

# socialist worker Review

March 1986

Issue 85

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## The Battle for Wapping



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EDWARD HEATH PRACTICES HIS THINLY VEILED LEADERSHIP BID

# NOTES of the month

TORIES

## The knives sharpen

IN THE last issue, we talked about how Thatcher and the Tories were in deep trouble over the prolonged crisis started by Westland. One month later, even the dispute around one helicopter firm has only just come to resolution. But the deep divisions and problems facing the Tories show no sign of resolution at all.

The Tory Party is in a state of disarray. Thatcher has lost two senior ministers as a result of the crisis, resulting in a more politically unfavourable cabinet for her. There is daily public criticism of Thatcher's leadership. The various contenders to take her place are now all making their thinly veiled bids. And there is growing unrest among Tory backbenchers as they see their majorities threatened by unpopular government policies.

They have a great deal to worry about. Perhaps the greatest single manifestation of crisis is the party's standing in the opinion polls. It is nothing short of disastrous. A *Newsnight* poll not only put the Tories in third place after Labour and the Alliance, it predicted that up to ten Tory ministers could lose their seats. Even on the most optimistic reckonings, the Tories are pushed into third place.

Even worse is Margaret Thatcher's personal rating. In one poll, 70 percent said they didn't find her honest. In another, a majority wanted her to resign before the

next election. Her rating is lower than it was before the Falklands war. There is little respite from the polls, either. The Fulham by-election looms, and following that the council elections in May. Both—at present ratings—will result in a terrible defeat for the Tories and will inevitably raise the question of whether Thatcher should remain as leader.

The speculation over the past two months has clearly led to a certain panic by the government. Most spectacularly Thatcher was forced into a rapid U-turn when it was discovered that she was planning to sell off not only the bus and truck section of Leyland, but was also negotiating with Ford to sell Leyland cars.

Most seriously for the government is Thatcher's recent statement backtracking on the promise of tax cuts in this month's budget.

This makes a mockery of one of Thatcher's major election promises. In 1979 she pledged the rate of tax would fall from 33 percent to 25 percent. By 1980 she had cut it 3 percent. Since then it has stuck fast. Thatcher will argue that she has little choice given the mess caused by the fall in oil prices. But she is also under pressure, even from many of her own ministers, to raise the level of public spending in order to cut unemployment. If she does so, it will be a further major blow to Thatcher's increasingly tattered monetarist beliefs.

Nor are any moves in that direction likely to make much difference. We have said since the end of the miners' strike that the Tories have deep, underlying problems which are not easily soluble. These all remain and are if anything intensified. The attempted sale of Leyland cars highlights some of them.

It represents the failure of the ruling class to make Leyland—and British industry in general—competitive on a world scale.

But in addition, there is a feeling that the

government is willing to sell any and everything in order to make short term financial gains.

This worry extends to the government's zealous privatisation schemes. Not that most Tory MPs or businessmen are against privatisation. But they are worried that it is not the panacea that has been promised. It brings in short term gains to the treasury—but there is little evidence that it increases profitability or eliminates waste.

The monetarist strategy of following the free market to increase efficiency and profitability has palpably failed. So has that of deliberately increasing unemployment in order to lower wages.

Even the set piece confrontations with the unions have not had the desired effect. The unions are still intact. Major strikes like the miners or health workers and now the print workers may succeed in defeating the particular group of workers, but the miners' strike, particularly, didn't generalise to stop other groups of workers taking action. The year long teachers' dispute has been very damaging to the government. It has both massively disrupted the education system and has alienated ideologically many teachers and parents who might otherwise gravitate towards the Tories.

Increasingly, nearly seven years of Thatcher are leaving people asking 'is it worth it?'. For millions of working class people affected by the human devastation of it all, the answer has always been 'no'. But today, an increasing number of our rulers are also answering in the same way.

That is a major change from, say, 1983, and underlies the real crisis the government is in. After Thatcher got elected in 1979, there was confidence that she could take on the unions and increase the level of profitability of British industry. The 1970s Labour governments were discredited as having been beholden to the unions (untrue, since Wilson's Social Contract of 1975 had a remarkable effect in holding down wages and industrial militancy).

With Thatcher, it was argued, there would be no more winters of discontent. She would bash the unions, weed out unprofitable industries and restore the fortunes of British capitalism. It was on that basis (cemented by victory in the Falklands war) that Thatcher remained unchallenged.

# NOTES of the month

## LABOUR

# Kinnock's caring capitalism

able in her own party until recently.

Yet the policies never delivered the goods. Even by 1981 Thatcher was becoming very unpopular, and the Tory 'wets' were beginning to question her economic policies and approach. The Falklands war ensured her 1983 election victory and the demise of a further bunch of 'wets'. It sharpened the image of the resolute Iron Lady. But the large Tory majority achieved in 1983 did nothing to solve the problems.

Today, probably most of the ruling class would still prefer to continue with Thatcher in office. She has no ties with the unions to pressurise her, as a Labour prime minister would have. She is unafraid of forcing a series of bitter pills on the working class. Those factors still make her a favourable option. But there are other factors mitigating against her. She is unable to heal the rifts in her own party, and she has clearly lost the confidence of many of those who elected her in 1983. Her continued leadership threatens to put in jeopardy the future of the Tory government itself. ■

WITHIN the Tory Party, that means an increasing number of contenders for the leadership and an increasing number of MPs willing to back them. In industry, big business and other sections of the ruling class it means a much greater willingness to look to the other options on offer—the Alliance and the Labour Party. Much of the argument centres on whether the results of the next election will produce a coalition government, or whether one of the parties will win outright.

In essence, there is little difference between the policies being put forward. There is already a form of consensus which sometimes makes it hard to distinguish Kinnockites from SDP, or SDP from 'wet' Tories. This centres round issues like more public spending, reflation, reduced unemployment; in short, as Michael Heseltine so succinctly put it, 'caring capitalism'.

Neil Kinnock is keeping pace very well in the race to develop that consensus. A recent interview on *Weekend World* put the stress on 'individual freedom' before equality and promised not to touch the taxes of those earning under £30,000 a year.

He agreed that there would be major dis-

parities in income and living standards. A recent speech by Roy Hattersley fleshed out some of Kinnock's policies when he promised City businessmen that tackling inflation would be the major priority of a Labour government above reducing unemployment. He also committed Labour to a buying British campaign. John Smith has pledged that Labour will not depend on public spending or renationalisation, but will heavily encourage and subsidise private investment.

Anyone who still has illusions in the reforming nature of a future Labour government should be disabused by all that. But Hugh Stephenson, writing in the *New Statesman* recently, made it even clearer:

'...the scope of autonomous influences on things like the exchange rate, interest rates and capital flows is quite limited...the scope for boosting a British economy and for reducing unemployment substantially and rapidly is equally limited.'

Stephenson also assumes that the key thing for any Labour government is winning a *second* election—therefore the watchword is caution. Kinnock's 'overriding political concern will be how best to organise things in order to win a second snap election in a year or two'.

What does all this mean? In short, that the policies of a Labour government would be virtually indistinguishable from the SDP or the Tory wets: massive handouts to big business; no attempts to achieve any redistribution of wealth; no attempt to deal with real problems of poverty and unemployment. It is a grim prospect for all those who put their hopes for a better society in a Kinnock government.

Yet increasingly sections of workers are doing just that. The latest *London Sogat Post* had an article headlined 'Labour government urgently required' which sums up the attitude of the bureaucracy on how to win the Wapping dispute. Ratecapped councils are borrowing on the hope of a future Labour government reimbursing them. Jailed and sacked miners hope for salvation from a Labour government.

They are likely to be sadly disabused. Not one word from Kinnock and his supporters gives any hope that the severe attacks on workers will be halted. Much of the Tory anti-union legislation will remain intact. Ballots are accepted by Labour. Police powers are unlikely to be dented. Most importantly the power of capital to hold down wages, sack and lay off workers will be left untrammelled.

The problems the Tories face give socialists hope that a vicious rightwing government can be defeated. But the key lesson to draw from everything that Kinnock is saying is that if a Labour government is elected, the last thing it will do is defend workers' rights. Instead it will be committed to 'reconstruction', to trying to make capitalism work. In that situation, workers have more than ever to rely on themselves to fight their own battles, rather than on a future Labour government. ■

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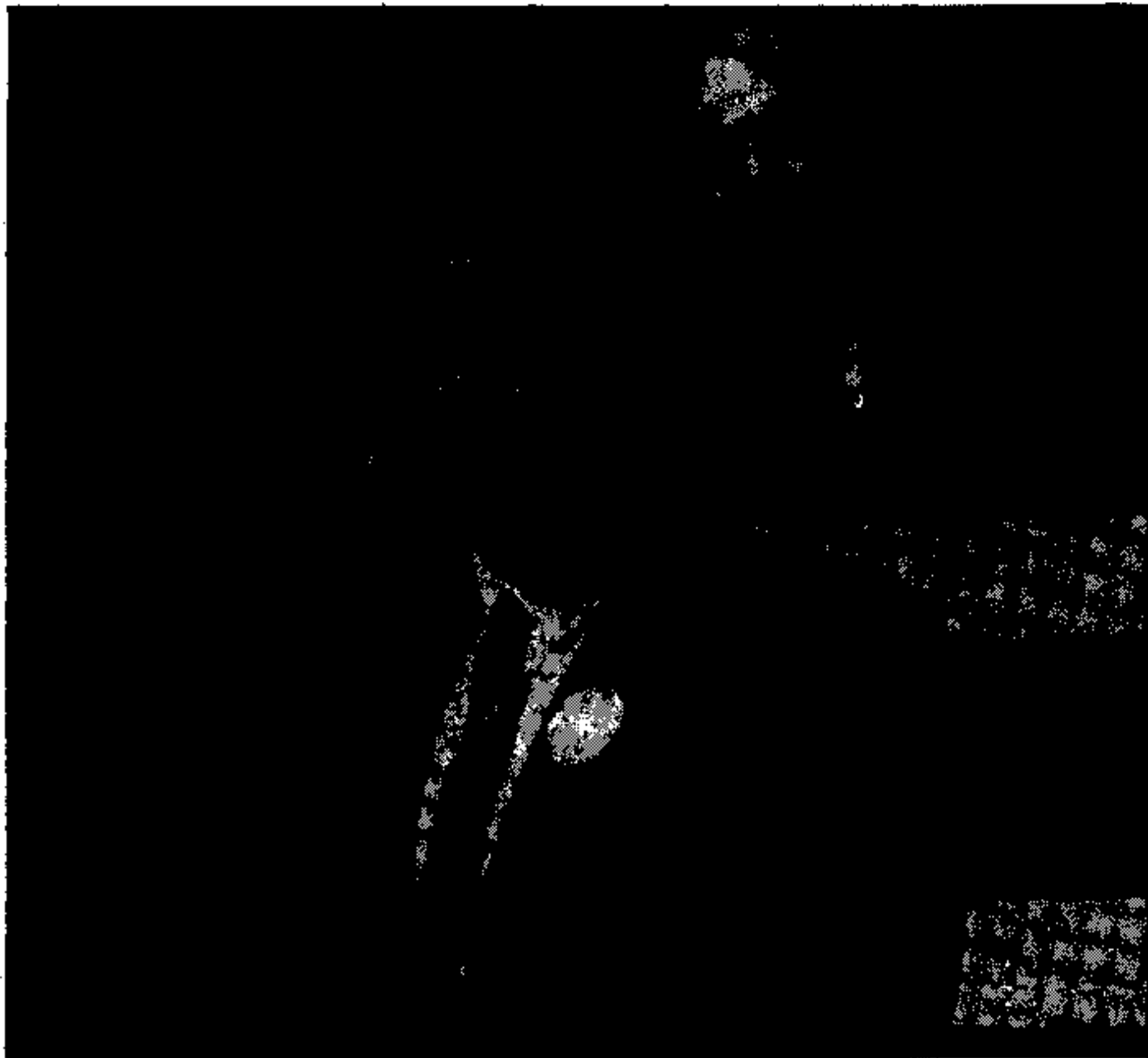
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Derek Hatton

## THE WITCH HUNT

# Soft left shuffle

THE witch hunt against socialists inside the Labour Party, which lay dormant over Christmas and the New Year, now appears to be raising its head. As we go to press, leaks from Labour's inquiry into Liverpool district party suggest further action—including possible expulsion—against 12 named individuals.

The possibility of such action shows the seriousness of Kinnock's attack on the left. It is underlined by the series of attacks on activists in the constituencies. The party's right wing has been given the go-ahead to purge activists in a number of local areas.

In Liverpool itself, the Labour Coordinating Committee has backed up the witch hunt with a grubby report on the supposed crimes of *Militant* and other left councillors. Even sections of the hard left who claim to oppose the witch hunt can't resist digs at the very councillors under attack—*Socialist Organiser* dubs Derek Hatton 'Flash Harry'.

The right wing, now backed by the likes of the LCC and *Tribune* have been given a free rein to toss out individual left wingers.

Yet it is also true that over the past couple of months there has been a certain distancing of some of the soft left from Kinnock. In a recent speech, Ken Livingstone attacked Kinnock's moves against *Militant*. 'My differences with *Militant* pale

into insignificance compared to my opposition to expulsions,' he said.

On the other hand he is quite prepared to argue that Hatton should be kicked out of Liverpool council.

Sheffield council leader David Blunkett is also prevaricating. In *Tribune* he has kept up attacks on 'sectarians' who criticise Kinnock, but at the NEC he voted against expelling individual *Militant* supporters.

What has led to these developments? In part Blunkett, Livingstone and Co are worried about the licence given to the right wing. After all, they reached their current positions after years of in-fighting with the right wing, for instance on the GLC. The remnants of the right have knifed Livingstone at every opportunity.

It is also clear that the rising stars in the shadow cabinet are not soft left nominees, but the likes of John Smith and John Cunningham of the hard right. Roy Hattersley has a crucial say among those advising Kinnock.

But perhaps the major factor influencing the soft left in openly criticising the leadership is Kinnock's failure to capitalise on Thatcher's fall from grace. Labour is not doing nearly as well in the opinion polls as was hoped.

Kinnock's speeches on Labour policy seem to go far beyond simply wooing Alliance voters and instead to paving the way for some form of coalition government or pact. Livingstone and Blunkett may calculate their best chances lie in distancing themselves from what Kinnock is up to. After all, their ambitions lie beyond the next Labour government.

The witch hunt also threatens Labour's coalition of left and right. Three years ago the left began the process of coming to

# NOTES

## of the month

terms with the right wing, following electoral disaster at Bermondsey and then the general election.

Now sections of the party fear the attacks can go too far and threaten far wider layers of people than just *Militant*. Already supporters of black sections in Hattersley's constituency and opponents of a coalition on the local council in Exeter are threatened. The witch hunt also threatens to upset all sorts of local deals and arrangements on which the local Labour Party depends.

So Blunkett can back an inquiry into Liverpool, but oppose kicking out local *Militant* supporters in Sheffield. Livingstone warned that expulsions would mean closing down constituencies or 'intervening' in local councils. He meant it as a warning to Kinnock not to go too far.

Livingstone's criticisms seem to centre not on the need to defend *Militant* but the difficulties the witch hunt might blow up. These reservations won't prevent the moves against Liverpool, which are a test of Kinnock's leadership—of how he can deal with the left well in advance of getting into Number Ten.

In addition they won't halt the wave of expulsions constituency by constituency. ■

WENDY SAVAGE

# Wealth before health

THE inquiry into obstetrician Wendy Savage by the Tower Hamlets Health Authority brings into the open attacks on the right of women to decide how they give birth, and a woman's rights over her own body. It is an inquiry that will not just affect prospective parents in Tower Hamlets but will have repercussions throughout Britain.

Wendy Savage was suspended in April of last year. This provoked petitions from medical students and local GPs, and a demonstration of over a thousand people who

# NOTES

## of the month



**A woman's right to choose on pregnancy and child birth**

marched to the hospital to demand (unsuccessfully) that the health authority reinstate her immediately.

She attracts such an unusual degree of popular support because she is that rare phenomenon, a consultant who treats her patients like intelligent human beings. She is known to put all her energy into her work and teaching, and doesn't see private patients. She also supports a woman's right to choose on abortion, and care during pregnancy and childbirth.

Against her are a group of consultants who all have lucrative private practices, and a professor, Grudskas, who is

interested in setting up a private IVF (test-tube fertilisation) clinic.

The case against her was compiled in secret and sent to an independent assessor—well known for his interventionist policies and for whom Professor Grudskas used to work. On the advice of these people, the chairman of the DHA suspended her. No discussion was allowed.

The support campaign has been led by local activists in the National Childbirth Trust and the Association for Improve-

ment of Maternity Services, and has mobilised many local women. Local GPs have set up an appeal fund. Hospital workers other than midwives have been conspicuously quiet. This is probably a result of the anti-union stance Wendy Savage has often adopted in the past.

The campaign was unsuccessful in having her suspension lifted, despite constant noisy lobbies of the District Health Executive meetings, and the demand for an inquiry into the whole department was also rejected. Eventually the health authority legal department agreed that evidence could be held in public and that the inquiry should sit full time over a month rather than part time over anything up to two years!

The case against her, after two weeks of prosecution witnesses, is looking very weak and it has emerged from a sworn affidavit that Professor Grudskas was intending to get rid of her from the start. It seems therefore, that the inquiry is unlikely to uphold the charge of incompetence.

However, this will not necessarily mean that she has won. Having now been suspended for almost a year, much of the work which has been her particular area of interest, such as the community ante-natal care scheme and the daycare abortion service, have already been undermined and her ante-natal clinic has been taken over by another consultant.

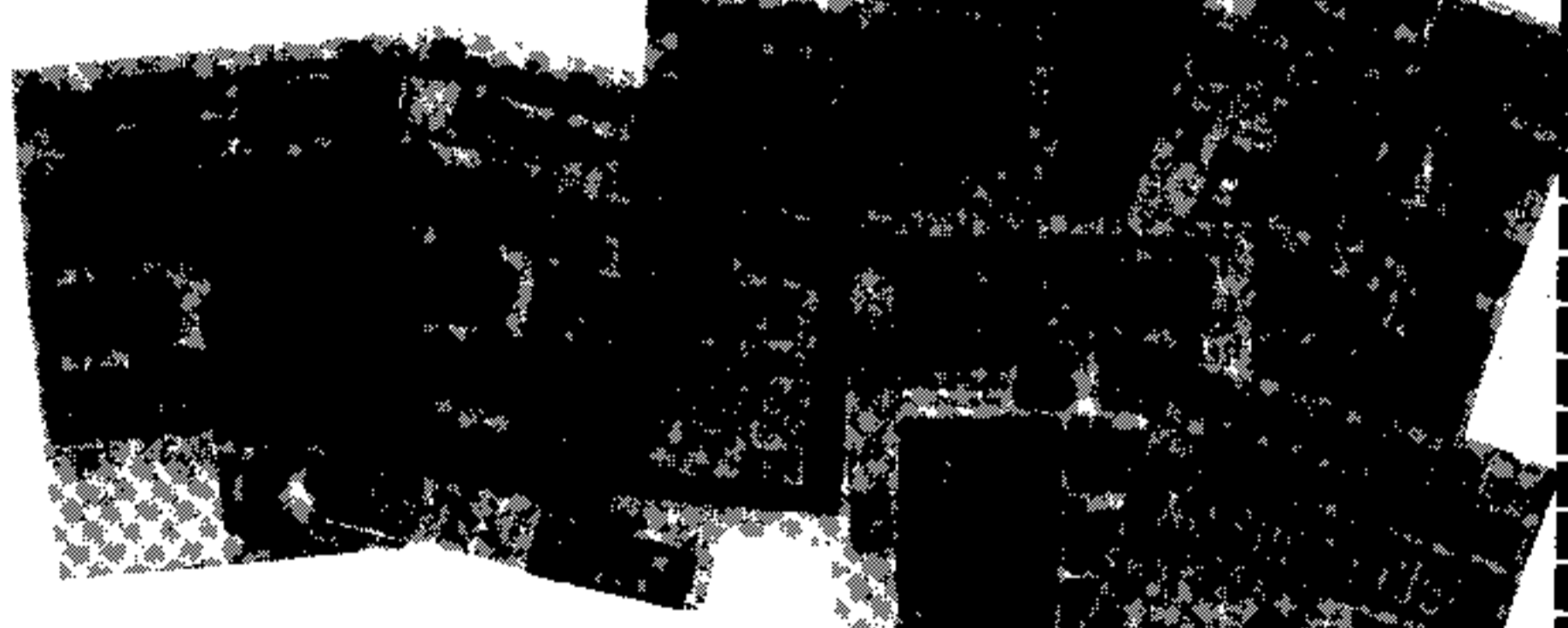
The health authority is not legally bound to reinstate her in her previous job and, judging by the performance so far, will not take a stand in her favour if the other consultants refuse to work with her again.

The antagonists of Wendy Savage may well have been shocked at the hornet's nest they stirred up by attacking her, but having come this far they may yet achieve what they set out to do.

Meanwhile, in one of the most deprived inner-city areas in the country the number of hospital beds was cut again in February and the new private hospital will be opening soon. ■

*Additional notes by Chris Bambery and Mary Edmundson*

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NIGEL HARRIS

# The last of the Keynesians

*'Every time anybody starts anything which will unwind or unravel this orderly, organised, sensible, rational society and make it irrational and emotional, I put a stop to it and without hesitation.'*—Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore National Day Speech, May 1982.

Singapore has come unstuck. For a quarter of a century, it has been one of the most state dominated and directed economies in the world, barring the Eastern bloc. In many ways, it was the prototype for the Keynesian managed economy. In the early eighties, public spending took 44 percent of gross domestic product (a third of it to defence). The government participated, directed or led every important sector of the economy, from manufacturing to trade and finance.

The results appeared spectacular. By 1983 Singapore had the second highest per capita income in the third world—3 percent above Italy, nearly 40 percent above Spain, and over three times that of Argentina. The rate of growth of output per head between 1965 and 1983 was an astonishing 7.8 percent per year, the highest in the world (including the oil producers). In 1980, the government boasted that Singapore would overtake the 1980 income per head of Japan by 1990.

A key element in Singapore's version of state capitalism was the tight control of labour. The National Wages Council decreed wage levels annually. The National Trade Union Congress' government-appointed officials controlled the unions in detail. The Central Provident Fund tapped wage increases, an enforced tax supposedly to finance public housing and welfare provisions but actually to meet government funding needs (50 percent of gross wages were paid into the fund, half by employers and half by employees). Immigration of workers was tightly controlled. And finally, massive pressures were brought to bear to control the birth rate—with special favours to encourage the educated to breed (in the thirties it used to be called eugenics).

In the early sixties, the unemployment rate was as high as 15 percent, but by the mid-seventies headlong economic growth had produced virtual full employment. At such a point, either the government would be obliged to permit immigration, or the labour force would have to become more and more productive (which means higher and higher investment per worker) or there would be massive wage pressure.

The government was cocky, certain it could achieve the middle of these three alternatives. Singapore was to become a land of computer programmers, consultant gynaecologists and astronauts. The government deliberately tried to push out of the island low productivity jobs (much of

the garment making was expelled in the mid-seventies), and lower the number of immigrants. In 1979, it was decided the change was not happening fast enough and, to accelerate it, gross wages should be increased by 20 percent per year for three years (in practice most of the increase went to the fund, not to wage packets). In 1982, the decision was taken to phase out immigrants by 1991.

Meanwhile, as the planners planned, the world was changing fast. An American boom sucked in Singapore's exports: the US took 14 percent of the city's exports in 1975, 20 percent in 1984. This last year supported a growth in the gross domestic product of 8.2 percent (after 1983, 7.9 percent). The effect of this massive export boom was compounded by a massive property boom in the city—construction spending increased by a quarter annually from 1981 to 1984. Property became a major outlet for the amazing 42 percent of national income saved in 1984.



Lee Kuan Yew

Regardless of government intentions to increase gross wages, a desperate labour shortage rapidly pushed up net wages and drew in legal or illegal immigrants. The government tried to escape by increasing shift times (from eight to twelve hours). They also tried to increase the retirement age—from 55 to 60 and then to 65—but the threat of political opposition curbed the ambition.

In the first half of 1985, the wave broke. The United States economy turned down. The property boom collapsed. Electronic component manufacture plunged into world crisis (and component exports had been a key element in Singapore's growth—to the US they increased 53 percent in 1983, 25 percent in 1984). Shipbuilding turned down sharply (half Singapore's capacity is to be closed). And the oil refineries—Singapore is the third largest oil refinery centre in the world—were caught in a general decline in

demand (the refineries were operating at 55 percent of capacity in 1985). Underlying many of these changes was the fact that the Singapore dollar was tied to the US dollar, and as the American currency rose, this effect was added to rising local wage costs to price Singapore exports out of the US and European markets.

Over 8 percent growth in 1984 turned into 1.7 in 1985. It will not be much better in 1986. Investment declined by nearly 40 percent in 1985, and the profits of the foreign companies that dominate Singapore's economy declined by 70 percent (Singapore companies' profits declined 35 percent). The rate of return on manufacturing was halved (to 16.5 percent). Bankruptcies rose by a quarter. And in December of last year, Pan Electric Industries collapsed and the Singapore stock exchange was closed for three days, with ramifying shock effects on the Asia dollar market and the city's standing as a financial centre.

Policy was badly dented. 1985 saw a swift increase in unemployment, 90,000 jobs were lost, two thirds of them affecting immigrant workers (who were promptly expelled from the country). The government suspended its policy of increasing gross wages, imposed a wage freeze and tried to find ways of cutting net wages. Last December, early results appeared when the opposition parties polled a third of the vote. And in January, after eight years without a recorded strike, workers in a US oil company walked out in protest at the sacking of six workers (which included five trade union officers).

Everything seemed likely to go into reverse. Wage cuts, cuts in the employer contributions to the Fund, tax cuts and a continuing policy of government withdrawal from participation in the economy (including the privatisation of the massive public sector). Singaporeans note that Hong Kong, with scarcely any government direction of the economy, has ridden the downturn far better than Singapore. When Singapore returns to growth, as it surely will, it will be as a much closer replication of Hong Kong's *laissez faire*. Friedman has dented Keynes yet again.

History had not, after all, been abolished. The world market that the tiny bourgeoisie of tiny Singapore had manipulated so brilliantly for two decades had at last caught up and overtaken Lee Kuan Yew, just as he was thinking of retiring and handing over to his son (yes, despite all the electronic gadgetry, nepotism flourishes). After all the years of confidence in the power of the state to shape the world, privatisation and the market had won. And with the freeing of the market, comes the freeing of labour. ■

# Wapping lies

THE print dispute is the biggest industrial battle since the miners' strike. Thousands of jobs are at stake, not just at News International, but throughout the rest of Fleet Street. The very existence of the NGA and SOGAT is in question as is the destruction of one of the best organised sections of the working class.

And yet the job onslaught by Murdoch, Maxwell and the other press barons has been met by one of the most bureaucratic and so far passive strikes ever called. The union leaders have not built mass pickets despite the fact that Wapping is only a mile down the road from Fleet Street and like any newspaper establishment is highly vulnerable to such action. Unlike coal you cannot sell yesterday's product. Mass picketing has only to hold up delivery by a few hours for it to be effective.

What is more, in Murdoch's international empire his greatest earners are the *Sun* and the *News of the World*. Without those two money makers Murdoch looks very stretched financially. After his recent buying spree in America, effective mass picketing could quite quickly start to hit Murdoch where it really hurts, in his pocket.

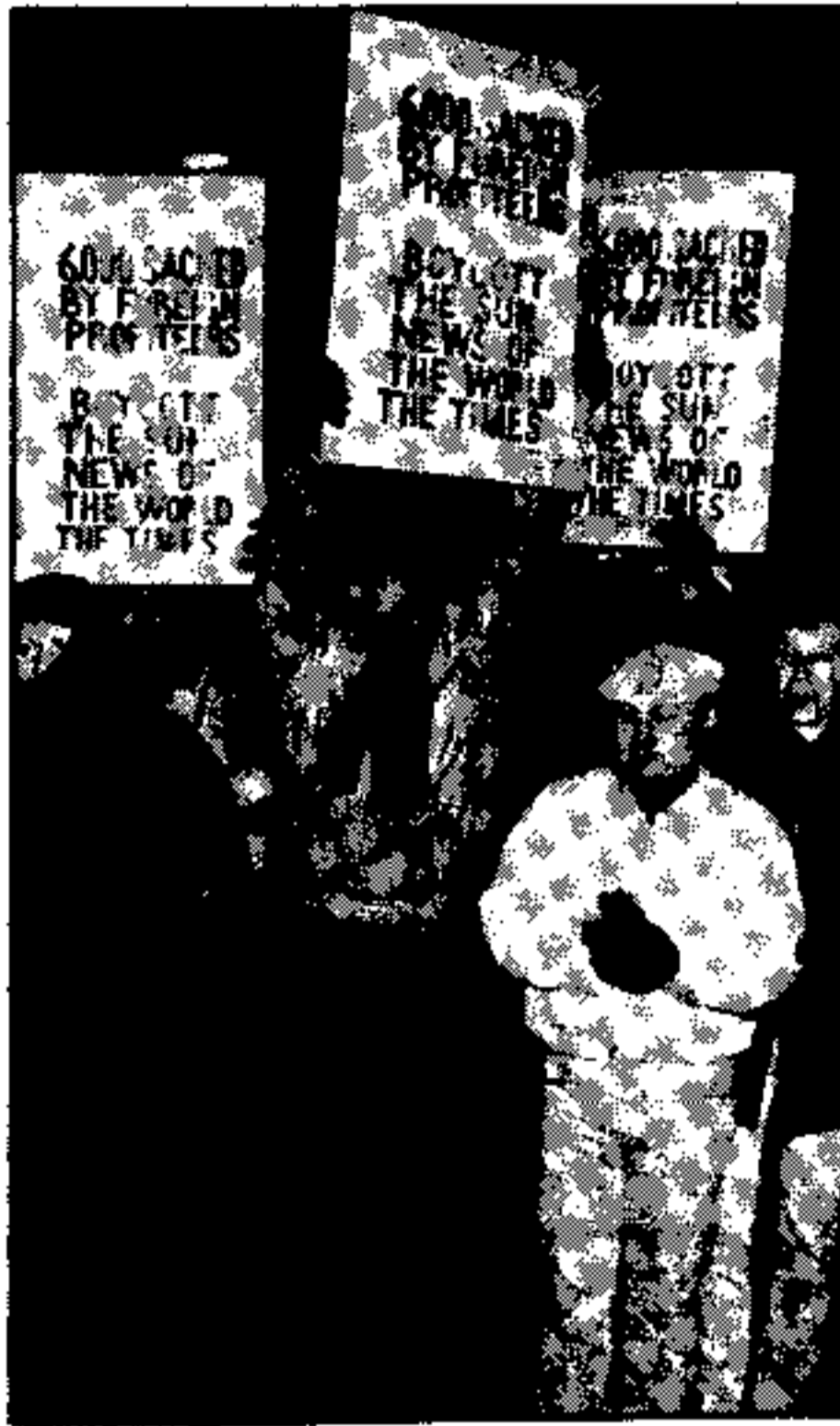
The lack of mass action appears even odder when you consider that the print workers of Fleet Street have one of the best traditions of militancy around. *Sun* printers along with railwaymen and some seamen were the only sections of workers to actually take strike action in support of the miners.

During that strike literally millions of pounds were collected. During the health workers' strike of 1982, again it was in Fleet Street where support was most clearly to be seen (ironically it was the electricians of Fleet Street).

The mass industrial action that released the jailed dockers from Pentonville in 1972, the days of action against the Heath government, the strike action taken in support of Asian women at Grunwicks—all featured the printworkers of Fleet Street. How has it come about that this tradition has led to the present strategy by the NGA and SOGAT leaderships and, more importantly, how is it that the majority of rank and file workers have gone along with it?

The strategy adopted is to try to win without fighting. No mass picketing, no call for a general strike over Fleet Street, not even stopping the setting of ads by NGA members that are going into Murdoch's papers! Instead it is token picketing, peaceful demonstrations and a 'reasonable' presentation of their case in order to win over public opinion.

It is the strategy that proved to be such a disaster for the health workers in 1982. Getting the support of public opinion has left nurses with some of the lowest wages



Mass pickets are essential

and worst conditions of any section of workers.

The health dispute was of course also led and planned by the TUC—a body to whom the print union leaderships are looking to to solve the 'problem' of the scabbing journalists and electricians.

Of course part of the reason for the strategy and its acceptance is the miners' defeat, the new 'realism' of the TUC and the related rightward shift of the Labour Party.

To large sections of the labour bureaucracy and the movement as a whole, particularly the middle layers of the Fathers of the Chapels (FoCs), the lesson of the miners' strike is that you cannot win by mass action.

But, in addition to this, developments in the class struggle inside the print have been significant.

Fleet Street militancy has always had its limitations. The production side is famous for its sectional strength, the local shop or chapel, which it has maintained by strong demarcation. A chapel can and often has stopped or threatened production without the need to picket or even ask other chapels for solidarity. In disputes it has been unusual to see a picket line.

The idea has grown that solidarity action is not only not needed but that it is better for workers to go to work and take the money than to come out in support. After all, with strong demarcation no worker will do the work of the few striking workers and so the paper will not be produced.

Even in small sectional disputes this approach has great dangers. With large disputes involving the whole paper it is suicidal. At chapel level there has arisen a layer of militants engaged in day-to-day struggle, but there is no equivalent of the joint shop stewards committee, or experience of spreading action beyond the chapel.

As the press barons have attacked the whole industry the local MoCs and FoCs have had no actual mechanism for building links across chapels, no experience of solidarity action in support of other chapels and have therefore come to rely on the official machine of the union, that is fulltime branch officers. Chapel lay officials have become tied to and under the influence of the union bureaucracy.

The strategy's acceptance is then a product of the gap between the chapel militancy and wider action, that is the limits set by sectional strength. But it is also the result of the experience 'learnt' from the 1978 *Times* dispute.

Then, as now, the dispute was a crucial one for the print industry that threatened the existence of the NGA and NATSOPA (now part of SOGAT). The final result of the dispute was a defeat for management, and it has taken them seven years to renew the attack, but was it a clear cut victory for the workers?

The unions retained most of the jobs, conditions and their traditional control, and some clerical workers even found their pay and conditions improved. But the way in which the victory had been won did not mean that the workers came away from the dispute better organised and having learnt vital lessons for future struggle.

The strategy pursued was similar to the one of today—no mass picketing, no spreading the dispute. What happened was that the *Times* workers were re-employed in other parts of Fleet Street. The union acted as a job agency using the closed shop to get alternative work for the 'strikers'. At the expense of school leavers the strike was 'won', and won by one of the most passive strikes in the print's history.

It meant that it was a strike that the union bureaucracy could control, it tied the rank and file to the union leadership, it reinforced all the old sectional and divisive attitudes inside the unions and, most damaging of all, it ill-prepared the membership for the present struggles, when only mass action can protect the jobs of a whole industry, as opposed to one section or one title.

The militancy of Fleet Street has therefore been neutralised by the sectional nature of the struggle, but it has not been neutralised without a fight. The struggle at Wapping has been foreseeable ever since the defeat of the NGA at Warrington, and for the past three years there have been almost constant management attacks. Through all this the union leadership have done everything possible to avoid a conflict, stamping on their own members whenever there has been a sign of resistance.



All the print unions have been petrified of court action against their funds, though of course this has done nothing to appease the courts, which have still seized them.

Warrington itself showed how the old sectionalism might be broken down, when solidarity was seen on the picket line as well as in the stopping of Fleet Street. The union leadership's immediate response was to call off the action and get their members back to work. The medium-term effect of the defeat at Warrington was to unleash a war between the NGA, SOGAT and the NUJ. Instead of fighting over the conditions under which new technology was to be introduced, the print union leaderships entered a tragic war of both words and deeds against each other, fighting over who could best cosy up to management and do the other unions down.

In the vital years following Warrington and leading up to today's struggle at Wapping, the leaderships have spent the majority of their time, when not stamping on their members' struggles (for fear of triggering off a major confrontation), plotting and attacking the other print unions.

The EETPU deal has not come out of the blue. It is the logical extension of the job stealing that the other print unions have been engaged in for the past few years.

Throughout the disputes that have led up to the present struggle the union leaderships have signed jobs away (Brenda Dean has just signed away 1,600 jobs at the *Mirror*), ordered their members not only to cross other unions' picket lines but even pickets by a different section or chapel of their own union, and, in short, pursued every method you could think of that would demoralise and weaken the rank and file for the battle to come.

Even during the present dispute when the very existence of the unions could be at stake the bureaucracy have not only stuck to their disastrous strategy, but pursued it against their members when there has been a sign of revolt from the ranks.

At the *Mirror* some of the workers wanted to show the minimum of support for their fellow workers on strike at the *Sun* by not printing extra copies. The union's fulltime officer came down not just to persuade them to go back but to threaten them with expulsion from the union.

With a closed shop this of course would also mean losing your job, and given what is happening in the print generally the workers did not feel confident enough to take on Maxwell and the union bureaucracy.

Throughout the disputes the leadership have verged on paranoia over outside influences corrupting the ranks with subversive ideas. All chapels have been sent warnings not to welcome 'fringe' groups on pickets, and officials have diligently worked with the police to ensure that picketing is peaceful and lawful etc.

All of which does not bode well for the dispute. However, the best laid plans of bureaucracy can easily go astray as the carefully planned, peaceful, women-only demonstration on 9 February showed.

The demo was intended to be a passive public demonstration for media consumption; chapels were told to encourage women workers to bring kids in push chairs etc (the majority of clerical workers are women), and it was not to be a mass picket.

The reality however turned out to be quite different. Once marching the women workers got a sense of their potential strength. It quickly moved from a passive, CND-like demo into a small mass picket.

Men joined the demo, the women held up the road. The women clerical workers, who the officials had been saying had no tradition of militancy and would be alienated by the 'macho politics' of mass picketing, took the lead in wanting to have an effective mass picket, much to the horror of the officials.

For the first time what a mass picket could achieve if it was organised and called for could be seen, and many pickets who previously had been telling outsiders to leave the picket and leave it to the officials now began to see the logic of building a mass picket. Further mass pickets have

since been built.

What could also affect things is the role and intervention of the state. No matter how 'legal' and safe SOGAT have played it the courts have seized their funds. The unions may be so forced into a corner that they are forced to change their strategy and organise a fight. For the dispute, despite all the errors and tactics of the union leaderships, is still very winnable.

There is nothing inevitable about the conditions on which new technology comes in. Murdoch is vulnerable (he relies very heavily for profits on his British publications) and the power of Fleet Street is still there to be used. If the rest of Fleet Street and then the whole of the print were brought out in support, if the strength of workers was utilised, it could be won very easily.

If that is not called for and the print goes down to defeat the responsibility will rest at the doors of the union leaderships. And if that happens it will have grim consequences for us all. ■

Noel Halifax

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## Lukewarm left

IT SHOULD be obvious to anyone on the left that the print dispute is the biggest and most important class battle since the miners' strike. It should also be obvious that the threat to break some of the best organised workers in Britain has implications for trade unionism far beyond the walls of Wapping.

The only action which can strengthen and eventually win the strike is mass picketing at Wapping. This means focusing on workers who are prepared to fight—to organise activity which boosts confidence and spreads solidarity. It means fighting rank and file dependence on the union leadership to avoid passivity and sell-outs.

Sadly it seems that most of the left has abandoned this tradition. Since the miners' defeat they have been variously reinterpreting history concluding that militant working class action is either a thing of the past or that it just isn't very nice.

Kinnock's studious attempts to ignore the whole issue is no surprise. But even some of the best-known left leaders like Tony Benn have found little to say.

In a major interview published in *Socialist Action* three weeks after the strike began there was only a glancing reference to the printers. He is supposed to represent what *Socialist Action* calls the 'class struggle left' as opposed to the 'soft left' who have fallen uncritically behind Kinnock. He argues that campaigning by women, blacks and gays inside the Labour Party, the activities of the Women Against Pit Closures during the strike, and the

'quiet' campaigns on the political ballot have led to a 'new wave of political leadership coming through the trade union movement which is more democratic in character, which is more radical in thought.'

Of course it is right to stress the importance of politics in trade unionism, but what kind of politics is the key question. What must be clear is that there has been a renewal of the right currents, not the left. This does not just apply to the union leaders, as Benn claims. If it did they would not be able to get away with the passive strategies centred around gaining public support, nor would they let Hammond off the hook by allowing the electricians to stay in the TUC.

The print union leaders themselves, and they are by no means alone, are using their interpretation of the miners' defeat to argue that mass picketing doesn't work. Brenda Dean, after delaying confrontation for as long as possible, has now said that she doesn't want 'her people' hurt on nasty picket lines.

Benn also argues in the interview that the 'major factor in British politics is fear and hopelessness'. He adds: 'It is encouraged by Thatcher and some of the left who argue that Labour will always betray,' pointing the finger directly at the SWP.

In fact it is the politics of Labour that is weakening and undermining an effective fightback. The shift to the right, identified by the SWP since the end of the miners' strike, is not restricted to the witch hunts. It spreads its poison to every group of workers forced to fight. Kinnock would

like nothing more than for Hugo Young's analysis in the *Guardian*—that Wapping marks the turn of the tide that makes trade unionism respectable once again—to be proved right.

The most disgraceful response from anyone on the left was Beatrix Campbell's interview with Brenda Dean in London's *City Limits* magazine. Campbell, a vociferous spokesperson for the 'movementist' wing in the Communist Party, states that introduction of new technology benefits women and blacks as it breaks down the monopoly of skilled work held by white males. Never mind that at Wapping this means the defeat of well-organised sections of the working class, the success of scab unionism, and another outright victory for Tory anti-trade union laws. She even has the gall to write: 'Many of the people who went to Wapping very reluctantly will now be using the new technology and they'll be feeling quite excited by it now including some good socialists.'

*Militant* have eventually argued for mass picketing at Wapping, for the stoppage of Fleet Street, and have put forward some serious demands. But because they are caught in the logic of electoralism which leads them to focus their energies on winning positions, they have not made any sharp criticisms of the strike's leaders. Rank and file workers must organise, but only 'to translate their leaders' words into action'.

After the sequestration of SOGAT's funds *Militant* demanded of the TUC a 24-hour general strike. Failing that, activists at every level would have 'to generate action from below to achieve a national mobilisation'. So without criticism of the tactics already pursued, *Militant* jumped to an unrealistic demand for a general strike with vague talk of national mobilisation.

From the sublime to the ridiculous is the response of the ultra-left Revolutionary Communist Party. During the miners' strike they argued, in common with the employers, the Tories and the scabs, for a national ballot and were quickly booted off many a picket line. Undaunted, they now oppose the expulsion of the electricians from the TUC on the grounds that one set of union bureaucrats is as bad as another. This abstentionist attitude towards splits and differences between union leaders shows their lack of connection with the most advanced sections of the working class, and how left-sounding purities end up feeding the right.

The SWP starts from the tactics that can win—the building up of mass picketing so that other workers can be brought in to extend the strike. Criticism has to be made of the strike leadership, and pressure on them mounted. But in the meantime print workers should try to build the mass pickets anyway. By focusing on what the strikers themselves can actually do to win, two pitfalls are avoided. The first is dependence on the leadership which leads to passivity. The second is ultra-leftism which ends up supporting the right. ■

Clare Fermont and Andy Zebrowski

## PRINT DISPUTE

# Will it happen here?

FORT Murdoch has brought American industrial relations to Wapping. On our side, all we need is some horses, bows and arrows and the picture will be complete.

In the seventies the American print owners opened a complete scab college in Oklahoma. They trained up whole workforces, in one paper after another they sacked all the union printers and flew in the scabs. And in our mines there's a long tradition of fortified scabvilles.

But the parallels go deeper. One thing about the ruling class, they generalise from their good experiences.

Murdoch, McGregor, Thatcher, Edwardes and your employer are now trying to generalise from the American experiences since 1945.

In 1945 the American ruling class faced the largest strike wave in human history up to that time. But the American ruling class is highly centralised, united, class conscious. They had a strategy.

The key issue was shop floor control. They gave pay rises and fringe benefits year after year. In return they asked only the right to manage.

In steel, for instance, there was no shop steward as such. There was a 'griever' instead. Like the steward, the griever was a worker on your section. If you had a beef, you took it to the griever and he wrote it up. Then the union full-timer and the management negotiated the grievance, without the griever or the worker there.

Management's second front was the anti-communist witch hunt. The Cold War blossomed. Local government fired any communist or ex-communist teacher or employer. The seafarer's union made sure that no commie would go to sea with a union ticket. The left auto union made sure no commie held union office. The government jailed hundreds of militants for belonging to the CP: for three, five, eight years.

The communists were not *that* important in the unions. The crucial thing was what happened to the other militants. On the shop floor they watched the communists go and signed oaths that they were not commies. In the bureaucracy they had to victimise the commies themselves or lose their jobs.

The militants lost their self-respect. And they were scared of being called commies if they talked politics or urged actions. So in their hearts they felt like scabs and victimised militants both at the same time.

The third front was the law. In 1948 the Taft-Hartley Act basically outlawed solidarity. Much of our recent trade union legislation follows Taft-Hartley clause by clause. This was coupled to court injunctions against the bureaucracy. These injunctions fined the unions for failing to suppress unofficial strikes. The fines were

cleverly calculated not to break the unions, but to hurt the machine badly enough to bring bureaucrats into line.

All three fronts went together: the right to manage, anti-communism, the law. Each was designed to split the union bureaucracy from the shop floor, and crush the shop floor militants.

It mostly worked. When a wave of unrest hit America in the sixties, the unions and the workplaces were mostly kept safe. As unions withered on the shop floor the leaders became more and more indistinguishable from business leaders and gangsters. They signed more and more three-year no-strike pledges. In steel they signed a six-year no-strike deal.

The logic of the path became clear when the air traffic controllers went on strike in 1981 and Reagan simply sacked the lot of them. They didn't have mass pickets of the airports and other unions had forgotten the habit of solidarity. They remain sacked to this day.

Sound familiar?

Seem to connect a few things you've noticed?

Will it work, here and now?

No.

But it worked for thirty years, because the American union bureaucracy was able to deliver to the workers. It was the longest boom in history in the richest country in the world. Wages went up three, four times. Workers used to say the Teamsters, the largest union in the world, might be Mafia, but they sure fought for you.

Teamsters don't say that now, which is why the present set up won't last forever.

The boom also justified the anti-communism. Workers valued Americanism because they got a car, a house in the suburbs, their kids maybe got to go to college.

But the employers here are offering Eric Hammond's members nothing and Brenda Dean's members minus nothing. This does not mean that union laws can't be enforced, Hatton can't be thrown out of the Labour Party, the printers can't be beaten. All these things will happen if we let them. And not if we don't.

But it does mean the ruling class can't win the political battle on the shop floor. They can break the shop steward system—maybe. They cannot exterminate the memory among the workers of the shop steward system as the way to fight. They can only store up bitterness.

The next wave of struggle won't be suffocated here in the way the secure business unionists suffocated the American struggles of the sixties. In the fifties American union leaders smiled as they stitched up their members. Dean and Dubbins are not smiling. ■

Jonathan Neale

# The cost of reformism

SUDDENLY, the French socialist government finds itself with a rosier economic outlook than anyone would have dared predict a year ago—all because of the drop in the price of oil.

Industry will benefit from cheaper energy and—given the slide in the dollar—cheaper imported raw materials. Inflation will continue to fall, possibly to 2 percent by the end of the year. Wage earners, whose pay settlements are averaging 3 to 4 percent, will experience a real growth in purchasing power.

All this makes the prospect of a crushing defeat in the general election to be held on 16 March, less likely.

However, for socialists the test of success should be whether working class interests have advanced under five years of parliamentary socialism. And the reality is that they have not.

When Mitterrand became president, and the left took control of parliament, in 1981, hopes were high that at last some changes would come about.

These hopes were not restricted to the French side of the channel. *Tribune* wrote of Mitterrand's electoral triumph that it represented 'the first salvo in the attack to drive back the madness of monetarism which has affected so much of the Western industrial world'. (15 May 1981).

What did that 'attack' amount to? There was a lot of talk about nationalisation, state intervention, and controls over trade and finance. In reality, most of Mitterrand's programme amounted to reflating the economy to induce growth.

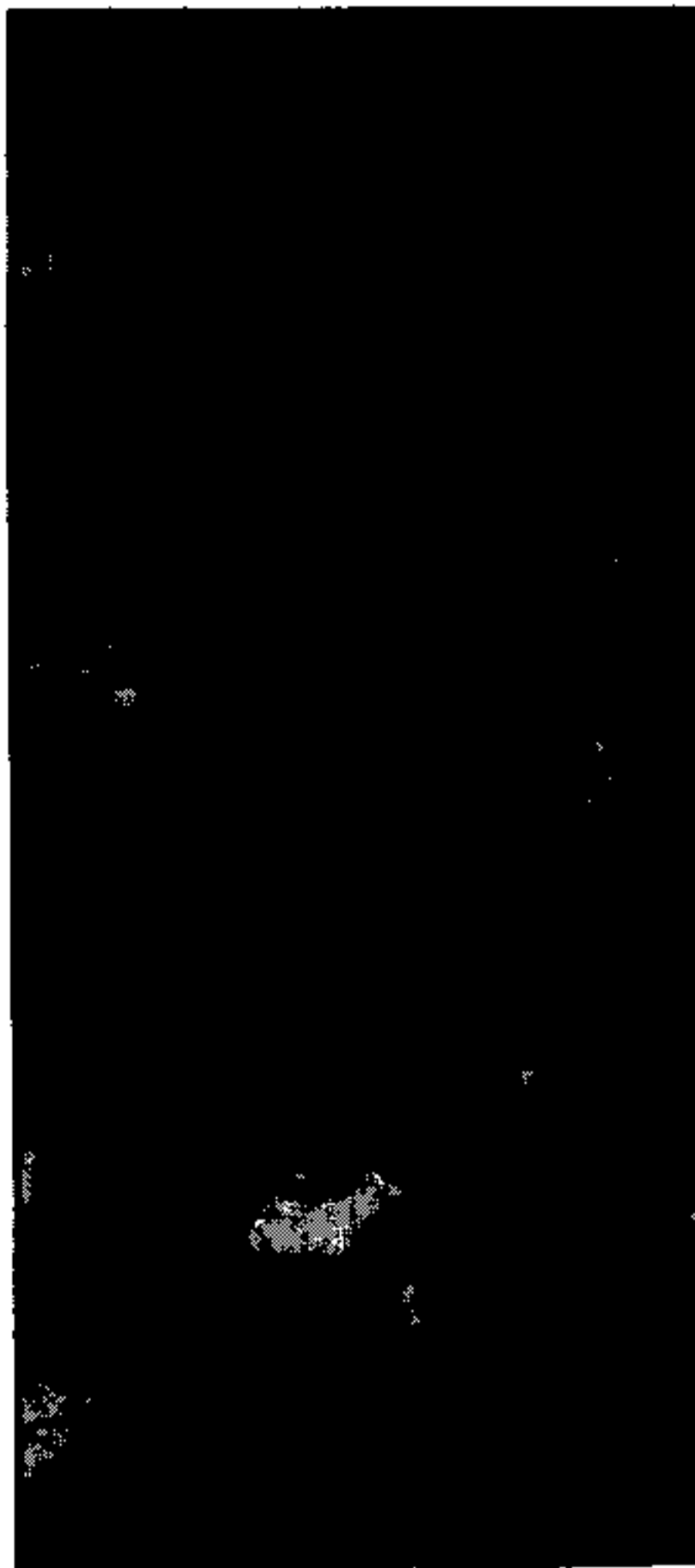
In the first year, it looked as if this policy might work. Public spending went up by 27 percent; unemployment rose by only 5.8 percent (it had risen by 23 percent the year before). The economy grew modestly by 1.5 percent. There were also improvements for workers. The working week went down from 40 to 39 hours (the unions had wanted 35 hours), and the minimum wage went up.

But the reformist dream was rudely shattered by a run on the franc.

The continuing high inflation rate—over 12 percent and higher than its trading rivals—made French exports too expensive. The boost in domestic demand created by public spending sucked in cheaper imports. The sale of cars, for example, rose by 12 percent—but the French car industry stagnated, with the demand for foreign cars rising by 22 percent.

The government responded by resorting to international borrowing, but the scale required (something like \$25 million in 1982) threatened to reduce France to the level of a debtor nation like Mexico.

In June 1982—just one year after its electoral triumph—the Mitterrand govern-



*Immigrant workers bear the brunt*

ment abruptly reversed direction and imposed the first of its austerity packages. This involved increased unemployment contributions from workers, cuts in redundancy pay, increased hospital charges, increased taxes on alcohol and tobacco, and wage cuts.

Faced with its first decisive battle with French capitalism, the socialist government did what reformists always do—make the working class pay for the crisis. They did this not because they were particularly nasty right-wingers but because they lacked any alternative. They had office, but no power.

Even if they had had the power, they lacked the will. By inclination, they saw the priority as curing the economy, restoring profitability and competitiveness.

The austerity package was given a 'socialist' gloss. Prices were also frozen, though in practice purchasing power fell by between 1 and 5 percent according to industry, with state employees worst hit because of the government's direct control.

The government also began to concentrate on the restructuring of industry. Employment ceased to be a priority. There

would be massive shake-outs in the public sector, to which strict market principles would be applied.

To reassure the bourgeoisie, Mitterrand made it clear that he would act as a strong guardian of the 'national interest'. He spared defence any of the cuts he imposed elsewhere, ordering a seventh nuclear submarine and promoting France's nuclear programme.

He went on to prove that he would defend French imperialism as vigorously as his predecessors. The sordid Greenpeace affair and his support for the white settler population in New Caledonia have amply demonstrated that.

The imposition of austerity measures changed the mood among workers to one of bitterness, confusion and demoralisation. The main beneficiaries were the right wing parties, including the fascist National Front, which began to pick up votes in alarming numbers in the March 1983 municipal elections.

With unemployment still climbing, NF leader Le Pen's argument—'Two million unemployed, two million immigrants too many'—cut with the grain. If the national economy had to be saved from foreign competitors (and everyone, even the communists, said it had to be), then why demand sacrifices of French people when there were aliens who could be repatriated?

Immigrants were also at the heart of the strikes that hit the French car industry in late 1982 and early 1983. The industry—and especially the state-controlled sector, Renault—was a crucial component in the survival of French capitalism, and the ability of the government to enforce its austerity policy on wages and redundancies was at stake.

The government itself was not above pandering to racist sentiment—anything, in fact, to isolate and weaken those prepared to fight back. The minister for labour declared that 'terrorist' methods used by strikers had no place in the French community of labour.

Faced with the anti-immigrant campaign led by the right and thinly disguised as concern over crime and security, the veteran socialist mayor of Marseilles, Gaston Deferre, declared: 'As for immigrants, who is better placed than I am to keep them out of our territory?'

In April 1983, after the municipal elections had deprived the socialists and communists of control in many towns, the government introduced its second and more savage austerity programme. Its purpose was frankly deflationary: domestic demand was to be cut by 65 billion francs.

The consequences were spelt out by the minister of finance, Jacques Delors (a former gaullist)—no growth for 1983 and 100,000 jobs to go.

What now disappeared was even token commitment to expansion. The priority was control over inflation, not even unemployment. It remained the government's priority throughout 1984 and 1985.

The government's 1985 budget involved, to quote the *Financial Times*, 'a real cut in public spending...reductions in state finan-

cial support to nationalised industries, and several thousand job cuts in the public sector' (25 July 1985). In fact, the budget looked for 4,300 jobs to go in public administration.

1984 was the worst year for workers in a quarter of a century. Purchasing power saw its biggest fall for 40 years. The percentage of those employed dropped by its biggest margin in 30 years. Consumption went up by the smallest amount since 1959. (Profits, on the other hand, did rather nicely: they went up by 24 percent and the stock exchange was rapturous.)

Socialist Mitterrand managed to do something that three years of right-wing rule had failed to do. What workers would not have accepted from right-wing politicians, they put up with from the left.

As the *Financial Times* remarked: 'For the first time since 1958 hourly wage rates (in 1984) rose less fast than inflation—6.4 percent as against a 6.7 percent increase in the consumer price index.' (26 June 1985).

The trend continued in 1985. With wage increases mostly within the government's 4.5 percent norm, and inflation at around 5 percent, workers experienced a further fall in their living standards.

Unemployment, on the other hand, continued to climb throughout 1985. It rose by 600,000 since the left came into office and now stands at 2.4 million (just over 10 percent of the working population). The reality is disguised by training schemes, which are more widespread than their British counterparts.

More job losses are in the pipeline. Two thousand are to go in the already hard hit steel industry and a massive reduction of 21,000 jobs is part of the Renault 'recovery' plan (11,000 jobs have already disappeared since October 1984). In the coal industry, there are cuts of 30,000 jobs forecast for the next four years.

The working class has paid for austerity in other ways, notably in the decline of its political and industrial organisations.

The retreat and confusion in the class is most clearly expressed in the fate of the Communist Party. In the June 1984 European elections the CP's vote slumped to 11.28 percent (only marginally ahead of the fascists). In the 1981 general election it had been 16 percent.

The CP has traditionally organised the most militant section of the French working class. Its Stalinism had long inoculated it against straightforward reformism. If it had an allegiance to a state, it was to a foreign state (the Soviet bureaucracy) rather than to its own.

It was therefore less subject to pressure from the bourgeoisie. In this it differed from the socialists, whose allegiance has always been first and foremost to their 'own' state.

The CP should have benefitted from the treachery of the reformists in office. It didn't because the CP has been caught in a trap of its own making. For decades it has sought unprincipled alliances with forces to its right.

The price it has been prepared to pay is

that it will not challenge 'democracy' (ie the existing bourgeois order) and will use its influence in the working class movement to stop anyone else doing so.

The logic of the process is reformist, and the CP's alliance with the Socialist Party (the union of the left) was crowned with success when, after Mitterrand's victory at the polls in 1981, four Communist ministers became part of the government.

Mitterrand knew what he was doing. He recognised that the CP would prize its newly-acquired respectability above anything else and therefore could be counted on to serve the administration faithfully by keeping its supporters in check.

Mitterrand could thus protect his left flank. Because of the CP's control over the biggest and most militant of the unions (the CGT), the government was able to use the CP as a transmission belt for its anti-socialist measures into the most combative sections of the French working class.

The CP's economic nationalism (produce French, impose import controls, etc) meant that in the end it accepted the 'right' of the French state (acting on behalf of the French bourgeoisie) to shed 'superfluous' labour in order to compete with other nations.

The Socialist Party record was much worse than the CP's. But the CP's participation in government cost them much more dearly. Equivocation over racism and support for austerity did nothing to enhance their popularity among militants and activists. The Socialist Party could suffer the same decline in popularity among workers but compensate partially by retaining support among the middle class. That option was not open to the CP. However much it showed itself as 'responsible', it could not rid itself of the smell of sulphur.

The slump in its vote in 1984 showed the CP that unless it broke with the Socialist Party its working class base was going to be further eroded. It therefore left the

government in July 1984, complaining about anti-socialist measures but failing to explain why it had accepted austerity for the previous two years.

If the CP's decline shows the political crisis of the French working class, the decline of trade union organisation shows the crisis of confidence among those wanting to fight back. Although membership was declining before Mitterrand assumed office, the experience of the last five years has confirmed the trend downwards.

By 1985 membership of the CGT had fallen to 1.6 million (it had been 2.3 million in the late seventies). Between 1976 and 1983, the percentage of workers it organised dropped by 31 percent (that was the official figure—the CGT's internal publication put the drop at 47.5 percent). The metallurgical section fell by 50 percent between 1978 and 1983, and by 22 percent in 1984.

The pro-socialist CFDT also lost members. In 1985 its membership stood at 880,000 and slipped into third place, behind the right-wing union, FO. According to a management study, the CFDT lost a quarter of its members between 1976 and 1983. (The figure should be treated with caution, given its origins. But the same study also reckoned that FO had inflated its real membership by a factor of two in 1982: 1,150,000 instead of 600,000!).

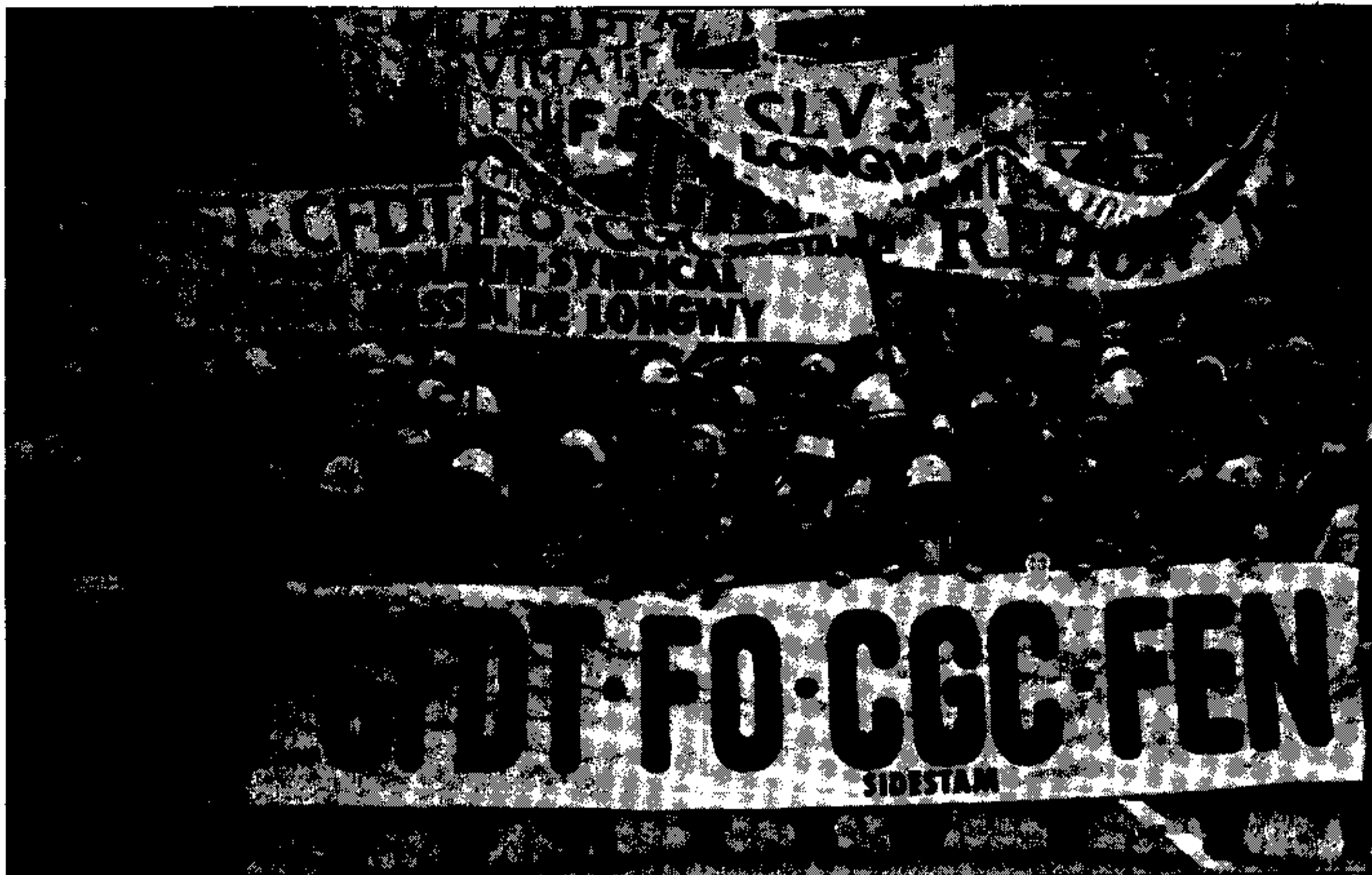
Some of this can be explained by rising unemployment. But the real reason is because both the CGT and the CFDT carried the can for the policies of the left in government.

Not even the CGT's greater aggressiveness since the CP left the government, which often amounts to little more than sabre-rattling in order to retain its electoral base, seems able to halt the decline.

But the right are not without their problems and their confidence may be



Whoever wins, they lose



**Both major unions are losing members**

short-lived. The right's programme reflects monetarist, free-market principles. The effectiveness of these principles is now being questioned in both America and Britain.

If the *Financial Times* is anything to go by, a consensus is beginning to emerge that rather approves of Mitterrand's economic strategy. The one regret is that he didn't start early enough.

That consensus is also shared by important sections of the Labour Party. They will have a reply to those who say that Mitterrand's period of office proves what a disaster reformism is in practice. They will say that socialists *can* be successful in government—but only provided they do not make the mistake of Mitterrand's first year in office. The scaling down of expectations fits neatly with Kinnock's (and the soft left's) view of the next Labour government.

The failures of the left and the fall in oil prices and inflation may well have put France in its most comfortable external position in more than a decade and it is there that profits and productivity are up. But French industry is still weak because it is more indebted than its neighbours and its growth rate lags behind.

That means after the next election there can be no let up on the working class. However cock-a-hoop the right may be in defeating the socialists, they will still be worried about the scale of sacrifice they have to impose (an average of 80,000 jobs a year to be shed over the next few years) if they are to make the French economy truly competitive.

They will be worried that too much

pressure (though they may have little choice, such is the nature of world capitalism) could provoke a fightback, one that might spread and release the accumulated bitterness of the last few years.

As we go to print the outcome of the general election is unclear. The socialists won't win, but they may be the largest grouping in the Assembly. With

Mitterrand choosing the prime minister that fact may be significant. The right are divided, with different strategies towards 'cohabitation' with the socialists.

The scope for parliamentary manoeuvre is immense. Both right and left will try to take advantage. But whoever forms the next government, the advantage will not lie with the working class. ■

Gareth Jenkins

## Left's weak response

The picture on the extreme left is bleak, and not just because no one would expect revolutionaries to do well in this period of confusion and demoralisation.

The LCR, the French section of the Fourth International, has spent most of the time tail-ending the Socialist Party. Instead of saying clearly that the Socialist Party would not and never could carry out its socialist commitments (such as they were), it pretended that the government could follow an anti-capitalist way of running the economy. The LCR thus pandered to parliamentary illusions.

The LCR's shift to the right is confirmed by its current electoral strategy. Instead of standing on a clear revolutionary programme, it has tried to put together slates based on constructing a new left alternative.

This has meant liquidating its politics in order to accommodate ecologists,

regionalists, pacifists, and feminists. All these people are fed up with the Socialist Party and the CP but are very wary of class politics.

Lutte Ouvriere, on the other hand, which is the other important trotskyist organisation in France, has insisted over and over again that the Socialist Party can never be trusted or changed, and that workers must depend on their own strength.

Unfortunately, this has been translated into a certain abstentionism towards anything that is not directly related to workplace politics, as their orientation towards the anti-racist movement showed.

Because, quite correctly, they saw the Socialist Party as responsible for the rise of racism, LO tended to be dismissive of the movement's non-class politics. These they felt let the government off the hook.

Insofar as they've intervened in the campaign their intervention has been a propagandistic one. ■

# Oil on troubled waters?

AMID the shambles of the Westland affair the Tories have had to cancel their plans for tax cuts in the budget. Sterling is falling on the foreign exchange markets: the reason—falling oil prices. Yet only a decade ago, sterling fell as the oil price soared, and politicians and economists blamed mounting unemployment and inflation on—rising oil prices.

Then, the big problem for the world economy was said to be something called the 'energy crisis'. In particular, the economic crisis was blamed on the 'oil sheikhs' of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) who had raised the price of oil from about two dollars in 1972 (where it had stayed since the post-war boom began) to more than eleven dollars a barrel by 1974.

The British media worked themselves into a daily rage against the 'Arabs'. These people had the temerity to want more money for the resources which had been profitably exploited by the major oil companies for years. Worse, they came to Britain and bought up great British institutions like the Dorchester Hotel (which the vast majority of Britons can't afford to set foot in). When the papers weren't complaining about Arabs moving into Knightsbridge and having solid gold bath taps, they were accusing them of shoplifting in Oxford Street.

Of course, all this was before Britain became a major oil producer and exporter itself. And anyway, the ogres of OPEC soon gave way to more familiar scapegoats like militant trade unionists and unemployed scroungers. Yet the idea that OPEC started the world crisis persists. It's not just a matter of historical interest, since if high oil prices were responsible for the mess then lower oil prices should be good news for the world economy.

Several things contradict the view that the oil price rise caused the crisis. Most obviously, there had already been a sharp recession in 1970-1, and it was clear that the US economy in particular was in trouble. Inflation was already rising. More fundamentally, while the oil price rise could and did lead to severe problems for certain sectors of capital, bankrupting those which were on the edge of profitability and those which relied most on cheap energy, it could not have led to a system-wide crisis. Why not?

The reason lies in the fact that what the oil price rise meant was a redistribution of profit from one section of capital to another—from the oil companies and governments of the oil consuming countries (via taxation)—to the oil producers. The buyers' cartel—the big oil companies known as the Seven Sisters—lost out to the producers' cartel, OPEC. As long as the funds which flowed

to OPEC were invested, the result for the system as a whole would be the same. The central question was whether capital could be invested profitably, not whether it was invested by Americans, Arabs or anybody else.

Much of the extra profits which OPEC received couldn't be profitably invested within the oil-producing countries, and so flowed back to the western banks and money markets. The bankers did not merely sit on the money—they lent it out.

Much of it went to Third World countries, some of which were oil-importers, like Brazil, and some oil-exporters like Mexico. This process was called 'recycling the OPEC surpluses' and sounds a worthy activity, like taking your empties back.

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## **'In theory, things should look brighter for the oil importing countries. But there are several flies in the ointment'**

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In fact it was highly profitable for the banks, at a time when outlets for profitable investment within the advanced countries were few and far between. It was so profitable that the banks were engaged in hot competition to find willing borrowers (the OPEC money was only a small proportion of the total lent). We all know what happened when the world recession hit the debtor countries, as the price of their raw material exports on the world market fell and the interest payments on their debts soared.

Just as the oil price rise was blamed for the crisis, now bourgeois economists are viewing the dramatic drop in the price as cause for optimism. They don't argue that it will work in reverse, of course, but they do believe that it can keep some growth going. They were very worried that as the American boom evaporated there would be nothing to take its place as the 'engine' for the world economy.

So what effect will it have?

First, Britain. Apart from Norway, Britain is the only advanced western country which is a net oil exporter (America is the world's largest producer, but it also imports). Oil revenues have kept

the Tories afloat, even as the oil price dropped over the last couple of years, because the pound was also falling against the dollar. Since oil is priced in dollars, each dollar bought more pounds, and the sterling price of oil actually rose. That's no longer the case and the Tories are set to see their expected oil tax revenue cut in half over the next year. As well as the price fall, production has also reached its peak and will decline from now on.

All this will reduce the Tories' room for manoeuvre still further and increase their desperation to sell off assets in order to finance what they see as politically essential tax cuts before the election. The idea that the lower oil price would lead to higher growth here looks like wishful thinking: the Treasury's own estimate is that a 10 percent drop in the oil price will raise growth by one-tenth of a percentage point.

In theory, things should look brighter for the oil-importing countries. And looked at in isolation, the lower oil price could result in higher growth. But there are several flies in the ointment.

One is that governments can respond to lower crude oil prices by raising taxation, without the risk of increasing inflation. There is a particular danger of this happening in the US where the domestic oil producers are screaming that they need protection from cheap imported oil, and where Reagan is looking desperately for ways to cut the budget deficit without cutting back on armaments and Star Wars.

Secondly, no one knows how far the oil price will fall and for how long it will stay there. It was the Saudi Arabian decision to stop trying to hold the price and instead pump out all the oil it could which has precipitated the dramatic drop. The reasoning was to try to force non-OPEC producers to join OPEC or at least cooperate in an operation to hold the price steady. It may succeed in pulling in Mexico and Norway to some kind of deal.

Much more important is the fact that some of the biggest debtors are oil exporting countries, especially Mexico, Nigeria and Venezuela. Mexico and Venezuela between them owe more than \$130 billion. These countries were having problems paying the interest on their debts even before the latest fall in the oil price. There is now a serious possibility that Mexico may default and throw the international financial system into chaos.

Anatole Kaletsky, writing in the *Financial Times* on 7 February pointed out that the OECD countries would save far more on cheap oil than they would lose through interest on the debts. But capitalism isn't that rational: the bankers won't give up their profits for the good of the world economy and cannot if they want to stay in business.

So like most things in capitalist society, cheap oil is at best a very mixed blessing for the capitalists. It certainly isn't a magic solution to all its ills.

This time, Thatcher is probably cursing Sheikh Yamani for driving the price down, not up. ■

Sue Cockerill



# The system laid bare

**O**FTEN people who read Marx's *Capital* leave out the last two volumes. There are quite a few reasons for this. Not least is the difficulty of the issues discussed in those two volumes. The carefully written pages of Volume One are much more accessible.

This is a pity as the work is really an integral whole. The ideas discussed in Volume One set the ground for the next two volumes. In those Marx develops more fully the analysis of capitalism and draws nearer the real world. The reason why *Capital* is so closely interwoven has to do with the scientific method of Marx. In his method

Marx owed a great debt to the German philosopher Hegel.

Marx employs Hegel's dialectic from a materialist standpoint. Dialectical materialism starts from concrete reality which is the capitalist mode of production. But in order to begin the analysis it abstracts from everything else in capitalism and starts with its most basic feature: the commodity.

In the opening parts of *Capital* Marx explains what the commodity is. He then gradually builds the analysis and brings in more and more real features of capitalism such as wage labour,

**Costas Lapavitsas reviews a new version of Marx's third volume of *Capital***

machinery etc. When we reach Volume Three Marx's theory is very complex and near the concrete reality again. This is precisely the dialectical method of going from the concrete to the abstract and back to the concrete. The advantage of doing things this way is that the second time you reach the concrete you have a deep understanding of it.

**T**HE first volume of *Capital* was published by Marx in his lifetime. Engels had to put the last two volumes of *Capital* together from Marx's notes. The ideas in them, however, had been worked out by Marx by the end of the 1850s. The entire work existed as manuscript long before 1867 when Volume One was published.

Engels' job, and a tough job it was, involved editing the notes into readable shape. Volume Three was the least finalised part of the work so it took a long time to bring it to the printing presses. If that were the only thing that Engels had done—and his own work is enormous—he would still be remembered as a great socialist.

Marx's aim in writing *Capital* was to 'lay bare' the inside of capitalism. The first volume of *Capital* deals with capitalist production. There are only capitalists and workers in this set-up. The workers sell their ability to work, the capitalists buy it and marshal them into the factory.

In the factory, workers are forced to work a full day and so the capitalist extracts from them more value than they are paid in wages. This exploitation and the extra is surplus value. Exploitation underlies capitalism and Marx shows how the capitalist class live off the labour of workers. In this respect they are no less parasitic than the feudal lords were. The difference now is that most of the extra labour—the surplus value—goes back into production. That is accumulation and the reason why capital grows bigger and bigger.

Volume Two moves from production to exchange. If capitalist production has been established, Marx asks, how do the products move from one sector of the economy to the other? Through some very intricate analysis he shows how capital is able to exchange more and more value and commodities. Crucially, all this is done without a conscious organiser of society and with the use of money.

Having explained first production and then exchange, Marx takes a step closer to reality and considers the process as a whole. The third volume is about the total movement of capital as it produces surplus value, sells the output and accumulates. In the process the various sections of the ruling class split the loot into profit, interest and ground rent.

We have now moved into a world of many competing capitals in different industries. They all produce surplus value—rather, their workers do—and then sell the products. As capitals they are all equal; Marx called them hostile brothers. Therefore, they have to earn proportionately the same profit regardless of where they are invested. After all, if they did not, the less profitable cap-

itals would simply move to the higher profit areas. So, Marx concludes, the rate of profit constantly moves towards the same percentage across industry.

But wait a minute. Some sections of industry employ more workers per unit of capital than others. Since it is workers who produce surplus value it follows that their products will contain proportionately more surplus value. If they all sell at the same rate of profit some products will sell above their value and some below. In capitalism then, commodities necessarily do not sell at their values.

This is the crux of the notorious 'transformation problem', on the basis of which Marxist economics has been repeatedly attacked as 'inconsistent'. Marx assumes in Volume One that commodities sell at value and then refutes it in Volume Three. Presumably the way he shows how commodities do not sell at value is wrong. The most coherent and articulate of the attacks was levelled by the Austrian economist Bohm-Bawerk at the turn of the century.

The best reply to those criticisms was given by that arch-opportunist, class traitor, but very clever man, Rudolph Hilferding. He pointed out that the essence of Marx's work was not at all to calculate accurate prices and the like. Rather it was to explain why capitalism creates such things as 'values', 'prices' and 'profits'. The 'transformation problem'—which has, incidentally, been made technically consistent by other theorists—does not detract from Marx's aim in the least.

**M**ARX subsequently derives the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. The rate of profit is the amount of surplus value produced by every unit of capital on average. Now, capitalists accumulate and compete so they strive madly to increase the productivity of labour. Higher productivity means more output per worker but also more raw materials and machinery used by every worker. So more and more of capital has to go towards raw materials, plant and machines rather than workers.

Every unit of capital will be split more heavily towards the purchase of machinery and raw materials than towards wages for workers. But it is workers who produce the surplus value. It follows that proportionately less surplus value will be produced by every unit of capital. The rate of profit will tend to fall.

Of course, it does not work as simply as that. Capital moves to areas with cheaper raw materials and so cuts its costs. It also speeds up work and so extracts more surplus value out of workers. The rising productivity of labour makes commodities cheaper and so the cost of machines and raw materials is cut. Cheaper commodities also mean lower wage costs so the exploitation of workers grows. All these and more Marx calls the counteracting tendencies which tend to keep the rate of profit high.

The falling rate of profit has been a very controversial question in Marxist economics.



There are deep disagreements on whether the rate of profit is something you can measure over time. It has also been disputed that accumulation implies a drift towards fewer workers per unit of capital. Others have tried to make the rate of profit simply a question of who has the upper hand in the struggle of workers and capitalists over wages.

There is one crucial point, however, which can serve as a guideline among the various options. Marx's thrust was to establish that accumulation undermined itself as it went along. The rate of profit falls and accumulation is disrupted for reasons which are part and parcel of the process of accumulation. As Marx put it, the only barrier to capital is capital itself.

The falling rate of profit lays the ground for crisis. The capitalist world periodically goes into periods when commodities are unsold. Factories are closed and workers are made redundant; capitalists go bankrupt because of past debts; wages are cut and the living standards of people fall. The reason for all this is, of course, that there are not enough profits for all the existing capitals. So some go out of business, their factories close and workers become unemployed. As the crisis works its way through, the weaker capitals which cannot make a profit are forced to the wall. What remains is 'leaner and fitter' and can again be profitable. The process can then begin anew.

**W**HAT puts Marx head and shoulders above other economists is that he makes crisis a necessary part of capitalism. It is not oil shocks or wage rises or droughts. It is not even sunspots—as some of the less serious bourgeois scribes have suggested—which create crises. The mad rush to accumulate itself generates the tendency for periodic crisis and stagnation. For this reason, amongst many, Marx is still greatly relevant today.

The least developed part of the book is the discussion of credit—Engels called the chapter on credit 'the confusion'. Some specialist forms of capital such as the capital of banks and the money dealers exist. The bankers do not exploit workers directly in production but rather lend their money to other capitalists. When these worthies have extracted some profit they pass on part of it to the bankers. This is the interest which the bankers are paid. Around the advance of credit and borrowing and lending enormously complicated structures are created—banks, building societies, insurance companies, state credit agencies.

Ageing capitalism is absolutely dependent on debt. Companies borrow to produce and give credit in order to sell. The state borrows heavily in the domestic and international markets. Even private debt expands greatly. Everything seems to get done on promises to pay and money is almost entirely disregarded. But there is a hitch. When the crisis arrives credit will do no more. If sales are uncertain, payments are doubtful and markets are collapsing, few will lend money or

accept promises to pay. Hard cash comes back with a vengeance and there is a debt crisis such as the world experienced in 1982. Thus the end result of the growth of credit is even more uncertainty and instability.

Finally, Marx discusses a coherent theory of ground-rent derived from landed property. He is concerned to show how the laws he has derived from industrial capital are changed by the existence of property in land. This again is a much neglected part of his work.

The style of writing of Marx is overwhelming at its best. Complete mastery of language and clear thought are a very powerful mixture. He had the capacity to summarise whole movements and theories in a few sentences. Anyone who has read the famous *Theses on Feuerbach* will know how great this capacity was. At its worst, on the other hand, Marx's writing can be florid and tedious, making very difficult reading. His sarcasm though always saves the day.

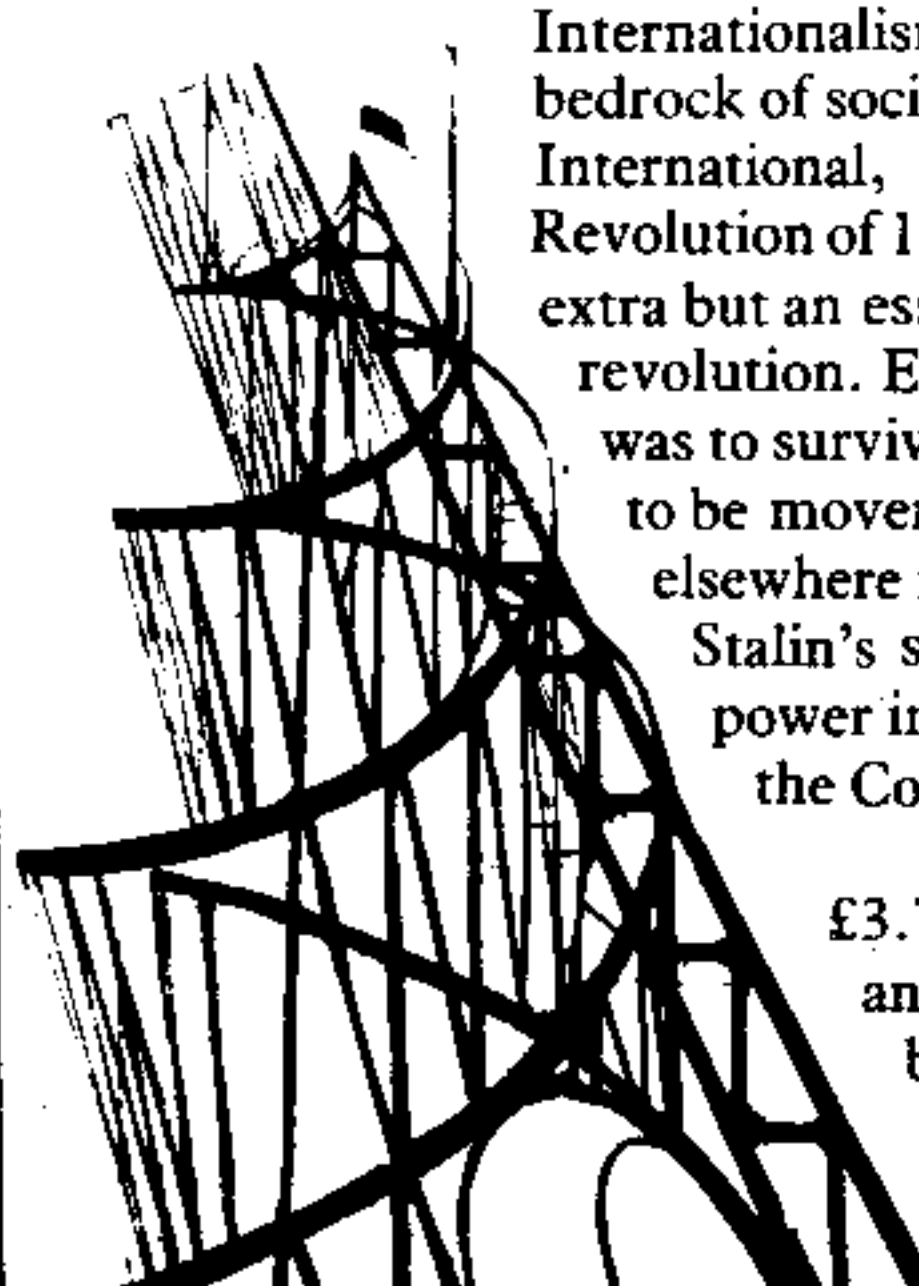
Marx did not have the final word to say on everything. There have been many developments of his economic theory and undoubtedly there will be many more. Competition, credit, the state and the world market are all areas where advances are needed in order to understand the present crisis more fully.

The lasting value of his economics in this respect will be that he showed the way for proper science. There is something else however. Development of Marx's thought and theory cannot take place away from the revolutionary movement. Marx's own practice is ample proof of that. Academic Marxists, despite some useful insights, will never make any decisive advances in Marxist theory.

■ *Capital Volume 3, by Karl Marx* Published by Penguin £7.95

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.

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# Pawn in their game

MOST PEOPLE'S image of the Duvaliers' Haiti came from Graham Greene's novel, *The Comedians*. It was of a capricious, blind, irrational tyranny. A society where thugs in dark glasses have a license to kill at will, with neither supporters nor opponents of the regime safe from random murder. A regime without any apparent purpose besides the maintenance of the tyranny itself, in a land of unbelievable poverty. All this wrapped up in voodoo superstition—and under the benevolent gaze of Uncle Sam.

It seemed a monstrous aberration even among the barbaric tyrannies of the US's Central American backyard, something which the normal categories of political analysis could not cope with.

There was an element of truth in this picture. Francois Duvalier—'Papa Doc'—did rule by the unpredictable use of terror against anyone who might potentially be opposed to him. But simply to state that says very little about the regime he established. It does not explain how it came into existence or how it managed to last longer than any other in the 180-year history of the state. Nor does it provide any understanding of the possibilities open in Haiti now.

The starting point for any serious analysis has to be the tragic dilemma which confronted the people of what was then the French colony of Saint Domingue when they first won their freedom in the world's only fully successful slave revolt.

Saint Domingue had been the jewel of the Caribbean, the centre of world sugar production and possibly the wealthiest colony in existence. Its trade was greater than that of the fledgling USA, and it accounted for two thirds of French imports.

But its wealth depended upon the cultivation of the sugar plantations by slaves. By the late 1780s 40,000 a year were being dragged to the colony from Africa. Such were the rigours of the forced labour they undertook that they died much more quickly than they reproduced themselves; only the importation of even more slaves could have kept the sugar exports flowing.

This was something slaves who had freed themselves through a dozen years of bitter warfare would never succumb to.

The early rulers, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Dessalines and Henri Christophe, tried to get sugar production going again by using military force to compel the ex-slaves to work on the plantations as share croppers. But this was too much like slavery for the mass of people to tolerate. They fled the plantations to till small plots of land for themselves in the mountains, and after the death of Christophe in 1820 the whole plantation system collapsed.

But with it also collapsed any possibility of sustained economic development.

From that point on 95 percent of the country's population lived by tilling individual plots of land, too small for the application even of the plough let alone of more advanced techniques. They were cut off from even the small towns and provided most of their own food. They traded the few coffee beans they grew by the laborious method of walking miles to the nearest market. They had no incentive to improve the land—quite the opposite.

When all other means failed they could make some sort of living for themselves by cutting down bits of the forest even though this caused continual erosion of the land.

The conditions of the ex-slaves turned small peasants might have been tolerable if they had been left to themselves.

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## **'The very existence of a country run by slaves who had risen up and slaughtered their masters was an abomination to colonial powers'**

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The young state was continually threatened from outside: the very existence of a country run by slaves who had risen up and slaughtered their masters was an abomination to colonial powers intent upon subjecting most of the rest of the world to their rule. And so from the beginning there was an inevitably high level of militarisation.

The immediate foreign threat was removed with French recognition in 1826. But the price of that recognition was immense: as twelve French warships steamed into Port au Prince harbour, the Haitians were told they had to pay an indemnity of 150 million francs.

This was the beginning of a burden of debt that was to plague the country for more than a century.

In the late nineteenth century each of the great powers saw the chance of preying upon Haiti's weakness. French, British, German and American warships would threaten the ports the moment Haitian courts resisted the claims of businessmen from those countries: the US alone sent warships into Haitian harbours twenty times between 1860 and 1915.

The years 1908-15 saw German and American interests battling it out in the classic imperialist manner to get control of Haiti's banking system and customs

revenues. German merchants financed coups by Haitian soldiers and politicians and the German fleet made a visit in 1912.

But the US soon upstaged them. The marines made a full-blooded landing in 1915 and occupied the whole country for 19 years, killing 2,000 resistance fighters in the single year of 1919.

But it was not only an external burden that had to be carried by the mass of small peasants. The Haitian state had within it, from the very beginning, a very well entrenched ruling class.

The old white slave-owning class had fled or been massacred. But this still left intact a class of mulatto (ie descended from white fathers and black mothers) land-owners who had owned a third of the plantations before the revolution. Although the mulattoes only constituted about five percent of the population (and not all of them were rich), they tended to have a monopoly of the skills needed to administer the state.

Alongside them there emerged in the new state a highly privileged group of blacks, particularly from among the officers of the revolutionary army, who expected to emulate the life styles of both the mulattoes and the ruling classes of Europe.

But the ruling class, whether mulatto or black, soon found its possibilities for accumulating wealth were constrained. Externally it was continually squeezed by the pressure of the great capitalist powers. Internally, the system of small land-holdings destroyed any possibility for making profitable investments in agriculture and prevented the creation of any appreciable market for manufactured goods.

Some of the mulatto families did do well out of control over internal trade. But for most of the ruling class there was only one guaranteed way of getting wealth: by gaining control of the state treasury. Politics in Haiti from the death of Christophe right through to present day became a question of competition between rival elements within the ruling class to get control of government funds.

From this followed a characteristic pattern. Presidents would come to power with promises of 'reforms' and 'democracy' and then resort to all sorts of repression in an effort to hold on to office while they built up their personal fortunes, until overthrown by tumultuous revolutions, coups and civil wars.

The only ideological element that was traditionally involved in such politics was that based upon the division within the ruling class between mulatto and black.

The mulattoes would claim, in a quite racist way, that they alone were civilised, cultured and fit to rule. They would paint a picture of Haiti's history in which every good—including the revolt against slavery itself—had been due to the actions of mulatto heroes.

The black section of the ruling class would counter-claim that they represented the overwhelming majority of the population and that it was blacks such as

Toussaint, Dessalines and Christophe who established free Haiti.

It is very important to note that the number of people involved in these vicious and often bloody arguments was quite small. They were the arguments of the urban elite, of a grouping which even today is estimated to amount to no more than 30,000 people out of a population of five million.

The chasm between the elite and the mass of the population was enormously wide.

Ninety percent of the population still lived in the countryside, farming plots of land that tended to get smaller and less productive as population pressure grew over time, had never been far from the area of their birth, spoke Creole instead of French, were completely illiterate and maintained their own cultural identity through the practice of the voodoo religion their slave forebearers had brought from Africa.

Very occasionally groups of peasant fighters would be paid to join the battles within the elite. But for most of the time the only effect of the politics of the ruling class upon the masses was the negative one: it foreclosed the possibility of anyone ever finding a way of breaking out of the vicious cycle of impoverishment.

The inter-war years saw two small changes to this overall situation. The American occupation was so crude that it led a number of intellectuals to try to overcome their separation from the vast mass in the countryside.

A *Noiriste* (black cultural) movement developed among them which attempted to understand the Creole, voodoo traditions of the peasantry and which sought to explain the political divisions between mulatto and black in terms of class (and, indeed, the beginnings of a black urban working class).

The political significance of these changes was shown in 1946. An attempt by the incumbent president to extend his term of office led to a strike by students and sixth formers that spread to the civil service. After military intervention, elections were organised.

All this was true to past form. But this time the elections themselves involved a new factor—the activity of non-ruling class groups in the cities. The *Noiriste* intellectuals (among them Francois Duvalier) showed they could mobilise the black middle classes. And the school teacher Fignole showed he could organise urban worker support through his populist, anti-communist Movement of Workers and Peasants.

The victor, Estime, promised a reform programme. He was bitterly opposed by the mulatto section of the ruling class. But this only increased his appeal to radical and *Noiriste* elements. Even the Communist Party announced it was dissolving itself in order to back the government. And Francois Duvalier used positions in the health and labour ministries to build a degree of popular support for himself (for instance, among the chauffeur guides' union of Port au Prince, one of the

strongest organised sections of workers).

In fact, Estime's government proved incapable of turning its words into deeds. He soon reverted to the old methods of arresting opponents, closing down newspapers and rigging elections. The military intervened once again in 1950, running elections in which one of the leading generals, Magloire, got 99 percent of the votes!

The new regime sought to rule in the traditional Haitian pattern. It based itself on a section of the mulatto elite, ignored the newly politicised urban middle classes and banned their parties. The president himself showed a rapacity that was outstanding even by Haitian political standards, accumulating a personal fortune estimated at between 12 and 28 million dollars. This lost him the support even of the mulatto elite.

His attempt to extend his period of rule produced a repetition of the events of 1946. Secondary school students began strikes which spread until the capital was paralysed.

The president fled, to enjoy his wealth abroad. But the movement against him involved a mass of diverse elements—the rival mulatto and black sections of the ruling class, the black urban middle class, and the new sections of urban workers, with dozens of opportunist politicians forging shifting alliances as they sought to get state power (and the state treasury) into their own hands.

A period of bloody strife followed which lasted for several months. The politicisation of the urban masses meant that neither section of the ruling class could consolidate its hold any more. But the underdeveloped character of the Haitian economy meant that neither the urban middle class nor the urban working class could challenge their hold on its own count.

Francois Duvalier was the politician who benefitted from this state of affairs. He managed to play his opponents in the black electoral camp off against one another until, when a presidential election was finally held, it was a simple choice between himself and a representative of the mulatto elite, Dejoie. Given that Duvalier had the support of the black middle class, the black working class and the army, he was bound to win.

Duvalier was not *the* candidate of Haitian business interests—his opponent was. Nor was he the nominee of the US embassy. He was an opportunist politician, who would engage in radical rhetoric while balancing between rival forces so as to rise above them all.

Once in office, he manoeuvred very cleverly to consolidate his power and to destroy all potential sources of opposition.

He worked with the head of the army to round up supporters of political rivals. Then he very carefully undermined the base of the head of the army by mobilising junior officers against him. He turned his fire against the mulatto business community, but cultivated the Syrio-Lebanese businessmen who ran about half the



**What's up Doc? Papa and Baby in happier times**

country's internal trade.

He carried out a vicious campaign of intimidation against one of his opponents who had political support among the urban workers, but was careful to do nothing to upset the unions until this campaign was over—and then smashed the unions as well.

He bought US support by getting the US Marine Corps to train the Haitian forces, but was prepared for a temporary break with the US when it tried to control his actions.

He got Catholic Church support by dropping his old *Noiriste* anti-clericalism until the late 1950s when he destroyed its political independence by arresting priests and deporting the primate; but he was quite happy to come to an agreement with the Pope six years later which gave himself a say in the appointment of bishops.

However, it was not just clever manoeuvring which gave him his power. The reason he was able to manoeuvre so easily was that he established a new political base.

He could break apart the small urban elites who had always dominated Haitian politics in the past because he mobilised against them a key section of the great majority of the population who were black, Creole speaking, illiterate peasants.

The 10,000 or so members of the notorious para-military force, the Tontons Macoutes, came from the traditionally most influential rural stratum, the better off peasants who could command the allegiance of their fellows and often held positions as voodoo priests. Duvalier, by providing them with a licence to kill, provided them with a means of advancing their own positions and tied them to his regime.

'Tontons Macoutes were an organ of repression, but they were also a means



**Who profits from their misery?**

of recruiting support throughout the country.' (Nicholls, *Haiti from Dessalines to Duvalier*, p215)

They provided a nationwide network of Creole speaking supporters who could, for the first time since the days of the independence, constitute an organic connection in each village with the French speaking national centre of power in Port au Prince.

Of course, for the mass of people in the villages things did not improve at all under Duvalier. If anything, average living standards declined as a bigger population scratched at a decreasingly fertile soil. But bitter experience had taught Haitian peasants that the presence of this or that government in Port au Prince did not make much difference to them. They

'were shrewdly aware that their lot under a succeeding regime [to that of Papa Doc's] would probably be no better. And so he could enjoy their "benevolent neutrality".' (Nicholls, P215)

It was this which enabled Papa Doc easily to withstand all attempts to remove him—either from representatives of the old elite, from groups of left wing guerrillas from Cuba, or from opponents enjoying US sympathy based in the neighbouring Dominican Republic. It also enabled him to do what no previous Haitian president had been able to do—to ensure a smooth succession for his own nominee (his son, Jean Claude or 'Baby Doc') in 1971.

Baby Doc survived much longer than most commentators expected. But he began to encounter a growing number of problems.

The land hunger in the countryside led to a growing wave of emigration, both to Port au Prince, which grew in population from 250,000 to nearly a million in 20 years, and

abroad (chiefly to the US).

Attempts to cope with this by reliance on US aid led to increasing US and IMF demands that the aid be used efficiently. Attempts to placate such criticism by giving government positions to non-political 'technocrats' led to a slight relaxation of the old terror, allowing very muted criticism of the regime into newspapers and pamphlets.

Finally, Jean Claude allowed his own greed to sway his political judgement. He boosted his personal fortune by marrying into one of the wealthiest of the mulatto ruling class families, the Benets. But this upset his own black middle class supporters.

They feared that from now on the rake-off from controlling the state would go to the old, traditional rulers and not to themselves. Even members of the Tontons Macoutes began to say that they were 'not prepared to fight for a mulatto government'.

Attempts by the government to go over the heads of the Macoutes and to appeal to the rural masses with radio programmes in Creole further increased such tensions. The old Duvalierist paper *Panorama* began, for instance, to criticise the government for 'treason' to the ideas of Papa Doc.

Eventually the point was reached at the end of November last year when a movement could begin to develop somewhat similar to those that overthrew unpopular presidents in 1946, 1950 and 1956. Young people demonstrated in the north west town of Gonaives 'against hunger and injustice'. Police shot four dead and the regime shut down a Catholic radio station for reporting the incident.

But five weeks later there were more demonstrations in the town and through

the month of January these spread throughout the island, with student and school student strikes spreading to the shopkeepers who would close their premises in sympathy.

For the first time in 29 years, the power of the Tontons Macoutes was not sufficient to terrorise the shopkeepers into reopening.

Jean Claude was eventually given his marching orders by some of those who had been closest to him. They feared that the revolt against his rule would turn into a revolution. There is no doubt they were advised in this by the Americans.

The new regime is very much Duvalierism without Duvalier. The army and the police are still under people who rose to the top under the old regime, and they are doing their best to protect the members of the now dissolved Tontons Macoutes from popular vengeance.

The calls of these murderers for 'moderation' are echoed by a powerful section of the Catholic Church, which is now using its position as one of the few legitimate focuses of discontent under Baby Doc to try to prevent an eradication of everything he stood for. And the American embassy, apparently, is advising the new government to call quick elections before any left wing organisation has the chance to get off the ground.

It is by no means clear how successful such attempts to re-establish the situation will be. Reports suggest that the unrest is far from over.

The great danger must be of a rerun of the old cycle of Haitian politics, with a period of unrest and rebellion simply serving to bring to power a new demagogic ruler who will then disillusion all the hopes placed in him. No doubt in both sections of the ruling class, in the urban black middle class and in the better off section of the peasantry there are already would-be politicians grooming themselves for this role.

But even in an impoverished economy like that of Haiti, changes take place, gradually, over the years, that produce new political possibilities. Not only has Port au Prince grown massively since Papa Doc took power 29 years ago, but within it there is now a sizeable industrial working class (about 60,000 strong).

It is, of course, very small compared with the total population of over five million. But it is much larger than either section of the ruling class and comparable in size with the urban black middle class. If it could attract around it older, non-industrial sections of workers (dockworkers, bus and lorry drivers etc) it could make a very big impact in a period of acute political crisis, drawing behind it sections of the peasantry.

Whether this happens will depend, in part, on the degree to which Haitian socialists, who see organising such workers as the priority, emerge into the open.

What can be said is that if this does not happen, the future for Haiti is likely to be grim, despite the end of the Duvaliers. ■  
Chris Harman

# Staying power

THE presidential election in the Philippines has not achieved the objectives of any of its participants. The political crisis sparked off by the assassination of Cory Aquino's husband, Benigno Aquino in August 1983, split the Filipino ruling class to the core, while unleashing a massive protest of strikes and demonstrations against the regime.

Marcos called the elections in the belief that he had ridden out the storm caused by the assassination. Large sections of the ruling class hoped for an Aquino victory to arrest the growth of the radical-nationalist movement and of the increasingly politicised and militant working class.

The US, which had backed both Aquino and Marcos, had hoped that the elections would restore credibility to the institutions of parliament, government and the military in order to defeat Communist insurgency.

Instead, the US has another *Samoza* on its hands, with the spectre of a second Vietnam over its head. Marcos, who has had all legitimacy stripped by this election, is determined to remain in power and is threatening to nullify the election because of the widespread intimidation and fraud which had been perpetrated by his own party.

The traditional opposition finds itself in a quandary: under pressure to strike back from its supporters on the ground, yet fearful of the anger and hatred which may not be controllable.

The one million strong trade union federation, *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (May 1st Movement) and the New Nationalist Alliance movement, *Bayan* (Bagong Alyansang Makabayan), who both called for the boycotting of the election, are calling general strikes and nationwide protests. Already, Aquino's supporters have occupied a part of the *Batasang Pambansa* (National Assembly).

A series of general strikes have paralysed large parts of the Philippines in the past, involving hundreds of thousands. The Escalante massacre of 27 people happened on the second day of the strike called in protest at the Marcos dictatorship.

The number of strikes have increased dramatically and so has the number of workers involved. One hundred and fifty five strikes involving 33,638 workers in 1983 have increased to 405 strikes involving 109,000 workers in 1985. The total number of working days lost has increased from 581,291 in 1983 to 2,440,000 in 1985.

The growing politicisation of the working class is reflected in the demands of the strikes—for the repeal of anti-labour legislation, the release of political detainees, the removal of US bases, and the restoration of subsidies to the local staples of corn and rice.



Anti-government and US demo

In this climate of growing popular resistance, the US and the local bourgeoisie had to find a replacement who could inflict further cuts on living conditions in a country where the average daily minimum industrial wage is £2.15. Benigno Aquino could command the confidence of the ruling class and was popular with the people. Upon his assassination his mantle passed to his widow Cory Aquino.

She has received a petition of a million signatures requesting her candidature. Her eventual decision to stand was made after discussions with the US ambassador, Stephen Bosworth, and the archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin.

She is the biggest independent sugar producer and is related to one of Marcos's 'crony capitalists', Eduardo Cojuangco the coconut magnate, who has his own paramilitary force trained by the Israelis.

One of her closest economic advisors, Jaime Ongpin, is president of one of Philippine's largest mining corporations, Benguet Corporation, and is vice-president of the Makati Business Club. He is brother to another of Marcos's cronies, Bobby Ongpin.

The much publicised independent custodian of free and fair elections, the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) is known to receive US funds.

Her running mate, Salvadore Laurel, had till 1980 been a firm advocate of martial law, which was lifted in 1981. Her popularity, based on her husband's assassination, made her well suited to head off popular expectations and to implement the austerity measures necessary to restore Philippine capitalism to profitability; as Marcos himself had done after his election to the Presidency in 1965.

He came to power at a time of waves of

student protests, resistance to land-grabbing and tenant evictions, and working class militancy. He promised to stamp out corruption and carry out reforms.

In 1969, more workers went on strike than in any year between 1965-75. Real wages actually increased between 1967 and 1969, while between 1970 and 1972 the growing nationalist movement was able to intimidate a normally conservative Supreme Court into issuing decrees revoking preferential rights for American investors.

In September 1972, Marcos turned on those expectations for change, decimated the left and the trade unions, and faithfully pursued the interests of the ruling class by declaring martial law. Real wages fell by 30 percent in the first two years of martial law.

The left rediscovered Maoism and formed the New People's Army (NPA) to launch an insurrection from the countryside. The National Democratic Front (NDF) was formed to unite the national bourgeoisie, the middle classes, the working class, and the peasantry in a popular front.

The basis of the popular front is hostility to the US and Marcos. American influence is symbolised by the presence of its military bases. Their removal forms one of the central political demands of the Philippine left who see their country as a neo-colony.

The biggest Maoist party in the world outside China, the CPP, dominates the left through its popular front organisation, the NDF.

It differs from the nearly defunct old Communist Party, PKP, which still holds Marcos to be a nationalist with some progressive content, in that the CPP sees Marcos as 'the armed terrorist force of American imperialism'. Hence, the US-Marcos dictatorship is responsible for keeping the Philippines a 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial' country.

The revised twelve point programme of the NDF seeks to 'protect national capital against foreign monopoly capital...' and 'support a genuine land reform programme...'

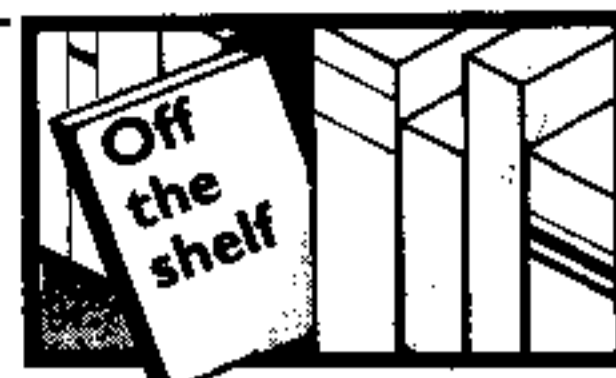
In practice this has meant setting up an underground business group in the Makati District and enforcing a 'just' interest rate of 6 percent per annum. An armed insurrection remains the road to national liberation. Socialism is the next stage beyond.

But the twenty million agricultural and industrial workers bear the brunt of the repression and form the backbone of the opposition. The Philippines are a fully integrated part of the world capitalist system and there can be no liberation of one without the destruction of the other.

The long line of nationalists who, having sought freedom for their country, turn into dictators exploiting the toilers and the workers in pursuit of their dream, litters our history. What is required is a revolutionary party which sees the working class as the main agent for change, because the freedom of the nation means the freedom from capitalist exploitation. ■

Lawrence Wong

# Thou shalt make profit



**Their Morals and Ours**  
Leon Trotsky  
*Pathfinder*, £3.25

DURING years of defeat, the ruling class does not only try to enslave our bodies in its relentless drive for profit. It intensifies its attempts to enslave our minds, to eradicate from our imagination the very idea that working people have the ability to control their lives. Reactionary ideas can then become a powerful force, strengthening the hand of the exploiting class. History is rewritten in the service of capital. The strength of the moral majority in the USA is just as much a product of the downturn as the breaking of strikes. Victoria Gillick and Mary Whitehouse symbolise the shift to the right in Britain as much as the defeat of the miners.

When Trotsky wrote his pamphlet *Their Morals and Ours* in June 1939 monstrous reaction was sweeping Europe. Fascism posed a deadly threat. War loomed. Stalinism had reduced the hopes of October 1917 to ashes. The grim events of the decade caused a dramatic shift of ideas to the right. Liberal, reformist and former socialist intellectuals poured out masses of literature to 'prove' that revolutionary socialism was immoral, violent and evil. Trotsky's essay defended the Marxist tradition against this attack. By exposing the claims to moral superiority of his opponents, Trotsky was defending the very soul of socialism.

Trotsky took his opponents head on. Morality cannot be divorced from the reality of class struggle:

'Supra-class morality inevitably leads to the acknowledgement of a special substance, of a "moral sense", "conscience", some kind of absolute which is nothing more than a philosophic-cowardly pseudonym for God.'

There is not a moral code suspended on high. Social classes develop a morality which serves their interests. Dominant classes demand that subordinate classes adopt their morality, claiming for it natural and timeless qualities:

'The bourgeoisie, which far surpasses the proletariat in the completeness and irreconcilability of its class-consciousness, is vitally interested in imposing its moral philosophy upon the exploited masses. It is exactly for this purpose that the concrete norms of the bourgeois catechism are concealed under moral abstractions patronised by religion, philosophy or that hybrid which is called "common sense". The appeal to abstract norms is not a disinterested philosophic mistake but a necessary element in the mechanism of class deception. The exposure of this deceit which retains the tradition of thousands of years is the first duty of a proletarian revolutionist.'

So the ruling class says 'Thou shalt not kill' but orders the death of millions in its wars; preaches 'Thou shalt not steal' but

protects the corruption of the city, and the exploitation of wage workers; proclaims 'Thou shalt not lie' but hides its true actions behind Official Secrets Acts and the 'national interest'.

Marxists view events from the standpoint of the class struggle and so distinguish between the violence of the oppressed and the violence of the oppressors:

'A slave-owner who with cunning and deception shackles a slave in chains and a slave who through cunning and deception breaks the chains—let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality.'

Trotsky's argument was a blast at those who condemned the use of violence by Russian workers to defend their beleaguered revolution. It applies equally to those today who denounce both apartheid and black workers who use violence to end it; or to the likes of Neil Kinnock who 'backed' the miners' case and vilified the mass mobilisations to achieve the same aims; or to the journalists who have taken to condemning anti-racism and not racism for the black revolts in the inner cities.

Trotsky set out the bald and (to some) unpalatable facts of class society. Power is wrested by force by one class from another. Violence is indispensable in the passage of capitalism to socialism as it is for maintaining capital's rule and as it was in the passage of feudalism to capitalism. Bourgeois democracy, now considered to be legitimate and natural was established by bloody conflict and the loss of Charles I's head.

To denounce all violence on moral grounds is not to avoid violence, but to accept the right of the capitalist class to use it against you. Against the institutional violence of class rule, the working class has to reject the morality of the ruling class and replace it with its own revolutionary morality;

'Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means, we answer, which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilability to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoers, imbue them with consciousness of their own historical mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle.'

From this and not some bloody-minded obsession with force comes the Marxist opposition to pacifism, and, of course, individual terrorism. Where liberals wring their hands over whether the end justifies the means, Marxists understand that the two can't be divorced;

'A means can be justified only by its end. But the end in its turn needs to be justified. From the Marxist point of

## THE WESTERN SOVIETS

WORKERS' COUNCILS  
VERSUS  
PARLIAMENT  
1915-1920



Donny Gluckstein

Parliamentary channels have proved incapable of defending workers against mass unemployment and falling living standards — but what is the alternative? East European-style dictatorship certainly has nothing to offer. But history provides another way. In the years 1915-20 workers all over Europe set up their own alternative, their own mass democracy. In Germany, Britain, Italy and Russia workers' councils — or *soviets*, to use their Russian name — challenged the existing order. This book brings together a wealth of information which is more relevant today than ever.

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**The violence of the state—and the resistance of workers**

view, which expresses the historical interests of the proletariat, the end is justified if it leads to increasing the power of man over nature and to the abolition of the power of man over man.'

By the 1930s the reformists and liberals who had been forced on to the defensive by the tremendous moral authority of the October revolution were delighted to be able to point to the degeneration of the Soviet regime as proof of the impossibility of a successful workers' revolution. Russia had become, and has remained, a stick to beat socialists.

The intellectuals who pointed to the 'inevitability of corruption by power' or the 'moral taint of violence' were complete hypocrites. Most of them had been lukewarm or even hostile to the young revolution with its mass democracy and insurrectionary energy. In the thirties they were attracted by the industrial might of Stalinist Russia. They were inspired by the image of dynamic wealth-creation and tight labour discipline, and all too willing to turn a blind eye to the labour camps and Moscow trials. Once the barbarism of the

regime was proved without a shred of doubt they would happily have their cake and eat it by arguing that Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin were all of the same mould.

In order to sustain the tiny and marginalised revolutionary current and arm its militants, Trotsky had to tear aside the veil of lies and slanders which masked what had really happened in Russia. He had to explode the myth of a direct continuity between the Russia of Lenin and the Russia of Stalin:

'The October revolution abolished privileges, waged war against social inequality, replaced bureaucracy with self-government of the toilers, abolished secret diplomacy, strove to render all social relationships completely transparent. Stalinism re-established the most offensive forms of privileges, imbued inequality with a provocative character, strangled mass self-activity under police absolutism, transformed administration into a monopoly of the Kremlin oligarchy and regenerated the fetishism of power in forms that absolute monarchy dared not dream of.'

Trotsky was not out to bury the corpse of a past revolution, but to lay the foundations of a new one.

Even today the myth of the inevitable decay of revolution into dictatorship is used by the ruling class. It is the unique achievement of Trotsky to have preserved the Marxist method of analysis, showing it was economic backwardness, isolation and imperialist violence, and the immaturity of the communist parties, which strangled the revolution, not some eternal moral failing. Without Trotsky's defence of revolutionary morality, socialists would be far less equipped to expose the mythology of their oppressors' morality.

Trotsky in *Their Morals and Ours* separates the distinct revolutionary tradition from Stalinism and reformism and rescues from the mire of distortions the Marxist heritage. At a time when despair was easy and cynicism commonplace; this little pamphlet helped keep alive the moral authority of the revolutionary tradition. In the battle of ideas *Their Morals and Ours* is an essential weapon. ■

**Alan Gibbons**

# The double edged weapon

The recent discussions in *Socialist Worker Review* about the Poundswick dispute have raised a whole number of questions on the role of education in capitalist society. Here we print two articles by teachers which look at this role, and how it is changing to fit the needs of a crisis ridden system.

THE development of capitalism in the nineteenth century led, among other things, to considerable debate about if, and how, the working class could best be educated to meet the needs of the system. This resulted in what developed into the present system of state education in this country.

For the ruling class, both now and then, education has very little to do with human enrichment and so on, and everything to do with the mechanisms of social control.

The creation of a large urban working class, organised on a collective basis, presented them with a problem, which Marx summed up succinctly when he stated that when capitalism brought people together for the purposes of mass production, it created its own gravedigger.

Education is a prime means whereby the future workforce can be suitably socialised. In the words of James Shuttleworth, an early educationalist, it was necessary to 'interfere'.

At a practical level men and women could be taught the skills necessary for an increasingly mechanised form of production, such as basic numeracy and literacy, while avoiding anything that might give people ideas above their station. Children could be disciplined, by being forced to sit in rows, to do many mechanical and repetitive exercises, by being subjected to constant and often extremely harsh discipline by the teacher.

Apart from tending, in theory at least, to produce a more docile and passive workforce, this reinforces and teaches the dominant ideology, reproducing ideas of strict hierarchy, of the 'natural' inferiority of black people, of the suitable roles for women and so on.

Teachers were regarded as agents for social control, sent in to 'rescue the working class from its moral squalor', and reinforce these lessons. The 1870 Education Act established some kind of teacher training, and aimed to recruit from 'the brightest of the working class'.

Teachers had fairly low status, especially as many of them were women (apart from headmasters, of course), and stress was laid on careful training of a social and moral kind. They were expected to be neat and tidy, and dissidents were fairly efficiently weeded out.

This may all sound very familiar. It

should, because, although the conditions in which teachers and schools operate today are substantially changed, as far as the ruling class is concerned the job of the teacher is to reproduce in his or her classroom and school the dominant structures and ideas in society.

Yet teachers all too often fail to do this in the way that our rulers would want. Firstly teachers, with the creation of mass schooling, have themselves organised. The National Union of Elementary Teachers (NUET), which was the forerunner of the modern National Union of Teachers (NUT), was formed in 1870 to represent the interests of teachers.

Acting collectively as trade unionists, teachers are 'failing to set an example', and are clearly shown to be part of the working class, rather than the 'professional' scabs the *Times Educational Supplement* is so fond of. This lies behind the scurrilous anti-socialist witch hunt that is currently being conducted in its pages.



Planning for the future?

Teachers also sometimes fail the ruling class because of what and how they teach. Education is a double edged weapon: it can be used—and generally is—to mystify and control, but it can also be used to inform and challenge, though this may often appear very minor. There is however a strong working class tradition of self-education, of lending libraries and meeting together to discuss issues and to keep alive an alternative view of things, and better education is a common demand of socialists and radicals everywhere.

Standard accounts of how Britain 'civilised' India, and why nuclear power is necessarily 'progressive' can be challenged. This produces hysterical reactions in the

media. Teachers are held responsible for any possible social ill, whether 'race riots', football hooliganism or teenage pregnancy—even bad grammar if Norman Tebbit is to be believed! On similar grounds comprehensive education, mixed ability classes and anti-sexist and anti-racist stances are commonly attacked.

Nonetheless, although teachers as trade unionists are oppressed, and fighting like other workers for better pay, better conditions and more control over their own workplace, it must be remembered that they have an acutely contradictory role. This is because of the central part they play in an oppressive system designed to suitably discipline and socialise children.

Children are, in general, powerless. Their parents have almost inviolable rights over them, except in cases of extreme cruelty—and then agencies of the state take over. They do no paid work, other than paper rounds or stacking supermarket shelves. Any kind of independence before the age of 16 is impossible, and the effect of mass youth unemployment is to make things even more difficult.

They have to go to school at least until they are 16. The effect of mass unemployment and the need to control the figures have led to the imposition of YTS schemes and the control of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) over courses and wages. This means that young people remain dependent for even longer.

Children at school are subjected to a whole range of procedures designed to keep them under control: registers (with sanctions for non-attendance), uniform, assembly and, above all, the discipline of the classroom: sit down—be quiet—listen to me—do this—do that—do this for homework—go out—have a detention—be suspended—get expelled.

Children are habituated to the naturalness and inevitability of such procedures, and the teacher is of course associated with them inextricably—to such an extent that a teacher who doesn't act like this is seen as soft and unnatural. At the same time a certain degree of control is exerted over other aspects of children's lives, such as smoking or their sexuality.

The other side of this is that some people will always fight back rather than accept the system and allow it to oppress them all the time. Some simply use it to get what they want out of it; others quietly opt out; others again rebel, refuse to accept teacher or school authority—much of which at classroom level at least is moral rather than real.

The alternative is to organise in a much more assertive and collective way, and start a school students union about both specific and general issues.

What has been particularly encouraging recently has been the action school



students and FE students have been taking against racism. Black and white students at Waltham College organised protests and pickets after their principal had a racist letter published in the *Times*, and at schools in East London Bangladeshi students have been fighting back against racial harassment and attacks. Students walked out of Morpeth on strike in protest, and at Daneford boys have held very effective protest meetings, and now patrol the corridors themselves to protect students from assault, abuse and extortion. Management had ignored and played down the situation, but the school NUT was in full support of the boys, and this led to a successful demonstration last November.

Clearly it is up to socialist teachers to support such initiatives, and to generally make efforts to disentangle themselves as far as possible from an oppressive system. There are many situations in which it is far more difficult to decide what to do. Normally it would be completely wrong to support expulsion, because many students are, in their own way, reacting against their oppression. You only have to look at the part school students are playing in the struggle in South Africa, fighting back over arrests, expulsions, victimisation and a curriculum and system of schooling they know to be demeaning.

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### **'The teacher must also be ready to recognise the rights of students'**

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All teachers are aware of how disciplinary procedures operate in schools, and should try to avoid allowing wayward students to be victimised by heads, who have all the power. This power is used to cut students off from each other, and from their right to an education.

The difficulties are underlined by the Poundswick case, where teachers found it very difficult to defend their own conditions of work and remain aware of the rights of the students involved. In the case of Daneford, teachers and boys called for expulsion quite rightly, as the boys concerned were guilty of racial abuse and severe assault, and their continued presence in the school was a threat to the rights of both students and staff not to suffer this kind of attack. The same would apply in the case of severe sexual assault.

What must then be said is that teachers must always be prepared to discuss these things with the students. It is not enough to be a wonderful trade unionist. The teacher must also be ready to recognise the rights of students, and argue for them with other teachers. Likewise a teacher must not impose from above, but should seek to allow the student to consider his or her

anti-racist stance. Even so success will always be marginalised. The system itself remains oppressive.

We are in the depths of economic crisis and political downturn, rather than in the midst of an economic boom and the expansion of the welfare state including education.

Education is under attack financially and ideologically, and teachers are under increasing stress. They are expected to police the crisis—and this is supposed to include welcoming police into the schools, where they can begin to harass and

criminalise working class and black youth—inevitably the teachers are more and more seen as part of the system. At the same time they are threatened over jobs and conditions, and are more defensive.

The students themselves, in the face of seemingly inevitable unemployment, are less ready to challenge constructively the ideas and authority of teachers, and very likely to rebel against them personally—and to the teacher, particularly the young and inexperienced, the only solution can seem discipline. ■

Janet Wolf

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## **Scope for subversion**

AGAINST the backcloth of the teachers' pay dispute there have been a number of other conflicts pointing unerringly towards the crisis in schools. Poundswick in particular exposed the contradictions that socialist teachers, students and parents face when they attempt to respond to the manifestations of the crisis in a capitalist educational system. The problem with their response is that it is largely reactive and doesn't stem from an underlying analysis of the educational policy of the present government or from a reformulation of the Marxist tradition of educational philosophy. This article is a limited attempt to provide such a perspective.

It is illuminating to start with the preamble to Lunarcharsky's first Soviet Education Act in 1918.

'The personality shall remain as the highest value in Socialist culture. The personality, however, can develop its inclinations in all possible luxury only in a harmonious society of equals. We do not forget the right of the individual to his or her own development. It is not necessary for us to cut short a personality, to cheat it, to cast it in iron moulds, because the socialist community is based not on the uniformity of the barracks, not on artificial drill, not on religious and aesthetic deceptions, but on an actual solidarity of interests.'

The aspirations reflected in this extract may have been betrayed by subsequent developments in Russia, but the first flush of revolutionary fervour spawned a wealth of innovative educational theory and practice. The emphasis on the 'right of the individual' and the development of the 'personality' may seem strange for readers more accustomed to having these concepts associated with Conservative educational philosophies, but it provides a valuable starting point for the purposes of this article. The 'solidarity of interest' may not have revealed enough of itself to make the 'harmonious society of equals' seem realisable at present, but we are all too familiar with the 'iron moulds' and the 'artificial drills'. They are a central feature of the Tory government's educational

strategy.

This strategy hinges on increasing state control over schools and a centralisation of the curriculum while simultaneously reducing expenditure and resources.

The White Paper, *Better Schools*, argues for privatisation of educational services, particularly in cleaning and school meals; the expansion of independent schools and the closure of state secondary schools with intakes of less than 180. It argues for a reduction in teacher numbers; compulsory assessment for teachers; continued restrictions on pay; no improvement in class sizes and the use of ratecapping to discipline the educational expenditure of local authorities.

In the year since its publication the problems the government has faced directly or indirectly as a result of the salary dispute have meant that its objectives have been only partially achieved. But in the area of post-14 education they have made considerable gains that have put unions in both schools and further education on the defensive and in some cases at each other's throats.

It has sought to replace notions of 'equality of opportunity' which supposedly provided the underpinning of educational policies in the period of expansion in the fifties and sixties, with 'vocationalist' ideas based on 'an awareness of market forces as an essential curricular element'. The principle agency for spearheading this ideological shift is the Manpower Services Commission, operating under the direction of the Department of Employment rather than the Department of Education and Science.

In addition to the role of the MSC there is increasing centralisation of control in projects sponsored by the DES. The Certificate of Pre-Vocational Training is an attempt to harness those students not catered for by 'O' and 'A' level—80 percent of all school students—to the needs of the market. The CPVE 'Red Book' describes it as '...a framework that will permit the development of courses that are demonstrably relevant to the needs of young people as emerging adults and prospective

employees.'

What this really means was spelt out by the then MSC Chairman Lord Young, in an interview in October 1984. He 'wanted to ensure that school leavers were much better trained for work before they entered the job market' and that they did not have aspirations of their place in employment that were too high.

The increased expectations that young people developed as a result of their involvement in compulsory education are now regarded as at best a liability and at worst a threat.

One of the consequences of the inner city riots was to accelerate government initiatives designed to reduce expectations and discipline young school leavers for a world of 'non-work'. These have been foisted on schools and colleges through the effective device of reducing funding for other projects and courses and increasing MSC funding for CPVE and TVEI. Courses popular with teachers and students and over which they have some measure of control, are threatened with being replaced by projects more rigidly controlled by central government.

It should not be imagined that this desire for tighter control is a product of Tory imagination alone. The previous Labour government prepared the way for this onslaught as it did for many other similar attacks outside the sphere of education. In 1977 James Callaghan castigated teachers for being out of tune with the 'needs of industry', and the impetus for greater attention to 'basic skills' was established. It was from this platform that the Tories were able to launch their current attacks.

In working out a response to this situation it's important that we don't fall into the trap of many 'Marxists' who argue that schools are 'microcosms of society'. They reproduce the correct proportions of the required labour power and they exercise an ideological function by creating acquiescence among these future workers.

This is only part of the truth. All of these functions are the subject of debate and conflict. There is room for manoeuvre and scope for subversion.

Education needs to be placed within the context of the government's overall objectives. The initiatives outlined above have not been pursued without difficulties. The rise of the Manpower Services Commission and the increasingly centralised control of the school curriculum have not been inevitable and irresistible.

The overall objectives of the New Vocationalism may well be to discipline school leavers into acceptance of phoney jobs or the dole queue. They may also have the added effect of blaming the victims for their own predicament. But the way in which these schemes are worked out in practice has become a terrain for struggle or at least for negotiation.

The protracted nature of the salary campaign has meant that many of the Tory priorities have had to be postponed.

But the key weapon in the Tory armoury, the ability to regulate local



#### Will Victorian values mean an end to this?

authority finance, still has the ability to inflict casualties on our side. The failure of the Labour controlled local authorities to mount an effective opposition to rate-capping has opened the door to cuts that are going to be much harder to fight. In fact Labour authorities themselves are operating as the agents for these cuts

One example of this type of 'rationalisation' is the proposal for the implementation of tertiary colleges, particularly in working class areas, as a response to declining school roles. Since the expansion of higher education was halted in the late seventies, fewer and fewer places are available on traditional degree courses at universities and polytechnics. Working class students are being made to bear the brunt of these cuts. It would be political suicide for the Tories to attempt to attack school sixth forms in middle class areas, but in the inner cities their rationalisation plans are in full swing.

Ironically they are being implemented largely by Labour controlled authorities who are rapidly abandoning any commitment to comprehensive education and equality of opportunity. They are even prepared to countenance the re-emergence of two-tier secondary schools similar to the old class-ridden grammar and secondary moderns. In Islington, for example, it is most likely that most schools will lose their sixth forms during the next year to a tertiary college, but two schools will be allowed to combine to retain their sixth forms as a result of parental pressure and the class composition of their intake. There is no doubt as to which school parents of future students will want their children to attend.

The impact of plans like these on jobs in the remaining secondary schools will be dramatic. The new tertiary college will be run on further education regulations and already there are clear indications that lecturers in that sector see the new proposals as a way of securing their jobs at the expense of teachers in schools. Many

spuriously 'socialist' arguments are being advanced in defence of these developments. Any analysis which starts from an examination of the employers' motivation for these moves can only conclude that they are designed to divide workers in schools and colleges and to provide a diet of narrowly based training courses for working class students. They will narrow the horizons of the students and reduce their expectations.

The sharpest attack will undoubtedly be on jobs and services. Socialists should resist any attempts to undermine existing provision by reducing the number of teachers and this means the closest co-operation between members in both schools and colleges. If one group of workers are set against another in the interests of rationalisation then the chances of either group defending jobs and conditions are undermined. Flexibility in teaching as in other jobs means greater productivity at the expense of union organisation.

The fight to defend *all* jobs need not necessarily be doomed to failure. The crisis that the government faces in other spheres is mirrored in education. They are not being allowed to implement their strategy of schooling for the dole without resistance and their confidence is being seriously undermined largely as a result of the salaries struggle. The ideological importance of the fight to defend 16+ education and protect the small gains that working class students have won over the years should not be underestimated.

At stake is the potential for combativity of a new generation of school leavers; we want them to be fighting on our side and not passively accepting their fate on the scrap heap of unemployment. ■

Shaun Doherty

*Some of the ideas for this article have been developed from Schooling for the Dole: The New Vocationalism I Bates et al, Hutchinson 1985.*

# Stages in the struggle

'WE have to base the struggle...in the areas of the people of no property, with the oppressed sections of the Irish community and with those who have a vested interest not only in removing the British, but also providing the alternative which is a democratic socialist republic.'

On the face of it these remarks by Sinn Fein's Joe Austin (in February *SWR*) make the position of Sinn Fein look very close to that of the Socialist Workers Party.

Certainly in his outline of Sinn Fein's position, Joe Austin said much that we would agree with. The analysis of Britain's reactionary role in Ireland, the oppressive role of British troops, the sectarian nature of the Northern Irish state, the RUC and the UDR, was all accurate and enlightening. We would also agree that the aim of the Anglo-Irish Accord is to isolate Republicanism.

But if there is agreement for the causes of the problem, what of the solution? Traditionally the argument between us has focussed on two points which are inter-related: militarism and the centrality of the working class.

The belief in a military solution to Britain's rule has been central to Republicanism throughout its history.

In the interview Joe Austin seems to be moving away from pure militarism. He says,

'A military victory is not possible, nor is it desirable, because we're not involved in a military struggle. We're involved in a struggle that has a military dimension to it.'

Austin is not unique in realising that purely military victory is not possible. In the whole of its history the IRA could only once have seriously contemplated a military victory over the British, and that was in the period 1918-21.

The IRA today fight on a much less favourable terrain. The war is restricted to the six counties of the North of Ireland—where two thirds of the population are hostile to their aims.

But in coming to terms with military realities, Republicanism has to provide an alternative, and it is here that the question of the centrality of the working class becomes crucial.

Again Joe Austin's position would seem to indicate a major shift for Sinn Fein. He explained that he didn't see the Catholic middle class as having any significant role to play.

This realisation is based on hard facts. Sinn Fein's support in the North of Ireland has come from the working class areas of Belfast and Derry, not from the Catholic middle classes.

For at least certain sections of Sinn Fein

the need to build in the South is also crucial. Here again Austin makes it clear to which section of society he is primarily looking:

'We need to organise correctly, become politically relevant and become politically involved with the issues that affect working class people North and South.'

Two central questions need to be answered here. What role do workers themselves play in the process? What does it mean for the practical day to day activity of Sinn Fein?

Sinn Fein recognise that workers are exploited in society, and are oppressed.

In a pamphlet called *Social Agitation* Sinn Fein list other oppressed groups, and although workers are clearly seen as the most important they are nevertheless one of a number of listed groups, such as small farmers, women and youth.

Yet for Marxists the crucial point about workers is not merely that they are exploited and oppressed, but that due to the wealth producing role they play within capitalism, and the collective nature of their work, they have the potential to overthrow the existing order. Ultimately workers must take power into their own hands. They are the only class within society with the potential power to change the world.

## '...workers power is not on the agenda until the national question has been settled'

Many other groups are oppressed within capitalist society, but workers alone have the power to smash that society. Workers are not just merely another constituency of support. The strike is far more important than the ballot box, workers' self-activity far more important than their passive support for left politicians.

It is this more than anything else that separates revolutionaries from reformists, even the best of left reformists. Sinn Fein ultimately view workers as potential voters, as oppressed groups to be related to, as cheer leaders, or even members of Sinn Fein, but not as a class who can themselves change the world.

This means that although Sinn Fein can have good individual militants in the factories, systematic industrial work doesn't exist, neither is it a priority. It also means that major questions like the nature of trade union bureaucracy are not even seriously dealt with. There is no Sinn Fein

caucus in any Irish union, and little or no control or criticism of members or supporters who hold leading trade union posts.

The reason for these shortcomings are not merely oversight but stem from a political analysis. Despite the apparent shifts in Provo policy outlined by Austin, one central plank remains. Class struggle, socialism, even workers' power, is not on the agenda until the national question has been settled.

The most obvious expression of this in the Austin interview came with his view of the Protestant working class. For Austin it is irrelevant that the crisis of capitalism may throw Protestant workers into conflict with their bosses, and elements of the state. It is not possible, he argues, for such struggles to have an impact on the consciousness of Protestant workers which will allow the possibility of at least some breaking with the reactionary ideas of Orangeism.

Yet Protestant workers have at times been driven into confrontation. This is a matter of fact. In the last few years Catholic and Protestant fought shoulder to shoulder in the health workers' dispute, Delorean dispute, and others. Recently a strike at the Abbey Meats factory in Belfast involved a workforce which was 60 percent Protestant, 40 percent Catholic. The headquarters of the firm was in Dublin, and workers from the factory went South to occupy it.

If ever there was an opportunity for Sinn Fein to show that they were serious not just about confronting Northern capitalism, but also Southern capitalism, this was it. Despite the involvement of individual Sinn Fein sympathisers within the factory, Sinn Fein did nothing.

Southern workers may provide a potentially sympathetic constituency as far as Sinn Fein is concerned, but the class struggle as a means of changing the world is no more relevant to Southern workers than it is to Protestant workers.

All this means that Sinn Fein can happily accommodate people whose stand on social issues lies well to the right of the positions outlined by Joe Austin. It means that compromises continue to exist. For instance, in the section of *Social Agitation* on women, the Catholic church is not mentioned or criticised once. It also means that the nationalism can take at best romantic and at worst almost reactionary forms. A piece on Irish culture in a Sinn Fein election document talks about Ireland being swamped by an 'Anglo-American non-culture', as opposed to Irish music.

Socialists do not believe that the national struggle can be separated from the class struggle in Ireland, nor that one struggle has to come before the other. The two are inextricably linked.

Failure to come to grips with the centrality of the working class and the need to smash the state North and South mean at the end of the day failure to break the impasse in northern Irish politics. ■

Pat Stack

# EDUCATION for Socialists

## Knowing the enemy

THE PRESENT time is a perplexing one for revolutionary socialists.

The experience of the miners' strike, the continuation of world crisis, and the slide of Labour away from even reformist socialist language is still pushing a minority of people to take an interest in revolutionary ideas.

Yet there are few opportunities to put those ideas into practice. For the defeats experienced by the working class movement have led to a low level of struggle, to defensive strikes that rarely enjoy success and to a shift of the majority of workers towards right wing labourism or even the Alliance Party.

This creates the great danger that enthusiasm for revolutionary socialism soon turns to defeatism, despair and cynicism, to the feeling that the real world will never change. The result can be that when the instability of the system suddenly raises the level of working class combativity (as with the series of bureaucratic mass strikes we've seen in a number of countries in the last couple of years), socialist organisation is so decayed as to be unable to respond.

One way to combat this danger is by involvement in whatever struggles, however defensive or however small, take place. Even in these you often get an inkling of the way in which workers can change their ideas and learn their power.

But that is not enough in itself. The dominant ideas continue to be the ideas of the ruling class. And all the time hammering it into our heads is the idea that the dream of socialism and workers' power is impossible to achieve.

The only way to combat this is systematic education in Marxist ideas. People who are new to revolutionary socialism *have to* be taught the rudiments of the Marxist analysis of how society has developed and can be changed, to learn the lessons of past working class struggles, how we can understand the modern world, and the basics of the analysis of the capitalist economy.

People who have been around a little longer need continually to deepen their understanding of these matters, so that they can cope with all the arguments

thrown against them.

We are on the ideological defensive and can only maintain ourselves by continually fortifying our positions.

For these reasons, the last National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party decided that our branches should give more priority than hitherto to systematic Marxist education.

But how should this be carried out?

Set-piece lectures always have a role to play. They give people a general view of the subject they deal with. That is why they are a feature of our rallies at Skegness every year and of our summer school, Marxism. But in themselves they are by no means enough.

People hear the lecturer and agree with what he or she says. But they are not usually able to put across those ideas themselves afterwards, and may well be overawed by someone else putting across opposing ideas. This means they do not have the confidence to put across socialist ideas outside the closed confines of the revolutionary organisation itself.

Two things are usually necessary to give this confidence: reading articles and books, and an opportunity to discuss the ideas in a non-intimidatory atmosphere, where you are not going to be attacked the moment you get something wrong.

Many Socialist Workers Party branches already run basic educational groups for newer members. Some also run more advanced groups for those who are more experienced.

These work best when an experienced member gives a talk and then withdraws from the room while the rest of the group discuss what he or she said. Their discussion can be guided by questions which the speaker has put to them, and they can both suggest answers to these and raise points that need clarifying. The speaker can then, after 30-40 minutes, return to the room and take part in a general report back.

If the education group is quite large (more than about 10 strong) it should split into sub-groups for the middle part of the meeting, so that everyone has the chance to join in the discussion.

People who would never dare open their

mouths in front of an experienced speaker, will gladly discuss issues with a small number of other people who are equally inexperienced.

But the groups can only work really successfully if everyone at them is encouraged to do at least a minimal amount of reading.

It is here that a problem nearly always arises. Many people have never acquired the habit of reading anything more than a few hundred words at a time—it is not something which the educational system regards as important for those who are destined for most working class jobs. And even those that have, often feel they have more important things to do. So the long book lists often handed out at educational groups rarely get taken seriously.

SWP branches have been dealing with this problem in two ways: by using relatively easy to read pamphlets and books like Chris Harman's *How Marxism Works*, Alex Callinicos' *Revolutionary Road to Socialism* and Duncan Hallas' book *The Comintern*, taking a chapter at a time, and by photocopying articles from back issues of *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Worker Review*.

But not everyone finds they have the facilities for doing the latter. To facilitate and encourage the education groups the SWP is now beginning to produce nationally 'Education for Socialists' packs, made up of articles that have appeared in *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Worker Review*.

Each will be a short pamphlet containing reprints of articles on between four and six different, related topics, so providing the framework for a corresponding number of group meetings (groups are rarely able to maintain a regular attendance of their members for longer than this). Questions will be provided to guide the discussion on each article, and there will be suggestions for further reading.

Socialist Worker Party branches will be able to order the packs, in bulk order of four or five copies at a time, direct from the SWP national office.

The first packs will be concerned with quite basic questions: the Marxist view of the modern world (imperialism, state capitalism, permanent revolution, national liberation movements, Zionism and anti-semitism); strategy and tactics for revolutionaries; centrism, ultra-leftism and terrorism; women's oppression and the family.

But we hope to be able to follow these up with material aimed at encouraging deeper and more wide ranging discussion among people who already have a basic understanding. ■

Chris Harman

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# Rocking for Kinnock?

Julie Waterson gives a personal view as to how socialists should relate to Red Wedge

'RED WEDGE is potentially the biggest politically orientated campaign in British pop since Rock Against Racism in the late seventies', commented the *New Musical Express*. They could be right.

Red Wedge has taken off in a blaze of publicity. Thousands of young people up and down the country have been to see the musical mixture of politics and rock during their first tour. Hundreds have committed themselves to, at the least, joining the Labour Party Young Socialists as a result.

Red Wedge was initiated by Labour Party member and musician Billy Bragg last year and has grown immeasurably ever since.

In the words of Billy Bragg, 'The Labour Party are completely failing to get their message across to young people...most people only come into contact with politics when someone comes knocking on their door before an election to ask their mum and dad how they are going to vote. We've got to get it right now.' (*Melody Maker*, 25 January.) Red Wedge's purpose is to overcome this.

Although committed to getting Thatcher out, not every one of Red Wedge's subscribers would put their emphasis on the Labour Party. Junior Giscome wants to fight black stereotyping, sexism is what brought Lorna Gee to join Red Wedge and Jerry Dammers came from his campaigning against apartheid in South Africa.

Paul Weller, from the Style Council, has said: 'My own hope is that we become important enough to be able to apply power and influence on the Labour Party to change what they think.' (*Melody Maker*, 25 January.)

We are going to hear a lot more of Red Wedge in the period leading up to the next general election. There are plans for a cabaret tour, a reggae DJs tour and a club tour. It involves many, many well-known bands and individuals.

Red Wedge hits the nightclubs, the concert halls and organises discussion forums, with Labour Party support, less than a year away from the end of the miners' strike.

It was the magnificent struggle of miners and their supporters that inspired many of the acts in Red Wedge to take to the stage during the strike in order to raise money and support the miners' struggle.

It has been that experience that has conditioned many artists' politics. As Billy Bragg said in the *Guardian*, it is 'a left wing alliance campaigning through the arts', to carry on where the metropolitan councils and the miners have been forced to stop.

In the eyes of nearly all the artists Red Wedge is at least an attempt to *do something* against the Tories and to bring

politics to young people who they feel are largely ignored by the 'politicians'.

Under criticism from Red Wedge are those who have refused to enter it—particularly the Socialist Workers Party members in the rock band, the Redskins.

Chris Dean, from the Redskins, said in a debate in *Melody Maker*, 'Red Wedge will not get the same kind of political response that benefits during the miners' strike did because during the strike there was a very strong, active political struggle. You are not relating to the same level of political activity when you are doing a tour around the possibility of a Labour government in three years time.' True.

But Red Wedge could be as big, and even as influential, as Rock Against Racism and the Anti Nazi League. With one qualification—they do not start from the same premise. RAR and the ANL were primarily about *activity*—about specifically getting the Nazis off the streets.

Billy Bragg draws parallels. He said that the ANL 'played an important part in halting the growth of the National Front', and that hopefully Red Wedge will stem the Tory tide and get Labour to power. A tall order.

Chris points to the shortcomings of Red Wedge and, as Martin Hewes, from the Redskins, pointed out in his article in *Socialist Worker* (1 February), there was very little political comment from the stage and no verbal criticism of Kinnock. There is a deliberate distinction between the political discussion, which takes place during the day in a forum, and the gig at night, 'where the music speaks for itself'. This in itself points to the fundamental flaw, and



## MARXISM & CULTURE

weakness, of Red Wedge. It is not specific—it does not point to concrete activity.

There can be no doubt that Red Wedge is, so far, loved by Neil Kinnock. It is his way of getting the message to youth and of attempting to stab at *Militant's* control of the Labour Party Young Socialists by making Labour's youth message, in his eyes, as broad and amorphous (and apolitical) as possible. But will the artists ultimately comply with Kinnock's wishes? They think not.

Chris also points to the *objective* political backdrop to the birth of Red Wedge. There is no longer a struggle like the miners' strike—a strike which influenced many, many people. Yet there are still workers fighting—from the women at Contracts in South Shields to the print workers in Fleet Street.

Martin said in *Socialist Worker*, 'Billy Bragg and Paul Weller both understand the class nature of society and the sooner they begin to talk about it the less chance Red Wedge has of becoming another tool in Kinnock's ballot box.' Exactly.

Martin and Chris are right—to a certain extent. But they draw the wrong conclusions.

We should support Red Wedge as much as it supports those who are fighting this system, whether over racism or sexism or the picket line. We are not in favour of uncritical support for Neil Kinnock.

Paul Weller said to Chris Dean in *Melody Maker*, 'We have always said it is a broad movement. I'd work alongside a CP member, or an SWP member, or any group which I feel I have something fundamentally in common with.'

We do have a lot in common with Red Wedge. We want to see the Tories defeated and we want a Labour government all be it that our expectations for that government will be rather different to many in Red Wedge. But we have our differences too. I feel it is only by being a part of Red Wedge that we can show, in practice, our alternative to Kinnockism. By debate, by argument and by active support of independent working class struggle—but we have to be in there in order to do this. ■

# A broken dream

'And I thought, "My lord, one thing is certain, and that's that they'll make musicals one day about the glamour studded 1950's"' (*Absolute Beginners*).

Thirty years later a musical has indeed been made, based on the very novel from which the above is taken. The long-awaited release of Julian Temple's *Absolute Beginners* looks to secure Colin MacInnes's posthumous promotion from cult hero to household name, a status he briefly enjoyed in the late 1950s with the publication of his 'London novels'—*City of Spades*, *Mr Love and Justice*, and *Absolute Beginners*.

MacInnes's success lay in his feel for the period, his understanding of what was happening in a country in the midst of a post-war boom and which by the end of the decade was judged to have 'never had it so good'. Above all, it was a time of optimism and hope (however misplaced it might seem in retrospect).

Old prejudices and values were being eroded and new social currents emerging. It was the era of Osborne and the angry young men, and on the international scene of Poland, Hungary, the death of Stalin and the continuing decline of the British Empire as symbolised by the Suez debacle, *débauche*.

Immigration soared to meet the needs of the booming economy and before long the stench of racism began to pollute the atmosphere of Britain's cities.

It was this latter phenomenon which MacInnes dealt with in *City of Spades*, but it was *Absolute Beginners* which saw him getting to grips with the subject which really fascinated him—teenagers.

If MacInnes took to absurd lengths his belief in teenagers as *the* driving force which would sweep away the cobwebs of olde England, he nevertheless pinpointed, in *Absolute Beginners*, a very real social phenomenon.

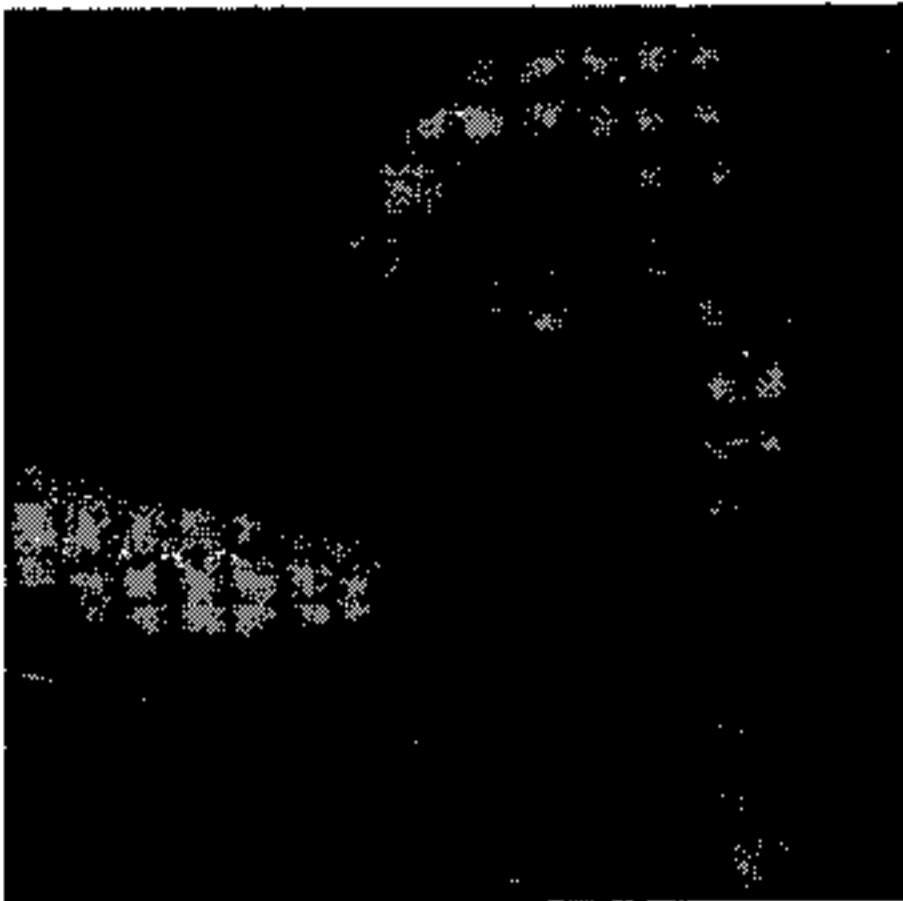
The relative affluence of the 1950s gave some teenagers a financial independence which their parents, brought up in the depression, could never have dared dream about. The unnamed hero of *Absolute Beginners* explains that the kids had money:

'which hitherto had always been denied to us at the best time in life to use it, namely, when you're young and strong...we found that no one could sit on our faces anymore because we'd loot to spend at last, and our world was to be our world...'

He also warps, however, that 'the newspapers and telly [had] got hold of the teenage fable and prostituted it' and teenage rebellion had indeed become big business, nurtured as it was by romantic celluloid images of James Dean getting drunk and abusing his parents in *Rebel*

*without a Cause* and a leather-clad, flick-knife wielding Marlon Brando posing menacingly in *The Wild One*. Not to mention rock and roll and cinema wrecking.

It was this new culture which MacInnes delved into. If Holden Caulfield (in *Catcher in the Rye*) epitomised alienated American youth then the teenage hero of *Absolute Beginners* was his English brother-in-spirit.



Colin MacInnes

For MacInnes's young hedonists style and 'coolness' were the main priorities. Anyone or anything suspected of being old or inhibiting—whether it be politicians ('parliamentary numbers') parents ('tax-payers') or the police ('cowboys')—was contemptuously dismissed. They withdrew into their own world of cafes, cappuccino bars and jazz clubs and, like their descendants, the mods, created their own language and code of conduct.

MacInnes's characters have names like the Wizard, the Fabulous Hoplike and Crepe Suzette. One of the few prosaic names in the book is reserved for a jazz loving Marxist (possibly based on Eric Hobsbawm, who wrote a jazz column for the *New Statesman* in the fifties) called Ron Todd!

This world was no fantasy creation of MacInnes's for he knew his subject intimately and regarded himself as a kindred spirit. Although into his forties by the middle of the decade, he lived as an 'honorary teenager', wearing the clothes, drinking in the bars and listening to the music.

It is the fact that MacInnes inhabited the same world as the teenagers of *Absolute Beginners* and the black immigrants of *City of Spades* which gives his writing its authenticity. Moreover, he doesn't patronize or merely tolerate, he identifies with and applauds youthful rebelliousness and non-conformity.

If *Absolute Beginners* is a 'teenage' novel, it is also a London novel. MacInnes's evocation of fifties London is affectionate

and intimate, particularly in the depiction of the hero's manor, 'Napoli', a nebulous area close to Notting Hill comprising parts of W9, 10 and 11 (the area 'that's got left behind by the Welfare State and the property-owning whatsit') and the reverential description of the bohemian mecca that was pre-sex shop Soho.

MacInnes's misplaced faith in the teenage dream led to bitter disappointment as the rebels of the fifties, having enjoyed their brief fling of semi-independence, became the respectable conformists of the sixties. He had been aware of the shortcomings of 'teenage neutralism and indifference to politics...their happy mindlessness' but this did not dilute his belief in the young generation.

His chief delusion, which he was not alone in holding, was that the class war had somehow miraculously disappeared in the 1950s. Old labels, such as left and right, were misleading, claimed MacInnes, and the old left in particular was irrelevant. He was especially disdainful of the 'dogmatic' Eric Hobsbawm whom he accused of puritanism and who, he said, 'disapproved of enjoyment, almost of imperfect life itself'.

For MacInnes, therefore, the new bonding, common denominator was not class but age. The evils of the world, such as the bomb and warfare in general, were perpetuated not by the ruling class but by *old* people.

When the *Absolute Beginner's* brother calls him a class traitor he retorts, 'I'm just not interested in the whole class crap that seems to needle you and all the tax-payers...'

What MacInnes missed, or rather chose to ignore, was the essentially superficial nature of the 'teenage revolution' (which didn't amount to much more than a revolt of clothes and musical taste) and the ability of capitalist society to absorb, tart-up and resell 'rebellion' to the next generation of disaffected youth. The class war proceeded, untouched.

Another defect in the scenario was MacInnes's cloudy notion of what 'youth' meant exactly. It was Richard Wollheim, a close friend, who detected an elitism in the lifestyle of the *Absolute Beginners* who buy their clothes at Cecil Gees, hang out at Ronnie Scotts and are generally disdainful of anyone who does not exhibit the appropriate amount of cool. Although unconventional, they are nevertheless successful, both financially and socially. Wollheim characterised them as an 'aristocracy' and it is quite clear that MacInnes was talking about a fairly narrow strata of fifties youth.

Although MacInnes regarded *City of Spades* as his 'novel about negroes', events, in the shape of the Notting Hill riots of 1958, persuaded him to return once again to the theme of immigration and racism in *Absolute Beginners*. This is where the novel gets really interesting, as the hero begins to realize that all is not rosy in the teenage garden. He sees his black friends persecuted and beaten up on the streets by

## Pioneers of the tradition

white youths, pilloried in newspaper editorials and finally observes with disgust the transformation of his erstwhile mentor, the Wizard, from streetwise hero to raving white supremacist.

MacInnes neatly contrasts the images of racial harmony at a Maria Bethlehem (Ella Fitzgerald) concert with the anti-black violence which breaks out the same evening.

But the Beginner is bemused by the insularity of the riot:

'Napoli was like a prison, or a concentration camp: inside, blue murder, outside, buses and evening papers and hurrying home to sausages and mash for tea.'

No doubt this reflects MacInnes's own puzzlement and inability to grasp that the riot area was enclosed not by a geographical but a class wall, in the same way that people can see no reason why there should be riots in Handsworth rather than Solihull or in Brixton and not Richmond.

But the significance of the riot was not lost on MacInnes—'My guess is that it will seem, with Suez, the key event of the post-war period.'

MacInnes himself was a life-long anti-racist, and after the Notting Hill riots he helped to set up, along with Johnny Dankworth, Cleo Laine and others, the short-lived Stars' Campaign for Interracial Friendship. Later on, in the sixties, MacInnes was to become involved with Michael X and his black protection organisation, Defence. His attitude, stated through the Absolute Beginner, is unequivocal:

'In the history books, they tell us the English race has spread itself all over the darn world...and that's one of the great, splendid English things. No one invited us, and we didn't ask anyone's permission. Yet when a few thousand come and settle among out fifty millions, we just can't take it.'

The optimism of the early part of the novel is dissipated as the Beginner, despairing of the hypocrisy and intolerance he sees around him, resolves to flee the country:

'What an age it is I've grown up in, with everything possible to mankind at last, and every horror too. And what a time it's been in England, what a period of fun and hope and foolishness and sad stupidity!'

But at the last minute he decides to stay in England and MacInnes retains some semblance of hope, and possibility for the future. *Absolute Beginners* brings the fifties to life and lays bare the hopes and disappointments, the dreams and realities of that period. If MacInnes's ideas were sometimes less than crystal clear he nevertheless knew the difference between dishonesty and truth, between integrity and hypocrisy.

Whether the film reflects this or whether it serves only to further inflate a bunch of already over-large pop stars' egos remains to be seen. ■

Simon Terry

**Against the Stream. A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1924-38**  
Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson  
*Socialist Platform* £5.95

THIS is a serious and substantial work. Although the publishers' claim that it is written 'from wholly unpublished material' is a considerable exaggeration, it is true that nowhere else is such comprehensive documentation brought together and the oral sources (recorded interviews) are uniquely rich.

Why, though, should today's reader be interested? The first Trotskyist organisation (the Communist League) dates from late 1932 and the book's coverage ends, more or less, with 1937. Such a short period and so long ago. There are three reasons why. First, as the authors say, we 'owe a debt to the people described in this book' because they maintained and transmitted the authentic revolutionary Marxist tradition in a time when it was nearly completely destroyed by Stalinism. Second, because it illuminates the problems of small revolutionary groups (very small by today's standards) in extremely adverse circumstances. Third, because the issue of entrism soon became central for the British Trotskyists of this period. It is still an issue and much can be learned from the experiences, both positive and negative, of the pioneers.

The book has two interesting chapters on the 'prehistory' of Trotskyism in Britain (1924-31) but, of course, it is with the Balham Group, which became the Communist League soon after the CP expelled Reg Groves, Harry Wicks, Hugo Dewar and ten others in 1932, that the story really begins.

The Communist League was oriented on the CPGB, in line with Trotsky's view that the task was to reform and reorientate the Comintern, and they had some success: 'By the end of 1933 they had accumulated 52 members.'

However, by that time Hitler was in power, the German Communist Party and the whole German workers' movement were smashed and Trotsky had completely reversed his position.

The central thrust of the Trotskyist criticism of the Comintern parties in the early thirties had been the call for a workers' united front against fascism, which involved rejecting the then Stalinist position that the reformist workers' parties were 'social-fascist' themselves.

The German disaster (and the Comintern's pretence that its line had been right all along) convinced Trotsky that the cause of 'reform' of the CPs was now hopeless. New parties and a new International

were needed.

This one hundred and eighty degree turn met with opposition at first in the British group (as well as in the others internationally) but it was the tactical consequences for Britain that produced the real conflict and the first split.

To understand this it is necessary to go back a little. In August 1931 Ramsay MacDonald, Labour Party leader and prime minister, had deserted (along with Snowden, Thomas and others) and formed a coalition with the Tories and Liberals. In the subsequent general election the Labour Party was routed.

Then the ILP, the most important non-trade union affiliate of the Labour Party, seceded (July 1932), moved sharply to the left and was soon talking of 'revolutionary socialism'. The CPGB, in line with Comintern policy, denounced the newly independent party as 'left social-fascist' and lost the chance of doubling or trebling its forces (the ILP took nearly 17,000 out of the Labour Party; the CPGB had then a little under 3,000) by its sectarian stupidity.

Here, surely, was a great opportunity for the little band of Trotskyists. Trotsky was quick to see it. In the late summer of 1933 he proposed that the British Trotskyists enter the ILP en bloc, abandoning their monthly paper in the process.

It is important to grasp that there was, as yet, no proposal to enter a reformist party. The ILP was described by Trotsky as 'left centrist' and, still more important, as 'moving leftwards'. The object of the entry was to win it, if at all possible. 'It is worth entering the ILP', Trotsky wrote, 'only if we make it our purpose to help this party, that is its *revolutionary majority* [emphasis in the original—DH], to transform itself into a truly Marxist party.' Of course, he allowed for the possibility that this maximum aim might well not be achieved; but, in the struggle to achieve it, at least a significant number of revolutionary-minded workers could be won.

A big majority of the 50 or so British Trotskyists rejected the idea. And here is a paradox and a lesson. The leaders of the Communist League, and a good number of their supporters, were working men and women who had five, ten or more years of active involvement in the class struggle.

They were very active in, and well-integrated with, the left wing of the labour movement in South West London. They had good and close relations with the local ILP people. Their activities are well described in the fourth chapter of *Against the Stream* and, more vividly, in Reg Groves' *The Balham Group* (first published in *International Socialism* 1973). They were

anything but sectarian. Yet for various plausible-seeming reasons, they rejected Trotsky's proposal.

A little group of young people, vastly less experienced and without roots in the working class movement, split away in December 1933, entered the ILP and set up shop as the Marxist Group within it. There were just 11 of them, led by an ex-LSE student, D D Harber.

There can be no doubt who was right. The Marxist Group grew to some 200 within a year. The Marxist League (as the old majority soon became) stagnated. It was a vivid demonstration of the fundamental importance of a realistic perspective and tactical flexibility. The Marxist Group seized a fleeting opportunity which led, if not to fortune, then at least to a three figure membership.

However, this first entry—the most successful of all—produced its own problems. Maximum success was gained very quickly. The ILP was slowly disintegrating under the twin pulls of Stalinism (as the CP moved out of its ultra-left phase and grew) and reformism (as the Labour Party revived strongly in 1934).

Trotsky quickly realised that the centrist mish-mash that was the ILP had no future and offered no further prospects for growth by the revolutionaries. He urged a break with it and an orientation on the Labour Party, which, given the relationship of forces, could only mean entry into it.

The leaders of the Marxist Group, now dominated by a brilliant and dynamic recruit, the West Indian C L R James, refused to recognise that yesterday's perspective was now a nonsense. The group became factionalised and started to splinter.

Harber, almost alone this time, broke away and joined the Labour League of Youth at the end of 1934. Around him, a third Trotskyist organisation—the Bolshevik-Leninist Group—was created. The Marxist League also turned to the Labour Party and particularly to the Socialist League, the then organised Labour left. Groves, especially, soon became prominent in it.

None of this activity reproduced the gains of the first years. Although the relationship of forces between the three groups altered over time, this was largely a result of transfers of allegiance by members. There was no net growth.

There are a number of reasons for this. The mere existence of three rival groups, all proclaiming exactly the same politics in their rival publications and divided on purely tactical questions, is one. Another is the growth of institutionalised factionalism, a product of the conflicts and splits, but outliving them. Another is the strength of reformism in the Labour Party.

One reason, though, overshadows all others—the growth of Stalinism and the Moscow Trials. Trotskyism had already

been denounced as counter-revolutionary in the early thirties. Now, with the trials and confessions, it was portrayed as an ally of Hitler and the Trotskyists as Hitler's agents.

With the Popular Front line, the CPs grew fast. The Spanish Civil War, the International Brigades, the successes of industrialisation in Russia, the obvious and growing expansion of Nazi Germany, all strengthened the appeal of Stalinism. The Trotskyists were marginalised even where (as in Britain) they could not be murdered.

When the three groups were eventually re-united in the second half of 1938 their claimed total membership was 200, less than the combined total in late 1934. Moreover, as events were to prove, many of them were so 'hooked' on entrism that they could not break with it even when, from 1940 on, it was ludicrously inappropriate.

Nevertheless, the positive achievement, although very modest, was real. We are the descendants of these pioneers. If their errors sometimes seem gross, we should remember that hindsight is easy. Without their efforts, without their continuation of a living tradition under enormous difficulties, we should not be where we are today. ■

Duncan Hallas

## Settling accounts

*Loyalties*

Raymond Williams

*Chatto and Windus £9.95*

THE lives of a group of communists from the 1930s through to the miners' strike of 1984 are the subject of this novel.

Raymond Williams is a Marxist. He is also a leading academic on cultural issues. If it does nothing else this book disproves the old adage that those who can't do, teach.

The Spanish Civil War, Hungary in 1956, Grosvenor Square in 1968, and the miners' strike are the events in which we see the characters participate. These events alter their lives.

The loyalties of the title are the loyalties to your friends and your class, your country and your party.

The real theme of the novel is the power and decline of Stalinist politics—and the corruption of the loyalties that went with them, loyalty to the Communist Party, loyalty to the USSR.

This is a critical settling of accounts. But it is an account written by someone who sees that world from the inside, not a political opponent, in other words, not a Trotskyist.

It is an account which is often sympathetic when it should be harder in its judge-

ments. But this weakness is paradoxical. For it allows us to see the real attraction, the real circumstances which brought all but a small section of the left into the orbit of Stalinism.

In doing all this the book deserves praise immeasurably higher than most of what passes for left-wing fiction. In particular it is in a wholly different class to those highly praised socialist detective novels in which political issues are simply introduced as local colour to whet the palate of Hampstead socialists. Here the whole dynamic of the book depends on great events and crises, not only in the lives of its characters, but in the lives of all of us.

In attempting to weld history to personal history, character to society, and to preserve the individuals from becoming simply political ciphers, this novel is attempting a great deal. It does not always succeed. But far better to aim at Naples and miss than to hit Margate.

The concerns and tone of *Loyalties* mirror those of Edward Upward's trilogy of novels and it deserves to be ranked alongside them.

But a central weakness remains: while Williams knows what is wrong with the Stalinist tradition and what remains important for socialists—the working class struggle—a strategy is missing. His characters of the post-war generation reject the old loyalties of their parents, are all socialists, are too clever not to know that a strategy is necessary but not what it is.

'I'm keeping an open mind,' is the best we get from one central character. But an open mind, while in many ways an admirable thing, results in permanent and chronic indecision if pushed beyond its limits. And politics is not like a discussion in a Cambridge common room. Time and decisiveness are at a premium. ■

John Rees

## Unclear pictures

*A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889, Volume II, 1911-33*

H A Clegg

*Oxford University Press £40*

THIS study is a companion to a first volume covering the years 1889-1910 written by H A Clegg, A Fox and A F Thompson.

Like the first volume, the present achieves a tremendous task of organising and arranging a vast amount of material, giving a comprehensive account of the subject.

A couple of reviewers of the first volume put it in the same class as *A History of Trade Unionism* written by Sidney and Beatrice Webb and published in 1894. In terms of



comprehensiveness and reliability the analogy fits. However the Webbs' book was far superior. The Webbs were pioneers in giving a clear description and analysis of the trade union bureaucracy. (The Webbs admired the bureaucracy precisely because of its conservative role.)

Clegg's book does not give a clear picture at all of the trade union bureaucracy; or, the other side of the coin, the rank and file striving to get out of its control. This defect is especially irritating in a volume that covers the period of the Labour Unrest, 1910-14, the great mass struggles of 1919, and the general strike of 1926.

A straight reading of Clegg's book will be of little use, but as a support for studying trade unions and trade union struggle for the period it covers, it is of very good value. Clegg's book, being of impeccable scholarship, will be of use to anyone doing research work. ■

Tony Cliff

## The war against war

**Don't be a Soldier! The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-1918.**

Ken Weller

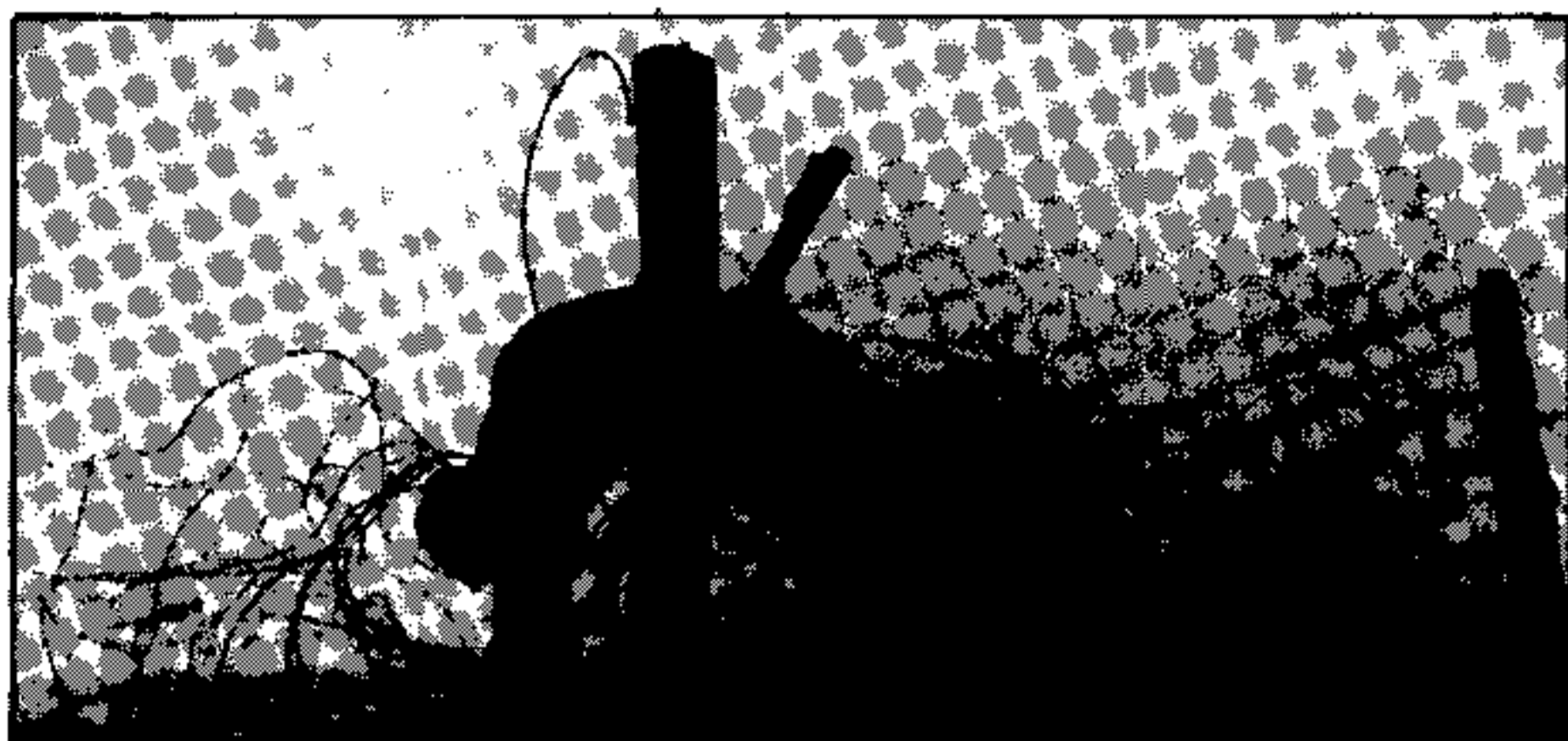
*The Journeyman Press/London History Workshop £3.25*

IN HIS immensely interesting and well written work Ken Weller traces the anti-war movement from its origins in predominantly industrial disputes at the beginning of the century through to the post-war labour disputes and growth of the Labour Party. Although his research is based in North London most of the trends he discusses were nationwide.

He begins by describing the split in the socialist movement over the Boer War of 1899-1902. This war was obviously imperialist—it was the height of the 'rush for Africa' yet many 'socialists' including the Fabians, supported it. They were to do the same in 1914.

The last few years before the war witnessed enormous industrial upheaval. In 1912 alone well over 40 million working days were lost due to strikes. Along with this unrest a wide range of socialist groups emerged who dismissed parliamentary and municipal manoeuvres and stressed direct action. During the build up to the war these groups were actively campaigning against it.

As late as August 1914 even the official Labour leadership were involved in the anti-war agitation and participated in a rally at Trafalgar Square. Keir Hardie and Arthur Henderson demanded: 'Workers stand together for peace! Combine and conquer the militarist enemy and the self-



seeking imperialists today, once and for all... Down with class rule. Down with the rule of brute force. Down with the war.'

Two days later war was declared and the rhetoric rapidly disappeared. The Labour Party and the TUC actively supported recruiting while the trade unions declared industrial peace and abandoned strike action. Later, the Labour Party joined the government and Arthur Henderson became a member of the War Cabinet!

With the outbreak of war, jingoism became rampant and war protesters were isolated and vilified, risking their life and limb in order to continue the protest. Weller describes the atmosphere very well as these people were 'struggling against the current...subjected to attacks on their meetings, treated as pariahs or victimised at work, harassed at home or localities where they lived, having their children assaulted at school, and, if they were 'aliens', becoming victims of racist attacks in the streets.

He includes very vivid descriptions of how meetings were attacked. One instance was particularly vicious—about 8,000 people attacked a meeting of 350 anti-war campaigners in the Brotherhood Church. One man was repeatedly assaulted. 'With blood streaming down his face he was attacked again and again. He eventually took refuge in a furniture van, and the police finally acted—they grabbed him and threw him back to his attackers.'

Some things haven't changed much! These attacks were repeated nationally with the authorities either turning a blind eye or becoming actively involved in the attacks.

Strikes during the war were very bitter. In May 1915, 7,000 tram men went on strike for a war bonus. On one day alone eight trams were smashed up outside Archway depot and scabs were assaulted.

In this book Weller concentrates his attention on the North London Herald League. This was a loosely-knit organisation based around the *Daily Herald*, a paper which began as a strike paper of the London compositors in 1911. During the militancy before the war the organisation grew rapidly and by 1914 virtually every major population centre was covered.

The League was committed to anti-war

struggle and also involved in campaigns such as tenants' struggles and supporting the Dublin Easter Rising in 1916. The League was an umbrella organisation covering a wide range of views and organisations from the Workers Socialist League and anarchist groups through the Socialist Sunday School. The only thing that bound the members together was opposition to the war either from a pacifist standpoint or militant anti-imperialism.

On the 'left' as a whole there was a mixture of often confused ideas, as expressed by George Rose in *The Communist* in 1919: 'We identify ourselves with the Third International, with the Communism of Marx, and with the personification of the spirit of revolt, Bakunin, of whom the Third International is but the natural and logical outcome.' Bakunin was a major anarchist figure and Marx spent a great deal of effort repudiating his ideas.

As the war progressed and more and more men arrived home in coffins or wounded, the atmosphere changed and activists involved in anti-war groups became popular. In particular wounded soldiers streamed into the League.

When peace was declared the disparate elements of the Herald League caused it to disintegrate. Without the common thread of anti-war activity and propaganda keeping them together, political differences soon came to the fore and by 1929 the League was no more.

Although many members became active in political parties such as the Independent Labour Party or the Communist Party, formed in 1920, many also dropped out of politics completely. The greatest beneficiary, however, was almost certainly the Labour Party, even though its war record was abysmal.

The anti-war struggle did, however, play an enormously important role in radicalising a generation of socialists who witnessed at first hand the brutality and barbarity of the system they were living in. Through involvement in the struggle many went on to defend the Bolshevik Revolution in the 'Hands Off Russia' movement and helped lay the basis for the massive wave of industrial and social unrest following the war. ■

Lesley Hoggart

## Course for change?

I WOULD like to make a number of points about Paul Ahmed's article 'Changing Course' (February *SWR*). As revolutionary socialists we are active anti-racists. This involves challenging racist remarks and jokes, arguing against racism with people at work or college, pushing our unions to fight back against racism and racial harassment, supporting the right of black people to defend themselves and going on strike against racist practices—whether they be from management or other workers.

However, we recognise that the divisions created by racism are developed and perpetuated in capitalist society and that in order to smash racism we have to smash capitalism and build a society where goods are produced for need and all people are treated equally. How does racism awareness training fit this perspective?

Frankly, if you live outside London or one of the other big cities and you don't work in local government or education, racism awareness training is likely to be something you haven't heard of. RAT works on the assumption that racism is a white problem, that white people are inherently racist and that our only option is to examine our own racism.

RAT also argues that because British capitalism has benefitted from the exploitation of black people—particularly through the slave trade—white workers have also benefitted from the exploitation of black workers. White workers in Britain may have higher wages and living standards than black workers in South Africa, for example, but despite the attempts of the ruling class to argue otherwise, as white workers our interests, like those of our black sisters and brothers in Britain or elsewhere, lie in fighting back together, not lining up with the bosses or government.

RAT doesn't operate on class lines, but on individual feelings and experiences. How otherwise could health authorities hold racism awareness training courses for senior managers, then, confident that they have confronted their own racism, implement privatisation policies which mean redundancies for large numbers of black workers? The way we fight against redundancies, privatisation, low pay, racial discrimination and

harassment is by collective action. At Ford Dagenham, when two foremen circulated a racist questionnaire, the demand wasn't for them to be sent on a racism awareness training course, but for them to be sacked.

Paul's right when he says we must always take the opportunity to have discussions with people and of course we don't argue against firms putting on racism awareness training, but I don't think we should be arguing for them to do so either. Many trade unions are organising anti-racist training courses and are including tackling racism on shop stewards courses—these are much healthier places for us to argue against racism and develop strategies for fighting back against it. ■

Maggie Falshaw  
Barking

## Positively complex

WHILE glad that you published Norah Carlin's serious article, 'Let's be positive' (January *SWR*), I found that the article presented too uncritical an analysis of positive discrimination.

The concept is more complex than Norah shows. She concentrates on the issue of reserved places for women in the trade union bureaucracy, but positive discrimination will be used in many different ways in different circumstances.

For example, we are not likely to support demands, under the banner of positive discrimination, for separate Muslim girls' schools or all-black schools, as at the moment such demands are likely to reinforce reactionary ideas and practices. On the other hand, I hope that we would critically support a campaign for increased access to the state education system for such specific groups and many others, although probably not instigating such a campaign ourselves.

Again, Norah does not draw out that positive discrimination involves management keeping ethnic records to discover whether and what 'imbalances' exist. Leaving aside the significant problem of how to measure such 'imbalances', if they are shown to exist, do we demand that management prefer a black or woman with 'equal qualifications' or rather merely with the minimum qualifications necessary for the job? Do we want to get involved in such questions at all?

The advocacy of positive

discrimination in this period encourages an explanation for its failure in terms of 'whites' and 'men' rather than class. It can also encourage a belief in changing the system's inherent racist/sexist practices from above. It is a classic example of the search for short term solutions.

Paul Ahmed's article on racism awareness training (February *SWR*) suffers from similar problems. He suggests that we should welcome such training as anti-racist.

In so far as anti-racism implies

an active commitment to challenging institutionalised racism, racism awareness training represents an opposing approach, in that it turns racism into an individual problem. That is not to say that socialists do not participate in and argue for such programmes. But we really have to distinguish more carefully between initiatives which we do not actively oppose and assuming that this implies a welcome or support for them. ■

Merilyn Moos  
North London



## More Marx less soul

WHY is it that we are able to fill a weekly paper, a monthly review and a quarterly journal with articles giving our distinctive view of everything from modern Russia to free range eggs, but when it comes to culture, we trail along behind the Stalinist/Eurocommunist tradition? This may be no bad thing—the Eurocommunists have so much to say about culture because they have so little to say about anything else.

But is it really the case that we do not have a distinctive view of culture, or is it that we choose not to present one? We certainly have the elements of such a view—Paul Foot's book on Shelley uses the revolutionary socialist viewpoint to create an original view of poetry. Many moons ago there was Paul O'Flinn's *Them and Us in Literature*, and his more recent analysis of Orwell. We have Ian Birchall's occasional erudition on popular culture. We have Chris Dean's analysis of the current music scene, and of course we do have a distinctive view of the Eurocommunist view of culture.

What we lack is a coherent theory. Now I am not suggesting that SWP members should scratch around until they find

one—theories only arise out of the need for them.

But there is also an element of wilful resistance about this failure to produce a coherent view of culture. While the party line's away, the comrades will play. Whim and prejudice are insufficient tools for an analysis of Russia or of the TUC, but they seem to be quite adequate for a critique of culture.

Who for instance could possibly take seriously Eamonn McCann's theory that rock and roll was revolutionary when he was young (whenever that was) but isn't any more; or Noel Halifax's roll-neck pullover critique of McColl and Seeger's attempt to raise money for the miners?

If we do not think culture is very important, then let's give over the pages of this review to other subjects and stick to the odd jokey letter as our contribution on the subject. But if we seriously intend to juxtapose Marxism and culture, then shouldn't we begin by analysing others who have also tried to juxtapose them, starting off with, say, Marx and Engels and moving through to Trotsky and Lukacs? This could be accompanied by a critique of

those who have attempted to put socialist ideas into cultural practice—Mayakovsky, Brecht, Serge and so on.

This would not constitute a theory, but would at least represent a coherent collection of articles, out of which genuine debate might arise. Otherwise the present series looks all set to dribble away to nothing, while the only subject of cultural debate in the *Review* will once again be soul music. ■

Steve Devereux  
Bolton

## A matter of time?

CHRIS GLENN'S article, 'The Patios Poet' (February, *SWR*), contains some insulting remarks. I must leave it to others more knowledgeable than myself to respond to his insinuations regarding Linton Kwesi Johnson and West Indian culture, but I can't allow his misleading account of C L R James' work to pass without comment.

Glenn states that James 'mistakenly insisted' upon the inevitability of the victory of socialism, a mistake that he opposes with the necessity of political organisation, an activity that CLR allegedly 'neglected'.

C L R James dealt with the arguments of those revolutionaries who rejected the inevitability of socialism 40 years ago. The question is a *class* question. In other words, it is rooted in the inner necessity of capitalist contradictions and its proof lies in human activity; specifically, working class activity. To reject the idea as a 'mistake' is to reject history.

The inevitability of socialism 'is a consciously constructed necessity of thought' without which 'thinking among those hostile to bourgeois society must become a form of scholasticism and agnosticism, self-agitation and caprice' (*Spheres of Existence* page 79). An excellent description of the thinking of much of today's revolutionary left.

The denial of the inevitability of socialism finds its logical conclusion in the denial of the capacity of the working class to solve the barbaric contradictions of modern society. This is not to argue that the working class will spontaneously achieve socialism through economic action, but that we must recognise the political content of working class struggle rather than theoretically separate that struggle from politics.

CLR's position is based on his profound work on the Marxist dialectic (ie the class struggle), theoretical and practical work. As I understand it, that position states that the Marxist party, as a form of political organisation, may well have a role to play under modern conditions but not a *decisive* one; what is decisive is the development of the independent self-activity of *all sections* of the class.

Chris Glenn would do well to study more closely what C L R James has to say about socialism—it may save him and his colleagues from alienating people from the SWP, an organisation that ought to be showing solidarity with the independent action of the increasingly revolutionary black community. ■

Don Watson  
South London

## The price of soap

THE article by Noel Halifax (January *SWR*) was excellent. Soap opera has become part of mass popular culture, and it needs to be treated as such.

Noel dealt with the reasons why soap connects with working people, but he failed to touch on why they are produced in the first place. TV companies don't produce good soap like *EastEnders* because they are concerned with moral, social and cultural questions of society, and they (the TV companies) like to help people to solve these questions. They do it because they are involved in capitalist competition.

The TV ratings dictate exactly what company programmers think in relation to the screening of programmes. The form and content of soaps are decided by the need to make a profit, not by what the people want. Noel was so right when he said of soap, 'They are the valium of the people.' What television is saying to working people is, 'Yes, you can involve yourselves in moral, social and cultural problems of our society, but do it in this pre-washed, pre-shrunk passive way, and leave the direct responsibility of society to those with power.'

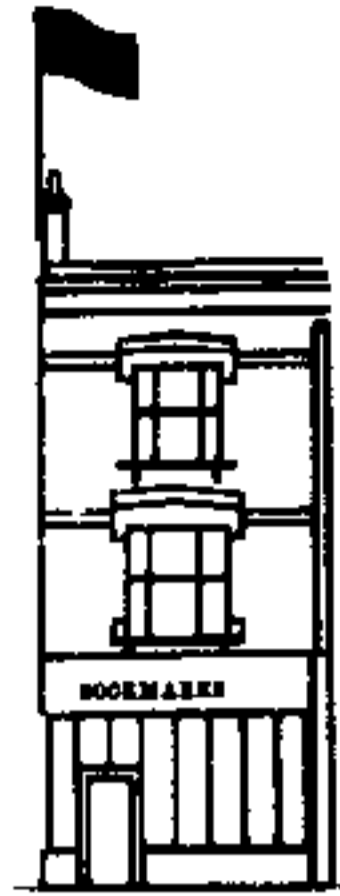
Having said all this, comrades, does it mean that with socialism soap opera as light entertainment will disappear, or will we have a twice weekly offering of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Soviet?* ■

Lesley Davies  
Salford

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# The darkest days

**MARGARET DEWAR** left Germany 50 years ago in 1936. Hitler had just occupied the Rhineland, Germany was starting to remilitarise and the working class was shattered. Margaret explained to *Socialist Worker Review* the difficulties revolutionaries faced in trying to organise against a background of working class defeat, fascism and the threat of war.

I had joined International Workers' Aid in 1930. This was a Communist front organisation run by Willi Muenzenberg, who had been an important leader of the Communist youth movement. It organised sympathisers for the Communist Party into supporting strikes, fund raising and so on.

We would meet once a week. I became a fulltime office worker for this organisation.

From there it was a natural progression to join the party itself, which I did in 1931. Although the party was pursuing a sectarian policy towards the Social Democrats, it was also a massive organisation. It received millions of votes at elections. So it was easy to hide this sectarianism since it was a mass party.

Nobody really argued about the politics of the social-fascist line (the line taken by the Communist Party that the Social Democrats were as great a danger to working class organisation as the fascists themselves). At most a few people would discuss it in private. But I was not aware of any important disagreements. Certainly nobody raised it at the weekly branch meetings we had in Berlin, which were dominated mainly by organisational detail and basic Marxist education.

Hitler's coming to power in January 1933 was a complete shock. The worst thing was that the party did not respond. We were not told to do anything. I was based in an area next to Wedding, the famous working class area of Berlin, where there had been street clashes with the Nazis.

There was no response from the party. The meetings just stopped, we lost contact with each other. Before, people from the branch (ours had around 20 members) would come and ask what was wrong if you didn't turn up to a meeting, or they would leave a note. Now all this stopped. Really it was not me that left the Communist Party, but the Communist Party that left me.

There were fresh elections in March where the Communist Party still managed almost five million votes. I was not aware of any campaigning at that time. I myself was not involved in any. The mass arrests only started when the party was banned after the election.

Organised activity was impossible at that time. The most important thing was to

think over our ideas, to find an explanation for the disaster in Germany. At that time I would meet with four or five others, most of whom had been members of my branch in Berlin. One or two were already Trotskyists. The rest of us came over gradually.

This was mainly due to the influence of Jan Bur. He was the most energetic of us, the inspiration of the group. He organised the literature from abroad and went out of the country for conferences a couple of times.

Our activities were internal. We didn't try to increase our numbers. The situation was too dangerous, Communists were being thrown into prison or concentration camps. We would get Trotskyist literature via Czechoslovakia and pass it from comrade to comrade.

The leaflets we produced would be to clarify our arguments among ourselves. Then we would meet and discuss politics. The most important questions for us were whether to set up a Fourth International (to break from the old Communist International), and the nature of Russia.

Our little group thought that it was absurd to set up a new international workers' party because our numbers were so few. We were confused about Russia but we did not accept that it was any kind of workers' state at all.

One thing we could organise was sending food parcels to comrades in the concentration camps or in prison. Our meetings, of course, had to be held in secret.

If you arranged to meet someone in the street, on a corner, you would make sure you were on time. It was too dangerous to wait around. Sometimes you met a comrade who would look the other way. You would walk on, ignoring them because it meant that they thought that they were being watched.

We were inspired by the fight back of the workers in Austria against the Nazis in 1934 even though they were defeated. The frustrating thing was that we could do nothing about it. We couldn't tell anyone what we felt or organise anything.

At that time I had a job at the Russian trade delegation. I was born and brought up in Russia and so could speak the language. I worked at the job from mid-1933. It enabled me to help fund our group, since it was well paid.

What struck me as strange was that when you were talking with one of the Russians individually they were open and friendly and would talk about events in Germany. But they would shut up if there was more than one of them in the room.

When I joined the Communist Party we didn't of course realise what was going on in Russia. We had a high regard for the achievements of the Russian workers and

peasants.

In the International Workers' Aid we had organised films. We would show things like Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* or something which portrayed the heroic work going on in Russia. One such film was *Turksib* about the building of the Turkestan to Siberia railway. We knew about the Five Year Plan which had been brought in in 1929 and regarded it with enthusiasm.

I lost my German citizenship (which I had acquired in 1926) in common with many others in 1934. In February 1936 I was approached by the Gestapo to supply them with information from the trade delegation. In return they would return my citizenship.

The international situation was hotting up. Stalin had signed a treaty with France earlier that month. I didn't like what was happening in Russia but of course I didn't want to spy for the Nazis. So I determined to leave for Czechoslovakia, which I did a few weeks later in early April.

When I got to Prague I found that the German Trotskyists were separated from the German-speaking Czechs (the only ones we could understand) by the Trotskyist organisation there. This was for security reasons. We would have been under suspicion from the Czech authorities and it would have put the comrades at risk.

In Czechoslovakia we discussed the major issues of the day such as the Popular Front and the Spanish Revolution. But it was even worse than Germany because we had no contacts and were restricted to chats in cafes.

To compound my isolation the Stalinists in Czechoslovakia accused me of being a Nazi spy. They had seen me speaking with other Trotskyists and knew about my job with the trade delegation. The allegations were published in the most prominent Czech newspaper, *Lidove Novotny*, the Czech version of *The Times*.

I protested to the editor who set up an enquiry. None of the Stalinists turned up but they were forced into a retraction. All the refugees used to spend a lot of time in the cafes discussing politics. They were from all shades of the left, not just revolutionaries. Now, despite the retraction, they had heard the rumours about me and would walk out as soon as I sat down at one of the tables.

By 1937 war had been clearly imminent for some time. I remember one grim joke amongst the arms production workers when I was still in Germany: 'They say we are making prams for little babies, but strangely enough they seem to be turning into tanks.'

I didn't want to remain any longer. It was impossible to do any political work. I had the opportunity of going to England so I left in August 1937 and reached England via Paris. ■

*Margaret Dewar was interviewed by Andy Zebrowski.*