was what the war had been about from the beginning — as anyone who wanted to face reality could now see.

'Everything that the war represented was symbolised in that last 24 hours — shocking even some who had supported it'

Meanwhile the effects of the war were not over with the US still occupying 20 per cent of Iraq and chaos in Kuwait — while Palestinians and other people of the Middle East needed support as never before. There had been a (provisional) ceasefire but the aims of the Committee had not been met. This did not stop the right wing now proposing to pull out of the Committee — the Greens doing so by a narrow vote. The Committee, rightly, decided to continue its work — although obviously the local committees could not be kept going. The people of the Middle East desperately need its help.

The work of the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf was inspiring. It was the mass organisation against the war in Britain. It brought together, and kept together, the most diverse forces against a shameful and horrific war. In engaged in every form of activity from mass street demonstration, through Parliamentary activity, to prayer and vigil. If you were opposed to the war for any reason, and wished to struggle against it by any means, there was a place for you. The Committee brought together every substantial force against the war. It was an inspiring experience for thousands those who participated in it.

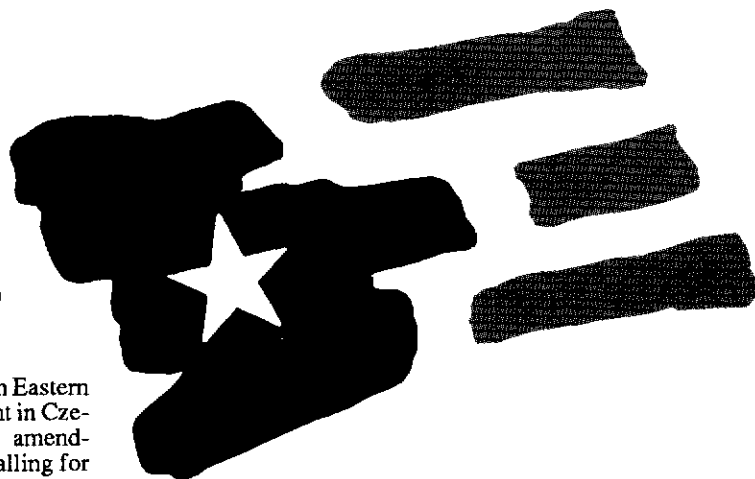
It also showed the tremendous power of Marxist ideas — although only a tiny minority within it were Marxists. Because the Committee was rooted in two simple principles. That those who knew what an imperialist assault on a semi-colonial country would mean and the pacifists — in class terms the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie — must be brought together to oppose the war. And that, as the only way to secure this, real democracy, that majority forces must decide, must govern the movement. All those who broke those principles built nothing. With those simple ideas, and an organisation to carry them out, the Committee did a superb job to oppose the war.

For a Marxist it was an example of hegemony of the proletariat. For many others it was simply the best way to fight the war. For the people of Middle East the Committee had the greatest success to try to protect them from a revolting crime. It must be a model for the movements that will be needed in the many wars to come.

Marx said socialists must 'have no interests separate and apart from those of the working class as a whole'. The Committee to Stop War in the Gulf showed how to achieve that.



Cuba next?



There is no doubt that Cuba today is one of the most threatened states in the world. With a population of 10 million and 90 miles of the US coast, it faces an adversary that has just proved in the Gulf that it has the military hardware to obliterate Cuba several times over. And there should be no doubt in anyone's mind that if the US felt it could get away with this, that is exactly what it would do.

Before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait the US was whipping up an international campaign against Cuba — and Castro — which is increasingly internationally isolated, especially following the events in Eastern Europe and the electoral defeat of the FSLN in Nicaragua.

First, this involved a massive coordinated attempt to slur Castro and the Cuban revolution through falsely linking it with drug running.

Alongside this the US brought its pressure to bear on the governments represented in the Geneva Human Rights Commission so that for the first time last year it adopted a resolution condemning Cuba's record on human rights.

Cuba invited a UN Human Rights Commission delegation to visit the island in 1988. The 15-day visit was widely publicised offering Cubans the possibility of meeting the Commission to denounce any violation of the convention of human rights. The number who came forward was approximately 1600. Of the cases examined by the Commission 73 per cent were about the right of entering and leaving Cuba; the rest ranged from alleged arbitrary detentions, lack of proper legal procedure, contravention to the right to work, and infringements on religious, social and cultural freedoms, and other lesser issues.

Despite the report of this commission, after pressure on various Latin American governments — and the support

for the first time of an Eastern European government in Czechoslovakia — US amendments were agreed calling for the sending of a special envoy to Cuba to monitor human rights abuses. This is a clear attack on Cuban sovereignty, which has not been proposed even in relation to those countries with a record of human rights abuses in a totally different league to those identified in Cuba, such as Chile, Iraq, or El Salvador.

The purpose of this campaign on human rights is quite clear — to seek to isolate Cuba and prepare the ground for intervention.

The second aspect of the US campaign has been to attempt to destabilise Cuba internally. This involves trying to tighten the economic noose around Cuba to provoke economic crisis or preferably collapse. In this the US has exploited the changes in Eastern Europe and the policy of Gorbachev in seeking agreements with imperialism on 'regional conflicts'.

Cuba's crucial economic support has come from the USSR which has bought almost all Cuban sugar at above market prices and provided cheap unrefined oil, which was re-exported once refined at world market prices. It is estimated that between the period 1983-85 the resale of Soviet refined oil contributed approximately US\$400 million per year, whilst the proceeds from sugar was roughly US\$250 million. Furthermore, Cuba was meeting approximately 20 per cent of its transport and machinery needs from the USSR.

Partly due to the economic squeeze within the USSR itself this is being drastically cut back, but a second major factor has been Bush's demand that support to Cuba be ended as a precondition for the agreements Moscow is seeking internationally.

Cuba now must have commercial exchange with the USSR based on market prices.

Moreover, trade on many items will not take place any longer through the Soviet state but Cuba will have to bargain with semi-autonomous Soviet enterprises which now demand payment in dollars. Trade agreements with the USSR will be on a year to year basis rather than five yearly as before. Moreover, since the coming to power of pro-capitalist regimes in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, these countries have stopped exporting to Cuba altogether. They were a vital source for trucks, buses and various spare parts for industrial purposes.

As a result the Cuban government has been forced to plan a whole series of crisis measures to deal with the economic consequences of limited supplies of Soviet oil and other economic aid. Not satisfied with this the US has sought to tighten its own economic blockade of Cuba. The 'Mack amendment' was introduced in the US Congress; this would penalise US companies whose subsidiaries trade with Cuba out of other countries. The governments of Canada, Venezuela and Brazil have objected to this amendment as a breach of their national sovereignty and right to determine their own terms of trade, but Britain, which would also be affected, has been noticeable for its silence on the matter.

Alongside the economic squeeze on Cuba, the US has been involved in the well-publicised attempt to beam its own TV station into Cuba from Miami. TV Marti, funded by the Voice of America, has so far been successfully jammed from within Cuba, but objections to the US breach of international telecommunications agreements and breach of Cuban national

sovereignty are still needed until TV Marti ceases operation.

Additional bellicose activity by the US includes sabre-rattling military exercises off the Cuban coast, the stationing of an aircraft carrier off the Cuban coast, and harassment of Cuban commercial shipping.

The invasion of Kuwait in August last year temporarily turned the US government's attention away from Cuba and into the Middle East, where it will remain occupied for some months to come. However, there is no doubt, that once resources are freed from the conflict in the Gulf attention will once more turn to Cuba as a matter of priority. Already Castro, who before the Gulf war was depicted as a Latin American Ceausescu, is being dubbed a Caribbean Saddam Hussein.

The pressure on Cuba has already begun to step up, with the reintroduction of the Mack amendment into Congress in early March. Moreover, following their success in the Gulf, the Pentagon must be reconsidering the possibilities of a successful military strike against Cuba. This solution previously had little support: in Pentagon circles, following the experience of Vietnam and the likelihood of a very broad social mobilisation in Cuba against US intervention, leading to high casualties. The possibility of a 'high-tech' war, without a US GI having to leave the Guantanamo base must lead to reconsideration of this view — greatly increasing the military threat to Cuba.

Now is the time for stepped up activity in defence of Cuban national sovereignty and independence.
JUDE WOODWARD and
JAVIER MENDEZ

Cholera in Peru: an IMF-induced epidemic

Recent news of a cholera epidemic in Peru — a disease which was thought to have been virtually eliminated world-wide — can be directly laid at the door of IMF.

It is officially estimated that the number of people contaminated by mid-March was 89,000, which may well be a gross underestimate.

As a result Peru's food exports have been drastically reduced so that it stands to lose an estimated US\$300 million in exports plus revenue it will lose from reduction in tourism.

Nevertheless, few of the experts on Latin America have pointed out that the epidemic has broken out because of the extreme poverty inflicted by repeated IMF austerity packages. Every time Peru has been unable to meet its obligations on the external debt the IMF steps in and insists upon more production for export, reduced government spending in the key areas of health, welfare provision, food subsidies, transport subsidies and state employment.

As a result, Peru's economy is literally collapsing.

Debt tightens grip on Brazil

The Brazilian government recalled parliament from holiday recess to pass temporary legislation to control wage rises which it blames for the inflationary explosion.

This follows last year's unprecedented move freezing US\$80 bn of private deposits — compulsory state borrowing.

A key proposal in the anti-inflation package was to cut state employment — reducing it by 300,000 — and do away with wage-indexing, alleged to be the main contributor to inflation.

The result: inflation in 1990 was 1,400 per cent, and, in six months, the government will have to start paying back the frozen money which it so brusque-

Last year, inflation was around 7,500 per cent, and the most successful Peruvian crop has become cocaine involving about 300,000 peasant families.

This situation is made worse by the protracted civil war, resulting in nearly 4000 deaths last year. Most of the killings are the work of the security forces and the army.

In Peru the minimal basis of existence for a sizable section of its population has disappeared. This does not refer only to jobs, but to even more basic needs such as food, water and sanitation. In fact for the whole of Latin America, Africa and the Third World to varying degrees the last decade has meant a massive economic setback. If the war against Iraq is the most visible hand of imperialism, the operation of the economic 'invisible hand' means and will mean the death of millions through poverty, starvation, and disease.

Peru is simply an augur for the other Latin American and Third World countries — a real chronicle of a death foretold.

ly borrowed.

The anti-inflation package contained two other planks: trade liberalisation and a wide-ranging programme of privatisation.

The basic issue is the enormous external debt — the largest in the third world: US\$ 140bn. Creditors are demanding 30 per cent of the arrears — that is US\$8bn — due by May. Brazil proposes paying 18.75 per cent.

Short-term financing (ie more debt) is now absolutely vital for crisis-ridden Brazil, but creditors are threatening to reduce this further if it does not accept their terms on repayments.

Not paying the debt is only rational policy in the face of the looming economic disaster.

El Salvador — election gains for left

The outcome of the 10 March elections for the legislative assembly in El Salvador saw a strengthening of the left, despite the background of army operations against the liberated zones, and electoral fraud, and some setbacks for the ARENA government.

The electoral fraud was aimed almost exclusively at Convergencia Democratica (CD), an alliance of several left wing parties, whose vote greatly increased: in the 1989 election CD obtained 3.8 per cent, estimates suggest it has now won approximately 16 per cent. The Christian Democrats got around 25 per cent, and ARENA won over 40 per cent of the valid votes cast.

ARENA conducted its electoral campaign at gunpoint. For example, it paraded through Mejicanos (one of the poorest barrios, where the FMLN has strong support), led by a vehicle of the First Infantry Brigade which carried four soldiers and a machine-gun plastered with ARENA stickers.

For several days before the election, the army launched military attacks into FMLN-held areas in the Morazan and Chalatenango provinces, bombing the outskirts of villages.

The Central Electoral Commission, in charge of overseeing the electoral process, suspended the voting in 7 cities in the north of the country and the east of Chalatenango province, both FMLN strongholds. Three weeks after the voting, there are no official results.

ARENA needs to win 43 seats to maintain its absolute majority in the legislative assembly, which it had not achieved at the time of writing. The most interesting element is that CD appears to have become the second largest force in San Salvador, the capital city, a position traditionally held by the Christian Democrats.

The FMLN called on its supporters to vote for CD.

However, in a statement issued before the election they pointed out: 'Although the FMLN is not proposing that the elections be boycotted, our position is that the power of the vote will be no more than an illusory publicity slogan. Until the power of the army is removed, ballot boxes change nothing.'

Until the army and ARENA agree to major reforms (which include the dismantling of most of the armed forces) there can be no ceasefire and therefore the justification for armed struggle will continue.

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article said: 'There is evidence of widespread support for the reforms that are required to achieve a solid, stable peace in El Salvador — and not just because the FMLN demands them' 12 January. The *Financial Times*, 19 March, made the same point: 'There are signs the guerrillas may be winning some hearts and minds outside their normal parish'.

The election result has allowed the FMLN to seize the initiative on the political and diplomatic fronts. They have presented a new peace proposal at the current regional summit of EC and Central American foreign ministers taking place in Nicaragua. It consists of simultaneously negotiating military and political reforms, and a ceasefire and it proposes 30 May as the date for the ceasefire to start.

The FMLN proposal also calls for the liberated zones 'under their control be recognised during a transitional disarmament period when constitutional and judicial reforms aimed at levelling the field for their eventual participation in future elections are to be negotiated' (*FT*, 19 March). There is no doubt that with these election results the FMLN's position at the negotiations has been significantly strengthened.

Articles on this page by JAVIER MENDEZ

Rolling back lesbian and gay rights

'There are many who wish that Clause 25 would lead to the recriminalising of homosexuality'

Dame Elaine
Kellett-Bowman MP

The Tories have deepened their attack on the lesbian and gay community with two recent moves. Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill sought to increase the penalties for consensual sexual acts between gay men, potentially raising them to the category of serious sexual offences. Paragraph 16, of the Guidelines to the Children's Act 1989, discourages foster placements with lesbians or gay men.

Clause 25 would leave the courts the task of interpreting the seriousness of the 'offence'. Following the judgement in last year's 'SM trial' in which the judge stated that 'consent is no defence' and the erratic interpretation of vaguely worded clauses there was widespread concern. Ominously the bill provided for compulsory medical or psychiatric treatment of up to five years for offenders.

The bill did not raise the penalties for rape or attempted rape but gave the courts the

right to categorise gay men apprehended in public places (defined in a notoriously ambivalent manner) or entrapped by agent provocateurs as serious sexual offenders.

The history of the gay community's relations with the judiciary, the police and medical establishment leave no room for illusions in their impartiality. Moreover, these moves take place against the backdrop of increasing punitive use of existing legislation (convictions for indecency and procuring or soliciting homosexual acts rose from 1531 in 1985 to 2311 in 1989).

Simultaneously the Department of Health issued new guidelines attempting to prohibit lesbians and gay men from fostering. Paragraph 16 of Guidelines to the Children's Act 1989 states 'the chosen way of life of some adults may mean that they would not be able to provide a suitable environment for the care and nurture of a child. No one has the right to be a foster parent and gay rights and equal rights policies have no place in fostering services'.

Seventy organisations, including Save the Children, Dr. Barnardo's, NSPCC and the

Children's Society, lobbied against this, arguing the current stringent rules should be applied fairly and singling out any social grouping for particular treatment would be a dangerous precedent. Rights of Women noted while no one has the 'right' to foster 'everyone should have an equal right to be considered as foster parents, and in this sense equal rights are an issue in fostering'.

Along with the conditions on providing donor insemination introduced via the Embryology Bill — now resurfaced around the artificial scandal of 'virgin births' — the impact of Section 28, and defeats in recent lesbian custody cases, Paragraph 16 reflects a steady assault on the social rights of lesbians.

A spirited campaign against these moves led to demonstrations in seven British cities and in eight other countries following the call for a day of action by ILGA (the International Lesbian and Gay Association). But with some notable exceptions the labour movement was silent or confused in its response. Chris Smith and Harry Cohen both made commendable speeches,

and Ken Livingstone voiced the frustrations of many of us when he spoke at a rally of 10,000 in February.

During March there was a partial retreat by the government on both issues. There was a promise to define 'serious sexual offences' more clearly and to drop three of the offences where stiffer penalties were being proposed. Virginia Bottomley has announced a review of Paragraph 16, promising to omit the offending phrases, although a public statement is not due until the end of March.

But the continuing attempts to stealthily recriminalise male homosexuality and for the first time introduce legal infringements on the civil rights of lesbians is symptomatic of the current attacks which promise to rumble on through the decade.

The Labour leadership's equivocation continues to leave the field open to the radical right. Society, riven as it is by prejudice, must not be allowed to continue to turn away from the lesbian and gay community, whose suffering has intensified so much under the scourge of AIDS.

JIM WHANNEL

NUS election chaos

The National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) failed to nominate any candidates this year for the National Executive of the National Union of Students (NUS), as their nomination forms were handed in just after the deadline.

NOLS has issued a call for a vote for 'Re-Open Nominations' (RON — constitutionally a candidate in all NUS executive elections) in the posts where they intended to stand. This campaign should be supported by the left. The alternatives in most cases, are either a liberal, a pro-liberal independent, an anti-abortionist, or the RCP. There are some left candidates from the National Black Students Alliance and the National Union of Overseas Students who should be supported.

However, it is not certain that RON can win all the elections that Labour would have won had there been a candidate, and the result will be an NUS executive with the Liberals substantially strengthened, if not controlling it. The Liberals have grown alarmingly over the last two years, mainly due to the right-wing policies of the NOLS leadership. An NUS controlled by the Liberals would be very weak and unable to struggle in defence of education.

A look at the Labour right's leadership of NOLS over the past few years gives some evidence that this outcome might not be entirely unwelcome to them.

The leadership of NOLS has been working very closely with the Liberals for

the last year in NUS, sending out joint resolutions for conferences, and particularly working with them for a series of reforms of NUS designed to remove accountability of the NUS executive. These include abolition of one of the NUS twice-yearly conferences, and regional election of the National Executive. This would leave the NOLS rightwing and the Liberals untouched by student pressure in the leadership of NUS, and students without a union willing to defend education.

There are also forces in NOLS who openly advocate not standing candidates for the leadership of NUS at all. The hard right and Kinnockites who support this move claim they wanted to 'build up Labour clubs'. The soft and hard left, who oppose

this and argue that Labour should continue to lead NUS, have consistently won on this in NOLS. The strategy of withdrawal is advocated by way of attempting to resolve the contradiction for the Labour right in the leadership of NUS.

The contradictions of leading a National Union of Students that must struggle against loans, fees, cuts in housing benefits etc, in the name of a party which refuses to fight them, is becoming unbearable for the leadership of NOLS. What NUS needs is a left Labour leadership which will actually take up the struggle for free provision of education, regardless of the Labour leadership's refusal to do so.

POLLY VITTORINI

Euro- Thatcherism and its consequences

That John Major does not simply represent 'Thatcherism without Thatcher' — despite being her own preferred nominee for the Tory leadership — has been strongly confirmed by his benchmark speech on the EEC in Germany on 11 March, by the budget and the nature of the announcement on the retreat from the poll tax, which followed it. Overall they sharply marked a further reorientation of the Tory Party to Europe, elimination of the adventurist aspects of Thatcherism in the poll tax, while maintaining the key elements of Thatcher's economic policies. Taken together they add up to the politics of Euro-Thatcherism. This political orientation will shape British politics throughout the next decade. SYLVIA ASHBY outlines its consequences.

Major's 11 March speech in Bonn, rightly regarded as representing a sharp break with Thatcher's attitude to Europe, nevertheless 'out of conviction as well as loyalty', as the *Times* put it, reiterated his commitment to Thatcherite 'dry' economic policies of 'privatisation and the application of market principles to publicly funded services', and the priority to defeating inflation, while at the same time pledging that Britain's place was at 'the very heart of Europe'. The change in direction was underlined because the previous day Thatcher herself had made an intervention into the debate on Europe with a Ridley-esque speech warning of 'German domination' of Europe and Britain. Major followed up his Bonn speech by making clear he wanted the Conservatives to sit in a common group in the European parliament with the continental Christian Democratic parties. The speech consciously sought close relations with Germany. It publicly closed the door on the period of British bourgeois politics towards Europe represented by Thatcher. The road to this turning point, of course, lay through a savage leadership battle inside the Conservative Party itself.

Thatcher's government, in historical terms, had represented a last attempt by the Tory party leadership to maintain independence of Britain from the dominant fractions of European capital — France and, above all, Germany. It was rooted in the traditional historical orientation of British imperialism — which had first dominated the entire world, then maintained its position through its extensive international influence and the special relationship with the US, finally becoming a virtual puppet of US foreign policy.

From an economic point of view the long decline of British imperialism had already made such a policy out of date by the beginning of the 1960s when Macmillan made the first attempt to enter the EEC — and was rebuffed by de Gaulle as a stalking horse for the US. By the time of successful entry into the EEC in 1972 Heath had made the necessary adjustments in policy and the first seriously 'European' premiership in Britain was embarked on. The following Labour government made no real shift from Heath's position on fundamental issues on Europe, and had to take no crucial choices as the EEC was largely paralysed during the mid-1970s by the consequences of the economic crisis of that period.

Thatcher however confronted a new situation. From 1979 onwards first Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing, and then Kohl and Mitterrand, sought to

break the EEC out of its impasse. The first expression of this was the creation of the European Monetary System (ERM). The second was the project of a common internal market by the end of 1992. The 'European question' was posed for British imperialism with a new sharpness.

This new drive to European integration however coincided with a temporary period of economic strength for British imperialism created by the coming on stream of North Sea oil and its high international price. Thatcher's government was able to use this to extend by a decade British political independence from the chief projects of European capital. It was not integration with Europe but a recharged 'special relationship' with the United States which she sought.

This entire Thatcher project — to reverse the long decline of British imperialism, rebuild Britain's international influence, and rebuild British economic success on the old imperialist model of high military spending and the export of capital — entirely failed, as it was bound to do. And in November 1990, amid economic crisis and the deepest peacetime balance of payments crisis in British history, it brought down its author to.

Major's speech in Germany signified a new approach. While Britain will remain a particular interlocutor for the US in Europe, and while it will not abandon attempts to maintain an independent British imperialist role, Major has at long last recognised the obvious — that there is no independent role for British imperialism outside of relations with the new Europe in general, and the new united Germany in particular. But the consequences of this will entail the realignment and reorganisation of the whole structure of British politics to force it into line with the economic changes.

With the shift in orientation by the Tories signalled by Major every major British political party, and most, although not all, major sections of British capital, are now oriented into integration with European capital (those which still hold out against it favour either little Englandism or special relations with the US instead). However, integration with big European capital, necessarily carried out within the ERM, implies that the British economy has to become competitive with the main European economies.

Britain enters that competition with the decisive disadvantage of its imperial past and all the consequences of that for the structure of its economy. Its

low level of investment, its heavy arms spending, its high capital outflows all reflect a quintessential imperialist past which bought social peace at home, not through massive investment in the domestic British economy, and the standard of living that would generate, but through the profits first of its old colonial empire, then imperialist investment abroad, all defended by massive defence expenditure. It is an economic structure not at all adapted to competition with European states which, in contrast, had concentrated on the building up of their domestic economies.

'Euro-Thatcherism changes the form, not the scale, of attack on the working class'

The internal alignment of social forces in Britain is also oriented to that past and is completely out of line with competition in the new Europe. From the late 19th century British imperialism was able to guarantee relatively high incomes for the British working class, tolerate a very high level of trade union organisation — today still almost 10 million trade union members in an economy with a manufacturing base the size of Spain's — and later go on to develop and expand a welfare state which included widescale public housing, the national health service, pensions and social security payments. The problem is that the British economy, above all a British economy primarily concerned with economic competition in the EEC, cannot afford any of these at anything like their present level.

Indeed the British economy is now crippled by its low levels of domestic investment, low spending on civilian research and development, low levels of education for the mass of the working class, and low level of virtually everything else that would be necessary to allow Britain to compete effectively in Europe.

This difference, and shortfall, can be seen most clearly in comparisons between the levels of investment in the British domestic economy and that of its European rivals. British domestic investment today stands at 19 per cent of GDP, while German stands at 25 per cent of GDP, and Holland has a higher rate even than Germany. The other main European economies invest at levels between Britain and Germany. To compete in Europe requires bringing the level of British investment up towards that of Germany. With 1 per cent of British GDP today worth around £5 billion, this means an increase in annual investment of between a minimum of £10 billion — to bring Britain up to the level of the less successful European imperialisms — and a maximum of up to £30 billion to bring it to the level of Germany or Holland. The

crucial question of British economic policy is going to be where the resources for this are to come from — because if that investment is not generated Britain cannot possibly compete within the ERM.

There are in fact only a very limited number of sources for such a vast increase in domestic investment. Essentially it must come out of working class consumer spending, state expenditure, the curtailment of foreign investment by British capital, or a combination of the three. It is already clear which choice the bourgeoisie has made — and also which one the left and the working class should be fighting for.

The first area the bourgeoisie will not cut significantly is military expenditure. The operations of Britain in the Gulf — it sent the largest force apart from the US and Saudi Arabia — underlines once more how highly-armed the British state remains. This is maintained by British defence spending at a level considerably higher, between 1.5 and 2 per cent higher, as a proportion of GDP than any other European country.

Cutting this defence expenditure to the European level would release £9-10 billion per annum — precisely the scale of resources necessary to commence the modernisation of the British economy. But it would, as Tom King pointed out at the South West region Tory Party conference, severely limit Britain's ability to undertake operations such as the Gulf.

The second area that will not be cut back by UK capital is foreign investment by British firms. After two quarters in which the outflow of capital stopped, as British firms waited for ERM entry, the outflow of capital from

the UK started again in the fourth quarter of 1990. Indeed the outflow of portfolio capital, buying of foreign stocks and shares, in that quarter was the highest on record. The vast international borrowing necessary to finance this, and the requirement it creates for high interest rates, further stifles the domestic economy. In the absence of exchange controls, whose scrapping was the first economic action undertaken by the Thatcher government, this outflow of capital is certain to continue.

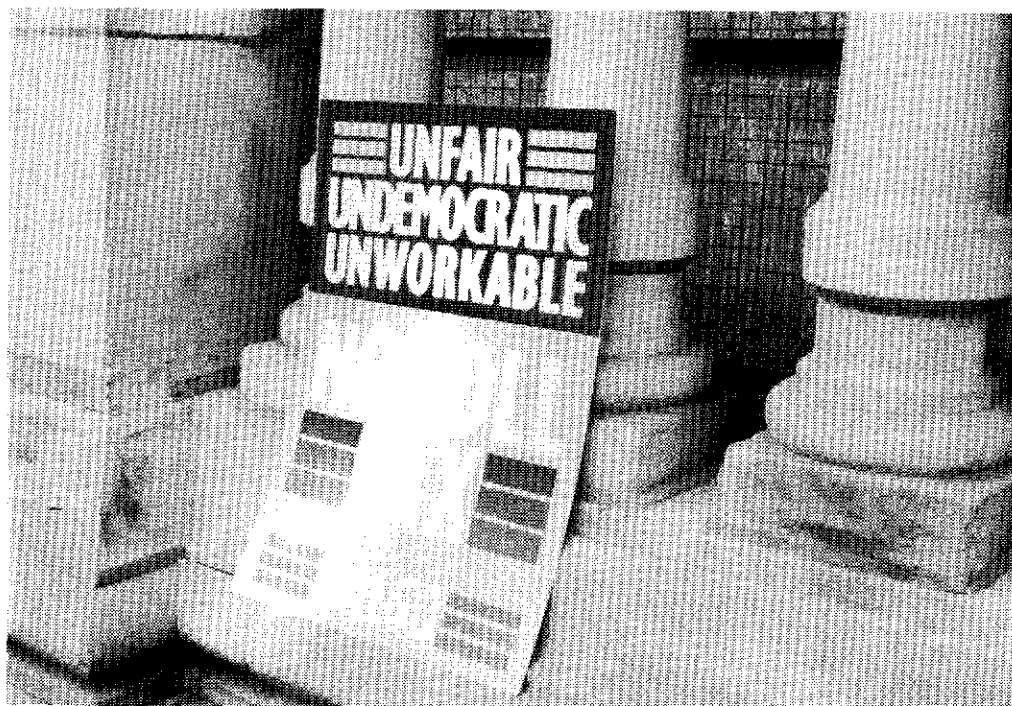
If cuts in military expenditure and control of capital outflows are excluded, and even temporary palliatives such as devaluation are now ruled out by ERM membership, the only possible path for British capital to attempt to generate the resources to bring British investment up to the European levels is to cut working class consumption and welfare spending. The new 'Euro-Thatcherite' course therefore does not imply an amelioration but an *intensification* of attacks on the working class. The form, not the scale, of attack is what has changed. Success in the new project in fact requires a qualitative rolling back of the social position of the British working class and of the organisations, the trade unions in particular, which defend that social position. This, clearly, is not a project which can be carried out in a few months but requires a period of some years of the class struggle. It will in fact dominate the next decade of British domestic politics.

An excellent example of this was given in the way the poll tax was itself 'replaced'. The poll tax was in fact the most adventurist of Thatcher's policies. It was an attempt to radically redistribute income within the working and 'middle' class — to drastically cut the taxation of the best off sections of the working and 'middle' class by shifting the burden onto the worst off. The result was social resistance which made the tax untenable.

But while Heseltine has abolished the most extreme excesses of the poll tax — although to what degree even that has been achieved will not be clear until the exact balance between the 'head tax' element and the property tax element in the new system is made clear — it has been replaced in what is the most socially regressive way possible.

The VAT increase used to replace the poll tax is almost as socially regressive as the poll tax itself. It is levied at a standard rate on all goods with certain exceptions (food, children's clothes, and books being the most





'While the poll tax is replaced, the attack on working class living standards are scarcely reduced'

important). It is therefore paid at a standard rate by everyone. There are no rebates. It is impossible for the poor to escape as it is paid on electricity and gas bills, adults' clothes, all household goods and so on. First analyses of the budget suggested that a minority of those who gained poll tax rebates, such as the single unemployed, will actually be worse off after the VAT increase than when they were paying the poll tax. As with all indirect forms of taxation it is socially regressive. In short while the open provocation of the poll tax is replaced the scale of attack on working class living standards is only marginally reduced.

This step, around the most hated part of the Tories programme, in fact gives a taste of the scale of attack on the working class that the British bourgeoisie is now forced to carry through. The current project of British capital in fact requires the British working class, on the basis of a weaker economy, to bear far greater burdens than the French or German working classes — because France and Germany do not attempt to develop their own domestic economies while simultaneously carrying a greater weight of military spending and overseas investment, which can only be financed by foreign borrowing, than their competitors (Germany is able to finance its overseas investment, which in any case is much smaller in proportion to the size of the economy than Britain's, through its trade surplus and the proportion of its economy which goes in military spending is much less than Britain).

The chief axes down which these attacks on the British working

class must pass are clear. First the welfare state has to be significantly weakened and dismantled. Indeed the attack on the welfare state will be a feature of politics across the whole of Europe in the next period. The welfare state in Western Europe was the result of the relationship of forces emerging from the Second World War — the price for capital of holding back the threat of the overturn of capitalism in Western Europe was substantial concessions to the working class including, most centrally, the development of the welfare state. With the restoration of capitalism in East Germany and other states in Eastern Europe the bourgeoisie feels under much less pressure today. The West European bourgeoisie as a whole will therefore move towards the US and Japanese model of weakening or eliminating the welfare state — a process whose first development can be seen in the crisis now gripping Social Democracy in the original home of the welfare state in Sweden. But in Britain, because of its specific economic problems, this attack on the welfare state will be particularly severe.

This, in turn, requires a centralisation of the British state itself in order to eliminate any centres of local control, accountability, and resistance. In Britain this was begun but has now been carried further in Lamont's budget and Heseltine's 'review' of the poll tax — whose measures in centralising finance and removing control of large parts of education from local authorities in reality undermine even further the vestiges of local authority power and independence. Stepped up central control will be used to push through the a further destruction of

local authority service provision. This will be followed through in the NHS and social security.

The second aspect of the bourgeois assault requires driving down wages coupled with a drive for increasing productivity. This, in turn, means conflict both in the public sector and manufacturing industry. The first step in such an attack is the current recession, and the particularly high level of unemployment that will result from ERM membership. The aim, as in 1979-81, is to use the dole queues to undermine working class militancy.

This policy has had some initial success. Days lost in strikes are already markedly down this year. But on previous experience even a relatively deep recession is unlikely to be sufficient to achieve the scale of reduction in real wages that the bourgeoisie is seeking — real wages rose almost continuously after 1981 despite the high level of unemployment. The forcing down of real wages requires first dismantling the organised capacity of the working class to resist — a renewed assault on the unions, with the aim of driving trade union membership down to 5 or 6 million over the next decade. The attack on wages will almost certainly also require at some point the introduction of a formal incomes policy — support for which is already being canvassed in the Labour right.

But to carry through such an assault requires also the reorganisation of the political system — for any government which attempts this scale of assault will immediately become deeply unpopular.

What is being created around the ERM, and the orientation to European capital, is already an essential consensus between the leadership of all the political parties. Further, the present economic situation, and the scale of attacks it requires on the working class, makes the current electoral system far from being the most satisfactory for capital. The policies that have to be pursued by a Tory government would seriously undermine it electorally. Similar types of policies pursued by a Labour government could produce a dangerous radicalisation in Labour's base of the type that created 'Bennism' after the 1964-70 and 1974-79 Labour governments — a current which the bourgeoisie had to spend a significant part of the last decade neutralising. Governments resting simply on either the Tory or Labour Parties are likely to prove too weak an instrument, with too narrow a social base, for the scale of attack which is required.

The crucial question for ensuring

the creation of governments with a sufficiently wide social base to mount this scale of attack on the working class, is the introduction of proportional representation. By ensuring either Tory-SLD or Labour-SLD governments a wider political and social base for attacking the working class would be secured. Furthermore, as Labour would only be able to come to office in coalition with the SLD, the Labour left would be permanently marginalised. Add to that anti-democratic reforms within the Labour Party which would almost certainly accompany the introduction of PR, for example a purge of the Parliamentary Labour Party through the introduction of a list system of selecting candidates, and a formula for a really serious defeat of the working class is in place.

The political processes that would give rise to such a solution are already taking shape. With the crisis in Tory support due to the economic situation, and capital's desire to prevent the formation of a majority Labour government, significant bourgeois attention has gone over the last year into building up the credibility of the SLD. This had its pay off in Eastbourne and Ribble Valley — where the SLD succeeded in preventing anti-Tory sentiment going over to Labour. Indeed as it is almost impossible in current conditions to create a high level of electoral support for the Tories building up the third party is the only way capital can prevent the return of a Labour government. Such a build up both meets the immediate needs of capital and lays the basis for a future system of PR.

To secure the necessary instrument for capital in this the SLD under Paddy Ashdown has sharply broken from the old 'fuddy-duddy' Liberal image and has become on some issues more belligerently anti-working class than the Tories. Anti-trade union laws have been enthusiastically endorsed. Positive support for railway privatisation has been adopted. Throughout the Gulf war the SLD projected itself as a pro-US and pro-war party, without any 'liberal' qualms at all.

Of course the immediately preferred option of the bourgeoisie remains a further term for a majority Tory government. The replacement of Thatcher by Major, the abolition of the poll tax, and most immediately a budget aimed at aiding the 'middle layers' — the working class voters who get no poll tax rebate, and were worst hit by the last years of Thatcherism — aims at securing a further Tory government if possible, and failing that it at least build up a vote sufficient to rob Labour

of an outright victory.

The chances of a Tory victory at the next election are seriously undermined by the economic situation. Furthermore even if the Tories were to win a victory they would rapidly become extremely unpopular — as would any government elected in current economic circumstances. Hence the shift to PR, and the task of ensuring that all parties are fundamentally committed to the same policies towards European capital, must be carried out alongside the immediate task of attempting to secure a fourth term for the Tories.

Put in its basic historical framework under PR the bourgeoisie will be safe from any threats of majority Labour governments while it deepens, faced with European competition, the task of dismantling the welfare state, driving down union membership, and cutting into working class wages and incomes. The political system dominated by the Tory/Labour duo, the construction of which accompanied the heyday of British imperialism and fitted it through the best part of a century, will eventually have to go. A new system, fitted to British capital's integration into Europe, with concomitant attacks on the British working class, is now under construction. Whether it is put in place in the next two to three years, as a direct consequence of the next general election resulting in a hung parliament, or whether it is delayed until later in the decade, nevertheless

'PR is not a mechanism for extending democracy, but for intensifying the attack on the working class'

the political course British capital is now on is clear. John Major's conversion on the road to Bonn is just the latest stage in that process.

Within that framework the tasks of the left, including within the labour movement, are evident. First the left has to support all the mass struggles which will undoubtedly break out against the scale of attack to which the working class will now be subjected. Second, the left has to fight against the attempt of the bourgeoisie to minimise the possibility for rebellions within Labour's ranks by the reorganised working class. This requires for capital minimising or breaking the links between Labour and the trade unions and the weakening of the constituency left through witchhunts, limitations of the rights of constituency parties, and the moves to a national individual membership scheme. Such attacks both weaken the working class now and begin to house-train Labour for coalition with the SLD.

For all these reasons there will not be, as the ideologues of *Marxism Today* and the *Financial Times* are suggesting, a new era of moderation in British politics, but stepped up class confrontation. PR is not a mechanism for any extension of democracy but an instrument for intensifying the attack on the working class — which is why it is ironic, even if logical, that it is supported by sections of the left.



This political situation therefore clearly determines that alongside the struggle around the economic attacks on the working class, and its international responsibilities, the left must take up a direct fight against the introduction of proportional representation. The campaign which CLPD and others have helped launch — the First Past the Post Campaign/Campaign for a Majority Labour Government — which is supported by the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, Labour Briefing, most campaigns in Labour Left Liaison and various MPs and MEPs, is a crucial step in beginning the counter-offensive on PR.

Within the Labour Party the Electoral Reform Society and Charter 88 have had an unnecessarily clear field in arguing for PR — mainly because the left has been confused and divided on the issue under the influence of the Socialist Movement. The Socialist Society, which has consistently supported PR for the same reason that many of its members refuse to join the Labour Party — because they have the illusory project of establishing a small, centrist 'socialist party' separate from Labour with between 5 and 10 per cent of the vote and parliamentary representation under a PR system — has used the Socialist Movement, with the willing support of *Socialist Outlook*, the main political force within it, to argue for PR in the Labour left.

This activity has made the Socialist Movement a Trojan horse for the right on an issue which is now at the centre of the bourgeoisie's proposals for the reorganisation of British politics in a right-wing direction.

The establishment of the First Past the Post campaign, as the first part of the fight against PR, creates an initial framework to draw together all those forces on the left that understand the real issues involved in the proposal to introduce PR — proposals that would prevent the formation of a majority Labour government, break Labour's hold on local government in favour of SLD coalitions (because PR would not be confined to Westminster elections), and which would render permanent the anti-union laws (because an SLD coalition would never permit the repeal of Thatcher's anti-union legislation).

This campaign has already scored some successes in ensuring that PR was defeated at the London and South West regional Labour Party conferences. Unfortunately the endorsement of PR for a Scottish Assembly, under the influence of the Communist Party, is a

further victory for the right. But the broad coalition of forces which opposes PR indicates that there is still considerable scope to build up an opposition to its introduction — certainly one potentially strong enough to stay the Labour leadership's hand from an outright endorsement of electoral reform.

This campaign has to go on through the present consultation in the party on PR, and beyond, to build the maximum pressure against PR in the event of a general election leading to a hung parliament.

The second area in which the left is also now able to take some initiatives on policy is on the economy. Over the last three years the left has carried out a very effective campaign, originally initiated on the NEC by Ken Livingstone, for the reduction of military spending. This gave rise to *Socialist Economic Bulletin*, supported by a number of Labour MPs and economists and informally linked to Labour Left Liaison, which has established an important factual service for the left and which has campaigned against the ERM, for defence cuts, and for other policies. This needs to be brought together with other left wing currents in the party campaigning around economic policy and, most importantly, must be linked to developments in the unions.

Combating rising unemployment, fighting the attack on wages, resisting cuts, giving renewed emphasis to opposition to incomes policy and campaigning against the further round of attacks on the unions will be the top priority in the next year.

Within this framework a priority continues to be the issue of reductions in military spending. This remains a crucial link between the task of defending working class living standards in Britain, and economic policy, and the fight against the general international offensive of imperialism which the Gulf war has once more brutally underlined.

In an international situation dominated by a new wave of military interventions against the Third World, and what will almost certainly soon become a new phase of the arms race against the USSR, every obstruction that can be placed in the way of the further arms build-up of the imperialists is in the immediate interests of the British working class and of the masses in the semi-colonial countries and the international proletariat.

Maintaining the position for a cut in British arms spending to the average proportion of GDP of Western Europe,

'A priority remains fighting for reductions in military spending'

the policy which the left has won in the Labour Party, is going to be extremely important as the right will undoubtedly launch a counter-offensive against it following its chauvinist line in the Gulf war.

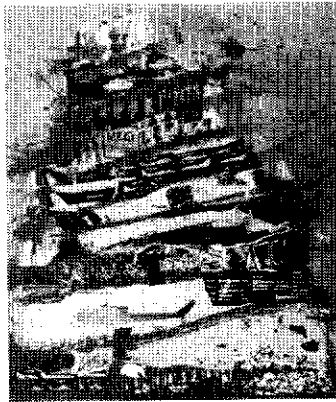
Finally the struggle around reduction of defence spending directly links to what must be the third key priority of socialists — that of taking up the greatly stepped up attack of imperialism against the semi-colonial countries. The present international situation, the opening of a new phase of direct military aggression by imperialism against the Third World places the questions of anti-imperialism, anti-militarism, and solidarity with those fighting imperialism worldwide right at the top of the political agenda.

The initial tasks in this flow directly from the Gulf war — defending the Palestinians, supporting the Kurdish struggle within Iraq, defending the democratic opposition within Kuwait, and the other issues that will arise from this. But these tasks also include, in addition to many campaigns that are already underway, stepping up defence of Cuba — which is now under increased threat.

Activity, campaigning and agreement around these issues, alongside the long term tasks of fighting to strengthen the position of women and black people in the labour movement, and to withdraw Britain from Ireland, is the next step in the forging of a serious and strategic left in the British labour movement — both the Labour Party and the unions.

The left in the labour movement and Labour Party did play such a role in the Gulf war. The Campaign Group of Labour MPs did its best work since the miners strike around the Gulf. Together with the majority of CND and the left wing in the Communist Party, the Labour left was the backbone of the fight against the war. *Socialist Campaign Group News*, unlike *Tribune*, totally opposed the war and in so doing carved out a wider role for itself in the Labour Party.

In a world which is now dominated by a massive recomposition of the left, the left in Britain both fits into that general international process, around common international themes, and has its own specific tasks related to the conditions of its own country. Those latter flow directly from the fight against what can be quite specifically characterised as 'Euro-Thatcherism'.



Images of war

When people remember the Gulf war what images will come to mind? JAYNE FISHER looks at the images that came to Ralph Steadman's mind.

During the war we were fed images of a clean, hi-tech, bloodless video game. As time goes on it is more and more difficult to make this sanitised version of a war, in which 85,500 tons of explosives were dropped, stick.

For those sickened by the whitewash, the current exhibition of paintings by Ralph Steadman at the October Gallery, is a must. In 25 paintings, completed in just three weeks, he conveys all the horror and hypocrisy of the war in an explosion of red, and black paint, combined with dark blood-brown varnish and montage.

Using montage from current newspapers and magazines he links images and ideas connected with the war. *New Statesman* readers will already be familiar with some of this work, which featured on the cover of the March issue, headlined 'the blood of others'.

He plays on wording and headlines from the mass media. 'The ultimate sacrifice' screams a *Daily Mail* headline, in a montage the shape of a mushroom cloud. A crucifix in the sand is made up of a desert soldier with the words 'land battle', 'fear' and a stark black backdrop. In a three-piece frame, red and black paint frames Norman Schwarzkopf with 'Hi Guys — I'm a Yank', a *Sun* Union Jack, and the words 'Get Him', 'execution bloodbath' and a burning tank next to an American baseball player.

The *Environment Guardian* is coupled with burning oil fields brown-black thick paint splatters, whilst a US fighter pilot gives the thumbs up.

Other pieces link starvation and world poverty to the waste of war. Starving children, and in some cases emaciated corpses, are alongside weapons of mass destruction. One particularly powerful montage is in the shape of a military gas mask. Within the black outline, a *Time* magazine headlined 'Deadly Calculation' marking the launch of the ground war. Amid bombs going off and a frenzy of red and black, is a picture of a tiny child of skin and bone being weighed.

In a recent interview, Steadman explained that the paintings were a impulsive and non-partisan protest against the de-humanising presentation of war as a video-game. He described them as 'ironic exclamation marks about the sinister undercurrents of a war that has so many hypocritical elements'. Alongside images of the mangled and burnt out Iraqi convoy on the road to Basra, and the charred face of the Iraqi soldier published by the *Observer*, Steadman's works are brutal and shocking.

The role played by artists in communicating the truth about the nightmare of the war is a vital one. Along with the work of other anti-war artists, such as Photomontagist Peter Kennard, whose image of a skeleton amid a burning oilfield on top of the Earth, heralding 'The new world order' became the identifying image of the anti-war movement, and the razor-sharp cartoons of Steve Bell in the *Guardian*, Steadman's work will prove a powerful and honest reminder of the horrific reality of the Gulf war.

Morphine and Dolly Mixtures

With the backdrop of a continuing rise in reported cases of physical and sexual abuse of children, media sensationalism of "ritual" abuse and governmental propaganda on 'suitable family environments', ANNE KANE reviews the portrayal of one child's story.

Morphine and Dolly Mixtures (BBC2, Sunday 10 March) was a portrayal, of quite overpowering realism, of what it is to be a child subject to the irrationality and unpredictable violence of a drug addicted parent - in this case morphine but more commonly alcoholism - in a working class home. The screenplay from Carol-Ann Courtney's novel was no heavy handed treatise; its power derived from its ability to convey, in a devastatingly understated way, a sense of the taken-for-granted, inescapable and therefore just to be survived cruelty lived through by 12 year old 'Caroline'.

The story, set in the 1950s, first established the mutually protective connection between Caroline and her mother, a bond reinforced through her mother's terrifying and fatal illness, shattered by her death and twisted into enduring guilt by the, 'childish' belief that she bore responsibility for her mother's death. The tension between Caroline's guilt, manipulated by her father, whose unbearable pain at his wife's death brings his own self-destruction another inevitable step closer, the reality of her father's brutality, and her need to protect her younger brothers works its way through to the 'end' chosen for the screenplay.

Deprived of any source of support, or even one in which to confide the horror of her life, Caroline wanders aimlessly into the night with her baby brother, a plea for help which brings not supportive enquiry, comfort, reassurance, but the duplicitous intervention of

the 'welfare' services, to the ultimate end of punishing Caroline by separating her from her younger brothers. In the postscript we learn that Carol-Ann Courtney has up to now not been reunited with her youngest brother.

Morphine and Dolly Mixtures was all the more powerful because Caroline's story is far from exceptional. Watching the bitter tale unfold one is moved by appreciation of the fact that today, in a small way, such harsh, but too common realities, can be told. The telling of such real stories in the last few years has helped build a communication between the many who as children suffered at the hands of brutal carers and a society which liked to close its eyes to this family reality. Presented with such pain it is impossible not to be consumed with rage at those like Stuart Bell who would have us all close our eyes again, for the sake of defending the institution of 'the family' and the society it rests upon.

The week after this screening the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children published figures showing that cases of sexual and physical abuse of children reported to the Society continue to rise. Sexual abuse cases rose by 20 per cent last year, with 4,385 referrals. In the same year the NSPCC dealt with 5,594 cases of physical abuse.

Such statistics only represent the tip of an iceberg: the National Children's Bureau has estimated that one in ten girls are sexually abused before the age of 16. Physical and emotional abuse may now be less shrouded in secrecy but statistics of reported cases still bear a loose relation to reality.

Morphine and Dolly Mixtures shouts at us to continue to insist on this confrontation with reality: the children must not be left to bear the suffering alone.

Marxism and liberalism on the Gulf and Eastern Europe

'Following the "revolutions of 1989" there was a widespread belief that a new era of peace was dawning on the world and that democracy was carrying all before it. One year later the sanguine hopes of that time have been belied by a pact between the re-charged "liberal militarism" of the West and a new but enfeebled "bar-racks socialism" in the East. The West is using Communist weakness to inaugurate a "new world order" with the largest bombing onslaught since the Vietnam war, thinly veiled nuclear threats and a finely calculated decision to expose the fragile ecology of the Gulf to the pyrotechnics of modern warfare.'

In these words *New Left Review*, in January 1991, described the shattering of its own and others illusions about the consequences for the world of the policies of Gorbachev and the events in Eastern Europe. But the Gulf war was not *contradictory* to but rather *the logical and predictable outcome* of Gorbachev's policies and the events in Eastern Europe. The Gulf war would have been infinitely harder to carry out, probably impossible according to the United States own analysis, without them.

Gorbachev's vote for the Security Council resolution authorising the use of force against Iraq was merely the logical culmination of his entire political course — even if it was made openly sordid by the Saudi foreign minister stopping in Moscow with a \$4 billion loan on his way to the UN meeting. The events in Eastern Europe both allowed a new military relation of forces — the US withdrew over 100,000 troops from Europe during the war — and the political confidence for the US to go on the military offensive.

Although *New Left Review* is self-proclaimedly a journal of the intelligentsia, and in the past it carried much valuable material, the last thing it showed in its analysis was 'intelligence'. For the aim of analysis, as Marx put it, is to understand the 'law

The Gulf war saw a recharged imperialist system carry out its greatest military assault since Vietnam. It was the first great development in world politics after the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe. The connection between them is obvious. An invigorated imperialism has stepped up its aggression against the third world. Yet parts of the left continue to deny the evident connection of the events in Eastern Europe and the Gulf.

GEOFFREY OWEN roots the issue in the fundamental analysis of Marxism.

of motion' of what is being studied — if one thing happens what will happen as a result of it? The correctness of different analyses is tested by how far they explain how one development follows another.

In regard to both Eastern Europe and the Gulf the two chief analyses are the Marxist and the liberal — no matter if the latter sometimes tries to claim it is the former. The difference between the two is that the former, the Marxist, starts from class forces and class relations. The latter, the liberal, starts from political forms. Whether the Marxist or the liberal interpretation is right is not a matter of dogma but of which analysis most correctly foresees what actually takes place.

Taking first the Gulf, we have analysed the example of Fred Halliday elsewhere. According to Halliday the US was a democratic imperialist power. Iraq was, allegedly, fascist. Therefore, according to Halliday's analysis the democratic imperialism should be supported against fascism — therefore the war should be endorsed. From a Marxist point of view what took place was that an imperialist country violently attacked a semi-colonial state. The real outcome has been described too adequately elsewhere to need repeating here.

The events which transpired in Eastern Europe gave the same lesson on a still higher level. *New Left Review*, *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* and others hailed the imperialist unification of Germany, and the creation of capitalist governments in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as advances over what existed previously because the political forms are, at least temporarily, more democratic than Stalinism. But what in reality happened is that capitalism replaced bureaucratic workers state. Was the world left a safer or a more dangerous place, closer or further away from the liberation of humanity as a result?

By now the balance sheet is again rather evident. The reality is that the events in Eastern Europe unleashed a

new wave of imperialist aggression and violence. Such events do indeed lead to the need for the profoundest reflection by socialists on the criminal role played by Stalinism — but in analysing how it had brought about these shattering defeats, not 'celebrating' these events (as Tariq Ali wrote of them in the *New Statesman*).

The reason that such defeats were guaranteed to make imperialism more, not less, aggressive was because it changed the international relation of forces in capitalism's favour. Gorbachev's policy of seeking to take the economic pressure off the USSR by making concessions to imperialism, thereby strengthening it, was guaranteed to have the same results. The Gulf war was simply the logical result of such policies. The social reality dominated.

Whilst precise events naturally cannot be foreseen, the *basic dynamic* unleashed by Gorbachev was *not* unexpected but entirely predictable and predicted. Very much against the stream at that time *Socialist Action* wrote in February 1990, in an editorial entitled 'Gorbachev reaps a carnival of reaction' that: 'When Gorbachev came to power in the USSR a large section of the left in Britain and Europe believed this would create openings for socialists in Europe... Such a view was theoretically absurd. Imperialism by its very nature is an expansionist and aggressive system. Any accommodation to it, or weakness, leads not to peace, stability and advance for the left but to greater aggression by imperialism and strengthening of reactionary forces. The only thing which leads imperialism to pursue "peaceful" policies is defeats. This is confirmed not merely by elementary marxist theory but by the entire experience of class struggle.'

The role of the new East European regimes in the Gulf war, six to twelve months after we wrote that analysis, rather dramatically reinforced the point. Czechoslovakia sent troops to the Gulf, Hungary and Poland sent

medical teams, and Hungary allowed US war planes to overfly its air space. This is the new foreign policy — objectively seeking to participate in plunder of the third world, rather than oppose it, via the imperialists.

The same development is occurring on the military field. Following the dissolution of the military wing of the Warsaw pact, far from seeking peace or neutrality in Europe, all three regimes have made clear they wish to join NATO. The Hungarian parliament voted by 187 votes to 3 on 29 January in favour of associate membership of NATO. Vaclav Havel, visiting NATO headquarters in February, declared that the organisation had 'saved liberty' in Europe. Hungary and Czechoslovakia have proposed parliamentary association with the NATO assembly.

This trend also shows the absurdity of the position argued by Oliver MacDonald, a member of the *New Left Review* editorial board and long time member of the *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* editorial team, that events in Eastern Europe show the potential of a 'third way' which is neither capitalist nor Stalinist: 'Nor is the third way a utopian experiment; it is quite simply the existing situation in Eastern Europe today — democratic political systems combined with an economy dominated by the public sector but with the mechanisms of both market competition and redistributive social policies.' (*International Viewpoint* 17 September).

In reality the new capitalist governments in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia are proceeding as fast as they are able to demolish what remains non-capitalist in these societies. The situation in Eastern Europe today is not a 'third way' it is simply the intermediary period between a bureaucratised workers state and the re-establishment of capitalism — whether in all East European countries this will be achieved remains to be seen (and whether in the countries where capitalism is restored democracy continues to exist also remains to be seen). This worsening of the relation of forces resulting from Eastern Europe allowed imperialism be more aggressive. Only defeats for imperialism, not successes, will limit its aggression.

This point is naturally *not* to argue that the Soviet Union engage in wild adventures. Defeats due to adventurism will not limit imperialist aggression. But this reality *does* determine the strategic line which must be pursued.

The United States is sufficiently powerful to destroy any of its opponents if it is able to concentrate its



firepower on one. Fortunately, it has generally had to deal with not one, but many, challenges simultaneously. Gorbachev's support however allowed the US to massively concentrate its resources on one target — Iraq.

Ernest Mandel put it well, much more correctly than his recent writings when, in 1970, in *Peaceful coexistence and world revolution*, he wrote of the bases of working class strategy: 'Instead of allowing the enemy to concentrate his tremendous forces upon each small country and each revolution separately, thereby enabling him to crush these revolutions successively, to force him, rather, to disperse and spread his forces over a wider and wider range of countries and continents... So obvious is this logic and so elementary the political and military truth that it reflects that... their [the Soviet leadership's] pathetic adherence to the myth of "peaceful coexistence" in the face of blatant imperialist aggression, can only be explained by their fundamental conservatism which clashes not only with the interests of world revolution but also with those of the peoples of the Soviet Union itself.'

Mandel wrote perceptively of the dynamic created by victories for imperialism, or conciliation of it, regarding what will almost certainly be the next wave of events in Eastern Europe after the Gulf: 'Can there be any doubt that should these aggressions be marked with success and be answered by further retreats by the Soviet leadership a mortal danger would loom ahead for all workers' states which lie in the immediate shooting distance of imperialism that is China, North Korea, Cuba, and in a certain sense also [then] the GDR. And can there be any doubt that at some point in this chain of aggression the Soviet leadership will have to intervene for reasons of military self defence and that the danger of nuclear world war will be

much greater than today?'

Gorbachev has indeed carried the policy of the Soviet leadership, of socialism in one country, to a new level of danger for the people of the world — and finally for the future, including the survival, of humanity. The results have been predictably disastrous for the people of the third world. But they also threaten the Soviet Union itself.

Because what is really objectionable to imperialism is not this or that *policy* of the Soviet Union but the *existence* of a non-capitalist USSR. As AJP Taylor once rightly put it: 'the greatest crime of the Soviet Union in western eyes is to have no capitalists and no landlords.' There is no *policy* of the Soviet Union which can satisfy capitalism. The only thing that would be satisfactory would be the destruction of the Soviet Union itself and the creation of capitalism in its borders. Or as Mandel again put it in 1970: 'In the long run the only way not to "provoke" the capitalists is to consolidate and restore capitalism everywhere including the Soviet Union... We see here the basic reformist fallacy in the strategies of "peaceful coexistence" and "socialism in one country". Underlying both is the hope that somehow, in some way, world imperialism will reconcile itself to the existence of the USSR, and "let it alone" if only the USSR lets world imperialism alone also.'

Gorbachev may have thought he was creating a new partition of responsibilities with the imperialists, or cleverly gaining some room for manoeuvre for the Soviet bureaucracy, by throwing Iraq to the imperialist wolves, but all he has done is tighten the noose around the USSR.

Having used the diplomatic cover provided by Gorbachev in the UN to assemble its military forces and gain international 'respectability' for war the US did not take the slightest notice of Gorbachev once the war began. Soviet peace initiatives were dismissed. A key post-war goal in the region is the establishment of a permanent US military base whilst keeping the USSR out.

Furthermore following the Gulf war imperialism is now debating how best to proceed in relation to the Soviet Union. It has three new objectives:

First, having secured East Germany for capitalism, and with excellent prospects in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland, it would now like to see the rest of Eastern Europe, and is starting up its intervention into Yugoslavia, Romania, and the rest of the Balkans.

Second, it is for the first time since World War II trying to tear away part of the Soviet Union itself, starting -

'The worsening of the relation of forces resulting from 1989 in Eastern Europe allowed imperialism to be more aggressive'

the Baltic states.

Whilst imperialism, prior to the military victory in Iraq, considered Soviet support in the Gulf made it worthwhile tolerating January's military action in Lithuania, the situation has now changed. The US, Germany and Britain all made clear that Soviet military action in the Baltic states would now be held to justify a new cold war with the overturn of the proposals for arms limitation and an end of the refusal to admit Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and also possibly Poland, into full membership of NATO. Major, Hurd, Genscher, and Baker, all made a point of meeting Baltic leaders since the war and the US and Britain have said they wish to open new consulates in the other republics of the USSR.

Third, for the first time support is being extended to the more pro-capitalist opponents of Gorbachev, above all those around Yeltsin, who have been greatly encouraged by the outcome of the Gulf war.

Within the Soviet Union, the most right-wing pro-market forces had suffered a defeat after the Shatalin plan, for decisive moves towards the restoration of capitalism failed to gain any popular support. This fiasco reflected the fact that its result would be 30-40 million unemployed, the destruction of much of Soviet industry, and the break up of the Soviet Union. The working class had shown no inclination whatever to mobilise to defend Shatalin. The result, given the weakness of the left, was that the conservative Stalinists based in the military, the KGB and the Communist Party took the offensive — forcing key ministers in Yeltsin's government of the Russian Federation to resign. The Soyuz, conservative Stalinist, group in the Supreme Soviet threatened a motion of no confidence against Gorbachev himself.

This struggle culminated in the resignation of Shevardnadze, following furious attacks on the results of Gorbachev's foreign policy in Eastern Europe and the Gulf, and objections from the military to the one-sided reductions in Soviet conventional forces negotiated by the ex-foreign minister. This was combined, in typical Stalinist fashion, with military action in Lithuania. Whilst the US was unwilling to do anything during the Gulf war to jeopardise Soviet support, it was already reassessing the usefulness of continuing essentially unconditional support for Gorbachev. On the day of Shevardnadze's resignation the report of the major world capitalist institutions on the Soviet Union recommended no significant economic aid should be given without tangible steps to the res-

toration of capitalism. The US made clear its support for the Baltic states leaving the USSR. Washington announced that the Soviets were circumventing the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty and that neither it nor the START treaty would be signed until this was sorted out to Washington's satisfaction.

A series of Yeltsin's supporters openly supported the war and, and encouraged by increasingly open support from the West, utilised the repression in Lithuania and the dire state of the economy, for which the Stalinists also have no solution, to counter-attack. The clash came to a head with the referendum on the future of the USSR which resulted in a large majority for maintaining the union despite implicit support for a 'no' vote coming from Yeltsin and the liberal opposition but at the same time a vote for establishing an elected president of Russia was passed by a large majority — a post Yeltsin intends use as a power base to challenge Gorbachev.

Gorbachev's support for the Gulf war was not only a crime against the people of the Middle East but also gave a second wind to the pro-capitalist forces in the USSR itself. A series of Yeltsin's supporters declared open support for the war. Gorbachev may have thought it very clever to have the entire media of the west conducting a public relations exercise on his behalf for five years but, precisely because his course has strengthened imperialism, which therefore is able to demand ever more, all he has done is undermine his own position. Because, as they are now making clear, *wherever* Gorbachev tries to draw the line, the imperialists can extend their backing to those who are prepared to go further. *Only* the restoration of capitalism would satisfy them — and that satisfaction would last a very short time until the imperialist powers started a nuclear arms race against each other in a new, and probably terminal, round of inter-imperialist competition.

Gorbachev represents the right wing of the Soviet *bureaucracy*. But his policy has steadily strengthened directly capitalist political forces in the Soviet Union, whilst attacking and undermining the most powerful objective opponent of capitalism, the Soviet working class. Now in Yeltsin's clash with the bureaucracy, including Gorbachev, the former is, for the first time, receiving more open support of the West against the former 'darling Gorby'. In a pincer movement Yeltsin's current, including the explicitly pro-capitalist Democratic Russia, has

also moved to try to turn the clash between the miners, fighting quite legitimately for tolerable living conditions, and the central Soviet government, to his advantage. It is a measure of the depths to which the Stalinist bureaucracy has sunk that those supporting capitalist restoration can attempt to link up with Soviet coal miners against the bureaucracy! But this is nonetheless, logically, the level to which Gorbachev, and Stalinism, has brought the crisis in the Soviet Union.

In an even more acutely dangerous international situation, Trotsky outlined precisely the basic forces beginning to be unleashed: 'The strangulation of the party, the soviets and the trade union implies the political atomisation of the proletariat. Social antagonisms instead of being overcome politically are suppressed administratively. These collect under pressure to the same extent that the political resources disappear for solving them normally. The first social shock, external or internal, may throw the atomised Soviet society into civil war. The workers having lost control over the state and economy, may resort to mass strikes as weapons of self-defence. The discipline of the dictatorship would be broken. Under the onslaught of the workers and because of the pressure of economic difficulties, the trusts would be forced to disrupt planned beginnings and enter into competition with one another. The dissolution of the regime would naturally find its violent and chaotic echo in the village and would inevitably be thrown into the army. The socialist state would collapse, giving place to the capitalist regime, or, more correctly, to capitalist chaos.' (Writings 1933/34)

The most that Stalinism can do in that situation is administrative repression driving the contradictions underground but in no way overcoming them. Meanwhile imperialism is able to use the mounting chaos to increase its violent aggression in the world.

Gorbachev and the events in Eastern Europe, in short, brought the prospect of 'peace and democracy' only for those, like *New Left Review*, who had no eyes to see. The reality was a regression, brought about by Stalinism, which made the world a far more dangerous and violent place, far further from its liberation.

That is why the recomposition of the working class movement against imperialism and capitalism, the only force that can take humanity out of its crisis, has taken place not in support of but *against* Gorbachev. It, unlike *New Left Review* long understood the consequences of his policy.

'Gorbachev has attacked and undermined the most powerful objective opponent of capitalism, the Soviet working class'

Socialist **Action**

Annual subscription rate (six issues):

- £5.50 inland subscriptions
- £11.00 multi-reader subscriptions
- £7.50 European subscriptions
- £10.00 all other international subscriptions
- £30.00 airmail multi-reader subscriptions

Name Address

.....

Subscription to start from issue number

Return to Socialist Action, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP