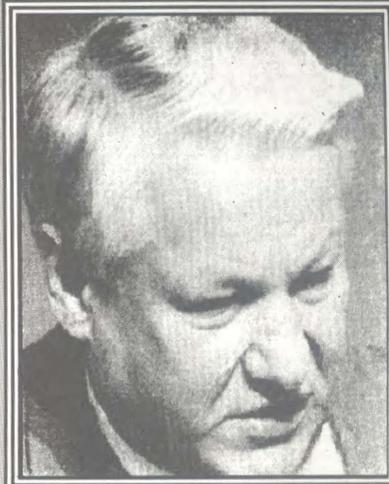


CLASS STRUGGLE

VOL.15 NO.8 SEPTEMBER 1991

30P



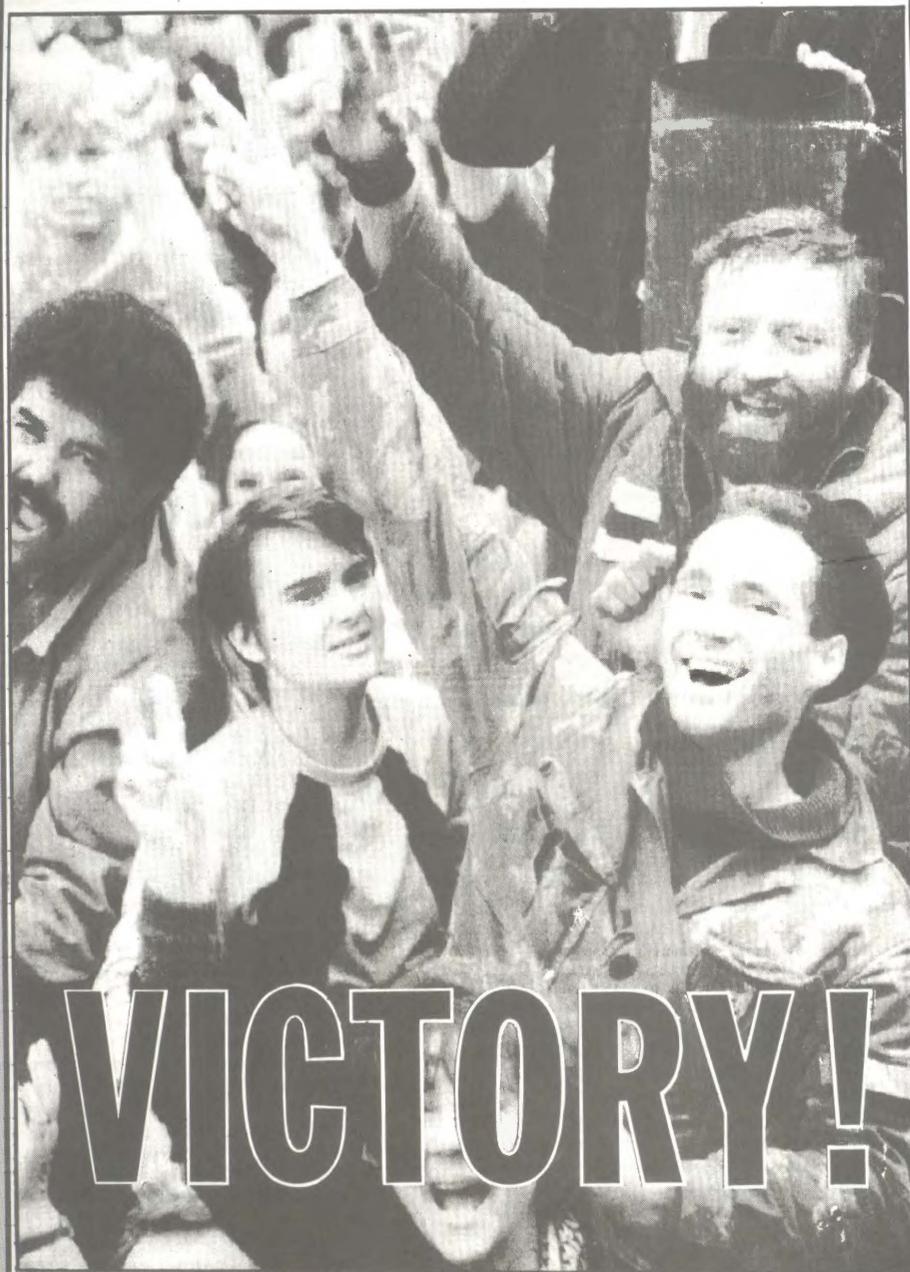
THE PARTY IS
OVER — YELTSIN'S
VERDICT

INSIDE

Home truths
on housing

Midland bank
in arms deal
scandal

NHS — stop
opt-out plan



FASCIST COUP DEFEATED...

PEOPLE CELEBRATE SOVIET DIS-UNION

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No to fascism —

The League condemns the attempt on 19th August to organise a coup in the Soviet Union. We welcome the successful resistance; the dismantling of the power of the "Communist Party" of the Soviet Union and its administration and the greater democracy and independence for the fifteen republics of the Soviet Union that has followed.

● The coup was organised by key elements in the ruling class of the Soviet Union: the "Communist" Party, the armed forces, the KGB and key people in the military/industrial complex. The declaration by the 'Gang of Eight' removed democratic rights, such as the right to demonstrate and publish papers and imposed a state of emergency in certain key areas of the Soviet Union. It aimed to use military force to suppress democracy and moves to independence by the republics.

The "Communist" Party of the Soviet Union has long turned into a social-fascist ruling party, with no trace of genuine socialism, communism or even democracy. In this sense, the coup was an attempt to re-impose fascism on the Soviet people.

● The timing of the coup was decided because of the new Union Treaty that was due to be signed on 20th August. This treaty would have formalised the process of shifting power from the centre to the republics, in both political and economic terms. It represented a decentralisation of power and limited recognition of national rights and autonomy and was a progressive move that was to be supported.

In a more general way, the leaders of the coup aimed to reverse the process started by glasnost and perestroika. The ruling class in the Soviet Union, particularly the "Communist" Party has attempted to block any genuine progress to greater democracy and economic change as a threat to their own power.

● We support the resistance to the coup on the basis that this was a struggle between bourgeois democracy and social fascism. Resistance to the coup had a popular basis as people fought against returning to a more repressive system.

We also support the role played by Boris Yeltsin in rallying opposition and providing leadership to the resistance. Most Soviet politicians are divorced from the people and wheeling and dealing has been their method of work, particularly Gorbachev. Yeltsin made a clear and courageous statement of opposition to the coup and led the resistance at least in Russia. He made a direct appeal to the people and showed great personal courage.

Resistance was widespread in other areas, particularly in the Baltic states and in Leningrad. Many working people supported the call to resistance, particularly the miners who went on strike. Oil workers, too, were considering their course of action. In Leningrad, a limited general strike was called and won widespread support.

Many of the local governments and ruling parties in the republics refused to recognise the leaders of the coup. Both the Ukraine and Georgia, for example, either refused to recognise the 'Gang of Eight' or opposed it. Others kept silent to see the outcome and only a minority supported the coup leaders.

The growth of democracy within the Soviet Union over the last few years, in particular the struggle for independence of the Baltic states and others, had eroded central power so that it was in fact impossible for fascism to be reimposed in the old way. However, the rapid defeat of the coup was determined by the resistance in Russia itself, particularly events in Moscow.

● Although there was popular support for the resistance, there were also considerable behind-the-scenes negotiations, particularly between Yeltsin's group and the armed forces. The splits in the army reflected the fact that the centre of the struggle was between the Soviet government and the Russian Parliament. The Soviet army had previously shown no such reluctance to shoot down people in other areas, like the Baltics and Azerbaijan.

● Yeltsin played a progressive role in support of democracy and national independence for the

Yes to democracy



republics. There is also a negative side to Yeltsin's position, particularly Russian chauvinism which may become primary in the future.

● The main focus of the struggle has been on the destruction of the power of the old ruling class. Within the democracy movement, there are clearly reactionary elements which will become the main focus for struggle in the future.

● The EEC condemned the coup and stopped aid. The USA prevaricated and it was clear that they were prepared to "do business" with the coup leaders who they saw as holding power. Their support

for democracy and freedom was once again shown to be hypocritical.

● Some people welcomed the overthrow of Gorbachev primarily because of the role that he has played internationally, giving support to the USA, particularly in the Middle East. In the long term, although the Soviet Union could act as a counterweight to the USA in some situations, it could not act as a progressive force in support of liberation movements. Therefore although in the short term its support for the USA creates problems, this cannot be a decisive factor in which stand we take in

relation to the coup.

● Since the defeat of the coup and the return of Gorbachev, events are moving fast. Gorbachev's power and its base within the "Communist" party and central government has been reduced, if not destroyed.

The coup achieved the opposite of what it aimed for: the destruction of the Soviet Union in its old form. While there are obvious dangers in the new situation, particularly the growth of Russian dominance, it also lays the basis for popular struggles to extend and defend democracy and independence.

EAST BIRMINGHAM HOSPITAL

Patients & staff oppose opt-out plan

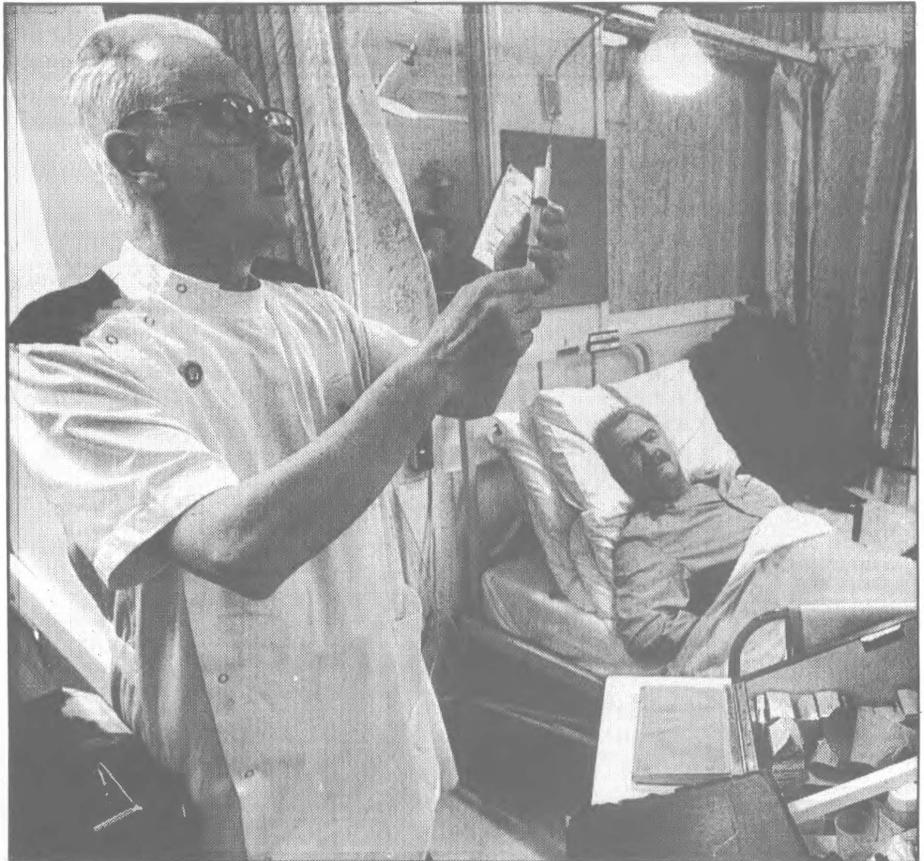
In Birmingham, there has been a strong campaign to stop the opt-out of the local East Birmingham hospital. We asked a shop steward involved in this campaign to explain what had been done during the three month consultation period, to try and prevent the hospital becoming a self-governing trust:

Although the consultation period was from late June until late August, we were clear that we had to get organised early. We started planning our campaign in March. We managed to unify all the staff organisations on site and co-ordinated with groups in the local community, such as the pensioners' organisation, the local Labour Party, the local Liberal party and the Community Health Council. Our aim was to decide to do a limited number of things, do them well and get maximum media coverage. We planned things so that they were spread throughout the three month period. We also learned lessons from campaigns against the first wave of hospital trusts.

Within the hospital a series of campaigning bulletins were put out to all staff to warn them of the danger to their pay and conditions. An open meeting was held on site to give staff a chance to ask questions and get involved. Individual unions also did propaganda work amongst their members. A secret ballot was held amongst staff. 70% of the staff voted. Of these, 91% were opposed to opting-out. That result was obtained after management had run hour-long presentations to all staff to try and get them to support the trust.

A very well supported public meeting was held in the community.

An exit poll of patients and visitors coming to the hospital on one day, was carried out. 1,800 people voted and once again over 90% opposed the trust.



Every household in the hospital catchment area was leafleted by the Community Health Council. That leaflet had a tear-off response slip, of which over 1,000 were returned, once again showing an opposition vote of over 90%.

A survey of local GP's showed a strong majority against.

At the beginning, two petitions were collected in the community. Both had several thousand signatures on them. At the end of the campaign, a further petition of over 10,000 signatures was handed in.

Throughout the campaign, our activities got good coverage in the local papers, on local radio and on local television programmes. Having a press officer helped maximise the use of the media.

We also made constant use of pro-forma which we gave to people to send in to the Regional Health Authority to encourage as many people as possible to register their opposition. Many thousands of these were handed out and people were keen to send them off.

Management failed to win a majority of the hospital consultants to support the application.

The East Birmingham and the neighbouring Solihull Community Health Councils both formally opposed the application. The East Birmingham District Health Authority, which currently manages the hospital, did not support the trust application.

All the staff organisations on site sent in individual formal submissions opposing the trust.

Basically, we achieved everything we set out to do and got a lot of support. We now await the Secretary of State's decision as to whether a trust goes ahead or not.

Even if we lose, we will have still gained several things. The issue of the attacks on the NHS have been raised with a lot of people. The staff organisations have strengthened their unity and support amongst the membership. Also, this means the stewards have a clear mandate from the members should they face hard negotiations with a new employer (i.e. the Trust).

The campaign has shown how unpopular is the decision for the hospital to opt-out. If the Secretary of State decides to go ahead, as he has elsewhere, ignoring all opposition, he will expose once again the lack of real democracy in this society.

SOME HOME TRUTHS

According to a recent report from the Faculty of Public Health Medicine, a part of the Royal College of Physicians, the plight of the homeless and those living in sub-standard housing is a national disgrace. It is a situation created by government policies over the last twenty years and it is getting worse. Official government statistics, for example, show that homelessness has doubled over the last ten years.

This coincides with figures from Shelter, the housing charity, that indicate that for the first three months of this year, local authorities accepted more than 39,000 cases as belonging to the statutory homeless. But since each case represents a household rather than an individual, the actual numbers of homeless people could be quadrupled.

TIP OF THE ICEBERG

These figures only represent the tip of the iceberg. For there are many categories of people without a place to live, whom the authorities do not recognise as being homeless.

The 1985 Housing Act makes it a statutory duty for the local council to rehouse people with priority needs: pregnant women, people with dependent children, old age pensioners and anyone made homeless by fire, flood or other disaster. But it does not, for example, include young people who have to leave home due to stress caused by poverty and unemployment, or who are at risk of physical or sexual abuse.

Many youngsters thus find themselves on the move for a lot of their time. Kipping down at a friend's for a few weeks; moving on to a squat; going back home for a bit and then having to get out when they discover things are still as bad as before. They are constantly changing addresses and are invisible from the eyes of officialdom as far as their basic housing needs are concerned. When it comes to tracking them down for their poll tax, no expense is spared by the state.

THE HOMEOWNERS

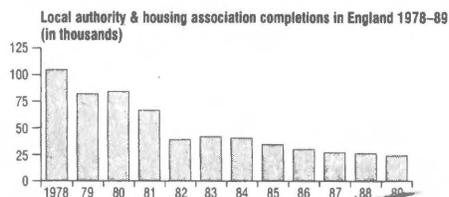
Different types of housing problems face many of those who decided to buy their own homes. Due to a combination of reducing the number of council houses built and encouraging the sale of council property to sitting tenants at what seemed

attractive prices, many people particularly on low incomes, took out mortgages. This has raised £23 billion for the Treasury, more than all government privatisations put

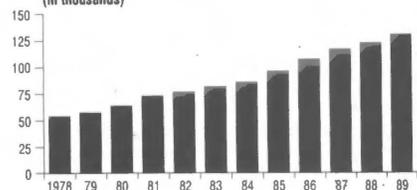
yet another of the country's housing front disaster areas, the large sprawling council estates, the government launched its 'City Challenge' campaign. This was a



Source: Department of the Environment



Homeless acceptances 1978-89 (in thousands)



together. Little of it has been reinvested in housing.

But many were soon to discover that their dream of owning their own house was to become something of a nightmare as the recession, high unemployment and short-time working along with high interest rates began to drive many people out onto the streets.

A record number of homes have been repossessed in the first half of this year because of the recession. At the same time, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of home-buyers who have fallen behind with their mortgage payments. According to the Council of Mortgage Lenders, a record 36,610 homes were repossessed. During the whole of 1990, the figure was 43,890. In addition, the number of home-buyers between six and twelve months behind on their payments has risen by almost one third to 162,210, the highest level ever recorded. In fact, around one in 44 home-buyers is now at least six months behind.

Recognising perhaps that something had to be done on

competition in which a number of chosen local authorities would literally compete for government money, in the form of loans, which could be used to tackle problems on some of the worst estates. Hulme, in Manchester, a huge estate with tenants who suffer high unemployment, poverty, bad housing and ill-health, became one of Heseltine's winners. It will receive £37 million over the next five years. When announcing the results, Heseltine commented that Hulme did not have a "monopoly on deprivation". How right he was. For that exists throughout the country in so many council estates.

Finally, it is nice to know that Virginia Bottomley is doing her little bit on the housing front. As Health Minister, she has just announced a one million pound scheme to provide hostels for runaway children at fourteen sites: that works out at around £72,000 for each location. At the same time, she is engaged in negotiations to purchase her own third luxury home: a £575,000 London town house, to add to her £400,000 Surrey cottage and the family home on the Isle of Wight.

NOT THE BCCI SCANDAL

In the past few months, there has been another banking scandal besides that of BCCI. But this tale of corruption and fraud has not received the same headline treatment, even though it has all the ingredients of a good story: dubious transactions; fraud; the involvement of the intelligence agencies and arms trafficking.

The centre of this intrigue lies in Cannon Street, London and involves a subsidiary of the Midland Bank: the Midland International Trade Services (MITS). The 'Financial Times' reported that the Midland may have incurred losses close to £100 million because of the activities of its secretive offshoot. The subsidiary has been involved in some dodgy dealings around money laundering from a fraud operation in Turkey that was disclosed in an internal report. But, as the 'Financial Times' quotes a senior bank executive saying, the Midland was "content to bury it".

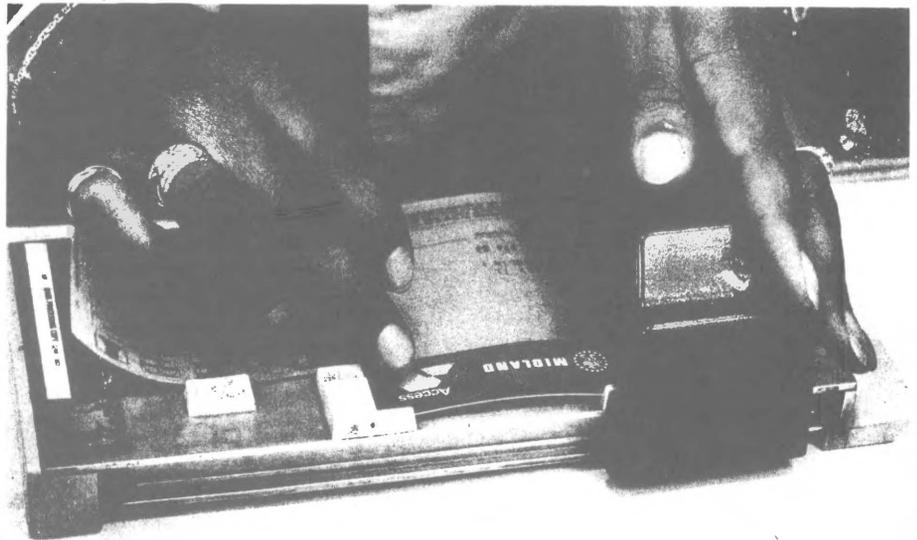
If it were not for the Midland's huge losses incurred after the takeover of the Californian Crocker National Bank in 1991, the losses in MITS would have attracted more attention. The company's shareholders were kept in ignorance as none of the losses involved were disclosed in the Midland Bank's annual report.

Sir Kit McMahon, who retired in June as Midland's Chief Executive, disbanded the 'defence sales team' ending its brief to build up the bank's defence business with its emphasis on the financing of arms sales to the Middle East and Asia. MITS's arms sales drive had been sponsored

by a small faction within the bank's top leadership and apparently without the knowledge of the Chief Executive or other senior managers.

What has emerged, remarkably underreported, was that the Midland's advertising slogan 'The Listening Bank' has other connotations given MITS's secret links with British security and the employment of a team of retired military officers on defence business for the bank.

The secretive 'Defence Equipment Finance Department' worked closely with the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the UK government's arms sales company, International Military Services. A non-executive director of Astra Holdings (fireworks and plastic bullets manufacturers), Stephen Kock, was a leading member of the team and is reputed to have links with Britain's intelligence services.



The 'Financial Times' speaks of life inside MITS as a culture "fostered in part by executives with links to British intelligence". The 1983 murder of Midland's Moscow representative, Dennis Skinner, raised questions about his activity in the Soviet capital. He had been recruited in 1976 by Lord Armstrong (Midland's chair 1975-80), formerly responsible for re-organising MI5 during World War Two.

Defence Deals

Sir John Cuckney, mentioned in Peter Wright's book, 'Spycatcher', was recruited as a non-executive director (1978-88). For part of that time, Sir John also served as Chair of the Government arms

company, International Military Services.

Amongst the ex-military consultants employed by MITS's Defence Equipment Finance Department were:

*** Paul Cormack, wing commander in the (non-flying) RAF regiment

*** Robin Hogg, vice-admiral in charge of naval operational requirements during the Malvinas (Falklands) War.

*** John Shrimpton, brigadier, assistant military deputy at the Ministry of Defence's Export Services Organisation

*** Mike Williams, Air Commodore, RAF instructor at Cranwell.

The input provided by Astra's Stephen Kock (ex-Rhodesian SAS, who claims to having "carried out special assignments for the Foreign Office") was the link with the UK's defence industry, principally Plessey, Astra and GEC. MITS was involved in preparing the ground for the £1 billion defence deal with

Malaysia in 1988 signed by then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. The focus on the Middle East saw Midland involved in a £270 million defence package to Jordan, and £25 million of credits for Iraq in the five years prior to the invasion of Kuwait.

Compared to the almost weekly revelations about the corruption at BCCI, the events around the arms traffickers, MITS, remain largely unacknowledged. One might ask whether the lack of outcry at MITS's questionable commercial practices lies in the fact that the Midland is a British bank.

Further details can be found in the 'Financial Times', July 15th 1991.)

Mandy's Diary



August 2nd: Two films have recently been made in America on the subject of women and food. One of them 'Eating' by Henry Jaglom, is described as a "very serious comedy about food". Jaglom made the film by hiring a selection of actresses and asking them to keep food journals for six months, then gathering them at a house where the scene is set and getting them to talk, mostly spontaneously, about their attitudes and hang-ups. Several of them have eating disorders including anorexia nervosa (self starvation) and bulimia (gorging and vomiting).

Statistics show that about 1% of American teenage girls are anorexic and 1% to 2% bulimic.

The other film, 'The Famine Within', is a documentary. Katherine Gilday, who made the film explains why eating disorders are so common among women in the Western world. "It is considered obligatory to feel dissatisfied with your looks," she said. "Achieving the 'perfect body' is almost another religion, associated with virtue, accomplishment and success".

She went on to say that women feel a lack of control over their lives as they struggle to balance the modern-day demands of relationships, jobs and families, and find that the only way they can exert control is by control over what they eat. Both men and women need to make a perceptual change in what is attractive, and the media should change the images it fosters and forces on us.

August 11th: A man who raped a prostitute was given a reduced prison sentence of three years today because she was a

prostitute. The recommended minimum sentence for rape is five years. The judge, Mr Justice Alliott, said:

"While every woman is entitled to complain about their body being violated, someone who for years has flaunted their body and sold it, cannot complain as loudly as someone who has not behaved in such a way."

Oh yes she can! As a spokeswoman for Women Against Rape said: "Every woman, whatever her sexual history or her occupation, is entitled to justice from the courts, and every woman is entitled to say no to rape. This case has not been judged fairly. The woman has been put on trial and not the man."

The same could be said of Marion Kennedy who was killed by her cohabitee Joseph McGrail earlier this year. He received a suspended jail sentence from the judge, Mr Justice Popplewell, who told him: "This lady would have tried the patience of a saint." Apparently, she drank a lot.

I don't necessarily disagree with the sentence because it seems that he did not intend to kill her. She died of internal injuries after he kicked her. However, I can't help feeling that her life was pretty cheap, and she could not even defend herself against the accusations and insults which came out at the trial.

Sara Thornton was not as lucky as Joseph McGrail. Two weeks ago she lost her appeal against a murder conviction and a life sentence. She killed her violent and drunken husband. When she heard of the outcome of McGrail's case she went on hunger strike as a protest against the injustice

of the very different sentences in similar cases.

August 27th: For the last six weeks in Wichita, Kansas, USA, there has been a fierce battle raging between supporters of abortion clinics on the one hand, and thousands of fundamentalist Christians, on the other, who have descended on the town in support of the anti-abortion group 'Operation Rescue'. There have been no less than 2,700 arrests among 'Operation Rescue' supporters. Some of them more than once. Abortion is legal in the USA. After one week or so of tolerating protests which included human blockades and insults hurled at women customers, the owners of the clinic went to court to seek the right to continue their legal services without undue interference. Judge Kelly issued injunctions against physical blockades of the clinics. That was when the anti-abortionists declared that they were answerable to a higher law, and the arrests began.

Over the weekend, there have been further developments. About 5,000 people who support the principle of 'A Woman's Right to Choose' marched on Wichita in opposition to the anti-abortion army. In reply to this, the Rev. Pat Robertson, the millionaire television Bible-basher, who ran for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1988, delivered a fiery sermon to 25,000 anti-abortionists in a local stadium. They went back and linked arms around the clinics to stop staff and patients from entering. Two caught and attacked the director of one of the clinics, beating her until police intervened. Then the police were attacked. They responded with teargas and batons. It will be interesting to see how the situation develops.

August 30th: The battle for Greenham Common is not over yet. I read today that Tom King, the Defence Secretary, is to be challenged in the High Court over his decision to remove rights of access to Greenham Common. Local people want the Common restored to public open space now the Cruise missiles have gone.



THREE DAYS THAT SHOOK RUSSIA

Regina Bogochova was one of thousands who stood on the front lines of the resistance. With other women holding a sign reading 'Soldiers! Don't Shoot Your People!', she took her place in front of the Russian parliament:

"I am ready to die here," she said. I am fifty five years old and for years nothing but obedience was pounded into my brain. The Young Pioneers, the Young Communist League, the unions, the Communist Party all taught me not to answer back, be a good Soviet, a bolt in the machine.

"But on Monday morning, I heard a rumbling and from my balcony I saw the tanks on the Mozhaik Highway. These monsters! They have always thought they could do anything to us. They have thrown out Gorbachev and now they are threatening a government I helped elect. I will ignore the curfew. I'll let a tank roll over me if I have to."

Sunday: On the evening of Sunday 18th August, a delegation visited Gorbachev at his holiday home in the Crimea, to persuade him to sign a decree proclaiming a state of emergency in the name of the 'State Committee for the State of Emergency' and hand over his powers to his Vice-President, Gennady Yanayev.

Gorbachev refused and he was held under house arrest until the coup attempt collapsed on Wednesday, 22nd August and he returned to Moscow late Wednesday evening.

Monday: The first that most people knew about the attempted coup was a brief announcement early on Monday morning that Gorbachev had been removed because of ill health. An appeal was later read out in the name of the State Committee for the State of Emergency: "A mortal danger hangs over our homeland... Extremist forces have set out to dismantle the Soviet Union.."

It was noticeable that the appeal did not call on people to defend socialism or communism. It relied instead on general calls for the defence of the mother or father land and vague promises of economic reform and law and order. Clearly, it was not believed.

While the television broadcast Swan Lake, tanks had moved in to enforce "law and order". Two army divisions were brought into Moscow. Demonstrations were forbidden and martial law declared in key areas of the Soviet Union. All except for official broadcasts and newspapers were closed down.

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

But the armed forces failed to arrest Boris Yeltsin. There are indications that he was warned by supporters inside the KGB and avoided arrest. By 11 a.m. that Monday morning, he had gathered key supporters including his deputy president Rutskoi and premier Silayev, inside the Russian parliament building.

When ten tanks drew up outside, Yeltsin went out to meet them. They did not shoot. Standing on top of one of the tanks, he denounced the coup as unconstitutional; called for the return of Gorbachev and for widespread resistance to the illegal regime.

The call for a general strike met a patchy response, but large numbers of miners in particular came out on strike

UNITE AGAINST THE THREAT OF TERROR

against the coup attempt. Demonstrations in Moscow on the Monday were sporadic. But people gathered outside the Russian parliament and elsewhere people argued with the main conscript soldiers.

In the Baltic states, troops seized television stations and massed in preparation for an assault on centres of resistance.

In Leningrad, Anatoly Sobchak, the mayor and staunch supporter of Yeltsin, had mobilised resistance faster than anywhere else. Bulldozers and mobile cranes were pressed into service to seal off his headquarters at the Mariinski Palace. The building was festooned with the red, white and blue flag of Russia and with placards echoing the city's historical 900-day stand against Hitler: "They shall not pass". Veterans who came out for an all-night vigil around the building proudly wore the pale green ribbon of the siege campaign.

Tuesday: By Tuesday, a range of people had gathered at the Russian parliament in Moscow. They included elected deputies of the parliament; intellectuals and former dissidents; veterans of the Afghan war complete with small arms and many ordinary citizens, young and old.

Barricades were built and it was clear that when the tanks came, they would meet armed resistance. By Tuesday night, Yeltsin had issued warnings of an impending attack. Tanks were, in fact, ordered to attack the parliament. But already splits were taking place in the army.

Only exploratory attacks were ordered. People moved to block them. Tarpaulins were thrown over the top of tanks to blind the drivers. Petrol bombs were thrown. Three young men were killed in

"In one night freedom of speech has been destroyed, along with freedom of assembly and demonstration, the rule of law and the right of the citizen to express his views. All media are now in the hands of the putschists. The lawfully elected president of the Russian Federation has no possibility of turning to those who elected him....."

"Objectively the new union treaty deprived practically all the organisers of the putsch of their duties. That's the secret of their conspiracy. That's the main motive of their actions...."

"I want once again to announce decisively that everything that has happened in the last 24 hours is nothing other than a coup d'etat. Its leaders are none other than state criminals."

"I turn to you, citizens of Russia. Support those to whom you entrusted Russia's fate in elections at this fateful hour. We must resist tanks and personnel carriers with one will and the desire not to tolerate the dictatorship. Unity and solidarity: these are the keys to our victory...."

Boris Yeltsin

skirmishes near the parliament.

Support for Yeltsin within the military and the KGB was thwarting the plans of the leaders of the coup when faced with popular resistance. At the same time, an increasing number of republics opposed the coup. On Tuesday, the president of Kazakhstan declared for Yeltsin and Ukraine followed suit.

Wednesday: By Wednesday, the 'Gang of Eight' was in disarray. Yazov and Kryuchkov made a last minute bid to make a deal with Gorbachev. But Gorbachev and Yeltsin were in touch with each other. That evening, Gorbachev was flown back to Moscow to resume his old position. The coup leaders were either under arrest or in flight.

As Gorbachev belatedly realised, the world he flew back to was not the world he had left when he went on holiday to the Crimea. The leaders of the coup had achieved the opposite of what they had set out to do.

The Communist Party was completely discredited. Power had shifted to Yeltsin at the centre and to the republics elsewhere. Far more people came out on to the streets of Moscow to celebrate this victory than had come out to

resist the coup. The Communist Party and the KGB, together with other symbols of a hated regime, came under popular attack.

Outside Russia, in the other fifteen republics, governments moved fast to claim their independence as power in the centre moved from Gorbachev to Yeltsin, from the Soviet party and state to Russia.

On his return, on Thursday, Gorbachev declared he remained General Secretary of the Communist Party and believed that the party had a progressive role to play. By Saturday, he had resigned as General Secretary and recommended that the Party be disbanded. He declared himself to be a social-democrat, Scandinavian-style.

But Gorbachev is no longer the central figure. Power now lies with Yeltsin. With the collapse of the centre, it will be the relationship between the republics, whatever form this takes, that will be the determining factor. Whether this takes the form of a loose confederation or whether the rise of Russia signals a new form of domination by the centre of the republics is yet to be seen. But it is clear that the Soviet Union in its old form no longer exists.

Who was who in the Soviet junta

All but one of the 'Gang of Eight' had direct links with the military, the secret police or the defence industry. All were members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union:

Gennady Yanayev: elected deputy president of the USSR, December 1990. Made his career through the trade unions and with links with the KGB. Opposed to economic reforms.

The real power among the Eight

lay with: Defence Minister **Dimitry Yazov**; KGB Chairman **Vladimir Kryuchkov** and Interior Minister **Valentin Pavlov**.

The interests of the defence industry were represented directly by: **Oleg Baklanov**, an armaments specialist. First Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Defence Council.

Aleksandr Tizyakov: president of the USSR Association of State-Owned Industrial, Construction, Transport and

Communications Enterprises - representing the specific interests of plants in the defence sector.

Vasily Starodubtsev: Chairman of the USSR Peasants' Union. Opposed to reforms in Soviet agriculture.

Both Starodubtsev and Tizyakov were signatories to the 'World to the People', a manifesto calling for a military coup and emergency rule, published in Moscow on July 23rd.

Many other leading communists were undoubtedly involved more or less behind the scenes. Establishing the truth of what went on, will be a priority in the coming weeks.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

AN  RELAND'S BIGGEST SELLING POLITICAL WEEKLY 

PHOBLACHT

Republican News

In the most breathtaking events in the Russian capital since October 1917, the three-day Soviet coup crumbled after determined resistance from the people of Moscow and Leningrad..... The 'emergency committee' under Gorbachev's former vice-president Gennady Yanayev, comprised key figures in the Soviet military-industrial complex which is profoundly worried by the Gorbachev reforms. It seems

to have expected a passive reaction by civilians and the support of both the entire army and the KGB, the secret service. But it was disappointed.....

They clearly understood the weakness of Mikhail Gorbachev. The president's initial popularity has evaporated over the years as he chopped and changed over reforms. Economic chaos is likely to bring starvation by the winter. Unemployment has grown frighteningly and prices have risen. Yanayev's government promised to provide food, cut prices and raise wages. These promises, designed to win over the population, were almost certainly empty. In any case, they were not believed.....

The determined popular response showed to the conscript, mostly Russian, troops of the Soviet army, that Muscovites were willing to die for liberty. Suddenly the remaining plotters found that the Soviet Union has changed utterly over the last few years and that their orders were just not being obeyed.....

Yanayev's coup was doomed from the start. His ham-fisted excuses for it show he does not really understand the changes which have happened in his country. It is impossible to turn back the clock to the days of absolute state control. The people have shown that they won't accept that.

From An Phoblacht/Republican News, 22nd August, 1991.



Rote Fahne
Wochenzeitung der MLPD

Red Flag: the weekly paper of the MLPD.

SOVIET PEOPLE PREVENT SUCCESS OF THE SOCIAL-FASCIST DICTATORSHIP.

The perpetrators of the coup could not hold out even three days in Moscow. On 21st August they took flight. The

determined resistance of the Soviet people was stronger than the pseudo-Marxist patched-up rule of force.

No sooner had the self-styled 'state committee for the state of emergency' announced on 19th August a ban on strikes, demonstrations and political activity, than workers in the main centres of industry throughout the country stopped work.

FASCISTS OUT!

Tens of thousands of miners experienced in struggle joined the strike. In Leningrad the tanks only got as far as the outer districts of the city. In the city centre the demonstrators shouted: 'Fascists out!' In Moscow a woman shouting 'Down with party privileges!' stood in front of the tanks. Hundreds of thousands like her flocked on to the streets in many

cities. The masses of the people wrecked the efforts of the dictatorship, socialist in words but fascist in reality.

The plotters came from leading positions in the state and party bureaucracy. For many years they had represented the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union as socialism

Now their shameful defeat has revealed before the eyes of the world the bankruptcy of this betrayal of socialism.

Their anti-people action has resulted in protests throughout the world. MLPD immediately joined the masses of the people in the Soviet Union, while the revisionist DKP openly supported the social-fascist regime.

From 'Rote Fahne' (Red Flag), paper of the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany (MLPD), 24th August 1991.

PARTI du TRAVAIL de BELGIQUE

solidaire

Which direction will the Soviet Union take?

There are four main political orientations:

Firstly there is the pro-Western liberal bourgeoisie favoured by Yeltsin and others. This is a system of private property and the privatisation of the means of production. It involves the complete independence of the different republics and moves towards imperialism. The liberals already have strong ties with American and

European imperialism.

Secondly, there is the system of mixed capitalism in a union of the fifteen republics under a strong central leadership (Gorbachev's position). An alliance might be possible between Gorbachev and the old Brezhnev bureaucracy. Both fear that the break-up of the Soviet Union will throw the country into civil war and popular uprisings.

The most likely outcome at present is that the Soviet Union is heading for an open violent bourgeois dictatorship. There is a growing class of bourgeois all pursuing their own private interests.

Most of the multi-nationals would prefer a country which progresses in a united and organised way, under a strong leadership, towards

capitalism.

The presence of millions of nuclear arms in a country torn by civil war is another nightmare.

Some progressive people hope to see a revival among the army and the KGB of genuine Marxist-Leninist forces, which will take power and re-establish socialist principles. These hopes seem to us illusory. It is unlikely that the army will take power on its own. Resorting to a military dictatorship will only inflame the situation. An open bourgeois dictatorship in the Soviet Union must always unite military intervention with political action. So we have an alliance between the army, the KGB and a social-democratic party. The political position of the military leaders is not

Opportunity for Change

Dear Editor,

Gorbachev cannot dissolve the Soviet Communist Party - the Party is more than one person. It may well be that the 15 million members see little to defend in the organisation's existence. With its top echelon deeply implicated in the anti-Gorbachev coup and the rank-and-file's silent acquiescence, the Party has lost whatever standing it still retained. It is hard to see how it could salvage its own credibility and distance itself from the plotters.

REVISIONISM NOT SOCIALISM

If the Soviet party collapses it should not be mourned by Communists. What passed for socialism in the Soviet Union was in the grip of revisionism. The Party leaders aped the political choices and methods set in the West. Gorbachevian glasnost could not rescue the Party from decades of corrupt political practices and bureaucratic manoeuvres.

In terms of Marxist advance, the Soviet Party has been a wasting asset for decades as it played the Superpower game with the stronger US imperialism.

Revolutionary Communists have long recognised that the ruling Party of the Soviet Union has been a barrier to socialist renewal. After initially backing the Party, Gorbachev, for different reasons, now regards it as unreformable. It is part of the problem and not the mechanism to find a solution to the revisionist-engendered crisis that wracks Soviet society.

While praising Marx and Lenin, the Party was used a career ladder as it came to dominate, rather than lead, Soviet

From previous page

fundamentally different from that of Gorbachev.

The alliance of forces capable of keeping the Soviet Union together under a strong leadership is fragile. The weak points are Gorbachev and the Communist Party.

The third and fourth political orientations are respectively: the re-establishment of monarchy and the re-establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

From 'Solidaire' ('Solidarity'), 21st August 1991, paper of the PTB (Party of Labour of Belgium).

society. The political goal of building socialism receded as new social inequalities were established and used to enhance the position of Party members at the expense of the working class and the nationalities of the Soviet Union.

SEIZING PARTY'S PROPERTY

The assets of the state, the army and state-owned enterprises were at the Party's disposal. Party life at the top was associated with privilege and wealth. When he resigned as Party leader, Gorbachev ordered the seizure of all Party property in the country - over 5,000 buildings (publishing houses, holiday homes, hotels) valued at 1.9

billion roubles. There were real material benefits in joining the Party.....

What the failed coup exposed was that this degenerate organisation could no longer rule in the old way. The people would no longer accept its rule..... It had been losing members even before the coup. Four million members resigned last year; millions of others were passive card holders.....

The demise of the revisionist party provides the opportunity for genuine Soviet Marxists to regroup, reorganise and renew the struggle for revolutionary advance in Lenin's homeland.

A London reader.



Ukrainians jeer outside Communist Party headquarters closed by Kiev City Council.

Against the Grain

Until 1988, Boris Yeltsin, like any other rising politician or government official in the Soviet Union, was a member of the Communist Party and moved steadily up its ranks. In 1988, Yeltsin lost his job as Moscow party boss and came under attack from the party. Since that time, he has changed course and concentrated on building a power base outside the party, with the party doing everything it could to block his progress.

Yeltsin's autobiography, 'Against the Grain', published in 1990, is thus already out of date. In an epilogue, added in 1991, Yeltsin himself said: "Many incidents, chapters and situations seem so different today from the way I perceived them in the not so distant past ... How many lines in my book were devoted to the Party... the Communist Party is dying, disintegrating and no amount of frantic effort can save it... The Party may try to turn back the clock of history, and I think it may well attempt to recapture its lost positions with the aid of guns, tanks and truncheons. But its power, built upon fear and violence, is historically doomed."

The book tells of Yeltsin's struggles within the party up to 1988. Although he early appealed to people over the heads of the party, he seems to have stuck to the well-trodden road to power up the bureaucracy. After his sacking as Moscow's party boss, he was elected Chairman of the Russian Federation's Supreme Soviet, and it was based on this position that he led the resistance to the coup in recent weeks.

Even if his political philosophy has changed with rapidly moving events, his autobiography gives us some useful background.

A PARTY CAREER

Yeltsin was born in 1931 in Sverdlovsk province, in a farming family. Driven off the land by extreme poverty, the family moved to a construction site where workers and their families were housed in huts. He did well at school in spite of battles with various officials and was active in sports. As a young man and student, he travelled widely within Russia, often trekking long distances or travelling with sports teams.

On graduating in 1955, Yeltsin was offered a job as foreman on an industrial building site. He refused to take a foreman's job however, until he had himself learned all the jobs - from bricklaying to carpentry - that he would be supervising. After fourteen years' work in the construction industry, he got a party post in the provincial committee. From there, he rose to provincial party secretary, to the central committee of the CPSU and finally the Politbureau when he was boss of Moscow's party.

The picture that he presents of himself is one of a hard-working and dedicated

direct, popular approach that has won him great support among the people, particularly in Russia. The fact that the communist party did all it could to stop his being elected to the Russian Federation no doubt increased his popularity.

In his book, Yeltsin specifically attacks the built-in system of privileges for party members and describes the hierarchical system of housing, supplies of food and consumer goods; medical care; dachas (country houses); holidays; cars etc. Party members lived a separate life from the people and the higher you rose in the party, the more removed you were.

Yeltsin won great support for his attacks on party privileges. At one stage, he was attacked by the party, for



administrator, intolerant of inefficiency or corruption. He is clearly a practical, down-to-earth person and prides himself on good relations with ordinary people.

In a general way, at this stage of his career, Yeltsin was a communist in his own terms, who upheld the views of Lenin but was critical of Stalin and those who came after him. He supported perestroika and glasnost and came into sharp conflict with Gorbachev whom he considers vacillated and compromised over the promised reforms. He sees Gorbachev as essentially a party man, who would go on upholding the party, of whose methods of work and practices Yeltsin becomes increasingly critical.

BREAKING WITH THE PARTY

It is probably his growing conflict with and opposition to the entrenched rule of the communist party, combined with

using cheap election tactics by travelling on public transport and refusing to see special party doctors. Instead, he went to the polyclinics used by ordinary people. His retort to the party on this was: if it is so easy to win popularity by travelling on buses, why don't you do it too?

The book contains much criticism of what is wrong and little programme for the future, apart from a general commitment to democracy in politics and a more efficient, free market economy. There is a general commitment, too, to independence for the republics.

It is clear why Yeltsin is popular, particularly after his outspoken and courageous resistance to the coup. It is less clear in which direction he will lead the country, or rather the many nations of Russia, let alone the Soviet Union.

LAND, BREAD & OIL

In 1985, Gorbachev promised reforms to the Soviet people. Glasnost was to mean political reforms. It led to limited change within the Communist Party itself. Outside the party, numerous organisations grew up and elections were held. For the first time there was an alternative. In many republics, nationalist organisations grew and were elected to positions of power. But economic change - perestroika - was slower.

Gorbachev appealed to the G7 summit for massive aid for the Soviet economy. The leaders of the recent coup attempt used the state of the economy as one justification for their crackdown. Yeltsin's group will use their current position to speed up the process of loosening state control and increasing the power of the market. All agree that action is needed.

COLLAPSING ECONOMY

There are few reliable statistics. But it is widely accepted that even though the Soviet Union as a whole has vast resources, output is collapsing by 10% to 20%. Unemployment is growing. The budget deficit is reckoned at over £60 billion roubles. Industry is old-fashioned and inefficient by Western standards, and a high proportion was designed for the production of military hardware.

The state of oil production is one important indicator of the state of things. The industry is nearly at the point where it can no longer export, thus losing a major source of foreign currency. Recent television films showed the disastrous state of some of the Siberian oil fields: machinery is rusting and old; oil has seeped into the land and poisoned it.

Another important factor is the state of agriculture. Last year, the Soviet Union grew some 217 million tons of grain. 20% rotted in the fields or nearby stores. 40% of total output of fruit and vegetables also rotted before it could be distributed. This year the harvest is predicted to be no more than 170 million tons. Massive imports will be needed to avoid hunger, if not famine.

LAND REFORM

Land reform is one of the changes that Gorbachev never tackled. 97% of the land is controlled by the state. Yeltsin has introduced in Russia a leasing system so that within Russia, seven million private farmers now produce half the fruit and vegetables and one quarter of



meat and dairy produce. Clearly, the system of state farming is unproductive and has to be changed.

In the new situation, land reform will now be introduced on a wider scale, along with other reforms previously blocked by the Communist Party, with its vested interests in the status quo.

One of the key aspects of the Union Treaty that the leaders of the attempted coup moved to block, was greater economic control for the republics. The signing of the treaty would in fact only have formalised a process that has begun already. Many republics have been raising their own taxes and organising a system of barter trade with other republics. Now this process will be speeded up. Most of the republics have already

declared their independence. The Baltic states have already won recognition from 30 countries.

It is likely that the independent republics, freed from central control, will deal with each other directly. In the last week of August, the first meeting of the ministers in charge of the economy of the separate republics was held in Moscow. Agreements have already been made between Russia and the Ukraine.

THE 'SOCIALIST' EMPIRE

One aspect of "socialist planning", Soviet-style, is that no republic has a fully independent economic base. They depend on each other for supply of raw materials, energy or components for industry. Radios made in the Baltics, for example, depend on supplies from Nagorny Karaback. This interdependence was designed to built subordination to the centre and stop trading links between the different areas, such as in the British empire.

The Soviet system had also built into it the classical colonial pattern of exploitation of some peoples, particularly those of Central Asia, to the benefit of the centre. It was a system of internal colonies.

Thus Russia controls two thirds of industrial output and the Ukraine one fifth. At the other extreme, Uzbekistan has been exploited as a producer of raw materials, cotton. The land has been poisoned by chemical fertilizers; the Aral Sea drained of water for irrigation and the people impoverished.

This situation means that even with formal independence, it may be difficult for some of the republics to develop a healthy economy. As with the relationship between former colonies of Western countries, the centre can continue to dominate in new forms.

In the short term, the peoples of the Soviet Union, face a difficult winter. We should support demands on the British government and the EEC to send food aid.

In the longer term, it seems inevitable that they will move to a system of open capitalism which will tie them into a world capitalist economy. The moves to greater democracy and independence, however, will allow the working people and different nationalities more scope to struggle over the different options for the economy, as with other aspects of their lives.

No Homeland in Sight

There is still speculation over whether or not a Middle East peace conference of some description will meet in October. But there is gloom among the Palestinians about the entire "peace process".

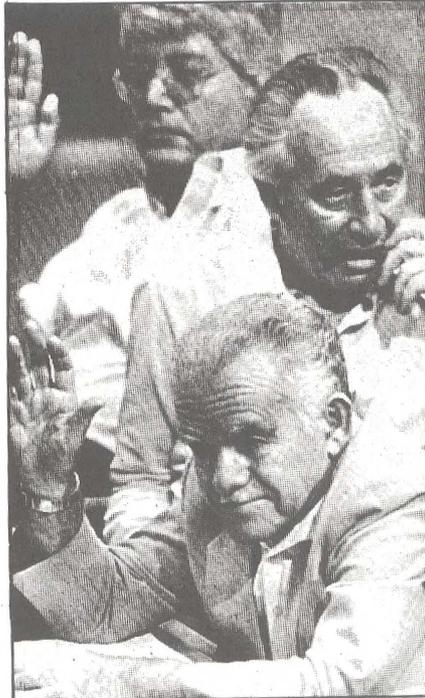
The USA has agreed with Israel that the PLO should not be represented at any peace talks, and even that any "Palestinian representatives" who take part in a Jordanian delegation should first be approved by Israel. Yet again, an attempt is being made to decide the future of the Palestinian people and Palestinian homeland in the absence of the Palestinians themselves.

Their position is a difficult one. Some in the PLO feel that if they come out clearly and say that they want no part of "peace talks" on Israeli terms, they will be condemned as people who oppose peace, and face greater isolation. Yet, if they do not do that, it can be made to seem as though the Palestinians are giving their consent to a process involving the denial of their right to self-determination and to independent representation.

Over the past two months, there has been a great deal of discussion among Palestinians under Israeli occupation and in exile, and it is hoped that a meeting of the Palestine National Council (PNC) will be convened in September, and that the PNC will be able to adopt a stand on peace talks which represents the demands of the people as a whole. The PNC is the body which decides on the policy of the PLO, and it represents the great majority of Palestinian political currents. Even those who dissent from its decisions will attach great weight to them.

US Guarantees?

In order to persuade the PLO to go along with its own plan for negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbours, the USA has indicated that it would be willing to make certain undertakings to the Palestinians. This is something many are wary about. They remember how the USA guaranteed the safety of Palestinians in Beirut when the PLO pulled out in 1982. Within one month, the Israeli army swept into the city and



Israeli leaders demand veto over Palestine

turned loose its Phalangist allies upon Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, killing 2,000 people. As the arguments have gone on, it seems that those who favour standing firm over Palestinian representation and the ending of the occupation in favour of Palestinian statehood have been winning out.

Meanwhile Israel is pressing on with its settlement programme in order to try to make the occupation permanent. It has now taken control of two thirds of the land in the West Bank, implanted over 120,000 Israeli Jews in and around East Jerusalem, and over 100,000 in settlements across the West Bank. It has also said that, while it is ready to talk peace, it will walk out of negotiations if the issue of surrendering territory is raised. This makes a nonsense of "peace talks" when both Syria and Jordan have said there is no prospect of peace on that basis. That makes it unlikely that all the diplomatic to-ing and fro-ing of the last few months will lead anywhere this autumn.

With the US presidential elections coming up next year, this effectively means nothing much happening, in terms of the "peace process", until at least 1993.

14 Reprieved

After an international campaign of protest, the death sentence passed on 14 people in a Grenada court has been commuted to life imprisonment.

These death sentences and lengthy prison sentences against another three defendants were passed as a result of the guilty verdicts passed by a court in December 1986. All 17 were being tried for the murder of Maurice Bishop, popular leader of the Grenadian revolution and seven of his colleagues, in October 1983. An appeal against the sentences was heard in July of this year and rejected.

Those campaigning against the death sentences do not uphold the politics of the 14 condemned people nor support their overthrow of Bishop. This event led directly to the US invasion and occupation of Grenada. But they point to the lack of justice in the way the trial was carried out and so-called evidence given. One observer at the appeal, former US Attorney, Ramsey Clark, pointed out in relation to decisions of the court:

"The decision was wholly political in context and tone. It included no consideration of facts and law that made the entire proceedings illegal, false in its finding of fact and a corruption of justice."

The Committee for Human Rights in Grenada, whose President is Lord Gifford, QC appealed to the Prime Minister of Grenada, to ensure that no executions took place:

"The committee reiterated the irregularities stated time over by lawyers of international standing and calls upon all those concerned about this trial, about justice and about capital punishment to join in appealing for clemency for the fourteen on death row"

The international campaign to stop the executions has now been successful. The farcical nature of the trial held in Grenada also means that the truth about what went on in Grenada, leading to the overthrow of Bishop and the US invasion, still needs to be investigated.

**HANDS OFF
GRENADA**



IRISH IN BRITAIN.....

Birmingham Six~The struggle for justice continues

The Director of Public Prosecutions is considering bringing charges against four former West Midlands police officers accused of lying during the successful Birmingham Six appeal.

If this goes ahead, it must not be used to scapegoat these no doubt guilty men and let off the hook the rest of the British legal system.

High-ranking police officers, judges and those in government all of whom conspired to frame the Birmingham Six, should also be brought to account.

Maguire Seven~inquiry resumes

The Sir John May inquiry into the Maguire Seven convictions resumes on September 9th. After a week, it will have a break and resume on 23rd September.

The inquiry is investigating the original decision to prosecute the Seven.

Although the Seven are either free, or in the case of Giuseppe Conlon dead, the reason given for their release was unsatisfactory in that it did not clear their names. Many observers felt that the decision was an attempt to keep some credibility for the courts, not to try and finally give justice.

The Maguires and their supporters hope that the May inquiry will finally reveal the truth - that they were totally innocent and victims of British injustice.

STOP PRESS....

Silkin had doubts about the case in '75

As we go to press, the 'Independent on Sunday', 1st September 1991, has a report which shows that the Attorney General in 1975 originally blocked the prosecution of the Maguire Seven.

Sam Silkin, the Labour Attorney General at the time, had serious doubts about the

strength of the evidence against Annie Maguire, her husband, her two sons, her brother, brother-in-law and a family friend.

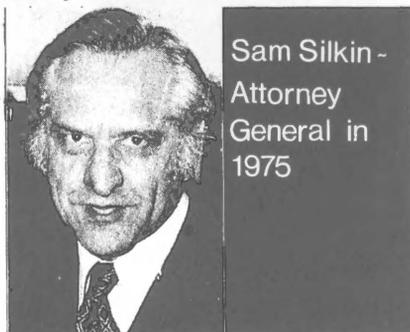
SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

Silkin initially refused to authorise the prosecutions because no explosives or other bomb-making materials were ever found in the Maguires' North London home. However, Sir Michael Havers, who ran the prosecution case, made a visit to the Royal Armaments Research and Development Establishment Laboratories on 7th February, 1975, to find out the worth of the scientific evidence. The scientific tests purported to show that traces of nitroglycerine were found on the hands of the Maguires.

The tests used - Thin Layer Chromatography - have subsequently been found to be unreliable and are now discredited, particularly as the sole evidence for a prosecution.

PERSUADED

Silkin was eventually persuaded on 17th February, 1975, by Havers that the tests carried out by government scientists were infallible. He then gave the go ahead for the prosecutions.



Sam Silkin -
Attorney
General in
1975

Alistar Logan, solicitor for the Maguires, said: "It reflects creditably on the Attorney General's Department that... he had looked critically at all the evidence and raised doubts about its sufficiency. Had this been known at an earlier stage, it would have lent considerable force to the arguments that were put subsequently to successive Home Secretaries."

The mystery remains as to why Silkin never revealed this evidence during the long campaign to prove the Maguires' innocence. The scientific evidence was called into question in the early eighties. Silkin died in 1988.

Unfortunately for the Maguires, Silkin's doubts have not been revealed until after his death and after the release of the innocent victims of a serious miscarriage of justice.

Judith Ward~current review

Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, is currently reviewing Judith Ward's case amidst growing concern that she was wrongly convicted in 1974 for the M62 coach bombing.

No longer a Category A prisoner, Judith is currently in Holloway prison. Despite having served more than seventeen years in prison, she retains her humour and has taken a BA degree through the Open University. In Holloway, she works in the education department.

Judith maintains that after the four days without food or sleep following her arrest, she was ready to confess to anything. The man who was her alibi was himself in prison for theft. Knowing Judith faced serious charges, he did not want to be associated with her and denied that he was with her, many miles away from the M62.

IN IRELAND.....

Sinn Fein~calls for peace talks rejected

The British government, along with the Irish government, have rejected a call from Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams, to hold talks to try and bring an end to violence in the North of Ireland.

Having seen their own attempts to hold all-party talks (excluding Sinn Fein) collapse, British imperialism did not want its true role in Ireland exposed by the attention talks with Sinn Fein would attract.

Sinn Fein's long-standing policy has been that it is ready to enter into talks with anyone to bring about peace in Ireland. It has been ready to talk without pre-conditions on any side.

However, the peace Sinn Fein is working for, is peace with justice. Their policies clearly show the true cause of the violence. That is the British occupation and division of Ireland by a British-imposed artificial border.

Sinn Fein's peace must be based on the right of the Irish people as a whole to decide their own future free from outside interference.

In the current 'October', we are pleased to reprint an English summary of a book by a leading comrade in the Norwegian Marxist-Leninist Party (AKP-ML). The AKP (ML) has for many years been active in the Women's Front in Norway. The contribution by this comrade, Kjersti Ericsson, is therefore based firmly in both theory and practice.

The article on 'Feminism and the Left in India' also shows how active women have been. The article makes it clear that the role of women and the women's movement is being debated and discussed at many different levels within the Left.

The basic position of the RCL is that we have to apply the scientific method of Marxism to the question of women but that many of the positions held by the Left on women are a crude economist version of Marxism.

In this issue of 'October', we try to take this debate forward by looking at some of the arguments around the basis of women's oppression, an important question if we aim to build a society which removes the basis for oppression as a pre-condition for moving to full liberation. We look at the question of reproductive rights, a key aspect of women's oppression. And we try to put the struggle for women's liberation within the context of the overall struggle against imperialism.

We hope that this journal will take the debate forward. We look forward to hearing the views of our readers and receiving contributions from you.

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