

socialist worker Review

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THE BLEEDING OF LIVERPOOL

PLUS: Interview with South African trade union leader
Thatcher and finance capital
Duncan Hallas on the history of the Communist Party

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NOTES

of the month

LABOUR PARTY

Charge of the right brigade

'I'M NOT a prisoner of the right. I lead the party in the way I want to lead it and I am under obligation to no faction, grouping or wedge in the party.'

This declaration of intent was spelt out by Neil Kinnock in an eve of conference interview with the Labour weekly *Tribune*. It reiterated his previous statements made over recent weeks, that he would control the next manifesto, regardless of what decisions are made at the Labour Party conference this month.

Kinnock is clearly determined that however embarrassing certain conference decisions may be, he will refuse to be bound by them.

He probably won't find that much opposition from the bulk of the Labour Party in this. Liverpool council are likely to win only half-hearted support for their stand against ratecapping. And although the miners are likely to be more successful because of the union votes, Kinnock will probably be able to minimise the impact of any such decision.

Sidesteps

The rest of his *Tribune* interview demonstrates that Kinnock far from being a prisoner of the right, is becoming one of its most enthusiastic leaders.

He sidesteps the issue of the amnesty for the miners. He is in favour of a review of cases, which is not the same as an immediate amnesty for all imprisoned miners.

But reinstatement of sacked miners he explains is impractical. After all, says Kinnock, some of those sacked may have reached retirement age by the time there is a Labour government. He gives no other argument on reinstatement.

But no reimbursement to the NUM he announces is a matter of principle. Retrospective legislation is, according to



him, a bad thing and the miners won't get a penny. If new governments started changing laws retrospectively, he says, this would only harm the labour movement. In other words, the miners can expect nothing at all from a future Labour government.

Not that much is on offer for the rest of us. He explains that his policies 'are not the ingredients of a wages or incomes policy that remotely resembles anything that has been tried before'.

In other words, there will be an incomes policy, but it won't be the same as the last one. This is precisely how Harold Wilson explained Labour's incomes policy, which wasn't the same as any previous policy, when he introduced a 5 percent limit in 1975.

This incomes policy which isn't an incomes policy comes from the TUC/Labour Party policy statement, *The New Partnership*. The only other place the trade union movement appears in the interview is in Kinnock's response to the question, 'what are the specifically socialist, as opposed to merely Keynesian, elements of our policy?'

Kinnock explains that Labour says it will create one million extra jobs over two years, while the SDP offers just half a million.

But the key is 'the partnership of production, the relationship with the trade unions.'

The last such partnership had nothing to do with socialism. The agreement between the TUC and the Labour Party between 1974-9, the Social Contract, saw unemployment rise, and real wages fall. It too was hailed as a 'new special partnership' and a 'radically different approach.'

It wasn't. Kinnock has changed a few of the words. But he's got the same old policies

lined up for another effort.

Getting elected now is the one absolutely clear and honest policy Neil Kinnock has. But in the rest of the ambiguities and evasions, the shift rightwards is clear and unmistakable.

This is true in Kinnock's opposition to any idea of blacks having the right to organise in their own sections, inside the Labour Party. It is even clearer over the question of *Militant*. Here Kinnock has the nerve to hide behind democratic socialism, which he counterposes to democratic centralism.

He and the editor of *Tribune* Nigel Williamson, agree that *Militant* have to be got rid of. But they disagree about how. Williamson favours leaving it up to local parties, but Kinnock explains, left to itself that process (of local expulsions) 'can be a long time coming.'

The danger is, Kinnock warns, that:

'*Militant* and its influence can become immensely distended by a large and honourable grouping in the party, that loathes their tactics and ideology, but has an infinite belief in fair play.'

In other words, anyone inside the party who shows any decency in opposing the witchhunt is doing the party immense damage. Clearly in Kinnock's view they have to be protected from themselves, so that their generosity is not abused by 'fringe elements who don't share those libertarian instincts at all'.

Centre of opposition

The interview is not really surprising for it is a further indication of Kinnock's politics, and the direction in which they are moving.

More importantly, it illustrates just how much he can now dare to say in public.

It also shows how far Nigel Williamson, once an enthusiastic supporter of Tony Benn, and *Tribune* have shifted to the right.

Just two years ago *Tribune* was at the centre of opposition to Michael Foot's leadership of the Labour Party.

In issue after issue the compromises and failures of Foot were exposed and ridiculed. *Tribune* was one of the firmest supporters of the 'outside left' in the Labour Party.

Labour MP, John Silkin, ended up taking the paper to court to prevent the weekly attacks on Foot.

Readers of *Tribune* today could be forgiven for thinking that all this never happened. ■

NOTES of the month

TUC A New double act

THE OUTCOME of the TUC marked, as predicted, the successful launch of the new social contract strategy. The capitulation of the 'left' unions over ballot funds was merely symbolic of the much more important shift to the right in policy terms. If anything we underestimated the dimensions of this shift.

A motion giving the go-ahead for a TUC 'Ballot Services Department' was agreed overwhelmingly. A motion reaffirming TUC guidelines on industrial action (six pickets, control by officials, emergency cover etc) was passed without a murmur. The resolution on a future 'positive framework of trade union law' received backing from all sides (including Ken Gill, once of the CP now of the *Morning Star*) and was proposed and seconded by the interesting new double act of Ron Todd and Alastair Graham. A resolution advocating a partnership between business, government and unions on technology, 'industrial democracy' and 'improving effective competition in industry' was similarly approved.

Needless to say, the Labour Party/TUC pact *A New Partnership, A New Britain* received overwhelming support with the various general secretaries basking in the glow of their huge majorities in the political fund ballots (they have even produced a challenge cup for the union with the biggest vote—currently ASLEF).

Only the miners' vote went wrong for them. The support for an amnesty and the repayment of money seized from the NUM and other unions was achieved by a very narrow majority (small enough to be swung by the National Union of Journalists) and only because both the NUT delegates and the bank workers' delegates abstained. The various manoeuvres to avoid embarrassing the leadership at the Labour Party conference have already taken place.

Nevertheless the TUC vote represents a gesture of defiance and can be used to argue for action in support of the miners, particularly as it commits the TUC to an 'immediate campaign'—a campaign which the TUC has no intention of organising. ■

MINERS

A confused picture

THE TUC vote calling on the next Labour government to reinstate the sacked miners was a political victory for the miners.

On the industrial front though, they face real trouble. The National Coal Board has announced a massive rundown in the industry. Some 50 pits and 50,000 jobs are expected to go in the next five years, with the majority of jobs going within two years. This is in addition to the 34 pits which have been closed since January 1984, or are under closure review.

Resistance to closures is severely hampered by the split in the NUM, with the Notts miners due to ballot on their breakaway this month. The voting, originally planned for the end of September, has been delayed because the breakaway union has run into trouble with the certification officer over its new rule book.

The difficulties faced by the scab leaders in Nottinghamshire, Lynk and Prendergast, may also have contributed to the delay.

NUM loyalists won branch elections at a handful of Notts pits. A circular issued to scab branch officials last month admitted

and the revelation that multi-millionaire Paul Getty has—at the request of coal board chief Ian MacGregor—given money to the scab union.

However, the NUM loyalists' campaign has been fraught with difficulties, only some of which were unavoidable. The NUM have held a series of meetings in the pit villages, Arthur Scargill speaking at many. Scores of meetings have been held, but they have generally only attracted a few of those who worked during the 1984-1985 strike.

The real job of winning the argument for one national miners' union has to be carried out face to face. Victimisation, the physical isolation of ex-strikers at work and management bans on NUM literature, in addition to the legacy of the strike, have made this hard within the pits.

Outside, in the mining villages lack of numbers limits what can be done. At most Notts pits, less than 100 men remained on strike in March 1985 and not all of them have been active in the campaign against the breakaway.

The miners' wives support groups have played an important role in some pit villages, organising meetings, leafletting door to door and canvassing for support.

Amazingly though, the Notts loyalists have had little support from NUM branches in Yorkshire. The Yorkshire branches have not twinned up with ex-strikers at Notts pits. They have not sent teams of militants in to canvass and campaign against the breakaway. Indeed the Yorkshire executive has shown an amazing indifference to the split.



Roy Lynk: relying on breakaway vote

that NUM loyalists were dominating some branch meetings. It ordered branches not to allow Arthur Scargill to speak at meetings or in welfare halls—a ruling which ran against the scabs' rhetoric about union democracy and shocked many Notts miners who are hostile to Arthur Scargill.

The breakaway has been further hindered by the decision of COSA, the NUM's white collar section, not to split, a strong campaign in the South Derbyshire area against the split

No amount of personal appearances in Nottinghamshire by Arthur Scargill can make up for the lack of face to face arguments with the 'silent majority' of Notts miners who worked during the strike and whom Lynk is relying on to vote for a breakaway.

In other coalfields, the picture after the strike is very confused. Much seems to depend on the quality of the branch leadership, and the future prospects of the pit.

Most weeks the industrial pages of *Socialist Worker* will report one or two disputes over conditions or victimisations. These are not confined to pits where the miners went back united in the long strike.

Coventry colliery for example had a 24-hour strike for the reinstatement of men sacked from the pit although only a few hundred men remained out until March.

However, in some pits—where closure is threatened and the branch leadership is poor or has been destroyed—the coal board is walking all over the union. Output in South Wales is above its pre-strike levels as men strive to make their pit profitable in the hope that the axe will fall elsewhere. One Kent pit is now producing more coal with 470 men

and one face than it did with 900 men and three faces.

Worse, the coal board recently announced the closure of the Yorkshire Main colliery in the Doncaster area. It was a militant pit during the national strike, but branch officials put the closure down to the men 'not knuckling down and getting production going after the strike'!

Nevertheless, six months after the national strike ended, it's obvious the coal board didn't score the knockout punch they'd hoped. The closure programme announced at the end of September will help them maintain fear within the industry, but they still face a workforce in the big profitable pits that's shown itself prepared to kick back. ■

NOTES

of the month

BLACK STRUGGLES

A question of race?

THE SUMMER OF 1985 has once again seen the simmerings of the deep racial divisions which exist in British society. Those who believed that somehow the tensions which existed in the mid and late seventies had disappeared for good have been sadly disabused.

In the East End of London there have been a number of horrific incidents involving arson attacks on Asian homes. But they are only the tip of an iceberg. There are very frequent complaints that even Labour councils refuse to rehouse Asian families whose homes are under threat from racists. Equally frequently comes the complaint that the police do nothing to protect the well being or property of Asians or blacks threatened by racists.

At the same time, the riot in Handsworth erupted. It was the culmination of years of deprivation, unemployment, bad housing, and police harassment. The piecemeal policies of urban renewal, community policing and Youth Training Schemes were not enough to compensate for the deep crisis which has left youth on the scrapheap and inner cities in decay.

Job losses

It is not surprising that the issue erupted as it did. Workers have now borne nearly ten years of cuts in jobs and services, the run down of schools, of the decimation of industry. The West Midlands, for example, lost one third of all manufacturing jobs between 1975 and 1982. The Tory government has shown that it couldn't give a damn what happens to the inner city areas.

Thatcher made a few mild criticisms of Enoch Powell's recent repatriation speech. But her government's policies only foster racial divisions—from a failure to build new housing to immigration controls. A future Labour government has little more to offer. Kinnock makes no promises to get rid of unemployment or to do much to improve



The job centre, Soho Road, Handsworth: not the liveliest place in town

the inner cities. It is hardly surprising that many people predict the growth of racist organisation under a future Labour government.

But the bankruptcy of the governmental alternatives means that the question of how you really do fight racism has come to the fore, at least for the activists. There are two different options put forward.

One is the response of those activists in Handsworth, some of whom, like the Handsworth Black Sisters, believe that only blacks should be involved in any defence campaign. Some white socialists and trade unionists have gone along with this view.

Yet separate black organisation is not the answer to the problems of Handsworth or any of the other inner cities. There are divisions, it is true, between black and white. But successful struggles against the police, the bosses and ultimately the capitalist state itself will depend on overcoming those divisions, not continuing to organise on the basis of them.

The other response comes from socialists

who have called for the setting up of black sections inside the Labour Party.

That people feel such a move is necessary is hardly surprising. Anyone who heard the response of MPs like Roy Hattersley or Jeff Rooker to the riots will have been aghast at their uncritical support for the police. And Neil Kinnock's intransigent opposition to black sections says at least something in their favour.

But black sections cannot solve the problems of racism inside the Labour Party. They may become vehicles for improvement in the positions of a minority of blacks. But they will not alter the basis of the Labour Party, based on support for British capitalism and therefore for racism.

They are not in any way based on the struggles of black people. This is clear from recent events. Black sections are an internal mechanism for slowly reforming the Labour Party, not a means of mobilising blacks in the community or workplace.

Yet it is precisely in these areas that the fight against racism can be won. ■

NOTES

of the month

HONEYFORD

School for scandal

THE BATTLE in Bradford over headmaster Ray Honeyford has drawn the divide clearly between racists and anti-racists. It shows how the institutions of British society are prepared to condone a level of racism within their ranks, and how little control those who this racism is aimed at, have over such institutions.

The Parents Action Committee was set up by parents in Drummond Middle school after Honeyford made racist statements in the right-wing *Salisbury Review* and the *Times Educational Supplement*. With 90 per cent of his pupils from ethnic minorities he asserted that the education of white children could suffer if they were in a minority.

This sent the Asian community in Bradford wild. They demanded that Honeyford be sacked. The hung council suspended him. The school's Board of Governors didn't agree and voted against the suspension.

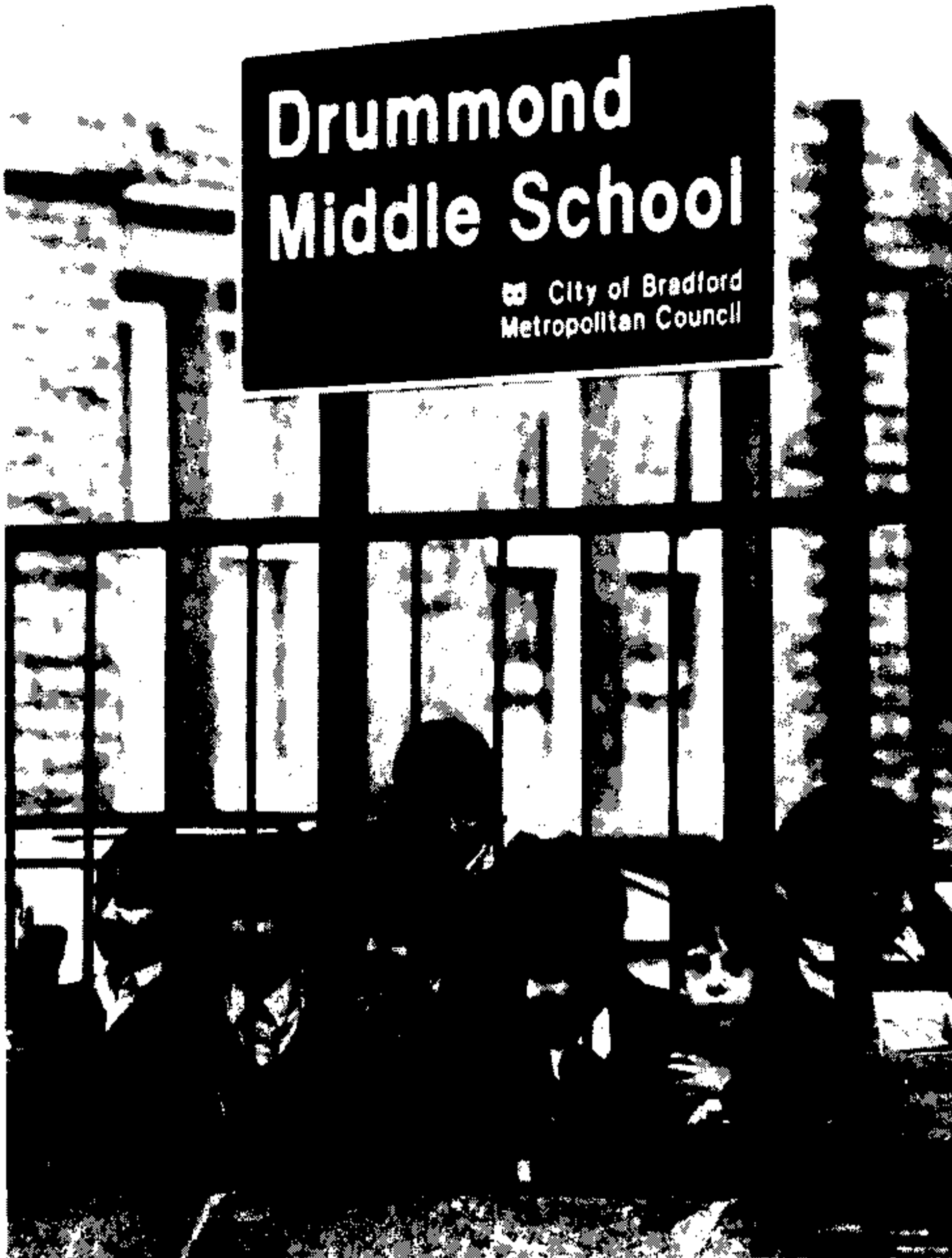
The fight in Bradford has continued to simmer since the initial outcry some months ago. Recent developments have inflamed it once again.

Tremendous campaign

Last month Honeyford went to the High Court where a judge ruled that he be given his job back. The council agreed, pending their appeal. The Parents Action Committee didn't and mounted what has been a tremendous campaign.

This campaign has developed on two fronts. Firstly it has involved large numbers of parents, pupils, local anti-racists and a few trade unionists into effective activity. There have been big meetings, big pickets and the successful boycotts, where only a minority of pupils have gone into school.

The second development has been for many local councillors and community leaders to direct the campaign towards 'semi-legality'. They want to channel the resentment and anger which has built up towards the new elections for the Board of



Should Honeyford teach these kids?

Governors, saying that these are the people who have the power to remove Honeyford. They also want to use 'influence', like the local paper and well-known individuals, to put pressure on the council to re-suspend the headmaster.

This has led to a certain cooling off in the dispute. Of course this is wrong. The strength of feeling should have been directed towards local workers—especially in the council and specifically in the schools. This would have placed the campaign in a better position.

But even without an industrial base, and given the particularly strong support amongst the large Asian community, the dispute still has the power to win.

It can also provide a political focus for local trade union activists. Arguments and debate about an issue outside of the workplace can strengthen and hold organisation inside the workplace.

The temptation for trade unionists will be to abstain, thinking one of two things: that the struggle has nothing to do with union members at all or that trade unionists should never call for the sacking of workers.

Both of these positions are totally wrong. Instead of being irrelevant it can help build politics in the workplace and the sacking of racists can be a sign of union strength.

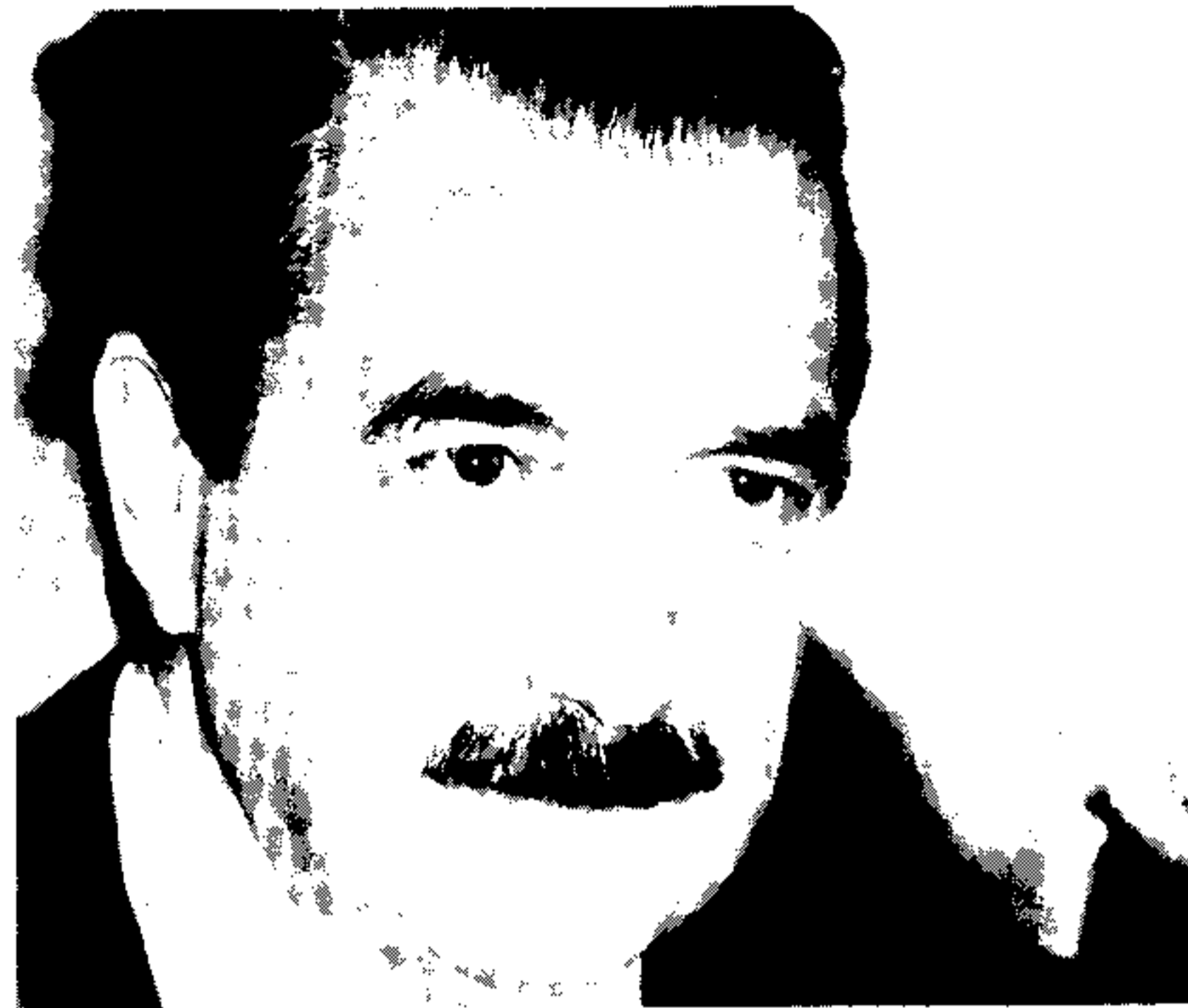
The recent Islington strike stands as a testament to this. One thing is clear. Every anti-racist—white or black—should see the fight against Honeyford as an important part of the fight against racism. ■

LATIN AMERICA

Gestures to the gallery

WHILE our attention is rightly focused on the upheaval in Southern Africa, it would be wrong to ignore the quite important political change which has taken place in South America recently—particularly as it presents a major problem for US policy in the region.

As little as three years ago, military dictatorship or right-wing government was the norm. Now the only military regimes left are in Chile and Paraguay, and with the exception of Ecuador all the other countries of South America have reformist governments of the left or the centre.



Alfonsín:
used army
to break
strike

NOTES of the month

In terms of the internal policies of some of these countries this does mark an important break. The Alfonsín government in Argentina has put on trial the former dictators, Generals Videla, Viola and Galtieri, as well as a handful of other right-wing officers.

In Peru, the newly-elected populist government under Alain Garcia has been carrying out a serious purge of the senior ranks of the police force who have been heavily involved in drug smuggling, and has dismissed the army chief for his complicity in the murder of seven civilians in the civil war zone in the south of the country.

But in terms of the situation facing the mass of the working class, the unemployed and the rural poor there is little change. Alfonsín has used the armed forces to break a lorry drivers strike. Garcia has made rhetorical gestures to the gallery—selling off civil servants' cars and using the money to distribute a little food in the Lima shanty towns—but is committed to pushing the dirty war against the guerillas, while perhaps curbing the worst excesses.

Less popular appeal

The first major political row in Brazil since the inauguration of a civilian government in March has led to the resignation of 'pro-monetarist' ministers and the reinforcement of the reformist wing, but the situation there remains unstable. The death of the incoming President, Tancredo Neves, means the regime of President Sarney has much less popular appeal than the ruling class hoped for and is correspondingly less likely to be able to control the strike movements that are occurring.

But it is the foreign policy stance of the new governments that worries the Reagan administration, in particular their stand on Central America. Both Brazil and Argentina also have a strategic role in relations with South Africa, and both have clearly distanced themselves from the US position. The US hopes of a South American version

of NATO have again taken a knock.

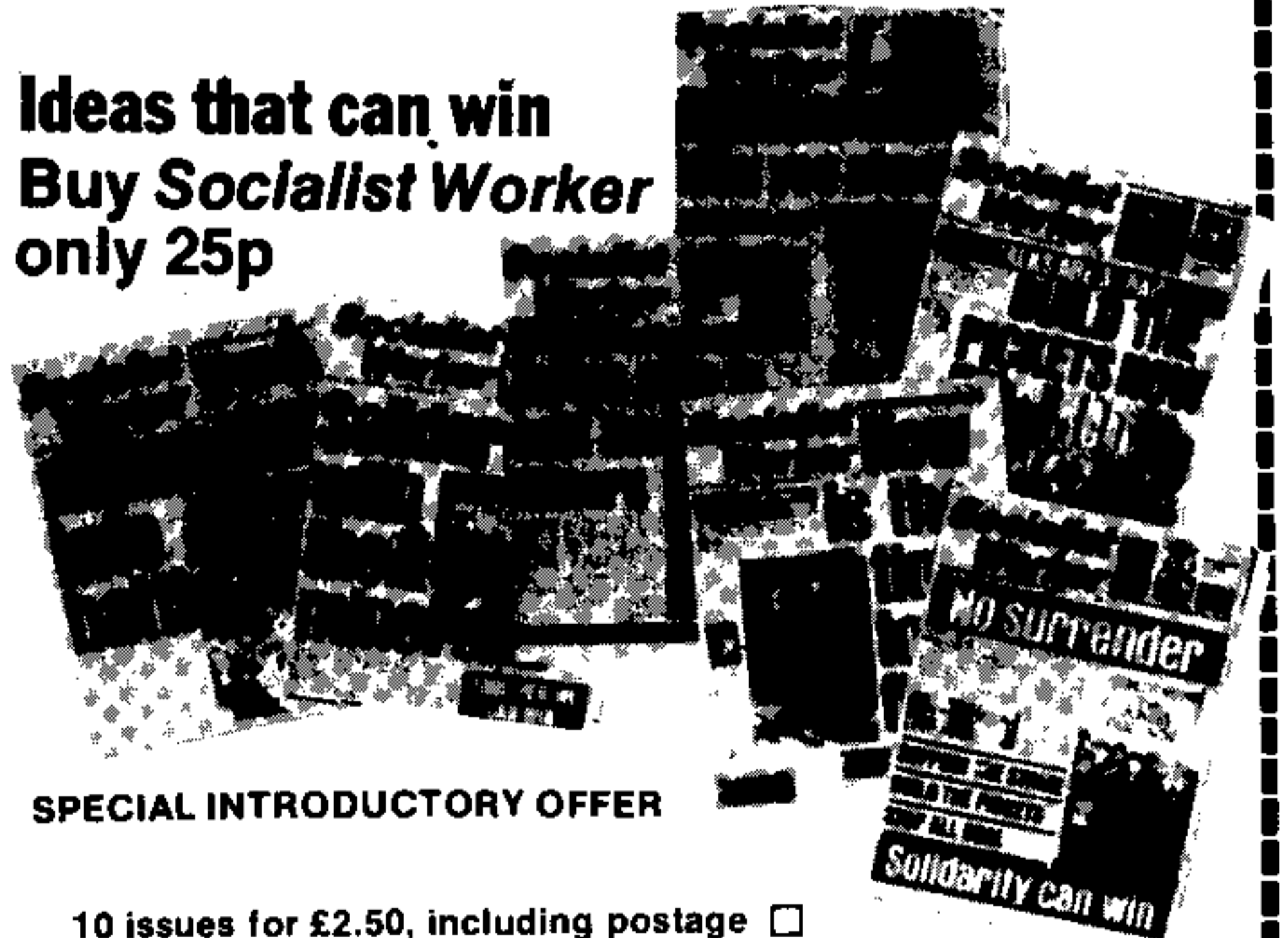
The attempt to strangle Nicaragua economically has had only partial success, although it has made Nicaragua dependent on Russian oil rather than Mexican supplies. Politically the Reagan strategy has run into

considerable problems. The Central America peace plan of the so-called Contadora countries (Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico and Panama) has now been supported by the governments of Peru, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil.

Any real escalation in Central America by Reagan has become a much more risky operation, and any intervention against Nicaragua under the auspices of the Organisation of American States is a non-starter.■

●Additional notes by: Dave Beecham, Mike Simons, Julie Waterson and Pete Clark.

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The year of anniversaries

'WHAT CAN we do? We can do much! we can inject the voice of reason into world affairs. We can mobilise all the spiritual, all the moral, all the political strength of Asia and Africa on the side of peace. Yes, we! we, the peoples of Asia and Africa; 1,400,000,000 strong, far more than half the human population of the world, we can mobilise what I have called the *Moral Violence of Nations* in favour of peace.'

President Sukarno of Indonesia, Opening Address to the Asia-Africa Conference, Bandung (Indonesia), 18 April 1955.

It is Sunday. The train is not crowded. It climbs slowly towards Bandung, chugging between the terraces of flooded brown paddy, stepped up to the summit of the hills.

Beyond them and higher lie the tea estates, regimented like formal gardens. Bamboo irrigation pipes funnel brown water down the fields. There are five crops in two years here. A volcano or two smoke evilly above.

A plastic toy rolls across the carriage floor between our ankles. It is a black military jeep, an appropriate plaything for a land overshadowed by military-industrial baronies. The iron fist has a glove of prodigious corruption. The police are mean in khaki and brilliant white helmets.

Republic proclaimed

Mean or not, the tangible evidence of their power—and the effects of a decade or more of oil revenue—are all around. The villages of West Java are prosperous; mopeds pop down the rural tarmac roads. There are no ancient thatched huts left, few traditional clothes or bare feet. The soil is very rich for those with access to it.

1985 is the fortieth anniversary of the proclamation of the Indonesian Republic, and the picture of President Suharto, now 'father of the nation', beams down from all the walls.

The proclamation was courtesy of the occupying Japanese, so it was not very real. It took three years of bitter and barbarous war to make the Republic stick. The British—Mountbatten and Churchill—held the door open to let the Dutch back in to recreate the 'Netherlands East Indies', and they scorched the red earth of Java to destroy the independence movement.

Only ten years later, there was yet another illustrious anniversary, in Bandung itself. In the former Dutch Pension Fund Building, a dull 1930s cement thing, the first Asia-Africa conference met. It was the foundation of the 'Third World', although they had not

invented the phrase then.

The great names were all there—Sukarno, Nehru, Tito, Nkrumah, Ben Bejla, Chou En-lai. And they embodied an idea: there was a third alternative to Washington and Moscow, to capitalism and Stalinism, to the terrors of nuclear Cold War.

It was a heroic moment, but when it rained, the Indonesian Ministers had to mop the floors for, as Nehru proclaimed, 'Bandung is the capital city of Asia-Africa' and there must be no puddles. In April of this year, there was a ceremony of commemoration, but the world has moved on. They don't have puddles now, and the delegates all stayed at the Jakarta Hilton.

That was 40 years and 30 years ago. But hang on, wasn't there another anniversary, 20 years ago? On 30 September 1965, Lieutenant Untung with a group of young officers attempted to murder the senior generals of the army.

The generals escaped, and launched a devastating counter-attack that slaughtered anything up to three quarters of a million people—including almost the entire Communist Party (the PKI, the largest Communist party in the world after China and Russia). Children played football with the heads. The rivers ran scarlet instead of brown.

That's where President Suharto came to power as General Suharto. You would think he would want to remember the time when he overthrew Sukarno. You would think in Bandung they would especially remember. For Sukarno was the most famous graduate from the Institute of Technology Bandung. And the city is the headquarters of the Siliwangi Division, the one that the head of the army, General Nasution, relied upon as one of the few loyal units that could be summoned to Jakarta in early October, two decades ago, to begin the slaughter. It announced the opening of that terrible year of the long knives.

But the kindly avuncular Suharto who gazes down from the walls does not like to remember. Perhaps he is ashamed to recall the abattoir from which he snatched his crown. And the left doesn't care to remember either.

For the destruction of the PKI was not only a terrible defeat, but an even more massive rejection of the politics of class collaboration than that which took place in Chile eight years later, or in Shanghai in 1927.

The strategy of the PKI had been collaboration, on a programme of mild reform. The President, Sukarno, needed the PKI to counter-balance the army—and offered the Communist leaders high state

office in return for their loyalty.

Almost certainly the PKI were not involved in Untung's adventure. It was not their style to be so daring. But, so unstable was the structure, the removal of only one brick brought the whole gigantic building to the ground. The PKI were smeared with being pro-China, and thus became the object of all the anti-capitalist feeling of Indonesians (capital was heavily concentrated in the hands of Chinese Indonesians).

Bandung spirit

Furthermore, under Sukarno the country was plunged into a series of adventures and a scale of economic mismanagement which reduced the mass of the population to extremes of poverty. The PKI raised no protest.

1965 was the end of the 'Bandung Spirit', as well as of Sukarno. But the new military regime kept the windy slogans, the litanies and catechisms—the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

The *pansila* is still the official intonation, drilled into yawning civil servants and school kids.

It is all long ago, marked now only in the cyphers on the regimental banners, in the melancholic memories of old men in Beijing, in nightmares of the winners in Jakarta. The old emperors have long retired to the history books and now hardly anyone remembers. Just as 1965 smothered 1955 in blood, so 1985 has buried much of 1965.

The train chugs on, reliable, clean and comfortable in reaching the place, Bandung, but it cannot take you to the idea. The famous 'spirit of Bandung' has joined the world of spirits, downed in many a draught in many a bar. It took more than talk to turn the world round, to end the nuclear blocs.

But the spirit lives on in something Suharto and his cronies would not appreciate. For the years of boom that transformed those villages in West Java, and plumped the children's cheeks and showed how corrupt and bloody dictatorships did so much better than incompetent leftist ones, also spread Jakarta into a giant industrial city. And in the industrial areas, the fever of liberty that distantly excited those gentlemen (there were very few ladies) in Bandung so long ago, that seemed horribly crushed in 1965, is as vigorous as ever.

In the waves of strikes in the early eighties, the new industrial working class of Indonesia began to flex its muscles. The stirrings are still too small to perturb President Suharto, but he may live to learn. ■

The volcano erupts

FOR FIVE days in July, the French West Indian colony of Guadeloupe was paralysed by a massive wave of protests. Barricades blocked access to the island's international airport, threatening the important tourist industry, while another cut the bridge linking the two parts of the island.

Tens of vehicles were burnt, shops were looted and gunsmiths' broken into. All shops in the main town, Pointe-à-Pitre, were closed, and all traffic halted. Even food supplies were running out until negotiations with the authorities resulted in a partial lifting of the blockade by the demonstrators.

The protests were in support of Georges Faisans, leader of the Popular Movement for an Independent Guadeloupe (MPGI), who was given a 3-year jail sentence for assault (he had wounded a white teacher after the teacher had kicked a black school student). Faisans had been on hunger strike for a month and a half in a French prison when the protests started.

The barricades were organised by a committee representing twenty different organisations, including the MPGI, the UPLG (Popular Union for the Liberation of Guadeloupe) and the extreme left.

The number and determination of the demonstrators shook the authorities. In Guadeloupe, the independence movement, though solidly rooted in the countryside and amongst some sections of workers, and gaining popularity amongst young people, is at present supported by a small minority of the population.

'Occupied territory'

Many of the protestors were unemployed young people—the number of unemployed in Guadeloupe is officially 25 percent of the working population, and half of the unemployed are under twenty-five.

The protests were popular for another reason—the widespread racism among the expatriate French, who occupy many of the top jobs in government services and French-owned businesses. According to a nationalist spokesman, many Europeans act as if they were in 'occupied territory'.

As many as one young person in three is forced by economic conditions to emigrate to France. Yet Guadeloupe, like the neighbouring French island of Martinique, is a popular playground for the French middle class.

Social tensions have also risen as a result of clashes between the poorest Guadeloupeans and the even poorer immigrants (many of them illegal) from Haiti and Dominica. These problems have been exploited by the local establishment and the island's only daily paper. So racist divisions exist even among Guadeloupe's exploited black majority.

This time, however, the protests were directed against white racism and the arrogance of the colonial judges. The same

court that jailed Georges Faisans for three years for assault recently handed out a 19-year sentence on another MPGI leader, Luc Reinette—and then increased the sentence to 23 years on appeal. (Reinette didn't stay in jail long. In June he escaped from prison in Basse-Terre, along with three other militants.)

Meanwhile, two local dignitaries, members of the right-wing business and political establishment, were released from prison despite strong evidence of their involvement in a massive financial scandal in which public funds were used for property speculation.

For all these reasons, the 'release Faisans' protest developed into a spontaneous revolt going well beyond the ranks of the nationalist organisations. But at no time did the movement's leaders go beyond the original demand for the release of the nationalist leader: 'If Faisans is freed, we'll clean up the town and everything will go back to normal. But if he isn't—watch out!'

The Mitterrand government acted quickly to meet this challenge to the state. Within 48 hours the number of gendarmes and riot police was doubled. Several barricades were demolished, to demonstrate the authorities' readiness to restore order by force (they were immediately rebuilt).

There was a way out, however—if only the judges would release Faisans. The court was hurriedly convened, and the judges conveniently decided the provisional release of the nationalist leader.

With the crisis in New Caledonia still unresolved, the government could not afford another major colonial problem. Scenes of armed riot police going into action against crowds of black youths would have been a severe embarrassment at the very time the government was polishing up its image with 'third world' countries by leading diplomatic protests against the state of emergency in South Africa.

How long can French colonial rule continue?

As in France's other colonies, those who benefit most from the status quo are determined to hang on to their privileges—in the name of loyalty to France. One of the leading 'békés' (the 'békés' are the old white slave-owning class) said in a radio interview:

'We are engaged in a struggle to keep our overseas provinces French...and in the fight against marxism. My fight is also against the Guadeloupe Communist Party, for ideological reasons, because for me communism is a plague, like leprosy... I am ready to take up arms if necessary.'

Yet the benefits of French rule are being increasingly questioned—especially by the young—and the Guadeloupe 'volcano' is certain to continue to erupt.

Forty years after being given the status of a French department, the economy is in ruins. Sugar production—once the mainstay

of the economy, and the source of enormous profits for the plantation owners and French capitalists—is down from 1.8 million tonnes in 1965 to just over half a million tonnes today.

Three-quarters of the country's wealth now comes from the tertiary sector (tourism, commerce, transport, administration), while 15 percent comes from the secondary sector and only 9 percent from agriculture and fishing.

Exports (mainly bananas and sugar) pay for only 14 percent of imports. The boom in consumption of imported goods is financed by 'transfer payments' from France, in the form of civil servants' salaries, welfare benefits and subsidies.

Workers' resistance is strong, and sometimes explosive. Recently there have been major strikes in the hospitals, the port, hotels, the supermarkets, and the building industry. Small farmers have occupied 1200 hectares of land belonging to big companies.

Many of these movements are led by militants belonging to the biggest nationalist organisation, the UPLG, which controls unions representing agricultural workers and small peasant farmers, as well as workers in the towns.

The UPLG refuses to take part in French-organised elections. Most workers who bother to vote (Guadeloupe has the highest abstention rate of all French departments) support the reformist CP or the Socialists—who are, at best, ambivalent on the national question.

Middle class nationalism

Growing support for independence, however, has forced the Guadeloupe CP—traditionally the strongest workers' party—to support autonomy *as a step towards independence*.

Neither of the two main nationalist groups has much to offer workers.

The UPLG has its roots in the middle class nationalist, and Maoist, movements of the sixties and seventies. It is more 'ideological' and more sectarian than the MPGI, which was founded in 1982. The MPGI is usually regarded as the legal wing of the underground Caribbean Revolutionary Alliance (ARC).

Both parties stress calls for the unity of all classes—workers and small farmers, but also 'medium-sized capitalists' and even (on occasion) the 'békés'. Only the 'metros'—French officials and managers who 'take Guadeloupeans' jobs'—are excluded from this hoped-for national consensus.

The UPLG slogan 'Independence means work' holds out the prospect of workers making sacrifices in the interest of a new, Guadeloupean ruling class—unless workers are themselves organised to take power.

The majority of the people of Guadeloupe have yet to be convinced of the case for independence. They are committed, whether out of principle or pragmatism, to remaining French citizens in a French department. But this situation could change, as the July events showed. ■

T Fabrice

Over the rainbow

AS THE French Socialist Party slides downhill towards electoral defeat, problems are accumulating for President Mitterrand. One of the biggest may prove to be the affair of the *Rainbow Warrior*, the Greenpeace ship blown up in Auckland harbour in July as it was preparing to monitor French nuclear tests at the Pacific island of Mururoa.

In the face of a flood of accusations that the French secret services (the DGSE) were involved, the French government set up a special enquiry under one Bernard Tricot, a long-time Gaullist who was deeply involved with the secret services at the time of the Algerian war. His report whitewashed everyone, and for a few days the affair seemed to have died down.

Then the newspaper *Le Monde* produced a report showing that no less than three separate teams of French secret service agents had been involved in the attack. In the face of these revelations the Socialist government are going to find it very hard to get off the hook. As many as possible of those involved will save their skins by looking for scapegoats. Defence Minister Hernu has been forced to resign. Mitterrand, a long-time survivor, will doubtless display clean hands.

The facts of the affair seem to be as follows. Firstly, two French secret service agents with false passports have been arrested in New Zealand, but the full case against them will not become public till their trial begins in November.

Secondly, a boat called the *Ouvea* (which has now conveniently disappeared) was also in the South Pacific at the time with three DGSE members on board. It is claimed they were simply there to observe Greenpeace activities. But all three of them came from France's Training Centre for Combat Swimmers and all three were highly trained for underwater sabotage. It is unlikely that such people were merely looking through binoculars.

Who and why?

Thirdly, according to *Le Monde*, there were two frogmen who actually planted the bomb. Tricot's report admits the presence of the first two groups of agents and says that the French secret services had official instructions to 'anticipate' Greenpeace action in relation to the Mururoa tests. While French officials insist that this meant no more than surveillance, the word is clearly ambiguous.

What remains unclear is who exactly gave the orders for the attack and, even more unclear, why they did so. The bombing seems to have had no obvious motive; the result has been mainly to give Greenpeace good publicity and to embarrass the French government.

The events do not cast great credit on the competence of the French secret service. So many clues point to French involvement that



one observer has said that those responsible left everything 'except a beret and a bottle of Beaujolais'.

As a result the French government seems to be caught in a cleft stick. If it accepts responsibility, it must take the rap; but if it denies any involvement then it seems to be admitting that it cannot control its own secret services.

Such an admission would be no surprise. Since coming to power Mitterrand has left the state machine well alone.

Nor would it be unprecedented for the French secret service to act independently of the government—especially one of the left.

In October 1956 leaders of the Algerian National Liberation Front were preparing to negotiate a possible peace with a French government led by Socialist Guy Mollet. But before negotiations could take place the Algerian leaders' plane was diverted by French military intelligence and they were arrested. No talks took place and the war went on. Neither Mollet nor any member of his cabinet knew anything of the kidnapping in advance, but Mollet covered up for it. Mitterrand probably remembers the episode well; he should do—he was Minister of Justice at the time.

Another possibility is the involvement of the extreme right, trying to discredit the French government.

However, all is not lost for Mitterrand. He has two things going for him. One is the widespread anti-English feeling that simmers below the surface in France—and for the purposes of the argument Canadian Greenpeace supporters and the New Zealand government all count as 'Anglo-Saxons'. Greenpeace is also widely alleged to

have links with the British secret services.

The view that the attack on Greenpeace was a quite legitimate act of self-defence to protect France's nuclear tests is one that has a great deal of currency.

Governments in trouble often turn to nationalism, and Mitterrand doubtless remembers what the Falklands did for Thatcher. While he is unlikely to send a task force to New Zealand, his style has been brazen.

He has expressed no regret at the death of the Greenpeace photographer killed in the explosion, and continues to insist that France will exclude foreign ships from the nuclear test zone. Indeed, he ordered the navy to protect the tests 'by force if necessary'.

'My country'

Secondly, there has been the role of the opposition. Six months before an election, the right has obviously taken the opportunity to embarrass the government and call for resignations. But among senior leaders of the right, the response has been remarkably restrained. Giscard d'Estaing's sole comment has been 'my country right or wrong', and Chirac has told his followers to keep quiet about the affair because he does not want to put at risk the secret service or French nuclear policy. Raymond Barre has approved the government's handling of the affair, saying: 'We must defend France's interests as a nuclear power and as a Pacific power.'

Whatever the exact degree of government complicity, the *Rainbow Warrior* incident has brought out the relation of the Socialist government to the French state. In terms of the secret service apparatus, nuclear policy and colonial interests, Mitterrand has accepted the framework inherited from his predecessors—indeed, he clearly recognises that he is powerless to change it.

Mitterrand has come a long way from the man who said in July 1973 that 'the Socialist Party has always considered French nuclear tests to be useless and dangerous'. France has been testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific since the days of General de Gaulle in 1966.

The Socialist government resumed nuclear testing as early as November 1981 and Mitterrand has increased France's fleet of nuclear submarines. France has still not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, now signed by some 130 states. Mitterrand has also gone back on his pre-election promise to cut back on France's nuclear power programme, and France leads the world in fast-breeder reactors.

The French Communist Party has backed Mitterrand's nuclear policy, and support for Mitterrand on the left has meant that France has been virtually alone in Western Europe in not developing a mass peace movement.

Doubtless there will be further cover ups, and the full truth may never emerge. But at least the world has had the spectacle of the revolting hypocrisy of a 'socialist' government which whimpers about terrorism, but stages nuclear tests and employs teams of trained naval saboteurs. ■

Ian Birchall

The West's new friend

ALGERIA is officially 'reinventing' its economy. Following the fashion set by Thatcher and China's Deng Xiaoping, the Algerians are engaged in a huge programme of privatisation, turning over state-run companies, banks and farms to private capital.

The reforms have been enough to convince Ronald Reagan that Algeria is safe enough to be offered major arms deals. They must finally dispel the illusion that Algeria remains one of the outposts of 'socialism' in the Third World.

Thirty years ago Algeria was one of the models for the anti-imperialist movements that swept Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia. Like the Vietnamese, the Algerians had begun a campaign of guerrilla warfare, based on the idea that 'a long war of liberation' could secure freedom from French rule and open up the prospect of socialism. In 1962, after nine years of bloody struggle, the National Liberation Front (FLN) succeeded in driving out 800,000 French colonists and declared a government based on 'popular power'.

The FLN's victory was a spur to all those who saw themselves as part of the anti-imperialist struggle.

New society

In the USA it gave encouragement to the activists who played a leading role in the black movement that swept American cities throughout the sixties. Black Power leader Malcolm X described the Algerians as 'true revolutionaries'.

The idea that Algeria, like Cuba and later Vietnam, was a new form of society, freed through struggle from the domination of imperialism, found its way into the politics of most of the left. Algiers became a base for a host of guerrilla organisations, especially from the Arab world. It even incorporated European leftists, notably leading members of the Trotskyist Fourth International, who were eager to participate in the construction of a new socialist system.

But the 'socialist' project was flawed from the beginning. While the FLN enjoyed massive support among Algerians, and at certain points its guerrilla war erupted into genuine mass struggle, most of the fighting was carried out by a small number of activists.

These came from all classes—the FLN was made up of prosperous merchants, landowners, religious leaders, students, workers and peasants. The movement was so broad that it had only one aim around which these elements could unify: the expulsion of the French.

Despite this huge political obstacle, the victory in 1962 unleashed great energies among Algerian workers and peasants. Most of the French *colons* abandoned their land and their businesses, leaving a million hectares and 700 industrial enterprises.

Workers and peasants had already organised to defend these against sabotage by the departing French. They then occupied them, forming 'committees of management' which frustrated the hopes of the Algerian bourgeoisie that it could simply step into the shoes of the French.

The movement was shortlived. Not only was the FLN a nationalist front, it was divided between a guerrilla organisation which had originally been based in the countryside, and a 40,000-strong army which had spent most of the war outside Algeria. When the army advanced to secure the final expulsion of the French it imposed its own forms of organisation—authoritarian, bureaucratic and intolerant of even the mild reformism of some of the guerrillas.

The first independent government was under strong military influence. Its leaders were obsessed with all the concerns of an officer caste and were determined to bring the 'disorder' of the land and factory seizures under control. 'Self-management' was soon declared the official policy, but within such bureaucratic limits that within months it ceased to have any real meaning. The government worked fast to develop a local élite, which took over the running of farms and factories. Almost before it had begun, 'self-management' was at an end.

During the sixties a new ruling class developed with great speed. It was composed mainly of young technocrats and the cadres of the FLN army. It saw its task as modernisation, and the development of an independent Algerian economy. But the new class did not redistribute the property of the Algerian landowners or capitalists, relying on them to play an important role in national development.

In 1965 the first president, Ahmed Ben Bella, who had been associated with the guerrillas, was overthrown in a coup by Houari Boumedienne, who had commanded the FLN's army in exile. This completed the elimination of that part of the Algerian movement identified with even token reform. Boumedienne crushed the few remaining centres of worker militancy, and tied the unions closely to the state.

For the next 20 years Algeria developed as a classic example of the state capitalism associated with so many of the post-colonial societies of Africa and the Middle East. Oil revenues were used to establish petrochemical, steel, electrical and fertiliser industries under state control. But while Algeria changed as the cities grew, and hundreds of thousands left the land to work in the new plants and factories, Algeria was not freed from the international system. Rather, it became more closely enmeshed within it.

The attempt at modernisation cost Algeria far more than its oil revenues could sustain. As oil prices fell, its foreign debt became a huge burden—by this year it had reached \$15 billion, making Algeria the biggest debtor in

the Arab world. And despite the attempts at diversification, the country remained dependent on oil and gas for 98 percent of its foreign earnings.

Under these pressures the government of current president Chadli Benjedid—an utterly faceless bureaucrat who succeeded Boumedienne in 1979—has beaten a path to the offices of the World Bank and the IMF, like so many Third World leaders before him. He has offered the world's financial dictators exactly the terms they require—the 'opening up' of the Algerian economy, the dismantling of state concerns that have run industry and agriculture, privatisation of industry, trade, banking and land, the re-establishment of a 'market economy'.

Indeed, Chadli offers more. In a fair imitation of a Tory manifesto, the FLN party magazine *Revolution Africaine* calls for a shake-up of the economic system and the development of 'a new breed of managers' who can increase efficiency and productivity. No wonder that Algeria is one of the few Third World countries to which international banks are eager to lend their 'eurodollars'.

Western capital

The Americans are delighted. Shortly before President Chadli flew to Washington for an official visit last May, the White House announced that Algeria was to be placed on the list of nations approved for major arms supply, and that the US government merely awaited the Algerians' weapons orders.

The west now sees Algeria, with its 20 million population, as an important market and a potential base from which to extend business in North Africa and the Arab world. Investment by European and American companies is under discussion, with western capital attracted by the prospect of low wages and a labour force disciplined by years of authoritarian government.

Only one fear may nag at potential investors or Reagan's CIA advisers. Over the last two years mass protests in neighbouring Morocco and Tunisia have rocked the governments of King Hassan and President Bourguiba. And only weeks before Algeria's Chadli visited Washington, riots shook Algiers itself, as the city's workers and poor protested against slum conditions. The site of the riots was the Casbah, where almost 30 years ago the Algerian war of liberation reached its highest level.

At independence in 1962 there were 300,000 workers in industry and services. Today there are a million, with the majority in heavy industry and manufacturing. There is every possibility that they will be the focus of new struggles as Algeria's rulers seek to keep their promise to the world's bankers.

In the process, it must be hoped, a current will develop which is independent of the 'Arab socialism' of Algeria's rulers and the Stalinist tradition that has suffocated workers' struggles in so much of the region. If it does not, the growing current of Islamic fundamentalism may be the beneficiary of the future battles of Algiers. ■

Phil Marshall

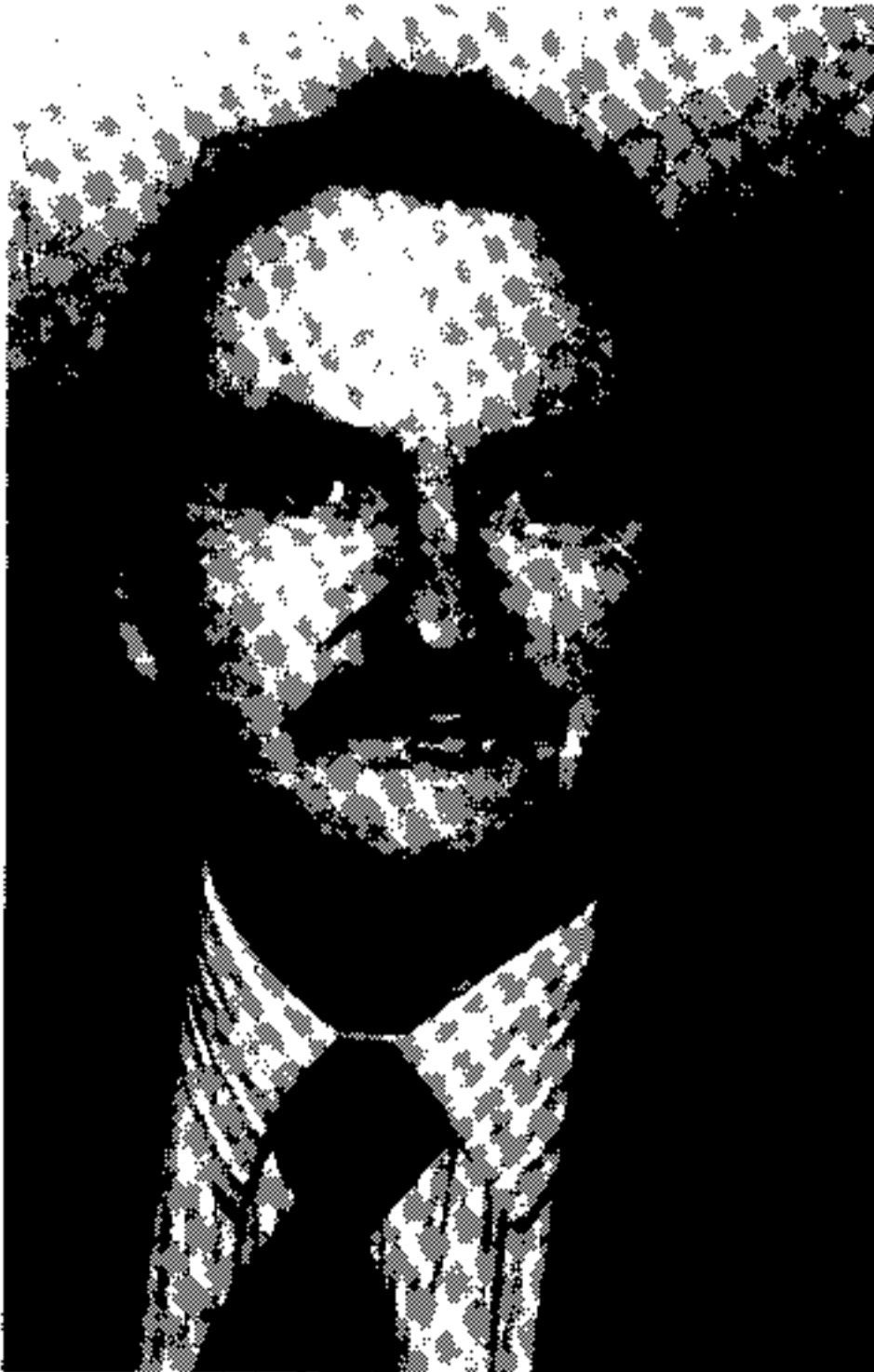
Banking on a future

IN THE last few months there have been many signs of open disaffection in big business circles with Thatcher and her government.

Lawson and the Bank of England have been criticised for their mishandling of the Johnson Matthey bank rescue last year, with its smell of incompetence and corruption. The CBI (Confederation of British Industry) has launched a succession of complaints about the level of interest rates, the damage inflicted by the fluctuations in the pound, and the government's failure to cut wages in the public sector.

The managing director (Lord Weinstock, once a firm Thatcherite) and chairman (James Prior, former Tory cabinet minister) of one of Britain's most powerful multinationals, GEC, have attacked the government's 'neglect' of manufacturing industry.

The disaffection has had an impact in the political arena—disaffection of the Tory wets; the backbench Tory revolt over the increase in top-people's pay; signs of resistance in the cabinet to anything too drastic or controversial; the cabinet reshuffle designed to improve the image.



John Henry Harvey-Jones, ICI chairman: an eccentric by the standards of British boardrooms

But more is at stake than fears by Tory MPs that they might be made redundant at the next election, or the television style of Selwyn Gummer. The whole direction of Tory economic strategy is in question.

The arguments within the ruling class have in turn raised a new issue concerning the logic behind that strategy, the nature of Thatcherism itself.

A number of writers on the left have

suggested that Thatcher has always only really represented the interests of a particular section of British capital—the money lenders rather than industry; the City and finance capital rather than 'productive' capital.

Tom Nairn of *New Left Review* for example, has argued that 'Mrs Thatcher's "experiment" is no more than an attempt to utilise the recession to hasten and complete the dominance of finance capital.'

It is a theme which goes down well inside the Labour Party, where the City has long figured as suitable bogeymen and scapegoats. Kinnoek, echoing Harold Wilson before him, has frequently attacked the bloated profits of the banks, and the export of capital by financial institutions.

Hearing the brunt

John Smith, Kinnoek's industry spokesman, recently summed up his talks with businessmen by saying that 'Labour is the only party left in this country that believes in manufacturing production'. Labour, in other words, is bidding for the support of industrial capital against what is supposed to be a common enemy—the parasites, speculators and usurers of the City.

In reality, Labour governments have always in the past refused to 'take over the City'. Attlee's and Cripps' fierce attacks on the bankers in the 1930s were forgotten after 1945. Wilson's rhetoric about the gnomes of Zurich did not prevent London becoming the main location for the new Euromarkets and international banking in the 1960s. Roy Hattersley has already diluted the proposals of the Alternative Economic Strategy for controls over the financial sector abandoning all suggestions of nationalising even a single bank.

But in the eyes of many on the left, this merely confirms their view of the dominance of the City and its financiers within British capitalism. Certainly Nairn's thesis seems plausible.

One reason for that is the stark contrast between the fortunes of manufacturing industry and the banks over the last six years.

Manufacturing has clearly borne the brunt of the crisis in Britain (although this is equally true in other industrial countries such as the USA and West Germany). Despite a significant recovery in the rest of the economy since 1982, output in this sector is still 7 percent below its level in 1979.

In areas such as the West Midlands hundreds of small engineering firms have gone under. Others have survived only by ruthlessly slashing jobs and closing factories, or moving their operation abroad. Yet profits for the banks, and other City institutions, have continued to rise despite the global debt crisis.

There are significant exceptions here. There are industrial companies that have

continued to do very nicely—arms manufacturers such as British Aerospace and GEC itself or the food, drink and tobacco giants which are largely insulated from foreign competition. There are banks, such as the Midland, suffering from massive losses on its Crocker subsidiary in the United States, or Johnson Matthey itself, which have done badly.

What is not in doubt is that it has been far easier in the last few years to make money out of lending it on the financial markets or speculating in foreign currencies, than through building new factories and employing more workers.

Historically, whilst British industry has fallen dramatically from its position of global supremacy in the nineteenth century, the City of London remains the world's leading financial centre.

Financial institutions in Britain manage about £1,000 billion worth of assets. Even though half that sum consists of foreign currencies, the remainder is a tempting target for those concerned at the lack of investment in British industry.

Yet London's role as a home for branches of over 400 foreign banks, itself poses serious problems for any reformist programme.

The City is a nerve centre for a network of money transmission which spans the globe. Proposals to legislate new controls, or divert more resources into 'British' industry would soon find that the target had escaped, the money flown. The nerve centre would simply move elsewhere to Luxembourg or perhaps Frankfurt. The pound would collapse.

More generally, the argument is riddled with misconceptions, and is far too crude an explanation of the emergence of monetarism or 'Thatcherism'.

British capitalism is divided, but not along a single fault line between two blocs of capital

Firstly, it is quite wrong to assume that there is a unified bloc of British 'finance capital' with a distinct set of well-defined interests. The 'City' consists of a variety of institutions with differing relations with industry.

The pension funds which own the largest bloc of shares in British companies have a very different outlook from the foreign exchange dealers and international banks for whom the City is merely a convenient location for their global operations.

The largest multinational companies themselves increasingly act as 'little banks', moving their surplus cash around the world and speculating on interest rate changes and currency movements. British Petroleum and ICI have both recently turned their 'in-house' banks into separate financial operations, competing with existing commercial banks on the money markets.

Rising interest rates have helped push up banking profits whilst squeezing companies

and governments up to their ears in debt (although even when interest rates are low banks can do well since what matters to them is the margin between what they pay to depositors and what they receive on loans). But interest payments have also been a major source of profits for GEC—with its £2.6 billion cash mountain which it has consistently preferred to invest on the money markets rather than plough back into production.

British capitalism is divided, but not along a single fault-line between two blocs of industrial and financial capital. Rather there are many cross cutting fissures—between multinationals and those limited to the domestic market; between those tied into the state machine with profitable contracts and those who are not; between exporters who prefer a low value for the pound, and importers who like it to be high; between debtors and creditors; between losers desperate to be bailed out by the banks or the state, and winners who preach the virtues of competition and the free market.

Certainly the major banks retain a distinctive and powerful role within capitalism as a whole. In times of crisis they become the arbiters (along with the state) of whether the weak who cannot pay their debts shall be pushed to the wall, 'bankrupted' or reprieved.

Yet for every Laker Airways, or toy company which were given the thumbs down, there are many more manufacturing companies which have survived the slump with discreet help from the banks.

Unity of interest

Whether it be a multinational like Massey Ferguson or a state like Brazil the conflict between the debtor and the bank conceals a fundamental unity of interest. Both depend upon the generation of surplus value through the labour of workers. Both want to keep wages low and profits high. Indeed, if the debtor fails to pay back the loan, the bank itself may be threatened with disaster.

Secondly, it follows from the extent of these divisions, the various forms of competition and conflict between capitals that the political expression of the interests of the capitalist class as a whole does not emerge spontaneously.

The argument that Thatcher represents the interests of finance capital is thus far too reductionist—it reduces the process by which the capitalist class formulates political ideas and strategies to the mechanistic expression of economic forces.

It ignores the fact that those interests whilst clearcut at one level—they will never willingly abandon their wealth or power—can be pursued in a variety of ways according to the state of the class struggle. It is precisely the role of political parties to give some sort of coherent expression to the needs of capital, and its demands on the state machine.

In Britain all sections of capital have long supported the Tory Party. But they have been willing to tolerate Labour governments. Indeed at critical periods, as in 1974, they have relied upon Labour to dampen down a tide of working class militancy. As



Freddie Laker: the banks didn't bail him out but he still got a share

one chairman of a large company recently told the *Financial Times*, 'We can live with almost any regime provided we know what the rules are'.

The significance of Thatcher's rise, first within the Conservative Party itself, and then in a lengthy battle to impose her domination over the cabinet and the state machine once elected, is that she managed to mobilise the support of most of the ruling class around a bold but risky strategy to cope with the crisis.

The City's spokesmen and publicists, the authors of the stockbrokers' circulars abused by Denis Healey when he was chancellor, were certainly fierce advocates of moves to end exchange controls and other restrictions on the financial markets, to cut public spending, and abandon subsidies to the lame ducks.

But the City was scarcely alone in these preferences, or its support for Thatcher. To take a crude but revealing indicator, companies such as GEC and Plesseys, and a host of other industrial giants gave large donations to the Tories in 1979.

That support was always conditional. It centred less upon the technical details of controlling the money supply than upon

Thatcher's pursuit of two central objectives.

One was to cut public spending (not arms or construction projects, but wages, jobs and social security benefits). The other was to systematically weaken the power of the unions, to shift the climate down on the shopfloor, and to hold down wages.

Much of British industry was fearful of the impact of a squeeze on the economy on their markets and profits. But they were willing to bear with it in return for various concessions, and the opportunity provided by the growing reserve army of unemployed to go on the offensive against workplace organisation.

If Thatcher now finds that support slipping away from her, it is *not* because industrial capital has found a new political instrument in the SDP (as John Ross suggests in his *Thatcher and Friends*). Harvey-Jones, the ICI chairman who is an SDP member, is still very much an eccentric by the standards of British boardrooms.

The government's difficulties flow simply from the fact that despite six years of high unemployment, and victory over the miners, it has failed to achieve either of its main objectives. Public spending has not been cut in total. Real wages have been above the inflation rate since 1982.

Outside the movement?

The strategy is in tatters. Even Fowler's highly contentious social security proposals will have little impact on state spending levels.

As Malcolm Rutherford observed in the *Financial Times* on 12 July, the disquiet is stemming as much from the City as from the heartlands of manufacturing industry.

'Rarely has one heard such acerbic comments about government as now come regularly from the top of industry and the City. "Whom does she talk to any more, certainly not to us..." It is beginning to look as if no one is in control any more; nobody knows any longer what British economic policy is.'

And, gratified as they are by Kinnock and Hattersley's 'courageous' stand against the left, 'Industry and the City have begun to discuss the possibility of how to live with a new Labour regime.'

Which brings us to a final but critical point. For if the argument of Nairn, Ross and others is in one sense too economic—underestimating the *political* debate within the ruling class—in another sense it is not economic enough. If on the one hand they mistakenly see Thatcher as expressing the interests of only one section of capital, on the other they overstate the possibilities of reform open to a Labour government. They fail to grasp the limits imposed by capitalism as a global system on the room for manoeuvre of any nation-state.

The row between GEC and the government is in this respect very illuminating. It has not been one-sided. In March, Nicholas Edwards, the Welsh Secretary, attacked the company's failure to risk its cash surplus in new investment in Britain, in terms which could have been used by any Labour minister. Edwards was forced to apologise, but both Thatcher and Lawson have gone onto the attack since, accusing industrialists of failing to hold down wages themselves, or create employment.

The problem facing Thatcher is in this respect the same as would face any future British government. They cannot simply pull levers, or press the keys on a computer, and make the British economy run.

Massive multinational companies like GEC are not going to invest just because governments want them to. They will invest only when and where they think it's safe and profitable. So ICI in the last five years has acquired a major US chemical company and a new plant in Germany. GEC has not invested at all.

Nationalising the banks (as the Bennites continue to demand), or bribing with tax concessions the pension funds and insurance companies to bring their money back to Britain (as in Hattersley's latest scheme) will not solve the fundamental problem.

Investment in Britain is low not because there is not enough money available, but because there has been little prospect of making a big enough profit to justify the risk. Thatcher's failure ultimately comes down to the fact that the rate of profit in Britain is too low. Kinnock and Hattersley will face the same problem and the same imperative—hold down wages. That's how capitalism works. ■

Pete Green

IS IT SECTARIAN to be outside the Labour Party?

Members of the Labour Party, ranging from Denis Healey to Tony Benn, would answer yes.

But on the left of the party supporters of *Militant* in particular would argue that those socialists who try to build a revolutionary party outside the Labour Party are condemned to become irrelevant sectarians.

They put themselves 'outside the movement'.

This argument is central to a major article in the recently published *Bulletin of Marxist Studies*. This publication argues politics similar to those contained in *Militant* but in greater depth.

The article 'Marxism against Sectarianism', by George Edwards, starts by attacking the idea that revolutionary organisations can be built outside the existing reformist parties, both in Britain and elsewhere.

'All history', Edwards tells us, 'demonstrates that the masses do not adopt new political ideas without first of all going through the old traditional organisations of the working class.'

He adds that:

'Nowhere where mass organisations of the working class have existed were new organisations established which did not at least come in part from the old organisations of the working class. Even in Russia the Bolsheviks stemmed from the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.'

It is certainly true that history demonstrates time and again that those workers who move towards challenging the system will tend to look to the established leaders.

The opposite direction

It takes experience of struggle over a period of time to break large sections of workers from the old leaders and to win them to a revolutionary perspective.

What conclusions do revolutionaries draw from this?

For George Edwards the conclusion is to stay in, and build, parties like the Labour Party—whether or not that party is incapable of achieving socialism—because the masses will look to Labour when they move into struggle.

But the experience of history points in exactly the opposite direction. In Russia as early as 1903 Lenin had understood the need to build a revolutionary party based on clear revolutionary principles and activity involving all members.

In order to build that party Lenin split from those in the Russian Social Democratic Party who didn't share that understanding of revolutionary organisation.

The fact that such a party existed in 1917 was crucial in winning the revolution.

Earlier, the outbreak of the First World War had seen the mass Socialist Parties

openly back their respective states in an imperialist blood bath.

Lenin called for a break from these reformist organisations and the building of new revolutionary parties in opposition to them.

When a revolutionary crisis affected Germany at the end of 1918, the tragedy was that the German Communist Party (the KPD) was only just being formed. Its central leader Rosa Luxemburg had not grasped soon enough the need to break from the old reformist organisations as Lenin urged.

The KPD failed to give the necessary lead and because of that it was precisely the old parties of the working class that the mass of workers looked to.

The names of the leaders of those parties became watchwords for betrayal and counter-revolution among revolutionaries. They smashed the German revolution and butchered Rosa Luxemburg, among many.

George Edwards recognises that in time of revolution new revolutionary organisations need to be set up in opposition to the old parties.

But he claims, 'The new organisations grew out of the womb of the old organisations.'

This is a very dishonest argument.

It implies a peaceful evolution from reformist parent to revolutionary offspring.

The truth is very different. Witness the hard fight that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had to wage against the reformist Mensheviks at various stages of their history.

This reached its peak in 1917 when the Mensheviks supported the bourgeois government against the workers' revolution.

In Germany, Rosa Luxemburg spent the last few months of her life arguing against workers having any illusions in the old reformist Social Democratic Party.

In every situation where revolution was on the cards the bitterest fight was with the old reformist parties.

No one who sees how Kinnock operates today should have any doubt that he would be a violent opponent of any such revolution.

Militant understands this but it prefers to sow illusions in fighting for change within the existing reformist parties—however right wing—rather than join in building a genuine revolutionary party.

Take the example of France, following the revolutionary upsurge of May 1968. Edwards attacks the idea that a revolutionary organisation could be established among French workers.

He states:

'In France the sects, and they were large sects unfortunately, declared the Socialist Party was finished. In the election of 1969 the Socialist Party secured only 5 per cent of the vote. Yet 13 years later, we see the victory of the Socialist Party in the presidential elections.'

Does Edwards regard the election of a

Socialist president once in 13 years as more valuable than the building of a revolutionary organisation?

What he certainly implies is that being in the Socialist Party is better than being in a 'sect'.

Yet the history of the Mitterrand government is one of unemployment, austerity and a horrific growth of racism.

The tragedy is that the sizeable organisations of the far left Edwards refers to campaigned uncritically for the election of that government. Today they have failed to organise round issues like racism. A revolutionary organisation intervening round these issues and building a genuine socialist alternative to Mitterrand could make real gains.

Reformist betrayal

But Edwards argues such a project would be sectarian and cut socialists off from the masses. But in the meantime many French workers will feel they are getting less and less from a rotten pro-capitalist Socialist government—and will look in more dangerous directions for an alternative.

At the root of Edwards' argument is a highly mechanical approach to building socialist organisation.

He argues that workers will have to 'go again and again through the experience of betrayal by the existing mass organisations before they will turn towards a new organisation'.

The job of socialists is to wait patiently within the reformist parties, attempting to 'guide' the more active elements towards a correct Marxist view of the world.

The tragedy is that the mass of workers do not necessarily draw the correct conclusions from the experience of betrayal by the reformists.

In Chile in 1973 the overthrow of the reformist government of Allende heralded the virtual destruction of working class

organisation. In such a situation it was immeasurably more difficult to argue socialist politics.

On a lesser scale the experience of the Wilson and Callaghan governments in the late 1970s undermined workers' confidence and paved the way for Thatcher.

What is totally missing from Edwards' argument is the way that workers' ideas change in struggle. The point of a revolutionary party is to both learn from and spread the ideas of that struggle, and to try and overcome the unevenness inside the working class between those who wish to fight, those who accept the existing set up, and the mass of workers who are somewhere in between.

This means a party has to involve itself in the day to day struggles of workers.

And in doing so it will inevitably come into contact with the bureaucracy which dominates the trade unions, the mass organisations which contain the bulk of workers.

That bureaucracy represents workers within the existing institutions of capitalist society. The bureaucrats stand between workers and the boss. In order to maintain their position they will try and stifle rank and file activity and seek any means to avoid all-out confrontation with the system which provides their standing.

For Lenin, the key was organising that minority within the working class who wish to change society. That minority can begin to fight to change the ideas of the class as a whole by challenging the bureaucracy, drawing the lessons from workers' struggle and developing new forms of organisation to carry the struggle forward.

Edwards fails to deal with the existence of the trade union bureaucracy.

What is also missing is the understanding of how, by taking action, one group of workers can often lead much wider groups into struggle.

The whole experience of the working class movement is that you cannot delay building a revolutionary organisation separate from

the reformists until the revolutionary crisis arrives.

In the absence of a revolutionary alternative rooted in the working class the reformist leaders will maintain control and ensure defeat for the revolution.

Sectarian

The tragedy of Edwards' article is that he simply pours sectarian abuse on those who attempt to build a revolutionary organisation of the type Lenin and Trotsky stood for.

Thus he labels such people as 'loonies' who graft together 'human rubbish' and 'poison' those workers who fall under their spell.

The simple truth is that revolutionaries can organise and lead workers in struggle. In doing so they can win support for their ideas.

They do not cut themselves off from the real world, but in reality see the key as organising workers in activity.

Of course the opposition they face at a day to day level isn't the forces of the state or the fire of the capitalist class—it is the existence of a trade union bureaucracy and the acceptance by the bulk of workers of the ideas of the ruling class.

That is particularly true in Britain. Examples range from the 1926 General Strike, through the great miners' strike of 1985, to the resistance of Liverpool council.

It is in the course of such struggles that revolutionaries can win support for their ideas of how to change the world.

But they can only do so if they understand the need to build out of these struggles a revolutionary party. Those revolutionaries who stay inside Labour are not helping to bring that party any nearer.

The danger is that they are also fostering illusions in organisations which at some point will try to block revolutionary change. ■

Lindsey German



Constituency delegates at a Labour Party conference. Is this the place for socialists to be?

The bleeding of Liverpool

THE LONG awaited confrontation between the government and the Liverpool Labour council has finally come to a head. But the expected strike by council workers has been called off.

Derek Hatton, deputy leader of the council and *Militant* supporter, claims that the council gave the Tories a bloody nose last year and that their refusal to provide money to the city this year is motivated by a desire for revenge.

But there is a lot more than a bloody nose involved in the present confrontation.

Since the Tories were elected in 1979 a central plank of their policy has been to protect profit margins by driving down workers' wages and living standards.

They have not been nearly as successful as they would like. In order to step up their attack on the public sector, and especially on local authority workforces, the Tories last year upped the stakes by launching an offensive on the 'left' Labour councils through ratecapping.

By passing a new rate law to limit the level of rates levied, they hoped to force 'left' councils to make the cuts they had pledged not to make.

At the end of the day, when all of the shouting had been done and there was no alternative but to take action, the councils pledged to fight collapsed, leaving nothing behind them but a lot of hot air.

Minority

Yet as each council ran away they left behind groups of angry council workers who occupied the council chambers to try and stop the councillors' treachery. These workers, although a minority, were the backbone on which the councillors, if they had been serious about fighting, could have built a real fightback.

Instead they were left to angrily cry 'betrayal' as the so called left councillors voted away their jobs and services.

By contrast, the Liverpool Labour council have shown a real commitment to no cuts in jobs and services.

Perhaps their most significant gain is their housing programme. They have built 3,000 new homes since taking office. That's far more than any other council in the country.

Yet precisely because of these gains the council have a responsibility to give a very clear lead. It is within this context that Liverpool should be judged.

The Liverpool story starts in May 1983, with the election of the present Labour administration. For the first time in a decade the city was free of its Liberal rulers.

Their record was abysmal.

The Liberals had cut their workforce by 4,400 between 1975 and 1982. Overtime was a necessity if low pay was to be overcome.

The present council aimed to change all this.

From the moment they were elected it was

inevitable that if they were to stand firm on their electoral promises they would come into conflict with the government.

What is staggering is that the council had been in power for two and a half years before this point was reached. Why?

Confrontation first reared its head last year. As the council prepared their first budget, in March 1984, they were presented with demands from the government to either treble the rates or make 5,000 council workers redundant.

The council responded by calling a day of action. They toured the city to raise support for the protest, and were rewarded by a magnificent demonstration.

The city ground to a halt as tens of thousands of trade unionists took to the streets in defence of their council. The action was not confined to the council's 32,000 strong workforce. Sizeable contingents which sometimes resulted in closure were mounted from all of the city's major workplaces.

The time to fight couldn't have been better. The miners were in the fourth month of their strike, and it was starting to bite. On 9 July they received the biggest boost of the entire year long fight when a national dock strike was called in their support.

The pound plummeted, the stock exchange went mad, and the Tories looked the shakiest they'd been since their election in 1979.

Unbelievably, on the very day the dock strike was called, when the council could have joined forces with the miners and added to the Tories' troubles, an agreement was reached.

The following day the *Financial Times* crowed that the deal was 'a great relief to the government'.

The agreement conceded an extra £10 million to the council and removed a further £20 million the government were threatening to claim by way of penalties.

But this was still not enough to meet the council's existing needs. And so a rate of 17 per cent was levied.

By settling then the council forfeited the best opportunity they were going to get to fight on terms unfavourable to the government.

But that's not all.

By winding people up to expect a fight, by leading them on to prepare for a fight in which they would be key players on the stage, the council did more harm than they realised.

The price to be paid only became clear this year.

'The campaign doesn't have the same bubble 'said one council worker. 'Because a hidden crock of gold was found last year without us having to do anything more than protest, people feel the same thing can happen again' he continued.

This feeling is echoed amongst many of the council workforce.

This year the campaign was overshadowed by the claims of the other councils that it would be a united campaign in which they would all refuse to set a rate until the government coughed up extra money. This year, they claimed, Liverpool would be only one of the players.

So by June when all the councils had collapsed except Lambeth and Liverpool, the council decided they had to reassess their strategy.

They ditched the tactic of not setting a rate and voted for a nine per cent rate rise. This fell short of their budget requirements by £80 million, and so although delaying the confrontation once more, still left them on course for a conflict with the government at some point in the future.

When that would be was somewhat unclear. And many people believed that they would muddle through until the next financial year.

This was reinforced by the councillors themselves, who only two months ago held a series of meetings around the city at which they proclaimed that they would run out of money at some point, but that it was impossible to say when that time would be.

It therefore came as a devastating shock to their workforce when they announced this month that they were running out of money and could not pay their 32,000 workers after December.

Redundancy

Unfortunately, the council then made the serious mistake of trying to further delay the confrontation which by now was clearly inevitable if they were not to abandon all of their achievements of the last two years. They tried to issue redundancy notices to their workforce. They argued that unless they did so and thus stayed within the law they would not be allowed to continue borrowing the money they needed for a further three months in which to build the campaign against the Tories. The alternative they said, was to run out of money within the next week or two.

They had put themselves in the position of trying to stay within the law in order to defend an illegal budget.

But much more seriously, they had tried to make the most unpalatable cut of all-sack their own workers, when they had the alternative of calling on them to take strike action in their defence.

Understandably this proposal was met with sheer outrage. 'We should be on strike. We shouldn't be laid off', said one worker. 'I couldn't believe it when I heard it', he continued. 'It's almost like they want not to have to pay our wages until April and then they've got their problem solved.'

This view was endorsed by the council's joint shop stewards committee who that week voted to refuse to accept the redundancy notices.

One of the stewards told *Socialist Worker Review* 'They shouldn't have banded around with the books. As soon as the money ran out we should have been called out on strike. Instead we've just been waiting and waiting and waiting.'

On 16 September, two days later, an emergency meeting of council stewards voted to call an all out strike from the 25 September.

This completely changed the situation.

Now the ground had been laid for a battle in which the council and their workforce could settle the question decisively.

But to turn this *potential* strike into a strike required overcoming the attempts of union leaders to sabotage it.

The dangers in the situation were clearly enormous.

The national executive of the key union, the GMBATU, came out against the strike a matter of days before their members were balloted.

And there was even a question mark over whether the national executive of NALGO would back the strike even if there had been a yes vote in the ballot.

The NUT and NUPE refused their members a say in whether they should strike.

Their behaviour, although disgusting, was nevertheless expected.

The fact that the council stewards agreed to ballot their members before striking was a sign of real weakness. But even worse was the decision even from GMBATU stewards to abide by the overall decision of the whole workforce. This was a disaster. It meant that the stronger sections inside the council workforce were held back by the less well organised.

Nobody has the right to stop any group of workers fighting for their jobs.

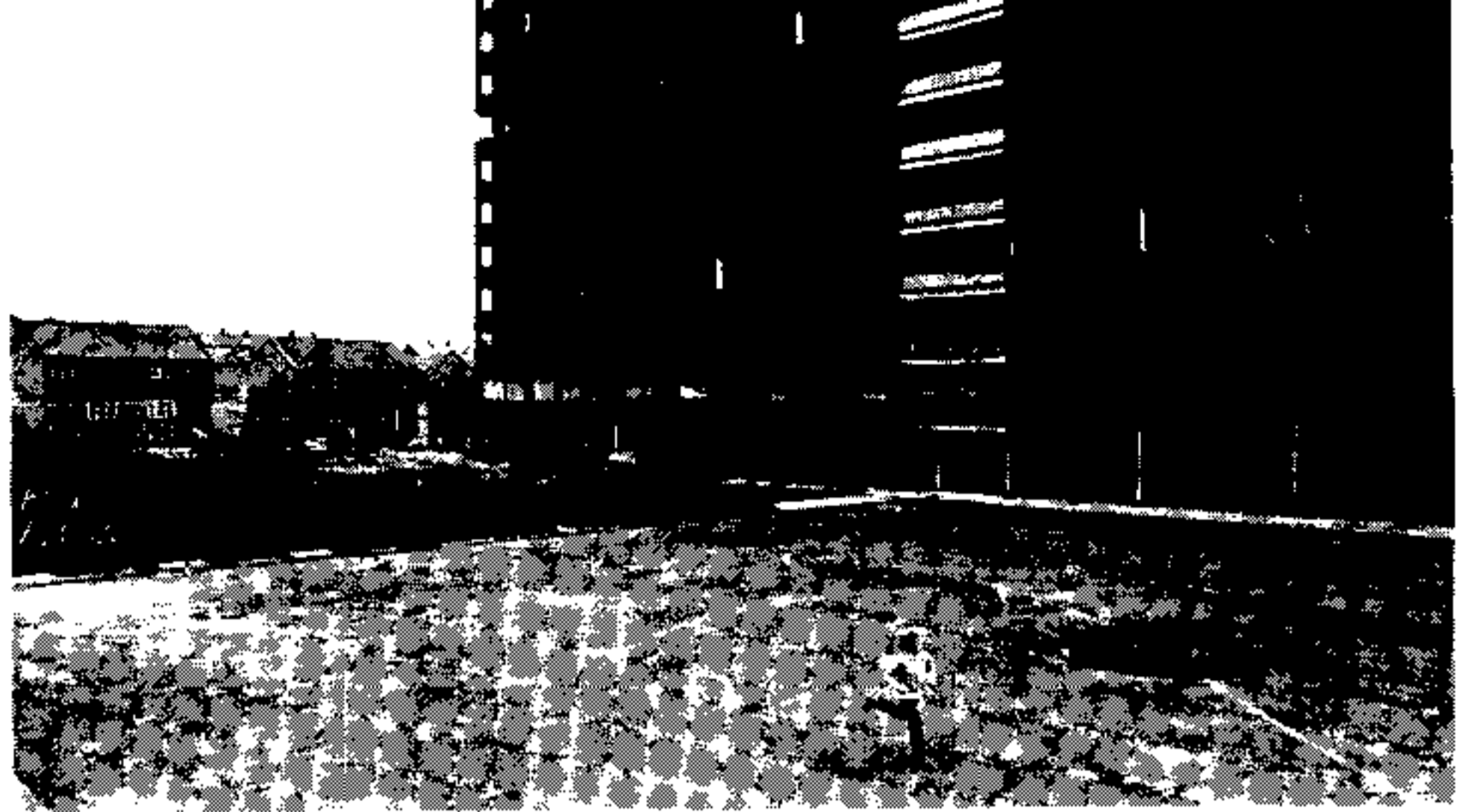
Some workers, the better organised ones, understand the need to fight better than others. It is this minority who are crucial in any strike.

At the beginning of the miners' strike the majority of union members in Scotland and South Wales voted against striking. It was picketing by the militant majority that persuaded them to join the strike.

The same thing could have happened in Liverpool.

The GMBATU is the best organised union and consequently got the most decisive vote in favour of striking. They, along with strong sections in other unions were the key to turning the potential strike into a reality.

In Liverpool the minority never got the chance to use their sectional strength. They



were tied hand and foot from the beginning.

The strike was called off at 9.30 on the evening before it was meant to start. The decision was taken despite the fact that 47 per cent of the 15,500 workers voted to strike.

The workers who voted for action in this situation could have provided a solid base from which to launch the strike.

If the argument had been that any workplace or section which votes to strike should come out and send out pickets to weaker sections immediately, the outcome may well have been different.

Although the confrontation had been delayed when the ballots were held, there was still a mood to fight.

Strike momentum

Even though people did not have the confidence to come out unofficially, the people who voted to strike in unions where the vote was lost would not cross picket lines.

As the strike momentum grew, they could picket out those who had either not had the chance to vote or who had voted against striking.

One NALGO member summed it up: 'There's too much reliance on whether the strike is official or not,' he said. 'It plays into the hands of people who want to break the strike. We have to build unofficial action. Everyone I know would refuse to cross a picket line. So we need the strongest sections to throw picket lines across workplaces alongside the GMBATU,' he continued.

Unfortunately even *Militant* in Liverpool don't appear to understand this argument. The day after the strike call was defeated, one of their leaflets argued, 'The call from some ultra lefts that those who voted for action should picket out those who did not is

a recipe for disaster, and would result in creating the maximum of disunity.'

The problem with the whole history of the Liverpool dispute has been that at every crucial point *Militant* have been caught between two things. They have always placed great reliance on winning council positions, and placed great stress on what a left council can achieve. Yet a council, however left wing, has little power against a vicious right wing government, unless it is prepared to mobilise local workers who do have the power. There has been little serious attempt at such a mobilisation.

Instead *Militant* have remained convinced that once the call was made the working class would automatically respond. A recent document argued the 'mass movement will exceed even the titanic miners' strike. [The government] will have to confront a whole city which will mobilise behind the council. The surface calm, even indifference, which seems to grip layers of the proletariat at the present time, will be burned away in the heat of events.'

Unfortunately the events of the past weeks have shown the danger of such arguments. Workers won't take action just by being exhorted to do so. The base for such action is there, but it has to be built on by the best organised sections.

Prospects ahead in Liverpool don't look good. Already the Labour council is talking about once again issuing redundancy notices. Such a strategy will be a disaster. NALGO is saying its members will not process these notices.

The scene looks set not for a united fight, but for different sectional disputes. These can set different groups of workers against one another, and can result in the exact opposite to the united fight with the government that everyone wanted.

The events which took place in Liverpool this month are a severe defeat, not just for the *Militant* supporters in the council and in the council unions, but for the entire working class.

A victory in Liverpool would have been an inspiration to workers throughout the country.

A defeat serves to reinforce all of the rotten ideas of Ken Livingstone and all the others who ratted last year—that Labour councils can only change things when Labour is in government, and that workers can't fight for their jobs and services and win. ■

Maureen Watson





Towards a workers' party?

The South African working class is now playing a prominent role in the struggle against apartheid. This raises the problem of how workers should organise. And this is the central issue which concerned Nigel Lambert in his interview with Moses Mayekiso, the secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers Union in the Transvaal. The interview is followed by commentary from Nigel Lambert.

NL. CAN we begin by asking you how you became a trade unionist?

MM. Its a long history. I was born in the Transkei. After schooling—because there's no jobs in the homelands—I went to the mines. Because of the working conditions—there were no unions at the time—I deserted to Johannesburg.

I got a job with Toyota, where I was organised into the union. This was 1978. I was labouring all through. Then at Toyota I got a job as a receiving clerk—this was a sort of promotion.

I joined Mawu, then being organised by Makama,(he had been a shop-steward before becoming Mawu's first organiser in the Transvaal in 1976).

Nationally, including Natal, we had 3000 members at that time. Now we have a paid up membership of 35,000.

How does that compare with other unions?

We are the second biggest, but the most militant union.

Let's take the example of Toyota. How have conditions changed since 1978, when there were the first struggles in the factory?

There's been a big change. At that time, as a black worker, the employer didn't want you in the union. When Makama and Bernie Falerooff (a white trade union organiser) organised in Toyota they had to hide in the forest. Then we sneaked—so the foreman wouldn't see us—and went secretly into the bush to fill in the forms. And we had the meeting in the forest.

Even when we were organised there were problems. We were dismissed before the management recognised the union. At that time the manager there used to say: 'I am the boss, no union here, no one is going to tell me what to do'.

Now we can organise openly. There is no fear. The management accept that the black workers can have a voice within the plant.

Now we can say, this is our position and you can't just fuck us around.

When we were talking earlier you said that some of the worst employers are British companies. Would you like to give some examples?

Yes, we can take BTR Sarmcol for example. It was the first factory we organised in the Pietermaritzburg area of Natal. But there is still no recognition agreement. When they went on strike Sarmcol dismissed all the workers. They are enjoying the Apartheid system, the homeland system, where they've got a big reserve of workers. We've been fighting that company for years, and still it goes on.

Then the other company is Fry's Metals. The workers have been fighting for negotiations at plant level. They agreed to this for wages but refused for health and safety issues. This is important, because Fry's is involved with processing lead. We said we were not going to sell workers' lives for a few cents. We are still in dispute.

Can we talk about the structure of the union? Mawu is well known for basing itself on strong workplace organisation. How does this work in practice?

Our first policy is that we are in an industrial union—we are just organising metal workers. The second policy is worker control (of the union). The third one is that we stand for worker rights, including political rights. The structure to do all that is like this...

When the workers are organised in a certain plant, once they are 50 percent plus one (of the workers eligible for membership), they elect their shop stewards. That's the first level leadership. From those shop stewards they elect two guys to represent that particular factory on the branch executive committee. There are four branches in the union. The committee controls the affairs of the union in a particular area—financial matters, hiring and firing of organisers...

So if you make a mistake they can say, 'Ach! Mayekiso he's no good,' and sack you just like that?

Yes. If I fuck around they can just dismiss me and I've got no other forum to say, 'No, they are wrong'.

If I go to a factory and deal with the management with no mandate from the workers, this is breaking the policy of the

union on worker control. Once this happens then the branch executive committee can decide to dismiss me straight away.

Another important factor in the development of a specific trade union bureaucracy in Britain has been the much higher standard of living enjoyed by trade union leaders, compared to that of ordinary workers. Is it the same in South Africa?

In some unions, yes. But in Fosatu (the Federation of South African Trade Unions, to which Mawu is affiliated), no. In Fosatu the salaries should be equal to the wages in that particular industry. Our salaries are determined by the workers.

Please can you continue to explain how Mawu works.

Our policy is that if a factory is organised it must have general meetings at least once a month. There is a national conference once a year bringing together all the branches.

Then we have another level—the shop steward councils. There is a shop steward council for this area, Johannesburg. This is a 'local'. We've got more than 50 factories in Johannesburg. It is the biggest local. We've got ten locals in the Transvaal.

Also we've got the Transvaal shop steward council which has 600 shop stewards, and usually more than 400 come. The national executive committee, if it wants to make a big decision, can call a national shop steward council.

Mostly the departments in the factories have about a hundred workers. The shop stewards must report back to this constituency immediately. We say we are democratic—bringing the workers closer to the decisions.

What about Fosatu (the Federation of South African Trade Unions), to which Mawu is affiliated?

Fosatu was formed in 1979. It had about 12 affiliates. The constitution of Fosatu is based on what I said about Mawu.

It has also got shop steward councils. The Fosatu shop steward council, is a big, most important political body. They discuss political issues—let's say rent issues, boycotts, the state of emergency. They bring together all leaderships from different industries.

What is the role of women in the union?

Our philosophy is that everybody is equal. We've got many women shop stewards. Our general secretary is a woman.

At the Transvaal Mawu shop steward council more than 20 are women. The number is still small compared to the number of women workers. There is still the old tradition that a woman's place is in the kitchen. We can't run away from it. But the union is opposed to that view.

How do you explain the link between economic struggles and the political struggle?

The unions have to be political because the state is so brutal and aggressive to people organising political organisations. Let's say

we form a workers' party, a communist party, then it will be crushed in one day. For the unions to gain credibility they mustn't just limit themselves to wages, they must deal with general township problems.

You mentioned a workers' party, what's your view about that?

At present the Fosatu shop stewards councils, and also Mawu, are discussing the political set up. We are looking at the crisis and the solutions to the crisis. The general feeling is that the workers must have their own party and their own freedom charter.

How would a workers' freedom charter differ from the Congress Freedom Charter (the ANC's statement of aims and objectives)?

It would differ greatly. The points of the Freedom Charter are confusing. You can't say, this is a socialist standpoint, or this is a nationalist standpoint, or this is a capitalist standpoint. Workers want something clear.

For example, what will be done with the land? The Freedom Charter talks about 'people'. Who are the 'people'? Matanzima (the President of the Transkei) is people. Buthelezi is people.

Then there is capitalism and the bosses. It's not enough to say I will be free to go to Cape Town and form a factory there. There must be a clear clause which says there can be a certain kind of shop, then we'll nationalise the rest.

The Charter is a capitalist document. We need a workers' charter that will say clearly who will control the farms, presently owned by the capitalists, who will control the factories, the mines and so on. There must be a change of the whole society.

Through the shop steward councils people are opposed to this idea that there will be two stages towards liberation: that we must clean up capitalism first, then socialism. It's a waste of time, a waste of energy and a waste of people's blood.

Apartheid is just an appendage, a branch of the whole thing—the tree of oppression of capitalism. Then if you chop the branch the tree will still grow. You have to chop the stem, straight, once and for all. South Africa's economy is at an advanced stage, where the workers can take over and direct the whole thing.

And we see our struggle as part of the struggle of all workers internationally. We can't be free until other workers are free.

There should be a relationship with the trade unions and also the workers' parties internationally. If we have a communist state (in South Africa), our state, then there will be trouble if there is still Reagan and Thatcher.

You have said that the conditions are not yet right for forming a workers' party. When will they change?

The first thing should be a charter. That is paving the way towards the party. The workers themselves should defend their party. For this they must be clear: there must be a programme first.

But a programme is nothing without a party. With that programme, then they themselves will say: 'Right, we need a party'. Then when they try to crush the leadership, then the workers should be in a position to defend. With a programme, let's say put by the new Federation (which will include Fosatu and other unions, including NUM) it's not a problem—there's no Secretary, President and so on to be arrested. The workers should be in a position to defend the party in the factories.

So you think it's possible to form a party while P W Botha is still President and apartheid still exists?

Yes it will be formed...next year, it's a possibility. People are discussing it heavily at the present moment.

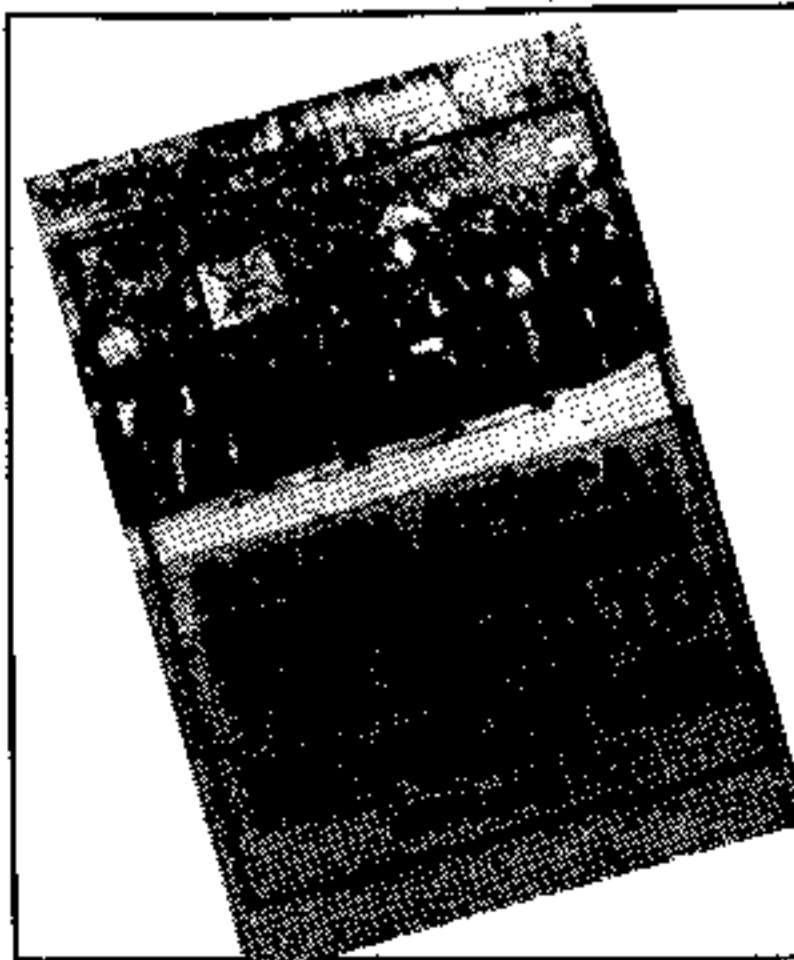
Would you describe that party as being a revolutionary party?

...It would have to be. It will be changing the whole society.

Do you think that the party would come into conflict with the supporters of ANC, PAC and so on?

In South Africa at the present moment, nobody is a peasant, everybody is a worker. If you are in a homeland you are just someone who is not needed: either you are retrenched, or old, or disabled. You can't depend on your piece of land. So that party, a workers' party, should have the support of 90 percent of the suffering people in South Africa, because of its programme.

Now with the Freedom Charter it's not enough for workers, it's wrong. And the people who built it (the Freedom Charter) must accept this. It must be changed, it's not the bible.



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Would members of Inkatha (Buthelezi's organisation of Zulus) be allowed to join?

Many members of Inkatha just join it because they are forced, or for traditional reasons. They could join.

And the ANC supporters?

Like Inkatha members they would have to support the programme.

And it would be a multiracial party, and include some whites?

Yes. We believe that anybody who doesn't own anything, who depends on wages, is a worker, never mind his colour. We expect that person to identify with the broad struggle. He is also oppressed, never mind if he's got a vote, that's just apartheid dividing the workers.

But how many white workers are members of Mawu?

Ah. I may say we've got a quarter of one percent. They are not serious about it. They just join because they know Mawu is a force.

Can you give some examples of Fosatu's involvement in political activity?

There are many. For instance in different areas we have been fighting on rents and the demolition of shacks. Building a shack is a protest against the government system which keeps wives separate from the men. And take the November stay-away (last year's action in the Vaal triangle area of the Transvaal) Fosatu was at the centre and it was successful.

You haven't mentioned the current boycott of white shops. The demands include: an end to the emergency, the release of all political prisoners, and an end to apartheid. Can it succeed?

Yes. When the emergency started, Fosatu together with the new federation unions made a clear resolution to call the Boycott.

That boycott is very complicated. We are fighting the capitalists and these are the people that those black traders are buying from. And these black traders, they are capitalists; we don't have to boost them to make them big capitalists. But the problem was that people have to eat somewhere.

The boycott is succeeding, it's making an impact. But the SA government is very stubborn and they won't give in to those demands. I think as long as the action is in the township and not the factories then the success is limited.

A national strike, that could make them change. The Transvaal regional congress of Fosatu made that proposal, but at the Central Committee it was decided to start with the boycott. A national strike called by the new federation could lead to some change. It may happen. ■

WE INTERVIEWED Moses Mayekiso in his house in Alexandra township, Johannesburg. He lives in one room, no more than 15 feet by ten. In it there are two beds: one for himself and his wife and one for his brother. His six children sleep where they can. There is also a wood burning stove, a sink and a paraffin lamp. There is no direct supply of water or electricity, and the toilet facilities are shared with six other families.

Although Moses is a leading full time official of his union, he lives in conditions which are no better than most of his members and possibly worse. This exemplifies the democratic tradition which is now well established in the Fosatu unions. The emphasis on shop steward organisation and worker control should be the envy of every trade union militant in Britain.

Despite these great strengths the South African trade union movement is encountering a number of problems. Chief among these is: how should the organised working class engage in political activity?

One answer was provided by Alec Erwin, national education secretary of Fosatu, in an interview published in *Socialist Worker* (14 September). His view is that Fosatu should be politically independent, but that it would be premature and unwise to launch a workers' party.

Trotsky was particularly contemptuous of this approach. 'Facts', he wrote in 1929, 'show that politically "independent" unions do not exist anywhere. There never have been any. Experience and theory say that there never will be any.'

At a formal level Fosatu would appear to disprove this argument. After all, they have steadfastly refused to affiliate to the UDF or any other political organisation. The practice, however, is somewhat different.

Notwithstanding the fact that its leadership is solidly petty bourgeois, the UDF is the dominant political force among black workers. In the absence of any working class political alternative Fosatu is compelled to back the demonstrations, stay-aways and boycotts of this organisation. Its only alternative at present is to adopt the kind of sectarian abstention which tends to undermine its leadership.

Mass party

For the working class to sustain an independent political position it requires its own party, with a programme distinct from that of the UDF/ANC. To argue that such a party is premature is to delay the struggle for revolutionary politics in the trade union movement.

Moses Mayekiso is right to argue the case for a new workers' party, but how will such a party be built? Moses believes that it can be launched by the trade unions as a mass party. If this occurred, what would be the nature of such a party?

It would in reality be a labour party. To be fair, it is unlikely to be quite as rank and rotten as the British Labour Party, because it would be formed under very different circumstances. For a start it would have to

use extra-parliamentary and extra-legal means to secure the right to vote.

Moses believes that the party could have a clear programme of demands based upon the objective interests of the working class. But such a programme would conflict with the programme of the ANC, the Freedom Charter, because subjectively most workers identify with the ANC/UDF. This could only be resolved by sacrificing the mass base or sacrificing principled politics.

Lenin's concept

Any mass workers' party formed under existing circumstances would end up with 'fudged' politics. It would be a centrist and not a revolutionary party. This reflects the nature of the trade unions themselves, which necessarily organise the most backward workers as well as the most advanced—Inkatha supporters side by side with Marxists.

Lenin's conception of the party was very different. Because its task was to mobilise workers for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' state, it would have to carry out a relentless battle against all those elements inside the working class movement that base themselves on compromise.

Such a body would seek to organise the vanguard among the workers. Even in the circumstances which prevail in South Africa—not yet a revolutionary situation—this would be a minority, not out of choice, but out of necessity.

Whatever Moses may desire, my impression is that a mass workers' party, launched by the unions, is unlikely to come into existence in the near future. Partly this is because of the genuine fear that it would be repressed by the state, partly because the Fosatu leadership are unlikely to benefit from the conflict with their own membership which it would produce.

The task of beginning to build a Leninist party is quite another matter. This does not depend upon the leaders of Fosatu, but requires at its inception, in the worst conceivable circumstances, the conscious decision of a handful of likeminded individuals. Such a grouplet would have to attempt to locate those other individuals who share the aspiration of building a socialist workers' party. In South Africa today these people can certainly be numbered in their hundreds.

It is unlikely that such an organisation would be able to lead the masses in struggle, but it would be capable of relating socialist politics to the several thousand class conscious workers.

In time, and under the impact of mass struggle and changed political circumstances it would be able to undermine the hold of ANC type politics over the working class. This may be a difficult, arduous and possibly lengthy path, but it is the only one which can provide success. There are no short cuts to socialism. ■

Nigel Lambert

Lenin's first struggle

'The movement of the proletariat passes through many stages of development, at every stage part of the people get stuck and do not join in the further advance'—Engels.

THE road of revolutionary development is littered with sectarians who have failed to understand the above quotation. There are all too many groups or individuals who have discovered a certain truth or campaign and then operate in a thoroughly abstract way, irrespective of the class struggle and the issues of the day.

A genuine revolutionary party, on the contrary, has to make many twists and turns in its development, not because of what's in the heads of revolutionaries, but because life itself does not progress in a straight line. If a road has many twists and turns it's no use driving in a straight line.

We have to keep that in mind when applying the lessons of Lenin's *What is to be Done*.

The book cannot be isolated from the particular road Lenin was driving down at the time, that is, the stage of development of the working class and its political organisations.

The arguments in the book do not apply to all occasions and all time. They apply to a specific stage in the development of building a workers' party in Russia. But even if we take that into account, it doesn't change the fact that the book is even today one of the most effective handbooks for the revolutionary activist.

To see why we need to take a look at the class and political background that caused Lenin to write the articles that make up the book.

THE early development of Russian Marxism was typified by the discussion circle. Here workers and intellectuals met to study not only Marx, but even chemistry, anthropology and philosophy.

In the years from 1881 to 1886 there were only 48 strikes. These had no link with the early socialists. In fact some of the workers in the circles held a condescending view of the rest of the working class and had no wish to relate to the struggle. Knowledge had become an end in itself. One workers even argued against agitational leaflets, saying that books were the answer.

It wasn't until 1893 that labour unrest made any connection with Social Democracy (as the early socialists were known).

With the struggle of workers now on the increase, the need for agitation became more

central. Lenin adapted well to factory agitation. He spent months studying factory legislation and he spoke to workers about the minutest details of factory conditions.

He produced agitational leaflets on factory laws, fines, wages and conditions. He bent the stick so hard to agitation that on one occasion he removed from the text of a leaflet an attack on the Tsar, as he felt this would detract from immediate activity.

The rise in class struggle, and the growing sterility of the Marxist circles, made such stick bending an essential stage in the development of a Russian revolutionary party.

In 1896 workers' struggles increased, and so did the links with Social Democracy. But at this time of increasing success for Social Democracy Lenin found himself under arrest and then in exile.

It was while Lenin was in exile that the trend that became known as 'economism' began to develop. The very success of the move to agitation, and the favourable response of many workers, led to some Social Democrats arguing that they should restrict themselves to raising factory issues only. Politics was not for workers, but the job of professional liberal politicians. Meanwhile workers could struggle to improve their everyday existence by building unions and fighting for better pay and conditions.

It was this complete separation of the economic and political struggles that earned them the name 'economists'. The term was not an insult for somebody who supported wage rises and strikes, as Lenin was at pains to stress. Instead an economist was a socialist who put the economic struggle over and above the political struggle, so that it became an end in itself. It was also a stages theory. It implied that workers would slowly win economic reforms, and only when these had been won could the political struggle take place.

To make matters worse, the economists used in their support the writings of the German Social Democrat Bernstein. He believed that developing capitalism could iron out its own problems. Boom, slump and wars would no longer take place, and the system could be gradually reformed. Institutions like parliament and the trade unions could be utilised to increase the influence of workers.

Strikes would only alienate potential supporters such as liberal politicians, academics and owners of small businesses. Bernstein used Marxist language to express all this, but argued

Andy Strouthous looks at Lenin's classic, *What is to be Done*



Lenin with a hard task ahead

that revolutions, insurrections and mass strikes were a thing of the past.

Bernstein's revision of Marx was concretely expressed by the Russian Y D Kuskova in a pamphlet known as the *Credo*. This argued, 'For the Russian Marxist there is only one course—participation, ie assistance to, the economic struggle of the proletariat, and participation in liberal opposition'. This meant supporting the building of trade unions on the one hand, and supporting the liberal bourgeoisie on the other. Lenin replied from exile.

FOR Lenin the politics of the *Credo* were narrow. They restricted workers to economic struggle and left political struggle to the intelligentsia. They meant completely abandoning the building of a revolutionary party.

It wasn't a matter of counterposing industry and politics; they had to be joined together. A division of the two leads to a sectionalism that has disastrous results.

Organisational form flows from politics. Its structure can have a decisive effect on the outcome of events. The politics of the economists did not require centralised organisation. There was a mixture of local agitation and waiting for the working class to evolve to a position of control in society.

The lack of attention to, or even the wish to build a revolutionary organisation was reflected in the poorly attended Social Democratic conference in 1898. The fight against economism could not be separated from the fight for an organisation of revolutionaries, and the increasing struggle of the Russian working class.

This then was the background to the series of articles that made up the pamphlet *What is to be Done*.

Lenin was never embarrassed by copying good ideas, and the title was borrowed from the book of the Narodnik revolutionary Chernyshevsky. Lenin was a great admirer of the book. No doubt one of the heroes who slept on a bed of nails appealed to him, not because Lenin was a masochist but because he believed in will power.

The role of a revolutionary was not to sit back and wait, but to urge and spur things on. The masses taking power or winning reform was not an automatic process. Without mass struggle there would be no successful revolution. But even mass struggle would not win without organisation. Lenin was well aware that if mass political strikes broke out the state would clamp down. Without a well organised network of revolutionaries rooted in the class, any revolution would ultimately be defeated.

Lenin felt that the coming period would be one of a rising revolutionary wave, and the main problem would be that revolutionary organisation would be lagging behind the masses.

The most important task in the coming period was to build an organisation of revolutionaries. The task was so urgent that it would have to be done by professionals, those who could dedicate their whole time to the task. This was not a difficult perspective given

the anticipated events. In formulating it, it is true that Lenin was to overstate some things and play down others.

There were two major areas of controversy. Where did revolutionary consciousness come from (could workers develop revolutionary consciousness on their own, or must intellectuals introduce it from outside)? The second was the need for centralised organisation.

Many of today's intellectuals love to agonise over these parts of the book, and completely ignore the arguments on the need for a revolutionary newspaper and organisation.

Lenin obviously overstated the case on consciousness. He quite clearly argued that workers cannot on their own develop revolutionary consciousness.

USING orthodox Marxist arguments Lenin states that consciousness must come from without. The founders of Marxism, Engels and Marx, belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. Engels had not only argued for political and economic struggle, but also theoretical struggle. This Marxist tradition explained why the German working class had a highly developed Social Democratic movement, superior to the backward English working class. Lenin also argued that trade union consciousness was not to be mistaken for revolutionary consciousness.

Now there are problems with this formulation, but we must keep in mind that Lenin's opponents were dismissive of theory and organisation. They argued that the movement will work out its tasks for itself.

This underestimates the differences in ideas that workers have, and completely ignores ruling class ability to influence workers and Marx's statement that the prevailing ideas are those of the ruling class. For much of the time most workers accept the right of the bosses to run their lives.

If revolutionaries relate to the average worker, then they will find themselves behaving like Neil Kinnock or even worse. It was against this 'tailism' that Lenin's formula was aimed. He pointed out that workers fighting to improve their conditions in one factory or trade was sectional. It was only when workers took up broader issues, ie demanding a change in the law or supporting other sections of the oppressed, that they behaved as revolutionaries.

'The Social Democrat's ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but *the tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions.'

Lenin is right to argue that trade union activity does not automatically lead to revolutionary consciousness, or that at the time of writing only a few workers came up to his exacting definition



Trotsky: disputed
Lenin's attempts to
build a party

of a revolutionary.

However, if ruling class ideas prevail how can workers break with them? We can, with the benefit of hindsight and recent experience, answer, in struggle. There is not a brick wall between sectional struggle and politicisation. Many miners embarked on their year long strike with the view that it was for miners' jobs and communities. By the end of the strike a minority understood it as part of the class war. Lenin learnt this lesson himself in Russia in 1905. The class was often ahead of Social Democracy. It was the party that lagged behind the class.

So Lenin's arguments on consciousness are not part of a cosy armchair debate. The important thing was the practical implications.

The practical implications of the economists' ideas were a worship of spontaneity. Sit back and wait for the class. That in turn means no need to build a centralised organisation.

For Lenin the state is centralised, therefore workers must have centralised organisation.

LENIN'S concept of a party is not that of an island of socialist virtue in the capitalist sewer. It is a weapon in the class struggle. It is there to smash the state.

'Give us an organisation of revolutionaries and we will overturn Russia.' This quote brings us to the most neglected part of the book. How will the organisation be built? There was a huge gap between Lenin's dream of overturning Russia and the reality of a few hundred badly organised Social Democrats.

Lenin's solution to the problem is simple but breathtaking in the imaginative way he conceives it. The party will be built by having a national newspaper. Before a building can be built, there has to be scaffolding. The scaffolding allows the builders to communicate and to co-ordinate their tasks. In the same way the paper will provide communication between the localities and militants building the party. The best ideas will be shared, mistakes learned from, and activities co-ordinated.

But Lenin's plan goes beyond the day-to-day activity of party building.

'But this work is *unthinkable* in present-day Russia without an All-Russian newspaper, issued very frequently. The organisation, which will form round this newspaper, the organisation of its *collaborators* (in the broad sense of the word, ie all those working for it), will be ready *for everything*, from upholding the honour, the prestige, and the continuity of the Party in periods of acute revolutionary "depression" to preparing for, appointing the time for, and carrying out the *nationwide armed uprising*.'

The paper will build a revolutionary organisation. To do that it will first organise the activists. Then as its prestige grows and its influence goes deeper into the class it will organise the class. Finally those who are active around the paper will be part of the centralised structure needed in a revolutionary situation.

Lenin was well aware that to get rid of the Tsarist state an organisation would have to have its own communication network that could

operate under illegal conditions.

The paper's fulltime agents would become the nucleus of such an organisation. Often western Marxists argue that such arguments do not apply to the west, as Russia was absolutist. But it would be nonsense to imagine that if a revolution broke out in a western country there would be no state repression.

Lenin did not conceive of a small but pure organisation that one day the class will flood into. In *What is to be Done* he talks of the paper having 200,000 agents, capable of relating to all forms of workers' and minority struggles. It would start as a vanguard. But it was the class that would make the revolution. The party would be its instrument.

AT first the articles in *What is to be Done* did not receive any strong reaction. Lenin was surprised by the reaction he was to get at the 1903 conference. There isn't the space to go into the 1903 split here, but after the split Lenin was attacked over the issue of organisation and spontaneity not only by the Mensheviks (the minority who split with Martov) but even genuine revolutionaries such as Trotsky and Luxemburg.

Of course, the Mensheviks pretended to be dedicated to spontaneous organisation. In reality that meant the age old right of reformists to ignore the party and class when it clashed with personal ambition. In 1917 they were to show their true commitment to working class spontaneity by trying to take power away from the soviets and give it back to the bourgeoisie.

What about the contradictions of Luxemburg and Trotsky? They were extremely worried that Lenin was trying to substitute the party for the class, and ultimately the central committee for the party.

Trotsky used one particular phrase of Lenin against him again and again: 'A Social Democrat is a Jacobin indissolubly linked to the working class.' After all weren't Jacobins bourgeois revolutionaries? Wasn't this an argument for socialism from above? How could bourgeois revolutionaries be used as examples for a proletarian revolution?

All this was to miss the point. Lenin was bending the stick hard into the need for organisation. The Jacobins may have been bourgeois, but they had the organisation and the courage to remove the feudal order. The working class had to learn from their experience.

For Lenin the key link was organisation at that particular time. In 1905 Lenin was arguing to open the gates of the party. And, for any hagiographer, worse than that, he completely contradicted his previous formulation on consciousness stating that 'the very essence of class struggle face to face with bosses turns workers into socialists.'

The perspective for a revolutionary organisation building in the upturn is not the same as building when workers are on the defensive. In revolutionary struggle workers generalise. Lenin was quick to recognise that and argue it. The only problem was that some old Bolsheviks insisted on quoting *What is to be Done* at him.



Martov became a Menshevik

What do
we mean
by..



Ultra-leftism

ONE OF the problems of revolutionary socialists is that like any other minority group in society we tend to evolve a language of our own, using words, phrases and concepts that either are not used or are used differently in everyday speech.

In general we should be on our guard against this. We are in the business of relating to the working class and talking in jargon frequently blocks communication and alienates people who are not initiated into our circle.

Nevertheless there are certain jargon terms that we do actually need. This is because they designate phenomena and help us to understand and analyse problems which are of no concern to the 'general public' or to the bourgeoisie because they do not share our purpose of overthrowing capitalism.

One step ahead

The Marxist concept of surplus value is one example in point, ultra-leftism another. In these cases we have no alternative but to make sure that we explain their precise meaning.

With ultra-leftism we can begin by noting that while the term is hardly common parlance it is quite widely used on the left and in the labour movement, often loosely and inaccurately.

To the right wing Labourite, it is a term of abuse that covers practically everyone with a strong commitment to socialism. To both Stalinists and Eurocommunists it refers to all those who contemplate revolution rather

than the parliamentary road. To *Militant* supporters it is often applied to all socialists who are not in the Labour Party. Yet the concept of ultra-leftism was mainly developed and analysed by a revolutionary Marxist, Lenin, who would certainly be regarded as ultra left by all the groups just mentioned.

So what is the Marxist meaning of ultra-leftism? It is, perhaps, best explained in relation to the fundamental strategic task facing revolutionary socialists, that of transforming the elemental working class struggle within capitalism into a political struggle for the overthrow of capitalism is a struggle for state power.

The accomplishment of this task involves revolutionaries in a continuous effort to combine firm adherence to Marxist principles—ie the historic interests of the class as a whole—with the closest possible contact with, and involvement in, the mass workers' movement.

Marxist leadership means being ahead of the mass of workers, not capitulating to their illusions and prejudices, but only one step ahead not so far ahead as to be completely out of sight. Lenin graphically expressed what this involves.

'It is not enough to be a revolutionary and an advocate of socialism in general. It is necessary to know at every moment how to find the particular link in the chain which must be grasped with all one's strength in order to keep the whole chain in place and prepare to move on resolutely to the next link.'

Ultra-leftism, then can be defined as the

failure or refusal, in the name of abstract 'left' principles, to establish and maintain the necessary links with, and involvement in, the mass movement. It means, to use Lenin's terms, not finding the next link in the chain and so losing hold of the chain as a whole.

It means would-be revolutionaries substituting their own subjective wishes for an assessment of the objective balance of class forces and thereby needlessly widening the gap between the conscious revolutionaries and the rest of the working class.

Within this general rubric ultra-leftism comes in many shapes and sizes. There is the extreme case of anarchism which seeks to leap straight to a classless, stateless society without any transitional period.

There is the ultra-leftism of terrorism which tries to substitute the violent actions of individuals for the mass revolutionary violence of the working class.

There is the old blackboard socialism of the Socialist Party of Great Britain which argues that since we oppose the wages system we should also oppose strikes for higher wages.

Political judgement

Of greater interest and most concern to us today is what might be called 'Marxist' or 'Communist' ultra-leftism which rather than being a completely separate political tendency like anarchism is rather a leftist deviation which often arises within the mainstream of the Marxist movement.

Again it can take a variety of forms and there is no shortage of historical examples, from Willich and Schapper, Marx's associates in the Communist League—who, after the defeat of the 1848 Revolution, wanted to raise an exile army and march on Germany—through to the insurgent workers and soldiers of Petrograd who wanted to seize power in July 1917 before the revolutionary situation had matured in the country as a whole.

However there is no doubt that the most historically significant development of ultra-leftism came in the early years of the Communist International between 1917 and 1921.

There was at this time a veritable ultra-left 'International' within or on the margins of the Comintern. Its leading figures included Bordiga in Italy, Gorter and Pannekoek in Holland, and Sylvia Pankhurst in Britain. What this trend represented was an alliance, or coincidence, between the extremely dogmatic and abstract views of certain intellectuals and the instinctive attitudes of a layer of young, inexperienced and newly radicalised revolutionary workers who had not yet learned to think strategically and tactically.

The characteristic positions of this tendency were refusal to participate in reactionary led trade unions with the aim of

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forming 'pure' revolutionary trade unions, and refusal to participate in any way in parliamentary elections or to support the mass reformist parties against the open parties of capital—all this in the name of a policy of 'no manoeuvres, no compromises.'

Against these arguments Lenin wrote one of his most important pamphlets *Left Wing Communism—An Infantile disorder* which subjected the ideas of the ultra-lefts to devastating criticism.

It was necessary he insisted to remain in the trade unions and 'carry on communist work within them at all costs' and that 'whilst you lack the strength to do away with bourgeois parliaments and every other type of reactionary institution you *must* work within them'. To do otherwise was simply to abandon the backward workers to the mercies of the treacherous reformist leaders.

'The task devolving on Communists is to *convince* the backward elements, to work among them, and not to fence themselves off from them with artificial and childish 'Left' slogans.'

Lenin's arguments carried the day and the positions of the Left Communists were rejected by the Comintern. As a serious tendency the lefts did not last long—they could not survive the ebbing of the direct revolutionary wave that had given them their basis. Despite this a strand of ultra-leftism remained present within the Comintern, even in its leadership, and was particularly strong in Germany.

The offensive

This expressed itself in the disastrous March Action in Germany in 1921 when the leaders of the German Communist Party attempted to provoke artificially a revolutionary situation when this flatly contradicted the mood of the mass of the working class. The result was fighting between Communist and non-Communist workers, a catastrophic fall in the membership of the KPD and an easy victory for the ruling class.

To justify their actions these ultra lefts developed a 'theory of the offensive' which maintained that it was the duty of revolutionaries always to be on the offensive, always to march forward and that the proletarian vanguard had to 'galvanise' and 'stimulate' the rest of the class by demonstrative actions.

Lenin, together with Trotsky, had to take up the cudgels again to explain that a revolutionary party had to be able to retreat in good order as well as attack. The direct struggle for power could be attempted only when Communists had gained the support of the majority of the working class—support which had to be painstakingly won in the course of many defensive as well as offensive struggles for partial and particular demands which affected the basic living conditions of the working class.

These arguments formed a prelude to the adoption, in 1922, of the tactic of the united front with the reformist parties which was designed to simultaneously unify the working class for its defensive battles against



Scene from the March Action

the ruling class offensive and to expose the reformists as incapable of waging a consistent struggle for even the most elementary demands.

One further form of ultra-leftism is what can be called bureaucratic ultra-leftism. This is where a bureaucratic leadership, having ceased to be accountable and responsible to its members, issues radical seeming slogans and orders to give itself a left image while taking no account of the practical realities faced by the rank and file, or the risks run by them.

Bureaucratic ultra-leftism, stemming from the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution, began to get a grip on the Comintern through the person of Zinoviev after the defeat of the German Revolution in 1923. It later went on to assume monstrous proportions during the Stalinist 'Third Period' when united action against the rising Nazis was rejected on the grounds that the Social Democrats were 'social fascists' and when orders went out to split the trade unions and form separate red trade unions.

These were exactly the sort of policies that Lenin had condemned in *Left Wing Communism* though the basis had changed from naivety to cynicism, and thus it was left to Trotsky, now in exile, to supply the Marxist critique.

If it is the period of the Comintern which supplies us with the classic examples of ultra-leftism, what then is the relevance of this experience today?

Tiny sects

First of all, it must be said that ultra-leftism is not at all the major problem facing the British left at the moment. The radicalisation of the late sixties produced a number of distinctly ultra-left formations (the IMG, the WRP, the Maoist organisations etc) which were able to exert a certain influence on left politics but the

overwhelming majority of these former ultra-lefts have either abandoned politics or drifted rightwards into the Labour Party.

What remains are a few tiny sects that most readers of our magazine do not even come into contact with. The WRP is still there, still calling for a general strike, but it is a broken reed, and we have seen the emergence of the RCP (though the ultra-left image was severely damaged by its support for a ballot in the miners' strike).

There is *Workers Power* who evidently thought the miners support groups could be transformed into soviets.

Anyone who wants, out of curiosity, to examine a case of extreme simon-pure ultra-leftism could search out the International Communist Current. This infinitesimally small sect regards itself as the descendent of early Comintern ultra-lefts (Bordiga etc) and is so far to the 'left' that it refuses to take sides between the ANC and Botha in South Africa and the SWP and the National Front in Britain.

But the triviality of these examples only reinforces the point that the main danger at the moment is not ultra-leftism but the pressure to move to the right—to capitulate to Kinnockism.

Nevertheless ultra-leftism is not a problem we can afford to disregard completely. The SWP, despite our recent growth, remains a small organisation without a mass base in the working class. Consequently there is the danger that we may fall into ultra-leftism through ignorance of, and lack of experience in, the mass movement.

Moreover, in our current and necessary determination to combat the drift to the right we cannot avoid berding the stick to the left but we must not bend it so far that we cut ourselves completely adrift from the actual struggles that are taking place. This only makes it easier for the reformists and ex-revolutionaries to get away with their sell-outs. ■

John Molyneux

We talked to an engineering worker on the railways

Time after time



I AM a fitter for British Rail. I've been in this job for three years. There are now about 30 blokes—electricians, fitters and mates. The organisation is very poor with no regular meetings. Small sections like ours are badly represented on the rail. We elect a steward who management recognises only as a spokesman for raising complaints.

The shop consists of two sections—20 to 25 on days and four on nights. There used to be two on nights at a time. If one of them was a steward, you would see him at least once a fortnight. Our steward did a deal with management about 11 months ago, that three people would cover nights almost permanently.

Petition for elections

This hurt our organisation because you now never get to see the steward. We organised a revolt. We passed a petition round which about half the blokes signed.

It said that we had no confidence in the steward and wanted re-elections. We had to do it like this since he refused to have any votes at his meetings which were held every couple of months. He thought he was entitled to stay on for life. We eventually drove him out by telling management that any agreement with him was invalid.

We held a meeting with the Lyons Committee which is a regional negotiating body appointed by the unions. They look after all the engineers (shopmen) employed by BR who have no shop committees. These only exist on the big depots.

At the meeting, we decided on annual

elections. I stood against the old steward's mate for the first election. He was a right winger. We also managed to get another popular bloke to stand thinking that this would split the anti-militant vote. The right winger got 19, and I got 14 with the popular bloke getting four. We had lost but it was close. We at last had a base inside the shop.

Because of the generalised attack on the railways and the nature of our place we feel very isolated. To turn the situation around what's needed is an issue the blokes are really angry about so that we can organise a fight in the teeth of the steward's opposition. The trouble is that these issues don't appear regularly.

There are two issues that I can seriously agitate around along with the other militants. The first is the foreman. Our one is thick and ignorant, and an ex-member of the British Union of Fascists.

He recently slagged off a young electrician for no reason in front of a contractor. The boy was very upset. We persuaded him to write a letter to the foreman demanding an apology. And we called the steward in off his night shift. This would have prevented him from going to bed. Aside from helping the lad it kept up the pressure on him.

The electrician won the case. Not because of the steward but because the foreman knew we were behind the lad. We had all stood beside the bench helping him to write the letter and the foreman had seen us.

We now have new managers—smiling smarmy bastards. Along with the general attacks on British Rail we are expecting a tightening up of working conditions.

I think the easiest way for them to start doing this is over the time-keeping. That's a formal disciplinary thing. Every three months they call people up and charge them. The argument I'm beginning to have with blokes is that the question of lateness isn't an individual thing. If someone is threatened with dismissal we should defend them.

What normally happens even with the best steward in the world is that you are there in front of the manager as the naughty boy and the steward as a social worker, with the manager lecturing you. There are two arguments.

The most important thing is to raise the question of challenging the management's criteria for lateness, both in terms of the numbers of lateness punishable by a disciplinary (at the moment its four so why not six or eight) or the five minutes we are allowed to come in late (why not ten or 15 minutes). It's completely arbitrary. The fact is if a worker had the same lateness record as the trains he wouldn't last five minutes.

Another argument I use is that say you are 100 minutes late in the quarter. That amounts to such a proportion over three months of 39 hours a week that you could never set up the machine tools in the work shop to that accuracy.

Lateness is an issue where management can attack the shop by picking on individuals. Much more so than if they attacked some one for messing up a job, which would only concern the particular individual. Because the charges are brought four times a year, it's a regular demonstration of their arbitrary authority over us. By fighting it we have an issue to focus on every three months.

Confidence to fight

I'm proposing that we have our own system of timing the management and noting their latenesses. If any one gets into trouble we can wheel out the number of times they have been late. This is mainly to give the blokes confidence to fight, but we may also find that a manager was late at the same time as the bloke on the disciplinary.

At the next round of disciplinaries two or three of the militants who are good time keepers should accompany each of the blokes. One of us is entitled to go up each time. If there are ten of them we should repeat our arguments ten times in exactly the same way. This would piss the management off and show the lads that we use the same arguments in the office as we do on the shopfloor.

When you're strong management don't take people on over things like lateness. It's a sign of our weakness that we have to try and take them on over such a seemingly stupid issue. ■



Of real consequence

ALAN BENNETT has been writing plays for over 20 years. He was one of the wave of writers who appeared in the 60s and who more or less invented the TV play, developing it from its stagey origins to today's half-studio/half-shot on location format.

The TV play was not just a development of new technology, it was a change in subject matter and role. For most of the time, both before the 60s and today, plays are about the angst, fears and hopes of the middle classes—usually the trials and tribulations of middle class family life. But in the 60s and 70s the high level of class struggle became reflected in what was shown on the box.

The TV play, the documentary based on investigative journalism, satire and even comedy were all affected by the up-turn. TV drama began to deal with questions of class struggle and the working class, even moving out of its obsession with family life. They began to depict critiques of society and even offered radical answers to the problems shown.

Petty Issues

Cathy Come Home dealt with homelessness in London, *The Lump* about building workers organising, *Leeds United* a textile strike and a sellout arranged by the Communist Party, *Big Flame* dealing with a workers' insurrection in Liverpool sparking off a potential socialist revolution. The period abounded with left or even revolutionary plays.

Detractors of these plays (usually of the right) labelled these 'kitchen sink dramas' and saw them as dreary and depressing, a criticism some of them deserved. And the format did tend to get stuck in a rut with its attempt at gritty working class realism often being highly unrealistic with a romanticised view of workers in slightly soiled donkey jacket et al.

But Bennett's plays were never like the gritty if dour plays of the Ken Loaches or the Trevor Griffiths. Bennett is not concerned with large issues. In the 60s it meant that he seemed rather wet when compared with a play like *The Party* by Trevor Griffiths which dealt with the need to build an independent revolutionary party.

Today Bennett's plays seem to have dated less than the others. While most of the left writers of the 60s have moved politically to the right and are back writing about the

middle classes, or by pressure or choice have been excluded from writing for the telly, Bennett has remained true to his insights and continues to write for the box.

Alan Bennett has always been concerned with the small petty personal crises that make up life for most of the time. He was as concerned as the others to show real working class life, except his real life is made up not of strikes, explicit critiques of society, or the failure to create a left alternative to reformism, but the crisis of missing the bus or getting your laundry done.

He's at his best when he draws on his own background and experiences. *Me—I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is a typical Bennett work. It's about a working class kid made good, that is having made it through grammar school to be a poly lecturer and stuck in his northern home town.

"His acute observation of people is his greatest asset, and for once the realism is actually life-like"

It's about the petty quibbles and frustrations in the life of the shy and socially inept hero as he tries to cope with his life. To both his and the audience's surprise it ends with his discovery that he is gay and he's saved by love.

A trite plot but one that in Bennett's hands is never sentimental. It is also full of the developments of the TV play, with voice overs to show what the characters are thinking on location shots, plus the usual studio scenes. It is a play that could only work on the small screen. And it teems with typical Bennett characters, with northern one-liners portrayed so accurately that they hurt.

His acute observation of people is his greatest asset, and for once the realism is actually life-like. Unlike 90 percent of present-day TV output (dominated by soap opera, sport and game shows) or the dramas of the 60s with their radical heroes haranguing the masses of RADA graduates, Bennett's plays are full of people you can believe in. His

homosexuality often gives the play a needed bite.

The other unusual aspect of his work is that he seems to like people. His plays have a humour and love of the common folk which is very rare. At the same time that he can show the small mindedness of a northern small town in *Me—I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, he also shows those living there as victims of their circumstances.

One of his constant themes is showing how people cope with their lives, how they turn tragedy into a joke or even farce. The most extreme example is *A Woman of no Consequence*, describing the slow death by cancer of a middle aged and rather lonely secretary. It manages to be sympathetic and poignant without being sentimental and again it uses all the tricks of the small screen.

But it's when he moves to writing outside his experiences that his weaknesses show up. Without the sharpness of the observation and the brilliance of the detail, you can be impressed with the skilled writing but at the end you think so what—what was the point of it all?

One liners

Bennett is brilliant at details and piecing together bits of observation but not so good at plots or larger themes. The best of his plays are when the story is taken either from his own experiences or directly from real life as in *An Englishman Abroad*.

An Englishman Abroad again has Bennett dealing with homosexuality, this time drawn from the real story of an actress visiting Moscow and meeting the exiled spy Burgess. What started as a short anecdote has been filled out with wit and humour to a full length play.

With the plot already provided the play runs smoothly and shows Guy Burgess as a sad if principled man coping with the Moscow of the 60s. It is unusual in that it is one of the few plays he has written about the upper classes which works as well as his ones dealing with working or lower middle classes. As usual it neither condemns nor makes any great statement.

With the TV play now firmly back in the mould of tracing middle class traumas and the endless drama of life in the family (Bennett is now one of the few writers left whose concern is not centred round the home), Bennett's plays are like a breath of fresh air.

He has remained true to the aims of showing real life and turning the play away from the stage and out to the world.

His world is the small world of trivial things or of people of no consequence, and he offers no solutions or great schemes. But his observations are acutely accurate and his love and understanding of people are as wonderful as they are rare. ■

Noel Halifax

Down the line

The History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941
Noreen Branson
Lawrence and Wishart £6.95

'ALL HISTORY is contemporary history.' The historian necessarily views the past in the light of his or her understanding of the present. Noreen Branson sees the history of the CPGB from the emphatically non-revolutionary standpoint of the CP today.

The CPGB was founded as a revolutionary organisation, a section of the Communist International. Yet Ms Branson wishes to trace a line of continuity between the revolutionary organisation which still existed in 1927 and the party of 1941 and (by implication) the party of today.

But there had been a *fundamental* change. The tendency of this book is as close to the current line of *Marxism Today* as is possible short of repudiating the whole history of the party.

Nonetheless, it is a useful book, one from which a good deal can be learned. It incorporates previously unpublished material. It is mercifully free from the outrageous lies about all Stalin's left opponents which rendered worthless most CP-inspired accounts of this period until quite recently.

The period it covers is of immense importance for revolutionary politics in Britain. It is impossible to understand the history of the Labour Party and, still more, of the successive Labour lefts in this period without, first, considering the role of the CPGB. The successive Labour lefts of the

Most important of all, it was through the CPGB that Stalinism became a real force in the British workers' movement.

The fact is that the best, the most politically conscious, the most militant and the most self-sacrificing workers identified with the CPGB as members or supporters, not only in the twenties but even in the thirties and later.

Shifts and turns

The period covered by the book saw a series of shifts and turns in the CP line, which are duly recorded. It may be useful to summarise them: the continuation (with modification) of the 'rightist' line of pressurising the union and Labour Party lefts towards 'left' policies in 1927-28; the violent swing to the left (in fact to the ultra-left) in 1929-33; the shift to more or less united front tactics from mid-1933 to early 1935; the violent shift to the right (away from communist politics altogether) in 1935-39; the abrupt abandonment of this 'Popular Front' line in late 1939 and its resumption—with an even more right wing content—from 22 July 1941 onwards.

This framework is necessary, but far from sufficient, for the understanding of the CP's—and therefore the trade union and Labour Party left's—evolution.

In 1927, in the aftermath of the General Strike of 1926, the leaderships of the TUC and the Labour Party were swinging sharply to the right. The CPGB was small but growing. Noreen Branson tells us: 'At the end of

influence was due to the party's extremely soft line towards the left wing of the union officialdom.

With the abrupt collapse of the left wing union leaders in the General Strike, the CP-directed National Minority Movement, which had done so much to build them up, was left floundering.

Inside the Labour Party, the CP-influenced National Left Wing Movement (founded as late as September 1926) found itself increasingly isolated.

The strategic orientation that the CPGB had adopted in 1925 (in line with the rightward shift of the Communist International at this time)—influence and push forward the reformist left without criticising them too sharply—was increasingly ineffective.

The party's allies of yesterday were either, like George Hicks, leader of the building trades union and Lon Swales of the engineers, openly hostile, or, like miners' leader A J Cook, increasingly cool and distant.

Tactically, by late 1927 the party was in a dead end. It is important to grasp this in order to understand what followed.

1927 was also the year in which Trotsky, Zinoviev and their supporters were expelled from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; the year of the final disaster of the Stalin-Bukharin class collaborationist policy in China (the Canton Commune), and of the suppression of all open dissent in the USSR. The process of Stalinisation was naturally extended to the Communist International, and the 'honour' of moving the expulsion of Trotsky and Zinoviev from its executive was awarded to J T Murphy of the CPGB.

None of these facts are noted by Noreen Branson. Perhaps she thinks they are irrelevant. She does, however, devote attention to the Ninth Plenum of the Comintern Executive (February 1928). It was called primarily to orchestrate an international campaign against 'Trotskyism' and all the leaders of the CPGB went along with this without demur.

The Plenum also marked the initiation of the 'New Line', a sharp swing to the left by the International, which was highly unwelcome to the majority of the British party's leaders.

Two things are important here: the rights and wrongs of the New Line itself, and the effect of its ultimate operation on the CPGB. The policies the party had actually been pursuing in the previous period were, in fact, 'right centrist' policies, as Trotsky argued at the time. They were not a peculiar deviation of the CPGB. They were the line of the Comintern centre.

After the betrayal of the General Strike, the union and Labour Party leaders (including many of the CP's allies of yesterday) 'opened up a new drive to outlaw the Communists and isolate them from the rest of the labour movement', as Noreen Branson says in a very good chapter ('The Great Purge 1926-28'). But what political conclusions needed to be drawn from this?

That the previous line had been mistaken, at least in its emphasis? That was an intolerable heresy.

That the circumstances had changed since the General Strike? That was the line of the



Daily Worker, aid from Moscow

twenties and thirties were, politically speaking, either a reaction against or an adaptation to the politics of the CPGB.

More important, the CPGB was the driving force behind the industrial left—in the workplaces and (during most, though not all, of this time) in the unions too.

1926 it had no more than 7,900 members. There had been a big gain from the (optimistic) party claim of 5,000 in June 1925.

Branson continues, 'But its influence was wider than such numbers suggest.' That is certainly true. It is also true that *part* of that

Comintern leadership and it had some plausibility. Things had indeed changed.

The right wing of MacDonald, Citrine, Bevin and the rest were clearly pushing both the TUC and the Labour Party to more and more openly class collaborationist positions and were gaining ground against the left. Bans and proscriptions against the left were multiplying fast.

Therefore, declared the Comintern leadership, a decisive break with them is necessary, and this line was pressed upon the reluctant British leadership. There were at least two things wrong with it.

First, the rotten class collaborationist positions of the TUC/Labour Party did not date from 1927-28 but from the beginning.

Second, if a 'united front' tactic had been necessary before the defeat of the General Strike, was it not even more necessary in the period of demoralisation and retreat after it?

The Comintern, now in an advanced stage of political degeneration, could not afford to have such matters openly debated. Therefore, the New Line, so far as Britain was concerned, was promoted first of all in terms of critical electoral support of the Labour Party, or not. To compress the time scale somewhat, the CPGB was pressured to drop support for the election of a Labour government, to adopt the slogan 'For a Revolutionary Workers' Government' and, finally, to urge workers *not* to vote Labour even where (ie almost everywhere) there was no CP candidate.

The argument was conducted on a false basis on both sides. The Comintern leaders argued that the Labour Party was now a fully-fledged social-democratic (ie counter-revolutionary) party—not the loose federation of which Lenin had written in 1920.

They were unquestionably right on that score. In the course of its struggle with the CP (and its own lefts) in the 1920s the Labour Party had become a real pro-capitalist party.

Lenin and Labour

Therefore, they said, Lenin's 1920 advice to give critical electoral support to the Labour Party ('to support them as the rope supports the man who is hanged') no longer applied. This was and is nonsense.

Lenin's argument in 1920 was that the Labour Party was 'a thoroughly bourgeois party, although composed of workers' and was led by people even worse than the leaders of the German SPD, who had saved the German boss class in 1918-19. The point was to prove this, in practice, to millions of workers. In no way did *that* part of the argument depend on the peculiar constitution of the Labour Party.

What *did* depend on the 'constitutional' argument was the campaign for CP affiliation to the Labour Party. By 1927 this was a lost cause—the tide in the Labour Party was to the right, and had been since 1925, and the Labour Party leadership had succeeded (or was about to succeed) in eliminating all open revolutionaries from the party.

The Comintern leaders argued (rightly) that the affiliation campaign be dropped. However, instead of resting on the position



J T Murphy—moved Trotsky's expulsion

that it was now a dead duck (as was manifestly the case) they produced spurious 'theoretical' arguments about the changed nature of the Labour Party—culminating in the absurd proposition that the Labour Party was now 'Social-Fascist'.

The third question in dispute between the British party and the Comintern executive was the future of the National Left Wing Movement.

Its object—'to secure the adoption by the Labour Party of a militant socialist policy in place of its present policy of compromise with capitalism'—was compatible with the aim of building the CP, *so long as* the lines of the two parties were converging and the whole left growing.

With the lines diverging and the left declining, the NLWM had become 'not a bridge [to the CP] but a barrier'. The 'New Line' required its liquidation.

Finally, and most important of all, the National Minority Movement must now give 'independent leadership', said the Comintern centre. Again, the reaction against the previous (Comintern-inspired) line of reliance on 'left' officials was unquestionably correct. But 'independent leadership' was then interpreted as operating virtually outside the existing unions.

It took some 18 months (and two party Congresses) to secure both the wholehearted adoption of the new line and a British leadership in which the Comintern had confidence. By the Leeds Congress (November 1929) it had been done.

Only 13 of the members of the old central committee survived on the new committee of 36. Party membership was down to 3,000. And effective leadership of the party was now in the hands of Harry Pollitt and his minder, the 'theoretician' Palme Dutt. Pollitt was an able and energetic organiser and an excellent speaker. But he was totally and uncritically committed to Moscow. The Comintern centre—which, for practical pur-

poses, now meant Stalin and his associates—now had an obedient party in Britain.

From now on, until long after the end of the period covered by this book, the line of the CPGB was determined by the requirements of Russian foreign policy. It had become a thoroughly Stalinist party. This was the really decisive event in its history.

All the evidence suggests that for most of the cadre and members, the tie that bound them was a conviction, a devout belief in the myth of 'Soviet socialism'. There was also, for the party apparatus, another tie, secondary no doubt, but important.

The CPGB had never been really solvent. Even in 1925, when the Comintern's rein was considerably looser than it later became, the party's income from its own members was about £1,200 a year, and the Comintern subsidy £16,000. Now, with the new line, a smaller membership and a much smaller periphery, the party launched a daily newspaper, the *Daily Worker*.

It was produced, it was cheerfully admitted, 'with the aid of comrades in Eastern Europe' (I take this statement from *The Story of the 'Daily Worker'* by its editor, Bill Rust—not from Ms Branson, who does not discuss the question).

Unquestionably, the dependence of the party on Comintern money greatly increased in the early thirties.

Stalin's tragedy

After 1929 we can no longer discuss the CP in the same terms. The wholesale repudiation of basic class struggle politics during the Popular Front period, the monstrous lie and slander campaign the CP directed against the old Bolsheviks murdered by Stalin, the obscene reversals of policy during the Second World War—these things have nothing to do with Marxism or revolutionary working class politics. They represent the prostitution of some of the best people in the workers' movement, in Britain and internationally, to a brutal despotism.

Yet these people—the great majority of them—were, and often remained, dedicated, self-sacrificing militants. This is the real tragedy of the international effect of Stalinism in Russia.

Read Noreen Branson's chapter on 'Conspiracy and Incitement to Mutiny', the story of the 1929-31 Labour government's use of police and the courts against party militants (and other internationalists), read her account of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement and of 'Industrial Struggles 1930-35' to get a flavour of that determination and self-sacrifice—all twisted and distorted in the interests of Stalinism.

Ms Branson sympathises with the militants, in spite of her current views. But she has no notion of what the politics were really about. This book, in spite of its detail and (relative) candour does not really help the reader to understand the revolutionary left in this period.

Hugo Dewar's much briefer treatment in *Communist Politics in Britain* is a real guide. Read it first and then, to flesh out the account, read Noreen Branson's book critically.■

Duncan Hallas

Still copping out

Police and People in London.
Policy Studies Institute
David J Smith and Jeremy Bray
Gower

THIS book is a sociological study commissioned by former top cop, Sir David McNee. As such it is everything you would expect it to be. It is a very detailed study and a serious attempt to find ways of improving the police performance. In 1979 McNee invited the Policy Studies Institute to study 'the relations between the Metropolitan Police and the community it serves'. The report was not published until November 1983, well after the 1981 riots had shaken the police and establishment. This volume, published by Gower, is only part of the research.

The purpose of the research is clear: to try and discover ways of improving the public profile of the police force. This became more important as the research progressed amidst rioting in London and other major cities.

The preface begins by outlining measures already taken by the police to improve their work. It mentions adopting new policies for training police officers to investigate racial attacks and consult representatives of the ethnic minorities affected.

As the level of racial attacks increases in East London and the police almost deny their existence, the ethnic communities could not be blamed for being more than a little sceptical.

Throughout the work we are treated to very realistic descriptions of police brutality given by people interviewed and supported by numerous tables. This really is an extremely well researched book. Many examples are quoted, like:

'They asked me to admit to crimes which were committed six or seven months before, and if I didn't tell they'd keep on hitting me which they did. They took my clothes off, told me to spread my legs and said they'd stick their truncheon up my backside.'

The Right advice

For a Pluralist Socialism
Michael Rustin
Verso £5.95

WHATEVER else Neil Kinnock may lack, it isn't advice. Some of his would-be advisers, like Peter Hain, are former members of the Bennite left who now believe they can gain influence by proposing 'realistic' policies for a future Kinnock administration.

Others like Michael Rustin are further to the right. His book is made up of chapters such as

The Institute find it: 'extremely disturbing to find that a substantial proportion of people who have been arrested make very specific allegations against the police involving gross misconduct in many cases'.

But don't expect any answers to the problems they analyse. They start from the position of accepting the existence of the police and then merely seek to improve their image, therefore only superficial solutions can be proposed.

No doubt the researchers would claim they are seriously attempting to tackle and reform the police force. Unfortunately, because of their starting point they can only come up with well meaning platitudes.

This means ideas like community policing, as recommended by the Scarman Report, which cannot hold back the tide of anger and frustration of British youth, as the recent riots in Birmingham clearly illustrate.

Recommendations listed at the end of the book include such revolutionary ideas as improving the selection procedure, a revision of the training programme, a stronger emphasis on assessment of performance and consultative management. Obviously, these reforms could, at best, only paper over the cracks.

They don't ask the question: why do we need a police force? Without recognising that it performs a function of the state, ie it is responsible for the oppression of one class by another, it is impossible to begin to understand why it operates in a particular fashion at a particular time. It is only from this starting point that their ferocity during the miners' strike can easily be understood.

This is not a book to buy and read from cover to cover, but it could prove a useful addition on a shelf for reference purposes. There is an example of every kind of police abuse you could imagine and plenty of facts and figures that are interesting.■

Lesley Hoggart

'Towards a feasible socialist foreign policy', 'Power to the regions', and 'Workers' plans and industrial democracy'. His political position can be gauged from the fact that amongst a list of 'nettles not grasped' by the Labour Governments of the 60s and 70s he includes 'the barriers posed by the syndicalist wage-bargaining powers of the trade unions to an expansionary economic strategy'.

In the afterword Rustin imagines the formation of a Labour/Liberal/SDP coalition government. This

government introduces wage controls (encouraged by 'the success of the Australian Labour Government's programme of an incomes policy'), does not repeal the Tories' anti-union laws, but does succeed in wedding the radical intelligentsia more firmly to its cause than its Labour predecessors had done, both by the recruitment of advisers, and by the re-invention of the Royal Commission.

Rustin modestly concedes this is not socialism but believes 'at least it

was a move forward again'. In the introduction he acknowledges his debt to Eric Hobsbawm and his application of the ideas of *Marxism Today* brings out clearly their reactionary nature.

The only other lesson to be learnt from this book is that it is possible to be a frequent contributor to *New Left Review* and a founder member of the Socialist Society, while unblushingly producing elitist right-wing nonsense like this.■

Brian McDonald

The unions slot

Trade Unions—Selected Readings
W E J McCarthy
Penguin £4.95

A WARNING from *Socialist Worker Review*! This book may cause you to waste £4.95. If you are thinking up an A Level sociology syllabus, or writing an election manifesto for the Labour Party, then by all means borrow it from your local library. If you are a trade unionist and a socialist, don't.

It's not that Lord McCarthy's collection of readings on trade unions is a broadside from the ruling class—its air of Sixties sociological Croslandism is hardly the stuff that monetarists' dreams are made of.

The view of the world presented here is one in which everything slots into place somewhere in our pluralistic society. There is a role for every institution—the House of Lords, Education, the Special Patrol Group. There's even one for the Trade Unions! Isn't that nice?

Some of the articles and extracts which make up the book attempt a wider explanation of the aims of unions and why they exist. Some are more detailed studies of specific aspects of trade unionism such as mergers, rule books and disciplinary procedures. With the exception of an extract from Richard Hyman's 1975 book *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction*, class just doesn't enter

into it.

McCarthy's first words in the Introduction are: 'Trade unions are always in the news, but this does not help them to be understood.' What he seeks to do is to analyse trade unions as institutions, to see how they can be drawn into the management of capitalism, and to create an ideology of incorporation which can be as useful to trade union bureaucrats as anyone else.

Margaret Thatcher feels able to ignore much of the 'consensus' argument, but the readiness of union leaders to accept the 'new realism' shows how insidious that ideology is.

Under a Labour government the arguments would resurface with a vengeance, as a smokescreen for the job of managing capitalism in crisis.

This collection isn't really of much interest, even as a document, however horrible, of the class war. It is largely marked by complete academicism. There are careers to be made out of labour studies, and most of the contributors have done just that.

If you are looking for views on what has happened to the shop floor organisation and militancy of ten or 15 years ago, or why the ruling class needs Thatcherism, you won't find them here. This is a book that both revolutionary socialists and Norman Tebbit will probably feel they can afford to ignore.■

Tim Sneller

Class sickness

The Patient Patients
Helen Roberts
Pandora £3.95
No Time for Women—Exploring Women's Health in the 1930s and Today
Charmian Kenner
Pandora £4.95

WOMEN go to doctors more often than men (even if one excludes contraception and pregnancy), take more medicines than men, and tend to consider themselves more unhealthy than do men, though in fact they live longer.

The Patient Patients is based on interviews with 240 women. It is sensitively written, with the women allowed to speak for themselves on

what constitutes a 'good' doctor, and on how they perceive their own health and illness and the relationship with their doctor.

The author tries to 'illustrate some of the hidden dimensions of power between doctors and their women patients, and to suggest what might be done to redress the balance'. While it succeeds in illustrating, I found both its explanations and suggestions for change limited and simplistic.

The patients interviewed all seem to be married and working class. The author fails to look at class differences.

Do rich women have no one to care for them when they are unwell?

Do they have to soldier on running after the kids and cooking tea when they have flu and a temperature? Is the power relationship between Mrs Thatcher and her Harley Street specialists the same as that between a working class woman and her GP?

Thus, the 'illustrations' come mainly from *working class* women's oppression, while the conclusions are about *all* women. The solutions proposed arise out of this confusion. Although there is ample reference to unhealthy jobs, housing, and even relationships making us unhealthy, we are urged to start by 'defining ourselves as basically healthy', and redefining and changing our lives and relationships.

This is, of course, not always possible for the working class woman, who has little choice of job, accommodation, or living situation.

No Time for Women also uses the oppression of *working class* women to make statements about 'women' in general. The book compares women's health in the 1920s and 30s to women's health today.

It is intended to be used for discussion by women's health groups, so after each chapter there is a list of questions and suggested activities—finding out about welfare rights, joining a union, cooking together as a group, getting husband and children to help with the housework, and so on.

'The basic idea of the book is that we need a society in which everyone has healthy living conditions and good welfare services. At present, many people have neither, and so become ill. We also need a society in which every woman can choose how she wants to lead her own life.

'Women, men and children could all be healthier if we lived in a more just and equal society: where every kind of work

(including housework and looking after children) was shared out, and where we could all be involved in making decisions according to everyone's needs.'

Despite this promising paragraph in the introduction, and the author's obvious concern for and sympathy with the plight of working class women past and present, the book is written from a feminist perspective, and has no serious analysis of, let alone real solutions to, the reasons behind women's (and men's) poor living conditions and ill health.

Thus, despite its well-written and often powerful descriptions of the terrible housing, damp, lack of fresh air, long hours of exhausting housework, lack of contraception and abortion, etc that existed some 60 years ago (and to a lesser extent nowadays), and its occasional references to life not being too easy for working class *men*, it constantly refers to 'women' as the victims of these awful conditions. There is no mention of the fact that things were very different for middle class and upper class women.

No connection is made with capitalism as a whole, the need to maximise profits, the cheapness of human life especially when there is a surplus of labour.

The author fails to draw out that this is not because our rulers, past and present, are nasty oppressive men, but rather because there is a nasty oppressive system called capitalism, where the working class must constantly struggle to claw back some of the surplus it produces.

There will only be a real substantial and lasting improvement in the quality of our housing, health, relationships and lives generally, when we have succeeded in replacing capitalism with socialism. ■

Annie Nehmad

problems in combining domestic responsibilities and employment. Yeandle never points out that a few women in our society never have these problems at all.

She does show that it is often very difficult for men and women to break out of the roles that society forces them into.

For example, if a family needs more income it is often more rational for the man to work overtime than for the woman to look for work. He will often earn more this way and it is usually easier to

organise.

Clearly, neither partner benefits from this. The man will be less able to take on domestic duties and the woman will be forced to carry even more of the burden of the home.

Yeandle concludes that in the present economic situation policy makers will need to look for fresh approaches, new initiatives and radical changes! It seems to me that what we need to do is to get rid of these 'policy makers' and work out our own solutions. ■

Pam Bainbridge

Class in Russia

Soviet Union, Politics, Economics and Society

Ronald J Hill

Francis Pinter 'Marxist Regimes' series £6.95

PROFESSOR HILL'S long essay on the Soviet Union is remarkably cool headed for these cold-war times. Indeed he looks at the country as just another unit of national capital on the world scene—another 'modern industrial state'. There is very little by way of defending or attacking the 'socialism' of the Soviet Union. This makes this book useful.

The monograph is at its best when Hill discusses the social structure and the political system of the country. He states clearly that the revolution was the work of a small working class in a sea of illiterate, backward peasantry. The Bolsheviks had to attempt to build socialism with third-rate material.

The society we are faced with now is fairly complex and definitely class-ridden. Hill then proceeds to discuss the various classes following the classification of the official Soviet sources.

Soviet peasantry primarily comprises the collective farmers of the Kolkhoz. Hill would argue that agricultural workers of the state

farms also belong here in terms of outlook. Together they form a substantial section of Soviet society, roughly 45 million people. Hill contends that there exists a definite peasant 'culture' and a different way of life to the city. Attachment to religion in the countryside indicates the difference from the city and its relative backwardness.

On every count I would hesitate to call these people a class: most of them own land and means of production collectively except for the state farm workers who have to sell their labour power. Their produce is channelled into pre-determined outlets and their supplies arrive from equally pre-determined sources. Their contact with the market which could have acted as a catalyst is minimal.

Finally they are spread all over the huge country, their mobility is restricted and, by all accounts, their consciousness is not advanced. They are certainly not a force that would provide Soviet society with the progressive impetus it needs.

The working class is entirely the creation of the Soviet regime and it is enormous. Hill reckons that 150 million people belong to the working class and this does not include office workers and their families,

Unequal burden

Women's Working Lives—
Patterns and Strategies

Susan Yeandle
Tavistock £7.95

I DIDN'T so much read this book as wade through it. Maybe the pages of sociological jargon were needed to convince us that this really is a scientific study, but they bored me silly.

Two things kept me going: the interesting subject and the fascinating interviews.

A number of women were questioned about their job histories, attitudes to work, trade unions, domestic responsibilities and the general organisation of their lives.

The result firmly hammers any notion that, as Wilmot and Young put it, 'by the next century society will have moved to two demanding jobs for the wife and two for the husband.'

The symmetrical family with both partners working and both sharing domestic responsibilities is still virtually non-existent. Anyone who has talked to women in miners support groups or on the Barking Hospital picket line won't be surprised by Yeandle's findings.

The majority of women want paid work outside the home but there is no one pattern of full-time, part-time, evening or whatever that would suit them all. The majority of women are economically dependent on a man. At home and at work women are subordinate to men. Women are responsible for the running of the home and for child rearing. This remains so even when they take on full-time employment.

Apart from two possible exceptions all of the women interviewed were working class, but class itself is not discussed enough. It is implied that all women face similar

Nicaragua:

REVOLUTION UNDER SIEGE

by Mike Gonzalez

Judge by the reaction of the US, and the Nicaraguan revolution is a Marxist threat on a par with Joe Stalin. According to its supporters, it is a socialist revolution 'of a new type'. Beneath these highly-coloured reactions, what is really happening in Nicaragua? Has mass involvement in the over-throw of the Somoza dictatorship been translated into mass democracy? What are the political effects of the US blockade and military threat?



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easily another 50 million.

As Soviet industry has advanced, the class has started to differentiate within itself. New layers have been created with extra mental skills and more general education but without the specialisation of the older workers. The younger workers have greater expectations than their parents and have tasted the better things of life. In this respect they will be much more difficult to integrate into the regime if they are not provided with rising living standards.

Yet for the Soviet working class as a whole the picture is disappointing. Class consciousness is stunted and its awareness of itself is minimal. The reasons for this are many. The state has promoted a mentality of social climbing connected with education and training. However, the most intelligent and alert workers are co-opted into the political and state apparatus as a matter of course.

The class is further weakened by sectionalism based on skill levels and cultivated by the state. Finally there is widespread identification with the system, contrary to what the Pentagon would have us believe, and, one suspects, Great Russian chauvinism.

This is not to deny that stirrings and struggles of all forms have

taken place and will keep doing so. However, Soviet workers as a class are not yet on the political scene.

The intelligentsia forms the last class in Soviet society, according to Professor Hill. Here he has lumped together the ruling class and a professional middle class. They comprise a surprisingly small part of Soviet society, only 5 percent. The key to entering the middle class is education and they make damn sure their offspring will have it. The Soviet middle class completely identifies with 'socialism'. They have a lot to lose from its demise: status, income, prestige, influence on production.

As regards the Communist Party, it is the political vehicle for the ruling class to make sure that all worthwhile individuals of other classes are brought to its service. The Party largely controls the state, although there is a degree of independence. The rulers firmly control the lot.

Hill completes the work with some run of the mill stuff on the economy and the policies of the ruling class. His analysis of the choices facing the Soviet Union in the eighties and beyond has nothing to add to the usual arguments on 'modernisation' and catching up with the West. ■

Costas Lapavistas

Upmarket gossip

Auden in Love

Dorothy J Farnan
Faber & Faber £9.95

DOROTHY J FARNAN is the step-mother of Chester Kallman, the American lover of W H Auden. Her book is little more than middle-brow gossip with a nasty taste to it. Chester Kallman does not seem to have been a very nice person. Moreover the personal trauma of Auden's love life seems to have had only a marginal effect on his poetry.

After Auden left Britain in 1939 with Isherwood, they left not only Europe but also the politics of the stalinist fellow travellers of which they had been the centre. Auden moved from worshipping Stalin to worshipping God as laid down by the Catholic church, while Isherwood fell amongst Californian eastern mysticism, guru and all.

Their brief interest in left politics started in the early thirties in Berlin,

where they settled after rebelling against Oxbridge and English establishment culture. Throughout the thirties they epitomised the CP fellow traveller, campaigning for Spain and following the stalinist line even to the point of staying quiet about their homosexuality. Their novels and poems of this time are full of the politics of the period.

Their flight to America changed all that and the contradictions that dominated Auden's poetry became the guilt about being gay and a Catholic.

This book opens with the arrival of the dynamic duo in 1939 in New York—in other words just at the point when their work stops being interesting—and it does nothing to explain the change in their views. There is in fact an underlying anti-gay feel to the book, an up-market *News of the World*. Not recommended. ■

Noel Halifax

Blasting the box

Television Mythologies

Ed Len Masterman
Comedia/MK Media Press £3.95

FOR many of its readers Eamonn McCann's TV column is the first thing they turn to in *Socialist Worker*. His blasts against the box try to politicise the depoliticised,

historicise the ahistorical, and scream protest at the common sense assumptions of fiction and fact alike.

It's a pity then that Eamonn wasn't approached for a contribution to this collection of 23 short pieces which attempt very much the same job.

Len Masterman's introduction explains that the collection has been conceived in homage to French critic Roland Barthes—particularly his rejection of the way that newspapers, magazines, films and exhibitions represented, or represented, reality as if it were *not* the result of struggle.

The simply 'natural' or 'common sense', the 'what-goes-without-saying' assumptions produced so relentlessly and pervasively within our everyday waking lives, could not be left unchallenged.

The principle of myth for Barthes is that history is transformed into nature; speech is depoliticised, reality is emptied of human activity and struggle. The writers here have tried to look at British TV in the same way. Topics tackled range from Russell Grant on Breakfast TV, Tommy Cooper, Torvill and Dean, *Tomorrow's World* and *Top of the Pops*, to TV commercials, preview writing and continuity, and on to 'The Glut of the Personality', 'Fragments of Neil: Entertainment and Political Leadership', and *What's My Line?*

Masterman's own piece, 'The Battle of Orgreave', is the most useful. He contrasts the BBC and ITN news coverage of last June's crucial confrontation in South Yorkshire. His general thesis is that to demythologise television output usually means pointing to what has been left out. In the case of Orgreave however, one side, ITN, was prepared to run certain of the footage that the other had, indeed, left out—the police violence.

The early evening news on BBC1 on 18 June showed Moira Stewart against a background picture of someone taking a flying kick at a policeman. The 'eye-witness' report of journalist John Thorne spoke of horrific attacks on individual policemen, and the film served to illustrate the overall theme that picket line violence was in fact *picket violence*.

In the following edition of *Sixty Minutes* presenter Nick Ross opened a report by addressing Yorkshire NUM's Jack Taylor with the words, 'How on earth do you explain what happened at Orgreave today?' With only his editor's inadequate footage to rely on, he was amazed that Taylor could reply that the same question should be asked of the police.

Meanwhile ITN were prepared to show the now infamous police assaults and Peter Sissons on *Channel 4 News* was confronting the Chief Constable of South Yorkshire: 'We've seen pictures of policemen clearly losing their tempers and using their truncheons. Do policemen truncheoning miners risk disciplinary proceedings?'

TV as a definer of reality for a huge audience could not be better exemplified. The seductive vividness of video images, the apparent *unmediated* quality of their immediacy and its realism, makes dis-

puting the 'facts' very hard. How many arguments do revolutionaries have at work which founder on the inability of our co-workers to question, let alone contradict, something they saw on the telly last night? It is often only when they in turn become the subject of TV coverage, through a strike or demonstration say, that the opportunity arises to demonstrate the nature of television selectivity.

Yet it is probably when we are at our most relaxed that TV is most pernicious. At least with news programmes political matters are addressed head on. Entertainment, however, is when we put our feet up, forget Monday morning, get the kids to bed, turn off and switch on.

Esther Rantzen's *That's Life* is regularly watched by 18 million viewers. Robin Gutch's piece cuts through its populism. It is produced by the BBC Current Affairs Department, like *Panorama*, but filmed before a live audience with transmission shortly after recording. Its brass band theme music, picture postcard graphics, bawdy and continuous double entendres, show a concern to be part of a tradition of popular culture. But, like *Coronation Street*, it is outdated and nostalgic.

Ian Connell warns against blaming the media for all the world's ills, particularly the failure of solidarity in the miners' fight.

At that point we either write off the working class as the agent of socialism, or get on with the job of rebuilding workplace confidence and organisation, countering the prime-time ideology which puts the ruling class line so persuasively.

But Connell is right to debunk what in its turn is a myth. We can really only talk of a *tendency* for TV to shape or deny class consciousness. How else can we account for the genuinely informative and enlightening role that television can play?

There will no doubt be tomes of research produced about the miners' fight by people who did nothing to help when it was a live issue. But this question of mobilising or demobilising power of television might be better understood by asking a few simple questions of NUM members. What priority, for instance, did strikers give to owning/renting their own television during the depths of their hardship? Was it the first to go or the last, a luxury or a necessity? Did scabs keep their telly in the isolation of their own homes and did strikers rely on communal watching in clubs? What other aspects of previously acceptable television output besides news programmes were looked at in a new light? For example, what was the reaction to Hilda Ogden's scab lodger by striking *Coronation Street* fans?

Answers to such questions might clarify the sorts of problems this book provokes. On balance this book provides little in the way of a

theory of how television works. And relying on a simple Marxist sloganeering of the ruling ideas of any society are those of the ruling class doesn't help explain how those ideas are distributed and made acceptable. Yes, it is galling to see *Newsnight* expose the Ridley plan, on the day after the return to work vote. Why didn't they put out such a report a year ago? But television is

also capable of Ken Loach's *Whose Side Are You On?*

The struggle to contest television in theory and practice has got to be an important element of revolutionary socialism. We cannot allow their instant history and love of the individual to obliterate our history and the power of collective struggle. ■

Nick Grant

Superior sisters

Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920

Martha Vicinus
Virago, £6.95

THIS book is about the life style politics of nineteenth century feminism. It tells the interesting and often moving story of thousands of mainly upper and middle class women who had to struggle against their families and social convention to live lives of their own in 'reformed' hospitals, women's

schools and colleges, settlement houses in areas, and even religious sisterhoods.

Class conscious

But what strikes the socialist reader most forcibly about these women is their class consciousness. Nightingale nurses campaigned against the alleged dirtiness and loose morals of working class nurses (who wore cheap jewellery and spent their evenings off at the music hall). Settlement workers

went to the slums to 'purge the air and destroy evil elements' with their assumed cultural and moral superiority. Elite girls' boarding schools did not admit the daughters of tradesmen even if they could afford the fees, and even Anglican convents admitted working class women only as 'lay sisters' who did their dirty work.

Full of benevolent intentions towards working class women, these elite reformers saw them as passive victims to be 'raised' by superior intervention. In an extraordinary passage quoted in this book, nursing reformer Anna Jameson expressed the belief that working class men might treat their own wives and daughters less harshly because of having been 'tended by gentle and superior beings of the other sex' in hospital.

These women were also sexual reactionaries, basing their claim to superiority on their 'purity', their 'sacrifice' of sexual relations with men in order to win respect and acceptance as independent single women. Ironically, perhaps, they were much given to what Martha Vicinus calls 'homeroetic friendships' among themselves, because in Victorian England these were not seen as sexual relationships.

It is only at the end of the book that Martha Vicinus gets round to pointing out that these reactionary sexual politics were a deliberate rejection of the sexual radicalism preached earlier in the nineteenth century by Utopian Socialists, and in the early twentieth century by Bolsheviks and feminists.

Martha Vicinus sees the Suffragettes as the inheritors of this elitist women's movement of the late nineteenth century. And she certainly has a point as far as the small group of self-appointed leaders around the Pankhursts are concerned. Their 'sacrifice of the body' through prison and hunger strikes, their self-conscious femininity expressed in stylish clothing, and their assumption of moral superiority and greater purity (culminating in Christabel Pankhurst's 'Votes for Women, Chastity for Men') all fit here.

But to interpret the suffrage campaigns in this way, Vicinus simply has to discard working class women and the important part they played in agitating for the vote, especially in industrial areas such as Lancashire where they had long experience of factory and trade union work. These working class women always kept their distance from the elitist, exhibitionist Suffragettes, as Jill Liddington and Jill Norris showed in their book *One Hand Tied Behind Us*.

For socialists, Martha Vicinus's book should help to show how impossible it is for 'sisterhood' to transcend class, and how basically reactionary the nineteenth century women's movement became in parts when it was separated from radicalism and socialism after the 1840s. This separation was a tragedy: we have to make sure that in the late twentieth century socialism and the cause of women's liberation remain together. ■

Norah Carlin

BOOKBRIEF

TWO useful books have been re-issued in paperback in time to cash in on new term student demand. By far the most valuable is Alex Callinicos's 1983 *Marxism and Philosophy* (Oxford £3.95). It is rather more technical than many of his books for the SWP and it is hard going in places. Anyone who has followed the debates over philosophy in *International Socialism* will, however, find it a very useful addition to their library. It fills out many of the details of Alex's often contentious position on Marxist philosophy. Less enthusiasm for another 1983 reread, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, edited by T Bottomore and others (Basil Blackwell £7.95). Very heavily influenced by academicism, it has strange priorities (eg more space for Karl Korsch than for Bukharin), staggering omissions, like any discussion of the class nature of the USSR ('State Capitalism? Never heard of it!—ed), and a general classroom tone. Within its modest limits it is quite a useful book: students will find it makes a handy work of reference.

Not quite a reread, the third edition of J A G Griffith's *The Politics of the Judiciary* (Fontana £3.50) comes in very handy given recent developments in the law. Sent to press before the end of the miners' strike, it is not as full on the most recent changes as we might like but it is still very interesting and an easy read. There can be no better review than that provided by Lord Denning: 'The youngsters believe that we come from a narrow

background—it's all nonsense—they get it from that man Griffith.'

Fiction continues to pour into the office. The *Women's Press* have issued the next batch of their science fiction series: Joanna Russ's *The Adventures of Alyx* (£1.95), Naomi Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (£1.95), Suzette Elgin's *Native Tongue* (£2.50) and a collection of short stories: *Despatches from the Frontier of the Female Mind* (£2.50) edited by Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu. To my mind they are more promising than the last selection. From the same publisher comes Suniti Namjoshi's *The Conversations of Cow* (£2.95) which is good fun. *Virago* have re-published Winifred Holtby's *Poor Caroline* (£3.50) and Majorie Barnard's *The Persimmon Tree and Other Stories* (£3.50).

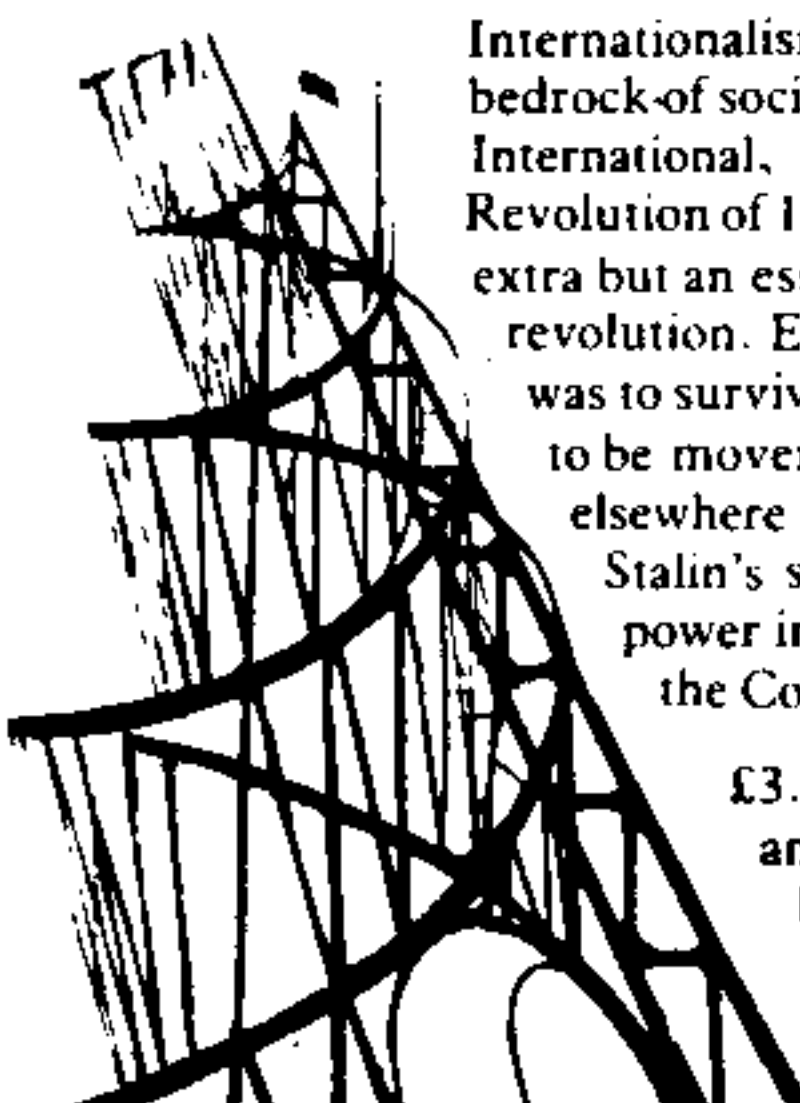
Marge Piercy is best known as a novelist but has in fact also published nine books of poetry. *Pandora* have just issued one, *My Mother's Body* (£4.95) which is a lot of money but well worth it.

Deep Digs! Cartoons of the *Miners' Strike* (*Pluto* £3.50) is in a good cause being a benefit for Women Against Pit Closures. It includes some real classics from Steve Bell, Ray Lowry and others. But it also includes some apolitical rubbish and some pretty feeble cartooning. The real mystery is why there are no cartoons from *Socialist Worker*, or *Militant*, or *The Morning Star* or indeed any publication to the left of *City Limits*. ■

Colin Sparks

Duncan Hallas

THE COMINTERN



Internationalism is the bedrock of socialism. The Communist International, born out of the Russian Revolution of 1917, was no optional extra but an essential part of that revolution. Essential if the revolution was to survive; essential if there was to be movement towards socialism elsewhere in the world. Conversely, Stalin's strangling of workers' power inside Russia is mirrored in the Comintern's degeneration.

£3.75 from SWP bookstalls and left bookshops, or by post (add 50p postage) from BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

More than just taste

SINCE I seem to have failed to get my point across to Chris Glenn (September *SWR*) at Marxism 85, maybe I can have another try. I will do so briefly because I largely agree with Chris Nineham's article in the same issue and will not repeat points made there.

When I urged comrades to listen to the Style Council's album *Our Favourite Shop* it was not because I thought it would make a major contribution to their political education, nor even because I hoped they would enjoy it. I commended it to their attention because it seemed to me to be an excellent example of socialist propaganda in a genuinely popular (Number One on the album chart) form, and therefore worthy of study by revolutionary activists.

In a period when significant possibilities are opening up for revolutionary socialists, the ability to make and use a wide variety of imaginative and popular forms of propaganda is an important task. In the period of the Anti-Nazi League, the SWP discovered and exploited a variety of forms of mass propaganda. Unfortunately this on occasion led to a dilution of politics—it was sometimes assumed that anyone who bought a Clash album was already a 100 per cent revolutionary. Quite rightly in the last few years we have put greater stress on political clarity, but sometimes at the price of losing liveliness and imagination. Hopefully we have now reached a point where we can afford to experiment a little.

Now good propaganda doesn't automatically flow from correct politics—otherwise Tony Cliff would draw the cartoons in *Socialist Worker*. There are also questions of style and technique. The great merit of *Our Favourite Shop* is the way it starts from individual experience (of unemployment, YTS, police violence, Milton Keynes, etc). Now politically this has the danger of leading to a succession of single issue campaigns for good causes (a trap that Weller in fact seems to have fallen into). But at the same time the Style Council's songs can appeal to people who are not yet at the point of wanting to bring down the whole insane system with the Redskins.

The need to discuss such issues seriously is quite separate from the question of the 'musical preference' of individual SWP members. One of the leading *apparatchiks* of the Anti-Nazi League actually *likes* opera. Fortunately he didn't try to organise Wagnerian carnivals.

At the same time, musical

preference does not exist in a social vacuum. What people like relates to their values, their experience and their social situation. For instance, I have never met a revolutionary socialist who likes Duran Duran. Maybe there is one out there somewhere. Or maybe not. Again, the *Economist* (17 August) reports that in order to improve its image with young voters the SDP is hoping to sign up rock stars—if it can find any takers, which so far it hasn't! Surely more than just taste is at stake here. ■

Ian Birchall
Enfield

On the pulse?

I HAVE, as Charlie Hore urged in September *SWR*, checked my pulse. Is there something I've missed? Charlie states in his review of the book *Nowhere to Run*, that, 'Soul music grew out of and in turn inspired the rebellion of Black Americans in the sixties, articulating both their desires for a better life and their understanding that it had to be fought for.'

Not one of the musicians Charlie then quotes to my knowledge released anything vaguely political. Great dance music it may be, but it seems to me that soul music removes all the power, the guts and the politics of the early black blues music.

Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Leadbelly, Blind Lemon Jefferson and the others made far more powerful statements about being black *and* fighting back than anything Messrs Brown, Franklin and Redding ever turned their voices to, let alone the Supremes and the rest of the Tamla hit factory.

I don't object to anybody liking any form of music, but why try and make your musical preference fit your politics? Charlie's claims remind me of a review Noel Halifax wrote claiming that discos represented collective action, whereas the early, highly political songs of Dylan represented atomisation. John Rees is clearly a Springsteen fan yet in his article in *SWR* 78 he avoids the traps of Hore or Halifax.

Never mind checking your pulse, check your politics. ■

Rick Hay
North London

No secrets

THE MAIN problem with Howard Senter's contribution to the Secret Road to Socialism debate is that the *practice*, as described, is saying that the active involvement of the revolutionary party is a

prerequisite of building basic trade union organisation.

Heaven help party *and* class if that's true. Historically, backward sections have leapt to the fore many times. Our job is to foster that process (for that is where workers' ideas become open to change) not to substitute for it.

Of relevance are two recent quotes: 'But one lesson workers didn't learn... was the need to build an organisation able to maintain the political strength of workers' organisations.' (*Socialist Worker* 951, p10) '...there are no shortcuts in rebuilding the movement. And it's the job of socialists to try and develop the consciousness, confidence, combativity of the rank and file.' (*Socialist Worker* 952, p10).

The party we need is one of workers who have *experienced* collective struggle—that is the main source of faith in the class.

A final point—if we keep our heads down in our workplaces, presumably we will not risk any public activity in that vicinity eg street sales. Our only defence is support from other workers in our workplaces and trade unions. And now that the witch hunt is on, it's not just the bosses that are after us...

But I would fully support the comrade in doing something rather than nothing. That's how we learn. ■

Ian Wallace
Sheffield

A fake militancy

IT APPEARS from the *Notes of the Month* (September *SWR*) that facts have been bent to fit a theory. It is claimed that the actions of AMMA (Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association) and the NAS/UWT (National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers) in the teachers' dispute have been more militant than the NUT, which therefore illustrates the emergence of some new centre-right in the Labour Party.

While Keith Joseph's intransigence has infuriated those for whom collectivity is seen as a professionals' talking shop and stung them into relatively elementary forms of trade union action, it is the NUT that has set the pace in negotiations and action at all levels in all areas throughout the dispute. It is wholly inaccurate to cite the tail-ending of these two groups as an influential shaping force in the Labour Party.

To set the record straight, no teachers' organisation is affiliated to the Labour Party, and only the NUT and the NAS/UWT belong to the TUC—since 1970 and 1969 respectively. AMMA is a relic of grammar school days, strictly for lower management, with an SDP

orientation.

While one or two SWP comrades and militant teachers belong to the NAS/UWT in areas where headteacher-dominated NUT branches exist hand-in-glove with management, the motive behind all NAS/UWT actions is competitive sniping at the larger NUT membership, usually through tough sounding rhetoric and petty, piecemeal industrial action.

There is no record of unofficial or rank and file activity in the NAS/UWT, and their line on corporal punishment, together with their origins in 1929—as a right wing breakaway from the NUT on the question of equal pay for women, leaves them still well to the right of the union movement.

While the competitive recruitment of members between the NUT and the NAS/UWT has been a motive behind the relative militancy of their national executives in this dispute, the real factors embittering the ordinary members are the Tory attacks, and that can only be fought by united action.

There will be renewed calls on the left after this dispute to achieve that unity, but that debate should not be limited to one which just talks about 'professional unity'.

As local government employees, teachers have as much in common with workers currently organised in NALGO or NUPE as with those managers in their own unions.

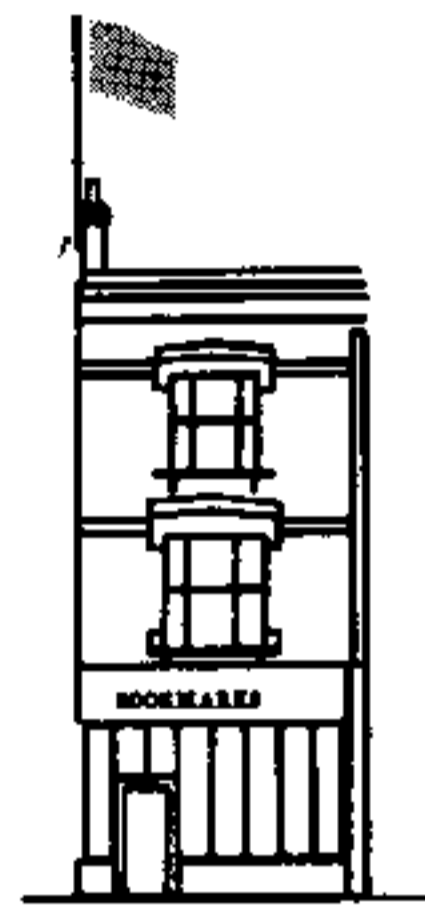
The key scandal about the teachers' dispute and the Labour Party is that teachers used to be an important constituency for Labour—Houghton and Clegg pay awards were their sops to that part of the electorate.

In this dispute Kinnock has been more silent than he was on the miners. As ex-shadow education spokesman and married to a Brent NUT member, he should know the issues inside out. Labour's local government management team has shown in recent manoeuvrings that a Labour Party in government would have no more to offer than the Tories.

Pressures from their respective memberships will keep the NUT and NAS/UWT pressurised to at least talk militant. The Labour Party, under no similar pressure of real economic life from its membership, will keep moving right until its flag-waving populism will start blaming teachers for riots, AIDS and unemployment! ■

Nick Grant
North West London

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SOUTH AFRICA: THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

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PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE GREAT MINERS' STRIKE 1984-85

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The bold Fenians

THE BRITISH working class has a long history of solidarity with Irish republicans in their fight for national liberation. From the 1790s and 1800s when English radicals had secret links with the United Irishmen through to 1848 when the Chartists allied with the Irish Confederation, British and Irish radicals and republicans have joined together against a common enemy, the British ruling class.

The 1860s saw the development of the Fenian movement in Ireland, a revolutionary conspiracy rooted among the urban working class and rural small farmers that had extended its organisation into the Irish community in Britain.

At the same time, the British working class was being mobilised by the Reform League to demand the vote for all adult males and its most advanced sections were involved with the International Working Men's Association and Karl Marx's attempt to establish an independent workers' party. Links were established between these different organisations at various levels.

The Fenians had originally planned an armed rising against the British for 1865, but

Many police were injured (one subsequently died) and Sir Richard Mayne, the Commissioner, was himself felled from his horse by a well aimed stone.

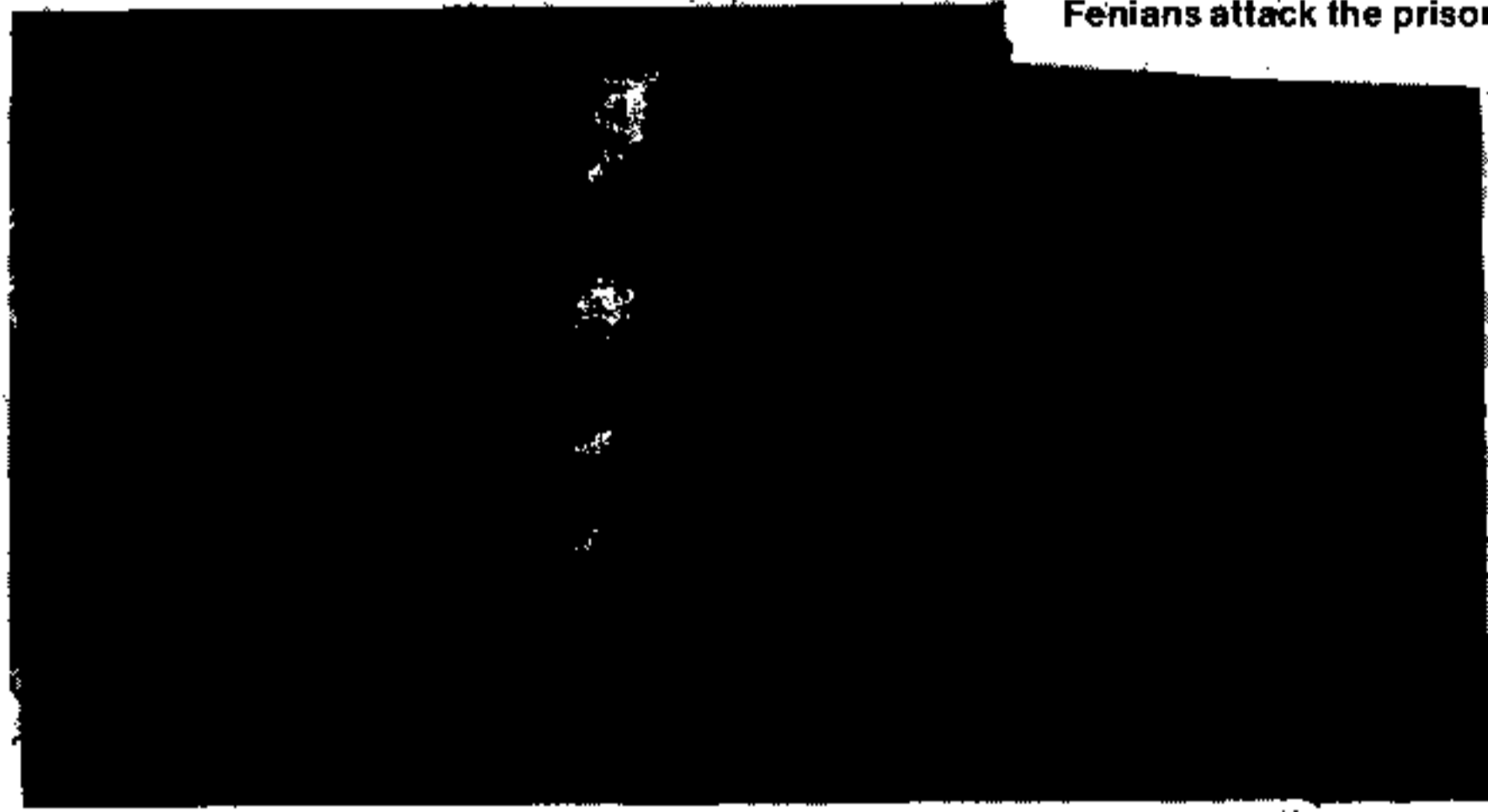
The situation had, according to Marx, 'nearly produced a rising' and only went to prove that the working class would 'never get anywhere without a really bloody encounter with the ruling powers'. Renewed confrontation seemed certain as the League continued its campaign for the vote.

Late in January 1867 Cluseret met the Reform League executive in secret, but although a number of its members were sympathetic, no alliance was concluded. In March the rising went ahead regardless.

The Provisional Government issued a proclamation drawn up by Kelly with the assistance of Charles Bradlaugh, a League Executive member. The proclamation declared that:

'We intend no war against the people of England; our war is against the aristocratic locusts, whether English or Irish who have eaten the verdure of our fields—against the aristocratic leeches who drain alike our blood and theirs.

Fenians attack the prison van



their insurrection had been postponed and its leadership decimated by arrests. Another attempt was planned for early 1867 under the leadership of a radical Irish/American Colonel Thomas Kelly, who established a secret Provisional Government in London off Tottenham Court Road.

Kelly, together with the military leader of the Fenian movement, the French revolutionary Gustave Cluseret, hoped to secure some sort of alliance with the Reform League before making their next move.

Cluseret was one of a number of European revolutionaries involved with the Fenians. He had fought with Garibaldi in Italy, for the North in the American Civil War and after his Fenian involvement was to go on to command the forces of the Paris Commune in 1871. Fenianism, at this time, had an internationalist outlook that is often forgotten.

The Reform League seemed a likely ally. In July 1866 the League had defied a government ban on demonstrations in Hyde Park

Republicans of the entire world, our cause is your cause. Our enemy is your enemy. Let your hearts be with us. As for you, workmen of England, it is not only your hearts we wish, but your arms. Remember the starvation and degradation brought to your firesides by the oppression of Labour. Remember the past, look well to the future, and avenge yourselves by giving liberty to your children in the coming struggle for human freedom.

The March rising was a disastrous failure, ending with hundreds of arrests and the organisation in Ireland broken. It was still intact across the water where confrontation between the Tory government and the Reform League loomed ever nearer.

The Reform League announced its intention to defy the Tories and demonstrate in Hyde Park on 6 May 1867. *The Commonwealth* newspaper which was controlled by IWMA members warned of:

'A war of the classes, of a revolution and

of the dire consequences for the ruling powers if the English democracy were to shake hands with the democracy of Ireland...such a union has been more than hinted at.

As it was the Tories backed down. The police and the troops stood by helpless while 150,000 working men and women effectively occupied Hyde Park. Any attempt to disperse this huge demonstration would have precipitated a virtual uprising with the London Fenians ready to fight alongside the British workers. The Tories were humiliated and the Home Secretary, Spencer Walpole, resigned.

Martyrs

Kelly himself was finally arrested in Manchester early in September 1867. Seven days later he was rescued when some thirty Fenians ambushed a police van, accidentally killing a police sergeant. Kelly was spirited away but the police rounded up a number of suspects. Five were eventually brought to trial. The campaign to save these men from the rope was the climax of British working class solidarity.

Three of the accused, William Allen, Michael Larkin and Michael O'Brien were sentenced to hang. Demonstrations and meetings demanding clemency were held throughout Britain.

On 17 November a large working class demonstration on Clerkenwell Green in London voted to send a delegation to the Home Secretary. The following day some eighty working men assembled in Whitehall. When the Home Secretary refused to meet them, they promptly occupied the Home Office, turning it into what *The Times* described as 'a sort of Jacobin Club'.

All to no avail. On 23 November the three men were publicly hanged.

As far as Marx and Engels were concerned the execution of the Manchester Martyrs made Irish separation from Britain inevitable. They believed that the question of solidarity with the Irish republicans was central to the task of building a working class socialist party in Britain and continued to agitate around the issue.

In December 1867 a Fenian rescue attempt at Clerkenwell prison went terribly wrong with an explosion killing some twelve bystanders. This temporarily polarised opinion against the left. Support was patiently rebuilt around the question of an amnesty for Irish prisoners culminating in a massive 100,000 strong demonstration in October 1869.

Marx considered that the Irish question held the key to the British revolution and devoted considerable effort to winning working class support for Irish liberation. He had no great illusions in Irish Republicanism and hoped that the IWMA would supplant it as a force.

His hopes on both counts were misplaced. The IWMA was driven out of Ireland and Marx's attempt to build an independent working class socialist party in Britain failed as the best organised sections of the British working class became the tail of Gladstone's Liberal Party. ■

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