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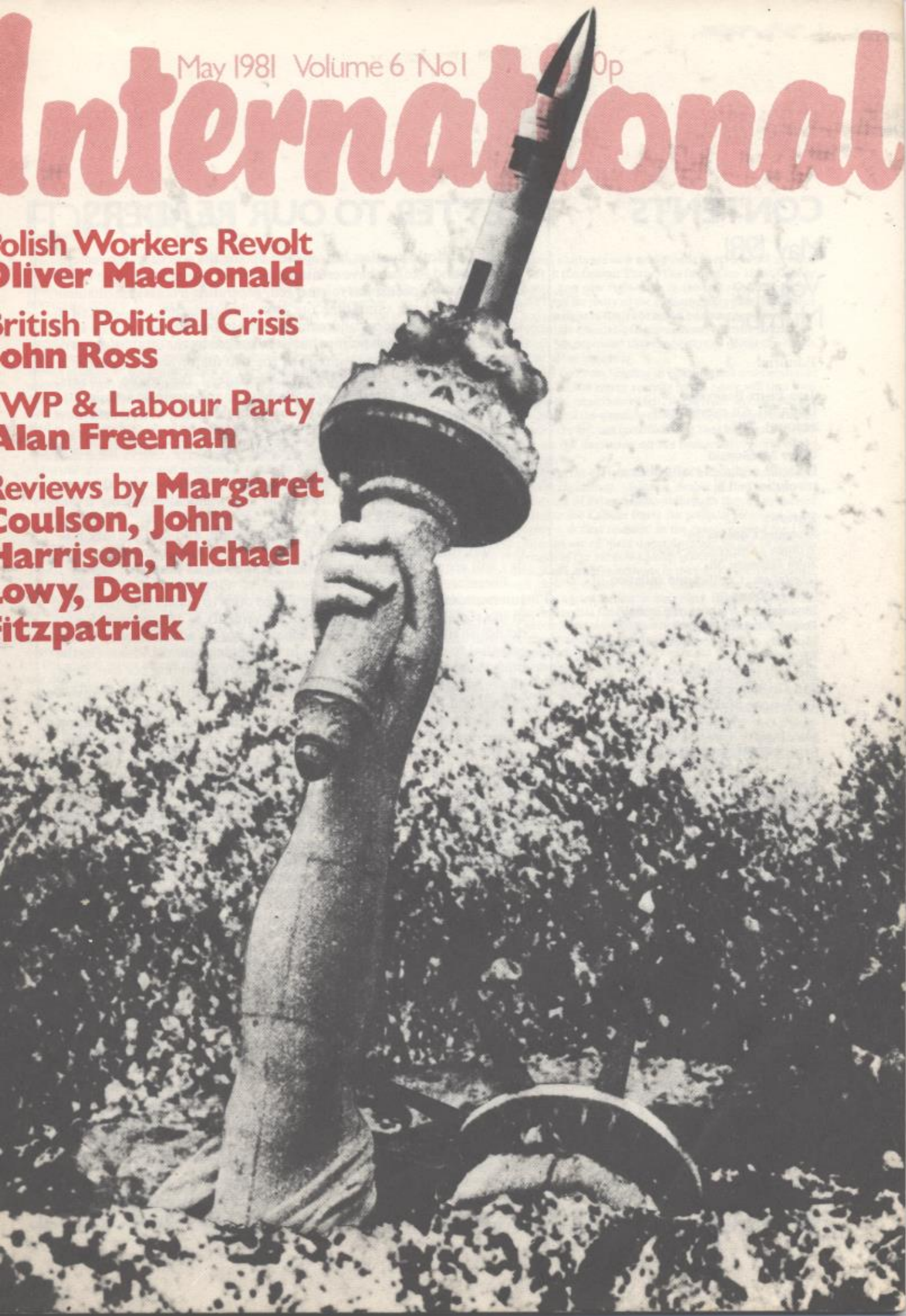
# International

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**Oliver MacDonald**

**British Political Crisis**  
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**WP & Labour Party**  
**Alan Freeman**

Reviews by **Margaret**  
**Coulson, John**  
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# LETTER TO OUR READERS

A new political situation has opened up for the workers' movement. Thatcher and Reagan have created a new cold war alliance. The threat of a nuclear holocaust has re-emerged, generating a mass disarmament movement. At the same time the economic recession has ushered in levels of unemployment undreamt of for almost fifty years. The traditional shape of British politics has been shaken by the establishment of a new centre party and the crises of the two major political parties.

These profound developments have forced the whole workers' movement to look afresh at overall political and strategic solutions to the problems it confronts. There has been a flowering of new reformist schemes and theories based on the Alternative Economic Strategy, fuelled by the successes of the Labour left in the battle for party democracy.

Revolutionaries have not been so quick to grapple with this new political situation and the theoretical and political problems it has created. **INTERNATIONAL** does not believe that theoretical 'blueprints' exist to answer every new question, and that the task now is simply to implement them. To build a mass revolutionary party today will require a profound theoretical, as well as practical, effort.

Therefore, while we are a journal of supporters of the Fourth International in Britain our pages will be open to debate with comrades in the socialist movement and other movements of the oppressed who do not share our views. Such a debate is not an added luxury — it is essential to making real progress in developing Marxist ideas. On the other hand we will not shrink from vigorously defending our own ideas and presenting the views of the Fourth International on major events in Britain and internationally.

It is in this spirit that we undertake the more consistent publication of our journal and apologise to subscribers for our previous irregularity. From this issue **INTERNATIONAL** is changing in form and content. It will appear more frequently (six times a year) and combine shorter articles of political analysis and polemic with the longer theoretical articles which **INTERNATIONAL** has always carried. The central project of the journal remains the development of a revolutionary socialist programme and strategy for Britain.

Our next two issues will appear in July and September. In the autumn we hope to further expand the journal, particularly its international coverage. Articles already under preparation for future issues include:

- **Tariq Ali**, The monarchy
  - **Julian Atkinson**, History of Labour's youth movements
  - **Peter Fuller**, Crisis of British art
  - **John Harrison** discusses the economic programme of the next Labour government
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  - **Ernest Mandel** reviews Harrison and Glyn's *British Economic Disaster*
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- Debates, reviews, and much more.

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# EDITORIAL

The map of British politics is changing very fast. Those who underplay the significance of such events as the shift to the left in the Labour Party, the formation of the Social Democratic Party, and the rumbling internecine strife in the Tory Party risk losing their way altogether.

Nowhere has this increased pace of events been more evident than in the Labour Party. The results of the four Labour conferences held since Thatcher won office has exceeded the wildest expectations of those on the left of the party who associated themselves with Tony Benn's critique of the performance of the Callaghan/Wilson governments. The right of constituency parties to reselect their parliamentary candidates has been won. The stranglehold of the parliamentary party over the election of the leader has been broken. If the left did not succeed in its other main objective — the drawing up of the final election manifesto by the National Executive Committee — then it advanced with giant strides on policy at the 1980 Blackpool conference, winning unilateral disarmament and withdrawal from the EEC, policies completely unacceptable to the British ruling class as the platform for a future Labour government.

Speculation on the outcome of the next election, particularly within the ranks of the Tories, has an astonishingly urgent tone for a government not two years into its five year term of office. But the events of 1981, particularly the victory of the miners and the almost universally hostile reaction to the March budget has put an earlier election on the agenda. The prospect of the Labour Party winning such an election fills ruling class circles with dismay. It would be a government that would dither and dabble, irritating both the ruling class and the working class, opening up the way to further inner party divisions and perhaps a lurch to the left in mid-office. Such a prospect explains the extraordinary reaction to Tony Benn by the media.

The serious intent behind the hysterical reaction is to deny Labour the chance to form such a government. The Social Democratic grouping within the Labour Party last year was formed to threaten a split in the party unless the policy drift to the left was halted. This rubber Damocles sword was treated contemptuously by the party rank and file. The split was carried through. The function of the grouping then became and still remains to deprive the Labour Party of the votes necessary to win the next election. However the unpopularity of the Tories means that such a tactic can cut both ways. The defection of Christopher Brocklebank-Fowler in the House of Commons was a weak reflection of the findings of opinion polls which show the Social Democratic Party gnawing into Tory support, often proportionately more so than into Labour's votes.

Ruling class opinion does not yet seem ready for whole-sale reform of the two-party system. When the *Economist* drew up a programme for 'the pinks', as it refers to the Social Democrats, it pointedly omitted any reference to the introduction of proportional representation. There is no doubt that such a proposal would meet with the most ferocious opposition from Tory politicians as it would spell the end of the alliance between big business and the frenzied middle class base represented by Thatcher in the ranks of the Tory party. The decimation of the Tory party is a high price to pay, even for permanently excluding Labour from government.

There are many options that can be exercised before such reforms become urgent including dumping Thatcher from the leadership of the Tory Party and the holding of referenda as a device to extricate the government from a deep conflict with the unions. At the same time

serious and sustained efforts are now being made to reverse the trend of victories for the left in the Labour Party. The formation of the Labour Solidarity Campaign as a new right-wing in the party, now including within its ranks the large majority of the parliamentary party in alliance with the centre and the right in the trade union bureaucracy, heralds the advent of a bureaucratic counter-offensive. Benn will not be the only target. Michael Foot has promised that supporters of *Militant* will also be in the firing line in the next year.

However the left is far from helpless in resisting this counterattack. The vast bulk of the 80,000 recent recruits to the party will find their way into the camp of the constituency left. In the trade unions the more discussion there is around the question of the method of selection of the party leader the more the left can consolidate its base amongst the rank and file and start on the discussion on the democratic reform of the trade unions themselves.

The shift to the left in the party is the result of a long process tied into the decline of British capitalism. Militants unable to find answers for the problems of defence of living standards through factory by factory struggle are looking to the Labour Party for political solutions to the crisis. This tendency was first revealed in the events around the UCS work-in in the first on-set of mass unemployment in the 1970s and, despite the experience of the 1974-79 Labour governments, has deepened since that time. Rank and file activists in the party have increasingly realised through their struggles that the mobilisation of the whole labour movement in united action is necessary to sweep away the Tories. They also realise that the battle in the unions over the questions at issue in the Labour Party will decide whether the gains of the left are to be defended and extended or eventually lost.

The implications of these developments have not been acted upon by most of the organisations to the left of the Labour Party. The Communist Party, only too well aware of the implications of the formation of the Social Democrats for its own organisation, has nevertheless only been able to respond to the advance of the left in the Labour Party with a feeble discussion around whether they should renew their traditional policy of requesting affiliation to the Labour Party. This is a serious position but in the hands of the Communist Party leadership it has become an aspirin against the ever-increasing flow of members from the CP into the Labour Party.

There is no doubt that the existence of a strong unified far left organisation could have had a profoundly positive role in influencing developments inside the Labour Party. However, both fighting for such a unified organisation and in relating to the battles in the Labour Party, the Socialist Workers Party has shown a depressing inability to act. Whatever the criticisms that we have made of the SWP in the past, failing to relate to new openings as they arise has not been one of them.

For our part we will continue to insist on the importance of these events and the necessity of building a left wing based on policies of class struggle both in the unions and in the Labour Party. The objectives of that left wing must be to fight for the greatest possible unity in action between the trade unions and the Labour Party to throw out the Tory government. In addition the fight for socialist policies as an answer to the crisis must be taken into the heart of the Labour Party — the fight to commit the next Labour government to socialist policies.

The conditions for revolutionary socialists influencing developments in British politics are better than at any time since the early seventies. The time must be seized.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Jean-Pierre Beauvais travels widely in Latin America and writes regularly for the French weekly paper *Rouge*.

Margaret Coulson has been active in women's liberation for many years.

Alan Freeman is a regular contributor to *Socialist Challenge* and is also involved in the Conference of Socialist Economists. He is now working on a book about Tony Benn.

Denny Fitzpatrick is a militant in the Post Office Engineering Union, and a member of the editorial board of *Women in Action*.

John Harrison is the author of *Marxist Economics for Socialists* and, with Andrew Glyn, of *The British Economic Disaster*.

Peter Kennard is a leading political photomontagist in Britain. His most recent work has been for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Michael Löwy has published many articles

and books in France. His work *Georg Lukacs — From Romanticism to Bolshevism* was published last year in English.

Oliver MacDonald is the editor of *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*.

John Ross is a leading member of the Fourth International.

Ric Sissons is a member of International's editorial collective. With Peter Kennard he has produced a touring exhibition and a pamphlet entitled *No Nuclear Weapons*.

# International Features

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## CUBA SI! AN EYE- WITNESS ACCOUNT

BY JEAN-PIERRE BEAUVAIS

ONE of the first statements of the new Reagan administration in America was that if Cuba continued to support the revolution in Central America they would pay a heavy price. All eyes are again turning to Cuba. But what is life like in Havana? Last December Jean-Pierre Beauvais visited Cuba for *Rouge*, the weekly paper of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire in France. The following account is edited from the series of articles he wrote. It is also a contribution to the discussion going on within the Fourth International about Cuba.

INTERNACIONALISMO! Reminders of this 'sacred duty' are everywhere on the eve of the second congress of the Cuban Communist Party and the 22nd anniversary of the revolution. One theme is prominent above all others: militant solidarity with Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala. One slogan is repeated over and over again: 'Without internationalism there would be no revolution!'

This morning, at the bottom of its international page, the CP daily *Granma* prints a Tass report about the imperialist con-



spiracy against Poland...

Roberto is not a 'vanguard worker'. Aged 54, he has spent his whole life in the Escambray, a mountainous region among the most isolated and backward in the whole island. He is a small farmer, growing coffee. In a chance meeting he tells us about his children. It is a real tale of the revolution: 'Three children, three internationalists. One is an officer and has been fighting the imperialists for 2½ years in Angola; another is an "internationalist doctor" in Ethiopia; the third is an "internationalist teacher" in Nicaragua, on the coast...'

This peasant talks about internationalism as the most beautiful thing the revolution has taught his children.

For the Cuban masses the revolution can only be internationalist. Sometimes this carries serious political risks. Thus the Cuban leadership has renounced the normalisation of relations with the USA in order to aid the consolidation and extension of the Central American revolution. As Castro says, such victories would be 'the best possible assistance' for Cuba.

But here too lie some of the most significant contradictions and limits of the Cuban revolution and its leadership. In the name of internationalism, and at the cost of huge sacrifices, more than 100,000 soldiers and officers have gone to Africa in successive waves. They successfully pushed back the imperialist invasion of Angola by the South African racists; but they also sided with the bourgeois Angolan government in putting a stop



Photo: Socialist Challenge

to the popular mobilisations in the urban centres. In Ethiopia they made a big contribution to the defence of the revolutionary process; but they also gave logistical support to the Ethiopian army in its repeated attempts to crush the Eritrean people's struggle for their independence.

Finally, faced with the Polish crisis, Castro's conception of internationalism leads him to side unambiguously with the Soviet bureaucracy. Evidently he would prefer not to see a Soviet intervention in Poland. But in advance he justifies the possibility in the name of the 'right of the socialist camp to defend its integrity against the attacks of imperialism.'

This empirical response is completely different from what Lenin saw as the essence of internationalism: 'The conscious will to organise the common action of the proletariat in different countries for its emancipation.' The Communist International was the concretisation of this conscious will and the instrument of this common action.

The practice of the Cuban leadership is fundamentally the product of its experience as a national leadership. While the revolution has survived thanks to the continuous mobilisation of the masses, it is also dependent on massive aid from the Soviet Union and its allies. Standing in the front line of the struggle against imperialism, the Castro leadership analyses the world situation from the point of view of a confrontation between two basic camps: imperialism and the socialist camp.

The international theses of the Cuban CP say that, 'unity of action is necessary among the three great currents of our epoch: the world socialist system, the international workers' movement, and the national liberation movement. To undermine the unity within any of these three great currents, and the unity among them, for whatever reason, is objectively to aid imperialism.'

Thus, by tying the interests of the world proletariat and the oppressed peoples to the interests of a supposedly homogeneous 'socialist camp', the conclusion is to subordinate the interests of the working class to those of the bureaucracies in power in the workers' states — to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, when it comes down to it.

There is a total contradiction between an internationalist policy of extending the revolution in Central America and a systematic defence of the policy and interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. Such a contradiction by its very nature can only be temporary. How it will be resolved depends not only on such factors as the advance or defeat of the Latin American revolution, but also on the equally contradictory internal dynamics of the Cuban revolution.

**MIDNIGHT ...** The 'report-back' meeting of the delegate to the municipal organ of popular power in the Boyeros suburb of Havana started more than three hours ago. About 200 people have come, as they do every three months. It is a lively meeting: the chair frequently has to call the participants to order. On the wall are a picture of Che Guevara and two banners: 'The right of recall: a basic aspect of proletarian democracy'; and 'The delegate is not your leader, you elected him (sic), you can recall him'.

Apart from the delegate's initial report - on the activity of the municipal popular assembly and his activity as representative of the constituency — the matters raised have a strictly local character. But they are also those which most affect the daily lives of the participants.

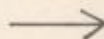
As everyone leaves, the delegate, Emilio, seems satisfied: 'Between this meeting and last week's (they are repeated to encourage greater participation) nearly 75 per cent of the voters have attended. The problems posed are real; the solutions put forward are constructive. It's now up to me to ensure that they are directly put into practice or discussed in the municipal assembly.'

The 174 municipal assemblies in the island are the basic structures of 'popular power'. Charged with applying the laws, it is up to them to organise and regulate all aspects of economic and social administration at the municipal level. This reflects the desire for major decentralisation after the hypercentralism — what they call 'centralised bureaucratism' in Havana — which prevailed in the first fifteen years of the revolution.

These assemblies are composed of delegates (30 to 200) who, like Emilio, each represent a constituency with an average of 500 to 600 electors. The constituencies are divided into zones (varying from two to eight) for the purpose of nominating candidates. Each zone has to make a nomination from among its ranks, the decisive criteria being the candidate's individual record and life history.

The candidates from the different zones make up the list at the constituency level. The delegate is elected after an 'election campaign' (also centred on their personal record) in a vote which goes to a second round if there is no absolute majority in the first round. Unless assigned exceptional tasks, the delegates undertake their activity — which is unpaid — outside working hours.

The reality of popular power must be understood in relation to the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). More than twenty years after they were created to mobilise the



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people against imperialist attack, the CDRs with their five million members (more than 80 per cent of the population between 14 and 65) are still the basic mass organisation in Cuba. Their social and 'vigilance' activities, their regular meetings for education and political discussion, mean that they structure and mobilise the masses street by street.

In Cuba we are not talking about passive 'voters' but 'citizens organised in the CDR' who put forward and elect candidates, discuss their activities or ... recall them. The right of recall, for instance, which has been exercised several hundred times since popular power was set up, could not happen without the organisation of the CDRs.

Regionally and nationally, however, it is a different question. For these assemblies the only voters are the municipal delegates. Those nominated are not necessarily drawn from the municipal organs which elect and are supposedly represented by them. A significant proportion (though still a minority) are directly nominated for election by the central apparatus of the party and the state, in the name of ensuring the necessary 'competence'.

In these circumstances the report-backs, the control over their activity, the nomination process and the possibility of recall are very largely formal and outside any real control by the masses.

So while the possibility of direct manipulation by the party apparatus is limited, it nevertheless retains the effective initiative in such elections. This is reinforced by the criteria which determine the choice of candidates at all levels: personal record, devotion to the revolutionary cause, and never any political consideration.

Locally, in the constituency and municipal assembly, the moral criterion of devotion to the revolution naturally seems necessary and sufficient to the voters. It basically corresponds to the tasks at this level.

But regionally, and above all at the national level, a good personal record and devotion to the revolution, while of some significance, is relatively meaningless in the absence of other political criteria. It becomes easy — and very common — to confuse devotion to the revolution with devotion to the apparatus and to the leadership; to confuse devotion with unquestioning obedience. While Fidel Castro has denounced this on several occasions, it appears to be a necessary quality for members of the provincial and national assemblies, since their role consists of putting into legal form and registering the decisions of the country's real leadership: the political bureau and secretariat of the party.

The reason why 'popular power' lacks any substance outside the municipalities and their constituencies lies in the Cuban leadership's paternalistic conception of its relationship with the masses. This leads it to want to remove inefficiency and waste — typical products of the choices imposed on the masses from above — while opting against a system of socialist democracy where the choices would be made by the producers themselves through the mechanisms of a real workers' power. Such a system is incompatible with the present single party regime and the fact that different currents of thought cannot express themselves inside the party.

In spite of all its positive aspects for the Cuban masses, it would therefore be wrong to see 'popular power' as the embryo of a real workers' power. Twenty-two years after the victory of the revolution, it is above all the institutional form of a relationship which is unique — at this level and over such a long period — between the leadership of a revolution and the masses.

'WHAT IS most amazing? Not to see any children in the streets during school hours...' The man stops short as if surprised,

almost shocked by his reply.

A business lawyer in the Colombian capital Bogota, a conservative and anti-communist politician, he finds himself in Cuba against his will. A passenger on a hijacked Colombian plane, he is touring the city while waiting to return to his country.

Perhaps, for the first time in his life, does he give a thought to the tens and hundreds of thousands of famished waifs wandering through Colombian towns in search of food and shelter?

Does he recall one of his many speeches on 'Colombia, land of freedom' and 'Cuba, island of the Gulag'?

The content of the US-organised and financed propaganda campaign against Castroism, which for 22 years has flooded the media of Latin America, melts away at the first contact with reality.

There are no children hanging about in the streets of Havana because the revolution wiped out illiteracy (which affected about 50 per cent of the population before 1959), trained teachers and lecturers on a massive scale, and built schools and colleges. This year more than one Cuban in three is receiving an education which, from kindergarten to university, as well as numerous adult education courses, is entirely free — including materials, books, transport and often even food.

The achievements in health are just as remarkable, if not more so. In many respects the number of units and medical personnel exceeds the average in France: 135 doctors per 100,000 inhabitants in France, 159 in Cuba, for example. There has been a drastic reduction in infant mortality, and average life expectancy now equals that in the most economically 'developed' countries: 74½ years for women and 71½ for men.

A banner we saw hoisted to the roof of a block of flats under construction in Matanzas sums it up: 'The revolution is the extraordinary become commonplace...'

Of course, the decision to give systematic priority to collective consumption has led to sacrifices in the realm of individual consumption, given the lack of infrastructures, of resources, and the effects of the imperialist blockade.

A small minority of Cubans oppose this choice and the restrictions it involves. They are attracted to the United States, more by relatives' tales of 'affluence' than any ideological or political considerations. A young technician tells us: 'In Miami I would be working for myself and not for the state, not for other people. And I would be able to buy what I want. Here it's impossible.'

However, the wage levels, free social services, low-priced food products and basic services all give the Cuban working class the highest level of real resources in Latin America, in spite of restrictions and rationing. This is even truer for agricultural workers. Those who want to leave know this perfectly well, but they are obsessed with the USA.

In spite of the exceptionally unfavourable economic conditions (as an appendage of the United States, Cuba produced literally nothing but sugar and tobacco before 1959); in spite of the absence of energy sources and primary materials other than nickel; in spite of a 20-year blockade; in spite also of mistakes, Cuba demonstrates the superiority of a planned socialist economy, freed from imperialist exploitation and the logic of profit, in the struggle against economic underdevelopment and its terrible social effects.

Even so, it is the economy which remains the weak point of the Cuban revolution. Bureaucratic methods of management have prevented a rise in the masses' consciousness in the economic sphere similar to that on the more immediately political level. Hence the phenomena of absenteeism, waste, repeated hold-ups in supply and, more generally, a very low productivity of labour.

For some years now, the Cuban leadership have tried to

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remedy this through the gradual introduction of a series of 'reforms' in the way the economy is directed and managed. These involve increased autonomy for individual plants; a strengthening of managerial authority; and a generalised system of production norms. The plant's profitability has become a key criterion, and is the source of a system of bonuses on top of the basic wage.

Systematically applied, these reforms could in the short term produce some improvements in the functioning of the economy. But they still do not amount to anything more than a series of technical improvements within the same bureaucratic framework. Furthermore, they will hardly contribute much to raising the 'economic consciousness' of the masses. This can only come through real control over economic management, combined with freedom of political discussion over the basic choices to be made. Open debate inside and outside the Communist Party is the decisive question here, just as it is in relation to 'popular power'.

If this does not happen, these reforms could in future have serious repercussions at the social level: producing significant inequality inside the working class and an increase in existing privileges. This could markedly deepen and systematise the bureaucratic deformations which already exist.

BIG GAINS have already been made in the struggle against economic under-development and its social consequences. But two short decades of this struggle have to be set against centuries of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation. The development of the productive forces is still limited; the relative weight of the proletariat is still small, and its cultural traditions weak; and a scarcity of goods for consumption will mark Cuban society for a long time yet.

These are the objective factors underlying the tendency towards bureaucratisation of the Cuban party and state. This tendency finds its expression in an intermediate layer which, as a result of its position in the state apparatus (administration, army, economic apparatus), enjoys social privileges. These are the people denounced by Fidel Castro in his report to the second party congress: 'Some people ... have begun to show obvious signs of a gradual relaxation in the spirit of austerity, of getting soft, of a lack of urgency, of a taste for privilege, of bourgeoisification...'

This is still a limited phenomenon, however — the more so since the leading group in Cuba is the same one which led the revolution. The logic of some of its political decisions may favour this layer, but they are prompted above all by the immediate and long-term interests of the masses.

In Cuba there is no crystallised bureaucracy existing as a privileged social layer with its own interests opposed to those of the proletariat. Such a bureaucracy holds power in a 'bureaucratically degenerated' workers' state such as the Soviet Union. Power and privileges of this kind are the target of the Polish workers' mobilisations. It is hard to imagine the organisation of militias and the arming of the masses by those who massacred the workers in Elblag, Gdynia, Slupsk and Szczecin in 1970. Yet these are the measures being carried out today by the Castro leadership.

For all these reasons it is correct to talk of 'bureaucratic deformations' which are by no means doomed to become more profound.

The accumulated ties with the Soviet Union are a factor in this direction, however. There is often a tendency to reduce them to the purely economic level, but in fact they are consolidated at various other levels: political, scientific, cultural, sporting, technical, etc. And they are consolidated above all with this intermediate layer, which is the most susceptible to the values, methods and conceptions of the Soviet bureaucracy.

This influence has its most serious potential impact in the area of education: already the social sciences, philosophy, economics, and 'Marxism-Leninism' are taught to entire generations of Cuban pupils and students on the basis of Soviet or Soviet-inspired textbooks.

Castro's denunciation of 'bureaucratism' at the second party congress shows that the Cuban leadership understand the importance of this problem for the future of the revolution. But essentially they see it in terms of individual attitudes and behaviour, not as a social phenomenon.

The struggle against tendencies towards bureaucratisation cannot be separated from the struggle to strengthen and defend the revolution. It cannot be conducted effectively on the basis of the Cuban leadership's paternalistic attitude towards the masses. It requires mass mobilisations for real workers' power which, starting with the extension and transformation of the existing structures of popular power, would guarantee the democratic management of the plan; the effective participation of the masses in all areas of decision-making, and not just at the local level.

That requires the prior recognition and organisation of freedom of expression and organisation inside and outside the Cuban CP.

Such a 'democratic reorganisation' would considerably advance the building of a socialist society. Drawing its strength from the mobilisation of the Cuban masses, but basing itself also on the revolutionary developments in other Latin American countries, it would in turn amount to a new and decisive contribution by the Cuban revolutionaries to the liberation of the continent. It would strengthen them against all their enemies as well as their false friends.

The real struggle for the defence of the Cuban revolution, a permanent duty for revolutionary Marxists, today means demanding such a reorganisation. Cuba si!...

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# International Features

## POLAND: A GLIMPSE AT POLITICAL REVOLUTION

BY OLIVER MACDONALD

Ten million workers organised in independent trade unions in a 'communist' state seemed unthinkable as recently as last summer when the Polish strike wave against meat prices began. Now the labour movement internationally is locked in a debate on the possible outcome: Soviet intervention, liberalisation, or real workers' power? Oliver Macdonald, editor of *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* examines the prospects for political revolution in Poland.

The present Polish crisis like earlier political upheavals in Eastern Europe poses one central problem: how far, if at all, can the political system be democratised? The answer to this question can only be found through a thorough examination of the political system in Eastern Europe. For socialists the roots of any political system are not to be found in the 'dominant values' of society or its 'political culture' but in the character of its economy and its socio-economic structures.

In the Eastern European states the basic means of industrial production have been nationalised. (There is also in Poland a system of petty commodity production by peasants on 68 per cent of the arable land but this is subordinate to the state sector of the economy.) The nationalised character of the industrial economy has immense consequences because it entails the suppression of the capitalist ruling class and of the capitalist market as the regulator of the economy. Instead economic life is regulated by the political planning principle. Production resources are therefore not allocated between industries and factories according to economic pressures — profitability on the market — but through deals made by those who manage the various production resources. These deals are made in the political arena by whoever is involved in the political system. This in turn means that the system of production must be bound together with the political system. There cannot be the separation which is fundamental to capitalism of the 'public' world of the political system from the 'private' world of capitalist property in the economic system.

The traditional model of the post-capitalist society, as envisaged by Marx and Lenin, consisted of democratic state organisations of the producers, managing all the political and production affairs of the state through political struggle and debate, and involving from the outset the withering away of the bureaucratic organisation of the state. In fact a different model has emerged in all the post-capitalist states of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, where a bureaucratised mass Communist Party has a complete monopoly on all political power and economic management. This latter system operates in Poland.

The mass Communist Party in such a system needs to incorporate more than just the economic managers and higher state officials. The suppression of the capitalist market has not only removed the economic discipline of the struggle for profits

from the owners of factories, it has also removed the economic whip of unemployment from the producers themselves. The political masters of the state must therefore develop new instruments for mobilising the productive efforts of the workers. The traditional 'sticks' for this purpose have been the Gulag and the police, while the 'carrots' have included the privileges of party membership. This membership in the factory is intended to be the driving force and example for other workers in their productive efforts.

Thus the working class membership of the party is not at all an irrelevancy for the functioning of the Eastern European states, nor simply a decorative relic stemming from the party elite's ideological requirements.

In Poland official statistics estimated in 1979 that 46 per cent of the party membership were workers. But that is a far cry from suggesting that the working class base of the party actually exercises political power in Poland or any other Eastern European state. Power is exercised in the social interests of the party/state apparatus. Since the social base of this fused apparatus is the planned economy, it is antagonistic towards any return to capitalism. At the same time however it preserves and defends its political monopoly by resisting all attempts at institutionalising socialist democracy. The bureaucratic apparatus is strictly hierarchical. The criterion for entry into the ruling elite is not social position — ownership of capital or land, social origin or the like — but political capacity to defend the interests of the bureaucratic apparatus. It is these features that are in many ways analogous to the officer corps in a traditional army — hence Trotsky's definition of this layer as a bureaucratic *caste*.

The membership of this caste roughly corresponds to the professional party apparatus, which in Poland at present numbers around 10,000, and the 'party activists' who number some hundreds of thousands of functionaries in the national, provincial and city state administrations, the apparatuses of the police and military and the economy, the official trade union and youth organisation administrations and so on. There is a frequent interchange of personnel between these two layers. The bureaucracy as a whole involves all those jobs covered by the 'nomenklatura' on a national or local level: that is the list of appointments controlled by the superior party secretary in the given field. At all levels the aspiring bureaucrat must satisfy one key criterion: his or her capacity to defend and serve the political needs of the bureaucratic apparatus as a whole.

From an historical point of view the bureaucracy is a weak and transient force. Its predilection for police apparatuses, its deceptions of the most short-sighted variety, its permanent tendency towards corruption and defiance of its own laws are all symptoms of its weakness. Simultaneously it has, however, for six decades in the USSR and thirty years in Eastern Europe also exhibited an immense political strength. The sources of this strength are derived from three crucial features of the post-capitalist states that have emerged.

First, the suppression of capitalism and the nationalisation of the means of production has placed social initiative for the first time in human history in the hands of the immense majority of the population, the producers themselves. But the acute poverty of the first workers' state in Russia and its devastation by civil war and wars of intervention left the masses without the living standards and free time to exercise their initiative. The Bolshevik Party leadership, not programmatically prepared for such conditions, was in its majority ready to occupy the field left vacant by the masses and to succumb to its own bureaucratism.

Secondly, the fusion of economics and politics in a workers'



# OLUTION

state concentrates enormous power in the hands of the political masters of the state. When these masters are the workers themselves, gigantic gains for the masses can be accomplished. But the bureaucracy can use these levers of power to consolidate its grip in a thousand ways over the workers.

Thirdly, the existing Eastern European states were born in the context of fierce resistance by imperialism on the military, political, economic and ideological levels. This offensive served to justify a heavier subordination of the workers to production and a semi-military style of social organisation which repressed all political oppositions.

The crucial problem for the bureaucracy is to maintain the complete political subordination of the industrial working class. Yet, as the productive forces in the Eastern European states develop and the standard of living and free time of the working class increase, the planned economy itself increasingly demands the active, creative involvement of the workers in the productive and political system. The bureaucratic caste becomes more and more a disorganising obstacle to the development of the forces of production, and at the same time has increasingly severe difficulties in maintaining the political subordination of the workers. Here we have the central contradiction in the Eastern European states, one that has acquired explosive features in Poland today.

The place of the working class within the economic and state structures pushes it to struggle for thoroughgoing, radical democracy and working class management of the affairs of state. Repression becomes more and more economically costly for the bureaucracy while the alternatives, buying off the workers and enlarging the party's base in the working class, ultimately weaken the bureaucracy's grip over the workers still further. The key features of the political system in the Eastern European countries and Poland therefore include the political atomisation of the working class and the bureaucracy's need to seal it off from information and ideas which might weaken bureaucratic control. Some political autonomy may be conceded to other social layers such as the intelligentsia of the Catholic hierarchy insofar as this does not promote political ferment and mobilisation of the working class.

## Political Alignment of Other Social Forces

There is therefore no possibility of the political system in Eastern Europe gradually evolving towards political democracy through mass working class pressure. Such pressures cause an immediate crisis threatening the *social* position of the bureaucratic caste, and ultimately posing in a sharp way the question of general political power.

Thus the bureaucracy tends to split into diverging currents. One seeks to re-establish bureaucratic rule through concessions which do not challenge its political hegemony over the working class. Another wing seeks the use of external, ie. Soviet, military intervention to re-establish its rule. The entire course of post-war Eastern European history has yet to produce a section of the national bureaucracy prepared to lead a movement seriously struggling for an overall alternative to bureaucratic rule.

The characteristic form of working class struggle in Eastern Europe combines the struggle for democratic rights with a battle to establish working class management of the economy. For the workers these are two aspects of the same struggle. Radical democracy is necessary to ensure efficient production and an end to bureaucratic mismanagement.

The Polish crisis has afforded many examples of the workers *spontaneously* and *immediately* connecting their own labour with the whole field of collective consumption: the general strike in Jelenia Gora to turn a Ministry of the Interior

sanatorium into a public hospital; Katowice workers demanding a party conference hall be turned into a social amenity; Bielsko Biala workers' long strike to stamp out corruption among local officials. In capitalist countries these connections are not characteristic of the first mass workers' struggles.

While the students and most scientific and white-collar workers in industry link up strongly with the industrial workers, the bulk of the cultural intelligentsia desperately seek some sort of compromise between the workers and the bureaucracy, usually involving greater, though largely informal, liberties for themselves rather than the workers. In Poland this current has no confidence in the victory of the workers over the bureaucracy and therefore prefers concessions from the apparatus. Such a view is probably shared by some of the intellectual 'experts' advising Solidarity who inserted the clause on the 'leading role of the party' into the Gdansk strike agreements last summer. These same advisors have opposed every mass action taken by Solidarity since that time to free imprisoned militants and for the five-day workweek. The same people favoured turning the Gdansk commemoration ceremony for the 1970 victims into a religious celebration of spurious national unity. They also manoeuvred to change the Solidarity delegation to Italy from a trade union sponsored event into a pilgrimage to the Pope.

The material basis for the hierarchy of the Polish Catholic Church comes from the popular funding from the church-going masses. This makes the Church susceptible to mass pressure even if such pressures represent a deadly challenge to the Church's reactionary social doctrines and its rigidly authoritarian structures. The hierarchy therefore used its authority to win concessions for itself from the regime in return for demobilising the mass movements.

This pattern was established in the crises of 1956 and 1970 and repeated more recently by Cardinal Wyszynski's televised appeal on 26 August last year to the workers to end their strike. Over Christmas the hierarchy's press spokesperson attacked the KOR and the radical socialist journal of the Warsaw Solidarity organisation NTO, in an attempt to drive a political wedge into Solidarity.

The Polish authorities have reacted with hostility to the organisation of the poor peasants into Rural Solidarity. Some 600,000 out of a peasant population of 3 million have waged struggles for improved state prices and credit for the peasantry. This peasant movement sees itself as closely linked to the workers' Solidarity. The richer peasants who have fared well over the past years have remained neutral in the recent crisis. The long-term interests of the working class require a better exchange relationship between town and country and more investment in agriculture coupled with gradual moves towards co-operatives to overcome the current inefficiency of agriculture.

## Political Revolution

Trotskyists use the term 'political revolution' to describe the transition from the monolithic rule of the bureaucratic caste to a system of workers' democracy. The 'political revolution' in Eastern Europe does not necessarily involve working class insurrection and armed confrontation with the repressive apparatus of the state. The appearance of a mass national working class movement immediately plunges the bureaucracy into crisis, as the central prop of the political system, the party, loses its working class base. This causes a much greater paralysis of the state structures than in a bourgeois democratic state or even a military dictatorship. A greater crisis of political legitimacy can also occur as the bureaucracy gains its authority from its claims to represent the working class. In



such circumstances the use of the repressive apparatus against the masses can be suicidal for the bureaucracy. Its alternatives are external, i.e. Soviet, intervention or retreat in the face of the mass movement in order to preserve the skeleton of the state apparatus intact.

The mass movement in Eastern Europe can very quickly make gigantic inroads into the bureaucratic system — a very different case from the protracted character of the socialist revolution in the West. Similarly the workers in Eastern Europe do not need to struggle to wrench the productive apparatus from the capitalists and suppress the workings of the law of value. The bureaucratic rulers cannot use the weapons of mass unemployment or the flight of capital from the country against the workers.

Political revolution in Eastern Europe also differs from political revolutions in the capitalist world — the transition from dictatorship to bourgeois democracy. Any democratisation process in Eastern Europe has to go much further than in bourgeois democracy to avoid bureaucratic recuperation. It must reach deep into the economic life of the state and be anchored in mass working class involvement in the country's political institutions. Only a mass working class movement leading all other sectors of society can carry through this transformation. Bourgeois or petty bourgeois currents would be too conciliatory towards bureaucratic restoration.

Another distinctive feature of the political revolution in Eastern Europe is its international character. Every working class movement for democratisation in one country threatens to upset the entire international bureaucratic system. The Soviet leaders therefore attempt both to seal off information about all such developments from the rest of the Eastern bloc and to use military force to nip such movements in the bud. There are two responses within the mass movement to the Soviet threat. The first attempts to confine the movement to forms acceptable to the Soviet leadership, namely forms that perpetuate working class political subordination, thereby making an invasion unnecessary. The second is to develop the independent working class movement to break out of the cordon sanitaire and gain the broadest possible support for the democratisation process making an intervention impossible.

To carry through this latter orientation successfully it is not enough to celebrate the spontaneous actions of the masses. At every stage the vanguard of the working class must fight for demands that can win the support of the entire class, as well as deepening alliances with other layers and winning support from the workers of surrounding countries.

This method rejects the notion of preconceived 'limits' for the struggle which are acceptable to the bureaucracy, beyond which the movement cannot progress. Such a notion ignores the capacity of the working class to impose its own 'limits' on the bureaucracy through struggle. Nor can the democratisation process be limited to a single country. Precisely because of the common aspirations of the Eastern European masses any such movement must utilise its international impact to further the whole movement. All other schemas are utopian.

That is not to suggest that an immediate all-out confrontation with the bureaucracy should be sought at all times. The most politically advanced sectors must ensure that at all times the movement chooses the *key objective at that time* to struggle for, downgrading if necessary other questions. At times the movement may have to make tactical retreats to consolidate its forces. But at all times the movement needs to preserve its political independence of the bureaucratic regime itself.

The history of the struggles in Eastern Europe shows that there are two key phases in the development of the political revolution. First, the establishment of an organised independent mass working class movement on a national scale. Secondly, the establishment of new institutions of working class state power within the country which the international bureaucratic apparatus is forced to accept. Previous working class upsurges in Eastern Europe have always failed to achieve these objectives. In Hungary in 1956 the workers responded to Soviet intervention by throwing up their own organs of state power — workers' councils — but this was before a national independent working class mass movement with a trusted leadership had been built.

In Czechoslovakia the working class built a powerful working class movement through the trade unions after the Soviet invasion. But it remained under the political hegemony of the Communist Party apparatus which capitulated totally to the

# International Features

Soviet leadership, forcing a wholesale retreat. Poland in 1956 saw a mass working class movement arise but it did not attain organisational independence from the bureaucracy which reincorporated it. In 1970-71 the independent mass movement did not establish itself strongly enough on a national scale and bureaucratic rule was reimposed. But in Poland today with the establishment of a nationally organised independent working class movement the political revolution has established itself with greater chances of victory than in any previous crisis in Eastern Europe.

The leadership of last August's strike movement had assimilated the lessons of previous workers' upsurges and the democratic organisation of the movement allowed the Polish workers to force the bureaucracy to grant independent mass working class organisation. Solidarity is rooted in the decisive sectors of the working class: heavy industry and the mines. Its regional cross-sectoral forms of organisation have helped to shatter the bureaucratic monopoly of political life. After the August victory the crucial task was political and organisational consolidation. Tremendous achievements have been made in the latter field but in the former there are still considerable problems. These can be summarised in the role of Solidarity and its relationship to the bureaucratic order.

The clause on the 'leading role of the party' was inserted into the Gdansk, but not the Szczecin, strike agreements not simply on the bureaucracy's insistence but also through the pressure and manipulation of some of the strike committee's 'experts', especially their chairperson, Mazowiecki. One of the 'experts', a Marxist, resigned from her position over the inclusion of this clause which was accepted only after some delegates were removed from the meeting that voted on the agreements. She fought instead for a definition of Solidarity's acceptance of socialism in terms of the country's socialised property relations. The workers struggled throughout last October against this clause in the battle over Solidarity's registration.

The inclusion of the clause in the agreements weighs heavily on the workers' movement. Every sentence of the agreement is a battle line in the struggle between the workers and the bureaucracy as each side uses the agreement to legitimise its

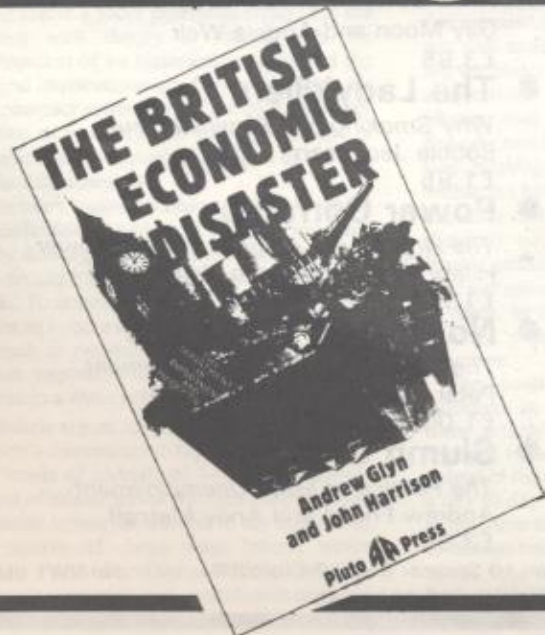
cause. 'The leading role of the party' is the decisive principle of reintegration of the working class into the bureaucratic straightjacket. It is the dividing line between those advocating a revolutionary or a reformist solution to the Polish crisis.

The main tactics to face the bureaucratic reincorporation of the working class are: to restrict Solidarity to 'economic' issues, and in particular winning Solidarity's acceptance for a new bureaucratically managed plan; to use the economic crisis to lower the living standards of the masses as a whole while granting a privileged status to some sectors thus dividing and demoralising the mass movement; to reassert the role of the local and national party apparatus in carrying out political decisions and 'getting things done' thereby forcing Solidarity out of political activity and strengthening the party apparatus within Solidarity itself. Some reformist currents champion such a perspective, believing that it will lead in turn to the growth of democratising currents within the party itself. But this view seriously underestimates the central role of the independent mass workers' movement in developing such currents within the party.

Other reformist currents, such as the KOR theoretician Adam Michnik, gloss over the fundamental nature of the antagonism between the interests of the workers and those of the party-state apparatus. They consequently suggest that Solidarity and the bureaucracy can co-exist as parallel institutions in the same way that the bureaucracy has allowed the parallel existence of the Church hierarchy and of various intellectual opposition — and semi-opposition — groups. Michnik does not acknowledge the fact that for the regime such concessions are in general precisely a means of pursuing the bureaucracy's aim of maintaining its grip over the mass of the Polish workers. Neither does the preservation of private peasant agriculture present a serious political challenge to the regime: the experience of the last 25 years has been one of political co-existence between the bureaucracy and the peasantry, without any serious challenge to the structures of the regime from the countryside.

The mass, independent working class movement is the only force able to lead the country towards genuine, permanent democratisation. The crucial political division in Poland today

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# International Features

lies between those who recognise this fact and seek to strengthen the capacity of the workers to make further advances along this road, and those who seek to push the workers out of politics as a means of 'reconciling' the workers and the party leadership.

The crucial next step in the advance of the Polish workers must be the battle for the workers' right to decide the national plan. The economic crisis is reaching catastrophic proportions. The bureaucracy's only answer is massive cuts in living standards, coupled with an attempt to break the backbone of Solidarity. The conciliationist intellectuals will be urging the workers not to struggle in defence of their interests and will thus find themselves objectively aiding the bureaucratic counter-revolution. If the bureaucracy succeeds in defeating the workers' resistance to these attacks there will be no solution to the economic crisis, for the workers will not co-operate with their oppressors. Only when the workers have the right to decide the social priorities and programme of a new plan and the right to supervise its implementation on a national scale, will they be prepared to take responsibility for beating the crisis. This is the only reasonable and realistic approach for the Polish workers.

The battle for a workers' plan will not be led by those sections of the mass movement under the influence of the Catholic hierarchy, the Communist Party leadership, nor the conciliationist layers of the intelligentsia. Only those currents with confidence in the working class and its capacity to build a new, socialist society based on working class democracy will be able to lead the struggle to beat the crisis. Such currents exist in large numbers within Solidarity, not least among many of the party members at the base of the movement. It is urgently necessary for these currents to show their colours on a national scale and to begin to mount a concerted challenge to the pro-bureaucratic, pro-Catholic hierarchy and conciliationist forces trying to gain preponderant influence within the movement.

Within such socialist, proletarian currents, revolutionary Marxists will be in the forefront of the battle to repel the ideological offensive of the bureaucracy and its satellites: against the phoney national consensus of the bureaucracy for the interests of the mass of working people; in place of the leading role of the Party, the leading role of the working class; in place of the battle against 'anti-socialist forces', the battle for socialist, national self-management and mass democracy. The bureaucracy's attempt to present Solidarity to the workers of the surrounding countries as a nationalist, Catholic movement must be rejected and support must be won from the German, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Belorussian and Lithuanian workers for the struggle of their Polish brothers and sisters. Workers in Britain and Europe must demand that the Western bourgeoisies put their money where their mouth is and back their phrase-mongering about the democratic rights of the Polish people and immediately wipe out Poland's foreign debts.

These socialist currents opening up a perspective of a working class struggle for power must become an organised political force based upon an overall political programme for the transition to socialist democracy. Without such organisation it will be impossible to rally the most class conscious sections of the working class and ensure that the struggle with the bureaucracy goes forward in a disciplined, planned way. In a number of regional Solidarity organisations as well as in the provincial party organisations the emergence of such organised groups or revolutionary socialists is already evident. It is of the utmost urgency that such developments should be transferred to the national level. Such currents will, of course, be completely subordinate to the collective discipline in action of

Solidarity itself and will defend the widest possible democracy for all currents of opinion to express their point of view in an unfettered way within the movement. Without such internal political democracy, Solidarity will be open to manipulation and provocation by the bureaucracy.

It should also struggle within the Polish Communist Party, for full, unconditional support on the part of the party organisations for the demands of Solidarity, the only authentic expression of the will of the Polish workers today. It should demand that in place of only one organised faction in the party — the bureaucratic leadership — all political tendencies inside the party should be able to organise themselves. And it should campaign for a government basing itself on the workers' mass organisation, Solidarity, not on the bureaucratic party-state apparatus. Only through the winning of such a government can the Polish people avoid a new and bloody confrontation between the bureaucracy and the working class and overcome the present crisis. And the winning of such a government will be a great triumph, not only for the working people of Poland and of all Eastern Europe but also for the entire international struggle for socialism. It will be a tremendous ideological blow against the Western imperialist system and an historic turning point for the workers of Europe, east and west.

The struggle of the Polish workers is the most important front of the struggle for socialism in Europe today. The attention and efforts of all socialists must be turned to Poland. We need massive, militant working class solidarity with the Polish workers and their mass movement SOLIDARNOSĆ. We need a thunderous call from British socialists and the British labour movement to the Soviet leadership to keep its hands off the Polish workers. And we need an equally powerful demand on the Thatcher government to wipe out the Polish debts instead of making the Polish workers sweat for the profit of the City of London.

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# WOMEN'S OPPRESSION TODAY

*Women's Oppression Today — Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* by Michele Barratt. Verso and NLB, £3.95.

By Margaret Coulson

The relationship between Marxism and feminism is an uneasy one. Class and gender, which are central political and theoretical categories of marxism and feminism respectively, have an awkward and contradictory relationship to one another.

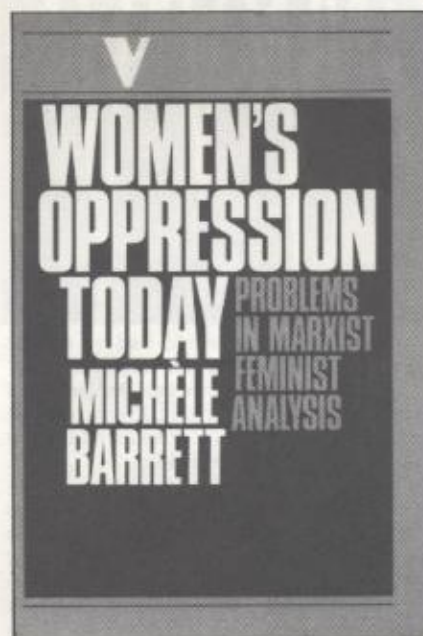
The histories and dynamics of male domination and capitalism do not appear to coincide. Within capitalism the reality of sexism within the working class is both oppressive to women and undermines class unity. Trade union struggles for a 'family wage' (for the breadwinner) are not compatible with the struggles for equal pay and work for women. The creation of socialism carries no guarantee of women's liberation and there is no agreement about the priority of women's demands within socialist struggles.

Michele Barratt's book starts from a recognition that problems must be identified and confronted if the development of a Marxist feminist analysis and practice is to be advanced. She carefully works through different areas of analysis which have been developing over the past ten years or so and which bear on these problems, examining two basic questions: 'Can we see women's oppression in capitalism as independent of the general operation of the capitalist mode of production? Do we see women's oppression as taking place exclusively at the level of ideology?' (p5)

An exploration of these questions is woven meticulously through the different sections of the book, through assessments of developments in the analysis of ideology, the relevance of Freud, work on cultural production, on education, domestic labour, the sexual division of labour, the ideology of the family and the organisation of the household, and the state. The way into these arguments at first seems rather abstract (which may be off-putting to some people who are not familiar with some of this theoretical work, or who would prefer a more polemical style). Yet the concern with theory is linked with the development of an historical analysis and the political implications are drawn out; there are very compact summaries of the contemporary position of women in the labour force and in education and a historical analysis of the rise of 'familial ideology'.

The book makes no claims to have resolved the difficulties of Marxist feminist analysis, but by drawing together diverse debates of the past decade it helps to clarify areas for future work. It doesn't close the arguments but incites us to take them further. In fact there is so much to respond to in this book that it's almost impossible to decide what points to pursue in a short review.

Michele argues against the proposition that women's oppression today can be reduced to the 'needs of capitalism' — for the reproduction of labour power through the privatised domestic labour of women in the home, for the reserve of cheap wage labour which women provide. The relation between women's oppression and capitalism is analysed



historically rather than seen as logically necessary to capitalism. Thus, in practice, the development of capitalism involved an assimilation and exacerbation of pre-capitalist sexual divisions which become related not only to forces internal to capital but also to struggles within the working class between women's interests and men's. Of course this does not mean that the links are superficial. The development of capitalism was only 'gender blind' in that it simply accepted already existing assumptions of male dominance.

Moreover the ideology of gender is structured into subjective identity not just as a difference between male and female but as 'division, oppression, internalised inferiority for women' (p. 113). Hence the importance, not well established in Marxism, of developing an understanding of the construction of subjectivity. However it is important to emphasise that the development of capitalism brought new contradictions to women's situation, pushing them into economic dependency within the bourgeois ideal of the family, pulling some of them into paid labour with some (limited) potential for independence from family position. Through that contradiction feminist movements have emerged, reflecting at times, in their ambiguous relation to class politics, women's dual relation to the class structure.

The position of women as domestic labourers in capitalism has other contradictions attaching to it. Thus while women engaged in housework, child care etc. are involved in the reproduction of labour power on a day to day and generational basis, they are at the same time involved in the reproduction of human beings — themselves and those with whom they are most intimately related (Unfortunately this does not mean that by choice

we can turn families into breeding grounds for feminists and socialists). But it does mean that we have a direct interest in the circumstances and conditions of our own reproduction and survival. How far have material improvements in working class conditions of life compared to 150 years ago been on the backs of women? How far did women 'collude' in this? How far have there been alternatives?

These questions are relevant to the debates about the significance (for the working class and for women) of working class support through the 1840s for protective legislation, the consolidation of the sexual division of labour in production, the struggle for a family wage. Historically it's necessary to see this in relation to the degree of exploitation and oppression which was being resisted at this period; and to recognise the gaps and tensions between consciousness of class interests and consciousness of women's interests.

It also seems that an exploration of these contradictions should be linked to the development of a 'more sympathetic and perceptive account not only of how or why a dominant meaning of femininity has been constructed, but how or why women have sought consciously and unconsciously to embrace and desire it.' (p. 251) Michele rightly argues that such developments are necessary if feminism is to reach out to wider groups of women.

She also emphasises the importance of historical analysis of women's oppression, arguing carefully against the analysis of ideology divorced from its material conditions and historical circumstances, and against the idea that women's oppression can be located solely at the level of ideology. She argues against the concept of patriarchy (except to mean precisely 'rule by the father'). I am unsure of her conclusions here. Certainly there has been great confusion about the definition of the concept. Its use (especially as 'the patriarchy') to refer to some timeless universal form of women's oppression is untenable.

However patriarchy has also been used as a general concept, referring to gender relations defined in terms of male dominance. There does seem to be a political point to retaining this general use. Firstly it points to the persistence of male dominance (and its capacity to take new forms) despite transformations of the mode of production, and thus the different historical dimensions involved in trying to relate gender and class. In addition it should point us to a more sensible recognition of biology as a material reality, although one always experienced and given meaning in culturally specific and non-universal ways. Much Marxism and some feminism, in avoiding biological determinism, have tended to talk about men and women as if they had no bodies at all.

I'm not certain that these arguments make a strong case for the concept of patriarchy. However the issues raised illustrate some of the problems of developing a clear and rigorous language of Marxist feminist analysis which is built from the tensions between them. *Women's Oppression Today* is a book which should be read, argued about and worked from.

# Reviews

By John Harrison

*Capitalism, Conflict and Inflation*. Bob Rowthorn. Lawrence and Wishart. Paperback £3.95.

I used to think that Rowthorn was God. This dubious notion came to me via a third-generation xerox of something he wrote about bourgeois and Marxist economics. As well as hurting my eyes, it convinced me that he had cut through debates in the Conference of Socialist Economists in a way that had escaped the rest of us.

The piece reappears as the first essay in this collection, under the title *Neo-Classicism, Neo-Ricardianism and Marxism*. So I approached the book — which deservedly won the 1980 Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize — with some nostalgia. I do not think this coloured my judgement.

Certainly *Neo-Classicism...* was no road to Damascus trip second time round. But it is still an important essay — the sort of thing that *New Left Review* calls 'seminal'. It tried to expose Neo-Classicism as ideology, to assess how far Sraffa's followers have demolished it and to outline the main insights of Marxist economics.

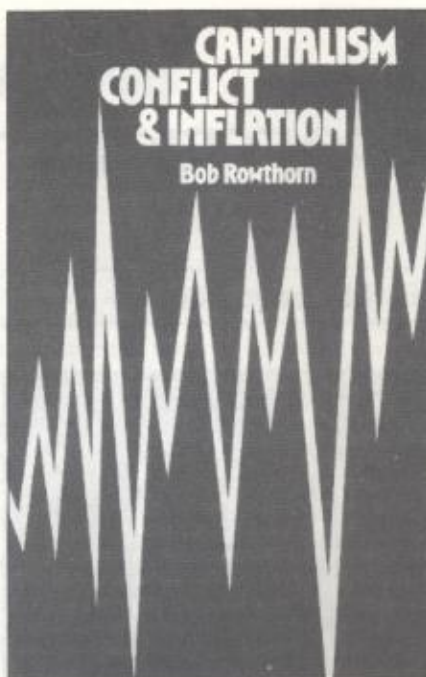
Eight years on, most of it holds up well. The section on Neo-Classicism is still the best introductory critique for students. The evaluation of Neo-Ricardianism is sound (and remarkably sober for the early seventies). And, while I now think searching for the differences between Marxist and bourgeois economics is like chasing the end of the rainbow, Rowthorn's answer at least stressed the right things — power relations in the factory — at the right time. Theory develops partly by polemics.

But the treatment of Neo-Classicism is one sided. It is not just an apology for capitalism. It is that, but it also contains real (scientific, if you like) insights into the system. It is wrong to dismiss it as nothing more than an 'epistemological obstacle' (p. 24).

It is also a shame that Rowthorn has not added a postscript. Since the article first appeared, some people have used Sraffa to argue against the labour theory of value (Steedman) and others have interpreted Rowthorn's emphasis on what goes on inside the factory gates (or 'production') in a way he never intended — and then used it to label some of his other work 'Neo-Ricardianism' (Fine and Harris). Rowthorn is understandably impatient with this debate. But I think the influence of *Neo-Classicism...* obliges him to stick his oar in.

I have spent some time on this first essay because it is the most influential. I will deal with the others more briefly before making some general comments.

Rowthorn's own summary and assessment of *Imperialism in the Seventies* is fair. 'It shows how the pattern of overseas expansion was very uneven during the fifties and sixties. The big firms of some countries, such as Britain and the United States, relied mainly on overseas investments as a way of penetrating foreign markets, whereas those of other countries, such as Germany and Japan relied mainly on exports ... However, the essay predicted that such differences were temporary and that the 1970s would see a dramatic change when German, Japanese and other hitherto national firms began investing on a large scale overseas. Events have amply confirmed this prediction. The essay also predicted that



overseas investment would lead to friction between the major capitalist powers and concluded that the seventies would be a period of growing inter-imperial rivalry. Events have not really confirmed this ...' I would add that it may well happen in the eighties.

*Britain in the World Economy* was Rowthorn's contribution to *Britain's Economic Crisis* (1974), a pamphlet which has played an important role in discussions about an 'Alternative Economic Strategy'. This section was probably the best and is still worth reading. I cannot think of a better AES-type analysis of the international dimension.

*Late Capitalism* is a long review of Mandel's book of the same name. It is far and away the best discussion of the book I have seen, and I think Rowthorn is right nine times out of ten. Anyone who has attempted the almost Herculean task of reading Mandel's book carefully and critically should also look at this piece. It is a model of a good review article.

*Inflation and Crisis* tries to relate inflation to capital accumulation. It argues that price rises are the outcome of expansionary state policies aimed at promoting accumulation when profits are falling. The result is pressure towards ever more inflation, which leads the state to shift priorities and go for contractionary policies to stabilise the currency. The piece seems timely. Thatcher is today crashing the industrial sector of the economy supposedly to fight inflation. But her aim is really to weaken the labour movement and radically restructure industry to jack up profits and competitiveness. 'Inflation fighting' is three parts ideological floss. The essay also includes the starry-eyed argument that more militancy would have improved UK economic performance by forcing capital to modernise. Come off it, Bob!

*Conflicts, Inflation and Money* offers a framework for understanding inflation in which class struggle, demand, employment, taxation, foreign trade and monetary conditions are all related in a coherent and sensible way. It is a framework — not a theory — and does not consider accumulation as such. So its relation to the argument in *Inflation and Crisis* is not brought out clearly. Unnecessary maths also makes it hard going for most people. But it is worth the effort.

Marx's Theory of Wages discusses Marx's writings on the topic against the background of Ricardo's. It argues that Marx took more

from Ricardo than is generally thought, and that his mature writings are less coherent about wages than most friendly commentators suggest. I am sure Rowthorn is right about Ricardo and he raises some interesting issues. But he makes too much of minor inconsistencies between different formulations of Marx's. The most disappointing thing, however, is that the essay stops where it does — it was planned as an introduction to something on the 'social wage'. That would probably have been fascinating.

Apart from a slight piece on Luxemburg and militarism, the only other essay is *Skilled Labour in the Marxist System*. Its main purpose is to show that skilled labour can be 'reduced to' (or expressed as a multiple of) unskilled without reference to wages. This is essential if values are to be independent of incomes, and Rowthorn does it neatly. But the most interesting product of the exercise is a way of looking at relations between the capitalist and state sectors in terms of labour flows.

To take a simplified example, suppose capitalists are taxed to finance a nationalised steel industry, which sells its output at cost. There is a 'labour flow' from capital to the state of the value of constant capital plus workers' consumption in the steel industry ( $c+v$ ), and a 'return flow' of this plus the surplus labour put in by steel workers ( $c+v+s$ ). Private sector profits then include surplus labour performed by state employees. This is a helpful approach, which has since been used elsewhere (Gough).

Clearly, a number of these themes recur throughout the collection. As Rowthorn notes, all the essays 'deal with classical themes of political economy such as imperialism, capitalist development, or inflation', and, 'they are united by a common thread, which is their emphasis on the importance of power and conflict in capitalist economies' (p. 1). Hence the title.

But there is another unifying element — a theoretical opponent who pops up time and again. Ernest Mandel shares top billing in *Late Capitalism* and plays a supporting role (usually as friendly villain) in the *Preface, Imperialism in the Seventies* and *Marx's Theory of Wages*. I will not discuss the specific disagreements. (I think Rowthorn is right most times, but then he is choosing the ground). But I will finish by contrasting the strengths of Rowthorn — a maverick member of the Communist Party — and Mandel — a man he describes publicly as a hero of his youth and the Pope of the Fourth International.

Rowthorn's main strengths are that he knows bourgeois economics backwards and makes the best use of it; that he always uses the best data around; that his arguments are invariably logical and consistent with the facts; and that he writes simply and clearly. For a first-rank Marxist economist, Mandel is weak on all these counts. His main strengths are the enormous scope of his vision; his ability to relate everything to everything else; seemingly limitless energy; and the ability to publish clever ideas at machine gun speed. For a first ranker Rowthorn is weak on these.

Most people's idea of a genius is someone who comes up with loads of exciting ideas, many of them wrong but one or two truly brilliant. That is Mandel. Another definition is the capacity for taking infinite pains. That is Rowthorn. Both have much we can learn from.

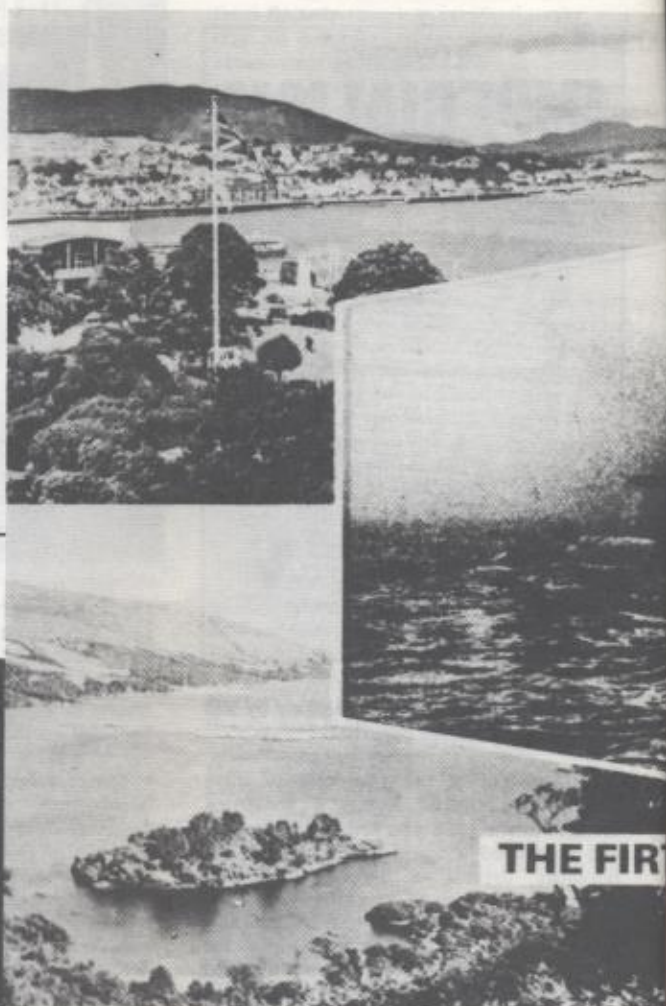


# POLARIS

Britain has its own nuclear weapons. The most important is the Polaris submarine. Four are based at Faslane on the Clyde. Each Polaris submarine has 16 missiles which in turn have three warheads.

By today's standards these are old fashioned but they carry nuclear explosives equal to all the bombs dropped during the Second World War. A single missile could devastate any city anywhere on the globe. To do that they would be dependant on targeting

The photomontages and texts on this page are taken from *No Nuclear Weapons* by Peter Kennard and Ric Sissons, which is a joint Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament/Pluto Press pamphlet which will be published in June, price £1.



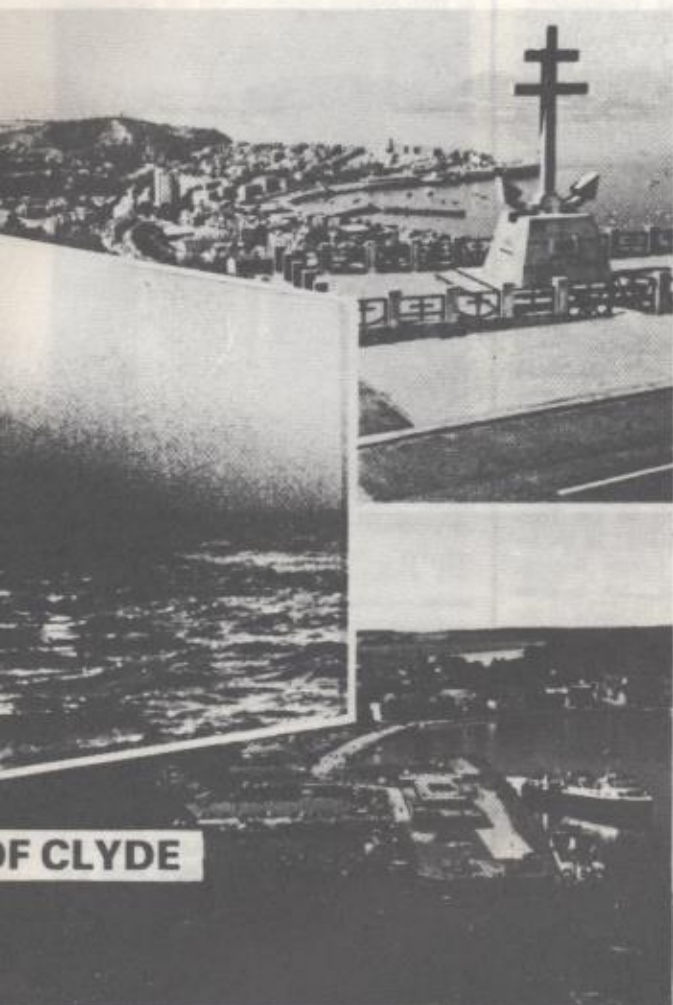
## TOMORROW: BRITAIN?

After more than 35 years the threat of nuclear extermination still hangs over the world. What would happen if a one megaton bomb were to explode 6500 feet over London?

The flash from the explosion would blind people several miles away. The heat would cause burns 20 miles away. Most buildings within a radius of 4-5 miles would be demolished. Over half the people in that area would be killed.

Fires would rage over a region with a 10 mile radius. Later radioactive fall out would cause death or illness through infection and cancer. Genetic damage would effect the offspring of many survivors. Communications, energy supply, water services, industry and agriculture would break down.





information supplied by American satellites. Although technically possible, it seems very unlikely they would be fired without US consent.

Polaris will be obsolete by 1990. The present government wants to replace Polaris with four Trident submarines at a cost of well over £5000 million.

Trident is the most destructive American submarine. Each of its 16 missiles has a range of over 4500 miles. A single Trident submarine carries 1000 times more nuclear explosive than was used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

## NUCLEAR CLUB

Britain, China, France, India, USA and USSR have exploded nuclear bombs. Israel and South Africa probably have also made nuclear weapons. Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Pakistan are just four among many who may be members of the nuclear club by the year 2000.

But most nuclear weapons are in the hands of America and the Soviet Union. The USA is estimated to have 9,200 strategic nuclear warheads and the USSR 6,000. These would be used in an all out war.

In addition there are tactical or theatre nuclear weapons. The USA has 21,000 such warheads and the USSR 15,000.\* Many are located in Europe and include short range missiles and bombs.

The present stockpile of nuclear weapons is far more than needed to destroy life on earth.

\*Source: World Military and Social Expenditures 1980.



# Reviews

pathetic to the opposition were reluctant to break because of their financial dependence. Chou En-lai told Wang that the bulk of the party's expenses were met by dues paid by Leningrad members of the CPSU. In Wang's view it is these factors, plus the increasing repression of the Trotskyists, squeezed between the KMT and the CCP, that contributed to the failure of Chinese Trotskyism.

The differences between the Stalinist and Trotskyist political line for the CCP after 1927 gives us an interesting insight into the way in which the Third International's directives were taken up. On returning to China in 1929 Wang worked in the CCP under Chou En-lai. He recounts an incident in which the Central Committee of the party had to interpret the Moscow resolution forecasting the imminence of 'a new revolutionary high tide'. At first the Central Committee was inclined to a cautious interpretation, afraid of repeating previous errors. Chou was very hesitant. They returned to the original Russian text which had two inflexions: 'high tide' and 'on the rise'. Chou finally decided to translate it as 'rising tide'. Wang recalls that the word imminent was to be understood as 'still quite a long way off'. A simple illustration of the difficulties the CCP leadership had in applying the line.

The Trotskyists maintained that a massive defeat had been suffered and that the Chinese revolution was not near any new high tide. Wang recounts how they saw their immediate tasks as rebuilding the shattered trade unions, establishing the party in the towns, and centralising the struggle for a constituent assembly. It was at this time that Ch'en Tu-hsiu, the founder of the CCP, began to move to Trotskyism. After the debacle of 1927 Stalin heaped all responsibility on Ch'en who, after all, had only faithfully put the International's line. Ch'en was stunned. The documents of the Left Opposition helped him to understand his role and gave way to his conversion to Trotskyism. He was expelled from the CCP in 1929. This resulted in a massive crisis within the party which was followed by a purge of Trotskyists including Wang. The early thirties saw the decline of both the Trotskyists and the CCP. Via the long march the CCP retreated to the North West countryside leaving a small group of Chinese Trotskyists in the towns.

Wang himself does not develop the question as to whether or not the CCP would have benefited from adopting the policies of the Trotskyists. However he does admit that the Trotskyists themselves hastened their own downfall by concentrating their efforts exclusively in the towns. Even from a purely tactical standpoint he considers that moving into the rural areas would have preserved their cadre. The entry of the Japanese into the war led to the partial alliance of the CCP and the KMT. The war created conditions which the CCP was able to exploit. Wang is critical of the Trotskyists for not actively participating and encouraging the formation of armed detachments of workers. Those few comrades who did organise guerilla units were annihilated either by the Japanese or the CCP. The Trotskyist movement was relegated to the side lines as the CCP came to power.

However, does the victory of the Chinese revolution diminish the role of the Trotskyists? Does it vindicate Stalin? In his introduction, the translator, Gregor Benton, most clearly repudiates this view as does Wang in a chapter which is to be found in the Chinese edition but not in the English. The course of the Chinese revolution broadly conformed to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution according to which the bourgeois democratic revolution would grow over, with no intervening stages, into the socialist revolution. The irony is, as Gregor Benton says, that the fundamental tenet of Trotskyism was put into practice, not by the Trotskyists themselves, but by the Maoists through a process of trial and error.

Wang's memoirs end with a period of great sadness for the author. The persecution of Trotskyism in 1952-57 resulted in the loss of many of his closest comrades. One amongst them, Chang Ch'ao-lin, was released, after 29 years, in 1979.

Despite this unhappy period we can read these memoirs with renewed optimism at the rise of the democratic movement in China. As Wang says:

Now that I am approaching the end of my life's journey, I cannot but feel happy to find what appears before me is not the darkness after the sunset but the bright glimmering of day break.

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# ELEVENTH HOUR



By Ric Sissons

*Eleventh Hour for Europe* by Ken Coates, Peggy Duff, Dan Smith, Mary Kaldor, E P Thompson and Roy Medvedev. Spokesman £2.75 paperback.

*Eleventh Hour for Europe* is a collection of six essays by prominent figures in the European Disarmament Campaign. Virtually all of them have been published elsewhere - for example, Mary Kaldor's contribution has appeared in the *New Statesman* while Ken Coates' opening chapter is available as a pamphlet. Their primary interest is not as new work but more as a vantage point from which to locate where some of the disarmament movement's better known public figures now stand.

This review will examine four issues which they raise, implicitly or explicitly, in the collection. These are:—

- 1) What position should be taken on British membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)?
- 2) How to achieve the goal of winning support within the working class?
- 3) Should the disarmament movement take a stand on the issue of nuclear energy?
- 4) What is to be gained through the Soviet Union developing nuclear weapons — 'the workers' bomb'?

### NATO

While the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) has made its opposition to NATO clear, the authors of *Eleventh Hour* seem strangely ambiguous. Ken Coates writes: 'A European nuclear-free zone does not necessarily imply reduction of conventional weapons, nor does it presuppose the demolition of the two major alliances.' While later Dan Smith comments: 'This would tend in the direction of military disengagement from NATO and perhaps towards abrogation of the North Atlantic Treaty. That ultimate step need not be taken, however, a long term option though it would remain.'

These formulations are surprisingly vague. Rather the campaign needs to state fundamentally and unequivocally its opposition to NATO and call for Britain's immediate withdrawal. NATO is dominated militarily, organisationally and politically by the United States. It is an extension of American foreign policy. As is generally recognised it is the US

which has led the spiralling upward drift in weapons procurement and development. The 15-member states of NATO account for 45 per cent of total world military expenditure; they control 66 per cent of the international arms trade; they supply 45 per cent of weapons to the poorer countries; and they deploy five million troops.

Within that context Britain's contribution is relatively minor. Of NATO's 9000 strategic nuclear warheads there are 192 in the four British Polaris submarines. These missiles are dependent on the US for targeting information. Britain's independent nuclear deterrent is neither independent nor very impressive. The US considers Polaris not as a strategic weapon but as a tactical force which would be limited to a European war which is the contrary of how the British military establishment like to view their prize possession.

But that should not mean that the campaign argues along a line of least resistance which says that Britain's contribution is insignificant and thus if Polaris, Trident, Tornado, etc are scrapped it will not hamper the 'West's' defence. There is little point winning a unilateralist position if the countryside is still packed with over 100 American, NATO, bases. They must be removed if unilateralism is to have any significance and that entails Britain leaving NATO.

#### Working class support

By all accounts one of the failures of CND in the late 1950s and early 1960s was its inability to consolidate its support in the trade unions and the working class, especially at the rank and file level. Other than a token stoppage in Stevenage no section of the labour movement would take industrial action against the bomb. The problem was how to link up the daily concerns of workers with the question of the bomb. International Socialism tried to do this by raising the slogan — 'The fight against the bomb is a fight against the boss'. But given the political period with much lower working class militancy this was difficult to bring to fruition. Today the situation is markedly different. The days of 'You've never had it so good' are long forgotten. The unions are better organised and more militant, while Thatcherite austerity brings issues like unemployment to the fore. The slogan of 'Jobs not Bombs' makes the connection between nuclear weapons and everyday life more accessible.

The other significant change that has occurred is within the Labour Party. It should not be forgotten that the Labour governments of the past forty years have been instrumental in developing nuclear weapons. It was the Attlee Labour government, in January 1947, which gave the go-ahead for the first British atomic bomb. This was kept a closely guarded secret from parliament and the Labour Party. The expenditure was hidden under an item called Public Buildings in Great Britain. It was the 1964 Labour government which bought Polaris against the conference mandate. And finally the last Labour government undertook the secret, Chevaline, Polaris modernisation programme which cost £1000 million.

A Labour government elected at the next general election will be in office when the important decisions will be due to be taken on the purchase of Trident or perhaps when the first Cruise missiles are due in 1983. It is essential that an incoming Labour government is in no position to follow the footsteps of its

predecessors and further extend Britain's nuclear capability.

However in rejecting Britain's nuclear weapons' programme the campaign does have to recognise that hundreds of thousands of workers and trade unionists find employment in those sectors of the economy. Dan Smith touches on this point when his essay calls for a new defence policy. For him that means: 'Reduced concentration on the costly and prestigious procurement programmes might then make resources available for proper provision for the services' pay and infrastructure, inadequate attention to which has both impaired efficiency and created major problems of morale in the last few years.'

Later Mary Kaldor suggests a similar line of reasoning: 'The alternative is a policy of territorial defence ... to make it clear to the potential enemy of any European country that invasion would be more difficult than Afghanistan and occupation as difficult as Vietnam.' One assumes that Kaldor chooses the examples with care to highlight where she sees the threats coming from.

The clear problem with both these solutions is that they accept the framework of the bourgeois state and wish to retain its armed forces but without the nuclear component. Here we are down to the fundamental debate over the state and reform or revolution. One would have hoped that the experience of Chile under Allende would have taught us that no reliance can be placed in the armed forces.

What needs to be broadcast are the work and views of groups like the Vickers or Lucas combines who have developed alternative plans for the use of armaments' factories. Their plans entail the conversion of these plants to produce socially useful products, which not only benefit working people and society generally but also come to terms with the problems of unemployment if defence expenditure is to be scrapped.

#### Nuclear energy

The disarmament movement has a tendency to see the question of nuclear energy only as of importance because weapons can be built from energy programmes. India has built an atomic bomb as a consequence of the technology sold to it by Canada, while recently Brazil purchased a nuclear energy package from West Germany which contains all the component parts to make crude weapons. While international, diplomatic efforts are made to halt the sale of expertise the market forces pushing the owners of expensive nuclear technology are such that the purchasing state is in a strong bargaining position.

The disarmament campaign has not come out strongly against nuclear energy. This is partly due to the fact that the unions are split openly on this question and the Communist Party has no clear position. Peggy Duff, in *Eleventh Hour*, has a different view: 'One cannot equate the results of accidents, such as that at Harrisburg, with the mass deaths and destructions caused by two "tiny" atomic bombs ...' and thus our issue is more important. Clearly she is correct if it is a matter of counting the dead but it is important that the campaign makes it clear that our view of the future is not one dominated either by nuclear weapons or nuclear power stations.

If Thatcher has her way in the 1990s Britain will be the home not just for four Trident submarines but also 15 Pressurised Water Reactors of the Harrisburg sort. Nuclear reactors constitute a major threat to the environment

and a health hazard for the installation's workforce. But as Britain, via weapons and energy, becomes further committed to becoming a nuclear state so do democratic rights and civil liberties diminish. Within nuclear power plants many basic union rights do not apply: security checks are rigorous; and an armed police force has considerable powers. With the movement of radioactive waste and nuclear weapons around the country the open presence of the state will increase.

Finally at a more tactical level it has to be recognised that within western Europe it is the question of nuclear energy, rather than weapons, that is to the fore. Britain is exceptional in this respect. In the major European countries the mass demonstrations and protests have been against the building of new nuclear reactors. Links need to be built and both wings of the anti-nuclear campaign recognise the intimate inter-relationship between them.

#### The Soviet nuclear capacity

The controversial question as to whether the Soviet Union should have the bomb and whether it would ever use it still haunts the movement. During the 1950s and 1960s it was the centre of many heated exchanges involving such people as Ken Coates.

The Soviet ruling elite cannot be absolved of all responsibility for the present nuclear build-up. The quantity and level of weapons they possess is way beyond that necessary to act as a deterrent to the USA. Their international policy of detente sacrifices the extension of the world revolution, which is the best defence of the gains of the Russian masses, for the maintenance of the status quo. The Soviet Union has a massive 'overkill' potential. Huge resources are devoted to the further development of nuclear weapons — resources which could be more productively employed in the interests of the Soviet workers. There is also massive investment in nuclear energy on the one hand and biological and chemical warfare on the other, neither of which can be justified as in the interests of the Soviet masses.

In 1979 the Soviet military budget was \$106,000 million. They have 6,000 strategic nuclear warheads, which while they may be less accurate than their American counterparts, pack a heavier explosive yield. The Warsaw Pact contributes 25 per cent of world military spending and in 1979 the Soviet Union made the highest number of nuclear test explosions.

But such criticisms are not made to equate the role of the USA and the USSR in the arms race. At every stage it has been the US imperialists who have taken the lead — from being the first to build the atomic bomb to developing the first submarine-launched nuclear missile. Criticisms of the Soviet bureaucrats' approach to nuclear weapons can and should be made but until the imperialist war-mongers have been disarmed the continued existence of the Soviet bomb cannot be opposed.

Nuclear weapons, by their very nature, are built to create mass and indiscriminate destruction. The major casualties will be the working people of either side. If there was a full-scale confrontation between the USA and the USSR, it is estimated that around 200 million people would perish. Given that civil defence precautions only really exist for the ruling classes and elites it will be the population at large which will pay with their lives.

# THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

By Joel Greifinger

*The Empire Strikes Back.* Director: Irvin Kershner. Producer: George Lucas. Screenplay: Lucas. Photography: Peter Suschitzky. Editor: Paul Hirsch. Music: John Williams. Twentieth Century-Fox.

Millions of kids (and many adults as well) have come to inhabit *Star Wars'* imaginative universe as a basis for their own play and fantasy. Since it uses a narrative structure and characterisations straightforwardly adapted from comic books, Flash Gordon, and Saturday matinee Western serials, the film is easily assimilable to children's everyday discourse. For adults, the reduction of the conflict between good and evil to the interactions of characters participating in cartoon-balloon dialogue and mind-boggling technical feats, has both self-conscious satire of, and a loving feel for, its popular culture sources. It is engaging and, above all, funny. Building on this cross-generational and often cultish audience, *Star Wars* has grossed \$410 million, making it financially the most successful film in history.

As you read this, *Star Wars* may stand on the brink of losing that designation to its first sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back.* *Empire* begins by redrawing the parameters of the *Star Wars* narrative. This is no ordinary spin-off from a successful blockbuster. Instead, it is the second episode of the middle trilogy in a projected nine-part *Star Wars* epic. Thus the film we have come to know as *Star Wars* is, in fact, Episode IV: A New Hope. In some ways this shift is quite simply made. Yet this is not just the lengthening of a sure-fire moneymaker. One of the over-arching connotations of the film is its own place in a discourse on Truth and Meaning. Thus, *Time* magazine in its cover story on *Empire* can analogise creator/executive producer George Lucas to Homer and John Bunyan, in case we haven't caught the point.

This shift to the serious and self-important — *Empire* has very few laughs — has elicited a split critical response. One either proclaims *Empire* mythology for modern man (sic) or dismisses it as the end of a creative innocence. Among the former are the glossy magazines playing the special-effects numbers game. Coing over the cost, the technique, and the sheer volume of the effects (with accompanying colour stills), they bring us 'behind the scenes' of the spectacle. They try to enlist us in a sort of technocratic ode which parallels their own self-image and forms part of the basis of their ideology. Having suitably loosened us up, they spring the analogies with Virgil and Dante.

The detractors, who are largely film critics by trade, grant *Empire's* spectacular achievement in special effects — they clearly outdo those in Episode IV. Nevertheless, they maintain that the attempt at 'real characters', at psychological motivation and metaphysical nuance, brings this huge technostructure crashing down in a cacophony of pretence. Having critically slain the dragon, they rest easy.

The most unfocused aspects of *Empire* are on the level of what is usually known as content: what is this film about? From the

This is a shortened version of an article which appeared in the American Journal Socialist Review September-October 1980.

beginning of *Star Wars* (i.e., Episode IV), we have been in the presence of a great battle between the forces of good and evil — or more precisely the good and evil sides of the Force. Yet it is never quite clear what the basis of the Empire's evil is, nor what precepts motivate the cause for which the Rebels fight. The good guy/bad guy dichotomy is entirely pre-given. It finds reinforcement in the films only at the level of individual behaviour. So we see the representatives of the Empire acting in a calculating and cold-blooded manner. Darth Vader kills off his commanders when they fail to capture the heroes; he goes back on the deal he has coerced Lando into, etc. The Empire is not so much evil as nasty.

The good guys, on the other hand, act unambiguously on principles of comradeship, deep concern, and courage. Again, the manifestations are interpersonal: they feel deeply for one another. We are given no sense of a set of underlying principles of a collectivity beyond themselves for which they are fighting. That we accept them as 'The Revolt' is entirely a matter of our ideological identification with 'the underdog'.

Luke, who is being tested in this elaborate rite of passage to manhood, does not yet know *substantively* the difference between good and evil. His impatience and immaturity are manifested in his inability to place his loyalty to his friends in the wider context of their common project. Like the view the film offers the viewer, Luke's moral universe is a pre-defined confrontation between light and dark forces. The threat of a dark side within Luke, at this point strongly hinted, approaches a moral ambiguity previously unknown to the saga. The first shades of grey are appearing on the screen.

Part of this move towards depth is a rather blatant appeal to depth psychology. The liaison between Luke and Princess Leia, the unobtainable woman in white, hinted at the end of Episode IV, is here disrupted as she recognises her sexual interest in a *mature* man. If we are unclear as to the implications of this, we are treated to Luke battling against Darth with those Force-field phalluses, of which one reviewer of *Star Wars* deftly commented, 'You carry it in your pocket until you need it, then press a button and it's three feet long and glows in the dark.' Darth declares himself Luke's daddy and slices off his sword and hand in one fell swoop. This opens up a host of ambiguities because, when it comes to Papas, 'if you can't kill 'em...'

Can the *Star Wars* serial carry this enormous symbolic weight? Up to now it has not even begun to clarify the political terms of this conflict over colonisation and empire. *Star Wars* (Episode IV) didn't have to. Standing alone, it was a one-shot camp extravaganza. Its simplicity, bordering on the simplistic, was one of its greatest attractions. It just won't work over the long haul. With *Empire*, Lucas and associates have already made a plunge into the waters of self-conscious myth-making. To answer the big questions the film poses, it will be necessary to put some political and spiritual meat on the bones of its caricatures of good and evil. If we are to judge by what we have seen so far in either sphere, the possibility of cogency looks bleak.

What are we to make of the enormous popularity of these films among kids?

*The Empire Strikes Back* is a high-tech shoot 'em up, with all of the implications this popular culture form has always had for children's play. Much like generations of

Americans before them, they can be seen in parks and playgrounds, hiding behind convenient shields and shouting, 'Zap, zap. I got you with my laser.' And like kids before them (and probably these are still mostly boys), the result of getting zapped by thumb and forefinger is instant death ... followed by instant resuscitation. Like always, getting to play the 'good guys' or your favourite character is something to be alternated, shared, or decided by other measures of status.

The title notwithstanding, these films are not primarily about warfare. Although both *Star Wars* films have contained a variety of stylistic references to many popular culture genres, the saga stands in clearest continuity with the Western. It comes complete with an 'outsider' (Han) on the fringes of society who possesses extraordinary skill, and who is drawn, despite his worldly cynicism, by the passion of a boy intent upon avenging the destruction of the old homestead by the 'bad guys'. While Luke is like a young colt yearning to run free, Princess Leia, like generations of Western heroines, is the embodiment of community-rooted norms and an ethic of responsibility. And, just as the Western is a representation of dehistoricised moral and social conflict, *Star Wars* evokes a future which, though technologically dazzling, is presented as 'like the present — only more so'. Starting from this classic schema, *Star Wars* is far from being the primer on clean, technological destruction which some have claimed. Like other Westerns, these films open most immediately and forcefully onto questions about individual commitment within a broader ideology of individualism. And though its facile treatment of moral issues may make *Empire* a mediocre film, it nonetheless may leave open more imaginative space than other, more coherent thematic formulations might.

On the other hand, this is *not* just another Western.

*Star Wars* has upped the technological stakes of producing a film which will keep kids involved and excited. Enormous amounts of capital must now be risked for such a project. Under these conditions, studios opt for the sure thing, thus exerting a centripetal force upon more innovative creative energies. Hopalong Cassidy will never be the same.

Another clear difference is the array and the marketing of the paraphernalia. In 1979, Kenner sold forty million *Star Wars*-related figures and games. And, admittedly, there is something sobering in watching a five-year-old crying desperately to his mother that he wants a Stormtrooper doll.

Perhaps it is the formulation of the question about the films' 'effects' that rings false. Assuming that *The Empire Strikes Back* 'does something to kids' lands us in a mire of behaviourist assumptions as mucky as the Dagobah swamp.

Kids are not so much formed by its rhythms and assumptions but rather adapt these forms and stretch their boundaries in their active play and fantasy. This is not to deny that power and domination are among the rules of the game learned at play in American society. Yet *Star Wars* provides a wide range of possible roles to occupy and relations to produce and reproduce. It is a fairly traditional piece in the complex puzzle of social determinations and cultural codes. Any simplistic notion of these films colonising the imagination is off the track.

# British Features

## BRITISH POLITICS IN THE 1980's



BY JOHN ROSS

Politics in Britain is entering into its greatest period of change since the First World War. The changes involved are more fundamental even than those of 1945 which ushered in the 'welfare state'.

Two developments — the split in the Labour Party and the process which will break the Tory Party in its present form — are immediate and striking. Others — proportional representation, Welsh and Scottish nationalism, renewed struggle over the EEC and Britain's relation to the world — are more subtle but equally far-reaching in their implications. Taken together they will transform the shape of British politics during the 1980s.

The left in Britain is extremely unprepared for these developments. In this article, based on a talk given in July 1980, John Ross looks at the emerging features of Britain's political crisis and situates them in a broader historical context.

### THE IMPERIALIST PAST

One simple fact holds the key to understanding the specific character of British society: *Britain is not just any capitalist society in general. It was for two centuries the greatest of the capitalist powers and the first imperialist state in the world.*

This has affected the very foundations and every single aspect of every major social layer of the country. It created for the ruling class enormous reserves with which to buy off the working class. Part of the problem for the ruling class now is that it can no longer afford all the concessions it has made over the years. What is more, the very success of British imperialism, the construction of the empire with its enormous finance and

banking capital, has helped create the conditions for Britain's spectacular decline today as all its international contradictions so to speak 'implode' in the domestic economy and society.

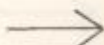
Britain's imperialist history also explains why the British bourgeoisie was the first in the world to develop what Trotsky described as the perfected, finished form of bourgeois rule. By this he did not mean Margaret Thatcher or her counterparts of his day. He referred rather to an interlocking system of two elements: *bourgeois democracy*, a state presenting itself as the representative of the people as a whole but in reality serving the capitalist class, based on a *labour bureaucracy* controlling the working class and preventing any challenge to the bourgeois democratic system from that quarter.

Contrary to the 'conventional wisdom' of the labour movement, it is this bureaucracy rather than the Tory Party which is the ultimate and chief bastion of British imperialism and the British ruling class. Without the labour bureaucracy, they could not survive one major crisis. We will look at some of the implications of this later. First, however, let us put the Tory Party in its correct place and perspective.

### The Tory Party

The Tory Party is the oldest continuously existing political party in the world. Its origins go back directly to the period 1685-8 and can be traced indirectly to 1640. It was never the chief party of the British *industrial* bourgeoisie; that role was played by a section of the Whigs and later, and more centrally, by the Liberal Party. The Tory party represented the most backward, archaic and reactionary forces in the most economically and socially advanced country in the world.

How did this political dinosaur come to be the chief party of the ruling class? Prior to 1848, the Tory Party found itself split over the repeal of the Corn Laws, reduced in parliament to a



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rump and perhaps historically threatened with disappearance. The Liberal Party looked a much more likely candidate to emerge as the dominant party of the ruling class.

What ensured the Tories' supremacy inside the ruling class was that British capitalism had created for itself a monster — a working class which by the 1840s, in Chartism, was beginning to take on a political life of its own. To confront this social threat to its power, the bourgeoisie set out to build a coalition of every possible force in society — no matter how archaic, decrepit or 'medieval'. The stable, fixed and utterly reactionary core of this coalition was provided by the obscurantist sections of the ruling class — the most backward of the aristocracy and landowners and their allies — who constituted the historical nucleus of the Tory Party. The modern Tory Party was built by a process of adding layer upon layer to this core: reactionary Protestant forces in the north of Ireland, the petit-bourgeoisie, the military hierarchy, and then, with the political genius of Disraeli followed by the organising skills of Joseph Chamberlain, a significant section of the working class — in the twentieth century around a third in terms of votes. The economically dominant force in the party was banking capital.

The problem for the ruling class was that while the Tory Party was able to maintain the political grip of British imperialism over society, it was at the expense of great damage to the domestic economy. The specific ruling class orientation embodied in the party, that of international banking operations, high exchange rates and concessions to the working class internally to maintain its firm political base, constitutes one of the chief historical roots of the present economic crisis of British imperialism.

## The Working Class Movement

The working class movement in Britain was, at the time of its formation, as advanced as any in the world. For quite a long time, indeed, it was the *only* working class movement existing on a mass scale. In its politicisation, internationalism, development of revolutionary currents and its breadth of support as a class movement, Chartism — the basic organised expression of the workers' movement from the mid 1830s onwards — was, in its time, second to none.

With the development of imperialism from the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the ruling class achieved an economic room for manoeuvre which allowed it to buy off and change the character of the working class movement. By a strange dialectic, the same imperialist process created the conditions for the British working class to become organisationally the strongest in the whole of Europe while simultaneously one of the very weakest politically. On the basis of its huge expansion, British capitalism had the *potential* to afford substantial concessions to the working class. Of course, the capitalist class would give nothing voluntarily — no ruling class ever does; but it could afford to let the working class *win* important concessions.

The working class built colossal organisations to struggle for such concessions. Today, we see the results: over twelve million members organised in trade unions; organisationally the most powerful trade union movement in Europe in the most proletarianised country and with the most favourable relationship of forces.

But at the same time, its ability to grant concessions allowed the bourgeoisie to maintain a *political* domination over the working class. It never had to engage in head on confrontation. There is no British equivalent of the Paris Commune, the German revolutions of 1918-19 or 1923, of Hungary in 1919 or of the Spanish Civil War, let alone of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917. The General Strike of 1926 — the nearest British

equivalent — was anything but an open fight for power.

Because the working class never faced such a confrontation with the bourgeoisie, the question of organising every oppressed layer of society against the ruling class was never a pressing one. It was able to get away with a chauvinist policy internationally, with failing to support the demands of the struggle in Ireland and so on. The political domination of the bourgeoisie was consolidated on all these bases.

The problem, judged historically, for the ruling class is that the material basis of the backwardness of the workers' movement is disappearing. Needless to say, the British working class is not genetically backward or stupid. It is no worse and no better than any other working class movement in this respect. Its historical backwardness has derived from the material strength of British imperialism, its ruling class, and the powerful bureaucracies created in its ranks. The material decline of British capitalism creates the conditions for a transformation of its consciousness, although as always consciousness lags behind the changes in objective reality.

The crisis of British imperialism therefore creates the following 'race' which summarises the problems of the British class struggle in their most general political form: Will the ruling class succeed in using its political strength to smash the organisational strength of the labour movement before the working class, to defend its social and organisational gains, is forced to break with its existing political consciousness?

The task of revolutionaries is to fight within the working class for a break with its existing political consciousness and the development of a movement adequate to the needs of the objective situation. This is no small problem and the solution cannot simply be plucked from the history of the working class as it has existed in Britain for the last 130 years and writ large: ie. economic struggles, bigger economic struggles, a grand fight against the Tory government etc. This is not an adequate strategy for socialism. Naturally all these elements have to be part of a revolutionary strategy; but they in no sense comprise either its totality or its framework. *The working class will have to confront and overcome a far deeper and more complicated crisis of British imperialism than anything it has faced in the last century and a half.*

## Political Crisis

Looking at the nature of a really serious crisis allows us to distinguish underlying features of such situations compared to periods of stagnation. It is, therefore, instructive, to get an indication of what precisely will develop and in fact is already developing, to look back to the most acute crisis that British imperialism has suffered in its history which unfolded in the period leading up to, during and following the First World War.

What characterised this period was not simply that there were major struggles on trade union and economic questions — although these did indeed take place on a massive scale. It was that a *general* social, economic and political crisis developed of not merely national but international dimensions.

The first was the developing struggle, and then war, of national liberation waged by the Irish people against British imperialism — the first successful anti-colonial struggle waged against the British state since the American war of independence. The second was the rise of the movement on a decisive question of women's oppression at the time — the Suffragette struggle for the right to vote. A third dimension was the impact of the war itself both in the direct effects of the slaughter and in its repercussions throughout British society. Fourthly, there were big changes in the party political system with the split and decline of the Liberals and the rise of the

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Labour Party. Fifth, there was the impact of the Russian Revolution and the role this played in bringing into existence the British Communist Party. Finally, all these were welded together with a frontal attack on working class living standards and trade union organisations.

In short, this period, on a less developed scale, showed the characteristics of every serious revolutionary crisis: the coincidence of a multitude of economic, social, political, national and international elements creating disorganisation in the ruling class, radicalisation among the intermediate strata of society, and major struggles of the working class. What differentiated this British political crisis from revolutionary crises in Germany, Russia or Spain was first that the objective crisis was not qualitatively so deep and secondly the hopelessness of the overwhelming majority leaderships and traditions of the working class. With a few honourable individual exceptions, there was an almost total failure to develop a coherent revolutionary strategy combining struggle around all the elements of the crisis.

There was no serious campaign of solidarity with the Irish war of independence — on this even the early Communist Party had a not particularly creditable record. The Suffragette movement was treated with indifference and sometimes even hostility by the majority leadership of the labour movement. As in the other combatant countries, there was a generalised capitulation in the face of the imperialist war; a tragic symbol of this is provided by the fact that tens of thousands of miners who had engaged in tremendous class battles before 1914, rushed to enlist when war broke out. Very few of those active on one particular issue made serious attempts to link up with people struggling on others.

The outcome of these failures was not merely that the working class missed its objective opportunities but that the ruling class was able to turn these opportunities into positive weapons against the labour movement and oppressed. In Ireland, the British ruling class had been brought by 1914 to the threshold of civil war posing the most serious internal crisis it had faced at least since 1832. The failure of the working class to mount mass solidarity with the national liberation struggle which developed out of the 1916 Easter Rising and the 1918 Sinn Fein election victory allowed the ruling class to create the utterly reactionary Orange state in the north of Ireland. The result was the establishment of a reactionary hegemony in the protestant working class and the creation of a counter-revolutionary force permanently aimed potentially against the Irish struggle and the British working class.

In relation to the Suffragettes, the working class had an even clearer opportunity. The movement's leadership initially gravitated spontaneously towards the labour movement and its political organisations. But the leadership and majority of the workers' movement refused to take up the cause. The result was the historically ridiculous fact that it was a Liberal-Conservative government which, after decades of bitter opposition, legislated votes for women. If the Labour Party had been identified as the party of women's rights, the whole shape of British politics in the inter-war period could have been significantly different. Instead the Labour leadership positively handed the Tory Party a new and important element for its electoral bloc with women, including working class women, casting a much higher vote than men for bourgeois parties.

Finally, the leadership of the workers' movement as a whole was totally unable to deal with the *political* crisis which was created by the war. The explosion of strikes, mass discontent in the army and dislocation of the police in the immediate post-war period was allowed to pass, or worse defused, by the Labour and trade union leaders. They then allowed successive

governments — Labour and Tory — to make preparations for the General Strike of 1926 and ensured by their actions that the strike would not succeed. The result was a working class movement defeated for a generation.

The failure of the working class to take advantage of its opportunities graphically illustrates a fundamental law of politics. The existence of a crisis of the capitalist system in itself determines nothing about its outcome; it merely indicates that the existing situation is untenable and must be altered. *If the working class fails to exploit the contradictions and crises of bourgeois society then these will be used by the ruling class to attack and weaken the working class and oppressed.*

## The Crisis of British Imperialism

Turning now to the present, I will not try to deal with all the elements which will develop before the emergence of a full blown revolutionary crisis threatening the rule of the capitalist class. Firstly, nobody can tell in advance exactly what they will be and secondly such a crisis is in any case quite some time away. What I do want to consider are the political lines of fissure along which the struggles of tomorrow are being prepared; here, the basic trends are already clear.

The first is an incipient political crisis in the Tory Party. The Thatcher Government is not just an 'ordinary' Conservative government but a last attempt to keep together the historical Tory bloc. Its failure is written into the whole relationship of class forces; it will not just spell the end of a particular administration but of the whole basis of the party, especially if it takes place in the context of an explosion of working class militancy and struggle. This will be the last government of the Tory Party in its present form.

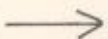
I do not want this to be misunderstood. I am *not* predicting that the defeat of Thatcher will be followed by a glorious succession of workers' governments — quite the contrary. Nor am I suggesting that the Tories will disappear never to hold office again. The point I am making is simply that the fall of Thatcher will not lead simply to a 'swing of the pendulum' but will rather initiate a process breaking up the old pattern of British politics.

## The Tory Crisis

To understand this point, it is necessary to dispose completely of the idea that the interests of the Tory Party and the ruling class are identical, that a defeat of the Tories is the same as a defeat of the ruling class, that 'Tories' equals 'bourgeoisie' and 'Labour' equals 'working class'. On the contrary, as we have already discussed, the Tory Party historically *did not* represent the most important and dynamic sections of the domestic bourgeoisie but particular and sectional interests. Its appeal for the ruling class as a whole lay in its success in containing the working class. Its formula of *political reaction plus economic concessions* both embodied the domination of foreign investment and banking capital which is the historically specific form of British imperialism and gave a tremendous political hegemony to the bourgeoisie.

The problem now facing the Tory Party and the ruling class is that this neat combination of economic orientation and political strategy has been undermined by the erosion of Britain's colossal profits from financial operations overseas and the domestic inefficiency of the economy. The most rational *economic* strategy for British imperialism today is roughly that represented by the Heath wing of the Tory Party and the Liberals: wage controls, state intervention to build investment, sharp increases in the rate of exploitation etc. These forces, however, have no *political* strategy for dealing with the working class as the Heath Government of 1970-4 conclusively showed.

Thatcher, in contrast, has got a *political* strategy which she



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used extremely skillfully in the period leading up to the 1979 elections. It is one pioneered in a more grotesque form by Powell ever since 1968. It consists of using the political strength of the ruling class to regenerate every type of reactionary campaign imaginable — against 'the Communist threat', 'Irish murderers', 'welfare scroungers', 'immigrants', 'the breakdown of law and order' and so on — to outflank the Labour leadership; in short, to use the historical backwardness of Labour and labourism to win support for the Tories.

The trouble with this orientation is that it has no coherent and acceptable economic policy. This was very obviously the case with Powell whose attempt to create a real political dynamic involved policies — withdrawal from the EEC, ultra-monetarism, etc. — economically quite unacceptable to the ruling class. Thatcher is trying to get the best of both worlds with reactionary campaigns lacking Powell's incitement of mass mobilisation plus less extreme monetarist economic policies which do not involve the total deflation and confrontation envisaged by Powell. In reality, of course, she will finally get the *worst* of both: an economic policy incapable of decisively shifting the class relation of forces, and one pushed increasingly towards pragmatism, together with an insufficient reactionary mobilisation to protect her from the unpopular consequences of her economic policies. The whole Thatcherite package is doomed although this will not prevent it imposing some serious defeats on the working class before it collapses. It is its inability to find a coherent combination of an economic formula and a political one which is creating a major political crisis for the ruling class.

## The Crisis of the National State

The British bourgeois state is incomparably the longest continuously existing one in the world. With the major exception of the liberation of the south of Ireland, its essential form has not changed since the bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century and the unification of the Scottish and English states which followed it. The major subsequent changes, above all the extension of the franchise and the incorporation of the working class politically into the system, were all within the basic framework of institutions which flowed out of the final bourgeois victories of 1688 and 1707. The elimination of a serious Welsh bourgeoisie and unification with the Scottish one and the maintenance of a bourgeois democracy with a monarchy, a strong two-party system based on a stable electoral arrangement, and a 'non-political' civil service, were its underlying features. The last major problem for the British state, that of integrating the leadership and bureaucracy of the working class, was successfully achieved within this framework during the period before and after 1945.

The combination of British economic decline with the problems of the Tory Party now threatens to throw this system into crisis. The first effect is that in the areas worst hit by economic decline, the Conservative Party is already incapable of holding together its historic bloc. This is most obvious in Scotland where it has been reduced from the majority party to a peripheral force; even in the 1979 election, Scotland swung to Labour and against the Tories. The same basic process, however, is also affecting the industrial north of England. As economic decline strikes deeper the Tory Party is being threatened with the loss of its historical base in the working class.

The second effect is the promotion of splinter bourgeois parties. As long as the Tory Party was strong and its working class base intact, there were big constraints operating against other parties of the bourgeoisie, both against the Liberals and against any new formations. With the weakening of the Tory bloc, there is a new tendency for splinter bourgeois groupings to

emerge corresponding to fissures inside the ruling class.

The first example of this process is the steady rise of the Liberal Party since its low point of the early 1950s. At the parliamentary level this is obscured by the electoral system, which is precisely designed to prevent the emergence of third parties, and by the particular features of the 1979 election. However, taken in terms of underlying trends the pattern is clear. Throughout the 1950s the Liberals were a bourgeois irrelevance. In the last years of the Macmillan government of 1959-63, with the onset of the first serious economic problems of the post-war period and the emergence of crises inside the Tory Party, they began to revive. By 1970, and more strikingly in 1974, their share of the vote started to rise. The Lib-Lab pact gave them their first *de facto* foothold in government since the war.

The economic policies of the Liberal Party, as we have already noted, today correspond more closely than those of any other party to the interests of industrial capital; it is therefore not altogether surprising that in 1974 they received for the first time some financial contributions from bourgeois sources. What is more, their traditional financial problems will be significantly further reduced with the introduction of state funding of political parties. The institution of any form of proportional representation would earn them an almost permanent role in bourgeois coalition governments.

The second splintering process is internal to the alliance which constituted the Tory Party itself. The reactionary Orange bloc in the north of Ireland has historically been the staunchest ally of the Tory core in England. The party even presented itself in elections as the 'Conservative and Unionist Party'. The new rise of the Irish struggle after 1968 has shattered the Unionist connection — first splitting them from the Tories and then marginalising the old official Unionist Party.

The third such process is taking place in Scotland. The setbacks suffered by the SNP in the 1979 elections led the bourgeois media and a significant section of the left to conclude that the question of devolution and nationalism was closed. The short sightedness and absurdity of such a perspective is indicated by the SNP's performance in the first Glasgow by-election under the Thatcher government and in the positions on devolution adopted by successive Labour Party Scottish conferences. In reality the SNP has evolved during the 1970s from a lunatic fringe sect to a serious party while the Tories have become a marginal force in Scotland.

More important, there is a real social basis for this development. Economically, sections of the Scottish bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie, particularly those tied to the emergence of oil as a key element in the economy, have distinctly different interests to those of the bankers of the City of London who play an important role in guiding Tory policy. Politically, the intense hatred of the Scottish working class for the Tories makes it impossible for them to win a major share of the urban vote in a period of decline. Only another bourgeois party can prevent a clean sweep in Scotland by the Labour Party. Finally, underlying all else, Scotland is a separate nation from England — even if not an oppressed one. The 'Scottish question' will not recede but will become more prominent an element in British politics as the 1980s go on.

The central thrust of all these developments, and others in Wales, is not just to break up the historic Tory bloc. Combined with a crisis in the Labour Party, they will recast the whole shape of British politics and threaten the present form of the British bourgeois democratic state.

## The Crisis in the Labour Party

The crisis of British imperialism does not only affect the institutions of the *ruling* class. Because every class was formed and



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moulded by Britain's imperial greatness, so every class is shaken and transformed by its decline. It is, therefore not surprising that we are entering a crucial period in the crisis and development of the Labour Party of which the present split is merely one stage. The basis of this split is the existence inside the Labour Party, especially since 1945, of a layer, represented by Jenkins, Williams etc., which has a social base fundamentally different from the traditional base of the Labour Party. Their base is not the trade union bureaucracy of the working class but parts of the state apparatus and nationalised industries, and even marginal sections of the bourgeoisie itself.

Why the split is developing now is not simply or even chiefly determined by the gyrations of the Jenkins layer itself but by the situation inside the unions. It has never been Fabianism, of which the Jenkinsites are the rightful inheritors, that has dominated the party. That is a myth of the petit-bourgeois intellectual layer they represent. It was the trade union bureaucracy which established the Labour Party and it has always ultimately controlled it. They were prepared to give prominence within the movement to people whose ideas fitted in with their own. But they have *never* allowed anyone but themselves the final power to decide what went on in the party. When they put their foot down, as they did for example in 1968 over *In Place of Strife*, then the party leadership came to heel.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, this situation caused no problems for people like Jenkins and Gaitskell. On the contrary, they found themselves aligned with the trade union bureaucrats against the Bevanites and the constituency left. As long as the 'new right' did not go too far — as they did, for example in attempting to remove Clause IV of the party constitution — the trade union bosses were quite happy to let them dominate the party.

The accelerated decline of British imperialism, however, undermined the basis of this alliance. The chronological turning point was the struggle over *In Place of Strife*. By 1968 the bourgeoisie was not offering concessions but rather demanding an open attack on the organisations of the labour movement. The Jenkinsites naturally rushed to comply. The trade union bureaucracy, on the other hand, under pressure from its base and fearing for its own position, rejected the proposals. As always, when it came to the crunch, the party leadership finally fell into line with the union bureaucracy — leaving the Jenkin-

sites isolated and creating rage in the ruling class. From that moment on, the Jenkinsites, to their surprise, have found themselves to be a relatively powerless clique and it was only a matter of time before they split.

The policy issues on which they have fought in the party have been those which are most unacceptable to the ruling class: withdrawal from the EEC, unilateral nuclear disarmament and any threat that the labour movement might develop a democratic internal structure. The combination of continued pressure in the unions, which prevents a total retreat by the bureaucracy and imposes 'leftist' positions on certain questions, and the need of the bourgeoisie for more and more open confrontation creates the conditions for an explosive crisis in the Labour Party.

## Bennism

This is the background against which we must analyse the emergence of Benn and 'Bennism'. Left wings inside the Labour Party are, in themselves, nothing new — previous examples were the Socialist League of the 1930s and the Bevanites in the early 1950s. But these previous lefts generally emerged either when the working class had suffered serious defeats — as after 1926 or 1931 — or when capitalism was entering a boom period — as in the 1950s. Their organisation was largely restricted to the constituencies which count for little inside the party. The parliamentary leadership, in concert with a right-wing trade union bureaucracy, could easily keep the situation under control.

Not since the National Left Wing Movement of the 1920s has a left wing developed in the Labour Party in a situation in which the working class has not been qualitatively defeated and the ruling class cannot grant serious and lasting concessions. What is more, today as in the 1920s, the radicalisation extends into the unions to the extent where there is serious pressure on the bureaucracy from below.

It is this latter aspect which most alarms the ruling class and gives Bennism its real significance. A few protests in the constituencies can be easily lived with but the trade unions are something quite different. They are enormously powerful instruments of struggle — potentially more powerful than governments as the ruling class rudely rediscovered in 1972 and 1974. Of course, the bourgeoisie has few illusions that its 'labour lieutenants of capital' are in themselves likely to overthrow the bourgeois order. But it does fear the consequences of actions they are pushed into either on the field of mass struggle or through their controlling position in the Labour Party. Above all, it fears the creation of expectations which might lead to their supporters getting out of control.

The distinctive characteristic of Benn himself is precisely that he understands that the left must base itself primarily in the unions. This is reflected not merely in the political themes he identifies with — the alternative economic strategy, workers co-operatives, workers 'control', etc., but also in his organisational orientation. From 1968 onwards, symbolised by him marching at the head of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders demonstration, Benn set out to build up political support inside the unions with the perspective of forging an alliance with the emerging 'left' sections of the bureaucracy. His whole orientation, from his left words to his decision to stay in the government in 1975 because of the position taken by Jack Jones, was calculated to win union leaders' backing for his candidature for the party leadership. Given his lack of support in the Parliamentary Labour Party, an integral part of his strategy had to be to wrest the leadership election from its exclusive domain — a policy incidentally cementing the alliance he wanted in that it further increased the direct power of the union bureaucracy inside the party.

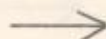
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What alarms the ruling class is that this orientation will prevent the infliction of any easy defeat on the Bennites. The right wing success and consolidation in the AUEW was a significant victory but, taken as a whole, the trade union bureaucracy today is still very far removed from the old reliable right wing monolith that defeated Bevan. Confronted with Thatcher's attacks, faced with a radicalisation in sections of their own ranks, even if they do not go all the way with Benn, some sections of the union bureaucracy will still go too far for the ruling class. The immediate orientation of the Labour Party leadership, of course, will be to orient to a direct alliance with the ruling class, and particularly the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), against 'Tory madness'. But in the medium term, any such orientation is unviable and only total capitulation of the 1975-9 variety or Bennism represent coherent alternatives. The choice between these options will increase dramatically the tensions in both the base and the leadership of the trade unions and Labour Party.

The combination of a right wing split and the emergence of a 'new left' is a major destabilising element inside the Labour Party. For the first time in several decades the mass of the working class can see a clear 'left' alternative to the traditional policies of recent Labour governments. The importance of this fact cannot be overstated. For the working class movement within the framework of the bourgeois democratic state, the Labour party is the *decisive element* in politics. Whether a question is discussed inside the party determines for hundreds of thousands of workers whether it is one of legitimate or of 'fringe' politics.

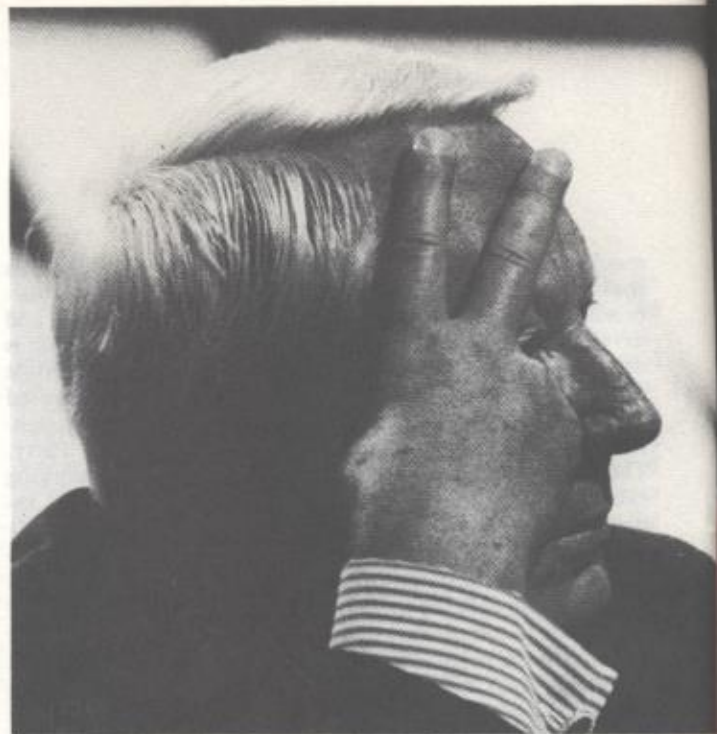
The combination of the objective decline of British imperialism with the crisis in the Labour Party has the potential enormously to speed up the process of politicisation inside the working class. It is in fact *the* precondition for building a mass revolutionary party in Britain. As Trotsky said, when you talk about a revolution any figure of less than ten million people is of no significance. Once you begin to talk about a politicisation of *the masses* then only a differentiation in the Labour Party is important. We are, as yet, nowhere near the type of crisis and differentiation which poses a mass revolutionary party. But it is, nonetheless, developments in the Labour Party and, in particular, the emergence of Bennism, which will dominate working class politics in Britain in the 1980s.

This can be clearly seen by comparing the present situation to the 1970-74 struggle against the Heath Government. The political situation then was overwhelmingly dominated by open mass trade union action; the strikes against the Industrial Relations Act, the 1972 miners' strike, the freeing of the Pentonville Five, the second miners' strike of 1974. Developments in the Labour Party had some influence but not a guiding one; the development of a new Bennite left had begun but was still relatively limited as an active factor in politics.

Today the situation is quite transformed. It is not that the mass struggle has disappeared — it is on a lower level than in 1970-74 but the working class has suffered no qualitative defeat; it is, however, today *combined* with the most general effects of the political crisis and in particular with the developments in the Labour Party. We have seen and will see not only big economic strikes like the steelworkers but also struggles against militarism, women's oppression and racism, confrontations over labour movement democracy and a continuing deep crisis in the north of Ireland with all these issues increasingly penetrating the political and policy discussions of the Labour Party.

#### Proportional Representation

The most dramatic development in the 1980s will occur at the *political* level. Some of the crucial elements of this have already



been discussed; others include a developing crisis in relation to the EEC. These elements, however, will not simply accumulate individually in the quantitative manner. *At some point they will combine with the deepening economic and social crisis and the potential for mass explosions in the working class to produce a qualitative shift in the alignment of British politics.*

The most likely occasion for such a shift will be the introduction of an electoral system based on some form of proportional representation (PR). It might seem surprising to argue that what seems a technical question could bring about decisive political changes but in fact extremely substantial issues are involved in electoral reform. The entire present form of British bourgeois politics is historically based on the premise that two stable parties, both defending the fundamental interests of the ruling class, can assume office and form firm governments. All the details of the political system — the 'non-political' head of state, civil service and state bureaucracy; the avoidance of coalitions outside wartime; the unitary state structure; the survival of the House of Lords; the absence of a strong dominant military/police caste — are based on this one premise.

In the period prior to the twentieth century, stability was ensured through an alternation in government between two parties of the bourgeoisie. In this century, the British ruling class has found itself in the fortunate position of having a labour bureaucracy so tame and under control that it could be permitted to govern alone; in most other major countries, the bourgeoisie have considered their labour bureaucrats insufficiently reliable and firm in their grip on the working class to assume office except in coalition with a capitalist party.

The various Labour governments from 1923 to 1979 served the capitalists well; and when problems arose or other considerations came to the fore, Labour could be alternated with the Tories. In either case strong and stable administrations governed with little need of coalitions, national governments outside wartime, Popular Fronts, the development of strong forces to the right of the Tory Party or similar dangerous experiments.

The trouble with the present situation is that both potential governing parties, for different reasons, are showing strong tendencies to instability; the Tory base threatens to become socially too narrow to face a major working class upsurge while Labour might create dangerously high and potentially uncontrollable expectations among its supporters if allowed into office by itself. The old party alternation is becoming increasingly difficult, even dangerous, for the ruling class. They need to mobilise broader and more powerful bourgeois alliances than those offered by the leaderships of single parties.

# British Features

The answer is not, as some people including Tom Nairn have suggested, a national government. In the first place this would only be a temporary solution — no bourgeoisie in history has ever created a semi-permanent coalition of all major parties. Secondly, the probable effect of forming a national government with an undefeated working class would be a dangerous radicalisation within the Labour Party and a general politicisation in the working class tending towards a break with all the established parties. The only peacetime national government which has existed, in 1929-31, could only be risked because the working class had suffered a crushing defeat five years previously (and this was, in any case, less of a real national government than a Conservative one with a rump Labour leadership split).

Very different, however, is a change in the electoral system to introduce proportional representation — which means in reality a move to a system of permanent, but shifting, coalition governments. This, in the medium term, offers considerable points of leverage for the ruling class.

Firstly, it would provide the best chance, within a bourgeois democratic framework, of preventing the Labour Party governing alone. The proportion of working class votes cast for a party of the working class in Britain is one of the lowest in any major European country. The Labour Party has never in its history received 50 per cent of the vote in an election. Unless there was a gigantic bourgeois crisis or the Labour Party adopted a clear socialist perspective and managed to mobilise the mass of the working class around it with the prospect of real gains, PR would offer the bourgeoisie a virtual guarantee that Labour could enter office only in coalition.

It also offers the best means, following a split, to recreate a clear and strong right wing inside the Labour Party. PR would force Labour to choose one of only two possible strategies. Either to orient openly to the left attempting to win a majority and govern in opposition to all bourgeois forces — a policy full of risks for the bureaucracy because it would unleash major struggles and one which they will therefore attempt to avoid at all possible costs. Or to seek an alliance with a party of the bourgeoisie — which, of course, means adopting as the price a pro-capitalist orientation. Around the 'need' for coalitions of this kind, imposed by PR, the capitalist class can exert huge pressure to crystallise a new right wing in the Labour Party and shift the centre of gravity of the bureaucracy as a whole rightwards.

Finally, a system of PR is an absolute necessity if the effects of splits in the Labour Party are to be maintained. The present 'first past the post' electoral system is not merely biased against third parties in general but would, in particular, electorally annihilate a 'Social Democratic' party with no base in the unions once the initial interest dies out.

There are, of course, considerable problems for the ruling class in the introduction of PR. In the first place, it would splinter the Tory bloc far more than Labour's; the Liberals, SNP, Welsh nationalists, and Social Democrats would gain. It will be violently opposed by the old party apparatus of the Conservative Party. Secondly, the whole system of permanent coalitions would far more directly and clearly implicate the monarchy in politics and create quite new strains in the state apparatus. In short, the introduction of proportional representation is not something which the ruling class will embark on lightly; it is, rather, something into which it is being forced by the decline and crisis of British imperialism and the party system it created.

## The Tasks of Revolutionaries

The developments we have discussed above pose big opportunities and a big challenge to revolutionaries. It would be nice

if one could say that inevitably the working class will thwart all plans of the ruling class and scatter its offensive like chaff in the wind. Reality, however, is very different. To defeat all the bourgeois attacks, the working class would require a revolutionary leadership, organisation and consciousness and, indeed, a mass revolutionary party.

The major crises and struggles which lie ahead will undoubtedly create opportunities to build a revolutionary organisation and implant it in the working class; there is no objective reason why some tens of thousands of workers, with influence in action over hundreds of thousands of others, can not be won to such an organisation in the course of the next decade.

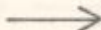
But these figures, very large as they are compared to present-day revolutionary groups, do not represent a situation in which revolutionaries will lead the mass of the working class. To take power in a country like Britain would require a party of *hundreds of thousands* leading perhaps some *twenty million* people. It is infantile to imagine that this kind of party can be built during the 1980s. And without these kind of forces, revolutionaries *will not* determine in its most basic aspects the course of national politics.

We must assume, therefore, that under continued reformist leadership, the working class will despite massive struggles suffer defeats and that the ruling class will succeed in important aspects of its strategies. The task of revolutionaries will be to intervene and build a powerful organisation in a reality in which they are a growing force but not at all the dominant one. What, then are the changes for which they must prepare?

The underlying trend will be for the strongest and most decisive sections of *both* classes to come to the fore. Already in Thatcher, and even in the Callaghan Government, the scale of attacks mounted by the bourgeoisie would have seemed impossible ten or fifteen years ago. If someone had said in 1966 that there would today be three million unemployed in Britain, that governments would attempt to lower living standards by ten per cent in a year — as the last Labour Government did — that the National Health Service would be faced with reduction to a charty level, that the whole post-war social expenditure would be under threat, that we would be in the midst of an arms drive hugely exceeding that of the frostiest years of the Cold War, that brutal military dictatorship and mass torture would cover virtually the entire continent in Latin America, and most of the colonial world, with the increasingly open support of the 'democratic' imperialist government of the United States of America, all this would have sounded like a bad dream. Indeed, even sections of the ruling class would have been honestly indignant.

But this is the *reality* of the present attacks mounted by the capitalist class and it is going to get far worse during the 1980s. By the end of the decade there will probably be a minimum of five million unemployed — with important effects on trade union membership and strength, a twenty per cent drop in living standards, drastic declines in health care and democratic rights, and unprecedented regimes of dictatorship possibly again spreading into certain parts of Europe. These are not fantasies but the *realistic prospects* of the class struggle in the 1980s of which the bourgeoisie is quite conscious and for which it is preparing. More and more decisive, forceful and right wing sections of the ruling class will come to the fore. This will be a decade of their hard liners rather than their 'wets'.

This has important consequences for the working class. Politics is not a question of numbers of passive votes but of *strength*. It is regrettable but true that in a capitalist society the millions of pensioners are far less powerful and decisive in the class struggle than the quarter of a million coal miners. The entire weight of all the teachers, social workers, university lecturers and students combined does not amount to anything like



that of any single significant industrial union. What is more, intermediate layers will be increasingly confronted and disorientated as the easiest victims of ruling class attacks.

Inside the working class the leading role will, therefore, also increasingly pass into the hands of the strongest and most decisive sections. This means, above all, workers in industry and in the industrial unions. These are the layers in which revolutionaries must be decisively implanted and have the majority of their members if they are to be involved in the key struggles of the 1980s which will decide both the class relation of forces and the outcome of the struggle in the Labour Party. In particular it will be among young workers that revolutionaries will find the most receptive audience for their ideas. It is often forgotten just how young are the people who make revolutions. The average age of the Bolshevik Party was around 23, of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua 24, and of the mass German Communist Party also in the early 20s.

A turn to building a party among industrial workers is, however, not nearly sufficient on its own. The 1980s will, as we have noted, be a decade of increasing social dislocation and political crisis; it will see increasing struggles against attempts to reinforce every kind of oppression and this defines the type of party which has to be built: *one rooted and with the majority of its members inside the industrial working class and simultaneously capable of taking up every issue of the class struggle.*

It is important to note that this is not simply a question of *programme* and *demands* but also one of *organisation*. The oppressed cannot struggle unless they are organised and the labour movement too will have to extend and transform its organisations to take up the new political issues it needs to confront in the 1980s. Organisations like the women's movement, black and asian groups, and united front campaigns can not be something 'secondary' in revolutionary politics. They can not be relegated to a back seat in relation to wage demands, the fight against unemployment and propaganda for the nationalisation of industry.

The relative importance of any one particular issue in the class struggle, of course, changes at different times. The movement against racism and fascism relaunched struggle under the Callaghan Government, to be followed by the 'winter of discontent' on wage questions. Today it is the fight against unemployment and militarism which has come to the fore. In the future, the dominant issues might be new wars, new attacks on women's rights, a massive wage explosion, or a new upturn in the fight against racism or in the Irish struggle. We can not tell from first principles, but only by looking at concrete situations, which will be most significant. But what is definitively *not* the case is that struggle against all the different forms of oppression will disappear to be replaced by simple 'bash the Tories' economic and trade union issues.

The forms of organisation of the oppressed and of struggle on international questions will, of course, change. These issues have increasingly penetrated the unions and the Labour Party and have led to the formation of specific organisations there; this trend will increase enormously. *Building movements and struggles of the oppressed, building specific united front campaigns, increasingly building these inside the labour movement; this is not a secondary but a fundamental element of any revolutionary strategy in Britain. They are part of the key goal of creating a class-struggle left wing in the labour movement.*

Just as the power of British imperialism shaped the features of every class in society and its political parties, so too it shaped the Marxist tradition in Britain. Whereas under the impact of the Russian revolution mass Communist Parties were built in France, Italy, Germany and elsewhere, in Britain only a tiny revolutionary organisation of a few thousands was created. No mass revolutionary tradition or organisation has existed in Britain since the decline of Chartism.

Furthermore the small Marxist movement which has existed in Britain since that time has been dogged by two contradictory but mutually reinforcing traditions. The majority tradition has coupled a right wing opportunism and economism in politics with sectarianism in organisation, the former has stemmed from accommodation to imperialism and its labour bureaucracy, the latter from the dialectic noted by Marx whereby a low level of class struggle always produces a high level of sectarianism. The minority tradition has consisted of a

revolutionary political current which is socially marginal and incapable of building a serious revolutionary organisation.

These mutually negatively reinforcing traditions have only been even partially overcome at times of heightened struggle: in 1889 with Eleanor Marx and the upsurge in unionisation; in Ireland — then part of the British state — with James Connolly in the decade and a half to 1916; with John Maclean in Scotland; in a more distorted form with Sylvia Pankhurst. For all their particular individual limitations, each began to unite serious revolutionary internationalist politics with a real base in the working class.

The early British Communist Party, arising out of the deep international crisis of the First World War, represented the most advanced development of this process. This development occurred at a time of deep crisis in Britain. The politics of the early Communist Party represented a major advance on anything that had previously existed in Britain. The most important of its policies including: the struggle for Soviet power, participation in elections, a fight for affiliation to the Labour Party, anti-imperialist foreign policy, and a systematic united front orientation inside the unions like the Minority Movement and the National Left Wing Movement.

It learnt many of these crucial political ideas from its involvement in the international communist movement, and the lessons of the most advanced experiences of the class struggle internationally. The American Trotskyist, James P Cannon quoted in one of his books a famous bandit, Willie Sutton, who was once asked by a reporter why he specialised exclusively in robbing banks. His reply was 'because that is where the money is'.

The point is obvious. For nearly a century and a half, Britain has had the lowest level of political class struggle of any major European country. To believe that out of this experience will come the most adequate and advanced revolutionary ideas is to turn historical materialism on its head — although the number of people 'reconstructing' the world workers' movement from London unfortunately shows that this elementary point is not yet fully appreciated. Revolutionaries have to start with *international* experiences and above all the experiences of working classes which have actually made revolutions.

*In Britain more perhaps than anywhere else, the creation of a national revolutionary organisation cannot be separated from the building of an international organisation.* It is not revolutionary-internationalist Marxism but British exceptionalism and parochialism as it has existed for over a century which is foredoomed by what will develop in the 1980s.

## Conclusion

What, in sum, do the political processes we have outlined amount to? They add up to the most radical change in British politics since the rise of British imperialism and the extinction of the mass revolutionary tradition in the working class. After 130 years British politics will once again take up the political traditions its bourgeoisie and labour bureaucracy thought had disappeared forever. This will be no rapid overnight development although there will be particular points when things change quickly. Nonetheless, the whole process is as inevitably built into the decline of British imperialism as the present political situation is a result of its rise.

But these transformations will create a crisis of every single institution and tradition rooted in Britain's imperialist past — the Tory Party, the British state, the Labour Party, and the dominant tradition of Marxism. This crisis will present enormous objective opportunities but it will have *no* automatic positive outcome. On the contrary the disaster of the forces attempting to be revolutionary in a country such as Italy, or Portugal in 1975, shows that simply left to its own impact a deep crisis produces disorientation and not solutions. The labour movement in Britain in the 1980s will be faced with problems it has not experienced for decades. How far it succeeds in meeting the types of challenges we have outlined will determine not only the nature of British politics in the 1980s but more important the final outcome of the political crisis these years will inaugurate.

A second article analysing the historical development and traditions of Marxism in Britain will appear in a future issue of this journal.

# THE SWP & THE LABOUR PARTY

BY ALAN FREEMAN

No aspect of the current political crisis has received more attention than the crisis in the Labour Party. The victories of the Labour left in the internal struggle and the subsequent formation of the Council for Social Democracy have forced all currents on the left of the workers' movement to re-examine their attitude to the Labour Party. Below ALAN FREEMAN polemicalises against the view of the Socialist Workers Party that the struggle in the Labour Party is diversionary.

Ever since the Labour Party was a glint in the TUC's eye British socialists have split over what to do about it. A year after the Labour Representation Committee was formed in 1906, the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF) walked out because the new body 'did not adopt a class struggle programme' while the Independent Labour Party (ILP) — which seven years before had voted to fuse with the SDF — took over its leadership.

Twenty years later Lenin had to bang together the heads of four jarring sects to form a united Communist Party, when three years of wrangling about parliament and the Labour Party had kept them disastrously apart. History repeated itself as farce a generation later when the British Trotskyists split over entry into the Labour Party — even though every modern group can trace its origin to someone, somewhere, who was in the Labour Party in the 1950s.

In the 1960s the Labour Party's falling membership and isolation from new movements opened old wounds and the left split once more on the issue. It is as if for eighty years the Labour Party's most secret weapon has been its ability to fragment the far left.

Today the largest revolutionary organisation to stay apart from the Labour Party is the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which has in the past months published two major statements on the Labour Party. The first, by Chris Harman, in the February *Socialist Review*, discusses the Wembley conference. The second is by Paul Foot in *Socialist Worker* on 7 February.

Both articles register a new recognition that what is happening is important. Foot writes that socialists cannot 'dismiss the changes in the Labour Party with the sectarian sneering to which we were accustomed ten years ago.' But both say that the struggle in the Labour Party is *diversionary*: that socialists should not get mixed up in it. Foot says that the party can be pushed into actions that benefit working people, but from the outside, by an 'SWP-type organisation'. He sums up his case with some homespun philosophy: 'If you want to push a wheelbarrow, don't sit on it.' Not such good advice if the barrow is on a steep hill.

Comrade Harman puts a similar but more detailed case. He talks of 'another Scarborough', referring to the 1960 conference decision for unilateral disarmament. This was reversed after Gaitskell's furious 'fight, fight and fight again' campaign, and forgotten in a blaze of unity when Wilson took the reins. The next conference, he says, will see the end of all the fuss. It is true, he says, that the constituency ranks are swelling again, with young and radical people. But the new footsoldiers (or Bennsoldiers as the case may be) are middle class, university educated, and have no organic links with workers.

The internal fight in the Labour Party, Foot says, won't solve our real problem — the fact that there is no fightback against the Tories: 'In 1970-74 ... the political leftward movement was matched by a huge groundswell of strikes and sit-ins, and of every other form of rank and file industrial action, which changed the Tory monetarist policies in midstream and

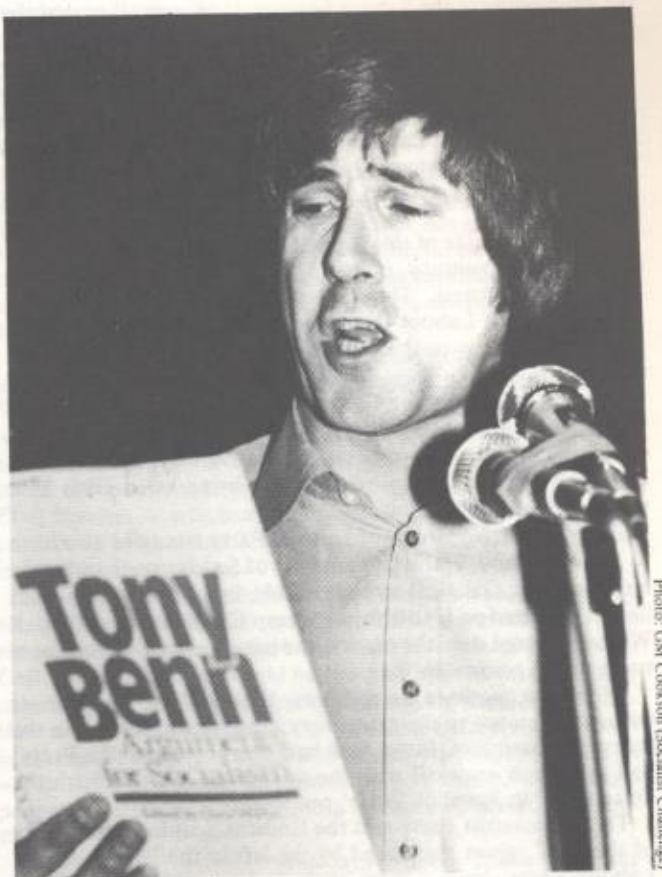


Photo: GM Cookson (Socialist Challenge)

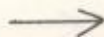
then pushed the Tories out altogether. Today the leftward movement has no such industrial balance. Indeed it is accompanied by a lack of confidence and a passivity in the workforce such as hasn't been seen for forty years and more.'

It is welcome to see the SWP discussing the Labour Party in a different light. But its wrong positions still weaken both the working class and the cause of socialism. A discussion of them is overdue. The SWP make three points on which every revolutionary can agree. First, any fight in Britain today will be settled not by the resolutions passed but by the actions taken. Second, the Labour Party's leaders — even the left wing — have no intention of launching or organising a serious fight against the establishment, in or out of government, if they can avoid it. Third, the best guarantee of success for the working class in everything it does is to build a strong independent combat organisation dedicated to a fight without compromise for workers' power.

But our agreement ends here. It is perfectly possible, as both Lenin and Trotsky always argued, *both* to build a strong independent organisation *and* to fight tooth and nail inside the Labour Party.

Indeed the Third International proposed precisely this to the British Communists and voted by 58 to 24 to declare itself:

'In favour of the Communist Party, and the groups and organisations sympathising with Communism in England, joining the Labour Party, although this party is a member of the Second International. The reason for this is that so long as this party will allow all constituent organisations their present freedom of criticism and freedom of propaganda, and organisational activity in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the power of soviets, so long as this party preserves its character as an alliance of all the trade union organisations of the working class, the Communists ought to take all



# Polemie

measures, and even consent to certain compromises, in order to be able to exercise an influence over the wider circles of workers and the masses, to denounce their opportunist leaders from a higher platform visible to the masses, to accelerate the transfer of political power from the direct representatives of the bourgeoisie to the 'labour lieutenants of capital' so that the masses may be more rapidly cured of all illusions on this subject.'

All the conditions outlined in this resolution hold true today, and it is not only possible but necessary to take part in the internal fight in the Labour Party. Furthermore, contrary to Harman and Foot's views, this internal struggle *does affect* the struggle in the unions and at the base of the working class generally.

The negative side of this is perfectly plain. How else can one explain the downturn of 1975? Workers didn't suddenly develop weak knees. They fell to a tremendous ideological assault from the Labour Party leadership, transmitted by their own union leaders to the rank and file, over the heads of the stewards.

Because no one in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) took a stand against Wilson and Callaghan, the union leaders could claim that there was no alternative except the Tories, and that blind militancy would only bring on a crisis that would defeat the government.

But the *positive effects* of Labour Party struggles also have to be understood. Harman's analysis of Scarborough only tells half the story. Gaitskell turned the tide on unilateralism — but he was *defeated* on his attempt to scrap Clause Four. Although Wilson papered over the cracks, the net result was to reinforce trade union control in the party.

Of course, as long as this was dispensed by bureaucrats without reference to their members, trade union control in the party was harmless. But a fuse had been lit under the Party, and the bomb went off with the attempt to push through the anti-union 'In Place of Strife' proposals.

The Communist Party and the Cousins-Scanlon-Jones wing of the TUC, given their head by the left in the Parliamentary Labour Party, built a mass rank and file movement which wrecked the Bill and the government. The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions was a child of Scarborough — but as far as Harman is concerned it might as well have come with the stork. He can explain it no better than the downturn of 1975.

The same blindness is shown by Harman and Foot in relation to today's struggles. A furious fight is going on in the Labour Party. Does this fight have no impact on workers' struggles? Within two weeks of Paul Foot's declaration that there is no industrial movement that 'can change Tory policies in midstream and then push the Tories out altogether', John Biffen came on television to explain that the miners had forced a complete policy reversal on the government, and that 'the only beneficiaries of a strike would have been the far left'. Who was overestimating whom?

It is not even true that the Labour left has no orientation to the mass struggle. They don't like it but they do it. The Labour Party has led, and partly organised, massive demonstrations against unemployment. On these marches have been considerable numbers, not just of trade unionists mobilised through their factories, but of Labour Party contingents mobilised through the party. At Glasgow probably a quarter of the march was made up of organised Labour Party contingents.

A strategy of partial mobilisations to pressure for change is well within the scope of left social democracy. Benn and his followers both advocate it and practise it. Left wingers like Hain advocate changing the Labour Party into a 'mass campaigning party'. They don't do enough of it, and they do it for the wrong ends — but they do it.

Indeed, because the SWP concentrates all its fire on the Labour left's lack of action, paradoxically it finds itself unable to offer effective criticism of left social democrats who do engage in action from time to time — or of their co-thinkers,

the Communist Party.

However, even if the Labour left were completely passive — and we would be the last to claim they have a shining record — their fight in the Labour Party would still affect the shop floor struggle. The root of the SWP's failure to grapple with this becomes clear in Paul Foot's discussion of what motivates workers to struggle. Real Labour voters, he says, aren't concerned with problems like what the government is doing:

'For Labour politics cannot ever be separated from the way in which real Labour voters think and feel. And the way in which they think and feel is, in turn, related to their own confidence in themselves. If they feel that they cannot be pushed around by their employer or their landlord or the council or by social security officialdom, then they will feel more radical, demand more change.'

But if the only thing affecting self-confidence is their relations with the landlord or the boss, why do they bother to vote? They don't have split personalities. They don't vote Labour at five o'clock, and then forget it and fight the landlord at six. They cling to the strange belief that if they can get a council or government that supports them, they might do better against the landlord.

They also see election results, in exactly the same way as the outcome of left-right struggles in the unions, as a barometer of other workers' feelings.

You don't take a decision to strike just on the basis of how angry you feel. You weigh up the odds, you judge the support you think you can get, and one of the ways you judge it is to look at the quality of leaders your fellow workers have thrown up. The same applies to the internal struggles of a mass workers' party.

As long as workers are still trying to get what they can out of Labour governments, it *matters* to them *who* in the Labour Party is going to form the government, what policies they have, and what chance there is of controlling them. When the miners saw Callaghan knocked off his perch they didn't think everything was solved. But they did think that if this could be done when Labour was out of office there was at least a half-chance of doing the same next time Labour is *in* office. And half a chance is better than none. It makes it just that little bit more worth struggling and worth striking. To deny the connection is to deny common sense.

Now Paul Foot knows, and we know, and in fact many Labour voters know, that putting Labour in office won't produce very good governments. But until we've built a mass party able to produce an alternative government, voting Labour is the only practical option open to millions of people, and the only pragmatic way they can register how they think the country should be run. It *does* help defeat the landlords and bosses if you can make the government support you. And one of the reasons we say vote Labour is because Labour, being based on the unions, *can* be forced to support and mobilise workers in limited ways and at certain times.

The point is that you have to do it by means of mass action instead of resolution-passing. And you have to make sure that when you have pushed up against the limits of what can be wrung from the Labour Party, you have built an organisation that can take over the leadership from it. But workers come to understand these limits only by exploring them, by pushing Labour as far as it will go. We should be pushing with them.

What Paul Foot has failed to register is the fact that working class self-confidence is *collective*. The deeper the crisis, the more this confidence comes to depend on national and international factors. What is happening now is that the ruling class keeps making a national issue out of every local struggle. The stakes are so high that to enter a national struggle, capable of wrecking the economy, *without* doing everything you can to get the next government on your side, doesn't make sense to the 'real Labour voters'.

The fight in the Labour Party affects local struggle precisely because workers don't just think about their landlords. They are in fact a lot more political than Foot is prepared to admit in

what is a rather patronising article.

Are we saying that British politics is now back to 1972, and we can confidently wait for the final big push against the Tories? Not at all. On the contrary, the face of British politics has changed utterly. The SWP's problem is that it hasn't caught up with the changes. It has forgotten one of the first rules of Marxism — that if you want to know what's going on in society, you have to look at what is happening in *all* classes and *all* parts of it.

It is true that the level of working class struggle has gone down. But this doesn't mean the ruling class has things sewn up, and it doesn't mean we're in for a prolonged period of working class passivity. John Biffen's speech, and the subsequent turmoil among the Tories, shows that the ruling class is very threatened.

Its weaknesses are not just the result of British workers' struggles, but also the lack of international competitiveness, and the depth of the world economic crisis. The result is a game for very high stakes. The lack of motion is not because the vital nerves of workers' resistance have been eaten away, but because the two great classes are locked in an Indian wrestle, neither side wanting to move an inch for fear of giving the advantage to the other, each manoeuvring for position to ensure the other side can't bring new muscles into play.

This is why it is so important to understand what Bennism is really about. Superficially, it looks very like Bevanism, which Harman deflates very effectively in his piece.

Benn's policies are very much a souped-up version of Labour's old 1945 programme. They are based on Keynesian demand management of a mixed economy, restoring the welfare state, with the added extra of some feeble government attempts to control investment and a useless and reactionary commitment to import controls. Rather than fighting for workers' control, they propose to use the old state machine to control the economy and seek a power-sharing compromise with the owners and management.

But there's a crucial difference between Bennism and Bevanism — the time and place. Indeed, this was already obvious by 1974. It showed in the incredible and vitriolic hostility of the establishment to Benn and his policies. That was why throughout 1974, until Benn was removed from the Department of Trade and Industry, the confederation of British Industry, the Treasury and whole sections of the Civil Service waged a furious campaign against 'Bennery'.

Adrian Ham, Healey's secretary, confirms that there was a 'Whitehall-wide conspiracy to stop Benn doing anything', including permanent secretaries, government ministers, and whole Civil Service departments. Benn generates unmitigated hysteria among the press and establishments alike. The *New Statesman* of 21 February reliably reports that before his death, Airey Neave seriously plotted with security forces the possibility of eliminating Benn using physical force if Labour won the election.

This hysteria even took on international dimensions. During the sterling crisis of 1976 a secret International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation booked into Brookes hotel under assumed names to negotiate terms with the Labour cabinet, and Healey even cancelled his holiday in the Bahamas to return to the battle against trade union sabotage of the pound. Two years later a senior American negotiator wrote of this period:

'We all had the feeling it would come apart in a serious way. As I saw it, it was a choice between Britain remaining in the liberal financial system of the West as opposed to a radical change of course, because we were concerned about Tony Benn precipitating a policy decision by Britain to turn its back on the IMF. I think that if that had happened the whole system would have begun to come apart. God knows what Italy might have done; then France might have taken a radical change in the same direction. It would not only have had consequences for the economic recovery, it would have had great political consequences. So we tended to see it in cosmic terms.' (*Sunday Times* 21 May 1978, quoted in A. Glyn and J. Harrison, *The British*

*Economic Disaster*, Pluto Press 1980.)

Why does Benn excite so much more violent reactions than Bevan ever did? Bevanism was at its strongest when the British economy was still warming itself on the embers of the dying Empire, and when the world economy was still expanding. Bevan's demands could be fought for by asking for concessions from the state — by electoral means. We are in the worst depression since the Thirties. The Empire has gone. Britain's relative competitiveness is so bad that the depression has affected it worse than any other country in the industrialised world.

In this situation even a mild programme of reform like Benn's is quite unacceptable to the ruling class, and he has been forced to break from the consensus that has governed British politics since 1945. Quite apart from what his policies would do to ruling class profits, they could arouse expectations in a still-undefeated working class that *cannot* be satisfied — and this whatever Benn's personal intentions.

If in 1976 government expenditure had gone on up, in the middle of a recession, there would have been a tremendous inflationary crisis and a collapse of confidence in sterling. Capital would have flooded out of the country, which workers would correctly have seen as open sabotage. Parliamentary methods could not possibly have controlled the flow, and indeed the Civil Service — which manipulated and planned the sterling crisis of 1976 — would have refused point-blank to co-operate in government policies.

The ruling class faced the risk that workers would forget any niceties about tripartite representation and partnership, and simply take over the factories *en masse* — just as they did in Chile. A similar crisis would be provoked by the foreign policy measures of the left's programme. Breaking the EEC connection and breaking with NATO's nuclear policy would mean breaking off the whole pattern of trading and state relations on which British overseas investment is now based. This would provoke a crisis of sterling and a collapse of investment confidence.

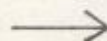
Worse still it would mean a complete break with the American 'special relationship' and open a period of intense economic and political hostility towards Britain in world markets. In either case the special role of the City, and of British multinationals and overseas investors, would be turned upside down. A tremendous political and economic crisis would ensue.

In no way does this imply that the Labour Party could produce a solution to the crisis it provoked. On the contrary, Benn steadfastly rejects the only reliable solution to this crisis — a working class takeover. As a matter of fact this is in many ways a much more serious problem about Labour than its lack of activity although the two are related. But the important consequence is that the ruling class is prepared to use any means necessary to stop a government coming to office on Benn's programme.

This results in a constitutional crisis in which the veils of parliamentary democracy are being ripped away. British democracy is actually one of the least democratic parliamentary regimes in the world. It is the only one with an unelected second chamber; the Prime Minister is chosen by the monarch and in turn chooses the entire cabinet, many members of which come from outside the Commons altogether; the Prime Minister has the right to sack parliament when it disagrees with her/him; and the two-party system excludes minorities from parliament and forces them to line up with one of the major party blocs.

Of course, all the more common frauds of parliamentary democracy are also perpetrated on the electorate. Real power lies in an unelected Civil Service; the electorate has no right of recall; the parliamentary parties function with complete autonomy as 'parties within a party'; the parties can resort to indefinite coalitions to avoid facing elections, and so on.

It is not unimportant for British socialism when this is challenged by Benn! The fact that his own project is a utopian reconstruction of early nineteenth century parliamentary



# Polemie

democracy doesn't change the fact that millions of workers are finding out just who really runs their lives through the revelations of this struggle.

Will it really have zero effect on their ideas of 'real Labour voters' about how to fight for socialism when they discover that Labour governments are not chosen by them at all but by tiny cliques of conspirators at the head of their party, the Civil Service, and business? Won't it encourage them to believe that perhaps the only way their aims can be met is through struggle, rather than trust in MPs? Isn't this struggle doing a propaganda job for revolutionary socialism just as effectively as Paul Foot's most inspired journalism?

It is because they don't understand the new situation that both Harman and Foot fail to grasp the political potential for socialists of the relation between the Labour Party and the unions. Harman's reference to 1960 is doubly wrong. First, for the reasons he himself gives — the constituencies are now under the majority control of a youthful left while at Scarborough in 1960 they were controlled by the right.

This is no accident, nor is it the result of a mass influx of workers. It has happened because everyone in society with an interest in preserving *state expenditure* has found that they cannot do so by polite lobbying. The ground is therefore far more fertile for the growth of radical and struggle-oriented currents in the constituencies than in the 1960s, when new movements — both middle class and working class — tended to bypass constituency structures.

Of course, the electoral structure of the constituencies makes them very ill-suited to house these new currents, which is why there is such a ferment of discussion at the base of the party. The result, however, has not so far been a stifling of radical ideas in constituency and parliamentary politics, but on the contrary the beginnings of a serious questioning of the role and nature of the constituencies, with currents round figures like Peter Hain arguing for the party to change its function altogether into a mass campaigning party.

Such currents, far from cutting themselves off from the unions, can easily take the next logical step of understanding that the battle in the Labour Party must be taken *into* the unions.

But the second and equally important point is that in the unions themselves the situation has changed since 1960. Paul Foot writes: 'The issue at Blackpool and at Wembley, we have been told, is democracy. It is about the sharing of power. Yet the trade union leaders who have voted for all this power sharing are, when it comes to their own organisations, the most ruthless enemies of power sharing. Do Moss Evans or David Basnett or Clive Jenkins or Alan Fisher have to face an electoral college every year to confirm them as leaders? Is there a single official in any of these unions, save the general secretary once in his life, who is every reselected, as they all propose Labour MPs should be?'

This is absolutely right — but the point is that these facts have not been lost on ordinary rank and file trades unionists! Frank Chapple's declaration for the Council for Social Democracy has provoked just as much of an outcry as his internal record. Clive Jenkins faced a roasting for his role in the council of inquiry. Do we make an issue of this or ignore it as a diversion? The struggle for democracy in the Labour Party is deepening not curtailing the left-right struggle in the unions, as well as the whole debate about accountability. It is breaking down the traditional division between trade unions and electoral politics. It is *politicising* the unions. And it is doing so because of the unions' connections with the party.

If we can explain to shop floor workers that Duffy and Chapple sell out struggles, back the Labour Party right wing or even the splitters, and act as Labour's Cold War Warriors *for the same reason*, then we can pursue the fight against them on *two* fronts instead of one. We can link up with workers who don't want Cruise Missiles but aren't sure about launching militant struggles in the middle of a recession, and explain the connection between the two by pointing to Duffy's dual role in the par-

ty and the unions.

Indeed, the ultimate argument against Harman and Foot is that we have no choice in the matter. The SWP might be able to absent itself from the Labour Party but millions of workers in the unions *cannot*. They built it. It is their party. Everyone who is affiliated to the party through a union confronts the discussion in the union about what positions to take in the Labour Party debates. Even in the non-affiliated unions there is now a growing debate on whether to affiliate.

If you don't have answers on these questions, if you don't take up the fight inside the Labour Party then you leave the field free not just to the Boyds, Chapples and Duffys of this world but also to the Evanses and Jenkinse. And this is basically what the SWP is doing.

The conditions are ripe for doing just what the Third International proposed: to combine building a strong organisation with taking vigorous part in the Labour Party, and indeed fighting to build, unite with, and lead its growing left wing. The way is open to link up the radical movement in the constituencies with the left in the unions in a combined movement against the Tories and the right wing leaders of both wings of the Labour movement.

To socialists in the Labour Party we should say: 'We are with you in your fight against the Labour right wing. We are with you in your fight for a government that will scrap the missiles, get us out of the EEC, implement the thirty-five hour week and bump up public spending. We are with you in your fight to control your MPS, who will try to sell you out when in office, just as they always do. There is no contradiction between being in the Labour Party and joining with us except the barriers created by your own leaders with their witch-hunts, bans and proscriptions. In fact, our type of organisation will help you in all these struggles, because we can link up the fight in the party and in the unions, and because we will keep up the fight when your present leaders give in.

'But we also say that you won't get results by passing pious resolutions. You'll have to mobilise the combined strength of the Labour Party and the unions in mass action — both now and under a future Labour government — to get what you want. Therefore, don't leave the Labour Party — but don't accept it as it is. Use it as your leaders shrink from using it — to serve you by organising action against the bosses and landlords. Use the unions to control the party instead of treating it as an excuse for inaction.

'You'll find the most bitter opposition. You'll find that the whole tradition, structure and leadership of the Labour Party stands in your way. You'll find that the bureaucrats are ready to smash up this party rather than let it fall into your hands intact. But you'll win the support and unity of millions of voters and trades unionists who still follow the party. That, and not a handful of careerist MPs, is your real weapon in struggle.'

In this way, hundreds of thousands of trade union and constituency activists will not only win real advances and acquire the self-confidence to take on the bosses and win, but they will also find out what is wrong with the Labour Party. They will discover for themselves why a different kind of organisation is needed, why we want to group together committed revolutionaries to create the basis of such a new organisation now, and they will take the first steps towards building a real mass alternative to the present Labour Party.

But they will do so not in the interest of a sterile discussion with the SWP on whether or not to leave the Labour Party but in the context of the most important debates in Britain today: how can we *all* unite to get rid of the Tories, and how can that unity be used to fight for a government that will launch a genuinely radical attack on the bosses, and how can the growing number of revolutionaries ensure that the upshot of this struggle is a genuine workers' takeover?

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