

socialist worker Review

April 1987

Issue 97

60p



ANGER AND AUSTERITY

An eyewitness account from
Brazil and Argentina
Plus Gramsci—50 years on
Labour and Gays, Football takeovers

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Subscription rate for one year:
Britain and Ireland £8
Overseas surface £9
Europe Air £11
Elsewhere Air £14.50
(institutions add £7.50)

Cheques and postal orders payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers.

Socialist Worker Review is sent free to all prisoners on request.

ISSN 0141 2442

Printed by East End Offset Ltd (TU), London, E3.



Kinnock: the road to nowhere?

AFTER GREENWICH

Time to panic?

AFTER EIGHT years of Thatcher you would think there would only be one question on the lips of everyone anticipating the next election: how big will Labour's majority be?

Yet the reality is that this is the one question nobody is asking. Can the Tories get back in or will there be a hung parliament? This is the question all the pundits are asking.

How can this situation have arisen?

Since 1979 the Labour left has had a very simple answer. Labour should put forward left policies, offer a socialist alternative and it is bound to do well.

In reality this argument has always been flawed. The low level of class struggle and the general shift to the right have meant that socialist ideas have been the property of a minority fighting against the stream.

In the pages of this journal we have always maintained this task to be a central one but never believed it offered a solution to Labour's electoral problems.

Indeed we argued that as long as the lefts put electoralism first there would come a point where the reality of the rightward shift in society as a whole would conflict with this optimism.

Added to this is the fact that the other main strategy of the Labour left, that of fighting the Tories through controlling local councils, ended in disaster, leaving them directionless.

A rightward moving process had therefore been taking place for some time, but there is no doubt that Greenwich marked a

sharp turning point, the full left surrender to Kinnock.

Following the Greenwich by-election result the infamous Hewitt letter was leaked. Hewitt's attack on "loony lefts" in general, and on the gay issue in particular, was disgraceful.

Yet the Labour left's response was one of thundering silence. It was followed by Kinnock's remarkably cool volte-face on Cruise missiles, which we deal with in more depth elsewhere in these notes.

Once again the left's silence was worse than shocking. The TV programme *A Week in Politics* reported that only one Labour MP, Jeremy Corbyn, was willing to appear on it to criticise Kinnock's stand.

Corbyn's explanation for his glorious isolation was that the rest of the Labour left were too busy dealing with the details of the budget, and hadn't had time to respond.

As if this abject surrender to Kinnock were not embarrassing enough, the sad fact is, it may all be for nothing!

For just as the belief that if Labour moved left, they would win, was built on sand, so is the Kinnockite notion that if you keep moving to the right sooner or later the votes will fall into your lap.

Labour is caught between on the one hand a low level of class struggle, which means ideas shift to the right, and on the other hand the Alliance, which restricts its room to manoeuvre to the right.

This then is the situation facing us, and it is important not to underestimate the problem. No socialist welcomes the defeat of the Labour left by Kinnock, just as no socialist welcomes the defeat of Labour by the rotten right wing politics of the Alliance.

By the same token though, it is important not to overestimate the problem. The working class is on the defensive, in retreat, something the Labour left resisted recognising for some years.

The working class has not been smashed, however. It simply is not the case that there is a massive shift in the balance of class forces.

Even on electoral terms this is not the case. The major shift seems to be from

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Will she win again?

Labour to the Alliance, and even the Tories to the Alliance, rather than from one of the main parties to the other.

This is reflected in much of what the Tories are doing.

Although their policies are undoubtedly anti-working class, it is still the case that their "radical" programme has been carried at a much slower and less ambitious pace than Thatcher and her ideologues would wish.

This has really been so since the miners' strike, because although the miners were certainly beaten it was at a far higher price than the Tories would have envisaged.

This in turn created a certain edginess amongst sections of the ruling class.

It is important to remember all this. It would be wrong to believe that the victory of anyone other than Labour represents the end of civilisation as we know it.

Of course socialists would much rather see a Labour victory. The best way to expose reformism is by putting it to the test in practice (although Kinnock has done better than most to expose these shortcomings while Labour is still in opposition).

There are many other reasons why socialists would not want to see a hung parliament, not the least of them being that it can provide an alibi for everyone. Each party can blame the other for the latest dirty deed being enacted.

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Nevertheless such parliaments can create a certain political instability.

One such example is provided by the convoluted efforts of successive Irish governments to get a tough budget through. Each opposition party, plus one of the parties of coalition, agreed with the budget, but for electoral reasons gave it a wide berth.

Such contradictions can present opportunities, and undermine ruling class strategy.

Even if the Tories are returned, it will not be the end of the world.

The Tories will have to try and reduce earnings. To do so they will need to confront a working class movement which is still intact, which still has enormous potential for struggle despite the real defeats it has suffered.

Just as class society cannot be legislated away, nor can class antagonisms and conflicts. They remain, regardless of elections.

The Labour left would do well to remember this in the depths of its current despair. ■

LABOUR AND DEFENCE

Cruise turn

IT LOOKED as if there could be no retreat on defence policy for Labour. Conference and the leadership were at one on the issue. Not only would an incoming Labour government get rid of Britain's nuclear weapons; it would also kick out the American bases.

No previous Labour policy had ever gone so far; and past Labour governments had always rattled on their limited commitments to contain the expansion of nuclear weaponry. Perhaps the next Labour administration would be different because



Saying goodbye to all that

Kinnock, unlike former Labour leaders (with the exception of Michael Foot) was a firm unilateralist.

True, there was the unpleasant side of Kinnock's unilateralism. As a better patriot than the Tories he was going to spend the money on more conventional weapons, not on hospitals or housing.

But on the question of Cruise missiles he seemed absolutely rock solid. The American bases would go.

All that was before the disastrous by-election in Greenwich. In the aftermath it has become clear that it is not only gay rights that are being sacrificed. Another electoral liability is for the chop.

It was former Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan who started it. No sooner had Patricia Hewitt's letter been leaked to the *Sun* than he started rocking the boat on the defence issue—just as he had during the 1983 general election.

His denunciation of Labour's official policy led to the famous tea-room row in the House of Commons with Labour's employment spokesperson John Prescott.

Prescott accused Callaghan of spoiling Labour's chances by dividing and weakening the party. Callaghan countered by saying that if the party had listened to him in 1983 maybe Labour would not have lost the election.

With the Tories attacking Labour as the party that would leave the country defenceless, and now Labour's own right wing joining in, what would Kinnock do? In 1983 Michael Foot, standing on a radical manifesto, had fudged. In 1987 Kinnock, with very few promises on anything, seemed bound to do the same.

After all, the whole point of asserting that the gay and lesbian issue is costing Labour dear with old age pensioners is to point to the party's extreme vulnerability on "extremist" issues. The same goes for "loony left councils". The humiliating result in Greenwich is being used to rub the left's nose in the fact that votes come before principles.

Ever since Kinnock's election as party leader he has spent his energies remorse-

lessly attacking the left for alienating public opinion. And the left has gone along with it. It retreated before the assault on *Militant* and Liverpool council; it is retreating now before the assault on gays.

Kinnock himself has presented economic policies designed to prove Labour's moderation and respectability. He has also stressed that there should be no fightback. "Better a dented shield than no shield at all" was his way of telling councils to make cuts in jobs and services rather than take on the Tories over ratecapping.

Again, the left has gone along with this. However, one exception to this moderation has been defence. Kinnock has never gone back on his commitment to a unilateral approach to nuclear weapons. Indeed, the left has put up with most of Kinnock's more obvious faults because of this.

Those of us with longer memories about Labour's actual record in office (secret modernisation of Polaris, for example, between 1974 and 1979) and fewer illusions in the Labour leadership's willingness to pander to electoralism took a cynical view. Since all the opinion polls suggested that unilateralism was a gift to the Tories, the question was not *if* Labour was going to abandon its commitment, but *when*.

Only one puzzle remained: how the hell was Kinnock going to do it? If you simply reverse your policy any benefit you may get for being moderate is immediately nullified by the charge of inconsistency and ineptness. The secret is always to reverse your policy but claim you haven't.

So with joblessness you abandon the goal of full employment but claim you are going to take one million off the register in two years. With wages policy you declare yourself against a Social Contract but make it clear that higher wage earners will have to show restraint.

That way you manage to keep some credibility among more class conscious workers but signal to both the ruling class and the floating voter that you don't intend to do anything extreme.

With an openly declared and publicly argued commitment to unilateralism that is

a bit difficult. Here was Kinnock with an electoral hot potato, the only one he has ever shown any inclination to hold on to. By his own electoral logic he should have dropped it a long time ago. There seemed no way of trying to reclaim the ground lost to the Alliance, whose defence policy (bar one or two slips) is much closer to traditional Labour thinking. Hence the puzzle.

Luckily Gorbachev has handed him the solution. Kinnock has now made it clear that in the context of negotiations between the superpowers to get rid of all intermediate nuclear weapons in Europe it would be inappropriate to press the Americans to remove Cruise from British territory.

Thus a responsible Kinnock can demonstrate his allegiance to NATO while claiming not to have abandoned his commitment to complete unilateralism for Britain—eventually. Yet does this new interpretation of Labour policy, which the Tories pounced on gleefully as evidence of a U-turn, differ from the kind of multilateralism the party used to hold? Denis Healey must be quietly smiling to himself.

Of course there remains a commitment to not replacing Polaris by Trident. But in essence that is the position held by the Alliance, even if the Liberals and the SDP are concocting their own messy little fudge about a Franco-British successor (maybe) to Polaris.

So Kinnock has achieved the apparently impossible and driven a coach and horses through what is still Labour's official policy. Whether that will benefit Labour's electoral chances remains to be seen. The Tories will be able to use the spectre of unilateralist defencelessness, while at the same time pointing to Labour's belated and perhaps only half-hearted conversion to reasonableness.

Probably the saddest element in all this is the reaction of CND and the Labour left. Far from furiously denouncing this retreat for the shameless treachery it is, they have expressed sympathetic understanding for Labour's dilemma. They say that nothing must be done to disturb the delicate negotiations that will take place between Russia and America.

They forget that no previous set of negotiations to reduce nuclear stockpiles has ever halted the arms race, and ignore the whole strength of the unilateralist case, which has always been to insist that we have to take the decisions ourselves, not put our trust in the deception of multilateral talks.

Nor is it clear whether anything will even come of Gorbachev's offer. Kinnock was not under any kind of pressure from the Americans or the military to make the offer he did on Cruise. His statesmanlike gesture was a symptom of his willingness, in the context of gaining votes, to jettison unilateralism now.

As for the left, it is a sign of their weakness that, as with gay rights, and whatever their private convictions on the issue, they are prepared to go along with Kinnock. There could be no more depressing verdict on the politics of electoralism. ■

TAX CUTS

Rewarding the rich

IF YOU have been earning ten times the national average wage for the past few years the amount you have to pay in direct taxes has dropped a staggering 15 percent. If, on the other hand, you've only been earning half the national average wage, then your taxes have increased by 2 percent.

But Nigel Lawson has been telling us that we're all paying less tax nowadays. So what are the facts?

When the Tories took office in 1979 they immediately reduced the basic rate of income tax paid by those on lowest incomes from 33 percent to 30 percent. At the same time they cut the top rate of tax, payed at that time by those earning over about £35,000 per year, from 83 percent down to 60 percent—a reduction of 23 percent.

Since then the basic rate has gone up and down depending on the government's requirements and economic analysis.

The top rate of tax has stayed largely the same. But of course income tax only represents part of the tax people from all wage levels have to pay.

National Insurance contribution (NI) also makes up a large part of personal tax, especially in the low and average wage brackets. In the bottom two tax brackets NI has increased substantially since 1979. So, while income tax has now worked its way back to about the same levels it was at after the first Tory budget, NI is now roughly 3 to 4 percent higher. As the *Observer* said on the Sunday after this latest budget, "most wage earners today pay out a greater percentage of their gross salary in statutory deductions than they did in 1979".

By "most wage earners" the *Observer* means everyone except the top tax brackets, who pay a good deal less as a percentage of gross wages in NI than the rest of us.

So much for direct taxes, what of indirect taxation. VAT has nearly doubled under the Tories. This increase means everyone, regardless of income, now pays twice the amount of tax on any item of food or clothing they buy. An unemployed person on £27 a week has to pay exactly the same amount for a loaf of bread as someone on £20,000, £40,000 or £90,000 a year.

Not only that, tax duties on cigarettes,

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"Bloody scroungers, bringing the country to its knees. What!"

beer and petrol have all increased enormously. Tax on beer is up 25 percent, on petrol 52 percent and on cigarettes by a gigantic 76 percent.

It's obvious who these tariffs hit hardest. Drinking and smoking are two of the main forms of relaxation open to those on average and below average wages. Indeed *Labour Research* have shown that the poorest 30 percent of the population pay more in tobacco duty than they do in income tax, a reflection both of the high tariffs on cigarettes and the low wage levels.

Meanwhile tariffs on wine and spirits have dropped by 28 and 22 percent respectively, fine if you've a well stocked drinks cabinet at home, but perhaps a little irrelevant if you don't.

Some forms of tax have in fact been abolished during the past few years. The investment income surcharge, the employers' national insurance surcharge and capital transfer tax are among those burdens that successive chancellors have removed from the backs of the rich.

In this latest budget the threshold for paying inheritance tax has been raised from

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£71,000 to £90,000, cutting by a third the number liable to pay it.

Thus the Tories claim that the country as a whole, when you include both the poor and the rich, is paying less tax. So where have Tory chancellors got the money from?

In 1986 tax cuts amounted to £8,100 million, of which 45 percent went to the wealthiest 10 percent of the population. In the same year £8,800 million was effectively "saved" by cuts in public expenditure.

This means there were fewer public service jobs like teachers and nurses. The pay of those in the public sector was held down to on or below the inflation rate. Social security benefit payments were cut and health service and prescription charges were increased.

Quite simply £8,800 million was taken from the sick, the unemployed and the low paid, and nearly £4,000 million was given to the super-rich. In this budget the government has pledged to continue "our objective of reducing steadily the state's share of the nation's income". For nation read the ruling class.

Lawson has cut the amount of money earmarked for public services to £4 billion. This means further restrictions on hospitals, schools, social services and other council amenities.

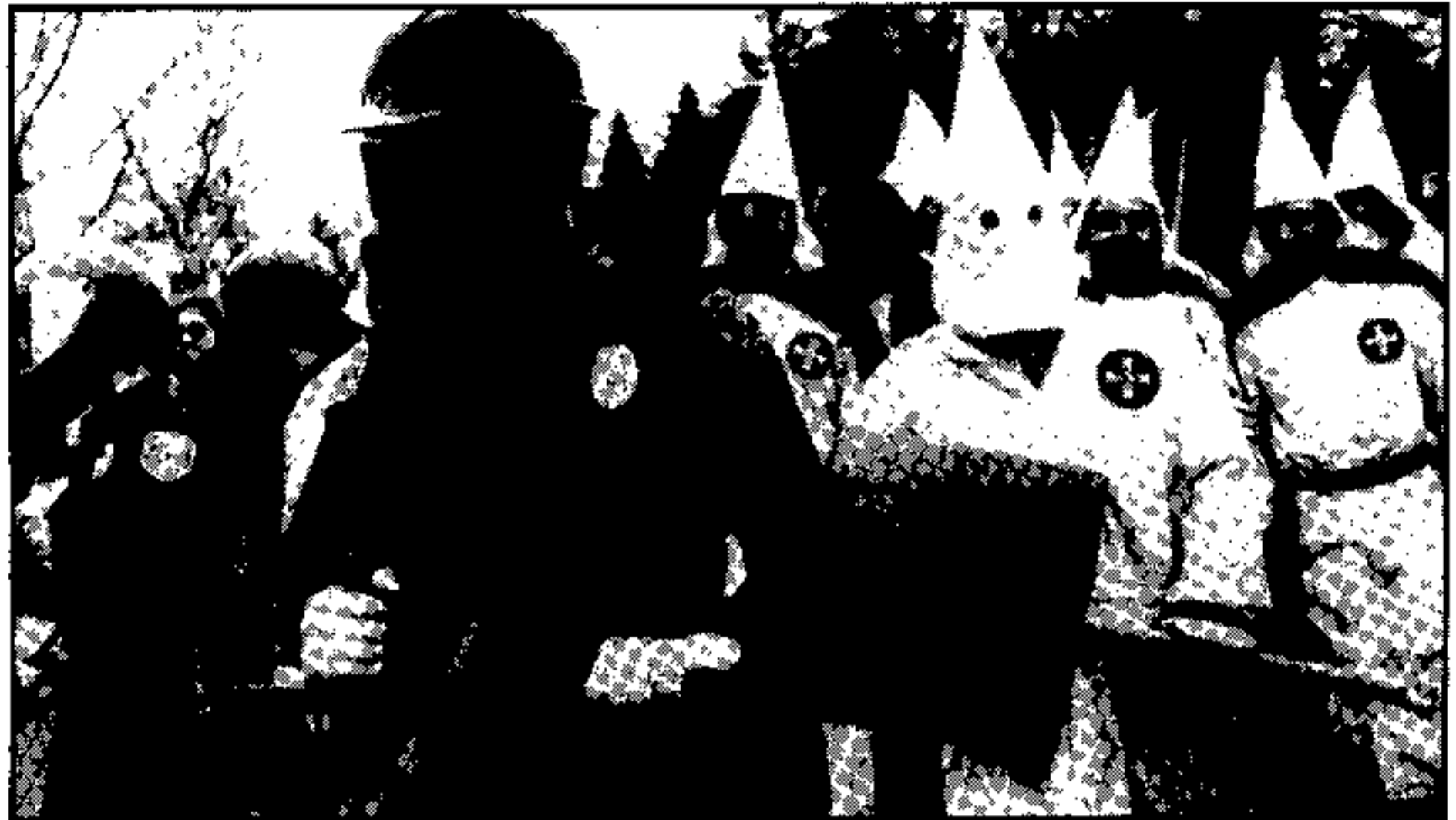
It also means higher rent and rates for those who can least afford it throughout the country. Meanwhile the rich get richer. ■

USA

Racism on the rise

A COUNTY demanding that it remain all white. A lynching. A black grandmother shot dead by a policeman who is later acquitted. A young white university student beaten up for being a "nigger lover".

It all sounds like something from the dim



The cops and the Klan

and distant past of the United States deep south. In fact it is the reality of the US north and south today.

The past couple of years in general, and the last few months in particular, have seen an increase both in racial discrimination and racist violence in the US.

To anyone living in Britain the events in Forsyth County, Georgia, will seem more like an account of South Africa than the US.

Thirty miles north of Atlanta, Forsyth has remained an all white area since 1912 when blacks were driven out or lynched following the alleged rape of a white woman by a black man.

Racists in the town demand that this situation remain. When some 300 black and white demonstrators marched through the town to commemorate the birthday of Martin Luther King they were met by a mob of several hundred including Ku Klux Klansmen who showered the marchers with bricks and bottles.

But it is not just in the south. Howard Beach is in the Queens district of New York. Three black men were walking through the area following the breakdown of their car.

Meanwhile white youths at a party were preparing for some "fun". "Let's go kill the niggers" was the rallying cry. Armed with baseball bats they set about the three blacks, and when one tried to escape they ran him down and killed him with a car.

In Tufts University, Massachusetts, a young white anti-racist is beaten up and dragged head first along a stone wall by fellow students who yell "nigger lover", "Jew boy" and "Commie pinko" at him.

In addition to this growth of racist attacks from gangs of young whites there is a steady increase in police violence against blacks.

In Tampa in Florida a young black was murdered by police who choked him to death.

A well known New York Mets baseball star, Dwight Godden, and his travelling companions were set upon by police in New York following a traffic violation. Twenty two policemen set about the five black men beating them with fists, knees, flashlights and night sticks.

Meanwhile one of the most notorious cases of New York police violence recently resurfaced with the "manslaughter" trial of the policeman involved.

In 1984 a 67-year-old black woman was shot dead when police went to evict her from a building for which she had fully paid her rent.

The policeman was one of six in the building but claimed he needed to shoot the arthritic woman in self defence because she had a knife.

Even if this were plausible, and it isn't, evidence has now shown that his first shot blew off her hand, knife and all. It was the second blast that killed her.

The response of the political establishment has been to support the cop, and New York cops showed their solidarity with this brutal killing when 10,000 marched to the District Attorney's office to protest against there being any prosecution.

All of this comes against a background of increased institutionalised racism, and the cynical use of racist prejudice by ambitious politicians.

For example, the newly elected Governor of Arizona, Evan Meacham, made the cancellation of a state holiday for Luther King's birthday his first official act.

Others are using the argument that affirmative action (positive discrimination) is really anti-white racism. Reagan and his supporters have always been at best lukewarm to the whole project.

Yet the figures speak for themselves. A third of all blacks officially live below the poverty line, three times the national rate.

The black male unemployment rate runs at 14.9 percent as opposed to the white male rate of 5.6 percent.

For all those who felt there was an electoral solution to the problem of blacks, the figures are particularly damning. There are today in the US over 250 black mayors, yet the general situation of blacks has deteriorated. This is well illustrated with the most notable example, that of Harold Washington, black mayor of Chicago.

It is true that some blacks have benefitted from Washington's spell in office. Black owned businesses have received a greater share of the administration's contracts. But this has been to

the benefit of the black business community, not black workers.

And although it is true that black and Hispanic workers make up a slightly greater percentage of the city's workforce than before Washington came to power—33.6 percent as opposed to 32.4—this has to be seen in the overall context of a 10 percent reduction in the city's workforce!

Washington has also tried to block public sector workers' right to strike, has crossed workers' picket lines, and has allowed the police to be used against strikes by private employers.

It is all a rather sad and salutary tale for those on the American left who believed Washington offered a real opportunity for change.

There is, however, a bright side to all of this. There has been a real response to the overt acts of racialism.

Following the attack on the 400 marchers in Forsyth County a follow up demonstration was called by anti-racists. Twenty five thousand black and white demonstrators turned up to oppose the "Keep Cumming White" movement.

This was much bigger than anybody had expected and was one of the most impressive and significant anti-racist demos in the States since the civil rights marches of the 60s. It also showed that the racists don't have it all their own way.

Again, following the death of the young black in Tampa, over 200 blacks took to the streets and fought pitched battles with police.

After the assault on the young student at Tufts 1,200 demonstrated against the racists.

These examples are an inspiration against the gloomy background of the growth of racism and provide a stark contrast to the failures of the electoral aspirations of the Rainbow Coalitionists.

It is in this self activity and black and white unity that the battle against racism will have to be fought. ■

SPAIN

Good times ahead?

THE SPANISH Socialist government is facing its biggest crisis since it first came to power in October 1982.

Growing discontent among workers was recently reflected by the election of members of the more militant trade union federation (the Communist Party led Workers Commission) as workers' representatives in a number of major engineering companies.

The government's 5 percent wage freeze has caused much anger. Last week rail and

building workers struck alongside workers in various manufacturing companies. And 21,000 miners in the Asturias have been striking for up to three days at a time against redundancies since February.

But the recent struggles do not only involve workers striking for better wages and conditions or against redundancies.

Doctors have also been striking against the government's public health policies—strikes which now involve nurses and other workers in every state hospital.

Farmers have been blockading major roads in protest at changes to agricultural prices following Spain's entry into the EEC last year.

And strikes and protests by university students demanding the government stop cutting courses, and free entry to further education, have now become nationwide.

Lastly the three year long struggle of farm workers in the south west, which has led to the arrest and jailing of hundreds for illegal land occupations, continues to cause alarm in government circles.

All these protests have been made sharper by the two month long fight of 6th form students for free entrance to further education and much higher student grants. This finally ended three weeks ago in a compromise deal between students' leaders and the government.

But the concessions made were still significant enough for other sections to see the possibility of winning demands themselves.

This is certainly the case for the leadership of the Communist Party, which now sees a chance of regaining the political credentials it had at the time of Franco's death in 1976.

It has been very much behind calls for a general strike. In fact the leadership's friends in the higher echelons of the Workers Commissions only narrowly lost a motion for a general strike in mid-March.

The government has yet to make any significant response to the situation. But one minister claimed the government could no longer tolerate violent demonstrations—a highly ominous statement given the recent vicious police attacks on a number of demonstrations.

The minister was, in fact, responding to the rather embarrassing incident at the northern town of Reinosa in mid-March, where hated Civil Guard squadists were captured by workers when the plastic bullets they were firing ran out.

The Civil Guard had been initially sent in to rescue the director of the town's main company. The man, also a socialist minister in the Basque regional government, was kidnapped when he announced some 2,000 redundancies at the company.

Given the level of protest and action against the government, the possibility of a general strike is still very high.

Some 30,000 shop stewards in the Workers Commissions are to meet in Madrid at the beginning of April. It was just such a meeting in 1985 that pressured the leadership into calling a general strike then.

In the meantime, however, the

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momentum of labour and student protests continues to build up pressure for national action. Leaders of both the Workers Commissions and the other main trade union federation, the Socialist Party led UGT, will be trying their utmost to control the action. It remains to be seen whether the militancy can be controlled. ■

YUGOSLAVIA

First stirrings

RECENT MONTHS have seen growing signs of workers fighting back against the "workers states" of eastern Europe. In Hungary last August 700 miners struck in two areas. This was the most important strike action since the revolution of 1956. There were strikes in Rumania in December.

Meanwhile in Czechoslovakia a couple of weeks ago, the Czech leader, Husak, promised fundamental reforms, stirring up interest in the possibilities of change. Ironically, Husak was installed in power by the Russian tanks which crushed the previous attempts at reform in 1968.

At the moment, though, the most militant workers are those in Yugoslavia. At the beginning of March they launched the biggest wave of strikes since Tito's republic was proclaimed in 1945. The strikes are important both in terms of their potential impact on Yugoslav society and because they show the limitations of the Gorbachev reform movement.

The Yugoslav ruling class pioneered some of the reforms that have periodically resurfaced in eastern Europe and that Gorbachev is proclaiming today.

The Yugoslav system of "self-management" and "market socialism" began in 1950 when Tito decreed that "workers councils" were to be established in the factories. The idea of the reform was to create a decentralised system in which the economy would not be treated like a single firm. Groups of workers would com-

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pete against each other for markets and resources. The pressure was, and is, to keep the workforce as small as possible to keep the enterprise profitable.

Although workers can elect their managers under "self-management" the system simply breeds apathy. The workers have no control over their product but are merely allowed to elect the people in charge of their exploitation. In Yugoslavia management is a career like anywhere else, not a form of workers control.

In effect, Tito built a Stalinism without Stalin. Workers had to show the *Karakteristika*—a sealed record of their political reliability—when applying for jobs. The harsh repression meant that for ten years after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 there wasn't a strike reported in Yugoslavia.

But the present outbreak of class struggle points to the limitations of reform as a way out of the crisis for the east European state capitalisms.

Yugoslavia is massively in debt to western banks and governments, to the tune of over 20 billion dollars. It has the highest unemployment rate in Europe. Today it's at a level of 16 percent—over one million workers. One in four workers are either unemployed or "guest" workers abroad.

Inflation is currently running at 130 percent. Like ruling classes everywhere, the Yugoslavs are trying to make the workers pay for the crisis.

The present strikes erupted after the government brought in a retroactive wage freeze on 27 February. Future rises are to be strictly linked to productivity. Wages have been cut and frozen to the level they were at in the last quarter of 1986. Workers have even been forced to return money that they have already received.

These wage cuts have meant 70 percent reductions in some cases and between 10 and 50 percent in most. At the same time food prices rose dramatically. Meat, sugar, edible oil and bread went up by 25-60 percent.

The government has admitted that there have been some 70 strikes involving 11,000 workers in the first two weeks of March. Half the strikes took place in Zagreb and other industrial centres in Croatia where they began. They spread rapidly to other



Tito: turning in his grave?

parts of the country.

In the last few years Yugoslav workers have been gradually gaining confidence. Last year there were some 100,000 workers involved in 900 strikes. Wages were 10 percent ahead of the 92 percent inflation rate.

The present attack on workers is a desperate attempt to improve Yugoslavia's position in the world economy.

The IMF was called in in 1983, a year when the government was forced to introduce food rationing. It is currently demanding interest rates of inflation plus one percent.

When prime minister Mikulic took office last May he had wanted to continue and reinforce a strategy of low interest rates to build up industrial production and increase exports. He was trying to resist IMF

pressure. It didn't work—last year's exports were down by 2.6 percent.

The measures he has introduced to placate Yugoslavia's creditors have led to opposition from his own bureaucrats as well as the workers.

The wage freeze has been condemned by some regional Communist Party bosses, factory managers and trade union leaders seeking to protect their own interests.

The trade unions are wholly incorporated into the state. They are not based on the ability of the workers to organise independently as they are in Britain. The pressure on their leaders from below are therefore more comparable to the pressures on the rest of the Yugoslav ruling bureaucracy than those on British trade union leaders.

At the time of writing it is hard to know whether the strikes are spreading. Two processes are taking place. On the one hand the government has retreated. On 20 March, after declaring it would not budge, it conceded a three month price freeze on food and consumer goods.

On the other hand, the police have been out in force although no clashes with workers have been reported. Mikulic has threatened to use troops. This would seem to indicate that the strikes are not yet over, and that the Yugoslav ruling class is more than a little worried. ■

Additional notes: Pat Stack, Gareth Jenkins, Lee Humber, Alan Gibson and Andy Zebrowski.

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Debt as a threat

YOU MAY not have noticed, but 20 February saw the end of civilisation as we know it. The Brazilian government defaulted on two thirds of its debt (by announcing a refusal to pay interest for an indefinite period). Oddly enough, this momentous event evoked only mild reactions in Washington.

Treasury Secretary Baker murmured moderate approval of the efforts of Brazil to avoid a worse crisis (crippling the economy by continuing to pay so much interest). And on Wall Street the shares of Citicorp, the bank with the largest loans to Brazil, dropped five and a half dollars to \$52.75, a mark of the threat to Citicorp's 1987 profits, not to its very survival. The world, it seems, is to end with a whimper, not a bang.

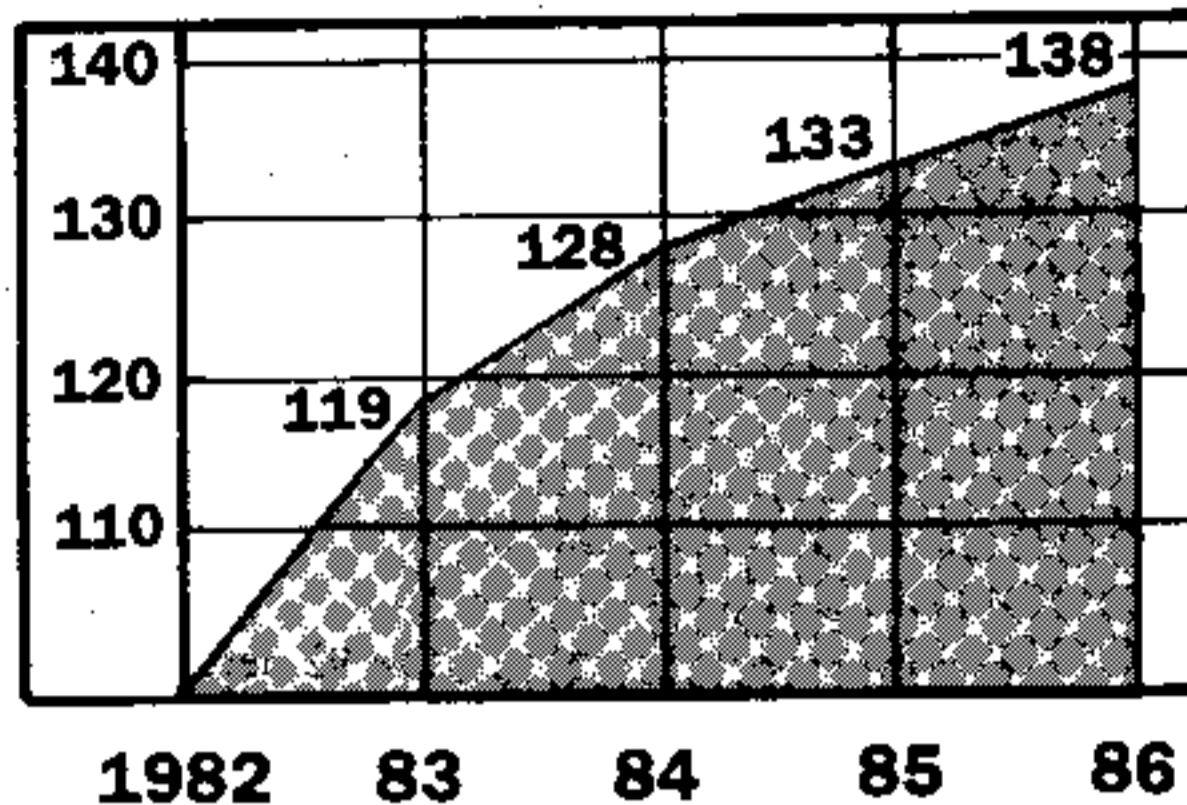
In fact, the "debt crisis" has become an increasingly phoney threat, a banker's ramp to frighten us all. After all, others—albeit with lesser size of debt than Brazil—have defaulted. Peru, Nigeria, South Africa and a host of others have been obliged to reschedule their debts (adding the outstanding interest to the principal and extending the repayment period).

Furthermore, the banks have spent the last five years salting away reserves to cover bad debts, reaching deals with other banks and governments to offset a run of defaults, selling the debt at knockdown prices or swapping it for shares in companies operating in the country concerned (a complicated deal, the details of which need not concern us).

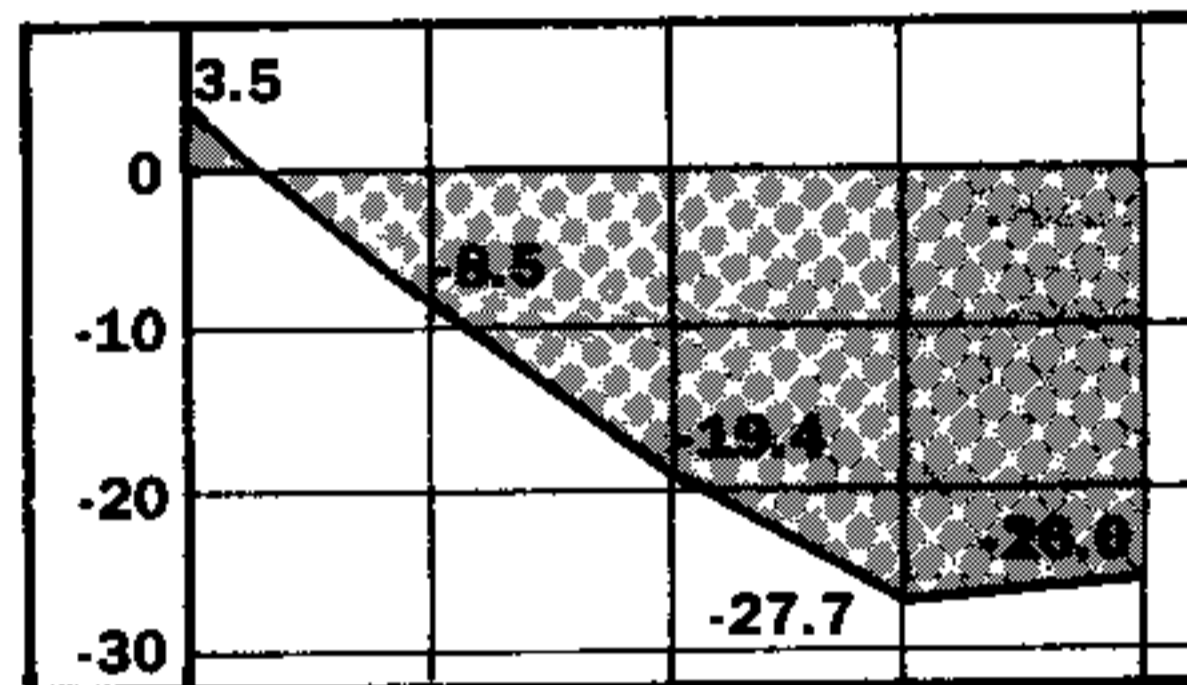
In sum, as a threat to the world financial system, the debts of the developing countries are not crucial except in very special and unlikely circumstances.

More worrying are the debts of North America. Domestically, companies, farms and households are supporting an Everest of debt, dwarfing the small hills of Brazil, Mexico, Korea and the rest. The US government has been borrowing around \$200 billion every year since Reagan came to power (as compared with Brazil, the largest Third World borrower, that has spent 20 years or so accumulating a debt of \$100 billion).

Indeed, this borrowing kept interest rates very high (as well as keeping the value of the dollar high for a time), so crippling the Less Developed Country borrowers. High interest rates have attracted into the States a massive share of the world's savings. The US has also been importing about a quarter of the world's manufactured exports while its own exports declined—producing a deficit on its trade balance last year of about \$150 billion. In sum, the Reagan administration may have added a million million dollars to the



Cumulative debt: 17 largest borrowers (\$billion, index 1982 = 100)



Net transfers between top 17 largest borrowers and Western banks and governments (\$billion)

external debts of the United States—now that really is walking tall.

This vast overhang of American debt can be managed in ordinary circumstances, despite the bankrupting of the odd bank, company or farm. But put it alongside the vastly inflated scale of the Tokyo Stock Exchange. As the yen has strengthened, there has been a massive flow of funds both abroad (to finance the US trade and government deficits) and into Japanese stocks and shares.

Monetary values have soared in the scramble to buy, going far beyond the expected profitability of the shares (indeed, the strong yen is hammering the profits of exporting companies). These are just the conditions for a stock market crash—when a chill to confidence turns to galloping pneumonia.

The problem is not the straw of a Brazilian default, but the appalling vulnerability of the camel of North American debt and Japanese speculation. If default pushed a Japanese bank to the wall, it could puncture the balloon of Japanese share prices. If that pulled down American financial companies operating on the Japanese stock exchange (or affected the shares of Japanese companies trading in the United States), it could affect confidence in the States—and the whole precarious house of cards could tumble. There would be no way of Europe saving itself.

Dramatic stuff, but unlikely. The scenario would require a whole series of coincidences and accidents, not to mention

the paralysis of governments. The Japanese government could organise the overnight rescue of a bank or seek to sustain the market on the margin long enough to smother the knock on effects. And if that did not happen, the US government has become quite skilled in organising and supporting threatened banks to inhibit a generalised crash, especially with the co-ordinated help of the European governments and international agencies (the Bank of International Settlements, IMF etc). In 1929, when a comparable run of financial crises, starting in Vienna, finally toppled Wall Street, these types of intervention were beyond the capacity of most governments and there was much less co-ordination.

On the other side, it is clear there is not much banks can do to punish defaulters. Gone are the days when Citicorp (or its predecessors) could call up the US Marines to act as bailiffs. The financial press not long ago was full of dark threats that the exports and overseas assets of defaulting countries would be seized (on, for some reason, "the high seas", but not the low ones). The country would get no imports or credits and quite swiftly the economy would come to halt.

It now seems there is no legal power to do any such thing—exports and credits usually concern private companies, and could not be seized when the debt is owed by the government. There is even doubt whether the exports and assets of public sector companies could be legally held. And

the threat to withhold new loans or credits does not carry weight—they are already denied to the countries with most debt. The historical record bears out the case. Most of Latin America defaulted in the 30s and nothing happened. In Brazil's case the economy expanded by 11.8 percent per year for several years after the 1931 default.

In the case of the US government's reaction, this shows Baker is more worried about keeping up or expanding US exports to Latin America (to reduce the gigantic trade deficit) than saving the odd bank. Between 1976 and 1981, US exports to Latin America increased three times over, fuelled by easy international bank loans.

The shutting off of new loans after 1982 had a violent effect on US export industries as governments in the south were obliged to slash imports. Thus squeezing the debtors leads not only to an expansion in the US trade deficit but also to the lay off of workers in American exporting industries.

However, if the debt crisis is in reality not much more than a nightmare for bankers, a different kind of nightmare continues for many Brazilians. The debt might worry an international ruling class, but even without the debt starvation persists. A recent Catholic report alleges that seven million Brazilian children have been abandoned in the past five years.

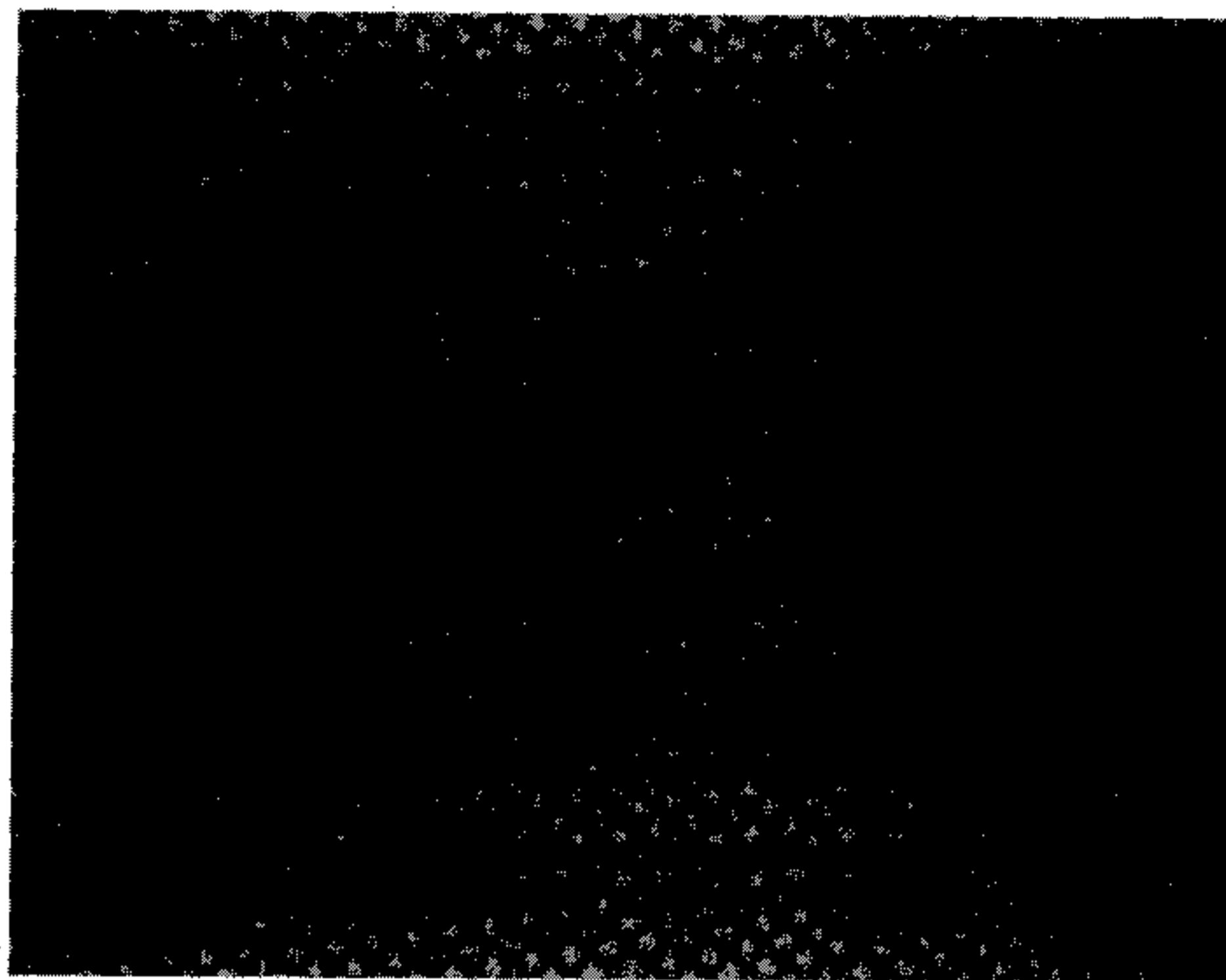
"In Rio, every month about 100 children under three years of age are abandoned in the streets and hospitals ... In Acre [an Amazon State] impoverished mothers sell their young daughters to lorry drivers or gold prospectors as prostitutes... In Sao Paulo, there are 1,200 gangs of child criminals and between them they have 10,000 firearms."

About a quarter of a million Brazilian children die under the age of one.

But was it different before 1982? Will it be different if all the debts are cancelled? The crisis continues with or without debt. Indeed, Brazil is by no means the worst off. A few months ago, the Government of Tanzania (with a quite small level of debt) announced a programme to promote donkey farms. The country could no longer afford to import oil to run trucks to the villages to collect the crops and deliver all the other things that make life possible. Now *that* is a debt crisis.

The poor of Africa with much tinier debts than the better off of Latin America are the worst afflicted by the debts. They do not loom large in the \$1,080 billion owed by Developing Countries, nor do they contribute much to the Third World's financing of Europe and North America—\$82 billion over the past five years (see the box). But in terms of sheer human survival they are much more important. The bankers do not care about that at all. And the very poor are too poor to borrow anything.

The debt crisis reflects the terrors of bankers about their loans. It has very little to do with any real fears about people. ■



You visited Brazil and Argentina recently. Both countries are in the news in Britain, mainly because of the debt crisis. How do you compare their economic situations?

In both countries there is talk of crisis, but the Brazilian economy is much stronger.

Brazil has a large, strong industry with an increasing percentage of its exports and GDP coming from manufactured goods. There is less unemployment than at any time since 1983, and industry is working at about 95 percent capacity.

In Argentina the economy is in a very sorry state. Between 1976 and 1983, because of the economic measures of the military, industry declined and it hasn't picked up under the Radical government. Unemployment is rising alarmingly and has, in fact, doubled since 1983.

Why did industry collapse in Argentina under the military?

The military followed monetarist policies supposedly to allow the best of Argentine industry to survive and expand, and to let the weak go to the wall. In fact, almost every size of industrial enterprise suffered. Very few companies did well, and there were thousands of bankruptcies and closures.

The Radical government under Alfonsín came to power in the aftermath of the Falklands war when the military junta had collapsed. What are its politics?

Its politics have moved first slowly, and then rapidly, to the right since 1983. Before Alfonsín was elected, and for a short period afterwards, his language was radical and he managed to outflank the left.

He talked about the need for union democracy and the different interests of the union bureaucrats from their membership. He also implied, by talking about national sovereignty, that the debt would not be paid.

His priority before coming to power was

defeating the Peronists who the vast majority of the working class had traditionally supported. The union leaders were also Peronists and very, very powerful.

They were, by and large, quite corrupt and right wing, very bureaucratic and undemocratic, but they served their membership well at the level of actually obtaining the pay increases.

Alfonsín tried to pass a law on unions through congress which would have liberalised the way unions are run. The Peronists blocked it in the senate. Shortly after that Alfonsín changed tack and started to court the old union leaders, and a working partnership between them emerged.

What about the debt and the International Monetary Fund's demands on Argentina, and the measures taken by the government? Alfonsín has reached a deal with the banks and the IMF over stretching out payments on the debt.

The Austral Plan was introduced in June 1985 to deal with inflation which was about 400 percent in 1985. It involved a wage freeze and a price freeze. It was illegal for employers to increase wages. The price freeze is, technically, still in existence. In reality it was never very effective.

The plan succeeded in reducing inflation—1986 was the first year since 1975 with inflation in two figures (80 percent). Nevertheless, the standard of living fell at a greater rate than since 1983 because of sharp cuts in government spending, higher unemployment and a decrease in real salaries.

How have workers responded to these cuts? There have been different levels of response. There have been, throughout, strikes of individual unions, some of which, especially in the public sector, were successful.

AUSTERITY AND ANGER



Police cars burnt by protesters in Brazil

The workers who have a lot of economic power, such as the electricity workers of Buenos Aires, succeeded. But the majority of strikes, particularly in the private sector, lost.

There has been a lot of anger about the austerity measures. The union leaders have tried to stay at the head of any protest. So in about 18 months there were seven so-called general strikes each lasting one day. These were passive and ineffective.

In Brazil, the military was in power from 1964 to 1985. Why did it give up that power, and is there now a genuine bourgeois democracy?

It gave up government because there was increasing pressure on it to do so. But it was not toppled by popular demand in the way that the Argentine military was after the Falklands.

There have now been elections, but one third of the senators were named by the military, and out of the 27 cabinet ministers, five are military.

The massive victory for the PMDB (the main party in the governing coalition) in the recent elections seems to show a lot of support for the Sarney government and the Cruzado Plan.

Yes. The government introduced the Cruzado Plan on 1 March 1986 to deal with inflation and to try and reduce the rate of growth. It was supposedly based on the Austral Plan in Argentina, but the effects of the plans were very different.

Because the Brazilian working class was strong and militant, the government did not feel it could risk something as hard as the Austral Plan. The Cruzado Plan did not forbid wage rises, though it did stop the automatic six-monthly wage rises in line with the cost of living.

The price freezes were quite effective, especially at first. They also gave everyone a wage rise on the day the Cruzado Plan

started. A "wage trigger" was introduced whereby wages would be automatically increased if inflation rose about 20 percent. **Has the situation changed since the elections last November?**

The economy was growing too fast. There was a lack of raw materials etc, and a lot of pressure, especially from the business community, to allow prices to be unfrozen. Meanwhile those workers able and willing, especially between May and July, had struggled and won wage increases.

The government kept the price freeze on until after the election, but within two days of winning they put up things like petrol and electricity massively. There was a lot of anger and a massive one day general strike in December called by the two main union confederations—the traditional bureaucratic yellow CGT and the new classist, combative CUT.

You have made it clear that the workers' movement in Brazil is still very strong, and has been able to win concessions from the government and ruling class over the last few years despite the pressures of the debt. Can you explain the history of the workers' movement?

In Brazil there is, by law, one union per industrial category per municipality. So the movement is fragmented into more than 4,000 different unions.

The union rules favour the self perpetuation of the union bureaucrats, although in theory they are democratically elected. Unions are meant to dispense medical care and other welfare activities.

During the very rapid growth of the industrial working class from the 1960s onwards two things happened in parallel. One was the growth of what is now the CUT. That started in Sao Bernardo, an industrial town just outside Sao Paulo, where most of the big car plants were established in the 1960s and 70s.

In 1978 and 1979 there were massive strikes in Brazil and a re-thinking within the workers' movement. There were discussions about unifying the struggles and forming a confederation to link unions in different categories.

The new unionism in the CUT is "anti-welfarist"—they say the union has to be an organ of combat, not of dispensing welfare.

The people who built the CUT were also very involved in building the PT, the Workers Party. There is a very strong link between them.

The other strand is best exemplified by the Metalworkers Opposition of Sao Paulo.

Initially a very small group of people, from the mid-60s onwards, despite terrible repression and difficult conditions, it organised the fightback in small ways. It fought to establish factory committees. It was fighting for rank and file trade unionism and democracy against the union bosses and employers.

Anyone who declares himself or herself a socialist faces a barrage of objections: 'You can't change human nature', 'Do you call Russia socialist?', 'Why don't you join the Labour Party?' This book gathers

Arguments together the best of John Molyneux's articles from Socialist Worker in order to answer these objections.

for Revolutionary

Socialism John Molyneux

£2.50 from SWP bookstalls or by post (add 30p postage) from BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

It also stood for union elections, and has nearly won three times since 1978.

In many ways its interests are the same as the CUT, and it now works within it. But it criticises the CUT for being bureaucratic, and for wanting to control the factory committees.

To what extent has the struggle spread beyond the car and metalworkers?

It has spread in every direction. For example it has spread to the north east. There workers have relatives in Sao Paulo working in the metal factories, as maids etc. What happens in Sao Paulo has a reality for them.

In many unions opposition movements have won elections against the old bureaucrats and joined the CUT.

Many of these developments happened under military rule. To what extent has the shift towards bourgeois democracy affected the class struggle?

Bourgeois democracy did not arrive all at once in the way that it did in Argentina. There were some features of it throughout the military government with elections to congress.

Bourgeois democracy has made it easier for workers to organise. But the bosses have not stopped calling in the police to intimidate workers.

The CUT has had its share of problems in the last year—partly internal dissension, partly because it totally misread the immediate effects of the Cruzado Plan. Many catastrophic predictions about the effects of the Plan by the CUT did not happen, so they lost credibility with some workers.

It looks like the Sarney government is going to have to move towards even harsher austerity measures. What impact will this have on the working class in Brazil?

The workers will probably resist these austerity measures, and they are in a much better position, better organised and stronger, than they were before.

Will there be any political leadership from left parties against any such austerity programme?

There will definitely be a lot of speaking out against these measures from the PT. Whether it will provide any leadership to the struggle is another matter entirely because the PT has been slowly shifting rightwards towards electoralism and respectability for the last three years.

It was founded as an independent organisation for the working class. Now it is looking to the middle class, the green vote etc.

What about the nationalism that has characterised many of the so-called left wing parties throughout Latin America?

It is a much less important influence than in Argentina, for example. In Brazil sections of the left in the PT and in the organised union movement have largely broken with populist nationalism. That was typical of Peronism in Argentina and a lot of Trotskyism in Latin America where the main struggle is seen to be anti-imperialist.



Riot on the streets of Sao Paulo



Alfonsín—where to now?

How would you summarise the situation in Brazil today?

When I left, the Cruzado Plan had finally died—almost all prices were freed. The government recognised openly that something different had to be tried.

There were lots of strikes, some were winning, some were losing. There is unevenness in the workers' movement—many workers have not been touched by the things I have described for the more advanced sections.

But I am still very impressed by the liveliness and creativity of the advanced working class and the activists across a spectrum of unions in Sao Paulo and across other parts of Brazil.

For example the workers in the Michelin rubber plantation in the state of Bahia in the north east, who are miserably paid and had never taken action until this year, had a long strike which ended in a draw.

One of their representatives came to Holland, France, Britain and Belgium to talk to Michelin workers. This was useful for the workers in Europe, but even more so for the Brazilian workers. They learnt for the first time that Michelin had another plantation in Brazil and saw Michelin's other interests and profits around the world.

They made the connections, learnt about their own power, and understood the power of a united world working class.

How would you see the prospects for workers in Brazil and Argentina over the next few years?

In Argentina it is very hard for the workers at the moment because there is such a deep recession. It is difficult for workers to be confident about winning strikes.

The best worker activists were killed by the military dictatorship. So, much like after 1956, the working class now has to start from scratch. There has been a break in the chain of transmission of how you organise in trade unions and politically. Although there are some left wing parties, there is nothing that has acted effectively as the memory of the class.

In Brazil things are much more hopeful, partly because the economy is stronger and the workers are more confident, and also because the Brazilian worker activists are breaking with the old ideas of populism, nationalism and even sectionalism.

There is mixed consciousness and a big gap between the less and more conscious workers. But what matters for us is that the union activists and the activists in the class are leaps ahead of where they were ten years ago. They are way ahead of the best worker activists in Argentina or even in Britain in that they are internationalist, very combative, and have no illusions in their own ruling class or in their own union bureaucracy. ■

Whisper who dares

THE LEAKED letter by Patricia Hewitt and the ensuing attack on the "loony left" over gay rights are not isolated incidents.

The signs are that, with the election looming and the polls showing a Tory victory, unpopular issues will be dumped and last year's conference vote for gay rights ignored.

The Labour Party was founded on the "respectable working class". As Harold Wilson once put it, the Labour Party is more influenced by Methodism than it is by Marxism.

Chapel puritanism remained a strong influence right into the 60s and beyond, with many viewing "decadence" such as homosexuality as at best a "private matter", and more usually as an upper class vice, strongly disapproved of. The Labour Party was not in the vanguard of the sexual liberation movement of the 1920s.

This record has not improved all that much in more recent times. In the 70s the gay movement arrived in Britain. Gays and lesbians started to come out and fight for equal rights. One consequence was a series of struggles where gays and lesbians were sacked for being openly gay.

The Labour Party was not just not on the picket line, but often the employer doing the sacking.

In 1979 Susan Shell was sacked by Newham Council. She was a residential social worker and Newham (all Labour except for one councillor) considered it impossible for a lesbian to work with young women. That year's Labour Party Conference was picketed by gay activists, but she failed to get her job back.

In 1981 Salford Council sacked a teacher in further education who had been convicted of "gross indecency" with another man.

In 1981 Camden social services sacked a lesbian in a case similar to Susan Shell's, again in the sensitive area of residential social work.

And yet in the 80s many gay activists joined the Labour Party, thinking not only that it could be changed but that it had been changed.

Left wing councils such as the GLC adopted positive positions on equal opportunities for lesbians and gays, setting up gay sub-committees, introducing non-discriminating recruitment policies and giving grants to gay organisations. At the 1986 Labour Party conference a gay rights policy was passed.

Many gay activists argued that the "broad church" of the party offered a structure within which they could work to change party policy and get a future Labour government to reform society. It was argued that the broad church structure



Tatchell-no help from Labour

offered lesbians and gays the space to operate as an oppressed group, separate but part of the wider party.

The problem is that the broad church embraces all—racists and non-racists, sexists and non-sexists, gay activists and anti-gay elements. It means the years of inner struggle through the sub-committees of the party only lead to empty "victories" at conference.

Not only is conference powerless to enforce its policy onto Labour governments, it is not even enforced within the party.

Anti-gay elements are not expelled, for they too have the space to exist inside the Party.

It is a structure that incorporates all elements, but where each group is powerless to enforce its ideas on the party as a whole. The real power therefore hides behind the facade of the broad church and almost totally with the leadership—it is a structure of apparent democracy, but the reality is that a small group round the leader decides. What counts for them is vote winning.

Gays and lesbians are not popular with the general public, as all opinion polls show. Homophobia is both deep and widespread and since the media campaign about the "gay plague" it has got worse.

The right has for years attacked what it has called the "loony left", a label now taken up by the right in the party as well, and the left has often backed away from the issue. The litmus test of the new commitment came in 1983 in the Bermondsey by-election.

A left wing constituency party chose a moderately left wing candidate, Peter Tatchell, who also happened to be gay.

The media, nationally and locally, launched a vicious anti-gay campaign against him, helped by a right wing break-

away from the local Labour Party. The Alliance milked the issue for all it was worth.

Never was there a clearer case for socialists to put their principles on the line. It was a test case for the depth of the Labour Party's commitment to gay rights.

The response was awful. First the national leadership, led at the time by the old "left winger" Michael Foot, disowned Tatchell. Neil Kinnock, then one of the leading figures on the left of the party, was reported to have commented, when asked if there was a witch hunt against Tatchell, that there was no witch hunt, and that he knew the difference between a witch and a fairy.

The local Labour Party instructed Tatchell not to publicly come out and answer the attacks.

The result was that a nasty anti-gay campaign was not openly challenged by the Labour Party. Instead it tried to avoid the issue, a tactic that proved suicidal as it had become *the* issue of the campaign. The Alliance swept to victory on the the anti-gay tide.

If that wasn't bad enough, the events during the following 1983 general election were even worse. This time the local candidate was safely heterosexual. To emphasise this point to the electorate the election leaflet had not just a photo of the candidate on it, but the candidate clutching both wife and child to prove how straight he was.

It was a total capitulation to anti-gay feeling and demonstrated the party's fear of unpopularity on the issue.

The same capitulation to sexism as at Bermondsey was seen at the 1986 conference during the debate over gay rights. It was carefully arranged so that the 15 minute debate would coincide with *Play School*, in other words at the only time when the conference isn't given live coverage on the telly!

The Labour Party has never shouted its commitment to gay rights. At best it has whispered it and then run scared whenever someone noticed. The name of the game for the Labour Party is winning elections, and if that means dumping gay rights then that is what has to happen. ■

Noel Halifax


AIDS

Duncan Blackie and Ian Taylor

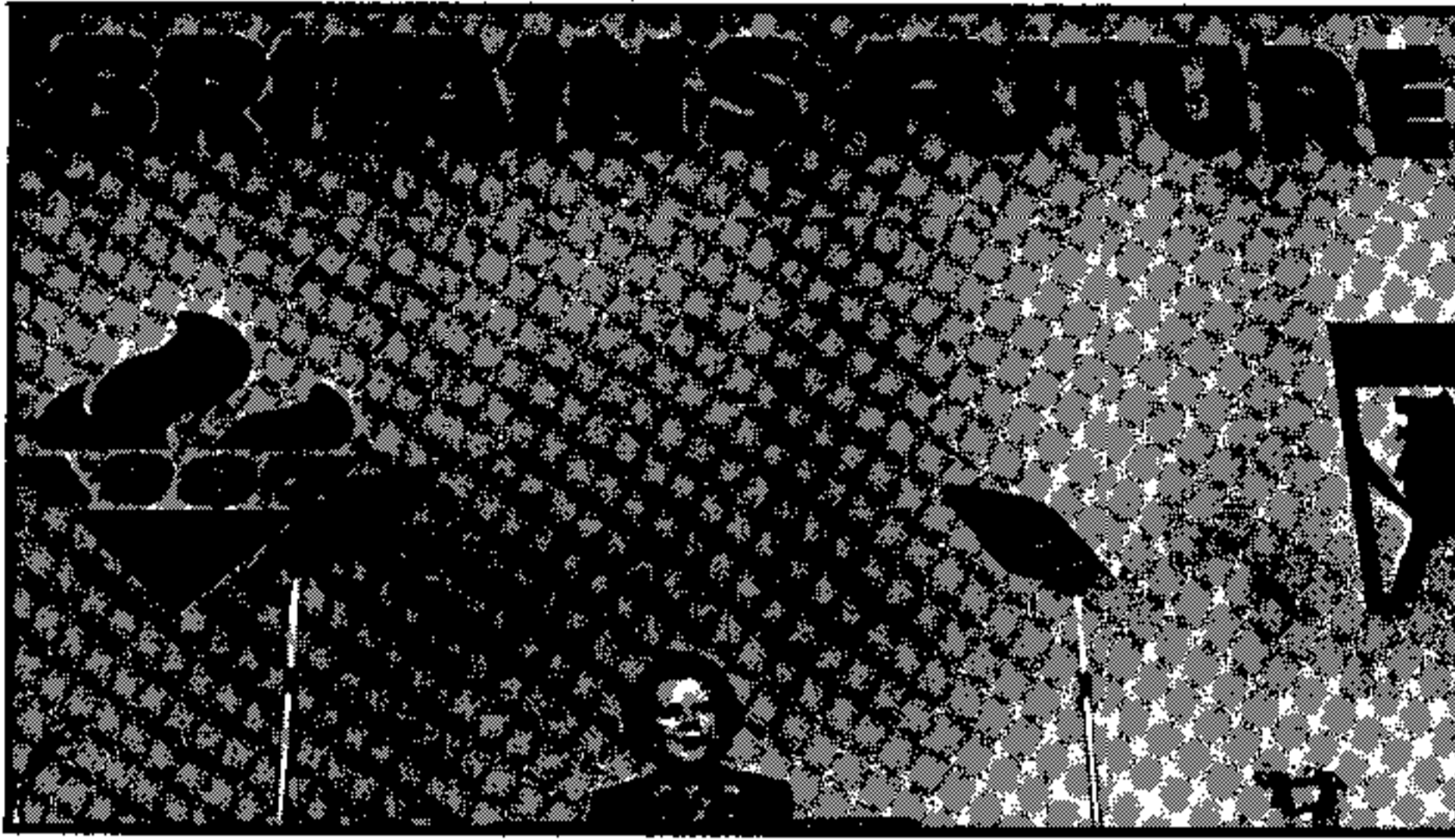
THE SOCIALIST VIEW

The AIDS virus is deadly, but fighting the disease isn't the only problem. Rumour and misinformation have led to attacks on gays, while the Tories use the health campaign to push 'Victorian values' which threaten us with a new dark age of guilt and repression. This pamphlet sets out the facts — and the politics — of AIDS. 40 pages.

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The way ahead



FOLLOWING the Greenwich by-election and with a general election imminent we reprint below a document presented by the Central Committee of the Socialist Workers Party to a Party Council, being held this month, analysing the state of the class struggle and the left today.

RECENT months have seen a whole number of developments that are worth examining. The government is intact and doing remarkably well, considering the deep unpopularity of many of its policies like unemployment or health cuts. There is an increasing possibility that the Tories can form a majority government after the next election. Many recent opinion polls have put them in front of Labour as the party with most support. They have certainly picked up from a year ago when various political scandals like Westland had sent their support plummeting.

But their popularity has been bought at a price. Living standards for workers in work remain constant or slightly rising. Wage increases over the past year have been well above the level of inflation.

These facts are something of a disaster for the Tories, who set themselves the task back in 1979 of lowering the real standards of British workers in order to make industry competitive on a world scale. This strategy has been an abysmal failure. Industry still suffers from a very low rate of growth and an absence of investment. Private sector investment in buildings and equipment actually fell in manufacturing by 2 percent last year. Industrial capacity has shrunk.

Much of the state of British manufacturing is obscured by the government's talk of boom. Lawson is promising substantial tax cuts in the budget. The Stock Exchange is booming and profits are at record levels. But the 'boom' is likely to cause as many problems as slump in the long term. Tax cuts will be possible because of the huge revenues the Treasury is build-

ing up—much of them from VAT on consumer goods, paid for themselves by the massive expansion of credit.

But the consumer goods are mostly imports, thus exacerbating the problems of British manufacturing and affecting the balance of payments. The government has been lucky in the rise in oil prices and in the fall of the dollar. That luck may hold until after the election—but it does little to ease their long term problems. A recent *Financial Times* article pointed out that in West Germany too the economy looked rosy and then took a dive after the election, and said that the same could happen here. There was one difference however—the writer had much more faith in the recovery of the German economy than of the British.

It is of course true that the working class movement has not been defeated, but it is also true that the level of class struggle remains very low. The struggles which do take place tend to be defensive, sectional and almost impossible to generalise. Even where they politicise the workers involved, that politicisation tends to lead to the (increasingly uncertain) hope of a future Kinnock government to solve the problem.

This is true not just of strikes, but of campaigns which only a few years ago might have generated substantial numbers. Today although we can sometimes win people to taking action on sometimes quite a large scale (this is especially true among students) the direction of the campaigns—whether over policing at Broadwater Farm or student grants—tends to be towards Kinnockism.

This has the effect of deadening the campaigns.

Meanwhile the strengthening of the right in the unions and especially in the Labour Party continues. Kinnock's performance over Zircon was an attempt to be more patriotic than the Tories. And the Labour left continues to play a marginal role. Benn's response to Zircon was to bemoan the loss of parliamentary sovereignty, rather than to focus on the central issues.

There have, however, been a number of new events in recent months which reinforce our general analysis. The first is the industrial situation. Earlier this year we were faced with another national dispute—that of the NCU. Although this suffered from all the problems of disputes in the present period—extreme sectionalism, control from the national bureaucracy, lack of generalisation—it also showed the immense strength of a group of workers who according to popular mythology should be totally contented with their BT shares.

Yet despite this Golding was able to sell out—with strong opposition from many branches, admittedly—relatively easily. As a consequence the defeat of the Telecom strike will mean victimisations and a general attack on working conditions. The defeat at Wapping is a green light for Fleet Street employers to slash jobs, introduce flexibility and go on the offensive. The employers know that the politics of the new realists are unlikely to lead to a serious fight against them. Paradoxically, however, the defeat of these disputes—brought about by the dominance of the new realism—also strengthens the hand of the new realists. For many workers, struggle does not appear as a viable alternative at present.

There are in all these disputes—and in the long running teachers dispute—a minority which rejects the passivity and collaboration of the national leaders and which wants to continue fighting. But nowhere does it have either the organisational strength or the politics to fight independently of the bureaucracy. This minority is, however, our audience in these disputes.

The second situation which has become much clearer since the end of last year is that involving the local Labour councils and their workforces. We said last year that, having failed to fight the Tories over ratecapping, the councils would more and more turn on their own workforces to try to carry the burden of the crisis. This is happening on a wide scale. Liverpool has led the way—despite its left wing rhetoric—with the council forcibly breaking up an occupation and with leading *Militant* supporters arguing against strike action in defence of jobs. Manchester is following suit. The London councils are floundering around, talking about selling town halls, but will almost certainly conclude that jobs have to go.

Already the softening up process is under way. The theorists of the reformist left regard many council workers as part of the 'white male elite' and therefore are

quite willing to go along with cutting their 'privileges' in terms of jobs, conditions etc. But the councils cannot attack the 'male' workers without simultaneously attacking working class women (eg nursery cuts which affect women's jobs and the services for other working class women).

Our position on all this should be quite clear. We are opposed to any attacks on the workforce by a council—however left wing—which is trying to find its way out of the crisis. This has to be our starting point and so marks something of a shift from two years ago, when our approach was much more to see ourselves as part of the fight against ratecapping, alongside the councils. Today that fight is over—as a result of the failure of the Labour left—and we have to draw the conclusions. If the councils, through their failure to fight, act as employers, then we have to attack them.

The third and most major change since our conference has been Labour's continued political crisis which results from its poor election performance. Greenwich was a political disaster for Labour. Kinnock can pretend otherwise—blaming the media and the collapse of the Tory vote—but the truth is that Labour went down 4 percent on even its very bad poll in 1983. Labour is not doing well nationally in the polls and finds it hard to rise above the 35-40 percent mark in votes in many places where it should be winning.

The by-election result and with it the likely prospect of at best a hung parliament and at worst another term of the Tories will create widespread demoralisation among Labour activists. It will also strengthen the hand of the right who are using the election in Greenwich to launch another major attack on the hard left. And it will reinforce the pessimism that very little can be done to change anything, which pervades the Labour Party and the unions.

The left has no real alternative to the right wing attacks. It goes along with Labour's electoral strategy totally and therefore is thrown on the defensive when it is shown that propaganda about 'loony left' councils sticks, or when hard left candidates prove unpopular.

The truth is that the left has fallen victim to the idea that taking over the existing institutions—without a corresponding rise in struggle or self confidence among workers—is enough. Yet in the absence of real struggle workers will fall prey to precisely the sorts of reactionary ideas peddled by the media, and to which the left has no answer. The experience of taking over the local councils and finding itself powerless to halt the cuts and lack of funding should provide an awful lesson to the Labour left. Unfortunately it does not seem to realise that a major reason for Labour's unpopularity in places like Greenwich is its identification with slum housing, rotten social services etc.

To sum up, we are operating in a politically very defensive period. Most of the left is on the retreat or even running to the right. When we say that there is nothing between ourselves and Kinnock we have to recognise that most of the time our ideas

are isolated. At the same time we should understand that the struggles which do take place are often marked by determination and bitterness among a minority to whom we can relate. The danger for us is that because of the period, we too can become pessimistic and not relate to what is taking place. This can lead to a danger of stagnation.

What then must we in the SWP do? The



Kinnock's right hook

first thing which is worth re-emphasising in our perspective is the continued importance of building on the basis of our politics. Our general ideas—which also provide concrete analysis of a range of issues from Zircon to abortion to the election—are absolutely crucial. This is particularly true in a period when the objective conditions remain very firmly against revolutionary politics and we are nearly always arguing against the grain.

The continued emphasis on public meetings which try to relate to issues of the day, on public paper sales which can provide the focus of our intervention in a locality, and on the essential back up of Marxist education to improve the grounding of all of us in the theoretical ideas which underpin our politics is absolutely essential. It is only by establishing these that we can chart an independent path which avoids the dangers of both maintaining a sectarian disdain for everyone else on the left, or alternatively liquidating into uncritical support for Labour lefts, strikers etc.

It is only against a background of this political routine that we can begin to operate properly in the various activities outside the party. We should be clear what this activity means. Every branch should be involved in selling at Labour Party ward meetings and other activities.

Many branches do not do this at present—or at least do not do so on a systematic basis. This is a serious mistake. We do not expect to get much, if anything, out of these sales in terms of immediate results or recruits, but we can establish valuable contacts. And the sales help us to get a feel for the local working class movement and understand the sorts of arguments we are up against etc.

The same is true in terms of sales outside union branches. A regular sale outside the AEU branch meeting helps us to implant ourselves locally, and enables us to find out what is going on. It also establishes us as a political pole of attraction that the rest of

the left is forced to take account of, however reluctantly.

These are major activities for us in the present period, and are much more a feature than the occasional campaign which flares up in a locality—for example against a deportation or over police violence. We have obviously to be a part of these campaigns, but recognise that they will be affected by the dead weight of Kinnockism and therefore usually very weak. We should on no account try to substitute for these campaigns, but should try to force the emphasis of them onto the local Labour Party, trade union branches etc—as opposed to the moralism which is so often a feature of the left wing sects involved in them.

None of these activities can be properly achieved unless we start from the political routine outlined above: regular public meetings, regular paper sales and education for every member. This has to be the centre of our activities.

We have talked, in the party, about the perspective of balanced growth in the present period—that over-emphasis on one particular area of our work would only damage the way in which we build. During the period of Bennism in the early eighties we had to steer a course away from the rest of the left for fear of being pulled into the 'swamp'. During the miners' strike, we involved ourselves deeply in miners support groups and other activities along with the rest of the left to try to relate to the minority fighting for the miners. Today neither perspective fits.

We have to work with the rest of the left and see ourselves as part of the left, but we also have to recognise the extent to which most of it has been pulled to the right. In the aftermath of Greenwich this pull will accelerate. So our independent political presence is absolutely essential if we are to make the small but essential gains open to us in the months ahead.

Balanced growth has to be seen in this context. But balanced growth can also be an excuse for stagnation or complacency. We pointed out months ago that it could not be a panacea. We also said that although it meant no 'stick bending' in terms of particular campaigns or emphasis

If revolutionary socialism is to offer any solution for a world in crisis today, then some tough questions must be answered: Exactly what happened after the Russian workers' revolution of 1917? What led to the rule of the bureaucracy under Stalin? To these hard questions, this book offers hard answers. 112 pages.

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Russia
WORKERS' STATE TO STATE CAPITALISM
Peter Binns, Tony Cliff and Chris Harman

in the party as a whole, it would mean a degree of stick bending in particular branches over particular things.

This is because growth in the party is uneven. We do not start with branches which are equally strong or with an equal understanding of the political problems facing them. Therefore the sort of growth which is needed depends on the sorts of problems the branch faces. If the branch has a tendency to abstract propagandism, then its balanced growth means going all out to establish Labour Party sales, union branch sales, student work etc. If the branch is stuck in campaigns, then its balanced growth requires going all out to establish a routine. Balanced growth means an emphasis on different things in different situations. And it means a degree of stick bending locally. The danger otherwise is that every branch takes what it wants from the perspective of balanced growth, and does nothing to correct its own defects.

As well as talking about balanced growth we have also put a lot of emphasis in recent months on the two minorities: the political minority around our general ideas, and the minority inside the unions and workplaces who are willing to fight over specific issues.

What do we mean by the term? We are referring both to a *political* minority—those people who constitute our political periphery, who buy our paper, attend our public meetings and are the people from whom we in general recruit—and we are referring to a second, wider periphery that wants to fight in the unions, in strikes like Wapping or the teachers' dispute, or over single issues. We have to understand that we are relating to the two and especially have to avoid confusing the two.

The danger is that an understanding of the existence of these minorities in itself tells us little or nothing about how we operate. We also have to understand that the minorities can overlap and that the relationship between the two and the party is constantly changing. What we should be clear about, however, is the need to relate to two sorts of periphery in different ways.

If we do not relate to a wider periphery—especially at work and in the unions—then we will not find it possible to build or even be relevant inside the working class movement. This is why we put an emphasis on our members being part of the Broad Lefts inside the unions, being good union activists at work and so on. We do not put the emphasis on BLs because we believe that they can be transformed in the present period into mass fighting organisations or that they represent the mass of workers. They are usually composed of a fairly narrow layer of activists.

But unless we are involved in these organisations we are not in a position to attempt to influence that minority of activists, or to relate to the much wider numbers of workers in struggle which suddenly arise. We should not abstain from trying to be part of what left there is inside the unions or in the disputes. There are



Pockets of resistance

however some dangers. Perhaps the most likely is that of trying to substitute for lack of activity by propping up the BL structures. So we should be clear what involvement in the Broad Left means: involvement nationally and locally in activities, but we should beware of trying to uphold the structures of Broad Left groups.

So for most of our teachers, for example, (especially outside London) we should argue the STA line, support its initiatives and sell its publications. But where we have only one or two teachers in a locality it would be pointless for us to try to sustain the groups ourselves.

Working in the Broad Lefts will not pay even long term results if we do not understand that our intervention there has to be backed up with the constant attempt to attract our political periphery to our ideas. Because the two minorities overlap, however, that doesn't mean simply putting forward abstract socialist arguments, but

constantly trying to fit our ideas to the questions concerning the people around us. Our public meetings in particular are important vehicles for doing this.

To operate successfully in the present period it is also essential to understand the aim of what we are doing. We are trying to build the party. If we are successful in doing this in the present period then we will also be able to relate to the outside world. It should also enable us to avoid the dangers of both isolationism and liquidationism to a large extent.

The period ahead is going to be a very difficult one for socialists. Our ideas will tend to remain isolated. Labour's rightward course will continue. But there will still be issues around which we can intervene. It is important that we take those opportunities and don't just succumb to the pessimism and passivity of the rest of the left.

But this means a realistic understanding of what we are doing and low expectations about what we can gain in the months ahead. We can recruit some more people in each branch, we can sell a few more papers, we can improve our student work in a number of places. If we can do these things and improve the level of understanding of our own ideas, then we can continue to make small gains.

Regardless of the outcome of the election the scale of the crisis will mean that the government is forced to attack groups of workers who want to maintain their living standards. As we have seen in France, that can provoke a fightback on a very wide scale. If we can follow a perspective of maintaining our growth, of stressing the political answers to the crisis and of having something to say about the problems facing groups of workers in struggle, then we should be well placed for the struggles ahead. ■

socialist worker Review

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AT the beginning of *State and Revolution* Lenin, with Marx particularly in mind, notes that revolutionary leaders have often suffered a common fate. During their lifetime, says Lenin, the oppressing classes savagely hound them and persecute them, but after their death:

“Attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them, so to say... while at the same time emasculating the ‘essence’ of their revolutionary teaching...”

No revolutionary has suffered as much from this process as Antonio Gramsci.

In the course of the last ten years the name of Gramsci has been on the lips of every rightward moving ex-revolutionary in need of a left cover.

It is used by every armchair Marxist who has found the struggle for ideological hegemony in academic journals more to their taste than the struggle for workers’ power.

And it has provided an alibi for every liberal masquerading as a communist who preferred CND peace marches and designer socialism to the bitter battles of the miners’ strike and Wapping.

So monstrous has been the perversion and distortion of Gramsci’s ideas that today it is impossible either to honour his memory or seriously discuss his contemporary relevance without first stopping to disentangle the truth from the myth.

According to this myth Gramsci is a prophet of a new non-economic Marxist which replaces the Leninist strategy of insurrection with a gradualistic struggle for ideological hegemony through the medium of a broad cross-class alliance.

However, the single fact of the matter is that Gramsci was an intransigent revolutionary who believed unequivocally in the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the working class.

Consider the record. Gramsci began his political career in the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), a mass workers party which stood far to the left of the British Labour Party, past or present.

Gramsci stood on the far left of this party as a critic of its centrist leadership. From this position he played a leading role in the Turin factory occupations of the “red years” of 1919-20.

Gramsci founded and edited the paper *L’Ordine Nuovo* which became the mouthpiece of Turin workers and carried the arguments for soviets in Italy—in other words for the building of independent institutions of workers’ power to challenge and replace the capitalist state.

Then, when the PSI demonstrated its incapacity to lead the Italian working class to victory in the revolutionary crisis, Gramsci broke from it to take part in the foundation of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).

At this stage Gramsci’s politics were not only clearly revolutionary but if anything ultra-left. The young PCI was dominated by the powerful figure of Amadeo Bordiga, a dogmatic ultra-left.

The years 1922-6 were ones in which Gramsci

GRAMSCI



progressively separated himself from Bordiga, at first privately, and then as leader of the PCI, openly.

Even a casual glance at Gramsci’s writings of this period shows that he remains firmly on the terrain of revolution. Thus in the *Lyons Thesis* of 1926, his major work of this period, he defines the fundamental tasks of the Communist Party as follows:

“(a) to organise and unify the industrial and rural proletariat for the revolution.

(b) to organise and mobilise around the proletariat all the forces necessary for the victory of the revolution and the foundation of the workers’ state.

(c) to place before the proletariat and its allies the problem of insurrection against the bourgeois state and of struggle for the proletarian dictatorship and to guide them politically and materially towards their solution through a series of partial struggles.”

(A Gramsci *Selections from Political Writings 1921-6*, page 357.)

Moreover we know from the memoirs of Athos Lisa, a fellow prisoner, that one of the main themes developed by Gramsci in discussion with other communist prisoners was the need for a military organisation capable of taking on the power of the capitalist state.

Why was Gramsci posthumously selected to play the role of theoretical prophet of

ANTONIO GRAMSCI, the great Italian Marxist, died 50 years ago this month. His legendary motto “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will” provides a wonderful guide for revolutionaries in difficult times like the present. However, reformism has in recent times claimed Gramsci’s works as justification for abandoning revolutionary politics. *John Molyneux* looks at how they’ve done this, and why it is possible for them to do so. He goes on to argue that Gramsci contributed something new and important to the revolutionary tradition.

Eurocommunism and "Marxist" reformism and how was it possible to distort his thought in this way?

ONE key factor was Gramsci's imprisonment in 1926. This removed him from the political scene just before Stalin took the international communist movement by the throat.

It is clear that Gramsci did not fight the rise of Stalinism. He tended to view the conflict in the Russian Party through the prism of his struggle against Bordiga and thus to identify Bordiga with Trotsky. But it is no less clear that he was a critical supporter of the Stalinist majority, not a mindless apparatchik.

Had he remained at liberty, he would have been forced, as was every other communist, either to bend the knee to Stalin, or to become an outright oppositionist.

To do the first would have meant accepting without question every twist and turn in policy, every lie, every theoretical vulgarisation. This process would have destroyed him as a theoretician.

The second path would have led to his excommunication from the communist movement. Either course would have disqualified him in the eyes of the Eurocommunists.

As it was he could be presented as that unique being, a loyal communist free from the taint of Stalinism.

A second factor was the nature of Gramsci's writings while in prison. The *Prison Notebooks*, written with a constant eye to the fascist censor, are highly abstract.

They make only the most oblique reference to contemporary political events, and the language employed is deliberately obscure to avoid arousing suspicion. This gave them a built in appeal to the armchair Marxist and made them relatively easy to interpret according to taste.

Nevertheless the foisting of a non, or even anti-revolutionary interpretation on Gramsci still required two things.

Firstly a complete separation of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, from all his past practice and all his past writings.

Secondly an extremely one sided, selective and tendentious reading of these writings.

To see both these processes at work let us look at what has been made of Gramsci's concept of the "historical bloc". For Gramsci this was his strategic response to what was known as "the Southern question"—a problem crucial to his thought as a whole and long a stumbling block for Italian socialism.

Capitalist industrialisation in Italy had occurred mainly in the north (and, to some extent, the centre) of the country, leaving the south sunk in abject medieval poverty.

The Italian socialist movement, basing itself primarily on the relatively affluent northern industrial workers, had tended to neglect the problem of the south, regarding its impoverished peasantry with almost racist disdain, as irredeemably backward.

Gramsci considered it imperative for the success of the Italian revolution that this situation be ended. The peasantry had to be detached from the influence of the possessing classes and a historical bloc formed between them and the industrial workers.

To achieve this the working class and its party had always to make clear in the most concrete manner possible its concern and support for the southern peasants. Thus for Gramsci the historical bloc was an Italian application of the classic Leninist worker-peasant alliance.

For the Gramsci epigones, however, the historical bloc has come to signify not an alliance between the workers and the peasants but an alliance between the working class and the middle class. They even included some so-called progressive sections of capital.

That is, from an alliance of the exploited *against* the exploiters it has been transformed into an alliance of the exploited *with* their exploiters.

In this way Gramsci has been distorted. His views on intellectuals, the question of hegemony, the party and above all "the war of position" have suffered a similar fate.

HOWEVER throwing the whole Eurocommunist-reformist academic distortion of Gramsci into the dustbin where it belongs does not by itself tell us what revolutionary Marxists today have to learn from him.

Is there something special to be learned from Gramsci which adds to the classic tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky?

To this question I would answer with a qualified yes. It is qualified because many of the claims made for Gramsci's originality are exaggerated.

For example, to suggest that Gramsci pioneered a new non-economistic interpretation of Marxism is to imply that economism was characteristic not only of the Second International, but also of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. This is clearly not the case.

Similarly the claim of startling originality for the idea that bourgeois rule is based in consent as well as force implies that previous Marxists were unaware of this fact.

Given that Marx had written in 1845 that, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas", this is hardly plausible.

Gramsci stresses the importance of creating a layer of "organic intellectuals" by which he means workers with an overall historical grasp of the class struggle and their role within it. But isn't this little more than producing a new and striking formulation for a practice that was always present in Leninist party building.

However there are aspects of Gramsci's thought which can be cited as making a real contribution to the development and advance of Marxism.

The first is Gramsci's philosophical writings. There are to be found in his prison writings many formulations and observations



A scene from the Turin factory occupations of 1919-20

which are superior in insight and clarity to anything since Marx himself—including in my opinion Lukac's great work *History and Class Consciousness*.

THE second and most important aspect is Gramsci's argument for a shift in the nature of the struggle for socialism from a "war of manoeuvre" with the expectations of rapid victory through direct assault to a prolonged "war of position".

Here the matter is complex because Gramsci is employing an analogy and on occasion mixes his metaphors, but the core of his argument rests on a distinction between Russia and Western advanced capitalism.

"In Russia the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West there is a proper relationship between state and civil society and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed." (*The Prison Notebook* p238)

Again it is necessary to pause to dispose of a straw man. The argument that Bolshevism and revolution might be appropriate for backward Russia but would never work in the advanced West was a favourite among reformists long before the advent of Eurocommunism.

However, to observe that the capitalist state is buttressed by the "sturdy structure of civil society", and that the power of the capitalist class is more rooted in the West than it was in Russia, is not to imply that it is more easily removed by peaceful parliamentary legislation.

Gramsci has touched on something important here. The extreme fragility and social isolation of the anachronistic Tsarist state in comparison with the bourgeois states of the West was shown by its rapid collapse in five days of street fighting in February 1917.

Equally the economic, social and political power of the bourgeoisie was manifestly underdeveloped in Russia compared with the West.

The most obvious manifestation of this difference was the establishment of the institutions of bourgeois parliamentary democracy and their accompaniment by stable, electorally oriented mass political parties, mass trade unions and the trade union bureaucracy.

Of course this was recognised by Lenin and Trotsky without the aid of Gramsci. That it would be easier to overthrow capitalism in Russia than in the West was central to Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution and to Lenin's notion of the imperialist chain breaking at its "weakest link".

NEVERTHELESS bourgeois democracy and mass trade unions do not exhaust the differences between backward Russia and the advanced West, and the 70 years since 1917 have seen a multiplication of the institutions of civil society.

In this category we can include the system of universal state education, enormously expanded in this period; the manifold institutions of the welfare state; the modern mass circulation press

and the broadcasting media; the mass entertainment industry and mass spectator sports.

The great merit of Gramsci's insight is that it focuses our attention on the fact that all these institutions constitute areas of struggle.

The insurrectionary overthrow of the capitalist state remains but it will be possible only as the culmination of a war on many fronts

The great weakness of Gramsci's analysis is that it remains at a high level of abstraction. From the isolation of his prison cell it was impossible for him to concretise the war of position

The academic Gramscians understand the war of position as a pure battle of ideas to be waged only as a war of books and articles. This is not only false to the example of Gramsci's life but also misses the point of his analysis which stresses the institutional material embodiment of bourgeois hegemony.

Gramsci's own practice during the *Ordine Nuovo* period and our own experience of the struggle in recent years points the way to the revolutionary interpretation of the war of position, namely that it should be waged from below, first and foremost by the workers in the institutions themselves.

Thus the authoritarian structure and reactionary content of the education system would be contested not by left councils but by pupils, students and rank and file teachers.

The repressive functions of the DHSS will be fought by rank and file civil servants, in alliance with the unemployed.

The propaganda and lies of the media will be combatted not by "left" editors and Channel 4 but by the collective industrial action of printers, technicians and rank and file journalists.

The rights of gays, women and blacks will be defended by workers' action in the workplace.

I would point to the experience of the Anti Nazi League, and Rock Against Racism as giving a glimpse of what this approach can achieve in the fields of music and sport, given the right conditions.

All of these struggles would be conducted not as an alternative to economic struggles against exploitation but as their necessary complement and extension. All of them would have at their centre, coordinating and generalising them, Gramsci's modern prince—the revolutionary party of the working class.

Of course none of these struggles can be decisively won while the bourgeoisie remains in power. The idea that the working class can establish ideological hegemony or any other kind of hegemony within the framework of capitalism is as absurd as the idea that workers can establish control of production within the capitalist system.

But in waging these struggles, just as in extending the frontiers of control within the factory, the working class will become aware of itself as an active creative force capable of bringing into life a new and better society.

This after all is the guiding thread running through all Gramsci's thought, just as it is the fundamental message of Marxism.



A practical challenge to bourgeois hegemony? An ANL demo

Profit of doom

Marxists argue that the crisis is a result of a fall in the rate of profit that capitalists can make on their investments. But haven't profits been rising in recent years, with ICI and the National Westminster bank just announcing profits for 1986 of over one billion pounds each?

YOU CANNOT avoid abstract concepts when you write about economic issues (or anything else for that matter). Even the simple phrase "the rate of profit" involves an abstraction from many different rates of profit made by companies in any one year.

The most difficult problem for Marxists today is not to develop the abstractions (Marx, fortunately, did much of the hard work for us). Rather it is the necessity of having to move from those abstractions to the concrete world in which we find ourselves.

When Marx talked about the "Law of the Tendency to a Fall in the Rate of Profit" he did not mean that the rate of profit will fall continuously in every situation, even in a period of crisis. Nor did he think that any such fall would affect every capital or country to the same degree. As he wrote in Volume 3 of *Capital*:

"With the whole of capitalist production, it is always only in a very intricate and approximate way, as an average of perpetual fluctuations which can never be firmly fixed, that the general law prevails as the dominant tendency."

Yet there are times when a few simple facts are more relevant than pages of abstract discussion. There is no doubt that there was a sustained fall of the rate of profit in *all* the major industrial economies which explains the return of capitalism to crisis in the 1970s.

The precise figures may be open to doubt. But the long term trend is unmistakable. According to one source the profit rate in manufacturing in the United States fell from a peak of 36 percent in 1965 to 10 percent in 1980. In West Germany in the same period it fell from 20 percent to 10 percent, and in Japan from 40 percent to 14 percent.

In Britain the profit rate in 1965 was already as low as Japan's in 1980. In 1980 it fell to the catastrophically low figure of only 3 percent.

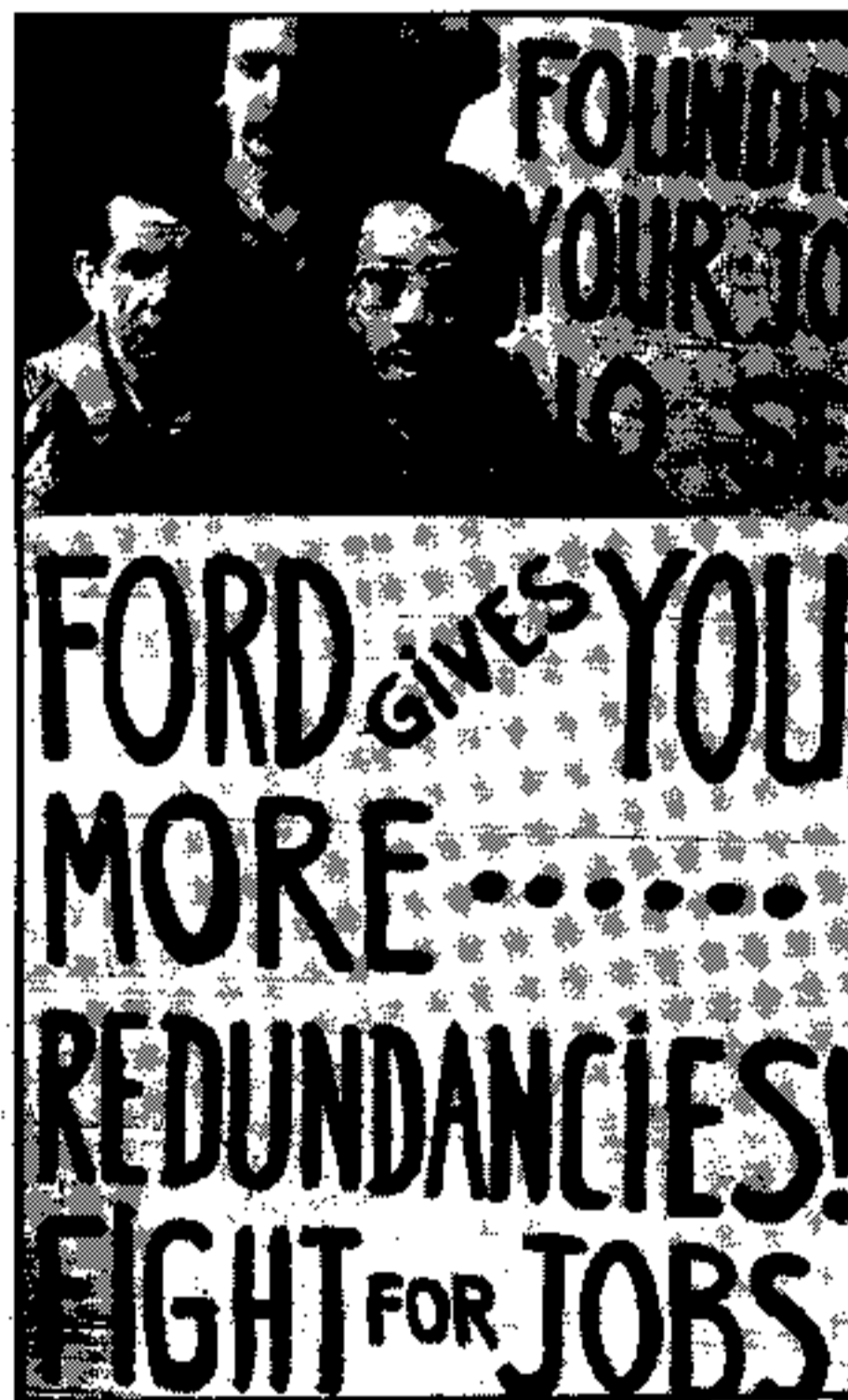
Capitalists have taken measures to restore their profits. They have closed unprofitable factories, sacked workers and desperately tried to cut their costs. Many smaller capitals have disappeared. Others have been gobbled up by stronger predators.

The results have been dramatic in Britain. The mass of profits outside of the oil sector rose by 70 percent between 1981

and 1986. According to the Bank of England the rate of profit is back to 9 percent, its highest level since 1973.

Clearly it is not because wages have fallen. The Tories and the bosses are still moaning that pay settlements are above the rise in the cost of living, and the figures seem to bear them out. But it also needs to be said that wages in Britain are still low by European standards, and were never the cause of Britain's low profit rate.

Could it be that there has been a wave of investment in new super-efficient technology making British capital more competitive and profitable?



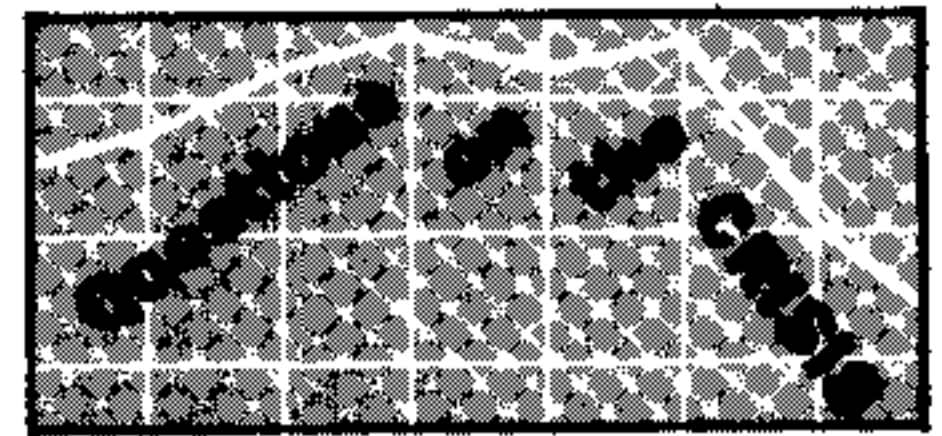
Workers paying for profits

That is true of one or two multinationals like Fords and IBM with the money to finance a programme of automation. But in most of industry they've either not had the cash or, more critically, they've not been willing to risk it in anything which might offer less than the 10 or 11 percent they'd get from keeping the money in the bank (6 percent in real terms after inflation).

The fact that the profit rate in Britain has on average risen just above the level of the "real" rate of interest on loans gives a clue to what's been happening.

Any company which makes a return on its capital investment of less than the going rate of interest is either heading for bankruptcy because it cannot pay its debts, or might as well leave its money in the bank.

That was the situation facing most of British capital in 1980-81, and their



response was swift. They closed down or sold off cheap any of their operations which didn't meet the minimum target of profitability. Those that could paid off their debts. Those with spare cash put their money into the financial markets or channelled it abroad.

The result is what we see today: an economy with an industrial base which is smaller but more profitable; financial markets which are booming; and investment in manufacturing industry still over 17 percent below its level in 1979.

The destruction of old capital has been more spectacular in Britain precisely because the rate of profit here was so much lower on average than elsewhere.

Two other developments have affected other industrial economies as much if not more than they've affected Britain. An international economic survey produced last year by a body called the OECD argued that between 1982 and 1984 in all the Western industrial economies

"a general improvement in profit margins was associated with a cyclical pick-up in productivity, in some European countries enhanced by a sharp labour shake-out. The rise in profit shares slowed in 1985 as cyclical gains in labour productivity and the widening of profit margins eased... The sharp fall in energy prices and weak industrial materials prices are projected to be initially supportive of margins and profit shares... All in all by 1987 rates of return in manufacturing in the seven largest countries could be back close to their 1974 levels, although still well below their mid-1960s levels."

That's a jargon ridden passage but it's worth unpacking it a little.

"A cyclical pick-up" means that it was part of a cycle which goes up and down. We've had big downs (in 1974-75 and 1980-82) and weak ups (76-79 and 83-?). Are we due for another down?

"The sharp fall in energy prices..." may have averted any renewed decline of profits for many industrial companies last year. But that simply means that the losses have been transferred onto the backs of companies and whole countries engaged in producing raw materials.

Rates of return "could be back close to their 1974 levels although still well below..." But the levels of 1974 were the levels that helped precipitate the crisis in the first place.

There has been a wave of destruction of old capital in the last five years. Millions of workers have been thrown onto the scrapheap. Whole national economies have been devastated. It has not been enough to restore capitalism to health. ■

Pete Green

Slick as parrots

THE DARKEST moment for a football fan used to be defeat in the FA Cup semi final, or relegation. Now it is discovering, courtesy of the morning paper, that your club will be closed down or, worse still, merged with nearby arch rivals.

Fulham and QPR fans were rudely informed last month that their clubs were to become Fool 'Em Rangers, or some such equivalent.

The decision was not made by the community, supporters, players, club staff or managers. Nor was it made by the Sports Council, the Ministry of Education or the Football League. It was made in a board room by property speculators.

Marler Estates are used to upsetting people. Their business means constantly ripping apart neighbourhoods to make profit on land. But when these hooligans took on the football fan, they stirred up a depth of feeling which has, temporarily at least, stopped what seemed to be the inevitable march of money.

London's football fans got together for this fight. There were protests at four grounds in the weekend following the announcement. Banners read, "Supporters united will never be defeated". Fans, forever being told that soccer is their game, exposed the hypocrisy by demanding a say.

Football is kinda popular. Over one million footballers play for 40,000 clubs (according to the Sports Council's 1986 study). Around half a million people walk through league turnstiles every Saturday, and half the population watch the FA Cup final.

Millions follow the game closely through newspaper and television reports. Many of them show an untiring propensity for discussing their team's merits. For the committed fan finances and social life are dominated by the team.

So the creation of an atmosphere in which any club can apparently be vaporised at a moment's notice is pretty upsetting stuff for an awful lot of people, including some top nobs.

Football has some obvious advantages for the powers that be. By the end of the last century it was already seen as a way of diverting newly won leisure time away from more threatening kinds of collective activity.

This channelling of frustrations, fervour and spare energy through playing or supporting soccer still goes on. How many socialists have listened to 30,000 mainly working class men chanting "Come on ye-Reds" and thought "If only...?"

Along with the nationalism that most sport now fosters, football has other uses. The excuse of hooliganism has helped the Tories introduce or promote new powers of control under a popular guise; dawn raids

on supposed gang leaders; new powers of arrest and control of travelling fans; introduction of identity cards; and blood thirsty media discussions on capital punishment.

The blatant subordination of the "national game" to business interests in the Marler deal meant many powerful people joined the chorus of protest.

If clubs, players and supporters could be so easily dismissed, then the whole basis of professional football—ardent fans spending millions of pounds on their favourite team—was in danger of being undermined.

Jimmy Hill chinned his way to the forefront. As the Charlton chairman who forgot to tell the fans they were moving home, his outrage was a bit hard to take.



Telling the fans to sod off

As was Robert Maxwell's. He tried to merge Reading with his own club Oxford United. The new team was to play in that well known centre of football—Didcot.

Having failed in that venture he tried to buy up Manchester United. He failed again. So he bought Derby County and gave it to his son.

The top clubs are big businesses involving huge outlays and potentially enormous profits or losses.

But the Football League has a string of rules designed to ensure that competition does not lead to its logical conclusion. Large clubs have to give up some income to help smaller clubs, and there are many regulations on ownership.

This means that clubs, most of which face financial crisis, cannot be run on strictly commercial lines.

Hence the frantic search for ways out—the superleague, plastic pitches,

bigger TV deals, changing the league rules, etc.

Another problem is that money from the turnstile accounts for less and less of a club's income. This is hardly surprising. The fans, those people for whom "the game is all about", are subjected to gruelling conditions in return for their loyalty.

Before and after the game they are herded, bullied and threatened by the police with horses and dogs. During the game they are crushed into bleak, dirty, often unsafe and invariably freezing stands.

And at half time there is the queue for inedible, over-priced hot dogs followed by the joy of stinking toilets (or trying to find the loo, in the case of women).

Some people must wonder why so many bother.

The relative reduction in admission fees combined with rising debts has emphasised that a club's greatest asset remains its most essential: its ground.

Many clubs have used their land to relieve debts by selling it to local councils and then leasing back.

Two clubs are already playing perm-

anently away from home. Charlton moved to share with Crystal Palace, and Bristol Rovers left its stadium for non-league Bath.

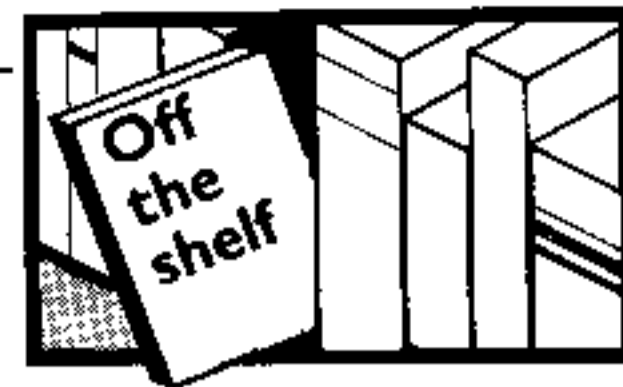
All the financial pressure, plus the phenomenal rise of land prices in London, lie behind the Marler deal.

Under chairman Bulstrode, Marler built up a golden portfolio of three West London league grounds: Chelsea (Stamford Bridge), QPR (Loftus Road) and Fulham (Craven Cottage).

The pincer movement cost around £14 million. Now Marler controls 20 acres of prime land worth £60 million after development.

Bulstrode, a former executive of the failed Slater Walker investment group of the mid 1970s, denies he is an old style asset stripper.

Tell that to the fans. ■
Clare Fermont



When Paris was ours

History of The Paris Commune
Lissagaray
New Park £3.50

IN 1871 the working class in Paris fought for and proclaimed the Paris Commune. For a period of 72 days, for the first time in history, workers proved they could run society. Massive class confrontation hit France.

The struggle that took place for a few weeks between the Parisian working class and bourgeoisie was enormously significant, first for Marx, and later Lenin. Revolutionaries today still look to the achievements and failings of the Commune for guidance as to how socialism can be built.

Lissagaray was a young journalist who lived through the Commune and fought for it on the barricades.

Following the 1789 French revolution the bourgeoisie had proved itself unable to provide a stable rule. The nineteenth century was characterised by revolutionary uprisings, short-lived republics and empires.

In 1871 France had been ruled for several years by Napoleon III and Parisians had been in the forefront of the political struggle against the Empire. During these years there had been extremely rapid industrial growth and a corresponding growth in the working class movement.

The socialist movement was very disjointed, containing an enormous amount of confused ideas, which Lissagaray illustrates very well in the foreword.

It was dominated by the ideas of two men: Proudhon and Blanqui. Proudhon hated the idea of collectivism which he thought was contrary to freedom. He looked to federalism and cooperation rather than class struggle. He also denied women a role as the makers of history—they could be either “housewife or harlot”.

Blanqui held the view that a small number of men would be able to seize power and spur the working class towards revolution.

On 19 July 1870 Napoleon III declared war on Prussia (Germany). Militarily the war was a disaster for France from the beginning and September 1870 saw the defeat and capture of the Emperor.

The working class in Paris immediately proclaimed a republic and days of rejoicing followed. But the men who seized power were representatives of the bourgeoisie, France was still at war and Paris was under siege from the Prussians.

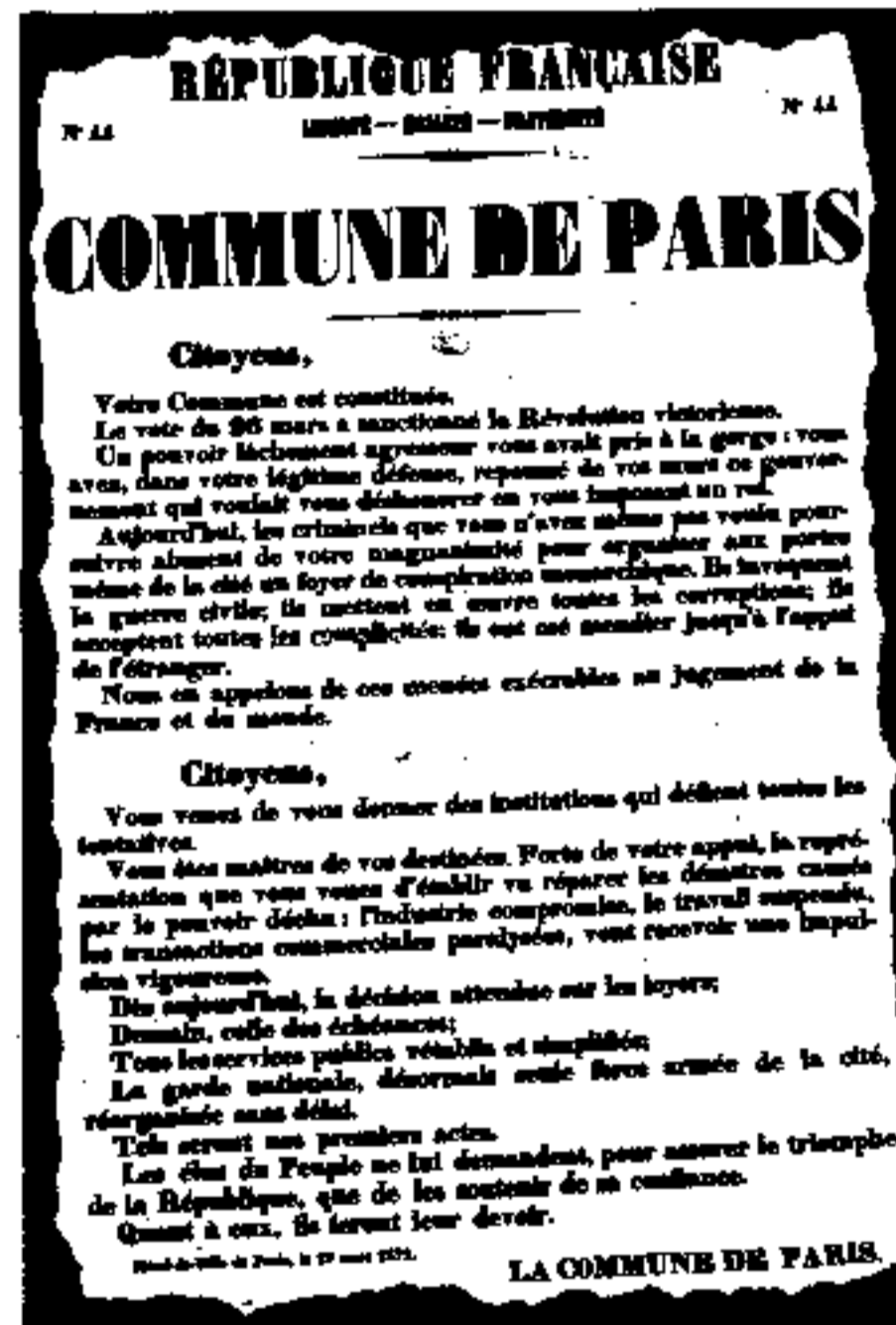
During the siege the situation in Paris was building towards class confrontation between the working class and bourgeoisie. Political radicalisation had taken place with the fall of the Empire and Paris was

now awash with revolutionary clubs.

Most of them were demanding the arming of the Parisian workers and the proclamation of a commune. In Paris 500,000 men waited to be armed. Outside 200,000 Prussians continued the siege which meant hunger, illness and death to those who had to withstand it.

The new bourgeois government of France was more concerned with controlling the Parisian working class than putting an end to the siege. Lissagaray describes how pointless missions were undertaken to try and fool people. He vividly portrays the effect of the siege:

“These repeated foils began to wear out



The proclamation of the Commune

the credulity of Paris. From hour to hour the sting of hunger was increasing, and horse-flesh had become a delicacy. The women waited for hours in the cold and mud for a starvation allowance. For bread they got black grout, that tortured the stomach. Children died on their mothers' empty breasts. Wood was worth its weight in gold, and the poor had only to warm them the despatches of Gambetta, always announcing fantastic successes. At the end of December their privations began to open the eyes of the people.”

The French ruling class at first attempted to come to an agreement with the Prussians to crush the working class. When this ploy did not succeed they concluded a peace agreement which left them free to crush Paris themselves. In February 1871 a very right wing National Assembly was elected. The ruling class was organising itself for class confrontation.

The same day that peace was declared

the Parisian working class began to prepare themselves. Their own organisation, the National Guard, re-organised itself under the control of a Central Committee elected by all the members.

The new National Assembly went on to attack the working class. Firstly the wages of the National Guard were cancelled. Then on 18 March it used the army to try and seize the cannon that the Guard had purchased itself through subscription. Events like these are described by Lissagaray in detail and make this history dramatic reading:

“As in our great days the women were the first to act. Those of 18 March, hardened by the siege...did not wait for the men. They surrounded the machine-guns.”

Faced with this fraternisation the army crumbled, much of it coming over to the side of the working class. The bourgeoisie gathered round it the remaining army and fled to Versailles. The Paris Commune was declared.

Lissagaray is extremely critical of the leadership of the Commune. The first major criticism is that the troops were allowed to leave Paris in peace while the central committee thought about elections.

“The clearing of the ministries was publicly going on; columns of soldiers were still marching off through the gates of the left bank. But the committee continued signing, neglecting this traditional precaution—the shutting of the gates—and lost itself in the elections. It saw not—very few saw as yet—that this was a death struggle with the Assembly of Versailles.”

This is a point that is illustrated clearly by his account. Those people involved in the Commune did not understand that the bourgeoisie and the working class cannot both rule. One of the classes has to crush the other. He quotes the *Journal Officiel* of 21 March:

“The bourgeoisie which has accomplished its emancipation, does it not now understand that the time for the emancipation of the proletariat is come? Why, then, does it persist in refusing the proletariat its legitimate share?”

Lissagaray, to a large extent, shares this lack of understanding. But he does attack the leadership for lack of clarity and illustrates the effect this had:

“In this concert without a conductor, each instrument played what he liked, confusing his score with his neighbour's...A firm and supple hand would soon have restored harmony.”

He is clear about the need to defend Paris and go on the offensive against Versailles, but he does not seem to understand why the bourgeoisie had to crush Paris. He attacks

CROQUIS RÉVOLUTIONNAIRES PAR PILOTTELL.



"The people must be on its guard"—a warning the leaders ignored

them for being blind and not seeing the value of the Commune:

"What bourgeoisie in the world after such immense disasters would not with careful heed have tended such a reservoir of living force? They, seeing this Paris capable of engendering a new world, her heart swelled with the best blood of France, had but one thought—to bleed Paris."

It was left to Marx and Lenin to emphasise the historical significance of the Commune and explain why the bourgeoisie had to crush it. Marx states in *The Civil War in France*:

"It was essentially a working class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour."

This economic emancipation was emancipation from the bourgeoisie—they had no choice but to attempt to crush it.

The Communards however did not see this and were even surprised when the attack on Paris began:

"At the report of the cannon all Paris started. No one believed in an attack, so completely did all, since the 28th, live in an atmosphere of confidence. It was no

doubt an anniversary, a misunderstanding at the utmost."

When the truth was discovered the revolutionary spirit of the working class asserted itself quickly. By 3pm "80,000 men were on their feet crying 'To Versailles!' The women excited the battalions and spoke of marching in the vanguard."

Lissagaray describes beautifully the experience of living in Paris at the time. He describes streets that are safe to walk in at any time of the night or day, and in one memorable passage he takes us into churches which have been transformed into revolutionary meeting places with red flags draped over all the statues.

What he does not do is discuss the significance of the measures taken by this workers' government. In *The State and Revolution* Lenin looks to these measures as the basis of building socialism.

The Commune abolished the army and replaced it with the armed people. It also put an end to bureaucracy—all officials were elected, paid worker's wages and were subject to instant recall. The power of the Catholic church was crushed, free education introduced and all foreigners were given equal rights.

On top of these changes the strength of

the working class asserted itself in labour measures. Night work for bakers was banned, as were all stoppages from wages. All abandoned factories were to be taken over and run by the workers.

It was also left to Marx and Lenin to draw the political lessons from the Commune, in particular with regard to the question of the state. Lissagaray's account points out many of the failings and mistakes:

"All serious rebels have commenced by seizing upon the sinews of the enemy—the treasury. The Council of the Commune was the only revolutionary government that refused to do so...they bent their knees to the budget of the bourgeoisie, which was at their mercy."

The working class controlled and ran Paris but did not take over the bank. They just persuaded or threatened the bank for money to feed people.

Behind all the failings of the Commune lies the lack of understanding of the class nature of their struggle, and the consequent necessity to crush the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state.

Lenin comes back to this point time and time again. He emphasises that the state exists as the instrument the ruling class uses in order to oppress other classes.

He uses the example of the Commune to illustrate his point. They did not crush the bourgeois state and it was only a matter of time before they had to pay the price for this mistake.

The French bourgeoisie understood it could not allow the Parisian working class to "work out the economic emancipation of labour". The Paris Commune lasted for 72 days and for most of these days it was under attack.

On 21 May the Versailles troops entered the city and a week of bloodshed followed. Men, women and children fought from barricade to barricade to defend the Commune. The bourgeoisie murdered 30,000 in the streets and arrested about 15,000 before it felt safe again.

Lissagaray continually shows the potential of the working class in his history of the Commune. He emphasises, "this revolution was made by proletarians". He points out the dangers of involvement. "The people hold sway but for an hour, and woe to them if they are not then ready, armed from head to foot."

Finally he pinpoints the lack of clear sighted, decisive political leadership. "The members came to the Council as to a public meeting, without any preparation, there to proceed without any method."

The Paris Commune is part of our revolutionary tradition. The fighting spirit and revolutionary potential of the working class inspired Marx and Lenin.

In the years separating us from the Commune we have seen many more examples of this potential, yet reading about the Paris Commune can still inspire us with the knowledge that the working class has the strength and capacity to run society. ■

Lesley Hoggart

Condemn or condom?

IT SEEMS to me that the AIDS phenomena puts our rulers in something of a quandary. On the one hand they really wish to use it as an ideological weapon to enforce reactionary ideals of sexual morality.

On the other hand though is the reality of trying to prevent the spread of a virus which could put enormous pressures on time and resources of a health service just when capitalism is trying to cut back on welfare expenditure.

Not to mention the fact that capitalism requires a reasonably healthy workforce and of course that the AIDS virus does not recognise class distinction and can quite easily be spread among sections of the capitalist class.

When AIDS first became a problem, it was relatively easy for these latter considerations to be cast aside. This was a "gay plague" which "junkies" and haemophiliacs were also vulnerable to.

Whilst we were meant to feel sorry for the latter, gays and drug addicts had only brought all this on themselves by their "unnatural" and "degenerate" behaviour.

The disease was one that appeared to be heaven sent, an answer to the prayers of the Whitehouses and moral majority-ites everywhere.

Once it became clear, however, that the disease was not God's wrath being heaped on "deviants", the moral majority became something of a nuisance.

There are two ways of preventing the spread of the disease—firstly no sex, or strict monogamy, secondly safe sex.

Herein lies the dilemma for the ruling class. Their heart tells them to advocate the first. Their head tells them the second. Ideology and material necessity somewhat at odds with one another.

All this occurred to me particularly when the recent spate of TV programmes on AIDS was on.

I wondered how would they deal with the dilemma, or would they avoid it in the bland and incoherent way that the famous Ice Berg and Granite advertisements had done.

I didn't watch all the programmes, but managed to see a few.

I found the BBC's late night *Open Air* on AIDS interesting and informative. Value judgements tended not to be made. The resident doctor was sympathetic and clearly knew what he was talking about.

Included on the panel were AIDS sufferers, doctors, activists and people from the Terence Higgins Trust.

The programme took the form of a phone in, and the phone calls tended to fall into three categories.

There was the hysterical "can I get AIDS from a bog seat?" group, there were re-

actionary nutters arguing, "It's all your own fault," and there were the genuine cries for help and dreadful descriptions of the ways people had been treated, particularly by the medical profession.

The programme dealt with the first group calmly. In one instance the doctor drank water from a glass the AIDS patient had used—not very dramatic but probably quite effective.

The tone of the programme made the second group sound out to lunch, and usually provoked a number of calls attacking them.

The tales of horror about the way patients had been treated by consultants, GPs, dentists etc left you feeling angry and bemused. How could it be that those in a position to know most were just as reactionary and backward as those who got their medical facts from the *Sun*?

The programme was certainly not without faults, but as these things go was not bad.

ITV went for a rather different approach with its *Live AIDS* programme, which was aimed at teenagers and young adults.

The programme featured various stars performing sketches, and the format did not seem at all bad.

The AIDS virus does not recognise class distinctions

Afterwards there was a discussion in which the word "condom" was bandied about and the item itself was produced.

So far so good, but at the end of a long piece on safe sex the presenter, the abominable Mike Smith, announced that there was one even better method than safe sex, "less sex".

What followed was truly awful, reactionary nonsense.

I had felt kind of uneasy from the beginning because of the make up of the panel. There was a doctor who was a sexual psychologist and a doctor who wasn't.

There were two members of the pop group Swing Out Sister, the woman who plays Mary in *EastEnders*, Jonathan Ross (one of the new breed of TV personalities) and finally a woman from *Cosmopolitan*.

Each of these vied with the others for awfulness. All were surpassed by Mike Smith himself.

The young studio audience were treated like idiots and subjected to the worst of lectures in homespun philosophy and half-baked medical theory.

Less sex was the thing to aim for. How to achieve this? Well, the answer lies with women.

BolsheVision



You see, women (who incidentally should also carry the condoms for safe sex) don't really require or desire sex except in a loving relationship, therefore in the words of *Grange Hill* they should "just say no".

Men, the Sex doctor told us, couldn't be trusted to do this, as the need to procreate had made men have a much higher sex drive. Also, once they got an erection all other faculties seem to fail, and men had no self control (this doctor would make a wonderful defence witness in a rape case).

The allusions to the differences were shown in street interviews, young men buying *Mayfair*, young women buying "romance" magazines.

Back in the studio we got back to a good old analogy I thought had all but died in the late sixties, that of the hunt.

Men are the hunters, women their prey. The problem is simply this: in recent years the fox has just laid down, rolled on its back and said here I am, or so thought the woman from *Cosmopolitan*.

Mary from *EastEnders* only had sex with her steady boyfriend, both she and a swung out sister were longing for a return to good old fashioned romance.

A woman in the audience backed it all up by saying she wasn't cheap. The one young woman who suggested that she enjoyed having sex and would rather like to continue doing so, was thought to be irresponsible.

Men were asked if they would cut down partners. One in the clear light of unerected day suggested that there was a lot of bravado from young men his age and that he agreed you should cut down, but wasn't really in the fortunate position to cut down as he had had few experiences with girls.

Rather than recognise this honest attempt to break with much of the machismo around him, he was ridiculed by Smith with "that's your problem." When people laughed the young man said he was trying to make a serious point and didn't think what he'd said was funny, back came Smith "well you wouldn't".

"Boys will be boys", and "Nice girls don't" was the simple message.

As I said the ruling class are in a quandary, maybe Mike Smith has found them their answer!■

Pat Stack

ART and the RUSSIAN revolution

Black Bread and Poetry

A SOCIAL revolution involves far more than just the seizure of political power. When working people who have been physically and spiritually oppressed take power into their own hands, they totally transform their view of the world, their way of life—their culture.

In the heady days of a post-revolutionary period, they may become naively, even absurdly over-optimistic about what can be achieved. But such optimism is an integral part of the revolutionary process.

complex, part of the subtle unfolding of revolutionary consciousness.

The first conference of proletarian cultural-educational organisations was held in Petrograd in October 1917, one week *before* the Bolsheviks took power. It was attended by some two hundred delegates from soviets, trade unions, factory committees and similar bodies; it was estimated that about three-quarters of the delegates were workers, most of them Bolsheviks or Bolshevik sympathisers.

The conference set up a permanent

what the theory of "proletarian culture" was. The 1918 Proletcult convention passed a resolution (drafted by Bogdanov, a long-standing ultra-left, who had had several brushes with Lenin) stating:

"A class-art of its own is indispensable to the proletariat for the organisation of its forces for social work, struggle, and construction. Labour collectivism—this is the spirit of this art, which ought to reflect the world from the point of view of the labour collective, expressing the complex of its sentiments and its militant and creative will."

A new art is not created by conference resolution, and many and varied interpretations could be put on such words. What lay behind them was more important—a feeling that a new age of human history was beginning and that a new culture had to be forged to embody its values. As the novelist Bessalko put it: "We do not need to fill the gap between the past and the present. Let us simply reject the past." A speaker from the floor at the first national Proletcult conference in 1918 elaborated:

"We are entering the new life with a load of proletarian consciousness. They want to load us with another excessive burden—the achievements of bourgeois culture. In that case we will be like an overloaded camel, unable to go any further. Let us throw away bourgeois culture entirely as old rubbish."

In the face of famine, civil war and the massive backwardness of Russian society, such aspirations were hopelessly over-ambitious.

As the revolutionary novelist Victor Serge, a sympathetic observer of the Proletcult, remarked: "After all, what cultural work could be expected when every committed party member lived on 200 grams of black bread a day, plus three dried herrings a week?"

As Trotsky pointed out, even in 1924 the cultural needs of Russia were above all the struggle against illiteracy, lice and syphilis. And for such a period, he argued, bottle-making machines were more important than heroic poems.

Culture could not race ahead of the material conditions. As Valerian Pletnev—a joiner who worked nineteen years at the factory bench before becoming a Proletcult organiser—pointed out, the formation of workers' theatre groups became possible only with the introduction of the eight-hour day.

Because of its over-ambitious programme, the Proletcult soon came into



The Red Star as produced by Proletcult in 1926

It is in such a context that we have to understand the heated debates that took place in post-revolutionary Russia about the question of "proletarian culture".

Seven decades on, it may seem an easy target for any hack armed with an aptly chosen quotation from Trotsky. But the real debate was something much more

organisation, the Petrograd Proletcult. A Moscow Proletcult soon followed, and from 1917 until the early thirties, with various ups and downs and under various names, organisations existed which defended the concept of "proletarian culture".

It is, however, hard to pin down exactly

conflict with the Bolsheviks. Many Bolshevik leaders were suspicious of the Proletcult's claim to be an autonomous mass organisation, fearing that it could become a focus for left-wing intellectuals hostile to Bolshevism.

The involvement of non-Party members such as Bogdanov, a leading figure in the Moscow Proletcult, compounded this anxiety.

Not only Trotsky but also Lenin was sharply critical of the Proletcult. In a speech in 1919 Lenin denounced the



The poet Gastev in 1919

“intellectual fantasies” of proletarian culture, arguing for a much more down-to-earth approach:

“The task of proletarian discipline is to distribute bread and coal in such a way that there is a careful attitude to each unit of coal and each unit of bread ... The basic task of ‘proletarian culture’ is proletarian organisation.”

Yet the fact that Russian backwardness doomed the idea of “proletarian culture” to ultimate failure should not blind us to the facts of its very real achievements on the ground.

It is one of the tenets of class society that “culture” is the preserve of a small layer of talented people; the role of workers, at best, is to admire the achievements of others in a state of passive awe.

The Proletcult organisation set out to create writers' circles, theatre groups and orchestras in which workers could begin to realise that culture was not beyond their grasp. In 1920 the Proletcult was operating 300 workshops with 84,000 members.

In 1925 Victor Serge reported that fifty workers in the Workers' Springtime group had tackled “15 plays, 76 short stories, 261 poems and 20 lectures in 96 evening meetings attended by 450 writers.” Serge described a typical meeting of a Proletcult circle:

“The Vagranka group in the Rogoysko-Simonovsky suburb of Moscow is made up of sixteen workers who write for the press. Perkati-Polé, an old Bolshevik writer, a forgotten man, blind and dirt poor, gathers them in his comfortless lodgings and teaches them how to get rhythm into their verse and prose. There are not enough chairs; they crouch in a circle on the floor. They arrive smelling of tar, machine oil, and metallic dust.” Pletnev describes how workers coming

to the theatrical studios would stay till eleven at night, so that “the leaders have to switch off the lights to force the workers to stop.”

It would be foolish to claim that the Proletcult produced artistic work of lasting value. All too often it combined facile images with an over-heavy rhetoric. Thus the poet Gastev, of the “Smithy” group, wrote lines like:

“Look! Here I stand: among lathes,
hammers, furnaces and forges—
among hundreds of comrades.
There are iron-forged spaces
above me.
Girders and angle-bars on the
sides,
Rising seventy-five feet,
Bending right and left.”

An account of the Proletcult play *The Mangy Dog* describes how it portrays “fat men” engaged in the purchase of human beings for cannon fodder. “The conclusion was a tableau. The electric light was turned off, there was a peal of thunder, and the blood-red soviet star rose above tall factory chimneys. In the light of lurid flames the ruins of the Stock Exchange were seen.”

In retrospect it is easy to patronise or sneer at such works; but in the context of the time their effect was doubtless much more powerful. And even where the products had no intrinsic value, the fact of their production was a symptom of a slow process of cultural transformation, one which would surely have borne fruit had it not been swallowed up in the bloodbath of Stalinist counter-revolution.

Trotsky's critique of the Proletcult, developed in *Literature and Revolution* and numerous other polemics, was cogent and powerful. A culture, he argued, was a rich and complex historical creation; it could not be summoned up overnight.

In the relatively short time that the proletariat would rule (he hopefully foresaw) before disappearing into a classless society it would not have time to produce anything worthy of the name of a culture.

For whereas the bourgeoisie, as a relatively privileged minority, had been able to develop its culture with feudal society, the proletariat, deprived of all power and privilege, could do nothing of the sort.

Trotsky was particularly anxious that the proletariat should take over and make use of the cultural achievements of the bourgeoisie in the fields of science and technology, where they represented a real increase in humanity's control of nature.

But he also believed that much should be taken from bourgeois art and literature too—from the work of Shakespeare, Pushkin, Goethe and Dostoevsky—the working class could learn much about the human personality and human feelings.

However, Trotsky did not dismiss the Proletcult as worthless; he argued that its organisations had a useful role to play if they abandoned the mirages of a “new literature” and confined themselves to trying to “elevate the literary level of the working class.”

But however sharp the polemics, it is important to remember that the Bolsheviks never made any attempt to suppress the Proletcult administratively. Trotsky and Lunacharsky (Commissar for Education) both publicly defended the Proletcult's right to exist.

It was Stalin who, in 1932, finally dissolved the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), the latterday descendant of the Proletcult. Any suggestion that workers could do things for themselves was unacceptable in this new epoch.

If the term “proletarian culture” was used after this time, it was purely as an abstract label to indicate political correctness; it had nothing whatever to do with workers' self-activity.

Clearly the Proletcult failed to live up to its own ambitious claims; yet within the limits of the age its achievements were not negligible, and do not deserve the contempt of posterity. Perhaps the last word can be left to Victor Serge. While accepting the main points of Trotsky's argument, he added the following proviso:

“Many generations of workers may very possibly never know other times. More than anything they will have to fight; they will have to destroy and suffer enormously to remake the world. But like the armies of antiquity, they will have their bards, their story-tellers, their musicians and their philosophers. In order to conquer the proletariat must be led by real thinkers and strategists who, like Marx and Lenin, have assimilated the essentials of modern culture.”



Stalin—the man who put cult into culture

In short, the proletariat must have *its own* great intellectuals. It needs lesser ones as well, for the smaller but equally vital tasks. What is imperative is that both these groups serve it alone. Then the revolutionary work it accomplishes will have an intrinsic value.

In this historically limited sense, there will be, in fact there already is, a militant proletarian culture.■

Ian Birchall

Up off the floor



A scene from *The Killing Floor*

THE KILLING FLOOR is about the struggle of a black militant to hold the union together when his mates scab in the wake of the 1919 Chicago race riot.

It is one of the best films about working class struggle that you are likely to see.

Elsa Rassbach wrote the story and produced the film. *John Rees* spoke to her for *Socialist Worker Review*.

SWR: What are the main themes of the film?

ER: THE MAIN plot is about a black man, Frank Custer. It appears his loyalties are divided between race and class.

Apparently he is forced to choose race. But ultimately one sees that the longer term direction in that period is of class unity, both in his vision and in what happened in history.

The film goes on to indicate that the union was successful, especially in meat packing. It overcame an intense heritage of racial antagonism and became one of the most progressive unions on the issue of race relations.

But drama is never that simple. Other aspects show characters like "Heavy" Williams who totally opposes black-white unity. His view seems borne out in the short term.

It's not brought out in the film, but there were attempts to build all black unions. Almost inevitably they became company unions.

THE LONDON screening was followed by speeches from Bernie Grant and Dianne Abbott of the Labour Party Black Sections. Were you surprised by the things they said about the "contradiction between

race and class" and about separate black unions.

THEY WERE right about the film showing a contradiction between race and class, but the film definitely doesn't say there should be separate black unions.

There was a racist heritage which had to be overcome in order to draw blacks into the unions. An authentic black union leadership was necessary.

A man like Frank Custer had to find his voice. At the end of the film he says, "They need us and we need them." As well as the need for unity he understands he has to fight around his own issues.

The whole US movement in the 60s tore itself apart trying to decide which was primary, race or class.

Sometimes it takes an artistic vehicle to encompass those contradictions.

WOULD YOU say class unity has to be fought for by the class championing the oppressed?

YOU SAY "the class", but who is that? You can't simply say "the class". The divisions, not only of race but craft and so on, don't allow you to say that.

WE WOULD say that you can define the class in economic terms, but class consciousness has to be fought for and constructed in the course of struggle. It is not automatic. When you were writing the film did you think about the role of political organisations?

YOU MEAN left wing parties? The focus was on Frank Custer's dilemma, but the original storyline had more material about the tendency represented by Johnstone and Foster who came out of the Wobblies and

later went into the Communist Party.

It might have been good to retain more of that, but it didn't seem possible in the context of the main drama.

You also have to realise the US has a very strong syndicalist tradition and a very weak tradition of political organisation. For example, there is no Labour Party.

American labour was being dissipated by Utopian political organisation in the 1870s-1880s.

People like Johnstone and Foster wanted to avoid weak political organisation and so concentrated on the unions which had some real strength. The Wobblies came out of that anti-political tradition. Some believed this to be a Marxist view.

The only repository of political consciousness was the unions.

People like Foster and Johnstone were important in laying the seeds of industrial unions.

But at the time the film is set they had left the Wobblies but not yet joined the Communist Party. They decided that it was ineffective to create a dual union. It was essential, whatever the risks, to work in the established trade unions.

DO YOU agree that the role of the trade union leaders paved the way for the racial divisions by selling the struggle short when it could have won?

THE PROBLEM with left wing criticism of union leaders is knowing what the options really were. The left seem to say that if the union leaders had "tried harder" or whatever they could have won more for the workers. But often there is a weakness in the bargaining position of the workers.

In 1919 the power of the state protected employers who hired scabs. So the point is, were the workers able to overcome this?

Bill Bremer, the white militant in the film, makes the point you made. It's a point that Foster and Johnstone would have made. But did the union leaders have options?

Maybe there were options. I'm not such a determinist to think that there weren't. But I also think those criticisms of the union leaders take a moralistic standpoint based on options that don't always exist.

There were divisions about tactics in the unions, with Foster and Johnstone wanting to get rid of the deal at a decisive point.

They thought the no strike deal would dig their own grave.

But with all the research that I've done it's still hard to know whether a tactical mistake was made or whether that was the only option given the strength they had.

It's like being a Monday morning quarterback.

WHAT?

YOU KNOW, re-running the game and saying what the quarterback should have done in retrospect, on Monday morning.

It's hard to know whether they could have thrown out the deal and had a general strike before the war ended and their power declined.

THERE WAS enormous power in the movement in 1919.

YES, INTERNATIONALLY as well. I would like to have brought that out more.

We once thought of having a scene where Frank is shining shoes and John Reed comes into Chicago. The meeting of the Socialist Party which ends in the split and the formation of the CP took place in Chicago in the same year.

We were going to have Frank Custer shining Reed's shoes and cast Warren Beatty in a cameo role so that people would connect up these two histories in their minds!

That would be an ironic comment about the radicals of the period as well!

THE FILM doesn't end on the kind of victorious note you get from *Reds*.

THE DECISION about where to end the film was important. A lot of people have said, "Why didn't you take the film up to the victories of the 30s?"

But I think this story is a story of our times. It ends with a tremendous defeat for the unions, sowing the seeds for victories at another stage, where they do more than they ever did before.

The film seems to end on the slender thread of that handshake but the film shows what eventually happens. It is good for these times.

I THINK it will mean a lot to miners or steel workers who are fighting to keep things together.

SOME UNION organisers in the States have said, "We don't want to show this film because it doesn't end in victory."

But I think the film is richer because it gives hope over time. The film tries to grasp

history as a process—that in defeat new seeds are sown.

YOU HAD difficulty getting the money for the film?

IT TOOK a long time. Television, in fact every institution in any society, is touched by these questions—it was a hot nerve.

We could only get the public money if we could get corporate money. That meant the corporations had a veto.

We weren't allowed to take union money. That dual standard became a scandal when it was exposed in the *New York Times*.

Finally, because of the outcry, the policy was changed. Raising money from the unions was difficult in itself, but in the end 40 different unions gave money.

That meant I couldn't possibly give the unions any say in the script. The fact that they still went ahead was an act of faith. I think it also showed how shut out of the media they felt.

THE FILM is one of a series isn't it?

THE ORIGINAL idea was for a ten part series of which *The Killing Floor* was part



Elsa Raasbach

eight. The idea was to cover the first century of US industrialisation from 1840 to 1940.

It would have been better than *Amerika!*

We'd got Senate agreement for major financing just before Reagan was elected. Then the Senate went Republican.

THEY AXED it?

YEAH, THEY axed it. There was also the general cut backs in public television and, of course, you encounter all the prejudices about labour. Dealing with this in the bureaucracy is very hard.

But now I'm doing the film which was planned as the first in the series.

It's about the early textile industry which was founded with a vision of somehow creating capitalism without a working class.

There was an egalitarian revolutionary tradition in the wake of the American revolution such that the major merchant capitalists, who created the largest industrial centre, did so with a social vision.

They were determined to avoid the

degradation of the workforce that they observed in England. Some say that this was just propaganda, but my reading is that they did hold those ideas. They thought that sheer will power would do it.

They thought they could avoid the cost of capitalist industrialisation. Wanting to avoid a permanent working class they thought they could just get farm girls to work on a temporary basis.

The same technique is still being used!

The story is very sharp and ironic, very bitter-sweet and even somewhat comic.

SO DID the original series deal with the 1937 Flint sit-in?

YES, THAT'S what got me into all this in the first place. I wanted to look at the unity of the different factions in the sit-in and how that fell apart in the period leading up to the McCarthy era.

But the more history I read the more I realised that you couldn't understand what a high point that was without looking back.

I SEE the director of *The Killing Floor* worked on *Hill Street Blues*.

I FOUND Bill Duke quite late in the day. We wanted a black director, someone who was in the directors' union. We needed someone who could shoot on a tight schedule, like a TV schedule.

Bill Duke was used to working with large union crews, unlike some of the independents. He has a background that gives him a pretty deep understanding—his father was a steel worker.

Most of the black directors come out of the black bourgeoisie or professional classes. We wanted someone with Bill's depth of experience.

ONE OF the things that is impressive about the film is how it weaves different levels of analysis together—from the individual to the broad political. *Hill Street* uses some of that technique. Was that a help?

NO, NOT really. I'd already developed the script with the black playwright Leslie Lee and I did the editing with black editor John Carter.

I think the writers are always underestimated in film making. People always concentrate on the director.

Bill was important, but the director can come in on the scene to do the shoot and then go home. That's actually quite common.

There wasn't even much already written history to go on. Most of it was done from original documents. We had a hard time with the ending because the documentation became very sketchy after the race riot.

We had a different ending where Frank walks out with the white unionists. But then we felt it wouldn't really be a victory because most of the black workers are in the plant. Then all the film would be saying is, "Here's the good black—he left with the whites, and here's the bad blacks—they scabbed." But we found original documents giving a true picture of events.

That all happened at the writing stage. But I guess we've been Monday-morning-quarterbacking the film. ■

Positively black

A SPATE of new black independent films has hit British cinemas. Four in particular stand out.

The best of these is *She's Gotta Have It* by Spike Lee, a very funny film based on sexual relations.

The story is about a middle class black woman who has three lovers. One is a romantic sentimental guy who writes poetry. Another is a vain, fastidious middle class snob. The third, Mars (Spike Lee), is a rappy street-smart, but immature, bike owner who keeps his trainers on in bed.

The film looks at the so-called problem of Nola's sexual desires. Why can't she settle down to a stable monogamous relationship like "normal" women?

Nola's only problem is the problem of an oppressive society. Her simple demand is for independence and control over her own body. This is met with incomprehension and annoyance by her lovers. Yet it is Nola who is told to see a psychiatrist.

Spike Lee uses an all black cast, which has caused consternation among film critics.

Black people are also shown making love. This was and is an uncomfortable sight for Hollywood moguls who refused to finance it—a sad indictment of the strength of racist ideas within the film industry.

She's Gotta Have It is an extremely well performed film, stunningly shot in black and white. Lee uses an array of techniques such as direct address to the camera, still photos of poor blacks in New York, repeated sequences, and slow motion.

The Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Songs* is a highly accomplished and imaginative film. It uses poetry, archive footage, newspaper cuttings and sound documentary to analyse the inner city riots of 1985, placing the deaths caused by the riots in a political and historical context.

Handsworth Songs is undoubtedly a major leap forward in black documentary film-making.

Passion of Remembrance, produced by the Sankofa workshop, is a film about the current state of a trend in black politics. Maggy's story is of a community video worker who confronts her family and the black guys at the youth club with their anti-gay and backward ideas.

The other story is the more allegorical tale of a 60s Black Power man versus a modern black feminist woman. She berates him for failing to mobilise around the women's issues.

Sankofa and other black independent film makers are aware that for their films to succeed it is not just the politics within the plot that is important, but also the politics of the characters. One of their aims is to challenge media images of black people as the merely decorative and exotic, the victim, or the threat. They provide a greater range of characters for black audiences to identify with.

Overall, however, the film is patchy. The root of the weakness can be attributed to the politics of the film—movementism, ie that oppression and exploitation can be fought effectively through alliances of various autonomous movements such as gay, peace and trade union movements.

Nevertheless, it is an important film because it provides an insight into the world view of a strand in black politics today.

Both *Handsworth Songs* and *Passion of Remembrance* are within the British left avant garde tradition. They both use the mixture of different styles to express ideas. Unlike some of the earlier films, they have moved beyond wilful obscurity and are interesting and challenging.

Horace Ove's *Playing Away* is a mildly

funny comedy about a black Brixton cricket team invited to play away to a Home Counties white team.

It had the potential to be a very funny and politically astute film, but it ends up feeling like an average TV sitcom. The characters are too crudely sketched.

Ove makes concessions to liberal views on racism. The white working class team members are portrayed as hardened racists and would-be rapists. And the black team has as its only ally, in a film that is meant to be a metaphor for English society, a white ex-colonial vicar!

All these films, despite some weaknesses, should be seen because of their intrinsically anti-racist politics. They raise problems that affect black people and go beyond the stock psychological and individualised explanations.

It is remarkable that they have been produced at all—financiers are not overkeen on black representations on the screen unless they are negative.

These are exciting times for black films here and abroad, especially with the experimentation and coverage of new issues. Let's hope it is not short-lived. ■

Simon Peters

Law of the Jungle

Down by Law

BARRY NORMAN, the Hollywood establishment's voice at the BBC, described this film as racist and complained that the escape from prison is never explained. How does such a simpleton stay in a position of such influence?

Down by Law is in fact a masterly exposition of the way rotting, urban America perverts people's identities and destroys their ability to communicate. Shot in sharp, moody black and white, it studies the relationships between three men thrown together in prison, and how their relationships develop during their adventures after their escape.

Jack is a failed disc jockey, Zack is a failed pimp, and Bob is an Italian, new to America, with a small collection of English words which he keeps in his note book.

Jack can only express himself in any sort of cohesive way by returning to the DJ-speak of his former radio days. Even then it is only to impress and not to say anything relevant.

Zack can only use the well worn clichés of the small time operator thinking big. "What's a guy like me doing in a place like this?" he asks, trying to play the part but only sounding and looking pathetic.

Bob though is different. He talks with everything—his voice, his body, his face; even his hair, which at one stage takes on the shape of a court jester's hat. Much of the more blatant humour stems from his perpetual wrestling match with the English language. But he is never degraded by the contest. Bob is not a Fawley Towers Manuel.

Rather, he is very much in the mould of Shakespeare's wise fools—ridiculous at first glance but underneath clever and cunning. It is Bob who masterminds the three friends' escape.

He is the catalyst between the two street-wise cell mates. In prison he puts his arms round the two after a particularly enjoyable conversation and says, "We are all a good egg." The two are obviously delighted by this flush of emotion but pull away in embarrassment in order to regain their momentary loss of "cool".

It is the supposedly naive Bob who survives the rigours of prison and on-the-run life best, and he who is eventually rewarded.

The film makes no judgements about the characters. We are never asked to condemn Zack for being a pimp or Jack for being a waster. But we are, most definitely and from the very opening shots of urban wasteland, encouraged to conclude that their characters have been formed, perverted and maintained by a corrupt and disgusting system.

The film is a masterpiece of wit, sensitivity and sadness. It is not racist, and only a moron would worry about how Jack, Zack and Bob escape from prison. If you get the chance, go and see it. ■

Lee Humber

In the devil's kitchen

Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma
A Badayev
Bookmarks £5.95

BADAYEV was a Bolshevik engineering worker elected to the Tsarist Duma (parliament).

His book provides a detailed history of the relationship between the activity of the Bolshevik deputies in the Duma and the developing class struggle outside. It covers the period from the election of the Fourth Duma in the autumn of 1912 to the arrest and trial of the deputies a few months after the beginning of the war.

This was a period of upsurge in working class activity after the years of reaction which followed the defeat of the 1905 revolution, an upsurge which culminated in the revolutionary wave of strikes in July 1914.

In spite of the electoral law, which guaranteed that the majority in the Duma would consist of the reactionary representatives of the landlords, and abject liberals representing the bourgeoisie, the Bolsheviks didn't take an abstentionist position.

They saw the election campaigns and work in the Duma itself as an opportunity to make revolutionary propaganda and agitation.

The programme for the election was formulated on the basis that:

"the task to which all other tasks should be subordinated is socialist propaganda on class lines and the organisation of the working class...special attention should be paid in the election campaign to maintaining the independence of the party of the proletariat from all the non-proletarian parties."

The centrality of working class activity to the work of the Bolshevik Duma deputies can be clearly seen in terms of the

space in the book which is devoted to strikes, demonstrations and meetings taking place outside the Duma compared to accounts of what was going on inside it.

Badayev only reports the Duma proceedings in so far as they provided an opportunity for the deputies to raise questions and protests about the treatment of strikers, the appalling conditions and lack of safety precautions in factories, the brutality of the police and so forth.

These protests were designed to be heard not by Tsarist ministers or the majority of deputies, but by the workers outside in the factories and the streets.

The Duma rostrum was used by the Bolsheviks to demonstrate to the workers that they could not hope for any improvement in their position from the Duma, only from workers' own organisation and strength.

The Bolshevik members of the Duma were by no means merely mouthpieces. They were required to assist the struggle outside parliament in every possible way.

So Badayev and the other deputies, all of whom were former shop floor workers, spent most of their time using their limited parliamentary immunity to organise and distribute collections for strikes, organise propaganda and agitation around disputes, and, when the Duma was in recess, touring the country to strengthen the legal and illegal work of the party.

The Bolshevik attitude to parliament is summed up by Badayev in describing the struggles which took place in the spring of 1914:

"Though the Duma reflected to some extent the political struggles which occurred in the country, the question had ultimately to be settled at the factories and in the streets and not within the walls of the Taurida Palace" (meeting place of the Duma).

This statement could not have been uttered by a reformist, not even by the Benns and Heffers, who see a role for "extra-parliamentary" struggle, but only as a back up to the "real" fight in parliament.

The Bolsheviks were very clear that the parliamentary work was subordinate to the rest of the party's work, and that the deputies were under the party's discipline.

Their work got the following tribute from the reactionary press:

"Every speech in the Duma arouses a response among 200,000 organised workers. All live questions in working class circles are immediately re-echoed from the Duma rostrum, when the Social Democrats [ie the Bolsheviks] censure the government and still further excite the ignorant masses."

Badayev's book is therefore very valuable as a concrete and detailed depiction of how revolutionaries used parliament in a period of rising workers' struggle. Nevertheless, it has serious flaws arising from the fact that it was written in

1929, after the triumph of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

There are elements of the rewriting of history in the form of references to Stalin at every opportunity, even when he could not possibly have been there.

More seriously, because less obviously, the book does not deal with a number of conflicts which arose over the work of the deputies. In general Badayev gives the impression that everything about their policy was correct all the time, in line with Stalinist myth. It would have been amazing if this had been the case.

Lenin was well aware of the dangers of any kind of parliamentary work, since it removed party members to an environment dominated by ruling class ideas. Consequently very strict guidelines were laid down for the deputies.

The most serious differences arose over work with the Mensheviks, and over the attitude to the war. The Bolshevik deputies worked for a year in a joint fraction with the Mensheviks, and Badayev implies that this was fully in accordance with party decisions, when in fact the deputies were urged to split a considerable time before they did so.

The policy on the war also began with an accommodation to the right. The Bolshevik deputies issued a joint declaration on war with the Mensheviks, which, while not supporting the war, fell far short of Lenin's position of revolutionary defeatism.

Again Badayev glosses over this, suggesting that when they received Lenin's *Theses on the War* these:

"confirmed the correctness of the policy which we had followed in Russia since the commencement of the war and at the same time strengthened that policy by a clear and precise formulation of 'defeatism'."

In spite of these flaws, the book is well worth reading. Its pages are filled with workers' struggle—a welcome change from all the parliamentary cretinism which surrounds us at the moment. ■

Sue Cockerill

Stalin in motherland

Moscow in World War Two
Cathy Porter and Mark Jones
Chatto & Windus £14.95

ON THE eve of the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution, Stalin addressed the Russian people from the depths of the Mayakovski metro station in central Moscow.

Just 19 miles away lay troops of Hitler's armies. Leningrad was under siege. Hitler together with the Americans and British believed Russia would fall to the German

In 1912, six Bolsheviks were elected to the Tsarist

parliament, the Duma, on a rising wave of class struggle which, though interrupted by the First World War, was to lead on to the 1917

revolution. This book, written by one of them, is unique. Not only does it chronicle a vital period of

class struggle, but it shows how socialists can use the sham democracy of parliament to organise the working class. 256 pages.

£5.95 from SWP bookstalls or by post (add 60p postage) from BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

A Y Badayev

**BOLSHEVIKS
IN THE
TSARIST
DUMA**

blitzkrieg.

Panic had already swept Moscow. Government departments had left the city. Party functionaries were trying to get out.

In his speech Stalin deliberately held up the age old image of Mother Russia, asking the Russian people to make war in the name of her dead heroes.

No one can doubt the impact of the war on Russian society. The reminders are everywhere today in Russia.

A book entitled *Moscow in World War Two* promises to be of massive interest. Unfortunately the title does not describe what the authors have produced.

Rather than being a description of the impact of the war on the civilian population it offers a general account of the war on the Eastern Front. An account culled from official sources and all too disappointingly in accordance with the Moscow line.

Thus the Hitler/Stalin pact of 1939 is seen as part of Stalin's diplomatic manoeuvring aimed at strengthening Russia's military.

The reality was that Stalin believed he could come to terms with Hitler. Hours before the Panzers rolled into Russia, vital military supplies were still being exported to Germany as agreed under the pact.

Even when warned of the exact time and date of the attack Stalin refused to believe Hitler would break the pact.

The Red Army crumbled because Stalin had shot its best leaders in the purges. His ageing cronies who led it in 1941 were not up to the job. Stalin's commissars were incompetent and cowardly.

His orders to defend the unfortified borders meant Russian aircraft, tanks and dumps were lined up along the frontiers awaiting destruction. His insistence that there could be no retreat meant forces could not be regrouped for a counter attack and were trapped by the Wehrmacht.

When Stalin addressed the Russian people in November 1941 he was responsible for a military disaster. Confidence in his regime was at rock bottom.

Cathy Porter and Mark Jones know all this. Listed in the bibliography is John Erickson's two volumed detailed history of the Russo-German war. It gives the facts fully and honestly, unlike Porter and Jones.

The second failing of the book is that it gives no account of how the regime responded to rebuild civilian support.

Its first move was to recreate the old officer corps. The commissars were demoted. The military bureaucracy began to emerge as a crucial force within the regime. While rifles and fuel were in desperate supply Stalin urgently ordered gold braid from London to decorate his marshalls.

The second move was to switch over the whole ideology of the state to Russian nationalism as reflected in Stalin's speech. The war was portrayed as a crusade for

Holy Russia.

Stalin himself rehabilitated the Russian Orthodox Church. People were openly told the "mistakes" of the 1930s would not be repeated and life would be better.

Before 1941 the ruling bureaucracy still felt constrained to cloak their actions and beliefs in terms of Lenin and Marx. From 1941 onwards Russian nationalism surfaced openly as the official ideology.

Victory over Hitler ensured a degree of popular support for the regime which remains fuelled today by Russian TV's ceaseless coverage of "The Great Patriotic War" and the compulsory visit newlyweds make to the war memorial.

As a history Porter and Jones's book will not do. It does not mention the treatment of oppressed nationalities within Russia.

Great play is made of the advancement of women's position during the war—the fact that they were employed in skilled trades or joined the armed forces. But that was true too in Britain and America.

But in 1945 that came to an end. Porter and Jones note in passing that in 1944, with Russia's borders cleared, the regime moved to get women back into the home. It boosted the birthrate by announcing a new title "Heroine Mother of More Than Ten Children" and an "Order of Motherhood Glory".

This book is a whitewash of Stalin. It even whitewashes the agreements between the allies which saw Stalin divide the world into "spheres of influence" and agree to the crushing of revolution in Greece.

The war is central to the emergence of state capitalist Russia as the world's second power and to its current ideology.

A few years ago nostalgia for Stalin was limited to the ageing Communist Party. Now Gorbachev's talk of reform is in danger of sowing new illusions in Russia as offering some sort of alternative. The undoubted sacrifices of the war remain a powerful draw.

But they should not blind us to the fact that Stalin, like Churchill or Roosevelt, was concerned with strengthening his state.

And for Stalin if that meant watching Polish freedom fighters be slaughtered in the Warsaw Uprising to ensure future Russian control, or complicity in the crushing of the Greek revolution, then that was fine. ■

Chris Bambery

Pocket polemics

Arguments for Socialism

John Molyneux

Bookmarks £2.50

TIMES ARE hard. The political atmosphere is made claustrophobic by

electoralism, and the defeat of the miners and the printers still hangs heavily in the air.

Yet we are in the midst of an ever-worsening economic crisis which sparks revolts the world over and political crises at home.

This contradiction poses particular problems for revolutionaries.

Myriad questions are thrown up for which there are no practical answers easily drawn from workers' immediate experiences.

Socialists often require a great breadth of historical example and a great depth of theory to give convincing answers to the most straightforward inquiry.

The beauty of John Molyneux's weekly column in *Socialist Worker* is that it fulfils that requirement.

The column is impressive by any standards. The sheer stamina is astounding. If all the columns were printed in one volume it would be longer than *War and Peace*.

Bookmarks have made a short selection of these columns, grouping them together under seven chapter headings. Each chapter is sub-divided by questions to which the following passage gives an answer.

This is an attractive format, especially for people new to these ideas. I well remember when I first started reading revolutionary theory finding Engels' question and answer *Principles of Communism* more accessible than the *Communist Manifesto* for which it was a draft.

The questions in *Arguments for Socialism* are the sort which any socialist, whether in the Socialist Workers Party or not, is liable to be asked in conversation in the canteen or pub.

They range from "What do you mean by socialism?", through "What about human nature?", to "Don't we need bosses?"

The answers to these questions, although short, do justice to the complexity of the issues and give the broad outlines of the revolutionary position.

At the same time Molyneux is not afraid to make new arguments for old positions and there is usually a fresh angle on issues that you believed had already been covered from every conceivable point of view.

The book will provide an invaluable second step for anyone who has just read Alex Callinicos' *The Revolutionary Road to Socialism*.

I found only one drawback. Reading the book straight through you find that the focus jumps slightly from passage to passage so that questions raised in one section aren't pursued or developed in the next.

I suspect that the best way to read the book is to dip into it and that its greatest use will be to start discussion, especially in educational settings. ■

John Rees

Travelling light

The European Tribe
Caryl Phillips
Faber and Faber £7.95

CARYL PHILLIPS was born in St Kitts in 1958 and arrived in Britain at the tender age of twelve weeks. He thus grew up in the same era as myself, and on opening this, his latest book, the memories of growing up in the sixties and seventies came flooding back.

Those of us who grew up here then were the first generation of black children to go through the English school system in any significant numbers. However we went through it before any ideas of multi-cultural or anti-racist education had been thought of.

Black people now in their late twenties or early thirties thus share a common experience. Being one of only a handful of black children at school, never seeing a book written by a black person or even one that refers to black people other than as the objects of history, slaves or conquered tribes.

But the seventies also saw the emergence of black resistance. There was never a civil rights movement in Britain, but by 1976 there were riots in Southall and Notting Hill. Small scale by the standards of what we've seen in the eighties, but reflecting an important development in the consciousness of young black Britons.

Phillips missed these politicising events because by 1976 he was studying in the cloistered environment of Oxford University. There he came under the influence of an older American student who had lived through the civil rights movement. This opened his eyes to the ideas of black consciousness and also invoked in him the urge to travel.

Travelling is what this book is about. Phillips spent a year travelling through Europe and here he details his observations and reflections, not on the places or sights, but the people, the "European Tribe". He appears to be grasping for some sort of explanation of his environment, not from the towns and cities, but the people, white people.

Some of his observations are amusing, others depressing. Here he describes a conversation with the French Socialist Government spokesman on affairs to do with North Africans.

"...He immediately informed me that he was an 'expert' on North African 'affairs' travelling there regularly, mainly to Algeria... France was glad to have black people, he said, because of the trade they bring. Food, hairdressing

and shirts, were offered as examples.

"Shirts?" I asked. Yes of course, shirts."

Most disappointing is Phillips' attitude to the Moroccans. (I know Morocco isn't in Europe, but for some reason he chose to start his travels there.)

50 percent of Moroccans live below the poverty line, 20 percent are unemployed, there is no unemployment pay and even those in work have suffered a two year wage freeze while the cost of living has doubled. Despite knowing and stating these facts our author is still disgusted and repulsed by the beggars and street hustlers to the point of being insulting. "Haven't you bastards got any self respect?"

Of course not. Self respect comes very low on any list of priorities when you can't

afford to eat and your children are crying for the want of nourishment. What about the self respect of King Hassan or the American government which backs him or the multinational companies who get fat on the profits from exploiting this misery?

So we see the essential weakness of the book. Phillips demonstrates no understanding of where oppression comes from or why white people behave in a racist manner. He concludes with what amounts to an appeal to white people to purge themselves of their racist attitudes and be nicer to black people.

It is the classic mistake of the liberal who sees ideology as something separated from material reality. ■

Mort Mascarenhas



The fate of Donald Woods

Dangerous dispatches

South Africa,
Graham Leach
Methuen, £2.95
Asking for Trouble,
Donald Woods,
Penguin, £3.95

GRAHAM LEACH'S hope, as stated in the preface to his book, *South Africa*, is that the people there, "black and white, rich and poor, famous and not so famous ... will one day resolve their problems." The next 300 pages are offered as his attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. Not surprisingly, he fails.

It is not that the book is short on facts. Indeed there are lots of them (and not a few fallacies too!). The book's major failing is that the author doesn't make much sense of these facts. He sees many trees, but not the

wood. In short he is a liberal.

Donald Woods is also a liberal, but of a very different breed. In his autobiography *Asking for Trouble* he gives an eloquent account of his life in South Africa.

The book starts with the quote, "education consists mainly in what we have unlearned."

From his early life as a white trader's son in the Transkei, through his legal training to his progress as a journalist, Woods charts his own political development.

He gives an honest account of his childhood, vividly describing the absurd level of prejudice amongst the traders. When at 18 he leaves to study law he has assumed much of his parents' racism.

His political views evolve as he embraces federalism, joining first the Federal Party, and when that dies its successor the Progressive Party. Woods rises to become editor of the *Daily Dispatch* in the course of which he helps liberalise both the political slant of the paper and its working practices. He employs black journalists and uses the paper to challenge aspects of petty apartheid.

His politics evolve further when he meets the leader of the black consciousness move-

ment, Steve Biko. Biko leaves a deep impression on him, due, in part to the common political ground between them.

Despite its historical and cultural wealth, Biko's philosophy is that of a radical liberal but with a black orientated twist to his critique of the economy and his proposals for bettering it.

Liberalism has nothing very profound to say about the economic character of society. Capitalism is either the natural state of affairs, or the best. Either way it is unchallengeable.

Liberals concern themselves with finding fairer, less oppressive ways of managing the economy, not with fundamentally changing it.

Biko does however expose to Woods the futility of *white* liberal attempts to dismantle apartheid from within, piece by piece.

The year is 1976 and Donald Woods is about to witness the brutal suppression of the black consciousness movement. In August 1977 Steve Biko is killed by the police. Through his newspaper Woods runs a campaign to bring his killers to justice. The state responds by "banning" him—placing him under virtual house arrest.

Following attacks on his children by the security forces he escapes to Lesotho in early 1978.

This is an interesting and often courageous story about a man who fought the state, on the state's terms—and lost. As

his little plane slips out of Lesotho, bound for Botswana, one can't help feeling that Donald Woods still has a lot of unlearning to do. ■

Roger Davies

The clem factor

Prospectus for a habitable planet
Edited by E P Thompson and Dan Smith

Penguin £3.95

BHOPAL, Chernobyl, the Ethiopian famine, unemployment and the debt crisis are not just chance occurrences. All were made more likely because of the Cold War.

The planet is divided into two armed camps, made more dangerous by Cruise missiles, SS-20s and Star Wars. On nineteen occasions between 1945 and 1973 American armed forces were put on an alert for nuclear attack.

This is the state of the world outlined in this book. Thompson, Smith and a "distinguished team of experts" claim to offer a prospectus which could lead to an alternative future.

"When we get rid of Cruise missiles we should press the Soviet Union to with-

draw their newly established nuclear armoury ... When we expel US nuclear bases we should call upon the USSR to commence withdrawing conventional forces which have been, since 1968, in temporary occupation of Czechoslovakia."

What will make this happen? How can the planet be made more habitable? All the authors reach the same conclusion. Only with agreements between states can the Cold War be ended.

All hopes for peace lie with the election of a Labour government—or even a Labour-led coalition. Peace activists are urged to try to win the sort of popular support for Neil Kinnock that there was for getting rid of Cruise.

The sights have been lowered. The aim now is to use public opinion to encourage a new government to develop "non-provocative defence policies", sign treaties and engage in diplomacy. Breaking with the "Atlanticist consensus"—a US-led nuclear NATO—is the most ambitious hope. Is it possible?

One contributor, Mary Kaldor, reveals that in the 1950s a British Prime Minister agreed to station American nuclear bombers in East Anglia without discussing the matter with the Cabinet, let alone Parliament.

Kaldor forgets to mention his name—it was Clement Atlee, leader of the Labour government with the biggest majority ever. ■
Mark Krantz

Bookbrief

BOOKMARKS' reissue of Tony Cliff's political biography of Lenin is completed this month with the publication of *Lenin: The revolution besieged 1917-1923*. This final volume traces the history of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party from the establishment of workers' power in 1917, through the founding of the Communist International to the start of the degeneration of the revolution.

First published in 1978 and 1979, it remains essential reading for all revolutionaries. Cover price is £8.95, but look out for a special offer in the Bookmarx Club's next quarter.

Further essential reading comes from *Socialist Worker's* new pamphlet, *AIDS: The socialist view (90p)*. Combining a detailed examination of the real facts about the disease with the arguments we need to counter the Tories' appeal for a return to "Victorian values", it shows how the priorities of capitalism have ensured the spread of the virus to epidemic proportions.

It will be invaluable to anyone defending basic socialist principles against the attacks of the right.

Good pamphlets from other sources are becoming increasingly rare, so it's good to see *New Park* re-issuing *John MacLean—Accuser of Capitalism (75p)*.

The pamphlet contains the speech from the dock that MacLean made when put on trial in 1918 for "inciting sedition, mutiny and disaffection".

MacLean had consistently fought against the First World War as a revolutionary internationalist, and he used his speech to hammer home his basic point that "The German workers' enemy is the same as our enemy in this country—the landlords and the capitalists are our mutual enemies." The pamphlet also contains a useful short introduction to MacLean's life and work. Highly recommended.

New in paperback from *Lawrence and Wishart*: Allan Merson's *Communist resistance in Nazi Germany (£7.50)*, which was highly praised by our reviewer when it first appeared in hardback; and Gramsci's *Cultural Writings (£6.95)*, which another reviewer found "a difficult, fragmentary book ... the effort of ploughing through it just too much." But at that price, you can afford to see if you disagree.

The American lake by Hayes, Zarsky and Bello (*Penguin £4.95*) is "full of useful facts and figures on American nuclear strategy in the Pacific, though written from a liberal point of view", our reviewer found. He thought it good value for money if you already know something about the subject,

but heavy reading.

Contemporary feminist fairy tales is the subject of Jack Zipes' *Don't bet on the prince (Gower £6.95)*—though for some reason it misses out the one about the Kinnock on a white charger whose Ministry of Women will rescue all damsels in distress! Not recommended at all.

Not all feminist fiction has degenerated that far, luckily. Barbara Wilson's *Sisters of the road (Women's Press £3.95)* is a fine detective novel, with a sharp eye for details and a gripping pace. And Rebecca O'Rourke's *Jumping the cracks (Virago £3.95)*, a thriller set in downtown Hackney, is equally well worth reading.

But the best recent thriller has been David Bradley's *The Chaneyville Incident (Serpent's Tail £5.95)*. A black American college professor goes back to his home town to discover that his father not only supplied bootleg whisky to every racist white politician in the place for 20 years, but kept detailed records of all his dealings.

The story takes off from there into a fascinating exploration of black history going back to the days of slavery. At 200,000 words it's hardly bedtime reading—but once you get into it, it'll be hard to put down. ■

Charlie Hope

The end is Nye

IN HIS article "Fifty years on" (February *SWR*) Ian Birchall discusses the *Tribune* newspaper's adoption of support for unilateral nuclear disarmament and argues, "Bevan had now defected to a pro-nuclear stance."

However, it should be noted that it was not Bevan but the Left that had changed its position. Geoffrey Foote in "The Labour Party's Political Thought", quotes from Bevan's "In Place of Fear", 1952, where he wrote,

"against the background of mounting tension, it is idle to talk of general disarmament. People are not, and never have been, prepared to throw their guns away while they feel unsafe. This applies as much to atom bombs as to more primitive types."

Foote adds, "it should have come as no surprise, then, when he rounded on the advocates of unilateral nuclear disarmament at the 1957 party conference."

Meanwhile, the Left was not static. Witness Foote again.

"Indeed, the Bevanite Left of the 1950s remained in many ways trapped in the role of guardian of an ideology which was no longer inspiring and looked increasingly like a conservative support for the status quo...It was in reaction to this that the New Left began to gather strength after the twin shocks of Suez and Hungary in 1956...They appeared to be part of a popular radical movement as tens of thousands mobilised around the issues of unilateral nuclear disarmament and then of the Vietnam war..."

It is often suggested that Bevan "sold out" in 1957. However, to suggest this is to simplify a rather more complex issue. ■

Tim Page
Oxford Poly Labour Club

Under their thumb

SINCE I wrote my article on 50 years of *Tribune* (February *SWR*), *Tribune* itself has produced its own anniversary issue.

This contains an interesting article by Chris Mullin (editor

from 1982 to 1984) which makes far more explicitly, and on the basis of first-hand experience, the point I tried to make in my article, namely that *Tribune* is financially and thus politically dependent on the trade union bureaucracy.

Tribune's front cover carries the slogan "Labour's Independent Weekly". Mullin (and he should know) denies this; he writes:

"*Tribune* is not an independent newspaper. It is heavily dependent on the goodwill of trade union leaders for advertising and other support... More than once during my editorship trade union general secretaries explained to me the direct relationship between their advertising and editorial views of which they approved. One or two even cut off advertising without bothering to explain."

The point is clear. We shall not be able to count on *Tribune* in any struggle in which the union bureaucrats are on the wrong side (and that's likely to be most of them). The only independent newspaper is one based on the finance and activities of its own supporters. ■

Ian Birchall
Enfield SWP

Odds and plods

I MUST protest at the inclusion (in *SWR* January) of the article by John Rees—"What Intelligence?"

As a piece of naive, narrow and national-centred journalism it is difficult to surpass.

Are we seriously expected to believe a description of the multi-faceted, internationally-organised "intelligence services" as being, in essence: profoundly conservative, anti-working class and malicious but not something we have to worry about because they are all bumbling idiots?

Of course they don't run the capitalist system. They are not capitalists. I know that. I don't need to be told this by the SWP. But they are an integral part of the capitalist hegemony.

The police, too, don't run the capitalist system—and they can be portrayed as PC Plods or the nice men who tell you the time—but their role becomes clear to anyone who publicly challenges the organisation of society.

What of the armed forces? What is their function? Rees probably thinks it is to wear funny clothes and pose for

tourists' cameras outside Buckingham Palace. Go to Northern Ireland and you may see them fulfilling a somewhat different function.

The intelligence service is not gossips, upper class misfits and peg-legged men scootering around their offices. It is the Special Branch and the National Reporting Centre; it is intimidation, detention, burglary, violence and murder. It is road blocks, identification demands, phone-tapping, letter-opening and a knock at the door at 4am.

You don't experience these things unless you are active in the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. I haven't experienced these things—I'm not an activist, only a sympathiser.

But I discuss with activists and so, from their experiences, I know. How is it that Rees doesn't know?

Frankly, I expect analysis from *SWR*—not this drivel. ■

Ian Garriock
Greece

Not my dilemma

I HAVE just read Donny Gluckstein's review of my book *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History*, (December *SWR*).

I am grateful for such a long review, but I couldn't help feeling amused at the assumptions made about my politics.

I'm a left wing socialist, but I'm not a member of the Labour Party, nor of any other party or group. The views ascribed to me by your reviewer aren't my own, and Labour's dilemmas aren't my dilemmas.

I suggest that the book needs more careful reading. It seeks to go beyond the Miliband/Coates debate in its analysis of the Labour Party, and to argue that Labour is a *labourist*, not a socialist party.

The problems of a parliamentary transition to socialism do not arise for the Labour Party, as its socialism has rarely been so radical that any problems would be really encountered.

I do think that Labour's internal contradictions should be looked at, though, with the sensitivity that they require, and I didn't see any signs of this in the review. ■

Geoff Foote
Balliol College
Oxford

Rocking the boycott

CHARLIE HORE'S article on Paul Simon and the cultural boycott of South Africa (March *SWR*), far from providing "clear and concrete" thinking on the issue, is actually full of contradictions and undermines the very basis for success of any boycott policy, which must be total, not selective, and based on general political principle, not specific material.

Charlie Hore has a false appreciation of art and politics. He maintains that a total boycott now "doesn't fit" because "it is now possible for genuinely radical black art to appear in SA, and even for those artists to be allowed to tour abroad". He puts it down to the development of the black working class over the last 15 years, forcing the regime to allow greater cultural freedom.

First, although Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky showed that the arts are determined by the type of class society they exist in, there is no mechanical link between, say, the rise of black trade unions and the development of radical art in SA.

Black radical theatre companies and township music existed, and black radical performers visited Britain, before the present strength of trade unions was achieved.

As Hore admits, there is still repression of workers and in the arts, so it is quite wrong to see "the cultural freedom" allowed as any less of a cynical cosmetic than the relaxation of aspects of "petty" apartheid. Concessions are made to win over world opinion.

Our political accent should be on the fact that SA performers have to be "allowed" by the regime to leave SA to perform here.

Hore is undermining the fight for boycotts in our trade unions. These cannot be selective. A trade union cannot adjudicate as to which theatre company or band is politically suitable to go to SA, banning some and letting others go.

How can we attack Thatcher's and Reagan's "selective" sanctions and notions of harming the workers themselves by sanctions, and then demand our own selective sanctions from below for the same reasons?

Further, *Graceland* may extend the audience for SA black music. Whether its *intention* or *effect* is to

aid anti-apartheid activity is debatable. Wider listening to black music—as with blues in the 60s—doesn't of itself make revolutionaries, or even anti-racists, even though it is often performed by anti-racist blacks.

The essential point here is that we shouldn't be encouraging contentious "consciousness-raising" through music when it means undermining political actions black organisations urge us to take to help their direct struggle, ie the establishment of an unequivocal boycott policy over all spheres.

Revolutionaries should not lapse into equivocal liberalism and write articles which could be *Guardian* editorials, overestimating the effect of some cultural events, and underestimating the need for a consistent clear line on the cultural isolation of SA while forging direct links with black workers in struggle to overthrow the system.

John Gillett
Hackney, E London

Don't forget class

I WOULD like to comment on Phil Marshall's article the "Bloody Chessboard" (Feb *SWR*) and mention a few facts which are unknown to the readers.

The article covered several issues which are very important, from the history and the nature of the Baath party (the ruling party in Iraq) to the state of the Iran-Iraq war.

Marx and Engels said "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". Unfortunately Phil didn't remember this in his analysis either of Iraq's history or of the war.

In 1958, after two decades of hard and bloody struggle against the monarchy, a mass movement broke out which became undeniably dangerous for capitalism in the region.

Many bourgeois parties volunteered to hammer the movement and smash it. The Baath Party and the Kurdish Democratic Party were the two parties who played the main role with the support of the pro-Russian Communist Party.

Civil war broke out in 1961 between a Kurdish movement led by the pro-American tribal leader, Barzany and then by KDP, and the Baath Party which resulted in the Baath party seizing power in February 1963.

Meanwhile the Baaths had slaughtered the communists and most militants amongst the working class, something they repeated in 1968.

From 1970 society changed substantially through big investments of the huge petrol revenues in the economy and the building up of a huge social administration system. The working class was reinforced by new blood and for the first time grew to more than four million out of a population of twelve million.

Also for the first time in Iraq's history small groups had emerged demanding socialism and the emancipation of the workers.

After the Iranian revolution in 1979 the Baath party were worried that Iraqi workers might take heart from the Iranian working class's success. They also feared the influence of the Shi'ite fundamentalists in Iraq represented by the Dawa party.

In spring 1980 a few Shi'ite demonstrations were organised in Baghdad, the capital. Also an attempt to assassinate Tariq Aziz, an important member of the Revolutionary Command Council had been unsuccessfully made. Meanwhile, loyal demonstrations had been attacked with grenades and machine guns, also in the capital.

At the same time the Mullahs, who had taken control after the revolution in Iran, frequently threatened to export their revolution, a move which would divert Iranian working class energies from problems at home.

They claimed that the way to Jerusalem's liberation was through Karbala and Najaf, the two holy towns in Iraq. They accompanied this with supplying weapons to the Dawa party and bombing the small border towns and villages. At the same time Bani Sader, the Iranian president, announced that he couldn't stop the army if it went ahead and attacked Baghdad.

In such circumstances war was the only choice for the Baath party. In reality it never was a war to destroy the mass movement which had toppled the Shah as Phil alleged. Nor had the US given Saddam Hussain a green light to start the war.

The war was the result of the class struggle in the region. Phil linked up the relationship between the super powers and the governments in the so-called Third World very mechanically.

Also, his analysis is exactly the same as what Stalinists say about the war, that it was an imperialist war against a working class revolution and an anti-imperialist revolutionary government.

Iraq's private sector has

exploited the war to the full. For the first time the government has relaxed its control on trade enabling the private sector to deal directly with the world market. More than that they can now obtain long term loans to develop industry and agriculture. These two factors have underpinned the private sector's position in the economy.

In reality Iraq's economy wasn't and isn't pure state capitalism as Phil argued in his article. The private sector has played a significant role in the economy particularly since 1970, the period of rapid capitalist expansion. It is clear that whoever wins the Iran-Iraq war the working class is the loser, but I am sure this will not always be the case. ■

Ali Tabrizi
Watford

Why Buchan fell

THE NOTES of the Month on the Zircon spy satellite affair (February *SWR*) should have included mention of Kinno's sacking of opposition arts speaker Norman Buchan two weeks previously, because some of Kinno's apologists have put his "more chauvinist-than-Thatcher" stand down to being duped by the Home Secretary, and that therefore he was being "stupid" or "misled".

But his sacking of Buchan proves it was no fluke. Buchan had argued that control of broadcasting should be brought under a future Ministry of Arts, together with responsibilities for museums, libraries, and other cultural state funding, rather than be spread across five ministries as it is now, with most control emanating from the Home Office.

Kinno disagreed. Control of the kind of people who make "Secret Society" TV programmes will remain with the same minister responsible for prisons, the police and the army, in any future Labour government.

Broadcasting is too vital an instrument of class rule to be opened up to the merest form of public scrutiny, accountability and control.

Kinno, as much as Thatcher, needs a servile BBC and it is no surprise that a Labour peer, BBC governor Joel Barnett, seems to have done most to remove Director General Alastair Milne. ■

Nick Grant
Brent

Ending the Scourge

MIKE ROSEN raises a number of points in his letter concerning Ann Rogers' article (Feb *SWR*), points that need to be answered.

Ann's contention is that racism is a product of capitalism. Arguments against this appear to be strengthened by the existence of anti-semitism in previous epochs.

What Ann attempts to do in her article is to demonstrate the specific historical circumstances where anti-Semitism rose and give material reasons why it arose. In doing so she shows how in certain societies Jews, allocated a particular role in those societies, constituted a class, a "people class".

Conversely in other societies under other circumstances Jews, having no specific economic role to play, were rapidly assimilated. In other words their continued existence as a distinct and identifiable culture was determined by their economic function in that society. It was not determined by their ideology or their religion.

This function, this service they provided in feudal society was modified by changes taking place in the class structure, leading to an all out challenge by the emerging merchant class by whom they were seen as an obstacle in their type of class society. And the more hideous the type of class society the more hideous and all-embracing the persecution.

For the Bolsheviks the international overthrow of capitalism was not a question of neat schemes but a fundamental pre-requisite for the emancipation of the international working class, finally laying to rest the scourge of racism and anti-Semitism. This is the tradition in which we stand. ■

Steve Guy
East London

We welcome letters and contributions on all issues raised in *Socialist Worker Review*. Please keep your contributions as short as possible, typed, double spaced if you can, and one side of paper only. Send to: *SWR*, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.

The plot sickens



McCarthy: A return to the bad old days!

AMERIKA, the latest media event in the USA, has some curious features. The idea for a television programme about the USA under Russian occupation came from Ben Stein, a right-wing Los Angeles columnist. The ABC network explicitly offered it as a sop to the right in compensation for the anti-nuclear weapons message of *The Day After*. On its way from Ben Stein to prime time, *Amerika* became a 14-hour "mini-series". (*The Day After* was a four-hour feature.)

When the content of the series became known, the United Nations hired a lawyer to negotiate the removal of UN symbols from the occupying troops, and a New York public relations firm to improve its image in the US. (In the series, America is occupied by UN troops acting as puppets of the Russians.)

TV Guide magazine—not noted for its in-depth features—got Harrison Salisbury, senior American Kremlin-watcher, to write about how the Russians never had behaved, and probably never would, as depicted in *Amerika*.

Cable TV mogul Ted Turner denounced the series as "a hate film", and scheduled five programmes promoting good relations with Russia. Another channel screened several hours of Russian television programmes about the USA, while the Chrysler Corporation withdrew its advertising a week before *Amerika* was screened.

The series must certainly have disappointed the advertisers who stuck with it, since even the first and last episodes came

nowhere near the 35 percent share (of all sets switched on at the time) that ABC had promised them. Despite the publicity, its ratings were low, being beaten by, among other shows, the Miss America pageant.

I watched most of *Amerika*, and I found it boring and confusing. We were never told *how* the Russians had taken over the US, but were offered about fifty different reasons *why*, along with "flashbacks" which failed to explain anything. The whole situation developed from a basically improbable one to sheer paranoid fantasy.

Yet some of the people involved in *Amerika* had previously appeared to be left of centre. ABC mogul Brandon Stoddard had been responsible for a number of mildly radical movies, including the excellent *Silkwood*. Producer Donald Wrye has apparently produced a string of creditable social-problem fictions for television.

Above all, lead actor Kris Kristofferson seems to have become acutely anxious about his left-wing image (he has publicly opposed US intervention in Central America) and tried to defend his participation in the series by claiming that he had tried "to soften some of the speeches".

There were indeed signs that *Amerika*'s right-wing concept had been tampered with. The two principal Russian characters had allegedly been softened so as to be more sympathetic towards America.

One of these characters turned out to be so sympathetic that he nuked several American cities as a move to stave off

**BACK
CHAT**



direct take-over by Moscow, and later shot himself after ordering the massacre of the whole Congress.

There were many protests and even demonstrations across the USA against *Amerika*. Most of them centred on something like "the damage done to US-Soviet relations", or brought in experts to defend the good character of the USSR; though some also alleged that it was "McCarthyite", or "against free speech".



Kristofferson: giving left cover

It seems to be difficult, in the USA, to argue *both* that the series is dangerous, warmongering nonsense, *and* that Russia is ruled by an authoritarian, state capitalist regime.

If *Amerika* comes to Britain, you may at first get a kick out of seeing middle class Americans poor and miserable instead of smug and prosperous. If you stick it to the end, you may even find the sight of 500 actors sprawled about a mock-up of the House of Representatives pretending to be dead mildly amusing.

But it would be better not to bother about the plot; just make sure you are in on the arguments at work about the nature of Russia which are sure to follow. ■

Norah Carlin