

Wildcat

Price 50p

HOW TO
FIGHT THE
POLL TAX -
SEE INSIDE

Autumn - Winter 88/89



Issue Nō 12

Superpowers broker deals in two war zones as Soviets continue Afghan troop withdrawal

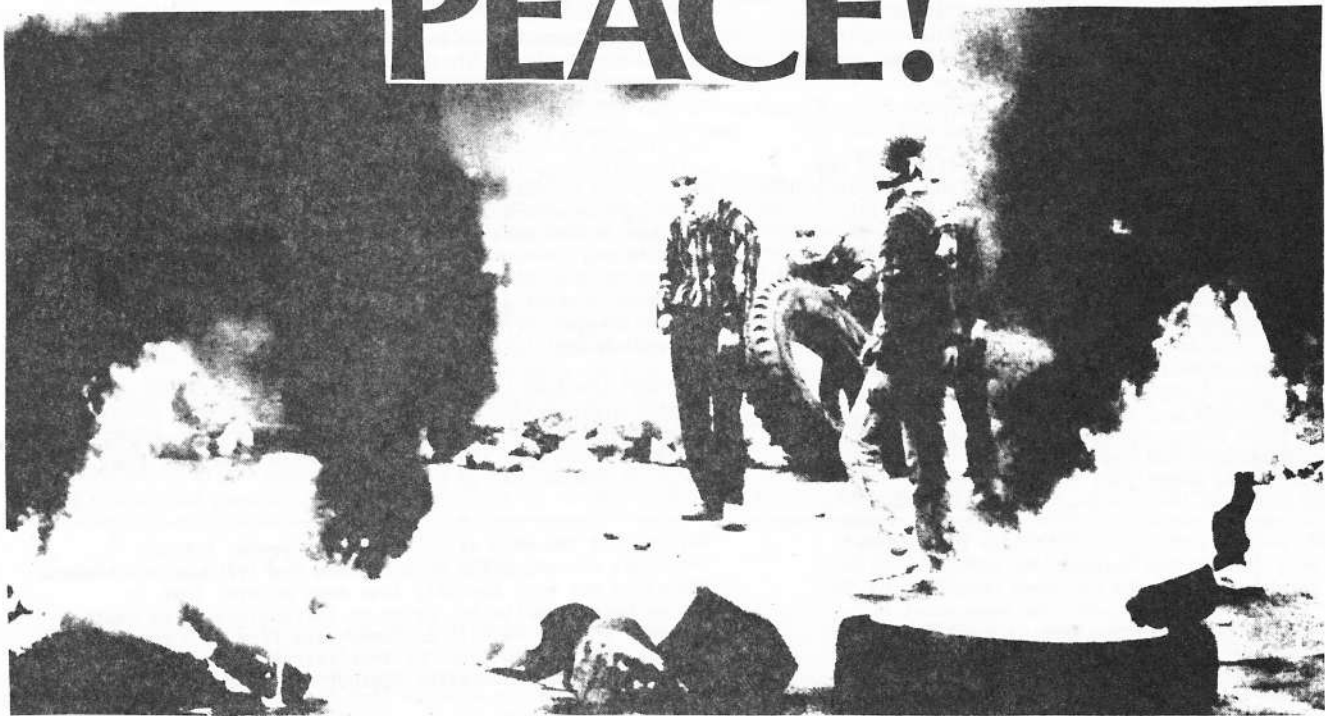
Ceasefire in
Angola begins



Mr Pérez de Cuellar

UN chief sets
Gulf peace date

DOWN WITH PEACE!



FOR CLASS WAR!

NEITHER WAR NOR PEACE: REVOLUTION!

An Epidemic of Peace

The INF Treaty, Afghanistan, Angola, Kampuchea, the Gulf... Capitalism is currently going through its most peaceful period for decades. We're in no mood to be grateful.

In the first place, aspects of the current Pax Americana contain the threat of further wars. For example, the retreat of the Soviet Union gives grist to the mill of US warmongers. They argue, rightly, that it was uncompromising US foreign policy that forced the arms reduction package and the Afghanistan withdrawal on the Kremlin.



Kurdish refugees gather in the Turkish town of Cukurca along the Iraqi border. Turkey says it will offer them temporary housing.

But on the other hand, the peace in the Gulf is the result of genuine inter-imperialist cooperation. It will enable the rulers of Iran and Iraq to turn their attention to the working class. This can already be seen in Kurdistan, an area which includes parts of Iran and Iraq, where there has been a lot of class struggle against the war. 30,000 Iraqi troops have attacked Kurdistan with chemicals and heavy artillery, resulting in a mass exodus. The town of Halabja was virtually wiped out in a gas attack. The Iranian government has stepped up executions of political prisoners in order to terrorise the working class.

Kurds Show the Way

The first proletarian reaction against the Iran-Iraq war was in Iraqi Kurdistan. There were strikes and demonstrations against the war with slogans like "Down with Hussein! Down with Khomeini!". Then there were struggles in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Suliamania and Amara where proletarians refused to work for nothing for the war effort. In 1984, when Iraqi jets attacked the Iranian town of Baneh, the population of the poorer areas went into the streets shouting slogans against both sides. There was constant resistance to the war amongst the Iraqi proletariat, with massive battles between armed deserters and loyal troops.

More recently, the class struggle started to take off again in Iran. Strikes had begun to increase in the two months preceding the ceasefire. For example, workers at Benz Kahavar who make lorries for the army objected to a new semi-automatic production line. A general assembly was convened and bonuses, which had initially been denied, were hurriedly granted the workers. At other factories, e.g. Ziba thread, workers who had been chosen to go to the front (by lottery!) refused. The management had to back down. The peasantry had been concealing their youth from the army recruiting agents for some time. The shanty-town dwellers, their numbers swelled from the countryside, had been raising anti-war and anti-Khomeini slogans. During the war of the cities, whenever a missile struck Tehran, the government's Revolutionary Guards had to cordon off the area in order to prevent people gathering and shouting the wrong slogans! Falling oil revenues coupled with the regime's inability to raise foreign credit has meant an acute shortage of raw materials. Industrial output has been falling and the discontent arising from heavy taxation has forced Khomeini himself to allude to it. Inflation has made things worse.



All this was exacerbated by six consecutive major military defeats for Iran, owing to a mixture of incompetence, corruption, falling morale, missiles, gas, and the direct intervention of the USA against Iran. All the major powers wanted to impose peace on the region. This manifested itself in: the annihilation of half the Iranian navy in one engagement, the shooting down of the Iranian Airbus, the diplomatic isolation of the mullahs and the obstruction of badly-needed military spare parts. The superpowers want stalemate rather than outright victory for Iraq. This means that Iraqi attempts to claim the spoils of victory will be frowned on by the UN Security Council and the Arab League. Iraq has not won. It has secured almost no Iranian territory and cannot guarantee full control of the Shat-al-Arab waterway. Imperialism wants two policemen in the Gulf: Hussein and a pacified Khomeini.

Effects of the Ceasefire on :

a) Iraq

The demonstrations of various classes of Iraqis in support of Hussein are to some extent understandable. After all Iraq was on the defensive for a long time and Saddam is now perceived as being on the threshold of securing an honourable peace. About 1.2m Iraqis out of a population of 15.5m are members of the Ba'athist Party and see their well-being linked to the regime's. The ideological hegemony of Hussein's Pan-Arabist vision over a certain section of the population has often been underestimated. As for the rest, a mixture of bribes to some sections and barbaric massacres directed at others, like the murder of some 5000 at Halabja, will give him a relatively easy transition to peace in the short term. We expect the fulcrum of class struggle is likely to shift to Iran.

b) Iran

Khomeini had placed all his eggs in one basket: the outcome of the war. It will be difficult for the mullahs to justify the sufferings of the last eight years, when they have nothing to show for it. Islam is finding its traditional role of unifying the nation an uphill struggle. Terror is taking its place. The execution of political prisoners is pre-empting the expected increase in the class struggle in the wake of the regime's humiliation.

The process of polarisation between the leading Shiites will accelerate. The private sector, supported by the bazaar, the Council of Guardians, most of Parliament, Rafsanjani and Montazeri, the heir apparent to Khomeini, has been consolidating its power and wealth. Supporters of the public sector and the further centralisation of government and nationalisation of key industries (e.g. President Khamene-i and prime minister Musavi) are biding their time and hoping for a slip-up by their opponents. As usual Khomeini treads a careful path between the factions.

The high level of unemployment, the rise in the exploitation of the working class during the war, the internal contradictions within the regime and the low level of oil exports all make Khomeini's short-term prospects less rosy than those of the butcher of Baghdad.

Sorting out the mess will take the UN years. But the peace has already given both regimes the freedom to prosecute the class war more savagely than ever before. That is why we oppose capitalist peace as intransigently as capitalist war, and why we call on communists from both countries to work together to turn the imperialist peace into a civil war - the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

MEETINGS

The Wildcat group is holding a series of meetings in November about the peace in the Gulf and the problem of Imperialism. Write to the group address for further details and a reading list.

جزوه‌های زیر بزودی به زبان فارسی منتشر خواهند شد :
 ۱- تجربه کمیته‌های کارگری در انقلاب روسیه (اثر آر.ام. جونز)
 ۲- لنینیسم یا کمونیسم (اثر ژان باروت)
 ۳- مبارزه طبقاتی در جبهه داخلی (اثر گروه "واپلدکت")

The following will soon be published in Persian:

1. The experience of the factory committees in the Russian Revolution, by RM Jones.
2. Leninism or Communism, by Jean Barrot.
3. Class War on the Home Front, by Wildcat.

An Opera Singer in Iraq

This is a translation of a communiqué by the Italian opera singer Joe Fallisi, which he distributed to the press before giving a performance at a festival in Iraq during the war.

Babylon (Iraq), 29 September 1987.

I, the undersigned, Giuseppe Fallisi, who today on 29 Sept. will sing *La Traviata* on the occasion of the International Babylon Festival, want to communicate to the press the public declaration which follows. It contains the reasons why I have agreed to participate in this show.

I consider that the "secular" and pro-Western dictatorship in Baghdad is no less reactionary than the freedom-killing theocracy in Tehran. That is why my presence here should in no way be interpreted as supporting the regime but purely as a contribution to the denunciation of the things that the regime is responsible for. The real interests of the exploited and manipulated masses of both countries lie in ridding themselves of the governments which oppress them (whether they are dressed like ordinary bourgeois or draped in the black robes of priests), in deserting the battle fields and turning their arms against those who make them carry those arms. They have been sent to the front for seven years as cannon fodder, in a war (unleashed by Iraq) which is carried on without any other perspective than further massacres, with the sole aim of maintaining the privileges and power of their ruling classes and the protectors of the latter. Consequently, I find absolutely grotesque the patriotic fervour of the Italian state, the fourth largest arms exporter in the world, which at this very moment is sending ships with the declared aim of cleaning up the waters of the Gulf, waters which it has already helped pollute with its mines. It is not a question of a "peace-keeping operation" but a military exercise, in preparation for the n-th contribution to war, to this local war as to the one which will follow, which will be on a scale far vaster and more tragic, and which is being concocted for us already.

All my solidarity to the proletarian victims of Iraq and Iran! It is to them and to them alone that I dedicate my *Traviata*. (The preceding declaration is strictly personal and was initiated by me alone).

Fighting for our Lives

The current weakness of the working class is allowing the bosses to get away with murder.

P&O aka Townsend Thoreson epitomise the ruthlessness of today's companies. A year after the Zeebrugge tragedy, they brought in contracts of employment with inexperienced staff working much longer hours without a break. The response of the union was to sabotage the all-out strike which followed, and support P&O's competitor Sealink. "Sail Safe, Sail Sealink" was the slogan. The week after the NUS led the return to work, one of the NUS's members was killed in a fire on a Sealink vessel. It's no exaggeration to say striking saves lives.

The day before the Kings Cross fire, railway workers handed out leaflets to passengers warning them that staff cuts were leading to dangerous conditions. This was briefly mentioned in Parliament after the fire, and then forgotten by the media. The transport bosses have been cutting back on staff, introducing one-person buses and trains and allowing piles of rubbish to accumulate, all to save money. Rail and bus workers are generally fairly quiet



at the moment, though there are some strikes going on among certain sections. A transport strike outside union divisions is the only way to force management to reverse the cuts.

Recently pilots on the French interna airline struck for the retention of three crew in the cockpit. Just after they went back, one of the airline's Airbuses crashed. A magistrate who started the investigation into the crash was suddenly dropped by the central authorities, and the aeroplane's flight recorder taken off him. It was hastily announced that pilot error was the only cause. If it turned out that replacing crew with computers is to blame, it would harm the airline's drive to weaken the numbers and power of its

employees. Everywhere, the stormtroopers of modern management are backed to the hilt by the state. Thatcher allowed Marine bases to be used to train P&O scabs.

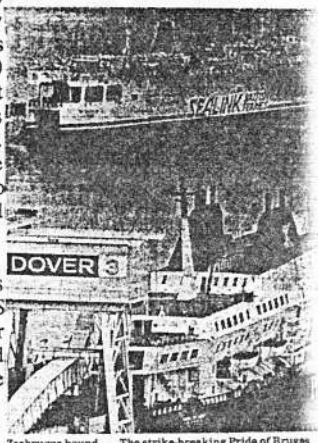
Throughout industry, safety laws are being made meaningless by government cuts in inspectors. Union calls to bring the oil industry under the Health and Safety Executive in the wake of the Piper Alpha disaster are misguided, to say the least.

Safety on sites in the booming construction industry has been falling for years. In 1987, 37 building workers were killed in London alone. There have been several strikes at the new British Library site next to Kings Cross station. The latest one involved 120 workers. UCATT organised secret meetings with some of the contractors on the site to get the men back. UCATT official Pat Shevlin went to the picket line told the men to go back to work with any contractor that would take them on.

UCATT's role is to help the contractors beat the workers, just as the NUS defeated the seamen by leaving Dover isolated. The fight against death and injury at work is a fight against the unions.



Firms with interests in the Piper fields will benefit from the Oil firms affected by Piper Alpha get tax concessions



Zeebrugge bound... The strike-breaking Pride of Bruges

Lefties Screw Up Council Strike

While Labour councils step up their attacks on workers as their role in capitalism's offensive demands, their allies do their best to sabotage their employees' attempts to fight back. In July workers at Lambeth's Directorate of Environmental Health and Consumer Services refused to cooperate with the council's planned cuts. Management responded by bringing in private contractors to rearrange offices in accordance with the plan, and when workers still objected they were taken off the payroll. As a result the DEHCS workers walked out on indefinite strike.

At a NALGO mass meeting a few days later the strikers were quite clear what was needed. Rather than being left isolated in a sectional dispute (as has happened

to other Lambeth workers recently, such as engineers and housing workers) they wanted an all out strike in the council.

Opposition to this idea came almost entirely from the Socialist Workers' Party. They argued that all out action should be postponed until meetings had been held to argue for support from people not at the meeting. Members of the strike committee replied correctly that the best place to argue for such support was at the picket lines. The SWP said that this would be letting the executive off the hook and that the local NALGO leadership should be pressurised into building a strike!

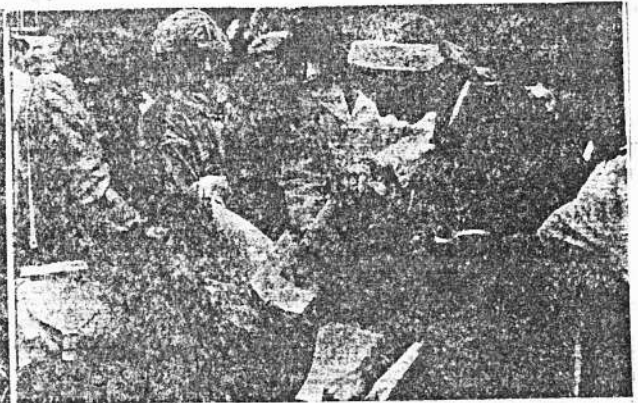
Due in no small part to the SWP's intervention the vote for immediate all out action was narrowly lost, and the next day DEHCS strikers returned to work, unwilling to fight on alone.

Shake on it, Scabface!

Workers at NUM headquarters in Sheffield have been striking again. They were only offered 4.28% while officials got 6%. Meanwhile, Arthur "I will never share a platform with a scab" Scargill shakes hands with Neil Kinnock at the NUM conference. Scargill shocked the assembled hacks by announcing his support for Shankland and Hancock, the two Welsh miners jailed for making a concrete intervention during the strike. Don't forget that during the strike, when active solidarity with imprisoned miners mattered, Scargill denounced their action in the name of the NUM with the other

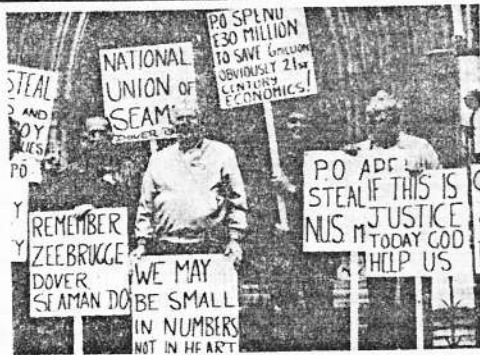


balding bastard grinning beside him.



Nurses in Manchester burn their job description forms.

Capitalism's gravediggers: Workmen digging the grave of Pakistan's late president, Zia ul-Haq.



P&O workers whingeing about British justice. This is not the way to win strikes. Like the printworkers' strike at Wapping, the Dover strike has been totally isolated. In spite of blatant union sabotage of any possibility of winning the strike through spreading it, the workers still have faith in the union.

LESSONS OF THE P&O STRIKE

This leaflet was produced by Thames Valley Class Struggle Group, who can be contacted by writing as follows:
Folder 4, 17 Chatham St., Reading, Berks..

Since 4th February, over 1000 Dover seafarers have been striking against P&O ferries. The strike started in response to P&O's plans to reduce manning levels and attack wages and working conditions, supposedly to make P&O more competitive in time for the Chanel Tunnel. (It is always disgusting when the rich bosses of companies worth millions or billions sack workers to "save money". However, P&O, which made £280m profit last year intends to save £8m in order to compete with Eurotunnel, which is being built by Bovis, a P&O subsidiary. Their cynicism is repulsive for this alone). The measures P&O are trying to impose are these:

- * A wage cut of £25 to £45 a week
- * Crewing levels to be reduced by an average of 15 per ferry
- * Crew members to spend a minimum of 72 hours on board, working three 24 hour shifts (with rest periods of 6 hours aboard ship, during which workers can be recalled at anytime).
- * Crews retained for up to 4 weeks if relief crews fail to report.

When you consider that Townsend Thoreson, including the sister ships of the Herald of Free Enterprise are now operated under the name P&O European Ferries, the deterioration of safety standards caused by the above measures is even more appalling.

THE FIGHTBACK

At the time of writing the main methods of struggle are picketing P&O at Dover, and collecting money for the communal kitchens for the strikers. Both of these actions are important and without them there would not now be any dispute to speak of. However, these actions are far from adequate to win the struggle. The only way to victory is to spread the strike to other workers. Three times since February there has been national strike action on the ferries. If these strikes had continued they would

have hit P&O harder than any blockade, boycott or blacking ever could. And more importantly, they would have united all ferryworkers, who are all facing the same attacks. Each strike however was called off by the National Union of Seamen. The reason given by union leaders for calling off the strikes was in order to prevent sequestration of funds and so leave the union powerful enough to fight on. It would be amusing that the NUS were calling off strikes in order to fight effectively if not for the damage that the union's action has done to the seafarers' struggle. Sequestration is a red herring; it is continuing the strike that is important.

Out of the 3 instances where the NUS has called off national strikes, the first was the most damaging. This strike (in support of the Isle of Man ferryworkers) was called off on 11th February, the day before the unofficial walkout at the Ford Dagenham plant. It was at this time that the potential for spreading and unifying the strike was at its highest. This is because during February there were strikes not only by seafarers and Ford workers, but also by NHS staff, workers at Landrover and Vauxhall, and miners. In addition to these and other workers who struck in February, there were others facing similar attacks from the bosses and still others (e.g. Transport and Postal Workers) who actively supported the NHS dispute. With all these struggles raging at the same time, it would have been perfectly possible to unite all the strikes around common demands (no redundancies, no changes in working practices, increased NHS funding, wage increases). But no union even attempted such a unification, and many (not least the NUS) took important measures to block such a development.

The way for workers to win struggles at present then, is for strikers to go en masse to other workers who are under attack and call for united strike action. Where other workers are already striking, join their picket lines and demonstrations and argue for effective action and for a unification of the demands and of the strikes. Spending time trying to get the union to organise effective action will be a waste of time and won't work - instead of wasting energy on that, workers should use it to unify and extend struggles themselves. These are the actions, broadly speaking, which the seafarers, and all strikers, must undertake to ensure victory.



POLL TAX:

EXOCET THATCHER'S FLAGSHIP

No method of resistance can be ruled out, from workplace resistance in the local councils, strikes, petty delaying tactics, to refusal to pay, and more active forms of direct resistance to the state and its collaborators. The Poll Tax can be made unworkable, and just as importantly, the fight can restore the confidence of the working class, and give experience of struggle to millions.

The Last Time They Had a Poll Tax

In 1381, the rulers of England tried to introduce a Poll Tax. This led to the first working-class uprising in history. The serfs, whose labour was now in great demand, demanded wages for it. The uprising spread throughout Southern England, and took London. Many hated politicians and churchmen were summarily executed, and tax records were burnt.

The working class in Britain today is in a less confident state. The ruling class has not been idle for the last 607 years, and has evolved a sophisticated machinery of coercion and negotiation. The Poll Tax is not going to spark off revolution. But there will be widespread resistance to the tax. The more determined and worked out it is, the more effective it will be.

Why Have They Brought in the Tax?

The ruling class knows that capitalism is in crisis. Unlike the sixties, when the economy was in good shape, the current situation requires ruthless attacks on the working class. The Thatcher boom needs a lot of financing. North Sea oil and the money from selling off the state industries will run out. So they have found another source of money: the poor. The Poll Tax is the most vicious yet of the bourgeoisie's methods for transferring money from the poor to the rich.

The other reason is to further increase the power of the central bureaucracy of the state. As the *Financial Times* put it: "Britain will be more than ever, a centrally managed state, with power concentrated in Whitehall".

Lessons from Scotland

The first lesson which opponents of the Poll Tax have learned in Scotland is - don't leave it too late. Anti-Poll Tax groups need to be formed now, to spread information about how to resist the tax, and news about collective resistance, well before registration forms start dropping through people's letter boxes in April 1989. This is essential to build the confidence necessary to resist.

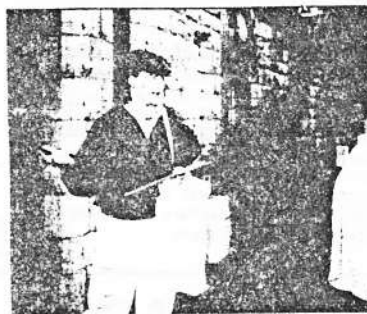
The other lessons are political.

The most important aspect of resistance to the Poll Tax is probably going to be petty, and not particularly illegal. An endless stream of polite correspondence can be remarkably effective at keeping the wolf from the door, if not actually shooting it and making it into a fur coat. Enough legal delays of this kind will cause major headaches, since they just don't have time to answer every letter.

There is going to be a huge increase in local council bureaucracy. This has a habit of getting tied up in knots anyway. This will be especially true if people deliberately bombard it with correspondence.

The courts, particularly in big cities, have problems keeping up with petty cases. This logjam will become an avalanche if enough people resist the Tax. Running totalitarian Britain is not as easy as in 1984. Bureaucratic delays and mix-ups already enable tens of thousands of people to avoid some taxes, bills and fines. The Poll Tax is likely to make matters much worse for the bureaucracy if a conscious and widespread campaign of resistance is organised. However, they'll try to make an example of the first few people found guilty of trying to avoid payment - these should be defended. Attempts to take furniture away should be resisted. Since this is most likely to take place in the poorest households, in places like Toxteth, such resistance is not unlikely.

But less spectacular resistance, most of it not even slightly illegal, is important. When the Poll Tax canvassers come round, DON'T fill in the form on the doorstep. Make an excuse, like



HAS SHE NO SHAME? Poll Tax snooper in Aikenhead Road.

you're late for an appointment. Ask them to leave the form with you. GET THEIR NAMES - canvassers will have to carry ID cards.

Are you named on the form as a "Responsible Person"? If not, ignore it. You are under no obligation to provide information for the time being.

If you are, read the notes on the form about "Responsible Persons". Without providing any information about yourself, write back asking why you have been designated responsible, and ask for details about how to appeal against the decision.

Always wait until the last minute, say 18-19 days, before responding to anything. When you get a reply, wait another 18-19 days before replying. Keep this up until you run out of questions to ask. Question the replies as well as the original form and the notes with it.

There will probably be plenty of badly thought-out and confusing notes on the form, if Scotland is anything to go by. These notes are the basis for polite letters to the authorities attempting to establish whether you are liable to pay the tax. You can ask the meaning of "solely or mainly resident", particularly if anyone who stays with you

- is a student
- is in the services
- goes on residential courses
- has another home
- travels abroad

- is about to leave the address
- is in hospital or in care
- is foreign.

When enquiring about how people staying with you affect your position, reveal as little as possible about them.

There will probably be a note about "Exemptions". This can also be used to cause delay. For example "persons aged 18 in respect of whom child benefit is payable" - you could ask if mothers in receipt of child benefit are exempt. Other exemptions include "persons solely or mainly resident in premises subject to non-domestic rates". You could ask what these are. If anyone either sometimes stays somewhere else like a hostel, or if you live somewhere attached to a hospital, a shop, etc., query if this is covered by an exemption.

Write asking about the rebate system and who is eligible.

Other tactics, of more dubious legality, include

- Returning the form marked "not known at this address". Don't do this in a hurry.
- Refusal to provide information about other people.
- Ignore the form and wait for further developments.

If you are going to do any of these things, it's worth doing the legal ones first.

Whatever you do, keep records of what you've done and written, and when.

The authorities have to warn anyone they think may be deliberately avoiding payment, and there is quite a long process involved before actually being fined. This again is subject to all kinds of delays and legal ways of resisting. If after all this, you do get fined, it's only £50 the first time. You can then ask for time to pay. Financially, the delay in paying the Tax may work out worth it, though obviously you are going to ask whether it's worth getting a criminal record.

Spread this information around your neighbours. In isolation, people believe what the government tells them, and think they're alone. One of the most crucial aspects of fighting the Poll Tax is building confidence and solidarity. Let everyone know they can rely on a network of support.

In Scotland, the government have been telling lies about their success in getting the forms returned. They claimed they'd had 70% back before they'd even distributed this many. They chose middle-class areas first, leaving some of the more difficult estates till last. There will be spectacular news of successful prosecutions, trying to make people believe resistance is impossible, just like the regular clampdowns on dole fiddlers. Don't be intimidated.

Photographing Poll Tax canvassers, taking their names and arguing with them are some of the ways they can be discouraged from snooping on the working class.

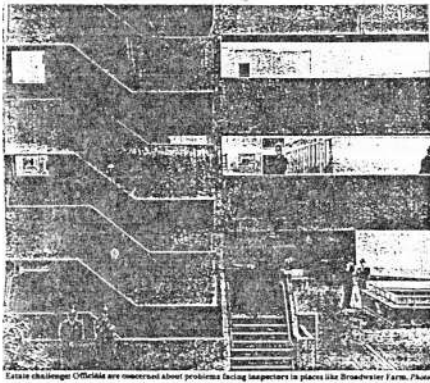
One local council treasurer asked "Would you want to be a poll tax inspector on Broadwater Farm?"

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Anti-Poll Tax Groups

There are various different kinds of anti-Poll Tax group in Scotland, and some have already been formed in England. The first thing that needs to be said about them is that they need a class basis. Working class people can't win struggles by uniting with all sorts of well-meaning people. Anti-Poll Tax groups need to see themselves as part of the struggle of the working class against attacks on its living standards, and link up with workers fighting for pay rises, against job losses, and so on. They need to attempt to persuade workers involved in the Poll Tax collection process to obstruct it. However, resistance will be largely street based rather than workplace based. Most of the work involved in setting up an anti-Poll Tax group is things like door-to-door canvassing, handing out leaflets, organising public meetings, and so on.

Another lesson from the experience in Scotland is the question of political arguments. By the time anti-Poll Tax groups really get off the ground, they'll need to spend all their time organising action. This means certain political arguments have to be sorted out before they start having public meetings. Political arguments cannot be avoided, but people coming to public meetings do not want to hear long discussions about the attitude of the groups to the Labour Party. It is inevitable that splits will occur in the resistance on questions like this, and these should take place as soon as possible.



Estates challenged. Officials are concerned about problems facing inspectors in places like Broadwater Farm, /Photo

The Labour Party claims to oppose the tax, and in Scotland organised a campaign called "Stop It". This inspiring slogan basically means sign petitions and wait till the next general election. Its important to vehemently denounce any official Labour/Trade Union campaign as not just a waste of time, not merely irrelevant, but an attack on the struggle. Labour try to direct people into following useless protests instead of resisting the Tax effectively. In Scotland, militant resisters go to Labour/STUC meetings about the Poll Tax to disrupt them. Obviously, people who support Labour will make it impossible to organise this effectively.

Trade Union officials will say "don't split our resources, build for this demo, that petition, wait for the Labour conference", etc.. These delaying tactics, designed by the Labour Movement to destroy the struggle, will be used south of the border just as they were in Scotland, and we must be prepared to fight them. Key trade unions such as NALGO are already cooperating with the Poll Tax in Scotland by telling members not to resist it.

The Labour Party says don't break the law. Not everyone involved in the resistance will want to break the law. But allowing members of a party which rules out illegality to join any anti-Poll Tax group is suicide.

One of the most important petty acts of resistance to the Poll Tax is to get as many people off the electoral register as possible, since this is one of the main sources of information for snoopers. This may mean not filling in details on all members of the family, or not declaring a lodger. 10% of the population moves every year, and around 25% in the big cities. The government has great difficulty keeping track of mobile people. For short-term residents of private accommodation avoidance may mean simply not putting their names on the electoral registration form. Labour is of course opposed to this.

Labour councillors are already enthusiastically collecting the Tax. Labour controlled Strathclyde regional council says this about work discipline for Poll Tax snoopers: "It is essential that the duties allocated be undertaken with the utmost diligence... sub-standard work will or may result in a termination of employment or withdrawal or reduction of payment." No sub-standard scabbing in Strathclyde, say Socialist scum.

MP attacks poll tax hoax as 'sick joke'

POLICE in Edinburgh are investigating a poll tax hoax which has left at least one elderly person in tears and others alarmed, Mark Douglas Home writes.

Nigel Griffiths, Labour MP for Edinburgh South, has described the hoax as a sick joke. It involves an official-looking form which gives details of an imaginary provision of the poll tax legislation.

Under the heading "urine screening", the form says that for general health purposes those on poll tax registers must provide a urine sample by law after 1 October.

The forms, pushed through letter-boxes in parts of Edinburgh, set out exemptions to the regulations and add: "Failure to provide a relevant urine sample will render the person responsible liable for a civil penalty of £50 or £200 if the offence is repeated."

Attack on poll tax canvasser investigated

STRATHCLYDE Police are investigating an attack on a poll tax canvasser in Glasgow, writes Alan Forbes.

The man had been visiting homes in Pollokshields last Wednesday when he was pounced on by four youths who kicked and punched him.

Police do not know if the incident was directly related to canvassing, but the man had been harassed shortly before the attack in Shields Road.

Mr Jack Wood, Strathclyde's community charge registration officer, said: "I regret what happened to this canvasser. Luckily he was able to return to work next day. This, as far as I know, is the fifth serious incident involving canvassers."

Anti-Tax groups must make it clear from the start where they stand on the Labour Party. Those who won't tolerate Labour Party members must split from those who will.

Many people will agree with what we say about Labour, but ask whether there is not a danger of ending up with very small, ineffective and pure anti-Tax groups. Even if this were true, it would be better than a campaign which can't make up its mind about Labour, and ends up being taken over by the kind of people who "demand" that Labour leads it. But experience in Scotland shows that many people who have never been involved in any kind of activity before become active supporters of local anti-Tax groups. These people will be convinced by active resistance of people who fight, rather than calling on cretins like Kinnock to do it for them.

NATURE CONSERVATION

3IP
EUROPA



SPECIES AT RISK
WILD CAT
(FELIS SILVESTRIS)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Rumours of Wildcat's demise have been greatly exaggerated. However the increased costs of producing our journal and forthcoming pamphlets mean we need an URGENT injection of cash. Existing subscribers are asked to re-subscribe NOW, and all readers are requested to take out subscriptions. £3 for a basic 4-issue sub, £5 for 4 journals plus pamphlets, and £10 for bundles of each issue to sell, plus pamphlets.

WILDCAT CAN BE CONTACTED BY WRITING AS FOLLOWS, WITHOUT MENTIONING THE NAME :

**BM CAT
LONDON
WC1N 3XX**

BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. We are for the abolition of capitalism by communist revolution on a world scale. We are for the destruction of the money/market/wages system which exists in every country in the world, and its replacement by a classless society, in which goods are distributed according to needs and desires. We will abolish the division between work and leisure. The role of revolutionaries is to actively participate in escalating the class war toward this end.
2. We are against all forms of capitalism; private, state and self-managed.
3. We are actively opposed to all ideologies which divide the working class, such as religion.
4. We are actively opposed to all divisions in the working class whereby one section oppresses another, such as sexism and racism.
5. We are against all expressions of nationalism, including national liberation movements such as the IRA.
6. The working class (wage labourers, the unemployed, housewives, etc.), is the revolutionary class; only its struggle can liberate humanity from scarcity, war and economic crisis. We support independent working class struggle, in all areas of life under capitalism, outside the control of the trade unions and all political parties.
7. We are against trade unions because they are part of the capitalist system, selling our labour power to the bosses, and sabotaging our struggles.
8. We totally oppose all capitalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. We are against participation in fronts with these organisations.
9. We are against participation in parliamentary elections; we are for the smashing of the capitalist state by the working class and the establishment of organisations of working class power.
10. We are against sectarianism, and support principled cooperation among revolutionaries.

WAR *For Anarchism* COMMENTARY

17 No. 21. SEPTEMBER 1943. TWOPENCE



BRITISH BOMBING has brought death to many thousands of people in the past few weeks. At Quebec, politicians who provide themselves with shelters well out of reach of bombs, are planning to continue massive bombing as a means of carrying on the "war against fascism".

Hamburg, Milan, Genoa, Turin, are covered with ruins, their streets heaped with bodies and screaming with blood. "Hamburgizing" is coming into use as a new term for wholesale destruction of cities, and the mass murder of their populations through terrorist raids. The Press boasts of the R.A.F.'s power to carry such destruction to all the cities of Germany and Central Europe. It screamed with indignation when the Germans bombed churches and hospitals, but now it gloats over the destruction of entire cities. "In Hamburg there are not fifty houses left untouched by our bombing raids". The Press wept crocodile tears over chained prisoners of war, but when the smell of carnage goes up from once beautiful and populous towns they find words of rejoicing. When the water mains broke in Milan, and flooded the centre of the city, they find it a subject for a joke. "Like Milan" the clever journalist calls it. "What does it matter to him if "the water is flowing between the ruins and the debris of bombed buildings, and people living in the district were forced to remain in the wreckage of their homes for four days until the water

from complete opposition to all sides in the war, and all parties who supported it.

Though full of woolly anarchist phrases like "people" and "freedom", Berneri in practice sides with the working class against capitalism, and argues for international solidarity. As well as attacking the mass murder of German civilians by the British war machine, she links the bombing of Italy by the Allies with the class struggle against the fascist regime. There was widespread class struggle in Italy in 1943, involving strikes, the sabotage of war industries, telephones and transport. When Mussolini failed to crush the working class, the job was carried out by British bombers and then German stormtroopers.

After the defeat of Germany, Berneri reported on the treatment of the conquered population by the Allied administration. She provides us with all the ammunition we need to oppose the official democratic/Zionist lie that the fascist regimes were in any sense worse than their opponents.

However she makes the classic error of arguing that the democratic powers weren't really democratic. This leads to some confused formulations: "Every defeat for the capitalist class is a defeat for fascism". Arguments like this are dangerous. Since the USA obviously was more democratic than Germany or Japan in any meaningful sense of the word, strikes in the USA were more harmful to democracy than to fascism. In fact those who argue that

strikes on the home front temporarily help the other side have got a point. Unless you are absolutely clear that the working class must be just as against democracy as against fascism, you could easily be persuaded that the struggle against capitalism must be postponed until fascism has been defeated. If you support democracy against fascism, you support the bombing of Hamburg and Hiroshima.



Cartoons by John Olday.

The same error about capitalism not being really democratic was committed at the same time by the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation. In our pamphlet on this group, we didn't criticise them enough on this point. Still, on many other things, the APCF were clearer than *War Commentary*. The APCF pamphlet is available from us, price £1.50 inc. p&p, and we will shortly be publishing a pamphlet of extracts from it in Persian. □

Review: Neither East Nor West. Marie-Louise Berneri. Freedom Press 1988.

The articles in this book reveal the strong points and the weaknesses of the anarchist movement of its time. Marie-Louise Berneri was an Italian anti-war activist who opposed the Second World War through the pages of *War Commentary* published in London. At no point did she deviate

SPLIT IN WILDCAT: COUNCILISM IN DECAY

"To delegate is to give up the possibility of direct action" *Battaglia Comunista*.



This is a reply by Wildcat to the article about workers' democracy written by a comrade in London which we published in *Wildcat* 11. We have two disagreements with it.

Firstly, the article advocates a system of revocable delegates. But this is no recipe for communism. What matters is the content of what a delegate does. If the mass assemblies instruct their delegates to do the right things, that's alright. But no communist delegate would accept a mandate just because its an expression of the mass of the workers voting in workers' councils. He or she would only accept it if they agreed with it. Why should a

communist accept a mandate to do things which are anti-communist? Only a democrat could accept this. Just as, at present, we do whatever we can for the class struggle, regardless of the views of the majority of those around us, so in the revolution, when we will have the power to do a lot more, we will act in the interests of communism, whether mandated by the majority or not.

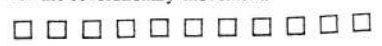
The second point we disagree on is where the article says our critique of democracy must distinguish itself from Leninism, implying this is another anti-democratic idea. But Leninism is a democratic ideology. The comrade quotes Lenin to the effect that the party seeks power for itself. We too attack him for this. But this isn't undemocratic. Democracy is quite compatible with dictatorship, and Lenin's works are full of references to "democratic dictatorship", "the democratic revolution", and so on. During elections groups influenced by Lenin denounce the bourgeoisie as not really democratic, calling on workers to fight for a more democratic system which really represents the interests of the working class. We not only "distinguish" our critique of democracy from the Leninists, we attack Leninism as a democratic ideology.

How Subversive is Subversion?

We have seen the first issue of a magazine called *Subversion*, produced by ex-members of Wildcat. We want to answer the things they say about Wildcat, and more importantly, say the things they miss out. They say *Wildcat* is the product of one individual. This is irresponsible and false. Wildcat is a politically active group - producing leaflets, addressing workers' meetings, intervening against leftists, holding public meetings, taking part in picket lines around the country, and continuing the international work of the group.

More seriously, *Subversion* continues to avoid taking a stand on the issues on which they prevaricated while they were in our group, like whether to support teachers or democracy. As a result, some of them admit that they are for workers' democracy, although their paper reproduces a Wildcat leaflet on the strikes in Britain in early 1988 which specifically and for sound practical reasons attacks it. They are so non-sectarian that they reproduce leaflets they disagree with, without criticism: "...we prefer to reprint them without comment and instead invite our readers to send in their own contributions".

This is called liberalism. It is no way forward for the revolutionary movement.



SLAV REVOLT

Yugoslavia is in crisis. This is manifesting itself in nationalist conflict and class struggle.

Inflation stands at 189%, unemployment is 15%, the deficit is estimated at \$21bn, and the recent austerity measures have raised the prices of electricity, gas, petrol and consumer goods. The Yugoslav economy is about to reach the "red zone", where 25% of hard currency earnings are required to service debt.

Despite successive attempts to reduce the economic inequalities between the various nations and regions which make up Yugoslavia, differences between them have deepened. This has produced intense resentment, which the regime has deliberately tried to keep on the nationalist terrain. Rich republics like Croatia are forced to hand over a proportion of their oil and gas to other regions, whilst some of their own plants stand idle. They resent this "reverse discrimination" in favour of their poor neighbours. Kosovo, with 1.7m Albanians and 200,000 Serbs, is the poorest region in the country. The "Albanisation" process initiated by Kosovo intellectuals has given way to racist persecution of Serbs. 30,000 have fled since 1981. Many of the ethnic Albanians feel they have gained nothing from the huge Western loans and see no reason why they should pay for them. Both Croats and Albanians feel, for different reasons, internally colonised.

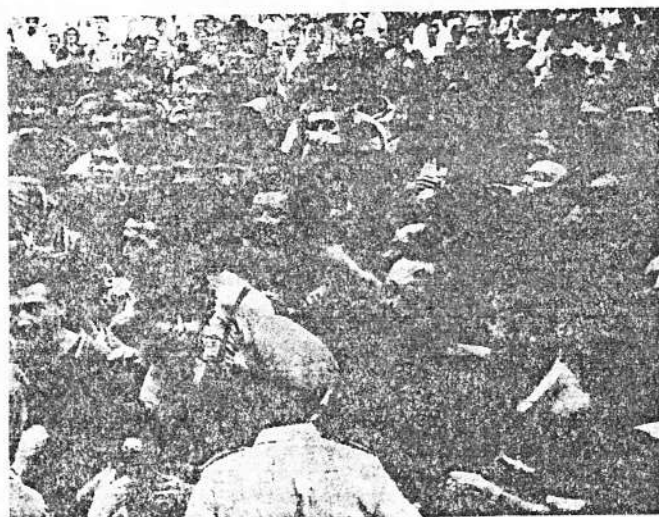
WORKERS FIGHT BACK

Scenes reminiscent of the Russian revolution, in which workers shouted "we want bread", have been enacted outside the federal Parliament in Belgrade. At last the localised nature of previous struggles in Yugoslavia is giving way to international strikes and solidarity movements. The Croatian workers marched not on their own republican capital, but on the federal capital, Belgrade. After storming parliament and publically declaring the sacking of "the entire management of their leather and shoe industry... as well as local government and Communist Party officials", they were joined by 900 Vojvodinian and 1200 Serbian workers.

The bourgeoisie have been attempting to channel the anger of the workers into dead-ends. The first of these is trade unionism. For example, the 5000 striking workers from the Zmaj tractor factory were organised by the factory's official trade union, and registered in advance with the police. Nonetheless the mood of the workers was far from trade unionist. Shouting down the deputy prime minister, the workers declared:

"We want no more phrases... you are thieves. Return the villas you have built. Return the money you have stolen from the people. We want changes."

The second major dead-end is the deadly quagmire of nationalism. While in the '70's nationalism was ruthlessly crushed, it is a measure of the bourgeoisie's desperation that today it is encouraging it to derail the class struggle. For example, thousands of Montenegrins and Serbs were encouraged to take up arms against the Albanians of Kosovo.



10,000 workers demonstrate outside parliament

In 1987 there were 1570 strikes involving some 365,000 workers. The IMF's proposal to lift the current pay freeze and deregulate 90% of prices by 1990 will further provoke the class struggle. Yugoslavia was originally seen by Gorbachev as the very model of "market socialism". Now the market socialists think that nothing less than a full-blown Western market economy will do. He can only look on in horror as stronger and stronger doses of market discipline have less and less effect on the country's state of political crisis and class warfare. He has seen the future, and it doesn't work.

Democracy where voting is just not worth the bother

Reuter in Washington

DWINDLING public interest in politics has put the United States, which sees itself as a shining example of democracy, at the bottom of the world's democratic voter league.

Voter turnout has dropped steadily over the past 20 years, despite the hoopla of American election campaigns. Republicans hold their convention in New Orleans this week amid predictions that more than half the electorate will stay away from the November 8 presidential ballot.

"There is every likelihood that turnout in November will be the lowest in 40 years, perhaps the lowest in 60 years," said Mr Curtis Gans, director of the Washington-based Committee for the Study of the American Electorate. "I wouldn't be surprised if turnout fell below 50 per cent for the first time in presidential elections."

Mr Gans said one of the reasons for the record low turnout he expected was the fact that the contest between the Democratic Party's Mr Michael Dukakis, and the Republican, Mr George Bush, was being portrayed by the media as "a race between a shrimp and a wimp."

But according to Mr Gans, a leading analyst of voter behaviour, and other political scientists, there are deeper roots for a widespread lack of interest.

Some political analysts argue that comparisons between the United States and other democracies are misleading because US citizens must register to vote while those in most other countries are automatically registered by the state.

But in the one US state where no prior registration is needed, North Dakota, turnout in elections has been dropping even more steeply than in the rest of the nation.

"Quite simply, for many Americans voting just

doesn't seem worth the bother," an election analyst, Ruy Teixeira, said in the latest issue of Public Opinion magazine.

"A basic lack of engagement with politics is still with us. It could be that Americans' disenchantment with politics is... getting deeper as time goes on."

Turnout in presidential elections dropped from 62.8 per cent in 1960 to 53.1 per cent in 1984. In mid-term elections, the number of voters declined from 48.1 per cent in 1962 to 37 per cent in 1986. This means that 104 million Americans did not bother to vote two years ago.

In comparison, Austria, Denmark, Finland, West Germany, Israel, Holland, Sweden, Norway and New Zealand all have participation rates of more than 80 per cent of eligible voters.

In France, which has a voter registration system similar to that of the United States, turnout is regularly above 70 per cent.



A poster against the Iran/Iraq war produced and distributed by some comrades in Bristol, who can be contacted at: BOX 36, 37 Stokes Croft, Bristol BS1 3PY.

The Wildcat group will be holding a series of meetings on the peace in the Gulf and the problem of Imperialism in November. Write to our address (see p.6) for details.

USSR

UNEMPLOYMENT

SPEED-UPS

STRIKES

RESISTANCE

The recent publication of accounts of the massacre of striking workers in the Khrushchev era shows that the Gorbachev faction in the USSR are as genuinely committed to openness as any democratic reformers. The sacking and bringing to trial of numerous highly placed corrupt officials, including the son in law of the late Leonid Brezhnev, and the proposed closing of special shops for the party élite show that they are equally committed to confronting bureaucratic graft and inefficiency. For the first two years or so of Gorbachev's reign 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' seemed to be largely cosmetic but the events of the last year have shown that there has been a real shift in policy on the part of the Soviet ruling class.

From its origins in the defeat of the Russian revolution by the Leninists the Soviet Union has faced one central problem - how to run capitalist society without the usual market mechanisms: enterprise profitability, private investment and a free labour market, i.e. unemployment and labour mobility. The absence of an enterprise profit motive has created an army of bureaucrats (enterprise managers and party officials) whose interests lie in appearing to fulfil the official plan rather than in producing goods that are usable. In 1985 the quantity of unsaleable goods mouldering in warehouses was reckoned to be equivalent to 118 days of industrial production. This has the interesting side effect that USSR economic statistics have very little meaning. In the West a figure like '10,000 washing machines' would at least refer to 10,000 washing machines that worked, not so in the USSR. The fact that everyone has had a guaranteed job has meant that proper labour discipline has been impossible to enforce. Extensive use of the secret police has made it hard for the working class to organise itself against capital on a large scale, but actually getting the workers to work is another matter. Getting them to turn up to work sober is hard enough. The wages that the workers are paid are not in "real money" in the usual sense. On the one hand the basic necessities of life (housing, food, transport, health care) are heavily subsidised. On the other, luxury goods, with the obvious exception of vodka, are either of pathetically low quality or completely unavailable except through the black market which runs on barter and hard currency (real money). This means that even if workers are paid more the additional Roubles are not of much use to them. In the '70's there were a whole series of strikes which resulted in substantial pay rises being granted almost immediately, in each case followed by a round-up of 'ringleaders' by the police.

Russian workers have a saying for all this - "They pretend to pay us and we pretend to work".

For capitalism, the obvious way to deal with this situation is to introduce some market discipline. This is what 'perestroika' is all about. But this is easier said than done. It involves vigorously attacking the working class on two fronts - removing subsidies on necessities and introducing unemployment by allowing unprofitable businesses to go bankrupt and drastically cutting jobs in the state bureaucracy. It also involves turning a stratum of bureaucratic managers used to a lifetime of corrupt wheeling and dealing into "responsible" entrepreneurs.

The secret policemen's ball

In theory Soviet society is planned. In practice Five Year plans are no more than wishful thinking and civil society is just as much of a "war of all against all" as it is in the West. In fact the USSR is in some ways an even more atomised society than the West with the secret police still playing a key role in holding it all together

along with the Army and the Party. Today the KGB are probably the most powerful backers of glasnost and perestroika, although the role of far-sighted Party officials and academics (such as Sorin, who has been openly writing about the question of labour discipline and the need for market mechanisms for many years) is also important. It is no coincidence that reforms began to be applied under Andropov, who had been the head of the KGB, or that Gorbachev was a protégé of Andropov.

It may seem odd that the secret police should be champions of openness and individual freedom (i.e. the market) but this is no more contradictory than the numerous occasions across the world (Portugal 1974, Argentina 1984...) where a clique of generals have suddenly decided that democracy is the way forward. It should be remembered that the main function of the secret police in the USSR has been the maintenance of economic discipline, under Stalin they virtually ran the economy. serious reform of the system in the USSR would mean a massive extension in their role, as well as relieving them of some of their more tedious duties such as harassing dissident intellectuals and religious nutters. Under Brezhnev things were allowed to slide, with corrupt enterprise managers and regional party bosses allowed to do as they pleased. With the installation of Andropov the KGB were given a freer hand. They will also have a vital role to play in crushing working class resistance to reforms.

The intellectuals

Gorbachev has made himself a hero to the ideology-producing strata - 'opinion formers' as they are called in the West - not least by granting many of them hefty pay rises (doctors and scientists in 1985, teachers in 1987). He has not merely allowed but encouraged intellectuals to make criticisms of the system. He has let dissidents out of gaol (leaving stropky proles in there, of course) and



allowed freedom for artists. He is doing all this at the same time as calling for the harshest discipline against the workers. His message to the intellectuals can be summed up as "stick with me and the police repression will be taken away from you and directed onto the working class, where it belongs". The intellectuals are obviously not slow to back a fraction which stands for a free market in ideas as well as TV sets, in the West this is called freedom of speech.

At the moment, though, the intellectuals are still too timid to play the role that they do in the West - encouraging participation in the State by raising issues, stimulating debate, investigative journalism and so on. Most of them are such grovelling hacks that they make Channel 4 News look like courageous opponents of the Thatcher regime. In March the newspaper Sovetskaya Rossiya published a letter from a Leningrad schoolteacher condemning glasnost. Gorbachev was visiting Yugoslavia at the time and liberal intellectuals immediately ran for cover fearing an end to the tide of reform. For three weeks not a single criticism of the letter appeared until Pravda gave the green light to 'criticism' once again by publishing an article vigorously backing reforms and attacking the teacher's views.

The crisis

If waste, poor quality of production and poor labour discipline have been a problem for many decades, why is it only now that there is a drive for reforms? The short

answer is that the system is in crisis. When we speak of "crisis", whether in one part of capital or in all of it, we don't just mean that the economy is in a bad state, that the profit margin on molybdenum widgets is now only 7.3% or whatever. We mean that the ruling class are in a position where they cannot carry on ruling without risking a major confrontation with the working class, or are already experiencing one. Mass unemployment does not make a crisis, what makes a crisis is the response of the unemployed and the workers threatened by unemployment.

The main causes of the crisis in the USSR are:

- 1) In the past the economy has expanded by means of an expansion of the labour force. This has now reached the stage where the workforce can no longer be augmented from the farms, the home or elsewhere. The result is that new factories cannot be built as there is not the labour to do it, slowing down the introduction of new technology. Goods are thus produced with out of date machinery which results in goods of even lower quality than usual. This creates greater pressure on the repair and spare parts sector, which also cannot get the necessary labour.
- 2) The economy is now more integrated than ever before. This means that failure to deliver on time, construct to specification and repair as requested has greater effects than ever before.
- 3) As a result of 1) and 2) the strength of the workers can only increase. They are in a position where their labour is in greater demand than ever and they are in a stronger position to disrupt the economy. A further factor is that, at a time when the capitalists in the West are increasingly making use of decentralised production, small work-places and small firms to atomise the workers, most workers in Russia still work in massive plants.

The Chernobylity

So what will the ruling class try to do about all this? From a technical point of view they need to set about replacing labour with machinery to solve the labour shortage. They could try doing this using just the resources of the USSR's economy by increasing the output of sophisticated machine tools and the like. This approach, though, would inevitably be doomed to failure since it would initially require more labour, particularly skilled labour, rather than less. Clearly they will try to get their sophisticated plant and machinery from the West, along with consumer goods which they need if workers are to be paid in real money. This requires hard currency, which the Soviet economy is not in a good position to get hold of through trade since, for reasons already discussed, it cannot produce very much that the West wants apart from raw materials. The most important of these is oil, natural gas and related products, which account for around 50% of the USSR's exports. The USSR suffers from the same problem as any other petroleum producer, the recession in the West means shrinking markets and so falling prices. Much of the hard currency that is earned has to be spent on food imports from the West and this situation has been considerably worsened by the Chernobyl disaster which occurred right in the middle of one of the most productive agricultural regions.

The other obvious way of obtaining hard currency is the 'Chinese option' of going all out to encourage investment by Western companies and securing massive loans from Western banks. It is highly likely this strategy will be tried. Whether it will work is another matter. The banks are pouring money into enough 'non-performing assets' as it is. The real problem is that banks and corporations will not consider the Soviet Union worth investing in unless free market conditions already exist. For example, there is no point in building a shining new high-tech factory unless you can recruit from a local pool of workers who are terrorised by unemployment. The development of a Western-style economy is proving much easier in China because its economy is still largely rural with collectivisation of agriculture tending to mean collective production for the market. The encouragement of individual farming has led to a small minority of peasants becoming rich capitalists, who hire and fire labour as they see fit, and many more to be ruined, in other words: turned into proletarians.

So much for what the ruling class need to do, but what have they actually achieved so far apart from a mountain of verbiage?

In theory enterprises are supposed to function much more as independent profit centres with managers having more autonomy in trading with other enterprises, planning pro-

duction and being responsible for the quality of goods produced. This is known as the New Economic Mechanism, or NEM, a conscious echo of the NEP of the 1920's. In practice the absence of unemployment means that they do not have the control over labour to effect much change. There have been a few spectacular successes at prestige sites such as the gigantic, 125,000 worker Vaz car plant in Togliatti. But prestige sites are in a position to get whatever resources are needed to make them look good and can make use of non-financial incentives to increase productivity, such as package holidays and company rest homes.

NEITHER ARMENIA NOR AZERBAIJAN BUT AUTONOMOUS

CLASS STRUGGLE!

The men in the Kremlin don't regard the rise of various nationalist movements in the USSR as entirely a bad thing. Increased national autonomy can be a step towards a more competitive economic system. It can also cause discontent over poverty, growing unemployment and pollution to be diverted into nationalist demands rather than class struggle.

The recent mass strikes in Armenia appear to have had a completely reactionary aim: the transfer of the region of Nagorno-Karabakh from the control of the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic to Armenia. This was partly an expression of the desire of the Armenian inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh, the poorest province of a poor republic, to live in a more industrially developed republic. If national autonomy is granted to the various local ruling classes these economic disparities will increase leading to more "unresolved national questions".

But glasnost has opened a Pandora's box of suppressed political yearnings, and the same crisis which produces nationalist ferment generates working class resistance. Historically the two things happen together. In recent demonstrations in the Ukraine, nationalist demands like defence of the Ukrainian language were mixed with denunciations of the 1929-85 period and the demise of the Soviets as "counter-revolutionary". If the proletariat breaks free of nationalist movements to press forward its own interests, the Russian empire will again be haunted by the spectre of 1905.

Drunkenness As Class Struggle

Repression against lazy workers has been stepped up with, in some places, cops roaming the bars looking for people to chase back to work. Gorbachev's measures against drunkenness and restrictions on the sale of alcohol have earned him the nickname "Lemonade Joe".

At the same time the State has tried to encourage genuinely private enterprise by means of allowing co-ops to be set up. In the past year the number of these has increased from 4,000 to 30,000.

The USSR's foreign policy has come to be increasingly dominated by the need to free resources for restructuring by means of cuts in defence spending, which *Pravda* has admitted consumes 19% of the GDP. It is this which has led to accommodation with the US in the form of the INF Treaty, attempts to limit long range missiles and reduce conventional forces and the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

All this, though, has done nothing to reduce the chronic shortage of consumer goods and the government has recently announced a crash program to overcome this. The official news agency TASS recently admitted that:

"Shortages were supposed to decline because of changes in the structure of the economy, but so far efforts to eliminate the shortages have not succeeded."

The ruling class are presently so concerned about the discontent arising from this that a leading economic adviser Nikolay Shmelov, has seriously suggested that a massive increase in imports of consumer goods should be financed by selling off the gold reserves!



Even if the necessary consumer goods can be obtained there is no guarantee that this will have much effect on the class struggle. In Poland there have been three separate waves of intense class struggle, 1970-71, 1976, 1980-82, which have all been responded to, in part, by the government securing loans from Western banks and making consumer goods more available. Each time this has failed. At the time of writing Polish workers are in struggle once again (see below). In China too there is growing unrest. According to the police in Guangdong province (SE China) there has been an:

"..alarming increase in strikes and public protest over price rises and present wage levels in the province which pose a serious threat to law and order."

Strikes are virtually an everyday occurrence in the Shenzhen special economic zone (SEZ) opposite Hong Kong. This is one of the first four SEZ's created by the government of China between 1979 and 1982 which between them received 60% of direct foreign investment. Struggle by these workers strikes at the very heart of China's modernisation program.

The opening up of the "Socialist" (read "inefficient autarchic capitalist") countries to the world market will mean that their fate is tied more and more to the condition of the Western sector of the world economy. This means that there will be a more and more direct link between working class struggles in these countries and our struggles here in the 'West'. It will also make the bullshit about rival political systems increasingly transparent as all the world's rulers come to speak the same language of "enterprise" and "freedom of choice".

POLAND

The Phoenix & The Fireman

As we go to press Poland is undergoing the second major wave of workers' struggles this year. Like the movement in May 88 it has been mostly based on the industrial centres which played a key role in the mass strike of 1980-81, the Nowa Huta steel mill near Krakow, the port of Szczecin, the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk, the Silesian coalfields and the town of Bydgoszcz where, in 1981, proletarians fought police and Solidarnosc officials to free comrades from the local prison.

The strikes began on 16 August when 3000 miners at the Manifest Lipcowy pit in Jastrzebie, Silesia occupied it. Within three days the strike had spread to five more pits in the region despite attempts by the police to seal off the colliery. The miners appealed to the local population to bring them food, distributing a leaflet saying

"The miners of Manifest Lipcowy make demands concerning our lives and our right to live in dignity and a life without queues and increasing prices".

Mr Urban also reported the first death in the strike wave that began on 15 August. He said a policeman died on Wednesday at the strike-bound Stalowa Wola steel mill, 120 miles south of Warsaw. It was not known if the policeman was killed or committed suicide "under psychological and physical terror". A Solidarity spokesman said the policeman got drunk and shot himself.

Many miners returned to work within a few days but by then the strike had spread to transport workers and dockers in Szczecin. On Friday 19 August there was a mass meeting at the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk which led to a strike the following Monday. During the next few days, Lech Walesa, who still works as an electrician at the yard, said repeatedly that the strikes could be called off if the government took steps towards the re-recognition of the Solidarnosc union. At the same time the government of Hungary moved quickly to prevent the struggle from internationalising by giving in to all the demands of miners in the Mecsek coalfields, who were on strike over pay cuts and pit closures.

On 31 August the Polish state once again called on the services of the "flying fireman". Walesa met the Interior Minister, General Kiszczak, at a government villa in Warsaw, supposedly to discuss the union's recognition. After three hours he called for an end to the strikes. In Gdansk the effect was dramatic. Thousands of shipyard workers marched through the streets singing patriotic songs behind a huge cross. But even here Walesa was booed and heckled and 400 workers remained on strike demanding guarantees of no victimisation.

At Manifest Lipcowy, miners initially stayed out for the same reason, but two days later Walesa personally drove down to meet them and persuade them to go back to work. The Pope's favourite trade union leader is up to his old tricks on behalf of Polish and international capitalism.



Walesa hits out at his critics

Michal Broniatowski in Gdansk

SOLIDARITY leader Lech Walesa yesterday told workers to stop criticising his efforts at dialogue with Poland's authorities and vowed to suppress any attempts to foment new labour unrest.

Speaking after Mass in Gdansk, Mr Walesa said Poland had an unprecedented opportunity to introduce political and economic reforms through an accord between the government and opposition. He hit back at his critics a day after successfully ending Poland's worst strike wave in seven years. He

persuaded coalminers, bus drivers, and port workers to end their stoppages.

"Poland does not need strikes. I know that we need a struggle, but it must be a struggle that does not turn against us," Mr Walesa told a rally of about 5,000 people outside St Brigid's church.

"You wanted more, especially my adversaries, who wanted to strike an even harder blow. But I am not going to toy with Poland... I extinguished the strikes, and I will extinguish any others that happen."

Mr Walesa urged an end to the strikes on August 31 after he held his first talks with the

authorities since 1982. The Interior Minister, General Czeslaw Kiszczak, told him the government was ready to consider re-legislating Solidarity, banned under martial law in 1981.

Mr Walesa's back-to-work appeal provoked anger among radical young strikers who launched their protests independently of Solidarity.

Mr Walesa said: "I have not been a traitor, and I will not be a traitor. There must be a victory, but at a low price. One cannot make jokes or take risks."

In Warsaw, meanwhile, the government news agency reported that a post-mortem on a Polish plainclothes policeman shot dead last week at the Stalowa Wola steelworks occupied by Solidarity strikers revealed that he had first been beaten. Lieutenant Mieczyslaw Turbakiewicz, was killed by a bullet in the head last Wednesday. He was the only fatality of the labour unrest. — Reuter.

BURMA

A Hungry Mob Is A Angry Mob



September 1988.

"There is nobody keeping order in Rangoon now" one diplomat reported. "It's in a state of peaceful and happy anarchy."

The uprising in Burma started because of a very simple problem: lack of food. Children ran in front of troops shouting "We can't get rice, so you may as well shoot us". When they actually did so, the proletariat and all sorts of other people erupted onto the streets, attacked police stations, publically beheaded their inhabitants, disarmed soldiers and looted and distributed the necessities of life. Mass strikes of workers paralysed the economy.

Whatever concessions the government made only encouraged the insurgents. Appalling massacres by the hard core of the army only spurred them on to further acts of revolutionary heroism. The army retreated to its barracks, and government collapsed throughout most of the country.

Out of a population of 38 million, Burma has approximately 5 million non-agricultural workers, and there must be many more agricultural proletarians. We don't know to what extent the working class, employed and unemployed, has acted autonomously from the various other classes involved in the current uprising. If it has, the media will have censored the fact. The British press version of events is that the students, inflamed by a deep passion for democracy, decided to incite a mass uprising, and off it went. This is exactly how they portrayed the proletarian uprising in Korea in 1982. It is obvious that the working class is central to the events in Burma. We can say little more at present with the limited information at our disposal.

Police Lose Their Heads

Despite reports of desertion and fraternisation, the basic structure of the army remains intact. It is clearly being kept in waiting by the ruling class. Various opposition politicians have sprung up. Nationalist leader Aung San's daughter Aung San Suu Kyi has flown in from Oxford, where she has been worrying about the Burmese poor for the last twenty years. The League for Democracy and Peace is trying to pacify the population, telling them the bad old days are over. When the danger of revolution has passed, the bourgeoisie will take its revenge.



The first British newspaper photograph of the height of the Burma state shows troops in Rangoon advancing with bayonet fixed on demonstrators who were trying to join forces with the army. Many were injured in the past. Another journalist, Tessa, says as Burma prepares for a new year: "The...

Wildcat

★★★

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At the time of writing, the situation appears to be stalemate. Although in the first days of the uprising workers armed themselves by attacking police stations, a mass workers' militia has not been formed. A revolutionary group in a situation like Burma would try to get a militia organised, controlled by mass organs of militant proletarians, to dissolve the army and disarm the bourgeoisie. It would have to ensure food supplies for the mass of the population, and aim for a rapid spreading of the revolution to other countries.



The proletariat of South-East Asia needn't passively suffer the fate of the Vietnamese boat people. In Korea, the working class demonstrated its power to shake the state. In Burma, it came close to overthrowing it. The lessons cannot be lost on the suffering masses of Vietnam, Thailand and China. The proletariat has the power to destroy the bloodstained regimes of the region and lead the masses in a communist revolution. This can start just about anywhere, not just in the most industrialised countries. Peaceful and happy anarchy will have to be postponed until the dictatorship of the proletariat has eliminated all traces of capitalism from the planet.