

socialist
REVIEW

Run down to a
World War?

21

Sartre: thinker
and fighter

Latest round
in Leyland

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United we Stand, Divided we Fall
The case against Import Controls

The Bill from the Tories

Trade union branches all over the country have been discussing 14 May - the TUC's Day of Action on the Tory Employment Bill. Yet there is still considerable confusion about the Bill, increased by the current attempts by Tory backbenchers to 'toughen' the Bill further than Prior wants. The measures which Prior is pushing through are presented by much of the media as 'soft' on the unions, but in fact they represent a very nasty set of proposals indeed, which would have a profound impact on every dispute and the activity of militants.

Picketing: picketing would be restricted to your own workplace. That means you could not join other workers on their picket line to give support; picket the head office of your company; picket another plant owned by the same company, even if your employer was moving work from your workplace there; picket customers or suppliers of your employer. In other words, effective picketing and blacking are under attack.

The criminal law is unchanged as yet so arrests can still 'only' take place on picket lines as in the past for obstruction, threatening behaviour, breach of the peace, assaults and so on, where police evidence is enough for your conviction. But if you picket anywhere which is not your workplace, you can now be sued by the employer as well.

Unlike in the 1971 Industrial Relations Act, it will be the individual militant who can be sued, not the union as a whole. Therefore there is not the broad threat to union funds which pushed the union leaders into active opposition to the 1971 Act. Prior resisted attempts by backbenchers to make unions financially liable for 'secondary' action. His undersecretary said: 'Companies are more concerned with getting injunctions to stop secondary action than obtaining financial damages against the union concerned.'

Obviously no worker has assets to pay for damages equal to the amount the capitalist has lost through his or her action, which the Bill provides for. The point is that the Bill leaves it up to the courts to decide when 'unlawful' picketing or blacking is occurring, and to grant an injunction to stop unions organising such actions or individuals taking part in them. Ignoring an injunction puts those taking action in contempt of court, and can lead to jailings.

Ballots: the government would provide up to £2 million a year to finance secret ballots on major elections or strikes. The ballots would not be compulsory, and this is one of the areas where Tory backbenchers have accused Prior of going soft. His reply to these attacks is very revealing: 'Compulsory ballots would undermine the authority of

union leaders, encourage unofficial action, extremism and even anarchy.' He wants secret ballots to take place when union leaders think they will head off industrial action; he does not want union leaders to be bound by them when that will make it more difficult for them to sell out members.

Closed Shop: the proposals would widen exemptions to those who object to belonging to any trade union or a particular trade union on 'conscience' grounds, and to those who were not union members when the closed shop was introduced. New agreements would need an 80 per cent approval by those covered, in a secret ballot. Also the closed shop clauses, as well as putting major obstacles in the way of establishing them, provide for legal interference if an individual thinks he or she has been 'unreasonably' refused admission or expelled from a union.

There are a whole series of changes proposed on unfair dismissal cases, which weaken protection even further.

Maternity rights are also under attack in the Bill; employers with less than six employees are totally exempt from having to re-employ women; all employers can offer women a 'suitable alternative job' on return, rather than their old jobs back, and the procedure for claiming the right to return would be made much more complicated, requiring three separate written notices of intention to return.

Other clauses would remove ACAS from any role in recognition disputes; cut guaranteed pay for laid-off workers to five days in any three consecutive months, and repeal Schedule II of the 1975 Employment Protection Act which allows unions to claim the recognised or 'general level' of terms and conditions in an industry and a district.

The background to the Bill is a predicted

fall in manufacturing production of up to 7 per cent in the coming year, unemployment forecast at over two million and 1930s blight creeping across whole regions. The TUC General Council, and most union leaders too, present no threat whatever for Thatcher. They have no strategy but awaiting the return of a Labour government. Meanwhile private industry will be closing and the public sector cut down. And while some workers depart meekly, many are going to fight.

So restriction is most needed at the level of individual militants and their power of picketing and blacking. Prior is very astute. To try to ban the right of workers to withdraw their labour, or to show solidarity, is just not on politically. Instead new limits are imposed, framed to sound as reasonable as is consistent with a chance of success. Beyond these limits each individual (more likely branch secretary-convenor-steward) is subject to that great bogeyman *Law*.

Since 1965 the decline of British capital has forced both Labour and Tory to try to restrict workers' rights. Wilson and Heath both failed. The present Bill is the result of Tory and Whitehall rethinking.

Two of the major weaknesses of the 1971 Act have been avoided: there is no National Industrial Relations Court to act as a focal point for union antagonism. Instead the 'ordinary' law is used. Secondly, the union as such is untouched: action will be taken against individuals so avoiding the risk of the whole membership coming out in defence of their union, as the AUEW did in 1974.

But the sanction of jail for defying an injunction is there, and remains a two-edged weapon. The Bill is aimed at minimising solidarity, but its ultimate sanction is the very thing most likely to create it on a massive scale. Workplaces have ignored injunctions successfully and gained morale from having done so.

Prior's response to the Tory Right is 'We must go slowly. We have little chance of getting all we want in one go. When we see how this chunk goes down, we shall have another look.'

The Tory 'wets' are not fools. They know the shopfloor might fight and can win.

Danny Phillips



Trade Unionists on the March 9th TUC Demo

Picture John Sturrock (Report)

Countdown to World War?

The news came through of the farcical, bungled US 'rescue' mission into Iran as we were sitting down to write this editorial. The US secretary of state and his assistant resigned as we were half way through the first draft. As it was near completion US fighters buzzed Iranian planes over the narrow strip of water between Iran and Oman, and an attempt was made to assassinate the Iranian foreign minister in Kuwait. The Common Market states are due to implement economic sanctions against Iran as this *Socialist Review* goes on sale. We can't help feeling that almost anything can happen before you actually get to read it.

We could speculate endlessly about what exactly happened with the so-called 'rescue' mission. No doubt it will be subject of books and articles (but perhaps not films!) for years to come, debating whether it was simply a bungled attempt to repeat the German commando raid that freed Mussolini in 1943 or the Israeli escapade at Entebbe, or whether something much more sinister was involved.

One thing can however, be said without hesitation: the raid was a desperate assertion by the US of its ability to intervene anywhere in the world to protect its interests, regardless of the consequences in terms of world peace. For powerful groups inside the US government, a raid on the Tehran embassy was to be the great occasion which would avenge the humiliating defeat for US power when, six years ago, it was forced to scuttle from the embassy in Saigon.

There were other voices inside the US establishment, it is true, voices that argued with a degree of plausibility that a rushed operation was not needed. If the US could only be patient enough, and put up with the humiliation of seeing its embassy staff as hostages for a few months more, then in the end things in Iran would start shifting the US way again: the central government would be unable to smash the Kurds; the armed forces would increasingly become enmeshed in border clashes with Iraq; the bazaar bourgeoisie around the mullahs would increasingly want a return to pre-revolutionary stability and safe profits; eventually, a substantial section of them would see the US as the only power strong enough to restore order for them.

Until a couple of months ago, these voices seemed to be predominant in terms of US policy. One of the reasons why Carter made such a fuss about the Russian operation in Afghanistan was that it enabled him to treat Iran as a bit of a sideshow, while emphasising to any Iranian who was listening the danger of 'atheistic Communism'. With the election of the 'moderate' Bani Sadr as president of Iran the policy seemed to be enjoying certain successes, and on both the US and the Iranian side there were conciliatory gestures.

Yet, the moment this approach suffered its first setback, Carter threw his lot in with the hawks. Suddenly it was almost as if



Afghanistan were the sideshow.

Part of the reason, no doubt, lay in domestic electoral calculations.

But that by itself is not sufficient explanation. You have to ask why the major challenge in the US has been from the right, and not from the 'liberals'. And that leads you back to the way in which major sections of the American ruling class see their global needs.

Defending its loot

American big business is more dependent upon the rest of the world than at any time in recent decades. Half its oil now comes from abroad; 10 years ago less than five per cent did. The fastest growing section of US-owned industry is the overseas subsidiaries of its multinational companies: even the biggest of them all, General Motors, fears that unless it can expand overseas and produce the 'world car' it will eventually be beaten down by competition from Japan and from Fords. The whole viability of the great American banks now depends upon their ability to borrow billions from the Gulf states and to lend them without danger of default to giant debtors like Brazil, Turkey, Poland, Zaire.

But world economic crisis now threatens to undermine parts of this international structure something which could suck key sections of American capitalism into a bottomless chasm. They view with horror the thought of an Iran-type revolution in Saudi Arabia or an Iran-inspired coup in Kuwait; they can be chilled to the bone by CIA claims that Russia is running short of oil and might try to divert some of the West's Middle East lifeline into its own veins; they are frightened that the European powers, long content merely to echo US attitudes on international affairs, might resort to protectionist measures that would US markets and multinationals; they shudder at the thought of the Nicaraguan spark enflaming their pri-

socialist REVIEW

- 3-6 Countdown to World War? Latest round at Leyland
- 9-12 Facing up to the Tories: Labour Left, CP and Fragments.
- 13-17 International: Italy, Spain and Brazil.
- 18 The case against import controls.
- 21-24 Industrial Discussion Section: Union conferences, Chix and Underground.
- 25 The Politics of Contraception.
- 26 The Movement: NUS Conference.
- The Movement: NUS Conference.
- 27 Letters.
- 28 Obituary: Jean-Paul Sartre.
- 30 Writers Reviewed: Victor Serge
- 31-34 Book Reviews: E P Thompson, Ireland, etc.
- 34-35 Film Reviews: Bad Timing, Kramer v Kramer, etc.
- 36 ABC of Socialism: M is for Marx.

Cover photograph shows striking Japanese railway workers.

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In rehearsal they look great but the opening night was a flop.

vate plantations in Central America and the Caribbean.

It is this background that explains why, at the turn of the year, Carter saw Afghanistan as a heaven-sent opportunity to justify the growing US arms build up (remember, the increased arms budget and the deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles was decided long before the Russian tanks went on to the streets of Kabul) and to recement the ties binding clients and allies to the US. In particular, the Olympic boycott campaign has been designed to recreate a cold war atmosphere in which those who challenge the Pentagon's pretensions inside and outside the US are isolated.

By itself, however, the Olympics campaign did not work. It revealed the weaknesses as much as the strengths of the US position. Many of the allies were very lag-gard in following Carter's lead. And even those, like Thatcher, who jumped to his command found they could not win the ideological battle on their home ground.

It was at this point that Bani Sadr, the recently elected Iranian president, proved unable to deliver the compromise that the Americans expected. Carter saw the possibility of gaining electoral advantage, overcoming the post-Vietnam constraints on the ability of the US president to take action and of pulling the allies back into line. Hence the ultimatum he announced in his television interview with European journalists on 13 April. He was cracking the whip as much at the European allies as at the Muslim revolutionaries in Iran.

He was telling the French and the Japanese and the West Germans, in effect: You may have strong economies, but when it comes to it the US has the overwhelming predominance of military might; unless you want to see that military might used in ways that could upset your economic interests, throw yourselves behind our efforts to isolate and crush the Iranian revolution.

The Europeans and the Japanese got the message. In private few were enthusiastic about Carter's schemes: only Thatcher seems to have been daft enough to think she

could be backing a winner; the Japanese with their biggest ever \$3bn investment project in Iran could hardly risk its loss without reluctance: the West German and the French wondered whether there were not easier ways to bring the Iranian bourgeoisie to see where its real interests lay. But in public they had to acknowledge that he who controls the missiles calls the tune. They announced 17 May as the deadline for imposing economic sanctions.

As the allies fell into line behind him, Carter felt confident enough to make a move which he thought would be a dramatic reaffirmation of American power. He ignored the immense risks of a US act of aggression only a few minutes air-time from the Russian border (where US propagandists were claiming there was a huge military build-up); he forgot the US's appalling record with previous 'covert' operations going back to the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba through to the dismal alliance with South Africa in Angola; he simply shrugged off warnings from within his own cabinet; and he tumbled into a farcical debacle that could all too easily have triggered off the armed great-power confrontation people have been dreading since World War Two.

What happens now? We don't claim to be able to prophesy. But there is a great danger that Carter will follow one aggressive act with another. That is certainly what Vance is predicting.

At the time of the Russian move into Kabul socialists had to argue against being so horrified at what the Russians had done as to effectively end up strengthening Carter, Thatcher, Schmidt, Giscard and Co. We warned that the campaign to boycott the Olympics had nothing to do with 'human rights' and everything to do with the Pentagon's dreams of military aggrandisement. Carter's criminal lunacy shows how right we were.

We have to drive the message home in every workplace and every locality: in its blind hatred of the Iranian revolution American imperialism is prepared to risk

unleashing world war. The only way to stop it is to insist: Hands off Iran, US Imperialism Out the Middle East.

in America . . .

10 years ago, on 4 May, 4 students at Kent State University were shot dead by Ohio National Guards. Nine other students were wounded. The next week, 11 students at Jackson University in Mississippi were shot down—two died. The students were protesting the American invasion of Cambodia.

Ten years and three presidents later, the US has undertaken another military adventure. This time in Iran. On the surface, the attempted 'rescue' mission looks like a botched up farce. And an ominous farce, with many questions unanswered.

In the words of Admiral Thomas Moorer, the man who co-ordinated Nixon's raid on the Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam: 'There are big holes in this story, things they are just not telling us. I just cannot believe anyone would be so stupid as to put on this sort of operation unless there are aspects we don't know about yet.'

US Secretary of Defence Harold Brown confided to a reporter at the end of 1978 that in the years ahead the US would have a 'very difficult time avoiding the choice' between armed intervention in the 'third world' and 'severe damage to our national interests and resources.' 'You ask how could it be worse than Vietnam? I guess what I'm saying is that your vital interests are more likely to be involved.'

The revolution in Iran strengthened this view, and Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew (Strangelove) Brzezinski requested that the Pentagon firm up plans for a Rapid Deployment Force, with the Persian Gulf as the main target.

This Rapid Deployment Force would consist of 100,000 to 150,000 soldiers capable of intervening anywhere in the world at a moments notice. Brzezinski announced proudly: 'Rapid Deployment

will give us the capability to respond quickly, effectively and *perhaps even preemptively* in those parts of the world where our vital interests might be engaged...

Carter is not particularly interested in the hostages, but is interested—as is the American ruling class of course—in Iran. This is why he refused to return the Shah to Iran, and along with the press, tried to whip up public sentiment against Iran and for military action.

And to a certain degree Carter was successful. This can not only be gauged by his electoral success thus far (the future is another matter) but in the growth of xenophobia and anti-Iranian chauvinism.

During the first days of the seizure of the embassy in Tehran, large anti-Iranian demonstrations were held in many cities. Iranians were physically attacked and beaten. Two Iranians were murdered in San Diego, California—an incident which did not even make the national press. A song whose chorus was something to the effect of bombing Iran and letting those stinking bastards drown in their own oil hit the charts. Bumper stickers proclaiming 'Nuke Iran', 'the Ayatollah is an Assahola' 'fuck Iran' and 'I don't brake for Iranians' could be seen on many cars.

The state department officially sponsored a massive 'send the hostages christmas cards' operation which was quite successful. A campaign to ring church bells during lunch hour was launched—again with some degree of success. And almost every night Americans were treated to coverage of the 'Iran Crisis'—amusingly called 'America held Hostage'!

Military intervention was regularly discussed in the media. Not so much the pros and cons of military intervention but what kind would be most effective. One naval officer suggested 'turning Iran into a parking lot' as a lesson. The *Wall Street Journal*—the equivalent of the *Financial Times*—suggested dropping a force of paratroopers into the embassy compound. And of course, blockading Iran was seriously, and is presumably still, being considered.

The anti-Iranian sentiment was toned down somewhat after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. In an 'Address to the Nation' Carter was conciliatory to the Iranian government arguing that they both had a common enemy in Russia. The key task was to fight communism. And therefore, he proposed the reintroduction of the registration for the draft. (According to *The Times* the explanation for the speech's conciliatory and yet rabid military talk is due to the fact that Carter was given two speeches—one by Brzezinski and one by Vance. They were quite opposite in content and Carter could not choose which one to use. So, the story goes, he simply incorporated them!)

When the various attempts at conciliation failed, Carter again shifted gear and the American 'hostages' again became the top priority. Again the war hysteria machine

was put into motion.

And now even after its farcical end, the operation in the Iranian desert is being defended. Brzezinski went as far as to insist that it really was a success because it showed Iranians (and presumably the world) that America was serious. And indeed the threat of further military action against Iran is still alive. According to the *Financial Times*: 'What really worries some in Washington, however, is that Mr. Vance may have resigned not merely because he opposed something which has already taken place—last week's mission—but because he cannot support what he knows is about to take place: that is further military operations against Iran.'

But all is not well for Carter. The initial reaction of 'too bad it didn't work' which some politicians have already expressed will no doubt give way to allegations of incompetence and stupidity.

Most importantly, though, all the talk about Iran, Afghanistan, a Russian threat and the like has not in any way alleviated the impact of the recession. While Carter was able to get support over Iran, it was, by and large, *passive*, and therefore can easily erode. And the recession is biting hard.

Investment is half what it was in the sixties. Inflation which was 12.7 per cent last July reached near to 20 per cent in March. Unemployment is on the rise again, as the scale of closures and lay-offs gets larger. Last November alone, US Steel announced that it was closing 18 of its plants and laid off an additional 13,000 steelworkers. There are now 200,000 auto workers out of work—with Chrysler due to prune its workforce by an additional 30 per cent. And Ford recording high losses.

And as the recession deepens we can expect workers to look for alternatives—not only to Carter and his war games but to the whole system. But, as the old phrase goes, old ideas never completely die until they are replaced by new ones. And the problem is, that it has been the right rather than the left that has gained ground over the last decade. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that there has been a right wing offensive—aimed particularly at workers and the gains that women and blacks made in the sixties and early 70s. The ease with which the anti-Iranian sentiment was whipped up is symptomatic of the growth of this right, and the *relative* decline of the left. While the left (in the loose sense) is probably larger in absolute numbers in the US than say, in Britain, the numbers on the organised revolutionary left are considerably smaller.

But small as it is, the opportunities for growth are there. There is despite it all a very deep cynicism well embedded in American society. That cynicism is easily turned into anger, as it has in any number of strikes and other struggles across the country. The prospect of choosing between one boss' idiot—Carter—and another—Reagan—can only further alienate large sections of the working class.

There is already the beginnings of a new anti-war movement opposing Carter's war

games. A few weeks ago 30,000 demonstrated in Washington against the reintroduction of draft. A large commemorative demonstration is to be held at Kent State on 4 May. Building that movement will be of tremendous importance. It will also offer socialists tremendous opportunities to grow.

Remember Kent State! Hands off Iran!

in Russia . . .

We have ascribed the growing aggressiveness of the Americans in the few months to their reaction as they see their hold over certain key subordinate states in their bloc weaken or even collapse, just as economic crisis makes them feel the need to control the bloc more than ever.

However, very similar pressures and reactions have also been at work among the Russians. In recent years growing symptoms of economic crisis within the Eastern bloc have forced its rulers to spread their economic tentacles increasingly into what used to be the West's colonial preserves. Throughout Eastern Europe, in Hungary, in Poland, in Eastern Germany, the bureaucracy is telling workers they will have to put up with stagnating and even falling living standards. The USSR has just recorded the lowest annual growth rate since the war. In Cuba Raoul Castro has warned that the country is faced with the threat of 'economic disaster and bankruptcy with its sequel of starving people and hundreds of thousands of unemployed' (quoted, *Financial Times*, 22.1.80). Meanwhile, the bloc as a whole has been expanding its investment in and trade with the 'third world' at great speed.

In the first quarter of this year, the USSR had a small trade deficit with the west, of 748m roubles. But this was much more than compensated for by a trade surplus with the third world countries of 31bn roubles. It is this surplus in its third world trade that enables the USSR to avoid the acute indebtedness with the west facing East European states like Poland—and indeed, to loan Poland \$1 billion to pay off some of its interests payments to the West.

As in the case of the Western states, so-called 'aid' has been crucial in developing these advantageous trading relationships. Economic credits and grants to third world countries from Russia and Eastern Europe amounted to \$25bn in the 25 years up to 1978, and agreements signed in that year were for another \$5bn. And these credits have not normally been restricted to 'progressive' states. In the past the biggest recipients of them were India and Egypt. The biggest single credit arrangement ever made by the USSR with a third world country was a \$2bn deal with the reactionary monarchy of Morocco—for the mining and shipment of phosphates destined for the USSR. The reactionary Turkish regime has similarly obtained \$1.2bn to expand a Russian-built aluminium plant, a major new refinery and a number of power stations.

These schemes give some idea of what

the overall aim of Russian 'aid' to the third world is. As an article in the Russian publication *Kommunist* put it a couple of years back, the aim is to enable Russia to participate more fully in 'an international division of Labour'. Investment takes place in projects in third world countries that can then produce items of which the Russian economy itself is short, especially raw materials.

So out of £17bn of Russian 'aid' in 25 years, 45 per cent was in metals and mineral projects: 3bn in iron and steel production, 2bn in phosphates, 1bn in petroleum, 900m in aluminium and light metals. One Western study now suggests that 40 per cent of Russian aluminium is now imported, half from third world countries. The Russians themselves admit that over the next 10 years they will need to import 60-80m tons of oil, large amounts of gas, 10-20m tons of iron ore, and considerable amounts of non-ferrous metals and other minerals. They hope to get these from what are effectively Russian enclaves in the third world economies.

As with the West, the issue of economic aid cannot be divorced from that of 'military aid'—ie arms sales. But if economic penetration and arms sales go together, it means that the Russians increasingly find themselves sucked into military conflicts outside their old traditional sphere of influence: napalming the Kurdish rebels for Iraq in the mid-70s, trying to smash the Eritrean national liberation movement for the Ethiopians, supporting the Indians against Pakistan (where, however, the Russians also have investments).

The Russians also share the American fear that one of the countries that is increasingly crucial for their own internal economic equilibrium will suddenly bolt from their control, do what the Iranian revolution has done to the US. This has already happened on three major occasions: with Tito's break with Stalin in 1948; with Mao's break with Khrushchev in 1961; and when Sadat of Egypt some years back suddenly threw out Russian advisors and turned to the West. The Kremlin must fear that in an increasingly unstable world it might happen again, with Syria or Iraq or even in the long term India. Just as the American ruling class has responded to its fears by throwing its weight around in the most dangerous fashion, the Russians too feel the need for exemplary displays of their power.

That was clearly one of the aims of the Russian action in Afghanistan.

In two reports designed to alarm US public opinion about the 'Russian menace', the CIA has suggested that the USSR economy is going to suffer a huge shortfall in terms of its need for oil and coal over the next ten years.

If there is any truth at all in these reports, it means that Russian involvement in what the Western imperialists have seen as their own sacred preserve, round the Gulf, will increase just as Western dependence on the areas is growing. The area is already probably

the most unstable on the face of the earth—with the possible exception of Central America. Virtually any one of its regimes could collapse in the next few years, while the cross-cutting of ethnic and religious groups means that none can remain immune from what happens in another—in particular from the momentous developments in Iran. As each of the two great imperialist blocs see its future as dependent on its ability to control the balance of forces in the area, the dangers of a real—and horrendous—repeat of 1914 will remain.

. . . and Iran

On the face of it the attitude of the left in the West to the Iranian revolution has been schizophrenic. At the time of the overthrow of the Shah there was general elation. A great tyranny had been overthrown, and a decisive role in that had been played by industrial workers and by armed guerrilla organisations of the left.

But then, last summer, the Islamic groups around Khomeini tightened their grip over the country. There was a witch-hunt against the left, against those women who rejected subjection and against the national minorities. Many Western socialists began to fear that the Shah's regime was giving way to something just as bad. There was a tendency to write off the revolutionary gains, even to see in the mass plebian backing for the Ayatollah a sort of facsimile.

Now as the anger against the Americans in Iran is accompanied by a renewed hysteria directed against the left—with armed assaults upon the bastions of the left and a new war against the Kurds—the same attitude could gain credence again.

What was forgotten by those who made such an assessment last summer and tend to repeat it now, is the scale of the revolutionary process in Iran. It has not involved a 1917-style development straight from overthrowing the old order to beginning to build a new. But that does not mean that the depths of society have not been stirred up. The old hierarchies have been shaken apart, and it will take years rather than months for those who preach new forms of oppression and exploitation to impose them successfully.

The armed forces remain demoralised and in disarray. The revolutionary guards are fanatically loyal to Khomeini, but indisciplined and poorly trained. The members of the bazaar bourgeoisie have succeeded in taking power into their hands in each locality, but it is an intrinsically fragmented power, as each petty capitalist sees political influence as a way to advance his own commercial interests as against those of other petty capitalists. The different sections of the state machine are dominated as much by mutual jealousy as by their common hatred of the left and the national minorities.

That is one reason why Bani Sadr's attempts at conciliation with the US fell apart. Among the lower depths of society,

bitterness, frustration, resentment, memories of a hundred and one forms of oppression at the hands of the Shah and his American backers, remain potent forces that those ambitious for the spoils of state power can direct against their rivals. Political influence still depends upon moving masses on the streets, even if around mystical, often reactionary slogans.

That can produce an atmosphere for weeks at a time that makes it difficult for the left or the defenders of the national minorities to get a hearing in many of the Persian speaking areas; but it is not conducive to building the stable, ordered state structure that can bring the revolutionary ferment to an end. Hence the incessant anti-imperialist rhetoric, designed to keep the emotions of the masses at a high pitch, to stop them seeing where their interests differ from those of the bazaar bourgeoisie and the mullahs, to create a xenophobia which will isolate the national minorities and the left—yet also stopping imperialism imposing on the whole area the stability needed by it and, ultimately by those Iranian bourgeois groups who see their own rule as the culmination of the revolutionary process.

Khomeini cannot yet survive without rhetoric to bring mobs on the street. But that rhetoric is deeply disturbing to Saudi Arabia, with its disaffected Shi'ite minority and Iraq with its Shi'ite majority, to the Gulf States only a stone's throw across the water from Iran, to the US with its dream of renewed dominance in the area, to the whole Western world with its fear of the Gulf oil being cut off. But with such hostility around it, the Iranian regime finds increased a hundredfold the difficulties of freezing the revolutionary process in Iran at its present stage.

Yet if it cannot freeze things, the success so far enjoyed by the revolt of the Kurds is going to encourage the other national minorities to set up their demands. Demoralisation within the armed forces and the revolutionary guards is likely to grow, making *systematic* repression in the cities difficult.

The left may be forced to keep their heads down for a time. But the medium term prospects for them can still be immense. The workers who were so important in bringing down the Shah have not yet developed a *class* consciousness, and often remain in the thrall of mystical, religious ideas. But they have already bent these ideas to justify their refusal to put up with worse conditions within the factories. Given time, their own experiences in a chaotic, possibly disintegrating state can lead them to see the correctness of what the left is saying.

The one thing guaranteed to stop that happening would be a successful imperialist intervention aimed at destroying the revolution. That is why there is no contradiction at all in opposing the American manoeuvres against Iran and in simultaneously opposing the manoeuvres of the Iranian regime against the left and the national minorities.

Latest round in Leyland

For a brief moment last month Michael Edwardes' scheme in Leyland seemed to have fallen apart. His attempts to impose a 92-page document destroying most elements of shop floor control over working conditions led to a sudden flare up of militancy. Shella MacGregor, Birmingham organiser of the SWP, explained to David Beecham for *Socialist Review* how the resistance developed—and how it was finally crushed by the attitude of union leaders.

So near and yet so far. That's the rather tragic conclusion about what happened in the strikes against Leyland's implementation of the 92-page 'slaves charter' last month. At one point 18,500 were out on strike, as resistance to the Edwardes regime mounted after the TGWU gave official backing to members who took strike action. At the Rover Tyseley and Common Lane Plants—which had not had strikes for years—the stoppages were followed by aggressive picketing of other factories. The strike's potential was enormous, with different plants coming out for different reasons, but united in opposition to imposition of the new working practices.

Then in a move which took virtually everyone by surprise the TGWU caved in on 17 April, signing an agreed statement with the other unions which conceded everything BL management wanted in return for some very dubious sops.

Under the names of Moss Evans and Granville Hawley, the union discarded every principle that T&G stewards and local full-time officials had for years considered inviolate: mutuality on speeds, manning levels, conditions, movement between jobs and plants; conditions and kitting-up allowances; rights over shift patterns and overtime allocations... the acceptance of the 'slaves charter' makes no distinctions. And as the details of the agreed statement make clear, the T&G went along with the other unions in accepting management's right to do what it wants with the workforce.

How did this come about?

The first thing to say is that the really treacherous role played by AUEW officials was a factor undermining resistance from the start. Before Easter there was a meeting of all the senior stewards in Coventry where AUEW executive member Ken Cure said that the union was not supporting a strike and in fact was giving an instruction to AUEW members that they had to go into work. The reason given was that under instructions all AUEW senior stewards had held mass meetings in the various plants which had 'come out against a strike'. This was the first time AUEW members were being instructed to hold meetings on their own, splitting the unions. But we know that in a number of Rover plants there was overwhelming vote of AUEW members for



Enthusiasm on the picket line at Castle Bromwich.

a strike. When asked for the figures, Cure just cleared off.

The Strike Starts

The walk out began with the Land Rover sections of the Solihull plant in Birmingham on 8 April, straight after the Easter break. About 40 people from the body shop marched up to the convenor's office demanding a mass meeting. Under pressure they got it, despite the opposition of Joe Harris, the convenor, and they won the vote overwhelmingly for strike action. On the SD1 side—the cars side—the vote was against, perhaps mainly because they'd only worked something like 6 months out of the previous 12 due to strikes and lay offs. The Land Rover side has had a strike-free record for years and years.

The body shop took the action for a reason that cropped up again and again over the following days—the issue of 'kitting-up' allowances, because of the need to turn up early and the generally poor conditions.

So the Land Rover side was out and picketing. The T&G stopped, the AUEW went in. What happened then was that Garrison St came out on the Wednesday after Easter, and the strike spread on the Thursday to Rover Tyseley and Acocks Green. And at Tyseley and Acocks Green the strike was on the *principle* of the document, not a sectional issue. Inside two days the strike had spread to five plants, including Fishers (Castle Bromwich) where again it was the body shop that walked out.

Tyseley came out, even though the vast majority of people are in the AUEW; and it's the only plant with a majority AUEW membership which struck. The union's

instruction to go to work was simply 'noted' at a mass meeting of AUEW members, which decided that they would only abide by decisions on striking taken by a mass meeting of *all* members. And that meeting then voted to strike overwhelmingly.

When the T&G made the strikes official, that Thursday the cars side at Rover Solihull was able to hold a mass meeting and win a vote to come out, which effectively stopped Rovers.

Edwardes, flying back from South Africa, realised that the AUEW instruction was not enough to halt the tide and that he'd have to cool things in the plants which were still working by stopping the implementation of the document. And that was the picture we had across the rest of the company. At Longbridge everything was sweet and quiet; management was bending over backwards to defuse any conflict there might have been, to prevent the strike being spread.

Edwardes faced real problems. The Common Lane Sherpa plant had struck solidly; the stewards' committee—very 'inexperienced'—had produced a bulletin, and they immediately started picketing the Drews Lane factory, which is part of the same site. By the next day they had an agreement from the Drews Lane T&G stewards to black all internal transport, which meant a crucial section of the cars division would have come to a halt within a week.

By the second week after Easter the strike looked very, very solid. And people were beginning to take very small initiatives to spread it. But people didn't really feel the urgency of spreading the strike and were more intent on stopping a few scabs than

taking it to other plants. The place that there were a lot of pickets, Rover Solihull, they weren't being deployed because of the factory leadership, which is bureaucratised much in the same way as that at Longbridge. And the other plants were really too small to take the issue up properly.

Given revolutionary leadership in a number of the Leyland plants there could have been picketing of the transport throughout the cars division at the start of the second week which would have had a very rapid effect; there could also have been picketing of the ports, to stop imports of the Allegro but also as a declaration of war on Edwardes—trying to stop the whole of the car industry in the same way as the steel pickets tried to stop all steel.

On Thursday the Edwardes/Evans talks took place. The management were trying to spread rumour and dissension. They had threatened to sack all the strikers the day before, and the company clearly thought it could spark a 'back-to-work' revolt. It didn't.

What happened at Tyseley, for example, was excellent. The stewards committee reacted very very quickly. They rang the local SWP up to get a leaflet produced for the following day. We'd already produced one bulletin for them previously.

They were very well organised there. The strike committee had a meeting every morning, at about 8 o'clock. Then at 8.30 they put their proposals to a meeting of all the pickets. They had tea, sandwiches, coffee on tap, and provided all the pickets with meals throughout the day. That was the situation where you felt that the stewards had the closest relationship with the activists in the plant—organising pickets, regular discussions, a clear sense of democracy, and so on. They were quite over the moon about it because it was the first time in some seven or eight years that they'd been out on strike, and they'd taken to it like ducks to water.

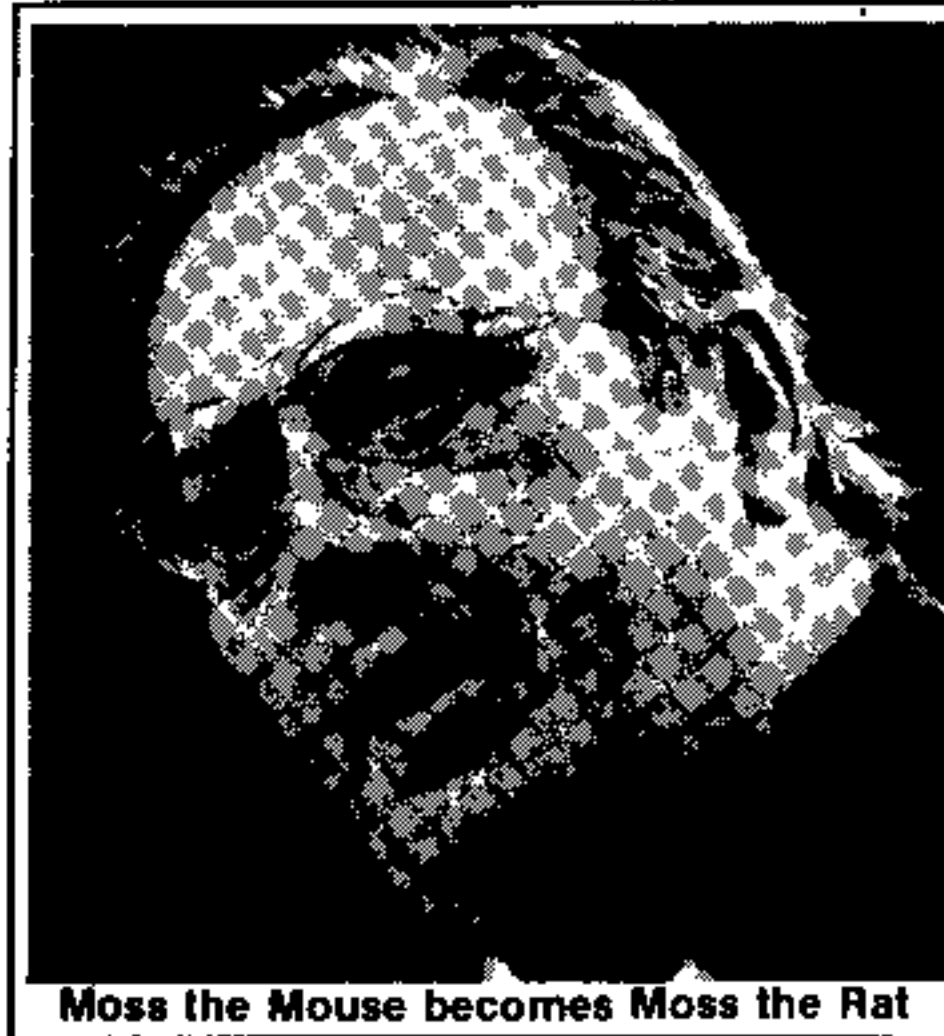
Part of the reason for this success is that Tyseley is quite a small factory—about 1,500—at least compared with the other BL car plants. Another reason is that the stewards were very aware of the need to create unity on the shop floor and they'd been working at that over two or three years. They had a new convenor. They were very conscious in their own minds that they had to discuss things and work things out.

17 April

Everyone thought that the Evans meeting would just be him going in to see Horrocks and Horrocks saying 'they're sacked', Evans saying 'up yours' and the strike continuing. It came as an absolute bombshell, late Thursday night on 17 April when Evans said 'we'll accept the terms and go back to work'. So confident were people, that no one went down to lobby the talks.

On the day after the talks, spirits were very low indeed. No one actually knew what the agreement even said. The SWP managed to produce a strike bulletin immediately. But at Tyseley for example the stewards were very unsure of what to do. Both stewards

committees—Tyseley and Acocks Green—wanted to oppose the sell out, but in the end didn't put a recommendation. At the mass meetings the following week there was a virtual 50/50 split at Tyseley and 60/40 to go back at Acocks Green. At Rover Solihull, with stewards much more removed from the shop floor, the SSC took an overwhelming decision to continue the strike—and lost about 4 or 5 to 1: the mass meeting was over in about five minutes, as opposed to very thorough discussion which took place at the the smaller Rover plants.



Moss the Mouse becomes Moss the Rat

Longbridge

Rover senior stewards had made an approach to the Longbridge plant to try to get it to strike on 15 April. The works committee told them to get lost. Inside Longbridge there was a lot of pressure for a mass meeting, but the works committee managed to confuse the issue and get it put off. Yet there was a real chance a mass meeting would have warmed up the membership on the issue of the document itself, even if not on an immediate strike call.

Immediately management had got Moss Evans' signature to the sell out, two days later they took the offensive on the kitting-up allowance in the West Works body shop. They gave the CO2 welders and linishers (doing high-speed polishing of bodies) in the body shop about 25 minutes notice that they would be losing their allowance late on the Friday afternoon. These groups decided to have a meeting first thing Monday morning. The works committee opposed a strike and said there should be discussions. But management made it clear in a bulletin that the 17 April agreement meant that the 50 people concerned would have to give up their allowance *before* negotiations took place. So the body shop went out, just as the Rover mass meetings were voting to return to work. Body shop attempts to get a message to these meetings were not successful.

The West Works held a very tense mass meeting the next morning and voted heavily to come out. The first to come out to the picket line was a group of West Indian workers who bounced out of the factory saying 'We're all out now', and shaking everybody's hands on the picket. When a

Rover 2000 come up determined to drive through the picket line, they just grabbed hold of the car and physically stopped it from moving. And they just grabbed the front of a Mini and lifted it off the ground.

There was a real spirit of determination. There was a real feeling of hostility to management, partly because Edwardes had come round there the previous week and been hounded around the shop floor, partly because management had spent thousands of pounds cleaning the place up for a press conference and guided tour.

But instead of the strike being spread throughout Longbridge by mass meetings in support of the West Works, it was isolated by the officials and the works committee. They cooked up an arrangement for a return to work and put the question to the 50 body shop strikers and then immediately afterwards to a mass meeting of the West Works. This meant whatever the body shop decided the pressure would be on for a return to work. The body shop voted with only seven against, to return. The extraordinary thing was that the mass meeting afterwards went on for at least an hour. One of the issues was the question of scabs: a lot of the members wanted to take action against them. The works committee said that they wouldn't support such action. It seems they've learned nothing from the Robinson defeat and are just prepared to give an even freer hand to the right wing in the factory.

When people came out of the mass meeting they were very choked off, very depressed about the outcome, because of the scabs and because of the deal the works committee had. Although the body shop is allowed to kit up in company time, it means that other people will lose money because the tracks start later and finish earlier.

The Outcome

The end result of first the AUEW's treachery, then the Evans' sell out and finally the way the Longbridge leadership ducked the issue is a serious setback for any resistance to Edwardes. Broad left TGWU officials and stewards have been arguing for a guerrilla strategy against Edwardes' document, taking on each issue as it comes up. But this approach is a confession of weakness first of all; and the first test of the guerrilla strategy—the Longbridge strike—showed that the factory leadership in the largest plant preferred a messy compromise with further weakening shop floor organisation to an all out confrontation over the imposition of a complete new set of working practices.

Finally the course of events shows yet again how important timing is in politics, particularly shop floor politics. Edwardes is something of a craftsman when it comes to the timing of threats and negotiations. The tragedy of the present mess at Leyland is that the old leadership presents him with opportunities on a plate whereas—as the Tyseley, Common Lane and Acocks Green strikes show and the initial response at Longbridge began to show—the potential still exists to turn the tide.

The Labour Left against Thatcher

The first year after an electoral defeat is always a time for the Labour Left to go on to the offensive. Deprived of the fruits of office and with no electoral boat to rock, it can appease its consciences at leisure. Bevanism in 1952 and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1960 are the most obvious precedents. The surprising thing, in this first year of Thatcherism, is not that the Labour Left has been vocal, but that it has done so little.

Within a few days of the Tory victory *Tribune*, the main organ of the Labour Left, launched itself into the 'Great Debate' on Labour's future. Richard Clements, the editor, called for 'the most strenuous campaign to build up the Labour movement and to harness its resources to the great battle to spread the ideas of socialism' (11 May 1979). In the same issue Tony Benn's eight-point plan was prominently canvassed. The eight points (defend workers' interests; analyse achievements of the Labour government; rebuild LP mass membership; advocate conference policy through parliament; support LP policy on EEC; make LP more democratic; launch more Labour papers; reaffirm democratic socialism) were in themselves pretty unexciting. So too was the plan (once again with the magic number of eight points) that Benn launched in January of this year: full employment; modernising of manufacturing industry; import controls; industrial democracy; expansion of public services; revival of authority of House of Commons; more democratic and tolerant society; free speech (*Guardian*, 23 January 1980).

The sharp certainties (on public ownership, foreign policy) which characterised the reformist left thirty or even twenty years ago have evaporated into a mist of liberal rhetoric. At the very time when the argument for a socialist alternative has become crucial, the Labour Left has become unable to carry that argument even in its own propagandist terms.

Instead the Left has got caught up in a long and debilitating wrangle about the structures of the Labour Party. Benn's argument was that 'If the Labour Party is to work together to fight and beat the Conservative government, the quickest route is to tackle our problems of internal democracy' (*Guardian*, 21 September 1979). Eric Heffer called for Labour to become a party 'deeply rooted among people to which they turn when in trouble' (*Guardian*, 25 June 1979), and *Tribune* (2 Nov.) demanded that the Labour Party hold one hundred major public rallies throughout Britain over the next six months (there was no mention of what the rallies should be about).

All this represented a clear recognition of the decline of Labour's mass base.

How is the left faring on the first anniversary of the Tory government? In previous issues of this *Review* we've examined the balance sheet of the fight back in certain key industries (Leyland, steel, the South Wales mines) and the record of the best known left wing union leader, Arthur Scargill. In these three articles Ian Birchall, Gareth Jenkins and Sue Cockerill look at what is happening among sections of the 'political left' — the traditional Tribune Labour left, the Communist Party and the new, amorphous current that identifies with the book *Beyond the Fragments*.

The official Labour Party paper, *Labour Weekly*, admitted (28 Sept.) that Labour's real membership was only 284,000 (as against an official claim of 675,000). But the logic followed ever decreasing circles as it became less and less a debate about mass participation and more and more a squabble about constitutional niceties.

In one sense the Labour Left is still obsessed with the lessons of 1960. Then the Left was at the head of a movement for nuclear disarmament which could put a hundred thousand people on the streets; but despite winning a conference victory was unable to do anything about the refusal of the parliamentary party to accept conference policy. One lesson of 1960 is that the Left failed to mobilise at the grass-roots, to turn union block votes into active commitment. Instead the Left has become obsessed with the possibility of capturing the PLP through the device of reselection, forgetting that 'left' MPs can sell out faster than they can be reselected. The whole project has the pitiable air of the attempt to dry a swamp by throwing in handfuls of dry earth.

A serious attempt to rebuild the Labour Party on a mass working-class base would have to begin with the main areas of conflict created by Thatcher's anti-working-class policies — cuts and the industrial struggle. Yet in both respects the Labour Left has fallen far short of what was necessary.

Labour is of course weakened in its opposition to the cuts by its own past, by the vicious cuts made under Callaghan. But it is also weakened by its future, by the knowledge that when and if it returns to power it will have to go on working within the same old capitalist framework. This is the logic that led Neil Kinnock, Tribune and shadow education secretary, to annoy his more naive colleagues by refusing to commit himself to restore the education cuts made by the Tories. Mr Kinnock clearly feels the weight of future office heavy



upon his shoulders. This is how he sees the problem:

'The next Labour government will be elected at a time of unprecedented economic and industrial weakness and will inherit disastrously impoverished education, health, welfare and benefit services. In the absence of firmly agreed Labour Party policies giving specific public expenditure priority to particular services removed by three or four years of Toryism it would be mistaken and unconvincing to create the illusion that we will fully or quickly restore the cuts made by the Tories.'

(*Labour Weekly*, 14 March 1980) -

For Kinnock, there is no utopian ultra-left nonsense about fighting the Tories here and now, about *stopping* the cuts. The next four years are inevitable, and after that Labour's excuses are already made. Hardly the stuff to inspire and mobilise workers who see schools and hospitals being run down and closed in the here and now.

All this is of a piece with the Left's refusal to mobilise for militant policies to stop the cuts. At a joint meeting of the Labour NEC and the Shadow Cabinet in December only Tony Saunio, the Young Socialist member, advocated defying the law in the fight against the cuts (*Guardian*, 4 Dec. 1980).

Instead of trying to build a serious grass-roots campaign, the Labour Left has come more and more to rely on the official leadership of the TUC. The special issue of *Tribune* produced for the November 28th demonstration against the cuts contains articles by no less than twelve general secretaries.

The same is true to an even greater extent of the industrial struggle. For the Labour Left the struggle for wages, the defence of trade union organisation may be an area of policy, indeed an important one; what it never becomes is the central core of the struggle, the realm in which the working class confront the very essence of their exploit-

ation and fight for their self-emancipation.

Tribune has devoted many articles to Thatcher's policies on wages and anti-union laws; some of them are interesting and well-informed. But all are characterised by a sense of looking at the trade union movement from the outside, of commenting on its strategy and predicting its achievements, but not, at any price, of fighting for a line inside the movement.

Thus within weeks of the Tory victory, *Tribune* ran an article on the front page headline, typically, *How Long Before the Confrontation with the Unions?* The article continued in interrogative style: 'But how militant will the unions' response really be? Are any of the major unions willing to get involved in an immediate confrontation with the Government?' The problem is seen as one of prediction, not mobilisation; there is no sense that *Tribune* wants to be at the head of the confrontation, or even that it really wants it to happen at all.

One reason for this passivity on industrial matters is the concern of the Labour Left not to get into dispute with the trade union bureaucracy. More and

more the Tribunites seem to be clutching on to the coattails of the TUC leadership, and not only of the left, but of the centre and even the right. Signed articles by Basnett and Weighell appear in the columns of *Tribune*.

This passivity was particularly clear in the case of the steel strike. Individual Labour Left MPs might speak and demonstrate in support of the steelworkers; *Tribune* carried well-argued articles putting the union case. But there was no strategy, either of mobilising the rank-and-file in the steel unions, or of winning other workers to solidarity. Putting the case for the steelworkers in *Tribune* (11 Jan. 1980) was entrusted to Bill Sirs himself. And *Tribune* was so remote from the blood sweat and tears of the struggle that it could commit an act of what can only be described as scabbing, by printing a full-page advertisement for the British Steel Corporation, urging participation in the strike-breaking ballot (7 March 1980).

Indeed, in some ways *Tribune* is lagging behind the General Council of the TUC. When it comes to the day of action planned for May 14th, *Tribune* begins to get cold feet; a front-page editorial (29 Feb. 1980) explains

'What the TUC must do about its "day of action".' Instead of fighting for maximum rank-and-file mobilisation, *Tribune* offers advice on public relations and warns:

'The TUC must spare no effort to make its policies known to the widest possible public. It must face the unpalatable fact that the May 14th strike could be a technical success (the majority of industries and services would indeed stop for the day) but an ultimate failure, because the public at large may see the strike only in negative terms, and not as a positive gesture towards the sort of society they themselves want.'

Only the depths of parliamentary cretinism could come up with this juxtaposition of the 'public at large' to working-class action.

Fourteen years ago Chris Harman concluded a history of the *Tribune* tendency in *International Socialism* journal with these words: 'When the working class itself begins to solve its own problems, *Tribune* will no doubt be looking the other way.' Nothing has changed.

Ian Birchall

The continuing problems of the CP

For many, many years the focus for left wing industrial activity was provided by the Communist Party. It was in order to try to regain this traditional position that a section of the party leadership pushed through a shift in the party's orientation at its 36th Congress last November. The previously ascendant tendency in the party — described by Steve Jefferys in two articles in this *Review* last year as the 'right Eurocommunists' — received a severe setback. The party shifted back a little to the old emphasis on identification with the 'socialist' countries internationally and a stress on industrial work at home. There was a move away — in words at least — from the 'right Eurocommunist' stress on community, 'non-economistic' politics.

Yet in the months since there has been little evidence of the party having anything to say to militants that could spearhead a real fight back against the Tory government.

The right Eurocommunists have continued to lose ground. One of their leading lights, Martin Jacques, editor of *Marxism Today* has lost his place on the day-to-day leadership, the political committee, while Kevin Halpin, one of the party's long-standing industrial militants, has been put on.

The problems of the 'right' are likely to grow in the months ahead. The growth of the 'left' within the Labour Party since the advent of the Tory government is a potent source of attrac-

tion for their supporters. Why fight for the transformation of the CP into a full-blooded social democratic party when a much larger genuine article already exists, of much the same white collar and professional composition, sharing a virtually identical vision of the 'alternative economic policy' to revitalise capitalist Britain?

As Dave Cook, the CP's national organiser and one of the right's key figures, put it, rather plaintively, in the *Morning Star* last December, 'The advances made by the left in the Labour Party are likely to make more attractive to some the perspectives of working within that organisation.' So what does the CP have that the Labour Party doesn't? The distinguishing mark between the two, according to Dave Cook, is the CP's commitment to 'mass democratic struggle' which is 'light years from the leave-it-all-up-to-us approach which afflicts much of the Labour Party'.

The same quest for a role emerges in a peeved article that appeared in the *Morning Star* the day of the 'Debate of the Decade' between Tony Benn and Paul Foot (March 17). Wondering why the CP had been left out, the writer of the article offered *The British Road to Socialism* as the bridge between the here-and-now and the socialist future, which neither the Labour Party (not aware enough of the problems of transformation) nor the ultra-left (too dismissive of the necessary intermediate

stages) were able to provide. Yet the report of the debate the following day showed the problem: it was so busy making sure it couldn't possibly be confused with the 'ultra-left' that it failed to distinguish itself from the Tony Benn line.

Successes in industry?

What, then, of the 'mass democratic struggle'? Have the 'lefts', those oriented on industry, proved much of a success?

Hardly. The one major initiative aimed at rank-and-file trade unionists, the January 26th Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions Conference, turned out to be a debacle. The *Morning Star* scarcely pushed it, apart from a fairly intensive burst about one week beforehand.

So, while the *Morning Star* devoted a lot of space to British Leyland's victimisation of Derek Robinson it made no links with the issues raised by the calling of the LCDTU conference. It placed rather more faith on which MP said what, culminating in the grotesque headline of December 20: 'Callaghan, Boyd, voted down: Labour Party call: reinstate Robinson.' On closer examination this turned out to be concerned with a timid amendment by Heffer and Allaun to an even more timid resolution before the Labour Party National Executive that 'hoped that Derek Robinson will be reinstated'. No doubt, Edwardes was trembling in his shoes at this threat.

As for the LCDTU conference itself,



it became obvious that roughly half the delegates present were not prepared to exclude discussion of united activity with the Rank-and-File Defend Our Unions Conference. Rather than have to admit that the party's hold over the rank and file was slipping, Kevin Halpin closed the conference an hour early in such a panic that he nearly forgot to put the declaration to the vote.

More interesting was the follow-up to the conference. The *Morning Star* maintained a deafening silence about how the conference declaration could be used — there was nothing in relationship to steel, coal or engineering — despite the fact that the first report of the conference had started with the solemn words, 'Britain's most influential and powerful rank-and-file organisation sternly warned the Tory government...'

In the weeks following the conference the *Morning Star* was filled with letters, not about struggle in Britain, but about what the party's line should be in connection with Afghanistan. The full-page article by Jack Woddis, the CP's International Organiser, on January 15, condemning the Soviet invasion and calling for the withdrawal of troops, sparked off a bitter controversy on the letters page that has still not died down. The line-up with, on the one side, the industrial 'left' wing, more or less defending the Soviet presence, and, on the other, the Eurocommunist right much more anxious to discard the Stalinist image, is predictable. But that this internecine feud should occupy so prominent a place indicates how secondary the question of the party's orientation to the workplace is.

The party's response to the sacking of Derek Robinson, one of their best known figures in the car industry, shows how difficult it is for the party to make a real left turn. The *Morning Star's* coverage was considerable, but activity on the ground left a lot to be desired. The party at first supported the campaign to unseat the AUEW executive, using the union's rule 15.5 (under which 10 per cent of branches can cause a re-election to take place). But it soon backed away from that and adopted

the less threatening tactic of bombarding the executive with ordinary resolutions. Yet half the 200 odd resolutions received by the executive used the 15.5 formula. The CP clearly had the illusion that Boyd and Duffy could be persuaded to take action by not attacking them too vehemently.

The *Morning Star* said about the long delay of the AUEW in issuing its inquiry into the Robinson sacking:

'The right-wing leaders seemed divided by their desire to exercise their political prejudices against Mr Robinson, on the one hand, and their need to sustain the viability of the union's long tradition in defence of its thousands of shop stewards, on the other.' (February 6th)

The real difficulty here, as well as elsewhere, is that the long period of 'broad leftism', with left officials standing in for the rank and file, has rotted the CP's capacity to make any real turn to the rank and file, even in a situation where the broad left has evaporated and the right wing had made considerable inroads.

A similar problem revealed itself with the ballot of the South Wales miners for action over steel. South Wales has traditionally been a stronghold for the party, particularly in the NUM. However the CP is now a dwindling force. The Rhondda was once one of their strongest branches, but it has had no secretary for six months. As far as the NUM is concerned, the number of CP delegates on the South Wales Executive is the lowest it has ever been.

Although the CP had been pressing a ballot they did little to campaign for it. Even Maerdy, with a powerful CP presence on the lodge committee, wasn't able to secure a majority. Once again, a turn to the rank and file was based on the idea that the rank and file would simply passively follow the lead given without that lead having to be fought for.

What has the CP learnt from all these defeats in the labour movement?

Very little, it would seem. There has been some fairly ritualistic advice that CPers have a 'crucial role' to play 'in

mobilising support for workers engaged in struggle' (McGahey in a report on the CP labour movement/industrial activity meeting held on February 22nd), and mild criticism about a failure to communicate information to the South Wales miners rank and file. But the 'lesson' that is hammered home time and again is the need to replace the Tories by 'a Labour government committed to left policies', plus appeals for import controls and controls over the export of capital combined with invective against the Thatcher government as the 'modern traitor class' selling out to the multinationals.

So the sum total of the CP's 'turn to industry' amounts to little more than an exercise in presenting the case for the need for a 'new' political and economic strategy, not an exercise in trying to mobilise rank and file trade union strength. And as the rank and file 'fail' to respond to the party's less-than-committed initiatives, so the party will retreat into its favourite political dogmas.

Does this mean that the CP will continue to decline?

Although last July the CP was admitting a membership drop to 20,599 from 25,293 in July 1977, Dave Cook, the National Organiser of the CP, was claiming in the *Morning Star* of March 4th that not only were a number of districts and areas of the CP almost going over the 100 per cent re-registration mark, but that the party had recruited more than 500 members in the previous six months.

In reply to criticism from Labour left-wingers that membership of the CP was declining a letter from the North West district (the third largest in the country) gave a more precise breakdown which claimed a re-registration of 93 per cent (84 per cent for the YCL), and a turnover of 7½ per cent.

If that is true it would seem to represent a halt to the downward drift in numbers, and it is possible that the left turn has inspired the party stalwarts to be more confident about their traditional image.

As against this, we have to put the admission that despite the big push on *Star* sales there is 'no sign yet of any significant advance to our aims of 3,000 more daily readers and 10,000 more weekend sales.' (March 7th)

Even if there has been some checking in the decline of the CP after ten years in which the party lost more than a third of its membership — possible given some kind of reflex response to the Thatcher government's right wing policies — it is not something that can be expected to last. The party is caught between reiterating sectarian dogmas about the 'socialist world' that seem more and more unreal to most people, and putting forward an orthodox reformist case which is more credibly argued by the Labour left.

Gareth Jenkins

Fragmenting into the Eighties

The ideas put forward in the three essays (by Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright) contained in the book, and by the various supporters of them, do not form a coherent whole, or a strategy for the left in Britain. In fact, none of the people involved make any such claim: and there lies the reason for the wide appeal of their ideas.

There are many shared assumptions underlying the views of the *Fragments* supporters, even though they disagree on a number of important issues. The major assumption is that the revolutionary left has failed, in various ways and for various reasons, since the heady days of 1968. Of course, reformism has failed as well, but that is, as it were, taken for granted. The key thing is that after five years of Labour government the mood is of demoralisation. In this atmosphere, talk of new forms of organisation are bound to receive a wide hearing.

The answer, according to the *Fragments* is to build on the diverse initiatives of different groups of people: women's groups, tenants' associations, trades councils, shop stewards committees, socialist centres and bookshops, local action committees. Local alliances must be built, spanning as many of these different groups as possible, where debate and common action will take place. These are the 'fragments'.

There is much emphasis on 'pre-figurative' struggles: through these local activities, people will, it is argued, glimpse the new socialist society which could come into being. The revolutionary left comes under fire for attempting to mould local initiatives into their organisational frameworks, for neglecting community issues, for concentrating too much on big struggles like the steel strike, for having no vision of socialism.

All these have equal weight in the eyes of the *Fragments*. They argue that the revolutionary left has given too much priority to organising at work. The workplace is not the arena where people are most likely to perceive the need to change society, because it is in the community that people organise on the basis of their needs. Hilary Wainwright argues that workers in their workplaces only organise around one 'need' — wages — and therefore are restricted in their capacity to develop socialist ideas in relation to their experience at work. The exception to this is 'Workers Plans' such as the Lucas Aerospace Alternative Plan.

So right away there is a contradiction between where the power is and where people's consciousness is supposedly developed.

The Fragments at work

What is the practical expression of all this?

Since the publication of the book *Beyond the Fragments* last year, its ideas have attracted sympathetic support from many people on the left. It has seemed to many to provide an alternative to what they see as the rigidity of those of us who stress the need to build a revolutionary party. Now supporters of *Beyond the Fragments* are planning a one-day conference at the end of the summer, probably to be followed by a larger two-day conference next year — although they stress these are not meant to lead to any formal organisation. But what do the ideas of *Beyond the Fragments* mean in practice? Can those who support them gain the practical result implied by the title? Who, or what, are the Fragments?

In order to try to get some answers to these questions, Sue Cockerill talked to two of the authors of the book, Hilary Wainwright and Lynne Segal, and also to other socialists about what the methods of *Beyond the Fragments* have meant in practice.

One of the 'fragments' which gets much praise in the book is the Newcastle Socialist Centre, of which Hilary Wainwright is an active member. One of the major defeats in Newcastle in the last year was the collapse of resistance at Vickers Scotswood to the factory's closure. Hilary uses this as an example of how the Labour Party's industrial strategy was a diversion from a real fight to save jobs. Yet at the time, the Newcastle Socialist Centre hardly served as a focus for a different strategy: the attempt to get an alternative plan worked out for Vickers foundered, according to Hilary, on the lack of a rank-and-file approach by the plant leadership, and apparently the Socialist Centre was not able to fill the gap. In fact the issues were never thrashed out in the Centre, and in practice no alternative was offered. The current short-time working and 350 lost jobs at Vickers Elswick (whose convenor, Jimmy Murray, is also a leading light in the Centre) is viewed as a sign that the plant may close as well, but again, the Centre finds itself unable to challenge the plant leadership of the workforce even in terms of openly discussing the problems with Murray in the Centre's general meetings.

Because of the need to preserve the alliance of different groupings within the Centre, the result is an unwillingness to openly criticise people like Murray. Take the already well aired case of Jimmy Murray's crucial vote on the AUEW Labour Party delegation not to join with the left on the issue of election of Labour Party leader. Murray did not discuss the situation with fellow



Hilary Wainwright.

Photo: John Sturrock (Report)

workers or Socialist Centre members, but declared that he would make up his own mind. At the conference he voted that the Labour Party leader should not be elected by conference, while voting for the reselection of MPs and control of the Manifesto.

Efforts were made by the local SWP to get the Socialist Centre to condemn Murray's 'making up his own mind' to side with Callaghan and Duffy. They were firmly resisted by Hilary and other Socialist Centre leaders. Justifying this, Hilary wrote:

'The basis of the alliance is not yet specific enough for the Centre, as a body, to condemn a member's vote over a particular reform of the Labour Party.'

So does the sort of local socialist alliance which is argued for so strongly by the authors of *Beyond the Fragments* actually lead to a strengthening of the local movement, and is it, in practice, more or less democratic than the revolutionary groups?

The SWP has always argued that 'unity' on the basis of no agreed political strategy and across a range of different issues leads either to constant squabbling, or to unity on the lowest common denominator, and in both cases to confusion and inactivity. As for democracy, if it is to be anything beyond a formality, it must mean control. But this is anathema to the *Fragments*, who see enforcing decisions as stifling individual initiatives. There is a great deal of talk about learning from experience, but how can such a learning process take place except on an individual basis, if decisions aren't taken and

carried out collectively?

Some supporters of the *Fragments* argue that there is a place for groups like the SWP and for them because we are 'better' at intervening in big strikes, while they are 'better' at organising in the community. Out of this, sometime or other, a real revolutionary organisation may emerge. Meanwhile, we must all develop links with each other, while sticking to a sort of left division of labour.

The notion that every activity has equal weight with every other activity so long as the right intentions are there is obviously very appealing to many people, especially to left-wing intellectuals. The parallel with the attempt by the Communist Party to construct a broad alliance, its openness to intellectuals and so on, is very striking. The authors of *Beyond the Fragments* specifically talk about there being freedom for manoeuvre in the Communist Party, especially for feminists, and in a review of the book, the CP noted that Sheila Rowbotham would not have had the same problems in the CP as she had in the SWP. In fact, it now seems that the layers of people drawn to the CP under a Labour government are turning more and more to the

position of sympathy with the *Fragments* with the Tories in power.

Unity

In an assessment of the work of the Newcastle Socialist Centre, Hilary Wainwright writes:

'We...feel that the notion that any one political party on the left has the programme or the 'total solution' to achieve a socialist society is not only politically naive, it also leads to the disunity on the left that allows our enemies to prosper.'

There are two points here. Firstly, is it really the disunity of the revolutionary left which is the biggest problem facing us? Isn't it rather the disunity of the working class which 'allows our enemies to prosper'? And if your starting point becomes the need to unite the class in struggle, different political conclusions naturally flow from that: the need for clarity and the need for organisation. Those needs cannot be satisfied by a false unity based on airing disagreements but never resolving them decisively.

Secondly, the SWP showed that it is possible to unite large numbers of people around a specific issue — the danger of the growth of fascism — who

disagreed on many other political issues. The Anti Nazi League did provide an arena for debating those issues, but not at the expense of paralysing its activity.

In practice, the views expressed in *Beyond the Fragments* do not result in increased activity or a wider debate. The politics of its authors are defined negatively in the main, as a reaction against the revolutionary left rather than a positive political strategy. As such they can hope only to have an appeal among people who have been through the revolutionary groups, or who have a desire to be part of the left without committing themselves to any consistent theory or practice. They cannot hope to provide an alternative to reformism for those in and out of the trade union movement who will be increasingly looking for such an alternative as the crisis deepens.

There is of course no guarantee that the SWP will be able to provide that alternative, but in the face of the attacks which the working class is suffering to lapse into the political and organisational agnosticism of the *Fragments* would certainly lead to disaster. It is one thing to admit to not having all the answers; another to elevate that to a political philosophy.

INTERNATIONAL

Terrorism in Italy

In the first three months of 1980, 437 acts of political violence were recorded in Italy. They ranged from cars being burnt, to knee-cappings to assassination. 27 people died, an average of two a week. The dead include both right and left, magistrates, police, managers, plus unfortunate by-standers.

Two incidents in particular stand out. One was the murder of Valerio Verbano, a twenty year old 'autonomist'. He was a member of a local collective investigating the activities of the various fascist groups in Rome. One February evening, a group of armed men broke into his home. When his parents arrived back they were tied up and gagged. When Valerio got back, he was taken by the group into his bedroom and shot through the head. His files on the fascists disappeared.

A few days later, his death was 'avenged': there were bombs at the print-shop which handled the fascist MSI's paper. One of their thugs was shot dead and the houses of their members burnt. But the move to 'avenge' Valerio did not go entirely according to the plans of those who were carrying it out.

A few days after his assassination a man was shot as he walked home late at



In this case the terrorist gunman turns out to be a policeman.

night. Within a few hours, a phone call hailed the death of a noted fascist in 'revenge' for the death of Valerio. But the killers had made a mistake — the victim was no fascist, he was a cook in a restaurant. In his pocket was found his CGIL card — the Communist dominated trade union.

The second element of this wave of violence was a renewed assault by the Red Brigades and similar groups on the forces of the state. This reached its peak at the beginning of March when three top magistrates were assassinated in the space of four days. Immediately the press was full of demands for tougher measures against the terrorists and they

look like getting them.

A series of laws are at present working their way through parliament which provide for increased telephone tapping, the right of the police to hold suspects for 48 hours, and, most horrific of all, 'preventive custody' for up to 12 years before some-one has to be brought to trial! That they are still going through is thanks to the Communist Party's vote of confidence in the government.

On top of this, there are literally hundreds of comrades, now held in jail. Their trials or even specific accusations may take years. One example should suffice. Toni Negri, a well known professor of political science at Padua



University was arrested in April 1979. At first, he was accused of being the master-mind behind the Red Brigades and a participant in the kidnapping of Aldo Moro. When this fell through, he was 'accused' of belonging to Potere Operaio, an ultra-leftist group which dissolved itself seven years ago!

The press, the judiciary and the police together have whipped up an enormous witch-hunt which has gone way beyond those actually firing the shots to threatening the whole milieu produced by the students and workers' movements of the late 1960s. The magistrates are signing warrants left, right and centre, often it seems just on the basis of some-one's name appearing in the address book of an arrested terrorist. The police are carrying out those arrests with enthusiasm.

The response to this repression has been weak and uncertain. In large part this can be traced back to the fact that the major party of the working class, the one which for years had made 'the extension of democracy' its key slogan, has been backing the repressive moves. We've already mentioned the Communist Party's vote of confidence in the government over the new repressive laws, but on a local level as well, CP functionaries often call for the rooting out of the terrorists, defence of the police etc. With the CP as the cheer leader for the repressive forces, the left's response has been weakened enormously.

While there have been a few conferences, many articles and a great deal of soul searching, the groups to the left of the CP have had little or no impact on

the increasing level of violence.

This is in part because the social roots of terrorism are enormously deep. Above all, there is the problem of unemployment, especially amongst the young. With the collapse of the various revolutionary groups and the integration of the Communist Party ever closer to governing circles, there is no force capable of giving a lead to the huge mass of young people who wish to fight back against the oppression and misery that confronts them. Terrorism provides them with a choice which seems to provide some resistance to the existing regime while remaining, in however a deformed way, within the left.

A sixty year old woman summed up what many people felt about the activities of the Red Brigades when she said 'I don't agree with any of the things they do, not one. But I must say, in Italy today the only ones who seem to have any ideals are the Red Brigades.' (*Il Manifesto*, 13.4.80). That is a crushing comment on the failure of the left.

The activities of the Red Brigades, however much they feed on the failures of the left, provide no answer to its crisis. We have already seen how the state has used terrorism to strengthen its own power. But the state is doing more. What is under attack, is the whole legacy of the upsurge in militancy of the last twelve years, including that of the working class.

The latest wave of arrests bear this out. Amongst those picked up on 11 April were four ex-militants of the Communist Party, two present members, and a couple of important provincial trade union leaders.

The case of one, Angelo Perotti, in particular stands out. He was elected by his work-mates in the huge electrical factory of Sit-Siemens as a delegate to the factory council and to the leadership of the provincial body of the UIL, his trade union. Then he was arrested as a 'presumed' terrorist. His work-mates immediately called for his release and hinted at a possible reason for his arrest. One of the bourgeois papers (*La Repubblica*, 12.4.80), reported a conversation with some of his colleagues:

'He was never one to keep quiet in assemblies or meetings. Many times the things he said really attacked the FIOM (the CP-dominated metal workers union) majority on the factory council. We reckon now that he has been put in jail for those reasons. They will use this case to attack any difference with the line of trade unions.'

Even more important however was the declaration read to a court the same day, by one of the FIAT 61 (one of the 61 workers sacked by FIAT this autumn in the first political sackings since 1969 and rightly seen as test case for the bosses offensive. See *Socialist Review* 1980:1). The statement started:

'I am a communist worker, a militant in the Red Brigades. The arms found in my house belong to my organis-

Spanish opposition

ation and were entrusted to me. This fact should embarrass those who have always bragged about the political isolation of the armed struggle inside the working class, of the unbridgeable distance between the fighting communist organisations and the mass movements.'

The reaction to this and the arrest of members of the CP was immediate. Top unionists put out a call for workers to isolate the terrorists, and to denounce them to the police.

More important than this however was the implication that could be drawn from this statement: that all the FIAT 61 were somehow linked to the Red Brigades — something also implied by the Red Brigades' declaration in court.

This was an attempt by the Red Brigades to claim the leadership of the factory struggles of FIAT over the last year, and, of course, the right wing press were only too happy to agree. For what this does is to throw suspicion on all the 61, to say that FIAT is right to sack them and to give the bosses a green light to attack those who are leading resistance to their plans. Hopefully, the attempt was too crude to persuade any but the most gullible, but more incidents like it could have a fatal effect on the self-confidence of the working class.

The conclusions of this whole unhappy episode are clear.

First, the social roots of terrorism in Italy are very deep and obviously extend into the factories. But there are many tendencies inside the factories and just because terrorism exists there does not mean to say that it is any less wrong. Rather it spells out the necessity of combating it even more strongly. For as FIAT or Sit-Siemens show, terrorism is in no sense a complement to the workers' struggle but deprives it of strength as the militants are open to witch-hunt and victimisation.

Therefore terrorism has to be defeated but the problem is through which methods? Certainly not by increased repression. The police massacred four 'presumed' terrorists in Genoa. It is almost certain that as a result many more, disgusted at the spectacle, will move into the orbit of the Red Brigades. Nor by a 'rooting out of the terrorists' as the trade unions and Communist Party propose, for that will only increase the suspicion and division which the terrorists have already created in the factories. Rather what is needed is a political alternative to them, one which actually offers some hope to the thousands who could so easily drift towards the terrorists. For without an effective opposition, one which carries forward its own ideals and which relies on mass actions to achieve its aims, the corruption and inefficiency of the Italian state is such that many people will be tempted towards the gun with all the dire consequences that involves for the workers' movement.

Jack Fuller

Opposition to Spain's right wing government is increasing. The most recent blows to the ruling Conservative Centre Democrats (UCD) come from regional opposition. Firstly, in February, a referendum in the vast southern region of Andalusia resulted in a 245,000 majority in favour of autonomy. The government, however, insisted that there had to be a majority 'yes' vote in all eight Andalusian provinces. Needless to say, one province, the smallest, voted narrowly against, and the already very limited autonomy statute lies on the table, to considerable local anger.

In March, there were elections for the new local 'parliaments' in Euskadi (the Basque country) and Catalonia. In both elections the UCD did very badly, as did the socialists (PSOE). The real winners were the local bourgeois nationalists, who increased their votes substantially. The radical Basque nationalist groups, most notably Herri Batasuna (HB), also increased their votes.

The regionalist and nationalist pressure on the central government reflects many things. On the one hand, traditional local and cultural grievances from groups heavily repressed under Franco; on the other a growing disillusionment with the UCD's 'reform' process. In the Basque country, the strengthening of the vote of Herri Batasuna shows the continued support for the armed activities of the guerrilla group ETA. Already the eleven HB deputies have declared they won't sit in the Basque parliament until an amnesty is granted to 150 or so ETA prisoners.

The government has been forced to grant these very limited concessions to autonomy. But now it has deliberately slowed up the process or, as in Andalusia, effectively thrown a spanner in the works.

Also in Euskadi, despite the imminent formation of a 'Basque police force', repression continues and incidents of torture and mistreatment are still widely reported. Fascist terror groups have stepped up activities in recent months, with murders and bomb attacks on ETA's political supporters and some left wingers. The state itself either ignores these incidents, or is invariably involved. Only recently, during the massive wave of student protests over the government's education policy, two students were shot dead by the police in a Madrid demo.

During the recent electoral campaigns in Andalusia, 60 members of the revolutionary organisation, Movimiento Comunista (MC), were arrested, and 90 more in Euskadi. This was due to their propaganda 'insulting' the prime minister in the South, and 'more seriously', attacking the security forces in Euskadi.

In the latter area, MC's posters were torn down wholesale by the police, and in a typical incident, two civil guards opened fire on a group of plain clothed police performing this task. The civil guards, apologising, said they thought they were sticking them up!

Politics and the industrial struggle

With inflation raging, and unemployment reaching a new high of 1½ million (11 per cent), working class struggles are increasing. However the trade union movement is faced with a dramatic fall in membership and increasing divisions. The socialist-led union federation, UGT, has lost possibly as much as 50 per cent of its members, gained since legalisation three or four years ago. Today only around 15 per cent of Spanish workers are unionised. A combination of factors has led to this decline: the general downturn in the class struggle in recent years, the lack of a 'normal' trade union tradition, the weakness of the union machine, and the chronic political divisions.

The PSOE have reinforced this disillusionment by their behaviour. Intent on being seen as a governmental alternative, they have floated the idea of a PSOE-UCD coalition. The PSOE's aim seems to be to win more middle class voters — hence the increasing rightward drift of their policies. So far, this has lost them some working class support both in the unions, and at the polls.

Recently, the PSOE supported the UCD's 'Workers Statute' (ie industrial relations bill), while the UGT signed an extensive agreement with the Spanish employers federation. This agreement intends to 'create a climate of mutual confidence and avoid conflict'. It ties wage increases, 15 per cent maximum to productivity, the lack of absenteeism, and the 'general economic situation' of particular firms. It also stipulates, among other things, that local agreements should last for two years. It is a serious attack on jobs, conditions, and organisation, and is seen as such by many workers.

What the agreement means in practice has been illustrated in numerous disputes recently. For example, at the SEAT car factory in Barcelona in January, 30,000 workers came out against the employers' proposals, which were based on the 'agreement'. The high level of militancy — pickets of 2,500 daily, mass meetings of 20,000 — was quickly undermined by the UGT who called for acceptance, and a return to work. The few UGT members who supported their leaders and ignored the decisions of the mass meetings were then escorted through the picket lines by the riot police!

The socialist position has caused great problems for the Communist

Party (PCE), who find themselves as a reluctant and isolated opposition. To some extent, they have led resistance to socialist collaboration, but this is more due to their exclusion than to any commitment to militant policies. As general secretary Santiago Carillo put it recently, the PCE would support a PSOE-UCD government because:

'without the presence of working class representatives (ie the PSOE) in the government, it doesn't matter how many social contracts are signed, the workers won't feel disposed to support anything that is applied without their participation and presence...'

Hence PCE opposition has been largely ineffective. After initially making much noise over the government's 'Workers Statute', a threatened one-day strike by the PCE-led union federation, the CCOO, was dropped. At a local level, the CCOO's opposition to the UGT agreement with the employers was hamstrung by their obsession with formal unity with the socialists. At SEAT, as in Madrid, instead of utilising rank-and-file militancy and anger, they initially supported continuing the struggle, and then quickly caved in. In the northern province of Asturias, when miners struck against the employers' 'package' (again based on the UGT employers' agreement), the local CCOO executive attempts to call off the strike were rejected by their members. Official CCOO support was finally withdrawn when the local PSOE threatened to break up the alliance they had with the PCE in municipal governments!



Where successful opposition has been mounted to the government-bosses offensive, it has, predictably, been from rank-and-file CCOO members, in defiance of their leaderships. Take the example of the Duro-Felguera factory in Oijon (Asturias). Here 2,300 workers came out in solidarity over 400 redundancies the company were making over a hundred miles away, in Galicia. Despite fierce UGT opposition, the workers, led by a local left wing CCOO, went on to the streets, built barricades, fought the police, blocked the motorway, and occupied the company's offices, a local bank, and UGT headquarters.

They also occupied the local US consulate, and the Spanish embassy in Paris (!) in order to force the national media to stop ignoring their struggle.

However, the PCE leadership are not interested in encouraging and developing this kind of militancy. In fact, recent months have seen a purge of left

wingers in the CCOO in some areas, officially for 'publically opposing the union's policies'. In particular, numerous militants, mostly members of the revolutionary organisation, MC, have been expelled from the union in Euskadi, while in Navarra province, local committees have been dismantled from above in order to destroy MC influence.

Despite disappointing results in the

recent elections, the revolutionary left still has many opportunities to relate to the growing workers' and left nationalist opposition. Whether they avoid the crisis which has devastated much of the European revolutionary left depends on their ability to relate to those fragmented rank-and-file revolts which are taking place.

Doug Andrews

Shutdown in Brazil

Just 16 years after the accession of the first economically powerful dictatorship in Latin America, which tortured and murdered thousands of militants and smashed the working class into submission the country has again been shaken by a huge strike of engineering workers. Sao Paulo is the heart of working class resistance to the military regime. It is one of the largest industrial cities in the world, with the biggest factories owned by multinational corporations. Mercedes Benz, Chrysler, Volkswagen, Ford and Scania alone employ some 70,000 workers.

As we write, 17 strike leaders are in jail accused of 'incitement to strike' under the Law of National Security. If they are convicted, it could mean prison sentences of between 2-12 years for them. Among those in jail is Luiz Ignacio da Silva, known as Lula, a charismatic union leader who has carried Sao Paulo workers into several major strikes before.

Of the 30,000 workers who came out on 1 April, almost half were still out a month later. Their demands: 15 percent increase in productivity payments, greater job security, free election of union representatives, and a 40 hour week. They have rejected a government offer of 5 percent and the new official wages policy does not permit bargaining on basic pay. Automatic cost of living adjustments are supposed to take care of inflation—but fail to do so adequately.

12,000 dockers in Santos, the port of Sao Paulo, have just won 10 per cent after a week's strike and textile workers in Rio Grande do Sul won 20 per cent. The Sao Paulo engineers from the ABC industrial suburbs, Santo Andres, Sao Bernardo and Sao Cayetano won great victories last year.

Why has the government has taken this strike so seriously and how are so many workers still fighting on?

Figueiredo's Problems

The new, 'liberalising' government led by the former head of the notorious secret police, General Joao Baptista Figueiredo, has been in office for just one year. Unfortunately for Figueiredo, his government is feeling the sting of the world crisis rather harder than his predecessors, especially as worldwide threats to oil supplies and the reduction in national and regional markets for automobiles is creating

considerable unease among some of the giants of the motor industry. The 'economic miracle' of the '60s has ended for Brazil and looks as though 1980 will, for the first time in many years, show a deficit in the balance of payments.

For the five million industrial proletariat, there will be greater unemployment, and for the 60 million Brazilians who share 13 per cent of the national wealth, mainly slum dwellers and landless rural labourers, poverty will grow harsher, infant mortality will rise and hope for the future, where it existed, will fade.

Discontent

The government of 'liberalisation' has made some feeble attempts to contain labour discontent and reduce the number of strikes with its wages policy. Last year, the authorities largely stood by and allowed industry to solve its own industrial relations problems following the wave of strikes. There were 140 major strikes in 1979. There was, of course, harassment of pickets, raids on union offices and strikers' homes and one man shot dead in October on a picket line—but compared to the level of official terror in the '60's and early 70's the harassment was mild.

The reaction to the April strike today indicates a hardening of attitude and has, furthermore, revealed tensions within the ruling armed forces and between the authorities and big business. The Sao Paulo labour courts did not, at first, declare the strike illegal. Central government denied knowledge of military helicopters, full of armed men, flying low above a football stadium during a strike meeting attended by 80,000. Complaints were lodged and subsequent meetings were not harrassed. But then came the arrests, the first of their kind for more than two years, posing a new threat and presenting a new challenge.

The Trade Union Opposition

Official unions in Brazil are tied to the state apparatus, with union officials being appointed by the government and still having no autonomy to negotiate directly with employers without the presence of representatives from the ministry of labour. This vertical syndicalism is based on Mussolini's model and has been operative since the nationalist-populist government of



Brazilian workers vote for strike action.

Getulio Vargas in the '30s. Since 1977/78, the Trade Union opposition (OS) has begun seriously to challenge the state unions from within, rather as the Workers Commissions challenged Franco's unions in Spain in the '60s and '70s. The (OS) has its base and roots in the ABC areas of Sao Paulo.

Their platform is straightforward. They are for building factory commissions (about 200 are already recognised by Sao Paulo employers), for the separation of the union from the state, the right to strike, direct negotiations, independent and autonomous organization for workers, a 40 hour week and a ban on overtime. The demands of the OS are reflected in many of the major disputes, not only among Sao Paulo engineers but also among bank workers, dockers, fishermen, agricultural workers, students, teachers and others. The OS leadership is constantly stressing their total opposition to any form of adherence to any political party. They stress their political independence and believe that their greatest strength is here. And yet among them, there are those who recognise the need for a party for the workers, separate from the union.

The OS work to build a strong rank and file movement based on workers commissions, often in semi-clandestinity, and many of their members are blacklisted. They stress the fact that they are small and cannot yet claim to be leading opinion in the unions—and yet their steady work, both at rank and file level and in the community especially among the women, has paid

enormous dividends in the last eighteen months. But as one leader has pointed out, 'The level of mobilization does not correspond to the level of organizations, the fact that workers are mobilized does not automatically mean that they are organized. This is a key to the better understanding of these concerns...'

Lula

So we have seen 30,000 ABC workers come out in April and only half of the number maybe much less, stick with the strike. It seems very likely that many workers came out, moved by the prudent, yet powerful words of 'Lula'. But the OS claim Lula is an orator, rather than a rank and file organiser. An OS spokesperson has said, 'We have a policy of working and discussing with Lula, although he has not got a class position...'

It is important to remember that Lula and the other leaders in jail at the moment are part of the official union structure despite their militancy. Moreover, as a leading member of a new incarnation of the populist 'Labour Party', which ruled Brazil before the generals, it has been proposed that Lula might, one day, stand as governor of Sao Paulo!

The workers of Sao Paulo and elsewhere could be led forward to spectacular defeats by this orator, if their organization does not continue to strengthen under the leadership of the OS (amazingly, with the protection of the Catholic Church). But the fact that so many workers are still on strike at the end of

April, with Lula and the rest in jail, would indicate that the level of community organization is high and that some important contacts have been made abroad (especially, it appears, with the CFDT of France, the German DGB, and the Italian unions) who will probably be giving important financial support.

The OS platform clearly has real support among Brazilian workers and has gained a major stronghold in the ABC areas of Sao Paulo, as well as in other important sectors of industry and agriculture. The military regime would have to drop any pretence of 'liberalisation' and incur the displeasure of the business community by returning to overt and massive repression if it were to succeed in eliminating the strong roots of this movement in the Brazilian working class. Its attacks on the official union leadership are unlikely to succeed in this respect. It remains to be seen, however, whether the sticks of unemployment and poverty will drive this movement back, or whether it will triumph to create new, democratic unions based on a high level of rank and file consciousness.

Jill Poole

Messages of solidarity and money for the strike fund can be sent to:-

Comite de Apoio aos Metalurgicos,
Asemblea Legislativa do Estado Sao Paulo,
9 de Julho,
Parque Ibirapuera
SAO PAULO
Brazil.

The Socialist case against Import Controls

The argument over import controls is becoming one of the central political arguments facing socialists. As the second great recession in five years is closing down factories wholesale and forcing tens of thousands of new workers into the dole queues, the demand to control imports is often the first to which people turn.

It is a demand currently very much associated with the left, since it stands at the centre of the Alternative Economic Policy preached by Tony Benn, the left trade union leaders, *Tribune* and the Communist Party. Yet historically, it was in the first third of this century the rallying cry of the Tory Party and already some voices of the Tory right wing are raising it again—as are, of course, the fascist National Front. And in the last few months several sections of big business have been demanding selective measures to protect their own particular

industries from foreign competition.

The Socialist Workers Party has always opposed the agitation for import controls. Our objection is primarily political: the agitation is based on the assumption that workers and employers have a common interest in fighting to protect British capitalist concerns from the capitalist concerns of other countries; it preaches a form of class collaboration, whereas our standpoint is unrelenting class warfare.

However, our view is often dismissed by non-revolutionaries as 'idealistic', 'impractical' and 'purist', because, they claim, through import controls there can be an improvement in the conditions of workers in this country. In this article, Nigel Harris looks at these specifically 'economic' arguments, and shows how they are wrong, even in their own terms.

Let's start with the experience of the past.

In 1931 the British government broke with its past policy of 'free trade', which allowed free entry of imports and free movement of British capital. In its place full scale 'protection' was introduced to limit severely imports, especially in what were then known as the *basic industries*—coal, iron and steel, shipbuilding and textiles.

In 1929, two years before the introduction of protection, employment in these industries was 2.3 million workers. Ten years later, after eight years of protection, employment was 1.8 million. Total unemployment in the country, running at 1.5 million in 1929 (or 12.2 per cent of the labour force), reached its peak *after* the introduction of protection at 3 million in 1932-33 (or 23 per cent of the labour force). In the basic industries, the rate of unemployment was double the average level for the country as a whole, and remained very high throughout the thirties.

If we take one example, textile and clothing manufacture, it seems employment declined during the period of protection (by 28 per cent between 1923 and 1938), and increased with more or less "free trade" after World War II. Thus, employment was around one million in the 1920s, declined through the 1930s, rose in the second World War to reach 840,000 in 1946, and then increased to 1,089,000 in 1950. It declined again to 840,000 during the 1950s, and then rose again to 1,086,000 in 1965 (when employers were complaining of shortage of capacity!)

Or take another example. Agriculture is the most heavily protected activity in all advanced capitalist countries. In this country, the protectionism of the 1930s and the Second World War period was never

dismantled after the war. These are the figures for agricultural employment:

<i>'Free trade' years</i>	employed
1901	2,243,000
1920	1,553,000
1930	1,340,000
<i>'Protection' years</i>	
1940	1,128,000
1946	1,240,000
1950	1,258,000
1960	1,062,000
1970	784,000
1976	656,000

A superficial reading of these figures might even lead you to believe that free trade creates jobs, while import controls destroy them. In fact, such a reading would obscure the real cause of the changes in employment in pre-war and post-war Britain.

The whole world was affected by an unprecedented slump in the 1930s and participated in a world boom from the 1940s through to the early 1970s. Unemployment shot upwards in the 1930s and import controls could do nothing to stop that. It fell in the 1940s and 1950s and was not prevented from doing so by the successive dismantling of import controls. It has been rising again the last 10 years, especially since the world recession of 1974-5, and import controls cannot and will not prevent a further rise. To argue in terms of 'import controls' versus 'free trade' is to ignore the real causes of the crisis, internationally and in Britain—the capitalist organisation of production. It is to suggest an attempt at tampering with the system which will not work but which will deflect attention from any real struggle to revolutionise society.



Import controls do not simply leave capitalism as it is. If adopted on any scale they push production backwards, and make the crisis of the system worse.

This is because capitalism has developed the world economy to a point where the forces of production in one country are inextricably linked to the forces of production in others. The more advanced an economy is, the more it is dependent on trade with others. The more backward an economy is, the more the mass of the population can be relatively self-sufficient—at an extremely low level of living (and what goes with it, a high rate of infant deaths, of deaths to women in childbirth, of disease and disability). The myth of self-sufficiency in an advanced capitalist country is essentially 'reactionary': that is, it harks back to a more primitive stage of development.

No single country, not even the giant United States, can produce within its national boundaries anything like the right combination of output to sustain the domestic standard of living. Every country must exchange what it can produce most cheaply for what can be produced most cheaply in other countries. To cut or to weaken the links which make such exchange possible is to impoverish the individual national economies.

The call for import controls is a call to cut back those links and to produce such impoverishment just so that some capitalists can increase their relative strength as against others. If the current protectionist pressures are successful, the end result will be, as in the 1930s, to break the world economy up into competing trading blocks, to push backwards the world wide forces of production and to make the economic crisis worse.

Of course, the present links that bind



Photo: Mark Risher (JFL)

international economies together are organised, as are those economies themselves, along capitalist lines. They involve all the cheating, oppression, bullying and savageries of the system. They reflect the fact that the present level of economic development internationally has been attained within an increasingly irrational and anarchic capitalist framework. But you cannot overcome that by calling upon the group of capitalists of the country in which you happen to live to cut off their links with capitalists elsewhere, so pushing backwards the world-wide level of economic development.

The way out of the world crisis is a reorganisation of the international organisation of production along socialist lines. That cannot be achieved without a revolutionary process, which liberates the forces of human production from the archaic, crippling, nationally based capitalist relations in which they have grown up. That liberation will involve revolutionary upheavals that begin within national boundaries and spread out from these. It cannot be furthered by linking up with particular capitalists to reinforce the archaic, national capitalist structure which cripples production.

The Extent of Interdependence

Most people do not see how dependent production and employment in one country is upon what takes place elsewhere.

For example, in Britain some people complain that "we should keep our own oil for our own use and not sell it to foreigners". It is a childish argument. First, it is not "our" oil at all, but the property of the giant companies, British and foreign-owned, who pump it out, and do so solely on the basis of

profit. Second, even if the North Sea oil belonged to the British State, it could not meet the needs of the British economy. The complex of grades and types of oil products—everything from lubricating oils to kerosenes—used in Britain does not at all match the quality of crude taken out of the North Sea. Every oil producing country has surplus and deficit grades, depending on the type of crude it has in the ground, and only trade can swap the excess heavy oils in one country for the excess light oils in another. And oil is a fairly simple commodity.

Again, take the example of three industries that perpetually complain about being crushed by imports in Britain—textiles, clothing and footwear, and vehicles:

Exports as a production of total sales (percentages)

	1968	1971	1974	1976
textiles	17.8	20.3	25.6	28.0
clothing and footwear	8.7	9.3	11.3	15.0
vehicles	33.7	36.5	40.5	44.0

Generally, when imports rise, so also do exports. Thus, between the first half of 1975 and the first half of 1978, British imports increased 14 per cent—but exports increased 23 per cent. It was not simply the result of increased oil exports from the North Sea. The British share of the manufactured exports of the advanced capitalist bloc increased—from 8.8 per cent between 1968 and 1974 to 9.4 per cent in 1977.

British exports are some other country's imports. Selective cuts in British imports will then provoke the governments of those countries that import British goods to retaliate with selective cuts—then the crisis

of those British industries affected by imports is spread to those British industries that export. Furthermore, countries prevented from earning revenue by selling to Britain have no funds to purchase British exports. Beggar thy neighbour might sound good on the surface for British capitalists, but finally it impoverishes people at both ends of the trade relationship.

The impoverishment directly hits British workers. For they are not simply producers, they are also buyers. British textile mills do not produce cheap mass consumption goods; they are specialized in high value goods, much of it for export. If they were obliged to produce for mass consumption in Britain, where they have severe disadvantages, the prices would soar, the prices of shirts, underwear and the rest. As a result, working class families would have to pay out far more for basic clothing—and would be able to spend far less on other items. And the result of that would be increased unemployment in industries producing for mass consumption, goods other than textiles. So far as working class consumption is concerned, cheap imports raise the standard of living. Without them, inflation is accelerated, unemployment increased—the slump is made much worse.

There is another element involved. Imports prevent British capitalists charging the highest prices possible. If they do this, then foreign capitalists will scoop the market and bankrupt them. If imports are banned, this control will disappear and prices for workers in Britain will rise even more than they would otherwise.

The Main Cause of Job Losses

Of course, increased imports do lead to the lay-off of workers in industries affected. But

imports are by no means the most important source of sackings. A British government survey of 24 industries most affected by imports found the job losses of 428,000 distributed in the following proportions:

1. Loss of jobs as result of increased imports:	
a) from backward countries:	11.0%
b) from other industrialised countries:	21.6%
	32.6%
2. Loss of jobs due to loss of export markets:	
a) in backward countries:	0.2%
b) in other industrialised countries:	4.9%
	5.1%
3. Loss of jobs due to declining demand in Britain:	12.3%
4. Loss of jobs due to 'rationalisation' of production:	50.04%

Thus, just over half the job losses resulted from the deliberate decision of employers to substitute capital for labour. The struggle for profits ensured that employers sacked, regardless of any other considerations. And such sackings would continue—and indeed increase—if businessmen were protected from foreign competition.

Blaming the Third World

The argument for protection frequently has a powerful thread of racialism in it, as well as chauvinism. Most imports into Britain come from Europe and the United States, yet it is always Japan or the Third World countries which are accused of "destroying British jobs". This is especially true in textiles. Yet, it is the main European textile manufacturers, themselves in decline, who threaten British millowners in the lines of production that Britain specializes in, just as British textiles threaten European textile business in their home markets. Right at the moment, the millowners are up in arms about textile imports from the United States—synthetic fibres and carpet imports. By and large, British mills are not competing at all with imports in the cheap clothing sectors, so they are not threatened by it.

Third World manufacturing imports take only 3 per cent of the British market. And for every £1 of imports, Britain supplies to the Third World nearly £4 of exports. The textile industry may suffer from imports, but the engineering industry gains by exports. In the United States, where there are continual complaints about imports from the backward countries, one job in 20 depends on making exports for the Third World.

In the British case, for the first half of the 1970s, if we subtract the jobs lost as a result of imports from those created by exports, then Britain gained on balance a net increase in jobs of 3000-4000. And, to repeat, the

imports to Britain provided backward countries with part of the earnings with which they could then purchase British exports.

In any case, talk of "imports" as if these were produced by "foreigners" is misleading. About 30 per cent of world trade is not "imports" or "exports" in the ordinary sense, but the internal transactions of international companies (the multinationals). Nobody knows the real value, because internal transactions are not valued in the ordinary way. In the case of Britain, about a quarter of both exports and imports are movements of goods between units of multinational companies. In this case, any reduction in "imports" produces an exact equivalent reduction in "exports".

Who Gains?

For British workers, then, 'protection' or import controls can only be a disaster, producing higher levels of unemployment and far higher prices than would otherwise be true. For small business, protection usually means their destruction at the hands of big business, now, by an act of state, created as monopolies.

Who gains? In a severe slump, big business is able to purchase the survival of its profits at the cost of everyone else. Its control of the domestic market gives it great bargaining power abroad with other national monopolies, and, in the 1930s, led to the creation of international cartels that agreed not to compete and divided up the whole world market into spheres of influence. Without the same degree of competition, prices were higher both at home and abroad—and the world's peoples were poorer as a result. Protectionism in the 1930s held down the world economy in slump. It was the first act of economic warfare that culminated in the real warfare of 1939. Insofar as each national working class accepted the economic warfare of their ruling classes, they brought real warfare that much closer.

The political debate about protectionism should not hide the fact that the world is already well on the way to protectionism. The leading states have, on a piecemeal basis, taken continuing steps to ban the imports of particular countries, impose quotas or prohibitive tariffs. For all its blather about "free markets", Mrs Thatcher's government has not resisted the trend; it has imposed restrictions on imports of textiles and fibres from the United States, on steel imports from selected countries (making cars more expensive, for example), on footwear, on consumer electronic goods, and many more. But it is still piecemeal, and supposedly "temporary".

All states try to cheat on the rules of world trade, but all are wary of general protection because they know that it would replace one disaster by general catastrophe. But dangerous precedents are set by creeping protection, and by the trade warfare now in train (for example, the battle between European steel exports to the US and US textile exports to Europe).

Protectionism is not about the protection

of British workers at all. It is about the protection of British profits, protection of the ruling class, at the expense of both the British working class and the world's productive system. It shows the despair in the ruling order for they know that protectionism will make slump much more catastrophic even if it also secures their power. That power is embodied in the slogan: only British capitalists have the right to exploit British workers!

Internationalism

Protectionism raises in a stark and unavoidable form the contradiction between those who believe in a world working class, in the aim of a world workers' republic, and those who in crisis, always side with their own national ruling class—thus making competition and conflict even more severe. It is usually the national trade union leadership who, in a political crisis, side with the employers against the demand to break a world order of national states.

Take a concrete example. On Mexico's side of the border with the United States there are enclaves of US business known as In-Bond Plants. Here, American business manufactures goods for export to the US market, using cheap Mexican labour. The American trade union federation, the AFL-CIO, has constantly denounced this activity. Not because the trade union leaders are outraged at the grotesque exploitation of their fellow workers in Mexico, but because "Mexico is stealing American jobs". The reaction of a serious trade union ought to be to defend its members, and to do so by recruiting all those employed in the given trade—that is, by helping to organise the workers of the In-Bond Plants, using the resources of the US labour movement to fuel the struggle of Mexican workers to achieve parity of wages with comparable workers in the United States. In that way, the attempt of US business to play off one group of workers against another would be neutralized.

By bleating about "American jobs", the AFL-CIO aids and abets US business in exploiting Mexican workers. It shores up the power of the US ruling class, at the cost of both American and Mexican workers. It makes that reaction even more extreme by being the leading campaigner for the expulsion of Mexican workers from the United States itself. Protectionism and tight immigration controls go together, and together they destroy the possibility of the working class defending itself against the depredations of capital. Worker fights worker, and capital, as they say, laughs all the way to the bank.

If the British textile unions are so worried about Korean competition, let them use the power of their trade union organisation to help Korean workers fight back. If British Leyland workers are so scared of Japanese car imports, let them bend all efforts to help the organisation of Honda, of Mazda, of Toyota. Capital is international and it can only be beaten internationally. National loyalty, loyalty to the local ruling class, is a disastrous weakness in that contest.

Conference round-up



I remember in 1973, two-thirds of the way through the first annual conference of the National Union of Journalists I ever attended, a voice crying out: 'Fifty up'. Mystified delegates discovered later what it meant – the national executive had just been defeated for the 50th time in three days.

This year's NUJ conference was not as spectacularly leadership-bashing as that, but the ineptitude of the platform was at times staggering. (On one occasion, the executive asked conference to oppose a motion for reasons which no member of it was able to remember. Conference duly passed it, overwhelmingly.) Only on the election of officials did the leadership seem to have its heart in what it was saying – and it even lost that.

The reasons for this curious impotence are complex: the union has been transformed over the last decade into one of the most radical and democratic in the country, and the process has made it difficult for the small, full-time bureaucracy to lord it over the membership. Which is good. Meanwhile, however, the elected lay executive – wobbling at the peak of an unwieldy, inefficient structure – is also weak. Which is bad. (Thankfully, conference voted for a smaller body.)

All of this makes conference, in contrast to those of many other unions, exceptionally accessible for the 'ordinary' member. And so a whole range of radical and militant resolutions were passed: for a women's conference at which only women can speak (the first time the NUJ has gone beyond its own liberalism and accepted the principle of positive discrimination), for pulling out of the Press Council, for action on May 14, for a special conference with other unions on Ireland, for a policy of opposition to nuclear power.

It was Ireland which produced the most bitter debates. The left won where it mattered – including resolutions supporting self-determination and for access of reporters to H-block prisoners – but lost stormy arguments on the siting of the conference (it was held in the Six Counties) and the pulling down of a pro-RUC poster. Nonetheless, on this and other issues, the left made progress in a year when it might reasonably have

expected a tough battle to hold its ground.

But there are hardly grounds for complacency. The employers are on the offensive – as shown by the recurrence of widespread blacklisting and the IPC magazines dispute – and the rank and file organisation Journalists Charter is still far from healthy after a long spell in the doldrums. (Charter will have seven supporters on the new 23-person executive.)

In the course of rebuilding, we need to think anew. Conference threw up a growing problem – the Star Speaker Syndrome. It paralyses a left which theoretically fights for the self-activity of the masses and yet, unconsciously, thwarts the involvement and development of tomorrow's leaders. Debate after debate is dominated by the same few militants who unknowingly intimidate their own, less confident, supporters. It's undoubtedly also a problem in other unions: but unless we begin to discuss it, and better still solve it, we will never unleash the rank and file leadership we need so badly.

Ireland

There were many who thought the holding of the annual delegate meeting of the National Union of Journalists in Portrush, Northern Ireland would give legitimacy to the British army of occupation through the apparent air of normalcy in a quiet Orange holiday resort. Unfortunately for those who hoped it would work out like that, it didn't. The holding of the conference in Northern Ireland concentrated the minds of those present on what the issues are and gave the left in the union more scope than usual to discuss what the war is all about and what a journalist's role should be in reporting events.

In fact reports of the conference in the Belfast press became so outraged by some of the statements being made at conference, that in the few days that we were there local people grew more and more suspicious, the police force, albeit small, was quadrupled, and the army was brought into town just in case the UVF tried any stupid tricks.

In advance of the conference the broadcasting section of the union had fought a battle with the BBC management in defence of the Panorama team who filmed the IRA

in control of Carrickmore. Even though the right wing hysteria whipped up against the Panorama team had been close to overwhelming at the time, the editorial unions had fought to defend their colleagues and the conference voted solidly in their support against the BBC management.

An important resolution was passed with a large majority on the issue of censorship in the North and South of Ireland, as well as in Britain. It called for an end to censorship of the war and called on the NEC to fight such censorship. It called for a campaign for access by journalists to prisoners, including those prisoners 'on the blanket' in the 'H' Block so that NUJ members can report on conditions there. It called for reports to be published of all incidents of censorship in connection with the war. Conference also called for opposition to any moves to restrict access by journalists to members of illegal organisations.

Geoff Ellen

Geoff, who has been recently elected to the NUJ executive, wrote the review of the Fleet Street SWP pamphlet on the Times lockout in the last issue of Socialist Review.



The annual conference of the clerical union, APEX, was held at Scarborough on 18-21 April also celebrated the 90th anniversary of the Union.

The presence of a Tory government served to create a very different atmosphere at the conference. Unity against the Tories hid the real differences in policies which had emerged in previous years.

The most important section of conference was the debate on proposals for amalgamation. Talks had been taking place between the executive committee and certain other trade unions. Resulting from these talks conference was presented with a document which suggested three possible alternatives:

1. Expansion into areas of recruitment of management staff.
2. Amalgamation with another white collar union (ASTMS or TASS).
3. Creation of a new Confederation of Trades Unions.

It was clear that the platform supported the third alternative. The proposal would create a Confederation with over 2 million members from the GMWU, FEPUJ, USDAW and APEX. Its political position would of course be on the right of the Labour Party and the number of votes which it would hold could exercise an

important influence both on the Labour Party and the TUC.

Conference also held a major debate on the call for a boycott of the Olympic Games and passed a resolution, proposed by the Executive Committee, which quite rightly while condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan rejected the call for a boycott. Speakers from both platform and floor drew attention to countries such as Argentina, Chile and South Africa and pointed out that Carter and Thatcher had not proposed retaliatory action against those countries.

On the question of the Labour Party a proposal from the platform, which was carried by Conference, has the effect of disenfranchising all APEX members who pay into the political fund, but who are not individual members of the Labour Party, from voting at a branch meeting on any matters regarding the Labour Party constitution.

In line with its 'moderate' reputation as a 'staff' union and despite several rousing speeches from the rostrum the conference failed to adopt a positive approach to 14 May Day of Action. It was made perfectly clear that whilst members were encouraged to take part in local lunchtime and after work initiatives, no support could be given to unofficial strike action and when Len Murray addressed the conference there appeared a positive reluctance to even refer to the word "strike", once again emphasising the lack of leadership currently being displayed.

Sonia McKay Dick Pole



I was an observer at this year's National Union of Teachers' conference, not a delegate. But I don't think I missed much—it seems largely to have been a rerun of previous years.

The executive exercises tight control for most of the time over the conference, which consists of 2,000 delegates, a majority of which are male and over forty, representing some 250,000 teachers—about 75 per cent women and on average below 40. The executive has only four women on it.

The executive controls discussion on key issues—salaries, the cuts, union funds, etc.—by the publication of executive memoranda containing resolutions which automatically take precedence over resolutions on the same policy areas submitted by local branches.

Top priority resolutions, often those promoted by Rank and File and the

Socialist Teachers' Alliance (the IMG and the soft left), are taken as amendments to the memoranda. Thus the whole debate is on the executive's ground.

The salaries memo was passed as usual. But faced with a growing dissatisfaction with the system of separate salary scales the executive were forced to suggest that changes were needed. We now have to step up our campaign for a single salary scale for all classroom teachers.

The executive were defeated, overwhelmingly, on two points. They are failed in their attempt to abolish the need for special salaries conferences to ratify any salary offer made by the employers. They also wanted to be allowed to use money from the sustentation fund (strike fund) for administrative purposes connected with industrial action. The fund is already small enough and the executive seem to show a great reluctance to 'sustain' anybody.

The delegations from Avon and Trafford attempted to suspend standing orders to report on their action against the cuts and to propose a meeting after conference of all the areas taking action—to pool experiences etc. The executive opposed this and won, largely by holding up a R&F bulletin and suggesting that the whole thing was a R&F plot. (Which it wasn't).

But why were the executive so worried? They don't want meetings of people taking action which might lead to developments they couldn't control. And they were very worried about what the members from Avon and Trafford might say. There is a strong feeling that the executive has not exactly been over enthusiastic about the action and would love an excuse to wind it up. The Avon and Trafford delegations were furious at being treated as R&F puppets (we had only one member in the combined delegations).

The annual visit by the secretary of state for education, this year Mark Carlisle, was perhaps the best litmus test of delegates serious commitment to fighting the cuts. The 200 who walked out passed mainly supporters of R&F or the STA passed. The rest who stayed to be 'professional' and listen to the words of the executioner failed. The CP and others opted for staying and reading their newspapers as a mark of disrespect. But when it came to it, many heckled. I think we did better. The heckling, the banners and the walk out, worried Carlisle, got the best publicity of the conference and showed that there are a group of teachers who are prepared to fight. The executive response was to compare us to Mosley's fascist of the 1930s—a remark which disgusted a large section of Conference who had not walked out.

Rank and File produced 1000 bulletins a day, which were well received by delegates, even on the morning after the Carlisle walk out, when R&F were supposed to have upset everyone. The number of Rank and File delegates was greater than ever this year, and the size of the fringe meetings reflected this.

Dick Brown

Asian women strike out

The tenacity of the workers at Chix in Slough, who have kept up a daily picket during the six months of their fight for the recognition of their union, the GMWU, has again focused attention on the militancy and high level of organisation that the most exploited labour group in Britain—Asian women workers—can rapidly develop in a situation of industrial conflict.

Asian women workers in factories receive as little as 80-90p an hour. The comparatively small workplaces where most of them are employed are rarely unionised. Even when the workers have overcome various obstacles in joining a union and gaining official status for the industrial action taken, many of the strikes have still not been won.

One of the vital factors in the winning of strikes in these small workplaces is solidarity action by other workers. Production at Chix, using white scab labour on higher wages, has only kept going because deliveries of glucose were maintained until recently from Tunnel Refineries; workers at the only other three suppliers in Britain having blacked deliveries. Official support for solidarity from the postal union could have won the Grunwicks strike.

Apart from racism in sections of the union movement, a major obstacle to the building of links and solidarity with workers speaking other languages is the prevalent lack of knowledge of English among Asian women workers. Of the 250,000 Asian women in the UK in 1976, 85 percent knew no English and threequarters of these were also illiterate in their own language. Not understanding English can lead to a lack of knowledge of their (few) rights for these workers. The new notification system for maternity leave in the Employment Bill, for example, will particularly hit those women who don't speak or read English.

Management uses the language barrier to divide and rule where it can. At Mars in Slough, for example, quotas on the number of workers from any one ethnic region have led to 30 different nationalities in a workforce of 5,000. Predictably, Mars is not unionised. There was an attempt to form a union 4 or 5 years ago. The Asians joined, but many others did not and the organisation was smashed.

A shared language that is not English can, nevertheless lead to a sense of closeness and community. This is largely responsible for the strength and stamina of the pickets in the Asian strikes. A sense of solidarity between the women can be felt very strongly on the Chix picket line. After the Imperial Type-

INDUSTRIAL DISCUSSION SECTION

writers strike of 1974, part of the strike committee report stated that: 'Right now the trade union movement in Britain is functioning as a white man's union.' Rank and file Asian women workers have a clearer view than many that reliance on the officials never won any strike.

Women factory workers, however exploited, do nevertheless have in the workplace an opportunity for organisation denied to the totally isolated individuals that form the home-workers.

The exploitation of the latter is made even easier by the cultural factor of the *purdah* system (more strictly adhered to by those from Muslim Pakistan than those from India) which prohibits contact with men outside the family. Pakistani women, especially older ones, tend to do only child-minding or other home-work, and only a very small percentage do any paid work. The tradition of male dominance within most Pakistani families is still maintained even for younger women, and many daughters—but not sons—are sent back to Pakistan to be brought up.

The cultural forces still oppressing Pakistani women are shown by the non-participation of the Chix Pakistani women workers on the picket line. The majority of the Chix workers, who are Sikh, attend every day, with the two male organisers, Yassim and Anwar who, incidentally, are Pakistani. The seven Pakistani women workers who are on strike stay away.

Many home-workers slave to sew 50 garments a week at 20-50p a garment. Reported rates are as low as 20p for all the sewing and finishing on a pair of men's trousers! Apart from being unable to organise to improve their pay because they are not unionised or together in one workplace, even the paltry payment they *do* receive may be docked for 'incompetent' work. The women also face insecurity of employment, since their work may disappear at any time at the whim or convenience of the employer.

Home-work also is not seen as a 'proper' job, and is never regarded as 'previous experience' if the woman tries to obtain other work. Few register as unemployed, and yet the *official* figure shows that a third of all unemployed women are immigrants. Clearly the *real* level of immigrant female unemployment is massive despite the fact that immigrant women have in the past been easier to exploit within the workforce.

The table shows something of the pattern of Asian women's organisation on the industrial front in recent years. A strike like that at Chix is feared by the employers as, in an area like Slough, it could trigger off further strikes in similar workplaces. The only way that the strike will be won, however, is by much more extensive solidarity action: the blacking of all supplies; mass pickets like the impressive 250-strong picket on April 30 largely organised by the SWP—and by workplace collections and resolutions of support to maintain the to date very good morale of the strikers.

Carole Ferrier

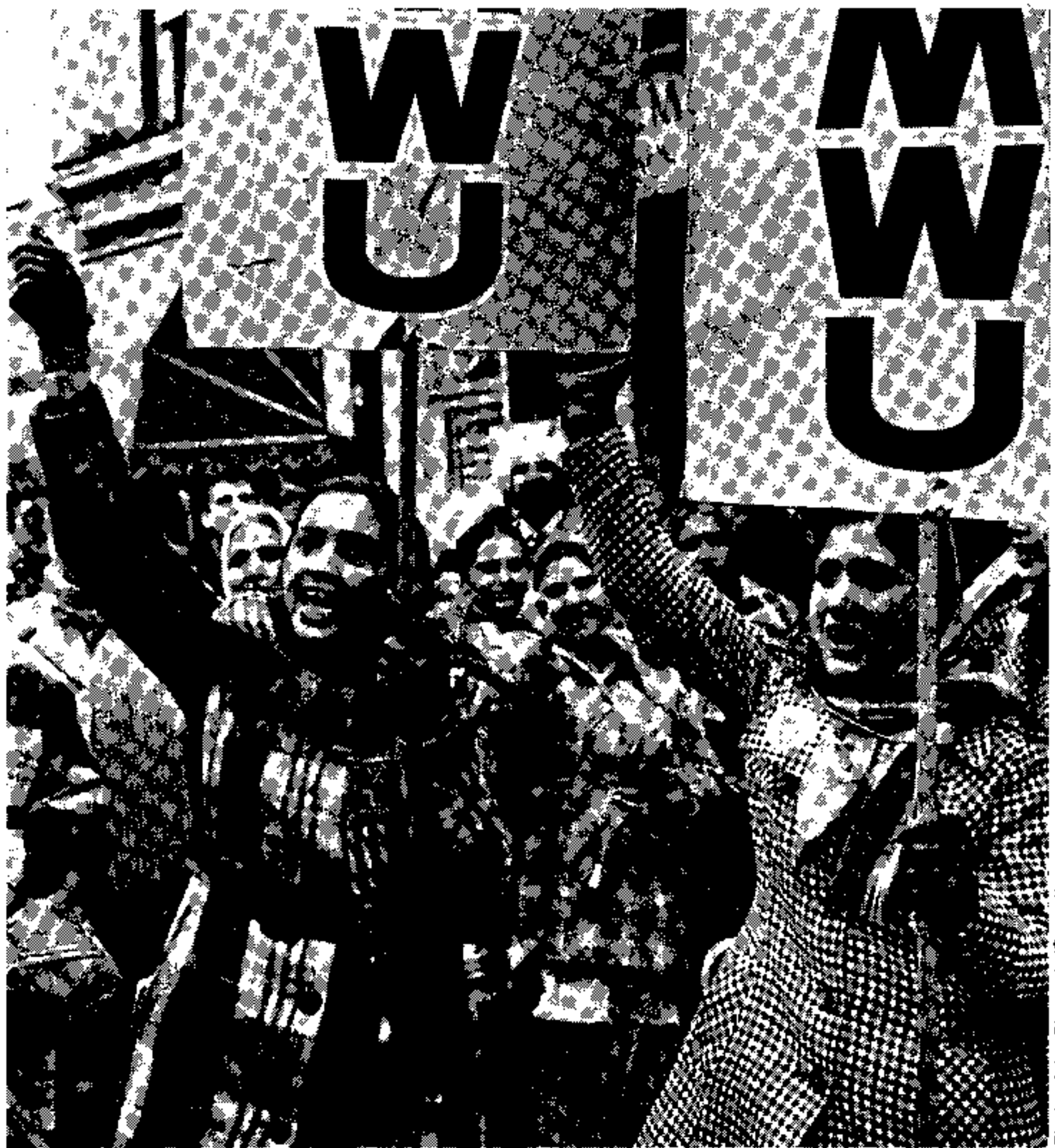


Photo: John Sturrock (Report)

INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS IN WHICH ASIAN WOMEN WERE LEADERS OR PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE

1967 Acme Cleaners at Heathrow sack 40 over a pay increase demand. (In 1974, workers were still getting only 38p an hour.)
 1972 Mansfield Hosiery, Loughborough.
 1973 Wyuna Corsets. Strike mainly for the recognition of the Tailor and Garment Workers Union.
 1973 (May-June) Malmic Lace, Nottingham.
 1974 Decca, Battersea. A sit-in by Ugandan Asians.

1974 Imperial Typewriters, Leicester. After a 3-month strike, the factory closed and moved to Germany.

1974 (September) Yarnolds, Wolverhampton. Workers were getting £13 a week.

1978 Grunwicks. Mainly for recognition of the union, APEX.

1979 (March) Fitters, Brent. Struggle for recognition of the AUEW, after 60 workers stage a half day strike.

1979 (July-August) Nceden Plastics, Slough. strike for a couple of weeks over AUEW recognition, pay and conditions.

1979 Chix, mainly over recognition of the G MWU.

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Underground but not ground under

It's always nice to know the level of activity when entering a new workplace. Starting work on the trains of London's Underground, I soon found out that the last strike was 1926, and even then some trains had run with scabs and volunteers.

Prior to that, 1919 saw a thirteen-week strike for the eight-hour day. But when it was won the men found it was an eight-hour day indeed—no meal relief was rostered, they were to spend eight hours on their train. They immediately struck for another three weeks and won a half-hour relief.

Since that period, culminating in the *Underground Depots Bulletin*, used by the Minority Movement from 1924 to 1930, nothing much has happened. A few short local disputes, but nothing across the combine and nothing for more than a couple of days.

So, was there any possibility of rousing the Underground from its slumbers? Various stories I heard, and eventually substantiated, made me believe that at rank-and-file level some of the men were quite capable of taking action, but nothing had any direction to it.

An example illustrates the possibilities. A guard on the Piccadilly line found a half-full box of matches on his train, and, naturally enough, being a smoker, slipped it into his pocket. A passenger reported losing a box of matches and, as the train was still in the platform, waiting to reverse, the station master asked the crew if they'd found anything.

The matches were handed over in a joking manner, as the crew couldn't believe that anyone would actually have claimed the matches. The guard was then notified that he would be reported for disciplinary action.

Within four days train crews on the Piccadilly had handed in something like fifty sackfuls of empty cigarette packets, crisp bags, dog ends, old newspapers and even Kentucky Fried Chicken Boxes, complete with half-gnawed bones. All items were accompanied by fully completed lost-

property labels. It was a complete victory over management, as they begged for the action to stop. But no-one had planned the action, it was spontaneous. Word of mouth had resulted in everyone taking action.

So it can be seen, the potential was there for a rank-and-file bulletin to channel the ingenuity of the crews to definite aims, and, for the first time for half a century, put pressure on the union bureaucracies.

For our first bulletin in September 1978 we produced 160 copies on health and safety with a questionnaire. Over 100 questionnaires were returned, fully completed. We thought we had it made.

Our second issue was in December 1978 and was now in booklet form with eight pages. It was free with donations being accepted. This policy has paid off in that after fourteen issues of the twenty page bulletin we have £20 in our kitty. A request in one issue for a typewriter resulted in three being given to us.

Our third issue for Xmas '78 was twelve pages and saw the start of our policy of centre-page spreads on specific issues. This time it was asbestos. We were developing the 'Our Norman' character in the bulletin and calling him Trainman Trotter. Trotter has now become an integral part of life on the Underground. We have used him for various specific campaigns.

After last year's pay deal we had a long article, setting out the average guard's pay for the year, and his expenses, food, accommodation, TV rent and licence, etc. He was £13 in the red at the end of the year. This is something that can be done at each pay deal and has people questioning just how good the pay deal is.

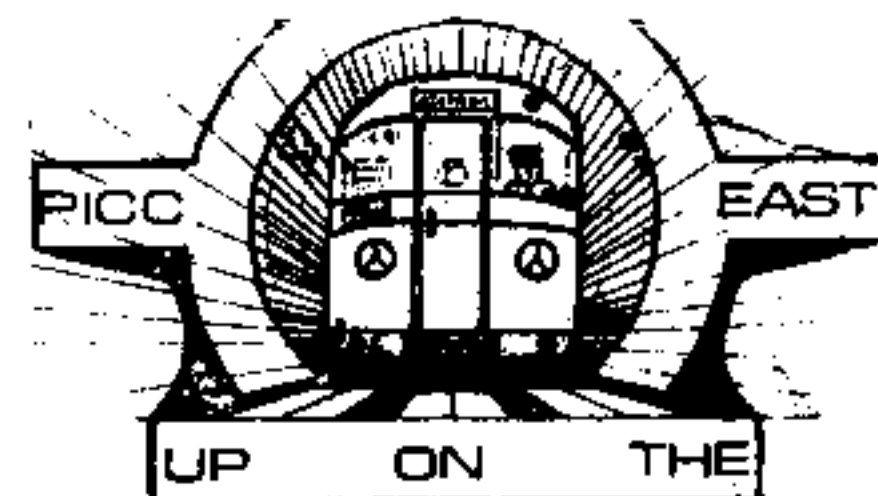
We also ran Trotter in an election against ASLEF and NUR candidates for a management-run participation scheme. We asked for his name to be written across the ballot papers, and in fact we received five per cent of the vote—not bad, considering that we only at that time covered one of the lines on London Transport, and the election

was for all tubes.

The present hard line by train crews over attacks can be traced to a centre-page spread we did on violence in our November 1979 issue. Due to the free 'adverts' we get in ASLEF's *Locomotive Journal*, with its denunciations of us, militants at other depots are trying to get hold of copies of our bulletin, *Pick up on the East*, and find out why it is so roundly condemned.

Our last few issues have seen copies go to over half the depots on the Underground, where we hear they are passed around, read and passed on. They are acquiring a place of their own in raising issues.

Our line on violence is for protection of staff, without giving an inch to the "flog 'em and hang 'em" brigade, and to this end we drew up a list of eight demands concentrating on staff protection that has been adopted by two open meetings at Wood Green and one at Friends' House for all Underground staff.



The unofficial action being taken for some months by Piccadilly Line crew over Southgate, and on other lines since the "Neasden Riot" has forced our unions, the NUR and ASLEF, to call a one-day official strike and two weekends of early closedown. However, the Friday and Saturday early closure of train service will continue 'unofficially' until our eight demands are met. No compromise of 'talks with the Home Secretary' will get it called off. The older men can remember that formula being used on countless occasions before.

One campaign which came to an end with our November 1979 issue was to get the ASLEF EC member of London Transport to submit a vote for re-election by all his membership midway through his term of office. This campaign predated the *Charter* campaign against the AUEW Executive. We needed 10 branches, and we had nine sewn up. The only branch that was still doubtful was the one that the EC member was actually in. He scraped home with just two votes, and he had to vote for himself.

Our hopes for the future are to expand our centre-page spreads, and to get them put into local rank and file bulletins for other lines, so that the majority of articles can relate to local issues.

The last word must go to the ASLEF organiser for London Transport. In a report to Ray Buckton he said: '*Pick Up on the East* is a semi-Trotskyist bulletin which involves many of our members on the Piccadilly line as well as senior branch officials.'

I object to the "semi", but the rest says it all.

John Robson
Chairman, ASLEF Wood Green Branch.

socialist REVIEW

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Politics of Contraception

With the exception of celibacy there is no contraceptive which is both 100 percent effective and safe from side-effects.

The search for more 'effective' contraceptive protection has led to the use of women (usually working class and often black) as guinea pigs for the new aids. Sometimes women are so desperate to avoid an unwanted pregnancy that they will try contraceptives that they have misgivings about. In any case they are not always told that new contraceptives are 'on trial'. Nor warned of the side effects.

More than anywhere it is women in the third world who have been used in this role. In the 1950's and 60's women in Puerto Rico and Mexico were used to test the oral contraceptives. More recently, the women of Thailand have been used to try out the effects of the controversial Depo-Provera injection.

For women contraception needs to be safe, effective, and under our own control. For the state, it has to be cheap, effective and easy to administer. Like Depo-Provera.

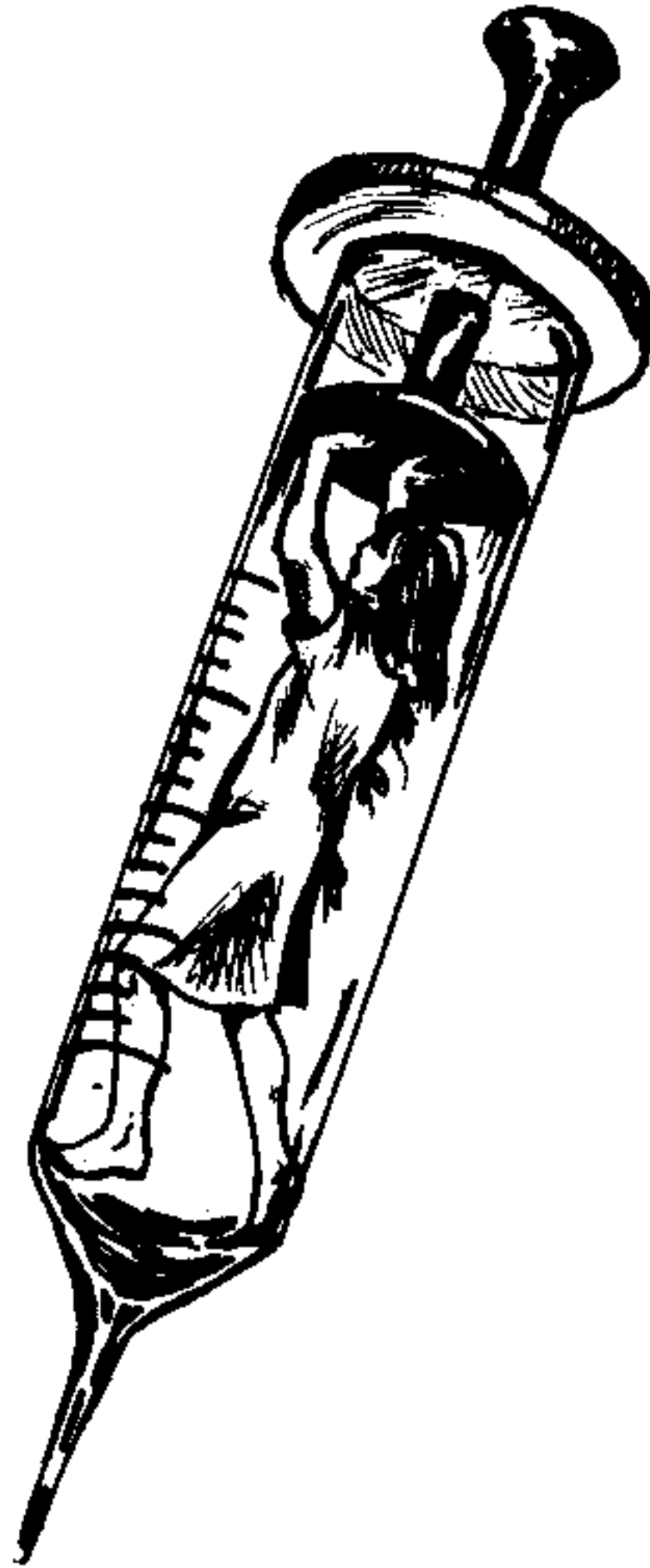
Depo-Provera is an injectable contraceptive, consisting of a massive dose of a synthetic hormone. The injection lasts for 3-6 months, so once injected it is impossible to reverse the process until the drug has run its course. The side effects of DP are completely unpredictable: they range from rapid weight gain to acne, from migraine and nausea to loss of libido. It is usually accompanied by complete menstrual chaos, and has been shown to cause long-term infertility and permanent sterility. Research has also shown that DP can cause cancer of the womb in monkeys and cancer of the breast in dogs.

Nor does the drug only affect the woman, as it is known that progestogens produce deformities in fetuses of women given the drug in early pregnancy. There is now also evidence that as DP is passed on in breast milk, it could affect the reproductive process of the child.

Not surprisingly, you made think DP, is banned in the United States. For use by American women that is, because DP is manufactured by an American company, Upjohn, and in the magnanimous tradition of American capitalism it thinks nothing of unloading its dangerous and defective products on the third world.

Depo-Provera is now being used in 76 countries throughout the world. 'International' birth control agencies such as the IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation) and the UNFPA (UN Fund for Population Activities) continue to distribute DP. Just how 'international' they are—and the extent of the hypocrisy of the US—is revealed by the fact that AID (the US Agency for International Development) is heavily financially involved in both these agencies. AID provides 40 per cent of the IPPF budget, and 35 percent of UNFPA. And AID even supplies DP under its own name for 'research'.

In Britain DP is officially sanctioned by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines—for short-term use only. But it is being used much more extensively, particularly on black, Asian and working class women. It is also recommended for the mentally retarded and the 'promiscuous'.



Recently the Committee was about to extend the licence of the drug, but panicked when the press published some of the unpalatable facts. We can confidently expect, as with drugs like thalidomide, and now Debendox, that DP will still be manufactured and distributed, until those responsible feel the financial pinch (ie when the compensation payments begin to hurt).

It was commercial reasons not reasons of safety that led to the withdrawal of the Dalkon Shield (an interuterine contraceptive or IUD) from the American market. The manufacturer, A H Robins, left the American market because women are queuing up to sue the company. It is alleged that the Dalkon Shield has killed 17 American women. 600 more women in American are waiting to sue Robins, and there are more in Britain. The company has already settled 2,300 claims out of court.

Yet that didn't prevent the dumping of the Dalkon Shield in unsterilized thousands in the Third World. The US Government engineered the dump, because it has a deep interest in the availability of contraception.

For most families in the third world large families are an economic necessity: to help carry out the harvest; to look after the old and sick. Many children need to be born because many will die. But for imperialist interests a growing and large population suffering from poverty and ill health is a serious threat to 'order', which is a threat to investment.

Always the 'solution' is population control, not economic development. The 'problem' is always too many people, not too little food.

Since the 1950's a large proportion of medical aid has been devoted to the 'population problem'. US AID now provides over 60 per cent of all 'international' assistance for population control. This is in preference to aid for other health programmes. Women can get contraceptives, but not any skilled help in childbirth or advice in serious illness.

In 1975-6 population programmes were allocated as much as two-thirds of all US assistance to the health sector.

Women in the third world have always provided unwitting guinea pigs for medical experiments, and as recipients of products that have been discredited elsewhere, like the high oestrogen pills that AID started buying up in 1973. In 1972 with adverse reports of the Dalkon Shield already appearing, Robins made AID an offer it couldn't refuse: the Dalkon Shield in bulk, unsterilized and at 48 percent off. Women in 42 countries from Ethiopia to Malaysia maybe even paid the price of their lives to the US Government for this act of sheer cynicism.

In 1975 AID issued an international recall of the IUD, but such a measure was an obvious impossibility. Nearly half a million women were already using the device.

The 1970's have seen the growth of the 'inundation' approach to contraception: to get contraceptives everywhere no matter how. The US is under no illusions about the need to spend massive amounts of money on this one area of interest. In the words of Dr R.T. Ravenholt (head of the AID Office of Population), 'Population explosions unless stopped would lead to revolutions'.

The hunger, abject poverty and population growth that characterize the greater part of the world are symptoms of a political and economic system that has failed. But imperialism has perfected new ways of continuing their plunder of the third world, and they even manage to mask the leer of commercial interest by their use of AID. Meanwhile it is ironic that the apparent liberation of women has led to new forms of oppression. The state wants to control the population for reasons which have nothing to do with a woman's right to choose. It needs to secure a work-force which is capable of reproducing itself; it needs to strengthen the nuclear family; it may even want to choose those elements of society which are allowed to reproduce (remember Keith Joseph's speech).

For women our most basic demand is control of our fertility. That means: adequate contraception and free abortion on demand. But most of all it means our right to choose.

Beth Light

Left advance left behind

The last edition of *Socialist Review* contained a brief analysis of the strength and weaknesses of the student movement and the present state of its organisation. One way of judging these factors is to look at the National Union of Students conferences which are held twice a year, the most recent taking place in Blackpool in early April.

In general NUS conference is no different to many trade union conferences, in that a large number of the 1,200 delegates are local union officers. However, there is a difference in that the revolutionary left is able to make a real impact in terms of not only elections but of interventions on the floor of conference and in debates.

For the past two or three years the Socialist Workers Students Organisation has consistently been able to use NUS conference as a debating forum, as a chance to get across the political differences that exist in NUS on a national basis, and to show that we are a real force in student politics with a base in the colleges.

Since the development of the Broad Left in the early 70's the leadership of NUS has been in the hands of a small grouping of Communist and Labour Party members along with a number of independent reformists, clustered around the executive of the union. However the guiding philosophy behind the union's policy has come from a smaller grouping, 'the inner cabinet' of the executive, the full-time national officers.

For the last year the executive have been attempting to alter the 'image' of student politics and to bring the union into line with the government's demands for greater 'accountability' (ie greater control) of students' union finance.

We have therefore seen a number of unfortunately successful attempts to change the constitution of the union, allowing among other things the introduction of secret ballots in union elections, and a drive to elect the president of the national union by nation-wide secret ballot thus reducing the power of conference. At this conference the executive forced through a subscriptions system (the money local unions pay in affiliations to NUS) that panders to the Tory-controlled university sector and a response to government attacks on the autonomy of students unions that vacillated between compliance and meek objection.

These are only some of the more obvious examples of the executive's determination to turn NUS into some form of a 'citizens advice bureau' that carries out little campaigning work and is more interested in professional lobbying of Mps. In fact NUS recently sent the new national secretary to the US to study lobbying methods employed in the Congress. The Left Alliance, as the Broad Left renamed itself last year, has consistently run away from the attacks by the right by adopting the strategy of 'one

step beyond', adopting the policies of the Tories on such areas as subscriptions and union democracy. They have also moved their electoral alliance to encompass the Liberal students.

What all this has meant for us is that it is far more difficult to argue the case for why local unions should stay in the national union and why colleges should even send delegates to the conference.

The debates and election results

A number of policy debates were held and the union adopted fairly good positions on nuclear power and on Ireland. In general there was a shift to the left amongst the delegates: though the executive managed to push through most of what they wanted it was by a far smaller margin than in previous years, particularly in the debate around government economic policy when the ideas of the 'alternative economic strategy' were rejected by a large number of delegates.

In the elections to the executive we managed to get two people elected. Jan Neilson from North East London Poly and John Rees from Hull University. The executive is now made up of: SWSO 2, SSA (Socialist Students Alliance) 3, Tories 2, NOLS (National Organisation of Labour Students) 2, Independants 1, and the Left Alliance (made up of 1 Liberal, 2 Communist Party members and 5 assorted Labourites) 8.

Formally the Left Alliance argue that they now have no overall majority on the executive and as such are no longer responsible for the disasters that NUS gets itself into. However the reality is different, and it is likely that the executive will polarise into two camps with the opposition centring around SWSO and the SSA. Our candidates stood on a very clear political basis and therefore our votes were solid, with a minimum of 80 delegates prepared to vote for us. In many of the major elections we were able to come second to the Left Alliance, thus disproving those who had claimed that we were finished in student politics.

The SSA centred around the IMG, however, managed to get three elected, and this requires a brief explanation. There are always a large number of delegates who would regard themselves as lefties, some even describing themselves as revolutionaries, and as such they are open to our politics. However to vote for SWSO in the elections is no soft option and is a definite commitment to revolutionary politics. The SSA on the other hand is an electoral alliance with blurred politics and little base in the colleges. Even though our caucuses were up to three times as big as theirs, our vote was not. Their candidates presented the image of the 'caring' socialists; ours were the fighters with no holds barred. In the absence of a massive struggle in the

colleges the fact that we got two people on to the executive was a significant victory.

Ireland

Our intervention on Ireland at NUS conference was one of our best ever and was a credit to our organisation. There are a number of lessons that we can learn about how to raise the politics of Troops Out and especially how to gain an audience in the first place.

We attempted to create a forum in which a rational debate could be held generally around the war in Ireland. Therefore we firstly organised a very successful fringe meeting with two speakers from Ireland who talked about the H-Block campaign for Political Status, and about the conditions in and the campaign around Armagh Women's Prison. We repeated this exercise the next day when the conference itself heard the same two speakers—they received a very good reception. One of our members then moved that there be a collection for the Armagh prisoners' campaign, but to the amazement of even many CP members Andy Permain, a CP member of the executive, got up and moved that the collection be not held. It is a measure of the amount of support that we had built up that he had to resort to the most disgusting right wing hysteria in order to carry the vote. Permain argued that any money collected would be going to the Provos who, in his words, 'are just a bunch of murdering terrorists'. There then followed, not surprisingly, a very heated debate in which we outlined our position on Ireland while the Left Alliance moved even further to the right. We lost the votes but decided to still go ahead with the collection as there were many individual delegates who wanted to donate money and we managed to collect £150 in five minutes.

The next day the battle continued as a policy debate was held on Ireland. The votes on Political Status and Troops Out were lost by 2-1, a close result in terms of NUS conference, and we succeeded in winning support for the Armagh Prisoners campaign by 294 to 214.

The lessons to be learnt from the above are clear—there is a potential audience that we can attract if we attempt to organise properly. We need to create the forums in which the politics of Troops Out can arise, therefore the Voices for Withdrawal and the Political Status (Charter '80) campaigns are crucial.

Conclusion

Our intervention at this NUS conference was one of the best ever. Not only did we succeed in raising our general politics but we were the only force on the left who consistently intervened throughout the conference for example, it was us who collected £70 for the Chix strikers and who got a speaker from the Jimmy Kelly Campaign; it was us who organised a walk out when the Tory Mayor of Blackpool got up to speak. Our work paid off as the size of our caucuses grew, and in the end we managed to recruit 10 delegates to SWSO of whom three immediately joined the SWP.

Rick Cole

LETTERS

Distorting the facts

The March issue of Socialist Review contained an article on Coventry trades council. It contained so many mistakes that I hope you will print this reply to avoid your readers drawing false conclusions.

Firstly, some minor points.

1. Of your three interviewees, only one is a current delegate (when he shows up). Yet you do not interview Caroline Johnson who is the only SWP delegate who puts any work into the trades council. Indeed at the March AGM Caroline was the only SWP delegate who bothered to turn up.

2. Your interviewees rewrite history. In 1972-73 Trades Council did far less work locally than it does now. And the reason the local SWP 'stepped back from Trades Council work' about 1974 was not because anyone argued for this but because almost all the SWP Trades Council delegates left the SWP.

3. The Trades Council is not led by a 'typical non-party grouping of the sort praised by Beyond the Fragments'. The majority are in the Labour Party with a sprinkling of members of left groups and the Communist Party. As for 'ex-SWP' members I am almost the only one. Perhaps your interviewees are confused by the sight of socialists working together despite differences.

Secondly it is quite disgraceful for your interviewees to describe 90 per cent of business as a 'total waste of time'. In the first place no SWP members in the last four years have ever once bothered to move one resolution, make one significant speech or take an organising role for any of the activities it is claimed should be undertaken. Why not?

Further it is simply not true that meetings are a 'waste of time'. Amongst the work organised has been:

★ Probably the best organised Trades Council work around housing in the country involving many groups of local residents and trade unionists.

★ Three publications on temporary tenants, the local impact of the National Enterprise Board and on health in Coventry (forthcoming) in addition to a cuts and a housing bulletin.

★ Regularly supported dozens of local disputes especially those such as Forward Trading, Draftex, Club One Bingo where newly organised groups of women workers have been involved. In the latter cases especially this went beyond circulating appeals and making collections to supporting mass pickets.

★ Breaking a colour bar at a local working men's club by mass pickets and stopping beer supplies—started by SWP members who dropped out when it involved too much work.

★ A whole range of other local work organised through sub-committees such as the education, cuts and international ones.

★ Regularly supporting political initiatives such as coaches to Grunwicks,

Troops Out marches, anti-fascist marches, pro-abortion activities.

And many more besides. No doubt we could and should have done more. Often the turnout was inadequate, the collections too small. I suggest, however, it stands comparison with most other trades councils. Constructive criticism and ideas from the SWP delegates—not to mention some legwork—would have been very welcome. None ever came, barring Sister Johnson.

Thirdly, and most important of all, what should be the local role of Coventry trades council? Simon Turner, on the same page as your interview, highlights the key problem—the separation of trades councils from the workplace and their dependence on union branches.

Back in 1974, I, amongst others argued against illusions in the trades councils as an alternative or substitute for mass work in the workplace. This is still my position.

To imagine that a trade union organisation based on branches peopled by small numbers of activists could compete for workplace allegiances with the stewards committees or district committees is sheer folly. This is less the case in the public sector since the branches are often more important here (though this often reflects weaker on-the-job organisation).

If any action takes place on May 14th, for example, it will come as a result of pressure on the engineering Confed, which the trades council, amongst others will support.

The relatively weak links between the trades council and the stewards committees is not to lack of effort or willpower on our part. It is rooted in the existing nature of the local movement.

To waffle about the 'huge potential' of the trades council is plum silly. It creates illusions in the trades council which few delegates have. We do a useful job, however, which may grow in the future. Your comrades would know if they came to meetings or bothered to support trades council activities—such as the recent public meeting on Ireland which the SWP boycotted.

To repeat, constructive criticism is always welcome. But sectarian sniping from the outside does you no credit. Indeed it reflects badly on the entire left—confirming many outside our ranks in their attitudes towards all non-Labour Party socialists.

Roger Kline (Trades Council Vice-President, in personal capacity).
Coventry

The Feminist ABC

I thought Alex Glasgow's alphabet was great


Till I thought back to sixty eight
When the Women's Liberation Movement grew

Forcing socialists to think anew
So I grabbed my red felt tipped pen
And wrote an alphabet to include women:

A is for Alienation which makes workers behave as they do


B is for Brothers who forget that women are workers too
C is for Class that unites us when fighting for workers' control
D is for Dialectic that directs us when capitalism has taken its toll
E is for Emancipation which workers alone can begin
F is for Feminism without which the workers won't win
G is for Grunwicks picket where we all fought for women's rights
H is for Hospital workers where women were leading the fight
I is for Internationalism, Luxemburg pointed the way
J is for all sexist Jargon which feminists will sweep right away
K is for Alexandra Kollontai a female bolshevik of note
L is for sexual Liberation about which she daringly wrote
M is for the meaning of Motherhood which socialists will totally transform when
N for New Woman is created and becomes a socialist norm
O is for our Organisation, male chauvinist warts and all
P is for the Party we'll build when women have shaken their thrall
Q is for the Question of women which socialists never got right
R is for the Rank and File who also need showing the light
S is for Suffragettes who united women of every class
T is for Margaret Thatcher who shows such unity is farce
U is for Unity in action which socialist feminism brings
V is for Victory when we vanquish all nasty male chauvinist things
W is for Women Workers in Russia whose struggle showed us the way and proved that women are leaders whatever our male cadres may say
X and Y are the chromosomes which caused all this sexual enmity
Z is for Clara Zetkin a fine socialist for all her femininity.

I think that is just about enough
Even though the rhymes are quite rough
It's just that I wanted to say
Socialist Women Rule O.K.
Anna Paczuska

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In 1917, for the first time in world history, a workers' government took power in Russia. Out of the bloodbath of the First World War an alternative and better society was born. But within 20 years it was dead, murdered by a new class, a new despot—Stalin. Why did it happen?
This pamphlet gives some of the answers

Alan Gibbons
RUSSIA
How the revolution was lost





From the flood of obituaries of Sartre a clear bourgeois party-line emerges. Sartre was on the wrong side politically, being 'soft on communism', an uncritical supporter of Russian labour camps, terrorism, etc., etc.; his influence has waned and he is virtually unknown to the younger generation; yet somehow, despite all that he was a 'great man'. Much of what has been written is marked by a combination of patronising smugness and pig-ignorance. Thus the *Sunday Times* (April 20th) quotes Mary Warnock as having consigned existentialism 'to the intellectual dustbin'. Ms Warnock's main claim to fame is a book on Sartre's evolution to Marxism in which she quotes Marx's 'fourteenth thesis on Feuerbach'. (NB for new readers—there are only eleven).

In *The Observer* (April 20th) John Weightman laments that Sartre did not agree with Voltaire's statement: 'I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it'. (Actually Voltaire never said any such thing.) But precisely one of the things Sartre always insisted on was that words were a form of action. Sartre never took refuge in 'theoretical praxis', 'relative autonomy' or any of the other mystifications whereby a whole generation of would-be Marxist intellectuals have sought to disconnect what they said from what they did—or more likely didn't do.

For Sartre the unity of theory and practice was paramount, and it is nothing less than an insult to him to suggest that one can acclaim his 'philosophy' while dismissing the practice it led to. The only obituary Sartre deserves is one that defends him against the smears and lies of his would-be friends, while at the same time rigorously criticising his political practice.

Contrary to received opinion Sartre was never a Stalinist and never a Maoist. Nor, contrary to the wishful thinking of some, was he ever a consistent revolutionary socialist. Sartre's work is a long dialogue

with the revolutionary left; a dialogue full of hesitations and misunderstandings. From the failures of this dialogue we can learn something of the weakness of the left in our age.

Clive James (*Observer*, April 20th) thinks Sartre supported Stalin and Mao because 'he was taking revenge for his bad eye'. (I don't know if Mr James has any physical disability to blame his inanity on). A more fruitful approach to tracing Sartre's development would be to start with a story he tells in his autobiography *Words*. As the child of a rich bourgeois family he had for a while a governess called Marie-Louise who used to lament to her pupil that she couldn't find a husband. For the young Sartre her unhappiness called into question the values which his family had tried to instill into him.

'I thought wages were proportionate to merit: so why did they pay her so badly? If you had a job, you were proud and dignified, happy to work: since she had the good fortune to work eight hours a day, why did she speak of her life as being an incurable ill? When I reported her grievances, my grandfather burst out laughing: she was much too ugly for any man to want her. I didn't laugh: so you could be born condemned? In that case they had lied to me: the order of the world concealed a state of intolerable disorder.'

It is this gulf between theory and practice, between ideology and reality, that led Sartre to break irreconcilably with his own class. His whole work is devoted to the quest for values which can be taken seriously, which can be implemented in practice. If God does not exist, if human beings have freedom of choice, then we must follow through the logic of those propositions, accept all the consequences they entail.

Sartre and Socialism

The only solution was socialism. But for Sartre the road to socialism was far from easy. Too young to participate in the great

social upheavals which followed the First World War, Sartre came of age politically as Stalin was consolidating his power over the Comintern, and fascism was rising throughout Europe. He was never in much doubt that he was an anti-fascist, but the question of positive political alignment was a much more difficult one. In the thirties his circle of friends included at least one Trotskyist, Colette Audry, and Sartre was certainly familiar with the debates of the period; but the revolutionary left was too peripheral to political reality to exert any real influence on him.

The major Marxist influence on him at the time was Paul Nizan, Communist, novelist and journalist. Nizan was a loyal Stalinist up to the Stalin-Hitler pact, after which he left the party; shortly after he was killed. After the war a number of CP intellectuals—notably Aragon and Henri Lefebvre—spread the totally unfounded story that Nizan had been a police informer. From this whole affair Sartre retained a distrust of the French Communist Party, which survived whatever tactical alliances he might make.

The German Occupation was a crucial period for consolidating Sartre's political commitment. Not that he was in any sense a Resistance hero; but the experience made clear to him the nature of writing as a political act. In 1943 his play *The Flies* was performed in Paris; Sartre's choice of a theme from Greek mythology had concealed from the German censor the fact that the play was a clear encouragement to Resistance. Sam White (*Evening Standard*, April 18th) dredged up the tired old slander that Sartre was somehow 'collaborating' with the Germans by cheating the censorship this way. This slander was first launched by Andre Malraux in 1959 when he was a minister in de Gaulle's government. Sartre was able to reply that the performance had been approved by the main Resistance organisation for writers, the CP-controlled National Writers' Committee.

Up to the end of the German Occupation, then, Sartre was a man of the mainstream left: against fascism, for socialism, agnostic about Marxism. It was in 1944-45, when revolution was on the agenda for France, that Sartre faced a real choice as to whether to take the reformist or the revolutionary road.

Many years later, in 1961, Sartre described the choice he faced at the time of the Liberation:

'It was possible, in 1945, to choose between two positions. Two and only two. The first, and better, one, was to address the Marxists and them alone, to denounce the aborted revolution, the slaughtered Resistance, and the disintegration of the left. Some journals adopted this position courageously, and disappeared unheard: it was the happy time when people had ears not to hear and eyes not to see. I am far from believing that these failures condemned their attempts, and I claim we could have imitated them without sinking. . . But to denounce the revolution betrayed, it

would first have been necessary to be a revolutionary: Merleau (Merleau-Ponty, his collaborator I.B.) wasn't one, and nor was I yet. We didn't even have the right to declare ourselves Marxists, despite our sympathies for Marx. Now revolution is not a state of mind; it's a day-by-day practice illuminated by a theory. And if reading Marx isn't enough to make you a revolutionary, you converge with him sooner or later if you are fighting for revolution. The result is clear: only men formed by this discipline could effectively criticise the left; so, at that time, they had to be more or less closely linked to Trotskyist circles; but straightaway this affiliation disqualified them, without it being their fault: in this mystified left dreaming of unity, they appeared as splitters.'

So Sartre turned his back on the revolutionary road; instead he adopted a reformist line; unwilling to join the Communist Party, which he saw as manipulative and dogmatic, he sought, through his journal *Les Temps Modernes*, and later through his own political group the RDR (Revolutionary Democratic Assembly), to put pressure on the CP from outside, though without any clear critique of the CP's non-revolutionary nature.

Ironically, it was just at this time that the revolutionary left had some chance of breaking through. With the CP deeply buried in a coalition government, following a no-strike line, the Trotskyist left offered the only militant alternative. There were modest electoral successes, and gains in the Socialist Party Youth; in 1947 Trotskyists took the lead in the strike at the Renault car plant. But it was too little and too late; with the Cold War and the consequent turn by the CP, there was set-back and demoralisation for the whole working-class movement.

The French Trotskyist movement dissolved into factionalism and unprincipled *bloes*. Instead of Trotskyism being a force of attraction to Sartre, it was the other way round. Many Trotskyists entered the RDR, seeing it as a short-cut to building a mass organisation. But the RDR, with its woolly programme, was bound to disintegrate. For some, like David Rousset, briefly a close associate of Sartre, the RDR was nothing more than an easy bridge from Trotskyism to Gaullism.

Dirty hands?

Yet the ghost of revolutionary politics still walked in the corridors of Sartre's mind. In his play *Dirty Hands* the young Communist Hugo denounces the old Party leader Hoederer as follows:

'The party has a programme: the achievement of a socialist economy, and one means to achieve it: the use of the class struggle. You're going to use it to carry out a policy of class collaboration in the framework of a capitalist economy. For years you're going to lie, cheat and manoeuvre; you'll go from one compromise to another; you'll defend to our comrades reactionary measures taken by a government that you are part of. No-

one will understand: the hard ones will leave us, the others will lose the political education they've just acquired. We shall be contaminated, softened, disoriented: we shall become reformists and nationalists; to end up with, the bourgeois parties will only have to make the necessary effort in order to liquidate us.'

For Sartre, Hoederer, not Hugo, is the hero of the play; yet it would be hard to find a more acute, and indeed prophetic, indictment of the policy of the French CP in 1944-47, and the sorry price it paid for it in the following decade.



But as French Trotskyism collapsed into factionalised irrelevance in the early fifties, Sartre was more and more pulled towards the Communist Party. At a time when many representatives of the bourgeoisie were calling for the banning of the CP, Sartre argued that, whatever the weakness of the CP, to liquidate the main organisation of the working class could only bring disaster for French workers. Moreover, he claimed, those thinkers of the extreme left who denounced the CP were in effect allying with those who wanted to see it banned.

Sartre's position was sadly wrong. In the 1950s there was no short-cut available, no alternative to the slow patient task of rebuilding the revolutionary current from scratch. But Sartre was never an uncritical pro-Stalinist. In 1952 he published a long article called *The Communists and Peace*, the aim of which was 'to declare my agreement with the Communists on precise limited subjects, arguing on the basis of *my* principles and not *theirs*.'

George Steiner (*Sunday Times*, April 20th) tells us that Sartre was 'damnable wrong—on the Soviet camps for example'. Now in 1952, when the CP were still denying the very existence of labour camps, Sartre wrote in a polemic against his former friend Camus:

'Yes, Camus, like you I find these camps unacceptable; but just as unacceptable is the use that the 'so-called bourgeois press' makes of them every day. I don't say: the Madagascan before the Turkoman; what I say is that you mustn't use the suffering inflicted on the Turkoman to justify the suffering we impose on the Madagascan. I have seen the anti-communists rejoicing at the existence of these prisons; I've seen them use them to give themselves a clean conscience; and I

had the impression that they were not bringing help to the Turkoman, but rather exploiting his misfortune just as the USSR exploits his labour.'

One can only assume that George Steiner thinks it was 'damnable wrong' not to applaud the camps.

But even in this period Sartre's dialogue with the revolutionary left continues. The *Communists and Peace* contains long passages of polemic, directed both against Germain (Ernest Mandel) and against an ex-Trotskyist, non-Leninist grouping called *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (political ancestors of the *Solidarity* group in Britain).

The right choice

Sartre's honeymoon with the CP ended with the Hungarian Revolution, and thereafter his main commitment was to anti-imperialism. Sartre had close links with those groups in France which gave active material support to the Algerian liberation struggle. Francois Jeanson, an old friend of Sartre's, organised one of the best known of the pro-Algerian networks; he tells how, when he visited Sartre in 1959, 'within two hours, I had an interview from him for our clandestine paper, as well as some addresses which were going to be very precious to us.' Sartre's giving of a signed interview to an illegal paper was a deliberate challenge to the state.

Apart from the Jeanson network, one of the main groups involved in giving aid to the Algerians were the French Trotskyists. Slowly, through the Algerian struggle and subsequently the Russel Tribunal on war crimes in Vietnam, Sartre rebuilt his links with the revolutionary left, and saw the increasing passivity of the CP, caught in the logic of its parliamentary aspirations.

1968 was the first time since 1945 when revolutionary politics came out of the wilderness. This time Sartre made the right choice; there was no ambiguity as to his support for the students, no doubt that this could be the beginning of a revolutionary process had not the CP diverted it back into safe channels.

From then until his death Sartre was always on the side of the revolutionaries. Yet Sartre could not escape the decline and crisis which afflicted the French left in the seventies. His main alignment was with the Maoists, though that never meant an uncritical support for Maoist politics, let alone for the Chinese regime. When Michele Manceaux published in 1972 her book *The Maoists in France*, Sartre contributed a preface which began with the words 'I am not a Maoist.' Sartre admired the Maoists for their activism and their total break with bourgeois legality; he rather naively hoped that Maoist students taking jobs in factories would come to be a new type of intellectual.

Sartre's determination, his continuing activism, inspire respect even where his political judgement require the most thorough criticism. If Sartre was a failure, his failure was a part of *our* collective failure; the corpse is ours to dissect; not a drop of blood must go to the smug ignoramus of the bourgeois press.



Testament of a Revolutionary

Certain writers fall into undeserved neglect, and although Victor Serge's writings received something of a revival in the 60s many socialists are still not familiar with his work. Yet Serge's theme—the revolutionary left in Europe, before, during and after the Russian revolution—is basic to the development of a contemporary socialist consciousness.

Serge, himself the son of Russian exiles, was brought up in poverty in Brussels. Apprenticed as a printer, he moved from the moderate socialism of the Belgium Socialist Party to the individualist wing of the anarchist movement in Paris. Accused of involvement with the Bonnot Gang (a sort of amalgam of Baader/Meinhof and Pretty Boy Floyd) he served five years in some of the worst French prisons.

His life story in the period between his release from prison in 1917 and his eventual arrest and deportation by the GPU is told in *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* and is a tale of constant struggles, risings that failed, deportations, imprisonment, clandestine work for the Third International, clandestine work for the Left Opposition, imprisonment, deportation by Stalin and finally exile in Mexico.

As we can see from his life, Serge was not a 'novelist' in the 'Book Programme' sense. He did not live in Bloomsbury or Greenwich Village. He spent more time in the Sante Prison in Paris than he did on the 'left bank'. His universities were those of life. Indeed all the evidence points to the fact that were it not for circumstances he would have preferred to remain an activist/journalist. Novel writing was an activity forced upon him by the GPU.

Deprived of the right to communicate his ideas through the press, he began a remarkable series of semi-autobiographical novels in order to obtain money to feed his family. In three years he had three novels

published—*Men in Prison*, based on his years in the French prisons, *Birth of Our Power*, the story of the Barcelona rising of 1917, *Conquered City*, about Petrograd during the period of the Red Terror.

It is the later novel, *Tulayev*, that is the most complete and finished statement of Serge's revolutionary testament.

The story hinges around the murder on impulse of 'beloved comrade Tulayev' (modelled on the Kirov assassination) by a young Communist militant—a totally arbitrary act of revenge following the death of his sweetheart, a labourer on the new Moscow underground. The murder of Tulayev/Kirov starts off a kaleidoscope of events ranging from the Siberian tundra to the barricades of Barcelona. It is the story of those caught in the web of events as the Stalinist terror machine crashes into gear. Each character has a place not simply in the story but also in the history of the period, and the characters of the revolutionaries are drawn with a loving care, as if Serge were saying, 'Here they are, to destroy human beings such as these was indeed a crime.'

There are two main Russian characters. Kiril Rublev is toiling away in an obscure Moscow library hoping that he has been forgotten by the Party. He is an old oppositionist who has capitulated to Stalin, a Bolshevik whose party has been destroyed and who has gone into internal exile.

But the death of Tulayev brings Rublev's name back onto the GPU's active list and, as he meets with two friends in the winter woods first to discuss current politics and then to engage in a wild snowfight, we are made aware of the progress of the 'investigation'. It must be a plot! the Trotskyite-Zinoviev centre is at work again! How else can a ruling class explain a random act of terror except in terms of plots and counter plots. To admit that an independent worker could assassinate a member of the

ruling clique is to strike fear into the heart of every bureaucrat.

It is this fear which we see transmitting itself throughout the novel. As the search for the plotters fails so the increasingly desperate functionaries turn on each other in their attempts to justify each line of the investigation.

The search now turns abroad to Spain. As the policies of the 'peoples front' disarm the revolution and the fascists advance, so the search for scapegoats continues. A young Trotskyist Stefan Sterne is arrested and murdered in Barcelona; a bureaucrat's blunder, it is covered up by linking it to the Tulayev case. The insanity spreads, as the denunciations reach the head of the GPU himself: the Stalinist police chief realises he is doomed as he attends functions where those in the know give him the cold shoulder.

But if there is to be a plot of this magnitude, then there must be a leader, and that means the search for an oppositionist of sufficient calibre. Here Serge introduces the other great character in the novel, Ryzhik.

Ryzhik is an old Trotskyist. He stands firm, intransigent in the face of the Terror. In a moving interview he tells his persecutors "Write them that I shit on the bureaucratic counter-revolution". When questioned by another functionary he tells her, "Look at yourself in the mirror tonight—I am sure you will vomit. If it were possible to die of vomiting you would die . . ." He determines not to be used by the counter-revolution and asks for ink and paper to make his confession. In its place he writes his testament, and enters upon a secret hunger strike to death. In the process he ensures the death of those who were to watch over him.

This book is incomparably more important than *Darkness at Noon*. Koestler started from the position of an outsider. His flirtation with revolutionary politics was never more than that. He could no more understand the mentality of a Ryzhik or a Rublev than fly in the air. And yet Serge died poverty stricken in Mexico City, an exile to the last, while the Koestlers of this world enjoyed their royalties and were lauded by the world bourgeoisie as 'having the sense to break with Moscow'. A Victor Serge praised by the bourgeoisie would be a contradiction—his novels are still too relevant to contemporary politics to be made respectable.

It is perhaps fitting to finish with the closing paragraph from the *Memoirs*, written in 1943 after the murder of his comrades Andre Nin and Leon Trotsky, in the middle of the greatest imperialist war ever fought, Serge summed up his life as follows:

"The future seems to me to be full of possibilities greater than we have glimpsed throughout the past. May the passion, the experience and even the faults of my fighting generation have some power to illumine the way forward."

With the help of his writings to understand our past we will change that future.
Jim Scott

Little illumination

Writing By Candlelight

E.P. Thompson

Merlin Press, £2.70

I started reading this book the day after returning home from this year's annual conference of the National Union of Journalists which was held in a sleepy orange holiday resort, on the northern coast of Northern Ireland. The NUJ is a transnational union with branches in the Republic, the Six Counties, Paris and even Brussels. The annual conferences have changed almost out of recognition over the last seven years or so. A younger, militant layer of activists has emerged with a genuine concern about the proprietors' control of the press and broadcasting. The professional hacks who controlled the union for decades are rapidly being left behind.

I say this by way of introduction because I turned over the first few pages of Edward Thompson's book still uplifted by the militancy expressed during that conference. But reading Thompson had an immediate depressing effect. In part, this was because the essays republished in this volume, originally published at various times over the last decade, are concerned with the steady erosion of civil liberties and the emergence of a transformed and transforming state — a depressing subject in its own right.

This was not what hit me hardest on reading more of Thompson's superb polemical journalism. His introduction annoyed me and as I read through the decade of his essays I realised why, and why his pessimism has to be checked. One of the earliest essays is his much celebrated *Sir, Writing by Candlelight...* originally published at the time of the electricity power workers' dispute at the end of 1970 which is a wonderful lampoon against *The Times* letters page and all the values represented by their writers. The essay is full of humour, trade union solidarity and polemical wit.

But Thompson has changed just as much as the world he is writing about has changed. He has chosen to call his book *Writing by Candlelight* because he now finds himself, albeit on the other side and a socialist, in a rather similar position to those *Times* readers he so successfully lampooned ten years ago when the power workers pulled the plugs out. He, himself, conjures up the image of the book's title — sitting at his typewriter, alone with the lonely candle, an individualist to the end, taking on all the appalling iniquities of the state and its repression. Part of his text hits the mark, but much of it is out of touch with, ignorant of, and elitist towards

the work of others. It ignores the spread of socialist or at least, oppositional ideas among, for example, journalists and broadcasters, so that his call for resistance is without even a semblance of awareness of any agencies of change.

This is all in marked contrast to the analysis of both potential and of consciousness contained within Thompson's most important work, *The Making of the English Working Class*. This book which has inspired many, including me, to turn to the roots, to the rank and file, to discover the reality of class consciousness in action and the potentialities offered when socialist agitation works with the grain of every day experience.

His concerns have shifted since *The Making* was published. His most recent political essays have been almost exclusively concerned with the state, its legal system and our civil liberties. Taken separately his articles on the ABC trial, jury vetting, the extension of police powers, the operation of the secret services and the question of overt and covert censorship are all brave and more than lucid attacks on the powers that be. But taken together, the essays as a whole represent the makings of a worldview in which Thompson's previous dialectical insights on class conflict and class consciousness are no longer present. In places he does make a call for a new movement, but there is little more than a hint of who he is talking about. In his view:

'we are now approaching a point of crisis in which not fascism but a peculiarly British form of authoritarianism, working behind the back of the democratic process, is now bringing national life within its general enclosure. The closure is named 'consensus', and the media manufacture that.'

Thompson's thesis is not acceptable. During the post-war boom the state rarely used its authoritarian powers. That was the period of suffocating consensus which socialists found almost impenetrable. The crisis of authoritarianism now is inextricably linked to the world economic crisis, within which each nation state is seeking to impose its own solutions. How far any particular state is able to impose more or less draconian solutions depends on the strength and level of combativity of the working class. In Britain the state offensive is but one part of the employers' offensive, and the question of how we collectively build working class resistance is the central one for all socialists. But Thompson hardly even touches on this. His state does not appear to exist within the economic order nor are there driving forces which explain why the

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state is moving as he describes it.

As a consequence, Thompson has little or no solution to offer us. We might do as he did and wander back into the Labour Party, but surely his party is part of the problem, not part of the solution. Much of the nastier dimensions of the state today were set in motion by his party, and even if Benn succeeds in building left Labour and winning the leadership, then we are talking of political ideas based on state socialism and state capitalism rather than the libertarian socialist politics that Thompson calls for.

His view that the media are a key element in the closure of democratic options suggests that in the last decade or so the media have grown significantly worse. Surely the media have been pretty appalling for a very long time. During the last few years the press, TV and radio have been no worse and no better than previously. Any small change in

fact runs against Thompson's argument because it has been the result of trade unionists in the media fighting back against the proprietors' rights to control. He adopts the call for 'at least one alternative daily newspaper' as part of a direct contestation with the media. This I find a rather substitutionist cop out. It suggests that the real problem is censorship and not consciousness. It also suggests that the ideas contained in such a paper would not be those of the labour movement's bureaucracy, the very people being approached to finance the project.

The cover of this book explains that 'the essays vary in style and give scope for the author's talent for satire and polemic as well as for measured political analysis.' Enjoy the satire and the polemic but take care with the political analysis.

Alastair Hatchett

Partition on the dissecting Table

Ireland: Divided Nation, Divided Class
ed. B. Purdie & A. Morgan
Ink Links, London, 1980, £3.95 p.b.

The territorial division of Ireland and the double division of the working class — between Catholic and Protestant workers in the North, and between workers North and South — are problems of immense complexity for the Irish left. How should they relate to the struggle for a British withdrawal from the North and the reunification of the country? How does, or could that struggle relate to overcoming the divisions in the working class? After ten years of near continuous warfare and with the Irish left weaker and more fragmented than when the present upheaval began, renewed consideration of these questions cannot but be worthwhile.

And so a book that brings together a collection of Marxist writings under the title *Divided Nation Divided Class*, should be a welcome addition to the scant literature. This book undoubtedly contains much food for thought, but overall it is disappointing. It is certainly not an introduction to key problems of the Irish struggle; it assumes a fairly detailed knowledge of the major theoretical debates and the conceptual tools used to handle them. In itself, that is not a cause of disappointment. But what it is, is the relatively narrow scope of perspectives offered, and the even more restricted range of strategic and tactical conclusions drawn. (The latter shortcoming is not unrelated to the fact that only three of the dozen authors are actively involved in political struggle.)

One theoretical division within the Irish left which is considered in this book is that between those who argue the necessity (and the possibility) for a 'democratic solution' within the confines of the Northern state as a precondition for socialism, and those who see the

road to socialism leading through the national liberation struggle for the destruction of the Northern state and the ending of partition.

The 'democratic solution' is advanced from two different positions: those who regard it as the 'first stage' towards national unity, itself a stage on the way to socialism (essentially the CP line, represented here by Hoffman); and those who regard it as a stage towards Six County socialism, rejecting national unity as both unnecessary and undesirable (a variant of the two nations theory, represented here by Bew, Patterson and Gibbon).

The argument presented by Hoffman fails completely to deal with the material basis of Protestant working class opposition to reform, and ends by asking the British state to abandon its repressive role and institute reforms that would allow a peaceful transition to Irish unity and socialism.

The argument for democratisation from Bew, Patterson and Gibbon is premised on the notion that the abolition of Stormont in 1972 meant the end of the Orange state — which they concede was unreformable. Direct rule from Britain has certainly curtailed the power of the Orange bourgeoisie, but to imagine that the Orange state has gone is to indulge in sheer fantasy. The RUC and UDR remain 98 per cent loyalist and better trained and equipped than ever before. The upper ranks of the civil service, who helped subvert Britain's only significant effort at reform, the Power Sharing Executive of 1974, remain unscathed. The judiciary, overwhelmingly Orange in background and sentiment, now enjoy powers never given them under the old Stormont set-up. The massive underrepresentation of Catholics in skilled or well paid employment has not altered and anti-Catholic discrimination continues.

The authors take the argument a step

further by arguing that socialists are wrong to advocate Irish unity. They dispute that Protestant workers constitute a labour aristocracy and that they cannot be won to progressive politics within the Northern state.

The latter point is crucial. The history of Unionism is not a history of an undifferentiated monolith. Protestant workers have shown an ability to fight on a class basis, and have at times united with Catholics to do so. What has prevented them going further and developing anti-imperialist politics has nothing to do with them constituting a 'separate nation'. It has a great deal to do with their material privileges guaranteed by the Orange state. But it also has much to do with the unacceptable nature of the united Ireland that awaited them if they abandoned Unionism.

How then can Protestant workers be won to an anti-partitionist position? Some Provos have argued that such a development is impossible and that Protestant workers will only be won to progressive politics when the Northern state has itself been smashed. This is so, they maintain, because the state (which is upheld by British might) guarantees the privileged position of Protestant workers by systematically discriminating against Catholics. The Protestants will therefore not join the fight to end British rule and destroy the 'Orange' state.

The same argument is implicit in much of the writing of Michael Farrell who has depicted the Protestant working class as a 'labour aristocracy'. It is an unfortunate feature of this book that Farrell's widely accepted perspective is not included in it, although Farrell himself is a contributor. Instead, Farrell has written a detailed historical account of the formation of the Ulster Special Constabulary in which he shows the direct and massive involvement of the British state in the creation of the sectarian institutions of the North.

But Farrell is also intent on showing how thorough-going structural reform in the North is impossible because sectarianism is woven into the very fabric of the state. It is only in passing that some hint of current strategy is given when Farrell mentions that the extent to which the Protestant masses have organised and armed to defend the state means that the Catholic 'minority' cannot overthrow the state unassisted.

Having virtually written off the Protestant working class as potential allies, Farrell looks South to the working class there. But the notion that the role of the Southern working class in the present upheaval should be one of supporting the struggle in the North, is quite inadequate.

A number of the contributors to this book have shown how the penetration of the Southern economy by international capitalism over the last twenty years has transformed the social and political scene there. The area can no longer be seen as a neo-colony of British imperialism; economic domination is shared among multinational

giants; the industrial working class has grown phenomenally; so have living standards, urban and rural; and the national question has been pushed to the margins of Southern politics.

There is a danger in carrying this line of argument too far: what happens in the North still has an impact on the South, and vice-versa. But it is increasingly obvious that efforts to mobilise Southern workers around the politics of 'Brits Out' are having minimal impact. That is not because they have abandoned the goal of Irish unity — as Bew, Patterson and Gibbon argue — but because the Northern struggle, as presently conducted, has little direct bearing on their own immediate needs and interests.

Drawing these strings together, it is clear that neither pursuit of the national liberation struggle nor reform of the Northern state as the first priority are the way to overcome the divisions of the working class within the North or between North and South. Neither can generate socialism.

The perspectives of our comrades in the Socialist Workers' Movement in Ireland, which are not represented in this collection, offer a way forward that avoids the pitfalls of both arguments outlined above.

'Workers in the 26 Counties and in Britain have a determining role in unravelling the complicated knot which is Northern Ireland politics. A withdrawal of British troops forced by the pressure of the working class movement in Britain, as well as by opposition in the Six Counties, would take from loyalism its most significant prop.

'The level of the struggles of British workers against unemployment, wage restraint and the "strong state", affects that of Northern Ireland workers. Where the links of solidarity are formed, those struggles can help undermine the ties of Protestant workers to loyalism and loyalist organisations. The workers of the South can, in their economic struggle and in their defence of democratic rights against the state and against the church, demonstrate to Northern Catholic workers an alternative to republicanism and nationalism. They can, too, begin to show Northern Protestant workers that those who are most consistently opposed to imperialism are also those most consistently opposed to capitalism, to sectarianism and to clerical domination of any kind. There are also possibilities for cooperation and contact in trade union and industrial spheres...

'The SWM has, in distinction from most tendencies on the fragmented Irish left, considered that the national question was one to be solved by a working class fighting for socialism — not one that could be solved at an earlier stage by different class forces.' (*International Socialism*, October 1976)

Mike Millotte

When the Ruhr was Red

The Ruhr and Revolution

Jurgen Tampke

Croom Helm, £11.50

The German revolution of 1918-20 is very much the unknown revolution to most socialists today. The great revolutionary upheavals of that period have been forgotten, buried beneath the memory of what happened after their defeat, from the apparent democracy of the Weimar Republic, through the barbarism of Nazism to the division of Germany.

Tampke's book is a welcome, if somewhat academic, contribution to the re-examination of the revolution. It looks in depth at what happened in 1918 and 1919 in the most industrially developed region of Germany, the Ruhr. The author shows in detail how the workers in the different towns and villages, with their differing political traditions, responded as the social democracy promised by the old Socialist Party, the SDP, turned sour and reactionary mercenary soldiers, the *Frei Korps*, were used by the socialist leaders to break strikes and destroy every element of workers' control.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the book is the author's conclusion. He is not a revolutionary and seems to regard the notion of socialist revolution as basically utopian. Yet he is forced by the facts to conclude that:

'The claim that "the prevailing goals were predominantly reformist and radical democratic" is not really supported. In the Ruhr the left radical groups which attempted to push the revolution "vehemently towards a complete change in the social

and political order" were not in a minority but had considerable support from the start... Even most of those parts which did not turn to radicalism immediately failed to do so not because of their opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat but because the local leadership gave the impression that parliamentary majority was the safest and speediest way to comprehensive social and economic change. When this proved an illusion, the full radical potential of the workforce was soon revealed... The German November revolution was perhaps more Marxist in character than it is recently given credit for.'

This is a useful counterblast to writers as divergent in other respects as Claudin and Barrington Moore, who have written off the German revolution because it did not succeed and used it to justify their claim that 'soviet style' revolution is not possible in the West.

The one regrettable thing about Tampke's book is that it deals only with 1918 and 1919, leaving untouched the great culmination of the revolutionary wave in the Ruhr: the response to the right wing Kapp Putsch of March 1920 that involved a general strike, a full blooded uprising and the creation of a Red Army of 60,000 to 100,000 members.

Given the price of the book and the limited range of events it covers, few people will be able to afford to buy it. But it is the sort of book which would be a welcome addition to your local library.

Chris Harman

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Giants and Dwarfs

The Russian Enigma

Ante Ciliga

Ink Links £5.95

This is an important book. Ante Ciliga was a Yugoslav communist who was in Russia between 1926 and 1935. Unlike the typical 'professional enthusiast' he went as a Marxist determined to know the revolution inside out. Here he records what he found and his groping attempts to explain it. As an orthodox Communist in 1927 he saw the destruction of the left opposition as 'an episode not a catastrophe'. Then he became more aware and joined the Trotskyist opposition until, convinced that they too did not understand, he developed a state capitalist position of his own. In trying to understand the *Russian Enigma* he determined to 'shrink from nothing'. This finally led him to see Lenin too as contributing to the rise of a bureaucracy which would stand the revolution on its head. This is a line of argument which readers of this magazine will be sympathetic to and might read Ciliga for this alone. But the book's significance goes beyond this.

It is simply the best easily available account of the degeneration of the revolution from below at the end of the twenties. At the top Ciliga 'expected to meet giants' but 'found dwarfs'. Digging deeper he saw

why. The whole party by the late twenties was dominated by careerism and bureaucracy. For the workers there was nothing but contempt which they returned in kind. A new class was emerging. By contrast the life of the mass of workers was wretched and it became worse in the thirties. For Ciliga it is all symbolised when a proud worker dies and his body is slung into a 'common pit'. On such countless pits a new ruling class had arisen.

Ciliga also brilliantly portrays the difficulty that the opposition had in explaining this. In the late twenties he was struck by its timidity, later its irrelevance. It was simply the left face of a bureaucracy which had no need of it. He makes it clear that it was no accident that four fifths of the left opposition went over to Stalin at precisely the time he was smashing and driving down the working class. The opposition lost sight of this completely—'by dint of admiring factory-chimneys, (it) no longer perceived living beings and the social relations existing between them'.

Trotsky must bear much of the blame for this. Whatever his significance outside Russia, his analysis had a truly catastrophic impact on the remnants of the opposition. His refusal to let go of the concept of a workers' state deprived his followers of a basis for serious opposition. Standing in the

wings they waited for the 'bureaucracy' to call them, unable to see that when the call did come it would be to destroy them. As for the working class? 'Trotsky never spoke of organising strikes, of inciting the workers to a fight against the bureaucracy in favour of the Trotskyist economic programme'.

From 1930 Ciliga saw Russia from its prison system. There he found a freedom which had long disappeared outside, an 'isle of liberty, lost in an ocean of slavery—or was it merely a madhouse?' Hounded and victimised by the GPU he fought to retain his sanity and integrity and finally to gain his freedom. With unshaken faith in the working class and no illusions about the extent of the counter-revolution that had occurred he kept going where so many others capitulated.

The 'Russian Enigma' is still with us. Ciliga helps us to both know it and to explain it. He is no Victor Serge, he knows neither the elation of the early days nor the tragic way in which the destruction of the Civil War blunted the edge of revolution. For an understanding of this we must go elsewhere. But for an appreciation of the 'filth and lies' of the later years and the necessity of 'taking an axe to the roots', as one Russian worker put it, there is no better guide. At £5.95 you will probably want to order this from your library. It is well worth doing this. *The Russian Enigma* is a six hundred page blockbuster which is not to be missed.

Mike Haynes

FILM REVIEWS

Coming down to Earth

Bad Timing

Directed by Nicholas Roeg

Nicholas Roeg, who was a cameraman before he became a director, has always been one for producing stunning images. I am thinking, for example, of the shot in *Don't Look Now* when Donald Sutherland is confronted with a premonition of his own funeral procession gliding silently through the canals of Venice. But up to now Roeg's films have always seemed empty and pretentious because the virtuoso style has never been used to convey a credible or even interesting plot.

Even *Performance*, based on the promising idea of a thuggish tough guy on the run who suddenly finds himself hiding out in a luxurious world of gentle but abundant sexuality, gets lost in its own imagery, and degenerates into confusing fantasy and faltering loose ends. It is worth remembering too that Roeg directed *The Man Who Fell to Earth* which should go down in history as the most tedious film ever made.

But *Bad Timing* is a different kettle of fish altogether. It is really a magnificent film. Roeg has finally found a basis for his powerful imagery.

Two Americans, Alex and Milena, played by Art Garfunkel and Teresa Russell, (who was Mo Dean in TV's *Blind Ambition*),

meet in contemporary Vienna and become lovers. The world they move in has an air of decadence only paralleled by Berlin in 1933 as we see it in *Cabaret*. The film begins with Milena's attempted suicide and works backwards to piece together and explore the couple's passionate relationship.

But the flashback technique is not used to give us the kind of straightforward snippets from the past we are used to. Nor is it used to deliberately mystify as in, say *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Instead the whole notion of chronology is abandoned and the scenes are dovetailed together to present the relationship as a fascinating and intriguing jig-saw puzzle.

In no way is the process designed to confuse, but as one scene is interleaved with the next we are led to ask new questions, and at the same time learn more about the couple and their disastrous relationship. The solid, minutely observed detail of the film acts as a hinge to lead us visually from one scene to another. This is film telling a story as only film can.

The relationship between Milena and Alex is one we can all relate to. They think and feel in the same contradictory ways we all think and feel under capitalism. Ultimately, the actions they take may be fairly extreme measures, but they are only the logical extensions of the way we all act. It

reminded me of what Alexandra Kollontai says in *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*:

"the idea of 'property' goes far beyond the boundaries of 'lawful marriage'. It makes itself felt as an inevitable ingredient of the most 'free' union of love. Contemporary lovers with all their respect for freedom are not satisfied by the knowledge of the physical faithfulness alone of the person they love. To be rid of the eternally present threat of loneliness, we 'launch an attack' on the emotions of the person we love with a cruelty and lack of delicacy that will not be understood by future generations. We demand to know every secret of this person's being . . . to look into the innermost corners of our partner's life."

Kollontai's words describe much of Alex's behaviour. He is constantly driven to possess Milena, to change her, to 'spy' into her past life, and finally, as the eccentric police inspector played by Harvey Keitel puts it, 'to take advantage of the love she is willing to give.' And Milena, whirling along on her chaotic and hedonistic course, is at least semi-conscious that to become what Alex wants, one way or another, will be fatal. Yet she is unable to wrench herself free.

The film may not offer a way out, but for its exploration of the tangled web of sexual relationships it is not to be missed.

Jane Ure Smith

Directed against the Monolith

Mirror

Director Tarkovsky

A woman runs across a deserted street somewhere in Russia. She is drenched to the skin by driving rain. She is alone and very afraid. She enters a printshop. As she strides through the works we catch a glimpse of a poster of President Kalinin. It is obviously the era of Stalin. A cupboard is opened and a set of proofs are snatched from a shelf and read. They've been printing all night so if there is a mistake it has gone through already. Has she made the same typographical error that had at a stroke sent the whole section of the Pravda printing staff to the Gulag?

To her relief she hasn't spelt Stalin 'Sralin' shitting man. This is how Tarkovsky, of *Solaris*, gives us a vivid picture of the fear that workers lived under in Russia in his latest film to reach the west. *Mirror*.

The film is very different to other films in that there is no narrative and the past and the present continually intertwine.

Newsreels of major events in Russian history follow dream sequences: very clear specific incidents like the print shop follow obscure childhood memories of the director.

The film at one level is an autobiography of the director, who comes from a well-off literary family. At another level it is an attempt to examine Russian history as it effects the mind of an artist. But always the present is seen as a reflection of the past, hence the title, *Mirror*.

From the film it would appear that the greatest influences in his life have been the mystical Russian form of Christianity (there are huge chunks of his father's deeply religious poetry), the Russian countryside, the relationship with his mother and wife and the fear of living in Stalinist Russia.

It is certainly not clear at least not from one viewing where he stands politically. He's obviously anti-Stalin, but with so many religious references, it is possible that he is a religious dissident. It is difficult to get any information about him. In Russia he is officially frowned on and his films are given limited distribution in small cinemas - exactly the same sort of distribution the film has in this country in fact.

Film hacks both in Russia and in the west admire his technique and style but criticise him for being obscure.

I did not understand many things that the director was trying to say. If artists are obscure because they are only trying to communicate with an elite then obviously a socialist should criticise them. However, if an artist is trying to communicate something of relevance to the class struggle in a new and artistically revolutionary way, then it may be difficult to understand simply because it is unfamiliar.

But of course there could be other reasons for the film's obscurity, namely the subject matter that Tarkovsky is dealing with. As

one critic said: 'What else can an artist do in a monolithic party society (read state capitalism) where drawing conclusions about the epoch's tragic contradictions (ie Stalinism) is not possible.'

See the film then for its outstanding

photography of the Russian countryside; for its technical brilliance; for the newsreels of key events in Russian history. See it to get some idea of the fear that Russian workers lived with under Stalin and since.

Roger Green



Dustin Hoffman and six-year-old Justin Henry in *Kramer v Kramer*

Divorce on £16,000 a year

Kramer v. Kramer

directed by Robert Benton

Kramer v. Kramer deals with the subject of a man fighting for the custody of his small son, after his wife leaves him and the boy. Even if you have been in the same position as the "hero", Dustin Hoffman, and not many men get as far as that, you may have the same misgivings as I had on seeing the film. I found it hard to relate the experiences of a Madison Avenue advertising executive earning £16,000 a year to those that I experienced when I was left in a similar position with two boys to bring up, or that any other working man or woman has to face bringing up children alone for whatever reason.

In this film there is no mention of the most important problems facing one parent families: money, or the need to get maintenance from the other partner for the children. Maybe on Kramer's high salary, the bitterness which usually surrounds this issue doesn't occur, and when maintenance was mentioned for the child, it was £50 a week, which is more than most working-class one-parent families, and many two-parent families, have to live on. The child always looks clean and tidy, but you never see dad giving him a bath, or washing and ironing his clothes, all the tedious domestic tasks which have to be done daily.

But there are other more important omissions from this film. The whole question of why the courts and judges in America and Britain are so adamant that the best people to look after small children are mothers and not fathers. In Britain, in February 1978, in the case of *M. against M.*, the Judge said "However admirable a father may be he could not perform the functions which a mother performs *by nature*." (my underlining).

Who are the people in Britain making decisions about custody of a child? In the

Family Division of the High Court approximately 95 per cent of the judges are men, but whether they are men or women, they have all the same class background: prep school, public school, and university. This leaves them with practically no experience of what our society presently considers to be a normal family background. Yet they sit in judgement on factory workers, hospital workers and so on, knowing nothing about their problems, and caring even less. This film does nothing to enlighten them. If you came to Britain from Mars and had to pick the very people who should not sit in judgement on families, it would be these judges.

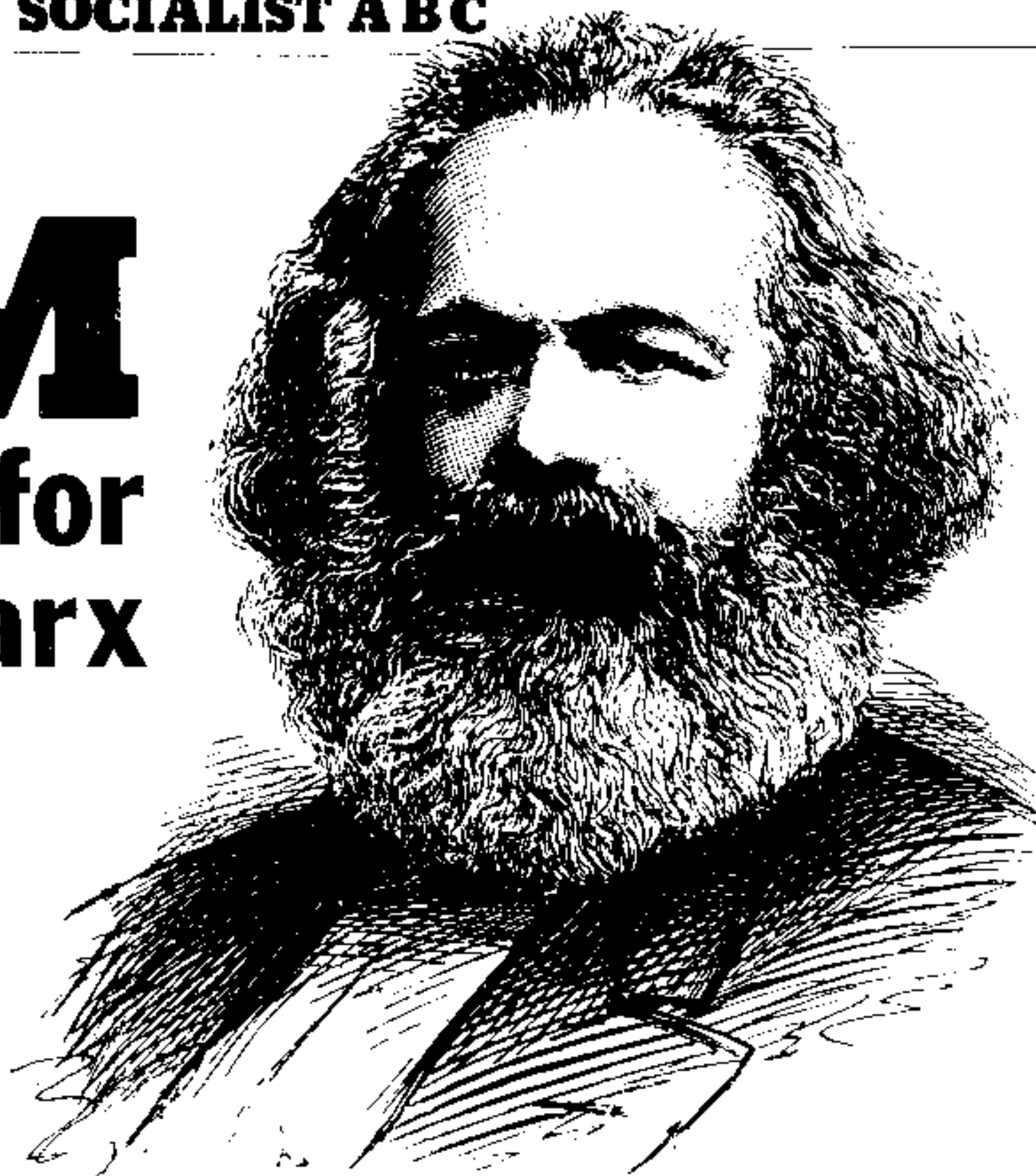
In nearly every walk of life in this country, women are treated unequally, until you enter the Family Courts, and the whole process is reversed. This happens because High Court judges see a woman's place as in the kitchen, and the man's in the factory, and therefore the one best fitted to rear the children is the mother. The image you get in the Fairy Liquid adverts, and so on. It's rather ironic that Mr Kramer was one of the victims of his own creations in advertising.

The film did touch on, but not very deeply, the real tragedies of such break-ups, the kids who are hurt, confused and unhappy, as they become part of the battle between father and mother. It did not suggest a way in which this could be resolved.

The ending I'll keep to myself, but I'm still trying to relate it to reality as I know it. This film got five Oscars. If Garnett and Loach had made it it would probably have got none. But taking the subject matter and going on their past record, they would have made ten times better film of it. To any parents bringing up kids alone, who get time to read this review, don't waste your time queuing to see it. Wait until they show it on the Telly, and if it clashes with a repeat of *Law and Order*, watch *Law and Order*.

Michael Fenn

M is for Marx



'Philosophers have interpreted the world in many ways, the point is to change it.' One person who has been fighting to change the world for over 70 years, since his first involvement in the working class movement as a teenager, is Harry McShane. Harry was a member of the British Socialist Party during the First World War, a close collaborator of the famous Scottish revolutionary John Maclean, an early

member of the Communist Party, organiser together with Wal Hannington of the hunger marches of the 1920s and 1930s. Daily Worker correspondent in Glasgow until he broke with Stalinism after the suppression of the East German rising in 1953. He is still an activist, a member of Glasgow trades council, an indefatigable speaker and propagandist. He writes on Marxism as he sees it.

It is now close on a hundred years since the death of Marx. Our opponents consider it more necessary than ever before to shy away from intelligent argument on the conclusions contained in his works. The occasional remark of a hostile character that escapes from the lips of Mrs Thatcher is in line with the bankruptcy of thought that prevails among the top leaders who would have us believe that they know the road to prosperity. They are prisoners of the capitalist order of society which, despite their hopeless predicament, they seek to preserve. It is easy to see why Mrs Thatcher gives priority to law and order.

Marxists belong to the one school of thought that points to a future for mankind. Marx wrote more about political economy than on any other subject, but it would be a serious mistake to conclude that he had a plan for the reconstruction of society. The aims of the bourgeois politicians, even if they could be achieved, are puny and dismal when compared to the vision of Marx on the future of man. The new society would be the result of creative labour by man himself freed from the restriction of human development imposed by capitalism.

When I was young we had access only to volume one of *Capital*. Concentration was centered on the early chapters of that work. It was there Marx brought out the fact that

capitalism and all that sprang from it was based on the exploitation of labour. This was the most important discovery of Marx in the field of economics. It gave meaning to all that occurred within the system and had bearing on the thoughts and aspirations of the workers. It brings relevance to our present day struggles.

Marx attached great importance to the shorter working week as being connected with the struggle for freedom. Technological advance added to the efficiency of capital without bringing any benefit to the worker. That problem is still with us and stands as a greater threat to the workers than ever before. The need for living labour has not been eliminated but the army of unemployed continues to grow. That fact alone justified the call for a shorter working day. Marx, however, tied it up with the struggle for human emancipation.

He talked about the 'realm of necessity' and the 'realm of freedom'. He wanted to reduce the time spent producing necessities by making full use of the powers of production so that more time would be available for human development. We know nothing about the potentialities of man. Marx talked about 'wealth measured, not by labour, but by leisure'. That would be making real use of the technical development we boast about.

Mention is made of the fact that Marx had no plan for the new society. There can be no new society until capitalism is destroyed. Marx found within the existing social order the force to carry out that task. The real victims of capitalism are the workers. It is impossible for them to share the dream of perpetuating the system. They can see top politicians arguing about the kind of cuts they should impose on the people. Capitalism has nothing but frustration to offer the workers. Marx saw the proletariat as the creators of the new society. He based himself on initiative from below. This was in line with his concept of dialectics.

Marx was dead 34 years when the Russian Revolution took place, but he was alive at the time of the Paris Commune. There was no plan for what the masses did. He was full of praise for the initiative of the masses. He commented on mistakes which he thought they made. He said they should have marched on Versailles. No less than 25,000 men and women were slaughtered by government troops. Some socialist writers dealt with it in later years. None of them saw it in the same light as Marx. I possess an old pamphlet by James Leatham, a socialist journalist. He praised the Communards for their heroism but argued that struggles of that kind were no longer necessary.

Lenin did not forget the lessons of the the Commune. He called for all power to the Soviets. In his battle with Kautsky over the Russian Revolution he drew on what Marx wrote about the Paris Commune. The point is that both Marx and Lenin placed their faith in the masses. Marx tore capitalism to bits but he did not consider that it was his job to plan for the future. He did see beyond power in the hands of the workers and predicted the 'withering away' of the proletarian state.

The point made by Marx on 'the withering away of the state' is taken from his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, written in 1875. It contains the same vision expressed in the Manuscript written in 1844 when Marx said, 'Communism is the immediate necessity but not the final goal of man.' This is important but it gives priority to the immediate struggle. Our philosophy is superior to that of our opponents but it entails struggle against every form of oppression.

Instead of being frightened by technology we must make it serve our needs so that all can give service to each, according to his ability and share the benefits. Political and trade union leaders seek to divide the workers and divert them away from the struggle against capitalism. The abolition of the House of Lords is long overdue but it will not have the slightest effect on the real aims of the working class. No programme prepared by the parliamentarians can meet our needs. It we must have plans for the future they must come from below. Mankind can be saved from the downward trend of modern society by revolutionary struggle.