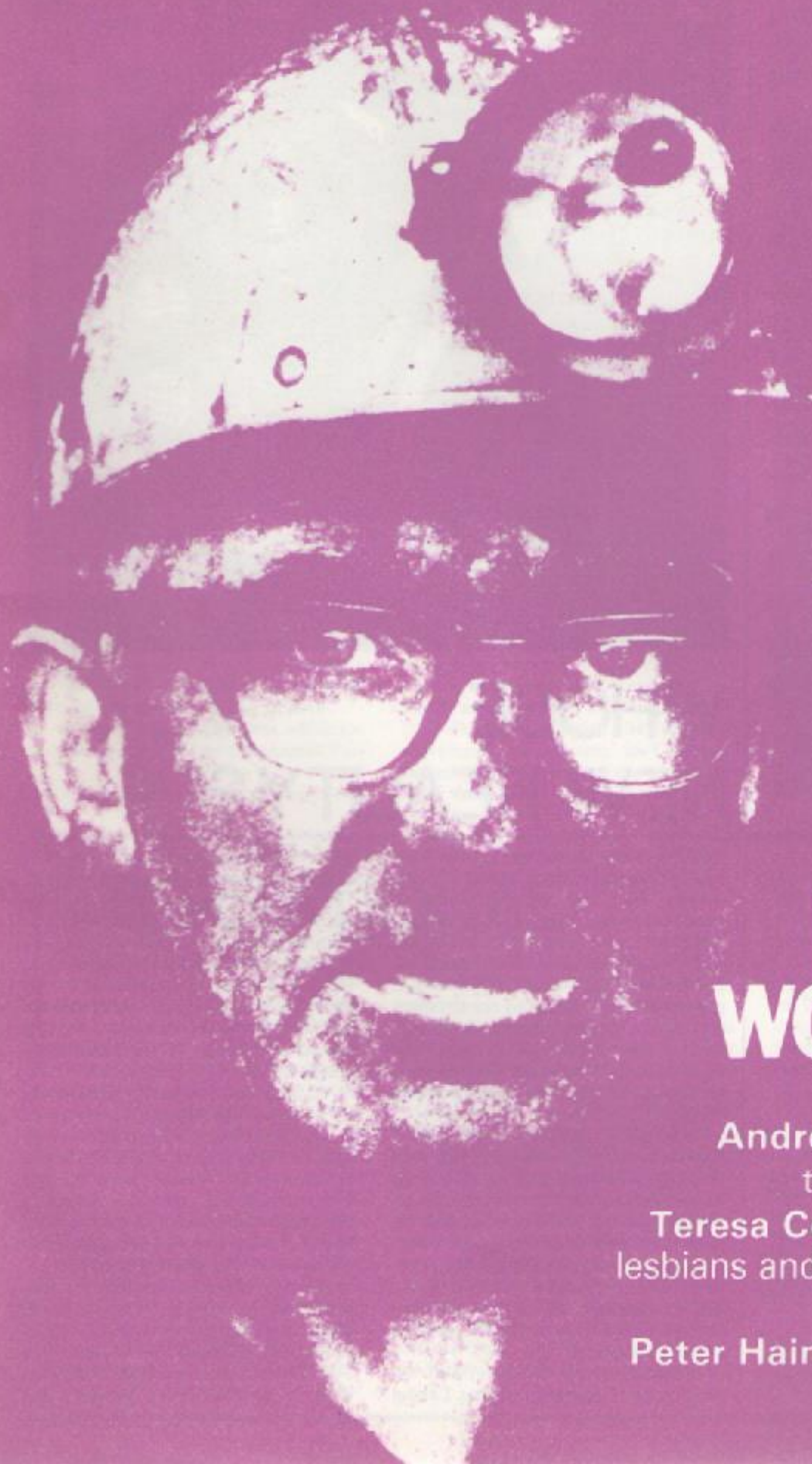


January - April 1984

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International



WHAT FUTURE FOR THE WORKERS?

Andre Gorz: Goodbye
to the Proletariat?

Teresa Conway: Women,
lesbians and gays organise in
the unions

Peter Hain: LCC's Strategy
for Labour

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* Subscribers receive renewal notices with the last two issues of their subscription. This code corresponds to the expiry number on those renewal notices.

Editorial



WHOSE NEW REALITY?

THREE events in recent months have starkly illuminated the realities of British politics. First, the National Union of Mineworkers has demonstrated that notwithstanding her victory over the NGA, Thatcher and her government remain incapable of using the anti-union laws to prevent effective action by the strongest and best organised unions — in particular the NUM. This was the significance of MacGregor's retreat from his court case against the Yorkshire NUM.

The tide is starting to turn against Thatcher. The government not only faces majority opposition to its policies on the NHS, on local government and on the missiles, it is now losing support for its attacks on the unions — the one policy area where it had support at the last election. For the Thatcher government the tide is threatening to turn from problems on particular policies to overall rejection of the government.

Secondly, the Chesterfield by-election had demonstrated that Labour

cannot be held down to the level of the votes it attained in the general election. The opinion polls are starting to show Labour neck and neck with the Tories. Chesterfield itself showed near enough the same result as in the general election. But this was in the conditions of the massive red-scare against Benn and the behind the scenes campaign by the Labour leadership to prevent Benn from being selected in the first place.

If Benn had lost at Chesterfield the left-wing of the Labour Party would have suffered a shattering defeat with the right claiming that Bennite policies lose elections. In reality Benn's vote demonstrates not only that Labour's vote cannot be pushed below its 9 June level but also that Bennism cannot be driven out of the labour movement.

Thirdly, the crisis over Britain's contributions to the EEC revealed the underlying realignment of all the major forces in British politics. The SDP/Liberal Alliance and Tory wets leapt to the defence of 'Europe'. The

Editorial

Labour leadership was notable for its silence. The Tory government is being squeezed at home and in its international relations. Against Tory Gaullism the Tory wets and the Alliance are prepared to fight tooth and nail, to demand that the Tories accept the terms on offer from the EEC. Here was a real fight between sections of the British ruling class. Yet Labour had nothing to say. Why?

Because the new Labour leadership is united on one thing above all others: defence of the interests of those sections of British capital most linked into European capitalism and the EEC. This is the real foundation of the 'dream ticket' and of Kinnoek's Eurosocialism. It is not simply an opportunist bloc of the centre and the right. It is profoundly based in the project of re-orienting Labour into the Party of European Capital in Britain. The realignment of both wings of the Party demonstrate this. On the right, the 'Europeans', Healey, Hattersley and company, have broken with the Atlanticist Callaghan in favour of a bloc with Euro-Kinnoek.

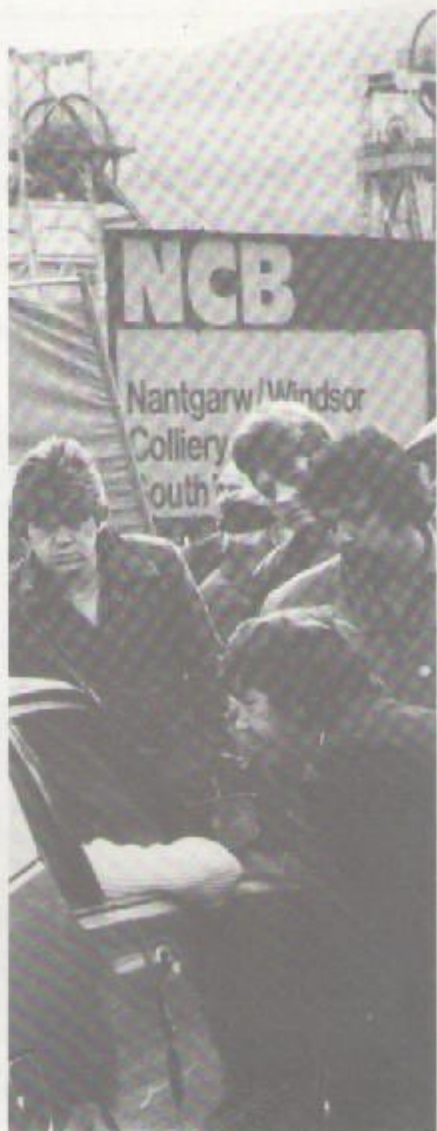
On the left, the fundamental aim of Kinnoek and his new kitchen cabinet in the Labour Co-ordinating Committee is to eliminate the anti-EEC Bennite left-wing of the Party. This is why infantile notions that the EEC is a 'non-debate' in sections of the constituency left are so totally short-sighted. What is involved is a drive to transform the Labour Party into a British version of Mitterand's Socialist Party — the Party of European Capital and missiles against Labour.

It is this same realignment which today is ripping apart the Communist Party of Great Britain. The wing around *Marxism Today*, now the majority, aim

to reorient the CP and the Labour Party into support of European Capital. In the peace movement they therefore unite with EP Thompson and Kinnoek to attempt to substitute 'freeze' for unilateralism, because this stops American missiles but leaves British and French missiles intact. *Marxism Today* looks further and perceives that Labour is unlikely to be able to rebuild its vote sufficiently to win the next election. So they are for a grand coalition of all the anti-Thatcher forces and, we might add, pro European Capital forces — the Euro-socialist Labour Party, the Alliance and the Tory wets. To do this they understand perfectly that Bennism must be beaten back.

April's *Marxism Today* carries an attack by Jon Bloomfield, on not only the Trotskyists in the Labour Party but also the 'fundamentalists', Benn and Heffer. Benn's crime in the eyes of *Marxism Today*? '... calling for campaigning on an explicitly anti-capitalist basis ... These sentiments may strike a chord among committed activists but they do not correspond to any sober assessment of the present political balance of forces'!

The truth is that there is a tremendous reorganisation of the politics of the labour movement taking place. But the divide is not between 'fundamentalism' and 'realism'. It is between the supporters of European Capital and European missiles, and the supporters of the European working class. Hattersley, Healey, Kinnoek, the LCC and *Marxism Today* are on one side of that divide and the bulk of CND activists, the Europepeace movements, the Greens in Germany, Bennism and this journal are part of the other side.



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AS we go to press the miners are engaged in a bitter struggle against the Tory government. There can be little doubt that the outcome of this battle will be instrumental in determining the entire relationship of forces between the classes for the coming few years. It is arguably the most important class battle since 1926, but certainly since ten years ago when the miners won two successive battles against the Conservative government.

Over the next few issues of *International* we will look in depth at the changes in the trade union and labour movement over the last ten years. We will assess the heady optimism created by the miners' victories in '72 and '74, and the harsh realities of 4 million unemployed and declining fortunes for the unions and

Labour in 1984. Arthur Scargill was scheduled to write our lead article on this very topic for this issue of the journal.

We do have the first of our series on this topic in this issue, written by Terry Conway. She examines the extraordinary growth of self-organisation of the oppressed within the unions over the last ten years, primarily but not exclusively in the public sector. The most advanced developments have occurred around the self-organisation of women, but now self organisation of black people, lesbians and gays, and people with disabilities has begun to develop.

It was ten years ago too that the Ulster Workers Council strike shook the Labour government's policy on Northern Ireland. Bill Rolston's article is a timely reminder that no other event in the

history of the recent 'troubles' more graphically demonstrated the meaning of the Unionist veto over any progressive political change in Ireland.

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee has often been criticised in the pages of this journal. Although we strongly disagree with its 'new realism' it does at least have the merit of arguing for a coherent strategy for rebuilding the labour movement. John Ross interviews Peter Hain in this issue on the politics of the LCC.

Recent issues have seen a debate over the nature of Stalinism in response to Perry Anderson's piece in *New Left Review*. Chris Arthur joins the discussion this time and the debate will continue over future issues, next time with Mick Cox from the *Critique* Editorial Board.

Lastly we must apologise to our patient readers and subscribers for the late appearance of this double issue.

International Features

THE ULTIMATE VETO

BILL ROLSTON

Ten years after the Ulster Workers' Council strike, Bill Rolston recounts its history and assesses its impact on subsequent British strategy and the Unionist veto.

'There is a new situation now which we must take account of. We have seen the rise of Ulster nationalism' (Merlyn Rees).

Ten years ago the British government's only serious attempt to replace the devolved system of government in Northern Ireland (NI), abolished in 1972, with something at least superficially different was spectacularly defeated by a strike by NI loyalists grouped together in the Ulster Workers' Council (UWC). Faced with widespread opposition to its proposed power-sharing arrangements, the British backed down. For fourteen days in May the loyalist workers held the political future of NI in their hands.

Ten years later it is appropriate to look at what the long-term effects of that strike have been. The UWC never became a provisional government of a unilaterally declared independent NI. In fact, the independence scenario, embraced willingly by many after the strike, is rarely heard of now. Nor for that matter is the UWC itself, nor its once prominent leaders. But the question is a much deeper one than that. What did the loyalists and the British government learn from that confrontation, and how far has what they learned then fashioned the politics of the last decade?

But first, it is necessary to look at the origins of the UWC and what it managed to accomplish in May 1974. Protestants have dominated skilled manufacturing jobs in NI since the foundation of the state (and before). Like skilled workers elsewhere they are unionised and, if needs be, militant in terms of wages and the conditions of their work. However, they are frequently among the staunchest of unionists not in the trade union sense, but in NI political terms. That is, seeing the historical dependence of industrialisation in the north-east of Ireland on the development of British capitalism, they have judged that the only guarantee of any continued dominance on their part in economic terms rests on a political commitment to keep the union with Britain and to oppose militantly any moves to break or weaken that union.

Consequently, loyalist workers have frequently formed themselves into associations to defend the British link and their position in it. In the early 1920s there was the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, and in the 1930s the Ulster Protestant League, formed 'to safeguard the employment of Protestants'. The fifties saw the similar Ulster Protestant Action. And in 1969, as the present round of 'troubles' took off, a small group was formed calling itself the Workers' Committee for the Defence of the Constitution. Prominent among its members was Billy Hull, a former member of the NI Labour Party, and convener of the engineering shop stewards at Harland and Wolff's shipyard. In 1971 Hull reformed the organisation, and the Loyalist Association of Workers (LAW) was formed. In the next two years LAW flexed its muscles a few times, organising a march of workers demanding the internment of republicans in 1971, closing down heavy industry for two days in 1972 through electricity power cuts in protest at the prorogation of Stormont, and (ironically) slowing industry down again in 1973 in protest at the internment of loyalists.

But LAW broke up in 1973, to be replaced sometime later

by the UWC. Hugh Petrie, one of the founders of the Workers' Committee for the Defence of the Constitution, was the leading instigator of the new organisation. A precision engineer at Shorts, he was also a member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. He brought together a few 'old hands' such as Joe Barkley and Harry Fletcher, also founders of the Workers' Committee for the Defence of the Constitution, and by the beginning of 1974 they had an impressive 21-man executive. On the executive were such paramilitary people as Andy Tyrie of the UDA, Ken Gibson of the UVF, Bob Marno of the Orange Volunteers, George Green of the Ulster Special Constabulary Association and Peter Brush of Down Orange Welfare. The leaders of the three main loyalist parties were also coopted — Ian Paisley, Harry West and Bill Craig. But setting the pace and very much calling the tune on the executive were the skilled workers.

That they were unionists in more senses than one is shown by looking at a few of them.

Jim Smyth, shop steward at Rolls Royce;

Harry Murray, shop steward at Harland and Wolff;

Joe Barkley, convener in Harland and Wolff;

Harry Patterson, assistant shop steward, Shorts;

Eric Montgomery, shop steward at Belfast Power Station East;

Glen Barr, Amalgamated Engineering Union convener at Coolkeeragh power station, once described by Vic Feather of the TUC as 'a very strong trade unionist', and a member of the UDA.

Little wonder that the UWC was to confuse Labour ministers at the NI office, especially Stan Orme. As Robert Fisk puts it, the British were facing:

'a growing working class revolt, fuelled by intimidation and aimed at the overthrow of consensus politics, but springing from the same trade union roots and the same background of poverty and deprivation that had fostered socialism in England' (p66).¹

The root of the confusion, as the quotation suggests, was the target of the UWC action: not better wages or conditions, not opposition to closure or redundancies, but opposition to the latest British plan for Ireland — an Assembly to replace Stormont. The plan contained two innovations that were the focus of loyalist fury: institutionalised power-sharing at executive level between Protestants and Catholics, and a Council of Ireland to debate matters of common interest to both governments. The Assembly was to discuss ratifying this overall plan at their meeting on May 14, 1974. Despite warnings of bad timing from Craig and Paisley, the UWC threatened a total strike if the ratification occurred. It did, and the UWC swung into action.

The plan was relatively straightforward. The electricity power workers would close down first Coolkeeragh station in Derry (the only station, by far, with a large percentage of Catholic workers, 50 per cent), then Belfast West and finally Belfast East. That would leave NI totally dependent on one station, Ballylumford in Larne, where UWC influence was major. Ballylumford would then itself be run down bringing all industry and many essential services to a complete halt. The British would have to give in eventually, conceding to the UWC demands for the abolition of the Assembly with its power-sharing and Council of Ireland, and the calling of new elections.

Such a plan took time to become fully effective. Thus, on the first day of the strike, although there were quite lengthy power cuts in parts of the North, there was no immediate closure of industry and business. In fact, to all appearances things went on much as usual on the morning of May 14th. Most people turned up for work and had little difficulty doing

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Unionist roadblocks backed up the strike

so as transport was moving freely. But by mid-morning of the first day and to a much greater extent on the second and subsequent days, another element in the plan came into effect — intimidation on a massive scale carried out by the paramilitary groups represented on the UWC executive. Road blocks, hijackings, threats to people at work, beatings of others, and eventually on the 25th, the murder of two Catholic brothers in Ballymena who refused to close their public house.

Of course, the one potential weakness in the loyalist plan was the possible intervention of the police and army. Such intervention in the early days of the strike might have helped to escalate it. On the other hand, the chances were greater that it would have nipped it in the bud. But such intervention did not happen. Any action that actually happened was both too little and too late. Secretary of State Merlyn Rees opted for leaving the strike alone to burn itself out, a naive expectation in the light of the evidence of widespread intimidation. When he finally acted on the 27th by sending in the army to keep a small number of petrol stations open — the UWC had increased the pace of the strike by cutting off petrol supplies except to a few stations nominated by them, where they vetted people queuing for petrol — the UWC was in its position of greatest strength; it responded by announcing the shut down of Ballylumford within twenty four hours. The army were convinced they could not run Ballylumford themselves, with the result that the threat was effective. The powersharing executive resigned on the 29th.

If Rees showed some hesitation in dealing with the strike, the police did not. Unhesitatingly they turned a blind eye to hijackings and intimidations. So worried were army officers by the open collusion between police and strikers that they would have been reluctant to try to engage in joint anti-strike action even if ordered to earlier by Rees. Thus, when the army moved against the Red Hand Commandoes in the wake of the Ballymena killings, they did so unilaterally without informing the police in advance.

Police inactivity was of great help to the UWC. It enabled

them to survive the shaky first days of the strike, to gather momentum so that any later action would be even more difficult. In addition the police response to the strike typifies well the reaction of many institutions in NI. A mixture of responses — ranging from deference to outright support — soon became apparent. Middle class businessmen queued up quietly outside the UWC headquarters begging for passes to prove they were essential car users. Civil servants passed on vital information to the UWC, even prior to giving it to NI Office ministers. And the BBC defined its brief of 'impartial reporting' as giving equal time to UWC, thus leading one strike leader, Harry Murray, to acknowledge:

'The BBC were marvellous — they were prepared to be fed any information. They fell into their own trap that "the public must get the news". Sometimes they were just a news service for us ... (Fisk, p127)²

It was hard to avoid the conclusion that the bulk of the unionist establishment and public was in one way or another supporting the strike. Certainly, this was the conclusion that the power-sharing executive reached. And, for entirely different reasons, it was a widely-held belief in Catholic working class areas. The nationalist response was a somewhat ambivalent one. On the one hand there were those who had no desire to see the Assembly survive. This was the most true in the case of the IRA who in effect engaged in a ceasefire during the strike. From their point of view the loyalists were showing the British one of the things that the IRA had been telling them for years, namely, that NI was basically ungovernable. On the other hand, there was a real fear on the part of the nationalists that the loyalists would let the power go to their heads, as it were. The SDLP (participants in the power-sharing executive) were furious at the British allowing the loyalists to wreck *their*

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Assembly. Ordinary nationalists may have been less protective of the SDLP's sickly baby, but they did fear the latent sectarianism in loyalist dominance. True, the strike had been much less sectarian than many had feared, the Ballymena killings notwithstanding. However, there were twenty eight people killed when car bombs exploded in Dublin and Monaghan on the 15th, and although they were not acknowledged by any organisation, the lesson of the military power, and not just the industrial muscles, of the loyalist workers was not lost on many nationalist workers. Although there was no pogrom launched against nationalist areas during the strike, there was the feeling of helplessness as food and fuel supplies dwindled. Nationalists realised how powerless they were in relation to the power stations, oil refineries and docks, and there was more than one nationalist worker who tried to hold on to enough petrol to get the family across the border if necessary.

This point is very important, not least because it was overlooked at the time by many left commentators. The Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist-Leninist), for example, saw the strike as 'a great step forward for the working class in Ulster, and strengthened their class consciousness, unity and revolutionary sentiment'. Similar sentiments were expressed by Tom Nairn, a writer less easily dismissed as being on the lunatic fringe, in a book which looks remarkably dated only seven years after its publication.

'It was the working class that made the Ulster nation. Its 1974 general strike defied, and defeated, three bourgeois governments and the British army. Although they will never concede the fact, it relegated the claims of the IRA forever to that historical archive from which they should never have re-emerged. It was without doubt the most successful *political* action carried out by any European working class since the World War. Before that turning-point there was an Irish-Protestant nationality confined to the level of pogrom violence, to the archaic inter-class tribalism of the Orange Order, Calvinist bigotry and Kiplinesque empire. After it, there is at least the possibility of a middle class nation.'³

Not only does Nairn miss the crucial fact of the relationship of loyalist workers to the state in NI, and therefore the extent to which the state was not prepared to take them on in the same way as, say, the French state did workers in 1968, but he also ignores the ways in which nationalist workers viewed the strike, and the effect the strike may have had on working class unity overall. With commentators right, left and centre either singing the praises of the loyalists, or at least acknowledging their invulnerability, many nationalist workers were understandably wary of what any post-strike political settlement would hold for them. The UWC had only one major demand as they called off the strike — new elections. But the UDA, the largest loyalist paramilitary group represented on the UWC executive, began to canvass actively for an 'independent Ulster'. Many — such as Merlyn Rees — lent credence to the political respectability of the loyalist position by referring to the basic invincibility and new-found nationalism of the loyalists. Even sections of the republican movement toyed for a while with the idea of some kind of 'marriage of convenience' with the loyalists, comparing Jim Smyth of the UWC with Wolfe Tone, the founder of republicanism (in *An Phoblacht*, 14 June, 1974) and pursuing even more forcefully their then proposal of a federal solution.

the loyalists held the ultimate veto in the political sphere in Northern Ireland

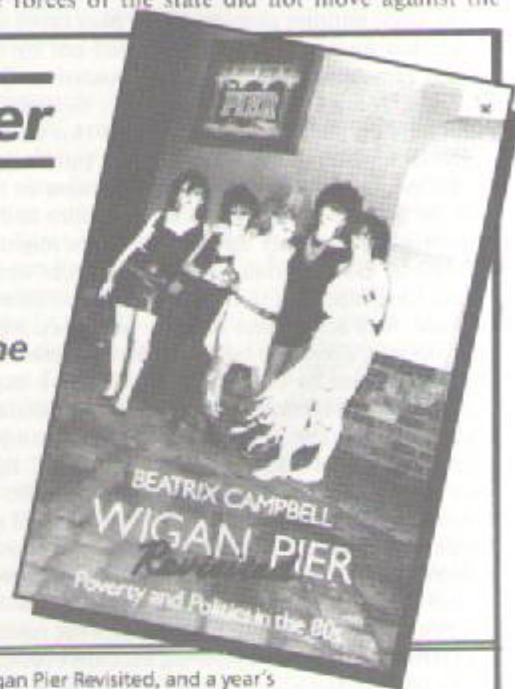
The loyalists were on a high, and few were seriously criticising them. But with the benefit of hindsight it is easier to draw another conclusion from the events, a conclusion that helps to explain the partly unarticulated fears of northern nationalists. Faced with even minor changes in their traditional position of dominance the loyalists closed ranks. They pulled the unionist middle class and all the major institutions of the state in behind them and were thus practically invulnerable. The trade unions organised an ill-conceived and abortive back-to-work march on May 19th. The forces of the state did not move against the

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were not prepared to push the loyalists on this point of their veto power. Since 1974 the essence of the bipartisan Direct Rule of the North has been determined by that lesson of the UWC strike. The 1975 Constitutional Convention, which resulted from the new elections demanded by the UWC, was not the Assembly mark two. True, the British were not prepared to concede to the loyalist majority in the Convention a return to straight majority rule, but at the same time, they did not push the loyalists towards any political progress, and the Convention collapsed. In 1977 Paisley, Ernest Baird and the UDA attempted to repeat the UWC strike, but their target — increased security — was less specific and the loyalist unity was much less tight than in 1974. Despite that, the 1977 'lock-out' was no failure. As the British had conceded to loyalist demands in 1974 by speeding up the process of 'Ulsterisation' of security, so the 1977 'lock-out' was followed by increased SAS operations and an expansion of the police force. Finally, Jim Prior's experiment of 'rolling devolution' reached a very sudden brick wall in the current Assembly. Even before the unionist parties began to bicker among themselves, it was apparent that Prior was not out to woo the constitutional nationalists of the SDLP as Rees had been in the mid-seventies. That in itself is perhaps the strongest proof of the conviction with which the lesson of 1974 has been internalised in the Britain bipartisan psyche. The SDLP can flutter around the Dublin Forum. Sinn Fein can go from electoral strength to strength. But there is no way that the British seem in the slightest concerned to challenge the loyalist veto on political innovations.

Could the loyalists repeat their success? There's no reason to believe that they could not

Could the loyalists repeat the success of 1974? There is no reason to believe that they could not. True, they are in many ways more disunited now they have been in a long time, but given the opportunity of having to react to some British proposal for political change which challenged the union or their position of dominance, they could surely be expected to close ranks again. The power stations are still loyalist-controlled. The British army is no more able to run those stations now than they were ten years ago. The institutions of the state in NI are still to some extent or another pro-unionist, and could be expected to defer once more to the muscle of a loyalist workers-led opposition to political change.

Any such political change seems a long way off while bipartisanship — despite the few slight dents in that structure inflicted by recent Labour Party conferences — reigns supreme. But the ultimate question mark is in respect to the actions of any future British administration which would seek to break with bipartisanship. Would they come up with any political scheme which seriously challenged the union? And, if so, would they be less naive than the Labour Party government of 1974, and realise that standing over that scheme will require them to take on the loyalists, not just in Westminster, or in Stormont Castle, but on the streets? For without that realisation, they would be destined to repeat the errors of the past, and even more emphatically underline the loyalists' ultimate source of strength here — their power of veto over any political progress.

Footnotes

1. Robert Fisk, *The Point of No Return: the strike which broke the British in Ulster* (London, 1975).
2. Fisk, *op. cit*
3. Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London, 1977), p243.

BILL ROLSTON teaches sociology at the Ulster Polytechnic and is joint author with TOMLINSON and O'DOWD of *Between Civil Rights and Civil War*.



Edward Carson reviews the loyalist veto force before the First World War.

strikers until it was too late. In short, the loyalists held — and were allowed to hold — the ultimate veto in the political sphere in NI.

In a sense, then, there was little new in the content of the UWC message, despite Rees, Nairn and everyone else. All that was historically different was the form. Hence, comparisons to other eras are both apposite and only partially valid. In 1912, for instance, it was the unionist bourgeoisie which moved against Home Rule and the loyalist working class which fell behind. So, in that sense 1974 was very different. But there is a valid logic in arguing that, at base, there was little difference. In both cases an all-class alliance of unionists opposed British attempts to extricate themselves somewhat from directly governing Ireland. In fact, if anything, there was something perhaps even more pessimistic about 1974 than 1912. In the latter, one could, if one wanted, paint the loyalist working class as duped by its bourgeois masters. But ten years ago the loyalist workers showed, as they have before and since, that they are often stauncher and more militant in their pursuit of the union than some of the unionist bourgeoisie are.

The lesson was not lost on the British. The Assembly, even in full flight, would not have meant any significant weakening of the traditional loyalist position of dominance. It was, however, judged by the loyalists as a potential chink in the armour which, if let be, could lead to the diminution of their power. The message of the UWC strike was that the British

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GOODBYE PROLETARIAT ?

ANDRE GORZ

Has the microchip short-circuited the classical Marxist view of the seizure of state power by the proletariat?

Phil Hearse talked to Andre Gorz, author of *Farewell to the Working Class*, about the consequences of new technology for the future of socialism.

The title of your book, *Farewell to the Working Class*, is very provocative. But are we saying 'goodbye' in fact? Surely the decline of the traditional manual working class has been accompanied by the proletarianisation of large numbers of white collar workers. There's also a proletarianisation of intellectual labour. Over the last decade there was an expansion of trade unionisation which was only halted by the capitalist crisis of 1974-5.

In other words, this society is still dominated by capitalist social relations of production, in which the overwhelming majority of people earn their living in the wage labour/capital relationship, as part of the proletariat.

No doubt about it. Everything you say is right. When the labour movement was born in the 1820s there was a revolution going on, the industrial revolution. This made it possible for a few people — the first socialists — to envisage a totally different society, one which would be based on the collective appropriation of the means of production, of workers' control of the production process.

Today there is another technological revolution going on which can be compared in its significance to the industrial revolution and which holds out the possibility of a realisation of the dream of the first socialists — the abolition of wage labour. In the *Grundrisse* Marx opposed disposable time to labour time. And certain key parts of his work say that the measure of wealth is disposable, free time. 'Really rich' is a nation where you work six hours and not twelve hours.

I think the micro-electronic revolution brings us into the same perspective as the first socialists, who said that wage labour was a curse which could be abolished eventually. The new working class has not at all the same relationship to work and its job as the working class in the nineteenth century, the relationship which made it possible to say that socialism was the taking of power by the working class in production and in society. This relation to work has been completely wiped out by capitalist management techniques.

The old industrial working class which had real power on the factory floor, which bargained on almost equal terms with the boss, is gone. The same thing has happened to the production process among white collar workers. Now both are being automated out of existence. You have on the one hand a small stable class of wage earners, and on the other hand a growing class of precarious workers who are unemployed part of the year, or most of it.

This bears out Marx's prophesy that workers would eventually not just do one particular job, but just work. And we have reached a stage where people are indifferent to the content of their work. A majority of the working class would rather not work, would rather just receive an income for not working. So the 'farewell to the working class' is a farewell to the proletariat which identifies with wage labour as a source of power and of social self-recognition. Only the working class aristocracy now identifies with its own work.

You have raised a number of questions. The first is the possibility of the microprocessor revolution leading to the abolition of wage labour. But hasn't it always been part of the Marxist programme, to reduce the working day through the application of technology?

According to the traditional Marxist schema, after the seizure of power by the working class we move immediately towards a reduction of labour time, to a gradual implementation of automation techniques and towards a gradual abolition of repetitive, drudge work. Surely the slogan of 'socialism equals automation plus workers' councils' is a modern rendering of the traditional Marxist programme?

The second question which arises from what you've said is your stress on the identification of the working class with its labour as a source of satisfaction and power. It seems to me that the objective basis for the working class becoming conscious of itself as a class and fighting together as a class is not a particular relationship of satisfaction and identification with its product, but its experience of the wage labour/capital relationship — which still dominates society.

Which brings us to an empirical question. Is it the case that the changes in the labour process necessarily mean that the working class has become any less conscious, any less unified and any less combative?

We are still in a process where work is being abolished. If we keep to the 35-hour week, in the 1990s there will be 30 per cent unemployment. In Japan labour time for the 1990s is predicted to be 24 hours a week. When people work two days a week, the essence of their life is no longer labour, it's no longer the wage relation, it's what they do with their free time. What will society give them in terms of facilities, possibilities, culture, creative potential and social relations which they can develop in an autonomous way?

today's technological revolution holds out the possibility of the abolition of wage labour

It can turn two ways. Either they will be allowed to have autonomous, productive, creative activity — that is based on self-managed social relations — or they will be manipulated in a '1984' society. So the emphasis on people's capacity to develop autonomy, to develop autonomous social relations, to develop autonomous productive and creative potentials is essential for the shaping of society to come — and not simply the taking of control of wage labour.

Then there's a second aspect. There's a crucial passage in *Capital* where Marx says that the self-management by the producers of their relations with each other, does not abolish the sphere of necessity, but just puts it under people's control so as to reduce it to its possible minimum. The sphere of freedom only begins beyond this stage.

I'm trying to say that wage labour is not necessarily something which is ungratifying. I'm saying that in a society like ours — which is not based on a village economy, domestic economy or on autarkic (self-sufficient) communes, but on comprehensive integrated social production — society always has the aspect of a big machine. You can take socially necessary labour and make it more pleasant. You can alleviate people's tasks and make them less boring, but you can never make them 'autonomous', they are 'heteronomous' (ie governed by the laws of others) by definition. Because society is a big machine, because the box made in Glasgow has to fit the screws made in Southampton. Because there are so many inter-dependent processes you need a country of five million people to make one washing machine.

So saying that people will manage the labour process in an

Polemie



you need a country of five million people to
make one washing machine

autonomous way, through workers' control, setting the rules and submitting them to their power, is eyewash. All they can do is self-manage a technical aspect, where there is a margin of initiative. They cannot consider it their autonomous creative activity. There can be some creativeness in this activity, but it cannot be the thing they identify with and say 'this is my work, this is my product'.

This identity with the product must develop outside the sphere of necessity, the sphere of wage labour, if you want to have a meaningful society with meaningful social relations. That's what I call post-industrial socialism, one where wage labour will be marginalised. If things go on as they are, it will be the majority of the population who are marginalised by one small stratum of privileged workers who have stable jobs, while the majority of the population have nothing.

On the question of whether the changes in the work process have made the working class less combative — certainly not. The capitalist technology and work organisation has destroyed for a long time the possibility of workers being the subject of power in production. Technology is not neutral, it was developed precisely in order to destroy workers' power in the factory. You can win a certain amount of control over working conditions, over the technical process of production on the shop floor. You cannot, as Marx thought in his early period, say that the working class as a whole will feel at one with a single integrated comprehensive social process of production. You have to compare the working class as it is now with an army. It is structured by capitalist management, like an army. It is sub-divided by smaller units, led by what Marx called the 'officers and petty-officers of production'. Of course an army can take power. But as long as the technology of production remains the same, the division of labour remains the same, the sub-divisions of the units will remain the same and those who take power will be the officers. It will not be the soldiers.

So if the working class is to take power, it has to change the organisation of work and the division of labour, and to a large extent abolish it. It has to reintegrate the individual worker into units where they feel they understand what they are doing —

which is impossible if you make the components of a washing machine.

This is made possible by the micro-electronic revolution, where you have much smaller means of production and it's possible to recover a certain control and decision-making power over what they're doing. It will not come on its own, but only if we understand that present capitalist technology has to be completely changed, as well as the division of labour.

I would raise two objections. The first is whether there is really going to be a 'collapse of work' so long as there are capitalist social relations. All the technological changes we've seen in the last 100 years have not led to this result. And according to Marxist theory there's a good reason why it shouldn't — which is that the only source of surplus value and profit is the exploitation of living labour power. If that is abolished then profits are abolished as well. Can capitalism abolish work? I think the answer is 'no'.

The second objection is that you seem to be saying that the realm of freedom can only start after the destruction of the division of labour. But why can't we, in the initial stages of socialism, proceed to reduce social labour rapidly, thus gradually expanding free time? It's impossible to destroy the division of labour overnight.

It always turns out that the capitalists haven't read Marx! The capitalists are abolishing labour, they don't know that thereby they're destroying the source of surplus value. What faces us in the future is a measure of automation that will make it impossible for people to live on a wage. Therefore governments and capital will combine to give people an income to buy commodities not related to their work. That's what's already happening.

The necessity of the capitalist system to make income independent of the performance of work is visible to everyone. You are paid for studying. In France we have 600,000 young people trained every year in skills they will never be able to use. Hundreds of thousands of people are paid redundancy money to ensure they give up work. They are trying to get people to retire at 55.

We are going towards a society where commodities will buy people instead of people buying commodities. It's what I call 'dead-living capitalism' — capitalism which is a living corpse.



Polemie



Photo: MIKE COHEN

The days of the powerful white male working class are numbered

Capitalism which is already dead but keeps up the appearance of the wage relationship and commodity production.

I think that you're saying that capitalism has already realised part of the Marxist project, or is in the process of realising it — the move towards the abolition of alienating labour. I think that the thesis that capitalism will be prepared to pay an increasing part of the working class not to work, even a majority of the working class, is not valid...

The ruling class will be forced to redistribute surplus value much more widely or the system will break down, it is breaking down...

But in a period of crisis there's an increasing attack on that redistribution of surplus value — look at Britain. The real income of the unemployed has decreased by 20 per cent in three years, which is precisely a demonstration that the law of value continues to dominate, and that the infinite redistribution of surplus value is not possible because it leads to a collapse of profits.

But what will happen when the work week comes down to 24 hours a week? If people are just paid for that you won't be able to sell anything you produce. This society has to soften its own terms if it wants to survive. And it will do so. It's a condition of survival.

What is your critique of the traditional notion of the working class taking power to solve these problems?

You can't rely on the working class because it's a minority. You have to widen your political base to the increasing number of people who are marginalised by this society — the marginalised sub-proletariat.

Obviously there's a necessity to assemble a popular majority for socialism, which means building an alliance between the

working class and other social groups and popular movements. Doesn't this still mean an overall political programme and a political party to cement the alliance?

But my point is that all political parties have become discredited because they are identified with government and not the aspirations of the people. They have become conveyor belts for state power and not for civil society.

When you talk about the state, why can't a new type of state exist — a workers' state based on workers' councils which are federated at a regional and national level, which breaks down the division between the state and civil society?

Yes, but you can't base your worker's councils on wage labour. You have to consider it as a federation of labour-exchange co-operatives. What does it mean if we are Marxists and communists? It means not the exchange of labour for money to buy commodities, but exchanging labour for goods and social services. That's the idea of the new communes that are growing up in Canada and Scandinavia. That you give so many hours to the commune and in return you have credits for goods and services. That is the only way to have autonomously controlled labour and social relations.

I think your vision is essentially utopian. Surely you can't immediately abolish the national market and a money economy after the destruction of capitalism. That requires a situation of abundance based on automation — it's more like the initial stages of communism. Otherwise you will revert to a simple barter economy and you will have de-industrialisation.

You are too rigid. I didn't say abolish the national economy, the national market. But you must have scope for autonomously controlled social relations at a local level. Otherwise you will never make the leap from the 'sphere of necessity' to the 'sphere of freedom'.

Farewell to the Working Class by Andre Gorz is published by Pluto Press, £3.95.

WHAT IS STALINISM?

CHRIS ARTHUR

In *New Left Review* 139 Perry Anderson provided an assessment of Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism. In *International* (Vol 8 No 5) Phil Hearse replied. Chris Arthur argues that although Hearse made some good points, he failed to convince on two crucial issues: the definition of Stalinism and its contemporary reality.

Trotsky held that there was an asymmetry in the role of Stalinism: *within* the USSR, the Stalinist bureaucracy played a *contradictory* role, repressing the working class while opposing imperialist attempts to restore capitalism; *outside* the USSR the Stalinist Comintern was purely counter-revolutionary.

Anderson makes two points in criticism of Trotsky's diagnosis. 'Firstly he erred in qualifying the external role of the Soviet bureaucracy as simply and unilaterally "counter-revolutionary" — whereas in fact it was to prove profoundly *contradictory* in its actions and effects abroad, just as much as it was at home. Secondly, he was mistaken in thinking that Stalinism represented merely an "exceptional" or "aberrant" refraction of the general laws of transition from capitalism to socialism, that would be confined to Russia itself. The structures of bureaucratic power and mobilisation pioneered under Stalin proved to be both more *dynamic* and more *general* a phenomenon on the international plane than Trotsky ever imagined.' (p56)

The first point here is the adoption of the pernicious politics of 'Socialism in One Country' with the consequent sacrifice of the world revolution to the shifting diplomatic interests of the USSR. After the spasm of the 'Third Period' perspective, the Comintern settled down to a consistently class-collaborationist practice which appeared to provide ample evidence for Trotsky to write it off as subordinate to the Kremlin bureaucracy. Nonetheless the objective weight of the growing power of the Soviet Union in the world, including its hurling back of the Nazi invasion, could not fail to have international effects in spite of Stalin's misleadership.

When the Red Army occupied large parts of Eastern Europe Stalin was still obsessed with maintaining an anti-fascist alliance. All indigenous revolutionary circles that had survived underground were crushed and the Communist Parties reconstituted under Stalinist leaders flown in from Moscow. Assured that no uncontrollable revolution would break out, and acting under the pressure of imperialist Cold War tactics, Stalin moved in 1948 to destroy capitalism from above. Hearse says that, 'the creation of buffer states was carried out not because Stalin was innately hostile to capitalism in Eastern Europe, but for the military defence of the USSR.' This is true but rather beside the point. The *actual effect* was to demonstrate the Stalinism was capable of extending itself geographically and to weaken thereby capitalism as a world system. The likes of Winston Churchill would not have been mollified by Hearse's fine distinction, in spite of Stalin's Yalta concessions. Defending its own interests, the Soviet state apparatus weakened capitalism in the short term, while storing up big trouble for itself, and ultimately damaging the standing of Communism in the eyes of the international working class, by establishing its dictatorship over new peoples. That is why we can say that its role was contradictory.

Having said that, we must also stress the limitations inherent in the nature of Stalinism's defence of the Soviet Union. As a fossilised layer of conservative bureaucrats totally divorced from the masses, the Kremlin Stalinists are quite incapable of defending the Soviet Union in a revolutionary way. The best defence of the Soviet Union lies in the extension of the world revolution, but the Stalinist bureaucrats have no confidence in the masses or capacity to lead them. They only know how to act under the umbrella of the Red Army. They reply to H-bombs with H-bombs.

I would therefore criticise Anderson for being overgenerous to the Soviet bureaucracy as an 'international revolutionary factor' in speaking of 'external gains by exploited classes'. Part of the problem here is that the objective weight of the surviving conquests of October provides the Stalinist apparatus with an inherent strength which is easily confused with the apparatus itself. The antagonism of the imperialist world to those conquests creates a situational logic in which the apparatus is forced to rely on that strength to defend itself — externally as well as internally.

In their debate Hearse and Anderson emphasise different aspects of this. Anderson points out the importance that the *existence* of the Soviet Union, even under Stalinist misleadership, has for new workers' states, the colonial revolution, and so on. But no Trotskyist has ever denied this. Hearse picks up the appalling opportunism of the Soviet Stalinists in misusing this strength. Because the strength of October is now mediated



Leon Trotsky

Polemie

Photo: DAVID KING COLLECTION



Stalin and Voroshilov share a little joke

through the Stalinist apparatus its potential is blocked, misappropriated, and distorted. The *crucial* question Trotsky was addressing, however, when he asked whether Stalinist conservatism had reached the point where it was counter-revolutionary, related to its inability to promote *socialist* revolution through a massive mobilisation of the working class. (Trotsky never dreamed of saying that Stalinism was always against bourgeois revolutions, or national revolutions, or the colonial revolution within strictly bourgeois limits.) Here the historical record of the Soviet bureaucracy, and the Comintern apparatus controlled by it, speaks for itself.

Anderson writes of the Soviet state being 'persistently *anti-capitalist*' externally (p58). Yet, leaving aside the structural assimilation of part of Eastern Europe to the USSR regime, we can see that *nowhere* has the political practice of the Soviet bureaucracy brought about such an overthrow of capitalism. Every serious commentator on the Chinese, Yugoslav, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions stresses the indifference, or downright hostility of the Soviet rulers to the prospect of the revolutionary seizure of power.

Let us now address the second point made by Anderson — and this is the important one. He expands on it as follows: 'Stalinism proved to be not just an apparatus, but a *movement* — one capable not only of keeping power in a backyard environment dominated by scarcity (USSR); but of actually winning power in environments that were yet more backward and destitute (China, Vietnam) ... Stalinism as a broad phenomenon — that is a workers' state ruled by an authoritarian bureaucratic stratum — did not merely represent a *degeneration* from a prior state of (relative) class grace: it could also be a spontaneous *generation* produced by revolutionary class forces in very backward societies, without any traditions of either bourgeois or proletarian democracy' (p57).

What is comrade Hearse's answer to this? Surely brute

historical facts have to be taken into account in our conceptualisations? Unfortunately Hearse attempts to solve the problem by means of a *definition*. He defines Stalinism as 'subordination to the diplomatic interests of the Kremlin'. This allows him to *deny* that the Chinese, Albanian, Yugoslav, or Vietnamese revolutions were led by Stalinists because all these Communist Parties '*broke* with Moscow, generally over the crucial question of whether or not to take power.' In asking the question whether Trotsky was right in assuming that the Comintern was purely counter-revolutionary Anderson imagined himself to be addressing a question of *fact*. With Hearse no facts are relevant because Stalinism is counter-revolutionary by definition.

But Trotsky became convinced of the need to found a new International, when he concluded that *as a matter of fact* the Third International was dead for revolutionary purposes. If Hearse insists on *his* definition, then Trotsky's diagnosis may be expressed by saying that he believed the Comintern parties were incapable of breaking with Stalinism. History proved him *wrong*. I have enough respect for Trotsky to believe he would have readily admitted that he had over-generalised the experience of the thirties.

But *should* Hearse's definition be accepted? Isn't it the case that the parties concerned profess loyalty to Stalin, and to this day model themselves on the conceptions, methods and organisational structures introduced by Stalin? Isn't it the case that the one country in the world with a profusion of public monuments to Stalin is Albania? Yet, because of the Albanian CP's antipathy to Moscow, Hearse's definition forces us to say that it has broken with Stalinism!

This definition of Stalinism — 'subordination to the diplomatic interests of the Kremlin' — refers purely to the political level, and to a very specific political conjuncture at that. It is more or less useless from a materialist point of view.

Polemie

In the thirties it might have passed muster, for there was only one workers' state and its Stalinist rulers had succeeded in subordinating the Comintern to their sway. This could all be passed off as a deviant phenomenon to be explained by special circumstances.

We are now fifty years on. We have several 'workers' states' in the world, beyond the control of the Kremlin, established under the leadership of parties coming out of the Stalinised Comintern and retaining the same regime. These states are similar to the USSR in their basic political system, and each of them bases their foreign policy on the narrow interests of their own state apparatus. Furthermore there have emerged, and there still exist, a lot of parties of varying size, marked by the same general features of 'Stalinism'. Hearse says this argument 'does not affect the substance of the matter' (p32). But it has *everything* to do with the substance of the matter because it shows that we are dealing with a *general* phenomenon. This provides a *conclusive* argument against Hearse's narrow definition of Stalinism, and for introducing a conception based on a scientific analysis of this new development. Hearse himself cites Trotsky: 'The most dangerous thing in politics is to fall captive to one's own formula that yesterday was appropriate but is bereft of all content today.' Yet he ignores it. It is a sign of our failure that we still resort to the personalised label 'Stalinism' long after his death, to refer to phenomena for which he could not be held personally responsible, namely the 'spontaneous generation' of 'Stalinist' tendencies on a world scale.

There are two broad dimensions of Stalinism as we know it. It represents a differentiation within the workers' movement whereby the apparatus becomes independent from, and dominant over, the mass membership, and legitimates itself in terms of such themes as homogeneity; so-called 'democratic centralism'; discipline from the top down; banning of tendencies; the imposed slate in elections; no open discussion of policy changes; so-called criticism and self-criticism; in sum a con-

stellation of methods and concepts pioneered by Stalin in the USSR. Above all, Stalinism approaches mass work in a manipulative way rather than endeavouring to spark self-mobilisation by the working class. It also consists in the fusion of this apparatus with a state apparatus, and a set of policies pioneered by Stalin under the slogan 'Socialism in One Country' which subordinates the interests of the world revolution, and of other workers' states, to the national interests of the state apparatus.

It is of course not adequate to characterise Stalinism simply in terms of its theoretical conceptions and institutional practices; we have to look to its material basis. The objective roots of Stalinism consist in the difficulty a subaltern class has in realising its own power and keeping its representative organs as servants rather than masters and the uneven development of capitalism which leads to the disaggregated character of world revolution.

On the question of the fusion of party apparatus and state apparatus, Trotsky admits there is a 'grain of truth' in anarchism. In *Stalinism and Bolshevism* he says: 'The state as an apparatus of constraint is undoubtedly a source of political and moral infection. This also applies, as experience has shown, to the workers' state ... Stalinism is a product of a condition of society in which society was still unable to tear itself out of the straitjacket of the state.' To those making their careers in such a national state apparatus, national chauvinism comes naturally.

I would argue that Stalinism is spontaneously *nationalist*. This was obscured in the period of the Comintern by the Orwellian use of the phrase 'proletarian internationalism' to mobilise support for the Kremlin in the Comintern. Later, Stalinist leaderships used the support of the USSR against their memberships. However the subordination of the Comintern parties to the dictates of the Kremlin was not really a spontaneous process. It required a brutal campaign of systematic deceit, slander, intrigue, bribery and violence. Ultimately,

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Was Mao Ze dong a Stalinist?

though, Stalinist leaderships which acquired an independent base, especially if they achieved state power, were to *imitate*, rather than collaborate with, the Kremlin.

As a general rule of thumb, one can say of the parties of the Comintern that the smaller they were the more they remained loyal to Moscow (whose moral and material support was required), and the larger they were the more they became autonomous (having a material base in the indigenous workers' movement, or, sometimes, the local governmental apparatus). The Kremlin had to displace the leadership of the German party four times before leaders pliant enough were installed. It is known that Mao tse-tung was not Stalin's candidate for the leadership of the Chinese CP. Mao defeated Wang Ming, the Kremlin-trained stooge, in a factional battle. The Chinese and Vietnamese CPs declared war on Trotskyism rather later than most.

What remains at issue in all this, as in 1938, is the perspective for world revolution. Hearse objects to the idea that bureaucratic forms of mobilisation in the semi-colonial countries are generalised spontaneously. He links this to the analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian revolution. In both cases he argues that to say such developments are inevitable amounts to apologetics for Stalinism. This is a completely fallacious argument.

Let us take the Russian case first. Given the actual material conditions Stalinism in the USSR was inevitable. To believe otherwise is tantamount to giving supernatural powers to Joseph Stalin. If one is a materialist at all, one must accept the

necessity of such consequences of a revolution taking place in a backward country, with a hostile imperialist world. The struggle of the Left Opposition was doomed to failure *without a spread of the world revolution*. However, it is simply bad logic to infer from this that Stalinism was *justified*. The real problem is: how can one justify the struggle of the opposition against overwhelming odds?

It was always possible that some new revolutionary upsurge in the West might have come to the aid of the USSR which would have changed the conditions of their struggle. The *international* role of the Left Opposition to Stalinism was well worth undertaking, for there the situation was more open. Even now, it is hard to understand how Stalinism and Social Democracy so comprehensively blocked the emergence of a revolutionary leadership in Europe.

When Hearse turns to the revolutionary movement in the semi-colonial countries he becomes completely abstract. He asserts that bureaucratic forms in the transitional regimes are 'the product of the lack of a conscious fight against bureaucratism, that is to say, the absence of a revolutionary Marxist leadership.' This is a pathbreaking method in social science to be sure. Positive facts are brought into being by other positive facts and not by absences! It is true that, speaking colloquially, we sometimes use expressions like: 'He died from lack of oxygen'; such expressions only make sense, however, if in normal conditions the factor is *present*. In our case the revolutionary Marxist leadership is generally *absent* so Hearse's expression is meaningless. *If* it were the case that revolutions in semi-colonial countries were normally carried out by Marxist leaderships and led to egalitarian and democratic regimes, then we might explain an exception *in the first instance* by 'absence of a revolutionary Marxist leadership'. But this is not what historical experience shows. It is necessary therefore to explain the *actual trend* (including 'the lack of a conscious fight against bureaucratism') by reference to *material conditions*, and discuss under what conditions a different leadership could emerge.

I have no idea whether Anderson accepts the inference comrade Hearse attributes to him — namely that his analysis might lead to 'abstentionism from the task of building parties which base themselves on the tradition of Trotsky and the Left Opposition.' However, it seems to me that the scope and persistence of Stalinism makes such a task more and not less vital.

There are four reasons why it is necessary to build an authentic revolutionary International:

- 1) Although we have had to modify Trotsky's perspectives it is still *largely* true that Stalinist parties are incapable of overthrowing capitalism. Experience shows that Stalinist parties are not very well suited to making revolution but well adapted to organising defeats (eg Chile) especially when they persist in the Menshevik 'two stage' theory of social revolution.
- 2) Only the Fourth International has the political programme which can relate the struggles of workers in the 'workers' states' to the authentic Marxist tradition and hence facilitate a thoroughgoing anti-Stalinist struggle.
- 3) It is necessary to carry out a persistent struggle in the capitalist world to convince the working class that socialism does not have to equal Stalinism and to popularise the programme of proletarian democracy.
- 4) Above all the International is necessary to promote genuine internationalism, relentlessly to criticise the narrow nationalism of Russia, China etc, to combat the virus of chauvinism in the workers' movement in the imperialist countries, and to strive to build the most appropriate form for the expression of proletarian interests, namely an international organisation dedicated to communist world revolution.

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NO EMPTY GESTURES

PETER HAIN

Labour may have lost millions, and the right wing may be dying to wave goodbye to the proletariat. But for the left in the labour movement the diagnoses and cures for Labour's ills are still hotly disputed.

John Ross talks to Peter Hain, vice-chair of the Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC), about the state of the Labour Party and its chances for rejuvenation.

What is your explanation for Labour's defeat in 1979 and 1983?

These are headline reasons rather than a full explanation, but I would say first of all that Labour's class base has been contracting. Since 1951 this has been expressed in electoral terms where the Party's vote has declined at every election, with the exception of 1966 which was a freak in this trend.

That is due to a number of factors, one of which is that the party's past appeal has been too generalised and woolly and based on a rather romanticised, old-fashioned view of what the British class system is about. Increasingly recently it has been appealing to male, manual workers in the manufacturing industry, which is a contracting sector.

But side by side with that is the party's 'statist' type of socialism, which we've been unable to win support with. At an ideas level bureaucratic centralism is unattractive to people. Also I don't think that it actually allows ordinary workers or voters to engage in socialist politics — it's all top-down rather than bottom-up. So there's both a values issue and a strategy issue there in the kind of statism that the party has been associated with.

Of course the party's traditional millstone is its incorrigible parliamentarianism, at an activist and at a leadership level, both suffer from the same problem — an almost total concern with elections. Those would be my major reasons for Labour's defeats. I don't accept the cretinous view often prevalent in various sectarian groups on the left, that it's all a matter of leadership: the leadership's sold socialism down the river, and if we had a good leadership we'd be marching to the sound of gunfire. I don't think it's all a matter of leadership.

the party's traditional millstone is its
incorrigible parliamentarianism

Why do you think the Labour Party vote has declined so spectacularly at a time when the French and Spanish socialist parties had such electoral successes?

It seems to me that you've got to look at it in a specifically British context, and that context must pay attention to the rise of a third party in British politics — which is another change since the fifties. Whether or not the SDP had broken away, I suspect that the Liberal vote would still be on a higher level than it was in the early seventies. Each period of Liberal revival has been a third force revival, also to be found in the rise of the SNP in Scotland — that's the critical factor.

Why the rise of third force parties and the inability of the Labour Party to combat them?



Can Labour ever win again with Wilson-type politics?

Because of those defects in Labour's strategy and ideology that has opened up the critical space for a third party to colonise part of Labour's working class base. More recently, Thatcherism in the mid to late seventies, helped by some events like the 'winter of discontent' and the Falklands war, has actually made a positive appeal to sections of the working class which the Labour Party's been unable to stop.

Let's come back to the point you made about the recomposition of the working class. You've put forward a factual objection to a widely held view which is that in the '79 and '83 elections the sections of the working class that swung furthest from the Labour Party were male manual workers living in the south-east and Birmingham. How would you explain that?

Those groups, the classic skilled manual (inevitably) male worker, their class ties to the party have been weakened by these other factors. You could equally say, well look at the swing there's been away, particularly since '79, among women voters. So even recent polls in the last few weeks show us in the lead among male voters, but behind amongst women voters.

But if you look at that point, there is a more complex phenomenon. It's true that the Labour Party's failed to win over women voters. But on the other hand the single biggest erosion of the Conservative Party vote itself has been the loss of women voters.

If you take the 1950's the Tories had roughly 8 per cent more women than men voting for it. This fell to about 6 per cent in the 1960's, 3 per cent in the 1970's and it completely disappeared by 1983. This is not the case among skilled male workers. Among these, the Conservatives actually increased their support, whereas they've been losing it among women.

I'm not saying there is a simple, single explanation that accounts for both of those specific factors and the wider collapse of the party's base. By the way, if this what you're getting at, part of the story of Labour's contracting base is the story of the Tories' contracting base. The Tories have been winning elec-

Photo: JOHN STURROCK

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tions recently on a lower proportion of the vote, successively. That factor's important as well.

I also think there is something — and this is almost an instinctive feeling rather than anything that can be explained at a high theoretical level — I think that the party's socialist appeal has been increasingly at odds with the skilled workers that are still in work, with their daily experience. For that matter many workers, not necessarily skilled workers but people who are in work on average or above average earnings — a very sizeable proportion of people — felt that the labour movement is not offering anything. Because we've fed the electorate on a diet of very conventional consumerism, without any real socialist content to it, they've been very vulnerable to Thatcherism moving into that breach. They've said 'we'll let you buy your own council house', 'we'll let you keep more money in your pocket' and so on. It was a basic failure to actually give any socialist content to our policies or our appeal.

Labour governments have been the most damaging factors in eroding Labour's base

If you take the policies of 1975 to 1979 that were pursued by the Labour Party, you had average wages of people in work falling by about 8 per cent over this period, particularly those of skilled manual workers who were hit most severely of all. Here is Thatcher's policy of increasing the differentials inside the working class, which she's done, and actually increasing the real wages of those in work. Don't you think that must have a really major effect on Labour's lost support among skilled male manual workers?

Yes, absolutely. I think it's among that group that a catastrophic haemorrhage took place under the '74 to '79 Labour government. I suspect that for the poorer working class, the really badly paid or those not in work, the beginnings of the rot set in for them in the '60s under Wilson and the failure to make use of what was then a relative condition of growth to actually deliver for the poor. Whereas what happened in the seventies was as you say.

My only point is that all the evidence suggests that Labour governments have been the most damaging factors in eroding Labour's base. But it's interesting to note that our vote has held up better during periods of office compared with the opposition. Our vote has collapsed more quickly and steeply during periods of opposition than during periods of government.

If you look at that question of how to win elections, one fact that stands out in British politics since the Second World War is that no party pledged to an incomes policy has ever won a general election. What do you think of the prospects, therefore, of the sort of view put forward by the Labour Coordinating Committee or in the leadership to make incomes policy the economic bedrock of Labour's economic policy?

I think that the view that incomes policy would be the centrepiece of the economic policy is suicidal — that is a view shared by a lot of people on the Labour right. If you construct the whole of your economic programme around the idea that holding down wages is keeping the cork from exploding out then you're not only going to lose the election, but there's no possibility of building mass support. That's not my position.

How does the LCC see incomes policy and its relation to economic policy?

Only to this extent, that I think the left has to construct a credible position on what it sees as priorities, which is an issue the left has always dodged. I think that's true also on public ownership. Because we, understandably, have adopted a kind of oppositionalist position saying no incomes policy, no selling out on public ownership and so on we haven't actually constructed

a credible alternative that looks at priorities, says what you do first and stops the thing going completely off course and onto the rocks.

In terms of dealing with people's incomes I see low pay as one of the first priorities — that there's got to be a statutory minimum wage. That has all sorts of consequences in terms of the repercussions vis a vis differentials and so on.

Women's pay has got to be again an incomes priority for a Labour government. There's got to be positive action both at a governmental and a union level to actually deal with that. Free collective bargaining hasn't, and I don't think as it has traditionally been conceived it can resolve that.

Thirdly, my priority for a Labour government is jobs. These three priorities, low pay, women's pay and jobs are more important than, say, boosting consumer spending in the sense of putting more wages in the pockets of those already in work. It's that kind of approach to income that we ought to be talking about and seriously exploring rather than the traditional idea of incomes policy as the be all and end all of economic policy.

Let me put two objections to that. The first one is that the Labour Party cannot win an election and cannot sustain itself in office if it allows the working class to be disastrously split, for example between higher and lower paid workers, as undoubtedly happened in 1979. All incomes policies have had that effect.

Secondly the policy is a very substantial reflation of the economy carried out in a specific way as you've outlined. This always comes up against the insuperable problem that people will not invest. How do you tackle these two problems?

I'm not talking about holding down wages of higher paid workers. What I'm talking about is giving priority to those other groups, to the low paid, to women and the unemployed. In other words, I think they should get more, and that higher paid workers should be prepared to take less of an increase.

The low paid, women and the unemployed should get more, and higher paid workers should be prepared to take less of an increase

That's not screwing them down or reducing their real wages which is what happened during 1975 to '78/9. And by the way the really high paid workers escaped from the social contract, which they always do under an incomes policy. I'm talking about priorities, and I think the left ducks that, and if you duck that you don't get round to tackling the problem or resolving it in the end.

In terms of investment it seems to me that the important areas are public ownership and democratic control of the economy, which I agree with you is necessary or else we're simply going to have a traditional attempt at Keynesian expansion which will fail. I think, by the way that's all we were offering at the last election.

So the key areas for the left to push on for specific commitment in the party's programme and for action thereafter in government is on control of finance capital and control of the direction of investment — which can only be done by public ownership and democratic control. It's those areas where we have to concentrate rather than on renationalisation or public ownership of other sectors of the economy. Obviously those would come later. But that has to be the upfront issue.

One thing that's been widely discussed has been Alec Nove's book, *The economics of feasible socialism*. As far as I've seen this book it seems to be a relatively rational planned organisation of a future socialist society. Positively, it rejects simple models of statist centralised planning.

There are two big objections to it. One, it has no mechanism for getting there. This is a society that somehow comes into ex-



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Photo: JOHN HARRIS

The dreamy ticket

istence. Secondly, it doesn't deal with the problem of resistance to such a society.

If you look at the traditional model of the left — I don't believe that you can go and nationalise the top 250 monopolies tomorrow and this will solve all your problems sort of approach — but I do see an insuperable problem in capitalist society which you don't deal with. You cannot talk about control if people just refuse to be controlled.

Also there are all sorts of mechanisms — economic, political, violent, foreign and so on — which are put in the way of any attempt to get control of investment and of the financial system. These seem to be the two problems you don't address yourself to.

I think we address ourselves to them, I don't think we're paralysed by them in the way that some of the ultraleft groups who continually raise these points are. Crudely speaking what you're saying is that the ruling class is not going to take this lying down, and that the forces of international capital are not going to take it lying down either. Well, to any decent socialist analysis that would be so blindingly obvious as to almost not be worth arguing about.

The question is important though if it becomes a prescription for a state of paralysis where you don't do anything. If you simply keep on talking about it and pointing out all the defects of the strategies that the labour movement has inserted in its programme because it's going to be hammered by American dollars, or the international economy or whatever, I think that you fail to give people a credible strategy.

What I would argue for is a position which pushes forward on these fronts and recognises that its going to face enormous opposition, and then it will seek to build maximum local support, maximum support among workers so there is a popular support for Labour's policies.

I don't think you can legislate for socialism without a real base of support. I don't think there is any easy policy programme which you can construct which will actually remove that threat in a world dominated by international capital.

No, I certainly don't think we're paralysed. But there's a sort of choice involved in which economics and the social alliances that are made are integrally connected.

To take for example the policies which Labour adopted in opposition from 1970-74. They weren't perfect and further-

more they didn't succeed in preventing the continued decline of the Labour Party vote, but they were sufficient, coupled with mass struggle, to defeat the Conservative Party and elect a Labour government which had some impact for the first year or so. It succeeded in unifying the working class rather imperfectly and defeating its opponents.

In 1975 you had real resistance to the programme of the government and you had two choices: one was to proceed against capital and maintain the unity of the working class and the other was to go with the interests of international capital, completely split the working class — and disaster followed.

Yes, it's always been part of my analysis and stock-in-trade for the left in the party — but I don't see why you're raising it as a problem at all.

The reason that I raised it as a problem is that while it may be accepted on the left, it's not so widely accepted outside. But it's the track record of the Labour government when confronted with these choices.

We're not discussing what Trotsky wrote in 1932 about the inevitability of capitalist sabotage — we have real examples of 1966, 1975. Each time the wrong decision was taken, each time it turned out to be not even electorally realistic but completely disastrous.

I agree. If you look at the experience of Tony Benn as industry minister in 1974/75 there are two lessons you can draw from that. One is precisely the one you made that the leadership of the party copped-out.

The other point, though, is that it was only allowed to do that because there wasn't the support among shop stewards, let alone below shop steward level, for planning agreements or for the kind of approach with which I'm in broad agreement. And this is where there's a lot of the disagreement between ourselves and *Socialist Action*, for example. So that when the IMF and the CBI and so on were used by the ruling class they were able to be used because there wasn't the actual response from the rank and file of the movement to stop them.

it doesn't achieve anything for the left to say
that the most important single issue is the
witch hunt

I think you have a somewhat distorted view of what *Socialist Action* says politically. I don't think you can change everything by changing the leadership at the top, nor is it an accident that you have the people leading the Labour Party you do. It's not due to the fact that secretly people are not aware of the views of *Socialist Action* or something, and if they were then they would follow the glorious road to socialism.

I think that the point is that you can only build mass support if you have policies which actually affect people deeply. Some of the things that are a magnificent example are what Maurice Bishop did in Grenada. He showed that socialist development, socialist revolution, transformed the fact of whether you had free milk, education, jobs and so on or not. And I believe that's the only way you can build mass support. The idea that people will cling to the Labour Party despite the fact it doubles unemployment or reduces wages — that is what is completely unrealistic.

But where the debate should be on the left — and I don't think it should be a sectarian debate — is precisely how to construct those policies. It's as much about strategy as it is about policy, about agreeing a party programme and about implementing it and winning support for it. So that you don't allow a good Labour cabinet minister honestly seeking to implement policies to be marooned on their own without any kind of base that is prepared to fight with them and for those policies.

British Features

If I wanted to sum up the problem of British politics today it would be how to construct a new Labour majority, that is construct a social alliance that is committed to the Labour Party — understanding that the previous one has disintegrated and that all attempts to say 'let's go back to where we were before' are doomed.

Policies are important but not sufficient. Resolutions passed at conference on their own won't solve anything. One thing that's been discussed is what one could call a Party of Labour, or the sort of debate that's taking place on the question of affiliation at the present time.

One of the strengths of the Labour Party unlike other European socialist parties was the direct affiliation of trade unions, cooperative societies and so on, instead of just resting on individual membership. What do you think about that, particularly in relationship to black organisations, women's organisations and many other existing groups of the same sort. Should the Labour Party simply add to its present structure, or have a different kind of structure or what?

The whole structure of the party is going to be a big internal issue. Not so much accountability, because I think this argument has been won as much as we're likely to win it in the foreseeable future. But it's actually that structural problem in relation to the base of the party.

The right is dying in the Labour Party

But that is going to be totally overshadowed by what happens on the political levy. Because unless we win that battle we could see a Labour Party with its trade union base torn out at a structural level which is going to have enormous consequences particularly for the national party. Less so than locally, because the links are so weak at a local level.

I'm not in favour of being obsessed with direct affiliation at a national level. What we ought to be talking about is the practice of local parties. I'm in favour of women's sections being much more central to the way local parties operate. I'm in favour of black sections of local parties, because I think that's a key constituency that the party's not even beginning to reach out to. But I don't see that as particularly being relevant at a national level. Affiliation's not the big issue. What's important is how we work with women's groups and black groups outside the party.

Why do you think the campaign around the political levy is so important?

I think that the critical political issue for the party over the next few years is to win those ballots. It can only be done at the rank and file level. Simply to rely either on union bureaucracies or the national party bureaucracy to do this will be totally ineffective.

I also see an enormous opportunity, which clearly we'd rather not have had, to inject socialist argument and debate back into the workplace level. There is a vehicle, and we have to prepare now to do it. It can't be done just at a kind of declamatory level — just parading around senior figures in the party to spread the message. It requires organisation and intervention by local activists.

What do you think about the demands of the Women's Action Committee that the women's conference should be able to elect women members directly to the NEC, and put resolutions directly to national conference....

I support those fully.

One big debate that has obviously come up is over the attitude of the Labour Party and the labour movement to the law: around the NGA and around what to do about rate-capping

and so on. What's your position on this?

The labour movement has historically always had to fight against the law, and the law is a ruling class instrument used against the interests of socialists.

This confrontation is taking a very specific form at the moment where Thatcherism is seeking to divert political struggle into the courts. This is the whole strategy of the employment law — to turn an industrial struggle into a law and order matter — and I don't think you can duck that issue. I don't think you can win the argument by saying that the law has to be obeyed. The law has had to be defied consistently by the labour movement in the past and it will have to be defied now. The argument that we should simply accept the law is politically wrong and is not a winning strategy. I think the party leadership was wrong in not coming out four square behind the NGA, and I think the TUC leadership behaved abysmally in ratting on the NGA.

In terms of the rate-capping, again I think that it's probably going to be necessary to defy the law. I'm not for empty gestures though. I think there's too much posing on the left of the party. A lot of the groups involved on the left of the party are interested only in posturing and putting positions which have no relationship with reality. If we are going to be in a position of defying rate-capping and defying the law, then you have to carry people with you, you have to carry the unions. You can't just go for empty gestures.

What do you think about the witch hunt inside the party? For example, the LCC's letter that was sent out immediately after the leadership election said 'no more witch hunts'. There have been at least two cases. One was the expulsion of Tariq Ali from the party. Secondly, the people expelled in Blackburn.

Also there's the continuing ban on the sale of *Militant* at Labour Party meetings and so on. What's your attitude towards this?

The LCC and I have always been opposed to witch hunts and this was reaffirmed at our annual general meeting. That's why the open letter mentioned it. I think the expulsion of Tariq Ali — a shabby decision to which I was totally opposed — was a legacy from the previous two years. I think Tariq will be in the party in the foreseeable future.

Blackburn was a very different matter, a more complicated matter involving a local party. I'm unhappy about expelling supporters of *Militant* or any other similar group in the Labour Party. I'm opposed to the decision conference took on that. But where local party rights have been a key issue in the campaign for democracy, you have to be very careful about condemning out of hand what local parties do.

It's not the only example. For instance, in Birmingham five people have been effectively expelled by the local party who have refused their transfer. There is a form of witch hunt which isn't centralised, but is giving the nod and a wink to local parties to get on with it.

Do you think that John Golding, for example, has given up all his ideas of how the party should be run?

Of course not. But I think Golding's position in the party is marginalised, and the right is so politically bankrupt that we shouldn't over-emphasise their importance. The right is dying in the Labour Party — not in the unions, that's a different matter.

The decision taken by conference — it was a problem for the left that there was a conference decision — is obviously giving an excuse for some local parties to settle old scores, and maybe even new scores.

I don't think it achieves anything for the left to say that the most important single issue is the witch hunt. I think it's the politics of the kindergarten, really. The dominant issue for the left, as we discussed earlier, is how to reconstruct Labour's historic bloc.

Reviews

LIGHT PERSPECTIVES

HILARY DRIVER

Most people don't understand how holographic images are produced, but are excited at the prospect of three dimensional reproduction.

Hilary Driver reviews the current state of holographic technology revealed in an exhibition currently showing at the Science Museum in London.

'Gradually Connie had aroused her curiosity and managed to get her to peep at the sparkling night sky of the ceiling. This ceiling too became a night sky with more purple in its black than the night they had just abandoned, with a pale moth-green moon rising in the south over one of the entrances. Slowly as people came wandering in to their seats, a different colour moon rose majestically over each of the doors ...

'As the moons reached the zenith, the four of them began a stately dance to music welling up. Their shapes began to shift from round to oblong to crescent to wing-shaped like birds, in images of dignified flight ...

'The cranes came down from the ceiling and became flesh — although she had learned that these vivid three-dimensional images were a mere trick of projectors and lights. The image broadened. One enormous crane filled it and then its head spread into clouds and its feet turned to water ...'

Marge Piercy's novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, portrays a vivid and striking view of the possible future of the hologram. The word hologram conjures up images of being able to view something from all directions which looks real, but is in fact a projected image. Indeed, the word itself is derived from the Greek *holo* meaning whole, and *graphis* meaning image.

But imagination and technology are still many years apart and, in spite of the theory of holography being developed as long ago as 1947 by the Hungarian scientist Dennis Gabor, holography today can be compared to the early developments of photography or film. Production of a hologram requires comparably as much investment in specialised equipment and technical know-how.

At the risk of infuriating the more scientifically-inclined readers, here's a simplified description of how a holographic image is produced. A form of laser light is the first requirement. Laser light beams are used because they emit a coherent light — that is a narrow beam of light all of one wavelength (or colour), unlike 'normal' light which is made up of a spectrum of wave lengths or colours.

Any perceptible vibration will interfere with an eventual image, so the equipment and subject matter of the hologram are placed on a vibration-free table. The light is then split into two parts. One beam passes through a deflecting mirror and a lens onto the subject matter which is in front of a holographic plate (similar to the early, heavy photographic plates). The second beam, also deflected by a mirror, passes through a lens directly onto the plate. Since this second beam hasn't had an object in its path, it reaches the plate in the same undisturbed pattern as it originally left the laser.

A shutter in front of the laser controls the two beams. When opened, both

beams meet at the holographic plate. The interaction of these produces an interference pattern on the light-sensitive plate which creates the hologram, a three dimensional image.

If you think making a hologram complicated, more problems can arise the viewing of the finished object. This can require the plate to be illuminated by laser light before the image can be seen. Even where no special light is necessary at present it is difficult for more than one or two people to fully view a hologram at the same time.

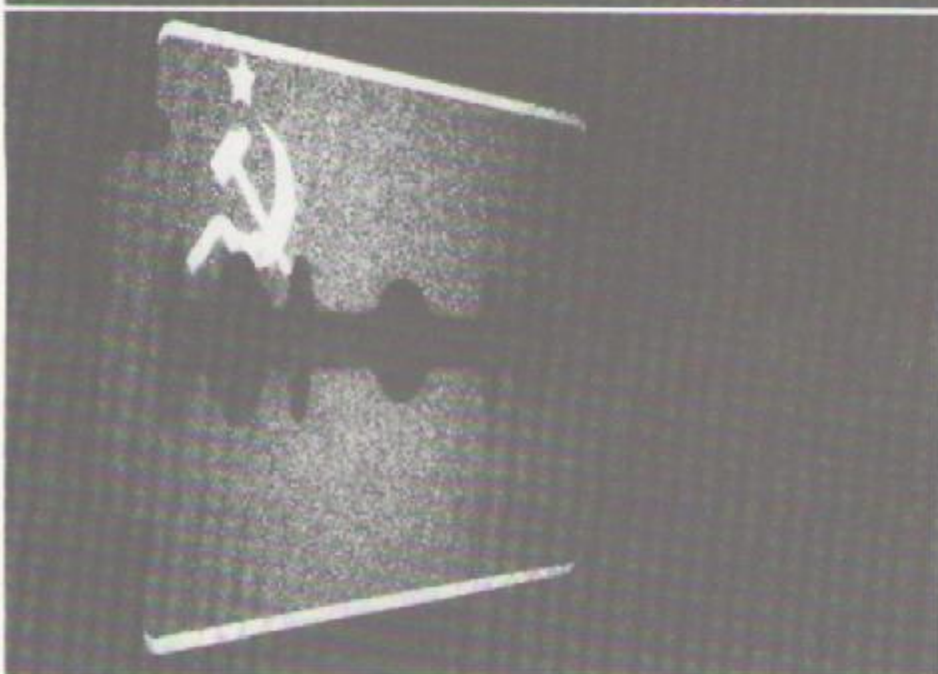
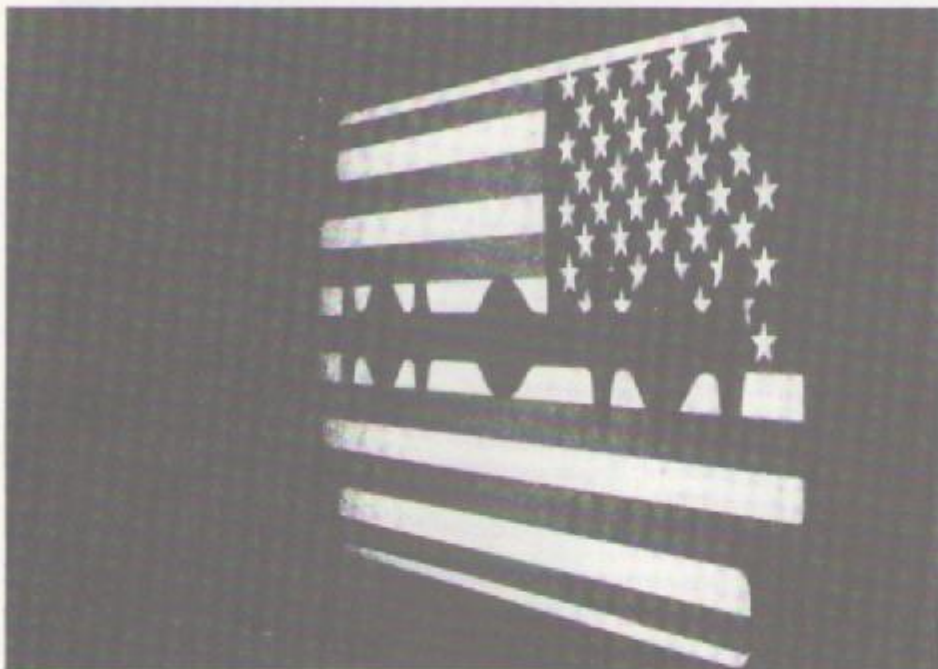
The exhibition at the Science Museum was at the same time disappointing and fascinating. Disappointing because it was on the whole artistically prehistoric with many of the works of abstract images that wouldn't have been given wall space if they were on canvas in a self-respecting gallery.

The exhibition was also dominated by capitalist enterprises, the military and on displaying how they use

'The Meeting' — a hologram of a whole glass meets up with the real broken one standing in front of it.



Reviews



'Yalta' by Francois Mazzero. As you walk past this hologram the razor blade moves to reveal the flags on each surface.

Holographic reproductions, such as this one of the famous Flying Horse of Kansu, are used in touring art exhibitions instead of the original.

technology of holography for such socially useful works as advertising, checking out groceries in supermarkets, or for forcing everyone to use a 'fraud-proof' credit card in call boxes. But it wasn't all bad. Some of the scientific applications of holography are valuable. For instance, the fact that minute vibrations can be detected by holographic analysis means that the efficiency of machinery or components can be scrutinised in tremendous detail. Holograms have also been used to open an entirely new area of medical research from body scans to locating tumours, improving the design of artificial limbs and even keeping holographic records of dental work.

In the Soviet Union the holographic reproduction of precious art objects had resulted in what amounts to a travelling museum. The work is of such amazing quality that it is hard to believe that the

object is not actually there in the glass case. People in remote areas of the country would otherwise be unlikely to be able to see these cultural treasures in such a lifelike form.

For me, it was these 'real' as opposed to 'abstract' images that held the true fascination of holography. In particular, holography comes into its own in the art of portraiture. The *Portrait of Nicole* by Nicole Aebischer is undoubtedly the most stunning of the exhibits. Impossible to reproduce in flat black and white, it is an animated hologram that really takes your breath away. The face looks real enough to touch, but as you view the image from different angles the eyes appear to naturally open, look directly at you, and then close — a very disconcerting experience!

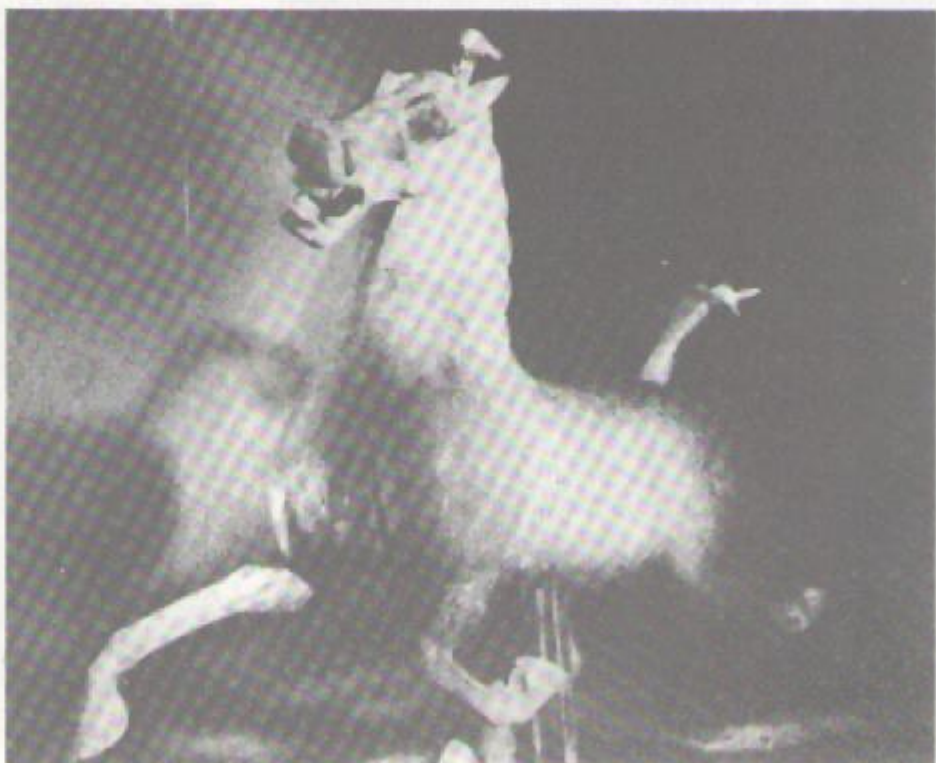
As a technology, holography can be like any other, developed for profit or for the benefit of the majority of people.

As an art or entertainment there is a long way to go before we can look forward to holographic theatre or cinema, with the biggest obstacle being the tremendous resources needed to enable someone to produce holograms and the limitations existing at present on the numbers who can appreciate the end result.

Whatever the drawbacks, holography is here to stay and, alongside other new technologies, will have to be wrested from the control of the ruling class if it is to be developed as genuinely socially useful.

● *The Light Dimensions* exhibition is running until 29 April at the Science Museum, London SW7 (01-581 4308).

HILARY DRIVER is a member of the *International Editorial Board*.



British Features

BREAKING THE CHAINS

TERESA CONWAY

Over the last ten years the face of the British trade union movement has changed significantly, increasingly forced to respond to the demands of the autonomous movements.

Terry Conway argues that the left has often failed to understand the significance of these changes, and examines the obstacles to deepening these far-reaching developments.

The first wave of developments towards self organisation took place specifically among women workers, spurred on by the impact of the recent women's liberation movement but in many instances also building on historical traditions. More recently black workers, lesbians and gay workers, and workers with disabilities have also fought for their rightful place within the trade union movement. There is a strong sense in which all these groups of workers have a common fight. All have traditionally been excluded from decision-making and influence within the labour movement, mirroring the discrimination they face in society at large. Even where individuals have fought their way through the structures, they have been seen as exceptional individuals, not as representing a particular constituency of interests. It is particularly on the right to self organisation and representation that these different groups are waging a similar battle; sometimes in different ways and in different places and occasionally, consciously as one struggle.

Yet each of the groups does face very different oppression in society and within the labour movement; and each has their own tradition of struggle. It is a crucial part of the politics of self organisation to recognise and respect these differences, to refuse to allow one group to be played off against another. It is vital to acknowledge that none of the groups is individually or collectively free of prejudice against others and that this needs to be consciously combated. Real unity can be achieved if it is fought for, not assumed.

To understand the historical relationship between the trade union movement and these oppressed groups it is useful to look at the initial development of the unions in this country and the particular role played by women.

The early history of British trade unions is a scattered patchwork which repeats a pattern time and again of women's segregation into particular sections of the labour market and the determination of most male trade unionists that a woman's place was in the home. Thus, whether women participated in particular unions very much depended on whether their origins were amalgamations covering occupations in which women were found, or whether they were based on individual crafts and excluded women. Even in the mixed unions things were far from perfect, 'women paid only half contributions and were excluded from management' according to Beatrice and Sidney Webb in *The History of Trade Unionism*.

Thus excluded from or marginalised within mainstream developments it was left to women to organise themselves. In the 1870s Emma Patterson returned from a visit to New York inspired by the Female Umbrella-Sewers Union, and started the National Union of Working Women and the Women's Protective and Provident League. An example of the prejudice which

these women had to fight can be seen in the TUC statement in 1877: 'It is the duty of men and husbands to bring about a condition of things when their wives should be in their proper sphere at home instead of being dragged into competition of livelihood with the great and strong men of the world.' There was also a clear assumption that men would make the running in the battles with the mill and factory owners, and that women, despite the horrendous conditions in which they were employed, would have nothing to contribute to the fight back.

Through the latter part of the 1880s and the early 1890s this illusion was shattered as women took part in a series of militant and bitter disputes. The most famous incident is of course the Matchgirls strike of 1889, crucial to the overall development of British trade unionism, but there were also strikes of cotton, jute and flour workers, of blanket weavers in Heckmondike, female cigar makers in Nottingham and women at a tin box factory in London, all of which took place in 1888. In 1891 there was a long strike by women at Manningham Mill and a demonstration in London organised by laundresses with the support of 27 trades councils. At the same time trade unions as a whole were growing and new amalgamations took place. Women were increasingly seen as an integral part of the labour force at least for the present time, and, as such, it was seen as important to organise them.

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Thus by 1907 there were 200,000 women trade unionists, double the number in 1890. But the majority of these were still in textiles and there were many areas where large groups of women workers remained completely un-unionised. In 1906 Mary McArthur established the National Federation of Women Workers with 2000 members and built its membership up to 80,000 by the end of the First World War. She recruited thousands of isolated and unprotected women — the jute workers of Dundee, the Lancashire chain makers, and the jam and biscuit workers of the East End among many others. But during the war women were drawn into new areas of the labour force, so that by the end of the war there were 437,000 women out of a total of union membership of 4,145,000. Female membership of the unions trebled during the war, while male membership rose by only 60 per cent.

The original basis for the self organisation of women was their total exclusion from male organisations and their treatment as second class citizens. As the patterns both of employment and membership of trade unions changed, the rationale for separate organisation began to fade. Thus, this period of women's organisation did not share the analysis developed by feminists in the 1970s of women's oppression in areas outside the labour market, nor was there any recognition that organising together as women could be positive in its own right. In 1920, Mary McArthur herself argued at the Federation's National Conference that it should merge with the National Union of General Workers to become, 'a great industrial organisation of men and women, in which women are not submerged, but in which they take as active a part as the men'. Presumably she thought that the experiences women had been through in the previous five decades of fighting bitter battles against the bosses and struggling for the vote, and in running their own unions, would protect them from being submerged and silenced. But sadly this hope was not to be fulfilled. At first the federation operated as a district of the NUGW and kept its own executive and special officers. But within 3 years the separate district and the National Women's Committee were abolished



Photo: JOHN HARRIS

"Not now dear, can't you see we're busy?"

and the number of women officers swiftly fell from 16 to 1. So bad was the situation that by 1930 the NUGW did not send even one female delegate to the TUC.

Remnants of these early forms of women's organisation did persist in weakened form. In particular individual unions may carry the hallmark of amalgamations between unions based on women's trades and those based on men's. So the white collar section of the engineering union TASS for example has had a network of women's subcommittees since 1922 when the all-female tracers union merged with the engineers and draughtsman's union. It was perhaps more likely that separate organisations would survive here than in the NUGW because of the craft nature of the union and the fact that women themselves represented a specific trade. Whatever the reason it has undoubtedly been the case that the existence of such networks made it much easier for feminists within TASS in the '70s to start to organise within the union.

In 1931 the first TUC women's conference was held, perhaps in some ways taking over the function of McArthur's Federation. The conference which is held annually has undoubtedly allowed discussion of many issues that would otherwise have been ignored. But the problem lies in the fact that the conference itself has no power; resolutions are passed to the General Council of the TUC which is at liberty to ignore them — and indeed frequently does!

It was not until the development of the women's liberation movement that the question of the organisation and needs of women workers was again raised in a concrete way. Initially much of this activity was focused around the question of pay; both in terms of struggles around the implementation of the Equal Pay Act and around low pay. But slowly, as the impact of feminism grew, other issues were taken up. The public employees' union (NUPE) negotiated maternity pay agreements for two large groups of public sector workers which went far beyond the statutory minimum. The local government union (NALGO) has produced a series of negotiating guides: Negotiating for Equality, Workplace Nurseries, Rights for Working Parents, and one on Adoption, as well as a leaflet on Sexual Harassment at work, all of which show strong feminist influences. In 1974 the Working Womens Charter Campaign was set up with a list of 10 demands of crucial significance to working women. Within 18 months it had won the support of

12 unions at their national conferences. The TUC Congress of 1975 however voted against it, mainly because it contained a clause on abortion, but perhaps also because it was a grass roots campaign which called for a national minimum wage. But the Charter Campaign did force the TUC to revamp its own 'Aims for Women at Work' and to begin to do some campaigning for it. Perhaps the biggest victory for feminism came in October 1979 when the TUC was finally forced to call a demonstration against Tory MP John Corrie's anti-Abortion Bill which brought 80,000 women and men marching through the streets of London. This was both the biggest pro-choice march ever, and also the largest trade union demonstration ever held for a cause which lay beyond the parameters of traditional collective bargaining.

Alongside these debates and advances on policy the question of self organisation was stirring anew. While often the pressure came from women outside the trade union movement, the impact of feminism on existing trade unionists and the involvement of more committed feminists within the unions began to lead to organisational changes. In TASS for example the existing structures of women's subcommittees began to take on new importance. The union began to run annual weekend schools for women and has produced an impressive array of material on women's issues. In 1975 NUPE commissioned a study of its structure from the sociology department of Warwick University which argued: 'We do not believe that the under-representation has anything to do with "women's nature" or lack of interest in the affairs of NUPE... It has to do first with the position of women in the wider society and at work... The structure of the union can either be designed to alleviate the effects of such disadvantages or it can operate on the basis of accepting subordination as a "fact of life" which is only confirmed by the low degree of female participation in the union at all levels'. On the basis of recommendations made in the report NUPE reserved 5 seats on its National Executive for women from 1975 onwards.

NALGO set up a National Equal Opportunities Committee, urged its districts to do likewise, and began to publish a national bulletin. The office workers unions, APEX and ASTMS, established similar networks or regional and national committees in the mid-'70s and by 1980 both the transport union (TGWU) and the manual workers union (GMWU), had begun

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to set up regional equal rights committees. While these bodies were often a recognition by the union leadership that issues of particular concern to women were not being dealt with, they had their own problems. Many were mixed committees and because they were organised at national and district level women already had to be fairly confident and experienced in the workings of the bureaucracy to be able to participate. They undoubtedly made the lives of those women more bearable, and by providing a channel for debate did lead to crucial initiatives being taken, but they didn't necessarily affect the mass of women at branch or steward level. Perhaps more significant was the spread of women-only meetings and courses pioneered notably by GMWU and TASS but also by the TUC. These courses have not necessarily been organised around 'women's issues', but in the case of many of the TUC courses have provided training for new women stewards to discuss issues of relevance to all trade unionists, but in a situation where women feel able to ask questions that they would be reticent to ask in front of men.

the objection that women's place is in the home, the hoary old prejudice ... is of course still with us

In 1979 the TUC endorsed a 10 point charter, 'Equality for Women within Trade Unions', which urged unions to take definite steps to increase women's participation at all levels. It recommended special seats on national and local bodies where women were under-represented, special advisory committees, paid time off for union meetings in worktime, creches, encouragement for women to go on training courses and non-sexist union material. Despite these advances, clearly we are a long way from putting all these measures into operation in even one single trade union branch, let alone one union nationally. Nor is it correct to suggest that these advances have not met with significant opposition, in many cases from people with all shades of political opinion. The objections are often similar to those faced by other groups fighting for self organisation. For the struggle to be extended it is necessary to name and confront these different objections.

The objection that women's place is in the home, the hoary old prejudice that has dogged women since the beginning of wage labour, is of course still with us. It operates today both in keeping women out of specific trades, for example the print industry, and with rising unemployment in notions that women's jobs are less important than men's. A second argument is that it is fine for women to have jobs, even to be active in the unions so long as they do so within the terms laid down by men. So, fighting around women's issues is seen as a diversion from the 'real' class struggle not as a way of broadening its scope and bringing in new and militant participants. Such arguments fly in the face of history and deny the crucial role that women in struggle have played in the development of the labour movement. A more sophisticated version of this argument has been to accept certain, primarily economic struggles as legitimate but to balk at taking up other, more political issues. This tendency has been particularly pronounced in Britain where the trade unions have historically been more economist than their European counterparts. Indeed in raising issues such as abortion, sexual harassment and childcare, women in the unions have been able to redefine what is a 'trade union issue'. For women this redefinition is particularly significant because without raising these issues it is neither possible for women to participate in the unions or to see them as organisations which defend their interests. In this crucial sense women's organisation has begun to break down the negative traditions of the British labour movement of the division between the unions as the fighters on the economic front and the Labour Party on the political. And it has to be said that in the same way as sections of the far Left were sectarian in the extreme towards campaigns such as the

'Reclaim the Night' initiatives taken by the women's movement, so many of them have not been particularly supportive of raising these issues within the labour movement.

But above all the reaction to women-only meetings and courses has revealed the greatest backwardness. As with the attitude to the women's movement itself the roots of this come from profound ignorance of the real extent of women's oppression. So instead of understanding that the purpose of women's separate organisation is to *draw in* more women, the cry is always 'but you are excluding men'. This represents a failure to accept that women are already excluded in so-called 'mixed' structures. Often it is combined with a complete disregard for women's commitment to the overall aims of the labour movement, an idea that women are not 'real' trade unionists and will come up with proposals that will be trivial, irrelevant or 'extreme'. Behind these expressed feelings there is perhaps the glimmer of unconscious understanding: that sometimes the road followed by the union has not been in the interests of women and that by women meeting together we will begin to demand that they pull back from this path.

Sometimes men are prepared to accept that there is a need for one-off women's meetings, perhaps for things like shop stewards' educationals. But this understanding may well be based on patronising assumptions that women are not able to understand the complexities of trade union structures and struggles, but once they have had their special treatment if they are worth their salt they should be able to keep up with the boys... Thus there is hostility to any *ongoing* organisation of women within the trade union structure. This represents a failure to understand that the people with the direct experience of a particular oppression are best placed to elaborate the strategy and tactics for its erosion.

Clearly some men fear that the granting of self organisation will lead to demands being made on the oppressors to change their behaviour, both in terms of demands on the union to change its priorities but also demands on individual members to confront their own oppressive behaviour. The amount of uproar that a challenge to sexist language often brings you would think a man had been asked to give away half his pay packet!

Finally it is important to recognise that even where all these hurdles have been jumped, even among those who seem committed to allowing women the privilege of on-going organisation, there will almost certainly be a vitriolic reaction if it is ever suggested that these groups should have decision-making power. In my own NALGO branch for example we have achieved a high degree of self organisation: we have four sub groups that are subcommittees of the branch executive for women, for black workers, for workers with disabilities and for lesbian and gay workers. These groups have co-opted members



Defence campaigns for victimised lesbians and gays have begun to attract union support

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Photo: MICHAEL ANN MULLEN

on the executive, but they don't have voting rights. We tried to change this at the branch AGM, pointing out that these groups of workers are not adequately represented through the stewards' system, not necessarily because of individual prejudice but because of the way oppression works. In particular there is no other mechanism for us to have our collective views as members of a particular oppressed group represented. We were opposed primarily not by ordinary members of the branch but by crucial sections of the branch leadership including some who had been supportive of the existence of the groups up to this point.

In some unions women have responded to these obstacles by setting up informal networks outside the official structures. These groups, for example within the teachers union (NUT), and in Telecoms, have been a vital way in which issues can be discussed and for women to gain confidence and support to take on battles within the union. In general this form of organisation has taken place in those areas where there was no previous tradition of women's structures.

The progress that has been made over the last decade has been enormous but uneven. The road has been a hard one and the victories won have been small in comparison with the battles that lie ahead. Even where formal rights to self organisation have been achieved, lack of other provisions such as child care and meeting in work time seriously limit the numbers of women who will be involved. Often there is inadequate opportunity for women to learn from each other's experience even within one union let alone across the unions. The Women's TUC, which perhaps has some potential to do the latter, remains an ineffective body and there are still significant divisions among women in the unions as to whether it should be disbanded or given greater power and status. In 1984, faced with the Thatcher Government and its drive to strengthen the family, and with rising unemployment the need for women to be centrally involved in the unions has never been greater. It is vital that the Left, and indeed the trade union movement as a whole, understands this and fights to deepen and extend the self organisation of women and other oppressed groups.

Perhaps the greatest gains on the question of self organisation have been made within NALGO. In 1982 the London District set up four area groups for women, black workers, workers with disabilities, and lesbian and gay workers. Each group is open to any member of the district who experiences that particular discrimination and has the right to send two delegates to the discrimination committee (a formal sub-committee of the district council). In comparison with other unions this may seem like utopia, but there are still problems. Perhaps the most striking thing about the structure is that all four areas of oppression have the same provision. But for the day to day operation of the union to be changed this has to be replicated at branch level. So far this is only the case in a very small number of the larger local government branches. Others

have groups for one or two of the oppressed layers or discrimination committees which only deal with some of the issues, and indeed others do nothing on equal opportunities at all.

There is also the problem that the groups as such have no decision making power. The way that the district leadership has dealt with this, and the fact that it is very difficult for the discrimination committee to deal with all the issues raised, has left a lot to be desired. First, there has been an attempt to divide the groups by arguing that women and black members should have formal committees of their own but that this wouldn't be appropriate or possible for the other two groups. So it seems that the understanding of the leadership is rather skin deep. When this is combined in some instances with racist comments about the way black members have dominated the discrimination committee then it's rather easy to wonder if we have really achieved anything at all. Fortunately the four subgroups have vigorously resisted falling into these divide and rule traps, but have argued for full consultation with the members affected, and in principle the same structures for each area of oppression. The discussion has also forced us to analyse the thin line between maximum involvement through open meetings and access to decision-making, which means being delegated and accountable. It is crucial to fight for structures which enable us to fulfill both roles.

At the same time we are conscious that the Metropolitan (London) district is not all of NALGO, and that the rest of the union is a long way behind. Positive action for black members was debated, and defeated as part of a debate on racism at last year's union conference. But it is significant that the NEC's own, white-dominated Race Equality Working party, which organised black members have boycotted, has nevertheless been forced to make recommendations which support self organisation. Earlier this year, the Metropolitan Lesbian and Gay Group organised a conference for all lesbian and gay members in the union which Geoffrey Drain, then National Secretary, urged all branches to support. It was only after his letter had been sent that those of us organising the conference realised what a coup we had made — official endorsement for a self organised conference! These significant achievements at national level do not mean that there are no severe difficulties on the ground. Several branches refused to sponsor delegates to either the lesbian and gay conference or the women's conference last winter because they were 'separatist', while others heaped abuse on us for organising them at all. This year's annual conference will see the whole question of self organisation discussed as part of the debate on racism, and also as part of an extensive motion on lesbian and gay oppression. There will also be a specific motion which deals with the right of self organisation for all oppressed groups. In this way I hope that there will be a principled debate on the floor of conference to allow us to realistically assess what support we have won over the last year, and to begin planning what is needed now to achieve more extensive discussion and understanding. Even in the union where the most gains have been won there is a great reluctance on the part of the majority to face up to the way in which the union does not represent the interest of its members and to change both structures and practices accordingly.

More progress has been made towards the self organisation of women than of any other groups. In 1980 the TUC Congress passed a charter of 'Equality of Opportunity' for black workers, which takes up 'discrimination in employment and within the trade union movement. In terms of the latter the issue of self organisation is fudged. Thus the Charter talks about examining the structure of the unions 'to ensure the removal of barriers which can prevent black workers from reaching branch office and decision-making bodies...' and also calls for the setting up of advisory committees within the union machinery to ensure that equal opportunities are actively pursued'. But it does not specifically suggest that members of these committees should be black. Given the fact that there is no tradition of black self organisation in the British labour move-

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ment this omission makes it unlikely that such groups will be set up. In Liverpool in recent years the GMWU, ASTMS, the Liverpool Teachers Association, and the Trades Council have all set up Race Relations Committees, several have put out material to their members on fighting racism, and organised special day conferences to discuss how to take it up with employers in terms of discrimination in recruitment, training and conditions. In the GMWU this local initiative followed a national conference within the union in May 1981 which recommended setting up regional committees. But what is clear reading material produced by all these groups, as well as the codes of conduct produced by the NGA/NATSOPA, is that they fail to tackle the question of racist practice within the unions themselves. So despite the fact that in relation to the

We are beginning ... to take on the unspoken divisions that heterosexism creates in the labour movement as well as in society as a whole.

population as a whole there are more black shop stewards than white that is certainly not reflected at higher levels: executives, delegates to conference, to TUC, full time officials, etc. Nor do initiatives taken on a national level mean that racism among the workforce has been tackled in anything like a serious way. Thus Bernie Grant, one of the very few black full time official officials who worked for NUPE in the Islington area, together with a number of other black trade unionists, decided to set up the Black Trade Unionists Solidarity Movement (BTUSM), which encourages the formation of black caucuses within trade unions, runs courses for shop stewards on anti-racism, speaks to branches and deals with individual case work where a worker has faced discrimination either from the employer or within the union. Bernie has been working full time for the organisation for the last year. While working for NUPE he became increasingly aware of the treatment black workers faced but did not have time within the constraints of his other commitments to take the matter up as effectively as he felt necessary.

The relationship between BTUSM and different trade unions varies enormously. Some like NUPE and GMBATU have been very supportive, but many others have been overwhelmingly hostile. The fact that such an organisation is necessary, outside the official structures of the unions is an indictment not only of individual racism but of the failure of the TUC Charter to be effectively implemented; for clearly the structures do discriminate against black members in extremely serious ways. On the other hand the work being done by BTUSM is extremely valuable, and follows the pattern of some trade union women's groups such as in the NUT and the POEU, who despite the historical tradition of women's organisation within the official structures in some unions, in others on an unofficial footing.

Even less progress has been made towards official self organisation for lesbian and gay workers. Indeed this has only happened within the Metropolitan District of NALGO. Further there has been little material produced by trade unions on the harassment and victimisation faced by lesbians and gays. NALGO again is the exception; in 1983 it produced an official pamphlet. There have been two instances, the sacking of Ian Davis, a social worker in Tower Hamlets, and John Warburton, a teacher, when local trade unions in particular have offered important support. The 1970s and 80s also saw the development of a number of unofficial groups within particular unions: in the NUT, NATFHE, the Civil Service Union and the NUR for example, and also the more general 'Gay Rights at Work' campaign. The fact that lesbians and gay men are generally invisible at work and face serious discrimination up to an including sacking if they are public about their sexuality makes any form of self organisation difficult in the extreme.

However toothless the legislation on sex and race discrimination is, and however prejudiced the courts, it is also significant that there is no legal redress for discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. In 1980 when John Saunders, a gay youth worker who was sacked, took his case to an Employment Appeals Tribunal, the finding of the original tribunal was upheld. This stated that it was 'reasonable' for an employer to dismiss someone because they were gay if they had any contact with children.

Despite these obstacles, the experiences of the Metropolitan District NALGO do show that if lesbians and gay men can achieve self organisation as part of general moves within a union, then that organisation can be sustained. The group has begun to look at ways in which various local and national agreements discriminate against lesbians and gay men. We have argued that the union should be negotiating 'parenthood leave' or 'nominated carers' leave so that every woman when she gives birth, has the right to support rather than the more restricted concept of 'paternity leave'. We have begun to negotiate equal opportunities clauses which accept that lesbians and gay men have the right to be public about their sexuality whatever job they do. We are looking at discussion among the whole trade union membership; we were involved in running a national school on sexuality and hope there will be future schools at district level. We are beginning in a small but significant way to challenge the notion that sexuality is a private, moral issue to uncover the way that the notion hides prejudice and discrimination, and to take on the unspoken divisions that heterosexism creates in the labour movement as well as in society as a whole.

Workers with disabilities face very particular battles for any real participation in the basics of trade union life let alone for self organisation. How many trade unions provide material on tape, or in braille? How many union meetings are held in smoke-filled pub rooms into which you can't get a wheelchair? How often, even in circles which in theory at least accept that sexism or racism, and maybe even heterosexism are political issues, do those with disabilities get a mention? People with disabilities are more likely to be seen as a group to be pitied, maybe to be helped through charity rather than as a political constituency. And this is perhaps particularly true in the world of work, for it is often assumed that those with disabilities (well anything serious) can't work anyway. In this sense NALGO is again breaking new ground by setting up the London group. However it is clear that it hasn't faced up to its real responsibility when time after time meetings are still organised in inaccessible venues. Members who have been excluded from the trade union movement so completely will rightly take more than the formal permission to meet to believe that the union really has their interests in mind. The sheer lack of material and experience of self organisation in this field severely restricts how much can be discussed at this stage on the issue.

My premise in this article is that each group of oppressed workers is as important as the other and that the trade union movement has to face up to its responsibility to represent and fight for each and every one of its members. This can only be done by tackling head-on the prejudice that is rife in its own ranks. My experience within NALGO confirms the belief that I held as a feminist that in the long term it is only where oppressed groups are given the right to self organisation that this will happen in anything other than a purely tokenistic way. Self organisation is the only way to create true democracy within the unions, because it is only then that the voices of all its members will be heard. And developing self organisation, far from diverting the unions from the real issues, will bring thousands more trade unionists into active participation, making them stronger in the fight against Thatcher. Divisions exist now in the working class, only if they are recognised and fought can they be overcome.

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IMPERIALISM BEGINS AT HOME

JOHN ROSS

The rising tensions between Western Europe and the United States are increasingly affecting West European politics. In a talk given to an *International* school in March, John Ross examines the theoretical problem of the long term development of relations between the capitalist states.

The most basic fact about the international capitalist order is that it consists of a hierarchy of states, organised in a highly structured world system. At the top is the US; then there is a second tier of capitalist powers — Japan, West Germany, France and Britain; then there are a series of lower tiers, with most of the semi-colonial countries at the bottom. The five chief imperialist states by themselves account for something like 70 per cent of world capitalist production, for 80 per cent of foreign investment. Developments in the US economy alone determine trends throughout the entire world capitalist economy.

This pattern is a feature not only of contemporary capitalism but of the entire history of capitalism. International capitalism has always involved relationships of international dominance and subordination among states. There has always been a dialectical link between two conditions of capitalist stability: competition between capitals and the international dominance of one capitalist power which sets the conditions of accumulation and economic relations throughout the international system.

At the same time, these relations of dominance and subordination are not static and in the history of capitalism there have been three great periods in the development of the international capitalist order: first, with the birth of capitalism, Holland was the dominant force, attaining this position through its bourgeois revolution and war of independence from Spain at the end of the 16th century; in the second phase England achieved dominance through a series of wars against the Dutch waged by Cromwell and his successors between the 1650s and 1680. This transition to English dominance culminated in the curious take-over bid by which the Dutch king, William of Orange became king of England while the English ruling class simultaneously assumed hegemony in Holland since the latter could not militarily defend itself against feudal France. During the 18th century, England consolidated its supremacy through a series of wars with France (under the leadership of Churchill's great ancestor the Duke of Marlborough).

England's supremacy was finally shaken by the great shock of 1914 that opened a thirty year bloody interregnum, until the end of the second world war inaugurated the third great period of the world capitalist order under US supremacy. In historical terms, the function of the two world wars and the many wars in between was to settle the issue of dominance, so necessary for the stable functioning of international capitalism.

This brief historical sketch underlines the second basic fact about the international capitalist order: that wars and militarism are normal, necessary elements in its functioning, not external interruptions of its stability. It is bizarre that an historian of such great ability as EP Thompson can be so blinded by political prejudice as to seek to obscure this historical truth with his notion that modern militarism is external to the capitalist economic order with an autonomous exterminist logic of its own. At every step in its drive to establish a world market capital has used military violence. And the biggest, most



10 million people died in the first inter-imperialist World War

ferocious wars are those fought between capitalist states over how regional or global accumulation should be organised.

From the standpoint of humanity's most elementary interests, the killing of 100m people in two world wars and their aftermath was criminal lunacy. But from the angle of the most elementary logic of capitalism the wars of the 20th century, just as much as those of the 17th or 18th centuries, were neither random nor superfluous. They were fought to achieve real, rational goals by the various national capitalist classes.

And we must bear this in mind when discussing nuclear war. All those who refuse to recognise the overriding logic of capitalism make an elementary error when they say that nuclear war could never deliberately occur because it is unthinkable irrational. It is indeed madness from a human point of view, yet it has precisely been the job of the establishment in capitalist America to debate periodically and cold-bloodedly whether launching a nuclear war against the USSR would be valuable and productive. This was badly disputed in the late 1940s/early 1950s when a serious faction led by General MacArthur pressed the case for a nuclear strike against the USSR. There was a similar debate in 1961/62 over Cuba, and this same debate has now been revived in American ruling circles.

But to return to changing patterns of dominance within capitalism, we find one threat running through the 3 great historical periods: the political transition from one dominant power to the next, corresponds, curiously enough, to a transition of economic dominance in agriculture. Modern agriculture first emerged in Holland. The English then borrowed Dutch agricultural techniques, applied them to capitalist farming and achieved huge surpluses for capitalist accumulation. (One interesting cultural reflection of English agricultural strength in the 18th century is shown in the cartoons of the period which portray the English as extremely fat and the French as extreme-



President Kennedy: massively popular throughout Europe

ly thin!) The US used the strength of the capitalist agricultural system imported from England to provide a surplus for capital accumulation in industry — its base for its rise to supreme power. (The Spanish exported a feudal agricultural system to Latin America with the result we know).

This American strength in agriculture has remained up to the present and the hierarchy that we mentioned at the start of this article is reproduced in the field of agricultural productivity. Thus American agriculture is about 4 times more efficient than West German agriculture, about 8 times more efficient than Japanese agriculture, and about twenty to thirty times more efficient than the agriculture of the semi-colonial world. Indeed one of the most fundamental problems of the semi-colonial world is the gulf between an advanced, 20th century sector in some branches of industry and an agricultural sector back in the 16th century.

There is, finally, one more feature that we must stress: the capacity of the capitalist states to engage in colonial wars and wars of plunder in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Let us return to the contemporary situation in international capitalism and to the relations between the US and other capitalist states. There is a tendency for people to examine only the industrial side of the picture. It is true that historically the US has had a much higher level of industrial productivity than other imperialist countries. And it is also true that it is in this sphere that American productivity has been most strongly challenged. In the 1930s American industry was at least twice as productive as German industry while today it is only about 20 per cent more productive. But the capacity of a single economy to dominate the world economy is not determined only by its industrial performance; in fact, dominance in the short term is probably not determined by industry at all.

The dominance of a capitalist state depends upon its capacity to set the framework within which all other capitalisms are

free to operate. Historically, Holland was able to do this because it controlled world commerce through controlling world shipping and through Amsterdam, the most powerful bank in the world, being able to control the international monetary order. This, of course, corresponded to the age of commercial capitalism. Britain's industrial capacity was overtaken by the US in the 1870s, yet Britain continued to dominate the world economy long after its industrial supremacy disappeared. It did so through maintaining the supremacy of the £ sterling and through its parallel capacity, through political and military means, to maintain the imperial system as an economic entity.

Today also, the US has been able to maintain its hegemony not simply through its industrial strength but through its control over the world monetary system — the fact that nobody can challenge the dollar. To this must be added the following other levers of power: its agricultural supremacy; its level of control over world raw materials, especially oil; and, of course, in the military field, where it has complete supremacy. It is only by incorporating all these levers of power into the analysis that we can establish the relations between the US and the other imperialist powers.

So far we have outlined the hierarchical pattern of powers within the international capitalist state system. But before analysing the current relations between the capitalist powers we must place them within the world capitalist economy. This economy must not be seen as the sum total of various separate national capitalist economies — the USA plus West Germany, plus France, plus Britain and so on. On the contrary we must grasp the reality of a world economy that governs the operations of every single national capitalist economy — an international division of labour from which none can withdraw. Even the US capitalists remain subordinated to the forces of the world economy.

This world economy is plunged into crisis by the declining rate of profit, and the sharpening capitalist competition is the outcome of this decline. The spontaneous tendency of individual national capitalist classes is to turn this reality on its head, to see the decline in their rate of profit as the outcome of competition from other capitalist classes. They therefore tell their domestic working classes that they must work harder because of the threat from the hard work of German workers, or the Japanese workers, and so on.

But it is not competition that creates the crisis of profitability, but the declining rate of profit that creates ferocious competition. As Marx insists, very correctly, when there is a high rate of profit and capitalism is expanding, there is a lessening of the competitive struggle between capitals. As Marx says, there is a large and expanding cake so the struggle over dividing it up can be softened by compromise by means of which everybody gets a larger mass of profits even if their share of the total declines. But when the cake is shrinking, the capitalists cannot compromise: they must attack the share of the others in order to survive at all.

That is what is happening at the moment, and what is producing the intense struggle between the USA and its main imperialist competitors. With this change in the economic conditions of capital has come a profound change in the relationship between capital and the international state system. During the boom years there was a softening of inter-capitalist competition and a readiness to use purely economic methods to compete. As a result some renowned Marxists thought that capital had freed itself from the national states and had become one single, supra-state international imperialist bloc. But in the 1970s and even more in the 1980s, as the rate of profit has declined and competition between capitals sharpened, the individual capitalists must increasingly turn to non-economic levers and weapons for carrying on their economic wars with their rivals. This has meant turning to state machines, above all the state machine of the home base, and seeking to re-shape that state machine to make it a useful weapon for carrying on the war.

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This involves two things: using the state against international rivals in sharply new ways; and using the state against the domestic working class also in new ways in order to jack up the rate of profit. We must be very clear what we mean when we say that big capital turns back to the various state machines, tries to grab them by the collar and thrust them into battle on these two fronts. This involves what, in historical terms, are very sudden, sharp and extremely far-reaching changes in *politics*, both in domestic and international politics, convulsive upheavals that tend to take the labour movement (and especially the Social Democrats) totally by surprise, utterly bewildering and disorienting people.

During the long boom years, such as up to the first world war or after the second world war, when there is a clearly dominant capitalist power able to provide a framework for international capitalist expansion in suitable world conditions politics moves very slowly, in a seemingly evolutionary way, according to seemingly natural and immutable rulers. Then, when this framework exhausts itself and there is a crisis of profits, a gigantic, shuddering earthquake shakes up the entire foundations of the international state system and the domestic political systems of the imperialist powers. Just such a world crisis tormented the peoples of the world between 1914 and 1945. And a similar crisis is upon us now.

But if the basic workings of the capitalist system have not changed, as between, say, the period before the first world war, the 1930s, the 1950s and today, the basic social and political balance of forces in the world has changed greatly since the 1930s. First, there is now a whole system of workers' states and the Soviet Union is immeasurably stronger than it was in the 1930s; secondly, the peoples of the third world have entered world politics in a massive way; and thirdly, the working classes of Western Europe have become enormously stronger, acquiring a range of political and social rights that they nowhere approached before the war in the capitalist world. These changes in the international balance of forces are a huge obstacle to the use of the normal mechanism for resolving international capitalist crises — namely war. The struggle between the imperialist powers is once again at the top of the agenda, but the form that this struggle may ultimately take is far more problematic.

Let us turn to this balance of power amongst the main imperialist powers we mentioned at the start of this article. First, we will look at the changing quantitative balance over the last century:

Percentages of World Industrial Production

	1870	1913	1926-29
USA	23%	36%	42%
France, Germany, Britain	55%	36%	28%

By 1945 more was produced in the United States than in the rest of the world put together. What lay behind these figures was, of course, the exhaustion of a world capitalist system structured and dominated by European imperialisms, a system that plunged into a death agony as the various European imperialist powers savaged each other to the point of mutual collapse during the second world war. (Britain's victory in the war was largely formal and pyrrhic — by 1945 it was entirely dependent on American life-support). The revival of European capitalism, materially and ideologically, came not in 1945 or 1946 but in the summer of 1947 with the massive injection of Marshall aid.

Production in the first quarter of 1947 in Western Europe was actually undergoing an absolute decline, and it did not recover its pre-war levels until 1948 — thanks to thousands of millions of dollars from the USA which realised Western Europe would go under in a socialist revolution without such assistance. (As a matter of fact, after the first world war, the revival of European capitalism had also been a matter not only of the political defeat of the German and Central Europe revolutions, but of injections of US capital, notably through

the Dawes and Young plan. And the withdrawal of short-term US funds from Europe following the Wall Street collapse in 1929 also was the key factor plunging Europe into the depression and onto the road of imperialist war in the 1930s.) After Marshall aid the USA continued to subsidise Western Europe in many ways: it provided cheap world oil prices in the 1950s and 1960s, and it also pumped huge quantities of US capital into Western Europe, reviving its economies throughout this period.

This co-operative international relationship between the American state and the Western European capitalist states went hand in hand with big changes in the internal political systems of Western Europe and within the West European working class movements. Above all, this period saw the development of pro-Americanism within the working class movement, expressed through the social democratic parties. We must grasp this historical reality, and it is not easy for us, in 1984, to do so. For us, when a US President arrives in Western Europe nothing seems more natural than for the Left to go out and demonstrate against him. When Reagan comes in June it would be inconceivable that anyone would stage a demonstration in his favour. But this is something that has applied only during the last 15 years, since the Vietnam war. History before Vietnam was, on the contrary, a story of US presidents receiving mass support when they arrived in Western Europe, and support not least from the Left. Some of the largest demonstrations in human history greeted Woodrow Wilson when he landed in Western Europe for the Versailles Peace Conference after the first world war. In France two to three million people participated in demonstrations in his support, demonstrations including the labour movement. And in recent times, when Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, this was experienced in Western Europe as a great historical trauma. Those old enough can confirm this from their own experience. Roy Jenkins pointed out — but he was speaking the truth — that every person can remember exactly what they were doing on the 22nd of November 1963 when they heard the news of Kennedy's assassination. It had a numbing, traumatic impact. That was still a period when American presidents were seen by the peoples of Western Europe as the symbols of Democracy, Liberty, Freedom and Hope. And Kennedy is still a myth because he is the last American president before the US became openly embroiled in Vietnam and we have a litany of US Presidents with a very different resonance in Western Europe: Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan — politicians objectively no different from Kennedy himself.

These pro-American attitudes within the West European labour movements were partly induced by the classic social democratic attitude of seeking to link itself with the most dynamic capitalists, the capitalists able to afford to give the most, and therefore the forces able to give the best prospects to pseudo-socialists seeking to tie the labour movement into the capitalist system. But it was also based on hostility to the old, bankrupt imperialist bourgeois leaderships of Western Europe, played out in the gargantuan butchery of two world wars. Both these factors, along with millions upon millions of dollars, were used to pull the West European labour movements under the hegemony of the US bourgeoisie after the war; splitting the Italian Socialist party, creating Force Ouvriere in France, creating the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), reviving the Socialist International through the good offices of the Labour Party's Atlanticist bureaucrats like Denis Healey, and so on. From 1945 to 1968 we saw not only a physical division of Europe but a political division of the West European labour movements between the pro-Moscow Communist Parties and the pro-American social democratic parties: the Atlanticists, the pro-NATO social-democrats.

Now, in the context of the new crisis of the imperialist system and the new rivalry between the West European states and the US we see the huge transformations in the working class movements in Western Europe. These transformations have taken the form not of the victory of the pro-Moscow CPs

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over the pro-American social democrats, nor the form of the rise of a revolutionary Marxist, anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist mass current within the West European labour movements, but rather the form of a rise of 'Euro-Socialism': the currents that first arose in 1968 in Western Europe against American imperialism have today been largely hegemonised by the mass social democratic movements of Western Europe seeking to build up a supra-national West European capitalism against the United States. Nobody symbolises this more clearly than Denis Healey, with his metamorphosis from being the arch-atlantist of the late 1940s, the 1950s and the 1960s into being an opponent of the strategy of the US and supporter of European capitalism in the 1980s.

Returning to relations between the West European capitalist states and the USA, we must see how these relations become transformed from relations involving US subsidies of Western Europe into an increasingly sharp rivalry. At the political level, Vietnam was the turning point. Coincidentally, at the economic level, the first generalised economic downturn of 1969 in the world capitalist economy inaugurated the beginnings of the economic struggles. Since that time, the world capitalist economy has been plunged into increasingly severe economic crisis and inter-imperialist rivalry. The USA had sought to replace its earlier policy of subsidising West European capitalism with policies designed to weaken its West European capitalist rivals.

There have been three big US counter-thrusts against European capitalism. The first was a direct consequence of the Vietnam war itself. The United States decided to fund this war through a huge balance of payments deficit. And it used its overwhelming economic hegemony within the world economy to ensure that it could avoid paying for this deficit in gold or in non-dollar currencies. The second move by the US was the huge oil price increase in 1973 which was a massive redistribution of world surplus value towards the USA. The oil price rise hit the USA very little because it imports very little oil from the Middle East, but it hits the West European massively because they have been importing 70 or more per cent of their oil from the Middle East. Furthermore all this oil has been sold in dollars and the oil price rise did not hit a US economy that could pay in its own domestic currency for the oil.

Thirdly, there are the economic policies of Reagan associated with high interest rates and the Federal budget deficit — policies which have the effect of sucking huge quantities of West European capital into the United States and funding rapid expansion of the US economy at the expense of West European capitalism.

The ramifications of this process for West European bourgeois and working class politics are, literally, fundamental. Western Europe is in no sense a natural creation produced by its own internal forces and equilibrium. It is above all a creation of the alliance of West European capitalist powers with the United States. Outside that context it has no shape and no coherence. Least of all does 'West Germany', a capitalism in two thirds of a nation, have any coherence outside this relation with the United States. The rise of conflicts with the United States therefore necessarily undermines the entire political stability of Western Europe which was so carefully created after World War II.

It is pointless to speculate on the outcome of these struggles. They will be determined also by forces which are outside Western Europe altogether — the class struggle on an international terrain, the advance or defeats of the colonial revolution, the development of protectionist and isolationist trends in the United States, the situation in Eastern Europe and so on. But what matters is the attitude and position which the working class movement takes on the fundamental trends and issues involved in this development.

There is no project for a break of European *capital* with the United States which has anything other than the most reactionary implications for the European working class. French or



Franz Joseph Strauss: the West German 'hard man'

German capital would not break with the United States to establish 'one, two, many Finlands' in Europe. It would break with the United States only if it had a European nuclear bomb, European austerity, European militarism. It would be a Europe of Chirac and Franz Joseph Strauss and forces far to their right, not a Europe of Michaelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and 'European culture'.

Secondly, there are massive obstacles to any break of European capital with the United States. It is almost impossible for European capital to create adequate military forces to defend itself. It has no way of creating an adequate international currency system. It has no centralised state. European capital today is seeking to *renegotiate* its relations with the United States, to avoid the worst blows directed by the US against it. Western Europe is not seeking today to *break* the alliance with the USA. Far from European capital carrying out a thoroughgoing struggle with the United States it is on the contrary *refusing* to break with it despite very sharp blows dealt against Western Europe.

At the level of policy this has serious implications. West

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European capitalism *refuses* to break with NATO, refuses to get United States nuclear weapons and bases out of Europe. It is subservient to the US military build up. It is the West European labour movement, not European capital, which is today waging a serious struggle with US imperialism and with its own bourgeoisie, over questions such as the missiles or US policy in Central America. The entire world working class has an interest in this struggle of the West European labour movement with US and European capital.

The labour movement must not forget that its own strategy can never simply consist of putting a tick where its own bourgeoisie places a cross, and placing a minus where its own capitalist class puts a plus. The labour movement, in Trotsky's words, must 'learn to think'. The banner of defence of 'European values' against the United States, or draping the labour movement in the tricolour or the Union Jack against 'America' is a reactionary struggle with which European labour must have no truck. Indeed such demagoguery will provide cover for some of the most vicious opponents of the labour movement, as Chirac and Powell have taught us.

But the struggle against US bases, US nuclear weapons, the US army of occupation in West Germany, is a deeply *progressive* struggle which the labour movement has every interest in pursuing. Furthermore the working class is the *only* class which will carry that struggle through to its end. Finally, in any clash with the United States the European labour movement necessarily encounters the struggle with its own countries' imperialism, and its own European states' militarism.

Today there are only two strategic lines which have any chance of winning a mass base within the European working class — the line of pure and simple capitulation to the United States has no chance of success. The first strategy is that of alliance with European capital 'against' the United States — a policy which is today that of the most powerful sections of the right wing social democrats, and is given a left ideological colouring by writers such as Gunder Frank, Coates, Thompson and Hobsbawm. Such a policy of 'alliance with European capital is a policy for disaster. It would mean the slow erosion and grinding down of the European labour movement by austerity, militarism and the restriction of its democratic rights. A policy which finally would end in an historical catastrophe comparable only to, or even surpassing, that of the 1930s and the rise of fascism in Europe.

Ironically, it would not even be a *real* struggle against United States imperialism! For a break with the US under the present class relation of forces in Europe is completely and absolutely unacceptable to West European capitalism. European capital feels itself far too weak in relation to its own working class to risk destroying the entire world capitalist order so laboriously built up and stabilised since 1945. Furthermore a break with the United States, in the present relation of class forces, would necessarily mean an entirely new relation of Western Europe with the USSR, involving both greatly increased economic ties and political agreements on military non-aggression and other issues. Finally, given the economic tensions within Europe itself, the European states would not be able to maintain a coherent united policy. Inevitably a series of weaker European states would undergo a process of attraction into the orbit of the USSR — a *real* process of 'Finlandisation' or perhaps 'Austrianisation'. Others would be pulled sharply and directly back to the United States. Under the present relation of class forces there will be no break of European capital with the United States. Only if European capital could first deliver a crushing blow to the European working class would it be prepared to risk a break with the US.

The sole progressive way for European labour out of the present crisis of the capitalist system is a struggle not simply against the United States but also against the British, French, German and the other European imperialist states. Such an orientation does not at all mean playing down demands against the United States, but on the contrary being prepared to carry

them through to their conclusion — for a *complete* break with NATO, for the removal of all US nuclear weapons and military bases, for the withdrawal of US troops from Germany. But it also means a struggle against the institutions and policies of the European imperialist states themselves; against *British and French* nuclear weapons, against the EEC, against the austerity policies, and for a nuclear free Europe from Poland to Portugal.

Such a strategy entails a precise and definite series of international alliances: with the colonial revolution against US, European and Japanese imperialism; for economic trade and co-operation with Eastern Europe; support for the political revolution in Eastern Europe. This is the framework which *is* being adopted objectively by sections of the left wing of the workers' movement in Europe. Within this framework a whole series of questions which have been ticking away under the surface of European politics are going to be re-raised — above all the question of German reunification.

For the division of Europe in 1945, a division created by and based on the alliance of European capital with the United States, created irreconcilable contradictions. While it is correct to reject any idea of 'socialism in one country', there is no real 'capitalism in half a continent'. The continuation of an alliance with the United States on a long term basis means the progressive weakening of European capital compared to its rival. But West European capital has no way out of that alliance which does not involve a violent confrontation with the West European working class, which finds itself driven into conflict not simply with the alliance of European capital with the United States, but also with any real measures to increase the independence of European capital *from* the United States. In that dilemma lies the germ of much of the future reshaping of European politics.

Behind this development lies an even more fundamental historical reality. For seventy years Western Europe has had no independent history. In August 1914 not merely the imperialist system as a whole began its decline, but that decline was in a sense the most spectacular of all in the centres of European capitalism. From the pinnacle of world power West European capital was reduced to a situation where its fate was determined by forces outside its control and even outside its boundaries. In 1914-18 the centre of the world capitalist economy passed for ever across the Atlantic — and the relative recovery of European capital after World War II does not hide that fact. Today the most dynamic centre of world capitalism lies in California, the sun belt, and Japan.

Within two months in 1917 two events occurred which between them have shaped the entire subsequent history of Europe. In February 1917 the process began in Russia which culminated in the first overthrow of capitalism in the world. In April in direct response to the February revolution, the United States entered the First World War. That clash between the beginning of the European revolution spreading westwards, and the power of the United States and its capitalist allies and opponents attempting to prevent that spread, determined through two world wars, and innumerable crises, the fate of the European continent and a considerable part of the fate of humanity. It still does.

In the socialist solution to its crisis, not in the inter-imperialist clashes which wrench its politics, lies the sole realistic outcome of the contradictions which continue to grip the European continent.

Reviews

CONSUMERISM RULES, OK?

OLIVER MACDONALD

Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, Allen & Unwin, £5.95

On the whole bourgeois economists haven't attempted to produce a theory of non-capitalist economies, and have been content to insist that socialism can work only if it becomes capitalism. In Eastern Europe and the USSR, economists have produced a great deal of economic writing about Soviet-type societies, but for political reasons they have been reluctant to produce general, critical theories of the political economy of socialism.

The field has therefore been left open for Western, anti-Stalinist Marxists to gain a near monopoly of general economic theories of post-capitalist societies. Amongst such theorists there is a widespread consensus that many of the most serious problems of Soviet-type economies derive from what can be called 'bureaucratic planning' in the absence of political democracy, with the way forward lying not through marketisation but socialist-democratic central planning.

These Western Marxist theories have become very influential in the Western Left, while being largely ignored in bourgeois academic circles. But this long-established tranquility has now been rudely disturbed by Alec Nove in his new book *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (Allen & Unwin, 1983). Nove is claiming Social-Democratic property rights on the whole field of the theory of socialist economics, arguing that both the classical Marxist traditions and contemporary Western Marxist economists have failed to produce a 'feasible model' of how a socialist economy can work.

Neither his general theoretical ideas nor his economic programme is particularly new and original (nor does he claim originality). He draws heavily on the work of East European economists and his programme of wide marketisation plus the introduction of a multiplicity of property forms — centralised state corporations, small-scale capitalist firms and petty, individual production — is very similar to that put forward by Polish economists close to the Solidarity leadership.

The novelty and force of Nove's book lie in the way he marshals these ideas for an assault on Western revolutionary Marxist writers, accusing them of utopianism and sloppy, vague thinking not only about existing Soviet-type economies, but also about programmes for the Left in the West. And in the course of this attack Nove time and time again argues that the failures of the existing planning mechanism in Eastern Europe and the USSR stem not from the deformations of the political regimes there, but from the nature of planning itself. Indeed, he suggests that the political authoritarianism of the Soviet system is, at least in some measure, a necessary effect of centralised planning.

As a great stimulus to theoretical debate among Marxists, Nove's book is to be welcomed. This is all the more true because Nove is himself a very knowledgeable scholar in the history and problems of the Soviet economy. However, the consequences of Nove's programme are not spelt out in the

book, yet they are consequences which should cause grave concern to any socialist.

The most valuable theme running through the whole book is Nove's hostility towards the strains of utopianism that can often occur in Western Marxist criticism of Soviet-type economies: rejections of material incentives, promoting schemes that imply a regime of abundance, exaggerated ideas about the blessings of plant self-management, hostility to any forms of petty production or service work, rejection of marketisation of any scope in non-capitalist economies and so on.

Secondly, in the field of general theory of a socialist international economy after the suppression of capitalism, Nove's critique of an economic theory of universal, centralised planning does constitute a challenge to Marxists. Nove's case has been stated many times before but he develops it with special vigour. As he points out, Marx's basic premise for his outline of how a socialist economy would operate was that it would be an economy of abundance, where absolute and relative scarcities would be abolished. Such a premise will not be achieved in the foreseeable future (for Nove it is a utopia) and consequently, the law of value must remain an important operational concept in socialised economies: some objectively established proportions must balance the various branches of the economy (Nove claims, wrongly, that Preobrazhensky failed to appreciate this).

Nove then argues that the market is the best, indeed the only way of objectively establishing such proportions in an adequate quantifiable form, and correctly points out that the alternative method of making some aggregate accounting of use-values, through their costs of production rather than their price established by the market, cannot work in any satisfactory, exact way.

This leads Nove to argue that central planning of an entire economy is bound to be inefficient and wasteful and to contain a large measure of economic irrationality. Decentralisation of decision-making is essential for the efficient use of resources and for avoiding crippling bottlenecks. He continues that competition between enterprises is vital for effective innovation and for the satisfaction of consumer preferences.

Nove then applies these ideas to the international field: 'One would hope that the clumsy "state monopoly of foreign trade" of the Soviet-type would be unnecessary, but, yet again, the only known alternative is a market, ie exchange, and since multilateral trade has evident advantages over bilateral barter, this would seem to imply currency convertibility, and the right of economic units to buy and sell across borders. This in turn means realistic prices and exchange rates. It means also that a productive or wholesaling enterprise will be able to acquire foreign currency without necessarily seeking permission from some government office. Internal and foreign trade prices in tradeable goods would be mutually consistent' (p 244).

It is here that the crippling weaknesses of Nove's method become obvious. His general theoretical case for wide marketisation is abstractly applied to a single national economic 'model', a model which is constructed outside any consideration of the existing world political and economic situation.

And if we try to situate this model economy in the real world it quickly becomes very unattractive from a socialist point of view.

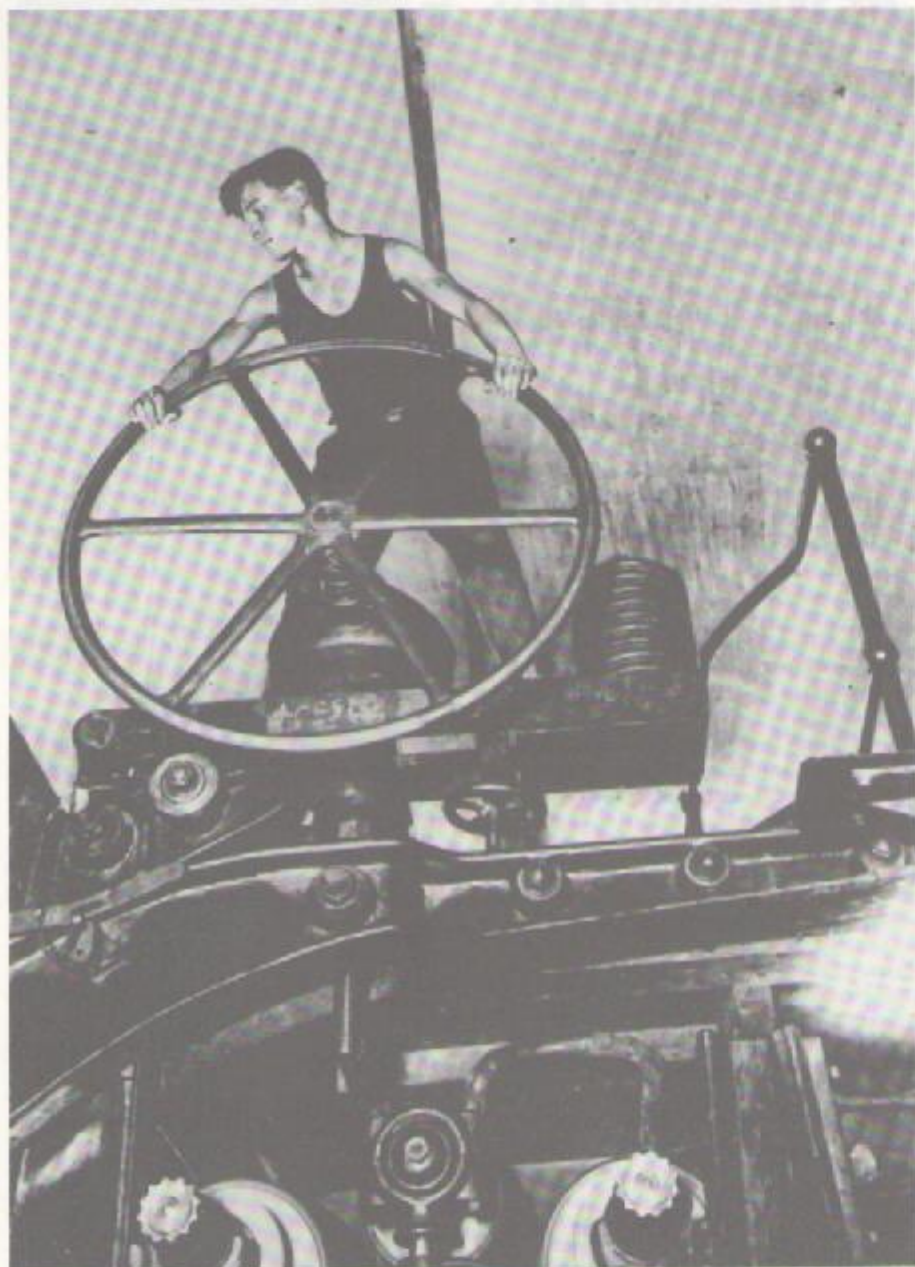
The most important fact about the world is that it remains dominated by a capitalist world economy which is enormously more powerful than the non-capitalist economy, with a far more developed division of labour and much higher productivity than Comecon. Secondly, this capitalist economy is presided over by imperialist powers that are remorselessly hostile to any form of socialised economy. Yet in Nove's entire book this *most important economic fact* for any consideration of a 'Feasible Socialism' plays no operational role whatever. If Nove was a cloistered academic with a distaste for politics this might be an understandable omission, but for a man who has frequented NATO seminars such obvious truths should not be obscure.

If we are considering the problems of the Soviet economy, this relentless pressure from a *much stronger* capitalist world economy must surely rank as a far greater obstacle to rapid economic growth in the Soviet Union than the problems of central planning. And it is a problem which is not open to any economic solution. The enormous economic advantage of socialism over capitalism for Marxists has lain not in the supposed superiority of central planning over a socialised market, but in the suppression of private property leading to the socialisation of production on a world scale, overcoming the straightjacket of the nation-state defending national private capitalist interests. Yet when capitalism remains entrenched in the most advanced sectors of the world economy and only relatively backward parts of the world economy have been removed from the capitalist sphere, this advantage of socialism cannot be realised, whatever the form of regime in the USSR.

Thus, if the USSR dismantled the monopoly of foreign trade, made the rouble convertible, allowed economic units automatic access to foreign exchange at the going rate, and let them borrow on the Euro-dollar market, who can doubt that in the second half of the 1970s the Soviet Union would have acquired a Brazilian-style debt with the economy swinging out of any control by any government. And what then? Any non-capitalist economy faces a Hobson's choice in its relations with the world economy: either it participates, in which case it benefits from the more advanced division of labour but loses control over its own economy in important ways, particularly as it is likely to participate precisely in key, bottleneck sectors of its own economy; alternatively, it opts for autarky and suffers the consequences in terms of sluggish growth.

In this connection, it is striking that Nove nowhere discusses the case of the East German economy. Here is an economy with centralised planning and presumably all the dire consequences that Nove assures us must flow from this. Yet the East German economy, which is much more sophisticated and advanced than the Soviet economy has enjoyed very high growth rates, has a developed consumer sector, provides a higher per capita income than Britain, with full employment, little inflation and a welfare state that in many fields is comparable with that of Britain. Ah,

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For socialists, democracy is a matter of political sovereignty of the working people

people say, this is because East Germany benefits greatly from its close trading relationship with the Federal Republic. No doubt this is true, but it precisely illustrates the point: relations with the capitalist world economy can be a far more important factor than internal economic management mechanisms in determining economic performance. By being the one country in the Eastern Bloc that can expect a large measure of political stability in its capacity to do business with the capitalist world, the GDR is the exception that proves the rule.

There is a second factor that ought to be stressed in the East German case: the administrative culture within a non-capitalist state. It is only really in the 1960s that the Soviet Union acquired a settled stratum of reasonably well-educated administrative personnel in the lower levels of the state and economic management, and even today there would be no comparison between the bureaucratic efficiency and ethical standards of lower functionaries in, say a Soviet and an East German provincial town. These factors are in turn a result of the cultural level of the

working class itself and they play an enormous role in the functioning of any planned economy.

This leads to Nove's dismissal of the role of political democracy within a planned economy. He treats the issue of democracy above all as a question of who takes administrative-managerial decisions, and consequently has no difficulty in arguing that in a centrally-planned economy these decisions must inevitably be taken at the centre. He rightly points out that plant self-management in a centrally planned economy leaves the workers council with precious little of importance to decide. But for socialists, the issue of democracy is not fundamentally a matter of administrative decisions — not in the epoch of transition to socialism, our present epoch. It is above all a matter of political sovereignty of the working people within the state and of permanent freedom of information, ideas and criticism. Without this it is surely obvious that there will be gigantic planning disasters and waste, without the development of a civic and political culture that exerts a powerful pressure for administrative effi-

ciency and initiative. None of this figures in Nove's book.

The fundamental value that Nove attempts to assert is consumer sovereignty. As he puts it: 'It is an essential part of socialist beliefs that there be a real form of economic democracy, that people can influence affairs in their capacities as producers and consumers ... To influence the pattern of production by their behaviour as buyers is surely the most genuinely democratic way to give power to consumers. There is no direct "political" way.' This theme runs right through the book as one of Nove's basic values. Such ideas are also to be found amongst many other anti-Marxist writers: the idea that central planning is a form of state dictatorship over the people as consumers: a dictatorship over needs.

The trouble with this notion is that it assumes one set of needs over and against others. If the set of needs is envisaged to be a wide range of clothes, fashions, car designs, furniture styles, restaurants, and so on, there is a great deal of force in what Nove has to say. But what about other producer and consumer needs: such as a job, very cheap electricity and gas, very cheap necessities at heavily subsidised prices, free holidays, very cheap standardised cars, virtually free and plentiful public transport, a huge state housing programme with nominal rents, nominal charges for theatres, cinemas, sports facilities? Are these not also economic needs and are they not more important needs than the others mentioned by Nove?

Yet, on the whole, Nove has little enthusiasm for meeting such needs. He devotes no attention to them, though he does deplore the huge subsidies on food. This seems an odd scale of values for a socialist and a peculiar blind-spot when looking at Soviet-type economies. Of course, it is easy to say that all these needs are not fully met in the USSR and that great shortages remain in these fields. Fair enough. Shall we cut the military budget in half? Nove doesn't discuss such matters. But the point that must be stressed is not the quantitative aspect of this problem, but the qualitative principle of the plan that enables such needs to be met and the principle of the market which tends to ignore these working class needs.

In conclusion, our quarrel with Nove is not that he raises the need for some elements of marketisations and indeed for some elements of a New Economic Policy (NEP) in the USSR. He might be right, up to a point. Our quarrel is that he treats these issues as matters of principle — he wants the market principle to replace the planning principle in non-capitalist economies. And he justifies this by abstracting himself from the socio-political aspects of functioning of a socialised economy in a predominantly capitalist world. He does not seem to realise that no socialised economy in this world can be organised on criteria of economic efficiency divorced from social and political criteria. For the economy to function in its hostile environment at all it must offer substantial, even if technically 'inefficient', social benefits to the working class which only the planning principle can provide and only the monopoly of foreign trade can underwrite. And it is the existence of those defences of the working class character of the state that makes both possible and necessary popular sovereignty over the state in the political sphere.

OLIVER MACDONALD is editor of *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*.

Reviews

A NON-JEWISH JEW

PAM SINGER

Maxime Rodinson, *Culture, Ghetto and State — the Persistence of the Jewish Question*, Al Saqi books, £5.95.

In one of Philip Roth's early stories a schoolboy is horrified as his mother and grandmother meticulously comb through a list of plane crash casualties to find the Jewish names in order to determine the extent of 'tragedy'. For Roth's characters, 'life had fractioned itself simply: things were either "good for the Jews" or "no good for the Jews".'

From fiction to fact. In issue No 124 of the London magazine *City Limits* the Jewish Feminist Group advertised that 'their newsletter is now available (for Jewish women only).' This is not to suggest that the Jewish Feminist Group meets to count how many Jews have died in plane crashes. It is to show that the particular form of Jewish nationalism that Maxime Rodinson would call 'Judeocentrism' is not confined to American novels. The recent revival of interest in Jewish culture and identity in left circles means that many old questions need to be looked at again.

Maxime Rodinson's new book *Culture, Ghetto and State: the Persistence of the Jewish Question* was compiled as a deliberate polemic against a 'Judeocentric' outlook on these questions. In a fascinating collection of essays written over 15 years, he tackles most complex aspects of the Jewish question from the point of view of the 'non-Jewish Jew' who refuses to be claimed by Zionism and religious dogma.

It is by no means easy reading. The essays are dense and exhausting. Because of the time gaps between essays it is hard to trace the development of Rodinson's thought. Although one has to marvel at Rodinson's mammoth intellectual effort, his political conclusions are a stunning disappointment. For those with a keen interest in the topic — and lots of stamina — the book is well worth the time and effort. Casual readers will probably find it indigestible.

Some may find Rodinson's introduction alone disconcerting. He allows himself frequent outbursts of passionate self-defence against his Zionist attackers. He expresses exasperation at the moral blackmail which has allowed the Judeocentric outlook to claim unchallenged authority on all matters relating to Jews. He points to the European ethnocentrism which has elevated the slaughter of white European Jews in Auschwitz to a 'metaphysical phenomenon' — to a horror somehow qualitatively different from the suffering of millions of non-Western others. Without minimising Jewish suffering, he expresses repugnance at the narrow viewpoint that would ignore the rest of the world.

The book is also admirable for its rigorous scholarship. Rodinson is even careful to begin with a detailed definition of what is a Jew. There are also two valuable essays written for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*. 'Nation and Ideology' is not specifically about the Jews, but the topic is obviously a starting point for anyone examining Jewish history and politics. Rodinson shows that modern nationalism is

not a timeless element of the human condition, but is a product of a certain period of history. Likewise, he shows that various ideological forms of group identification go back to ancient times. Unfortunately, an encyclopaedia must be concise, and it is difficult to do justice to so huge a topic in a short piece. The result is rather head-spinning.

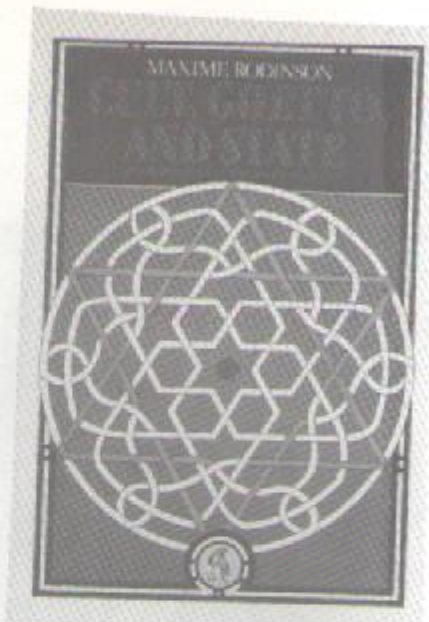
The second encyclopaedia piece, 'What is Zionism?' flows better. It is one of the best short pieces on the origins and early history of Zionism. It suffers from an apparent attempt at 'even-handedness'. Some statements which were dodgy in 1972 when the essay was written are utterly ridiculous today. Rodinson claims, for example, that Israel has had some beneficial consequences for Jews: economic and military success. Leading to improvement in their world image, as well as a 'secure refuge for persecuted and harassed Jews'. Had the essay been written in 1984, it is unlikely that Rodinson would have been so generous. However this is a minor irritation in an otherwise sound piece.

One of the high points of the book is the controversial essay 'From the Jewish Nation to the Jewish Problem'. It was written as an introduction to the French edition of Abram Leon's classic *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Analysis*. Leon, a Belgian Trotskyist who died in Auschwitz, set out to prove that there was no spiritual or mysterious quality that exempts Jews from the general laws of history. The Jews survived not because of religion, but in spite of it. He elaborated the theory that Jews, like other peoples, constituted a 'people-class'. In other words, Jews played a specific social role in the societies in which they dwelled which prevented their total assimilation. Rodinson examines this theory in the light of historical information unavailable for Leon. He has some substantial criticisms of Leon's material, but claims to be expounding upon his fundamentally sound analysis.

It is obviously impossible here to outline the points of this debate, and one needs very specialised knowledge to determine the validity of the critique. But for those interested in further reading, there is a reply to Rodinson in the American edition of Leon's book. Nathan Weinstock, author of *Zionism: False Messiah*, criticises Rodinson severely for his objections, and upholds Leon's original material.

Their differences notwithstanding, Leon, Weinstock and Rodinson all agree on the two fundamental issues. First of all, as Rodinson explains, 'Judaism is explained by history and not outside it'. And secondly, that Zionism has offered no panacea to the problems of world Jewry, but has aggravated them. Finally, Rodinson pays homage to Leon's courage and lucidity in producing so innovative a work in the dire conditions of the Belgian resistance to Nazi occupation. He delivers an inspiring message to everyone, particularly Jews, to follow Leon's example in trying to halt the process set in motion towards more and more reactionary options.

A curious inclusion in the collection is a 45-page mea culpa of Rodinson's 21 years in the French Communist Party. He needn't have wasted the reader's time. For, unfortunately, in the only essay written since the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Rodinson comes



out with a solution to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict which is virtually indistinguishable from any CP's position. The title alone should arouse suspicion: 'Conditions of Co-existence' puts forward the astonishing position that, with good will and understanding on both sides, an Israeli state and a Palestinian state can live side by side.

Rodinson rejects the PLO position for a democratic secular state where Muslim Christian and Jew can live together. He believes that the Israeli Jews are not a traditional religious community as such. Rather, he believes that despite their disparate origins, the Israelis now constitute a nation-in-formation. Therefore both Palestinian and Israeli nations need a political structure — a nation-state — of their own for the foreseeable future. The Arabs, he says, would have to accept an Israeli state. He allows that this is a tough one, given the ruthless manner in which the Zionists succeeded in their original project. He does not allow for a second that Jewish colonisation on Palestine was legitimate. But he is prepared to accept the fait accompli.

On the Israeli side, Zionists would have to define the limits of their borders for once and for all, and promise not to step out of line. Secondly, they would have to show more patience and understanding to Arab public opinion and acknowledge 'that the Arabs of Palestine had primordial rights to this land, which they inhabited and cultivated. Their renunciation of these rights can be negotiated, but it cannot be expected that they will acknowledge that they never existed'. An astonishing statement indeed. It is mind-boggling that someone of Rodinson's calibre would ultimately to so simplistic and pragmatic.

Whether or not there is now an Israeli nation as opposed to a Jewish nation is a valid ongoing debate among Marxists. Certainly, just as nations can be destroyed, they can also be created under certain circumstances. Even if, for argument's sake, we accept Rodinson's position on the Israeli nation, his conclusions do not necessarily flow. In an interview with Moshe Machover which appears in Weinstock's above-mentioned book, he speaks of an Israeli-Jewish nationality and a Palestinian-Arab nationality. His conclusion is that the most favourable scenario for co-existence is a voluntary socialist union of the Arab East. This internationalist socialist viewpoint is far less utopian than waiting for Shamir and Sharon, or even Peres and Rabin, to limit their horizons.

PAM SINGER is a socialist in the NUR and an activist in the Palestine solidarity movement.

UNVEILING WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

ROS YOUNG

Germaine Tillion, *The Republic of Cousins — Women's Oppression in Mediterranean Society*, Al Saqi Books, London, £4.95.

'The seclusion of Mediterranean women ... represents the most massive survival of human bondage' and according to Tillion represents a serious obstacle to progress. In her thesis, the Mediterranean societies (North Africa, Southern Europe and the Levant) whether Christian, Muslim or Jewish share several specific forms of women's oppression. These are the veil, the harem, female seclusion, the strict sexual code imposed on women and the 'male honour' to enforce it.

These particular forms of women's oppression are often equated in the west with Arab society and Islam. Tillion sets out to show that they are common throughout the region, in all religions and that their roots can be traced back to prehistory through the marriage institution common to these societies — endogamous marriage (or the marriage of first cousins where the fathers are brothers). Hence the 'Republic of Cousins'. Tillion divides the world up on the basis of kinship systems (the study in anthropology of marriage, who is related to who, and how women are used in this exchange to form alliances). 'Savage' society is the 'Republic of brothers-in-law' and industrial, urban society the 'Republic of citizens'.

The Republic of Cousins has its origin and legacy today in the Mediterranean area, but according to Tillion, its influence has spread further to America and the far East. She claims that she is setting out to prove the connection between 'bread, butter, soup and the cooking pot with the origins of the harem, preferential marriage between cousins and the philosophy of expansionism'. For this she uses a mixture of anthropology, ethnography, historical sources, archaeology and her own field-work observations amongst nomadic peoples in North Africa, to give examples of the prevalence of first cousin marriage, or 'keeping the girls in the family for the boys in the family'. Its origins go back to the Neolithic Revolution where the domestication of plants and animals led to the accumulation of surplus, private property, inheritance and women and children becoming the property of men.

This system of marriage gave rise to societies where male solidarity and the preserving of 'male honour' through the oppression of women became the institutionalised norm as opposed to 'civic or patriotic' duties. As examples, Tillion describes the 'vendetta' in Italy and the 'blood feud' in North Africa.

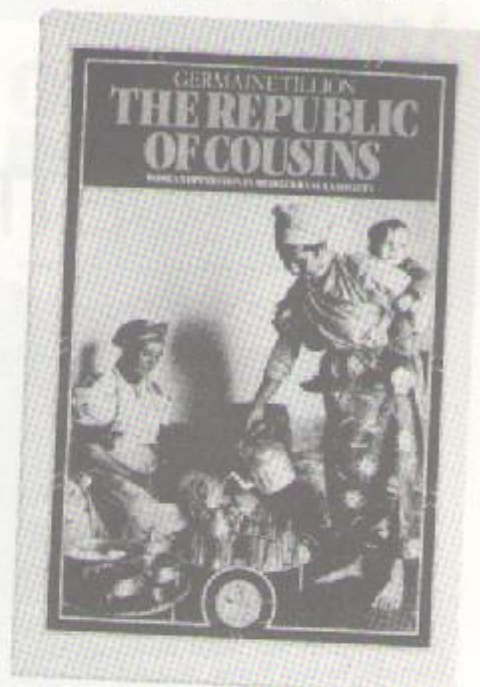
The veil takes several forms, from the mask in Saudi Arabia to the headscarf in Greece. But Tillion also singles out the veil in the Islamic countries by drawing a parallel between its geographical distribution and where women have some property rights through Koranic laws on inheritance (where women get half a man's share). Where women

did inherit, the veil was used to seclude them further from any males outside the family, clan or tribe. In the cities it resulted from being in closer contact with males from other families.

Tillion's leaping around from country to country produces nothing but a jumble of ideas and confusion. She does not prove what she has set out to do — that endogamous marriage is linked to the philosophy of expansionism. Nor is her hypothesis on the origin of marriage unique. She does illustrate that Arab society is not alone in its seclusion of women, but in a very unsatisfactory and superficial way.

Is it an anthropological travelogue or does it have more serious implications? If it is meant to be a serious contribution to the study of women's oppression, as the title suggests, then what emerges is reaction in the core. Nowhere does she challenge the institution of marriage itself. In fact she implies that where endogamous marriage is breaking down and individuals assert themselves to be able to marry outside the family that this is progressive! For whom? Certainly not women, as we can see very well in this country. I would also question her use of the word 'harem' with all its racist connotations against Arab society, particularly when Tillion does not fully explain what she means apart from symbolising women's seclusion.

Worse still, no mention is made of political, economic or class reality, of the effects of colonialism in North Africa, the economic deprivation in the South of Italy, the years of the Generals in Greece and Franco in Spain. For example in discussing the veil, she says Algerian women wear it '... to avoid the ribaldries of urchins ... in many Algerian towns.' What about the effects of brutal French occupation in Algeria? Didn't women



take up the veil to avoid the harassment and sexual attacks of the French troops? And how do we explain the phenomena of the veil in the Iranian revolution?

To add injury to insult she repeats the age-old theory that we women are our own worst enemies — we've only ourselves to blame! Women 'have brought up little boys and passed on to them anew the old prehistoric virtues'.

As to the rural masses she has very little sympathy — while they are flooding into urban areas, dragging the intelligentsia down, the urban family proper (presumably the nuclear family of 2.4) 'are currently evolving towards respect for the human individual, even when this individual is a woman'. Well I haven't noticed this in London.

This book provides in actual fact, very little information on the oppression of women, is patronising to the point of racist and I suspect is an 'intellectual' exercise designed to confuse and distort women's oppression and how we fight it.

ROS YOUNG is an activist in the Palestine solidarity movement.

LABOUR MOVEMENT CONFERENCE ON PALESTINE

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Reviews

'IT'S POETRY I STILL LOVE BEST'

CHARLIE VAN GELDEREN

Alan Wald, *The Revolutionary Imagination: the Poetry and Politics of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan*, Chapel Hill, 288p, \$28.00.

The international revolutionary movement has been enriched throughout its history by the adherence of talented literary figures to its ranks. The years following the victory of the October Revolution in Russia were particularly fruitful in this respect. In Europe, major literary figures like Henri Barbusse, Andre Malraux, Bertold Brecht, Auden and Spender were among those who were drawn into the Communist movement, and in the United States this influx heralded by people like Max Eastman, John Reed and others.

As the revolutionary wave ebbed and fascism reared its ugly head many of those intellectuals saw the Soviet Union as the shining beacon in the sea of darkness. But Stalinism sought to implant its image on art as on any other forms of human activity. This had a stultifying effect on the emergence of new art forms and the creativity of artists. John Wheelwright, one of the two poets who form the subject of this meticulous study by Alan Wald, recognised this even before he joined the organised socialist movement in 1932. About the American Communist Party, he wrote: 'they grind out the dialectic, just as a papal court grinds out its dialectic'. Under Stalinism, the artist had to conform to the twists and changes of party policy, veering from the ultra-leftism of the 'Third Period' to the reformism of the popular front. This was completely foreign to the conception of the role of art in the years immediately following October.

Trotsky, in his classic *Literature and Revolution* written in 1924, wrote: '... Art must make its own way and by its own means. The Marxist methods are not the same as the artistic. The Party leads the proletariat but not the historic process of history. There are domains in which the Party leads, directly and imperatively. There are domains in which it only orientates itself. The domain of art is not one in which the Party is called upon to command ... The Party cannot and will not take the position of a literary circle which is struggling and merely competing with other literary circles ...' Under Stalin and Zhdanov, all this changed. The Party did constitute itself the supreme arbiter in all things, including the arts. Thus, in the late '20s and '30s the so-called proletarian novel became a cult only to be abandoned in 1935 when the political line changed.

To independent minds like Wheelwright and Mangan, the conformity which Stalinism demanded from the poet was repugnant. Developing in the same literary traditions as TS Eliot and with the same class background, unlike Eliot who moved to the right, they became acutely aware of the decadence of capitalist society. They were formed and transformed, as the author writes: 'by consecutive immersions in two movements of thought that allured the most advanced of the inter-war generation of writers. First as Harvard poets and periodic



exiles in Europe, they integrated innovative modernist ideas with their classical education. Then when the Great Depression upset their former conceptions of the world, they assimilated the revolutionary socialist politics that seemed plausible to many during the 1930s. The result was that both poets blended aristocratic cultural training and modernist tastes with working-class political loyalties. Like Shelley, Byron, Morris and Emerson's Uriel, they were 'class traitors', who turned against the privileged groups from which they came.'

Repelled by Stalinism with its sterile theory and repressive attitude to the arts, John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan turned to the repository of revolutionary Marxism — Trotskyism. They joined the Socialist Workers Party (USA) in the 1930s. When, as a result of the Stalin-Hitler pact in 1939, the intellectuals began to leave the cause of revolution in droves, Wheelwright and Mangan remained firm in their political commitment. They saw no contradiction between their literary activities and their politics. They had a great admiration for Leon Trotsky, who they considered the foremost political figure of their day. Trotsky's definition of art as 'an expression of man's needs for a harmonious and complete life ... his need for those major benefits of which a society of classes has deprived him ...' completely fitted in with their own conception of their role as artists and revolutionary socialists.

As Wald writes, 'they came to personify Trotsky's conception of the bond between the dissident artist and the political heretic'. Unlike many of the contemporaries who confined their contribution to the revolution to their literary work, Wheelwright and Mangan realised that art alone was 'an inadequate instrument for the transformation of society and allied themselves with the working-class movement. In these successive stages of artistic and political rebellion, they remained pledged to a higher order of values than they believed existed in the society around them.' Not for them the comparatively passive role of 'fellow-travellers'. Once he had decided to throw off the shackles of his Boston upper-class background, Wheelwright threw himself enthusiastically into the living socialist move-

ment. He took part in demonstrations, spoke from soap-boxes and ran for office as a revolutionary socialist candidate.

Wheelwright's poetry has been rescued from obscurity by the publication in 1972 of the *Collected Works of John Wheelwright* (Alvin H Rosenfeld ed. New Directions, 278pp, \$10), and Alan Wald's book has added a new dimension to the appreciation of his life and work both as poet and revolutionary. He remained an active member of the Socialist Workers Party (USA) till his tragic death in 1940.

When Sherry Mangan became radicalised in the 1930s he was already regarded as a young man of great literary promise. But for Sherry the revolution now became the prime motive for his existence. While working as foreign correspondent for *Time* and *Fortune* magazines in London and Paris, he was secretly working for the Fourth International as journalist and translator, and as a member on the International Secretariat. He sacrificed his life of comfort and literary creativity for the cause in which he believed with all his heart. When a boyhood friend asked him what socialism had done 'for' him as well as what it has done 'to' him, Sherry replied: 'For me it has given a guidance and a purpose far beyond any personal one that I might have conceived, save poetry itself. To me, yes ... it has made me pay and pay dear ... But I won't change one opinion, one iota because of it.'

Under the name of Terence Phelan, he became the European correspondent of *Socialist Appeal*, then the organ of the SWP. When his articles arrived in New York, Max Shachtman, then editor of *Socialist Appeal* read parts of them aloud to the editorial board as exemplary Marxist journalism. During the German occupation of Paris and before America entered the war, he contrived to keep in touch with the Trotskyist underground. In 1943, back in London, he set to work trying to unite the disparate Trotskyist groups. After the war, he played a leading part in re-establishing international contacts and setting up the International Secretariat in Paris. He was also active as a member of the Central Committee of the French section.

As a revolutionary journalist, Sherry was, as Max Shachtman said, exemplary. His article, 'The End of French Democracy' which appeared in the Fourth International in the spring of 1941, was a brilliant Marxist analysis of the historical reasons why France had fallen so easily to the Nazis. Just how much Sherry gave up by his devoted work for the revolution is perhaps best summed up by the letter he wrote shortly before his death in Bolivia in 1960: 'Even though revolutionary politics are an honourable occupation, it's poetry I still love best.'

Everyone interested in the left-wing literary tradition who wants to learn how intellectuals can find a place in the revolutionary movement should be grateful to Alan Wald for this authoritative research into the lives of these two people for whom the revolution completely synchronised with the future of humanity, and who gave their all to its cause.

CHARLIE VAN GELDEREN is a Trotskyist of 50 years standing.

END OF THE ROAD FOR RAIL?

IVOR EVANS

Philip Bagwell: *End of the Line — the Fate of British Railways under Thatcher*, Verso NLB, £3.95.

British Railways have a reputation for being overstaffed and unproductive. Debates in the media focus on whether 'the country' can afford the huge subsidies involved in running the system and whether or not railway lines should be concreted over for the use of private vehicles. This preoccupation only goes to show how far hatred of the public sector can distort reality.

In 1950 British Railways employed 497,000 staff. By 1981 the figure was 166,000 and falling. Yet passenger mileage was only 5 per cent down on the 1950 figure — quite an achievement in terms of productivity statistics! Strangely enough, of the 21,000 miles of railway closed down since the early 1920s only 70 miles has been converted to roads and that's despite the fact that most of the lines were not in rural areas but in big cities or on main routes.

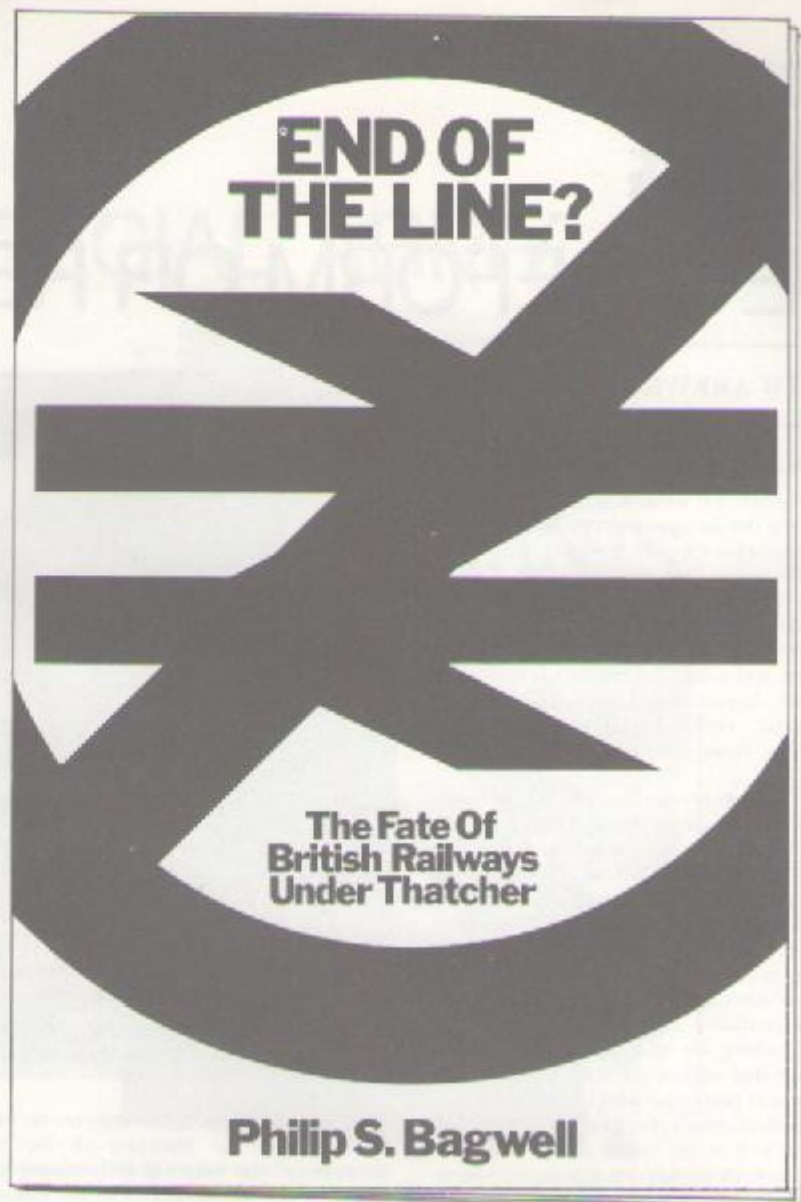
Conversion to roads is a nonsense. So is the idea that the railways are oversubsidised. It is roads and private transport that have benefited from government transport subsidies over the years. The long term discrimination against public transport is finally being transformed under Thatcher into suffocation of the railways. *End of the Line* documents the process.

The railways are beginning to rot in front of our eyes. Out of the remaining 22,000 miles of track 3,000 miles will have to be closed by 1990 due to lack of maintenance making it unsafe. More and more speed restrictions due to worn out track are slowing down the system.

Again by 1990, 7,000 miles of railway will be controlled by signalling equipment more than 50 years old. In 1979 only 16 new locomotives were built out of 2,000 which needed replacement. The government is firmly blocking electrification which is the key to development of modern railways.

From a straightforward economic point of view it doesn't make sense to run a major national asset into the ground. Britain is completely out of step with the rest of Europe in its transport policy. A 1977 study found that BR capital expenditure was lower than any of the nine other countries examined. That was before Thatcher got in. Since then BR investment levels have fallen to half the 1977 level.

However, the opposite applies to the roads and to private transport. The government happily approved expenditure of £740 million on trunk road schemes in 1982-3, an increase on 20 per cent on the previous year. Nor did they object to local authorities spending a further £1,200 million on road maintenance and construction. This reflects the blatant



discrimination involved in allocating transport resources.

When the Department of Transport considers a trunk road scheme, it uses a method of cost benefit analysis which takes into account the value of time saved by motorists using the route. In other words, the road scheme is assessed as a public service. But when it comes to the railways, capital spending is judged by commercial criteria in terms of return on capital invested.

It's no wonder that other industrial countries which do not make this crazy distinction spend so much more on public transport. Anyone reading an article in the press about BR would gain the impression that the discrimination worked the other way around.

The granting of licences to private coach firms has resulted in low coach fares between cities. But it has also forced the National Bus Company to compete on equal terms with the privateers — cutting back on their rural services which were subsidised by takings from the more profitable routes. Dozens of villages are now without any form of public transport at all.

The success of the NBC in competing with the privateers (despite the fact that private coach firms were also receiving subsidies) is to be rewarded by privatising sections of the NBC itself. The NBC estimate this could lead to a withdrawal of sixty million miles of services.

There are many other hidden subsidies to private transport — tax subsidies to company car owners run at around £2,000 million a year, while the cost of road accidents is estimated at £1,730 a year.

Pollution and damage to the environment

is impossible to estimate in cash terms, as is the social cost to the old, the young, women and the poor in general who have to rely on public transport and suffer at the hands of government policy.

As far as the labour movement is concerned, a policy of simply *defending* the railways and public transport is inadequate. The only case that can be made is a case for *improving* services entailing a massive national campaign mobilising transport workers and the public.

End of the Line is a useful tool for such a campaign. It explains the problems facing the industry and the attacks made on it by the government, the consequences of privatisation to date and the proposals of the Serpell Report. This is vital educational material both for railworkers (the NUR has purchased 5,000 copies) and for socialists concerned with the serious development of policy on industry.

As far as the actual development of policy by the rail unions is concerned, however, Professor Bagwell's book suffers from his long association with the NUR bureaucracy during the era of Sid Weighell. In two chapters on the 1982 strikes he defends the sell out of the ASLEF strike and the deliberate disorganisation of the 2-day NUR strike. It is clear that along with the trade union bureaucrats he doesn't expect much from the rank and file. His only hope for change is placed with the election of a Labour government.

But in order to see elected the type of Labour government which would seriously put public transport first, the NUR and other trade unions will have to lead their membership into campaigning and confrontation.

IVOR EVANS is an activist in the NUR, working on London Transport.

Reviews

AES: REFORM OR REVOLUTION?

JUDITH ARKWRIGHT

Anne Phillips, *Hidden Hands*, Pluto, £2.95

Anne Phillips has written a useful contribution to the debate over an economic strategy fully integrating feminist demands — a debate which has raged since 1978 when Bea Campbell and Valerie Charlton published their controversial paper 'Work to Rule'. These arguments were later repeated in *Sweet Freedom*, and except for one article by McIntosh and Angela Weir there has been no systematic reply to Bea Campbell's arguments, from within the feminist movement.

Bea Campbell's arguments, we are told, take up three essential points. First, that collective bargaining is a practice which benefits only male trade unionists, and that to develop a strategy for women at work we must reject many of the things which have resulted — such as differentials, long hours and the family wage. Secondly, Campbell argues that the history of the trade unions proves them to be male institutions, and that women should look elsewhere for allies in their fight. She concludes that women's new allies lie with the state, and in particular with the notion of incomes policies which she maintains have in the past and will in the future act to distribute wealth between workers on a more even basis (through flat rate increases, protection of the lower paid, etc.)

Phillips argues cogently against this, pointing out that 'we cannot trust the state' to redistribute in favour of women. She states that only under a different system of social ownership can planning of incomes really work to women's and men's advantage. In the present context incomes policies merely mean that wealth is taken from Labour to give to Capital rather than ironing out inequalities between workers. She ends by arguing that trades unions must be changed from within. The basis of a programme for women in the workforce is spelled out in demands for shorter working hours, a minimum wage, closing of differentials, and so on. These are general demands which must be put forward in their feminist context because, as an earlier paper from the Sex and Class Group has pointed out 'women's relation to wage labour is differently structured from that of men'.

However, it is precisely when the book elaborates this framework that some of the ambiguities and pitfalls become apparent. Phillips strongly argues that the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES) is inadequate from a women's point of view: that it is based on recapturing a boom in the economy which is unlikely to reappear; that when issues such as full employment and industrial democracy are raised it is therefore never spelt out what role women will have to play. She declares, 'why should anyone support a strategy that threatens conflict with Capital unless it says something new?' In other words such a programme is not bold enough to mobilise either female or male workers in its support and will therefore be crushed by Capital.

The concept of industrial democracy put forward within the AES has many problems apart from the lack of reference to women. It



talks about persuading employers to be involved in central planning on the naive assumption that they will fully cooperate. It does not talk about control of the economy, seeing even a minimal amount of nationalisation as 'old fashioned'. In these circumstances trade unionists, women and men, become mere pawns and democracy would be a sham. Anne Phillips seems to see the main problem as one of male bias, rather than the utopianism of the whole schema. She does not clearly resolve her attitude towards the AES, should feminists reject it or should they try to change it? This question is never answered.

The book puts forward the notion of shared labour as the major plank of any future strategy. This is counterposed directly to the issue of socialisation of the different tasks which men and women perform. She states that Marx and Engels saw capitalism 'as liberating for women' because it got them involved in socialised production. This is not what Marx and Engels said at all. They merely stated that for women, as for the proletariat as a whole, the best chances of organising collectively against class society and male domination was under capitalism. It is undeniably true that where women are more involved in the workforce they have found it easier to organise. This does not mean, of course, that women will not and should not organise in many other ways as well.

Anne Phillips then expresses reservations about the socialisation of domestic labour too, on the grounds that it is some crude extension of the former error made by Marx and Engels, and is a solution which 'demands nothing of men'. It is true that collectivising the domestic functions of childcare, cooking and cleaning does not in and of itself challenge the division of labour between men and women, but the point is should such a framework inform our demands or not? It makes a difference to which demands we prioritise and how we fight for them. Again

the book fails to answer and concentrates instead on getting more men involved in sharing tasks with women as the *main* solution.

This new strategy is based on the fight for the shorter working week. The book argues that this would give more time for men to be involved with children, housework, and so on. This may well be so but of course there is no reason to assume that the extra time will be used by men to share housework. The shorter working week is primarily a demand to fight unemployment — in women's and men's interests. This is not to say that women cannot use it to their advantage in other ways but can this demand really be used as the *starting point* in tackling the issue of domestic labour?

This demand also raises the vexed question of productivity deals and wage cuts in return for shorter hours. Anne Phillips argues that it is not in women's interests that shorter hours be traded off against harder work. However, later on she contradicts herself when she says that in order to reduce the hours 'productivity would have to increase in miraculous ways and at a certain point there would have to be trade off between hours and income.' A strategy to reduce wages and increase unemployment will hardly benefit women. However, she persists that men have privileges which they must give up if women are to get equality. Are these the kind of privileges she is talking about — decent wages and jobs with decent conditions?

In fact the problem with her proposals is that while many are acceptable individually — more time off for parents, more flexible as well as shorter working hours — the whole framework is still based on the notion of redistribution *within* the working class in a similar way to Bea Campbell's arguments. On the issue of differentials and overtime for example, Anne Phillips still talks of the need to 'take from men in order to give to women'. Weir and McIntosh answer this point well when they state, 'there is no automatic mechanism by which wage rises for miners or printers must come out of the pockets of clerical workers or cleaners...'

The confusion here is further exaggerated when the question of how and in what context these demands will be granted. Anne Phillips states that, 'crisis always has two faces. It threatens what we used to take for granted... At the same time it is a preface to revival, when Capital lays the groundwork for its next phase of expansion'. In other words the demands are premised on some form of economic recovery within capitalism. Here the book comes full circle with the debate on the AES. Even the pundits of the *Financial Times* and the *City* are now beginning to doubt the extent of the so-called economic recovery. If they have so little faith in their own system, should women build their perspective on the basis of such a prospect? As socialists and feminists we want practical demands around which we can organise now and win certain gains, but these must be linked to the fight for a different society where our needs can be fully met. A difficult task and this book does not completely make the link.

JUDITH ARKWRIGHT is a member of the National Union of Railwaymen.

ULSTER'S SPECIAL ARMY

GEOFF BELL

Michael Farrell, *Arming the Protestants*. Pluto, £7.95.

So there was David Lloyd George, former leader of the Liberal Party and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, discussing with his Cabinet the possibility of supplying arms to the Protestant proletariat of the North of Ireland, in the month of May 1922. He told his government colleagues that these 'loyalists' had been compared to the lower orders in the East End of London, but for Prime Minister Lloyd George that was a slur on the East Enders. 'The Fascisti in Italy would be a more exact analogy', he remarked. And then he proceeded to arm and finance the loyalists.

This is just one of many, many incidents reported in Michael Farrell's latest book which will make even the most suspicious observer of Britain's dealing with the people of Ireland shake the head and go back over sentences just to make sure that it was read correctly. It is a book of horror stories, and only Michael Farrell's cool, matter-of-fact dispassionate style stops the hairs rising on the back of the neck as page after page is turned over. Example: Winston Churchill, the great statesman of British bourgeois folklore, on a number of occasions in the years reviewed suggested the British government should prepare an invasion of the South of Ireland. Example: members of the 'security forces' in the North of Ireland who were known to be guilty of assassinations of individual Catholics, were, for their contributions to law and order promoted within those security forces. Example: a boundary commission which political representatives of the South of Ireland had been told would transfer large portions of North to the South, was fixed beforehand so as to ensure that could not happen. And those who sanctioned the rigging were the members of the minority Labour government who came to power in 1923.

There are other, less shocking, even humorous incidents recounted. Like how the super loyalists in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ulster Special Constabulary, those who pledged their fidelity to everything British with the most enthusiasm, would protest loudly any time an English policeman or soldier was sent over to command them — because such foreigners could not be trusted in 'Ulster'. And yet, although the discovery by Michael Farrell of such occurrences is a fine testimony to his work as a historian, the sum total of the book is even more important because of the political conclusion which can be drawn from it, and because of its relevance to current theoretical debates on the issue of Ireland.

There is the question of the Protestant working class in the North of Ireland. There are some who insist that the members of that class are and always have been 'ordinary workers' and who, for instance, would jump at the chance of voting for the Labour Party if only Neil Kinnock would send an expeditionary force to the North. There are also those who agree that yes, the prods might be

sectarian now and again but really, it is all the fault of the nasty Catholics who keep raising political issues like the partition of Ireland. And there are those who say the Protestant workers are simply dupes of the nasty Unionist bosses. *Arming the Protestants* provides an overwhelming refutation of such vulgar socialism. Farrell displays, beyond any doubt that the Protestant working class in the years 1920 to 1927 could be and was an independent political force whose main unifying factor was an anti-Catholic bigotry which needed no supposed Republican threat before emerging with all the flourish and all the malevolence of the Ku Klux Klan. Of course, at times the upper class leaders of Unionism urged their followers on, but on other occasions they had to run to keep up with the sectarianism of their supporters.

A second general conclusion that can be drawn from this book concerns the nature of the British role in the North of Ireland. It is common coinage among modern British politicians to accept that in the past Britain did nasty things in Ireland, but that really, it can hardly be directly responsible for what is happening today. This is another myth demolished by Farrell. He shows that not only did the leaders of all the political parties in Britain permit the sectarian character of modern 'Ulster' to be built in the 1920s, but they went further and encouraged and paid for its construction. Indeed, the only 'liberal' figures to surface in this book is the occasional British civil servant who protested at the overtly sectarian actions of the political masters at Westminster.

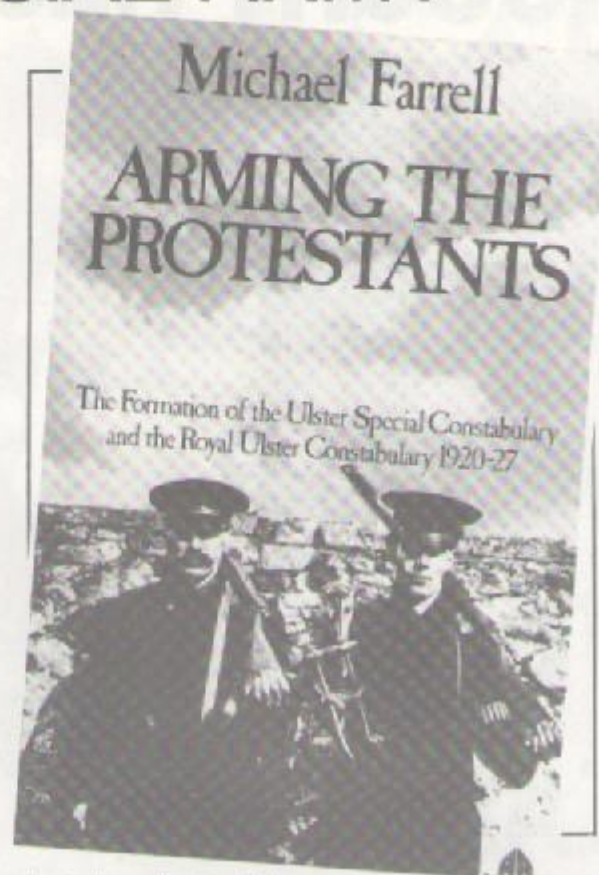
And there is a third lesson on offer, almost incidental to the Irish issue. This involves Farrell's account of how the leadership of Unionism and the British establishment

built up or encouraged and financed the illegal army of loyalist volunteers in the early 1920s. In doing so, every constitutional nicety was trampled under foot, every semblance of adherence to a non-partisan 'law and order' was dispensed with. This was 'parliamentary democracy' in its naked and vicious mood. There is a warning there for all those who believe in the fairness and humanity of the British system of politics.

Some may say that Farrell's version of history is a history and little more. That such a series of events couldn't possibly happen today. The 'B' Specials have, after all, vanished from the scene. No they haven't, only the name is changed. Today they are called the Ulster Defence Regiment, set up by the Labour Government in 1970. Between them and the old 'B' Specials there is only a 2 per cent difference. In the 'B' Specials everyone was Protestant. The last, and out of date figures available for the UDR were that 98 per cent were Protestant. But its countless members who have been involved in sectarian murders in the last ten years shows that the UDR is as Orange and bloody as Farrell shows the 'B' Specials to have been.

It can be admitted that at times *Arming the Protestants* is a heavy read. But that is because Farrell has chosen to detail the story he tells so meticulously. And that, in turn, is to his credit. He avoids emotion, he avoids rhetoric. He just places mass after mass of evidence before his reader. But in that way he ends up with as telling an indictment of the North of Ireland 'loyalist' and their British sponsors as is available.

GEOFF BELL's latest book *The British in Ireland* was published by Pluto Press last month.

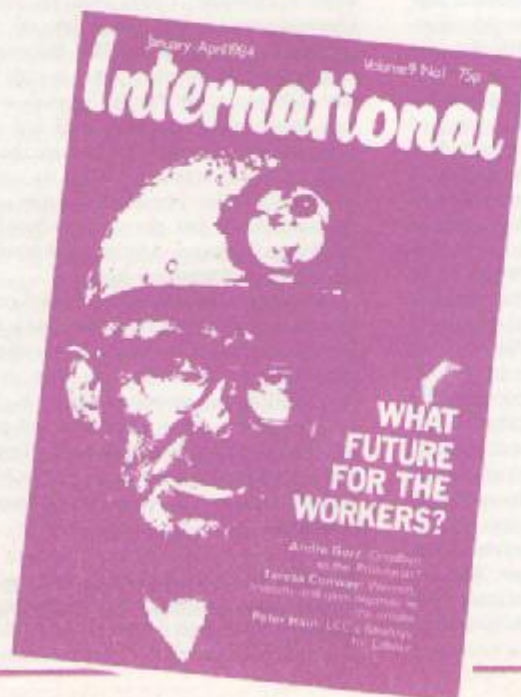


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