

socialist worker Review

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Class struggle and the Labour vote

IT LOOKS
LIKE A CLEAR
SWING TO
CLASS
STRUGGLE!



Plus: Conragate - the crisis of
American imperialism.
Child abuse and the family

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Thatcher—has she put her foot in it...

ELECTION 1

On and on and on?

AS WE go to press Labour's electoral prospects look much more favourable than they did even a few weeks ago. It is still not possible to tell what the outcome of voting on 11 June will be. But a number of things are clear.

The Tory campaign seems to be faltering after its initial burst of confidence. Margaret Thatcher declared her stated aim to drive out socialism forever.

She wanted the election campaign to be a crusade for people's capitalism. She pressed for a third and even a fourth term in office to finish what she describes as a half made revolution in people's lives.

At the time of writing, the Tory lead in the opinion polls is still sufficient to make it likely that she will—at least in part—get her way. But all the signs are that the problems facing the Tories if they get a third term will remain and in some cases intensify.

Both the Tory manifesto and the opening shots in the campaign have seen the continuation of an ideological offensive designed to show that the Tories are the only party capable of ruling. So the manifesto—a surprisingly lengthy document—paints a picture of a happy and contented capital owning democracy in which everyone can participate.

It plays to the idea of a Britain that is once again great. We are told that there is a "British revival". The economy is stronger. Inflation and strikes are at a much lower level. Britain's role internationally has

been enhanced by Margaret Thatcher's willingness to stand firm against the enemy abroad (in the Falklands) and within (the miners' strike).

The Tories' first election broadcast echoed these themes: film clips of World War Two evoked the Dunkirk spirit, while we were told—and presumably expected to believe—that Britain's economic performance compared favourably with that of Japan, France or the United States.

These claims don't bear serious scrutiny. Nor do the various other Tory claims that education, social services and the Health Service have never been better off—most people can see the evidence with their own eyes. But such claims do allow Thatcher to

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brag that radical measures are needed for her to finish the job.

So the manifesto's main planks include firm commitments to the spread of home and share ownership and the introduction of "choice" in education (although Thatcher has already let the cat out of the bag that this means not only grammar schools for the few but also fee-paying). It also calls for the replacement of local rates by an even more regressive poll tax, which would penalise the majority of working class people.

In reality these measures are not fantastically "radical". They are a continuation of the Tories' policies of "popular capitalism": the idea that all the problems facing workers—jobs, wages, housing, education—can be solved by giving them a stake in the system through mortgages or shareholding; and of the attacks on local councils.

There are also proposed new trade union laws which will give individuals the right



...or has she got her finger on the pulse?

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ELECTION 2

Coming up roses?

to call secret ballots or not to take part in a democratically decided strike with which they disagree. They intend to effectively abolish the closed shop, and force the election of trade union leaders by secret postal ballot every five years.

All this is done in the name of strengthening the rights of the individual, and of helping the ordinary voter. Actually its impact, as with many of the other Thatcher reforms in the last eight years, will be to further weaken collective rights and to further enrich a minority.

This indeed has been the impact of Thatcher whatever the rhetoric. A recent article in *The Economist* entitled "The rich get richer" stated the facts behind the Thatcher boasts of higher wages and lower taxation. It asked the question "Who has gained most from eight years of Thatcherism?" and answered "unambiguously the better off".

Thatcher's confidence and aggression may still pay off electorally.

But then she would still be beset in the third term by the central problems that plunged her government into crisis in its second term—the weakness of British capitalism on the one hand, and the continuing resilience of an unbroken working class on the other.

Even on these issues, there are all sorts of divisions inside the ruling class as to how this can be achieved. For example employers' bodies like the Confederation of British Industry are wary of proposals to allow individuals to opt out of ballot decisions since they believe this weakens the force of the arguments for ballots.

They are worried that there is no real strategy for the ruling class in resisting the demands of different groups of workers.

The fact that the teachers are still continuing their dispute with the government after nearly three years, the civil servants are taking strike action during the election and the London buses have been forced into action against privatisation, are all signs that some sections of the working class are prepared to fight over wages and jobs, even if the traditional manufacturing sector is very much on the defensive.

This more than anything gives the lie to those like Eric Hobsbawm who regard struggle as outdated and who tell workers to put their faith in tactically voting in some form of coalition government. ■

THE TORIES are not popular. On the basis of even the most favourable polls, they only command a minority of the vote. If they do get re-elected, they will almost certainly do so on a lower vote than the one with which Alec Douglas-Home lost the 1964 election.

But they have succeeded in the last eight years in putting Labour on the defensive over its ideas.

Labour's early showing in the opinion polls has, it is true, been better than many expected. It may have succeeded in forcing the Alliance decisively into third place.

And certainly its policies are not the same as the Tories. Because Labour depends for its support on the votes of

working people, its election policies to some extent reflect that.

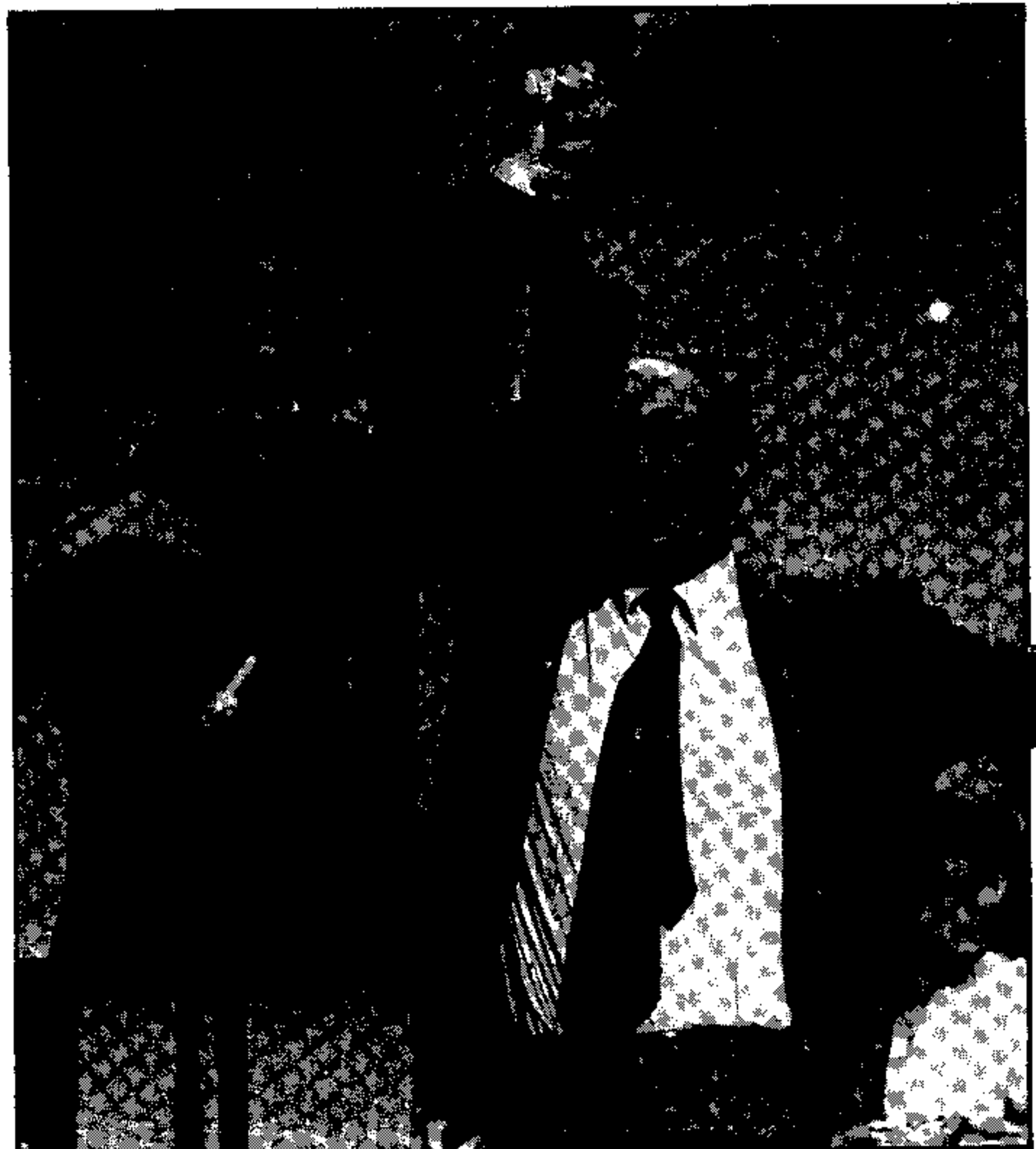
So there is a commitment to reduce unemployment by one million in two years; for a statutory minimum wage; for a wealth tax on the richest one percent. Labour would reduce prescription charges and waiting lists in the NHS, and end privatisation there.

But many of Labour's present policies are ones forced on it by the Tory success in areas like privatisation and council house sales.

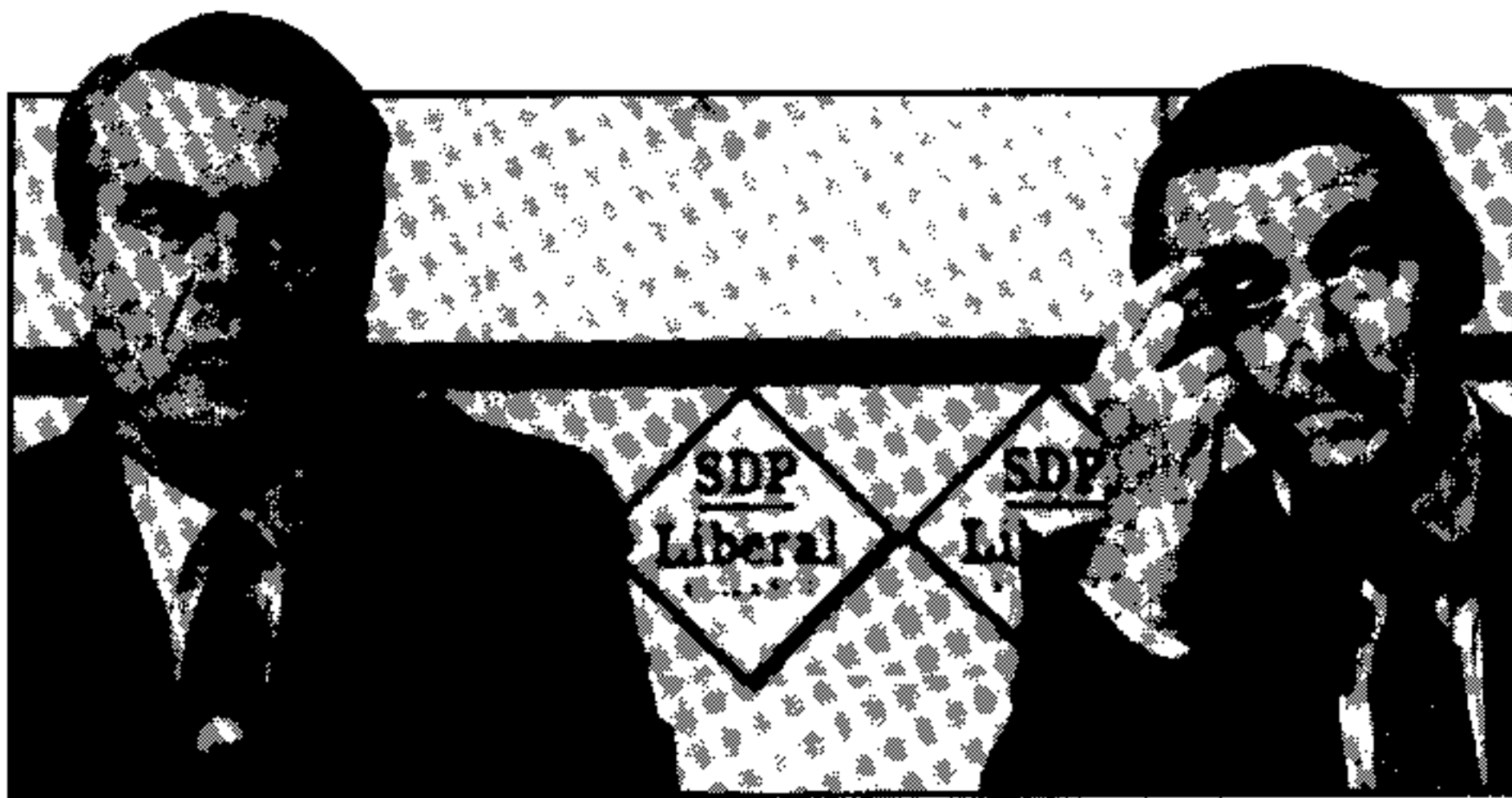
So Labour will maintain the "right to buy", although this means the depletion of council house stocks. And it will not renationalise British Telecom. It also tries to outdo the right wing with calls for more police and more attention to law and order.

The style of Labour's campaign also has little to do with presenting strong alternative policies. Its first election broadcast stressed Kinnock's personality and private life to the exclusion of anything else, and was as depoliticised as any US presidential election campaign. Labour is being marketed and sold as a package, with as little emphasis on politics as possible.

One reason for Labour's approach has been the continued pressure from the Alliance. Indeed, as the *Financial Times* recently put it, it is hard to see why given Labour's present policies, the SDP bothered to split in 1981.



Nice video, shame about the song



Tweedledum and Tweedledee

Although the Alliance tries to project itself as the caring alternative to Thatcher, its own manifesto gives the lie to that claim. True, there is some commitment to equal rights for women and for blacks. So it says "we will combat discrimination against black people in housing and employment".

But Liberal Tower Hamlets council has

expressly discriminated against homeless Bengali families by evicting them on the grounds that they made themselves homeless by leaving Bangladesh.

The Alliance calls for the reduction of unemployment by one million in three years and for the abolition of class divisions in the workplace. But the real

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intention becomes clear when it talks about an incomes strategy—restrictions on wages—and when it proudly boasts that

"we have taken the lead in promoting the extension of postal ballots and internal elections and have vigorously opposed pre-entry closed shops."

All future disputes, say the Alliance, should be referred to arbitration—a further restriction on strikes.

The "caring" policies don't differ very much from the Tories either. Although they are critical of health spending cuts, for example, they also "uphold the right of individuals to use their own resources to obtain private medical care".

Essentially they are the junior ruling class party. True, any sort of outright electoral victory for them is extremely remote. But there is no doubt what sort of policies they would follow if in office: they want to attack the unions, to bolster private capital, to hold down wages and to cut public spending.

It seems from the opinion polls that many voters are also drawing this conclusion, which is why the contest seems to be shaping more and more into a two horse race between the Tories and Labour.

But all the commentators leave out of the equation the most central factor: the existence of a working class and of a class struggle. Since the end of the miners strike that struggle has remained at a very low level.

This in turn has allowed Kinnock and Labour's right wing to bash the left and to pull the party very much to the right. But the class struggle still remains.

And millions of workers will feel unease and anger at the idea of further decimation of the NHS or education, or unemployment remaining at the same level. It is this which explains the resilience of the Labour vote, despite all the attacks on it.

Elections are only a pale reflection of the class struggle. Election campaigns are even more so. But what this campaign—whatever its outcome—does show is that the British ruling class has major problems and very few solutions.

They have covered up those problems with a mixture of bluff, bluster and good luck. It will only take even a slight revival in the level of class struggle for them to surface once again. ■

UNEMPLOYMENT

His Lordship's lies

"THERE has been a drop in the unemployment figures in each of the last nine months"—"Unemployment is about to fall under three million"—"Job creation is higher in Britain than in any of the EEC countries".

These proud boasts make up the headlines as the Tories attempt their ultimate whitewash—their record on unemployment. The source of these ravings is none other than Lord Young of Graffham, the government's chief employment conman.

Clearly there are no limits to Young's brashness. On several occasions he has said that Britain is doing more than any other advanced industrial country to tackle the problem of youth unemployment.

In truth the shortening dole queue is nothing but a figment of the Tories' imagination.

The Unemployment Unit has established that since 1979 there have been some 19 changes to the system of counting unemployment. That's one change for every five months of Tory rule. These changes have not been motivated by any respect for accuracy. They have simply removed whole groups of the unemployed.

A couple of examples of this creative discounting will highlight the point. In July 1982 unemployed men aged 60 and over and drawing supplementary benefit for at least a year were offered the higher rate of long term benefit if they did not register for work. This was a straightforward bribe and 30,000 fell out of the dole figures.

So pleased were the Tories with this that in June 1985 all men aged 60 and over drawing supplementary benefit were offered the long term rate. Some 54,000 were excluded from the figures. In the same month they removed the rights of school leavers to sign on during the summer and between 100,000 and 200,000 also vanished from the figures.

However, the most far reaching cooking of the books occurred in October 1982 when the concept of "the unemployed" changed beyond all recognition and logic. No longer was an unemployed person to be viewed as someone out of work and wanting a job. Rather the unemployed were people who claimed certain welfare benefits. In a single stroke between 170,000 and 190,000 were taken out of the reckoning.

But there is more. Not only has Lord Young changed the definition of those without jobs, he has also changed the definition of those with jobs. Thus the Department of Employment's "Employees in Employment" series counts jobs and not people.

This would not matter except that with the rise in unemployment and the huge growth in part-time work there has also been a rise in the numbers doing more than one job. Recent estimates show that some 800,000 have at least two part-time jobs, all of whom will be double counted in the estimates of employment.

The Tories have also started to count as employed those on the Community Programme, the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and a good chunk of the YTS trainees which, it is estimated, boosts the employment figures by half a million. In June last year unemployment fell by 1.5 percent as a result of "using a larger denominator". That is Youngspeak for inflating the numbers in work. The Tories have even invented an estimate of the number of self-employed (one million).

However clever Young gets at fiddling the figures, the truth is that there are still at least four million without work who desperately need it. ■

Kevin Cunningham

NOTES of the month

INDIA

Rough times for Rajiv

FOR THE past month there has been speculation in India that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is about to be dismissed by President Zail Singh.

Rajiv is indeed in serious trouble. He has been unable to either impose or negotiate a solution with Sikh separatists in Punjab. Terrorist attacks are increasing and he has been compelled to dismiss the state government in favour of direct rule from the centre.

His Congress (I) Party has done badly in recent state elections—losing once again in

private sector which would increase growth and build up exports.

Unfortunately for Rajiv, Singh decided that it would be necessary to deal with the underground parallel economy which sucks away vast amounts of resources in corrupt dealings. Uniquely, Singh set about seriously investigating corruption.

His investigators discovered that large sums of money had been illegally spirited away by Amitabh Bachchan, film star MP and close pal of Rajiv. So in January Rajiv moved Singh to defence and took over finance himself.

This was a mistake, because Singh began investigating arms deals and rapidly uncovered evidence of corruption in deals to buy West German submarines and artillery from the Swedish Bofors company.

At this point the balloon really went up. Singh was attacked in parliament by a Congress (I) MP, he was criticised in the cabinet for ordering the Amitabh Bachchan investigation (which involved an American detective agency), and on 12 April he buckled under the pressure and resigned.

Since then he has rapidly become a "non-person", with a continuous stream of insults being heaped upon his head. Yet before this began he was well regarded by the Indian ruling class as an effective finance minister.

In the short term, Singh was unseated because his attempt to root out economic crime destabilised the already rocky structure of the Congress (I). He was too dangerous for many at the top who have had their fingers in the till for years. All capitalism breeds economic crime, but the Indian ruling class is quite notorious in this regard.

The restructuring of the economy has not gone forward far enough to produce a

The only thing going for Rajiv at the moment is the absence of a major challenge from workers. Even with his problems limited to ruling class factionalism he is out of his depth. Luckily for him this very factionalism has prevented anyone from the ruling class putting together enough support to replace him.

The immediate threat is from the right, which is organising through Hindu and Muslim communalism. There have been a series of communal incidents in recent months which are used by the parties of the right to build support. They are hoping for big gains in the Haryana elections by attacking Rajiv for being soft on Sikh terrorists.

This is what made Rajiv dismiss the Punjab government and launch a new anti-terrorist campaign. Since this will indiscriminately terrorise Sikhs, all it will do is further alienate ordinary Sikhs from the rest of India.

The whole business has the makings of an unholy mess. The long term aims of the ruling class are being wrecked by factionalism, while there is no effective challenge from the working class, largely due to the servile reformism of the two main communist parties and the beating back of workers' struggles after the defeat of the Bombay textile strike in 1983.

It is futile to speculate on the immediate future. Rajiv may worm his way out of trouble with a foreign policy adventure in Sri Lanka. If he does go, then there really will be a faction fight and the prospect of very nasty people ending up on top. ■

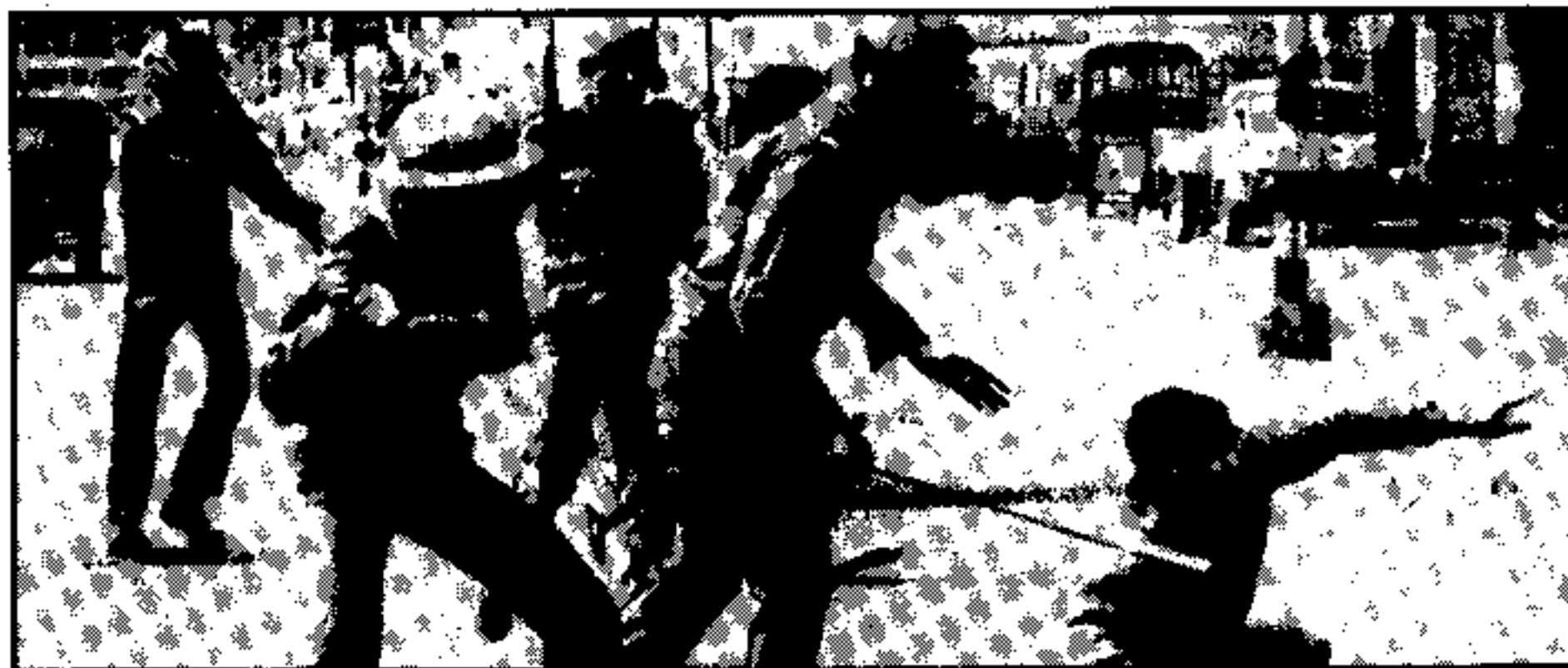
PHILIPPINES

On a knife's edge

ON 11 MAY this year congressional elections were held in the Philippines. Cory Aquino has secured a massive majority in favour of her government. She has apparently succeeded in restoring some degree of legitimacy to the democratic institutions and the constitutional process. But can the present strategy of the Filipino ruling class bring stability to the Philippines?

Aquino's strategy for dealing with the militancy in the cities and the insurgency in the countryside is to be a combination of repression and reforms.

The ceasefire, the constitution, and the May elections form the thrust of the Aquino strategy. The more clear sighted within the government and the American State Department know that the military *on its own* is not capable of defeating the Communist insurgency. Aquino needs to restore confidence in the state and the "democratic process" to eradicate the memory of the Marcos era.



Police clash with demonstrators in New Delhi

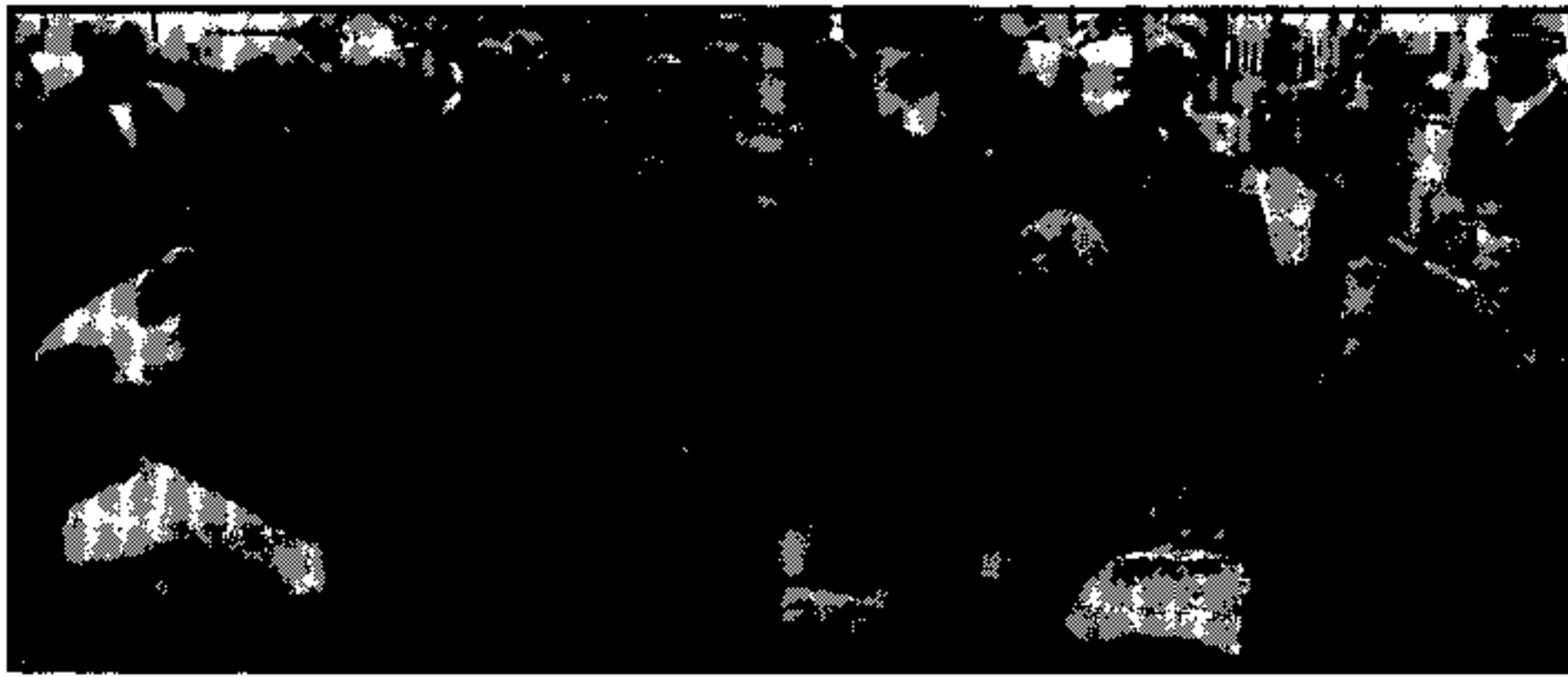
West Bengal and being pushed from office in Kerala, in both cases by coalitions led by the Communist Party (Marxist). He stands to do badly against the right in forthcoming elections in Haryana, next door to the Punjab.

The strangest part of the whole affair, and the one which provoked the dismissal scare, is the case of former cabinet minister V P Singh.

Singh was brought in as finance minister to supervise the "liberalisation" of the economy. In plain language this meant restructuring the economy to promote a

powerful and cohesive faction of the ruling class who are confident to take on the economic criminals. Indeed, Singh's fate may deter anyone from trying again, and thus abort the restructuring process.

The affair has yet again revealed the rampant factionalism inside the Indian ruling class. The stories of presidential plots arise because Rajiv has surrounded himself with a small set of cronies, dumping some of his earlier allies in the process, notably his cousin Arun Nehru. Together with Zail Singh, they are now out to get him.



Right wing demonstrators call for a coup

The ceasefire saw Aquino demonstrating some measure of control over the military and delivering political stability of some sort. However, the generals see the ceasefire, and the efforts of a civilian administration to curb the military's worst offences, as a threat to their power.

The attempted Enrile coup in November 1986 reveals the deep divisions within the ruling class, while confirming that the majority of the Filipino bourgeoisie and army are trying out Aquino's strategy.

A new constitution has been drawn up by a commission made up almost entirely of conservatives and liberals. It is a thoroughly right wing document. The repressive labour laws have not been repealed and the American bases will remain.

The plebiscite on the constitution was taken as a vote on Aquino's presidency. The right wing called for a rejection of the constitution. It launched a destabilization programme, murdering the chair of the independent trade union confederation (KMU-1 May Movement).

The left argued for a "critical yes" vote thus providing no independent intervention, much less leadership, in the most precarious three months in the Philippines' recent history. The result was an 80 percent vote ratifying the constitution.

The May congressional elections were a further step towards solidifying a party machine and a popular base around Aquino. The left has taken the popular front to new extremes by campaigning under a coalition Alliance for New Politics. "New Politics" means a properly democratic and properly bourgeois government.

The February revolution of 1986 dramatically shifted leftwards the whole terrain of Philippine politics. However, the inadequacies of the Filipino left means that alternatives are posed, in terms of either a partial reforming democracy or a military dictatorship.

A socialist alternative based on the confidence and activity of the working class is ruled out. Yet, the democratic space, the degree of democracy possible, rests upon the combativity and the confidence of workers.

The extreme right around Enrile has been gaining confidence. Anti-Aquino demonstrations have grown from pathetic crowds of hundreds to a 15,000 strong

demonstration calling on the army to depose Aquino (May 1987).

No perpetrators of previous coup attempts have been put on trial. Only three arrests were made in the May anti-Aquino demonstration. The death squads remain and strikers continue to be murdered.

However, the left's response to the right has been based on the possibility of uniting with "progressive capitalists". The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) pledged the aid of its military wing in the event of any coup attempts rather than calling for the defence of Aquino by the arming of workers, by the taking over of factories and by developing workers' self-activity.

The divisions within the ruling class are products of an economic crisis which is still

endemic to the Philippine economy. Reforms were successful in the late forties as the world economy boomed sucking in Philippine exports.

This time around the room for manoeuvre is simply not there. Aquino's economic policies, endorsed by the IMF and World Bank, have to further attack the working class.

The anarchy of the world economy can split open the ruling class. Long term political stability cannot emerge out of an economy in deep recession. There are major battles to come. ■

Additional notes by Barry Pavier and Lawrence Wong.

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NIGEL HARRIS

Stateless left in mid-air

SINCE 1945, at least 45 million people have been driven out of their homelands. Simultaneously, the governments of the world have increasingly tried to prevent immigration.

Automatically, a growing number of people are rendered stateless. Some of them are parked forever in camps, in offshore no man's land. Others are bounced between the airport lounges of countries refusing entry.

The British have not taken in many refugees or immigrants, despite the supposed Christian charity of their ruling order. Between 1984 and 1986, the immigration officers accepted for asylum 240 for every one million inhabitants (in other words, 0.024 percent)—compared to nearly 5,000 for Sweden, over 4,000 for Denmark and Switzerland.

Yet even this handful was too much for Mrs Thatcher. She has just changed the rules to levy stiff fines on any airlines bringing travellers without proper documentation, passports and visas.

It is marvellous to think of the refugee, hunted for his or her life by the secret police or paramilitary death squads or shot at by soldiers of the military coup, lining up peacefully to get a passport (which of course, the government from which he or she is fleeing will happily give) and then carrying it over to the British Embassy to get the requisite entry permit.

How is an airline to judge whether the desperate man at the airport counter is genuine or not? To be safe, the airline will always refuse to carry the refugee—just as sea captains were obliged to refuse to pick drowning Boat People out of the Gulf of Thailand once the countries to which they were travelling said they would refuse them admission (remember that completely spurious argument—they are not *real* refugees, just "economic migrants"!).

Fining the airlines is a characteristically hypocritical dodge to escape the obligations of compassion—and make the airlines pay to implement British immigration controls.

The Germans, who used to be among the more generous hosts to refugees, have now turned round too—they also fine the airlines, but as well, prevent refugees they have admitted from working for five years, force them to live in camps and forbid them to move about the country freely.

By dint of these massive disincentives, the numbers seeking asylum in Germany have dropped from 12,000 to 3,000 a month in the past nine months. But nobody can say the Germans actually *refused* entry to those in need of succour.

Why do governments maintain border controls on movement at all? They are

expensive, arbitrary, cause maximum aggravation, and achieve apparently nothing worth having. Stopping people entering does not save jobs nor stop unemployment. People who move do so either to escape something fairly terrifying (nobody changes countries lightly) or in search of work. If there is known to be unemployment in their proposed destination, migrants do not move there. If there is work, they more than pay for whatever they consume (and, because of their age, always pay more for the social services than they draw from them).

Refugees are, in the scale of the world, a small number who hope their stay will be temporary. In any case, both immigrants and refugees are usually above average in education, skills and energy, so they make a disproportionate contribution to building the economy—think of the Huguenots or the Jews.

Indeed, so well known was this in the eighteenth century, rulers offered incentives to make people immigrate to them. These were the days before passports, visas and all the appalling machinery of restrictions on movement operated.

Today, governments imply that out there are untold millions only awaiting the chance to get in. Have you ever noticed how immigrants never travel like most people—by plane, ship, train, bus or what have you? They invariably pour, stream, flood, swamp, flow or flux, as if they were not adults but a mindless torrent, stopped only by the impressive breakwater of the immigration officer.

There are no such millions, waiting to throw themselves into Britain; most of them could never afford to get here, even if they wanted to (and strangely enough most people do not want to emigrate).

The function of immigration controls is to terrorise a small fraction of the labour

force in order both to warn the rest of what punishments follow transgressions, but also to create cheaply a significant area of "disprivilege", in order to invent a privilege for the natives.

It is a means to continually reaffirm the importance of national loyalty, to invent a spurious homogeneity of "We British"—with a supposedly common culture, ethnic descent, way of life or whatever, the masks for the real common element, as common subordination to a state. The benighted foreigner, excluded from the fire that warms the happy natives, can only gape in envy at his or her exile from paradise.

Immigration controls are thus entirely political. That is why the experience in controlling the movement of commodities internationally is so different to that in controlling people. World trade has become increasingly unrestricted in the same period when there are increasing controls on people moving freely.

The first embodies the vast growth of a world economy, of world profits. The second, the increased subordination of people to their respective states. The world's governments have consistently pursued increasingly free trade, but not free migration—that is solely for national politics, not international economics.

Western governments are very keen to lambast that continuing "prison of peoples", the Soviet Union, for denying its inhabitants the right to emigrate. But the right to emigrate is meaningless without the right to immigrate.

Here the hypocrisy grows thicker and thicker, as revealed most vividly when China's Deng Xiao-ping, reproached by a Senator from Washington State for not allowing free emigration from China, swiftly asked the bumbler how many Chinese he would like? 25 million? 45 million?

The integration of the world economy must ultimately come to affect the movement of workers. It is impossible for the world's labour force to be locked up indefinitely in national ghettos. But it will take a long campaign to achieve that ancient revolutionary aim of tearing down the border posts (they just had posts in those far-off happy days, not Berlin Walls), letting people decide in their wisdom where they want to be, confident that the outcome of their decisions will be the best of all possible worlds.

It will be difficult because the state's right to own a defined segment of the world's population (and commit it, if required, to fight and to die) is as fundamental to its existence as its territory, its armies and police. ■



Nowhere to go

Watch them squirm

THE LAST decade has been the era of Reagan, Thatcher and the Ayatollahs. That's why Contragate is such compulsive fun: watching the bastards squirm. When we've had a good scandal before we've always known it was a giggle but not really politically important: Watergate, Peter Wright etc.

But Contragate's important. It represents a significant moment in the disintegration of American imperial power.

It all started with Vietnam. For 30 years the Vietnamese peasants fought first the French army and then the American with heart-breaking determination. Their courage produced a world-wide solidarity movement.

That movement was actually strongest among young Americans who were expected to kill and die in Vietnam. That anti-war movement linked the student movement to a powerful black movement.

The anti-war movement back home gradually found echoes in the working class, heavily black American army in Vietnam. The soldiers often hated the Vietnamese. But they hated the army too. An anti-war movement in the services produced at least a hundred rank and file newspapers.

From at least 1966 the soldiers had been shooting some of their more gung-ho officers. By the early seventies they had a word for it: "fragging". That meant killing an officer who risked your lives by ordering you out on patrol, normally by throwing a fragmentation grenade into his tent.

The last year the Americans were in Vietnam they fragged 300 officers. Soldiers were interviewed on American TV explaining why they had refused to go on patrol that day. With the army out of control, the Americans had to withdraw and the Vietnamese won.

The trauma of domestic unrest and the effective army mutiny persuaded the American ruling class that they could not again fight overseas.

When Kissinger wanted to send the troops into Angola in 1976, the generals explained reality to him. The combat army was almost half black. Everybody in Angola was black. If the US army went in to save South Africa, nobody knew which way the guns would point. Kissinger didn't send the troops.

Instead the ruling class had a new strategy—the Carter option. Reform the worst dictatorships, like Somoza's Nicaragua. At the same time build up regional military powers, like the Shah's Iran, to intervene in place of the US marines.

In 1978-9 this strategy failed. In Nicaragua an insurrectionary workers general strike toppled Somoza.

In Iran street demonstrations, mainly composed of workers, went out to be shot down by the police month after month. Finally the workers in the oilfields went on strike, the demonstrators grew more confident and the air force started giving guns to the revolutionaries. The Shah ran.

The movements in Iran and Nicaragua were not socialist. The new government in Iran was a viciously reactionary bourgeois regime. The Sandanistas struggled to present themselves as social democrats.

But for the American ruling class that was not the point: for the first time since Bolivia in 1952 there had been successful workers insurrections. That was what they feared above all else.

Their first priority was to stop the example spreading. Carter changed course:



Vietnam scarred America more than just physically

the new task was to drown these examples in rivers of blood. The first theatre was El Salvador.

The victory in Nicaragua produced a large strike wave the next month in El Salvador. The army went into the factories and shot picket lines. But the electrical power workers came out.

Salvador gets most of its power from one big dam. The workers there wired themselves into the dam and announced that if the army came in they would blow up the dam, themselves and the country's power. They won.

Carter's response was to organise the death squads. In two years they killed 40,000 Salvadorians, mainly workers and the left.

El Salvador is a small country. An equivalent level of killing in Britain would take out 750,000 people: not just all the readers of this journal and their families and flat-mates, most shops stewards in engineering and most staff reps in tax offices and most of the Labour left, but also the equivalents of Brenda Dean, Neil Kinnock and Eric Hammond.

It was a close run thing, but the death squads won. In Iran the bloodshed was worse. The Americans encouraged the Iraqi state to launch a war.

For seven years Iran and Iraq have been locked in a replay of the First World War. Wave after human wave of boys have died. The war has consolidated the power of reaction in Iran and held at bay the prospect of the Iranian example spreading.

But blood alone did not solve the problem faced by the American ruling class. Every ruling class rules by a combination of force and consent. That is true with national boundaries *and* internationally.

What terrified the Solidarity activists in Poland was the prospect of Russian tanks. If they had known the Russians would not invade, it would have been very different.

If the Sandinistas had known the US

marines were not coming, they would not have tried to get the left in El Salvador to wind down the struggle.

American power had been based on a combination of economic power, political leadership and force. Now force was missing. After Vietnam the American working class were not about to send their boys to die for American power again.

The whole project of the Reagan presidency has been to move the American working class far enough to the right to sacrifice their children. The ultimate symbolic humiliation of American power had been the Iranian hostage crisis.

The US Embassy staff in Tehran had been held captive for months. In old imperial days the gunboats would have

gone in. Now Carter did not dare. Reagan took office the day the "hostage crisis" ended.

The ideological offensive on the American working class began. The central symbols were a new pride in country and flag and a new devil: the Middle Eastern terrorist. The offensive had many wings: *Rambo*, the Olympics, the sacking of the PATCO strikers, *Top Gun* and *Heartbreak Ridge*.

It encompassed an attack on abortion rights and equal hiring of blacks: that was part of erasing the memory and confidence of the movements of the sixties.

In a fun teenage movie like *Back to the Future* there is suddenly the burning alive of Libyan terrorists. In *Hill Street Blues* no month goes by without a hostage crisis resolved by the blues going in with blazing guns.

This ideological offensive was supported not just by Republicans and religious cranks. It had started under Carter and it had the backing of the whole of the American ruling class and their hirelings.

That explains Reagan's "Teflon Presidency": no matter how stupid he was and how corrupt his aides were, nothing could stick to Reagan. The press and TV gave him a free ride. The Reagan project was crucial to the whole of his class.

It seemed to be very effective. The move to the right in the working class, the rise of sickbag nationalism, the collapse of the confidence in the labour movement, the women's movement and the black movement: all these were real.

But the key issue was sending in the troops. There they failed. Their judgement was that committing the troops would produce another wave of protest like the sixties.

The Pentagon has been against sending the troops to Nicaragua. They could take the country. But in holding it they might break the army.

The US army is not just the world cop: it is the ultimate cop in America too. The soldiers who put down the Detroit riots in 1965 were flown straight from the Dominican Republic, where they were putting down the working class there. If they lose control of the army, nobody knows what will happen.

Reagan did send the marines into Lebanon, as Eisenhower had in the 50s. But when a truck bomb blew up 250 marines, Reagan pulled out immediately.

He covered that defeat with an invasion of Grenada.

He had finally found a place to "make America great again": a country the size of College Station, Texas, where the population could be counted on to welcome the marines with open arms.

But the Sudan, Haiti and the Philippines were different. The "Ethiopian" famine has affected neighbouring Sudan too. In the spring of 1985, starving refugees, workers and students began making daily attacks on the grain stores in the Khartoum bazaar. After several days the enlisted men in the army refused to fire on the crowds again.

The General Staff launched an immediate coup to forestall insurrection. The army didn't dare hang onto power



The ultimate cop—policing Washington DC in the late 60s

itself: parliamentary democracy replaced America's man Numeri.

Then in the spring of 1986 a movement began with the school kids in Haiti, rather like the one in South Africa now. It spread to the capital and "Baby Doc" took the plane out as the crowd occupied the presidential palace. A week later "People Power" had taken the Malacanang Palace in Manila.

These movements were not socialist. In Manila a million men, women and children had pushed the tanks back with their bare hands. The majority of them were workers, but they thought of their movement as a "People's" movement. But whatever their politics, the threat was there: successful insurrection, mass strike waves, a revolutionary situation.

Reagan reacted. He didn't dare take on the Phillipino workers or even the Haitians. He didn't dare send the troops in anywhere. But he could, and did, bomb Libya. He looked tough and only two American lives were lost.

This was not so impressive, though, if you were the president of South Korea, Pakistan, Indonesia or Egypt. The dictators wondered whether, when their moment came, as Marcos's had, Reagan would also refuse to return their calls.

Meanwhile the project started to come apart in Nicaragua and Iran. It looked increasingly likely that the Iranians would win a military victory. That would throw both Iraq and the Gulf wide open.

The American ruling class had to deal with the Iranian state. They hoped it might be possible to join the Ayatollahs in controlling the Gulf.

In Nicaragua the problem was money. The Contras were necessary to cow the Sandanistas. But their fight wasn't one of principle: they were professionals. They had to be paid, and paid well.

Congress would not approve enough money directly to fund the Contras. That would have been the green light for invasion. But they were eager to tolerate "covert funding".

The money went through Israel, and everybody knew it. I knew it, the Nicaraguans knew it, anybody who read the quality European press knew it, and the Democrats in Washington knew it. Only the American working class didn't know it.

The Contras demanded too much money for the CIA to simply fund it out of slush funds. So they had to solicit it internationally. The Sultan of Brunei paid up. So did the governments of Taiwan, Korea, Saudi Arabia and others we haven't heard about.

And they went to the Iranians. The Contras needed the money: the American ruling class needed to develop an alliance with the Iranian right. And for a while it worked.

But then a Lebanese newspaper published the news: Reagan had been selling arms to the Iranians.

Remember the Iranians had been the big devils of the Reagan myth. It was as if Thatcher had been caught selling Exocets to the Argentinians to raise money for the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Then the fun started, and it looks like this one will run and run. So far Reagan has been able to contain the damage. He has not been hounded from office like Nixon. He is not in jail where he belongs. Far from it.

Part of the reason is party political. The Democrats want to keep the whole circus running up to the election. Then with Reagan twisting in the wind any Republican candidate will have to attack Reagan and lose or defend Reagan and lose.

But more important, this is not an investigation into a bunch of cowboy plumbers in the White House. This is an investigation into the machinery by which the American ruling class attempts to police the world.

Push that investigation too far and they do serious damage to the machinery. Neither Democrats nor Republicans want that.

Nicaragua: **REVOLUTION UNDER SIEGE**

by Mike Gonzalez

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



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The ultimate cop—on manoeuvres in Honduras in 1983

They need that machinery. Look around the world. There are revolutionary situations in the Philippines, Haiti and South Africa. The possibility is there in Pakistan, Brazil, Chile, Korea and Egypt. And behind them are many places that were as stable as Marcos's Philippines.

So far they can ride the tiger. The CIA is reorganizing the Philippine death squads. Aquino, Benazir Bhutto, the Church in Haiti, the Kims in the Korean opposition: these people will come to terms. And most important, nowhere is there a strong party organizing for workers' power and international organization. So capitalism as a world system is not under threat.

But there is a real problem. Up to now I've been speaking of the American ruling class. This is not quite right. There is one world ruling class with many warring sections.

For 40 years the majority of these sections have looked to the American state as their organising centre and the American army as the cop of last resort.

Now that centre is not doing its organising job properly. This is happening at a time when the real economic growth of American capitalism is also declining. And capitalism does not rule workers as an abstract economic system. It rules through a network of states.

Those states are made up of real individuals with particular interests. Maybe the Americans could do a deal with Benazir Bhutto. Where would that leave Zia and the Pakistani generals?

And while Pakistan, the Philippines, Korea, Brazil, South Africa and all the others are not crucial to the world economy, too many revolutionary situations threaten the grip of the ruling

class on a world scale. Because the thing about insurrections and mass strikes is that they can, and sometimes do, spread.

The world ruling class has two more problems. There is no immediate prospect of workers power anywhere. But there is far more scope for workers organisation when the local state is in crisis. There are strike waves now in Brazil, the Sudan and the Philippines. Further crises will produce further strike waves.

Their other problem is America. Contragate has probably ruled out the threat of invading Nicaragua. It may wind up the Contras. This is an important victory for our side.

But the ritual humiliation of the White House going on every night on American television is also a ritual humiliation of the American right. The right was wedded to the Reagan project.

Before Contragate the political climate was already beginning to shift. The Democrats did far better in the November congressional elections than for a long time. Now that move is gathering momentum.

There are many small signs. People who were afraid of the fundamentalists are taking the piss out of Pearlygate. *Platoon* won the Oscar. The networks are beginning muted criticism of Reagan.

For fifteen years American politics has been moving steadily rightwards. For the last few months it has been moving the other way. Has the tide finally begun to turn?

I think so. But so far all the movement has been at the level of ideas. There is no action, no significant struggle. The labour movement is mostly quiet. The black movement, the women's movement and

the peace movement are all in a mess. Without the confidence that comes from struggle at the base any ideological move can run into sand.

And of course it's always difficult to tell when the tide turns on the beach. At first there is only a gentle movement, hardly noticeable. Two hours later you can clearly see the tide racing out over the sands. And if the tide is turning, that's important for all of us.

The dominance of reaction in America has been a key ideological part of the worldwide ideological grip of the Thatchers, Kohls, Mubaraks and Khomeinis. Contragate is one step in breaking that dominance. ■

Jonathan Neale

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Family fortunes

THE HORRIFIC case of the young child Kimberley who was battered to death by her stepfather is just the latest in a long line of similar cases. Children are beaten or starved to death and for no apparent reason. Often, as in this case, other children within the family are treated completely differently.

But the hypocrisy of those who—like the tabloid press—wring their hands in outrage and cry never again, knows no bounds. They try to put these incidents down to monsters, evil men and women who take out their sadism on young and defenceless children.

But the explanation for these cases is not so simple. In particular it lies in the nature of one institution of capitalist society—the family.

The family, we are told by all the party leaders and all “respectable” opinion, is essential to the maintenance of “civilised” society. Anyone who attacks it or even suggests that there may be alternatives to it, is subjected to the most vile abuse.

Young girls especially are encouraged to believe that the pinnacle of their achievement is marriage and a family—and that failure to achieve this is tantamount to disaster. Every image in society—from schoolbooks to advertising—points towards the man, woman and two children as the ideal norm to be striven for.

But this myth of the ideal family is one of the biggest lies perpetrated by capitalist society. The family promises happiness, stability and security. But it cannot deliver the goods.

For a start, the majority of people at any one time do not live in happy nuclear families consisting of a man, woman and children. Some are pensioners; many are single parents (one in four of inner city families); others are living alone or in gay couples.

Significant numbers of men and women get divorced at least once. In 1983 up to a third of marriages taking place involved at least one partner who had been divorced.

And of course most women, even when married and with children, work outside the home as well as within it for most of their adult lives.

This divergence between the ideal of women's lives and the actuality puts a fantastic strain on the family. This strain is greatly increased by the fact that successive governments—and especially the Thatcher government—have cut spending in areas which would ease the burden on the family.

So a fairly typical survey in Lambeth in the early eighties found that there nearly half of all children needing full daycare got no provision. Unemployment, cuts in health spending and pruning of social services all take their toll.

All this would be bad enough. But the family is also the repository of some of the worst violence in capitalist society. Much of this violence is hidden most of the time. When refuges for battered women were started in the mid 1970s, there was a massive response to them.

Battering inside the family is commonplace. Women are battered, children are battered, even grandparents are battered. Rape, incest and other forced sexual liaisons are also widespread inside the family.

So is murder and suicide. The rates for these are highest at Xmas and New Year—because people are forced into their families most at this time.

The most violent city in the United States is Detroit. But the violence is not mainly on

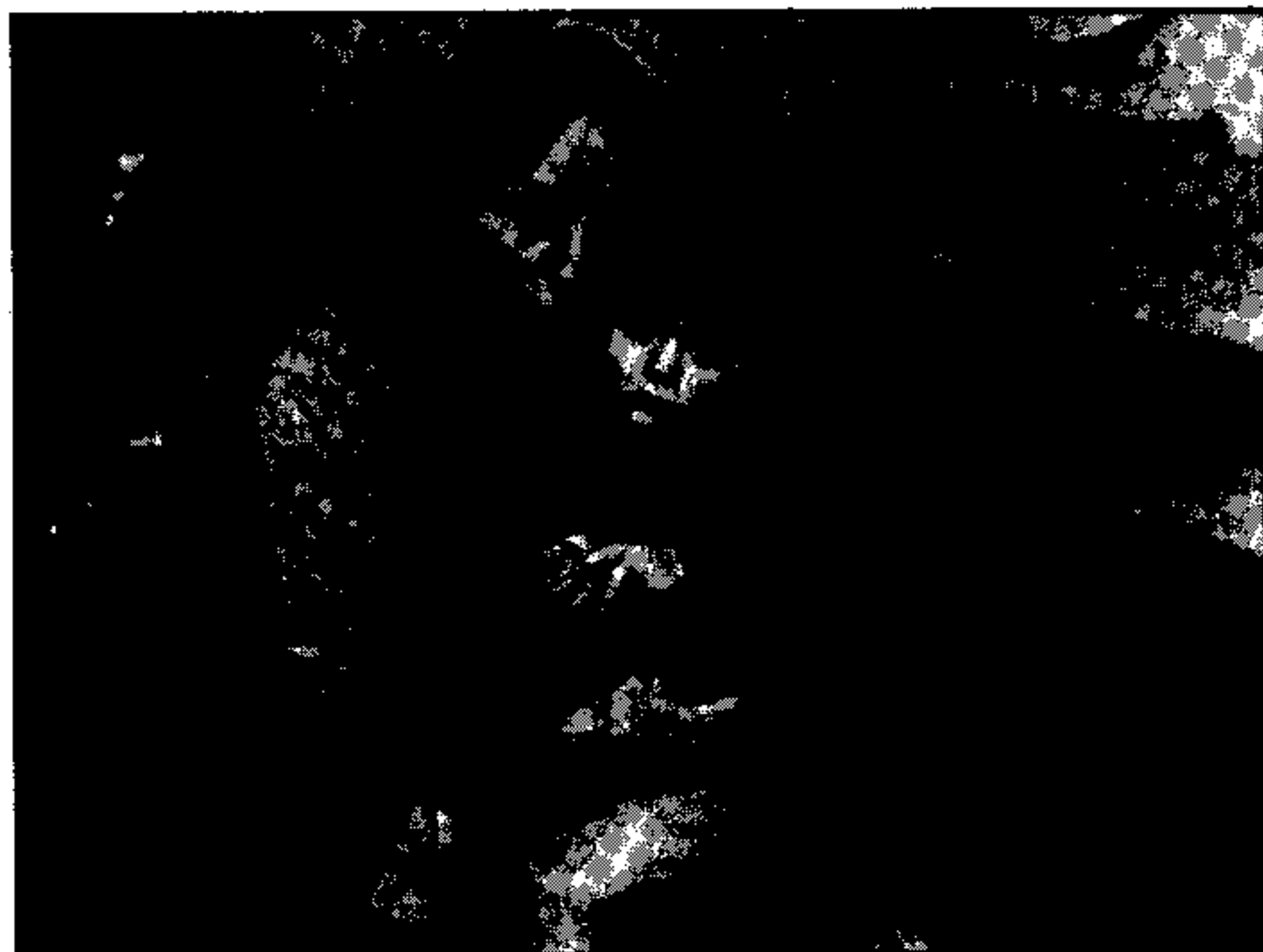
Kimberley, stated in court that she was frightened to go to the authorities because she believed that they would take her children away from her. She couldn't cope with them, but she couldn't cope without them. Her dilemma, which had such terrible consequences, sums up the contradiction of the family.

It has an extremely important role for the capitalist class—the reproduction of labour power. So it exists to care for and maintain the existing generation of workers, and bring up the next generation.

The family is important enough to the system for it to intervene if this is not being done. So there are laws to make sure that children are sent to school and are not treated too cruelly by their parents.

The role of the much maligned social workers, too, is to ensure that this system is maintained and that individual families are propped up where possible if they cannot cope. But the needs of capital dictate that less and less money is spent on propping up families already under attack from the ravages of the system—with the results that we see in the horrific battering cases.

For most working class people there is



Isolated behind closed doors

the streets. A study in the early 1970s showed that four out of five homicides committed in Detroit were performed by relatives, friends and neighbours of the victim.

But there is another side to the story. Because the same people who feel the hate and misery and pain of the family, also cling to it.

So Lillian Rubin's *Worlds of Pain*, a study of working class American families, shows a number of interesting things. Working class children repeatedly made allowances for parents who had beaten or deserted them, on the grounds that their lives were hard so such action was understandable. These children also tended to marry young, and so reproduce the sorts of family that they had grown up in.

Pauline Carlile, the mother of baby

no alternative to the family in this society. They cling to the myth even when the bitter reality of poverty and violence is a million miles away from it. This is why women like Pauline Carlile continue to try to cope when they obviously cannot.

This particular case is a personal tragedy. But blame cannot be simply laid at the door of the parents. Governments, newspaper owners and judges all know that thousands of families live like this.

Usually they remain behind closed doors, which is where the rulers of our society would like to keep them. Occasionally the full horror of these people's lives is made public. But no one then points the finger at the real criminals, who by their economic decisions ensure that these cases will continue. ■

Lindsey German

Whites dig in

BEMUSEMENT greeted the outcome of last month's whites-only general election in South Africa.

The winner—or at least the party with the greatest number of seats—was no shock. President P W Botha's National Party coasted home with another thumping majority, as it has done for the last 39 years.

But this hides a significant shift to the right by the mass of the minority white population. The "liberal" Progressive Federal Party was replaced as the official opposition by the ultra-right Conservative Party.

The PFP lost a third of its seats including the "grey area" of Hillbrow, in the heart of Johannesburg's yuppie belt where residential segregation laws are openly flouted.

And the much vaunted "New Nat" defectors failed to make any breakthrough, winning only one out of three seats.

The Conservative Party virtually doubled its votes, taking the far right vote to nearly a third of the total. But for a split vote going to the Herstigte Nasionale Party, they might have raked in even more seats.

This shift has confounded the hopes of Western leaders, including both Neil Kinnock and Margaret Thatcher, that apartheid could be steadily dismantled without violent struggle.

The National Party still has 123 of the 165 seats, but this masks the real extent of the shift and the pressure it will have on the government.

South Africa is not a normal bourgeois democracy, even for the whites. It is in the grip of an open and prolonged struggle, fought day in day out in the factories and on the streets.

In this battle the mood of the government's base, the armed white population—whether as soldier, as police or as civilian with shotgun over the fireplace—is crucial.

This pressure has already shown itself. Last June's declaration of the State of Emergency came as Botha was in real danger of losing his base to the extreme right if he did not clamp down on internal unrest and "foreign interference".

Foreign Minister Pik Botha, the South African Michael Heseltine in the eyes of the National Party blue rinse set, was forced off a platform in the northern Transvaal by Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB) thugs. The AWB, an openly fascist organisation which talks about fighting "Anglo-Jewish capital", looked set to grow massively.

Soon after the government bombed three southern African capitals, allegedly to flush out ANC guerillas, and told the Commonwealth "Eminent Persons Group" to get lost.

One State of Emergency and 30,000 detentions later Botha has proved that he hasn't gone soft.

The Emergency has been very successful in stemming township insurgency, but has brought new problems with it.

It has forced the unions, hard hit at the start of the clampdown but surviving more or less intact, into the centre of the stage.

A million workers stayed away on election day, including 370,000 miners who don't have a tradition of supporting overtly political action. There was even a 70 per cent stay away in the Durban area, where the unions have been under heavy fire from the scab UWUSA union who ran bussing operations on the day.

And, because of the nature and bitterness of the struggle, economic issues have often swiftly taken on an overtly political dimension.

The current strike by up to 16,000 black transport workers is an excellent example of this process. One worker was suspended, and later reinstated with a £26 fine, for "cash irregularities" involving £13.

That this should blow up into a two month long strike across South Africa's industrial heartland is testament to the militancy and confidence of black workers. It also provides an illustration of the corner the ruling class is backed into.

The state sector, of which the transport company SATS is a part, has traditionally been a source of patronage for poorer whites who benefit from job reservation that has formally been abolished in much of private industry. Most of the new Conservative Party votes came from just such people. Independent black unions are banned in public utilities.

So, to prove to whites that they were safe from "black advancement", the state started roughing up black transport workers. But now it has a strike on its hands that if successful could lead to union recognition and a beachhead into the state sector.

This new found prominence has also brought a "no-holds-barred attack" on the unions. Strikers have been shot dead in the middle of Johannesburg, COSATU headquarters has come under siege twice and then been wrecked by a bomb on election night, and at least eight other union offices around the country have been attacked.

And, in a decision that fits this general pattern, the state has charged the general secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers Union, Moses Mayekiso, with high treason—a hanging offence.

All of this has been done in the interests of defending the privileges of the white population, which need not always coincide with the interests of big business.

Botha will want to salvage whatever



Only a quarter of the whites have so far been used in the armed forces

reforms he can, ultimately the creation of a prosperous black middle class as a buffer against black workers is the best hope for salvaging South African capitalism.

Unlike the periods after Sharpeville in 1960 and Soweto in 1976, the existence of a skilled and well organised black working class has ensured that repression alone has not crushed the movement.

But the potential for reform is constrained. South Africa is in the grips of an economic crisis (although it is partially offset by the rise in the price of gold as a result of world market jitters) so the funding to materially back up reforms is not going to appear out of thin air.

Most likely is an extension of the homeland policy to "city states" or black representation on the President's Council. But these "reforms" go alongside an increased level of repression designed to wipe out the radical opponents of the collaborationist leaders.

While it remains unlikely that the unions will be banned in the near future, almost certainly the state is trying to terrorise union leaders away from political activity. This could mean trying to close down COSATU while leaving the individual unions intact.

The long term prospect is a repeat of the experience of other African countries like Zimbabwe or Algeria. There the colonial powers placed their hopes in moderate leaders who would steer the country steadily to independence.

But the white settlers would have none of it. In Rhodesia the white settlers, in a position much more isolated than South Africa is now, fought a fifteen year long guerilla war to hold onto power.

Compared with this the South African state has much greater forces at its disposal. Every one of the two million-plus white males is a de facto member of the armed forces and as yet no more than a quarter of the armed forces have been used against the movement.

Viewed like this prospects seem gloomy. Fortunately our side is much better equipped than anywhere else in Africa, with a large and well organised working class. ■

Duncan Blackie

Voting for our class



Does voting make any difference? Should socialists vote at all? If so, which way should we vote? And what about tactical voting? Paul Foot looks at the arguments.

A NEW political epidemic is striking down political commentators on the left. It is called tactical voting. From *Marxism Today* to the *New Statesman*, all of which were healthy Labour supporters in 1983, a feeble cry has gone up that the only way to save us from ruin is to vote tactically. Former Labour voters are urged in the day before polling day to study the opinion polls (many of which will be commissioned by the same people who are asking us to read them), look which party is most likely to beat the Tories in your constituency, and vote accordingly. If the party is SDP, vote for it. If Liberal, vote Liberal.

Eric Hobsbawm, the former Marxist, tells us that the differences between voting Labour and Liberal are very slight. The most urgent need of all decent people, he says, is the removal of the Thatcher government from office. In the face of this need, why pay attention to old loyalties? What use is a Labour vote in a constituency where Labour cannot win, but where a decent-minded SDP candidate can?

Let us imagine, for the sake of argument, that these new realists win the day, and that the Thatcher government is toppled by a combination of Labour and the Alliance. In what way will the new government improve the lot of the working class? Will they, for instance, cut down unemployment? They will try to do so. But every single example over the last ninety years of political history shows that they will not succeed.

In 1924, 1929 and 1977 Labour ruled with the tacit consent of the Liberals. In all three cases unemployment was higher at the end of the

period than it was at the beginning: in spite of the sincere promises of both parties that it would be reduced. Will the new parliament build more houses, more schools, more hospitals? Will it rescue the National Health Service?

Will it do such things when, in 1967 and again in 1971, a Labour government, not dependent on Liberals and utterly committed to doing all these things, was thrown into reverse on all these issues and was forced to cut the housing programme, cut the schools programme and even levy charges on the sacrosanct National Health Service?

These are the "issues" which, the Hobsbawms of this world tell us, should guide our judgement and our advice on polling day. Yet in their heart of hearts they must know that a Liberal-SDP-Labour government is even less likely to improve the conditions of the working class than have previous Labour governments.

BUT wait, they might reply. Readers of *Socialist Worker Review* have been told over the years that electing Labour governments makes little or no difference to what happens in the economic and political field. That is quite right. Anyone reading this paper or *Socialist Worker* will be fed to the brim with the argument that the elected governments in capitalist society are not in control of that society.

However much they may wish to reform, however much they legislate for reform their wishes and their legislation are swept aside by economic tides which they do not control or even understand.

So although Labour may pass plenty of laws which look good for the workers, the economic movements which they do not control leave these laws like signposts in the wilderness, better than no signposts at all, but no use for anyone's improvements. What use an Employment Protection Act, shoring up the trade unions' role in the machinery of the state, if the whole of that machinery is flung into a campaign to restrict workers' power on the shop floor and to restrain their wages?

What use Equal Pay Acts and Race Relations Acts if the tides of sexism and racialism are flowing because of an economic recession? Of course the laws passed by Labour governments are likely to be better than those passed by Tory governments, but if the economic conditions which govern people's lives are worse nevertheless, what use the new laws?

All these arguments apply, of course, a hundred times more to a Lib-Lab government than they do to a Labour government. But do they lead, as our critics so often suggest, to an electoral abstentionism?

If we mean it when we say that the colour of the governments in office makes precious little difference to the lives of the workers, why bother to take part in the vote at all? Why not shout a plague on both your houses, burn your ballot paper or write "socialism" on it, or put up socialist revolutionary candidates who argue not for crumbs but for the whole bakery?

The first answer is that we live in the real world, not one we would like to live in. In this real world almost every worker who thinks like a socialist supports the Labour Party. The enormous majority of such people, including pretty well every militant trade unionist, believes that change can come through the Labour Party in office.

The second one is that the Labour Party came into existence to represent the working class (and no other class) in parliament. It was founded, and still is founded, on the trade unions. Trade unions in turn came into existence to improve the lot of working class people. They devised democratic constitutions which made their leaders and executives subject to some form of rank and file control.

Discussion and debate would be sheltered from the capitalist class and its media. Just as that ruling class resented the granting of the vote in the first place, so they doubly resented the formation and the survival of working class-based parties which brought the organised working class into the elections.

However much the ruling class were able to contain and corrupt such Labour Parties when they got to office, they never let up in their resentment of these parties' existence, and have used all their mighty powers to replace them with "alternatives" which will not be subject in any way to the decisions or the debates of the organised working class movement.

Thus in 1931, although the power of the ruling class was able to humble a Labour government, split off its leaders, reverse all its policies and replace that government with fourteen years of Tory rule, they never forgot that the organised trade union movement could not stomach further cuts in the dole, and refused its consent to a Labour government to carry them through. Even such entirely negative control is enough to unite the ruling class against the Labour Party.

SO the issue of what to do in that split second in the ballot box every four or five years is not a difficult one for socialists who see the world clearly through its class divisions. It is a class issue. The Labour Party is founded on the working class. The Liberal Party is not. The SDP is not. If the Alliance replaces the Labour Party as the main anti-Tory Party the organised working class will be removed from its electoral politics, and that will demoralise every class conscious worker in the land.

On election night, while the Hobsbawms and the Kellners are cheering every time Labour comes bottom of the poll and the Alliance candidate is elected on tactical votes, the militant worker who thinks a bit about politics will feel, from the same news, confused and disorientated.

In his marvellous pamphlet, *What Next?*, Leon Trotsky denounced those who dismissed all the institutions of bourgeois democracy as though they were all part of some gigantic capitalist plot. He wrote:

"In the course of many decades, the workers have built up within the bourgeois democracy, by utilising it, fighting against it, their own strongholds and bases of proletarian democracy: the trade unions, the political parties, the educational and sports clubs, the co-operatives etc. The proletariat cannot attain power within the formal limits of the bourgeois democracy, but can do so only by taking the road to revolution; this has been proved both by theory and by experience. And these bulwarks of workers' democracy within the bourgeois state are absolutely essential for the taking of the revolutionary road."

Trotsky probably overstated the case a little. He was talking, after all, about the urgent menace of fascism, and the need to unite all elements of the workers' movement against it. And the educational, sports clubs, and co-ops have long since gone. But the basic point is as important now as it was in 1931.

The revolution he spoke of is *impossible* if the bulwarks built by the workers—including the trade unions and their political parties—are torn down by the rulers; and every defeat for the unions, every defeat for Labour at the polls, pushes the revolution back.

In the polling booths, vote Labour. The day after, keep up the effort to build a socialist organisation in the struggle at the point of production, where the working class has power, and not in parliament, where it hasn't.



Leon Trotsky



Class struggle and the Labour vote

What is the relationship between the Labour Party's vote and the class struggle outside parliament. Donny Gluckstein argues that although the two are connected, each has a rhythm of its own

ELECTIONS can do very little to change society. Lenin said that one strike is worth ten general elections, and that "Bolsheviks regard direct struggle of the masses...as the highest form of the movement, and parliamentary activity...as the lowest form." While he stressed the limitations of the parliamentary system he also castigated those who ignored them entirely.

The existence of parliamentary democracy shows a degree of consensus in society. Elections are only allowed to operate within the limits of "constitutional rule" founded on the property rights of capital. The difference between the various parties is *less* than what they have in common, for the argument has always been over how *best* to run the capitalist system, not whether it should exist at all.

If it ever seems likely that workers' pressure might make parliament overstep these bounds, the ruling class will jettison democracy and use military force to maintain its monopoly of power. From Spain in 1936 to Chile in 1973, this has been confirmed time and again. For real power is not found in parliament, but in the physical force of state and economic power of capital. Whether the government is reactionary or reformist, this power of capitalism remains intact.

There are further factors to take into account. The parties in parliament rise from the the foundations of the class society which exists outside the House of Commons.

Marx said the prevailing ideas in society are the ideas of the ruling class. He also showed that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself. In other words, through struggle workers change their ideas. There is a contradiction between these two statements which is manifested in reality.

A minority of workers are dominated by ruling class ideas—they are reactionaries.

Another minority—the revolutionaries—has learnt through struggle, past and present, to reject capitalist ideology outright. But most workers both reject and accept capitalism at the same time—they are reformist, and vote Labour.

So the Labour Party's vote must be understood as a partial rejection of capitalist ideas. Despite Kinnock's right wing stance and the record of previous Labour governments, workers do not vote Labour because they want worse social services, lower wages or higher unemployment. They want improvements in these spheres.

Kinnock's attacks on gays, the black sections and unilateralism may be designed to shed vote-losing policies, but no one will vote Labour because they think it is *more* anti-gay, racist or war-mongering than others. People vote Labour because they are working class and identify the party with that class.

Nevertheless, for most workers, voting Labour does not mean mass support for genuine socialism. Capitalist ideas are resisted, but not denied outright. Thus profits are acceptable as long as a proportion are ploughed back into social services. Private ownership of industry is okay as long as workers are also allowed to organise themselves in unions.

However, there is a contradiction in the Labour vote. Labour's record in government shows that it has behaved exactly like every other capitalist party and defended big business. In this it has been as successful as its rivals. Indeed, Labour's various attempts to hold down wages have proved consistently more effective than the Tories'.

In other words, workers do not vote Labour because of what Labour governments do, but *in spite* of what they do. They vote Labour because, through its rhetoric and its history of organisational links with the trade unions, it is seen as a party of the working class. Its activity is pro-

capitalist, its membership working class—thus it is a capitalist workers' party.

PERHAPS the most remarkable thing about the Labour vote, whatever its size in 1987, is that the party will still receive millions of workers' votes. This is no mean achievement in the face of the massive right wing persuasion of newspapers, the radio and TV. Behind these stand the churches, schools and other institutions, all reactionary. How do millions manage to withstand such forces?

The Labour Party itself hardly helps. In government its efforts to prevent strikes, raise profitability, cut immigration and maintain defence, do positive harm to left wing ideas. In opposition, apart from some rhetorical tub-thumping and the occasional canvass for votes just before elections, the Labour Party does little or nothing to change people's ideas.

The source of Labour votes lies outside the party. It does not arise from the Palace of Westminster but from workers' direct experience of class conflict. It is because workers resist the system in their daily lives that left wing ideas are generalised.

A fascinating study from 1967 shows that in tiny workplaces (1-10 workers), where organisation is usually poor and class division obscured by the proximity of the boss, 62 percent supported the Tories. In large plants (1,000 workers plus), in which union strength and a sense of class is usually more pronounced, 75 percent backed Labour.

So the smaller the workshop, the weaker the Labour vote. The larger the workshop, the more organisation and workers' consciousness are encouraged, and the larger the Labour vote.

But there is no direct connection between the level of class struggle and the Labour vote. All the great waves of class struggle in British industrial history have been led by people indifferent or even hostile to parliamentary reformism.



Troops on the streets of London, 1926: the Labour Party played no role in the General Strike

The new unionist wave of 1889 was led by industrial militants like Will Thorne, John Burns and Tom Mann who repudiated dependence on parliament in favour of workers' self-activity. The Labour Unrest of 1910-14 was partly blamed on disgust aroused by the party's performance in parliament. Mass strikes, especially in the pits, were led by syndicalists who openly denounced the Labour Party's methods.

The First World War shop stewards' movement was in favour of soviets not parliament. It was followed in 1919-20 by "direct actionists" whose name showed how they saw Labour's efforts as futile.

From the 1930s until quite recently the Communist Party, though no longer revolutionary, provided the strike leadership which the Labour Party would not and could not offer. In the 1926 General Strike not only did they not figure in any of the thousands of leaflets issued, but the one and only mention of the strike in the NEC occurs two and a half months after it was over.

Indeed, the Labour Party has never called a single strike in its entire history. It exists solely to win elections. Its supporters have participated in all strikes, but not as Labour Party members, always in spite of their membership. Against this must be set the numerous occasions where the Labour Party has intervened as an organisation to sabotage action, either by rushing through negotiated settlements or, when in office, by the use of troops as strike breakers.

THE second reason for the gulf between class struggle and the Labour vote is that there is a qualitative difference between the two. Successful strikes may develop feelings of self-reliance in the face of the boss.

Experience on picket lines may cause hatred of the police or contempt for the press, but this does not automatically lead to an immediate change in general ideas. A strike can win without those involved having to think about the broader aspects of the state, workers in other industries let alone other countries.

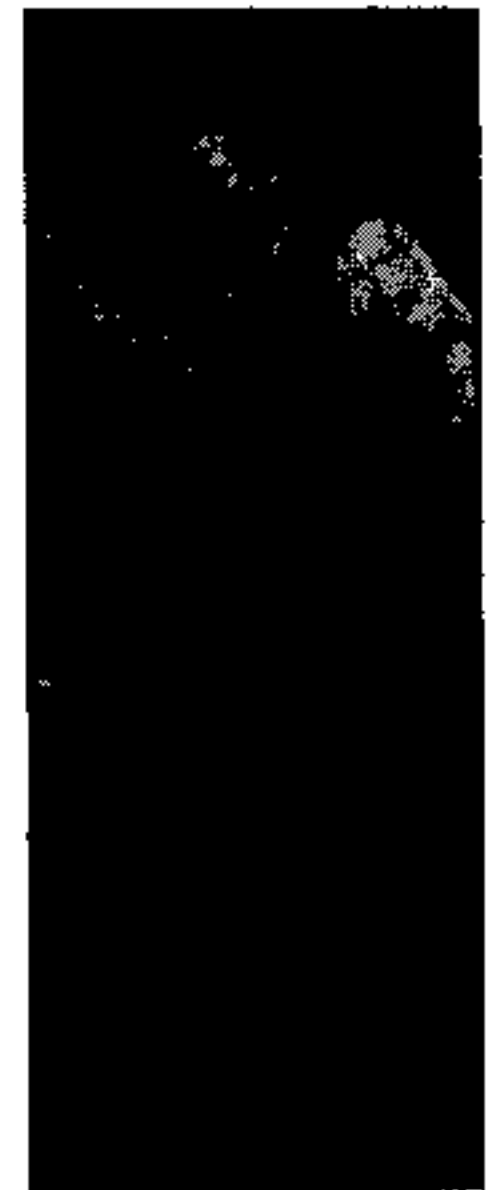
Every workplace activity creates the potential for changing ideas. Not everyone will be affected equally. Sometimes the most advanced workers draw revolutionary political conclusions, while the less advanced take a small step forward.

Perhaps the lessons drawn are purely economic, while at other times reformist politics may be encouraged. The character of such shifts depends on outside forces—the general situation in society, how effective union officials are in blocking action, or the intervention of socialists.

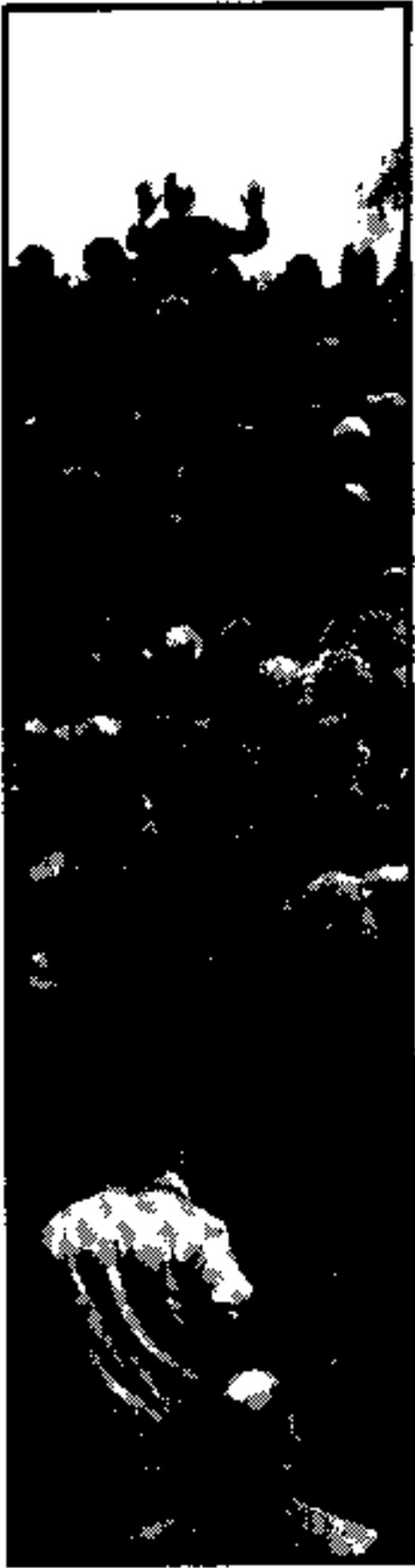
A good example was the Labour Unrest of 1910-14. In these massive struggles one group of workers moved beyond reformist politics to revolution. A broader group may have shifted to Labourism away from allegiance to the openly pro-capitalist parties. *But electorally Labour did not benefit.*

Labour not only lost four seats but came bottom of the poll in the other 12 by-elections. Many middle class voters, or those on the fringes of the movement, were probably frightened by militancy and voted for openly capitalist parties.

A similar pattern developed in 1974 when a wave of strikes brought down the Heath administration. Though miners, dockers and others were in the forefront of action, their electoral



Tom Mann repudiated parliament in favour of workers' self activity



Striking miners, 1972: their electoral weight was slight

weight was slight. The minority of advanced workers hardly figured in election results, since their votes were worth no more than small businessmen, pensioners, policemen, the unemployed and others who played no part in the labour movement.

Even if a high proportion of workers held advanced views in relation to their immediate workplace struggles in 1974, this did not increase support for Labour. Although Labour won the election, it actually polled 5 percent less votes than in 1970 and 10 percent less than in 1966.

So there are two main types of reformist consciousness. One is do-it-yourself reformism related to the workplace. The other concerns politics in general. For the majority of workers, voting Labour can reflect an attitude to society which in their minds may be quite separate from struggle at the point of production.

But these different types do not always exist in separate watertight compartments. The two great leaps forward in Labour's electoral fortunes followed world wars. The first propelled it into forming the official opposition.

The second gave it its first outright parliamentary majority. War conditions created full employment giving workers more confidence in the factories and compelling them to think in general political terms about their situation.

The First World War is an interesting case. Though the 1910-14 unrest did not contribute directly to voting, it started a process of radicalisation which was added to by wartime experience and the Russian Revolution.

By 1918 many workers were drawing political conclusions and, while a minority went on to create the Communist party, a greater number voted Labour. Nevertheless this electoral shift was a very insignificant factor in that tremendous year, 1919, when Britain stood "on the brink of revolution".

The key decisions were taken in the giant unions of the Triple Alliance, the miners, railwaymen and transport workers. The Labour Party as an organisation was largely irrelevant, its vote an incidental spin-off from a much more important process.

It was out of a decade of workers' self-activity that the mass vote for Labour was born. Ironically it was the success of revolutionaries and rising confidence at work that eventually spilled over into a shift at the polling booths. Of course, the logic of the struggle—workers' self-organisation and action—was not instantly absorbed by all those involved. If it had been Britain would have been covered by soviets and led by a mass Communist Party.

So it is not true that Labour's vote necessarily rises with the class struggle, or with its defeat. Conversely the class struggle is not decided by whether Labour does well at the polls or badly. The two, though indirectly connected, have a rhythm of their own.

In a social crisis workers' struggle, if followed to its conclusion (which can only be done if a revolutionary party is consistently arguing for it), leads through do-it-yourself reformism to revolution. Higher votes may occur in elections, but these are incidental, for workers' self-activity does not and cannot run to the parliamentary timetable of five-yearly polls.



1931: downturn and despair saw a collapse in the Labour vote

At such times the key battles are fought out between the rank and file and revolutionaries on the one hand, and trade union bureaucrats on the other. Often it is union officials rather than Labour MPs who organise the most effective restraint, although they may use general reformist ideas about the electoral needs of the party as an alibi in blocking action.

Labour Party organisation only becomes a powerful influence in its own right during



or vote

periods when self-activity is blocked and workers are on the defensive. At this time there may be a loss of confidence in workers' ability to change events for themselves. They therefore look to the MPs for salvation.

The Labour vote can be a sign of working class strength, or lack of self-confidence. It all depends on whether workers see the vote as part of a wider advance, just a subsidiary means of extracting reforms from the class enemy; or if

they are looking to parliament to grant concessions they do not feel strong enough to take.

If the latter is true the Labour vote, far from being a by-product of struggle, now becomes a substitute for it. Labour benefitted greatly from the terrible defeats of Black Friday, 1921, and the 1926 General Strike. In 1924 and 1929, though still a minority in parliament, swings in its direction enabled it to form governments.

In the first instance a 50 percent drop in union membership saw a 50 percent increase in Labour votes. At such times as this the Labour Party and parliament cease to be a side-show and come to dominate the labour movement's thinking.

HOWEVER, the party cannot live at the expense of the mass movement indefinitely. Though hated and feared by the Labour leadership which craves respectability and wishes to run the system harmoniously, *its long-term electoral support lies ultimately in the radicalism generated by workers' struggles.*

Since Labour contributes nothing to these by its own activity, an absence of struggle brings only temporary electoral success. *In the long run a serious setback for the class eventually saps the source of Labour votes.*

This happened in 1931 and the same seems to be occurring today. On both occasions a long period of class collaboration had been the rule among trade union leaders. Then came economic crisis which caused mass unemployment and a loss of shopfloor confidence.

In 1931 the unions seemed inadequate in the face of global economic problems. But the Labour Party had no solution either, and while many of the best militants clung to Labour for want of a belief in any other alternative, millions of voters drifted away.

The decline of militancy since the late 1970s led to Bennism at the end of the decade. This was another movement living off the legacy of previous extra-parliamentary activity. When it was not replenished from this source, it too died.

Bennism became an electoral liability in the 1983 election. In contrast, the fight of the miners in 1984-5 shifted many people to the left. But as the political effect of the strike waned and the industrial downturn deepened once more, Labour resumed its weak position in the opinion polls.

Labour's right wing stance in 1987 may prove no more successful than its left wing manifesto in 1983. The key to the situation lies not in red roses, styles of presentation or "a bold socialist programme" but outside the party itself.

Perhaps the best way to explain the relationship between class struggle, the Labour Party and its vote is like this: through its struggles and experiences, the working class generates a resistance to capitalism. But as long as these struggles are limited and remain within the system, so are the ideas of the mass restricted to reformism.

Upon such struggles rise first the union bureaucracy, which is parasitic on this movement and pursues its own interests as the manager of discontent. The Labour Party is even further removed from the real struggle, but it too is parasitic on workers' struggles and reflects them in an even paler and more indirect form.



Bennism: lived off a legacy

The parasite returns?

What did Lenin mean when he described Britain as a "rentier state", dominated by a class who live by "clipping coupons"? Is it true today?

THE REFERENCE is to Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written in 1916 during the First World War. Lenin argued that the war was the inevitable result of the concentration of capital in the hands of giant monopolies located in a few dominant imperialist countries. These "monopolies" in turn competed with each other to control the raw materials and markets of the whole world. One characteristic of the period Lenin summed up as follows:

"Further imperialism is an immense accumulation of money capital amounting as we have seen, to 100,000-150,000 million francs in securities. Hence the extraordinary growth of a class, or rather, of a stratum of rentiers, ie people who live by "clipping coupons" who take no part in any enterprise whatever, whose profession is idleness. The export of capital, one of the most essential economic bases of imperialism, still more completely isolates the rentiers from production and sets the seal of parasitism on the whole country that lives by exploiting the labour of several overseas countries and colonies."

A rentier was someone who lived off the interest and dividends from the wealth they'd inherited. The coupons were the bonds issued by governments when they needed to borrow, with attachments which were clipped each year to claim the interest which was due.

Lenin argued that the growth of the "rentier" element within capitalism was a

general tendency in all the major imperialist powers. But it was most developed in Britain which was the first to industrialise, the largest exporter of capital, and therefore showed the most advanced symptoms of parasitism upon the rest of the world.

In the years immediately before 1914 British capitalism lost its dominant position as the "workshop of the world".

But British capital continued to own almost half of the global total of foreign investment.

In the fifty years before 1914 British capitalism consistently imported more from the rest of the world in food and raw materials than it exported in manufactured goods.

Nineteen fourteen was the highpoint of both British imperialism and the "rentier" element within the British ruling class. The two world wars imposed an enormous strain, forcing on both occasions a substantial sell-off of overseas assets. Britain had entered the epoch of imperialist wars as the world's leading creditor nation.

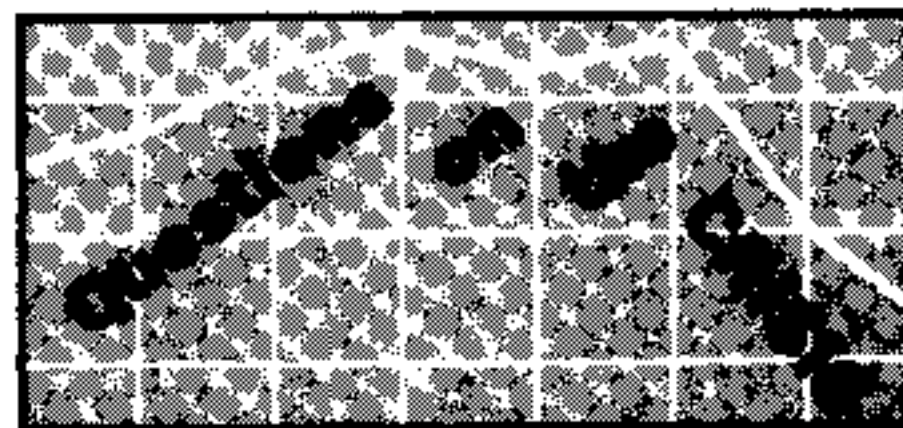
It emerged in 1945 as a net debtor (especially to the United States), forced to export more than it imported, both to pay off its debts and to cover the cost of maintaining its military commitments around the world.

Both slump and war also meant a further transformation in the structure of capitalism which Lenin had not anticipated. In particular the dominance of "finance capital" was replaced by the dominance of "state" capital. The rentier element within the ruling-class did not disappear (though Keynes had advocated the "euthanasia" of the rentier). But it was subject to heavy taxation, and controls over the financial system which kept the rate of interest low at their expense.

In the last fifteen years, however, the situation has changed again. In response to the return of crisis in the 1970s British based companies have sought desperately to improve their profit rates, and gain access to bigger markets, through the export of capital.

British multinationals have long been free to move their capital abroad. But the lifting of exchange controls by the Thatcher government in 1979 unleashed a flood of foreign investment by financial institutions such as the pension funds and insurance companies. North Sea oil revenues provided the surplus on trade which gave British capital a renewed opportunity to expand its overseas assets.

In 1979 total assets owned by British private capital outside of Britain (excluding the banks) amounted to £42 billion. By 1985 that figure had risen to £145 billion.



In "net" terms (after deducting the foreign-held assets in Britain owned by multinational oil companies in the North Sea etc) the external assets of British capital amounted to £80 billion. Britain has become the world's second largest creditor nation after Japan—whilst the United States has become a net debtor.

In December 1986 the *Economist* carried an article headlined "A rentier nation once more". Its argument was that Britain could cover most of its trade deficit with the income obtained from the rest of the world via both the operations of the City of London and the profits on overseas assets.

Combine that with the revival of the parasitic rentier element within the British ruling class, living off high dividend payouts and interest, and Lenin's account acquires a new relevance.

But history never repeats itself in quite the same way. We have to be careful, as Lenin always was, to be clear about the differences as well as the similarities with 1914. Three need emphasising.

Firstly most of the capital exported from Britain has gone not to "colonies" or the Third World, but to the "heart of the beast", the United States of America. In 1986 alone British companies spent some £9 billion buying companies there.

Secondly, in 1914 the returns to the British ruling class from its global investments were proportionately far larger (8-9 percent of GNP compared to about 2 percent in 1985). Today they are not sufficient to cover the growing trade deficit as North Sea oil production runs down.

Thirdly, and most fundamentally, in 1914 the size of British capital's overseas assets was an index of the strength of British imperialism, as the size of Japanese assets is an index of their industrial strength today.

But the revival of British capital export in the 1980s is a result of the windfall of North Sea oil, and reflects the depressed state of the rest of the British economy. It is tempting to describe it as a matter of rats leaving a sinking ship, but that would be an exaggeration. Companies like ICI and GKN now have more than half of their workforce employed outside Britain. But they cannot write off assets here.

Nevertheless whilst the Tories and their supporters in big business circles crow about the economic recovery and "boomtime" Britain it's worth remembering two things. Firstly this is a boom in which most of the benefits are going to a bunch of parasites, "whose profession is idleness". Secondly, look not at what they say, but where they put their money, to discover what they really think about the prospects for British capitalism. ■

Pete Green



Idle rich at Big Bang party

The war of nerves

LAST SEPTEMBER it was claimed that a few litres of a virus went missing from a US army laboratory. If used as a weapon, there would have been enough of the chikungunya virus to infect everyone in the whole world. But because the word "nuclear" was not attached to this weapon, it rated only one column inch on an inside page of a newspaper.

Chemical and biological weapons can be as dangerous as nuclear ones. But whilst only a few countries have so far achieved a nuclear weapons capability, to produce chemical weapons (CWs) is a relatively simple matter.

The formulae for tabun and sarin, two nerve gases developed but never utilised by the Nazis, are freely available in text books.

Iran, Israel, Syria, Libya, Burma, Taiwan and North Korea are all thought to have some CW capability. At the current 55 nation CW disarmament talks, both Indonesia and Pakistan were opposed to free access for inspection of chemical facilities. Eritrea claims that Ethiopia has used Russian-made CWs against it, and France has just declared its intention to begin stockpiling.

Iraq has been using CWs for more than three years, killing or injuring over ten thousand Iranians, and has countered a European ban on sales to it of certain chemicals by building its own chemical plant.

The anti-Vietnam war movement in the late 1960s forced President Nixon to suspend production of CWs in 1969, following America's heavy use of napalm and the Agent Orange defoliant.

When Reagan (backed by the casting vote of Bush in the Senate) gave the go-ahead last summer for the resumption of CW production after 17 years, he took the opportunity to say he was earnestly seeking to ban such weapons. This earnest search is hampered by several factors.

CW antidotes and other protective measures require production of the offending CWs in order to test counter measures. No state has so far offered to abandon such research, so no one denies that production of "laboratory quantities" will continue.

As Iraq shows, no industrialised country would have any technical difficulty in stepping up production of chemicals for weapons use if it so wished, whether at civilian or military establishments.

Newly industrialising countries are very often the site of chemical plants, such as that in Bhopal, for the simple reason that their less rigorous safety standards keep down costs.

The CW disarmament talks in Geneva revolve around the question of verification, since no one, with good reason, trusts anyone else. Yet fear of industrial espionage,

plus the expense of the extra regulations that would be entailed, leads governments to be unenthusiastic about instant on-site checks for companies registered in their territory.

The US therefore held the propaganda high ground in 1986 with its "open invitation" initiative by which a spot check demanded at any time, could not be refused. However, some types of chemical production were to be exempt from such openness.

The Russians, meanwhile, wanted all super-toxic lethal chemicals and key binary weapon reactants produced to be limited to up to one tonne per year and to be produced at one declared location, subject to inspection. This still left out the inspection of certain kinds of chemicals.

Both parties were willing to allow a full ten years for the destruction of existing, mainly obsolete stockpiles (which presumably amount to around 50,000 tonnes on either side).

All this is considered to be a major advance. The Russians didn't even officially admit to having any stockpiles at all until March this year.

For political more than commercial reasons, the Russians have never been keen to allow foreigners to come in and poke around their factories. The Americans were probably banking on this when they suggested their "open invitation" initiative in the first place.

When the Russians showed signs of coming round to on-site inspection by invitation last year, the US hardened its position to demand a 48-hour mandatory challenge procedure.

A British compromise proposal that documented data might be provided instead of short notice inspection prompted Richard Perle, assistant US Defence Secretary, to accuse Geoffrey Howe of "mealy mouthed evasion", although the administration denied that his remarks represented their views.

Even after ten years of talks, all observers are agreed that the chances of finalising a CW agreement before October this year, are virtually nil. This gives the US time to start work on its 155mm binary nerve gas artillery shells, which should be ready for assembly at Pine Bluff, Arkansas by October 1987. The 500lb "Big Eye" binary nerve gas bomb is expected to be ready a year later, all at a cost of around \$210 million.

It is impractical for these new weapons to be whisked over to the European theatre in time of crisis. The F-111 bombers based at Lakenheath and Upper Hayford would be an ideal delivery system for "Big Eye", and the British Army of the Rhine will have equipment to fire the shells. A long range



Dressed to kill

nerve gas delivery system involving Cruise is being planned in the US.

All this still awaits the official go-ahead (as far as we know). But last year, an MoD spokesperson went from "There is no question of the deployment of American binary munitions in the UK in peacetime" to "the peacetime deployment (of binary weapons) should be kept open", within the space of three weeks.

Britain's involvement extends to home grown contributions to chemical and biological warfare. According to the Campaign Against Military Research on Campus (CAMROC), 65 of the MoD's 750 contracts with universities and colleges were initiated by the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down.

This £2 million worth of research does not include the MoD's own military colleges, or US or NATO grants. One example of the contracts collated by CAMROC is the Department of Pharmacology at Manchester University's research into the mechanism of producing pain by the new harassing agent, CR, which is a possible replacement for CS (tear) gas.

Biological weapons are less popular with the military, being unpredictable, uncontrollable, usually slow to act and, like Anthrax, often long lasting in their effects. But these little disadvantages have not prevented continuing research since the days when Churchill made plans to wipe out half the population of six German cities using Anthrax bombs.

The Pentagon's defensive biological warfare programme has grown almost five-fold under Reagan, and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute fears that recent advance in biotechnology and genetic engineering have opened the way to "numerous possibilities" for new biological weapons.

Because of the anti-nuclear lobby, there is some pressure to seek alternative military resources. The attraction of binary CWs is great: they are much cheaper than nukes and don't require nuclear power; and their effects are relatively containable and short lived. What's more they are safer and therefore more mobile than the old non-binary CWs; their production is fairly easily concealed; they support the local chemical industry; and they don't damage hardware.

For these reasons they are a practical and indispensable weapon in the armoury of any modern state. ■

Sophie Grillet

Trading insults

IN THE long running melodrama of the world crisis, Japan has once again been cast as the villain of the piece. The media in America, followed by the bulk of the press here, has given voice to a chorus of boos and hisses directed at Japan's "unfair" trading practices. It is generally not regarded as necessary to spell out exactly what these are, since "everybody" knows that Japan cheats.

Before looking at the facts it is worth taking note of the context in which the latest row, about semi-conductors, is taking place. Our rulers are increasingly uneasy about the direction in which the world economy is heading. They fear another recession. World trade, which grew by only 3 percent last year, seems likely to manage only a 2½ percent rise this year.

Just as the stimulus from the US boom was running out, the oil price fell, and optimism was widespread. But all sorts of problems were overlooked.

The debt crisis, which most economic commentators considered to be solved or at least rendered harmless, keeps rearing its head. The oil producing countries, suffering a loss of revenue, are buying less. That was predictable, but the expected increased growth in the oil consumers which would more than make up for it hasn't materialised.

Many farmers too have gone bankrupt and are losing everything. In this situation an external scapegoat is necessary. Japan, the old enemy, does very well.

Of course this does not by itself refute what is said about Japan. However, it gives us the starting point for examining it: the world system as a whole.

The enormous trading surplus which Japan currently has, in particular with the US, is as a result of competition. Bosses in Japan and America agree on that, and they believe that is how it should be. What they disagree about is whether the competition is "fair" or "unfair".

Our starting point is quite different: we think that the system is anarchic and should be overthrown. It is important to remember this and not to get drawn into arguments which suggest that if there was free trade all would be well.

So what are the facts about Japan's trading behaviour? As far as it is possible to disentangle them from the mass of accusation and counter-accusation, it seems that Japan has no more barriers to trade in manufactures than the US and rather fewer than the EEC.

This wasn't always the case: throughout the 1950s and early 60s the Japanese domestic market was highly protected, but by 1963 import liberalisation had reached about 92 percent, amid headlines from the

measures for the enforcement of decreed prices, and tariff quotas.

According to them, the share of imported products restricted by non-tariff barriers in total manufactured imports in 1980 was about 6 percent in the US, 11 percent in the EEC and 7 percent in Japan. In the two following years non-tariff barriers were extended to other products by the US and the EEC, but not by Japan.

Looking at the consumption of product groups subject to restrictions, this amounted to 20 percent in the US, 24 percent in the EEC and 16 percent in Japan, as a percentage of the consumption of manufactures.

So as far as industrial products are concerned, it is clear that Japan's market isn't any more closed than those of its competitors.

Food is a different matter. Rice imports are effectively banned and other food imports are priced out of the market by tariffs. The subsidies to rice farmers—a vital electoral base to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party—have had two main effects.

One is to raise the price of land and, some argue, the price of housing, as farmland is so valuable as a subsidy producing asset that farmers don't want to sell it.

The other is obviously to raise the price of food to the consumer. Together these act to cut the disposable income available to consumers to buy other goods, among them imports.

However, the international pressure on Japan to cut the subsidies has had to be left to the Americans, as the European Common Agricultural Policy has an embarrassing resemblance to the Japanese one. Indeed it wasn't long ago that the "trade war" in the newspaper headlines was between the US and the EEC over farm exports.

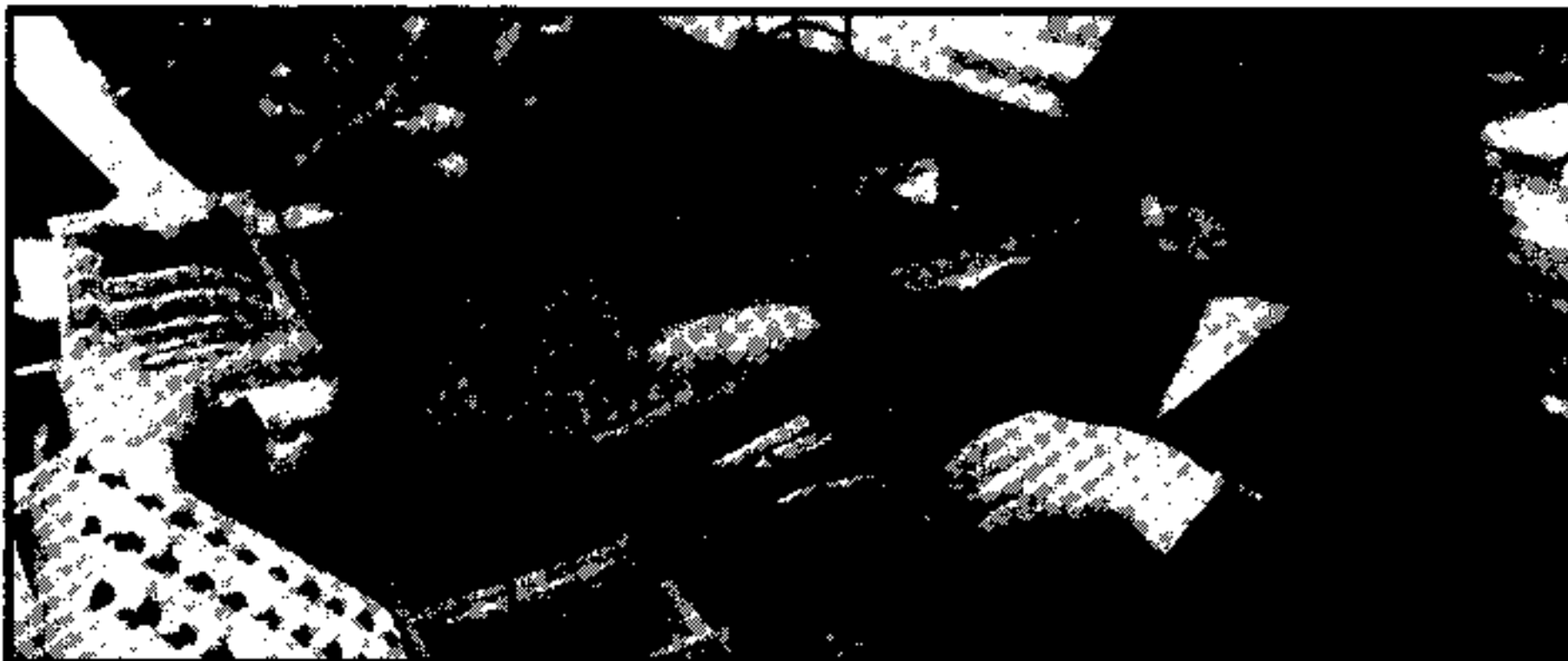
What about services? One of the biggest howls of outrage heard recently is about Japan's failure to allow competition in its telecommunications industry. One problem with this complaint is that the French and West German telecommunications markets are also highly restricted.

There are other complaints. Japanese safety testing is too stringent. Well, I don't think British workers would be unhappy if British safety standards were tightened up.

At the moment inspectors don't have the power to seize suspect products at the point of entry, which means they have to be recalled later when they might have already been sold. Too bad if a child has choked to death or someone's been electrocuted in the meantime. It is quite common too for additives and drugs to be permitted in Britain which are banned in the United States.

It was not too long ago that British car manufacturers were protesting that US restrictions on the emissions of car engines were too strict. One capitalist's pollution control is another's restrictive trade practice.

There are lots of other arguments about Japan's bureaucratic procedures and antiquated and monopolistic distribution



Japanese worker: will a trade war help her?

That is why the Americans are continuing to push the rulers of West Germany and Japan, in particular, to boost their domestic economies to create more demand for US exports.

The US boom was based primarily on the massive expansion of government spending, mostly on armaments, which has left the government with a huge debt. The boom sucked in a mass of imports, and of capital to fund the government's deficit.

Meanwhile, although it has fallen, unemployment in the US remains at 7½ million. In spite of Reagan's promises and the sacrifices made by the working class, millions of American workers are jobless and in poverty.

Japanese press like "The second coming of the black ships", a reference to the forcible opening of Japan's ports in the nineteenth century.

This was a precondition for Japan's entry to the club of advanced capitalist countries, the OECD, in 1965. By 1968 Japan maintained residual import restrictions on 122 products, compared with 43 for West Germany, 22 for the UK and 74 for France. By 1975 the number was down to 30, of which 23 were agricultural.

A study by Balassa and Balassa, *Industrial Protection in Developed Countries* (1984), investigated non-tariff barriers, which consist of quantitative restrictions, voluntary export restraints,



Standing up for whose America?

system which have a degree of truth in them. But what it really amounts to is an attempt to load responsibility for the problems of the system as a whole onto one of the competitors.

That it should have credibility is because of the success of Japan in the competitive battle, a success which is due to quite different factors.

It should be clear from this that all industrial countries have resorted to various forms of import restrictions in response to the crisis. A study, *The Revival of Protectionism and its Consequences for Europe* (Page, 1981), showed that the incidence of restrictive measures was growing fastest in areas like clothing, textiles and footwear, where certain newly industrialising countries had a competitive advantage, and in basic industries like steel and shipbuilding.

The first lesson of this is that the measures have mostly been taken against countries which cannot retaliate. The second lesson is that none of these measures have saved jobs.

All the areas in which restrictions have been imposed have seen the most disastrous job losses. The effect of blaming imports for the crisis is to let the bosses off the hook.

The current advertising campaign of the US United Auto Workers Union says it all: "Stand up for America. Require foreign nations to reduce their trade surpluses."

What about Japan itself? Can it go on growing on the basis of export success? Are there any signs of movement by the Japanese working class?

The fact is that major changes are happening in Japan in response to its changing position in the world economy.

The huge rise in value of the yen over the last year has accelerated these changes, but the fundamental shifts were already taking place. Capital has been flowing out of Japan at an enormous rate.

This has taken the form both of purchases of bonds and shares, mainly in the US (lending money to the US government and buying a stake in US companies),

and of direct investment—creating production facilities in the US, Europe and Asia, buying property and so on.

The move by Japanese companies to start manufacturing abroad is not new, but it has been given an enormous boost by the rise of the yen, which has meant the equivalent of a 50 percent tax on Japanese exports.

One forecast suggests that about 450,000 Japanese manufacturing jobs will be shifted overseas between now and 1991 as a result of increased Japanese direct investment abroad.

The same forecast envisages that a total of 900,000 more workers in Japan will be out of work by then, on top of the official 1.6 million unemployed at the moment (the true figure is probably about twice as high).

The brunt of the effect of the high yen is being borne by the small and medium sized companies—those employing less than 300 workers.

Four hundred and seventy thousand sub-contractors employ about half of the industrial workforce. They make up 60 percent of the small and medium sized companies. This group stands to lose directly as the big companies which they supply with components shift abroad or start to import supplies from cheaper sources. Some of the larger sub-contractors have followed their "parents" in the motor industry to the US, but most don't have this option.

What does this mean for the class struggle in Japan? At present the situation looks fairly grim. The unions have responded to the calls for belt-tightening by accepting the lowest wage rises for 28 years. The level of strikes is very low compared to the 70s.

The export-orientated industries were the site for the pace-setting wage deals in the annual wage offensive—the shunto—but these are precisely the areas most affected by the yen's rise in value.

A management offensive has also taken place in one of the industries where the workforce was most strongly organised—Japan National Railways.

Ninety five thousand railmen have lost their jobs in the privatisation of the railways completed this spring.

Union activists who opposed the privatisation have been sent to a special school, described by the union as a concentration camp. The first thing that happens is that they are made to remove their union badges, but the second batch sent refused to do so, and after three days the management gave up and sent them home.

The story on the railways is familiar: brakemen now have to collect excess fares as well as attend to safety, with the result that reportable "incidents" have risen ten-fold in two years.

It is likely that there will be little resistance in the short term to the restructuring which the ruling class needs to carry through in order to remain competitive. But in the longer term the changing role of Japanese capitalism within the world economy is bound to be destabilising.

The courageous struggle of the Japanese working class in the years after the Second World War was tragically crushed, leaving as a legacy the divided workforce and plant-based unions which our own employers would so like to copy. But the Japanese capitalists are forced by competitive pressures to undermine some of these structures, leading to a greater potential for class unity in struggle than for many years. ■

Sue Cockerill

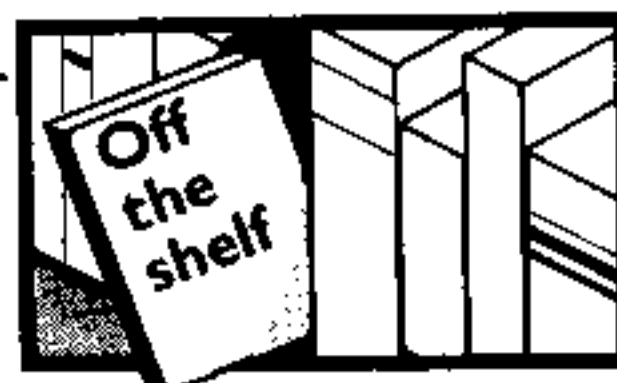
WHY THE WORLD ECONOMY IS IN CRISIS

by Peter Green

Mass unemployment in the West, the 'developing' countries prostrated by debt, food queues in the Eastern bloc — why does the world economy generate such waste and inequality? This is a straightforward introduction to the economic forces that force capitalism into crisis.

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Sit down struggles



Labor's Giant Step—20 Years of the CIO
Art Preis
Pathfinder

1937 was the "year of the sit-down" in the USA. An official of the conservative American Federation of Labor's Hotel and Restaurant Employees recalls:

"You'd be sitting in the office any March day of 1937 and the phone would ring and the voice at the other end would say: 'My name is Mary Jones; I'm a soda clerk at Liggett's; we've thrown the manager out and we've got the keys. What do we do now?' And you'd hurry over to the company to negotiate and over there they'd say, 'I think it's the height of irresponsibility to call a strike before you've even asked for a contract' and all you could say was 'You're so right'."

In the spring of 1937 some 400,000 workers took part in 477 sit downs; crucially in the auto industry but also in many other areas including refuse collectors, hospital workers and even baseball players. It was on the basis of this wave of worker militancy and self-organisation that the previously unorganised mass production industries such as auto, rubber and steel were organised under the banner of the CIO or Committee for Industrial Organisation (to become in 1938 the Congress of Industrial Organisations).

Art Preis chronicles the background to these events and the subsequent history of the CIO in the aptly titled *Labor's Giant Step*. The book provides a marvellous answer to those who would write off the US working class, giving us a detailed history of class struggle in the USA in the twenty years after the CIO's formation.

Better still, Art Preis was a revolutionary—a member of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and a contributor to and later editor of its paper *The Militant* during the period covered. Hence his perspective is that of the self activity of the working class.

He carefully and vividly describes the struggles which both heralded and prepared the ground for 1937. The Toledo Auto Lite strike of 1934 in which he participated, the Minneapolis Teamsters' and San Francisco Longshoremens' strikes of the same year; the rash of sit downs in the rubber industry in 1936.

In so doing he shows clearly that this was an upsurge from below, often under the leadership of socialists and often in opposition to the union bureaucracy even where they were in favour of industrial organisation.

The position of the American Federation of Labor's leadership was clear: they were opposed to anything that might disturb the balance of power within or be-



Miners' leader John L. Lewis (left) and contemporary strike painting (above)

tween their precious craft fiefdoms and were therefore fiercely opposed to the notion of industrial organisation itself let alone workers self activity to achieve it.

More complex was the position of a section of the AFL bureaucracy whose most vigorous representative was John L. Lewis, leader of the mineworkers union.

In 1933 he had used the ambiguously pro-organisation sentiments of section seven of Roosevelt's Recovery Act to put himself at the head of a wave of unofficial struggle in the mining industry under the slogan "The President wants you to join the Union".

Nevertheless there were strict limits to the kind of organising campaign that Lewis envisaged. He aimed to begin the process in the steel industry, particularly important for the miners union where "captive mines" were run by the steel bosses to provide fuel for their mills.

Preis describes the creation of a steel workers organising committee composed solely of trade union officials from outside the steel industry, many from Lewis' own union. He tells how the campaign of organisation reached its climax with secret "exploratory" discussions between Lewis and Myron C Taylor, the chairman of US steel, in December 1936.

As Preis wryly comments, we would not have learnt the outcome of these "exploratory" discussions had it not been for the workers of General Motors taking matters into their own hands with the sit down strikes of the winter of 1936/7.

When victorious, these strikes opened the floodgates of class struggle for the rest of the American working class.

What is implicit in the material covered by Preis but not brought out clearly is the contradictory nature of the trade union

bureaucracy. It depended on its ability to mediate between bosses and workers always within the framework of capitalism, running to catch up and overtake workers who were fighting but terrified lest workers' struggle turned into a real challenge to capital.

The thinking of Lewis' wing was very clearly expressed by Charles P Howard of the Typographical Union, speaking at the 1935 AFL Convention:

"Now, let us say to you that the workers of this country are going to organise, and if they are not permitted to organise under the banner of the AFL they are going to organise under some other leadership... I submit to you that it would be a far more serious problem for our government, for the people of this country and for the AFL itself than if our policies should be so moulded that we can bring them under the leadership of this organisation."

This meant that Lewis, whose own union banned Communists from office, could swing far enough to the left to contain the upsurge of 1937 within safe bureaucratic channels.

In this, tragically, he was aided and abetted by the American Communist Party, then in the process of swinging from the "red unions" of the ultra-left "third period" to the search for the respectability of the Popular Front. When Lewis hired Communists by the dozen as organisers for the CIO the CP was both unwilling and unable to see who was using whom and repaid Lewis' compliment by adopting the more unsavoury tactics of the bureaucrats.

As early as September 1937 members of the CP on the national executive board of

the United Auto Workers voted to ban all newspapers produced at union branch level and to inform General Motors that it could sack workers engaged in "unauthorised" strikes.

In 1938 out of a CIO national executive board of 42, 15 were CP members or sympathisers.

Preis goes on to chronicle the struggles of American workers during World War Two, including a national miners' strike in 1943. These strikes took place in the face of bitter opposition not only from the "regular" trade union bureaucrats but of the now super-patriotic CP as well: the *Daily Worker* of 19 June 1944 typically editorialised:

"Those who violate the no strike pledge are scabs and should be so treated. Scabs were never handled with kid gloves."

The fact that the CP's influence was acquired not in struggle but through manoeuvres and rotten alliances with this or that section of the bureaucracy and that it used its influence to attack those workers who were willing to fight, meant that come the beginning of the Cold War and the great post-war boom the bureaucrats experienced no great resistance when they turned upon the Communists.

The attack took place simultaneously with, and was facilitated by, the legislative attack upon organised labour by the Taft Hartley Act of 1947 which, amongst other things, required 60 days notice prior to

strikes, imposed penalties upon trade union leaders for unofficial action by their members and allowed the US president to order the postponement for 80 days of any strike deemed to endanger "national health and security".

Furthermore the Act contained clauses which linked a union's right to win representation of groups of workers with the signing of an affidavit swearing that union leaders were not members of the CP or "affiliated" with it.

The bureaucracy in the main combined token opposition of the most feeble kind to Taft Hartley with the use of its provisions to turn upon their erstwhile allies in the CP. They drove them out of positions of influence, splitting unions and even the CIO itself by expelling CP led unions and then "raiding" them for members.

It is the great merit of Preis' book that it provides detailed evidence that this turn of events was by no means inevitable. The defeats inflicted on the US working class are attributable to the rottenness of the bureaucracy and the crucial failure of the CP to provide any alternative.

There is however a problem with Preis' book which stems from the vastly over-optimistic perspective of growth of the American Trotskyist movement after the war—growth which did not materialise. So, unhappily, Preis blurs party and class—the influence of the party does not grow but all is well for the class is marching onwards and upwards.

However this itself requires a considerable bending of reality, leading Preis to adopt a very crude yardstick of the militancy of US workers which goes, the longer the strike or the more workers out on strike, the more profound the class struggle. No distinction is made between offensive and defensive struggles.

This in turn leads Preis to blur the distinction between rank and file and bureaucracy. So for him the strike wave of 1946, not that of 1937, enjoys the title "American Labor's Greatest Upsurge" although these strikes were much more firmly in the grip of the bureaucracy than those of nine years previously.

Likewise in the preface to the book he quotes statistics to attempt to show that there was "...a tremendous intensification and expansion of the class struggle, reaching its peak in the second decade of the CIO"—that is the decade after Taft Hartley.

This lack of the cutting edge of an understanding of the role of the bureaucracy and the blurring of the character of different periods mars an otherwise very useful book.

Nevertheless there is much to be gained from it; not least the knowledge that things need not have turned out as they did and that given the struggles that will come at some point in the future, revolutionary socialists will once again be able to lead the struggles of American workers. ■

Michael Szpakowski

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Party poopers?

FORGERY, surveillance, electronic eavesdropping, burglary and infiltration are the weapons that the secret state uses against the left, according to Peter Wright and other ex-MI5 agents.

Need we worry?

Many socialists do. Duncan Campbell of the *New Statesman* has made a career out of watching the watchers.

Tony Benn and Peter Hain have joined the chorus bidding us beware of the spys.

Obviously the secret service can damage the left, particularly public individuals like Hain and Benn, but also individual trade union militants.

Nevertheless it would be a mistake to overestimate the power or the success of the secret service.

The paranoia that sometimes sweeps the left has as much to do with their view of the state as it does with the real power of the state's secret arm.

The Labour left believe, providing real socialists are elected to parliament, they can control the army, the police, Whitehall and big business.

The secret service is an obvious threat to this perspective. It is self evidently beyond even the pretence of parliamentary control.

To the Labour left the secret service is more than a secondary, if extreme, example of how the whole system works—it is the heart of the beast.

Something else attracts the Labour left to the issue of state security. Like the monarchy, the secret service is anathema to sincere democrats, let alone socialists, and therefore a relatively easy target.

Marxists have a different view. Certainly the secret service shows parliamentary democracy to be a fraud, but its role in actually running the country is minor.

The economic power of the ruling class, its local and national bureaucracy, its media, the armed forces, the police, courts and prisons are all of immeasurably greater importance. All of them are nearly as far beyond democratic control as the secret service.

In concentrating on the secret service the Labour left minimises the need to smash the whole state machine and quietly furthers the myth that the democratic part of the system can be used to clean up the few undemocratic parts of the system.

But would a revolutionary movement be undermined by the secret service? Could it destroy a revolutionary party?

The secret service is at its weakest when confronting a revolution.

The Russian Revolution faced one of the largest and most efficient secret services in the world—the Tsar's Okhrana. Its hundreds of thousands of files, its thousands of agents, hounded revolutionaries throughout Europe.

But, as Bolshevik Victor Serge records, their efforts came to nothing.

"The reports of the Okhrana affirm that the revolution is at hand and offer the Tsar vain warnings. Just as the most knowledgeable doctor called to the death bed can only observe, minute by minute, the progress of the disease, the omniscient police of the Empire watched impotently as the world of Tsarism plunged into the abyss.

"For the revolution was the outcome of economic, psychological and moral causes outside their reach."

This is the fundamental weakness of the secret services. They are a tiny body which, by definition, is cut off from the mass of the population, powerless to halt the storm around them.

But what of a revolutionary party in a pre-revolutionary situation, when it does not enjoy mass support? Can secret services wreak havoc then?

There are a number of reasons for rejecting this argument. Firstly, the secret service



Campbell—watching them watching us

has little reason to show interest when the influence of revolutionaries is marginal.

Secondly, a revolutionary party is particularly difficult to subvert. Serge explains that spies will exist so long as the class struggle goes on, "but they are *individuals* to whom the habit of collective thought and work, strict discipline and a scientific theory give the *least* chance of success."

Serge says that even when the revolutionary party is numerically weak,

"its role is immense, since it is the role of the brain and of the whole nervous system, albeit inseparable from the aspirations, needs and activity of the whole proletariat—so that within it the designs of individuals, *when they are not in line with the needs of the party*—lose much of their significance."

That is why Serge defined an agent in a revolutionary party as "a policeman who

serves the revolution in spite of himself".

Of course it is true that the Okhrana could score victories and that the Bolsheviks took elementary precautions to avoid their attention. But even the secret service's gains could be turned to advantage by the revolutionaries.

Serge records what happened after the Okhrana liquidated the entire 70 strong Riga party organisation.

"For a start the imprisonment of the 70 did not go unnoticed. Each of the members was in touch with at least ten people. Seven hundred people, at least, were suddenly faced with the brutal seizure of the honest, brave people, whose only crime was to strive for the common good... The trial, the sentences, the private dramas involved, brought about an explosion of interest and support for the revolutionaries.

"Even if one of them could make his impassioned speech heard from the dock, it could be said with certainty that the organisation, at the sound of that voice, would rise again from the ashes."

That determination to break the state machine and its secret service is a world away from the cynical use made of the secret state by past Labour leaders or the woefully inadequate talk of parliamentary control that the Labour left indulge in.

But is it true, as some on the left argue, that revolutionary movements which face the modern state machine are less likely to succeed?

A moment's thought dispels this idea.

In Poland Solidarity were not beaten by the ZOMO, but by their leaders' unwillingness to challenge for state power. South African workers are not held in check primarily by BOSS, but by the strategy of the ANC and it certainly wasn't MI5 which made the difference between victory or defeat in the miners' strike.

But perhaps the Iranian revolution provides the most devastating refutation of this argument.

The revolution's enemy, the Shah's SAVAK, was one of the most brutal, barbaric and well equipped secret police forces in the world.

Yet the revolution swept SAVAK aside. The CIA operation in Tehran went with them. Ever since, to the unending embarrassment of SAVAK's Western supporters, Iranian students have been painstakingly piecing together the files that were sent to the US Embassy's shredder.

The most advanced of new technology was little help to the Americans as they struggled against the Shah's enemies. Aware that US spy satellites could intercept radio transmissions, Iranian forces resorted to what proved a safe form of communication—they sent a man on a bicycle.

The truth is simple. No amount of modern hardware, no secret police, however brutal, can save a ruling class which has lost control over the majority of people it exploits. That was true for the Bolsheviks and every revolutionary upheaval since has shown that it is still true. ■

John Rees

FOR EIGHT years Thatcher has attacked working class living standards and organisation. For four years Kinnock has shifted Labour to the right in the quest for votes. In the run-up to the general election the Tories are promising new horrors if elected—and the Alliance offer nothing different.

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Mainstream mystic

**Farewell
Come and See**
Director: Elem Klimov

"GLASNOST" has hit the film screens of Britain.

Two films by the Russian film maker Elem Klimov, *Farewell* and *Come and See*, are now on release. Klimov has been made first secretary of the film makers' union by Gorbachev in an attempt to revitalise the Russian cinema.

He has a reputation as a critic of the establishment, encountering numerous "script problems". One of his films has never been screened, while yet another was twice halted, took a decade to make and was finally shelved.

Klimov rose to head the film makers' union after a meeting earlier this year at which the old bureaucrats in charge were shouted down and then unseated.

So how do the two films on view reflect on "glasnost" and on Klimov as a dissident figure?

Farewell centres on a group of peasants living on an island in a Siberian lake. They are to be decanted into a sprawling estate on the edge of a new industrial town because the island has to be flooded as part of a hydro-electric scheme.

It offers certain insights into the way the regime operates. We see how party bureaucrats operate unchecked and the soulless housing of the workers.

But like the author Solzhenitsyn or the film maker Tarkovsky, who both went into exile in the West, his criticisms centre on a mystical, religious celebration of "Mother Russia".

The technicians are seen as threatening aliens. In contrast the peasants maintain the old way of life. In the end the mystical

powers of nature defeat the bureaucrats and the experts.

Like other middle class critics of the regime within Russia, Klimov in no way represents any real challenge.

Indeed *Farewell* reflects hostility to the working class. The creation of a massive working class is the key feature of how Russian society has changed in this century.

The whole celebration of "Mother Russia" and of traditional family values has been central to the ruling class since Stalin's time.

If *Farewell* meanders along *Come and See* jumps straight off the screen at you.

It centres on a mute boy who is our witness to the slaughter the Nazis inflicted on the peasant population of Byelorussia, culminating in the mass murder of a whole village by the SS. The extent of the Nazi terror and the fight back by the population comes as a shock to those brought up to believe that Western allies won the war.

The Russians took the brunt of it and the lion's share of the victory lies with them. That in itself offers a useful antidote to Thatcher's Churchillian imagery.

But *Come and See* is mainstream Russian cinema. The war dominates both television and the cinema. Not just because of the extent of the suffering but because it is used daily to cement the legitimacy of Stalin's heirs.

The film also reflects Russian nationalism with its crude anti-German ending. The Nazis come across as being simply depraved.

Come and See would gladden the heart of any bureaucrat in the Kremlin.

Both films show the limits of "glasnost" by offering no fundamental challenge to the dominant ideology. ■

Chris Bambery

Blood lust

Chronicle of a Death Foretold
Director: Francesco Rosi

A YOUNG woman in a small Colombian town is wooed and married by a wealthy and handsome stranger. On her wedding night she is returned to her father's house, her white dress in shreds. She was not a virgin on her marriage and so is subject to the ultimate disgrace. The marriage is over after a few hours.

The woman's family vow revenge. She names her seducer, Santiago Nasar, another rich young man. Her brothers take their butchers' knives and set out to kill Nasar, which they do with the passive complicity of—and in the full view of—many of the townspeople.

These are the bones of the story that is

Chronicle of a Death Foretold. Rosi's film is taken from the short novel by the famous Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The novel itself is slight—as is the film in content—but throws marvellous insights into life in Latin America in the 1950s.

Political life in the region was corrupt, dominated by the Catholic hierarchy, and increasingly by American imperialism. A series of dictatorships governed.

This is epitomised in the film by the mayor whose main concern is to impress the bishop—and the bishop himself who is only seen as he sails by the town on a riverboat, blessing it as he does so.

There is terrible poverty, although the main characters live in some comfort and even wealth. But perhaps worst is the nature of the society itself. For Colombia is shown as a country which has developed neither politically nor economically. Accordingly social relations are among the most backward.

The father of the family has control not only over his wife and daughter living at home, but over his married daughters as well. Women are treated as commodities—owned by the father until marriage, then by the husband.

For most women, like the rejected bride Angela Vicario, anything else would seem unthinkable. So it appears absolutely in the natural order of things for her discovered "dishonour" to be enough to ruin her life.

The death of Santiago, too, seems totally normal to most of the inhabitants. It is the only way to restore Angela's honour, and so it is almost as if the whole town is complicit in the killing.

Certainly no one tries very seriously to stop it. There is a sense of fatalism that this is indeed the natural order of things. The strength of both Marquez as a writer and of Rosi as a director is that they are honest portrayals of the society—but they are also sympathetic ones.

So they show the narrowness of the life, and the sheer waste of at least three people's lives as a result of the narrowness of its social customs.

This makes the novel and the film worth seeing. Rosi's sense of time and place is especially powerful. But there are two quibbles.

One is that in the book Santiago was an Arab—and so likely to be unpopular for his race as well as his money. In the film this doesn't appear to be the case. The other is that the ending of the film is ambivalent, at least suggesting a conventional happy ending.

This probably wasn't Rosi's intention, who was probably trying to portray the wasted past rather than future happiness. It definitely was not the intention of Marquez in the book.

The film is not great, but it is good and thought-provoking. Even better would be a Rosi film of Marquez' great novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. ■

Lindsey German

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

Tel it like it is

ELECTION time is upon us and with it comes an abundance of my very favourite form of television, the interview and the chat show.

As I write this it is a bit too soon to do an in depth study of electoral coverage—maybe next time. Nevertheless I'm sure much of it can be predicted.

Thatcher will be interviewed by several sycophants; varying degrees of slavish worship will be dolloped out in her direction.

"Can you tell us the sad one about the alderman (her dad) that always brings a tear to the eye of yourself and every decent person in the land?"

"When did you first realise you were the greatest living human being since Winston Churchill?"

"That's a very fair question, Sir Robin. I think I realised it the day he died."

It says much for the competence of our fine interviewers that, in spite of everything Thatcher's government had done, at the last election she was put on the spot only once, and then only by a complete amateur on a phone-in who had studied the facts about the Belgrano and didn't hesitate to point out that Thatcher was telling porkies.

But of course it isn't mere incompetence, for in somewhat different circumstances the same interviewers can be brilliantly brutal.

"Right, Kinnock, you old windbag, the Russians are on our doorstep just waiting for you to be elected so they can invade. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Well, I don't think..."

"Of course you don't think. How can you when you're a prisoner of your own lesbian loony left wing Trotskyite thugs?"

"Look, Sir Robin..."

"Don't try to get out of it that way, you freckled face pinko."

All a bit sad really when you consider that the boy Neil has sold his soul and much more besides in order to seem respectable.

What is more, he has appeared on everything from a Tracey Ullman video to the *Wogan* show, in order to show us he's more than just a boring politician, he's also a personality, an entertainer, a thoroughly rounded, "all around" man, capable of enjoying and taking part in trivia just like the rest of us.

Where better to show just how trivial you can be than on the *Wogan* show?

Wogan has raised the genre of the chat show to a whole new plateau. Once in chat shows you would get serious people with something important to say being treated seriously. On *Wogan* nothing is too serious and everyone (actually there are exceptions) is lovely.

On *Wogan* myth and reality become completely intermingled, so you can never quite tell if the soap star is being asked about his/her life, or that of their characters.

Also, everyone has to be good on *Wogan*. No innuendo stronger than you get in a *Blankety Blank* clue. *Wogan's* mother apparently watches the show and is, I am reliably informed, the yardstick by which he judges how risqué a show can be.

So that one Bond girl (whose name escapes me) used the word "tits" on his show and apparently will never be asked back.

But I digress. It seems to me that one of the main things which Terry has done is to try and sell us our political leaders as decent human beings. Not always an easy task! How for instance do you make a polecat like Norman Tebbit seem cuddly?

Tebbit always reminds me of a particularly nasty kid I went to school with. The kid laughed a lot, but had the distinctly unnerving habit of never laughing at the same things or at the same time as the rest of us.

He was the sort of child that got hours of pleasure pulling the wings off daddy-long legs. I think he is now foreman in a slaughter house.

Anyway, for reasons not too hard to imagine, whenever I see Tebbit I think of him.

How could *Wogan* sell Tebbit?

BolsheVision



Pat Stack writes on television.

Where there's a *Wogan* there's a way.

"My next guest is a very courageous man," says Tel, "and before he comes on I'd like to show you a bit of film."

And there, before you can say "On Yer Bike", is the most famous big toe in Britain sticking out of the rubble that was once the Grand Hotel Brighton.

Only hard hearted "Trots and terrorists" could now lack the desire to take Norm to their bosoms.

I had a dream the other night that *Wogan* was interviewing Hitler.

"You've had a lot of bad press, but are you as bad as ol' JR?"

"Nein, Terry," (says AH, stroking the famous knee).

"I didn't think so. Are ya' still with the lovely Eva, hey, and will you pass on a few tips to your old pal Benito about fighting the flab?"

"Ladies and gentlemen, Adolph Hitler." (Loud applause.)

God save us all from *Wogan* and his bloody mother! ■

socialist worker Review

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The day of the bishops

Against the Tide
Noel Browne
Gill and Macmillan, £9.95

NOEL BROWNE is that very rare animal indeed, an honest politician. It is likely that many readers of this magazine will not have heard of him.

Browne first sprung to prominence when as a young almost unknown politician he was appointed Minister for Health in the rather strange coalition government elected to office in Southern Ireland in 1948.

This coalition was made up of five parties, the largest of which was Fine Gael, Browne was a member of the third largest grouping Clann na Poblachta.

Clann were themselves a strange political combination. On the one hand they consisted of the largest break from the IRA opting for "constitutional politics", and on the other they pulled in a number of young radicals and socialists looking for an alternative to the sterile politics that dominated the South of Ireland.

Browne fell into the latter grouping. His abhorrence of the poverty and privation that still existed throughout much of Ireland was built on a tragic first hand experience.

He had watched first his father and then his mother die of tuberculosis, followed by a brother, and two sisters, each of them finishing up in a paupers grave.

TB was the most deadly killer of them all in Ireland at the time. In particular it affected the poor, who could neither afford the cost of proper treatment, or the hospitalisation, and therefore isolation of the victim of what was a highly contagious disease.

Browne himself later contracted TB but survived. Through a set of fortunate circumstances and the kindness of others, he was removed from the poverty of his upbringing and placed in a Catholic public school in England, later in Trinity College Dublin where he studied medicine.

Browne's arrival in politics was as a naive young man, but he threw himself into the task of creating something akin to a decent health service in Ireland, and in the boom conditions of the 1950s was able to achieve quite a degree of success.

He is still widely regarded as the "man who eradicated TB in Ireland".

Browne much admired the British NHS as set up by Labour immediately following the Second World War, and he sought to extend the area of state health care in Ireland. Most health care was in the charge of the church at that time and practically all

of it apart from the notorious poor houses was fee paying.

Part of Browne's plan for this extension was the mother and child scheme.

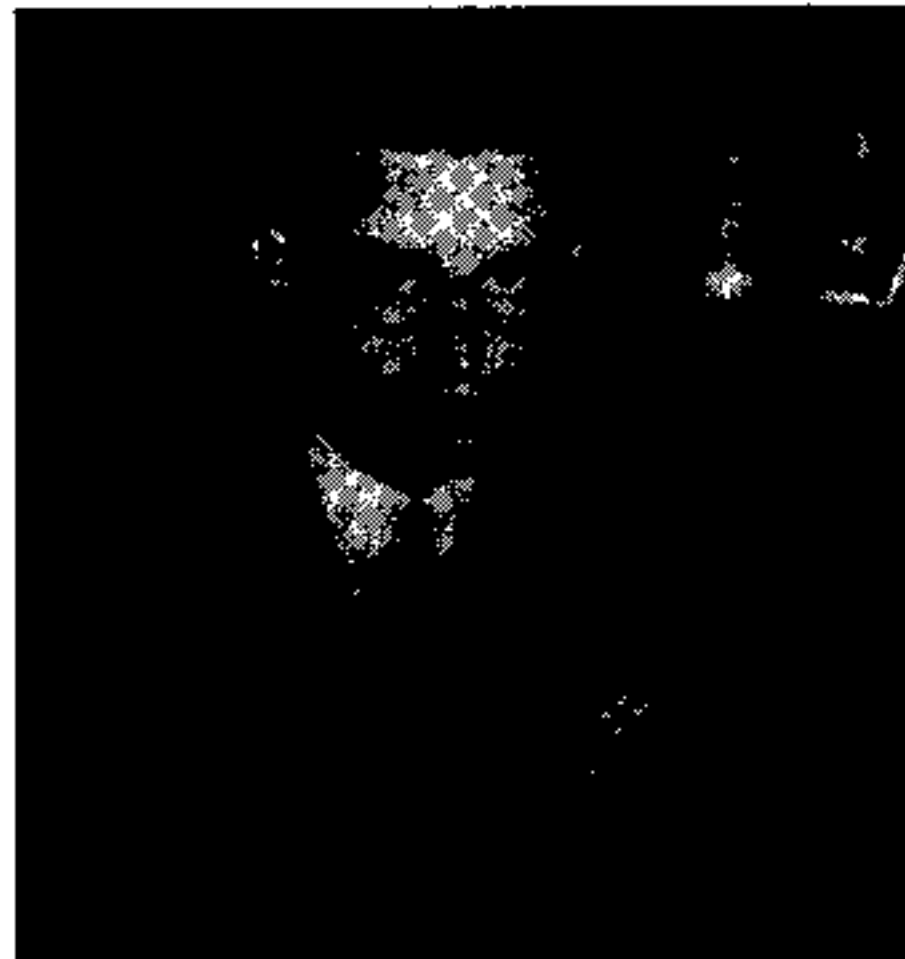
The scheme aimed to provide full free medical care before, during and after childbirth. There was to be an entirely free health service for all children up to the age of sixteen years.

All this may not seem particularly earth shattering but it created the most unbelievable backlash, the medical profession howled its protest in its anxiety to keep its grubby hands on the purse strings, but at the spearhead of it all came the Catholic bishops.

This they argued threatened the institution of the family. All matters of sexual health and education were the responsibility of parents.

The act, they argued, also attacked the "right" of parents to pay for their children's health.

What was even worse as far as the bishops were concerned was that Protestant doctors might deliver Catholic babies, and if it came to an either or choice between mother and baby the Protestant



Noel Browne

doctor would save the life of the mother, which is contrary to Catholic teaching.

Behind all this quasi-religious mumbo jumbo lay what Browne cites as the recurring objection of the bishops, the thought of the rich having to pay increased taxation to help the poor.

Browne was able to prove just how shallow the opposition to a health service on "moral grounds" was by asking one simple question of the bishops again and again.

The Catholic church in Ireland operates on an all-Ireland basis. If Browne's act was morally improper for the Catholics of the South, why had there never been any objection to the much more extensive health service available to the Catholics of the North?

It was a question they never attempted to, and indeed couldn't, answer.

The church created a hysterical backlash, all of Browne's cabinet colleagues caved in to the pressure, the

Labour ministers doing so behind the hypocritical stand of not wanting to provide a free health service for the "fur coated ladies of Foxrock".

It says something for his standing that despite a bitter witch hunting campaign by the church and his opponents Browne, standing as an independent in Dublin immediately following the collapse of the government, was re-elected almost doubling his vote.

Browne was forced to resign, and with him went the government. From that moment on he became a dissident Irish politician, floating in and out of both Fianna Fail and Labour, and flirting with groups to the left of Labour.

He was returned to the Dail many times thereafter. It says much of Browne's commitment that he and his family having enjoyed the height of power and prestige were to live much of their life afterwards scraping together an existence.

Browne refused to leave Ireland, despite the fact that he was effectively blacklisted from the state medical sector, and refused as a matter of principle to take one penny from any patient in a private sector that still dominates Irish medicine.

Having said all this is not to imply that Browne's politics are our politics, they are a considerable distance from them.

When it comes to the national question, Browne takes what can only really be described as a reactionary anti-republican position.

This stems in part from a fondness for the British who were so kind to him following the horror of his Irish childhood. More importantly it stems from his deep hatred of the clericalism of Southern society.

He can't see how such a society can be anything but a backward step for the Protestants of the North, and this has led to him taking the same side in debates with such out and out reactionaries as Ian Paisley.

James Connolly's maxim that a divided Ireland would enjoy a carnival of reaction on both sides of the border is clearly lost on him.

Secondly Browne has a touching faith in bourgeois democracy, and is an arch-parliamentarian. He has of course been victim of state suppression of his own democratic reforms, but puts this down merely to church interference.

He believes that if only Irish politicians weren't such a gutless lot where the church is concerned everything would be possible.

Despite his hatred for the rich and powerful, and his scorn for the "fake socialists" of the Irish Labour Party, Browne himself ends up with no way out of the trap of the capitalist system, and in a period of crisis watches not the reforms that he believed made parliament worthwhile, but the erosion of those reforms.

Noel Browne's name still commands

respect in Ireland today, but unfortunately his swim "against the tide" really has no shore to aim for. ■

Pat Stack

Flowers for the grave digger

Stalin

Alex de Jonge

Collins £17.50/Fontana £5.95

The rose bud opens

Bluebells all around

The iris too awakens

Flowers wave in the wind

I HAVE always distrusted people who like flowers, and when I discovered the above poem by J V Stalin my suspicions were confirmed. (Doubtless many comrades will be interested to learn that Beria, Stalin's murderous henchman, was a vegetarian.) If it's anecdotes you want, de Jonge has got plenty.

After Lenin's death Stalin realised that he had to establish himself as a theoretician, so he hired a philosopher to give him regular tutorials on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. The tutor was not very successful; as a reward he was shot in 1937.

Stalin was bitterly opposed to mathematical economists (because they disagreed with his plan targets). So hostile was he to mathematics that he banned the production of desk calculators or cash registers and made accountants use the abacus.

During the purges one man was charged first with Trotskyism, then with Tartar nationalism. He was told that the authorities had "sent the file back saying they had exceeded the quota for Trotskyists but were short on nationalists".

Stories like this are so good it doesn't really matter if they aren't true. As they may well not be. For de Jonge is not very scrupulous about his sources. If his bibliography is to be believed he has read a lot of books, but he hasn't read them very carefully. On two points where I checked his references to Isaac Deutscher, he either failed to understand his source or wilfully distorted it.

But even if only half the material in de Jonge's 517 page account is true it makes its point. Stalin was a very nasty piece of work and Russia under Stalin was the next best thing to hell on earth.

Buy why do we need a book to tell us that in 1987? Today the overwhelming majority of Communist Party members treat Stalin the way the Queen treats her mentally handicapped relatives—one simply doesn't refer to them.

Of course the understanding of Stalin is still relevant. But for that we need an analysis, not just a catalogue of crimes. And analysis is something that de Jonge is incapable of giving us.

He simply cannot grasp the ideas and the circumstances that led people to make the 1917 revolution. As a result he cannot understand the Stalinist counter-revolution. He is like someone producing a detailed second-by-second record of the movements of a grave digger—without ever noticing the coffin and the corpse.

To be fair, de Jonge has one interesting insight. In his introduction he compares Stalin's methods to those of a chief executive in a British corporation who never listened to advice and created fear by random sackings.

But he does not follow this up. For to do so would be to recognise that Stalin was a product of the same system that oppresses us here in the West.

De Jonge's book is not wholly without interest, but if you want a serious political biography of Stalin that sets the man among the ideas and events of his time, Isaac Deutscher's *Stalin*—for all its limitations—is still a hundred times better. ■

Ian Birchall

Karl, Rosa, god and the devil

A People Betrayed £16.95

Karl and Rosa £9.95

Alfred Doblin

Angel Books

ALFRED DOBLIN'S novels about the German Revolution are extremely bizarre. On one level they are a dreadful insult to the memory of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. They are deeply mystical; alongside the human characters, the devil, various angels and heavenly messengers play crucial roles; and the essential message of the books is a religious one.

At the same time the novels convey with dry humour and a certain brilliance the betrayals and corruption of official Social Democracy—the butcher of the revolution.

The portrait of Ebert, the SPD leader, will bring pleasure to any socialist. Doblin shows him as a man slavish in his devotion to the old Prussian state.

Ebert hates the revolution with his whole being; he wants to preserve the monarchy; he will do anything to preserve capitalism.

The best written and most powerful passages in the novels are those concerning the machinations of Ebert with the old imperial generals. Their mutual hatred for each other, subordinated to their joint

desire to crush the workers' councils and the rebellious troops is wonderfully portrayed. They collude, but they also plot against each other.

His description of the confrontation between the militant sailors of the People's Marine Division and the government during Christmas 1918 is a wonder of sarcasm, bursting the pomposity and elitism of the official powers. We are then involved in the botched uprising of January 1919.

We see thousands of workers, armed and in the streets, betrayed and left leaderless by their centrist leaders. To the author the only honest men and women in Germany are the ones fighting the last hopeless battle against the right wing troops in the police headquarters.

The revolution is defeated and through the author's pen we see the world hurtling to the next war. He hates the system, hates capitalism—but can see no way forward other than submission to god's will. Despite some wonderful writing the books end up as another appeal for passivity and quietism in the face of oppression. ■

Neil Rogall

Marxism by numbers

State Capitalism: The Wages System under new management.

Adam Buick & John Crump

Macmillan £8.95

TONY CLIFF'S *State Capitalism in Russia* rescued the theory of state capitalism from the ultra lefts. Buick and Crump's book demonstrates why that is necessary.

Firstly the things we can agree with. The authors spell out that capitalist production in the West is not a pure system of "private" capitals. They demonstrate that nationalisation has taken place to defend capitalism, not to undermine it.

Only the false identification of capitalism with private property prevents the bureaucrats in "communist" countries being seen as state-capitalist ruling classes.

They, absolutely correctly, emphasise that those bureaucrats are not free agents but operate under constraints.

The authors' stress on the need to examine the dynamic of state capitalism is undermined by their approach. They have no sense of *contradiction* and real historical processes are reduced to abstract schemata.

We are given *The Six Essential Characteristics of Capitalism*, *The Four Questions To Decide If A Revolution Is Socialist*, and *The Seven Main Features Of The Model Of State Capitalism*. Even better we are given *Five Reasons the revolution of 1917 could not be a Socialist Revolution*. This is desiccated Marxism.

They establish that there is a labour market in Russia, but try to use this to beat Cliff's book. While *formally* correct they don't see that Cliff's analysis explored the contradiction between looking at Russia in isolation and seeing it as part of the world system. They sometimes give the impression that surface similarity between private capitalism and the internal organisation of "communist" countries is enough to establish state capitalism.

This serves as a prelude to some appalling politics. Readers of this *Review* may be surprised to learn that the Bolsheviks sought to replace private capitalism by state capitalism. Stalinism is seen as a direct continuation of Leninism. All this is standard mythology on the ultra-left.

It is simply a lie to assert that the tradition of this *Review* can

"consider capitalism to have been 'restored' in Russia because, in their [ie our] view all that is required for 'socialism' to become 'capitalism', and vice versa is merely a change of political regime."

On the contrary we stand for workers' social revolution. Because we know that the real revolution will be inside history we reject the nonsense of Buick and Crump.

For them "... 'socialism' and 'communism' have identical meanings. We use both terms to describe the society which immediately follows the abolition of capitalism." For them, if we haven't abolished states, classes and money the day after taking power they're not interested.

To reject in advance the struggles that will be necessary *after* the socialist revolution, to reject the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat, is to retreat from Marx. So is to present socialism as an abstract utopia without a single word on how it is to be achieved. ■

Derek Howl

Adding to the confusion

A History of the Jews

Ilan Halevi

Zed Press £7.95

THE RECENT debates in this *Review* about Judaism and the origins of anti-semitism have been at times confusing. You might think an Oriental Jew like Ilan Halevi—brought up in Israel and at one time Paris Ambassador for the PLO—would throw some light on them. But you'd be wrong.

True, Halevi's book does have some rich pickings. One, in particular, floors the Zionists in one blow when he describes how the Persians destroyed the First Temple in 600BC.

After the fall of the Temple

"the majority of the Judaeon aristocracy, both military and priestly, had been deported to Babylon, according to normal custom of conquerors at that time..."

"For their part, the ordinary people, the Hebrew peasantry did not experience the honours of exile... They remained where they were...integrated by the ties of inter-ethnic marriage and the ties of local pagan cults... All these people, that is the overwhelming majority of the 'children of Israel', the Hebrews, ceased to be part of the history of Judaism. Later, many were to become Christians. Later again, many were to become Muslims. The Palestinian Arabs of today are no doubt the direct descendants of the ancient Hebrews..."

Superb! But this doesn't explain why the religion then flourished, which it did. It was written up and carefully crafted for posterity in Babylon under Persian protection, and "...Persian imperial instructions gave the injunctions of Judaism force of law for all Jews, as far away as the Judaeon military colony at Elephantine, Upper Egypt and subjected the whole of the diaspora to the fiscal and spiritual authority of the restored temple."

Halevi tells us no more about this Jewish military colony in Egypt. But in fact it is the site of a very fascinating archaeological discovery.

Documents found there dating from 500BC, belonging to a Jewish family indicate that the "Jews engaged in trade, bought and sold houses and land, loaned money, acted as depositaries, and were well versed in matters of law...the songs and chronicles are in Aramaic, which shows that as early as 500BC, Hebrew was no longer a customary language for the Jews."

This finding is reproduced in Abram Leon's *The Jewish Question* whose method of analysis Halevi dismisses as "economistic mechanism". But those who deny that Leon's method can be applied to antiquity have to explain two things. Firstly why a flourishing Jewish diaspora existed *before* the fall of the First Temple. And secondly why the Persians encouraged a new universalistic religious group, a religion which competed with their own, and gave them military protection throughout the empire.

Again, Halevi tells us that at the very moment in 70AD when the Romans were sacking the Second Temple, they actually conspired in setting up the first Jewish Seat of Learning.

Again, why did the Romans, like the Persians before them, simultaneously break up the Jewish power base and protect and encourage the Jewish diaspora? Halevi provides no explanation. Worse, he tells us that the Jewish communities then survived "by drawing its cohesion from its law."

This is the idealist method run riot.

Social groups do not survive because of the rules that flow from their ideas. They survive because of their economic role. The book no more offers theoretical explanation for Jewish history than he offers a practical solution to Palestinian history. ■

John Rose

The charm and the chop

Women of the French Revolution

Linda Kelly

Hamish Hamilton £12.95

THE WOMEN pioneers of the French Revolution—Madame Roland, Theroigne de Mericourt, Olympe de Gouge—belonged to an emerging bourgeoisie whose further development was blocked by the conditions of feudal society. They were revolutionaries because they knew that the establishment of a new capitalist order required the smashing of feudalism.

The Gironde was the right wing, more conservative section of the bourgeoisie who were prepared from the outset to compromise with the old aristocracy. The more determined Jacobins saw the necessity of alliance with the Paris poor, the Sans Culottes. In 1793 they overthrew the Girondists and then declared: "We can only afford to be humane when we are certain of victory."

The main characters of the book belonged to the pro-royalist section of the Gironde. It's clear that the time spent by the author as travel editor for *Vogue* has had a big influence on her approach to them. As each character is introduced there is detailed information about their looks, their clothes, their houses, their ambitions, their noble origins if they had any, their social lives and their lovers.

If she had spent as much time describing the living conditions, clothes and diet of the women of the Sans Culottes, then this book may have gone some way to explain the zeal with which the Paris poor adopted the slogans of the Jacobins to participate in the Great Terror. It may even have explained the fate of Linda Kelly's heroines.

They were guillotined, imprisoned, attacked and driven mad by the women of the Sans Culottes. All of this is seen by the author as an unnecessary tragedy.

The author devotes more time describing the "courage" of the queen before her execution than on the contribution of women like Clair Lacombe and Pauline Leon, who organised the Republican Revolutionaries, the Sans Culottes women's club on the extreme left of the revolutionaries.

These women led the street fights, they led the march to Versailles, they were

prominent in overthrowing the Girondists and routing the counter-revolutionaries. It was these women who constantly pushed the revolution as far as it would go.

Linda Kelly describes their contribution as "political rather than feminist". This was certainly true of the Sans Culottes women, but it was also true of the bourgeois women. At no point was their loyalty to their class submerged by a loyalty to all women.

Even Olympe de Gouge's famous pamphlet, *Rights of Women*, was dedicated to Marie Antoinette, the queen. In the end Olympe de Gouge and the others went to the scaffold, not because of their feminism, but because of their support for the king and the counter-revolution.

As an account of how the fainthearted section of the new bourgeoisie reacted when the revolution "went too far", *Women of the French Revolution* is worth a read. ■

Helen Blair

The populist pitfall

A State of Fear
Menan du Plessis
Pandora, £3.95

Sometimes When it Rains: Writings by South African Women
Edited by Ann Oosthuizen
Pandora, £4.50

CAPE TOWN at the height of the massive school students' revolt in 1980 is the setting for *A State of Fear*. Over 100,000 students were involved in a series of school boycotts and explosive demonstrations throughout the Cape. The novel uses this as a setting for a detailed description of the experiences of a young white teacher, Anna, who is caught up marginally in the struggle.

Anna comes across as an isolated figure, observing events yet constantly pulled back into herself, searching her past for an explanation of her sense of confusion. Cape Town is vividly portrayed but the overall effect is dreamlike, with little sense of the growing dynamism of the struggle. That struggle is represented only by the shadowy figures of the two young coloured students who Anna shelters from arrest. They remain representational, one-dimensional characters.

There is no feeling, either, of the development of a mass movement. The bus and meat boycotts are presented simply as part of the atmosphere of dislocation that Anna moves through. The only development that we are given is that of Anna's interior life.

Sometimes When it Rains is a collection of short stories by both black and white writers, though most concern the

experiences of black women in facing the apartheid regime, and their day-to-day struggles against the dehumanising effects of oppression.

A couple of the stories do focus on direct involvement in the struggle. In one, for example, Miriam walks out of her domestic's job in a white suburb to join the demonstrations in her township, confronting the police when they come to smash up her home and arrest her sons.

But the overall picture is not one of collective resistance, but rather of individual experience. Nowhere is there a consciousness of the struggles of black workers as a class. This is not to invalidate the direct voices of experience that speak to us from these stories; some of them are truly moving and help to deepen our understanding of life under apartheid.

However, the lack of political analysis in both books, and their uncritical acceptance of populist ideas and strategies, also leave a feeling of frustration. What we get is a partial and often confused picture of the fight against apartheid—one that too often dominates contemporary South African literature. ■

Fran Cetti

Wobbling on Wall Street

Greed and Glory on Wall Street
Ken Auletta
Penguin, £6.95

THIS BOOK breaches the closed world of high finance and details the collapse of Lehman, a major US banking house. Its pages bulge with almost unimaginable greed and no noticeable glory whatsoever.

Auletta is an unabashed admirer of American capitalism. His detailed account of the firm's last year and the internal

power battles that preceded its demise glories in minutia, such as annual bonuses. (Tragically one partner's "was raised a mere \$25,000 to \$400,000".)

It is a very readable book, once you learn to skip the acres of financial details. It's an adventure story, not unlike an extended episode of *Dallas*, with lots of false smiles and backstabbing.

For socialists its main interest lies in portraying the instability of ruling class life, the unceasing battle to accumulate. One of the leading partners says of the firm's previous boss: "He was like a Mafia Don who could be nice because he could send people out to do his dirty work. Bobbie's speciality was keeping people at each other's throats."

Oddly the author disputes this view of high finance, though it is borne out by everything else he says in the book. Auletta wants to see the world in terms of mighty personalities creating wealth, of great risk takers reaping great rewards.

Despite concentrating solely on the US ruling class, so that workers and the rest of the world are barely mentioned (except in terms of "rationalization"), Auletta is forced to show his mighty personalities pushed by the development of capitalism.

The House of Lehman's failure was not simply due to a clash of wills, but to the overall replacement of smaller private partnerships, like Lehman, by multinational giants such as American Express.

A comparison is made with the early seventies when a similar crisis of profitability occurred. Then the option was open to expand and diversify. In the crisis ridden eighties no such choices are left.

We can take considerable comfort from the fragility of the US finance boom and the general instability of the parasites on Wall Street. They are not as faceless and invulnerable as they are sometimes portrayed, and their weakness opens possibilities for workers around the world. ■

Ken Olende

Bookbrief

THIS MONTH sees the long-overdue re-issue of Isaac Deutcher's biography of Trotsky (*Oxford University Press, £6.95 a volume*). The definitive study of Trotsky's life and work, it is written with a clarity and a commitment that bring to life both Trotsky's enormous contributions to revolutionary socialism, and his eventual defeat at the hands of Stalinism. Deutcher himself eventually came to accommodate to Stalinism, and this is reflected in some of his judgements. But despite that, it remains essential reading.

Lynn Pan's *The New Chinese Revolution* (*Hamish Hamilton £12.95*) is a comprehensive and readable account of the changes in China since Mao's death. The title gives away some of the weaknesses of the book,

and her treatment of Deng Xiaoping is positively sycophantic. But it is one of the sharpest books on the subject to date.

Ismail Kadare is one of an extremely rare breed: a surviving Albanian dissident. His latest novel to be published in this country, *Chronicle in Stone* (*Serpent's Tail £9.95*), is a child's-eye view of the Italian occupation of Albania during World War Two. Kadare mixes fact and fantasy to tell a story that is both frightening and compelling. Well worth looking out for.

Also set during the war is Primo Levi's *If Not Now, When?* (*Abacus £3.95*), a marvellous account of the struggle of Jewish partisans against the Nazis in Poland and Russia. ■

Charlie Hore

Political desert...

GEOFF FOOTE'S article on the Labour Party—"The Left's Dilemma"—(May *SWR*) is thoughtful and interesting, but ultimately it presents a false dilemma. He argues that the Labour Party is "fundamentally incapable of challenging the foundations of power in a capitalist society, and could never really be socialist in any meaningful sense of the term."

Hopefully not many readers of *SWR* will need persuading that this is an accurate description of the Labour Party. However, Geoff goes on to say that,

"socialists who have left the Labour Party in order to create a genuine socialist party have suffered the fate of finding themselves in a political desert."

This would seem to suggest that socialists have a hopeless future.

But it ignores a number of points. First, the failure of the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party or the Communist Party to become significant political expressions of the working class cannot be simply explained by the fact that they tried to build organisations which were independent of the Labour Party.

The decline of the ILP in the 1930s and the CP in more recent years can be explained much more cogently by their *politics*, rather than their organisational independence from the Labour Party.

Secondly, the only way out of this hopeless situation, according to Geoff, is for socialists outside the Labour Party to find ways of working with the "hard left" of the Party, to "earn their trust" and convince them of the futility of trying to make Labour into a socialist party.

In many ways this is true: socialists inside and outside of the party can, and should, work together on a range of issues. But there would be no point in pretending that this joint activity does not contain serious political differences.

Even the "hardest" left of the Labour Party, the Trotskyist "entryist" groups, are notoriously ambiguous about the Marxist theory of the capitalist state.

It is precisely in times when the left is weak that the need for political clarity is particularly important; in a downturn of workers' struggles there are fewer opportunities to test out Marxist

ideas in practice. Consequently there is an urgent need to be clear about these ideas.

Finally, Geoff seems resigned to the nature of "political" possibilities within a capitalist society. The future of socialism in Britain seems to depend on what socialists inside and outside of the Labour Party decide to do.

Marx, on the other hand, stressed the point at which the established demarcation of politics was shattered. He wrote that "every movement in which the working class comes out as a class against the ruling class and tries to coerce them by pressure from without is a political movement."

This is precisely the point where we should be looking for hope in the future, at how the "economic" struggles of the working class can, if successful, remake the terrain of politics. Politics will then be not simply a question of supporting a political party, but a direct expression of workers' self-activity.

It seems to me that the people who are most at risk of finding themselves in a "political desert" are those "independent socialists" who reject the Labour Party and the attempt to build a socialist alternative to it. ■

Malcolm Webb
Evesham

...is Inside Labour

GEOFFREY FOOTE'S article on "The left's dilemma" (May *SWR*) is a welcome progression on his book *The Labour Party's Political Thought* because it clearly states that socialism can only come from an organisation *outside* the Labour Party. He is right to add that this alternative socialist organisation must "find ways of working with the 'hard left', earning their trust" etc.

However, there are two points which the SWP would dispute. Foote argues the Labour Party has "represented the organised working class". Lenin discussed this self-same idea at the Second Comintern Congress. "I have met the same view several times...it is erroneous." He went on to say:

"Of course, most of the Labour Party's members are workingmen. However, whether or not a party is really a political party of workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and political tactics..."

Regarded from this, the only correct point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party."

If Labour does not represent workers how does this "thoroughly bourgeois party" keep its influence? The answer is through the trade union bureaucracy. They created and fund the party. They occupy the centre point between Labour as a capitalist party competing with other capitalist parties to run the state in the interests of business, and the mass support Labour receives at election times.

Labour represents the trade union bureaucracy, not the organised working class. It is, in Trotsky's words, "only a political transposition of the trade union bureaucracy".

The second point is Foote's assertion that "socialists who have left the Labour Party...have suffered the fate of finding themselves in a political desert." It all depends on what you mean by politics.

If you mean voting once every five years Foote is right. But voting is the most passive political act imaginable and if you mean the politics of class struggle, Foote could not be more wrong.

Labour has never led a single strike, it has sabotaged a good many. The NEC, for example, never discussed the 1926 General Strike, and the only mention this gets in the minutes was a sub-committee report two and a half months after the strike was over! Yet despite the Labour Party's abstention from real class politics, there has been a century of fights without which the trade union movement, let alone the Labour Party itself, could never have existed.

In the fight of class against class the lead came from the new unionists of 1889, the syndicalists of the Labour Unrest, the shop stewards movements of two world wars, the Direct Actionists of 1919, and the Communists whose industrial organisation was at the forefront of workers' militancy from the 1920s right up to the struggle against Edward Heath in the 1970s. All had one thing in common—they were hostile to the passive reformist politics of Labour and electoralism.

They were able to lead the class because they were outside the Labour Party. Their support was not dependent on the ballot box, but the willingness of masses of workers to follow them *in action*.

We are not in any lush pastures at the moment, but as Sharon Atkin and many others are learning, *the political desert is not outside the Labour Party, but inside it.* ■

Donny Gluckstein
Edinburgh

A common interest

BOB CANT (May *SWR*) criticises the SWP's analysis of gays. He uses arguments we often hear from Labour and Communist Party members and others who believe that exploitation and oppression have different roots and separate solutions.

Let me take up some of his arguments. He says that we "fail to understand the historical nature of workers' action in the workplace" and that this has been "dominated by the interests of white heterosexual men".

This short statement encapsulates several fundamental misunderstandings: first, as revolutionaries we are supporters of the international working class. Read any issue of *Socialist Worker* and you will read of workers' struggles in South Africa, Brazil, Argentina...dominated by white workers? Come off it Bob.

Unfortunately, Bob Cant confuses the groups who *initiate* action with the groups *in whose interest* it is. The outstanding recent example is the miners' strike.

Certainly most miners are white and male. Almost certainly the majority are heterosexual, but does Bob Cant seriously believe that a victory for the miners would not have been *in the interests* of all oppressed groups and of all workers?

Has he already forgotten how the organisation of women in the pit villages and of gays, lesbians and black workers in support groups changed the ideas and understanding of all those involved?

Has he forgotten how the strikers' experience of the police and the press led them to see the role of the state and to identify with young blacks and the Irish?

In Poland, Solidarity was born in the shipyards—another male-dominated industry (though sparked off by the sacking of a woman)—but it shook the stranglehold of the state on all workers and opened up the possibility of the spread of a genuine revolution.

Every revolutionary movement in history has combined the struggle against exploitation with that against oppression.

Bob Cant writes of the importance of "organisation around difference". In the SWP we support the right of all oppressed groups to autonomous self-organisation, but we believe

that those who see it as the solution to their oppression have taken the profoundly pessimistic step of abandoning the hope of revolution and looking only to reform.

In so far as separate organisations of gays and lesbians build confidence to come out and demand recognition and equal rights, we value them, but we call for a united struggle to achieve that recognition and defend those rights.

In the Islington Housing Department black and white workers united in industrial action against racists—a small example of what John Molyneux was talking about.

Yes, there have been examples in history of sectional, divisive and reactionary industrial action—too many examples—but the workers' action we claim for our tradition recognises unity and solidarity as the key: remember the Yorkshire miners picketing and marching in solidarity with black women striking at Grunwicks? Remember Portsmouth hospital workers striking rather than handle South African goods?

Here, today, when the working class movement is weak and solidarity is hard to win, it is easy to lose confidence in the possibility of revolution and to look for short cuts on the reformist road, relying on separate organisations and left Labour councils.

By contrast, we continue to affirm that *all* workers, black and white, straight and gay, have a common interest in the overthrow of a system which exploits and oppresses us all, and *that* is what we work for. ■

Sarah Cox
Harlesden

Not just workers

I WAS interested to read Alan Gibson's and Miguel Cabrillana's article on the revolutionary left in Spain. Unfortunately most of it seems based on a very limited understanding of MC's political line.

Rather than comment on everything raised in the article I would like to refer to a couple of aspects which are particularly misleading.

According to Alan and Miguel the MC "see the *working class* [my emphasis] as just another movement". What MC argue is the following: the working class remains the central force and will

bring about the destruction of capitalism on a world scale.

But a distinction should be made between the "working class" (ie as a class), "the workers' movement" and the "trade union movement" though clearly they are all connected.

The workers' movement has various components, one very important one is the trade union movement—under 10 percent of Spanish workers are unionised. Other "movements" are, or can be, part of the workers' movement as a whole.

A case in point is the Peace Movement in Spain which is overwhelmingly working class in composition, as well as being led by the most militant sections of the left. Obviously the PM contains within it elements which are alien to the working class.

This is also the case in the trade union movement. Contrary to the impression given in the article MC believe that the trade union bureaucracy can represent distinct class interests from that of its members.

This leads to the most mistaken part of the article—that MC do not understand the role of the trade union bureaucracy. Historically the party has not only sustained a militant opposition to the leadership of the Workers Commissions (CCOO) but has never entertained illusions about so called "left bureaucrats".

In the past this position has been criticised by the LCR who as Alan and Miguel point out have held certain illusions in sections of the trade union leadership. MC have paid the price of their opposition to the CCOO with a whole series of expulsions from the unions over the last ten years.

To criticise MC for not concentrating solely on the CCOO, as Alan and Miguel do, does not take this situation into account. In Spain, partly because of the bureaucratic methods of the CCOO and partly due to historical reasons, there exists a number of important independent trade unions—in the Basque country, Andalucia, Galicia, Asturias and other localities as well as at a state wide level among dockers, seamen and teachers.

Revolutionaries have to be active in such organisations especially when work inside the CCOO has become impossible for many activists.

This does not mean advocating "red unionism" but facing up to the reality of a trade union movement which is extremely weak and divided.

Obviously the SWP has every right to criticise MC or any other revolutionary organisation with which it has differences. However it would help if such criticism was based on a more serious

understanding of the politics of the group in question. ■

Andy Durgan
Barcelona

Genesis of Gulf war

ALI TABRIZI'S letter (April *SWR*) is a sharp criticism of my article on the Gulf war (February *SWR*). According to Ali the article reproduces a Stalinist analysis which sees the conflict as an "imperialist" war against Iran's "anti-imperialist" government.

There are two main points at issue:

1 Why did Iraq go to war? We can agree that by the late 1970s the Iraqi regime faced a largely passive domestic opposition, a result of its fierce repression and the bankrupt policies of the Iraqi Communist Party. It was when the opposition showed signs of life that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein settled on war.

Ali also agrees that what gave the Iraqi opposition new confidence was the success of the Iranian working class and national minorities in the 1979 revolution.

It was this which compelled Saddam to take drastic action. Instead of merely stepping up the level of domestic repression—something he had successfully done many times—he precipitated a war aimed at rallying Iraqis around the regime and neutralising the Iranian movement before it could do him further damage.

As I originally put it, Iraq's rulers had an "independent interest" in precipitating the conflict. This was not an "imperialist" war but one brought about by the determination of a ruling group to reduce all local opposition. And in Iraq's case, such opposition included not an "anti-imperialist" Iran but one in which Saddam and the Ba'ath perceived a growing threat.

2 What was the role of the US? Ali criticises my remark that the US gave Saddam "the green light" to go ahead with the war, seeing this as part of a "mechanical" interpretation which linked the conduct of local ruling classes to the interests of the superpowers.

Saddam did not act as an extension of Washington or Moscow—far from it. He had had poor relations with the US and the link with Moscow was wearing thin—Russia's rulers

being more interested in Iran where their Tudeh Party was courting Khomeini. But there is overwhelming evidence that once Iraq's rulers had decided on war they turned to their Arab neighbours for help—and through them sought US reaction to their plans. The Iraqis would have been crazy to do otherwise—for the US, the Gulf was a vital strategic area and the main target of its "quick-strike" Rapid Deployment Force.

In the summer of 1980 there was a series of meetings between Iraq and the Arab Gulf states. When the conflict began in September these states were quick to back the Iraqis and in subsequent months provided them with billions of dollars for the war effort.

Is it conceivable that the Iraqis had not used the meetings to explain their plans: and is it possible that the US—the military guardian of the Gulf states—had not been told?

Washington did not initiate Iraq's plans but it knew of them and approved.

The American attitude towards Iraq was opportunistic. US strategists believed that Saddam's strategy fitted their immediate aims and they acted accordingly. Later—as during the "Irangate" period—they changed their line.

While for socialists in Iraq and Iran the main enemy is at home, it would be wrong to assume that Washington and Moscow have not influenced the way in which the rulers of these countries have formulated their strategies.

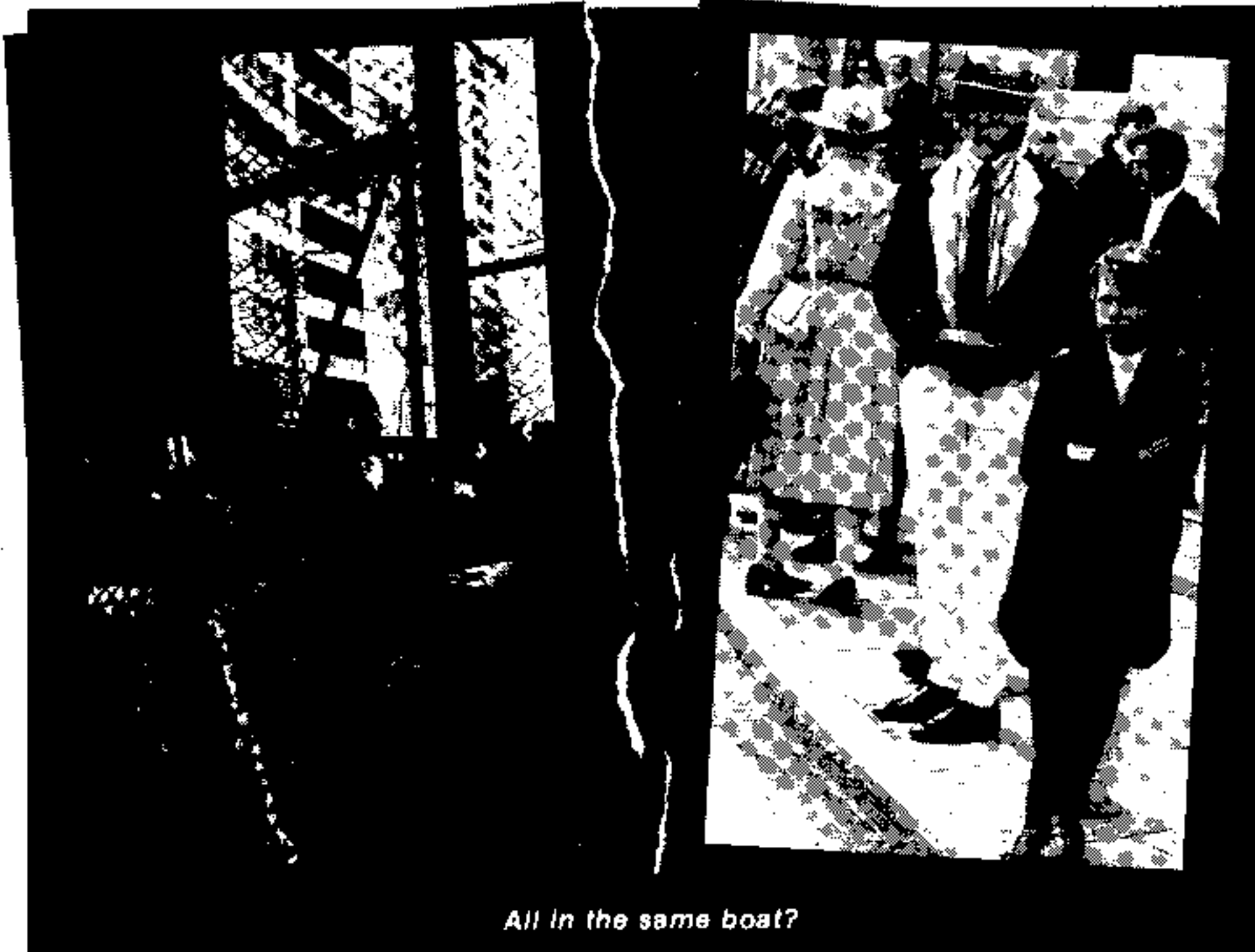
To make this point does not mean embracing a "mechanical" or "Stalinist" analysis—it is a recognition of the way in which Saddam Hussein, Khomeini and their like calculate their chances of survival.

The Stalinist approach directs fire away from the local bourgeoisie on the basis that it is a "progressive" force in the struggle against imperialism. We should reject such an idea but recognise that Washington and Moscow have often complex relationships with local ruling groups. These have to be disentangled if we are to understand the genesis of events such as the Gulf war.

Phil Marshall
North 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 Great Divide



All in the same boat?

AT THE Marxism 86 AIDS meeting, I can remember suggesting, blushing, that branch treasurers seeking a good investment might consider the London Rubber Company, the near monopoly condom manufacturers.

In less than a year, not only are condoms out of the closet but Tory ministers eulogise them, pop stars toss them instead of kisses to admiring fans, Ian Dury has demonstrated exactly how to affix them on television, and Katherine Hammett has taken to designing clothes with prominent rubber wear pouches.

The point is not whether universal condom use is necessary to contain what remains the highly localised incidence of AIDS (though it certainly would limit other sexually transmitted diseases like cervical carcinoma, gonorrhoea, NSU and clamidia which have always made heterosexual sex risky for women).

Nor is it to foster any illusions about the government's motives for their belated advertising campaign, so clearly devised to give the appearance of action and in sharp contrast to its meanness to those doctors and nurses dealing with the disease.

But it is to observe that when the modern state puts its weight behind an item of health promotion, publicity can have a very real effect.

Contrast the government's approach to obtaining publicity for the numerically far more important clinical advice given by the doctors commissioned to review and update the findings of the Black Report on inequalities in health. The carefully argued and statistically rigorous document "The Great Divide" was *not* launched on Wogan

by Edwina Currie or made the subject of keynote speeches by cabinet ministers.

Instead its press launch was cancelled and had to take place in the rear of a guitar shop off New Oxford Street.

Because its findings, far from suggesting that good health is a result of individual enterprise and clean living, show instead that health, good and bad, is deeply connected with living conditions and thus, in a society so deeply stratified as ours, with class. Working class babies are born smaller, and die more often in the first year of life. Working men and women die younger and suffer more illness when they are alive.

The common causes of premature death like heart attack, stroke and lung cancer, are not equally distributed across the board, as one is encouraged to think, but are skewed according to social class.

As a general practitioner one sees the human evidence every day of one's working life: children whose developmental potential is damaged even before they can walk because of poor diet, over crowding and understimulation; young mothers' bodies aged by chronic infections, repeated pregnancy and the strain of bringing up young children as well as holding down exhausting manual jobs; the working men dying unnecessarily before they reach retirement age.

For the majority life is not about enjoyed good health but, as a widow put it to me last week, "Well, he worked hard all his life, he got made redundant and then his heart went on him." Indeed this is why socialists oppose capitalism so bitterly: not

because the inequality of class society is somehow aesthetically or sociologically displeasing, but because it kills and maims and distorts the potential of the great majority of those who live under its rule.

No reader of *Socialist Worker Review* will be shocked then at the damning findings of the Health Education Council's analysis of the widening health gap between the rich and poor. Nor should we be surprised that the Thatcher government shows little enthusiasm for publicising the recommendations of these reports ("political dynamite in an election year" the new Chairman of the Health Education Authority is said to have remarked) or that Radio One DJs aren't chirpily introducing its statistics between the traffic jams and the plugs.

But what is interesting, surprising and heartening is the radicalism of these reports' conclusions.

The medical profession is one of the oldest and most stable of the bourgeois professions. The philosophical outlook of most doctors is either hostile to or incomprehending of Marxism and the BMA has been fairly accurately called the Tory Party at the bedside. But doctors have a scientific education and are relentlessly empirical.

So it was the BMA's Board of Science not the editorial writer in *Socialist Worker* who wrote recently: "The problem as a whole is so great and so entrenched in the structure of society as to be insoluble without significant diversion of public resources", and that "allowing deprivation to persist on the scale we have described is a national scandal".

It is Professor Alwyn Smith the epidemiologist not Jane Soap the agitator who argues that "the damage to health from unemployment can no longer be gainsaid. Britain has not only some of the worst housing in the industrialised world but the general standard of housing is very low in the basic amenities...our national diet has been the subject of sustained criticism for decades. It is particularly poor among those who are generally underprivileged".

And it is the editors of the *British Medical Journal* who agree with the authors of these reports that "policies to combat inequalities in health by concentrating on the individual are misguided".

So perhaps some of the slow and painful lessons of the Thatcher years are being learnt and by people who, in terms of their own class position, ought to be sympathetic to the present government. If there is anyone out there terminally depressed by *Marxism Today* and the *New Statesman*, you might consider switching your subscription to the *BMJ*. ■

David Widgery