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INSIDE  
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The end  
of the  
parliamentary  
road to  
socialism

# CHILE

# The way to recruit workers?

The witchhunt of the 'Cowley moles' provided the press with a lot of good copy. But behind the fuss there were other issues of interest to socialists. **Colin Sparks** reports.

In the heat of the witchhunt the first duty of any socialist was obviously to mount the most determined defence of the 13 sacked BL workers.

Readers of this magazine should need no reminding of the dangers which can arise from allowing a management to get away with sacking a worker for any minor infringement, let alone for what were quite obviously ulterior political motives.

Behind the immediate issue, however, is another question. Some at least of the 13 activists are supporters of the Socialist League, and that organisation has a record of trying to build through what is called 'industrialisation'.

The idea of industrialisation is as follows: a revolutionary organisation needs a base in the manual working class. Therefore those comrades recruited in other areas, for example, in universities, should be directed by the party to become manual workers.

This strategy has a long history, but it has proved particularly attractive to revolutionaries over the last fifteen years. This was because the 1968 wave of recruits to revolutionary politics came largely from the student milieu, and turning them into workers by means of a directive seemed a good way to improve the social composition of an organisation.

The SWP and its predecessor the IS group, has always been opposed to this strategy.

The reasons for our opposition are important. Obviously it is not because we do not have an interest in manual workers — any one even glancing at our publications can see we are a little obsessive on that question.

In our view, it is possible to recruit workers to a revolutionary organisation by relating to their struggle and showing the relevance of socialist ideas. That is something that can be done by anyone — worker, student, pensioner — provided they understand revolutionary politics.

We oppose industrialisation because it is a wrong strategy.

It is important to be clear about what is involved in industrialisation. In any period of crisis students find themselves taking manual working class jobs for which they are 'overtrained' — sheer economic necessity drives people that way. We can have no objection to that, nor to students who decide that a white collar future is not for them. And we do not mind in the least if people tell lies to management in order to get jobs. Most people with a record of militancy have done

the same sort of thing.

Industrialisation is something else — it is the conscious re-direction of a party. It involves not personal preference or economic pressure but a political perspective. It is because that political perspective is wrong that we reject the idea.

The tragedy is that the perspective starts from correct premises: it is absolutely right to argue that in order to lead a revolution a party must have a firm base amongst the manual working class. Elitist and dilettantes who oppose this part of the strategy are clearly wrong.

Industrialisation proposes to win that industrial base not by convincing workers of the correctness of revolutionary ideas but by shuffling around the existing socialists. It starts not from the outside world but from the party organisation. In a word, it is a form of substitutionism.

Like all forms of substitutionism it rests on profoundly elitist politics. It rejects the idea that 'ordinary' workers can be recruited to revolutionary politics. Instead the supercadre of the party will go forth and lead them.

And if it does admit that it is possible to win ordinary workers then it says that this

can only be done if they can smell your armpits. Ordinary workers, apparently, are too stupid to understand revolutionary politics if they come from a student.

The strategy has serious consequences for socialists who try to carry it out. It inevitably leads to a 'pecking order' inside an organisation, based on what sort of job you do. If you are a car worker you can spout rubbish and get applause; if you are a student you can be right and be ignored.

The pressure on the comrades who do industrialise is strong too. Usually they keep their heads down and hide their politics. Doing that to get a job is one thing, doing it in front of your workmates is quite another. And if their background, as opposed to their politics, do become known to their workmates, then that can play to the worst prejudices inculcated by society.

Workers are workers because they have no choice about it. No-one glorifies the sort of job he or she does and most people would much prefer a better paid or less demanding job. To find that someone has given up such a job in order to come and argue for socialism might lead to a certain sort of respect, but it is the sort of respect usually reserved for vicars and madmen.

The strain of these contradictions tells even on the most dedicated comrade after a while. They usually end up leaving politics.

Industrialisation is an attempt to cheat history, to take a short cut. It is a dead end. There is no substitute for the job of winning workers to revolutionary politics.



**No substitute for winning workers to revolutionary politics**



## After the generals?

The tenth anniversary of the coup in Chile presents an opportunity for an analysis of the politics of popular frontism. We do this at a time when the repressive regimes of Latin America are looking increasingly shaky. The question has become not whether they fall, but what will replace them.

A great deal of the space in this issue of *Socialist Review* is devoted to an assessment and explanation of the coup in Chile, which took place ten years ago this month.

We make no apologies for this, in fact there are two crucially important reasons for paying close attention to what happened in Chile.

Firstly, the experience of Chile has been used by almost anyone you can think of to justify their particular brand of politics. The right point to it as clear proof that workers are incapable of running the system, and giving them even a small amount of power and control leads to bloodshed and chaos.

The reformist left, on the other hand, see it as a clear case of going too quickly, and use the Chilean experience to justify their own politics of class collaboration.

The revolutionary analysis is very different to either of these. We can point to a whole number of situations when crucial opportunities to shift the balance of power in favour of the workers were missed.

Preventing another Chile depends upon the workers' movement learning the lessons of how and why these opportunities were missed.

This brings us to the second reason for why understanding Chile is so important.

The fall of the Allende government was only one of a series of bloody coups which destroyed opposition in Latin America in the 60s and 70s.

Now the generals are looking increasingly shaky. Their regimes, in Chile and elsewhere, are being challenged by strikes and demonstrations. And they are being challenged by

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workers. It is no longer a question of *if* the generals fall, but of when. And more importantly, it is a question of what succeeds them.

Now there is a resurgence of struggle in Latin America, there are lessons to be learnt. Firstly even the most bloody and repressive regimes cannot keep workers down for ever. The reason for this is quite simple — any regime which is trying to manage capitalism is subject to the contradiction of capitalism. Part of this contradiction is that any such regime is forced to create a working class which has the potential to overthrow it. The very structure of capitalist production leads this way, however much the ruling class dislikes it, or tries to alter it.

Just because a working class will always exist under capitalism, and will always struggle, that does not mean they are guaranteed victory.

We do not have a crystal ball and we do not know the date on which Pinochet will wake up and find he is no longer the ruler of Chile. But we are Marxists, and we can say a thing or two about the question of who takes power in Chile and elsewhere.

Although strikes and demonstrations are what make the headlines, and although they are evidence that it is the working class which forms the most determined opposition to military rule, it is very rare for military dictatorships to fall simply to working class pressures alone.

The very same social and economic failures that lead to mass working class resistance also lead other sections of society into opposition. Some of these people fight because they see the military rulers as an ob-

stacle to their own economic and social development and want a more relaxed form of bourgeois rule. That is very often a characteristic of the student sons and daughters of the privileged.

Other, staid, members and friends of the ruling class argue that the enormous cost, political and economic, of a dictatorship is no longer worthwhile. Some, more cynical, see which way the wind is blowing and want to make sure that they are firmly on the bandwagon of a new regime.

Whatever their motives, the working class finds that it has allies in the fight against the dictatorship. But they are allies who oppose the military rulers but not the social system upon which the dictators rest. The presence of these allies can have important consequences for the outcome of the struggle.

Those allies, or at least the most farsighted of them, are worried by possible consequences of the overthrow of the dictators almost as much if not more than they are by the prospect of continuing military rule.

### Chancy business

The ending of a military dictatorship is of necessity a chancy business. Social tensions which have been crushed during the preceding period are suddenly released: the anger and energy of a decade or more explodes into action in a matter of weeks. The transition itself calls into question the military hierarchy and its role in society. There are, by definition, no comfortable, established, secure, bureaucratised reformist

organisations ready to head off the energies of the working class. Even the would-be reformist leaders are penniless exiles or hunted fugitives without a desk, an armchair or a secretary to call their own.

From the point of view of the opposition sections of the ruling class, the problem is to make sure that the transition is sufficiently controlled and slow motion to make sure that the working class discontent is kept under control and that the reformists have a chance to build stable and influential organisations.

In modern times, they look to the example of Spain in the decade around the death of Franco. There the process of 'democratisation' was a long protracted event. Political parties and trade unions which had been bloodily persecuted in earlier years remained formally illegal but in practice were allowed increasing freedom to organise and recruit even while Franco still clung to life. After his death they could emerge as fully fledged organisations willing to sign Spanish social contracts and able to make them stick.

As a result none of the major structures of Franco's state machine, with the exception of the fascist 'trade unions', was radically altered. Crucially, the hated civil guard and the thoroughly fascist military hierarchy remained and remain intact and plotting coups, a guarantor of the continued subordination of the working class.

That was, from the point of view of the bourgeoisie a model 'democratisation'. But the process is not a simple one, as a glance at Portugal a couple of years earlier show. There a group of younger officers staged a coup against the decrepit fascist regime and provoked a wave of working class struggle which very nearly led to the overthrow of Portuguese capitalism and indeed led to the prompt liquidation of Portugal's vast and bloodsoaked colonial empire.

The essential difference between Spain and Portugal was that in Portugal neither of the main reformist parties, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, had sufficient of an organised base to be able to *control* events. They fought each other bitterly in an effort to establish control of sections of the working class, and used all sorts of left wing rhetoric to win support. In the confusion, workers were able to act independently and to make substantial gains which have still not been entirely destroyed.

In the end the parties were able to head things off and to make sure that workers did not go beyond the limits set by one or another version of class collaboration. But it had been a close-run thing and illustrates the dangers involved.

From the point of view of the reformists the key to their keeping control of the situation is that it is possible to sell the idea of a class alliance against dictatorship and for democracy. And just because that alliance is with sections of alien classes the price that has to be paid for it is the surrender of any talk of socialism. That is the classic form of the popular front, this time in the twilight of dictatorship rather than its infancy.

Obviously, since there are other classes fighting against the dictatorship the idea of



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**Riot police charging students during a pro-democratic day of national protest against 10-year-old military regime**

the popular front has a definite appeal. But inevitably it means diverting the energies of the working class, of preventing them using their best weapons — those of class warfare — and ensuring that they remain under the domination of the existing economic order.

These were the arguments that were to be heard yesterday in Spain and Portugal and they are the ideas that are to be heard in Latin America today. They find widespread support. The question for us is: how can they be fought?

Obviously it would be the crudest sort of ultra-left madness to argue against any sort of joint struggle against the dictatorship. Concretely, that joint struggle will take the form of the fight for democratic demands — freedom of the press, free elections, freedom of association, freedom for trade union organisation, etc. None of these are in fact socialist demands. A glance at modern Britain shows they are quite compatible with the most unpleasant forms of bourgeois democratic government.

But if the working class are going to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the collapse of a dictatorship then they have to do rather more than just show themselves the most determined fighters for bourgeois democratic demands. They have to raise their own demands as well.

In particular, the problem is one of drawing the logic out of the struggle which is actually going on and trying to lead it forward. One of the classic examples is the question of the armed forces of the state.

In any military dictatorship it is obvious that the police and the military are very deeply implicated in the crimes of that regime. It is they who have broken strikes. It

is they who have arrested, tortured, and murdered workers. It is they who are the hated face of the rule of capital.

The removal of the generals at the top automatically makes the demand for a thorough purge of the armed forces a popular one. The bourgeoisie will try to limit it and make sure that only one or two particularly notorious figures are punished. The victims of the armed forces usually have different views. Thus in Portugal the secret police, the PIDE, was literally hunted down by workers when the dictatorship fell.

### United front

One of the obvious tasks of a revolutionary party is to fight very hard for the purge to be a thorough one — to fight for the dissolution of the most hated special police and troops, to demand a full purge of the officer corps of the armed forces, to try to push that forward to the principle of the election of officers, and from that to the need for the destruction of the bourgeois army and its replacement by a weapon of the working class.

This, of course, is an application of the principle of the united front. In the course of the struggle for democratic demands the revolutionaries prove in practice both the superiority of their own methods and the hesitations and failures of the reformists and bourgeois parties. Out of the successes they can begin to get a growing audience for their own, more extreme demands.

But there is a key condition for the successful operation of any united front tactic. There must be an independently organised working class revolutionary

organisation. That organisation will recognise both the need to maintain its political independence from the bourgeois opponents of the regime and the need to have a separate organisational identity.

To give a concrete illustration: the struggle against a dictatorship is not conducted at a uniform pitch of principled political struggle. Like every other example of the class struggle there are ebbs and flows. If one day there is a mass demonstration involving a wide range of political parties under slogans demanding free elections, the next day there might be a minor strike in an obscure factory over wages.

For the bourgeois opponents of the dictatorship it is an irrelevance, a mere economic struggle of no importance. For the reformists it is a potential embarrassment which might frighten off some of their capitalist friends. Only for revolutionary socialists is the small strike as important as the mass demonstration.

The small strike is an example of the class acting for itself. It is an example of the class acting as a class in a way that a demonstration, which at best only mobilises the political activists, is not. The strike is a school in which workers learn to go beyond the limit set by bourgeois democracy and start to learn the lessons of workers' democracy.

The outcome of the struggle against the dictators is not fixed in advance. The conditions obviously exist which make Chile, Argentina and above all Brazil potential sites of proletarian revolution. Whether that potential is realised depends upon whether revolutionary politics find any implantation amongst the workers.



# CHILE

The military coup in Chile and the destruction of the workers' movement remains the most damning indictment of reformism in history. Yet a socialist revolution was possible. Ten years later the events of the Popular Unity period are more significant than ever. **David Beecham** analyses the causes of this tragic and unnecessary defeat.

What took place in Chile remains one of the most powerful object lessons in history for revolutionaries. What might have been is no longer important. What is important is that at every stage in the unfolding of the struggle, the conflict between revolution and reform was put at its sharpest. The form which the revolutionary struggle took in Chile between 1970 and 1973 is of course unique. But the political issues were those of Spain in 1936. Germany in 1918, 1921, 1923, 1932. Russia in 1917 ...

Such events cannot be reduced to one-off formulas. It does not do simply to say: the workers were not armed (though it is true); the workers were split (though it is true); the Communist Party sold out (though it is true); the MIR was not a party of the Leninist type (though it is true). It was the combination of these factors and their inter-action which was crucial.

## State and revolution

The central question in Chile was the state and revolution. The Popular Unity period witnessed the acting-out of an age old drama: the idea that the existing state machine can be used; can be somehow moulded into the service of the working class. Though the UP leaders time and again pronounced that of course 'the necessity of replacing the bureaucratic bourgeois state apparatus was indisputable' (Corvalan's words in April 1973)—the question was *could it be reformed?*

For Karl Kautsky, the renowned leader of German Social Democracy, there was no doubt:

'Democracy' he wrote 'offers the possibility of cancelling the political power of the exploiters, and today, with the constant increase in the number of workers, this in fact happens more and more frequently. The more this is the case, the more the democratic state ceases to be a simple instrument in the hands of the exploiting classes. The government apparatus is already beginning, in certain conditions, to turn against the latter — in other words to work in the opposite direction to that which it used to work in the past. From being an instrument of oppression, it is beginning to change into an instrument of emancipation for the workers.'

Such might be the epitaph for the Chilean

UP. They followed Kautsky to the letter.

For us, as for Lenin in his bitter polemics against Kautsky, our prime task is to re-establish what Marx really taught on the subject of the state. For us, with Lenin:

'The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonisms objectively cannot be reconciled. And conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable ... the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another ... all previous revolutions perfected the state machine, whereas it must be broken — smashed.'

But wisdom in hindsight is not wisdom.

If, looking back on the Chilean tragedy ten years ago, we were to say 'of course, it was bound to happen'; 'there was no alternative'; 'the triumph of reformism was inevitable, and with it the eventual victory of the most bloody reaction'—we would be guilty of the worst type of abstract analysis. Worse, we would be ignoring the wealth of revolutionary socialist experience, the experiences of previous generations of socialists, their victories and their defeats. And we would, of course, be forgetting the judgements made at the time.

Ten years after Chile's Popular Unity government was overthrown, it is worth recalling what verdict was reached at the time: an armed mass movement could have been built.

As an editorial in *International Socialism* (the precursor of *Socialist Review*) stated in October 1973:

'All the elements necessary to such a movement were present in Chile: the occupation of the factories, the fight of the peasantry for land, the preparation of at least some sections of workers for armed struggle, the linking of factories together in new delegate structures—the workers' *cordones* — the attempts at mutiny in the armed forces.'

'The tragedy was that instead of drawing together these elements, the main workers' parties lulled themselves to sleep with talk about the "constitutional role of the army" and left the initiative with the ruling class.'

In essence we might stop with that verdict.

But an understanding of the revolutionary process in Chile between 1970 and 1973,

above all in that final year, is an essential part of understanding the struggle for socialism in the future. It is an essential part of the armoury of those seeking to change the world. For, like the Bolshevik Revolution, and a few other cataclysmic upheavals in history, the lessons have enormous importance for us today.

The coup of 11 September 1973 was only the climax of a series of events which witnessed massive working class struggle on the one hand and, on the other, the seemingly wilful and systematic failure of the Chilean left to understand what was taking place.

The impact of the disaster which occurred had (and has) far-reaching consequences. The 'lessons of Chile' for reformists from Buenos Aires to London was that 'Allende moved too fast'; 'They failed to reach agreement with the opposition'; 'The workers' struggle was not controlled.'

## International effects

In Britain the damage was relatively slight. For Eric Hobsbawm of the Communist Party, writing a week after the coup:

'The choice of "revolution" rather than "legality" was not on. Neither in military nor in political terms was the Popular Unity in a position to win a trial of physical strength.'

The lesson Hobsbawm and others were to draw was that the class struggle is always doomed from the start. From there it was only a short step to advocating an alliance with liberals, the SDP and 'progressive Tories' today.

We should be thankful that the influence of this tendency is relatively weak here. In Italy, however, with a mass Communist Party, a fragile state, and a history of attempted coups, the lesson of Chile was the need for a 'historic compromise'. The Communist Party and the unions must govern jointly with the Christian Democrats. The Italian working class is still paying the price. The historic compromise dragged Italian workers to a series of defeats and disillusion; it divided and shattered the Italian revolutionary left. And similar policies in countries influenced by Italy — notably Spain — produced more setbacks.

The movement called 'Eurocommunism' — in reality a new word for reformist collaboration with the ruling class, and restraint of workers' demands — owes its

existence directly to the defeat of the constitutional road to socialism in Chile. It is a bitter irony that the bankruptcy of the left-reformist process under Allende should have served as the excuse for right-reformist policies in Europe.

The tragedy of Chile was not just that a vicious military regime overthrew the Popular Unity (UP) government. The tragedy goes back long before 11 September 1973. For when it came to the crunch only isolated groups of workers were in a position to fight. One year before the coup, hundreds of thousands of workers had organised independently to take control of production and distribution. Even a matter of 12 weeks before the military took power, the attempted coup of 29 June brought a massive response from the working class — and the right was thrown into temporary confusion.

The tragedy of Chile was that on these crucial occasions, and others less significant, the official leadership of the workers' movement held back their struggle, did more to appease the right than rely on the strength of workers' self-organisation. And the unofficial leadership — the militants in the factories, the offices, the mines — did not break with a government which was increasingly acting against their interests. To the last days, the revolutionaries in different parties still considered their role to be

support for the UP, rather than the construction of a different sort of power — workers' councils — which existed in embryo as defensive organisations against the right but were not seen as the actual basis for a workers' state.

### Origins of Popular Unity

The words of Lenin in September 1917, writing on the technique of insurrection, fit what happened — or rather what did not happen — in the last months of the UP government:

'To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a *revolutionary upsurge of the people*. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that *turning point* in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the *vacillations* in the ranks of the enemy and *in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution* are strongest. That is the third point ...'

The UP front which took power in the 1970 presidential election was not a new phenomenon in Chilean history. A popular front government had first come to power in 1938, immediately following the creation of Chile's TUC, the CUT. Its themes had been anti-fascism; taxes on the multi-national copper firms; basic improvements in living standards — 'Bread, Clothes, A Roof' — and a programme on national industrial development. The state development agency CORFO which played a key role under the UP was first set up in 1938. It had many similarities with similar state agencies established by governments ranging from Mussolini in Italy in the 1930s to Wilson/Callaghan in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Popular Front was a period of considerable industrialisation. Living standards improved. There were few strikes

and almost no worker mobilisation until 1945 when the 'workers' government' declared several unions illegal. Repression led to the collapse of the government. The communists and socialists split: the CP still in alliance with the 'progressive' bourgeoisie. The split allowed the social democratic president Videla to turn on the left as a whole. The CP was outlawed by the 'progressive bourgeoisie' in the new atmosphere of the cold war. Massive repression followed and the working class movement was set back a decade.

Subsequent years indicated the left had learned little. Populist 'reformist' leaders courted working class support and then subsequently turned on the workers' parties when they had served their purpose. The experience of the Videla period was repeated under Ibanez in 1955/56. But the electoral outcome in terms of the Chilean bourgeoisie and its US backers was not good. In the 1958 Presidential election, the candidate of the left, Salvador Allende, got 28.5 percent. The reformist Christian Democrats got 20.5 percent and the radicals (Social Democrats) 15.4 per cent. The right-wing victor took power with only 31.6 percent of the vote. A new period, typified by the US strategy of the Alliance for Progress, was ushered in. The more intelligent sectors of the Chilean ruling class shifted their support, along with the US, to the Christian Democrats, born in



President Allende



1937 but an insignificant party until the 1950s.

In 1964 its Presidential candidate Eduardo Frei won 55.7 percent of the vote. Allende was again the candidate of the left. He won 38.6 percent; the radicals 5 percent. Allende was to take power six years later with a smaller share of the vote (36.2 percent) but with the help of the Christian Democrats.

The characteristics of the Frei government between 1964 and 1970 were an attempt at limited reforms (particularly on the land) which got more and more out of control. Christian Democratic workers and peasants, who believed the slogans of 'revolution in liberty' and 'solidarity' to be more than a left cover, began to agitate increasingly for demands which the Chilean bourgeoisie could not concede. At the same time the number of strikes rose dramatically. Between 1966 and 1969 there were 1,000 strikes a year, double the number of the early 1960s, most of which were illegal. In the last years of the Frei regime factory occupations rose from eight (in 1968) to 133 (1970). Land seizures rose from 16 to 368 in the same period. In the year after Allende was elected, the number of factory occupations was 399; while 658 farms were seized.

### Compromise from start

The Chilean ruling class was split. Frei took power in 1964 with the backing of the old Conservative Party. In 1970 the new right wing formation, the National Party, put up its own candidate. The Christian Democratic candidate was from the left, a man who had canvassed the idea of a Popular Unity coalition including the CD. The result of the election was as follows:

- Allende (Popular Unity) 36.2%
- Allessandri (National Party) 34.9%
- Tomic (Christian Democrat) 27.8%

Allende could take power, but to obtain the two thirds vote of confidence from Congress he needed the support of the Christian Democrats. To secure this constitutional victory, the UP compromised from the start.

The UP government took power essentially as a classic popular front. The difference from the previous Chilean experience, however, was that its support rested heavily on a militant working class and on the newly radicalised peasantry. In the weeks between Allende's election and his inauguration, when it looked as though the right might launch a pre-emptive coup (and there were various attempts at sabotage) several thousand Popular Unity Committees maintained their organisation. One of the first acts of the UP on attaining office was to deprive the committees of any function. It was just the first of many moves to *demobilise* and disarm popular support over the next three years.

Allende received the support of the Christian Democrats necessary under the constitution in return for a compromise which, in its way, was just as decisive. This was the so-called Statute of Guarantees. It was a document which in fact fitted the constitutionalism of most of the UP coalition. The UP did not on the whole claim it had a socialist programme for power, but

that it had conquered 'part of the power' as a lever towards achieving socialism. The Statute of Guarantees (which the UP adhered to with a blind faith right up to the coup) was the reality as opposed to the illusions about a 'peaceful transition'. It had six points:

- 1 The continuation of the existing political system together with constitutional guarantees of individual freedom.
- 2 The existing legal system should remain.
- 3 The armed forces and police should continue to guarantee democracy.
- 4 The independence of the educational system from ideological orientations and the autonomy of the universities should be guaranteed.
- 5 The continuing independence of the unions and social organisation.
- 6 The press and mass media should be free from state intervention.



For Allende and his coalition partners, the Statute fitted their political prejudices. The UP strategy was in most essentials a continuation and a deepening of the policies proclaimed by Frei in 1964. Vuskovic, the independent Minister of Economic Affairs in Allende's first cabinet, who was in fact to the left of almost every other UP minister, argued that 'economic policy is subordinate, in its context, shape and form, to the political need to increase Popular Unity's support' — in other words electoral support. The policy was hardly radical. Even in terms of land reform, the programme would only have benefitted about 15 percent of the peasantry — and this modest aim was itself not achieved. Nationalisation of the copper industry, which provoked an international boycott by the companies over the level of compensation, was not even a controversial measure. The Chilean congress and senate approved the move unanimously.

It is true that there was much more opposition to nationalisation of other industries. The so-called 'social property area' was expanded considerably during the first year of the UP and the right fought a long rearguard battle over these takeovers. From the point of view of the government

there were two aims: (i) increasing the state share of industry for the purpose of controlling national development; (ii) increasing workers' participation in order to maintain production and raise efficiency.

By the end of the first year, the state share of industrial production had grown — but still only to about 20 percent of the total. There was increased output and efficiency as the government inflated the economy and concentrated on boosting production. Wages rose considerably — but significantly much faster for white-collar workers than manual workers. The policy was to increase consumption and this was to the advantage above all of the middle class, the professionals and groups such as state employees.

### Three turning points

The politics of 'participation' — the other side of the strategy — were to produce massive confusion. The system gave a lot of participation but no control. There was no doubt of the enthusiasm of thousands of workers at being given a say in the running of industry — just as there was after the war when coal mining was nationalised in Britain — but the reality was not workers' control but control from the state, with the collaboration of the union hierarchy. As Lenin remarked (again in September 1917): 'If we simply say ... not workers' control but state control, it is simply a bourgeois-reformist phrase'; the right 'know perfectly well that such participation offers the bourgeoisie the best way of fooling the workers.'

In December 1971 Fidel Castro paid a historic visit to Chile, touring the country with Allende. He was greeted rapturously by the left — the CP, Socialists, MIR (movement of the revolutionary left) etc — and with horror by the right. Indeed the emergence of the fascist group, Fatherland and Freedom, which was to play a small but significant role in the coup, dates from its organisation of demonstrations against Castro's visit.

But Castro's visit was not devoted to any great mobilisation of workers' struggle. On the contrary, the idol of the left called repeatedly for workers to devote themselves to the 'battle for production', to giving a day's free labour a month, to increasing productivity and efficiency. Thereafter 'participation' went hand-in-hand with productivity. As the economic crisis closed in in the second year of Allende's presidency, the emphasis shifted more and more to sacrifice by the working class while the government moved to conciliate the bourgeoisie and the middle class. The left reformist face of economic planning, Pedro Vuskovic, was replaced by the right wing Stalinist face of Orlando Millas. The Millas plan was essentially to limit the size of the 'social property area', returning factories to former owners. From June 1972, when Millas took over, and especially from January 1973, the thrust of policy on participation was ever more towards placating the ruling class on the one hand and increasing the level of exploitation of workers on the other.

After the first period of the UP there were

several key 'turning points' (to quote Lenin) which were decisive in the development of the crisis. Such turning points in any revolutionary struggle are not of course the only events of importance. When history accelerates there can be clashes every day, each of which has significance in the struggle for power. Every revolution, however, has its decisive moments — such were the 'journées' of the French Revolution, days of decisive confrontation; the great events of the Bolshevik Revolution, the July days, the Kornilov attempted coup etc; the mobilisations of the workers and soldiers against the right in the Portuguese revolution of 1974/75; and most recently the general strikes and the moments of vacillation during the struggle of Solidarnosc in Poland.

In Chile there were three such decisive turning points in the final year:

- 1 the offensive of the right in October 1972, centred on the lorry owners' strike, and the response of the working class. The workers organised independently to defeat the

strike; a massive offensive was on the cards but the government moved to conciliate by taking generals into the cabinet.

- 2 the strike at the El Teniente copper mine in May 1973. The strikers were denounced by the government and the left, and supported by the right for its own ends. The key section of the working class was alienated from the government.
- 3 the attempted coup of 29 June 1973, which was put down by soldiers loyal to the government. A huge mobilisation of workers took place. Again the government moved to demobilise the masses.

The decisive development of the last year of the UP government could have been the 'cordones industriales' — literally 'industrial belts'. They emerged as a political force during the October days of 1972. In the subsequent downturn in the struggle they were marginalised, only to re-emerge even stronger in the aftermath of the attempted

#### **Castro and Allende in Santiago, 1971**



coup of 29 June. The cordones were centred in the industrial suburbs of Santiago, linking factories across different industries and sometimes involving delegates from other organisations, such as the Price Control Committees established by the government in late 1971. They existed in other industrial centres as well, but it was the cordones of the Santiago zone which were the most powerful, the most politically advanced, and which had the most industrial muscle — notably cordone Cerrillos and cordone Vicuna MacKenna.

The idea of the cordon was not an entirely new one in the autumn of 1972. Factories in one area of Santiago (Macul) had briefly been linked by an unofficial organisation before 1970. But there was no real sign of this in the first year of the UP. As the crisis grew worse, however, militants from different plants began to meet informally, in ones and twos originally, to discuss common problems; the inactivity of the official union bureaucracy, the CUT, and general politics. By the time of the crisis of October 1972 and the first major offensive of the right, there was a group of a few dozen stewards meeting in the Vicuna MacKenna. But though one of the leaders, Carlos Aguilar, was a leading worker member of the MIR, a revolutionary organisation, the MIR in common with other parties were completely surprised by the key role the cordones played in defeating the right wing offensive.

After the cordones had shown themselves to be organisations of enormous potential power — delegate workers' assemblies, taking on the function of controlling production, distribution, workers' defence, administration — even then the political parties of the left had an extraordinarily ambiguous attitude to them. It was as if the experience of the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Bolshevik Revolution itself, Germany in 1918, Italy in 1920, Hungary in 1956 had simply not existed.

#### **The left and the cordones**

Reading the debates of the time, primarily in the pages of the main magazine of the left, the non-party *Chile Hoy*, the word 'parallelism' occurs again and again. For the CP and its fellow travellers, as for one or two of the smaller UP parties, the cordones were a 'necessary form of popular power' to be subordinated as quickly as possible to the control of the CUT and the political direction of the government. For the MIR, the cordones were something of an embarrassment. Despite the MIR's growth during 1972/73 it was still a marginal force in the factories. Its real base was either in the countryside or among the 'marginal' sectors of the urban poor — the pobladores of the shanty towns of Santiago. The MIR's favoured 'popular organisation' was the 'commando communal' — a more tenuous organisation which emerged with the cordones — and they echoed the CP in saying that they disapproved of the cordones acting as 'parallel' bodies to the CUT.

This was pure sectarianism it seems. The MIR's small working class base meant that they had to argue their politics from a

minority position inside the cordones. This was not something they were very good at. The MIR's concept of a rank and file organisation was a tightly-controlled 'revolutionary front' such as their periphery organisation the FTR (revolutionary workers' front). The communal commands were genuine organisations — but the MIR had more scope in them, because it was easier to get delegates from a price control committee, or a mothers' centre, or a community organisation than from a workplace.

Throughout the last weeks of the UP, *Chile Hoy* was filled with debates about the role of the cordones, the commands, the role of the CUT; dual power — the essence of class politics in a revolutionary situation. Some of these debates constitute an important legacy for us. Despite the fact that the notion of developing the cordones into workers' councils did not surface as a matter of public debate, the arguments about the role of the cordones are in the tradition of the arguments about soviets or factory committees in the great revolutionary upheavals of the past. Similarly the politics of the Chilean CP are as instructive as the polemics between Kautsky and Lenin. Indeed the speeches and writings of Luis Corvalan, the leader of the CP, mirror closely those of Kautsky in 1922 and afterwards. Nevertheless Corvalan and his co-thinkers retain their influence in communist parties throughout the world and many of his formulations would win warm approval from Tony Benn and his supporters in this country.

### Lorry owners' stoppage

October 1972 was the first major tragedy of the Chilean revolution. The UP snatched defeat from the jaws of the workers' victory. Lorry owners in the south of the country began a stoppage which spread rapidly into the rest of country and other petty bourgeois and middle class sectors. The 'strike' was accompanied by a wave of fascist attacks, student violence etc. It was directly aimed at either bringing down the government or at least forcing it into open retreat on its political programme.

The response of the workers was magnificent. Instead of simply working on as their leaders exhorted them, they took control of factories, transport, food distribution. The cordones sprang into action throughout Santiago and the surrounding area. The CUT provided much of the impulse for the initial response with its committees for the Defence of Industry etc. and lists of drivers prepared to brave the lorry owners' violence and sabotage and so on — but the response of the cordones went far beyond the leadership's plans. In a month the level of organisation improved dramatically. The lorry owners' strike — an extremely serious threat — was defeated by a combination of workers' self-reliance and activity.

But the outcome was not a crushing blow to the right. The offensive that could have been unleashed was never allowed to develop. On 2 November, with the strike broken and the army acting against the right,

Allende moved to appoint serving officers to the UP government. The move was 'balanced' by the appointment of two members of the CUT executive to the three heads of armed forces.

The object of the exercise was to reassure the opposition. By implication the 'Chilean process' of the UP would be halted. Simultaneously the lorry owners were let off the hook. Their strike was merely suspended (to the following August as it turned out); the shopkeepers were also left to carry on their business — the price control committees were removed from their direct role of intervention. Worse, the government proposed the return of factories to former owners who had been engaged in sabotage or attempted to lock out their workers. This plan, under the Stalinist economy minister, Millas, had to be substantially abandoned in the face of opposition from the rank and file in the Socialist Party and in the cordones. This was one occasion when the left of the UP parties, together with the MIR, mobilised successfully against the government's policies. But the necessary political conclusions were not drawn.



The net result of the October crisis was a stalemate, but a high level of demoralisation for workers. Far from hitting the right hard, the UP government had conciliated. Workers were also deeply confused about the role of the armed forces. *Chile Hoy* publicised an opinion poll at the climax of the October crisis which asked the rather loaded question: 'Do you believe that the Armed Forces could abandon their role as defenders of legality?' A total of 76.5 percent replied that they trusted the forces. It was symptomatic of what the politics of reformism were leading to. By relying on one or two loyal military figures, notably General Prats (who was assassinated on Pinochet's orders a year after the coup), the government convinced its supporters it had nothing to fear from the armed forces.

This was, as ever, carried to its logical absurdity by the Chilean CP, and in particular its leader Corvalan. The latter declared right up to the end that 'we continue to support the absolutely professional character of the armed institutions. Their enemies are not among the ranks of the people but in the reactionary camp.' The irony of the statement (made on 8 July 1973) was that it was reprinted by the British CP in September, after the coup and when Corvalan was already in prison and facing seeming certain death (he was later swapped for the Russian dissident Bukovski). Even

after the coup, Corvalan was apparently still wedded to constitutional cretinism. He was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* (6 October 1973):

'We never backed the guerillas, or the idea of an armed rising. On the contrary, when we were called upon to support a civil war, I drew up a letter on the need for a constitutional solution and went to see President Allende on Sunday 9 September.'

The old saying that a fish rots from the head has some validity.

### Copper miners' strike

The strike at the El Teniente copper mine in May 1973 was a disaster for the UP, a tremendous boost for the right and a hammer blow against workers' confidence. It remains to this day a matter of great controversy on the Chilean left — who do not like talking about it.

The strike was not a simple matter. It centred on a special pay agreement won by the workers of El Teniente after a series of strikes many years previously. The government declared that the 41 percent wage 'readjustment' which the workers had received on the basis of this monthly cost of living agreement would be offset against the general 100 percent wage 'readjustment' which the government had declared nationally. So the new law passed by the UP would not be applied directly to the El Teniente workers.

The workers initially went along with this pending arbitration, but simultaneously the opposition parties were carrying out a campaign for the 100 percent increase to be applied to everyone. The UP opposed this partly because it conflicted with official policy on equalising wages — but mainly because the government was trying to control wage rises as a means of controlling inflation.

The Teniente workers declared themselves not concerned with general government policy — they wanted their wage rise, as promised under Law 17,713 (passed on 2 September 1972). The workers voted overwhelmingly to come out and strikes began on 18 April 1973, at the Rancagua plants.

The strike lasted in one form or another for 74 days. But for most of that time the majority were at work. Enormous pressure from the government in the first two weeks of the strike, coupled with the offer of a productivity bonus, appeals to national interest, loyalty to a state-owned firm etc meant that, by 8 May, the management could claim that around 60 percent of the miners were working. In fact the number was less than this. Even at the end of May, the number of workers out was still 25 to 30 percent. As for the other groups, white collar and technical, a very large number remained out on strike.

The result of this split in the rank and file was disastrous. The UP and CP militants inside the various mines and plants — foundry, smelter etc accused the workers of 'economism'. Suddenly the copper mines were being described as 'backward', 'not part of the process' and even a 'labour aristocracy'.

This was absurd. For three decades or more the copper miners had been in the front line of the struggle in Chile. Under Frei, for example, the Teniente miners had a three-month strike declared illegal. Union leaders were sacked and dismissed. When the El Salvador mine came out in solidarity, troops were sent against them and murdered six miners and their wives. The CP and Socialist presence in the mines was extremely strong. Among the manual workers in 1973, 15 of the 20 union representatives were CP or SP militants. On the white collar side the Christian Democrats had the majority however — a fact that became more important as the 1973 dispute went on.

The allegation of 'backwardness' was even ridiculous in the UP's own electoral terms. In the March 1973 elections, the highest percentage votes for the left were in the mining areas. As for the allegation that the miners were a labour aristocracy it was based on the rumour (!) that some miners employed maids, that their pay was 12 times that of a peasant, that they enjoyed special conditions etc, etc. All the sort of filth which workers normally have to put up with from the capitalist press.

When the facts are examined the truth is rather different. Adult life expectancy of copper miners was lower than almost any other sector of workers. About 40 percent of the miners were suffering from some sort of silicosis or other lung disease. The wages that were quoted in the press included such items as: travel allowance, 'promised' overtime, productivity bonus, holiday pay, educational leave, benefits, workers' compensation etc. It is notable that not even *Chile Hoy*, by far the most objective of the left's publications, bothered to talk about the strike in any other terms than (i) workers holding the country to ransom; (ii) the 'inadequacy' of the participation and union machinery in the mines.

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### **For the left as a whole, miners' strikes were an embarrassing side show to be overcome as quickly as possible**

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It is worth looking for a moment at this second point, because it is a familiar one in Britain. While the left almost without exception (the exceptions were some of the best Socialist Party worker militants) saw the 'problem' at El Teniente as being 'lack of participation' or 'economism', the reality for the workers was that the union leadership was not even visible. *Chile Hoy* for example published interviews with workers in the Caletones foundry (who went back to work fairly early) and there was still great confusion. The foundry was in fact the strongest CP base, yet there was division and confusion on a wide scale. In the Rancagua section one worker, described ironically as a 'moderate' said:

'It's sure we'll be accused of being antipatriotic, but tell me who is really antipatriotic; those who are in conflict or those who don't want to solve the problem? According to our calculations the loss of five hours production could satisfy the claim and here we are on the 23rd day. So we tell those leaders who are acting as politicians, not on behalf of the mass meetings, don't they remember that in the past they've defended the same principles they're forgetting today? ...'

The unions at El Teniente (and probably at the other mines) were very bureaucratic. For example, there were nine different Teniente unions with 45 'leaders of the zone'. After nationalisation of the mines in 1971, there was a proliferation of committees of all sorts, participation machinery etc. The left was not only sucked in administratively, but politically the attitude changed completely. Instead of talking about grievances and disputes, they talked about production. At Chuquicamata for example there were over 100 bonus and grading disputes in 1982; this was treated as a matter of great regret by the left. The left in fact ignored the copper mines almost entirely — except as producers who would earn the precious foreign exchange to develop the national economy. When for example *Chile Hoy* discussed the first copper production figures for 1973 it casually mentioned that at one of the large mines —

La Exotica — the maintenance workers had been on strike for a month in February, 'after which there was another strike movement recently'. For the left as a whole, miners' strikes were an embarrassing sideshow to be overcome as quickly as possible, so as to get back to the serious business of production (and participation).

Added to this were two key political issues of a more general nature. First, the October 'bosses strike' undoubtedly made the left, and the advanced sections of workers in Santiago, particularly alert to suggestions of sabotage. The copper miners had not gone through the same experience of self-organisation — they were just told to keep working. This certainly meant that there was a much greater tendency towards sectionalism. The copper workers were also, to some extent, protected from the worst effects of shortages elsewhere in the country, because food distribution to the mines was a priority.

The second issue was simply that the UP was thinking always in terms of capitalist economics. Thus Sergio Bittar, a minister who was a member of the Christian Left (a split from the Christian Democrats which became closely allied with the MIR) — said of the Teniente strike:

'There are various things at stake. The first is that the government must of necessity insist inflexibly on certain principles which alone will allow a given distribution of wealth, an order to pay policy, a control over political economy. There are principles laid down which we cannot concede, because to follow a policy of irresponsible increases, without any relationship to production, would be to raise inflation to uncontrollable heights. And to concede to the strongest unions, such as in the copper industry, would be to create unacceptable discrimination between groups of workers. There has to be a very hard struggle in the copper sector to make the workers see that their action now must be directed towards participation and management of their enterprises and not fundamentally to wages. Not to do this — to follow the line of least resistance — could mean that instead of one large stoppage we could have a hundred small ones which would be much more prejudicial from the economic point of view.'

As if this were not enough, the minister went on to tell the readers of *Chile Hoy* (in May 1973):

'The other more general point is that today in Chile we have a consumption of roughly \$600 a head and have created expectations of \$800-\$1,000 a head and real capacity for consumption is \$500 a head. So if you set expectations against real capacity and if you want to keep the country without a big foreign debt, this means restricting consumption.'

This was the reality behind the UP's rhetoric in 1973. In fact workers' economic demands were being suppressed because of a capitalist crisis and the attempts of a reformist government to run a capitalist system in a humane manner. The workers of El Teniente came up against this, just at the



moment when the world price of copper was rising from an unusually low point and the government was desperate for more foreign exchange.

The UP's response to the strike was to declare a state of emergency in the province on 10 May. The skilled workers and white collar groups still stayed out. The government and mine management attempted to put all the blame on a small minority of right wing agitators (who were certainly present around the dispute) and on non-workers. In fact regrading moves meant that so-called 'empleados' (staff) included such groups as transport workers, maintenance workers, craftsmen etc. On 16 May the government only just avoided a strike by the workers at Chuquicamata who voted by a majority of only 29 (2,912 to 2,883) not to support El Teniente.

The leaders of the Teniente strikers were isolated in terms of workers' solidarity (though some sections at Chuqui took action during June) — but the right wing was able to pounce. The strike leaders both had dubious pasts. Guillermo Medina, the key figure, who became Pinochet's chosen man after the coup, was an ex-Christian Democrat who had become the left candidate for union leader. The other remaining representative on the five-man executive (the CP and SP members resigned) was Julio Galvez of the USOPO, an obscure left split from the Socialists, some of whose members ended up as fascists. These two and the remaining strikers were lauded by the right. A march on Santiago was launched on 14 June. The truck owners declared support. There were violent clashes with police and UP supporters when they reached the capital, while the right wing milked the spectacle for all it was worth.

### **The failed coup**

The outcome of the El Teniente strike was to achieve what the October right wing offensive could not: divisions of a deep and lasting nature had appeared in the working class. The copper miners were at least alienated from the UP government, and some were driven into outright opposition. For five years after the coup the leaders of the anti-Allende agitation in the mines went unchallenged, even though the rigged plebiscites under Pinochet showed that the left retained the loyalty of 25 percent or more of the population in the mining districts. When it came to the crunch of the police and army raids of July/August 1973, of the armed offensive by the military against the workers preparatory to the all-out assault of 11 September, it was significant that the attacks were not directed against the copper miners. The job of disarming the traditional vanguard of the working class had already been done effectively by the UP itself.

If El Teniente was the key conflict in allowing the right to go onto the offensive it did not yet destroy working class resistance. The third and greatest tragedy was the lost opportunity which came with the failed coup of 29 June. The story can be simply told. In the wake of the Teniente agitation, the right mounted a major offensive. There were 77 fascist bomb attacks in one week of June

alone. Strikes by professionals — doctors, teachers — were accompanied by civil disobedience and open talk of military intervention. The campaign accusing Allende of breaching the constitution reached its peak.

At this point on 29 June the Second Armoured Regiment launched an attack against the presidential palace and the defence ministry. But the coup flopped. Loyal military intelligence was still too good for one thing. Secondly the plotters were under the direct influence of the Fatherland and Freedom organisation who jumped the gun. Suddenly the left was handed a present on a plate. The parties of the UP agreed to distribute arms to the workers; Allende came on the radio to call for seizure of farms and factories — and arms 'if necessary'.

### **If El Teniente was the key conflict in allowing the right to go on the offensive it did not yet destroy working class resistance**

The workers' reaction was once again magnificent. Hundreds of factories and offices were occupied round Santiago. On 30 June a giant demonstration surged onto the streets. In the provincial cities, hitherto slower to mobilise than the capital, cordones and communal commands suddenly mushroomed. Cordon Cerrillos began taking decisions as a workers' council. The CUT was no longer relied upon. Communal commands must become 'organisations to direct and control the struggles of the working class and the people', stated its instructions of 1 July. Suddenly everything was possible. The enemy was vacillating, confused. Those who had held the struggle back were forced to shout loudest for action. The conciliators were without a policy.

But, from the first, the opportunities were missed. As the plot foundered, workers poured onto the streets to demonstrate. A big march gathered in Central Santiago, chanting, 'Soldier, friend, the people is with you' — but there was little or no systematic attempt at fraternisation with the troops loyal to the UP government. There were clearly important groups in the forces ready to be won over by a determined policy. Yet even the MIR, for all its rhetoric about democratisation, did not carry out any strategy of fraternisation between workers and soldiers.

The left in the armed forces were largely seen as sympathetic generals or officers. The question of democracy was turned into just a question of soldiers' right to participate in the normal democratic processes such as voting. Even Miguel Enriquez, the general secretary of the MIR and probably its best political leader, largely repeated the formulas of 'citizens rights' in the forces. This at the end of July 1973, when the army was already sweeping through the more isolated working class areas, raiding factories on the pretext of the search for arms. But the MIR to its credit did attempt to carry out propaganda inside the armed forces, as did some sections of the Socialist Party. But, once again, the revolutionary process does not wait for political parties to

catch up: the decisive moment for an intervention in the rank and file of the forces was in the two to three weeks after 29 June when the right was temporarily thrown off balance.

The outcome was different. The government yet again began talks with the Christian Democrats, who were preparing an impeachment against Allende. Worse, the CUT, under the influence of the CP and the right Socialists, instructed workers to hand back the factories taken over on 29 June and afterwards.

Yet again this was a hammer blow against the self-activity of the rank and file. Yet there was a glimmer of hope. The two largest Cordones, Cerrillos and Vicuna Mackenna, with left Socialists and MIR members in the leadership, flatly refused to go along with the CUT's instructions. The police were sent against them. A huge mass picket of 5,000 workers from Cerrillos gathered on 18 July to block the return of the factories, demanding their nationalisation. Government representatives sent to 'conciliate' received a cold welcome. The day after, Vicuna Mackenna followed suit. About 4,000 workers threw up barricades



and took over the streets. In came the riot police, raining tear gas on workers demanding 'their' government's support. One MIR member was killed, several wounded.

It was at this stage that the debate over the role of the cordones surfaced in public. The right demanded action against them. The CUT said that such bodies should function under its authority. The left wavered. The MIR was seized with what can only be described as the fetishism of demands. For every question there had to be a programme. The organisation had come a long way from its Guevarist origins. It had developed a minority audience of workers and, most important, a relationship with the Socialist Party left. But the abiding problem for the party in the past weeks before the coup was that on the one hand it was obsessed with formulas — for the army, peasants, cordones, commands, students etc. On the other it was lurching back to its clandestine, guerrilla past. After 29 June the MIR went underground to a large extent. Preparing for the worst was obviously a sensible precaution (except that the MIR envisaged a military strategy after a coup) — but in the vital July days its political strategy became increasingly rhetorical.

It was in fact not in the MIR where the clearest thinking was taking place. On the left of the Socialist Party existed a group of militants known as the 'Cordillera' group. Their level of analysis went beyond the simple idea of 'extending and developing popular power'. In their paper *Tarea Urgente (Urgent Task)* they were the only group to declare that the formation of cordones was the act of the workers going beyond their traditional organisations:

'In other words creating the fundamental weapon of the proletariat and its allies in the conquest of state power.'

They went on:

'We believe that it's wrong to talk about the necessity of creating popular power... The alternative popular power exists, the cordones and communal commands are the expression of it.'

Published on 22 August, this argument formed part of an analysis of Lenin and Trotsky's comments on dual power. The

duty of all, for these revolutionaries, was to build the communal commands with all speed.

Unfortunately, by this stage this was too optimistic a position. The revolutionary wave had passed. In its place came the wave of repression launched by the armed forces towards the end of July. The final stages of the UP saw a government paralysed by its reformist strategy, giving its blessing to raids on the very workers' organisations which had supported it through thick and thin.

The excuse was an arms law (ostensibly against the fascists) pushed through by the UP with the Christian Democrats' support in 1972. It had never been activated. Suddenly it was being used against the left with a vengeance. While the CUT was telling workers to hand back their factories, the police and the military were raiding them. To a large degree the military carried out the repression necessary for a successful coup while Allende was still in office. General Pinochet was brought into the closest circle of the President as a loyal and trusted advisor. Meanwhile the El Teniente strike was over, but the lorry owners had come out again. Their 'suspended' stoppage of October 1972 began again, and this time the workers were much more exhausted, much more disoriented by the contradictory positions of their leaders, and were faced by the escalation of military pressure, apparently with the backing of the government.

### The final stage

By 10 August, the army was emboldened by the success of their first wave of repression in the isolated cities of the far south and began raids in the Santiago area. On 5 August about 100 workers and naval ratings, based at the Valparaiso dockyards, were arrested for 'dereliction of military duty'. They had noted the coup preparations and begun to organise to oppose it. The case became a symbol. Allende at first denounced his supporters. Then he disclaimed them. Finally when the navy attempted to implicate three party leaders, including Altamirano, the official UP did move to condemn the actions of the navy.

This pathetic spectacle ruled out entirely

the possibility of any agitation within the armed forces in the build-up to the coup. Soldiers and others under ruthless military discipline will only move to the side of the workers if they are convinced that workers' organisation is strong, prepared to fight all the way, unflinching and consistent. By the middle of August 1973 the workers were in the weakest position they had been in for over a year. Though the cordones of the capital still existed, though even the CUT began to have second thoughts about its policies of conciliation, the vacillations of July were decisive.

This is not to say workers gave in. On the contrary. Under the most heavy pressure, in provincial capitals which were almost under a state of seige throughout August, workers continued to organise and resist. New cordones were built, under the most difficult of conditions. The far left prepared themselves for a coup. But the balance of class forces had shifted, and the political understanding of what was happening was missing. For the MIR, right up to the end, to the publication of their ironically-named journal *Punto Final* on 11 September itself, the question was of 'demands on the government'.

For the CP, as we have noted above, the policy was and remained 'no to civil war'. 'Some reactionaries have raised a storm', said Corvalan, 'because they think they have found a new issue to use to drive a wedge between the people and armed forces. They are claiming that we have a policy of replacing the professional army. No! We continue, and will continue, to support keeping our armed forces strictly professional.'

The coup of 11 September 1973 was well anticipated. A week before one of the largest UP demonstrations of all had paraded in front of the presidential palace, with Allende taking the salute. It was a gloomy affair, many were in tears. The thunder clouds had built up and the storm had already begun.

Even then, the official leadership ensured that Chile's workers paid the highest price. The CUT, the CP and others instructed workers to go into the factories when the coup began. Tens of thousands responded — waiting for the instructions they felt were bound to come, and the delivery of arms which many had promised and which they had been told about on 29 June. For hours nothing happened. A few arms were distributed. The Socialist Party militia was organised (they were to beat a sensible retreat two days later).

A few arms were distributed. Those who waited for further orders (as instructed) were rounded up. A handful of factories resisted bravely against huge odds.

Even then the CP did not give up. It broadcast information that an army, under the loyal General Prats, was marching to relieve Santiago. Moscow radio repeated it. For a few days, courage and hope kept resistance alive — then the world fell in. It is worth remembering of Salvador Allende, reformist leader though he was, that he died bravely, gun in hand. Many of the UP leadership sought a softer option. For the workers — as always — there was nowhere to hide.



# Potential power

Wars in Central America, and possible direct US intervention, continue to be a focus for the left. But events in the countries to the south, though less dramatic, are potentially far more important. **David Beecham** looks at the role of the new workers' movements and their impact on Latin American politics today.

Ten years ago, on 11 September 1973, the military overthrew Chile's Popular Unity government. It is just on 30 years ago that guerrillas led by Fidel Castro stormed the Moncada barracks in Havana, in a move which was effectively the opening of the Cuban revolution. It is now four years since the Sandinistas led the general insurrection which overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua.

Each of these anniversaries is being celebrated in different ways by socialists in different countries. They are important anniversaries. The Cuban revolution inspired a whole generation of revolutionaries in Latin America and Europe. Although it cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as socialist, it nevertheless represented a great step forward as compared with what went before and, most important, the first successful revolt against the power of US imperialism in Central America.

In its turn the Sandinista victory removed a tyranny on which the United States had relied since the Second World War. Once again, the regime which emerged was a nationalist one. The Sandinistas declared

their aim as being a mixed economy from the start. But the material benefits for the mass of the population were a tremendous advance. And a successful revolt led to a revolutionary upsurge elsewhere—notably in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Chile is of course an anniversary of a different sort. The pursuit of an imagined constitutional, parliamentary road to socialism led to a massive defeat for a workers' movement which at the time was more advanced than any other in Latin America. And, as we show elsewhere, workers' power was on the agenda—a socialist revolution was possible in Chile.

These anniversaries now coincide with a tremendous escalation of the war in Central America. Over the past few months the United States has raised the stakes considerably, concentrating a vast taskforce in Honduras and off the coasts of Nicaragua. At the same time, a formidable counter-revolutionary force, armed and trained by

## Escalation

the US, has been attacking Nicaragua from Honduras. There has been a major offensive against the FMLN forces in El Salvador, spearheaded by elite US-trained troops. And in Guatemala officers backed by the US authorities have overthrown the Rios Montt regime and backed a joint military campaign with Honduras and El Salvador, a revival of the old US plan for the region.

It is no longer fanciful to talk about Central America becoming another Vietnam. It could do so, though to keep matters in perspective we should remember the scale of eventual US military involvement in Vietnam amounted to 500,000 troops and support personnel, rather than the hundreds involved in operations in

Central America today. Nevertheless a continued US escalation is almost certain, with the pressure being applied to the Sandinista government to cease its support for the guerrillas in El Salvador.

Revolutionaries have a clear position on Central America. We are for the victory of the FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador; for the defeat of US imperialism and its supporters, including as usual the British government; for the defence of Nicaragua against the United States and its puppet forces. We start from these positions.

But solidarity also requires clarity. Nicaragua is not a workers' state, nor is it on the way to becoming one. The struggle in El Salvador is increasingly a protracted guerrilla war, conducted in a way removed from the possibility of the self-activity of the working class which is the key to any socialist struggle. We do not expect workers' states to be built in Central America.

## A new working class

Nor do we sink our differences in general support for the 'people' of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala or, for that matter, Chile. For the notion of 'the people' is something dear to those in the Labour Party and the Communist Party who see the fight in each country as essentially a national one against foreign domination. The class struggle is frequently forgotten, or mentioned as a question only of giving land to the peasantry.

Now not only does this not even fit the struggle in El Salvador—where 60 percent of the population of the countryside has now been deprived of land and turned into a rural proletariat—it also hides the reality of the main struggle in the countries of Latin America.

This is not the struggle as portrayed on the television or in the newspapers. It is not the struggle which sections of the left romanticise with visions of heroic guerrillas 'liberating the poor', as once they romanticised Castro and Guevara. It is not the struggle of 'peoples' but of workers.



For the countries of Latin America have changed out of all recognition. Even ten years ago, most of the left talked in terms of (a) anti-imperialist, nationalist struggles; (b) the peasantry; (c) guerrillas. Even today there are those who see these issues as the main ones. And yet the major countries of Latin America, like some of the others in what used to be called the third world, have now emerged as the flashpoints of the world economic system. And at the same time, the working class of the metropolitan centres of these countries—in great conurbations like Sao Paulo, Caracas, Buenos Aires, Mexico City—have become a highly concentrated explosive force. When that force is mobilised, as in Sao Paulo over the last five years, it is enormously powerful.

It is workers' struggles which have shaken the military dictatorships of Brazil, Argentina and Chile. It is workers' struggles, and working class reaction to vicious austerity programmes, which today concern the international bankers and the IMF. The 1983 report of the Inter American Development Bank, one of the key funding agencies, states that the resolution of the international debt crisis will take many years because the reaction of workers to the 'necessary austerity measures' in the short-term would be too violent for Latin American countries to stand. When the austerity measures in Brazil were first announced at the beginning of June, a tremor went through the international gold and currency markets. The international gold price rose \$16 an ounce in one day because of fears that Brazil would default on debt repayments. Fears which resulted from the sudden four-day strike wave which swept Brazil's oil refineries and car factories in protest.

## Brazil

This is the sort of power undreamed of by guerrilla armies, however brave their struggle or noble their cause.

These countries are the flashpoint of the international crisis because with approaching £250,000 million in foreign debt in the largest Latin American countries—chiefly Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela—and \$300,000 million plus in all, workers have great economic power. They are also enormously concentrated.

Brazil above all is the best example. Taking the figures for 1970, which understate the numbers by about half, there were 2,634,630 industrial workers. Greater Sao Paulo, (population then 8 million, now nearer 14 million) had 34 percent of these workers, Sao Paulo state a total of 50 percent. Sao Paulo, including its satellite towns like Sao Bernardo, Santo Andre, Diadema etc, accounts for two thirds of the motor industry in Brazil, two thirds of plastics, well over half the chemical and rubber industries, about half the engineering and related industries. The state of Sao Paulo accounts for the vast proportion of the key industrial sectors. And taking the South East of Brazil together—a larger area than West Germany, admittedly—and the so-called golden triangle of Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Belo Horizonte in particular, you have an area taking in 70 percent of industrial em-

ployment, 80 to 90 percent of the major industries.

The proportion of the population on the land has fallen dramatically while the urban population has exploded. Of course employment has not kept pace. There are probably 'only' about five or six million manufacturing workers in Brazil, the same number as in Britain but with a total population more than twice the size. The service sector has grown while agriculture has declined—but the huge growth has been in unemployment. Alongside the great concentration of employed workers in greater Sao Paulo, there are anything up to six million people (including children) eking out a living from casual work and seasonal jobs or who are just unemployed.

The other point about this new working class is its concentration in huge factories. The truly colossal factories—Volkswagen in Sao Bernardo with 30,000 workers—are rare. But Ford, Mercedes, General Motors, Fiat and several Brazilian firms all have factories with 10,000 workers or so and there are vast areas of industry with plants of between 500 and 5,000 workers. Even in 1970, before the last great rush of industrial investment, 25 percent of the labour force was in plants of 500 and over. A further 30 percent was in factories of between 100 and 500 workers.



Now the experience of Brazil is not repeated uniformly across Latin America, even in the largest countries. While the size of the working class and its concentration has grown enormously in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela, there has been de-industrialisation in Argentina and Chile. But politically in each country the weight of the working class has grown.

The key question remains what sort of workers' organisation and what sort of politics. The old ideas of Latin America being a US colony, the anti-imperialist rhetoric employed by every opportunist bourgeois politician across the continent—these die hard. The mobilisation of the Argentinian workers behind the Junta during the Falklands crisis, and the failure of almost the entire left to oppose it then and since, is a salutary warning. Similarly the simmering border conflicts between such countries as Peru and Ecuador are used to divert attention from the crisis at home. Nationalism remains a major political issue.

But it is a waning one. The workers of Sao Paulo, whether employed by Ford, Volkswagen, General Electric or Toshiba, do not

see the working class of the most advanced capitalist countries as their enemy. The problem here has in the main ceased to be simple nationalism. It is reformism, and the politics of the popular front, which are the main threat. In the crisis of June and July for example, the unions led by militants of the new Brazilian left wing party, the Workers' Party (PT), abandoned a major unlimited strike in the oil and car industries (supported by other groups) in favour of supporting a one-day mobilisation called by the right wing labour federations which still predominate across most of Brazilian industry. This general strike on 21 July was of some size—around two million workers stopped—but the level of mobilisation was of course far smaller than the previous explosion. In place of flying pickets several thousand strong, the militants were left to bring factories out, and to be picked up by the police. Instead of mass spontaneous demonstrations, the left had to go along with the moderate Democratic Movement (PMDB) the main opposition party, which was doing everything to preserve the image of its newly elected governor in Sao Paulo state. The PMDB and its equivalent in Rio, the PDT, led by one-time radical Leonel Brizola, were of course far worse. Brizola even opposed strike action against the 20 percent pay cuts planned by the government

on the basis that it 'divided the people'.

Outside the main areas of workers militancy, where there have been massive strikes every year (bar one) since 1978, workers were largely passive. And in the interests of 'unity' the militants were sinking their differences with the opportunists, who are in many cases only maintained in power by a system of patronage and ballot-rigging.

It is absence of a working class party based in the factories, offices and other workplaces which remains the common factor across the key countries of Latin America. The potential for such organisations exists in dozens of places. The impact of such organisations, even of modest size, arguing consistently and learning the many lessons of the last few years in Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela—could be enormous. The grip of reformism and nationalism, of populist solutions to the crisis, could be broken down.

There are some hopeful signs, in a few countries. The few anti-nationalist socialists in Argentina, the 'union opposition' in Brazil, and others. It is these groupings and the potential forces they represent which are the hope for socialists in Latin America.



# The gap that's closing

The post election gloom in the Labour Party has forced most of the left sharply rightwards. But a few, most notably Ken Livingstone, seem to have moved to the left. **Pete Goodwin** assesses this trend and shows that it is more illusory than real.

In the heady days of the rise of Bennites, Ken Livingstone and Peter Hain stuck out as two of the most perceptive members of the new Labour left. Not that they agreed on everything even then. But both seemed to see rather further than the end of Tony Benn's nose. Both seemed to be moving leftwards and both seemed to have some appreciation of the need for the left in the Labour Party to build an extra parliamentary base.

But in the years since the deputy leadership election of 1981 Livingstone and Hain have moved in very different directions. And the gap between them seems to have grown to a chasm since the election. It reveals just how completely the Bennite camp has crumbled over the years. But a closer look reveals even more.

Peter Hain first, because he is swimming with the tide. He didn't start that way, for Hain was one of the first Labour lefts to openly recognise the downturn in class struggle and its implications for the Bennites. But the conclusion he drew was that the Labour left must suspend the battle

inside the party and concentrate its energies outside. He, and the Labour Co-ordinating Committee of which he is a member, were already arguing that in early 1982, separating themselves off from those more naive Bennite enthusiasts who wanted a rerun of the deputy leadership election.

The theme has become shriller since the election. Writing in the *New Statesman* last month Hain lambasts the 'combination of meetingitis' and 'revolutionary politics' (which) has become a substitute for the much more demanding and difficult task of actively campaigning for socialist politics.' One can see his point. The problem is what sort of 'socialist politics' the campaigning will be for. Once you accept that the battle inside the Labour Party can be taken no further, then that means the sort of 'socialist politics' that the Labour Party has now—or rather those politics suitably watered down after their battering at the last election. And Hain is open, even aggressive, about accepting this logic. He has come out for the watering down on the Common Market and council house sales and he is an enthusiastic backer for the leadership of Neil Kinnock, the man who personifies the whole process.

## Watering down

In short, Peter Hain's 'campaigning for socialist politics' means a little extra-parliamentary razzamataz to secure the election of a Kinnock-led Labour government. Quite likely it will happen. Most of the ex-Bennite left is taking Peter Hain's course, and very likely once Kinnock



**Ken Livingstone**

is in the saddle, Hain's proposals can generate some enthusiasm for him. But as for 'socialist politics', a Labour Party led by Neil Kinnock has as much in common with socialism as the party Harold Wilson led with similar enthusiasm into the 1964 election.

Ken Livingstone has the merit of seeing that clearly. Of all the Labour lefts Livingstone has been rudest about Kinnock during the leadership campaign. Indeed he has even suggested it might be better to have Hattersley as leader because at least no-one would have any illusions in him!

Livingstone also has the far greater merit of seeing that the problem with Kinnock is not so much that he will abandon the policies that Labour fought the election on, but that those policies themselves are totally inadequate. In a number of speeches and interviews since the election Livingstone has clearly argued that the alternative economic strategy is not even a half-way house for the left. Its inconsistencies were demonstrated as clearly in an election as they would be if a Labour government actually tried to implement them. And he has argued equally firmly that it is no use campaigning for unilateral nuclear disarmament unless at the same time you argue for Britain out of NATO and substantial cuts in conventional weapons.

So the lesson Livingstone has learned from the election debacle is the need for a qualitative move to the left in Labour Party policy and so a stepping up of the internal battle. And that is where Livingstone's problems begin.

First of all, there is absolutely no reason to believe that in a period of downturn in working class struggle and consequent demoralisation, a more left wing Labour Party would do any better in elections. Indeed there is every reason to believe it would do considerably worse.

A Labour Party campaigning now on the basis of Britain out of NATO, troops out of Ireland, and the necessity of workers taking over industry to get out of the crisis, would, of course, be far better for socialists, as it would help win a significant minority of workers to these positions. But it would get hammered at the polls.



**Peter Hain was one of the first Labour lefts to recognise the downturn in the class struggle. His conclusion however was that the Labour left must suspend internal party battles with the Labour right**



**How seriously can Livingstone fight for his position in the Labour Party?**

And for Livingstone, when it comes to the crunch, it is the second fact that counts. For, like all of the Labour left, he is in the business of winning elections. If he wasn't then he wouldn't last two minutes inside the party. So when actual elections loom, Livingstone's left policies are likely to be sacrificed to electoral pressures just as readily as the whole of the hard left Labour candidates sacrificed their hard left policies at the last general election.

But in the meantime can Livingstone seriously fight for his position inside the Labour Party? That brings us to the second problem. Just imagine what such a fight would entail. It would mean arguing to kick

out the right wing. It would mean quite clearly breaking from Tony Benn and arguing that he is wrong over the alternative economic strategy and NATO. It would mean breaking from most of the trade union Broad Left supporters and arguing that they are wrong on for example import controls.

With the present climate of opinion inside the Labour Party that would leave Livingstone, and the rest of what remains of the hard left, very isolated indeed. They would incur the wrath, not merely of the party leadership, but of all the left union leaders and also most of the constituency party activists. Their position in the Labour Party would be put in peril. And that is the one thing that they are not prepared to risk.

### Community politics

So in practice, Livingstone and his co-thinkers don't even start a serious fight in the party for the politics they profess to believe in. They vigorously deny that they want to drive the right wing out of the party. They are proud to have Tony Benn or Michael Meacher or various left union leaders on their platforms, and of course when they are on those platforms they go uncriticised. To survive the hard left need to have the protection of those immediately to the right of them. But as those people build their bridges to Kinnock (and in the case of Meacher and most of the left union leaders the bridge building is rapid in the extreme) then the hard lefts like Livingstone must inevitably get pulled along.

The chasm that has grown between Livingstone and Hain over the last two years will, therefore narrow down again over the next two. And the shift will be in Peter Hain's, and therefore Neil Kinnock's favour.

Anyone who doubts that should look at the last strand in Ken Livingstone's current position. For of course Livingstone too, is not content simply with 'meetingitis' and 'resolutionary politics'. He is clear that it is no use simply winning battles inside the party. 'We must support all workers' struggles', he argues and argues strongly. But what, in practice, does he mean by this?

Two things. First of all the sort of 'community' politics practised by the GLC and various other left Labour councils: cheap fares, facilities for women's groups

and ethnic minorities and so on. But this is exactly what Peter Hain is now advocating, what he calls 'a new strategy of community politics'. Of course it is not so new. The whole of the Bennite left have been advocating it for the last four years, and, particularly in local government attempting to practice it. We have examined some of the results in *Socialist Review*. Over the next years, with less money, with tighter restrictions on local government from the Tories, they are likely to be even more miserable.

Both Hain and Livingstone presumably recognise that the room for manoeuvre in local government will probably diminish. Perhaps they can compensate for this by stepping up other party activity. Hain argues that Labour parliamentary candidates 'should start work in the local community, mounting personal canvasses, taking up local issues, dealing with casework, and publicising such activity'. Livingstone would not dissent. But even supposing it happens what does it amount to? The sort of 'community' politics practiced for years by the Liberals in some inner city areas.

The second strand of Livingstone's 'support for workers' struggles' is activity in the unions. Livingstone, like all the rest of the Labour hard left, make much of wanting such activity stepped up. But what sort of activity in the unions? Again, Livingstone and all the rest of the Labour hard lefts agree: building the 'new' Broad Left in the unions.

### Complete agreement

But on this second strand of extra-parliamentary activity they also find themselves today in virtually complete agreement with Peter Hain. For Hain's Labour Co-ordinating Committee has been deeply enmeshed with the 'new' Broad Lefts in the unions over the last few years. Probably rather more deeply enmeshed than Ken Livingstone.

Like the 'new' community politics, the 'new' Broad Lefts are not nearly so new as they would like to think. Like their predecessors whose greatest triumph was getting Hugh Scanlon elected as president of the engineering union they are essentially electoral organisations geared to capturing union positions. And just as the triumph of Scanlon's election proved to be a hollow one so will the 'new' Broad Left victories where they occur.

That is not simply a matter of speculation about the future. It is already happening. The new left leadership in the NUR is accepting deals on the railways at least as bad as its right wing predecessors. And on the Labour Party front both it and the new left leadership of the POEU have swung virtually unchallenged behind Kinnock. Peter Hain would approve of that, Ken Livingstone would not. But both support the Broad Left strategy that inevitably resulted in it.

So it is not just that the chasm between Livingstone and Hain will be closed over the next couple of years. On the question of extra-parliamentary action it doesn't exist in the first place.

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# Militancy isn't enough

The strike by clerical workers at the *Sun* newspaper in the early summer brought out some of the strengths and weaknesses of disputes in the present period. Jane Bernstein explains:

THE immediate cause of the strike was the sacking of a night telephonist, allegedly for sleeping at work. The man was 'instantly' dismissed for serious misconduct—more than two weeks after the offence was supposed to have taken place. In the intervening weeks he had continued to do his normal duties. The manager concerned in the sacking—Tony Britton—did not produce any evidence against him and totally ignored the recognised disciplinary procedures.

The sacking was clearly a threat to the whole SOGAT 82 clerical chapel, which has nearly 300 members. The chapel voted for strike action.

This section of the workforce had never been militant and until very recently was badly organised. The FOC (convenor) had been elected only six months before, replacing one of the worst convenors in the clerical branch.

The new FOC had a history of militancy and a background in revolutionary politics. He had been the steward for the switchboard for a long time which had been involved in a number of disputes with Britton, including a strike lasting several weeks about five years ago. After the switchboard was transferred into the clerical chapel, he successfully built a base there.

The first problem facing the strikers was the same problem faced by clerical workers almost everywhere—lack of direct power over the productive process. They knew that stopping the *Sun* appearing—even for a few days—would almost certainly achieve reinstatement and victory. In the current bingo-circulation war on Fleet Street, *Sun* management can't afford to lose copies.

At the very least, they needed effective blacking of their work. At best they wanted solidarity action from SOGAT production workers and others. After the first couple of days, picketing was excellent, involving a large part of the chapel on a rota from 6am to 10pm. The women in particular were very involved and very militant on the picket.

But the production workers crossed the picket. Worse, they accepted work done by scabs—management and non-union labour—and agreed to have their methods of payment changed. One of the ways clerical workers can affect production is through the wages offices being out and therefore the stopping of pay to production workers. SOGAT officials did nothing to enforce blacking and did not make the strike official, the excuse the production workers used as

they crossed the picket line.

The officials went further than this. They systematically excluded the clerical FOC from negotiations while they proposed wonderful compromises such as that the sacked telephonist should be suspended without pay! They also spread the story that the dispute was caused by a personal feud between the FOC and Britton.

The clerical chapel leadership tried to approach the NGA for support directly. Although sympathetic, they naturally argued that they couldn't come out while there were SOGAT members still working.

## Accepted compromise

Throughout the week of strike, the chapel was amazingly solid. They had three mass meetings and not a single member raised a call for a return to work. Unfortunately the chapel leadership were afraid to tell the membership about the fact that the FOC had been kept out of negotiations, and about just how bad the officials were. Because the chapel was so inexperienced, they feared it would lead to demoralisation and a collapse of the strike.

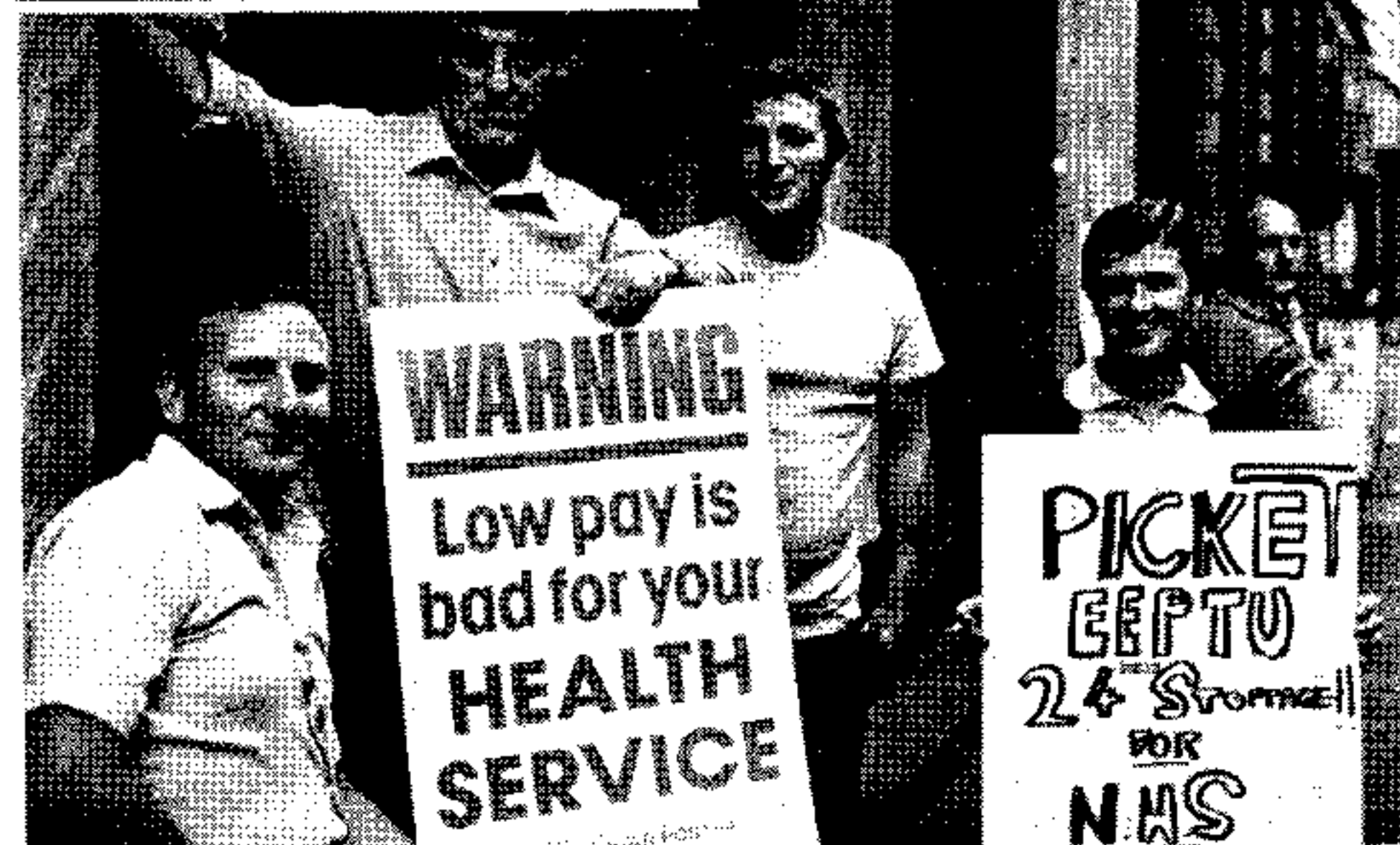
It was a persuasive argument, but completely mistaken. If you feel you cannot rely on the membership, you end up relying on the bureaucrats. By the end of the week the pressure on the chapel leadership to accept a compromise was enormous, since the general secretary of SOGAT, Bill Keys, had been brought in.

We in the SWP had suggested holding a mass picket on the following Monday night, and had prepared a leaflet for distribution in Fleet Street on Saturday night and Monday morning. The chapel leadership agreed that it was necessary to escalate the dispute. But by Friday night they were backing off and by Monday the strike was over. The deal which was made involved the sacked man being employed in a different department pending an enquiry. Although this was by no means a terrible defeat full reinstatement could have been achieved, which was the aim of the strike. It is indicative of the strength of the chapel over the issue that 40 people voted against the deal. The man involved is still working in another job, as the enquiry was called off the following week.

There are clearly other lights ahead with Murdoch's plans to move the *Sun* to Wapping and rationalise the clerical staffing of the *Sun* and *Times* newspapers.

\* \* \*

A particularly sad feature of the strike was the role played by the electricians. People will remember the marvellous solidarity shown by the EETPU press branch with the



The split in the EETPU press branch over whether or not to join SOGAT prevented them giving solidarity to the strikes for fear of upsetting SOGAT's general secretary Bill Keys (inset)

health workers, which defied Tebbit's law. The press branch has long been one of the groups in Fleet Street most ready to support other workers in struggle. This time an internal split wrecked the chance of solidarity.

The split in the press branch is essentially over whether or not to leave the EETPU and join SOGAT. The press branch has long been a thorn in Chapple's side, and many of its members are fed up with battling inside the EETPU. Others saw certain possibilities (electoral ones) opening up there. Others, especially apprentices, were worried that if they left the EETPU their job prospects would be restricted to Fleet Street or perhaps the print trade generally. The result has been a terrible mess.

The bulk of members are now in SOGAT, but without the autonomous branch they were promised. They are presently in the London machine branch, and presumably under Keys' thumb as they were under Chapple's before, only they are in a worse position at the moment. There is still a possible row between Chapple and Keys over SOGAT's breach of the Bridlington agreement on poaching. The electricians can't afford to upset Keys.

### Political organisation

Those who wanted to join SOGAT argued that it would place them in a better position to support other Fleet Street workers. What happened at the *Sun* was the direct opposite. Those in SOGAT argued that they had to cross the picket line because their future was in the balance and Keys hadn't made the dispute official. Those still in the EETPU argued that if they came out the SOGAT electricians would still be working. Some of the electricians offered to man the picket while the clericals had their chapel meetings—the picket they were crossing! They also paid for the clerical chapel to hire a hall for their meeting. Their instincts were to show solidarity but were wrecked by the tragic split.

What the strike at the *Sun* shows very clearly is that militancy isn't enough. Political organisation is essential. Of course SWP stewards also make mistakes, but our stress on the rank and file saves us from some and helps us to correct others. Individuals, however principled and militant, cannot substitute themselves for the mass of workers. In the present period especially they will find themselves sucked towards the bureaucracy.

When their membership is passive, it is all too easy to justify manoeuvrings on behalf of the members. When workers do move, militants can be caught between them and officials determined to sell out. Because they are accustomed to a passive membership, they find it hard to change gear and operate openly, involving everybody in the fight. In the case of the *Sun* much that the chapel leadership did was absolutely correct—holding mass meetings, having everybody involved in the picketing, actively seeking support from other workers—their mistake was not to see that the only counterweight to the officials is a fully informed and involved rank and file.

## Failures of the Broad Left

The victory of the Broad Left in the Post Office Engineering Union executive elections came as a surprise to everyone — including the Broad Left themselves. It came at a crucial time for telecom workers, as the threat of privatisation came nearer. **Ann Rogers and Marta Wohrle** look at the tactics the union have adopted to fight this threat.

The government's privatisation plans for British Telecom will not only mean massive job losses (up to 10,000 on some estimates), it will also lead to a decimation of the union, as a major industry is parcelled up into smaller components. But, even though they are faced with this back-to-the-wall scenario, the Broad Left leadership of the POEU is playing around with selective action, rather than trying to organise an all-out strike.

There are two problems when it comes to organising an all-out strike against the privatisation of BT. The first is the general one of the lack of confidence in the class at the moment. The second is that the fight is *directly* political. The government is ideologically committed to privatisation, and it would be a major and very public climbdown for them to backtrack on this commitment. This means that they will almost certainly be prepared to sustain a high level of cost and inconvenience in order to defeat the POEU. In this situation a strategy of selective action is extremely unlikely to work. The level of delay and nuisance which it causes is one which the government will be quite willing to ride out.

There has long been a feeling within the POEU that the union is 'powerful', although in reality its strength is largely untested. The supposed reason for this strength is the importance of telecommunications networks for business and government. The potential to stop the City overnight is kept like a rabbit in a magician's hat, ready to be pulled out should it ever be needed.

There has been much dispute among POEU members about how long it will take the City, to grind to a halt, should the engineers servicing its telecommunications networks be pulled out. The likelihood is that things would not fall to bits quite as quickly as some people think. But this sort of argument misses a major question, which is not to do with technology but is to do with ideas.

Stopping the City would be to directly challenge a major power centre of capitalism, and to risk causing economic chaos on a mass scale. To challenge such a central part of the system as we know it

requires a very confident group of workers, and at least leading militants who are prepared to put forward socialist arguments. This situation does not exist now, and the Broad Left leadership of the union know this.

Creating a situation where rank and file workers are prepared to take this sort of action involves, paradoxically, generalising and spreading the struggle as widely as possible. Only an all-out strike will create the upswell of confidence and solidarity in which workers will be able to force the union leadership into a course of action which so directly challenges, not just the organisation of one industry, but the central economic organisation of society.

If there was an all-out strike in BT certain areas would be more important than others in putting the pressure on the government. Any ruling class is going to be more worried if its banking system grinds to a halt than if the residents of, say, Brixton lose their domestic phones. But because these important areas involve putting on direct political pressure the feeling of power and the possibility of changing things which comes from an all-out strike will be essential.

### Selective strikes

The situation which currently exists in the POEU is a million miles away from this. The selective action taken to stop the introduction of the Mercury private network has been perfectly suited to the bureaucratic left rhetoric style of politics so beloved of the Broad Left. They assume that they can manoeuvre around the problem that there is no mass feeling for a strike, by having what almost amounts to a series of secret strikes. Small selective actions, which they do not bother to publicise throughout the industry, so workers who are not on strike have no idea what is going on.

The history of selective strikes, from the AUEW's 1972 campaign to the hospital strikes last year, shows that they tend to isolate and demoralise those taking part, while the prospect of spreading the action gets more remote the longer selective action drags on. Numbers involved in selective strikes by the POEU can be very small indeed: the recent targeting of the Bank of England involved only eight members actually on strike, and it is estimated that repairs and maintenance could be entirely withdrawn from the whole of Whitehall by under three dozen.

Management attitudes have hardened, and in 1981 selective action at computer centres by another union, the small section of the Society of Civil and Public Servants employed by Telecom, was smashed very quickly by management scabbing. Selective strikes by the POEU could be mopped up by moving in management grade engineers as repairs become necessary.



David Norman POEU treasurer speaking at the Hands Off BT rally held in London in May 83

The fact seems to be that no one is sure just how much disruption will be caused by any selective strike, since there is no certainty that any particular equipment will break down, even in the more vulnerable new technology installations (a small minority of all installations).

There are even more serious problems about the union's ability to select the areas for action. If management take the hard line, instructing members outside the selected group to carry out repairs and suspending them when they refuse, they will in effect be selecting weak areas for lockout treatment rather than letting the union choose strong areas for strike action.

The Broad Left have seriously overestimated the effectiveness of the selective action so far. At the same time they have underestimated the willingness of the company's management to escalate action themselves by calling in management or white collar scabs, picking on weak provincial areas and suspensions.

### All-out strike

Up until now selective action has been very much nibbling away at the edges of Tory government policy. If the action is escalated it will not only bring the union into conflict with the government, it will also put them in breach of the Employment Act. To defend sections or individuals against a government which will go to great lengths to push its privatisation plans through will need a rapid escalation and generalisation of the action. The leadership of the POEU could well find itself in the position of having to call its members out to smash the Employment Act.

Within the POEU the Broad Left are busy denouncing calls for an all-out strike as ultra-left nonsense. Their reasons for this attitude are interesting because they throw the faults of their politics and their way of operating into very sharp relief.

To take the most plausible argument they have first: that POEU members would not support an all-out strike. This may be true, but one is tempted to ask why the Broad Left are running a union in which they can't get the members on strike when faced with the biggest ever threat to their industry. The truth is the Broad Left leadership haven't tried very hard to get a strike. A mass propaganda campaign, using the strongest sections as an example, and a bit of leading from the front could change the situation dramatically. Selective action only makes the problem worse. Most rank and file workers do not know what is going on and the few who are on strike feel isolated and vulnerable.

The second argument is that the POEU could not afford an all-out strike. They have a strike fund of £1½ million which the leadership say would quickly disappear in an all-out strike.

Of course this argument ignores the fact that the union has *other* funds. Getting the leadership to release these funds for strike pay is always a major political battle for rank and file militants during any strike.

Much more important though is the fact that a large scale strike against privatisation would be relatively easy to generalise, at least easier than most other disputes in this period. It would be comparatively easy to get solidarity from other trade unionists. It is now obvious to most workers who identify with the union that a major attraction of privatisation is its potential to weaken union

organisation, and thus drive down wages and conditions.

When you consider that it has been possible for the SWP to collect money for an almost unknown strike like Greenings almost single-handedly, you can see that even in the midst of the downturn there is a pool of opposition to the Tories. A fight against privatisation which won would blow a large hole in the Tories' confidence and credibility, because it would undermine one of their central policies. It would also have to confront the government head on. Thus it would increase and strengthen that pool of opposition.

### Spread the action

So the reasons the POEU leadership give for not calling an all-out strike are really a smokescreen for their own inability to organise, and a reflection of their lack of understanding about how and when consciousness changes.

Furthermore, they have no choice but to spread the action. Selective action in BT has confirmed what workers in other highly technical industries have already learned—that pulling out a few key technicians just means that their jobs can be covered by supervisory staff or management.

It also allows management to take the initiative. The 'guerrilla' tactic might look very good on paper, but in practice it means management can choose to lay off groups of workers and that *they* are determining the pace of the strike. This is what has happened in BT and it is a sign that the union is losing. Unless the POEU changes its tactics quickly it is certain to lose, and the Tories will have achieved a major policy objective.

# Divided working class

The massacre of Tamils in Sri Lanka was the final outcome of a long history of imperialist manoeuvres, petit-bourgeois nationalism and reformist failures. Barry Pavier explains the background.

The island of Ceylon has been occupied by many different powers. The Tamil population of Northern Ceylon came with the eleventh century Chola kings from southern India. Subsequent invaders were the Portuguese and Dutch and, in 1802, the British.

Departing from previous practice, the British attacked the kingdom of Kandy in the central highlands, and overran the state in 1815, thus gaining control of the whole island.



British rule was different from that of the Portuguese and Dutch. They seized over a million acres in the central highlands, including all forest, waste, and uncultivated land. This action dispossessed tens of thousands of peasants, and deprived them of access to wood and grazing land. The colonial state then sold off this land to prospective plantation owners.

The dispossessed peasants were not considered likely to provide a reliable workforce. The British began to import Tamil workers from south-west India as indentured labourers. This process, which began in the 1840s, created the Tamil plantation workers of the central highlands. They endured lives of immense privation and oppression. But to the dispossessed Sinhala peasants, it appeared that the Tamils were in part the agents of their misfortune. Part of the basis of Sinhala nationalism was laid down.

For most of the colonial period the British ran Ceylon as a plantation economy but they were compelled to expand the industrial base during World War II. They favoured the Tamils of the north to the extent of giving them a disproportionate number of jobs in the colonial bureaucracy.

One peculiarity of colonial rule was the introduction in 1931 of universal suffrage for elections to the legislative assembly. In 1935 the Tamil plantation workers elected five of their own number and seven from the Lanka Sama Samaj Party (LSSP), a party which in 1939 declared for Trotsky—as opposed to Stalin.

There was no anti-imperialist struggle worth the name in Ceylon. The British left in 1948 as part of their general withdrawal from South Asia. The new government of the United National Party (UNP) was mainly composed of former collaborators. Nevertheless they immediately passed a law which removed citizenship from most of the Tamil plantation workers. That laid the only basis of Sinhala 'nationalism'—vicious anti-Tamil racism. At a stroke, this removed most of the electoral base of the left parties (a Communist Party (CP) had been formed in the early 1940s).

For parties with revolutionary politics this

would not have been an insuperable problem. It revealed the reformist degeneration of the left in Ceylon that this move produced, over a decade, a major shift in perspectives. If you are a reformist party attempting to gain office through parliament, then people without a vote cannot be central to your politics. The reaction of the left enabled this measure to destroy the unified working class of Ceylon and replace it by a Tamil plantation working class and a Sinhala working class, permanently divided.

By 1956 bourgeois politics suffered a major shift as the militant Sinhala petit-bourgeoisie, reaping the benefits of free education but unable to get all the state employment that they desired, threw up a party of national chauvinism, the MEP, led by SWRD Bandaranaike. This party won the election of 1956 on a programme of unadulterated Sinhala nationalism.

The new regime began a campaign of systematic discrimination against Tamils in the public sector. The left was still capable of mobilising organised workers against the anti-Tamil riots of 1958, but in the early 1960s both the LSSP and the CP finally capitulated to reformism as, in 1964, they

joined a coalition with the renamed MEP, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike after the assassination of her husband in 1960.

The SLFP adopted a strategy of development through state capitalism, reflecting the needs of its political base, the Sinhala petit-bourgeoisie. Their demands for employment were met by an expansion of the state sector of the economy. This was quite enough for the LSSP and CP to label the SLFP as progressive, and they remained aligned with it during the period of UNP rule in 1965-70, fighting a successful united election campaign in 1970.

During the first coalition, in 1964, a fatal move was made in the so-called Sirimavo-Shastri pact with India. Under this agreement 525,000 Tamil plantation workers were to be compulsorily repatriated to India, in return for 300,000 being given Ceylonese citizenship. The fate of the remaining 150,000 was to be decided later.

## Compromise

By 1980 280,000 had been repatriated, most of whom languished in refugee camps, while 160,000 had been granted citizenship, and the rest remained in their stateless limbo. Both left parties were prepared to be part of a government which negotiated and operated this vicious anti-working class measure, and none of the left has made a central point of their politics to campaign against the deportation of the largest group of workers in the country.

By this action the left allied themselves with the party of state capitalism, Sinhala national chauvinism, and anti-Tamil racism. The new government elected in 1970 showed its colours by imposing the Sinhala nationalist name for the state, Sri Lanka. As the crisis of the economy and the state sharpened in the early seventies, the left became stranded.

By 1974 pressure from their working class base compelled the LSSP to campaign on economic issues and to make covert attacks on the SLFP.

This led to their expulsion from the government in 1975, the CP staying put. Meanwhile the SLFP attempted to implement a constitutional dictatorship in the manner of Indira Gandhi's emergency regime in India.

This attempt to stave off the consequences of the international crisis collapsed in 1977. In the July elections the UNP made a recovery and almost wiped out the parliamentary representation of the erstwhile coalition, gaining 139 seats out of 168. Tamil parties from the north ended up as the main opposition, with 14 seats.

The basis for this spectacular reversal of fortunes was the effect of the post-1973 recession, which knocked the stuffing out of the SLFP's economic strategy. The left were hopelessly compromised by their complicity with the Bandaranaike regime.

The UNP government of J R Jayawardene pursued a free market economic policy, opening up the economy to foreign investment in the futile hope of turning it into an Asian boom economy on the model of Singapore. The policy has been a complete

flop, but the UNP has been protected from the consequences of its strategy by the political shambles of the left and the fact that it has pinched the politics of Sinhala national chauvinism off the ailing SLFP.

Anti-Tamil riots followed the UNP election victory in July 1977. The Tamil bourgeois parties, united as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), had fought the election on the demand for 'Eelam' a separate Tamil state in the north. When it became quite clear that the UNP regime had no intention of conceding Eelam, a section of Tamil petit-bourgeois youth split from the TULF to form the 'Liberation Tigers', who from early 1979 began a terrorist campaign against Tamil government officials and Sri Lanka army and police personnel in the north.

This has provoked the virtual occupation of the north by the army and police, and generally stirred up a reaction from Sinhala racism, which produced a more serious outbreak of anti-Tamil rioting in June 1981.

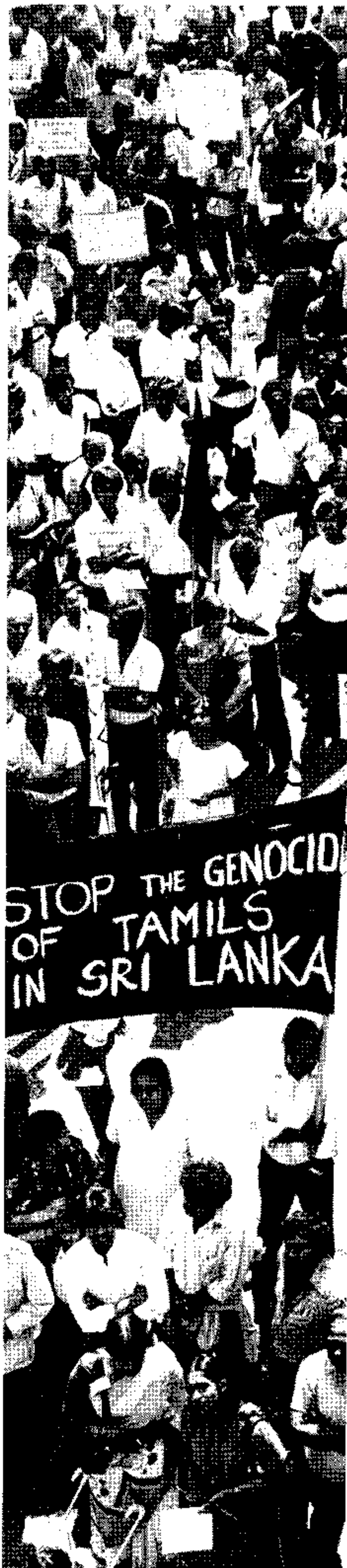
The Tamil plantation workers of the central highlands have been left as helpless spectators to this, and the Tamil separatist movement has never made a serious attempt to involve them, for the simple reason that the plantation workers can never be integrated into Eelam. That is the essential flaw of Tamil separatism: without the workers, they cannot win, but if the workers do win, then that will mean the defeat of Sinhala national chauvinism and the removal of any need for a separate state.

### Deep racism

Following the 1981 riots the government passed an Anti-Terrorism Act which gave the army and police sweeping powers of arrest, detention and torture. Since that time the north has been in a virtual state of siege, with the Tigers continuing to carry out terrorist actions, such as the killing of thirteen soldiers which sparked off the recent pogroms.

While all this has been taking place Jayawardene has been able to push through constitutional changes aimed at shoring up his regime. In 1978 the parliamentary system left by the British was replaced by a French-style directly-elected President, who appointed the government. Jayawardene took the post, and was re-elected at the end of 1982. He then pushed through a referendum in March this year extending the life of the parliament elected in 1977 for a further six years. This achieved two things. Firstly it avoided elections which would have produced some opposition gains. Secondly it disabled the opposition, who have all followed electoral strategies and been left stranded by Jayawardene's actions.

This applies even to the JVP, a split from the CP who launched a rising in 1971. They were suppressed by the Bandaranaike regime and thus not compromised like the rest of the left, and so had the opportunity of building a revolutionary party. But they compromised themselves by sectarianism and by their failure to break from their Stalinist roots. This led them into playing bourgeois politics, using the working class as a counter in the game, and they did not take a stand



against Sinhala nationalism.

They have hidden behind quotes from Lenin on the national question, when what was needed was a simple statement along the lines:

'We campaign for full rights for all Tamil workers and the right of return for any workers deported under the agreement.'

That would be quite enough to fight Sinhala national chauvinism, on a basis of working class politics, not the nationality politics of separatism.

But this is precisely what the left has not campaigned for. Until they do so there is no way for them to break the political domination that the Sinhala petit-bourgeoisie has built up over the Sinhala working class. No workers' movement worth the name can now be built unless the campaign against Sinhala nationalism is fought. As the recent pogroms have shown, racism has penetrated deep into the Sinhala working class.

The left have now reaped the rewards of their reformism, for Jayawardene has taken the opportunity provided by the riots to ban the JVP, CP and the Nava Sama Samaj Party (a split from the LSSP, aligned with the Militant, of all people).

The prospect now is that matters may be taken out of their hands by Indira Gandhi. She is under great pressure, especially in the south of India, to intervene to 'protect' the Tamils of the north. For reasons of electoral expediency, and the chauvinist desires of the Indian ruling class to become the protector of the Indian Ocean, her regime may undertake a Cyprus-style invasion, occupying the Tamil north. Jayawardene has already created the conditions for this by the mass evacuation of Tamils from the south to the north.

### Failure of the left

If this ever came to pass, it would be a major disaster. The Tamil state in the north would become a rotten borough of corrupt bourgeois politicians. It would consolidate Sinhala national chauvinism, making it even more difficult for the left to reorganise. It would place the Tamil plantation workers in a horrendous position, outside the zone of Indian occupation and open targets for attacks by racist mobs organised by the Sinhala petit-bourgeoisie. The whole shambles would be topped off by the certain capitulation of most of the Indian left into supporting Indira Gandhi's intervention as a 'progressive' measure.

Even if this does not happen, the working class of Ceylon remains divided by the Sinhala petit-bourgeoisie, into Tamil plantation workers on the one hand and a Sinhala working class on the other. This means socialists must place uniting the working class at the centre of their politics.

If the left in Ceylon had done this in the 50s they would never have abandoned the Tamil plantation workers, and would have been able to fight Sinhala national chauvinism. Instead they embraced parliament, reformism, and the SLFP. Instead of Ceylon, they got Sri Lanka, that was the inescapable result of their reformism.



French troops enjoying the scenery in Chad

## Mitterrand's 'Socialist' Imperialism

French foreign policy since the left's 1981 election victory has included a fair dose of 'third worldist' and 'human rights' rhetoric — emanating in particular from foreign affairs advisor and former intimate of Che Guevara, Régis Debray. Increasingly, however, the key word in the foreign policy declarations of Mitterrand and Foreign Affairs Minister Cheysson has been 'realism'.

Realism for them means an export drive for French military hardware, including the sale of nuclear technology to Iraq. It was even elastic enough to allow Mitterrand to angrily reject Andropov's recent proposal to limit French and British nuclear capability as part of a general arms agreement on the grounds that the French capability was purely defensive and to then confirm the construction of a new nuclear weapons-carrying submarine.

### The French empire

So despite the obvious diplomatic risks in Central and South America, the Mitterrand government was able to give enthusiastic and solid backing to Thatcher and Pym against 'Argentinian aggression' without, giving itself any headaches.

But why did it do so? One of the main reasons is that just like Britain, France still has colonies to defend against potential rivals as well as any internal threats from nationalist and revolutionary movements.

Until the 1950s the French Empire was a vast land mass extending from Saigon to Dakar, via Beirut and Algiers. Today it is

Mitterrand's prompt dispatch of troops to Chad served as a reminder that his 'socialist' government continues to maintain large garrisons in former French colonies. As **T Fabrice** shows, Mitterrand also wants to hang on to those genuine colonial possessions that France still has.

essentially a dispersion of, mainly exotic, islands. There are French possessions in the Pacific (including the atomic bomb-testing facilities of Muroroa and a condominium with Britain, the New Hebrides), the Caribbean, Antarctica and the North Atlantic. In addition, France's one continental possession, Guyana, gives her a foothold in South America together with an ideal launching site for the European rival to America's Space Shuttle, Ariane.

This list omits one very important French possession, the Mediterranean island of Corsica, which is the base for sizeable contingents of the French Foreign Legion. The main Corsican nationalist movement, the FNLC, declared a truce after the election of Mitterrand's Socialist government only to renew hostilities last year, both in Corsica and on the mainland. Interior Minister Defferre responded by using an old anti-fascist law to ban the FNLC and despatching

a notorious 'super-cop' to head the island's police, who were suspected of softness towards the nationalist resistance.

Mitterrand's foreign policy, though little different from his predecessors' in substance, does differ in form. Regional decentralisation, involving the election of local assemblies open to 'moderate' nationalists, has been accompanied by economic and legal reforms. Radical and autonomist movements have been handled more intelligently. Demands for greater recognition of local history, cultures and languages have been met. In consequence, repression is used now more as a policy of last resort.

### System of dependence

Still, nowhere does the right of self-determination appear in the Socialist programme. On the contrary, when accused by the racist and colonialist right of 'selling out' French interests, socialist ministers are quick to reaffirm the inalienable attachment of the overseas possessions to the 'fatherland'.

Nor, despite minor institutional reforms, is the constitutional and economic framework to be touched. France officially does not have 'colonies'. Instead it has 'overseas territories' (TOMs) and 'overseas departments' (DOMs). The latter are considered to be part of France and their inhabitants have full French citizenship.

Since the creation of the DOMs in 1946, with the support of the local CPs and others who today favour 'autonomy as a step to-



wards national independence', they have become more thoroughly locked into a system of dependence than ever before. Traditional industries like sugar have declined and given way to tourism. Emigration to France has been officially encouraged as a solution to economic backwardness and high birth rates. The net result of all this is a vicious circle of backwardness and dependence that none of the policies of the Mitterrand government even begin to threaten.

Political reform, for example, has gone no further than the election of regional assemblies in each of the DOMs by proportional representation. A slightly more radical Bill to merge the regional and 'departmental' assemblies was successfully opposed by the right on the grounds that it would encourage separatism by creating a sort of local parliament.

The political situation in the TOMs and DOMs which elect deputies and senators to the French parliament is marked by a high level of abstentions—over 50 percent in some cases.

The right is in a strong position, due not only to its natural support amongst the privileged groups in the population — mainly whites — but also because of patronage and corruption.

The reformist left, the Socialist Parties, the CPs, as well as local parties such as the Progressive Martinique Party, is well-established, though much of its support derives from the same 'clientism', the same distribution of favours in return for votes as that practised by the right. But in electoral terms it is in a contradictory situation.

### Increased social tension

In the first round of the 1981 presidential election, Mitterrand's share of the vote actually collapsed everywhere in comparison with his 1974 showing, with the so-called 'legitimist' voters giving a massive majority to Giscard. Yet in the general election a few weeks later, the left not only consolidated its existing position but picked up a number of seats from the right. In part this turnabout was due to the fact that many traditionalist voters who backed Giscard in April voted for the new 'legitimate power' in France in June. But in part it was because of illusions in the ability of the local Socialists and Communists to 'get things done' by pulling the right strings in Paris. Not surprisingly, many careerists have jumped on the Socialist bandwagon since the election.

The credibility of the reformist parties is weakened by their ambiguity on the question of national independence. The CPs have evolved from outright support of the 'French connection' to a moderate nationalism which even led the CP in Martinique to boycott French CP candidate Marchais' presidential election campaign. The Socialist Parties, generally committed to some form of autonomy, have in practice called a moratorium on the issue to avoid embarrassing the government. They also contain 'assimilationists' who urge an even greater integration with France.

The revolutionary left and the nationalist groups also have a small but not insignificant

audience in those territories where there is an organised working class with a tradition of struggle. In recent years the trade union movement has seen a growing split between the reformist organisations linked with the French unions and the local unions connected with militant nationalist movements and inspired by semi-Maoist ideas.



**President Mitterrand**

That there is nowhere today a real threat to French rule does not mean that French capitalism and its local acolytes have no problems. No government in Paris, whatever its political colour, can wish away the worsening economic problems, or the social tensions caused by the glaring class and racial inequalities and the population explosion.

In New Caledonia the indigenous Kanaks are in open revolt against French colonialists, a revolt which the government is trying to appease by introducing land reform. In January of this year Kanaks killed two policemen in an ambush following a dispute with a white farmer.

In the two West Indian 'departments', Guadeloupe and Martinique, social tension breaks out periodically in the form of strikes, land occupations and violent confrontations

with the colonial army and the police.

French 'overseas departments' do not exist in isolation. Developments within them are becoming increasingly dependent upon what happens in neighbouring regions. The impact of 'radical' cultural forms such as Rastafarianism on the young unemployed of the French West Indies, which is undermining the grip of Roman Catholic traditionalism, is one visible sign. Nationalist and revolutionary ideas have a much bigger audience in the younger generation than amongst their parents, who are often keenly attached to the 'benefits' of French citizenship.

### Deepening gulf

More difficult to predict is the impact of the political upheavals taking place in Central America (Nicaragua, El Salvador), the Caribbean (Grenada, mass working class struggles in Trinidad) and the Indian Ocean (the left wing landslide in Mauritius). We can discard the 'revolutionary armed struggle' rhetoric of some, mainly petit bourgeois, nationalist groups and therefore, the prospect of another Vietnam or Algeria in the near future. But we are still left with a deepening gulf between the interests and aspirations of the mass of the colonised peoples and those of their French and local exploiters.

That this gulf will find expression in bitter mass struggles against French colonialism in the not-too-distant future is certain. That the opportunities afforded by these explosions will be lost is equally certain unless revolutionaries in these colonies doggedly resist the pull of 'third worldism' and 'Maoism' and set about the hard task of building organisations capable of becoming the nucleus of mass revolutionary parties. To do this they will need to develop a clear line on the revolutionary potential of the working class, on national oppression on the class struggle at home and finally, on the class nature of the 'anti-imperialist' regimes in Cuba, Nicaragua and elsewhere.

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# The national question

Christine Kenny looks at Marx's developing ideas on the national question from the revolution of 1848 through to his later studies of India and Ireland.

For Marx and Engels the national question was never a matter of morality or of sympathy with oppressed peoples, nor of abstract rights and international justice. Their attitude to national independence rested on an assessment of the revolutionary potential offered by each situation. It is difficult to find in their writings any global set of prescriptions as to when national liberation movements should be supported and when they should be resisted. But it is never difficult to see the passionate interest that they took in the question.

As revolutionaries in Germany in 1848 there was no way that they could avoid the issue. The whole of Eastern and Central Europe was alive with national liberation struggles—in Poland and Hungary, among the Slav peoples of the Austrian Empire. In Germany itself the task of national unification, replacing the 36 states with a centralised republic, was the question of the day.

For Marx, the practical assistance that the German bourgeoisie gave to the national struggles was a real test of its determination to act as a revolutionary class. The attitude of the liberation movements to the German revolution was a measure of their own revolutionary potential.

How determined were the German bourgeoisie to be revolutionary? Unfortunately, hardly at all. As Norah Carlin

explained in her earlier article in this series on 1848, Marx saw the fundamental tasks of the German revolution as the sweeping away of all the feudal remnants to which the aristocracy clung so tenaciously and the establishment of a democratic united republic under which both capitalism and a strong and independent workers' movement could develop. Marx expected the Prussian bourgeoisie, as the strongest element and the one with the most to gain, to lead the revolution.

As Marx observed their progressively more pathetic shilly-shallyings and compromises, their creeping paralysis in the face of the German working class, he raged at them from the pages of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*:

'Grumbling at those above, trembling at those below ... without faith in itself, without faith in the people, without a world-historical function; an accursed old man who found himself condemned to lead and mislead the first youthful impulses of a robust people in his own senile interests — sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything — this was the nature of the Prussian bourgeoisie.'

The capitulation of the Prussian middle classes and their accommodation to a restored monarchy sealed the fate of the German revolution. But their cowardice also had disastrous consequences for the liberation struggles that were then taking place in Poland.

The Polish question hadn't just appeared in 1848. Poland had been a cause célèbre among European democrats, since its partition between Russia, Austria and Prussia in the 1790s. It was to remain a subject to which Marx and Engels returned

throughout their lives.

In 1848, the liberation of Poland became a matter of revolutionary necessity. The Prussian occupation of northern and western Poland shackled the Prussian aristocracy to the Tsar. Both parties were equally threatened by the Polish democratic and agrarian revolutions that seemed imminent. (The fact that the Polish democrats understood that agrarian revolution was necessarily a part and parcel of national liberation particularly endeared them to Marx and Engels.)

## Betrayed democracy

When an uprising broke out in Prussian-occupied Posen in May 1848, the German bourgeoisie were presented with the ideal opportunity to put into practice the verbal support they had hitherto given the idea of Polish liberation. By making a decisive attack on Prussian feudalism they had the chance both to break their own masters and to help the Poles.

Their timidity held them back. Realising that support for the Poles would most likely end in war with Russia, they allowed the uprising to be crushed by the Prussian army. Engels struck out at them in his usual style.

'War with Russia meant the complete open and real break with the whole of our shameful past, it meant the real liberation and unification of Germany, it meant the erection of democracy on the ruins of feudalism and the bourgeoisie's short dream of domination. War with Russia was the only possible way to save our honour and our interests vis a vis our Slav neighbours and, in particular, the Poles. But we were, and we remain philistines ... all problems were dealt with in a spirit of the most faint-hearted, thick-headed and narrow-minded philistinism, and in this way our real interests were naturally again compromised ... even the great question of the liberation of Poland ... and our enthusiasm for the Poles changed into shrapnel and caustic.'

By failing to take on the Prussian aristocracy, the bourgeoisie had betrayed not only themselves, but also the German workers and peasants and the cause of Polish democracy.

They had also strengthened the counter-revolution that Marx and Engels saw brewing in the pan-Slavist movement which was rapidly growing in the Austrian Empire.

Pan-Slavism had arisen as the democratic ideas of the French and German revolutions of 1848 gradually penetrated the stifling censorship imposed by the Austrian state.

The majority of Slav nationalists were in favour of a liberated Austrian Empire as a means of defence against political and cultural domination by German speakers that they foresaw would result from a successful German revolution. There was a small Czech revolutionary minority in favour of the overthrow of the Empire in alliance with the German, Austrian and Hungarian democrats.

While this minority was still able to agitate around revolutionary demands, Engels kept an open mind on the question of Slav nationalism. Once they had been crushed by

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the defeat of the Prague uprising in June 1848, Engels considered the entire remaining pan-Slavist movement was irredeemably counter-revolutionary, shackled not only to the decaying Austrian Empire, but more importantly, to their fellow Slav, the Russian Tsar.

Engels did not allow the German bourgeoisie, or the German speaking Viennese bourgeoisie, to escape their share of the blame for this:

'A nation which has allowed itself throughout its history to be used as an instrument for oppressing all other nations, a nation of this kind must prove that it has really become revolutionary. It must prove this in some other way than through a few semi-revolutions, which have no other result than to allow the old indecisiveness, weakness and disunity to continue ... It is the Germans who will bear the guilt for the downfall of the Czechs. It is the Germans who have betrayed them to Russia.'

Engels' later writings on pan-Slavism followed from this. They deserve further comment. His condemnation of the Slavs with the explicit exception of the Poles, as

counter-revolutionary 'national refuse' and other less complimentary terms stems, in part, from his adherence to the Hegelian notion of 'historic nations' — nations that had managed to put their own distinctive mark on history:

'Peoples which have never had a history of their own, which have come under foreign domination the moment they achieved their first, crudest, level of civilisation, or are forced onto the first level of civilisation by the yoke of the foreigner, have no capacity for survival and will never be able to attain any kind of independence.'

Clearly this is nonsense; but it is not the racism that it has been taken for. Engels continued:

'If the Slavs had begun a new revolutionary history at any time within the period of their oppression, they would have proved their capacity for independent existence by that very act. The revolution would have had an interest in their liberation from that very moment onwards ... But it did not happen at any time ... The revolution of 1848 compelled all the European peoples to

declare for it or against it ... Everything depended on which nation seized the revolutionary initiative, which nation developed the greatest revolutionary energy and thereby secured its future. The Slavs remained dumb ... and in this way were completely thrown into the arms of the counter-revolution.'

The progressive labels that the Slav nationalists sported did nothing to change Engels' mind:

'The so-called democratic pan-Slavists were in a difficult dilemma: either abandonment of the revolution and at least partial salvation of their nationality by the Austrian monarchy, or abandonment of their nationality and salvation of the revolution by the collapse of that monarchy. At that time the fate of the revolution in eastern Europe depended on the attitude of the Czechs and the South Slavs; we shall not forget that at the decisive moment they betrayed the revolution to St Petersburg and Olmütz (the refuge of the Austrian monarchy) for the sake of their petty bourgeois aspirations ... we shall fight an "implacable life and death struggle" with Slavdom, which has betrayed the revolution; a war of annihilation and ruthless terrorism, not in the interests of Germany but in the interests of the revolution!'

With hindsight it is possible to see that Marx and Engels' fears of intervention by the Tsar, that 'friend of the people' may have been exaggerated, but there can be no doubt that horror and loathing of Russian despotism and of the danger that it posed to the revolution were immensely powerful determinants of the way in which they regarded the Slav national question—'hatred of the Russians was, and still is, the *first revolutionary passion* of the Germans'.

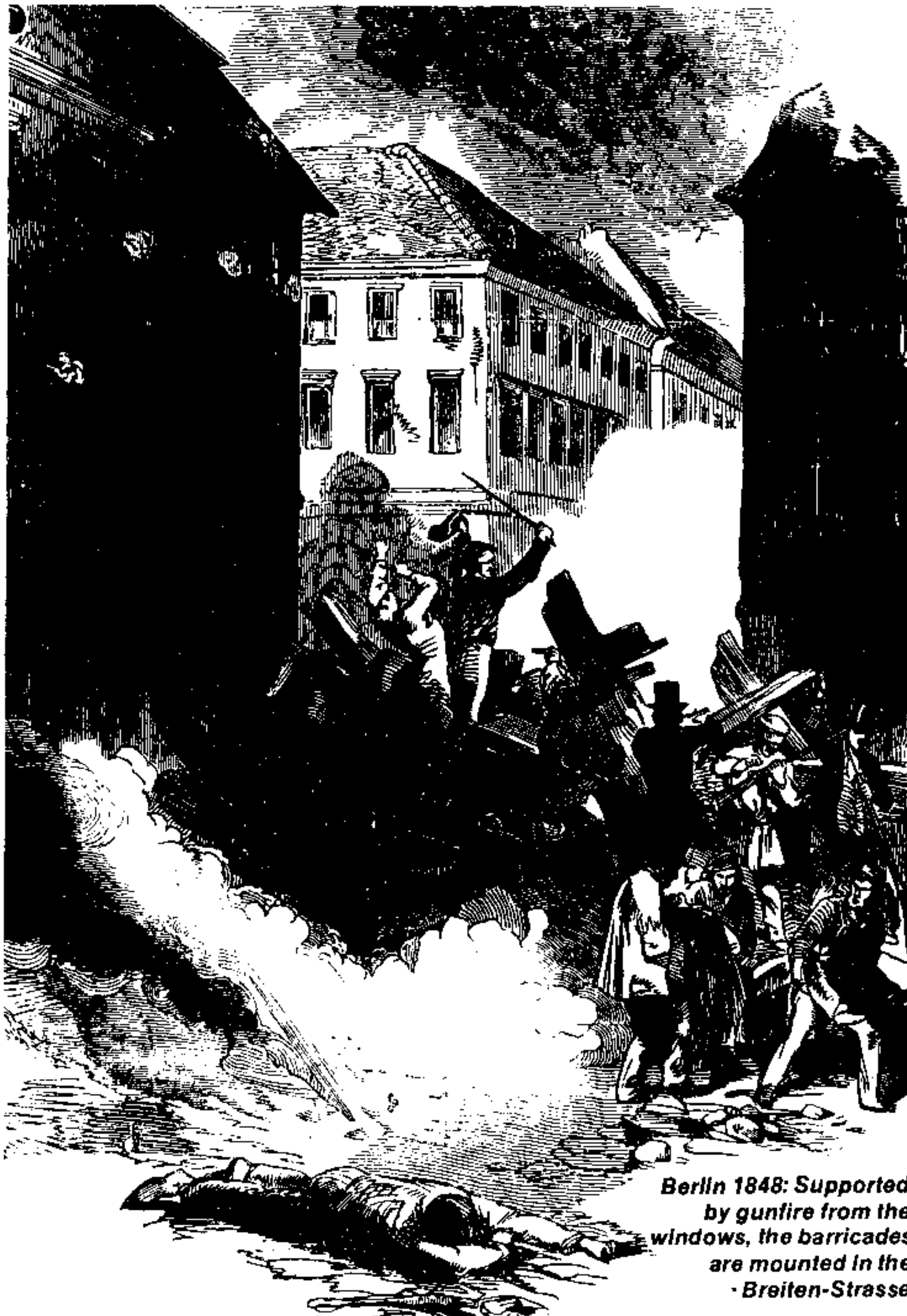
There is no justification for the charge that Marx and Engels were racist and German nationalists. The sole criterion by which they measured the rights of nations, in practice, was the interest of the revolution. In their opinion, the real future for the Eastern European Slavs lay in the development of the forces of production that could have been made possible by the German, Viennese, Hungarian and Polish revolutions.

The fact that the Slavs effectively chose to oppose these revolutions, and, so contributed to their failure, condemned them to a further period of autocratic rule from which they could not by their own resources free themselves.

### 'Civilising' India

During the 1850s, Marx spent the majority of his time studying the workings of capitalism, and in the process devoted a good deal of effort to an analysis of how England's colonies had contributed to, and were now an essential part of, the growth of capitalism. He was able to give more substance to the assertion in the *Communist Manifesto* that:

'The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most



**Berlin 1848: Supported by gunfire from the windows, the barricades are mounted in the Breiten-Strasse**

barbarian nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, ie to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.'

The means by which the English 'civilised' barbarian India was a subject to which Marx returned time and again in articles published in the *New York Daily Tribune* throughout the 1850s.

In the early 50s, India was the battleground on which British finance and industrial capital fought out their own class war. The archaic system of English rule in India through the East India Company had become a block to the development of the industrial bourgeoisie who needed to establish a more modern infrastructure in

India in order to expand their textile trade.

While not unsympathetic to the misery caused to the Indian peasantry whose native industries had been destroyed and whose social relations had been thrown into chaos, Marx recognised that this was an inevitable result of developing capitalism:

'All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on their development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both. Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and peoples through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?'

Marx did not expect such vicious exploitation to continue without violent resistance from the Indian people; indeed he looked forward to it, but with little expectation that the Indians would be able to

throw the British out in the foreseeable future. Although Marx believed that eventually the Indian workers would be able to take control of their own society the prospect seemed far removed during his own lifetime.

Marx's hope was that an Indian rebellion would weaken the British state through the ruinous cost of having to maintain a huge army in India and that by sufficiently disrupting trade it would instigate a severe economic crisis in England, the expected prelude to an upturn in the class struggle in which the English workers could take power.

In 1853, he wrote:

'The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether.'

But even the upheaval caused by the Indian mutiny in 1857 failed to precipitate the proletarian revolution in Britain, and Marx was quite certain that the productive forces and relations of production in India had not developed sufficiently to allow Indian independence. The Indian question was shelved for the time being.

### Uneven development

There was something seriously at fault with Marx's analysis of colonial development as put forward in the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Future Results of the British Rule in India*. It asserted that capitalism creates a world after its own image. On a large enough scale this is undoubtedly true, but it fails to recognise the uneven development forced upon colonies and ex-colonies, and the fact of how very different the development of capitalism was in England and in India.

It was really left to later Marxists — Trotsky, Lenin and Bukharin — to explain how imperialism left its own mark upon world capitalist development, but perhaps we can get a sense of the uncertainty that Engels in 1882 began to feel about how colonial countries reach socialism:

'In my opinion ... the countries inhabited by a native population — India, Algeria, the Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish possessions — must be taken over for the time being by the (European) proletariat and led as rapidly as possible towards independence ... Once Europe is reorganised, and North America, that will furnish such colossal power that the semi-civilised countries will of themselves follow in their wake; economic necessity will see to that. But as to what social and political phases these countries will have to pass through before they can likewise arrive at socialist organisation, I think we today can advance only rather idle hypotheses.'

On the Irish question, Marx and Engels reasserted and developed their treatment of the national question in other contexts. Much of their writing served to expose the sheer brutality of English rule in Ireland. As ever, though their main concern is the

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advancement of the revolution in general and, most importantly, the proletarian revolution in England, from which would spring democratic agrarian and indeed proletarian revolutions throughout Europe.

Was proletarian revolution on the cards for Ireland? Marx and Engels certainly thought not. Since the destruction of the native Irish industries by English capital after the Act of Union in 1801, the tiny Irish working class only really existed in the linen industries of the northern counties, and even then it was still not centralised in factory production, but still largely based on homeworking.

The most that Marx and Engels hoped for was a democratic and agrarian revolution that would free Ireland from English domination and allow the development of Irish industry and an Irish working class. The question for Marx and Engels was how Irish liberation could be brought about, and how the struggle for liberation could interact with and accelerate the English proletarian revolution.

### The Irish question

In January 1848, the Chartist movement in England at long last seemed about to take seriously the question of agitation in Ireland among the Irish peasants and of winning them away from the 'fanatical papists and political rogues' who had been leading the Repeal movement. For Engels this was an important breakthrough:

'There can be no doubt that henceforth the mass of the Irish people will unite more closely with the English Chartists and will act with them according to a common plan. As a result the victory of the English democrats and hence the liberation of Ireland will be hastened by many years.'

But the Chartists soon collapsed, and with them the possibility, for the time being, of revolutionary change which Marx and Engels considered, at that time, to be the essential precondition for Irish independence.

During the 50s and 60s Marx spent much time on an examination of how Ireland had been subjugated to England, and how British capitalism had not only been the main cause of the famine of 1846/7 but was currently engaged in evicting hundreds of thousands of peasants from their land and replacing them with cattle, forcing them to emigrate and so spreading a renewed hatred of the English landlords to America and among the Irish workers in England.

The rise of the Fenian movement in the 1860s put the Irish question back on the agenda for the English working class, and Marx and Engels fought long and hard to ensure that the International took the correct position.

Arriving at the correct line to put to the English workers involved Marx in a reassessment of his earlier opinion that the English proletariat would liberate the Irish through revolutionary change. With the rise of Fenianism the Irish liberation movement had grown spectacularly, far outstripping the slow revival of class struggles in England. Marx also noted that, although not a

proletarian movement, the Fenian struggle had 'socialistic' tendencies. There was growing a movement of opposition to the traditionally petty bourgeois leadership, and of anti-clericalism. In addition, the dispossessed agricultural labourers were beginning to oppose not only the English landlords, but also the Irish farmers.

This convinced him that the Irish liberation movement would eventually break the power of the English aristocracy in Ireland and consequently achieve both an agrarian revolution and self-government. Once that was done, Marx's attitude was to let the Irish get on with it, to sort out their own problems, and to determine for themselves the kind of relationship, if any, they wished to have with England.

However, Marx's confusing phrase 'the lever must be applied in Ireland' — confusing because only ten days earlier in 1869 he had said just the opposite, although he meant the same thing — was not intended to let the English working class off the hook:

'To hasten the social revolution in England is the most important object of the International Working Men's Association. The sole means of hastening it is to make Ireland independent. Hence it is the task of the International everywhere to put the conflict between England and Ireland in the foreground, and everywhere to side openly with Ireland.'

Just as over the question of Poland, Marx had demanded that the German bourgeoisie break with feudalism and prepare for war with Russia as a condition of their remaining a revolutionary class, on the question of Ireland, Marx insisted that the English workers had to support Irish independence:

'I have become more and more convinced — and the only question is to drive this conviction home to the English working class — that it can never do anything decisive here in England until it separates its policy with regard to Ireland most definitely from the policy of the ruling classes, until it not only makes common cause with the Irish, but actually takes the initiative in dissolving the Union established in 1801 and replacing it by a free federal relationship.'

'And this must be done not as a matter of sympathy with Ireland but as a demand made in the interests of the English proletariat.'

So how was Irish independence in the interests of English workers? The first of the reasons that Marx gave seems nowadays

rather obscure. He argued that the overthrow of the landed aristocracy in Ireland would lead to its inevitable downfall in England. In fact, the effect of this would likely have been pretty minimal in England. The landed aristocracy were, even at that time, a declining breed whose only real remaining power base was in Parliament, and they were soon to be manoeuvred into irrelevancy by the increasing power of the English industrial bourgeoisie.

### Enemy at home

Marx was on much surer ground when he suggested that the aristocracy and English bourgeoisie had identical interests as far as Ireland was concerned, and that the downfall of the former would give the latter serious problems. The bourgeoisie benefited from Ireland to the extent that it was a cheap source of meat and wool, and hence allowed them to pay lower wages to their workers. Ireland also supplied cheap labour, as the evicted peasants competed for work in England with the English workers, and so served to undermine wages and working conditions.

This rivalry between English and Irish workers was used by the press and the church to reinforce the English workers' sense of identification with their own ruling class, and so to strengthen the power of the bourgeoisie over the whole working class.

'This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And that class is fully aware of it.'

The real importance of the Irish question of English workers was that it presented an opportunity to break the ideological ties that united them with their ruling class. It was why Engels had been so excited when he wrote in 1867 'the London proletarians declare every day more openly for the Fenians, and hence — an unheard of and splendid thing — for, first, a violent and secondly, an anti-English movement.'

In essence the advice that Marx and Engels gave the English workers in 1869 over the Irish question was the same that they had given them more than 20 years earlier over Poland: don't waste time on pious expressions of sympathy. Recognise that your own enemy and the enemy of the Irish people is the British ruling class. Defeat your own enemies at home and you will have struck a decisive blow for the social liberation of all oppressed countries.



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## Socialism not moralism

Ray Challinor's Review of Barbara Taylor's book in the last issue of *Socialist Review* made a number of important criticisms of the utopian position. They were particularly welcome since this trend is currently undergoing a small revival in petit-bourgeois circles.

But Ray then went on to spoil it all by dragging in a set of absurd and quite unnecessary arguments about the allegedly progressive nature of legislation which drove women out of the work force.

What he seems to be arguing is this: that the laws which drove women workers out of various jobs were really progressive because, given the current level of productive technique, there was really nothing better available. For women to have stuck in these jobs would have been bad for them.

He then goes on to cover his back by arguing that, today, of course, things are completely different.

Ray's position can best be described as 'sexual menshevism'. What he argues is that since nothing better was on the cards, then it was the job of the working class to line up with the more progressive sections of capitalism.

In this he clearly parts company with Marx and Engels, who as early as the *Communist Manifesto* were of the opinion that, in Western Europe, and even more in Britain, capitalism was not the best that was on offer. They argued for a proletarian revolution and the replacement of capitalism by socialism.

### Poor substitute

In general, from 1848 onwards, they were of the opinion that it was necessary to organise independently of the 'progressive' bourgeoisie, even when there was a coincidence of ends — for example the issue of free trade.

Challinor will have none of this. The best that could be hoped for was to improve capitalism a bit.

He completely misses the fact that this legislation wasn't introduced because it was 'good' for women — it was introduced because women working in heavy industry no longer suited the needs of capitalism. Pregnant women, for example, were removed from the mines, not because capitalists felt sorry for pregnant women, but because they were worried about the ability of these women to produce the next generation of miners.

Ray also assumes that the sentiments behind the removal of women from the workforce were essentially liberal: they were not. The ideology behind the legislation rested upon Victorian morality. It was considered a scandal that men and women worked closely together in the pits, and even more of a scandal that both were improperly

dressed!

Victorian moralists were also deeply worried that the institution of marriage was disappearing amongst the industrial working class. The reason for this was quite simple — women were earning their own wage and so had no need to be dependent upon husbands.

Whether Marx or Challinor are right about the level of objective economic development of Britain in the nineteenth century is, of course, a matter of judgement. But even if socialism was not on the cards, Challinor would still be wrong.

The best way to improve working conditions under capitalism is to organise. Legislation that drives one section of workers out of an industry is a very poor substitute. Organisation leads workers to rely on their own strength. Legislation

leads them to look to saviours from on high.

Accepting that some conditions were not fit for some people to work in can lead to all workers organising to improve those conditions until they are fit for any worker. Legislation leaves the rotten conditions relatively untouched and merely specifies that only certain sorts of workers will be forced to suffer them.

In this case the legislation, along sex lines, had the added disadvantage that it helped the ruling class to create a large number of 'reserve workers' and to drive a major split into the working class.

Women only have the power to challenge their oppression if they are organised as workers. The exclusion of women from certain industries greatly weakened the ability of women to fight. Those women who stayed at home became utterly dependent upon men. If they were stuck in a miserable marriage,

there was little they could do about it; at least when they were stuck in a miserable industry they had the chance to fight back.

But of course, many women had to continue to work, either to supplement the family income or because they didn't have a man to support them. But 'protective' legislation meant that instead of working in the centre of productive industry they were forced to the periphery of the system — into sewing sweatshops, domestic service, prostitution and other areas of 'women's work'. Perhaps Ray thinks that whoring in the Haymarket is a better way to earn a living than working down a pit — we doubt it. Even if it was, working in such economically important areas as mining makes it a hundred times easier to organise to gain some control over that work than working in 'women's work'.

Think again Ray.  
Ann Rogers and Colin Sparks

## Marx saintenary?

The two recent contributions to the otherwise excellent Marx centenary series, Norah Carlin's 'The 1848 revolutions' and Noel Halifax's 'The bleak years of the 1850s' have unfortunately fallen into hagiography. Instead of examining Marx's life and work in the critical spirit which he himself exhibited all his life (the word 'critique' appears in the title/sub-title of no less than four of his books) they place it beyond assessment by canonizing it, and defending its infallibility and omniscience.

Thus Norah concludes her article as follows:

'Anyone who thinks that Lenin invented the theory of the revolutionary party, or Trotsky the permanent revolution: that the idea of dual power was totally new in 1905 or 1917 ... all these are sadly misinformed. Though these ideas remained in embryo for many decades, they were all the result of Marx's development in that extraordinary year of revolutions, 1848.'

Now, taking only the most important and contentious of these claims, is it true that Marx developed the theory of the revolutionary party, albeit embryonically, some fifty odd years before Lenin is generally supposed to have done? Norah's only evidence that it is comes from Marx's 1850 *Address to the Communist League* where he calls on the league to 'work for the creation of an independent organisation of the workers' party.'

If Norah's interpretation is correct, then this is indeed a truly amazing statement of Marx's since it pre-dates by 21 years Marx's realisation that, in order to establish its dictatorship as a class, the proletariat has to smash the existing centralised military-bureaucratic state machine. So first he discovered the instrument and only

later did he discover the task.

However, Norah is wrong here. Marx, as John Molyneux has argued in his *Marxism and the Party* used the word 'party' in a variety of ways:

'... to refer to such widely different phenomena as the extremely broad and loose Chartist movement, his own small group of associates and followers, and the general revolutionary cause'.

His vagueness on this point stemmed precisely from the fact that he never developed a theory of the revolutionary party and so, consequently never arrived at any worked-out idea of the relation between the 'party' and the working class.

Far from being a call to build a revolutionary party opposed to all other parties, Marx's 1850 *Address* is rather calling on the Communist League to work, in some undefined manner, towards making the workers' movement or as he puts it, the workers' party, independent of the petty-bourgeois democrats. And as Norah makes perfectly clear his reason for this is, that given the slightest opportunity these democrats would strangle any new revolution in Germany half-way.

There is one very important non-textual piece of evidence for this more modest interpretation of Marx's *Address*. It is that within 18 months of penning it Marx had entirely withdrawn from direct political activity, an exceedingly odd thing for him to have done had he just invented the theory of the revolutionary party.

This brings us to Noel's article. Not only does Noel, who accepts Norah's conclusions, fail to notice let alone explain the contradictions between Marx's supposed theoretical developments after the 1848 revolutions and his retreat from political life throughout the

1850s, but he appears to make a positive virtue out of this retreat. Hence, without any critical comment he quotes Engels to the effect that:

'everyone must necessarily become a fool, a donkey and a scurvy knave, unless he withdraws from it (the exile clubs) completely and contents himself with being an independent writer who doesn't bother his head in the least even about the so-called revolutionary party'.

Are we to conclude from this that Noel is of the remarkable opinion that Lenin, Trotsky and the other leaders of the Russian revolution, who even in a massive downturn did not shun the necessity of involving themselves in exile politics, were fools, donkeys and scurvy knaves? And are we perhaps also to conclude that Noel's recipe for the survival of revolutionary socialists in the present downturn is to liquidate the SWP?

Of course Noel would not dream of any such thing. Yet the inference is unavoidable. This is the price of hagiography. Not only does it have the potential of being able to distort our political practice, but it also distorts our understanding of the tradition to which we belong. It gives credence to the hoary old bourgeois myth that Marxism is a grey, academic and hopelessly outdated body of ideas, which sprang full-blown from Marx's head whilst he was studying in the splendid isolation of the British Museum reading room. And by the same token it dulls the perception that Marx was the founder of a tradition of theorising and practically working for the self-emancipation of the working class. That this tradition survives and from time to time grows is a legacy of its great though not infallible thinkers and, above all else, because of the creativity of the most revolutionary class in human history.

Rod Hudson

# Music and class

The increased urbanisation of 'third world' countries has created an audience for western rock music. Noel Halifax argues that we are seeing the development of a world-wide music based on class rather than nation.

A subject discussed in the music press and the new 'sociology of rock' courses is the influence of African or 'ethnic' music on rock or western pop. The influence of western music on African and 'third world' music, with the spread of the transistor radio and cheap cassette tape recorders however has not often been commented on. As the world has become an integrated whole, so vividly described in Nigel Harris's *Of Bread and Guns*, so this process has had its cultural effects.

I'll give just one example, as it is an extreme one. In 1978 David Toop with others went to the Amazonas to record the music of the remote Yanomamö Indians. After witnessing and recording their performance and religious rites he travelled back towards the nearest mission. He wrote in the magazine *Musics* (21 March 1979):

'Two nights later back in Tama Tama before falling asleep I lie watching yet another incredible tropical sunset — a picture postcard of black, deep blue and faded yellow. In the next room two Makiritari youths are listening to a cassette of disco music: Boogie Oogie Oogie, the Bee Gees, etc.'

Not only are there peasants, hunters and gatherers or share-croppers listening to western music and so modifying their own. Their very lives have been transformed by the spread of capitalism. There are now industrial workers in Nigeria and Korea as urbanised and responsive to rock or disco as in Liverpool or Detroit. At a result local musics have changed to fit the new life. In short we live in a world system and the music played in Soweto becomes just as vivid and relevant to us as any made here or in New York.

The response within the left to these changes has been varied. In particular I want to argue against the ideas (largely followed by the communist parties) that see such developments as a bad thing and examples of 'cultural imperialism'. This view sees adaptations to 'western music' as an evil to be equated to the spread of coca-cola or hamburger chains and which undermines the local 'real' culture. So they try to preserve and maintain the local traditions. They aim to protect the old music, dress and rituals by recording them and where possible encouraging the 'national culture'.

And so in all East European countries you

find folk museums presenting the old peasant (read 'folk') traditions with often a newly created 'national costume' songs and dances. It is the epitome of culture as a dead, static tradition created or maintained by the state as the 'national culture' (a romanticised peasant past, strangely similar to the world of comic operetta) used to foster the idea of national identity and unity and used as a balance to the high art of the concert hall. This partly explains the official denunciations of 'decadent western music', the Polish authorities disapproval of punk (of which there is a large following) or in the most extreme case, the banning of any western and 'capitalist' music in China in the 70's. Even today many types of music are not available in Russia and there is a heavy demand for them on the black market.

## There are now industrial workers in Nigeria and Korea as urbanised and responsive to rock or disco as in Liverpool or Detroit

The attitude of West European communist parties has tended to move away from a blanket denunciation of 'rock and roll' as decadent and an alien sound to be boycotted, as was the case in the 50's. But the idea of the 'realness' of folk and local traditions is still strong and in a muted form hostility to 'commercial' especially American (and as it happens often black) music remains. It's also a view which continues to influence many music critics who attack 'commercialism'.

In Italy the local CP festivals, a central feature of the party's social life, still concentrate on folk with a dash of anti-Americanism thrown in. In Greece the blending of communism with straightforward nationalism and anti-Americanism is even more clear, and with it attacks on the 'American way of life' which rock and pop are seen to represent.

This condemnation of the 'American way of life' goes hand in hand with puritanism, an aspect of Stalinism that shows little sign of waning. The Greek CP is just one example of a widespread trend with the CP lefts. All that is foreign is seen as evil and contaminating the local pure traditions. So the dislike of disco is linked to views on sex and the family not unlike those of Mary Whitehouse. As the resolution of the first congress of the KNE (communist youth movement of Greece) said in May 1976:

'The youth condemn the monopolies because they spread to the wide layers of youth the "American way of life", corruption and darkness.'

Or, as the slogan of the KNE has it 'First in the lessons, first in the struggle'. In 1979 the paper of the KNE *Odigitis* ('leader') urged

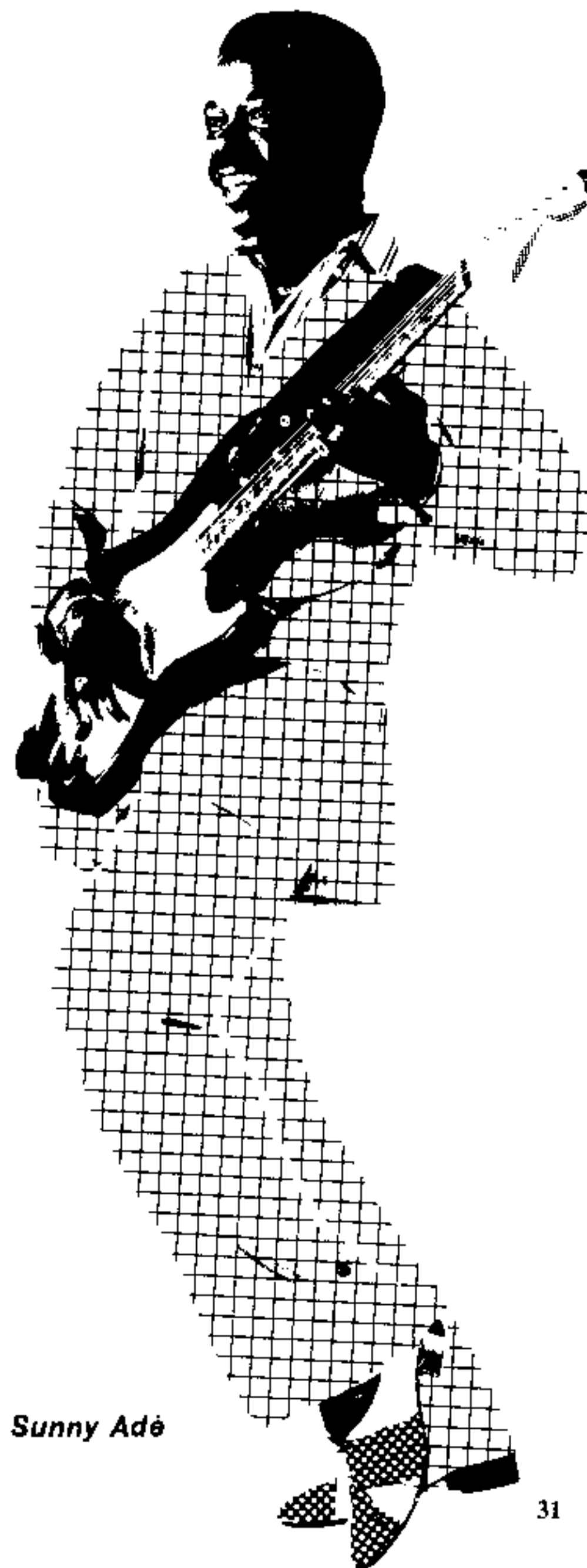
the communist youth to behave themselves in school and:

'For the fighting patriotic education of youths the central committee of KNE says that it is a fact that the moral crisis of capitalism affects the institution of the family in different ways. The rupture of the values of the family permanently or for a period of time — the tendency for independence etc. The rupture of the links with the family, desertion, indifference etc are unacceptable for the members and more importantly for the cadre of the KNE.' (From *Odigitis* 1979).

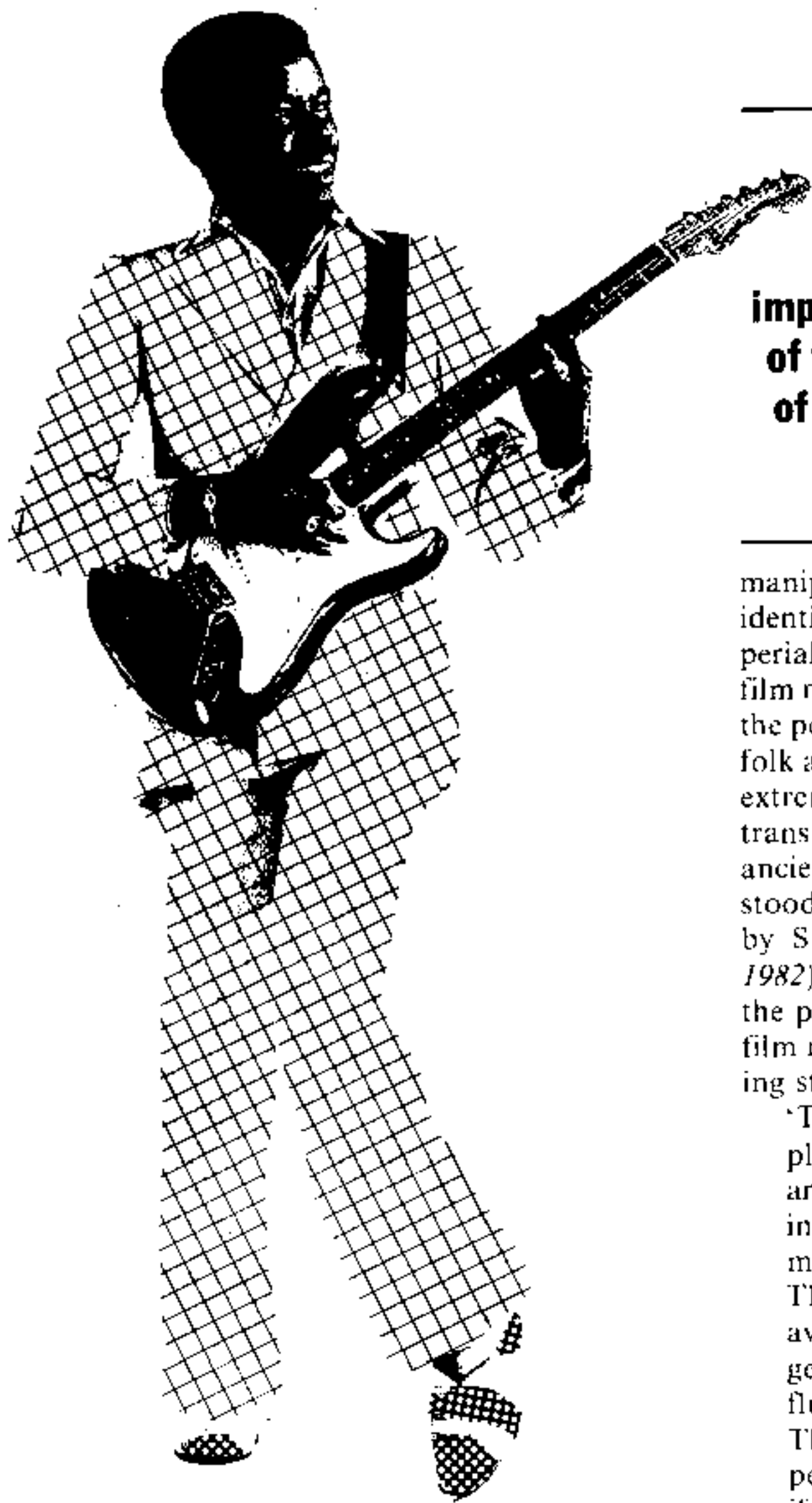
In recent years their line has been slightly softened as they have found it difficult to recruit. Greek youth, to their horror, appear to prefer the 'American way of life' and their disco music to the KNE's puritanism.

In the third world you see similar developments and concepts. In Zimbabwe and black ruled countries of Africa a manipulated or in some cases a newly created national folk or tribal traditions are preserved for 'national identity' and cross class unity.

The urge to preserve and save endangered cultures by recording them on film or tape has created a new category of music, 'ethnic', such programmes as *The World About Us* and



Sunny Adé



**The idea of a national culture beset by cultural imperialism has become one of the ideological trappings of the new ruling classes in the third world**

manipulate and use to give themselves an identity and to pose as opponents of imperialism. All India Radio banned Indian film music, listened to by the vast majority of the population and replaced it with unsullied folk and classical Indian music. It reached its extreme when the same radio station transmitted regular readings in Sanskrit (the ancient and classic language) then understood by an estimated 555 people! As quoted by Sherri Garratt (in *Collusion Feb/April 1982*) the view of the Indian ruling class to the popular and culturally extremely mixed film music can be summed up in the following statement:

'This facile orchestration, these plagiarised melodies from foreign sources, and the mixture of native and alien instruments ... have (an effect) on the musical sensibilities of the Indian people. This orchestration mush has been blaring away in thousands of villages for over a generation and has now started to influence the folk music of the peasants. This music stems from the very soul of the people, and it would be a gigantic tragedy if these concoctions ... were to injure so rich a tradition.' (by R J Massey)

An extreme case of the use that this view can be put to is in South Africa. There the white government has latched onto some of these preservationists' arguments to back up its own plans and ideas of 'black homelands'. Black South African workers are denied the rights of being citizens or workers in South Africa by labelling them people of a different nation and culture. The ideas of a 'national culture' have been transformed in a particularly nasty and cynical way, but it amounts to the same view. It denies class and defines people by their nation and culture and tries to preserve these tribal traditions, though towards a totally different end result.

So the view shared by the liberal viewers of *The World About Us*, the racists of South Africa or the communist collector of peoples' folk music is at root the same, of a world of static and besieged national cultures. To the left this leads to a fight against capitalism involving a fight against mostly American culture and supporting folk or traditional music. To the racists of South Africa it means manipulating tribal traditions and differences to prevent social unrest and to maintain its rule. To black South African freedom fighters it means encouraging a national culture in opposition to the government's tribalism.

Against this I want to argue the opposite. That the world is not primarily divided by nations and national cultures but by class which is international. That music if it is to be at all relevant and a living form has to change and respond to the changes in society and these musical changes are to be welcomed and enjoyed. So music danced to in Soweto can now be enjoyed here as it is there. Of all forms of culture perhaps music most clearly shows the potential internationalism of the proletariat, overriding nations and race.

An example of the type of music that I have in mind is that of the Nigerian King Sunny Adé. Not because Sunny Adé is left wing or his music are songs of struggle (neither is the case) but because it is the product of a modern and understandable Africa. Capitalism has transformed the social function of music, of being an integral part of village life, into a commodity. This means that there are now producers and consumers and all the contradictions and alienation that this involves. But it also means that the music is no longer exotic and speaking to us of a strange and different world.

From the 60s onwards Nigeria has undergone an industrial revolution. It is now a bigger customer of British goods and capital than South Africa. It is a highly urban and industrial country based on oil.

African music was greatly influenced in the 60s by the adoption of the electric guitar and by 'The Shadows', an influence that can still be faintly heard. But it was an influence on a huge and rich tradition. The new music that has been created is now beginning to become available. Sunny Adé has had an LP in the charts (*'Synchro System' on Island*) has toured Britain and appeared on TV. At last it seems that the great wealth of modern African music will get a market here.

It seems typical of the age of capital's decline that such good music is not being exploited to the full. As with punk in the 70's the record companies seem unable to appreciate and market an obviously good product. In Paris this does not seem to be the case and now that Malcolm McLaren is selling ripped-off South African music things might change. Of course the danger is that all we will be sold is some white superstar jamming with African players as was the case with Mick Fleetwood in a recent TV documentary on Nigerian music, or some post-punk 'going ethnic'. But it is possible, just possible, that we might be given the chance to hear the sound of urban Africa.

numerous coffee-table books and colour supplement articles. This is not in itself a bad thing, and has certainly helped the employment prospects of anthropology graduates, but it feeds into the myth of Africa as an exotic and alien place. It contains the same static and preservationist view of culture, saving them from the likes of the Bee Gees and *Dallas*. It turns the peoples studied into human zoos to be viewed as exotica, and left-overs from man's fall from a 'noble savage' past.

In fact the idea of a national culture beset by cultural imperialism has become one of the ideological trappings of the new ruling classes in the third world. An idea they



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## Interesting titbits

**What a Beautiful Sunday**  
 Jorge Semprun  
 Secker and Warburg £8.95.

Jorge Semprun is best known these days as the script writer of such Costa Gavros films as *Z* and *L'Avenue*. But before that he had a long history as an activist inside the Spanish CP under the name Federico Sanchez.

This resulted in him spending a period in Buchenwald towards the end of the Second World War.

His ability to speak several languages fluently got him a position in the statistics department which enabled him to survive. It then led him into numerous underground expeditions in Franco's Spain and innumerable leadership meetings of the CP which took place in Eastern Europe.

His last book *The Autobiography of Federico Sanchez* was a series of reminiscences of these years. It was a best seller in Spain because it revealed the inside dirt on what the leaders of the Spanish CP had been thinking and doing during their long years in exile. Where else could you learn about their holidays in the Crimea, their personalities, their attempts to avoid coming to terms with the truth about Stalinism (as late as 1964 Carrillo complained that concern with the horrors of the Stalin period was an obsession of 'guilt-ridden petty bourgeois'), their absurd belief you could overthrow Franco through a 'pacific general strike'.

The book was a fascinating read. Yet it suffered from one great fault. For all his contempt for the leaders of Spanish Eurocommunism, Semprun did not offer a radically different perspective to theirs. A lot of his venom came from the fact that they had expelled himself and his friend Fernando Claudin back in 1964 for saying things they themselves began to say after 1968.

*What a Beautiful Sunday* is very

much in the style of the earlier book. But the memories it records are about wider things than just Spain — memories of Buchenwald, of trips to Prague, of the stories passing between top Communists during the years after Stalin's death, of the shocked horror for people like Semprun when they learnt that Stalin had his own Gulag system of Buchenwald type camps.

Some of the stories are fascinating: the account of the fear felt by a former Buchenwald prisoner, now an East German police officer, when someone who had been under him in the camps' CP cell is executed at a Prague show trial for working with 'fascist spies' in the camp; the story recounted by Carrillo of how after foreign Communist leaders had been told by Khrushchev how Beria was shot dead by other members of the Politbureau, rolled in a carpet and smuggled out of the Kremlin, John Gollan of the British CP remarked. 'A gentlemen's affair, indeed!'

But the faults of the earlier book are even more marked this time. Semprun has no analysis of why Stalinism developed, and ends up seeing it as the logical culmination of Leninism and even Marxism.

This is combined with an attempt to give his memories a metaphysical depth they don't have by embroidering into them imaginary conversations between Leon Blum, the former French socialist premier (who was an honoured prisoner in a house just outside Buchenwald) and the ghost of the German writer Goethe (who 130 years previously used to walk in the wood where the concentration camp was built).

If you ignore these bits of self-indulgence by the author the book is a good read. It relates interesting titbits from the history of Stalinism. But in the end, you don't feel it's led you anywhere.

Chris Harman

## The true story

**In Time of War**  
 Robert Fisk Andre Deutsch £25.

The myth of the 'Dunkirk spirit' and all that still holds about the Second World War. Officially at least everyone rallied around the flag. Naturally that isn't quite the true story.

One area in particular caused Churchill's cabinet great unease because of the high number of strikes in crucial war industries. Surprisingly that area was Northern Ireland. It seems strange that Northern Ireland where the vast majority of workers were Unionist

voting protestants who loudly proclaimed their loyalty to the crown every 12th July, should have seen such resistance to rallying behind king and country.

RUC records reveal that 260 illegal strikes took place in Northern Ireland during the war. As many as 6000 strikers were prosecuted. The official history of Northern Ireland's role during the war only mentions these strikes in one brief paragraph. Yet in 1942 there was a prolonged pay strike by 18,000 shipyard and aircraft workers. The Northern Ireland government tried to break the

strikes by using the courts. In 1944 after a month-long aircraft and shipyard workers strike five shop stewards were gaoled. A virtual general strike erupted, the five men were freed and the strikers won their demands.

The war years also showed that whatever Unionist politicians and the British government claimed, Northern Ireland wasn't naturally British. Conscription was never applied there. The Unionist government did demand that it should but after reports from the RUC and the army that they couldn't deal with catholic opposition to such a measure Churchill backed off — announcing it was 'more trouble than it was worth'. Interestingly enough government reports indicated that among the protestant working class there was strong opposition to conscription based on the sacrifices their fathers had made in the Somme.

Such information is contained within an excellent new book by Robert Fisk, *In Time of War*. It examines the relationship between Eire, Northern Ireland and Britain during the war years. Years when Eire was officially neutral.

Fisk himself is an exceptional character. A journalist who while with the *Times* in Belfast established a reputation for reporting the truth — even if that meant contradicting British army statements. His earlier book, *The Point of No Return* proved that during the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council strike the army ignored instructions from the then Labour government to deal with intimidation by Loyalist paramilitaries, thus guaranteeing the strike's success.

On both sides of the Irish sea myths have grown up about Eire's neutrality. In his victory speech Winston Churchill took time out to attack Eire's prime minister Eammon De Valera, for stabbing Britain in the back. In contrast he praised Northern Ireland as that 'loyal sentinel'. The British press produced stories about U boats calling into Donegal fishing villages for a quick Guinness. One ex-sailor has even told me his ship was torpedoed by an *Irish* submarine.

Eire's neutrality was in reality a sham. Most RAF pilots who crashed there were driven to Northern Ireland. On the first day of war a British flying boat landed in Dublin Bay, was refuelled at De Valera's instructions and sent on its way. Throughout the war Britain had aircraft tracking facilities in Dublin.

All together some 70,000 men from Eire served in British forces — far more than volunteered from the North, to the deep embarrassment of the Unionists.

At the height of the U boat attacks in the Atlantic the idea of a British invasion of Eire was toyed with but dropped remarkably quickly. For a few months Irish ports could have been decisive in protecting British convoys. On three occasions Britain offered De



Valera Irish unity not even to enter the war but to allow the Royal Navy use of Irish ports.

In Eire even today, neutrality is seen as a triumph for De Valera. Proof that Eire was truly independent of Britain. De Valera had already fought and largely won a tariff war with Britain in the 30's which brought a degree of industrial development. That success, combined with their nationalist rhetoric, gave Fianna Fail a massive popular base. Later it would be the party which ruled over the massive creation of industry in Eire based on multinational capital.

During the war years — as today — the majority of Irish workers voted Fianna Fail. To them De Valera seemed the best nationalist — a man who'd beaten the British at their own game. That explains why De Valera could get away with internment and even hanging republicans in Eire with virtually no opposition, while at the same time there were mass protests in the South over the hanging of an IRA volunteer in Belfast.

To the vast bulk of Eire's population independence had been won. The IRA weren't seen as offering a real alternative to De Valera. But there was a passive sympathy for the catholic minority in the North — a sympathy De Valera easily channelled by regularly making formal protests over various Unionist actions.

De Valera raised nationalism to a new level — Eire's ability to compete and succeed as a capitalist state in its own right. Neutrality — however formal — was proof of that. Britain's acceptance that Eire was an independent, capitalist state and not simply a colony was reflected in its acceptance of neutrality.

Finally if neither De Valera nor Churchill come out of Fisk's book with any credit, the real villains of the story must be Northern Ireland's Unionist government. In the days following Dunkirk while Britain hourly expected to be invaded these bigots couldn't look beyond expanding the forces of repression aimed at the Catholic

population. When Belfast received the full force of German bombing raids there wasn't the slightest air raid protection. In private at least, the British government poured scorn on the Unionists. During the Second World War they still needed

Northern Ireland ports and bases but even then sections of the British ruling class were quizzing De Valera about the possibilities of a united Ireland placed in the safe hands of Fianna Fail.

Chris Bambery

## War maps

M Kidron & D Smith  
*The War Atlas*  
 Pan Reference, £5.95

This is the second book to appear from the Pluto political atlas team in conjunction with Pan.

The First, *The State of the World Atlas*, broke new ground with its highly original and very striking geopolitical graphics. *The War Atlas* follows the same format in charting the slightly more restricted domain of the arms race and the new cold war.

The strengths of this approach mean that instead of having to crowd out an argument with statistics it is possible to present it in an immediately comprehensible visual form. In *The State of the World Atlas*, for instance, maps on 'guns or butter' provided a useful adjunct for arguments that we have had from time to time around the slogan 'hospitals not bombs!' Maps such as 'hey big spender' in the current atlas can play a similar useful role.

Take for example, the question of imperialism. The facts of US involvement in Central America may be more or less well known but nothing illustrates the huge military power available to the American ruling class better than a map

showing the size of the USA swollen in proportion to its military outlays and with the whole of Latin America shrunken accordingly. It speaks volumes at a glance.

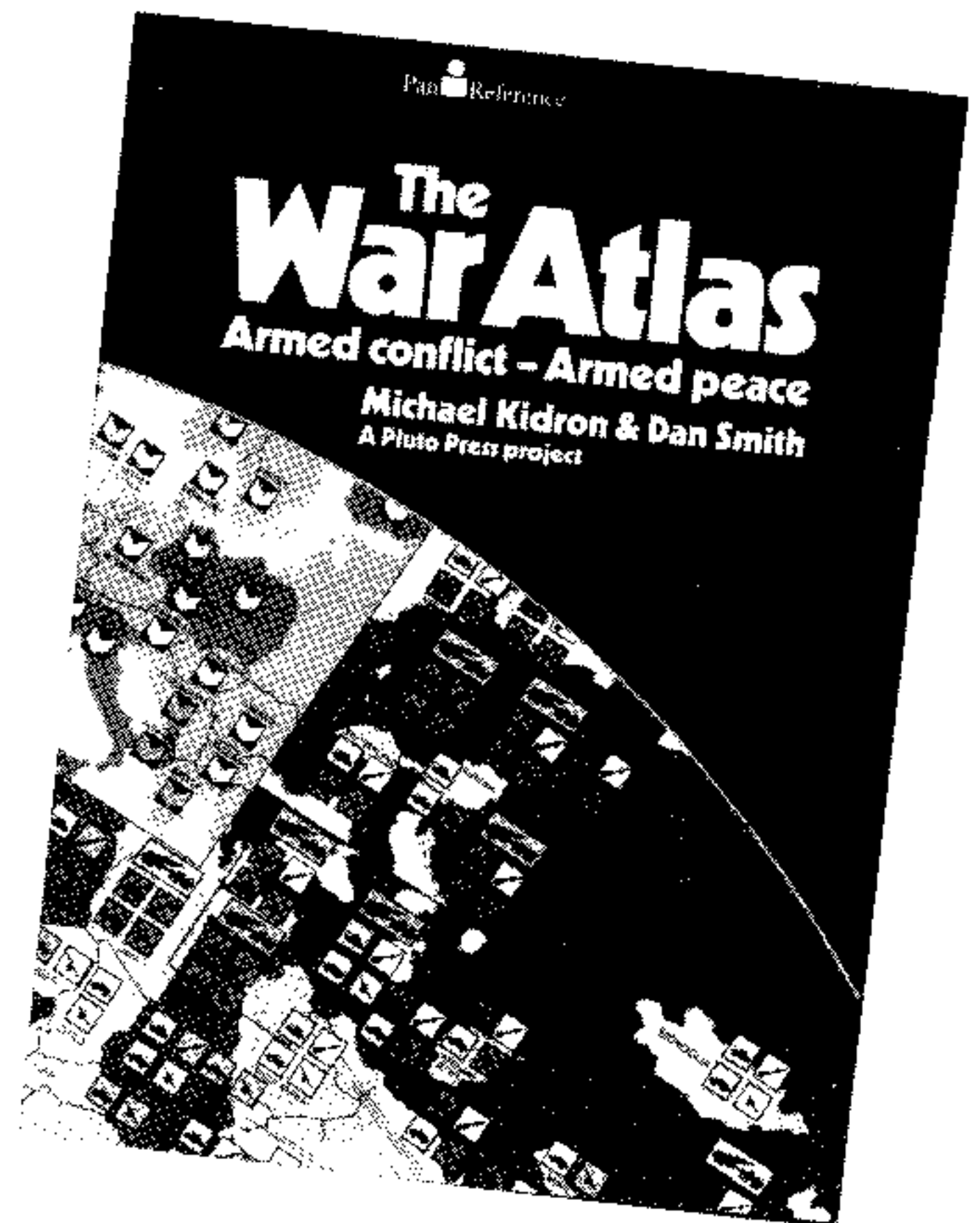
Secondly, the politics implicit in the global graphical presentations of the atlas are those which emphasise the fact that we live in a world system. East and west, north and south, black and white — we all live in societies in which our rulers are perpetrating comparable atrocities against us.

These atlases have cut through the nonsense of those who would pretend otherwise.

Maps like 'ground zero' show how all the world's ruling classes have, through collusion with the superpowers, contributed bases and economic or military facilities (and therefore potential targets) which have in their turn contributed to the run-up to world war III.

And the one entitled 'shuttle service' shows the degree of collusion between the rulers of America and Russia themselves over the exchange of the strategic raw materials that each need for its own respective war machine, with tungsten flowing eastwards and titanium flowing westwards, for instance.

Finally the maps are interspersed



with a dozen or so pages of commentary which, while failing to raise the question of how the arms' race arises out of capitalist society in crisis, nonetheless demolishes the pretensions of the warmongers and their hangers-on (both east and west).

There are certain problems remaining however.

On several occasions the authors force material and argument into a map form even though that adds to the problems of understanding it.

Thus maps of the nuclear stockpile force you to count up lots of little submarine, aeroplane and missile silhouettes before you see what is going on; maps depicting the location of the world's armies, navies and airforces are so hopelessly crowded out with little box-pictures of them all that any overall impression is lost; and the map showing accidents with nuclear weapons gives you no idea of the level of seriousness of these accidents.

There are also a number of very dubious assertions. By what criterion is lowly Sudan outspending Egypt and Israel combined with the military, one might ask? What sense does it make to refer to the military share of central government funds when in many federated countries other expenditure gets devolved upon the local states? Why is much of the third world classified as having 'strong economic ties to the west and shared political traditions' while Sweden (along with Yugoslavia and Iran) is not?

But although one could go on with this list at some length, the overall effect of the atlas (and its general accuracy) is still very positive.

*The State of the World Atlas* sold

a quarter of a million copies. It must have got into innumerable local and school libraries where nothing remotely comparable would be at hand. If even a fraction of that number of *The War Atlas* do likewise, that will be a significant achievement.

But *The War Atlas* does nothing to tackle, let alone solve, the problems and the crisis that CND now faces in Thatcher's second term in office. It does not tell us why CND's 'peace ballot' of this year has been entirely unsuccessful. It does not confront the question as to why the strategy of CND's leadership has not led to a strengthening, but rather to a massive wavering of support for the Campaign in the past year.

Nonetheless, the authors do assert that:

'Fortunately, power is not easily conserved. Although the rich and powerful do everything to bend popular perceptions along their own sight paths, they do not always succeed. Now and again, people reject their views. And in that lie opportunity and hope, for not even the international military order can withstand systematic rejection of authority within it.'

But, we might ask, if the authors really do believe this, why is it that one of them, Dan Smith, as a prominent leader of CND, still argues that CND should not oppose Britain being a member of the NATO alliance? If that is not an alliance of the 'rich and powerful', armed to the teeth, then what is?

Let us hope that others draw the conclusions *in practice* that Smith and Kidron, for all their fine words and beautiful graphics, never will.

Peter Binns

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# 'Worker exploit thyself'

Workers Co-operatives: Jobs and Dreams—Jenny Thornley

At a time when there is little organised resistance to the onslaught of redundancies, any form of escape from the horrors of the dole queue will appear to be attractive. After all, the argument goes, some sort of job is better than no job at all. The alternative can appear to be even more enticing when it is dressed up in some sort of rhetoric about workers' control, the dignity of labour and the ability to run your own life. Such is the case with workers' co-operatives. Ken Livingstone's GLC have been pushing co-ops as an alternative to redundancy, and even the collapse of the Associated Automation Co-op (previously owned by GEC) doesn't seem to have dampened their enthusiasm. This despite the fact that the co-op at its height had only provided 180 jobs in a factory that, in the early 60's, had employed 6,000 people.

Jenny Thornley argues that 'workers' co-operatives in Britain in both this century and the last have been inspired by utopian dreams of a new socialist society' and that co-operatives have provided people with a 'chance to fight against the principles of capitalism in a fundamental way, and provided some clues of the kind of society that could be built under socialism.' The co-operative is supposed to be a new form of democratic structure which challenges the capitalist mode of production through its very nature.

There are two problems: firstly co-operatives are not new, the idea and practice has been around for two hundred years; secondly as an examination of the history shows, co-operatives do *not* challenge the capitalist mode of production. In fact they are inextricably caught up in the web of capitalist economic relations.

The example set by early 19th century pioneers, such as Robert Owen, encouraged the setting up of many worker co-operatives in the second half of the century. But by 1900 only 100 remained, and today there are about eight affiliated to the Co-operative Productive Federation (the trade association for producer co-operatives within the traditional co-op movement).

The best known were the Rochdale Pioneers with their Toad Lane store, who by 1860 owned spinning mills as well. Their aim was:

'that its members may have the profits arising from the employment of their own capital and labour in the manufacturing of cotton and woollen fabrics, and so improve their social and domestic condition'.

Hardly revolutionary, being much more in the mould of the Victorian ideology of self-help. However, in order to raise capital, the society had to sell shares to non-co-opts, and by 1862 the workers' rights to profit-sharing had been abolished by a vote of the new shareholders. The sea of capitalism had swamped the island of socialism.

The 'consumers' capitalism' of the Co-operative Wholesale Society has continued ever since, but as Jenny Thornley points out producer co-operatives have usually arisen out of the conditions of hardship and disillusion that capitalism's periodic crises produce. Co-ops have been seen by the labour movement and the Labour Party as alternatives to unemployment, and the idea of setting them up has often come from *outside* of the particular group of workers involved. It has been Labour MPs, ministers or union full time officials who have often been the 'inspiration' behind them.

Les Huckfield MP and Bill Lapworth, divisional organiser of the TGWU were the force behind the Triumph Meridan co-op. Tony Benn and Robert Kilroy-Silk in the case of Fisher-Bendix in Kirby. As Tony Eccles in his book on the Kirby co-operative says:

'at no time had the people at Kirby ever consciously set out to establish a co-operative. Their main motive was that of saving jobs'.

'They must wish now that they had never listened to their high-powered 'friends'!

In general the problem is that the slight changes in the social division of labour within co-operatives are only possible because of the intervention either of the state or financial institutions, and because the market allows this to happen. Co-operatives, whatever their internal organisation are bound to capitalism because they have to sell their product on the market.

Thornley argues that 'the basic feature of a workers' co-operative is that it manufactures goods and services that it owns and is controlled by those working in it'. Yet she acknowledges that co-ops face a major problem of finance and further that they can only exist with some form of approval from the state, large firms and financial institutions, if they are not to be excluded from the market. This hardly constitutes a *challenge* to capitalism if a co-operative's existence needs the approval of capitalism's most powerful institutions!

Furthermore one can even quote Thornley to refute Thornley in that she has to acknowledge that co-ops: 'have been forced to find alternative ways for competing

in the market. The basic need has been to increase productivity in line with other firms. With less money at their disposal, co-operatives must often buy inferior machinery and accept poor quality premises. To remain competitive they must then reduce the costs of labour to a greater extent than other firms and work more effectively.'

In other words, 'worker exploit thyself'. This vision of socialism seems to consist of working long hours on low pay, in lousy conditions, with clapped-out machinery. If this is the blueprint then it is no wonder we have difficulty getting through to people about the need for socialism.

Essentially, those who fly the co-operative flag look only at what takes place within the four walls of a workplace, and ignore the outside world. They ignore the importance of competition, the fact that, as Marx said, 'the influence of individual capitals on one another has the effect precisely that they must conduct themselves as capital.' This goes as much for co-operatives as it does for any new small business. Thornley accepts that 'the co-operative must produce

surplus value'. These pressures are imposed from the outside, and these self same pressures make a nonsense of her claim that the exploitation inherent in extracting surplus value has somehow been miraculously transformed to mean something entirely different for the workforce in a co-operative. When 'pay and conditions are lowered from the average only by the acceptance of the members and with the aim that the co-operative becomes profitable', democracy and control over your own life become little more than illusions, quickly shattered by the reality of the market and the need to compete — here the matter cannot be put to the vote.

The essential features of a successful workers' co-operative? A marketable product, a healthy economic climate and a keen desire to compete. Can they be distinguished from a successful small business? Only in one vital respect: the people who work in a co-op have surrendered any chance of organising independently against those who exploit them. After all, how on earth do you go on strike against yourself?

Mick Armstrong



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# Apathy rules...sometimes

'The working class is the revolutionary class'. So say the Marxists.

'Just look around you. The real working class is indifferent to your schemes. Far from revolutionary fervour, or even plain class consciousness, the most distinctive characteristic of modern workers is apathy.'

So says common sense.

It seems a damning retort. And in practice many people on the left accept it as such. On the one hand they do believe that the mass of their fellow workers are intrinsically apathetic and therefore have to be manipulated for their own good. On the other hand they bolster their own spirits by pretending that real workers are quite different to what they actually are. The 'this great labour movement of ours' speech delivered by generations of union bureaucrats at countless broad left gatherings is a perfect example of the syndrome.

Marx however took a very different approach. Working class apathy would have come as no surprise to him. Indeed it was part of the bread and butter of his theory.

It was, after all, Marx who wrote, a century before the *Sun* produced a page three, that 'the ruling ideas in society are the ideas of the ruling class'. And he didn't just mean that the ruling class engage in a succession of con-tricks. He meant that from cradle to grave the ruled class is brought to interpret its experience in ways which lead it to accept its lot. For someone who spent so much effort understanding the power of the pulpit, the power of the video would cause few surprises.

It was, after all, Marx who wrote in the first chapter of *Capital* that in capitalist society:

'The social relations between men themselves ... assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things'.

And what could be more apathy-inducing

than that.

And it was Marx in the 1850s who had to warn his more impatient colleagues that so long as capitalism was undergoing a period of expansion then there was no prospect of the working class becoming revolutionary. This warning it should be noted, he delivered decades before the first sociologist even started his thesis on the 'affluent worker'.

In short, Marx's assertion that the working class was the revolutionary class, went alongside a quite open recognition of the apathy or downright slavishness, which the workers of his own time displayed. And not only did Marx recognise it, he commented upon it with a forthrightness that would shock most of today's left wing intellectuals. So how did he think it would be overcome?

First because capitalism itself organised workers into great cities and factories and bound them together in a world economy. Second because the interests of workers led them to struggle, whether or not they 'believed in' the class struggle. Third because the dynamism and crisis-ridden nature of capitalism led it to force those struggles constantly beyond the bounds of capitalism. Capitalism itself created workers apathy. But capitalism itself broke it down.

Of course that breaking down would be very partial this side of the revolution itself. As Marx put it in his first years as a marxist:

'Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*: the revolution is necessary therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the old crap and become fitted to found society anew.'

Mere theory? Clearly out of date? Well, just look at the hundred years since Marx's death.

During those hundred years capitalism has continued to create, concentrate and bind together a working class on a scale undreamed of in Marx's time — apart from by Marx himself.

And for all its apathy during those hundred years that working class has displayed a quite remarkable tendency to organise in the way that Marx suggested. Just two examples should suffice.

To this day not a single Fleet Street newspaper ever advises workers under any circumstances to go on strike. But every year several hundred thousand workers in Britain do so, including in years of downturn and demoralisation like today. That's the mundane side of it. The dramatic is the fact that these hundred years are littered with the most ruthless and often initially popular dictatorships which have tried to suppress strikes completely. Chile and Poland are only the latest in the long catalogue of the failure of these regimes to do so.

From the mundane to the dramatic, the workers who engaged in those struggles were not superhuman. Clearly a large chunk of British strikers not only read the *Sun* but believe much of what they read in it. And the very drama of the Chilean or Polish strikes obviously means that the majority of workers who struck had spent previous years passively accepting, perhaps even applauding, dictatorship. In other words they had spent those previous years being apathetic.

And the same goes for the most dramatic cases of all: the *revolutionary* situations. We have had a good sprinkling of them in the century since Marx died. Situations where masses of workers took power into their own hands: in Petrograd in 1917, in Barcelona in 1936, in Budapest in 1956. Nothing in the history of those cities suggests that their workers were magically free of all the vices we call apathy. But in each case, for a few months or weeks, those cities actually saw what the young Marx had written about: 'the alteration of men on a mass scale ... to become fitted to found society anew.'

Pete Goodwin

