socialist REVIEW

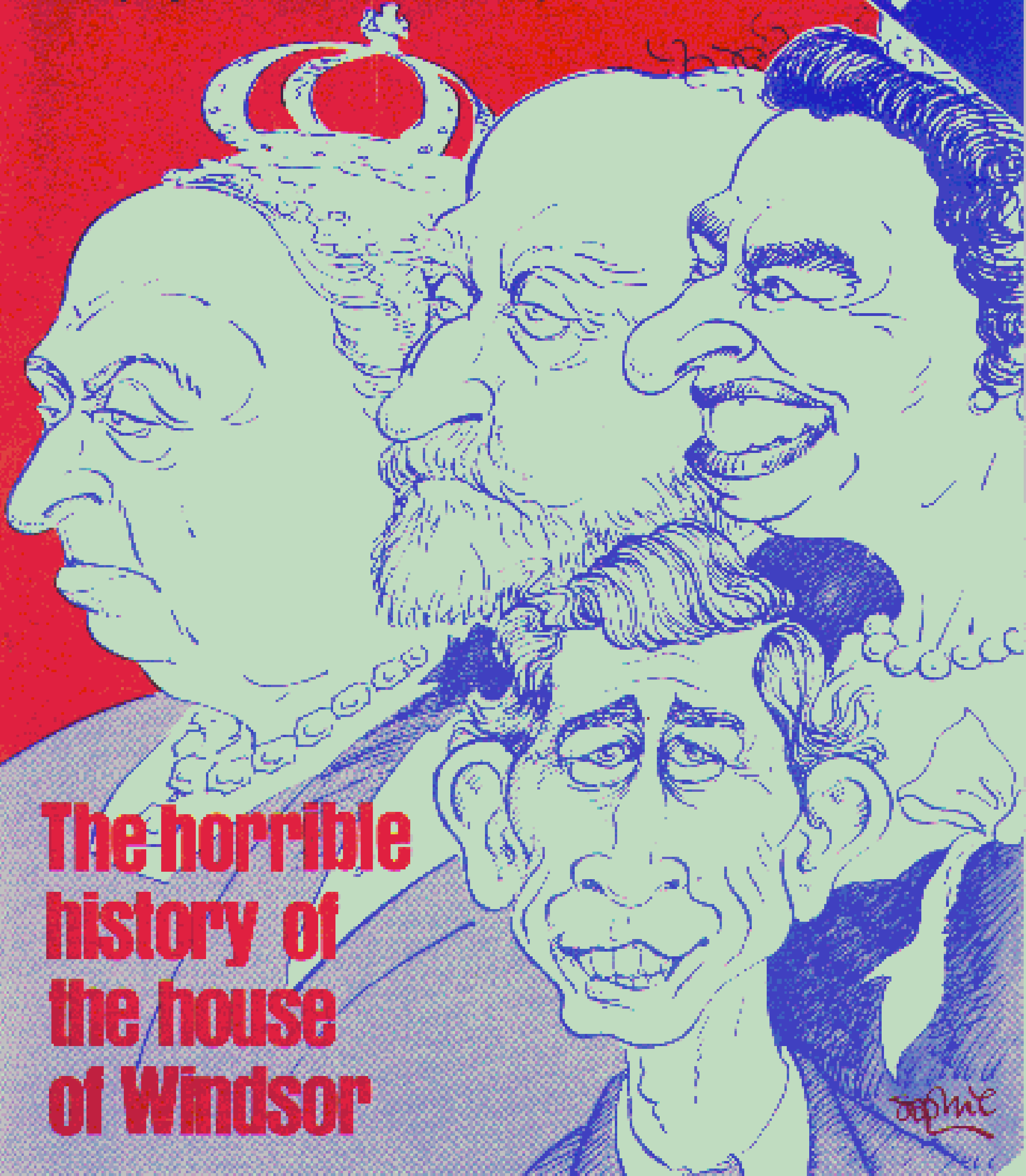
Monthly magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

13 July–12 September 1981:7

34

Special expanded summer issue 60p

Facing up to Bennism



The horrible history of the house of Windsor

Mitterand's first month

Mitterrand has now been in power for over a month. With a solid majority backing him in parliament he would seem to have little excuse for not putting his socialist programme into effect. French workers, even those who recall his sordid role during the Algerian war of independence in the late 50s, are inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he's changed, they tell revolutionary socialists warning about his past.

Yet, to look at Mitterand's first month in office is to see how little the leopard has changed his spots. By appointing ex-Gaullists and the former head of Renault to his government he intends to reassure the big bourgeoisie that they have little to fear. And even the prime minister, Mauroy, long time socialist mayor of Lille, has gone out of his way to tell the bosses' weekly, *Usine Nouvelle* (New Factory), that the unions would press their claims 'while keeping a sense of responsibility and bearing in mind the state of the French economy.' Just in case the readers missed the point, he also promised, in reply to a nervous question about rising salaries, that the measures proposed by the government would avoid problems because 'they would not be imposed by the state, but freely negotiated to an adequate level between the two sides of industry.'

Add to these soothing class-collaborationist words the open secret that Mitterrand's chief economic adviser, Delors (one time chief economic advisor to Gaullist prime minister Chaban-Delmas) is decidedly lukewarm about nationalisation – which was another of Mitterrand's election promises – and it is quite understandable why a top Fench bourgeois paper like *Le Monde* can welcome (if not actually enthuse about) Mitterrand's victory. After the scandals of the Giscard presidency, with its crude interference in the mass media, the more far-sighted members of the French bourgeoisie can detect distinct advantages in having a president like Mitterrand to clean up the face of French politics.

However, it could be argued that Mitterrand was bound to make noises like these to appease the right and so secure a majority in parliament in order to carry out his full programme. (Many revolutionaries in the workplace have found that when they have urged immediate action on long-standing demands, now that Mitterrand was in power, they have been met with the argument not to rock the boat.)

So, what of the measures already taken?

Mitterrand has raised the legal minimum wage by 10% (to the princely sum of roughly £260 per month!). But half of that was due in any case because of automatic rises and indexation linked to the cost of living. As for the remaining 5%, the government intends to reduce the employers' contribution with the costs being borne by the state (ie eventually by the workers). Even then, the burden won't fall heavily on the bosses, who will pass it on in the form of higher prices (Mitterrand has made no attempt to freeze prices.)

As for the reduction of the working week to 35 hours – another longstanding demand of the left – Mitterrand and the socialist trade union (CFDT) have suddenly shown fantastic 'realism'. Instead of being imposed straightaway, the CFDT wants it negotiated piecemeal, sector by sector and over a period of time – in fact, only by 1985! Clearly, the CFDT would hate to embarrass the comrade president by pushing too far and too fast. Whereas before the election the CFDT was regularly pushing the demand for a 35 hour week as part of its anti-Giscard propaganda, it has now quietly dropped the question in many of its workplace union bulletins.

The other main trade union, the Communist-led CGT, can be expected to take a similar line now the Communists have their ministries.

'Mitterrand has been compared to Benn. The truth is his image is not even that left wing'

So when it comes to the two most basic demands on pay and hours, Mitterrand's government has already backpedalled. The bosses are not going to be forced to cough up too much when it comes to raising low salaries, and the 35-hour week is already receding into the distance as Mitterrand's government refuses to impose it and the socialist trade union refuses to fight for it.

As for other issues, the new government has suspended the expulsion of immigrants (Giscard, the previous president had in any case brought in a three month halt to the expulsion of immigrants under the age of 25 except for serious offences). Phone-tapping, one of the long running scandals of the last administration has also been suspended (except, significantly, 'where the national interest is affected').

These measures are, of course, to be welcomed. But what is not clear is whether the daily harassment of immigrants by the police will stop, or how the police will be prevented from undertaking unauthorised phone tapping and surveillance. The new minister of the interior, Defferre, has threatened severe legal penalties; however, a law designed to deal with just such matters has been on the statute book since 1970 – with no effect whatsover.

On the nuclear issue, Mitterrand has cancelled the building of a new nuclear power station at Plogoff in Brittany – a gesture that has pleased most of the left and the environmentalists – but won't stop projects already started (whatever that means) and has simply 'frozen' all other decisions for the moment. Mitterrand has also yielded to pressure from the army chiefs to go on testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific.

Mitterrand has been able to get away with all this because for the moment at least he can rely on the passive support of the vast majority of French workers. Revolutionary socialists report no heightening of class consciousness, no increase in the tempo of class struggle. If anything, the contrary. Other elections – elections in the workplace to elect trade union negotiating representatives – show a decline in CGT representation and an increase for the less militant CFDT.

It is true that you would expect the CFDT to benefit from the rising fortunes of Mitterrand (with the converse effect for the Communist dominated CGT). But not every CGT militant is a CPer, and by and large the CGT have been to the fore in disputes. But from the giant Renault car plant to the steel plants in eastern France the decline in CGT votes reflects an overall lack of struggle. For the time being, workers have more confidence in politicians than in their own forces, and the Socialist trade union is able to use this good will to back away from struggle both great and small.

Mitterrand has been compared to Benn. The truth is his image is not even that left-wing. In lots of ways he's an old-fashioned Keynesian wanting to use decentralisation of decision-making combined with greater state investment to stimulate demand in order to reduce unemployment and create growth.

Finally, however authoritarian and conservative Mitterrand's predecessor showed himself to be in the latter part of his presidency, Giscard was no Margaret Thatcher figure when elected. The beginning of his seven-year mandate saw the announcement of all sorts of liberal measures: reduction of the age of majority to 18, liberalisation of prison conditions, greater availability of contraception, abortion law reform.

But at a farewell dinner Giscard complained bitterly about the 'obstacles placed before our reforming projects by the political right and the hard element among the employers... These same reactionary forces prevented us from carrying through necessary social changes.'

If non-Socialist Giscard, enjoying much greater confidence from the French bourgeoisie than ever Mitterrand can, was beaten by the 'hard element', what hope has the new president following the same parliamentary path as his predecessor?

Gareth Jenkins

A new mood

One man crops up rather a lot in this issue of *Socialist Review*. His name, you've guessed it, is Tony Benn. Not only do we have a major feature on the politics of Bennism, but he's hovering not far from the centre of half a dozen other articles: from the report on the conference of Britain's biggest union to the more rarified atmosphere of a gathering of socialist academics, through to the book reviews and the letters pages. Glancing across the page, he's even made it into our international coverage.

The reason for all this coverage is quite simply that Benn's campaign for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party has come to symbolise the biggest shift in British working class politics since the miners' strike of 1972.

We are certainly not the only people on the left to think that. Nor are we alone in believing that this shift opens up immense opportunities.

Many socialists are now deciding they were wrong when they concluded in the past that the Labour Party could not be a vehicle for socialist advance. We think their about-turn is fundamentally misconceived. Nothing has altered our view that a revolutionary workers' party has to be built *outside* the Labour Party.

More immediately, the political exuberance in the labour movement is in marked contrast to what is happening in the real world of the factories and the streets. While conference delegates raise their hands for an Alternative Economic Strategy for some time in the future, the appalling toll of redundancies and factory closures continues in the present. While all the specualtion in the TGWU is on whether the union's leadership will get away with not voting for Benn, the fact that the union has lost a quarter of a million members in a year is virtually ignored. While socialists worry about the niceties of reselection conferences with short lists of one, unemployed white kids are being attracted to the British Movement and the National Front, producing a horrendous toll of racist murders and attacks.

Yet the the new interest in all forms of socialist politics could feed back into the real world so as to deal with some of these problems. If, for example, the Labour Coordinating Committee conference in mid-July involved serious discussion on why the government seems to be enjoying success in the face of the biggest industrial action ever in the civil service or of how to stop the racialist attacks, the whole movement would be much stronger. We fear, however, that left to itself, the new Labour left will ignore such problems.

The issues will only be raised—let alone *organised* around—if political organisation is built *outside* the Labour Party.

That does not mean ignoring what is happening in the Labour Party. It means revolutionary socialists seizing every opportunity to engage in joint activity with those attracted to the new Labour Left. But it also means maintaining the argument *against* the politics of Labourism and *for* the building of an independent, revolutionary socialist organisation.

socialist REVIEW

CONTENTS

Edited by Chris Harman
Assisted by Colin Sparks, Simon Turner, Pete Goodwin, Norah Carlin, Sue Cockerill, Stuart Axe, Jane Ure Smith, Dave Beecham, Gareth Jenkins, Jill Poole, Jon Bearman, Christine Kenny, Jim Scott, Andy Durgan Peter Court.

Films: Jane Ure Smith

Business Pete Goodwin, Jane Ure Smith

Correspondance and subscriptions to Socialist Review, PO Box 82, London E2. Please make cheques and postal order payable to SWD. Socialist Review is sent free to all prisoners on request.
ISSN 0141-2442
Printed by East End (Offset) Ltd, (TU All Depts) London E2

Spain is different

Doug Andrews writes from Madrid on sinister, horrific and bizarre developments since the abortive coup.

The old tourist slogan of Francoist Spain—'Spain is different'—has recently taken on new bizarre proportions. Following the 'tragi-comic' coup of February comes the now notorious assault on the Central Bank of Barcelona. On May 23rd an unknown number of armed men took over the bank and held over 200 people hostage all weekend until ejected by the Spanish SAS. GEO.

The exact purpose of this assault, let alone who did it, has since been clouded in confusion and contradiction. During the seige it was *officially* suspected that the assailants numbered over twenty, were well armed and included members of the Civil Guard, one of whom was identified as Captain Sanchez Valiente, wanted for his part in the abortive coup of February 23. A communique read from a phone box elsewhere in the city demanded the release of Colonel Tejero, who led the occupation of the Spanish parliament in February, and three others, plus two planes to take both the latter and the assailants to Argentina. Everything seemed clear—more Fascist thuggery.

However, late Sunday night (24 May) after the freeing of the hostages, it was announced that there were only 11 assailants, of whom one was killed, and what's more none were connected with either the Civil Guard or the fascists, but were a gang of 'petty thieves, pimps, sexual deviants and anarchists' (*sic*)! The following day the assailants, whose number had now mysteriously dropped to ten, were indeed 'in the pay' of unnamed ultra-rightists but definitely did not include any Civil Guards. However, the Spanish police have now gone one better after three weeks of 'investigations', the attackers had no political motives but had hoped to rob the bank and escape in the confusion through the sewers!

People first began to smell a rat (more like a heap of elephant shit) when police chief Fernandez Dopico and government representative Rovira Torazona entered the besieged bank to 'deliver an ultimatum' that the assailants immediately surrendered unconditionally. It was insisted that there were no negotiations. Why then did the 'ultimatum' take three quarters of an hour to deliver? Why couldn't it have been delivered by telephone or loud hailer? Why did assailants keep appearing on the bank's roof following the 'ultimatum', potentially exposing themselves to the many police marksmen?

The 'eleventh' man

Why was it officially announced that 'there were reasons to be optimistic' shortly after the 'ultimatum'? What was the meaning of another statement, a bit later, which referred to 'a group of some eight' who refused to surrender? ('Some eight' is more than a group if there were only ten attackers!) Why were the Civil Guard, and what's more their commander-in-chief General Aramburu Topete, involved in the siege when they have no responsibilities for urban security? Why did a Civil Guard armoured car approach the bank and suggest by megaphone that if the attackers surrendered immediately it would be treated as a 'mistake' (!)?

What's more who were the people seen fleeing across the bank's roof minutes before the GEOs intervention? It was widely accepted at the time that these were hostages, but since then no hostage can be found who escaped in this way. Who was the eleventh assailant who vanished overnight? This 'eleventh' man was identified by the police as 'a brother of one of the assailants'. However from photos of the attackers leaving the bank the 'eleventh' man has been identified by some people as a well known fascist from Madrid who disappeared some months ago.

All the hostages questioned insisted that the assailants numbered *at least* 14 or 15 and that there were definitely some 'military types' involved (eg military terminology was used throughout), especially the apparent leader 'No 1'. However the police identified 'No 1', the man shot dead in the seige, as an 'anarchist', Jose Juan Martinez,. In fact Martinez had infiltrated the CNT as a police informer and had been identified as such by the union some years ago. The hostages also insisted that the attackers were well armed in particular with CETME automatic rifles, common issue in the Civil Guard and easily identified by anyone who has done military service (practically all the male hostages). Yet after the seige the only arms produced were one Stein machine gun, a few pistols and some knives.

The press conference following the bank's liberation was given by Aramburu Topete, well known for his fascist views and who recently ordered all Civil Guard posts that Franco's portrait should remain on the walls (as if they needed telling!).

It was Aramburu who announced to the flabbergasted press that the assailants were 'anarchists, pimps etc.' The press conference then took on truly surrealistic proportions

Journalist: Didn't the assaultants have an external commando assisting them? For instance the communique was read from a telephone box.

General: No, there was no external help. After three hours a hostage was released in order to make the call.

Journalist: But after three hours the bank was completely surrounded, if anyone had left we would have seen them?

General: As I said, they were anarchists and degenerates.

The government seems quite prepared to accept the whole amazing story—that it was failed robbery! This is despite all the evidence to the contrary and the fact that these common criminals on the one hand had no explosives to blast themselves into the sewers (their supposed plan), while on the other hand they had obviously planned the assault in great detail—the Central Bank is a massive labyrinth of a building and would be difficult for 20 men to hold let alone ten. Also these 'common criminals' did not touch one peseta of the 60 million in the building and had the strange habit of yelling, and getting hostages to yell, 'Viva Espana!' every so often.

To get to the bottom of this affair one has to ask: Who does it help? Quite obviously the whole business has served the interests of the ultra right. The general state of tension since the coup attempt has undoubtedly intensified, and government credibility is now lower than ever.

The assault took place exactly three months after the coup attempt, with 'Armed Forces Week' and the national congress of the fascist party, Fuerza Nueva, both taking place in Barcelona that week. What's more, it followed the horrendous events of Almeria.

On May 10 it was reported that 'three ETA terrorists had been killed trying to escape' from the Civil Guard in Almeria, in South East Spain. However, it soon emerged that the three were not even Basques, let alone having the slightest connection with ETA. (One in fact was a CP member). Since then the Communist weekly *Mundo Obrero* (6.6.81) has published details of the testimonies of Civil Guards involved in the events. These statements reveal that the three men were brutally tortured on the orders of the regional commander, Carlos Castillo Quero, who was personally convinced of their guilt. Two died under 'interrogation' and the third was placed against a wall and shot dead. The commander then ordered that the bodies be put in a car and burnt in order to concoct the story that the car had exploded when fired on as the three tried to escape. The inquiry into the affair continues, but people cannot really expect justice to be done.

The fantastic events in the Central Bank and the Almeria murders illustrate vividly the nature of Spanish 'democracy'. Since the abortive coup of February, the Army and Civil Guard, riddled from head to foot with fascists, have clearly had their way. After the dictator's death the Fascist state was left intact and the Spanish people are still paying the price.

Unfortunately the reformist parties see little alternative to this but to placate the ultra-right and collaborate more closely with the conservative UCD government (see March and April SRs). Yet another sweeping piece of repressive legislation, concerning 'states of emergency', has recently been rushed through parliament with only the Basque Nationalists opposing it and the CP abstaining. On June 9th a new social contract, the 'National Employment Agreement' was signed by both the Socialist and Communist trade unions, the government and the employers. Among other things this agreement limits wage increases to below 9% while inflation is twice that, except in firms 'in crisis', where increases will be much lower.

Rather than organise mass opposition to the fascists and the government the CP is more concerned with continuing its witch-hunt against revolutionaries in the Workers' Commissions (CCOO). The recent Basque regional congress saw the CP successfully exclude in the most blatantly undemocratic manner, members of the revolutionary organisation Movimento Communista from the local executive, where they had previously held a third of the seats.

The CP's present politics are well summed up by the front cover of the latest *Mundo Obrero*, which shows the King and the General Staff watching a tank pass during the recent annual military parade, beneath which is the immortal slogan 'The unity of the people and the army is the basis of democracy'.

However despite the repression, particularly in the Basque Country and the general decline of the left, there are some hopeful signs—above all the growing left opposition in the CP, especially in Catalonia and Andalusia. For example the recent Catalan CCOO congress voted overwhelmingly to reject the new social contract. The present crisis has provided an impulse for more united action between the revolutionary left and other militants, in particular in the anti-NATO campaign which has shown the possibilities of mobilising substantial numbers of people on a militant basis.

Doing it the IMF way

Abbie Bakan of the Canadian International Socialists describes on Jamaica, eight months after the defeat of the Manley government in the elections.

Jamaica is quiet these days ... relatively. People remember the events of the last few years, of the general election last October, like it happened yesterday. They remember when all they could buy in the stores were sardines. They remember hearing gunshots every night outside their windows, and wondering if a friend or relative was being shot. They remember taking home the same paycheque every week, and buying less with it in the shops.

They are tired. And the hope that the recently-elected government led by prime minister Edward Seaga and his right-wing Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) can put things right is only surpassed by the fear that he won't be able to do it.

So what is 'relatively quiet' in Jamaica? Only two deaths at the hands of police, routinely armed with M-16s and sub-machine guns, are reported daily in the press. Only about two or three reports per week appear of politically-motivated gun attacks.

In Kingston, where almost half of Jamaica's two million residents live, many will still not walk in the streets after dark. Windows remain barred, and pick-pocketing and petty robbery are regular occurences. But compared to the unprecedented level of violence which surrounded last year's election, Jamaicans are feeling 'safe'.

Some will candidly tell you the thing they hated most about former prime minister Michael Manley was that he couldn't control the gun wars: 'The JLP turned on the violence, so we voted for Seaga so he could shut it off.'

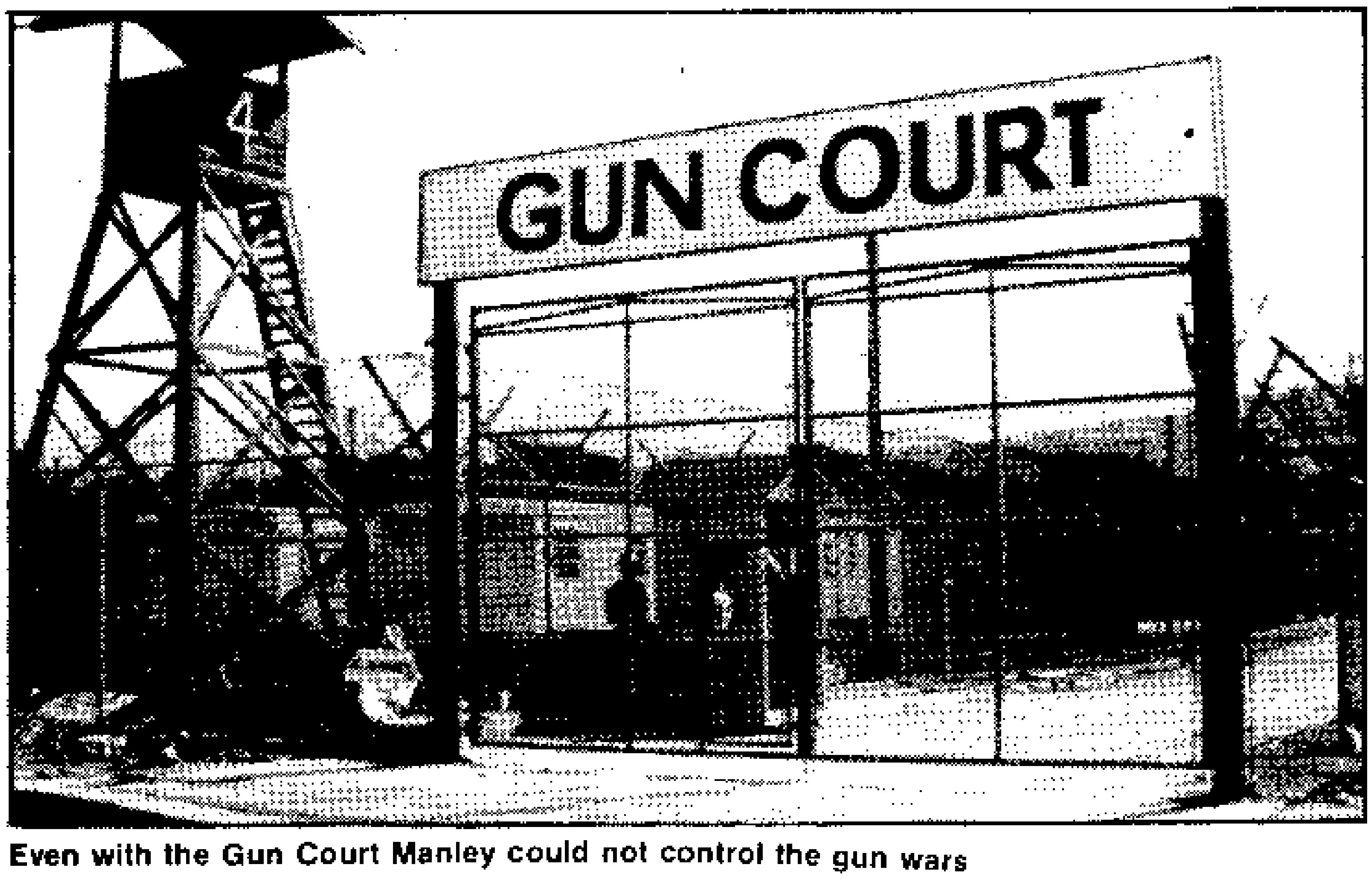
The labour movement is also currently considered fairly 'still'. In May, strikes were underway in the single Jamaican cigarette factory, in the state oil and soap company, and among the non-academic staff at the University of the West Indies. Nurses and junior doctors in the island's hospitals were on go-slow.

But with some 100,000 government workers represented by all the major unions in Jamaica threatening strike action against the new regime's wage offer, this feeling of relative quiet could soon change.

For both the unions and the government these negotiations are a test case. With inflation still running at some 29%, and price controls having been removed from a large number of basic consumer items, the public service workers are digging their heels in to stay in the same place. Seaga's budget, on the other hand, presents a choice of either a wage offer well below inflation or the elimination of 11,000 jobs.

Rents have soared, increasing by 100-200% in some areas. A leading JLP supporter estimates that unemployment has risen 5% since the autumn, to a current rate of 35%.

The main issue in the October election was Jamaica's crisis-ridden economy. The election was called after the prime minister, Manley, under pressure from the left wing of his social-democratic Peoples' National Party (PNP), refused to lay off 11,000 public service workers. The lay-offs were set as a condition for refinancing a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In March of 1980, negotiations with



Even with the Gun Court Manley could not control the gun wars the IMF broke off, and Manley announced that a new election would be called within the year.

But the so-called 'non-IMF path' never materialised. Without foreign exchange, shortages plagued every sector of the economy. The global recession, which is leaving no corner of the world untouched, could not be reformed away by Manley's bold anti-imperialist rhetoric.

Instead, Manley's 'democratic socialism' seemed to bring only skyrocketing inflation (reaching 50% in the late 1970s), massive lay-offs and further unemployment, as foreign and local investment decreased dramatically, and a climate of violence and fear developed on a scale, that Jamaicans had never before witnessed.

On October 30th, more than 80% of the Jamaican electorate turned out to the polls. The victory for the JLP was absolute — 51 out of 60 seats, and almost 60% of the popular vote.

Everyone left of centre seems to remember a feeling of extreme depression as they watched the result come in that night. Yet at the same time, there was a sigh of relief. All the signs indicated that if the JLP did not win at the polls, it would have organised to win by the gun. Heavy CIA involvement on the island indicated that the US would at least covertly back such an effort. Either a JLP victory or civil war were taken to be the prospects.

The PNP is now in dire crisis. With only nine seats in the Jamaican parliament, and the major newspaper unabashedly biased in support of the JLP, the PNP has to work hard to keep up a public profile. Manley's submission of resignation to the Party's National Executive has been overwhelmingly rejected. His response has been to place clear conditions on his continued leadership—no more association with 'Communists'; no more party 'indiscipline'; more central 'control' over party activists and public spokespeople.

In sum, the PNP is to take a sharp turn to the right, and assurances that those who refuse to follow that turn will be severely dealt with are to be given. The next PNP congress, to take place in September, is likely to see a sharp divide between left and right. So strong are the tensions in light of the PNP's defeat, that there are rumours of a PNP split at the congress. Such an event would see a more left-leaning, but still social democratic, party emerge on the Jamaican scene.

The JLP, and the Seaga government, are also hardly without difficulties. In the short term, money is coming into the country. The major international capitalist powers have certainly backed Seaga to the hilt—before, during and after the election. Ronald Reagan had the dubious honour of receiving Edward Seaga as the first head of state to visit the new president. A loan pledge of $7 million was announced soon after, followed by a Canadian pledge in the same month.

One indication of the extent of US interest is the setting up of a special US Business Committee on Jamaica. The Committee is chaired by none other than David Rockefeller, and includes leading executives from Exxon, Gulf, United Brands, Kaiser, Reynolds, Alcoa, and Western and Eastern Airlines.

Since the first meeting of the Committee, some $1,500 million on loans from the World Bank, a number of Western coutries, commercial banks, and the IMF have been secured. But while short-term funding rolls in, Seaga has still been forced to approve the printing of $227 million in unbacked currency to cover a gap in last year's budget. The 1980-81 budget deficit alone was $752 million.

A major factor in determining whether foreign investment returns to Jamaica in force is Seaga's ability to control the island's well-organised trade union movement. Though the current IMF agreement states no explicit wage guidelines—unlike the agreements negotiated during Manley's office—the terms of the loan depend upon the maintenance of rigid wage ceilings.

The problem for Seaga is complicated by the Jamaica Labour Party's historic links to the largest union on the island—the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) (hence the party name). The party has always held to a conservative political platform. But the founder of both the JLP and the BITU — Alexander Bustamante— depended upon trade union support to catapult him into power in the late 1930s. Since the labour rebellion that swept the island in 1938, no political party has been able to sustain a voting base without official trade union affiliation.

Today, the former prime minster and current deputy prime minister in the JLP government, Hugh Shearer, continues to hold the title of president in the BITU. The long-standing inner-party rivalry between Seaga and the more moderate Shearer is now being strained by the former's extreme anti-union stance.

Further, the second major union in Jamaica, the National Workers' Union, is affiliated to the PNP. The BITU leadership, fearing a loss of membership to the rival union, has been forced to take a hard line public stance against Seaga's anti-unionism.

In order for Seaga to secure the confidence of the multi-nationals, he will have to prove he can suppress labour militancy; yet open confrontation with labour will increase support within the JLP for the Shearer wing of the party, and weaken Seaga's base of support.

Seaga's right-wing political and economic strategy, following what the JLP has called the 'Puerto Rican model' is nothing new. It will be no more effective in challenging the ravages of a world crisis on the tiny island than was Manley's band-aid reformism. Further unemployment, double digit inflation, massive indebtedness and increased domestic repression will be the order of the day.

But Jamaica's working class remains angry and militant, and its trade unions are intact. Bob Marley's cries for justice for the poor have struck a receptive chord among people of all ages in Jamaica. But neither the current union leadership, nor the main left-wing party, the 500-member pro-Russian Workers' Party of Jamaica, will direct that militancy towards a decisive struggle for workers' power. Only an international working class movement can challenge the stranglehold of the Western monopolies over Jamaica and the other Caribbean islands. The need for a revolutionary socialist alternative in Jamaica today is greater than ever.

Currency chaos

As the crisis continues, so the anarchy of the system increases. Dollar rises, deutschmark in trouble, devaluation of the Italian lira, pound falls, speculation against the franc – the headlines alone bear witness to the chaos in the international exchange markets over the last few months. But what really is happening? Pete Green **explains.**

The immediate cause is clear enough. High interest rates in the United States, hovering around the 20% level, have proved an irresistible attraction for holders of spare cash throughout the world. 'Hot money' as it is known, can be held by anyone from large multinational corporations to oil sheikhs. To obtain the 20% interest available from US banks or the American government's 'treasury bills', all they have to do is to swop their holdings of pounds, marks or whatever, for dollars. What it adds up to is the rapid movement of huge sums of money from one country to another, wreaking havoc on the foreign exchanges as they go.

Only two years ago, all the financial commentators were frantic about the decline of the dollar. A year ago it was the rise of the pound which was causing a stir. Now they are all complaining about the dollar going up and an interest-rate war. That is not just a matter of academics and journalists suffering from a chronic inability to make up their minds. It expresses the deep-rooted contradictions and the intensification of competitive pressures in the world economy.

There are no exchange rates between England and Scotland, or London and Yorkshire. In a rational world there would be no exchange rates at all. There would be a single world money (with a limited and rapidly diminishing role), serving an organised system of global production. As it is, exchange rates express the division of the world into national chunks managed by states jealous of their prerogatives, especially their 'own' bits of paper called money. The instability of those rates expresses the contradiction between these national divisions and the international character of trade, finance, and, increasingly, production.

In the 19th century the pound, and after the second world war the dollar, played the role of world currencies, acceptable everywhere. As long as the pound or the dollar were strong that meant stability on the world financial markets. But by the late 1960s the relative decline of the American economy and the inflationary impact of the Vietnam war had undermined the strength of the dollar and its acceptability on world markets. After a succession of crises the fixed link between the dollar and gold which underpinned that acceptability was broken. From 1972 the dollar and most other currencies were allowed to 'float', to move up and down freely as the 'market' decided.

Since 1972 there have been extreme fluctuations of exchange rates, reflecting the unevenness of the crisis between different countries, and the growth in 'hot money' especially 'oil money' which can be shifted from one country to another. With profit rates in many industries low or uncertain, multinationals, banks and the OPEC countries are all unsure what to do with their money. Reuluctant to 'immobilise' it in 'real investment', in factories, machinery and labour, they shift it instead from one financial market to another in search of the best short-term profit going.

As governments seek to attract or hold onto these funds, interest-rates are forced up throughout the world. The movement of funds serves to transmit recession from one country to another. Events on the New York financial markets have repercussions throughout the world. They can force up interest-rates in Bonn and lead to German workers being unemployed. They can add to the debt-burden of countries like Turkey or Bolivia and provide the background for a right-wing coup. Those events are not the basic cause of the crisis. But they do add to it – and make it impossible for governments individually or collectively to take action to deal with it.

In Britain rhetoric about the 'pound' has long been used to justify all sorts of attacks on working-class living standards. Whether the pound is falling, as in most of the early seventies, or rising, as in the last years, workers are the ones who are expected to pay. But what does it all really amount to? Is the fall in the pound a bad thing – as Chancellor Healey said in 1976? Or is it a good thing – as Dennis Healey in Opposition is saying? Before looking at what's happening to the world economy, it's worth examining just what the changes in the exchange rate have meant for one economy – the British.

The Rise and Fall of the Pound

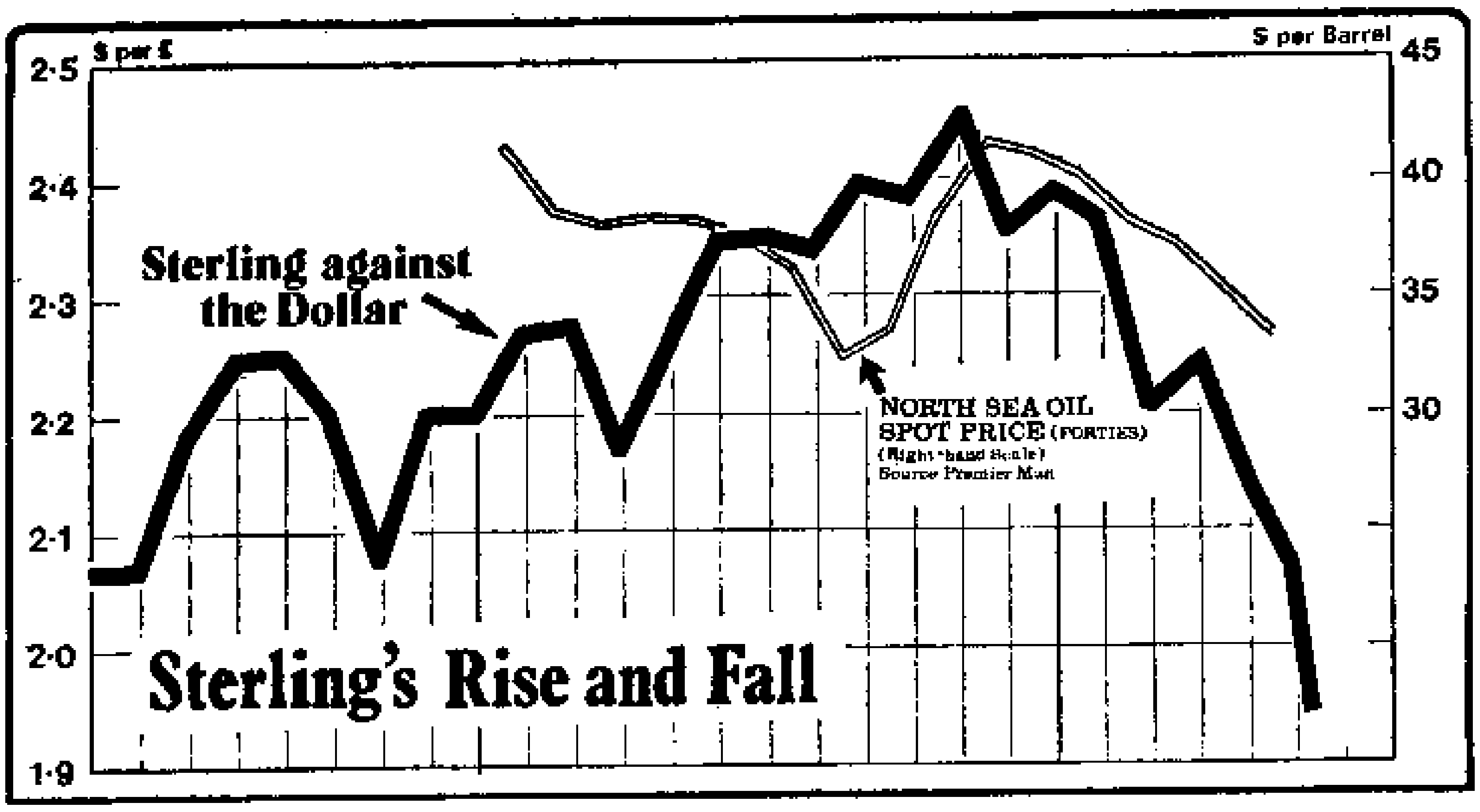
The pound's fall against the dollar was rather more rapid than its earlier rise. At the time of writing it had recovered slightly to around £1 to $2 – but this still amounted to a fall of around 20% on it s value at the beginning of 1981 (although it had fallen much less against the other European curencies which have also been in trouble.)

For over a year the CBI and the TUC complained that the value of the pound was too high. The rise made exports more expensive and imports cheaper. Combined with a high rate of inflation this meant an average 'loss of competitiveness' of around 50% in the three years from January 1978. The price of goods made in Britain rose on average by 50% compared to that of goods made elsewhere. Exporting firms were forced either to cut prices and squeeze their profits to face a loss of sales. Even now British-based capitals are still at a significant disadvantage compared with their European competitors.

In the *Sunday Times* of 14 June, the chairman of ICI claimed that ICI profits go up or down by £2½m with each change of only a pfennig in the pound's rate against the mark (ICI's major European competitors are are based in Germany). Last year when the pound rose from 3.9 to 4.9 against the mark, thus cost ICI £250m in profit. Similarly Michael Edwardes has said that the rise of the pound cost British Leyland £1.7 billion in 1978-80.

From one point of view therefore, the rise of the pound has been one of the main causes of the slump in Britain being so much worse than elsewhere (with industrial production falling by 16% last year). The fall in the pound should be providing welcome relief, yet the response has scarcely been enthusiastic. A falling pound also means problems.

When the pound falls the price of imports rises. For firms subject to intense foreign competition that is good news. For those relying on imported raw materials, machinery and components it is not. The one success in the Tories' economic record, a rather moderate reduction in the rate of inflation, is largely attributable to the strength of the pound. Now that is threatened. Not only will the price of imports rise. Domestic firms competing



with imported goods will also seize the opportunity to put their prices up.

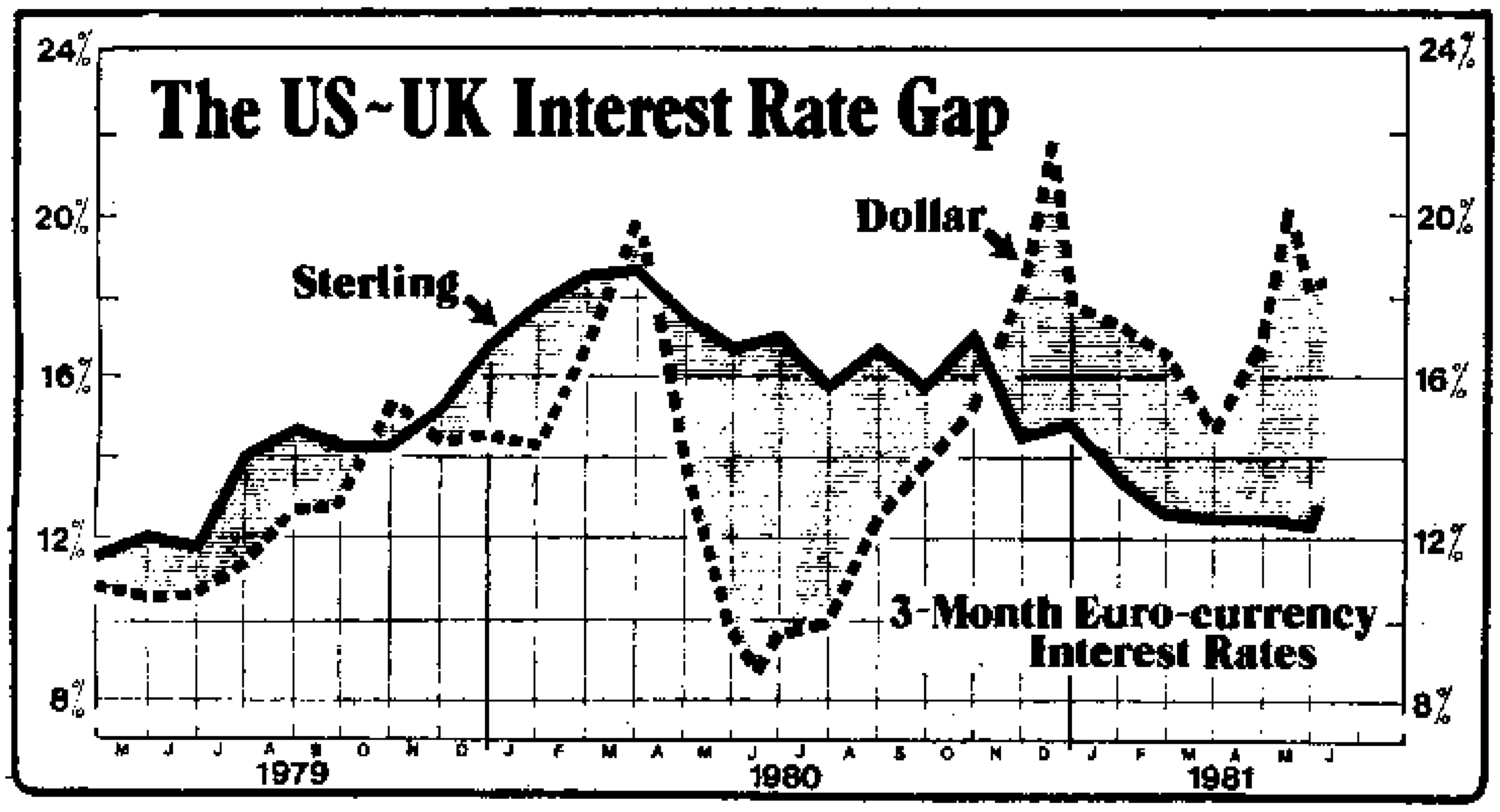
The experience of 'floating rates' since 1972 has consistently shown how inflationary a fall in the rate can be – especially if the country like Britain is one heavily dependent upon foreign trade. The rise in inflation prices British goods out of foreign markets, causing the exchange rate to fall, which in turn boosts inflation – and so on in a vicious circle. For much of the 70s that was the situation in Britain. Only North Sea oil and the forcing up of interest rates by the Tories changed the situation and caused the pound to rise. Now there are several reasons why the fall should continue.

The scale of the recession has meant a glut of oil. The price of North Sea oil has just had to be cut. That has added to the pressures reducing Britain's current account surplus (the trading surplus which comes from an excess of the amount of foreign exchange received for exports that paid out for imports). The surplus on trade has only been high recently because of oil and because imports have plummeted with the slump. By the end of the year the current account is expected to be in deficit once again.

On top of that huge amounts of money are being sent out of the country for overseas investment. In the first quarter of this year the outflow of capital amounted to £2.58 bn, a new record, and almost as much as the total trading surplus for the whole of 1980. Insurance companies, pension funds and the banks in particular have been shifting funds abroad as fast as possible, in the face of the collapse of profitability in much of British industry. Manufacturing investment in Britain continues to fall (by 8% in 1980 and by an expected 17% in 1981).

In effect, the foreign exchange saved or obtained by North Sea oil is being used to finance a flight overseas of British capital. Meanwhile the Cambridge Economic Policy Group is predicting 4,300,000 unemployed by 1985 and their 'pessimism' has been consistently right in the last two years.

It is impossible to predict what will happen on the foreign exchange markets (which is another reason why firms aren't too happy). The whole situation is far too volatile. But if the fall in the pound does get out of hand, as it did in 1976, the Tories will be forced to do something. Interest rates will rise again. That will put further strain on all those companies and individuals seeking to borrow money or heavily in debt. The effect will be to further postpone the much heralded recovery. In the rest of Europe the 'recession' is already proving much more durable than expected.



Reaganism and the World Economy

In contrast, in the United States the economy seems to have staged a rapid turnaround. Output grew at an annual rate of 6.5% in the first quarter of 1981. However, it remains below the peak level of early 1979. Factories are being pushed up to working at full capacity again. But the recovery will not be sustained unless investment rises and capacity is increased. That is highly unlikely (General Motors recently announced the postponement of two new assembly plants part of its $40bn investment programme). Indeed the Reagan government seems to be doing everything possible to prevent it.

The Reagan programme is strikingly reminiscent of that of the Tories in 1979. It is a blatantly vicious example of class rule. Tax cuts for business and the rich are to be financed by cuts of nearly $50 bn in public expenditure by 1982. With defence spending planned to rise by $30 bn (a real increase of 14.6% a 'peacetime' record) what that means for welfare, the unemployed and public sector jobs is truly horrific.

Apart from what are quaintly termed its 'redistributive' effects the programme will be deflationary. The level of spending and thus demand in the economy will fall. The notion that tax cuts will stimulate the economy through incentives is ludicrous. If the British experience proves anything it is that any amount of tax cuts will not persuade capitalists to invest when profits are low and demand is stagnant.

Yet Reagan is coming under attack, from Wall Street and in Congress – not for boosting arms spending, not for cutting welfare, but because the programme will still mean a budget deficit which they fear will be inflationary.

Nothing illustrates better the collapse of the old Keynesian orthodoxy, that governments should run deficit in times of slump to stimulate the economy. Instead the American monetarists are advocating policies of balanced budgets and a monetary squeeze that can only make things worse. The rise in interest rates has been the government's reponse to the pressures from Wall Street, designed to hold down a rate of inflation still running at around 10%. It is that same rise which will inhibit any revival in investment and is adding to the chaos in the world economy.

It seems like madness, and of course it is. Yet there is a warped logic to it. The long term problems of declining American productivity and competitiveness against its main rivals in Germany and Japan have not disappeared. Any recovery will, as in 1977-78, lead to a flood of imports and rising inflation. The American working class has been very much on the defensive with real wages falling by 10% or more in the last two years. Yet as the recent coal strike indicates workers could well start hitting back given only a slight recovery. As in Britain, Reagan's monetarism is designed to hit American workers, clear out the inefficient bits of the economy, and let the market force through a restructing of the economy. As in Britain the consequences will be severe.

What it all means for the rest of the world was summed up recently in the *Financial Times:*

'Hopes that a soundly-based world economic recovery would begin gently this year and accelerate through 1982 have been abandoned or at best postponed, mainly because of the gyrations of US Interest rates and the strength of the dollar.' (June 8).

Throughout Europe governments have been pushing up their interest-rates to stem the devaluation of their currencies against the dollar. That has added to the pressures forcing down their already weak economics. All the other major European countries are now expected to show a fall in the GNP this year.

For the 'middle-income' countries such as Brazil, South Korea, Turkey and Poland which are heavily in debt to the world's banks, the consequences are if anything worse. One estimate is that each percentage point on Eurodollar interest rates adds $1.3 billion to their interest payments. They will have to cut their imports and their level of borrowing, again putting the squeeze on their economies.

The American government is proving oblivious to the complaints from its supposed allies. Indeed so sharp were the disagreements at the latest OECD summit of economic ministers that they couldn't even produce a joint communique full of the usual platitudes. That says a great deal about the chaos in the world economy, and the destructive competition between the ruling classes of the world it is generating.

The horrible history of the House of Windsor

An undistinguished military man in his early thirties is to be married in front of vast crowds and the world's press. How does this come about? What is there about the man which makes his person and doings so fascinating to millions of people? It can hardly be his personal qualities. Despite acres of newsprint, there seems to be nothing very special about him which would distinguish him from thousands of other upper-class twits who merit much more modest treatment. The only possible explanation is the family he was born into. But what's so special about the Windsor family? Colin Sparks **investigates.**

All families have long histories and they are usually littered with rather sordid events about which it would be better to say nothing. It is in the nature of the institution that it makes people behave in very strange ways. But since this particular family is held up as a model to us all, and rests its wealth and power purely and simply on its history, it is well worth looking hard at that history.

If Charles is going to be King because, and only because, of his descent, it must be admitted that his family's record is so spectacularly sordid, and so riddled with malice and accident, that he would do better to change his name and try to lead a normal life.

Without delving too far into the murky and bloody history of the English Crown, with its murders, imprisonments, usurpations, massacres and general bloodiness, we can conveniently begin with one James II. His subjects suspected him, quite rightly, of secretly preparing tyranny and of being a crypto-Catholic (about the worst thing you could be at the time). He was consequently deposed in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. This was a bloodless coup, largely because the commander of the royal forces, a certain John Churchill, later Duke of Marlborough and ancestor of the current war-monger Winston Churchill, was bribed to change sides just before the decisive battle. This noble act founded the young officer's future fortune but left the old king with no army and no choice: he had to run away.

He was replaced by his daughter Mary. Her claim to fame was that she was a Protestant and was married to the equally Protestant William of Orange – King Billy himself. So the origins of the modern monarchy are based upon a military coup and surrounded by bribery, treachery and foreign mercenaries.

After a few years, the direct line of descent ran out. The descendants of James II were disqualified for their obstinate persistence in Catholicism. So Parliament had to look around for someone else. There were two qualifications: some sort of distant claim and Protestantism – the second of which was much more important. They lighted on an obscure German prince, the Elector of Hanover, and duly shipped him over to be George I. There was not much wrong with him as a King, apart from the fact that he could not speak English.

Despite having locked his wife up in a castle for 32 years, George I somehow managed to produce offspring, and he was duly succeeded by his son Geroge II, who managed to learn English. His main claim to fame was that, despite having fought in many battles, he eventually died by falling off a lavatory seat in Kensington Palace, striking his head against a chest and expiring from the wound thus gloriously received. His son, Frederick, was already dead, having been hit by a tennis ball nine years earlier, so he was succeeded by his 22 year old grandson, George III.

If Georges Mark I and Mark II had been harmless if rather expensive, George III was not at all harmless. He was simply the most prominent of a pretty bad lot.

His sister, Caroline Matilda, for example, was married off at the age of 15 to the King of Denmark, whose major activity was, as the chronicles quaintly put it, pursuing 'low amours'. To recompense herself she took as a lover the Prime Minister, Struensee. This being discovered, he was hanged for his temerity and she was locked up in a castle for the rest of her life. George's youngest brother, the Duke of Cumberland, seduced Lady Grosvenor, was sued by her husband for 'criminal conversation' (ie adultery) and had his love letters read out in open court. Another brother lived with a woman who had the triple handicap of being a widow, illegitimate, and the daughter of a tradeswoman.

George III, who was a bit of a snob and a lot of a puritan, decided that these goings on were getting the family a bad name, and he determined to clean things up a bit. One of his main instruments was the Royal Marriages Act, which he forced through parliament in 1772. This piece of despotism, which is still in force, states that any marriage of a descendant of George II is null and void if contracted without royal consent. This caused an awful lot of trouble because, while George III had a lot of children, they were, in the main, a very much worse lot even than his brothers and sisters.

All of his morality had an unfortunate effect on poor George, and he became a little crazy. On one occasion, driving through the Royal Park at Windsor, he stopped his coach, got out and tried to shake hands with an oak, being under the impression that it was Frederick the Great, King of Prussia. This state of mind came and went with George until, opening the 1811 session of Parliament, he began his address: 'My Lords and Peacocks . . . '. This was going too far: he was declared unfit to rule, locked away in Windsor Castle, and his eldest son was made Prince Regent.

Now, if George III was mad, his son was positively bad. He had, for example, committed the greatest crime that any future King of England is capable of: he had married a Catholic. Besides this, his extravagance, his reaction, his general uselessness, were nothing. His marriage, to a Mrs Fitzherbert, in 1785, he kept a secret, but it presented him with problems. It made it difficult to marry legally and beget an heir, and without that assurance of future monarchy, Parliament would not agree to pay off his enormous debts. Fortunately, Mrs Fitzherbert was a reasonable woman, and for a bribe of £3,000 a year, agreed to keep quiet about the whole thing.

This noble gesture freed the Prince of Wales to marry his cousin, Caroline of Brunswick, who had been located on the Prince's instructions that, 'One damned German frau is as good as another.' The couple met for the first time three days before the wedding, and hated each other on sight. The Prince was drunk during the wedding, and had to be supported by the Duke of Bedford. The bride nearly fell down under the weight of her wedding dress. Despite these ill omens, the marriage produced a daughter, the succession was secured, and Princess Caroline was given her marching orders in the shape of a formal letter of separation. The Prince of Wales resumed his life with Mrs Fitzherbert.

So far, things have been simple if unpleasant, but at this point it starts to get complicated. In 1817, the successor, Princess Charlotte, died giving birth to a still-born child, and the whole business was back in the melting pot.

The Prince Regent was in a mess. He was married to Mrs Fitzherbert, but she was a Roman Catholic, and if this was discovered he would forfeit his title and be convicted of bigamy to boot. He could shelter behind the Royal Marriage Act but his second regal wife was completely estranged from him. One recourse was to divorce Caroline and find a third wife. This could only be done on grounds of adultery, which was quite drastic, since the adultery of the wife of the heir to the throne is High Treason, and if convicted, Princess Caroline would have to be beheaded.

(Incidentally, this piece of barbarism is still law, so Lady Di had better keep her vows if she wants to keep her head.)

There *were* plenty of children floating around from his various brothers, but they were all illegitimate – due once again to the aforesaid Royal Marriages Act – and none of them would do. The Prince started proceedings to divorce his wife, which turned up a good deal of extremely unsavoury evidence as to her activities with her brother Bergami, but she died before she could be tried. The Royal Brothers also took matters in hand. They left their long-standing mistresses in the lurch and hurried off to find eligible princesses.

Like the reality they conceal, the House of Windsor are a festering sore, and the great lie that they are fitted to reign over us is the apex of a system of lies.

The situation was pretty desperate. The unemployed regularly took pot shots at the Prince Regent with live ammunition, and if one of them were to aim straight, the first 17 candidates for the throne had no children who could legally inherit. And the first 14 candidates were all themselves over 40. Unless one of them could get legally married and produce a legal heir, then it was a fair bet that the crown would pass from ageing hand to ageing hand quicker than the ball at Cardiff Arms Park. This, it was felt, would be bad publicity for an already detested monarchy and might give occasion for seditious activity tending in a distinctly Jacobin direction.

There was an additional incentive: legal marriage and legal heirs were the only things that would persuade Parliament to raise the salaries of these extravagant drones and pay off their vast debts.

Fortunately for all concerned, the numerous royal houses of Germany had numerous offspring whose parents were quite happy to overlook the moral and personal shortcomings of future spouses who might be expected to sit on the throne of England. Consequently a ready supply of royal brides and bridegrooms were on hand. Thus a Princess Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen had no qualms in marrying the foul-mouthed and disgustingly reactionary Duke of Clarence, despite the fact that he had only just left the actress Mrs Jordan with whom he had lived happily for 20 years. And at the same ceremony, a Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg took on the relatively progressive Duke of Kent, who had just left Madame de St Laurent, with whom he had lived for 27 years.

There were a flurry of other Royal Weddings, but the succession was soon secured: the Duke of Kent and Princess Victoria produced a daughter named Victoria. Thus, when George III described by Shelley as 'An old, mad, blind, despised and dying king' finally snuffed it in 1820, the Prince Regent duly became George IV. He was succeeded by his brother the Duke of Clarence as William IV, and he by Victoria.

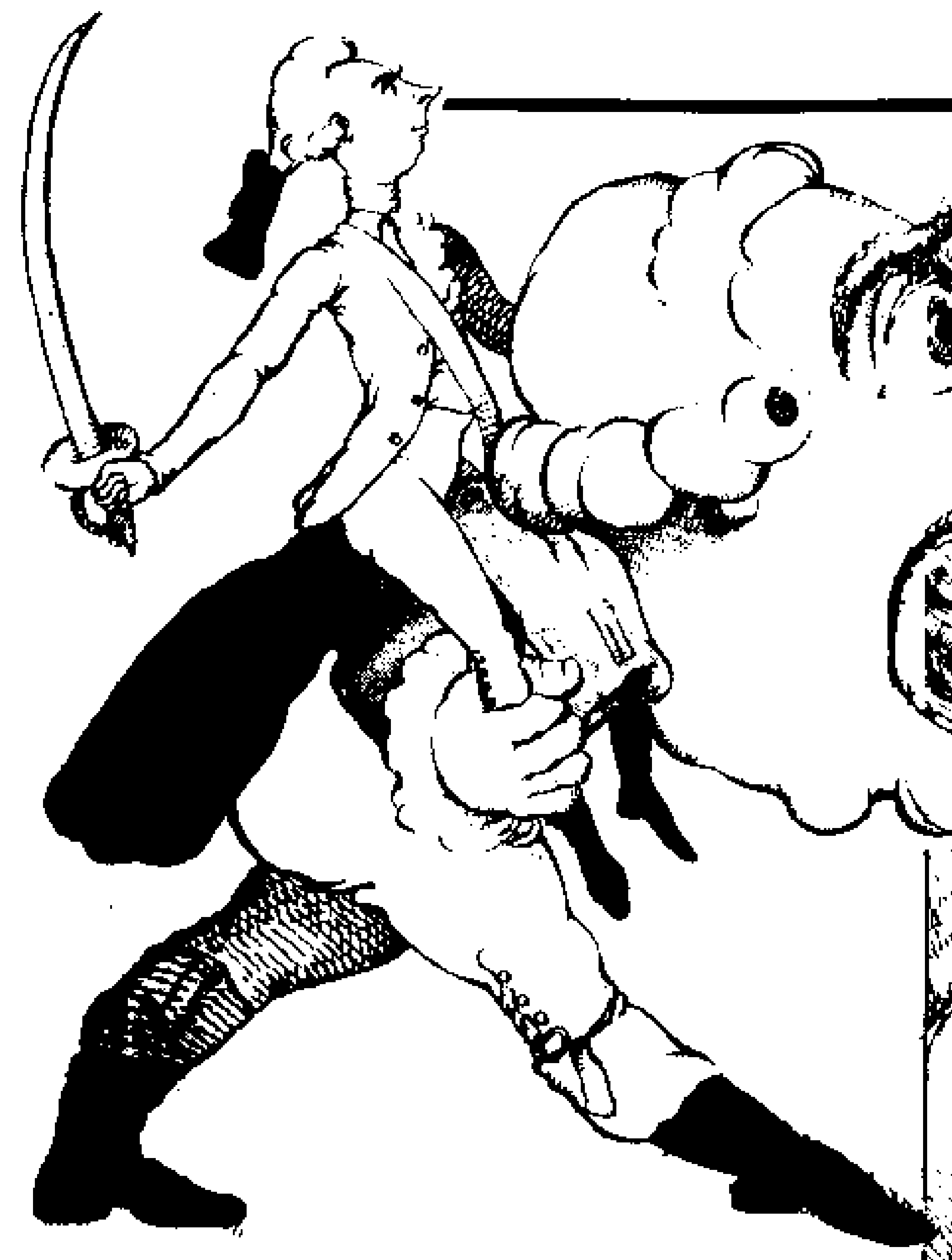
With her, things settled down a bit. She reigned for an awfully long time and was pretty respectable. Around her, the myth of the modern monarchy was built. Some idea of the breadth of her comprehension can be judged from the fact that female homosexuality has never been illegal in Britain, since she refused to believe that women did that sort of thing and consequently it was exempted from legislation.

She married yet another royal German stud, Prince Albert, and produced an enormous brood. Her successor, Edward VII, was rather less respectable, gambling prodigiously and allegedly cheating at cards, but his personal scandals were confined to illicit liaisons with actresses and married women rather than horrendous crimes like secret marriages to Catholics. His successor, George V, was again very respectable. On being told that a famous man was a homosexual, he replied, 'But I thought that chaps like that shot themselves.'

So far, the vagaries of the succession had depended on the bizarre accidents of dynastic matrimony, and with George V's marriage to Princess Mary of Teck, great-grandaughter of George III, it looked as though things were nicely sewn up among the petty German princes. Almost without exception, these people had been political reactionaries of the deepest hue, but they had never been too far out of step with the ruling classes. At this point there comes about a filthy coincidence of reactionary politics and the absurd regulations of royal marriage which once again shifted the line of succession drastically.

The successor to George V was Edward VIII. He wanted to marry a Mrs Simpson, who was a commoner, an American, and a divorcee. About the only thing going for her was that she was not a Catholic. In addition, young Edward was an

Had enough of the swamp of sickening royalty that's piling up around us at the moment? Well we've got a special four colour souvenir yawn to bring a grin to your face and wipe it off the royalists'. Brought to you by the rADical wallpaper/Socialist Worker partnership to bring laughter to the fight, put the k back into kulture and a bit of colour to the left. Send £1 for one (incl post). Bulk orders and reduced rates available. Contact SW Circulation (Poster) PO Box 82, London E2. All proceeds to help improve the paper.



George III as seen by his contemporaries: (above) swallowing plunder supplied by Warren Hastings, (right) ridden into battle against reform by his prime minster Pitt.

enthusiastic admirer of Adolf Hitler. The British ruling class did not much mind fascism as long as it kept the workers in check, but some of them saw a war coming with Germany over the spoils of the world, and thought that they needed to watch their backs. Consequently, Edward was forced to abdicate.

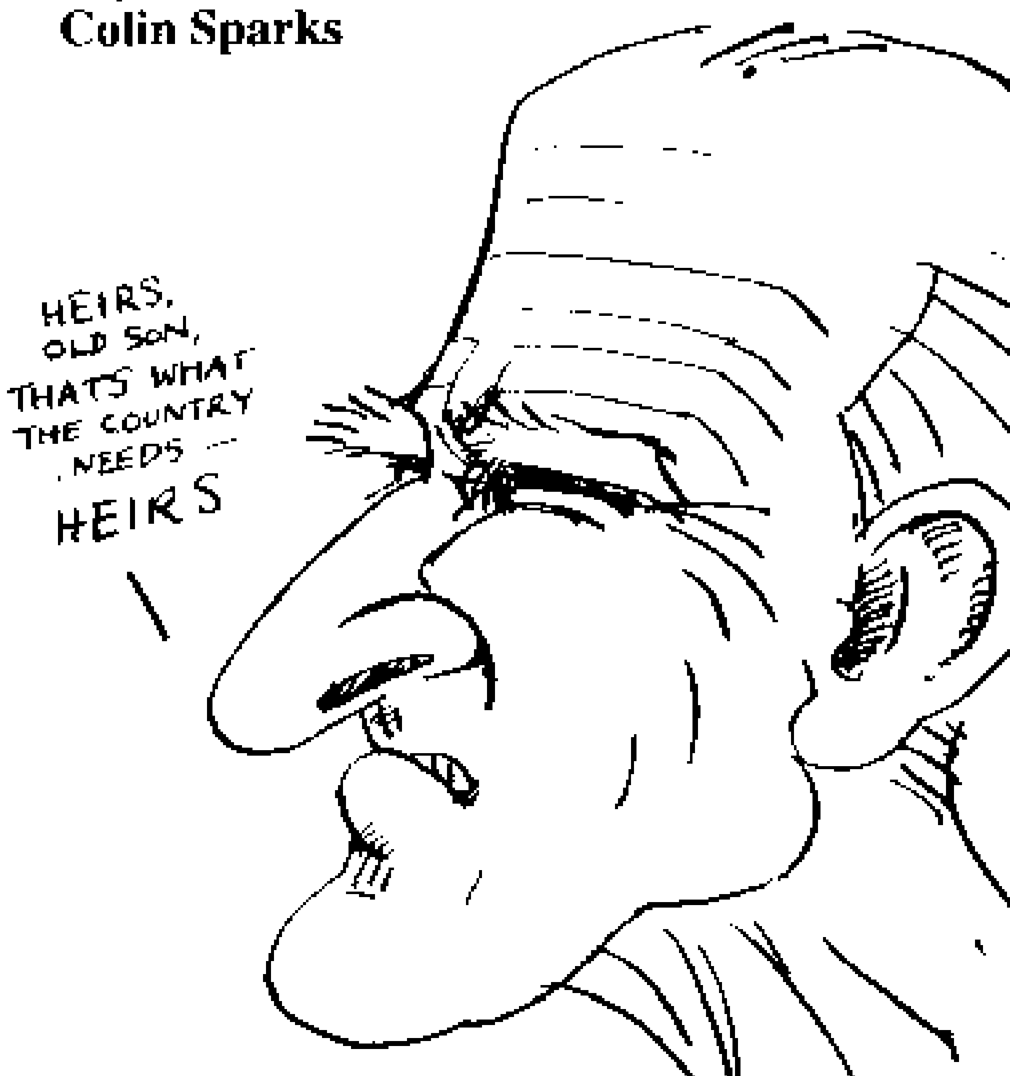
He immediately shuttled off to the Bertschesgarden to have an audience with Hitler, who went on record as considering him 'an ideal fascist monarch'. He continued his contacts with the Nazis during the war. In 1940 the Spanish foreign minister, one of the intermediaries, reported: 'The Duke is a firm supporter of a peaceful arrangement with Germany. The Duke definitely believes that continued severe bombing would make England ready for peace.' A later dispatch said: 'The Duke was considering making a public statement... disavowing present English policy and breaking with his brother (ie the King).' Even when shipped off to the West Indies, he continued in contact with Nazi agents, and after the war settled down next door to Oswald Mosley outside Paris.

His brother and successor, George VI, broke with tradition by marrying a commoner, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the current Queen Mother and an enthusiastic supporter of Ian Smith. Their eldest daughter is now Queen, married to a Greek of German royal origin, and mother of the splendidly undistinguished Charles. It is on that illustrious history that his claim to our attention and respect rests.

Nothing sums up the tacky nature of the British royal house so much as its name. We have traced a welter of Guelphs, Saxe-Coburgs, Saxe-Meiningens, and god knows what else, none of which seem to bear much relation to homely old Windsor. The fact is that it was changed to Windsor for 'patriotic' reasons during the wave of anti-German feeling at the start of the First World War. They are a family whose record proves time and time again that they will do literally anything to hang on to their wealth and power.

None of this would count for much, or even be worth the telling, if it were not for the ideological importance of the House of Windsor. They are projected as a central image of our society. They buttress the idea of the family. They prove that some are born to rule and others to be ruled. They embody the notion that merit is of no importance and inheritance is everything. They are the focus of every attempt to paper over the stinking decaying reality of British society with pretty pictures of an ideal dream of the past. Like the reality they conceal, they are a festering sore, and the great lie that they are fitted by breeding to reign over us is the apex of a system of lies which drowns the truth every day.

Colin Sparks



The English Republicans

Scottish, Welsh and, especially, Irish republicans are ten a penny. The English, on the other hand, are allegedly inflicted with some genetic mental defect that makes them cower before crowns and thrones and leap to attention and bare their heads at the sound of the opening bars of the National Anthem.

There is, unfortunately, a lot of truth in this: royalism has a deep hold on English thinking and penetrates well into the labour movement. From Ramsay MacDonald to Harold Wilson, Labour prime ministers have displayed a quite sickening devotion to whichever crowned clown happens to be sitting at the top of the mall. That is not all of the story, though. There is a long and stubborn republican tradition in England. Colin Sparks **looks at it.**

There have been at least two periods in which republicanism has commanded mass support. On both of these occasions, the leading republican thinkers were the ideological representatives of the bourgeoisie, but in both cases the bourgeoisie itself, once it saw the consequencies of consistent republicanism, backed down and made its peace with royalty. It was left to the plebian, and later proletarian, inheritors to keep up the struggle.

The first mass flourishing of English republicanism was during the English Revolution of 1641-60. For a long time, the leaders of the Parliamentary forces comforted themselves with the notion that they were actually fighting for the King, and only against his advisers who had misled him. A consequence of this was that they did very badly, suffering defeats and missing opportunities for victories. But the dynamic of the war was already forcing new men to the fore, who had far fewer illusions in the King and were determined to beat him.

The best known of these was Oliver Cromwell. He told his troops:

'I will not deceive you nor make you believe, as my commission has it, that you are going to fight for the king and parliament: if the king were before me I would shoot him as another; if your conscience will not allow you to do as much, go and serve elsewhere.'

Once the king had been beaten, there was the problem of what to do with him. The compromisers still wanted to do deals with him, but Cromwell and his independent party controlled the armed forces and suitably intimidated the opposition, telling the special court that: 'We will cut off his head with the crown upon it.'

Charles Stuart was duly judged as a 'tyrant, traitor, murderer and enemy to the country'. Cromwell himself wrote out the death warrant, and on 30th January 1648 the King was beheaded in Whitehall.

The regicides had their theoreticians. The best known was the foreign minister and poet, John Milton. Less than two weeks after the execution he published a book justifying it called: *The Tenure of Kings and magistrates; proving that it is lawful, and hath been held so through all ages, for any, who have the power, to call to account a tyrant, or wicked king, and after due conviction, to depose, and put him to death.*

Milton broadened his ideas to a general statement of republican principles, which he publised as *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth, and the Excellence thereof compar'd with the inconvenience and dangers of readmitting kingship in this nation*, just before the Restoration of 1660. In this, he argued:

'People must needs be mad or strangely infatuated that build the chief hope of their common happiness of safety on a single person... The happiness of a nation must needs be firmest and certainest in a full and free Councel of their own electing, where no single person, but reason only sways.'

By then, there were few to listen to Milton. Cromwell's own generals negotiated and arranged the restoration of monarchy. Among their reasons was the dangerous implication of the arguments that Milton was using. If the revolution had been led by landlords, merchants, even great nobles, much of the hardest fighting had been done by working men from the towns and fields and, in the course of the war, they developed their own, radical ideas.

The Leveller, Overton, wrote:

'It is naturally inbred in the major part of the nobility and gentry to oppress the persons of such sort that are not as rich and honourable as themselves, to judge the poor but fools and them wise ... It is they that oppress you, insomuch that your slavery is their liberty, your poverty is their prosperity.'

Another group of Levellers went even further:

We were before ruled by Kings, Lords and Commons, now by a General, a Court Martial and a House of Commons; we pray you, what is the difference? ... We have not the change of kingdom to a commonwealth; we are only under the old cheat, the transmutation of names but with the addition of new tyrannies to the old... and the last state of this commonwealth is worse than the first.'

To the left of the Levellers stood the Diggers, who had a clear idea as to the origin of all this misery and a theory and a programme for righting it.

Diggers and Levellers alike were crushed by the generals, shot at Burford Church for refusing to serve in Ireland or driven from St George's Hill by soldiers. But the idea was there still, rooted in the brain of the common people and rooted in the brain of the rich. It was this that the elegant arguments of Mr Milton led to. Better by far to forget the ideals of republicanism, compromise with a rotten king and a rotten court, lest in the struggle against them there was a loss of *all* power and privileges.

The next great outburst if popular republicanism was at the end of the eighteenth and the start of the nineteenth century. The monarchy was widely hated on all sides, and new sections of the rich were emerging, an industrial bourgeoisie who wanted their place in the system which the existing set-up denied them. The upsurge was crystallised and given form by the journalist Thomas Paine.

In 1776, Paine published a pamphlet *Common Sense*, which was an immediate best seller and made him a famous man. The pamphlet is a justification of the American Revolution, but in his argument Paine raised more general questions.

Paine asked what was the origin of kingship:

'... It is more than probable, that could we take off the dark covering of antiquity, and trace them to their first rise, that we should find the first of them nothing better than the principal ruffian of some restless gang, whose savage manners or pre-eminence in subtilty obtained him the title of chief among plunderers.'

And if kings in general owed their origins to a robber band, the King of England in particular held his title purely by that right:

'England, since the conquest hath known some few good monarchs, but groaned beneath a much larger number of bad ones, yet no man in his senses can say that their claim under William the Conqueror is a very honourable one. A French bastard landing with an armed banditti, and establishing himself king of England against the consent of the natives, is in plain terms a very paltry rascally original. It certainly hath no divinity in it. That William the Conqueror was an usurper is a fact not to be contradicted. The plain truth is, that the antiquity of the English monarchy will not bear looking in to.'

The American Revolution echoed across the Atlantic. When the British general Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, he ordered his band to play a tune called 'The World Turned Upside Down'. Before long that choice proved very apposite. In 1789 the people in Paris stormed the Bastille and the French Revolution had begun.

Having seen the birth of two free nations, Paine wished to see the birth of a third – that of Britain.

He wrote *The Rights of Man*, which became an instant best seller. In this book Paine repeated and developed his ideas about the origins of kingship, and was particularly savage about hereditary monarchy:

'Hereditary succession is a burlesque upon monarchy. It puts it in the most ridiculous light, by presenting it as an office which any child or idiot may fill. It requires some talents to be a common mechanic; but, to be a king, requires only the animal figure of man – a sort of breathing automaton.'

For Paine, the spread of republican principles was the guarantee of a new and better world:

'Never did so great an opportunity offer

1819 - a month after the Peterloo massacre - George Cruikshank pictures the Prince Regent and his ministers fleeing from a walking guillotine wearing the republican cap.

itself to England, and to all Europe, as is produced by the two revolutions of America and France... When another national shall join France, desotism and bad government will scarcely dare to appear. To use a trite expression, the iron is becoming hot all over Europe. The insulted German and the enslaved Spaniard, the Russ and the Pole, are beginning to think. The present age will hereafter merit to be called the age of reason, and the present generation will appear to the future as the Adam of a new world.'

The movement which Paine had done so much to inspire met savage repression and was broken. But the ideas of republicanism continued to have widespread circulation. The poet Keats, for example wrote in 1815 a poem *On 29 May: the Anniversary of the Restoration of Charles II*:

Infatuate Britons, will you still proclaim
His memory, your direst, foulest shame?
Nor patriots revere?
Ah! while I hear each traitorous lying bell,
"Tis gallant Sidney's , Russell's, Vane's sad knell,
That pains my wounded ear.

(Sidney, Russell and Vane were condemned to death by Charles II for having voted for his father's execution.)

But, though many capitalists and intellectuals were distanced from the idea of monarchy, active republicanism was more and more a prerogative of the newly emerging working class movement. Paine himself had always been a defender of private property, believing that this was the way to establish freedom, equality and plenty.

But the arguments that he used against the idea of monarchy and hereditary government were ones which had dangerous consequences. Consider his crushing demolition of Burke's argument for hereditary legislators:

'The idea of hereditary legislation is as inconsistent as that of hereditary judges, or hereditary juries; and as absurd as an hereditary mathematician, or an hereditary wise man; and as ridiculous as an hereditary poet-laureate.'

That is a fine and irrefutable argument, but it is open for some wage slave to take it a lot further. What answer comes if we ask what basis there is for any sort of hereditary social power – for example the private ownership of the means of production? By Paine's own logic, the answer is a socialist one.

It is thus that the republican tradition has, since then, been almost exclusively a proletarian one. There have been bourgeois republicans since, and probably many of the capitalists even today consider the monarchy a quaint and outdated institution. Even an editor of *The Economist*, Bagehot, considered it as 'decorative' rather than 'efficient'. But it was the illegal and working class newspaper *The Republican* which denounced the Peterloo massacre in 1819, and it was in Julian Hanney's *The Red Republican* of 9 November 1850 that a lead article *Manifesto of the German Communist Party*, by a certain K. Marx and F. Engels, appeared.

The tradition continued with William Morris. The name of his paper *Commonweal* harks back to Milton, and it was there that the denunciation of the 1887 Jubilee appeared:

'Socialists feel of course that the mere abolition of the monarchy would help them little if it only gave place to a middle-class republic... Nevertheless, now the monstrous stupidity is on us – one's indignation swells pretty much to the bursting point. We must not, after all forget what the hideous, revolting, and vulgar tomfoolery in question really means nowadays...'

The modern revolutionary movement is proud to claim to stand in this republican tradition. Of course, the real power of the English crown is feeble today. Charles III will be no despot like Charles I. He will do exactly what his capitalist masters tell him to do. He will be, in substance, little more than an enormously expensive parasite upon the backs of the working people. But the monarchy is more than substantial importance; it also carries an enormous symbolic weight. It is one of the key pins of the ruling ideology. The struggle against the monarchy is an important part of the ideological struggle for socialism.

It is a struggle which only socialists can now wage. In previous epochs, like the ones we have glanced at, the monarchy represented the interests of classes, or parts of classes, which were at odds with important sections of property owners. Some of them were prepared to fight the king in their own interests, and others were happy to denounce him. That is not true today. The English throne is linked by chains of gold to the capitalist order. The only class which has an interest in the overthrow of the monarchy is the class which has an interest in the overthrow of capitalism: the working class.

The last words belong to that great republican Thomas Paine. When he wrote them, they were not yet exactly true and he certainly could not forsee what their future meaning would be. But today they are precisely right:

'Monarchy would not have continued so many ages in the world, had it not been for the abuses it protects. It is the master-fraud, which shelters all others.'

The gay movement today

John Lindsey looks at how a movement that has given so many people hope over the last decade is coping with political and economic crisis.

Soon after the attempted coup in Spain, the police raided a gay bar yet again and arrested 40 people—the fifth raid in as many months. From his comfortable cell Colonel Tejero wrote an article for an influential Catholic paper in which he called for the elimination of all those who campaign for the 'third sex'.

The response of the gay movement, capable at one stage in Barcelona of calling a demonstration of 8000, was paralysis. 'But we are all so tired', said one activist. And this after the PSUC, the Catalonian Communist Party had gone further than any other European CP in its support for gay rights, including the standing of an openly gay candidate. Meanwhile the FAGC, the main gay movement organisation, was split over whether to use Spanish of Catalan in its leaflets.

Yet the memory of what happened after the Pinochet coup in Chile is fresh in their minds. A number of them who attended the international gay conference in Turin shortly afterwards raised most urgently their security should they be forced to flee in the face of another, more successful, coup.

In Britain police raids on gay bars are still capable of producing a response and murders of gay people still capable of precipitating demonstrations, but the heady feeling of the 1970s has long since been lost and there has been a sense of routine, boredom, except in the starstruck new gay clubs, which are minting money.

Unless gay liberation is to remain the province of the middle classes and ex-students of half a dozen industrial countries, we have to have an understanding of where the gay movement so far has gone wrong, and what its lessons really are.

Ever since the 1950s there had been a campaign for legalisation of male homosexual acts, and the change in law in 1967 in Britain was part of a pattern right throughout the world, during a period when a number of anomalies in the relationship between the state and the individual were ironed out. The upsurge of demonstrations, magazines, meetings, discussions and conferences after 1970 however, was completely new, and put forward fundamentally new demands—that gay people are glad to be gay, that it is society which is screwed up, not the individual homosexual, and that sex and sexuality are social products, not unchanging biological human inevitabilities. In other words, in asserting the slogan of 'Glad to be Gay' was also asserted the instability of 'normal' heterosexual relationships. But where did the enthusiasm go?

One result of the upsurge was the growth of 'gay capitalism'. This is not nearly so developed in Britain as in New York, San Francisco or Amsterdam, but there was still no shortage of people to take advantage of the possibilities of a commercial gay scene. Gay clubs, companies producing perfumes and jewellery; hairdressers, all seized the opportunity of the much wider implications of the gay struggle in freeing men from white shirts and short-back-and-sides. A whole new industry of male-peacock grandeur, hidden since the beginning of the Victorian era, blossomed.

Capitalism had no trouble in developing commodities to satisfy this new spending power of young people during the post war boom and the demands of gay liberation played their part in stimulating that boom. *Gay News* which started life as a co-operative, growing out of the demands of the gay movement and giving them direction, now has an editor and a board of directors, and is as much subject to take-over bids as the *Observer*. Virgin Records owns the biggest gay disco in London—*Heaven*—which changed hands for half a million pounds.

Another section of the gay movement produced the analysis that basically straights are the source of the problem. The solution therefore is to create a world without them. This led to the setting up of gay communities, either in the worst areas of decaying cities or in the countryside. These groups proved to be pressure cookers for all the contradictions of gay liberation, and have blown themselves apart. However, there remains from the ideas of gay identification the most lasting valuable contribution, the gay switchboards and self-help agencies, the alternative to the processions of doctors, lawyers, sociologists, psychiatrists and policemen who attempted to 'cure' this 'problem'.

But although essential in helping to decontaminate your mind from the process of being brought up, they still present gay liberation as a matter of civil liberties and individual liberation—'I want the right to be myself'—and the solution to the problems of being gay in terms of having enough money to be able to live a gay identity in terms of housing, entertainment, sex.

During the early stages of the gay movement, there was a tendency which was attracted to Marxism. Many of the early fighters in the gay movements had been socialists or communists. But the *best* response of the left had been to take the 'I want the right to be myself' at its face value, and to say that while civil liberties demands would be supported, it was a matter of private life and therefore had nothing to do with politics. If that was the best response, the *worst* was to say that homosexuality is a petty-bourgeois distortion which will disappear in the socialist millennium.

The left was only just breaking from the shell of Stalinism, correctly feeling the need to establish links with the working class at the point of production, but incorrectly afraid of 'frightening the workers' by raising issues in their newly-donned donkey jackets which weren't immediately related to the workers' struggles, as if sex isn't.

It was only with the need to raise the question of gay liberation in the workplace in order to fight sackings, victimisations, queerbashing jokes in the canteen, that the gay movement was thrust back on that left which had rejected it and which it had rejec-

ted. To come out at work requires considerable courage and it is only possible to survive if you can find allies. To take up gay rights systematically to fight a sacking requires courage, and an organisation. In NALGO, NUT, CPSA, the unions where systematic work on gay rights has best been done, rank and file groups existed which provided the network of support and communication.

But you cannot raise the issue in the labour movement as simply a matter of gay rights, or at least you can, but it won't stay there. Because the experience most people have, of homosexuality comes from their own childhood, education, the media, the church, their opinions and arguments are inextricably tied up with their own sexuality.

The normality of divorce, childbattering, wife-beating, arises as soon as discussion commences. Questions of child-sexuality, paedophilia, the myths of the molesters, pornography and 'do you want your son to turn out one?' cannot long be ducked. Which means that the original questions of the gay movement have to be asked once again—if sexuality is a social product then why has it emerged in the way it has, what are its contradictions, and how do we act?

These questions cannot be answered within the gay movement because there isn't the width of experience and perspective to make generalisation possible. It is only by understanding the role that sexuality plays in the relations of production and in social reproduction that we can then find a basis for analysing our own situation, our own responses. Without this understanding all our attempts to fight for gay liberation will be hampered by our own fears and by resurgences of morality over difficult questions.

There are no short cuts. Every queer-bashing joke requires a response and an argument. Every sacking requires a campaign built around it, not because there is much chance of winning reinstatement, but because every victimisation gives the chance of having the argument over again.

The comrades in Spain took a short cut. They won the support of their party without having the argument right down to the rank and file, in the workplace. The result is that when the attack comes comes and support is demanded, it is not forthcoming. There is of course another side to it: when the working class fails to take the lead which the situation requires, then groups of people whose experience has marginalised them from the main stream of society, people who with the lead of the working class could be drawn into the struggle with a revolutionary potential, stand back and wait, or find individual escapist responses.

The result is that struggles for sexual liberation are not carried into the heart of the class and movements without the strength and determination of the class will have no will and no muscle.

Middle class gays try to escape into another world. Whether it is an excape from Barcelona to Marseilles or from Islington to 'Heaven' the parody of heterosexual society which the gay movement takes on becomes more and more difficult to bear. Before we discovered liberation we lived with our bars and jails. Now we have discovered liberation we need a socialist revolution even more.

GLC Bolognese?

I want to take up a couple of remarks from Ken Livingstone's extremely interesting statement of what he sees as Labour's strategy for the GLC.

The first is how he defines class. Ken obviously regards class as being determined by what views people hold, not by their position in society. He writes of skilled manual workers that 'they are not necessarily, just because of their factory background, likely to be radical'. On the other hand, the new intake of Labour councillors are the products of 1968, have shifted to the left and therefore are working class.

His analysis of what people think may or may not be correct, and certainly socialists have to relate to all members of the 'proletariat' (the working class seen in its widest terms as all those who are forced to sell their labour power to capital). But the real point is another: the potential economic power of the mass of the population which Ken hopes to represent is still concentrated inside the manual working class. These people still exist contrary to what Ken claims. He only has to go to Park Royal Estate or the Lea Valley to see that for himself.

The danger in Ken's position is that by concentrating on the new demands of the radicalised white collar workers he could perpetuate and even increase the divisions that have existed in the past between manual workers and the left. Look for instance at the swing to the Tories in areas like North East London or the Midlands in the elections of 1979.

This view of class that Ken proclaims obviously lies behind his surprising statement that the book *Red Bologna* has been something of an inspiration for many of the incoming Labour councillors. Bologna has been run by the Italian CP ever since the end of the war, and it would be silly to deny that in comparison to the rest of Italy it is a remarkably nice city to live in.

However, the specific claim is that in Bologna the local authority throws its weight behind strikes. In general, this is just not true — it only happens when the ruling Communist Party and the strikers' aims coincide and that has rarely happened over the last twelve years. In general, the CP has attempted to mediate within strikes rather than help the workers win them. This is because in Bologna the CP is a party that spans the classes and in which 'Red Bosses' play a prominent role.

On a national level, the CP has for years been trying to force its way into national government alongside the Christian Democrats; a governmental strategy which continually rules out a whole-hearted defence of workers' struggles.

A much more authorative book than *Red Bologna — Communism in Italy and France* by Blackmer and Tarrow — explains the reality of the CP's intervention in disputes.

'My observations confirm those of other students of the PCI in finding that the local PCI is often drawn into labour disputes ... and then it performs very much like a referee between Communist workers and Communist — or sympathetic — employers ... One CP leader said, "this of course has happened. What happened. Well, we compromised that's what happened" '.

Hardly a very good model for a Labour GLC to follow!

The Communist Party in Bologna though does share one point in common with Ken Livingstone: it constantly tends to identify the working class as itself, as those who agree with the CP. So any attack on the party was identified as an attack on the working class itself.

Socialist REVIEW

FREE with each new subscription to Socialist Review on this form a copy of OUR HISTORY - A POCKET HISTORY OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN by Steve Cherry

Send me 12 issues of Socialist Review starting with the ..... issue.
I enclose £ ......

Name ....

Address ....

....

....

Subscription rates for 12 issues UK and Eire £7.50, Overseas Surface £8.50, Europe Air £10, Elsewhere Air £12.(Institutions add £4)

Return to Socialist Review, PO Box 82, London E2.
Make cheques payable to SW Distributors.

In the 'Movement of 77', students, unemployed and some white-collar workers united in a mass protest against the CP's line of the Historic Compromise. The local administration cracked down; a militant of the movement was shot dead, free radio stations were closed down and dozens of militants ended up in jail.

No-one is suggesting that the same could happen in London but I would make two suggestions to the new Labour group: a) they should rapidly do a bit more reading before talking about the Bolognese model and b) they should recognise that the Party, be it British Labour or Italian Communist, is a very different thing from the working class and they should never confuse the two.

Tim Potter
Stoke Newington

No wonder we're cynical

In the March issue of *Socialist Review* I explained why my experience working for Lambeth council led me to take Labour's promises for the GLC with a pinch of salt. I therefore read with interest the interview in the last *Socialist Review* with the new GLC leader.

First I must reply to Ken Livingstone's remark that 'a lot of tendencies on the left in a desire to maintain their own credibility always have to find an issue on which they can differentiate themselves from the left within the Labour Party. The rates issue has been used in that way quite cynically.'

It must be admitted that it was the SWP who raised the 'No cuts no rate rises' slogan when Lambeth introduced that memorable supplementary rate. We in the Lambeth council workers SWP must also admit to a somewhat cynical attitude to our employers. Lambeth's latest blow in the fight against unemployment has been to threaten their employees at Clapham Reception Centre with compulsory redundancy or redeployment. Next the council plans to introduce a voluntary redundancy scheme. If our politics are to be called 'bankrupt' for opposing this then the politics of municipal socialism may equally be declared 'redundant'.

It has taken no special effort, no Machiavellian cunning, on our part to 'differentiate' ourselves from the other side to the Lambeth U-turn. Ken Livingstone's solution for Lambeth, that the whole financial burden be passed on to the rates, would have meant that this year's rate rise was 56% instead of the hefty 37% the council did levy. The council may wish to balance its budget, but we who live in Lambeth have to balance ours too!

On my estate we already pay more in rates than we do in rent and few people round here can afford to be squeezed much harder. The rates option blocks any possibility of the council mobilising on the estates *against* the Tories. The only effective mobilising done when Lambeth raised its supplementary rate was led *by* the Tories.

Similarly it prevents mobilisation amongst the council's workforce. Although from a purely sectionalist point of view rate rises might seem a simple way to finance the demands that council unions raise there is absolutely no faith in this option amongst the workforce. Indeed I have seen in many shop meetings how the memory of the success of the right wing inspired demonstrations held against the supplementary rate, once raised, can still paralyse council workers considering industrial action (handy for our employers of course!).

In any case Lambeth council clearly recognises that there is little room for further rate rises, and Heseltine will soon move to make sure there is even less. As the Tories tighten the screws on local government, more and more cuts in both jobs and services will be the only legal 'option'. The point is that cuts and rate rises are not in fact two different options; they are but two sides of the failure to confront the government.

We draw no sectarian pleasure from the sad defeat of Lambeth, but neither can we duck the questions: what were the reasons for that defeat? And how could the GLC do any better?

When asked if he would adopt the SWP's position, 'No cuts no rate rises', Ken Livingstone replied, 'That bankruptcy option is credible when you have got trade union and mass support. But when the government isn't threatened with defeat it opens the way for the government to set you aside'.

I believe we must take this argument seriously. Suppose the GLC turned round tomorrow and declared that they were no longer prepared to pay out to the city financiers more in interest than is levied from them in rates. To do this without organising to gain mass support would be nothing but ultra-left substitutionism. Government commissioners would in turn be 'substituted' for the Labour councillors. This kind of isolated confrontation would have no benefit for the organisation and confidence of the class.

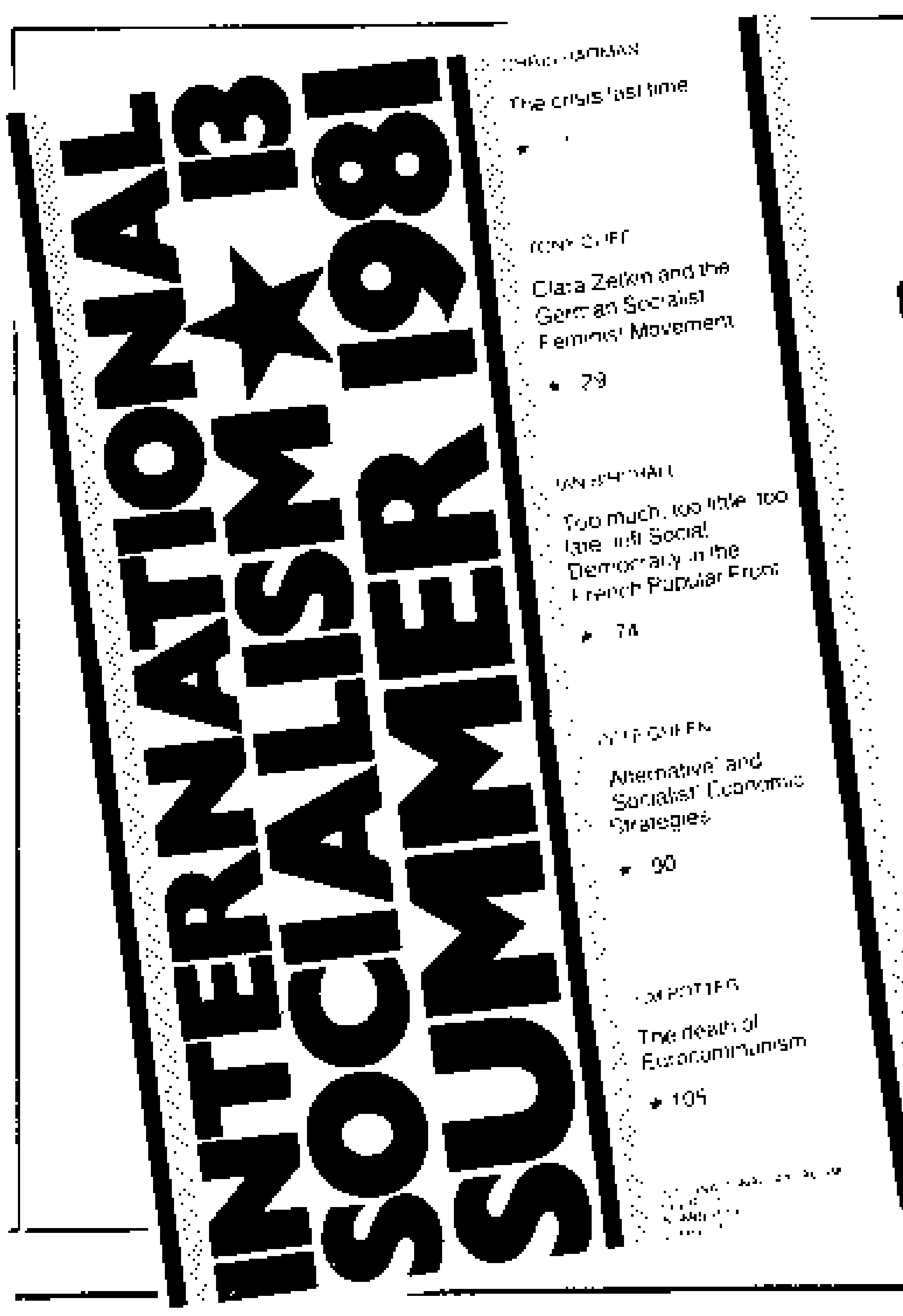
Our slogan, 'No cuts no rate rises', though, means neither capitulation nor ultra-leftism but class organisation. It must be used to link up tenants' associations, opposed to rate rises but too isolated to sustain active opposition, and council unions fighting to save jobs. It is the fulcrum essential to the process of co-ordinating fragmented opposition, in different sections of the class, against the various effects of the Tory onslaught on local government services. The new GLC still have sufficient credibility to play a leading role in linking up workers in the public sector and in the private sector, on the dole queues and on the estates, wherever a fightback can be organised. The forging of these links entails opposition to cuts *and* to rate rises.

It is therefore hard to understand Ken Livingstone when he says of the GLC manifesto, 'We have a Labour Group with a determination to carry it out (which is quite unusual in Labour party terms)', and asserts 'the rate increase option does benefit our class'.

Determination or no determination, the Tories simply will not permit the expenditure necessary for even half the manifesto to be carried out. They can throw out the annual GLC Money Bill from parliament and they will certainly penalise any sustained increase in revenue through precept unless they are forcibly prevented from so doing. They can only be stopped by a united counter-offensive by substantial number of workers opposed to cuts *and* to rate rises.

Ken Livingstone wants us to believe that he represents a new type of Labour councillor, different from the 'old municipal deadheads'. With disarming naivety he states 'I don't believe that they were all 'little Ken Livingstones and Ted Knights'. The tragedy is that many of them were. That tragedy, it would appear, is now being re-enacted.

Will Webb
Lambeth



OUT NOW. £1.25 (plus 25p post). Annual subscription: £5 (Britain and Ireland). £6 (overseas surface). £7 (Europe air). £9 (elsewhere air)

Regressive rates

Ken Livingstone argues that 'the rates option does benefit our class'. But the latest official figures (*Economic Trends*, HMSO, January 1981) clearly show otherwise. They show that rates are a *regressive* form of taxation — they hit the poor much more than the rich.

A household with an income of £26 a week pays 7.5 per cent of it in rates. As income goes up the proportion paid out declines, until a household with an income of £278 a week pays out only 1.7%.

Gross income per week	£26	£55	£100	£133	£188	£278
Rates as %	7.5%	4.6%	3.3%	2.6%	2.2%	1.7%

All these figures are *after* taking account of any rebates — so much for the claim by left Labour councillors that the rebates ensure that rates increases hit the rich only.

The point about rates is that the system by which the rateable values of houses are set greatly undervalues the superior features of the sort of houses lived in by higher income groups. So rateable value declines as a proportion of market value in the case of more expensive houses.

Jim Kincaid
Leeds

Too soft on subsidies

On the question of import controls, there is a small problem in the politics of the SWP as put forward both by John Deason and Roy Smith (1981:6). For while we fight against import controls for the reasons that they ably put forward, we could get ourselves tied up in knots over the question of government subsidies.

John says (approvingly, it seems) that 'the fight of the miners has always been with the government over the question of state subsidies' and Roy says 'we must, where necessary, raise the demand for subsidies'.

Now, of course, this position does avoid the central problem of import controls — that so easily and often they can be directed against the 'foreigner' with all the implications for racism and chauvinism that are carried in its wake. However, we ought to be quite clear that subsidies are only a hidden form of import controls. What they do is to make British goods cheaper than imported ones. Imported goods are driven out of the market, workers abroad lose their jobs.

Further, where is the money to pay for these subsidies to come from inside the present system? From taxation or from borrowing neither of which, I presume, we are particularly in favour of.

Last major problem: the demand for subsidies absolutely does not prevent workers lining up with their own employers or with the state itself around the demand. After all, Thatcher is presently fighting Schmidt and the EEC bureaucracy to preserve the very high levels of subsidy being pumped into BSC, and it's easy to imagine the same happening even with this government over cars and coal.

As to the rest of what John and Roy say I agree absolutely. But to talk about increased subsidies as a goal without any qualifications, is to leave an enormous hostage to fortune.

Tim Potter

Making a virtue of necessity

In the May issue of *SR* Chris Harman asks, 'How often have we heard so much nonsense about how the women's movement can 'teach new forms of organisation'?'

But is it so much nonsense? I agree with Harman that the form of organisation needed to overthrow capitalism is not one which can guarantee unlimited personal development for its participants. But does he have to make a virtue of necessity?

His dismissingly rhetorical question has come at the end of a passage where he himself describes society at a particular time as a 'competitive rat race for men'. Unless he is a fan of the 'competitive rat race', I would have thought Harman would have looked more positively at something which tries to undermine it.

Jeff Pike
East London

How many people, when asked to list the great socialist thinkers, will come up with a line of men? Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky ... Far too many of us forget that among the greatest stands Rosa Luxemburg. Here's a book to redress the balance.

Cover price £1.95
Bookmarks Special Offer £1.35 including postage
BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4

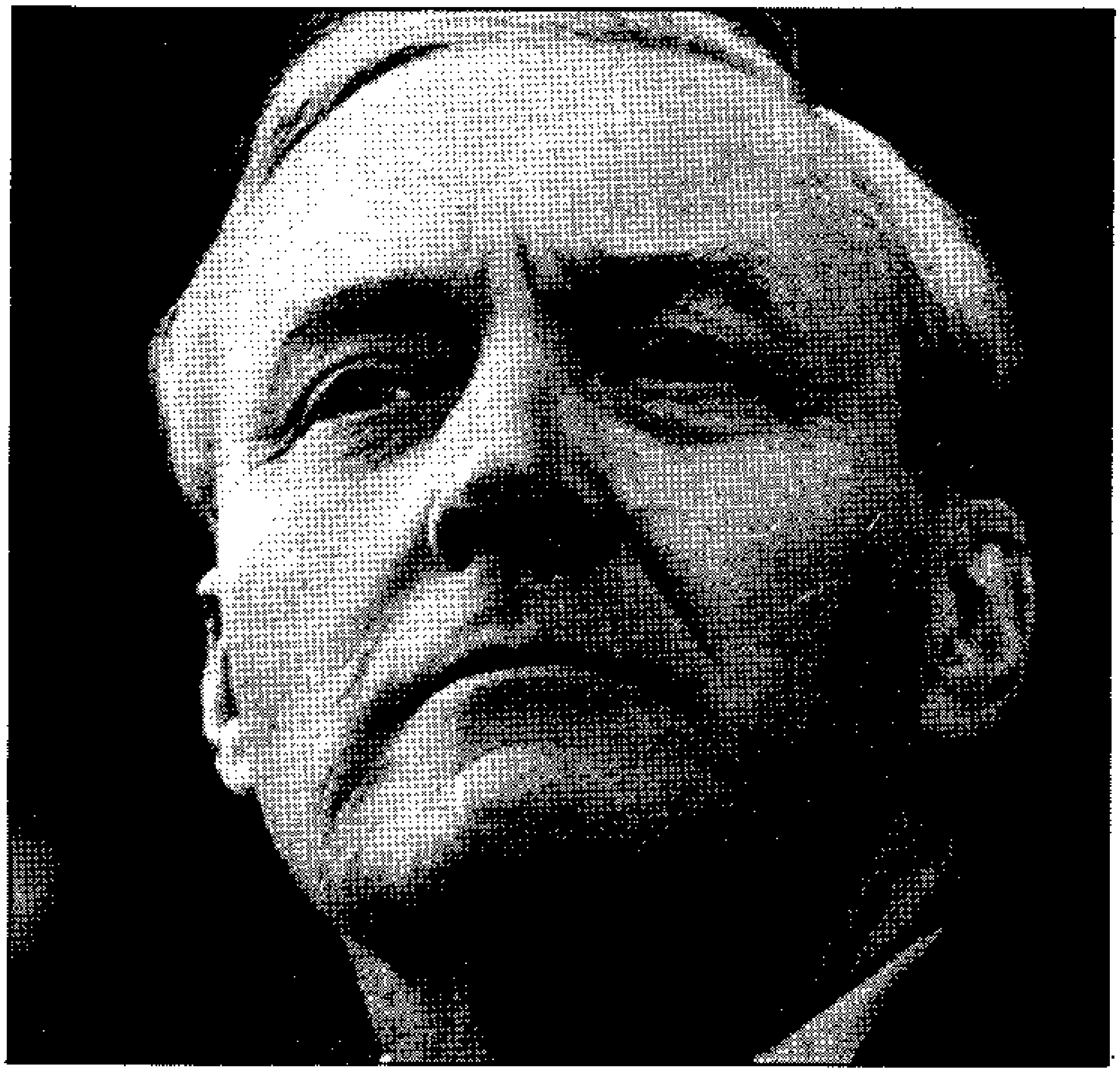
MISSILE MADNESS

SWP pamphlet by Peter Binns on the new weapons system and how they threaten your life. 40p (plus 10p postage). Bulk orders £3.25 for 10 post free from Socialists Unlimited, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London, N4.

ARSY-VERSY WORLD
Poems by Hugo Dewar

SPECIAL OFFER TO S.W. READERS £1.20 including postage
Socialists Unlimited 265 Seven Sisters Road London N4 2DE

The case for keeping out of the Labour Party



Something is happening in and around the Labour Party the like of which has not been seen for at least a generation. The movement associated with the name of Tony Benn is totally different to anything since the Bevanism of the early 1950s. And in a number of important respects it is on a much higher level than Bevanism was. Any socialist who ignores Bennism's strengths is on a rapid journey to sectarian irrelevance.

What are these strengths? First and foremost that it is a *movement*. It involves masses of people.

This can be seen at the mundane level of public meetings. In the sixties and seventies even the best known Labour MPs were not great crowd pullers. A local appearance by one of them was an event of little consequence, pulling at most a few dozen of the Labour Party activists. A speech by Tony Benn in your town hall tonight would be a rather different affair, getting an audience of several hundred, including a lot of fresh faces. In the past year Benn has done dozens of such meetings. To find the Labour left directly addressing audiences on such a scale you would have to go back to the *Tribune* brains trusts of the early fifties (and they faced no competition from the TV).

The difference can also be seen on the far bigger scale of street demonstrations. These traditionally have not been part of the Labour Party's limited range of activities. Yet over the past twelve months it is the Labour Party itself which has called the hugely successful demonstrations against unemployment in Liverpool and Glasgow, as well as the first major national demonstration in the new campaign against nuclear weapons last spring.

Not, of course, that the Labour Party has suddenly gained a monopoly of calling big demonstrations. The two biggest ones of the last year — last October's CND demonstration and the 31 May climax to the People's March—were both called by other organisations. But, in a sense, the reality of Bennism as a movement was even more visible here. For on both occasions Benn was not merely a decorative appendage on the platform, the role so traditionally played by left MPs, but a figurehead greeted with considerable enthusiasm. No Labour left since Bevan in the early fifties has played such a role.

It is a role which has been spectacularly confirmed by the response at this year's union conferences to Benn's campaign for the Labour deputy-leadership. It has been *the* event of the conference season — and not just from the point of view of the media. At every conference he has attended he has drawn large and enthusiastic meetings, even in bastions of the right-wing like APEX. And this has not been simply orchestrated from above by the left trade union barons. Many of these have been distinctly cool or downright hostile to Benn's campaign. But they have not been able to stitch things up on this issue, as Clive Jenkins found to his cost at the ASTMS conference.

Again, to find the Labour left taking their campaign into the unions with any success, you have to go back to Bevan campaigning for the Labour Party treasurership from 1953-55. Bevan eventually won it. But the response to Benn's few months of campaigning seems to have already reached further than Bevan's three year campaign.

It would be early days yet to talk of any specifically Bennite *machine* in the unions. But it is noteworthy that some of the most successful Benn meetings at union conferences were organised by new Broad Lefts, built mainly of people actively involved in the Labour left. From this basis of trade union support the Bennite Labour Co-ordinating Committee looks like being able to hold a quite impressive trade union conference this month. If this does live up to expectations then it will be a most significant first for the Labour Left.

Bennism has an audience that goes way beyond the ranks of the Labour faithful and this, for the first time in three decades, significantly reversed the decline in the number of Labour activists. From a highpoint of over one million individual members in 1952, membership declined to what *Labour Weekly* was estimating in 1979 to be 284,000. A large proportion of these were old, 80-90 per cent were totally inactive. In many working class areas Labour organisation, even in electoral terms, was a shell or worse. Even the unpopularity of the Tory government of 1970-74 did little more than slow down the rot.

But again, according to *Labour Weekly*, after two years of Thatcher the Labour Party had put on an extra 60,000 or so extra individual members. Local reports would confirm this, and also add that these new recruits have also significantly expanded the party's *active* membership. Proportionately this increase in actual membership of the Labour Party is by no means as great as the expansion in influence of the ideas of the Labour left, which go way beyond party card holders. As the first real break in thirty years of decline it is, however, of no little importance.

It is the resonance that Bennism has among many tens of thousands of activists, particularly trade union activists, that puts it in a different league from anything in the 60s or 70s. Nothing illustrates this so much as the contrast between this Tory government and the 1970-74 one. Then Labour conferences went sharply to the left, but the activists found their focus in the industrial struggle. The Labour lefts found themselves reflections of or decorations for the industrial struggle. They were not, as Benn is, a focus for aspirations on the ground.

This fact that Bennism is a real *movement* is undoubtedly its most important feature. One other feature is also worth noting. The Bennite movement is happening in very different times than the Bevanite. Bevanism was crucified by an era of full employment and rising living standards. Bennism is growing in the worst economic crisis for two generations. As a consequence and particularly as a consequence of the bankruptcy of the last Labour government in the face of that crisis, the Labour right is today ideologically very weak. The Bennite left has therefore succeeded in making greater inroads into the party machine than ever the Bevanites did.

These inroads are above all represented by the constitutional changes. Of course, the effects of these are exaggerated. The much loathed Denis Healey is still just about favourite to scrape through as formal winner of the deputy leadership; the re-selection guillotine will in all likelihood chop off fewer heads than its opponents fear; and absolutely committed Labour lefts like Ken Livingstone and Nigel Stanley have both made clear to us that their time scale for a Bennite Labour government is not the next election, but the one after. Nevertheless, the Bennite left has got a lot further in the machine than any of its predecessors, and that adds further fuel to the hopes that are placed in it.

Yet if Bennism is in a totally different league from its predecessors, it is still playing the same game. Behind the very real new strengths, how many of the old weaknesses remain—plus at least one important new one?

Let us start with the new. How do we explain the change from the marginal place of the Labour left in the fight against Heath to the central place of Bennism in the fight against Thatcher? The answer quite simply is that from 1970-74 there was a lot of very successful industrial struggle, sufficient in itself to provide a focus. The heroes were the dockers, UCS, the miners. Under Thatcher there has not been the same industrial success, so another focus takes its place. The upturn of Bennism (plus a more general political upturn) has been grounded on an industrial *downturn*.

It is a vital weakness that the Bennites either ignore or portray (with references to 'economism') as a positive strength.

What about the old weaknesses of the Labour left? They were that the Labour left's power base was the declining shell of the constituency parties, exclusively oriented to elections and increasingly manned by teachers, social workers and so on rather than manual workers. The decline has been reversed in the last two years, overall membership and attendance at meetings has significantly increased. But the numbers participating in constituency Labour Party activities has probably not even returned to the level it was around 1964, never mind to the level at the highpoint of Bevanism. And despite much publicised urgings to extra-parliamentary Labour Party activity, Constituency Labour Parties remain essentially what they were in their darkest days, small groups overwhelmingly geared to elections.

Peter Hain and others may dearly wish that local Labour Parties were intervening in industrial disputes, but as yet there is little sign of it.

Nor has the recent growth in party membership rebuilt direct organisation in the working class. All reports are agreed that a very high proportion of the new recruits, especially the active ones, come from the professional white collar layers rather than manual or lower grade white collar workers. Of the 50 Labour GLC councillors elected this year only three were manual workers immediately prior to election. The enormously important resonance of Bennism in the unions still finds a very limited reflection in terms of the active membership of the constituency organisation.

And it has not yet dramatically transformed the skeletal organisation of the Labour lefts themselves. The Bennite Labour Co-ordinating Committee may hit the headlines and can call a trade union conference. But it still has no real paper and only a few hundred formal members. Its activities at the grass roots can be judged by a glance through the Local News section of its newsletter, *Labour Activist*. 'In Watford Michael Meacher was the guest speaker at the inaugural meeting of the Watford and SW Herts group. This attracted 30 people, a high attendance from only two Constituency Labour Parties.'

Finally, the real grass roots support among trade union activists for Benn's campaign does not mean that the Bennites have broken from the traditional left Labour dependence on the trade union bureaucracy. True, they did give Clive Jenkins a fright at the ASTMS conference, and they do talk about greater accountability of trade union officials. But their operation in the unions is dependent on the goodwill of a whole layer of appointed full-time officials in unions like NUPE, TASS, TGWU etc. It is a layer they are unwilling to risk alienating.

It may be objected that the weaknesses we have described in the Bennite movement are organisational, rather than political, and that, given the strengths, they can, in time, be overcome.

It is a reasonable enough objection. But only so long as it is recognised that organisation and politics are inextricably tied together. A serious look at Bennite politics reveals it not on the strengths side of the balance sheet, but is the most fundamental weakness of the Bennite movement.

Benn's programme

Benn has become a symbol for the whole of the new Labour left, for people who hold a variety of views, often conflicting in both aims and strategies for achieving them. Hence the oft-heard claim that it is not Benn's personal political positions that matter, but the principle of establishing control of Labour Party policies by rank and file party activists.

Yet Benn's own politics *do* matter in two very important ways.

First, Benn himself is by far the most widely known publicist of the new Labour left. It is his speaking engagements which attract the large audiences. It is his words which spur the union gatherings to standing ovations. It is what he says in television interviews that represent the views of the Labour left to the ordinary man or woman in the street. The rest of the Labour left has very much been capitalising on ideas which he projects.

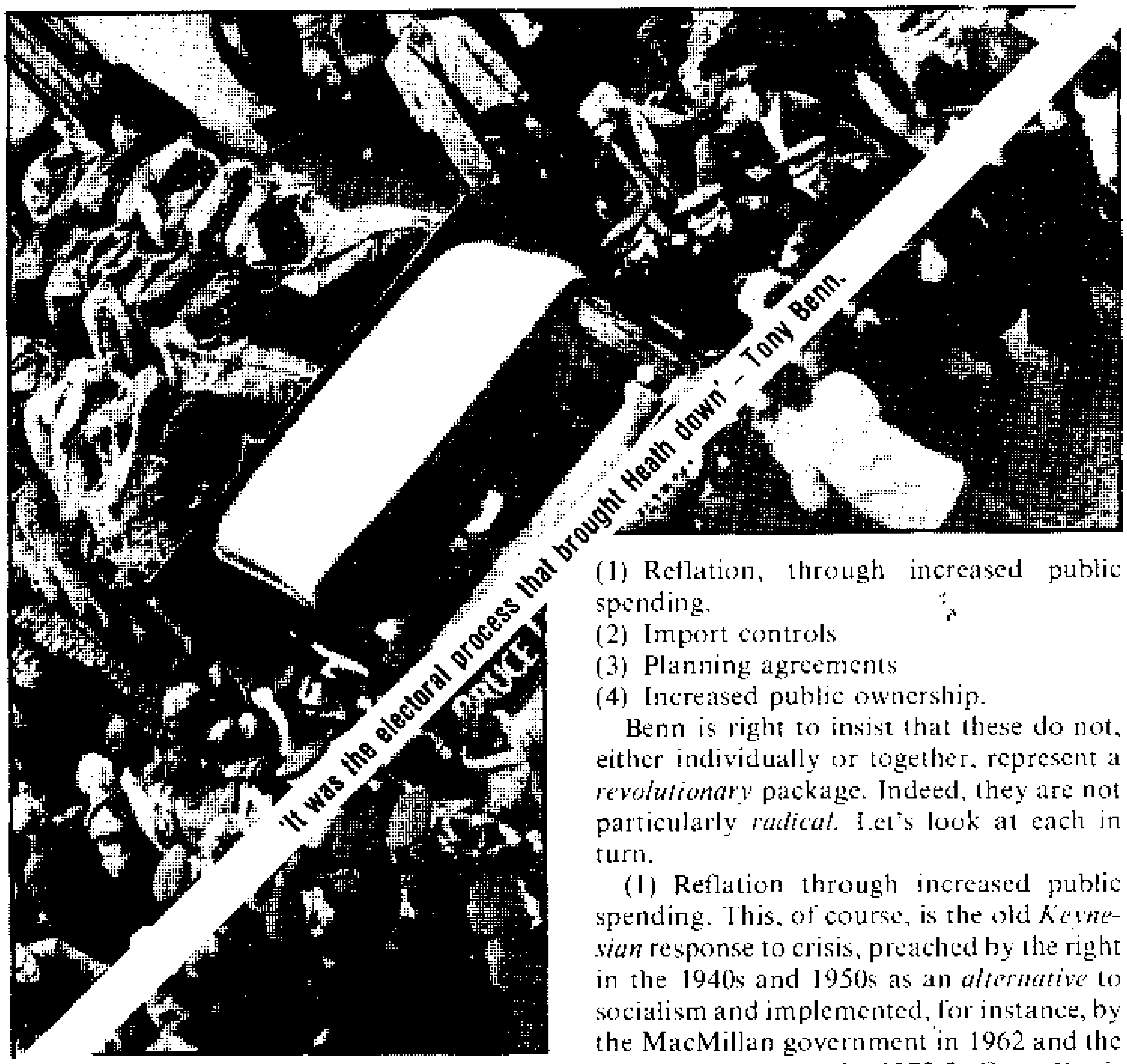
Second, the key mechanism by which the left hopes to achieve its aims is a Labour government. Whatever may be the future logic of constitutional change within the party, for the moment it is the leadership which will tend to dominate such a government and, by the political patronage at its disposal pull the rest of the Labour MPs into line. That is the significance of the Benn-for-deputy campaign. The left want to ensure for him a position of considerable power in such a government, whatever the majority of centre and right wing Labour MPs desire. But that means the left's aspiration to change British society in the near future depends crucially on the politics of Benn himself.

Benn's political starting point is his perception that the policies of the Labour governments of 1964 and 1974 failed miserably.

As he told Robert McKenzie in a recent television interview:

> 'The policy was to use the state to make capitalism work. To pour money into private industry, to merge companies together, to deal with businessmen and so on ... The more I looked at it, the more I realised that it was really a corporate state we were making ... And it wasn't efficient, it didn't improve our growth rate, it wasn't egalitarian, it wasn't democratic, it was very secretive,

After two years of Thatcher, the Labour Party has put on 60,000 individual members.



and it was accompanied by a steady and continuing decline of British industry' (*Listener*, 21 May 1981).

What applied at home, applied also in international policy.

'It seemed to me (in the late 1950s) that unilateralism was not the right initiative to take. I have changed my view on that because I am utterly persuaded, particularly after being in the last Labour cabinet, that if a country has nuclear weapons, it destroys parliamentary democracy by having them.'

Benn's solution to such problems is for a Labour government to take far more radical measures than the last two ever did. Instead of giving in to what he calls the 'international financial community' and to those with 'power' — 'the banks, landowners, military, civil service, media, multinationals, Brussels' (interview with *Socialist Challenge*, 5 June 81) — that government should impose its policy regardless, relying on 'the support of the trade unions, the Labour Party and the people who elected them.'

This is not, however, Benn is quick to point out, talk of *revolutionary* change. The problem of past Labour governments has been 'not of reform having been tried and failed, but of reform not having been tried ...'

Determined reform, Benn insists, can end the crisis, stop de-industrialisation *and* bring about an 'irreversible shift in the balance of wealth in favour of working people and their families.'

The reform that is needed is imposition of the Alternative Economic Strategy which, the Labour Co-ordinating Committee pamphlet *Socialism and the Trade Unions* assures us, has already been 'supported' by the TUC and the Labour Party conference.

The key components of the Strategy are:

(1) Reflation, through increased public spending.
(2) Import controls
(3) Planning agreements
(4) Increased public ownership.

Benn is right to insist that these do not, either individually or together, represent a *revolutionary* package. Indeed, they are not particularly *radical*. Let's look at each in turn.

(1) Reflation through increased public spending. This, of course, is the old *Keynesian* response to crisis, preached by the right in the 1940s and 1950s as an *alternative* to socialism and implemented, for instance, by the MacMillan government in 1962 and the Heath government in 1972-3. Even Denis Healey is preaching its virtues as part of his bid for the deputy leadership.

(2) Import controls have never been regarded as a *socialist* measure. In the first third of this century they were the campaigning slogan of the *right wing* of the Tory Party, and today 'Buy British' is a favourite refrain of right wing union leaders like Frank Chapple and Bill Sirs. In the 1950s and 1960s Japanese capitalism systematically used them to build up its position, and today all major powers are threatening them against competitors who are too successful..

(3) According to Benn, 'the whole purpose of planning agreements is to introduce the democratic tripartite element into industrial policy' (*Arguments for Socialism*, p72). The three parts of the 'democratic element' are, of course, 'government, trade union movement and management'. In other words we are back to the old notion of partnership, of institutionalised class collaboration, engrained into the traditions of the British trade union bureaucracy since the Mond-Turner talks of the late 1920s which Benn's Labour left forebear, James Maxton, and Arthur Scargill's forebear in the mining union, A J Cook, joined together to denounce — a far cry from Benn's present attitude.

(4) The vaguest part of the Bennite canon concerns 'public ownership'. The only solid commitments seem to be to renationalise ('without compensation') those parts of nationalised enterprises 'hived off' by the Tories and to insist on a state holding in the shares of companies which receive public funds. Neither is all that radical. The general lack of success of the Tories in hiving off industry means there will not be much to renationalise. And schemes for buying shares in private industry have been the Labour *right's* alternative to outright nationalisation ever since Harold Wilson got conference approval for the policy statement *Industry and society* back in 1958 — and was denounced for wanting to patch up capitalism by the then leader of the left in the unions, Jim Campbell.

Other than these commitments, all you get from Benn is vague waffle about Clause Four of Labour's constitution ('the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'). Thus he told *Socialist Challenge:*

> 'I'm in favour of Clause Four. I think that the process by which you bring about Clause Four has to be first of all the persuasion of the party of the relevance of socialism, and for 30 years no-one has spoken about socialism ... It's no good me saying it's got to be that way. I've got to persuade the Labour Party ...
>
> 'I couldn't tell you with any authority what the next Labour government will do about anything because we haven't yet succeeded in dealing with the problem of the manifesto ...'

To be honest, such statements could have come from Harold Wilson in 1964. And they are to the *right* of the sort of commitments made by Labour in the 1950 and 1951 elections, when specific industries (chemicals, road haulage, sugar refining) were listed for nationalisation.

Benn's supporters claim this shows the need to work harder within the party to win specific policy points (when they are not claiming, as *Socialism and the trade unions* does, that the party is *already* won to the Alternative Economic Policy). But you cannot win anyone to anything without calling for it. So why Benn's silence?

The answer probably lies in the fact that the talk about Clause Four is not to be taken seriously. That certainly must be the view of Benn's close ally and economic guru, Stuart Holland: in his book *The Socialist Challenge* (not to be confused with the paper of the same name) he argues for public ownership of *at most* a quarter of the top 100 companies — ie for less than 12½ per cent of British industry. The latest Communist Party publication to endorse the Bennite strategy, *The Road from Thatcherism* by Sam Aaronovitch, suggests that when the Alternative Economic Policy has been fully implemented 'nearly 80 per cent of manufacturing output or 75 per cent of total industrial output' would remain in private hands. And the Labour Co-ordinating Committee in its list of 'policies crucial in any contest for the deputy leadership' makes *no mention at all* of a takeover of private capital. (*Labour Activist*, April/May 1981).

The point is important, not because rhetorical commitments to further public ownership would in themselves mean much, but because of what their absence signifies: all the talk of 'tripartite structures', 'planning agreements' and import controls is talk of what is going to take place in what will remain an overwhelmingly private capitalist economy. And so is the talk which sometimes slips out of something else — incomes policy.

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee, in *Trade unions and Socialism* argue that such a policy could be 'supported'—providing the Alternative Economic Policy is being implemented (that is, even if *three quarters* of industry remains in private hands) and providing 'profits, prices and dividends as well as incomes' are controlled (something which has been promised by every incomes policy since 1948, but never achieved).

They are in fact calling for support for an incomes policy under capitalism, however they dress it up.

On defence Benn's position is just as flabby as on economic issues. He says he is opposed to nuclear weapons. But he is also adamant that Britain must stay in NATO—although nuclear weapons are integral to the alliance's global strategy.

He told *Socialist Challenge*:

> 'I am basing myself on conference policy. The conference rejected a request to leave NATO, but said we should have a non-nuclear policy, like Canada's ... I think that the non-nuclear defence strategy and being a non-nuclear member of NATO is a perfectly logical position.
>
> 'Maybe the Labour Party will go beyond it and say we should leave NATO. I think it unlikely, because there are a lot of people of my generation who remember the pre-war years ... My generation could not possibly sit back and say whatever happens anywhere else doesn't concern us anymore ... '

Benn would leave intact all of Britain's 'defence' effort apart from the nuclear weapons. He goes as far as to claim that 'The Tories are destroying the Navy to produce the Trident, so we are seeing defence reduced ....'. What goes for Benn seems to go for his supporters. *Trade Unions and Socialism* is 'against increased arms spending' but says nothing about *cutting* the arms budget.

The Labour Left's mechanism

For Benn and his supporters the notion of control of government policies by the Labour movement is more important than the specific content of those policies. Control from below, they argue, will force any Labour government to move as required to confront the power of big business. 'The experience of office', claims Benn, 'will create the demands for radical policies.'

The mechanisms of control are based, unashamedly, on parliamentarianism. When Benn stood in the contest for Labour leader back in 1976, a key point in his programme was to *increase* the power of MPs. In *Arguments for Socialism* he states categorically his belief in 'the power of the vote'. Marxists have a place in the Labour Party, he says, on condition that 'they commit themselves to advancing socialism through parliamentarianism.'

In his *Socialist Challenge* interview he rules out as a 'coup' any notion of bringing the Tory government down by industrial action.

'If you are saying we should replace the government by industrial action, my opinion is that without winning the argument you can't build socialism ... ' He even claims that it was not the miners but 'the British people' that got rid of Heath in 1974. 'It was the electoral process that brought Heath down.'

What differentiates Benn from the traditional Labour left is not his parliamentarianism. It is his belief that it can be made more radical by increasing the responsibility of Labour governments to Labour MPs and of Labour MPs to the Party at large. The electoral college (already achieved) is meant to make the Labour leadership responsible to the unions and constituencies as well as the MPs; reselection (already achieved) — the ability of constituency parties to displace a sitting MP at the next general election — is meant to ensure MPs keep to their manifestos; the drawing up of the manifesto by the conference (not yet achieved) is meant to ensure that the manifesto expresses conference policy.

It should be added, however, that Benn himself does not go further than this in calling for the disciplining of MPs who refuse to go along with party policy.

> 'I'm not in favour of expelling MPs because they find it hard to go along with party policy on individual matters. The great characteristic of the left is that it is not out for blood if everyone doesn't come into line ...'

Given that under any conceivable circumstances, the Parliamentary Labour Party after the next general election is going to contain a large number of right wingers, Benn's 'tolerance' is remarkable.

But what can such mechanisms and such policies be expected to produce in practice?

Scenarios

The mainstream Bennite Left assume that a Labour government in which they were dominant could lift Britain out of the crisis and improve working class conditions substantially by parliamentary introduction of the Alternative Economic Policy. Extra-parliamentary agitation is merely an adjunct to what goes on inside the Labour Party and parliament — it can help to build support for left policies in the unions and it can sustain a left parliamentary government against financial or military attacks, but it cannot substitute for parliamentary mechanisms.

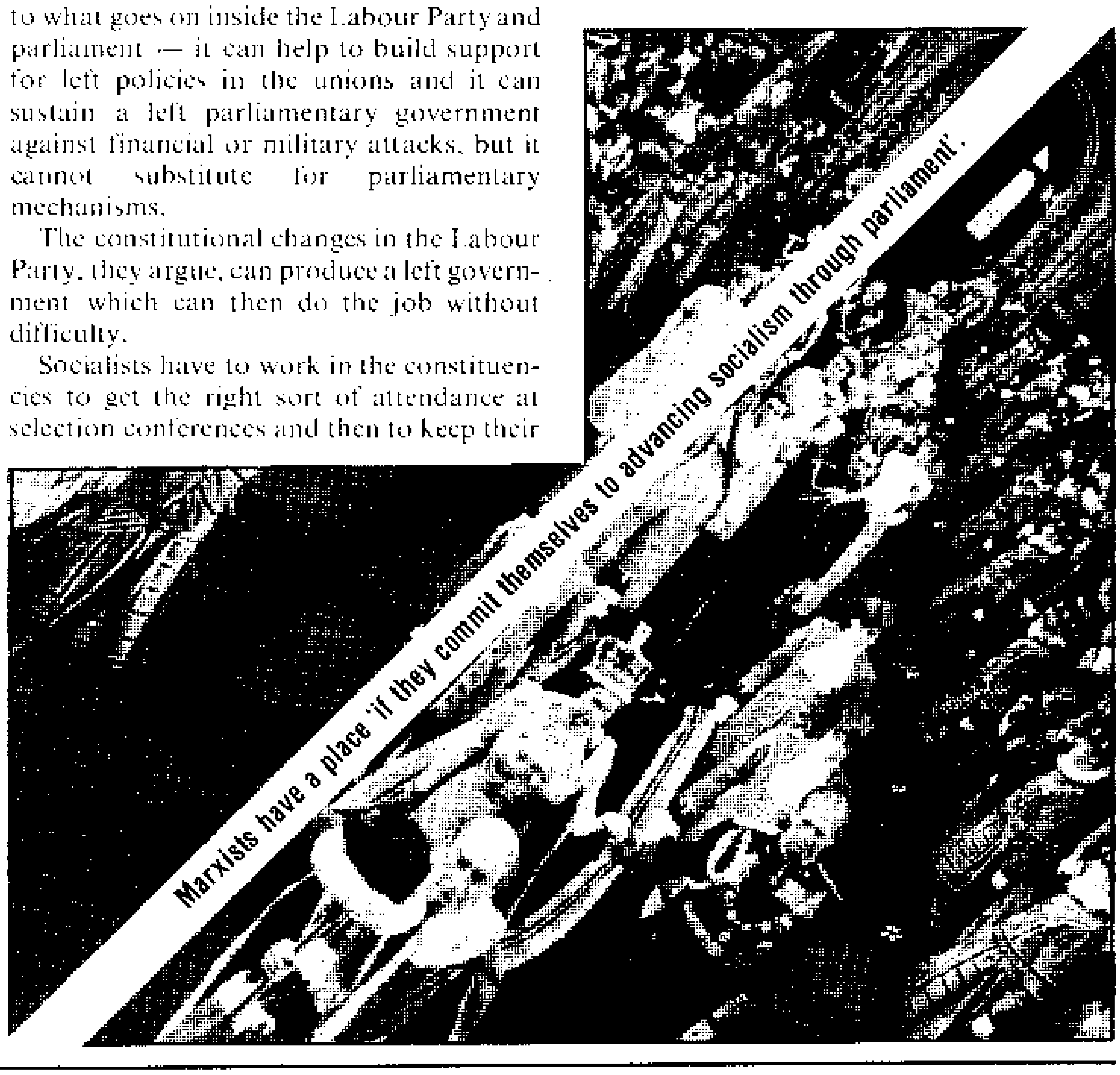
The constitutional changes in the Labour Party, they argue, can produce a left government which can then do the job without difficulty.

Socialists have to work in the constituencies to get the right sort of attendance at selection conferences and then to keep their eye on sitting MPs. The new Broad Lefts in the unions have to work to get block votes for Benn and for the control of the manifesto by conference. Workplace branches have to be built to facilitate both these tasks and to deliver voters on polling day. Hopefully this will mean, by 1984, a Labour majority in parliament committed to the Alternative Economic Policy by its manifesto, with a left inclined leadership and under pressure from the constituencies to fulfill its promises. Fear of reselection and of the left presence in the unions will then be enough to make the parliamentary party and the Government stand up to the city, big business and the IMF. The economy will expand, unemployment will be eaten up, welfare services will improve and the government will further strengthen its hand.

Looked at more closely this proves to be a very naive perspective.

First, it assumes that the limited controls on the private sector entailed by the Alternative Economic Policy would be enough to prevent direct economic sabotage. Past experience suggests that this is just not so. In 1931, in 1964, in 1966, in 1975-6, Labour governments found that the littlest things they did to please their supporters, upset British big business and its international financial friends,and produced 'runs on the pound' that undermined the value of the currency and 'investment strikes' that threatened to force unemployment to still greater heights.

It will be argued that the Alternative Economic Strategy gives the state more power than in the past to impose controls on the operation of private capital. This may or may not be true: import controls have existed in the past as a possible weapon (and, in the form of import deposits were actually used by the first Wilson government); planning agreements depend upon the *co-*



Marxists have a place 'if they commit themselves to advancing socialism through parliament'.

operation of big business, however they are framed; and even the strongest versions of the Alternative Economic Strategy assume that private capital will still be responsible for three quarters of productive capacity (and therefore jobs). But, more importantly, the power of private capital to *evade* state controls is greater than ever before.

Modern capitalism does not merely involve the international flow of commodities via trade or the international flow of capital via overseas investment, it is also based upon the organisation of *production* internationally. This is most clearly the case with the multinationals of, say, the motor industry: 'British-made' Fords contain up to 50 per cent of German-made parts; while 'German-made' Fords contain up to 50 per cent of British made parts. It is difficult to see what 'controlling imports' means in such a situation — or how a government with the mealy-mouthed powers of the Alternative Economic Strategy is going to be able to stop a multinational moving funds wherever it wants simply by rigging the prices its different national plants pay each other for components.

This is just as true with many 'British' firms. A huge chunk of British industry imports half finished goods, processes them and then re-exports them. In this case too import controls are bound to be ineffective, and price rigging to move funds abroad easy. Against such practices the state controls of the Bennites would be no more than a very leaky colander.

The experience of Chile under Allende is worth recalling here. Faced with a popular government doing things it did not like all that much, big business deliberately closed down factories to create unemployment and hoarded goods so as to create scarcity and high prices. State controls greater than those envisaged in the Alternative Economic Strategy were unable to deal with this sabotage. Indeed, a powerful section of the government (the CP and the right-socialists around Allende himself) argued that the only way to avoid catastrophic crisis was ... to bring the main capitalist party, the Christian Democrats, into the government so as to keep big business happy.

One can easily imagine what would happen under such circumstances in Britain in a couple of years time. Those who believe most fervently in 'tripartite' agreements (backed, no doubt, by a substantial section of the Parliamentary Labour Party and by many elected-for-life trade union leaders) would begin to insist that the workers had to make 'sacrifices' in the interests of the greater good. They would say that the only way to protect 'their' government was to stop behaving in 'economistic' ways, and instead to behave 'politically' so as to get the agreement of 'all sides of industry' to 'restabilise' the economy, so 'consolidating' the 'great gains' of 'our' government.

We can guarantee in advance that not merely the Labour *right*, but *also* a good number of the Bennite leaders would say this. How? Because they have already said it at least once. In 1975 and 1976 Benn himself behaved in exactly such a way when the last Labour Government was under pressure. He decided it was more important to remain in government than to stand up to big business and the IMF. As late as 1978, as Secretary for Energy, he threatened to use troops to break a strike at Windscale and helped draw up contingency plans to use troops against oil strikers. There can be no guarantee that he would not do the same thing again.

And as we have seen, a section of the Bennites are already preaching the virtues of a 'socialist' incomes policy for next time round

The tendency for such a government to capitulate to pressure would be strengthened by something else. All the Bennite plans assume that the state can be used to discipline big business. But the state is not a *thing*. It is a strictly hierachical organisation of *people*, with quite specific people from quite specific backgrounds with quite specific ideas at the top of it, giving the orders. Almost without exception those who dominate in the armed forces, the civil service, the judiciary, the publicly owned media, the Bank of England belong to the same class as those who own industry. They can always be relied upon to use their dominating positions in the state to obstruct the implementation of any government orders they dislike.

The Labour left do not see the economic struggle as something on which to build political consciousness.

In its most extreme form this means the sort of coup that took place in Chile in 1973 or in Turkey last year. But much more subtle techniques are also available — and they have been used quite recently in Britain.

Someone as 'moderate' in Labour Party terms as Wilson's former press secretary Joe Haines can tell on the basis of the experience of 1975-6:

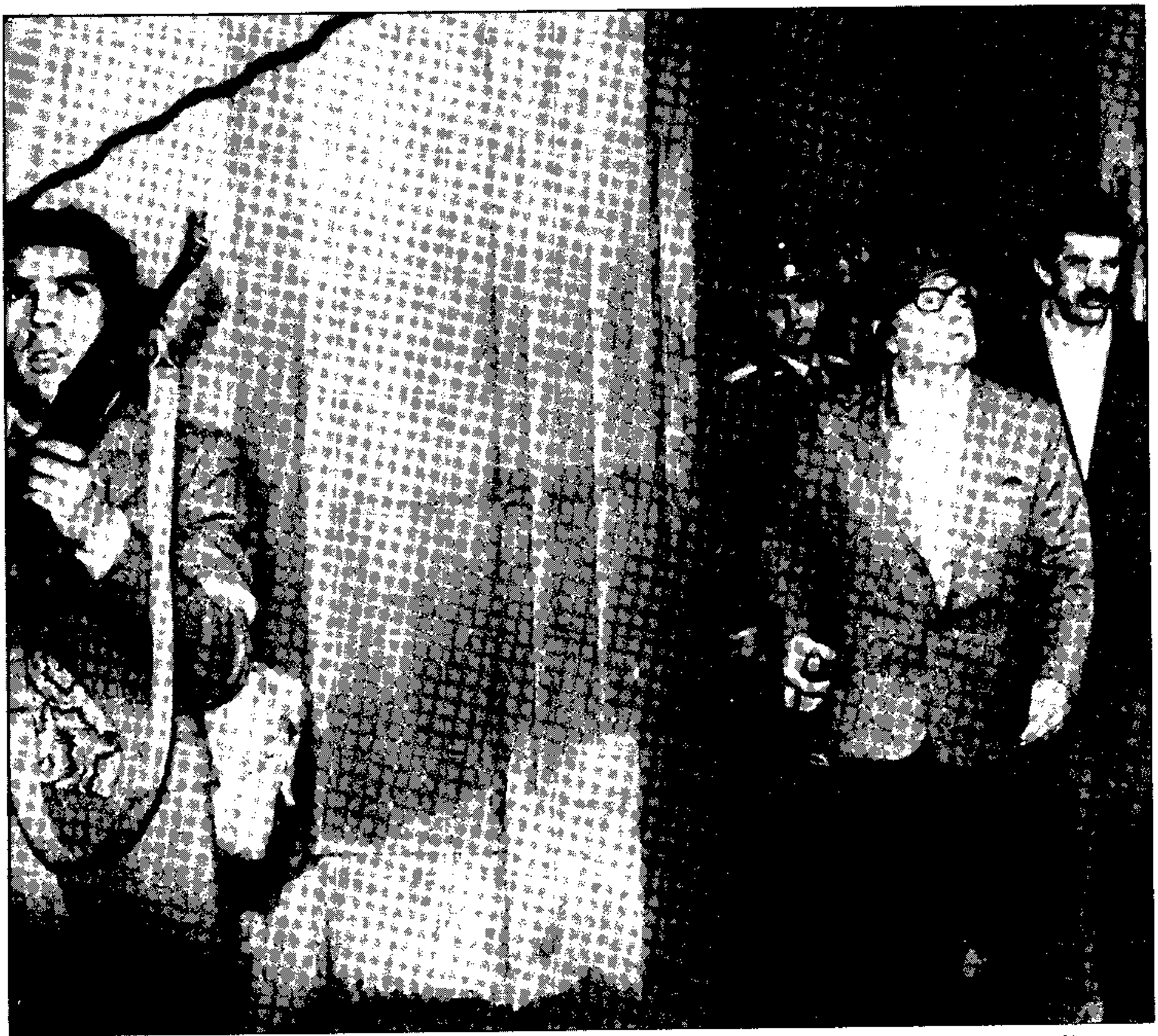
> 'At times the determination of the Treasury to tell the government of the day to accept policies is ruthless, even to the point where it seeks to create conditions which make it impossible for the cabinet to spurn its advice'.

In 1975 when a run on the pound developed that eventually produced wage controls from the Wilson government, the *Financial Times* told of top civil servants who argued that 'alarm over the pound is a necessary ingredient in negotiating new wage guidelines', while the *Sunday Times* told that 'Instead of the Treasury and the Bank and England arguing violently the virtues of the pound, the authorities seem anxious that no-one should miss the gravity of the situation ...' Finally, Peter Jenkins reported in the *Guardian* (28 October 1967) that a 'foreign source' had told him that 'Your Treasury seem to be agreed that the Labour manifesto is a manual for suicide.' They are constantly in touch with our people saying, 'Don't bail the bastards out'."

All this could be done quite 'constitutionally'. And so could other forms of obstruction. Even if a government led by Tony Benn were to ask the Queen to create a thousand peers so as to overcome the House of Lords' delaying powers over government action, that would leave untouched the ability of top judges to interpret the law as they wish. One can easily forsee a situation in which the government would take emergency measures to deal with, say, a run on the pound, only to find that Lord Denning declared the measure illegal and top civil servants accordingly refused to put it into effect. Even were Denning eventually overruled, the delay could be fatal, since these days enough money can flow out of a country in a matter of hours to completely undermine its economy.

Instead of the state machine helping the Labour Government curtail the power of big business, it would help big business evade the controls of the Labour government.

Such economic and political sabotage of the government does not have to happen immediately after it has been elected, when it has clearly 'won' an election and can most rely upon popular support. The ruling class are intelligent enough to wait until the right moment before moving. Thus, in Chile, they tolerated Allende for two years, from 1970 until the autumn of 1972. It was only then that they made their first attempt to force him out by economic sabotage. When this failed, they rushed back to apparent collaboration with his government, putting some of their generals in his cabinet. But in return they insisted that he endorse measures against his own supporters — eviction of those who had occupied factories, disarma-



The end result of Bennism would be a right wing disaster – whether in the limited form of Britain in 1976 or the absolute form of Chile.

ment of those who had prepared to defend theselves, attempts to stop wages rising as fast as prices. As these measures destroyed the momentum of popular support behind him the ruling class prepared its second, and fatal, onslaught.

In its desperate attempts to placate the ruling class and to get back to 'tripartite' agreement, the Allende government forced its own supporters to make 'sacrifices'. In at least one case the result was disastrous. Striking copper miners were subject to bitter abuse by the government parties and were attacked by the riot police: so desperate did some of the miners become that they turned to the parties of the right and refused to back the government when the final coup came. The ruling class had set terms for collaboration with Allende that meant that he drove his own supporters into their arms.

Of course, the more politically sophisticated workers could see what was happening. But the working class is only strong when the more experienced can lead the less experienced workers behind them. And you can't do that if you continue to demand 'sacrifices' of them so as to allow a government to collaborate with capitalism.

Again, similar things have often happened in Britain, even if the final defeat has not been as catastrophic as in Chile. In 1931, 1951, 1970, 1979, it was weariness with continual calls for 'sacrifice' from Labour governments that led many less experienced workers to see Tory governments as no danger, or even as possible solutions to their problems. Collaboration between a Labour government and the employing class, whatever name you give it — social contract, planning agreements, Alternative Economic Strategy — always has the same effect: it makes workers bear the burden of dealing with capitalism's crisis, disillusioning many of them with the Labour government and opening them up to the propaganda of the right.

To sum up then: the mainstream Bennite perspective is wrong, not simply because it proposes reforms of capitalism, but because it cannot even hope to build the halfway house it proposes. Rather the end result would be right wing disaster — whether in the limited form of Britain in 1976 or the absolute form of Chile in 1973.

3The left of the left

The Bennite movement is drawing in its wake significant numbers of socialists who would claim to accept some at least of the criticisms of what we have called mainstream Bennism. They have witnessed past Labour governments, often leaving the party in disgust, but feel that Benn is creating a new ferment out of which something new can emerge. There is a flood of people back towards the Labour Party from the left: the editors of both the original and the later *New Left Review*, the authors of the anti-Labour Party *May Day Manifesto*, the former luminaries of the *Black Dwarf*, leading lights from the Eurocommunist wing of the Communist Party, the supporters of the International Marxist Group, the authors of *Beyond the Fragments*..

These would all give different nuances to their reasons for sticking back together the party cards they once tore up. Yet all in one way or another would say that Benn is opening a door to socialist advance via the Labour Party which others can use even if he falters. The only pre-condition is to be a party member.

The argument is most coherently put by those who would claim to accept all our criticisms of Benn's own programme — especially those entering the party from the revolutionary groups. But bits of what they say crop up in most of the other justifications for rejoining the Labour Party from the 'extra-parliamentary' left. They all claim that what matters is not the Bennite programme, but the fear it arouses in the ruling class on the one hand, and the enthusiasm it generates among workers on the other.

Take, for example, Alan Freeman of the International Marxist Group writing in a recent issue of their journal, *International*:

'Even a mild programme of reform like Benn's is unacceptable to the ruling class ... Quite apart from what his policies would do to ruling class profits, they could arouse tremendous expectations in a still undefeated working class that *cannot* be satisfied — whatever Benn's personal intentions.'

A Benn government, he argues, would produce a rerun of 1976 but with a quite different outcome.

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

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

'In no way does this imply that the Labour Party could produce a solution to the crisis it provoked. On the contrary, Benn steadfastly rejects the only reliable solution to this crisis — a working class takeover.'

In one respect this scenario is probably over catastrophic. It does not even consider the possibility that what would happen is what has happened every time in the past when a British Labour government has run into trouble. The leadership, however 'left' its previous credentials, has been terrified by the prospect of catastrophe, has therefore used all its prestige to get workers to back down before the demands ofthe ruling class, and has carried both the majority of constituency activists and the leading 'left' union officials with it. That was what happened through the machinations of Foot, Jack Jones, Hugh Scanlon — and Tony Benn — in 1975 and 1976. No doubt it is what a lot of the Labour left would want to do in Britain if the situation developed under the next Labour Government.

The class *as a whole* does not *automatically* move spontaneously to the left as it loses its faith in revered reformist leaders like Allende or Benn. Much of it can drop into apathy and demoralisation, an easy target for the radical demogogy of parties of the right. This is especially the case if the reformist leaders have tried to impose on it 'sacrifices' in order to placate big business; under such circumstances the less politicised sections of the class can turn away from the activists in the workplaces and unions who have traditionally led the class into struggle.

Still less do the reformist *political* organisations of the class automatically swing to the left: in Chile the CP and the Allende wing of the Socialist Party swung to the *right* as the final catastrophe approached, doing their utmost to get an alliance with the generals and/or Christian Democracy. We can expect the elected for life leaders of Britain's trade unions and the majority of Labour MPs to swing even more in that direction should a really deep political and social crisis develop.

These qualifications do not mean that it is impossible for the election of a Benn or a Foot-Benn government in certain circumstances to lead to a huge social crisis of the Chile type. But it does mean that this crisis will not have a positive outcome unless a powerful body of revolutionary socialists is operating in the factories, mines and offices long before it breaks, warning their fellow workers that no faith can be put in reformist politicians or 'left' union bureaucrats.

The problem of reliance on such elements does not arise simply at the moment of crisis when they shy away from confrontation. It begins long before that.

The Labour left always say they would rely upon the strength of the trade unions to prevent any moves against them from the right. But trade union strength is not something fixed and immutable. It depends upon the confidence and organisation of workers in every workplace and industry. That is something that cannot be relied upon to develop spontaneously at the moment desired by those engaged in manoeuvres at the parliamentary level. It has to build up through thousands of struggles, some little, some big, often erupting at completely unexpected — and from the point of view of 'left' bureaucrats and politicians, 'embarrassing' — moments. The only way to build the strength of the class is for socialists to give all such struggles unconditional support and throw every effort into providing the solidarity and leadership that can help them win.

It is here that the Labour left (including most of the left of the left) fall down. The very word they use to describe an obsession with the struggle at the point of production — 'economism' — betrays their approach. They do not see the economic struggle as something on which to build the political consciousness of the class, but rather as something to be turned on and off in accordance with the needs of political manoeuvres in the parliamentary-electoral sphere.

And so, at present they are enthusiastic about any struggle in unions controlled by leaders who will vote for Healey; but they do not care overmuch about organising in

As Secretary for Energy, Benn threatened to use troops to break a strike.

unions run by Benn-supporting bureaucrats like Alan Fisher — even though Fisher can be as hostile as any right winger to spontaneous upsurge of militancy, self-confidence and potential class consciousness among his own membership. Certainly, if we did have a Bennite government, much of the left would be doing its utmost to head off strikes which might embarrass it.

Such an approach prevents precisely the development of trade union strength which the Labour lefts claim will protect them at the crucial moment from the attacks of capital.

There is a contradiction at the very heart of all the strategies of all sections of the Labour left. They believe that a 'step towards socialism' can be made by a left government committed to running capitalism, leaving at least 75 per cent of industry in private hands. But to make a success of that you *have* to clamp down on the spontaneous struggles against capital which workers take part in at the point of production. Yet when capital moves against such a left government, it wants to rely upon a strength at the point of production that could only have been built by encouraging such struggles to the utmost.

Can a mass revolutionary left be built within the Labour Party?

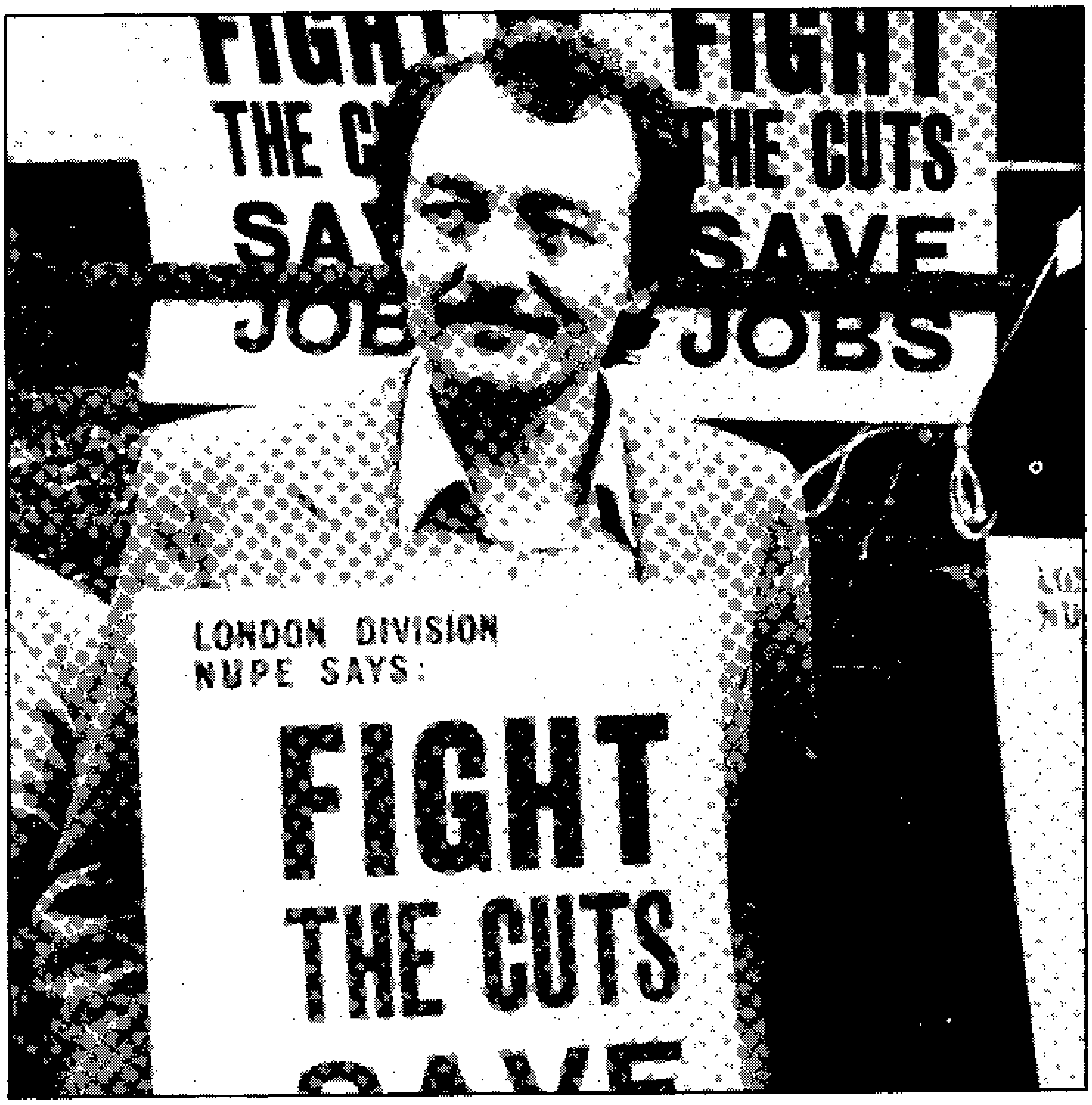
Some, at least, of those re-entering the Labour Party would agree with our last point. But they insist, it is possible to build a current *inside* the Labour Party that preaches lack of faith in left leaders and bureaucrats. Indeed, they say, there is nowhere else it can be built.

But there are problems with any such perspective.

First it just is not possible politically to have your cake and eat it as revolutionaries within the Labour Party. Even the most outspoken of the leaders of the Labour left are calling for a programme to *reform* the present system. It is the words of these leaders that are attracting many militants towards the party. Yet to build the independent politics and organisation that is needed to prepare the class for confrontation, you have to be criticising those leaders mercilessly. You have to be pointing to each vacillation of Arthur Scargill, each woolly ideological compromise of Tony Benn, each absurdity of the Alternative Economic Strategy.

It was for these reasons that when the questions arose of what should be the fledgling British Communist Party's attitude towards a Labour Party much looser and with much less rigid traditions than the party today, it was taken for granted that it should only consider joining the Labour Party if it was allowed to retain its complete independence as regards agitation in industry, political criticism of both wings of the Labour leadership, and propaganda against the parliamentary road. Even at that time such demands were unacceptable to the Labour leadership. They remain unacceptable today, and revolutionaries who join the party do so, in practice, by watering down their independent politics.

You have to use the same *harsh* polemical tone that Rosa Luxemburg used during the First World War against the leaders of the



Even the most outspoken of the Labour left are calling for a programme to reform the present system.

left socialist current in Germany (Ledebour, Hilferding, Haase) or that Gramsci used in 1920 when he realised how unrevolutionary was the left wing leadership of the Italian Socialist Party (and that spoke of Soviets rather than of 'planning agreements'!)

If you talk in this way in a Labour Party ward or GMC today, you find yourself very unpopular with the left as well as the right. All the pressure is to *blur* the issue, to appear to be talking about more left wing versions of reformist Labour Party politics rather than about a politics which breaks the reliance of workers on left Labour leaders. You find that if you identify yourself with Benn, sell 'Benn-for-deputy' badges, you can get support. If you criticise him, you are virtually alone.

The same goes for the parliamentary road. It is not possible to remain in the Labour Party while putting your main emphasis on denying the possibility of parliamentary socialism: as we have seen, even Benn would not have you in the party on that basis. Instead, in order to win the respect of the rest of the left, you engage in the same sorts of electoral activities as them, whether it is packing selection conferences or canvassing for votes, and end up giving the impression that you believe in the soggy mix of 'parliamentary activity backed by extra-parliamentary pressure' they preach.

The logic of such politics is shown, perhaps most clearly, in the case of the *Militant* Tendency — the group of organised Marxists who have been longest in the Labour Party. Whatever they may say to each other in the privacy of the education meetings, in their press they do not criticise the parliamentary road and publicly their spokespeople like Peter Taffe and Ted Grant have claimed that 'Marx and Trotsky' thought a 'peaceful road to socialism' was possible.

The other often-mocked feature of the *Militant* tendency is also no accident: its sectarian and clandestine organisation. For to organise in the Labour Party you either have to do so on the loose basis which is acceptable to the apparatus and the reformist left, or you do so clandestinely, saying things in private you deny in public. But the mere whiff of secret, underground organisation is usually enough to put off many you would like to attract to you.

All these problems are linked to the most fundamental one of all. The Labour Party is built from top to bottom on the basis of the division between the political and industrial wings of the movement. It is taken for granted by the left as well as the right inside the party that trade union meetings discuss industrial issues and Labour Party meetings discuss 'political' issues—which means that 'politics' comes to exclude the struggle in the workplace. Yet it is in the workplace, where they collectively contest the power of capital, that workers most become open to new political ideas that stress their ability to emancipate themselves without reliance on 'saviours from on high', whether of a 'left' or 'right' variety. And so it is in workplace struggles that revolutionary arguments have the cutting edge over reformist ones.

The new Labour left claim to want to relate to industrial struggles and to build Labour Party branches in the workplaces. But when pushed, it soon becomes clear that they are merely refurbishing the old view of the party as occasionally supporting the industrial struggles waged by the unions, and of Labour members arguing in the workplace for support for a political struggle seen as taking place outside. They are not talking about political structures which will *challenge* what trade union bureaucrats suggest in the workplace, about Labour Party branches fighting for certain sorts of activities inside stewards' committees, for wards and General Management Committees hammering the local full time trade union officials for their conduct of battles over wages and jobs.

Organisational structures themselves condition what people see as possible. A structure based upon the separation of politics from industrial muscle necessarily focuses attention not on fighting back against the *present* industrial offensives of the government and employers, but on waiting upon the next Labour government to deal with things. Socialists inside the Labour Party do not discuss at ward and constituency meetings *why* Linwood went down or Ansells was sold out. Instead, their concern, like that of the reformist left, is with resolutions and conferences. Under such circumstances, they, again like the reformists, come to behave as if nothing can be done about the Tories until a general election is called.

It might be argued that in the past mass revolutionary parties *have* emerged as splits from reformist parties. This was certainly true after the end of World War One. But two conditions were required for that. First, the existence of a fantastically powerful pole of attraction outside the parties in the form of the Russian Revolution and the Communist International. Second, sustained, no-holds-barred agitation from independent revolutionary organisations which never wavered in their criticism of the left socialist leaders. And even then, the mass parties were all too often formed after the decisive revolutionary upsurge had passed (in Germany and in Italy).

The independent party and the united front

Fortunately, there is no need to join the Labour Party in order to get a hearing from the workers attracted towards Bennism. The party does not have the all-encompassing domination over the working class movement that, for instance, German Social Democracy enjoyed in 1914 or the French and Italian CPs for the twenty years after World War Two. Hundreds of thousands of activists continue to organise and meet in structures quite outside the direct control of the party — shop stewards' committees, union branches, trades councils, tenants associations. Millions of strike days occur every year without anyone waiting for the say-so of the local Labour Party.

And the new activists who have been drawn into the Labour Party respond to this fact by a willingness to work alongside people who for one reason or another refuse to take Labour Party cards. So, for instance, members of the Socialist Workers Party have found no difficulty in working with left Labour Party members to gain support for occupations like Lee Jeans or Lawrence Scott, to build for the People's March or to campaign against the bomb. *Not being* in the Labour Party can be a positive aid in such situations: not only are we not hide-bound in our criticism of the disastrous tactics often preached by trade union officials or Labour leaders; we also are not wasting on electoralism and inner-Labour Party manoeuvres energy that is needed to build such campaigns.

The spectacular growth of Bennism means that we are going to have to develop such joint work systematically in the period ahead. All the time we are going to have to search out Labour Party and trade union members influenced by Benn and to urge upon them the need for joint action on the issues on which we are agreed. Every strike, every CND demonstration, every campaign for election of union officials, every protest at racialist attacks, has to involve revolutionaries reaching out to draw Labour Party members into joint activity. But that is not the same as revolutionaries forgetting what they have learnt by bitter experience — that the Labour Party by its very nature *cannot* be an instrument of socialist change.

There has been no difficulty in working with left Labour Party members to gain support for Lee Jeans and the People's March but ...

the Labour Party cannot be changed.

A Marxist dissident

Socialism is a word whose meaning changes according to who is using it. In the Soviet Union today socialism no longer stands for the democratic ideal of workers control once promised by the October revolution. Instead socialism has come to mean an authoritarian one-party system preserved by means of political censorship and a repressive state apparatus which works systematically to eliminate all forms of opposition.

Those who have spoken out against the Communist Party and its regime have had many objections—religious, artistic, academic as well as political. The challenge to orthodoxy has been met with imprisonment, hard labour and internal exile. Others have been interned in psychaitric prison hospitals where if they fail to conform they are asked to leave the country.

Some dissidents started out on the right of the political spectrum. Others moved there as in desperation they looked to the West and liberal democracy for change within Russia, when attempts at internal reform failed. Understandably, therefore, those who remained loyal to any concept of socialism are few. Even rarer are those who would call themselves Marxists.

Piotr Egides, a socialist dissident who recently came to the West, describes the reaction of his friends to his persistent belief in socialism.

'You, you who have been in prison for eleven years, how can you remain a socialist. We cannot understand you,' they said. In reply he told them 'I am a socialist, but in Russia there is no socialism'. And when friends argued, pointing out of the window saying, 'This, this what you see outside the window this IS socialism,' he remained adamant.

For unlike other 'socialist' dissidents he does not believe that the Soviet Union is socialist, or that it can be reformed. He says: 'The main task now is to fight for democracy in the Soviet Union—for without democracy there cannot be socialism. I believe there is not one iota of socialism in the Soviet Union, because there is no democracy. It is a totalitarian regime. The leaders of the Communist Party have betrayed the interests of the working class, of socialism and of Marxism, and they have turned our state into an anti-working class state.'

Central to his idea of socialism is the idea that the working class must be a leading force in the revolution. He and the other six editors of the underground journal he has been involved in producing believe, 'The working class has a revolutionary potential. The Polish events have shown us just how much a working class is capable of'.

But Piotr insists the working class cannot act alone:

'The working class in Poland did not act alone, but in conjunction with KOR (the Workers Defence Committee) which is an organization of intellectuals. Before when the workers moved, the intellectuals did nothing, and vice versa. Now they have joined together they have accomplished something.'

Piotr regards the distance between the dissident intelligentsia and workers in Russia as regrettable. When the Ukranian miner Klebanov tried to organise a Free Trade Union some years ago, he insisted that he was not a dissident and that the workers in his union were not struggling against the state but around economic issues alone.

'The intellectuals said if that was the case, then they would have nothing to do with it. I think that neither they nor Klebanov were right.'

Piotr Egides and his group tried to make contact with Klebanov in order to work with him. But it was too late. Klebanov had been interned in a psychiatric prison, and his trade union smashed. Piotr and his associates then formed an organization which they believed had to have a broader outlook. Thus SMOT was born.

G M Cookson (Socialist Challenge)

Piotr Egides

'SMOT was something different—it was a trade union organised by dissidents. In SMOT there is unity between intellectuals and dissidents.'

Marxism, however is rejected by most dissidents:

'In Russia today hardly anyone has ever read Marx. The most widely read of his works in the *Communist Manifesto*, althouth I doubt if Brezhnev and his lot have read even that. Most dissidents are not philosophers or even historians. They are chemists and mathematicians, doctors and scientists. They see what there is and they disagree with it. When people have gone through the camps, seen thousands killed under Stalin, all in the name of socialism, then they no longer believe in socialism. They don't theoretically.'

'I have read almost all the Marx and I hold a different view. But I didn't just learn from books. I learnt from my experiences. I was chairman of a Kolkhoz (collective farm). And I know that a collective farm is not really a collective farm. And I know that you can't build communism with the Communists in Russia today, but that with us Kolkhozniks you can. I know that many people aren't against socialism but that what exists today is not socialism.'

'I was always a socialist, but before 1937 I believed that Stalin would practise socialism. I was still young. But in 1937 when I saw Stalin arresting and killing honest people I realised that Stalin was simply a Ghengis Khan with a party card. Then during the war there was the pact with Hitler, and the whole of Europe was divided by leaders.

'I was imprisoned twice, once under Stalin and once under Brezhnev. I finished university and volunteered for the front during the war. The German surrounded six Russian armies. I managed to get out through the German lines back to our own army. I was arrested. It was decided that all of us who got out where betrayers of the country. I wasn't tried, but I was in a camp for almost eight years.'

When I came out of the camp I was, of course, unemployed. I couldn't get work. Then I taught for a while. After Stalin's death Khrushchev made his famous speech. He said, 'We shall take another path.' I believed it. I volunteered to go and work on a Kolkhoz.'

'I worked there for six years as chairman of the Kolkhoz. It was there I had to deal with all parts of the system and learned how it worked—the committees and the regional committes and the party committees. But I couldn't do all things that were possible because the leadership hindered me. They kept on acting in Stalin's way.

'If you are ploughing a field you have to do it deeply. But the collective farm worker does it shallowly because he is paid by the hectare. They plough at night—again shallowly. If the chairman of the Kolkhoz gets up to check they see the lights of his car and they plough deeply. When he is gone they plough shallowly again.

'I proposed a new system of payment on yield rather than hectare. Then supervision would not have been necessary. (The rate of pay would of course have taken weather into account). But the regional committee said, 'No this is not a socialist way of working. Who else is doing it this way?'

'I told the Regional Committee that noone else was doing it this way, that we were doing something new. They told me that was not possible as there had been no order from above.'

'Eventually they tried to sack me. I said that they had not elected me and that they could not sack me. So there was a collective farm meeting. But the collective farm workers sacked the secretary of the Regional Committee instead of me. Three times they elected me at meetings instead of sacking me. Eventually I was threatened with prison and I had to leave.'

This incident convinced Piotr of the impossibility of reform. His views was strengthened by the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. After it he wrote a book *The Only Way Out*, which led to his second spell in prison.

For years Piotr worked to publish an underground paper *Poiski* (Searches). Unusually among Russian dissident journals it carries articles by workers as well as intellectuals. Two of its editors are workers.

Now in the West, he is looking for socialists who can help him in his aim of taking socialist ideas to the working class in Russia. But he has been disappointed in many of those who profess to be of the left. As he puts it.

'The right are against us, they fear the Russians. The left on the other hand bow down to the Russians and think that dissidents are necessary sacrifices in the cause of detente. What are needed are socialists who are neither afraid of the Soviet Union, nor admire it.'

Anna Paczuska.

A Marxist Fabian Society?

On 20 June about 150 people gathered in London for a day's rather woolly discussion on setting up a 'Socialist Society'. Most of them were academics, most would consider themselves to be Marxists and the object of the proposed society would be to put their intellectual resources at the disposal of the labour movement.

It is not the first time such a project has been attempted: the Centres for Socialist Education in the mid sixties, for instance, or a couple of years later, the May Day Manifesto were attempts by socialist intellectuals disillusioned with the realities of Harold Wilson's Labour Party to play a more activist and more nationally co-ordinated political role. Both soon disintegrated without achieving much; partly because even socialist academics find it difficult to stay long out of their ivory towers, more because neither was able to find a political focus to maintain it.

But despite their fate, their naivety and their political confusion both were worthy initiatives. For one thing they were part of the process of establishing an extra-parliamentary left in Britain. And for another, however difficult it may be, socialist academics *should* be out of the ivory tower, using the skills they undoubtedly have to aid the struggle. Quite rightly the International Socialists (the SWP's forbear) critically supported both the Centres for Socialist Education and the May Day Manifesto.

If you went by either the discussion on the day or the documentation circulated, the current initiative would have even less hope of getting off the ground than its predecessors. Two things, however, make us think that it just might make it.

First of all the spread of people at the (not very well publicised) 20 June meeting was, in its own terms, impressive: leading figures of the 'old new left' of the late 50s—early 60s like John Saville, Ralph Miliband and Raymond Williams; the present *New Left Review* team, Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn; the *Beyond the Fragments* authors, Hilary Wainwright and Lyn Segal; feminist intellectuals like Michele Barrett; the editors of both the Communist Party and the forthcoming Labour Party theoretical journals; Tariq Ali; Vladimir Derrer, secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. One could go on naming names; certainly not household names, but representing virtually the whole spectrum of the left intellectual world that has built up over the past twenty years. All had their quibbles, but all were prepared to at least seriously investigate the project.

But the more important reason why the project might make it is that this time it does have a focus: the rising star of the Bennite left. References to the possibilities opened up by developments in the Labour Party dominated the meeting, even from the small minority who remain determined that they will never take up again the Labour Party cards they tore up years ago. A common shorthand way of describing what the proposed society would be was a 'Marxist Fabian Society'. They are thinking of a society affiliated to the Labour Party.

However the same real political focus that makes the project viable, also creates very big political dangers. Another piece of shorthand used at the meeting was that the proposed society should be a 'bridge' between socialists inside and outside the Labour Party. Fine: socialists in and out of the Labour Party have plenty of areas where they can usefully co-operate. But you should be able to cross a bridge in both directions. And judging by the debate this bridge is in danger of carrying only one-way traffic: a headlong rush of most of the formerly 'Marxist' intelligentsia behind Benn. At the meeting Alternative Economic Strategy theorist, Stuart Holland, was listened to with apparently uncriticial respect, and the general consensus seemed to be that talk of 'smashing the state' was distinctly outdated.

So if the society does get off the ground how will it be using its intellectual resources? Take the example of the Alternative Economic Strategy. Will 'Marxist' economists find themselves glamourising it, providing sophisticated justifications for a 'socialist' incomes policy? Or will they be ruthlessly exposing it as utopian and ultimately class collaborationist? It is not an issue that can be fudged.

From the mood of the meeting we guess that every attempt will be made to fudge it, and if that is successful then the path to providing intellectual cover for a Foot-Benn government is wide open.

The meeting ended with setting up a 26-person committee to explore the project and report back after the summer. The committee includes Ian Birchall for the SWP. He will have a hard but necessary job on his hands of making sure that the issues are not fudged and that if the 'Marxist Fabian Society' is formed it will be the Marxist that describes its politics rather than the Fabian.

Pete Goodwin

INDUSTRIAL DISCUSSION SECTION

The new Broad Lefts

This year's union conferences have shown how the political situation within the working class movement is undergoing a significant change. Substantial numbers of trade union militants have responded to the continued battery of assaults on the industrial front by seeking generalised political solutions to the crisis. Unable to stem the tide of widespread factory closures, enforced and voluntary redundancies, rigid cash limits and pay restraint they are showing a renewed interest in Labour-type reformist politics. Ralph Darlington **looks at what is happening.**

The New Broad Left groupings have emerged in a number of unions recently – notably in the Post Office Engineering Union and the Union of Communications Workers. There are signs that the same thing could soon happen elsewhere, following the considerable success of meetings organised in support of Tony Benn at many union conferences.

Following Benn's address to a number of delegates at this year's APEX conference it was agreed to form a Broad Left: initiated by the Labour Left and *Militant*, a draft statement has now been circulated and preparations are in hand to unite left forces. At this year's EETPU, Fire Brigades Union and steelworkers conferences tentative moves were made along the same lines. The Labour Coordinating Committee trade union conference in mid-July has been organised to extend and consolidate this Broad Left phenomenon.

If the model of Broad Left organisation in the 60s and 70s existed in engineering then the model today is very much the Broad Left within the civil servants union, the CPSA. Although established some some years ago it has now developed into a formidable grouping and has helped provide the impetus and encouragement for newer Broad Lefts in other unions.

There are about four hundred individual members of the CPSA BL. National conferences have attracted between 200-300 supporters. Although the Broad Left journal is published sporadically, it has a national network of distribution. And in this year's elections for the CPSA National Executive Committee the Broad Left stood 28 candidates and successfully captured 11 (with 17 going to the right wing).

Four major political tendencies co-exist inside this far-from-homogenous amalgamation of union activists. The Labour left and the Labour right are both represented (and the Communist Party are in both camps depending on the issue). There is a Socialist Caucus of ex-revolutionaries and semi-revolutionaries and political fragments. And probably the best organised current is the *Militant* Tendency.

The CPSA Broad Left has an overiding elitist interpretation which holds that if only the union had the correct political leadership dramatic changes would occur. 'Providing leadership' is posed as a panacea to the weakness of the working class movement generally. And the membership are to be 'mobilised' but from calls from above.

The result is a virtual obsession with capturing official union positions. But the Broad Left's success in doing so bears little relation to their support on the office floor. In the middle of the most protracted and widespread industrial dispute ever to involve the union's members the Broad Left have studiously avoided any real campaigning amongst the rank and file, with few leaflets, little the first six crucial weeks of the pay campaign the Broad Left swung all its efforts into an elaborate campaign for the NEC elections.

Given a choice between right wingers and the Broad Left candidates the 'rank and file' *Redder Tape* grouping argued for the latter, including the Broad Left's nominee for President, a leading Militant supporter Kevin Roddy. But the main problem for militants in the CPSA over the last few months has *not* been their attitude towards the elections but their attitude towards the pay dispute.

And the CPSA Broad Left have argued for stubborn caution in winning the pay dispute. It was the Broad Left at the union's conference who moved a motion for a five-day stoppage (which was never carried out) preventing an array of motions for indefinite strike action (the only way the dispute could have been won) from being heard.

Far from organising solidarity for the Scottish DHSS unofficial strikers who walked out in disgust at the official selective action strategy, the Broad Left argued for their return to work. Such Broad Leftism is always exposed in strike situations.

The Brixton dole strike last year over the victimisation of two union militants was the longest running unofficial dispute in the history of the union. Yet again the Broad Left was by no means unanimous in its support. An article in the *Militant* newspaper attacked the strike as a 'diversion of resources'. Individual Broad Left members played a very good role in assisting the Brixton strikers. Yet they operated only as *individuals*. The Broad Left grouping in the CPSA is not an activist body geared for disputes. It is essentially an election machine.

While formally the Broad Left have a similar programme to *Redder Tape* their *method* and *approach* to the class struggle is entirely different. They have no wish to establish groups among the rank and file that will battle to involve the membership in a struggle against both employers *and* the union bureaucracy.

In telecommunications, the first major national dispute for the 35 hour week in 1978 was undoubtably the watershed for the emergence of one of the newer Broad Left groupings. The POEU membership flexed their muscles in collective action with a combination of escalating sanctions and immediate walk-outs in response to suspensions.

After that, and in particular because of the ultimate sell-out by the overwhelmingly right wing union executive, important changes occurred within the union.

There was always a left group inside the POEU whose leading figures were members of the Communist Party. In the last three years that group has become an open Broad Left organisation, involving an uneasy alliance between the Labour Left, Communist Party and *Militant* Tendency.

It's formation succeeded in attracting a number of branch committee members *and* rank and file militants disaffected with the official leadership of the union. And recently the POEU Broad Left has made a considerable impact winning policy changes in the face of fierce opposition from the union bureaucracy.

There are roughly 400 individual members of the POEU Broad Left, with up to 200 attending national conferences. An elected steering committee of members from across the country (similar to the CPSA Broad Left) meets from time to time. They produce a journal *The Spark* which appears four times a year and sells about 2,000 copies. Quite regular Broad Left meetings are held in London with about forty supporters attending (A third of the entire POEU membership are concentrated in London).

After three years of contesting union elections the POEU Broad Left have managed to win nine seats on the Executive Council. However there are continuing wrangles over the accountability of Broad Left EC members to the organisation that helped raise them to prominence.

The impressive success of the POEU Broad Left sparked off a similar initiative last year within another right wing dominated trade union, the Union of Communication Workers (formerly the UPW)

The 1971 postal strike was a massive set-back to any militant and socialist within Tom Jackson's union. Anti-union views flourished in the absence of any credible group able and willing to challenge the leadership. For a period the National Front were able to build up pockets of support in a few London offices.

Then after eight years of inactivity and meek acceptance of any pay rise no matter how small, the membership exploded in 1979. An Executive Council recommended pay and productivity package was rejected in a union ballot by 6-1, and over 1500 UCW members laid siege to the union's London HQ.

The formation of a Broad Left, composed of older militants alongside newer recruits into the industry who had not experienced the 1971 defeat, was almost inevitable. And in the last year the newly formed BL has held a number of national meetings attracting 60-odd supporters, gained a membership of about 300, issued a magazine *Communique* and it almost won the election of a BL member onto the EC at this year's conference.

Again the driving force behind the UCW Broad Left has been the Labour Left and *Militant*. And like the POEU BL they have rapidly gained adherents not only among union officials and branch committee activists, but from grassroot members in the sorting offices and telephone exchanges.

There are three major aspects of policy that unite all these newer Broad Left groupings that we need to consider. Firstly, their general statements of aims were such that no real socialist could oppose them.

The key points of the UCW and POEU BL programmes are:

* Re-nationalisation without compensation of all enterprises hived off by the Tories.
* Democratic workers control and management of the PO/British Telecomms.
* A level of pay commensurate with the needs of the members, their skills and knowledge.
* For a 35 hour week.
* No reduction in posts by natural wastage.
* Elections of all officers of the union.

The real crux of the problem however is that their statement of aims *are so general*. they have been deliberately designed to reach a wide concensus of support within which individual supporters can hold varying opinions, even on major issues.

No harm in that you may wonder. Yet the new Broad Left style of catch-all approach *can* lead to serious divisions when it comes to its attitude towards unofficial disputes, regularity of election

The Broad Left as such did not campaign for the Brixton dole dispute

John Sturrock (Network)

Nationalities Bill demo — the new Broad Lefts have not raised this issue

of officials, their accountability to the membership, etc. More importantly such vague policies over wages, jobs and conditions do not commit rank and file supporters to much more than general backing for 'alternative policies'.

The argument is an important one and reflects the *political attitude* that underpins the Broad Left's orientation. Rank and file groupings need to be absolutely uncompromising in their relation to union bureaucrats if they are to maintain some unity of purpose and discipline over their supporters.

The Broad Left's programme is aimed not at rank and file activity in the workplace but in changing overall policy within the union. A glance at any of the existing 'rank-and-file' groups' statements of aims indicates a radically different approach.

* For flat rate wage increases.
* The regular election on each section, block or department of shop stewards fully accountable.
* For regular mass meetings and shop stewards committee bulletins.
* For regular meetings of all members in every section/department.
* Full report backs from all negotiations with management.
* Against 100 per cent facility time for union reps in office, branch, regional or other committees.

For all officials to be elected annually and subject to instant recall. For the honouring of all other workers' picket lines and full respect for calls for blacking.

* Uncompromising opposition to all forms of racialism and sexual discrimination. No Nazis to be allowed to hold union office.

Given the fact that the Broad Left programmes are not aimed at organising the rank and file, it is of no surprise that they make their greatest efforts at intervention at union conference and not around disputes throughout the year.

Secondly, there is an obsession among the newer Broad Lefts with the Labour Party. Hence in the UCW Broad Left programme we find it spelt out thus:

* 'Full support to the democratic changes passed at the 1980 Labour Party conference, and the involvement of all postal/telecomms workers in the party to build a mass membership.
* Labour to Power on a Socialist Programme, including the implementation of Clause 4.'

And in the POEU Broad Left we find: 'Kick out the Tories and return a Labour government committed and accountable to a truly socialist programme.'

Again the orientation leaves a lot to be desired.

What matters to the BLs is not how strong and confident workers are to fight back and how deeply socialist ideas have penetrated into the heart of the workplaces, but rather the task of ensuring the return of a Labour government. In common with the Labour left in the constituencies the new BLs do not see the *industrial power* of workers as *the* force to transform society. Yet without that industrial strength and the willingness to agitate to use that strength socialist politics are impotent.

Worse, the whole notion of 'Labour to Power on a socialist programme' fires illusions in the parliamentary road to socialism, the alternative economic strategy and the ability of even a left wing labour administration led by Tony Benn not being blown off course by those who control and run our society.

Although CND has been backed at most union conferences the Broad Lefts as organised groupings have been conspicuously absent in generating enthusiasm for one of the largest mass movements seen in Britain. Similarly the Anti-Nazi League is never mentioned in BL publications or energetically campaigned for other than by sympathetic individual members. And for all the pretensions of being anti-racialist, the Nationalities Bill has been totally ignored.

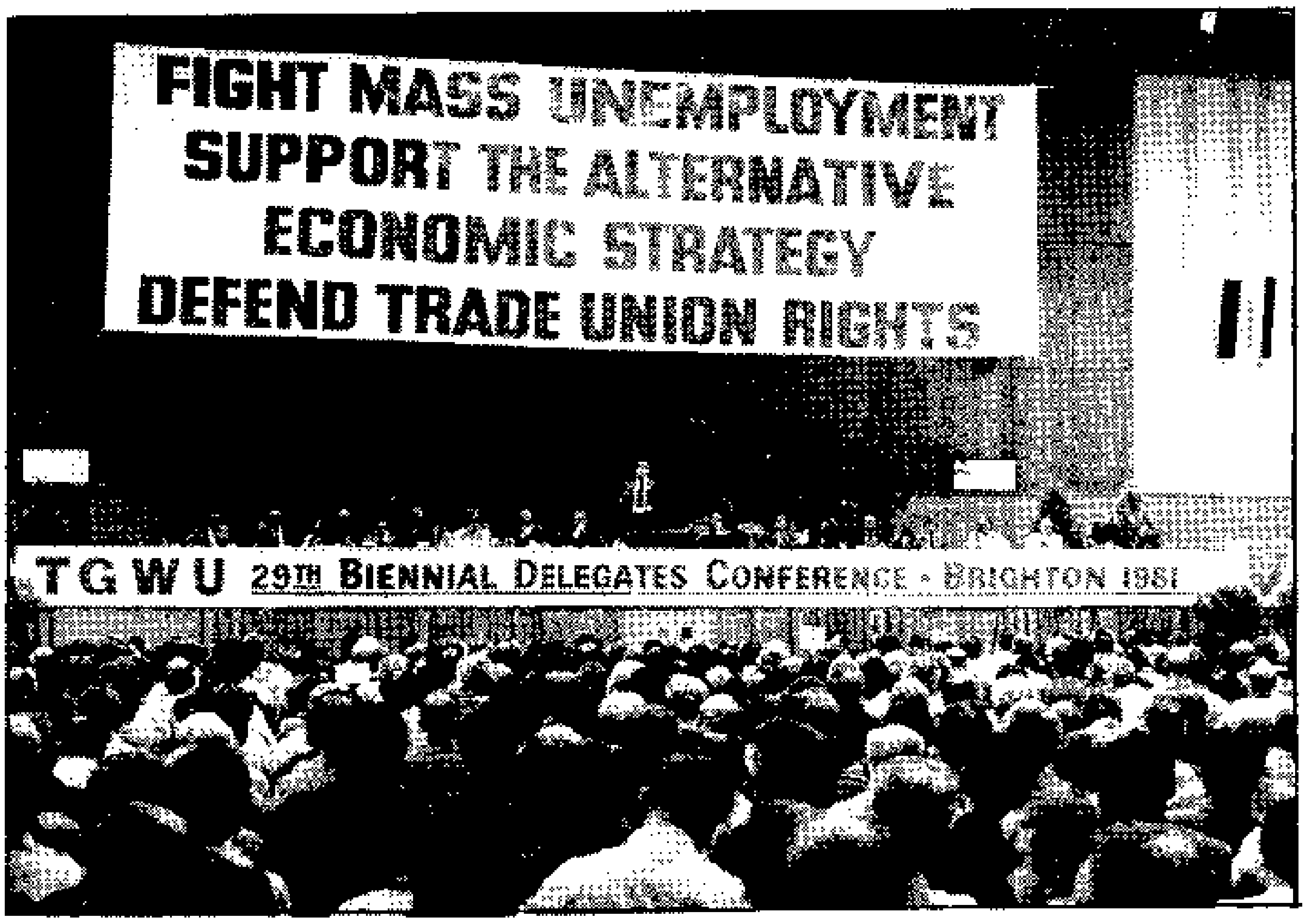
In relating to the new Broad Lefts it is imperative revolutionary socialists do not adopt a sectarian attitude, denouncing or ignoring their initiatives. Yet we also have to guard against dissolving ourselves into such movements by failing to differentiate our own brand of politics.

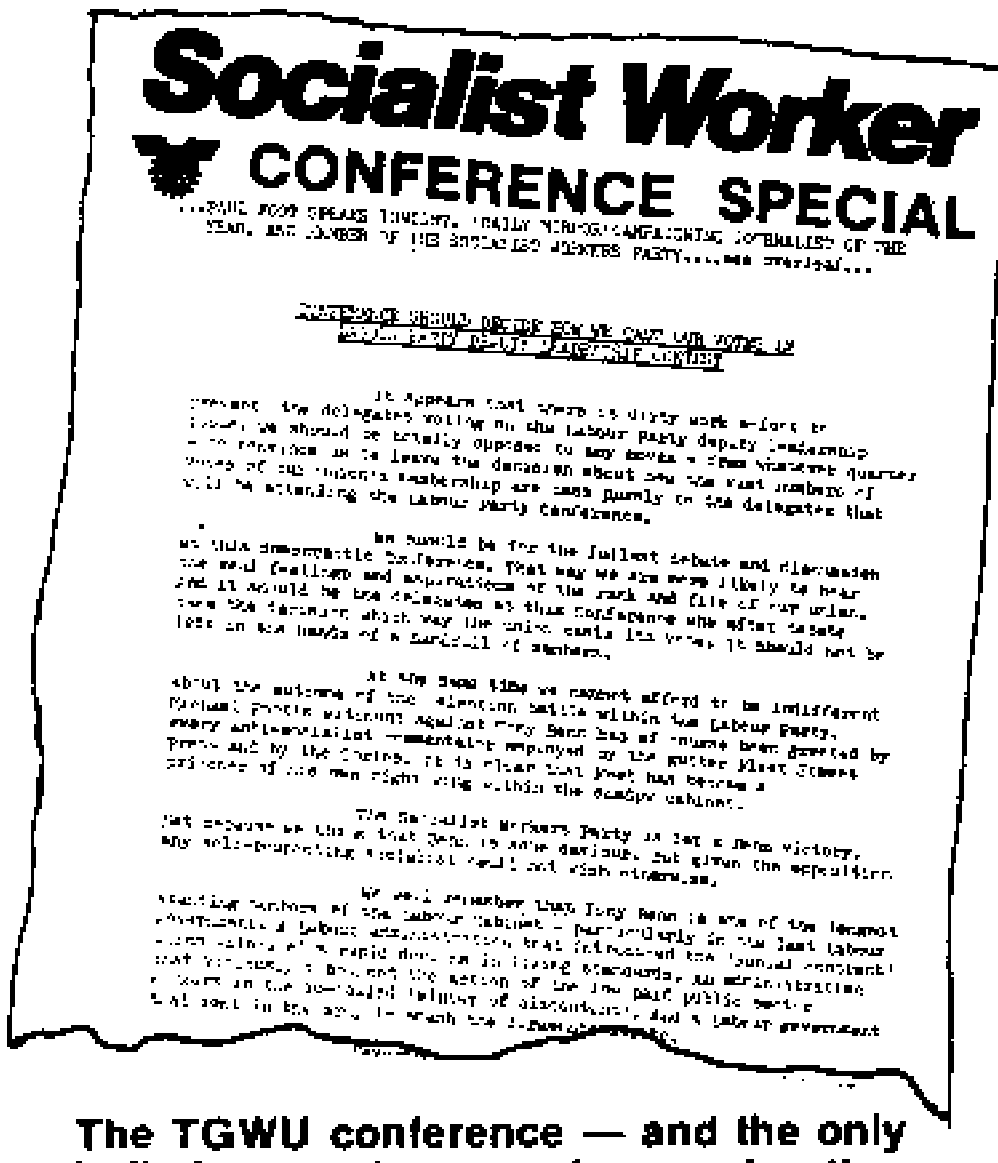
Those attracted to the Broad Lefts are those who want to fight the employers and the Tories. There are many excellent militants involved with or influenced by the new Broad Lefts. We should stand shoulder to shoulder with such forces against the right even though we may disagree with some of the policies and tactics of the Broad Left leadership.

The left must achieve a degree of unity in action if the Tories onslaught on the working class is not to prove disastrous. In this situation the united front *in activity* is of central importance. That means the struggle to unite on limited aims on which there is at least formal agreement, irrespective of the profound political differences that may exist on other issues. The 'rank and file' groupings like *Redder Tape*, NALGO Action Group, *Engineers' Charter*, need to make repeated initiatives for joint activity with the Labour left, while still preserving their own organisational independence.

The experience within the EEPTU where *Rank and File Contact* and the CP/Labour left have joined together in a campaign to re-open the suspended London Central Branch is an example of that united action.

In those unions where revolutionary socialists are isolated individuals, they should work within the Broad Lefts but only as a critical voice. The newly formed UCW BL has for the moment a rank and file type approach, although we should not underestimate the influence of the current that sees this as a way of winning influential union positions and who at a later stage may well steer clear of agitation at the base of the union for fear of alienating potential allies at the top. Even as a small voice within the Broad Lefts, revolutionary socialists can still be full of suggestions for active solidarity for disputes, backing for the Right to Work march to the Tory Party conference, etc. And we should always seek to argue every gambit of our politics over the Alternative Economic Strategy, and the impossibility of dealing with the crisis via reforms.




Socialist Worker
CONFERENCE SPECIAL

The TGWU conference — and the only bulletin to go in every day arguing the left's case

The big one balks the issues

At a time when the government is riding roughshod over the working class movement, the TGWU conference buried its head firmly in the sand. Motion after motion was composited in such a way as to remove its teeth.

The whole thrust of the debate and the resolutions was aimed at what a future Labour government would do. It was ironic, therefore, that the General Executive Committee was conniving all week in an attempt to prevent delegates from voting on the issue of the Labour deputy leadership.

Despite the manoeuvring of the Executive, there was a revolt from the floor over the question of the deputy leadership. It was quite obvious from the beginning that the overwhelming majority supported Benn, but every bureaucratic means was used to prevent a decision. And the stitch-up succeeded.

Alongside the parliamentarianism went a dreadful undercurrent of nationalism. This came out most strongly in the debate on economic policy and import controls.

The main resolution recommended by the Executive contained nothing by a series of wishy washy palliatives, all aimed at class collaborative economic nationalism. The constant references to 'our' industry, 'our' trade etc were very noticeable, and the arguments used for import controls were often little short of racist. There was a mock internationalism, with attacks on the multinationals. But no-one explained how they expected to fight the multinationals without the support of our brothers and sisters employed by these multinationals in other lands.

This attitude reached a farcical low point in the debate on the Channel Tunnel moved by Number One Region committee. We were told to oppose the Tunnel because it would allow some of 'our' trade to be controlled by the French. Perish the thought!

The import controls argument was well answered by a steelworker who remembered the support of the Swedish steelworkers during his dispute. All to no avail: the union's existing reactionary position was endorsed.

As well as nationalism, the conference was marked by sexism. Something like a quarter of the union's membership are women, yet there were only a handful of women delegates. And there was not a single motion on the agenda which related to women in any way, despite the increasing government attacks on women.

As opposed to all this the bright spark in the debate was a motion on the cuts which was carried in the teeth of vicious opposition from the Executive. It is worth repeating it in full, as one of the few examples of what should have filled the order paper:

> 'This conference is totally opposed to cuts in the public services and supports direct action against the cuts. Where workers take direct action and occupy to defend jobs and services, the TGWU will calls for strike action to support such occupations to create the best conditions for success. In addition the TGWU will support Labour councils who refuse to implement the cuts, put up rates or refuse to pay interest debts to the banks.'

The other victory on economic policy—although not seen as such—was in the debate on Industrial Democracy (class collaboration, in everyday terms). Workers, participation has been very important to the bureaucracy in the union and is central to the Alternative Economic Strategy. And we turned it over in the face of the General Executive Committee. The interesting thing about this is that many of the delegates argued the case on the basis of their experience of trying to operate planning agreements and the like, and they saw that they had been fooled.

How do we reform the TGWU? You may not have heard of it, but here exists within the union an organisation called the Broad Left which managed to get together a meeting of more than a hundred delegates early in the conference. You probably haven't heard of it because it is a purely electoral block which does not exist below the level of senior steward. And so at the conference it did not bother to put out a single bulletin or leaflet. Nor was it capable of making any well-organised intervention over the Benn issue—it was left to Alan Thornett from Cowley to try to get the issue voted on.

The Broad Left's lack of effectiveness was matched by a lack of principle when it came to political issues. At one point a leading member of the Broad Left went so far as to issue a call to bring back flogging in the debate on bus assaults!

The way to reform does not lie in electoral trade offs, but in building a rank and file movement capable of mobilising the membership.

The SWP delegates made small steps in this direction when we initiated a Right to Work Campaign meeting which was addressed by representatives of the Ansells workers, Holmann Michell, and Lawrence Scott strikers. We also put a *Socialist Worker* bulletin every day. We believe this had some constructive effect on the decisions, although the chairman, aided by the regional secretaries, managed to work the miracle and prevent most of us from speaking in any important debate.

Steve Cushion

WHY IMPORT CONTROLS WON'T SAVE JOBS

In the face of growing unemployment and ever-falling living standards, the call for import controls—particularly from some sections of the trade union leadership—is rising to a hysterical chorus. But would import controls save jobs? Would import controls improve living standards? Would the prices in the shops go up or down? *This pamphlet answers these questions.* This is

THE SOCIALIST CASE against import controls.

25p · 15p postage
10 copies £2.25 (post free)
Socialists Unlimited, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4

A SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY PAMPHLET

Smoke without fire

Back on the trains a few days after the ASLEF conference and you wonder what was achieved. Despite intense debates on wages, job losses, one-man operation, and proposals to restructure the union, all the policies won by the left will now go before an Executive Committee for *its* interpretation.

The militant conference atmosphere, with fiery speeches from Tony Benn, Ray Buckton and delegates praising 'accountability' and demanding real socialist policies, fades when local management try to stop 25 jobs and you wonder what the hell can be done.

The loss of jobs is *the* issue on British Rail. This was reflected at conference. Delegates made it clear they were disgusted with the lack of a fight. In the last year some 2,200 ASLEF jobs have gone. In December the EC said they would 'not sit idly by and watch the demolition of the railway industry' and resolved to take industrial action to stop it.

But the action was called off! Instead, the EC went hand in hand with Sir Peter Parker to the transport minister and said they were prepared to talk about further job cuts and productivity if the government would fill BR's begging bowl.

Delegates from the South East and Scotland insisted that a policy of industrial action be implemented at the end of the conference as the only way to save jobs. The Executive Committee wanted to stall industrial action and would have preferred a few more lobbies of MPs and protest marches. Delegates stressed that the recent unofficial strikes on Southern Region have saved more jobs and reinstated more trains than all the lobbies and marches put together. Despite two attempts to water the resolution down and delay any fight, it was eventually carried unanimously.

But this victory could prove illusory without further pressure from the rank and file. Already the EC are backing off over the closure of the Manchester-Sheffield line.

The effect of the attack on jobs stood out in the wages' debate. There were no resolutions this year calling for industrial action on pay, and despite our 29.2% claim there seemed to be a willingness to settle for something around 10%—which would be a massive wage cut.

Given this atmosphere, the high point of the conference came when two Lee Jeans strikers spoke from the platform. All 46 delegates applauded their tremendous fight and £325 was raised. All the speakers in the political debate referred to Lee Jeans, including Tony Benn. Unfortunately, the debate was dominated, to the exclusion of most other things, by our decision to back Tony Benn for the deputy leadership. Ray Buckton even wound the debate up early so that this support could hit the evening headlines. Nevertheless, there was overwhelming support for a resolution on total opposition to the siting of Cruise missiles in Britain. And there is also a possibility that the Right-to-Work-Campaign-backed resolution for a National Unemployed Workers Union will go to the TUC from ASLEF: it was one of four suggestions for the agenda accepted by the delegates.

Meanwhile the membership dispute with the NUR drags on. Len Murray has now suggested we give up 150 members on London Transport in exchange for sole negotiating rights on British Rail. A number of LT and BR delegates were opposed to this horse trading, which they saw as further steps in the sell-out of the LT membership, but it appears the EC will get their way.

Murray has also imposed a Railway Union Federation on us. This sounds good in theory, but in practice it could be a disaster. The aim is the establishment of one union which could see ASLEF's occasional militancy suffocated by the NUR. Bearing this in minds, some delegates were suspicious of the EC proposals to restructure the union. The disbandment of District Councils, the reduction of the EC and the phasing out of organising secretaries may be the first step to winding up the union.

The EC report on these items was referred back to a recall conference. Counter proposals from branches mean there is a real possibility of ASLEF officials, including the general secretary, facing regular reelection. This is possibly the first time our campaigning will have succeeded at a national level. We'll just have to wait and see.

Ray Buckton

Steve Forey
Kings Cross

Looking left and standing still

NALGO conference was marked by a tendency to draw back from committing the union to action while giving stunning support to the action of others. There was definite recognition of the need for a political as well as a trade union response to the crisis. But it fell just short of moving into action to prove the point. Two issues in particular highlighted this: CND and the cuts.

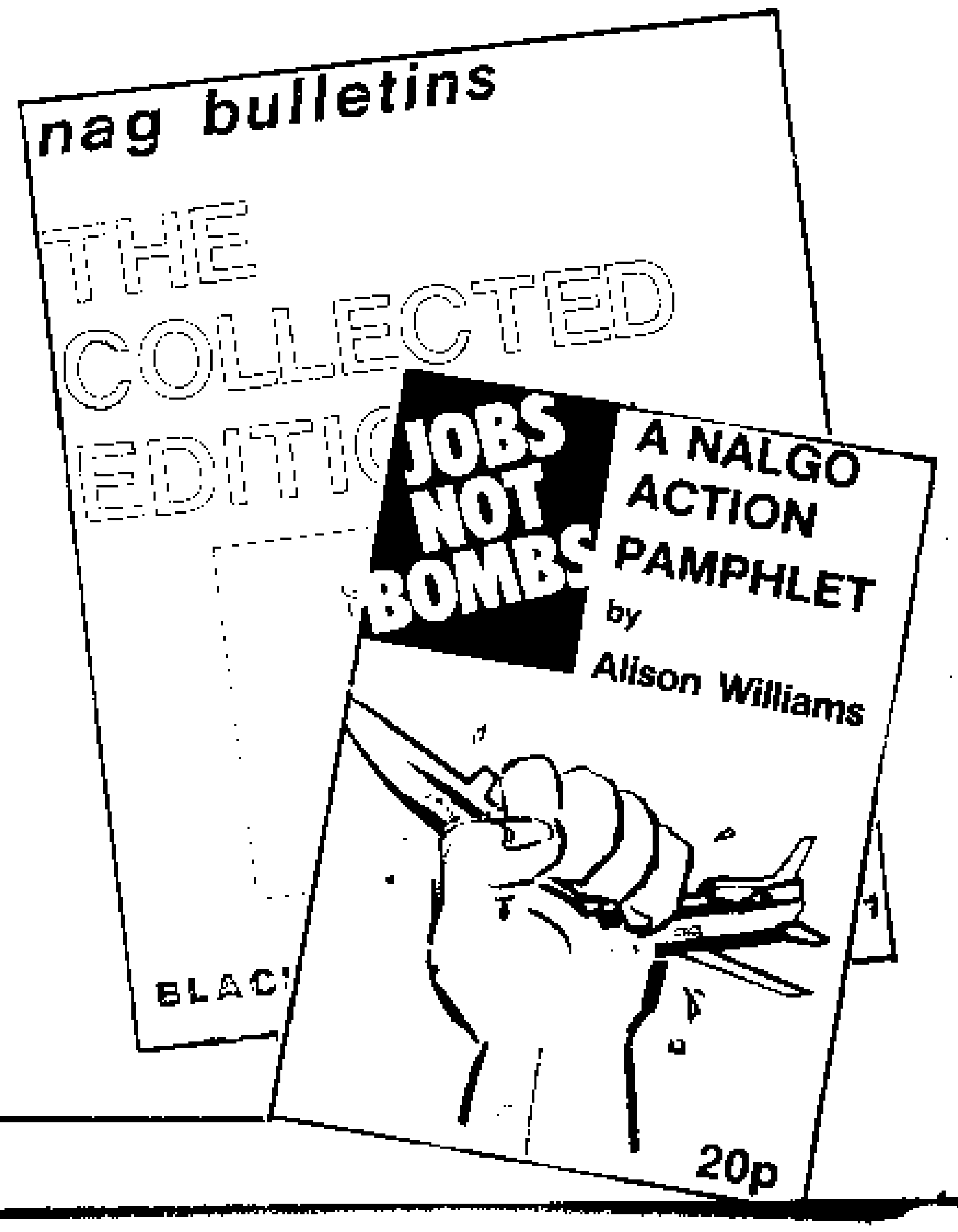
On CND the NEC were resoundingly defeated when they tried to defend multilateralism, and there was an overwhelming vote for unilateralism and affiliation to CND. But a small amendment to commit NALGO to taking part in a general campaign of industrial action to stop Cruise and Trident was defeated. Regrettably the opposition of the informal Scottish 'Broad Left' played a role in this.

However, the Health Group meeting did vote to boycott new posts being created to organise a post-holocaust health service! And full conference voted to support any member refusing to work on civil defence.

On the cuts, conference decided 'in principle' that the law should be broken in defence of jobs and services. But, later in the week, it refused to support members boycotting the sale of council houses, thus breaking the law in practice. It must be said that this was a narrow defeat on a card vote, but did seem to epitomise the conference's predilection for talking politics and not putting them into practice.

Most of the action we saw at Blackpool came from the NALGO Action Group, who put out daily bulletins which were well received and which were discussed in daily meetings. On top of this, NAG called several other successful meetings, including one to discuss action across the country to defeat the Scottish cuts, one for health service delegates to plan a pay campaign, and a good meeting on Troops Out—a topic not reached on the agenda for the third year running but pushed well to the fore by NAG's efforts.

Conference's two emotional high



spots were generated by outside speakers. Following a proposal from NAG a speaker from Lee Jeans was allowed to address conference and received two standing ovations together with a collection of over £1000. The second heartening speaker was a delegate from the Polish union, Solidarity, whose second, standing ovation followed his call for international socialism.

NALGO did have some strikers of its own to welcome to the conference. The *Typists Charter* campaign, originated by NAG supporters, continues to spread, and the local government meeting overwhelmingly called upon the NEC to increase strike pay for Liverpool typists and machine operators being victimised for low level industrial action (The NEC later managed to twist this request in such a way as to kick the typists in the teeth).

There was also a good response from Gas members to the threat of selling off show rooms and consequently destroying several thousand jobs. The national leadership are totally unprepared on this issue, and a lot will depend on rank-and-file militants building for national all-out action—a response manual workers are ready to make.

By far the biggest issue, though, was the massive threat to local government in Scotland, particularly Lothian. There were two responses to this. Outside conference there was an almost immediate and very well supported one-day strike by the Lothian Nalgo branch. Meanwhile, the Scottish District Council (dominated by the 'Broad Left') was putting forward a conference motion calling for everyone under the sun (eg STUC, TUC, Labour Party NEC) apart from the NALGO members affected to do something. This took up six of seven paragraphs, while the members—who alone can build the mass action which is the key to success—got only one paragraph and that was about acting jointly with their employers.

The search for political answers and the lack of confidence in producing action culminated in a vote to have a national ballot on the creation of a political fund and affiliation to the Labour Party. This vote was all things to all delegates. Right wingers want a ballot so that affiliation will be resoundingly defeated. Other delegates know their members could not blame them for their pro-Labour inclinations, since the decision was merely to have a ballot.

Nevertheless, the vote was big and did reflect a genuine wish for some political solution, albeit in a form that meant *others* solving members' problems. But is hardly justified the euphoric outbursts of many left delegates. Any attempt to unite politics and trade unionism is welcome. But there are two dangers. One is that in face of the right, the Labour Party will be presented uncritically—not much of a danger, though for those of us fighting *Labour* councils. More importantly, many lefts will see campaigning for affiliation as an excuse for ignoring those small but not insignificant groups of workers that are fighting now.

Last, but not least, a lot of lip service was paid at the conference to the majority of NALGO's membership being women, but not even lip service was paid to a rule change that would have made sexism (among other things) an action against the union's interests and therefore an explusion offence if a branch desired such a move. That was rejected. Although women have often been in the lead in struggle in NALGO Conference and the NEC remain overwhelmingly male and well paid. Any successful fight back and any successful rank-and-file group must be based on a sound socialist and feminist approach.

SWP NALGO delegates

Telecoms witch-hunted

The power of the capitalist press and their ability to intervene in trade union issues was demonstrated at the POEU conference in early June.

In 1980, the Broad Left had won three additional seats on the National Executive, giving them nine out of the 23 available. Only three more seats were required to give the left control of the executive for the first time to the late 1940s.

Some (although not all) on the left in the union believed that 1981 would be the year to win. So apparently did the ruling clique on the NEC and their supporters within the *Mainstream* group of right wingers. The 'evidence' of a potential 'red threat' appeared when, for the first time figures showing which branches had voted for what NEC candidate were published. The voting figures showed a wide spread support for the policies and candidates of the left, not just in London (the traditional base) but in branches as far apart as West Cornwall and Kendal.

The right wing were seriously concerned. Soon documents began to appear, with the right indicating those branches they felt to be in danger. In West Cornwall an anonymous letter was circulated to all members warning them of the 'danger to democracy' posed by their branch supporting candidates of the left. In response, at a massively attended meeting, the leadership of that branch received an overwhelming vote of confidence.

But the right were not down yet. In early March an article appeared in the *Daily Mail* warning of the 'threat to democracy' posed by the Broad Left in 'Britain's most important trade union'. They sited as evidence those same voting figures, together with comments from general secretary, Bryan Stanley, and the leader of the right, John Price. What the *Mail* omitted to say was that if it had not been for the Broad Left supporting the rule change enabling voting figures to be published against fierce opposition from the NEC and the *Mainstream* group, the so-called 'evidence' would not have been available. So much for the threat to democracy!

The article in the *Mail* was followed by similar articles in the *Telegraph*, the *Times* and the *Sunday Mirror* (W Wyatt — who else?), all highlighting the 'threat' and publishing the list of right wingers standing in the coming elections.

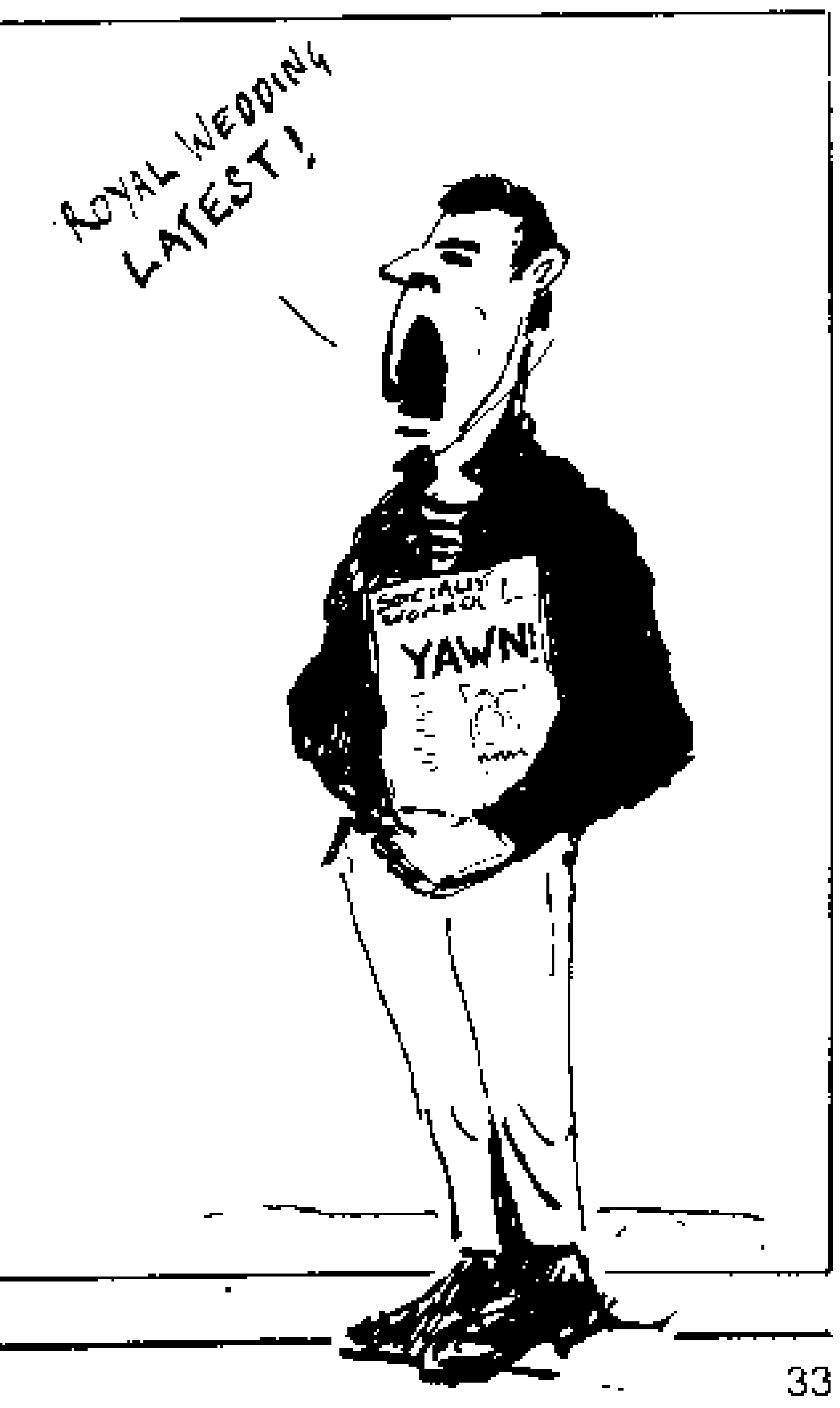
Just two weeks before conference, when branches were holding mandating meetings another article appeared in the *Daily Express* exhorting POEU members to get along to their branch meetings and ensure that the pay offer was accepted and the left kept off the NEC.

As a result many branch meetings were flooded with members, many of whom had never been to a meeting in their lives, mostly leaving as soon as the pay claim was accepted with only a handful of branches voting against.

Throughout the week the NEC won all the major debates. In fact, the only high-spot of an otherwise depressing week was that all nine Broad Left members retained their seats, two of the nine actually increasing their vote. Gloating over its achievement the *Express*, during conference, published a leader congratulating the union's members on

Why not subscribe?
10 weeks trial £3
Six months £8.50
One year £17

From SW Subscriptions,
PO Box 82, London E2.



beating off the 'attack from the left' and quoting John Golding, a POEU-sponsored MP and leading right winger, thanking the *Express* for the help it had given the POEU.

So what now? It has to be accepted that the press played a major role in the affair. They, at least, realise the potential power of a POEU led by socialists and know only too well what that would mean for them and the capitalist class that they support. To blame the press, though is to avoid the real issues.

The left lost because they did not recognise the right's ability to fight and their inbuilt advantage of controlling the union machine. We only have one answer to that inbuilt power, we *must* win the rank and file. It is not enough to compete for seats on the executive; the fight for policies and politics must be won.

The right *are* bankrupt, they do not know how to fight either Telecom management or the Tories. Their commitment to capitalism and their reliance on a future Labour government wedded to the same philosophy cannot beat off the increasing attacks on the members. Only socialists can offer the opportunity for survival, as Telecom moves out of the cosy environment of the last 30 years.

The threat to the monopoly, new technology, grade reorganisation, all pose major threats to the workers in the industry. The Broad Left has to develop the fighting policies needed to win the battles that lie ahead. Some on the left do not believe in that fight, they baulk at declaring their position and arguing their corner within the union. They have to change or move over, the rank and file will not wait for them. Socialists in the POEU must recognise the importance of the Broad Left and of working within it, the importance of fighting and winning the battle for policies. Our emphasis on the rank and file is the key to success.

Socialists in the POEU have to take their task seriously and become more active both in the union and within the Broad Left. The union is not a soft option, it is essential to our politics. People moan about the bureaucracy, about the endless meetings and committees, what they fail to realise is that without the slog, without the hard graft, there can be no success. Your politics may be immaculate but if you cannot translate those politics into action you might as well give up now.

Bryan Macey

Bill Sirs and friend

Yes Sirs, No Sirs

The Iron and Steel Trades Confederation held its annual conference last month. Unlike most union conferences this one has only been going the last few years. It is non-policy making. Delegates are often appointed by district officials rather than elected. The whole atmosphere is rather like a jamboree with general secretary Bill Sirs (unelected of course), dominating the speeches and the union organising functions in the evening—including a banquet with free drink which cost more than £25 per head.

Despite this atmosphere the conference was far far more positive than in previous years. Sirs was beaten on two important issues. The conference voted for unilateral disarmament and withdrawal from the EEC against the direction of the platform. Even after Sirs had pulled out Joe Gormley, Sid Weighell and Michael Foot—two years ago Prince Charles spoke from the platform—to speak, he only just carried the vote for the Labour right's position on the electoral college and the deputy leadership.

But Sirs maintained his bureaucratic control over the union. Two important resolutions on EC elections and making conference policy binding on the executive were dropped to the end of the agenda and then not taken due to lack of time.

Real Steel News was the only focus in the conference arguing for a positive rank and file fight back. George Sanders, a *Real Steel News* supporter from Sheffield, made an excellent contribution on how redundancies can be fought. By banning overtime they had forced their management to fill the vacancies left by voluntary redundancies.

The *Real Steel News* strategy of arguing through the rank and file and organising around disputes stands in stark contrast to the Reform Movement started three years ago. The Reform Movement have wheeled and dealed during those three years to get members elected to the EC. Because this strategy was carried out behind the backs of the rank and file and was never connected to fighting the BSC and the employers, no-one at the conference could tell who the Reform EC members were. They failed to move resolutions or attack Sirs and the EC majority.

At last the ISTC have adopted a position of opposition to any further redundancies. But Sirs managed to get this year's wage offer of 7 per cent, postponed for six months, accepted without a fight. The conference showed there is some wind of change in the ISTC, but *Real Steel News* and militants in the steel industry have a long struggle ahead.

Simon Turner

Neither Washington, nor Moscow, but International Socialism

Socialist Workers Party

NAME ....

ADDRESS ....

....

TRADE UNION .... TEL ....

For details of the Socialist Workers Party fill in this form and send to the National Secretary, SWP, PO Box 82, London, E2.

Staring bankruptcy in the face

As *Socialist Review* goes to press, the Edinburgh area Lothian Regional Council is facing cuts of £53 million—an eighth of the council's total budget.

A staggering 10,000 plus redundancies could easily be the direct result of cuts on this massive scale.

Lothian is number one on Secretary of State George Younger's hit-list of Scottish local authorities which have failed to slash spending to the Tories' satisfaction. And Younger is now armed with a new bludgeon, in the shape of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions (Scotland) Act, which gives him sweeping new powers to cut the Rate Support Grant to authorities which exceed the Tory 'guidelines'.

Not that Lothian has been exactly profligate. Still, since reorganisation in 1975, it has taken on about 4000 workers (total workforce about 40,000) of which 3000 are in education, 1000 in social services and 300 elsewhere and it has not increased charges for services or bus fares. Rate increases have only reflected inflation and a massive cut in the Rate Support Grant from 66% to 44% in the last two years. A fair amount of militant noise was generated in Lothian's rejection of cuts, and it is now attracting the wrath of less stalwart Labour councils who say that things wouldn't be so bad now if Lothian had kept its mouth shut and made a few token cuts.

The argument for no rate rises, no cuts, and confrontation sooner rather than later was lost substantially in the Labour Party, the Labour Group and the unions. Instead, an attitude of uncritical adulation of the Lothian Labour Group has prevailed. The two year period of 42% and 51% rate rises has given birth and sustenance to a vocal ratepayers' organisation (RAGE) and a sustained portrayal in the mass media of Lothian as spendthrift.

Required to respond to Younger's demands by July 3rd, the signs are that the Labour Group will say no, although one defector can upset the majority on the council (25 -24). Younger should get parliamentary approval to dock the rate support grant in the next few weeks. The council will then be staring bankruptcy in the face, and the commissioners (bailiffs to you) will be closing in for the kill.

In response to this most of the running so far has been made by the organised rank and file, the NALGO Action Group and Rank and File Teacher. NALGO fortuitously had a branch meeting arranged for the day on which the £53 million was demanded. While branch officers argued for a 'general campaign of action' a NAG emergency motion for a one day strike was carried overwhelmingly and five days later there was a good response and a march of about 2000 which received excellent coverage.

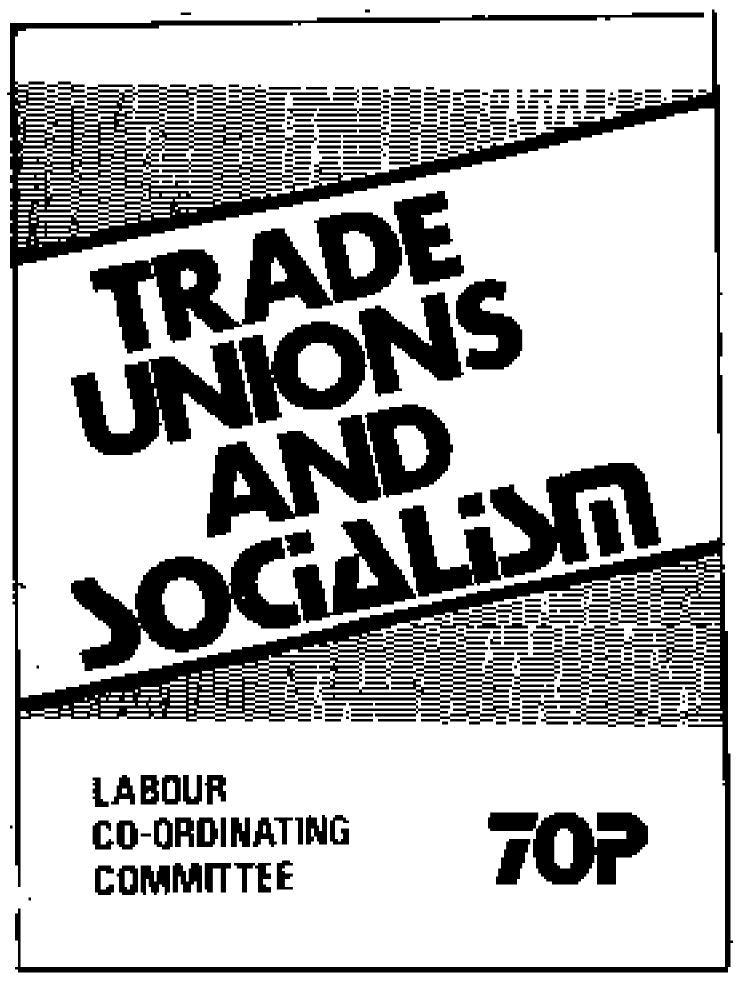
At a joint conference of all shop stewards in Lothian Regional Council, debate from the floor was curtailed and the platform motion 'to take whatever action is necessary including industrial action' was passed. NAG and R&F Teacher are pushing for all out action from the date of withdrawal of the Rate Support Grant. The signs are that the officials will argue for selective action, as necessary.

The one day strike on June 30th looks as though it will be massive but there is a danger of a vacuum after that, as the teachers break up on 3rd July and the summer holiday period begins. If the Labour Group cracks, the union bureaucracy will swing towards cooperating with them in order to make the cuts as 'humane' as possible, and to help them win the May '82 elections.

Broadening out the action across the country is essential not only to avoid isolation and defeat, but because Younger has only just started in Scotland, and Heseltine intends to do the same in England and Wales. The issue could be big enough to bring Thatcher down. But for that to happen rank and file militants must be prepared to think big and push for bold solidarity action. Lothian just might be the start of something very big indeed.

Laure Ross (NALGO) and Dave Strutt (EIS)

REVIEW ARTICLE



An old tune

Everyone with a TV set must remember the scene from the film *Casablanca* when Bogart comments on Bergman's reappearance in his life: 'Of all the joints in all the world she has to turn up in mine'. That is roughly how I felt when I read the new pamphlet, *The Trade Unions and Socialism* by Pete Rowlands: of all the reformist rubbish that has been written down since 1945, must we have some more? Am I being rude about a former IS comrade's attempt to construct a trade union strategy for the Labour Coordinating Committee? Unfortunately the answer must be an unequivocal No.

Socialism as we understand it is a system of society based upon the self-activity of working people. Therefore the methods we use to achieve such a society will determine its nature. The reformist left—no matter what extra-parliamentary rhetoric they may use—have no strategy for socialist advance which does not entail the manipulation of workers' organisation. Hence this pamphlet.

I use the word 'manipulation' advisedly, since this is a conscious attempt to woo the 'left' bureaucrats away from the *Tribune* 'centre' of Michael Foot towards the Bennite camp. In order to achieve this it is necessary to distance the LCC from the 'rank and filism' of the SWP. This is achieved on page 16 where, under the heading 'Key Areas of Debate', we have the following gem:

> "The main fault with this analysis (that the role of the bureaucracy will lead them to contain the action of the rank and file) is that it substitutes sociology for politics, seeing the crucial difference as being between members and officials rather than right and left.
>
> "Such criticisms often amount to little more than condemning leaders because they are not revolutionaries, a view misplaced in a number of white collar unions, where the leadership are often to the left of the membership."

The argument is remarkably similar to that I heard last year from a well known London CP 'Broad Left' engineer, that if Ken Gill was to stand for election on AUEW rules as general secretary of TASS, he would probably lose, since 'Every office girl and typist who was a TASS member would have the vote.'

But Ken Gill will have nothing to worry about from the LCC's trade union strategy. Under the heading 'Internal Democracy', we read:

> "It is often said on the left that unions are

> undemocratic, but this is a view which needs qualification and consideration. The formal constitutions of all unions are democratic in that policy is ultimately decided by the membership at a conference which all unions hold."

Undoubtedly, our EETPU comrades will be extremely pleased to read this, especially those belonging to the Central London Branch.

Again, on page 22 we are told that the 'debate about trade union democracy is extremely complicated. It is all too easy to sloganise in this area and put too much emphasis on election of officials.' So Ken Gill can relax. After all, he is a left official, albeit one with a penchant for British built nuclear fighter/bombers.

It is on issues such as these that revolutionary socialists must reiterate our considerable differences with the Bennites. For us the concept of the rank and file is *not* a sociological abstraction. Yes, we may appear to have a 'simple minded attitude to the trade union bureaucracy' (as the review of the pamphlet in *Socialist Challenge* puts it), but then our distrust is borne out by years of practical experience. I am afraid that I must consider those who call our distrust 'simple minded' as people preparing to make compromises with the left and not-so-left officials at the expense of the workers.

On the question of the election of full time union officials, again we make no apology over the matter. We are 100 per cent for the election *of all officials* as often as possible and for the inclusion in union constitutions of rules governing their recall.

There are other points in the specifically trade union section I could take up, in particular the attitude to the 'block vote' at the Labour Party conference: as the sails are trimmed to Benn's contest for deputy leader, all of a sudden the block vote isn't such a bad thing after all.

At the LCC's first industrial conference last year, few trade union officials were present. We commented at the time, correctly it appears, that they were not likely to be so long as there was loose talk from the committee about democratising the unions as well as the Labour Party. This year's conference has the blessing of many of the top left officials; there's nothing in this statement to frighten them.

If the pamphlet simply dealt with union organisation it would be bad enough. But it attempts to lay out a 'road to socialism' also.

What Pete Rowlands has proposed is a re-run of the 'Socialist Wages Plan' of 1959, with the same proposals for socialism by committee, gradually weaning away capitalism's power, in a slow, painless, peaceful process.

In the section 'The Future: the Policies We Need' Rowlands lays out the Alternative Economic Strategy. At one point he slips back towards his IS past, talking of the extra-parliamentary power of the working class, of the on-going fight for democracy in the unions and the Labour Party. Whoops! That could be a very slippery slope. But he soon recovers and we leap back into the extremely soggy swamp of the AES with:

1) Reflation of the economy through increased public spending (Good old Keynes).

2) Planned controls on foreign trade and the movement of capital (that sounds a very polite way of saying import controls)

3) Extension of public ownership, planning agreements and industrial democracy (problems here, since the TGWU conference has just thrown out planning agreements, and there is no indication from the author that industrial democracy means anything other than the TUC proposals—indeed, he later talks of a 'social audit' in this context).

4) A national economic plan (wait a minute, didn't we have one of these once before from a man called George Brown?)

5) Price controls, in exchange for...? Yes, you've guessed it—an incomes policy! This is not spelt out at this point, but further back on page 19 under the title 'Free Collective Bargaining' the ground work is laid for a new social contract.

We are told that in order to hoodwink the IMF and big business, a future Labour government attempting to implement 'socialist policies' (a rather vague phrase, but we can assume that if they intend hoodwinking big business they don't propose hanging them from the lamp posts) must make a deal with the unions on the following conditions:

a) Agreement to include profits, prices and dividends as well as incomes.

b) Guarantees of full implementation of the AES.

c) The agreement to be preceeded by 'measures *indicating* a determination to redistribute power away from the rich and big business'.

This agreement to limit wage rises would, of course, be 'voluntary' and based on 'union support' and 'free collective bargaining'—just in fact like the 1975 one. So presumably, someone—a Labour chancellor perhaps—would express his or her determination 'to squeeze the rich until the pips squeak', thus *indicating* their determination to redistribute power etc.

It is at this point that the really old movie comes on the screen. What Pete Rowlands has just proposed is a re-run of the 'Socialist Wages Plan' of 1959. In that year two 'socialist economists' John Hughes and Ken Alexander presented almost precisely the same strategy for a future Labour government. The LCC may have learnt the value of socialist rhetoric in selling such a package. But in basics they are the same proposals for socialism by committee, gradually weaning away capitalism's power, in a slow, painless, peaceful process.

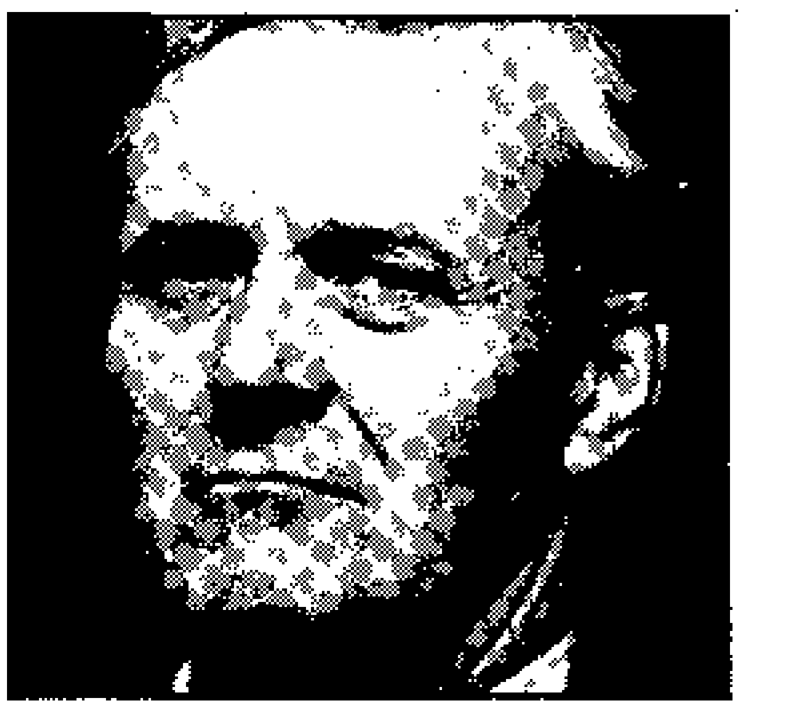
In the first series of *Socialist Review* in 1959, Eric Heffer (then a lowly carpenter) had the following to say:

> 'The economy is capitalist. Capitalist laws apply, even in the event of a Labour government, certainly if it buys shares in the various industries and fails to expropriate the owners. The British state is a class state, created by and for the ruling class'.

It was inconceivable, he claimed, for the state to be so obliging as to fashion and implement an incomes policy designed to expropriate the class whose interests it was there to defend. 'We have had too many false dawns,' he wrote, 'I'll settle for old thinking based upon the class struggle'.

I would finish there, but one final word. Ken Alexander ended up on the Board of Directors of Fairfields shipyard, where he was responsible for bargaining away the rule book. He was appointed to the position at the behest of the Minister of the Technology of the time, a certain Tony Benn.

Jim Scott



A new pamphlet from the *Socialist Workers Party*.
35p + 15p postage
10 copies £3 post free.
Socialists Unlimited
265 Seven Sisters Rd
London N4

Fight for the right to carry guns?

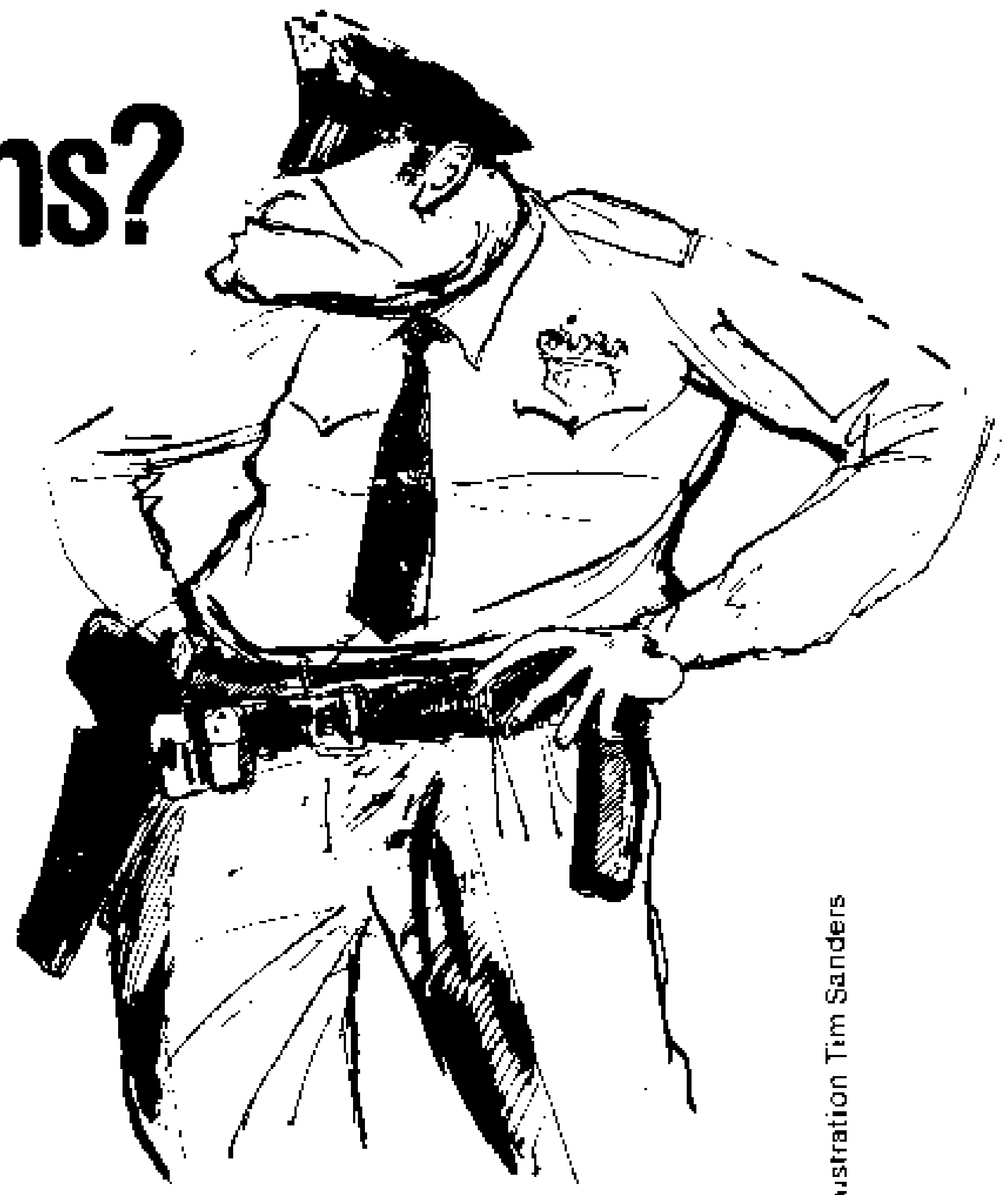


Illustration Tim Sanders

The attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan last March unleashed howls of liberal protest about the fact that fire-arms are so easily available in the USA. Many people on the left, who do not think too much of Reagan, have joined in that protest.

The argument runs rather like this: it is shocking that guns are so easily available in the USA. Quite apart from the shootings of presidents and other public figures, it means that there are a vast number of murders of ordinary people in the USA. Add to that the carnage from hunting accidents etc and you have a dangerous system which profits only the manufacturers of fire-arms and red-neck apes playing cowboys. Fire-arms should be tightly controlled just like they are in any other civilised country.

From a Marxist point of view, this argument is total nonsense. The ready possession of fire-arms does not lead to an increase in murders. This is easily proved. In Switzerland every adult male citizen has a modern high-velocity rifle and 25 rounds of ammunition at home. This is provided by the government as part of the defence programme. Zurich and Geneva are not the scenes of mass slaughter in the way that New York and Dallas are. It is the rotten structure of American capitalism which drives its victims to murder, not the possession of fire-arms.

It is worth while asking why Americans have such a situation in the first place. The legal position is that it is written into the Constitution—the second amendment, adopted in 1791, as a matter of fact. It reads:

> 'A well regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.'

The thinking behind this was based on recent and real experience. On July 4 1776, Congress had unanimously adopted another document, the Declaration of Independence, which reads in part:

> 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted amongst Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government ..... '

The authors of this justification for revolution had a very clear idea about what the pursuit of this 'right and duty' entailed. Among the charges they levelled against George III were:

> 'He has kept amongst us, in times of peace, Standing Armies.......quartering large bodies of armed troops amongst us... He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging war against us.
> 'He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, and destroyed the lives of our people.
> 'He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny....'

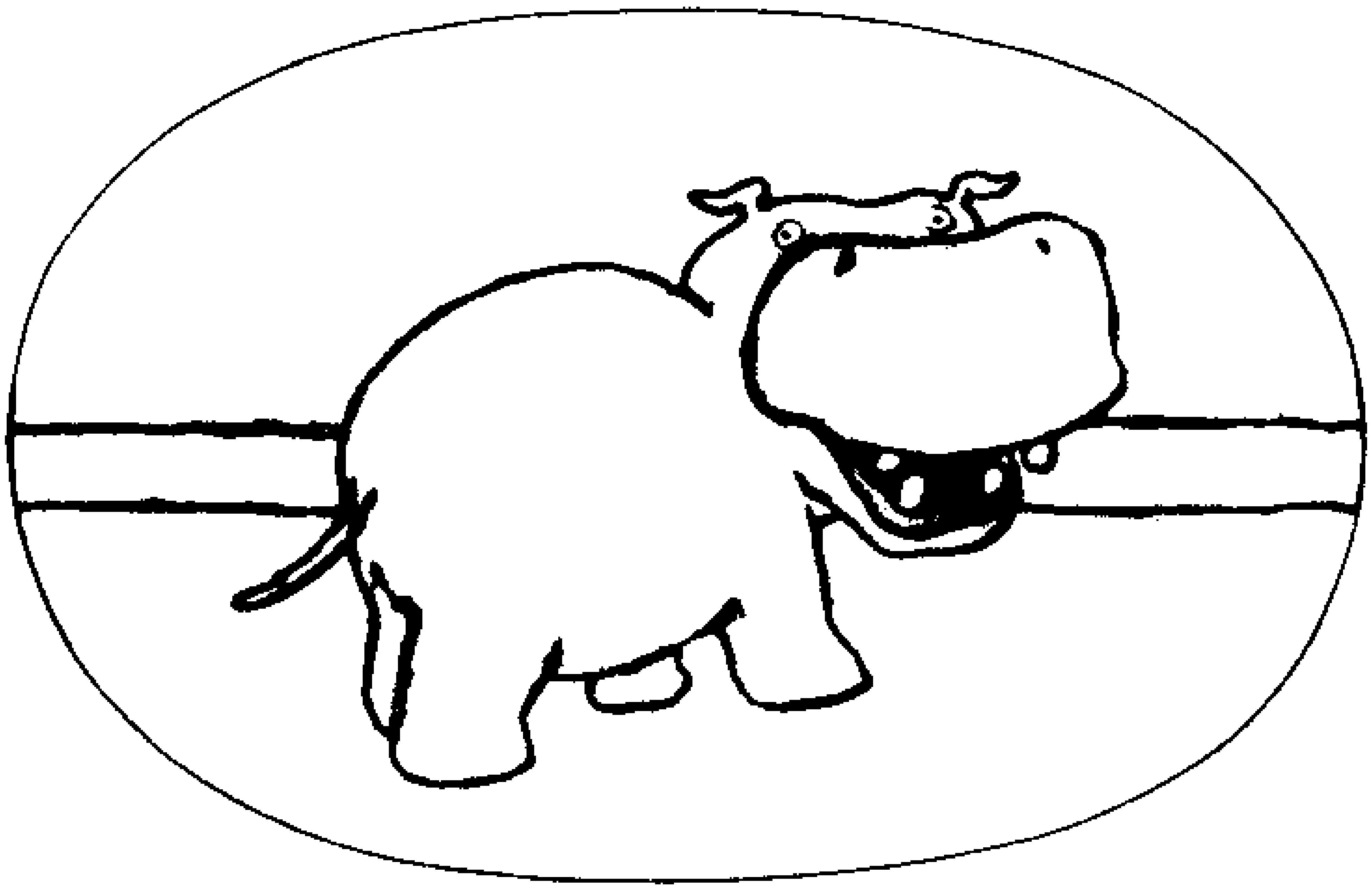
The right to bear arms was written into the constitution because it was quite clear that the only guarantee against tyranny was the armed people. In this respect, the USA was not unique. In every great revolution, the arming of the people, and in particular of certain classes within the 'people', have been key issues. The uprising in Montmartre which sparked off the Paris Commune was precisely about who would control the artillery.

Every ruling class in history has tried to make sure that access to weapons is restricted to itself and its trusted servants, and to keep them out of the hands of the masses. For a number of almost accidental reasons, the US working class is fortunate in that its rulers are stuck with a sacred document which prevents them doing just that.

The abolition of that right today would not mean the disarming of the racist police. It would mean the disarming of black militants defending themselves against the worst atrocities. It would not mean the disarming of the company goons in Harlan County. It would mean the disarming of striking mine-workers defending themselves against armed attacks on their picket lines. And it would not mean an end to the appalling tide of murders: it would just change the instruments used.

The right to bear arms is, in fact, a fundamental democratic right, just like the right to join a trade union. It should be defended with the same vigour.

H Brandler



Books to read every day

Michael Foreman is one of my favourite writers; in fact I can honestly say that I read at least one of his books every day of the week.

Perhaps that's not such an achievement, when you know that Foreman writes books for children. But even so some of them are great books by any standards.

I make no claims to being an expert on children's literature. My interest is purely practical: we've got two children we're trying to bring up with a fair and rational view of the world and that's why I like Michael Foreman's books.

All his stories are well written, and beautifully illustrated, and all of them tackle political issues.

Some like *Winter Tales* and his new book *Trick A Tracker* have a gentle political point to make, but the rest whatever the storyline, all have a serious political moral.

Moose for instance, believe it or not, is about the Cold War. *War and Peas* is about world poverty and hunger. Both are lovely books, but maybe a shade too self-conscious. Written for parents rather than their children.

But Foreman has written at least four authentic classics – *Dinosaurs*, *Horatio*, *All the Kings Horses* and *Panda's Puzzle*.

Dinosaurs tells the story of a factory owner who in his headlong drive to reach the stars turns the Earth into a pile of rubbish. Once he's zoomed off, dinosaurs re-awaken from the Earth's interior and set about clearing up his mess. The intergalactic capitalist returns and he wants his planet back, or at worst a part of it. 'No' says the communist stegosaurus. 'Not a part of it, but all of it. It's all yours, and it's all mine. Remember that. This time the earth belongs to everyone, not parts of it to certain people, but all of it to everyone.' "Everyone!" came the chorus from all living things. Everyone. Everyone.'

Horatio is a story of hippopotamus liberation. Horatio is bored with mud, but his parents are stuck in it. 'Mud was good enough for my father, and my father's father. It's good enough for me and your mother and it should be good enough for you'.

But it isn't. Horatio is a new romantic and he leaves for the big city. He gets his big break and becomes a removal man. 'For the first time Horatio was proud of his size and strength.'

By accident Horatio then becomes a dancer. After dancing round the world he gets nostalgic to return to his muddy roots, but his message to hippokind is still optimistic: 'We can walk together in the mountains and forests, the deserts and woodlands of the world. We can wallow in streams and see the oceans. We can form a football team or a symphony orchestra, be dancers and doctors and poets and kite fliers and moving men.'

All the Kings Horses is the story of a princess, 'But this wasn't the milk-white golden haired pink little number the way princesses are supposed to be. This was a big girl and dark.'

The King is keen to get her married off, but she isn't. Keen that is. She throws the richest man in the kingdom down the stairs, and says she won't marry any man she can't wrestle with.

The King devises a scheme to turn this to his advantage. All the eligible rich boys are invited to wrestle for his daughter's hand, but if they lose they have to forfeit a hundred horses. The princess mangles and mauls everyone of them.

Finally along comes a poor woodcutter's son. 'Of course,' thinks the King, 'It's always the woodcutters son who gets the princess'. On the day of the big match, 'the crowd could sense that this was something special. He was indeed a handsome fellow. The princess and the woodcutter 'met in a big hug and stood motionless in each other's arms'. Aaar. Turn the page. 'Then she twisted and turned him, mangled and mauled him and threw him into the crowd.' The princess jumps out of the ring, releases all the King's horses and rides to her freedom.

But *Panda's Puzzle* is my all-time favourite. It's the story of a panda's epic voyage to discover 'whether he is a black bear with white bits or a white bear with black bits'. He searches the world looking for an answer. Finally, he returns to where his search began, a wise panda. An old man asks him again, 'Are you a black bear or a white bear?' 'I DON'T CARE' replies Panda. 'A great discovery' says the old man.

I'm fairly confident that even now green biros are being put to paper to slag off Foreman and list his crimes against humanity. He writes more about animals than people: he doesn't write enough about the toiling masses (although there are a few of the labouring poor in Foreman's books, my favourite is a water buffalo who tells Panda, 'The important thing is to work to live, not to live to work. The best thing about working is stopping.' My philosophy entirely). Foreman also turns thin kings and big princesses into heroes and heroines without explaining the need for a socialist republic.

I'll offer no defence to the charges. All I'll say in mitigation is that I love Michael Foreman's books, and so do our children. Which I would have thought is ultimately the test of socialist children's books. Some of the Very Worthy non-racialist non-sexist books are also non-interesting: and a lot of the socialist realism books for kids like *Olly's Brother Gets the Crabs* are very useful but slightly heavy going.

Before anything else Foreman's books are interesting: they're funny, and colourful; they're imaginative and surprising. Foreman doesn't just reject all the evil sexual and racial stereotypes he goes further and subverts them, and *argues* against them in terms children understand even if some adults don't.

A friend of mine who's a teacher told me about when she read *All the Kings Horses* to a class of 8 year olds. Some of the girls just could not cope with the moment where the princess rejects the handsome woodcutter. They almost broke down, because it challenged just about everything sugary and spicy that little girls are brought up to accept. And if there's a better retort to all the garbage of racism than 'I don't care!', I don't know what it is.

I know nothing at all about Michael Foreman: the man might well be a unreclaimed Stalinist, he might even be an Arsenal supporter (although I doubt that). What I do know is that he's written some brilliant books: and if our children grow up the way we'd like them to, it will at least partly be down to Michael Foreman.

Bob Light

Dirty Harry goes to Dock Green

A few weeks ago Jack Warner, the seemingly immortal soft-cop hero of *Dixon of Dock Green,* died. His favourite episode from the series, made in 1975 when Warner was 75, was rescreened on the box a few days later.

The episode began with Dixon's familiar face-on statement to the audience. 'No one likes a bent copper,' he said, 'least of all coppers themselves'. After that the elderly cop spent his time strolling around the police station giving voice to the ideas about the police which informed the series for over 20 years.

'So-and-so is ambitious, but is he a *good* cop?' 'The police are there to protect the public from the villains who prey upon society'. 'The police force isn' t perfect, it's manned by ordinary men.' And so on.

No one expects police series on television to be anything but pro-cop. One way or another they all reinforce the idea that thanks to the police force we can all sleep easy in our beds at night, secure in the notion that 'crime' is being ably dealt with. The police force is there to protect 'us', the normal, law-abiding citizens, from the deviants in our midst.

But police series differ in the way they put that message across. The fictional world of one series differs from another, determining a different style of police action in each case. There is no way for example the cosy world of *Dixon* could accommodate the raw violence of *The Sweeney*. The more complicated the fictional world becomes, the more it is troubled by inherent contradictions. And the more difficult it is, I would argue, to maintain ideological coherence.

Dixon of Dock Green presented an extremely uncomplicated world. The series grew out of the Ealing Studios film *The Blue Lamp*. The film epitomised the utopian vision of British society espoused by all Ealing productions: the vision of a society based on communal solidarity, on loyal relations within a hierarchy. The police fit into this structure as a family unit within the extended family of the nation as a whole.

There was a freshness and vitality about the Ealing films, an avoidance of stereotypes, which *Dixon of Dock Green* never managed to achieve. The series plodded down the years offering a dead weight of cliches and moral platitudes about the police force which probably even the police themselves found hard to swallow.

When *Z Cars* appeared in the early sixties it was in conscious reaction to *Dixon*. It was an attempt at a more realistic approach to the police and their work. What is most remarkable about the early episodes, looking back from the post-Sweeney era, is the lack of emphasis on action. Even the plot seems incidental.

The main concern was with the relationships between coppers. An enormous amount of time was spent in claustrophobic close-ups of one or other pair in their patrol car. We were immersed in their mundane wrangling and friendly banter. Where they were going and what they were doing seemed irrelevant.

The emphasis was on teamwork: individual heroics were frowned upon. At the same time the police seemed curiously vulnerable in *Z Cars*. Their job was to keep order, but wherever possible by non-violent means. Guns only ever appeared as a last resort.

Z Cars drew attention to the class system within the police force. The hierarchy was clearly visible with Barlow at the top, the four PCs at the bottom and Watt somewhere in between. It caused minor tensions, but nothing in comparison to internecine strife which characterises *The Sweeney*.

Z Cars was, like *Dixon* before it and *Softly Softly* after it, essentially British. All three have little in common with the mainstream of police fiction whose traditions are very much American.

Cop sagas are simply one manifestation of the broader 'tough guy' tradition in film and writing. The tradition dates back at least to the 1930s when the gangster film emerged as a dominant form in Hollywood. In every case the key figure is the lone individual, alienated from society, rebelling against its conventions, relying for survival on his wits, his intuition and his gun. In this respect, Cagney the gangster is little different from Cagney the G-man. The 'hard-boiled dick' of Hammet and Chandler novels is cast in the same mould. It makes little difference whether the tough guy is on the right or the wrong side of the law. His tactics remain the same.

It is interesting however, that few films in the forties and fifties articulated the contradictions and tensions which must necessarily arise when this kind of character finds himself within an organisation like the police force. These tensions only emerged later as the central theme of the Clint Eastwood film *Dirty Harry*.

Clearly *The Sweeney* is very much the offspring of *Dirty Harry*. But it draws on the British tradition as well. It is an extremely intriguing mixture. In no way is it anti-cop. It was said to be the police's favourite programme a few years back. It is certainly not subversive. But at the same time it is ideologically more complex and more contradictory than on the one hand an American series like *Starsky and Hutch* or on the other the offerings of the BBC.

The Sweeney relocates 'Dirty Harry' Callaghan's conflict with authority in a class society. It is class that structures the police force just as much as the world outside, and Regan, whatever his titular position, is on the side of the underdog. There is a kind of gutsy populism about *The Sweeney* which allows the working class people Regan encounters while hunting his prey to be portrayed in a realistic and sympathetic way. The contradiction is that Regan's role at the same time legitimises the strong-arm tactics that real life cops would love to use more frequently against picket lines and demonstrations, ie against the ordinary working people with whom *The Sweeney* aligns itself.

If I were stuck on a desert island with a television that only showed police fiction, I guess I'd choose to watch *The Sweeney*. With all due respect to the memory of Jack Warner, it is better than *Dixon of Dock Green*.

Jane Ure Smith

Immersed in greed and lust

The Postman always Rings Twice
Director: Bob Rafelson

James M Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, written in 1934, has been filmed three times. The latest attempt has been welcomed with an avalanche of enthusiasm and praise from the press.

The Sunday Times hailed it as 'undoubtedly a work of high style and intellectual rigour'. Derek Malcolm in the *Guardian* thought it likely to turn out one of the best directed American films this year.

While suggesting *The Postman Always Rings Twice* might possibly be one of the great 'art' movies of the decade, neither reviewer was reluctant to sell us the film on the basis of its turgid sex scenes. Alan Brien in *The Sunday Times* talked of

'... Sexual passion in all its grossness and animality, narrowly avoiding a kind of macho-porn, at once exciting and implausible. The shifty, drifting handyman (Jack Nicholson) batters the blowsy beauty (Jessica Lange), married to his boss, into lubricious receptivity in the kitchen... so that she engineers her own rape, elbowing aside the cooling loaves and dragging him into her.'

You can almost hear Brien dribbling into his typewriter. But his comment typifies the way the film has been received and also shows the way the director, Rafelson, invites the audience to indulge in contempt for the characters and for womens sexuality in general.

Rafelson's approach is coldly voyeuristic. Rather than encouraging critical observation of the couple's desperate relationship, it demands we take a vicarious part in its nastiness.

Rafelson's films are all intended to be allegories about American life. Set against a background of the Depression, *The Postman* pretends to give the couple's insecurity and aggression economic and psychological roots. But what it really does is immerse itself in greed, lust and ambition, so that any valuable or sensitive observations that could have been made are drowned in Rafelson's own self-indulgence.

Even the performances of Nicholson and Lange cannot save the film. Nicholson particularly is less than convincing, uncomfortably adopting the character he assumed in *The Shining*, except this time round he is fatter, more unshaven and the glint in his eye more manic.

Of the two, the woman is the dominant character. It is she who plans the murder, with the desperate need for self-preservation her most powerful instinct. This could have been built into a character who decisively and determinedly forged her own life. But instead we are given a female character with all the stereotypes of 'wanton temptress' and 'dewy-eyed mother-to-be' rolled into one.

It is a film almost entirely dominated by grotesque violence, gratuitous amorality and an utter contempt for women and their sexuality. It is a thoroughly nasty film.
Marta Wohrle

Everyday life in the Third Reich

GERMANY, PALE MOTHER
Director: Helma Sanders Brahms

Any film which deals with the rise and fall of Nazism and the reconstruction of the post-war German state should be interesting. After all, Germany remains today what it has been for the last hundred years: the dominant economic, political and military power on the European continent.

Germany, Pale Mother is, for me, one of the best German films in the last few years to critically examine their past. It is a sad and painful story of a couple who lived the early years of their marriage under the constant shadow of Nazism and war.

The story, told through the eyes of their young daughter, chronicles the destruction of their relationship by forces totally outside of their control. The man, sent away to war because he was not a member of the Nazi Party (his Nazi friend stayed at home since he was needed to run the state), returns on leave each year, demanding comfort from his wife, to find her moving progressively further away from him. But the real story is that of the woman trying to bring up her child in a devastated country. Bombed out of her home, living on others' charity and tramping across a destroyed society she survives, discovering great reserves of self sufficiency but only at the cost of retreating into herself.

The war ends, the family is still alive and is re-united. But it is doomed as Germany reconstructs itself. The ex-Nazis are once again promoted at work while the honest soldier languishes. The upper class relations re-emerge at the top of the heap, changing ideologies with regimes. The family collapses into drinking bouts, interminable rows and suicide attempts. Through it all sits the child, obsessively doing her homework.

What sticks in the memory, though, is not so much the plot of the film, harrowing though it is. Rather, it is the images, the hints of the horror of the war and Nazism that remain in the mind.

Things are never spelt out explicitly: the corruption of Nazism is symbolised by flies covering a swastika. The concentration camps are never mentioned, instead there are glimpses of the rape of a Jewish friend and the wreckage of a Jewish shop. Hitler is rarely mentioned but his voice is heard constantly over the radio. However oblique, the images are real. Every so often, old newsreel is inserted into the film. It hits hard: the film is a documentary but on an intensely personal level.

The film does not spell out all the dynamics which lay behind the rise of Nazism nor the catastrophe of the war. Rather it examines what happened to those who survived in body but were destroyed in spirit. It is none the less powerful for that.

The daughter, Anna, born in the middle of an air-raid, would have been in her mid-twenties in 1968. That year, students were on the streets, to be followed by the first major wave of workers' struggles since the immediate aftermath of the war. *Germany, Pale Mother* helps explain the mood of that generation and the corruption that exists at the heart of the West German state.

You could do a lot, lot worse than go and see this film. It will leave you deeply moved and provide you with a political education of just what it was like. As a result, it is likely to remain ghettoised in specialised cinemas. But if it is shown near you, do try and see it.
Tim Potter

'This bright day of summer'

THE PEASANTS' REVOLT OF 1381

by Paul Foot

35p plus 15p postage / ten for £3 post free

Socialists Unlimited
265 Seven Sisters Road
London N4 2DE

A bureaucrats inquiry

State intervention in industry — A worker's inquiry
Hilary Wainwright and others for Coventry, Liverpool, Newcastle and North Tyneside trades council
£2

The authors of this book have suggested it is a 'focus for political discussion from below'. But throughout the book there is confusion as to what 'below' means.

What strikes you first is the authors' central theme: the belief they have that ordinary workers had high expectations and were involved in discussion over Labour's industrial policies between 1974-9.

Now if any discussion is to be useful, then above all it has to be honest. What seems clear is that the authors are detached from the realities of the shop floor and the workplace. If that is the case then it explains the confusion of the book.

The third chapter, 'Expectations', illustrates this confusion. The authors talk of the 'expectations' workers had of Labour's industrial policies and give as an example the Tyneside Shop Stewards' Conference. But contrary to what the authors suggest, the vast majority of shop stewards and factories were not represented at that conference, let alone the entire working class on Tyneside. Wainwright and the others even contradict themselves in the same chapter when they say 'what shop stewards brought up again and again was their members' lack of awareness of the political and industrial situation.'

This comment puts the problem in a nutshell. Workers were *not* throwing parties in the workplace, gleeful at the prospect of Labour's industrial policies in action.

The authors talk of the nationalisation of the shipyards, a major industry on Tyneside. The history of the shipyards is one where the senior stewards became more and more involved in various committees and negotations with management. They became separated from those they represented. As in British Leyland the gap grew wider. The people the authors define as the workers with high expectations about Labour's industrial policies were in fact that small group of senior stewards.

A central question for the authors is the extent to which Labour's industrial policies have contributed to 'political self confidence', both in 1973 and today. Either they live in a dream world or I do.

One of the main reasons why the labour movement is in such a state today is the hammering it took as the last Labour government carried out its policies. Far from building self confidence those policies were designed to break that confidence. The years of the 'social contrick' between the government and the TUC leaders, the policies throughout industry in separating the shop stewards from their members, have had a dramatic effect on shop floor organisation.

The ideas that were generated in those years of co-operation between union and management led to the demise of the militancy that existed around the time of UCS and the struggles of the miners and engineers.

Wainwright and the others see 'workers' plans' as the saviour, but those plans grow out of feelings of demoralisation, out of the feeling of not being able to carry a militant fight with other workers. The example of Tress, which the authors use, states the case exactly. Tress shop stewards, when confronted with closure reacted by campaigning for the National Enterprise Board to take over Fairey. Tress closed.

Tyneside has been full of 'alternative plans' for the last few yuears. It


John Sturrock (Network)
Hilary Wainwright

has also seen massive job losses at Vickers, Tress, CA Parsons, Chrysler and British Leyland.

Finally a few points about the 'workers inquiry'. The authors state, 'Our intention then (November 1978) was to use the inquiry to put pressure on the government to change its disastrous policies.'

But the inquiry was confined to a small group of people: the authors, a group of Labour MPs and a handful of senior stewards. That's where we in the SWP see things differently from the authors. They see the labour movement as a few at the top. We see it as the many 'below'.

It wasn't plans or resolutions that saved the jobs at Parsons over Drax B and changed the Labour government's policies, but industrial action by Parsons workers, supported by other workers in the area and the threat of that action being spread. The problem we face now is not how we produce more inquiries, but how we rebuild on a day-to-day basis the shop floor organisation and how we combat the prevailing ideas within workers heads.

For that you need a socialist organisation based in the workplace that can discuss first, then put into *action* what is agreed; that can strike as a body, and involve ordinary workers in action. The only 'plan' we really need is the one put into action in Russia in 1917. It was simple: the workers took control for themselves.

Dave Hayes

Drawing the class line

Between Labour and Capital
Pat Walker (ed)
Harvester Press £4.95

> 'Why was the left, especially the white left which emerged in the 60s, so overwhelmingly middle class in composition? ... Probably the most common pattern within the organised left was for the working class membership to drift away, repelled by the college seminar style which the left clung to ... A man who had spent the day unloading freight with constant harrassment from a supervisor and a man who had spent the day lecturing to admiring students were supposed, at the end of the day, to engage in political work together on a basis of comradeship and trust'

The quotes, from an essay in this book by John and Barbara Ehrenreich, refer to the problems of the American left. But they do point to problems which have arisen — and continue in part to arise — in Bri[illegible] of the new generation of socialists that arose after 1968 came from the ranks of students and ex-students. And although the wave of industrial struggles that took place in the 1970s supplemented these with large numbers of industrial workers, there are still large chunks of the left that live in a Posy Simmons world where a degree and habitat furniture are as much taken for granted as are opposition to sexism and racism.

Often in the history of the revolutionary movement, practice has come before theory. This was certainly the case with our organisation — then called the International Socialists — in dealing with this phenomenon back in the early 1970s. We began by insisting on the classical Marxist maxim that what matters is where power lies, with workers in the factory, docks and mines. And accordingly we insisted, again and again, that revolutionaries thrown up by the upheaval in the student world had to break with that world and turn their attention to the workplaces.

If they did not, we insisted, they would end up like previous generations of once-radical students, drifting around in a vacuum and eventually opting for a comfortable middle class life and the politics which goes with it. The last 13 years have proved us right — except, it seems, in one respect: the mid-1970s saw a flourishing of struggles in new sorts of workplaces, in the town halls, the schools, the civil service. We made an adjustment in practice — building *Rank and File Teacher, NALGO Action, Redder Tape,* and insisting in all those cases that the key was the *lowest grades* of workers. But we never paid a great deal of attention theoretically to what was involved: we did not feel the need to.

Others did try to develop the 'theory'. And what a mess they got into.

Two apparently opposed positions emerged. On the one hand there were the theorists of 'the new working class'. These claimed a layer made up of technicians and

Out of the economic crisis, unemployment and deprivation of the 1920s and 1930s, fascism brought the Second World War and the death camps of Nazi Germany. Faced with such horror, we are tempted to see it as a blind and elemental force, sweeping along with the destruction of humanity as its sign.
Today, as another economic crisis deepens, fascism raises its head again...

NEVER AGAIN!
THE HOWS AND WHYS OF STOPPING FASCISM
COLIN SPARKS

Cover price: £1.95. **Bookmarks** special offer £1.35 including postage from **Bookmarks**, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE

In 1967 and 1968 some students identified themselves as the new working class, a new vanguard for the class as a whole.

university graduates constituted a new vanguard for the class as a whole. It was easy in 1967 and 1968 for some radicalised students to identify themselves as this vanguard. The theory has continued to provide comfort to remnants of that generation as they settle into comfortable careers as senior lecturers, local government administrators, social work advisors or the like.

The other popular view was that systematised by the rather obscure reformist 'Marxist', Nicos Poulantzas. His contention was that white collar workers and government workers could not be working class because they did not take part in the direct production of surplus value and therefore, in the strict Marxist sense, were not 'productive'. *All* employees in commerce, the banks and the civil service are therefore, according to him, 'the new petty bourgeoisie'.

The sheer absurdity of the thesis — it would end up designating dustmen, bank messengers, janitors in government buildings and copy typists as 'new petty bourgeoisie' since none of them are in his terms 'productive' — has served to reinforce adherents of the new working class thesis in their position. When told that they are not actually proletarians, they reply, 'then half the working class under modern capitalism are not'.

The merit of the main essay in this book, by the Ehrenreichs, is that it is opposed to both these positions. They distinguish within white collar work between the lowest grades, which they see clearly as part of the working class, and the middle and upper grades which they designate as 'the professional and managerial class'.

They see this as a privileged class within capitalism, concerned with 'the reproduction of capitalist social relations'. It has interests different to, and opposed to, those of capital; but it is also given authority over the working class and cannot identify with it either. It therefore tends to develop a collectivist ideology of its own, which sees a rational organisation of society as being possible if it can take over from capital the task of running society and ordering the working class about.

Given the size of this grouping — they estimate it makes up 20 to 25 per cent of the US population, some 50 million people — its ideology is of immense social importance. In one form it lay behind the 'progressive' trend in US politics in the first part of this century; in another behind the 'new left' of the 1960s. They conclude that a mass socialist movement can only be built by an alliance between this class and the working class, in which each takes account of the problems of the other.

There are two problems with the Ehrenreichs analysis.

First (as several of the essays included in this collection point out) its definition of the 'professional and managerial' class as those 'who reproduce capitalist relations' just does not work. All sorts of people help reproduce capitalist relations who the Ehrenreichs would not include in the new class. At the same time many groups the Ehrenreich would include in the new class (research physicists, lecturers in higher mathematics, architects) do not organise that reproduction.

Second, the Ehrenreichs' analysis looks at the production process without looking at what, for capital, is the key thing about it: the production of surplus value (a fault shared by almost all their critics).

The one thing on which Poulantzas was right (and no-one can be wrong *all* the time) was to point out that an account of the working class within capitalism has to begin with the process of exploitation. Productive workers were exploited, Marx said, by being forced to accept wages which merely served to reproduce their (and their children's) ability to work (their 'labour power') while labouring to produce goods of much greater value than that. It was this which drove them into class opposition to those who exploited them, whether they liked it or not.

But, unlike Poulantzas, Marx extended the argument to *non-productive* workers. He pointed out that the lowest grades of workers in commerce, sales promotion and financial institutions — and, for that matter, the lowest ranks of soliders and police — received a wage which was determined by the general conditions of the labour market. They got the pay they would have received if they were productive workers, and that was just sufficient for them to recoup their productive powers.

However, Marx did not say that *all* employees of capital fell into this category. He also pointed to people who he called 'the hangers-on of the capitalist class' — people who were given a share in the spoils of exploitation in return for helping the ruling class retain its position (in Marx's day, priests, lawyers, generals, police chiefs). These received from the ruling class much more value than their labour could possibly have produced in any sphere of productive employment.

Under modern capitalism, both the 'non-productive' workers and 'hangers-on' of capitalism tend to be organised into the same bureaucratic hierarchies — in the large firms, local government, the state. At the top the incomes of generals, top civil servants, nationalised industry bosses, are determined by direct comparison with what they would receive were they running capitalist concerns in their own right. At the bottom, the filing clerk, typist or primary school teacher is expected to get along on something less than the average industrial wage.

What is particularly interesting for the present discussion however, is what happens in the middle. Whether people in these rungs of the bureaucratic hierarchy are directly 'productive' or not, those at the top like to pay them more than is absolutely necessary. That binds them to the system, so that they can be used against those at the bottom. So 'career structures' are established, where in return for pro-management behaviour people can hope to look forward to incomes far in excess of what is needed to recoup their ability to work and, in a minority of cases, in excess of the total value they could produce under any conceivable circumstances.

The small scale exploiters of the working class, the petty bourgeoisie, are no longer just shop keepers and traders. They are also middle managers and administrators.

The majority of the middle bureaucratic layers are still 'exploited'. They do not get the full fruits of their labour, even if they are less exploited than the average worker. They may be the labour aristocrats of white collar work, but their struggles over wages and conditions remain struggles against exploitation. It is the privileged minority who would seem to fit into the Ehrenreich's 'professional and managerial class'. They are not exploited. They do not 'live merely in order to work'. They positively benefit from the capitalist system, in so far as they get a cut of what capitalism takes off the working class. However, it is not helpful to describe them as the Ehrenreichs do.

This is because they are not a group with clearly defined interests and a corresponding world view of their own. Nor are they in any clear way cut off from those above and below them. When the system is expanding some of them can hope to rise still higher. When it enters crisis and contracts, however, its attempts to preserve profit rates means that their privileges begin to disappear and they are threatened with a downward plunge into the ranks of the exploited (witness the effect of the government's wage norms on middle ranking civil servants and local government employees at the moment) — or even into the abyss of 'executive unemployment'.

Moreover, they exercise a general *ideological* influence on the white collar 'labour aristocrats' below them, who can hope in 'good times' to rise into their ranks. Hence the rapidly shifting attitudes of almost all those in the middle white collar ranks to trade unionism: at one moment adopting the most reactionary attitudes and identifying with the government and the employers against those below; then reacting to wage controls by joining the lower ranks in wage struggles, even affiliating to the TUC; then trying to separate themselves off again by pushing for salary scales that recognise 'responsibility' and 'seniority'.

Because of this vacillating, middle position between labour and capital, it seems much better to me to follow Trotsky and before him Karl Kautsky in calling this layer 'the new middle class' or 'the new petty bourgeoisie' than the 'professional and managerial class'. Under aging capitalism, the ruling class is not just made up of private entrepreneurs and shareholders: but managers in private corporations and state industries are also part of the bourgeoisie, of the class which is driven into unlenting opposition to the working class by the drive to accumulate surplus value. Similarly, the small scale exploiters of the working class, the petty bourgeoisie, are no longer just shop keepers and petty traders, they are also middle managers and administrators, the higher grades in local government, the most privileged groups of college lecturers.

Does it all matter? Yes, if we go back to the quote we started with. Many of those involved in left politics today belong to the new middle class or the white collar 'labour aristocracy' which tends to merge into it and shares most of its attitudes. Such people play a dominating role in many Labour Party constituencies, they make up much of the Eurocommunist wing of the CP, in London they are to be found among the officers of many trades councils, they play the leading role in what remains of the women's movement.

They themselves represent very little in terms of social power: those they work with are disinclined to rock the capitalist boat because of their privileges and their hopes of further promotion. Yet the very language they talk and the lifestyles they cultivate cut them off from those who could represent a real power — the massed ranks of dockers and typists, of miners and filing clerks, of car workers and telephone engineers. In practice only the very small minority who join a revolutionary party are likely to make such connections.

This book is useful because the essays in it raise all these issues, even if they are a long way from solving them.

Chris Harman

The personal is artistic

"Don't think that it is all right nowadays if it is only music of which a musician is ignorant. No, he should aspire to be a passionate ignoramus in every sphere as well." (H. Eisler 1928)

"Fashion to the left of them. Fashion to the right of them . . . Fashion." (D.Bowie 1980)

Since the demise of punk, the music scene has become fragmented. There is no over-all trend or fashion that dominates. Punks, skins, disco, mods, rockabilly, soul-funk, two-tone, reggae, all have their following. The one style that has captured the imagination of EMI executives and BBC producers and that the media have latched on to is the 'New Romantics'.

By New Romantics I mean all that the press includes in this general heading. It's really a whole series of different groups that have been lumped together, and I know some people will jip at me including Joy Division & Co. I mean the scene around Spandau Ballet, Duran Duran, Ultravox, Adam & the Ants, Cabaret Futura, Visage, Bow Wow Wow and the like.

In the press they are portrayed as the exact opposite of skins. But like many apparent opposites they have many things in common. They are largely white and working class, both have links with black music, one with reggae the other with disco. Both have associations with fascism, the skins with their union jacks and BM influence, the New Romantics play with nazi names and black shirts (Joy Division, Spandau Ballet, The New Order, The Final Solution). Both have more to do with style than with music itself. They are both cliquey, elitist and present themselves as life-styles that are out to shock.

To the New Romantics dress is all important. They dress up like pirates, highwaymen or whatever, in brightly coloured silk shirts, scarves worn Palestinian-like or over one shoulder. They wear make-up, have stylish hair-dos, some of them camp it up to shock and provoke. There seem to be two main factions within the NRs: one extreme is the silly faction, the Blitz Kids and the most famous rip-off of it, Adam and the Ants; the other more dark and sinister, using nazi associations, all angst and black silk and sounding like Jim Morrison singing disco. While the skins, punks and mods fight it out on the streets, the NR's arena is the disco and night-club. They are non-political, or rather, anti-politics.

It may seem odd, in the years when unemployment has more than doubled, that punk, with its direct political claims, should be replaced, even if only partly, by a movement rejecting all politics, and replacing the dole-queue anger-style with a camp, flamboyant dandyism. The reasons that made the 30s a time of Busby Berkeley musicals are making the 80s a time of dyed quiffs and frilled shirts.

It's a movement of escapism and enjoyment opposed to the dismalism that has become punk. Opposed to the prolier-than-thou posing of punk. Punk always presented itself as the movement of working-class whites, yet it was never as pure working class as it claimed. That really was why it became so joyless: as well as working-class kids being punk, it had middle-class kids being what they thought working-class kids were like, often grim and crude.

"All that punk ever said to working-class kids was 'You're dirty, scruffy, with no hope, and you're supposed to stay that way'. We came along and we say to them, 'You don't have to stay a scruffy nobody. You can be your own heroes.'" (Gary Kemp of Spandau Ballet, in NME 16/5/81)

NR is a style which is expensive and needs a big commitment. It has its own clubs and scene. Like skins go to football, so NRs go to the disco, not just to enjoy the music and dancing but to be part of the style.

What seems to be happening to music at the moment is a repeat of the early seventies when the 60s explosion of new, innovating and exciting music was tamed and turned to profit, the spontaneous and creative becoming nothing more than commercial ditties. It was a time of the Bay City Rollers, The Sweet and T.Rex. Like then it has been a star of the old order who has been the centre of the new commercialism. Then Marc Bolan transformed Tyrannosaurus Rex, *the* arch hippy group, into T.Rex, the teeny-bop wonder. Now it's been Malcolm McLaren (of the Sex Pistols in 77), and his influence on Adam and the Ants from a hard-core punk band into the present hit. And like then it's become a style to consume.

I said before that it was a movement that seemed split in two, but as well as having stylistic differences the split is to do with involvement. The kids round Spandau Ballet, Visage etc., look and live the style. The fans of Adam just consume it, buy pix of him; they do not become highwayman clones.

McClaren has since parted with Adam of the Ants; his new creation is Bow Wow Wow whose female lead singer is just 15. They perform with two 14 year old dancers. Their songs are all written by McLaren and are usually about sex or work. Part of his promotion plans for them was to pose in a soft porn mag that was to be called 'Chicken'. His call at present is 'to demolish the work ethic', to live life for pleasure, don't work, etc. Fans of William Burroughs, or readers of old situationist or yippy pamphlets, will recognise the message.

So far nearly all I've said about the NR has been damning, and musically, it's nearly all awful, but they do have some good aspects to them. To start with, they are anti-macho, at least in the leather-jacketed type of Clash and co. Also, it seems OK to be gay with NRs, some of them do, after all, dress in drag and some are ambiguous about their sexuality. If anything, their attitude to sex seems to be against any form of it. "I'm not a sex-object, I'm an art-object." And in spite of all the elitism (you have to look right to be allowed in them) their discos have good music and so unlike so many punk gigs are fun.

Noel Halifax

Revolutions are never linear processes. The actions of millions of people flow and ebb, veer off at tangents, seemingly insoluble problems resolve themselves, parties and leaders who until the revolutionary moment have behaved impeccably find themselves paralysed without the audacity to make that great leap into the unknown; others attempt to make the leap too soon and destroy themselves and the class they would lead.

It would have been asking a tremendous amount of revolutionary socialists in the years after the Bolshevik revolution to have expected them to do other than concentrate their energies on studying the supreme moment of the October insurrection. It has shone like a beacon in the dark night of repression, counterrevolution, fascism and war for every person calling themself a revolutionary for the last sixty years.

And yet, it has been precisely this desire to emulate October which has led in many cases to the triumph of reaction and the destruction of revolutionary movements. To understand what I mean, it is necessary to look a few months before the Bolshevik revolution, to an earlier revolutionary crisis, that of the 'July days'.

In July 1917 the Russian revolution was already five months old — five months which had seen a massive radicalisation of soldiers, sailors and workers, with a corresponding growth in the size of the Bolshevik Party. According to the party secretary, Sverdlov, the party had grown ten fold by July.

Already in June, with the collapse of the provisional government's offensive against German and Austrian troops on the Galician front, and rising unemployment in the cities, a mass demonstration called by the pro-government Menshevik/Social Revolutionary majority in the Soviets had resulted in a massive propaganda victory for the Bolsheviks.

The official call for the demonstration had sounded like nothing so much as something from the South East TUC: 'Only official banners and slogans, please.' Yet the response was quite different. The Menshevik historian, Sukhanov, recalls:

"'Bolsheviks again,' I remarked, looking at the slogans. 'And there behind them, another column. Apparently another one too.' I went on calculating, noting the banners advance on me in seemingly endless rows.

"'All power to the soviets.' 'Down with the capitalist ministers!' 'Peace for the cottages, war for the palaces'".

Can anyone imagine a demonstration of 400,000 workers and soldiers, the vast majority of whom carry our slogans? How then did the leaders and the old cadres of the Bolsheviks feel? They had emerged only six months before from the obscurity of being a small but disciplined party and now they were a mass party of the revolution. Some indulgence would surely have been permissible if all this had gone to their heads.

By the beginning of July the coalition government had collapsed and reformed itself, minus the bourgeois constitutional democrats. In the words of Sukhanov 'no coalition could be found, so one had to be invented.' In the streets the crisis was deepening, mass strikes developed, and the Machine Gun Regiment and Grenadiers marched on the Tauride Palace, the seat of the government.

The Bolsheviks were in an extremely delicate situation. A mass movement of a violently revoltionary character was developing, armed with their slogans and undoubtedly led by many of their rank and file militants. The question was being posed in an increasingly clear manner on the streets: was this the moment for the insurrection? Could revolutionary Petrograd carry with it the whole country?

The central committee of the party, meeting on the night of 3 July, decided that although the time was not yet ripe for insurrection, if the masses were to appear on the streets the next day, then the duty of the Bolsheviks was to be there with them.

Lenin now faced opposition from his own ultra-left militants, in particular two from the Kronstadt fortress, Raskolnikov and Roshal, who appeared the next morning with 20,000 heavily armed sailors and presented themselves outside the headquarters of the party.

Raskolnikov and Roshal were, however, only the very sharp tip of the ultra-left iceberg. For some weeks the Bolshevik military organisation and its paper *Soldatskaya Pravda* had been at loggerheads with the central committee. While the central paper, *Pravda*, was urging moderation and campaigns to win majority support in the Petrograd Soviet, *Soldatskaya* was demanding the seizure of power.

The authority of the central committee rested solely on the relatively small cadre of old Bolsheviks and the influence which they, as the most conscious section of the party, could exercise over the new enthusiastic, radical, membership. But in many cases the old Bolsheviks bowed to the pressure of the new rank and file, and from this came the crisis of the July Days.

On 4 July the demonstrators filled the streets of Petrograd. Over half a million were there, carrying the slogans of the Bolsheviks. Lenin spoke to the sailors from Kronstadt, urging moderation. The sailors, disappointed, marched on the Tauride Palace. There, only the quick thinking of Trotsky prevented them lynching the leaders of the Soviet majority.

The party leadership, however, maintained its course. Lenin knew that the most important task was the winning of a Bolshevik majority in the Soviets, the workplaces and the armed forces. This, he recognised, would mean several months more of hard work to expose the vacillations and betrayals of the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary Party leaderships. To have attempted to have seized power before the bankruptcy of the 'official' workers' leaders was apparent would have resulted in the sort of massacre that followed the Paris Commune. As it was, only hesitation by the provisional government prevented a complete purge of the Bolsheviks. Many (including Trotsky) were imprisoned and Lenin (who had no illusions in 'justice' from the government) spent three months underground.

The lessons of 'July' have, unfortunately, not been learnt by many, and the bloody cost has been paid by our movement. In January 1919 in Germany soldiers and workers inspired by October ignored the advice of the most experienced Spartakist leaders like Rosa Luxemburg and attempted to seize power, even though they were still a minority in the workers councils. Hundreds of revolutionaries were butchered in the ensuing defeat, including Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

The experience has been repeated many times since – from the March Action of 1921 in Central Germany to the talk of instant insurrection by Otelo da Carvalho and the PRP in Portugal in 1975. A successful revolution needs the strength of the masses around it, and the graveyards are full of those who ignore this.

Jim Scott