socialist worker

Review

February 1985 Issue 2 60p

THE FIGHT FOR THE UNION

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Labour Left
Poland
Gillick

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Subscription rate for one year: Britain and Ireland £8 Overseas surface £9 Europe Air £11 Elsewhere Air £14.50 (institutions add £7.50) Cheques and postal orders payable to Socialist Review. Socialist Worker Review is sent free to all prisoners on request.
ISSN 0141 2442
Printed by Laneridge Ltd (TU all depts) London E2.

NOTES of the month

THE FIGHT FOR THE UNION

A lot left to fight for

'ALL OVER bar the shouting', was the headline about the miners' strike in one of the Tory tabloids earlier this month. It may not be true but it is easy to see why they thought so. The sight of Arthur Scargill making repeated and reasonable requests for negotiation with the Coal Board gives us some idea of the real problems affecting the strike. And the strident intransigence of Margaret Thatcher in refusing to contemplate these negotiations without advance surrender by the miners points to the highly defensive position the miners are now in.

Even though as we go to press there is little sign of an immediate end to the strike, the constant talk of negotiations—or even of returning to work without any settlement of the strike—give some indication of the direction in which it is going.

Talk of defeat for the miners is now common even in the heartlands of the strike like Yorkshire. This is quite different from even two months ago, when it was only in areas like North Derbyshire, where strikers have become increasingly beleaguered, that defeat seemed to be staring them in the face. The frankness with which many miners now approach the outcome of the strike, and the way in which Scargill himself now doesn't speak publicly of open victory, are indications of the very difficult phase the strike has now entered.

The back to work movements and the constant gradual erosion of the strike, the threat to the unity of the national union and the failure to put any visible dent in the coal stocks, have all combined to pressure the miners' leaders into suing for peace. Margaret Thatcher wants to take scalps—and especially Scargill's scalp—before she concedes anything. So the NCB and the government have put forward demands for written concessions which they know must be impossible for the NUM leaders to fulfil without complete surrender.

This in turn has led to the realisation among many miners that there is a threat not simply towards individual pits, but to the union itself.

Certainly to listen to Thatcher—and her supporters in the rabid Tory press—that appears to be her strategy. It may also be the view of the remarkably quiet Ian MacGregor, who has created bitter divisions among Coal Board chiefs through his failure to see any positive role for the union in the Coal Board's future plans. But Thatcher, MacGregor and those who support them inside the ruling class are held back by two major factors which may inhibit their room to manoeuvre.

Commitment to the union

The first factor is one which the government has consistently underestimated. The commitment to the union is very great, even among those who have broken the strike. The return to work 'surge' was not as big as they predicted, partly through loyalty to the union from non-activist strikers. Attempts by scabs in Notts to break away from the national union have met with a surprisingly high level of resistance. And even on the Board's figures, over 60 percent of miners remain on strike.

At the end of the strike the union will remain a fact of life which NCB management cannot ignore, and which will still have an important say in the pits. Sections of the ruling class fear that a completely humiliating settlement for the miners may store up problems in the years to come.

The second problem which has been glossed over during the strike but which will rear its head is the future of the whole coal industry. Put simply, the ruling class needs a coal industry. This is true despite much talk about the glut of coal on the market, and the need for British miners to be competitive.

More farseeing members of the ruling class see that the miners will not always be in the weak position they are now and that their bargaining position can be very powerful in certain circumstances. Oil supplies may be plentiful now, but it wasn't many years back that the world was thrown into economic crisis by precisely the opposite phenomenon—a shortage of oil. Even in the short term, the weakness of the pound against the dollar makes imported coal expensive and therefore puts British coal at a more favourable price.

Here what is crucial to the ruling class is the need to ensure a moderate rightwing leadership for the NUM. That was exactly what happened after the miners' defeat in 1926. Leftwingers like Will Lawther were pulled to the right over a period of years. This process not only made the union easier to deal with for the employers, but also meant that when coal was in greater demand when war broke out, that there was a pliable right wing union leadership in the pits.

That is what the NCB and the employers will be hoping for now. It is why they are putting such a hard line to the miners' union executive. Obviously they have short term aims. They want to persuade waverers back to work, and hand out a warning to other workers of the danger of following the miners' example. But they also want to affect the politics of the NUM itself.

By putting a hard line, they hope to force the area leaderships to disavow Scargillism and return on the NCB's terms. Ideally for them, this means written support for pit closures. Even if that is not eventually forthcoming, the Coal Board want the large

NOTES of the month

majority of miners to go back thinking that the militant tactics outlined and pursued by Scargill in the last year cannot win and are only counter-productive. No doubt some of the area leaderships will be all too happy to help convey this view. Already it is clear that Scargill is in a minority on the executive.

The Coal Board want to strike another blow at the militants who have held the strike together. They want to hold fast against re-instatement of those sacked in the course of the dispute. If they succeed in doing this, they will have succeeded in the wholesale victimisation of the core of the union's militants. A large number of the key pickets have charges hanging over them or have been convicted.

Talks of compromise on this issue or of area settlements are fraught with dangers. In some places the Coal Board may take back, for example, those sacked for taking coal but not those sacked for picketing. This, far from being a victory, would be an attempt to separate out the 'political' from 'non-political' victimisations, and could leave the militants in a very isolated position.

Faced with the strength of the employers' side, there are two crucial questions facing those who want the miners' strike to end in victory. The first is what are the real prospects for the strike? Here we have to be brutally honest and say that the likelihood of victory is extremely remote. The increased return to work, the lack of morale among the area leaderships, the terrible hardship faced by miners and their families, are all acting in the government's favour. Although it is true that a hard core can hold out for a very long time, and that accidents can happen in their favour, it is unlikely that many miners relish the prospect of being out in a year's time.

But that doesn't mean that the miners are facing abject defeat. Even when the balance of forces are against a group of workers, there is a world of difference between a retreat which is disciplined, and a retreat which turns into a rout. A rout in this situation will mean the employers taking the maximum advantage to victimise militants and weaken union organisation.

Militants inside the union must make sure this doesn't happen. This means winning policies now of no victimisations when work starts again. It means stepping up activity in terms of going on the knocker, arguing with waverers the importance of holding on for a settlement and going back together. It means fighting to convince even some of those back at work that the strike is not lost. It means still building and stepping up solidarity collections, to try to cement the strike together.

To do this requires a clear, absolutely honest and realistic view of the strike and where it is going. It also requires an understanding that what you do in defeat is very important. The militants must ensure they keep up this activity and not allow the constant speculation lead to passivity.

The second question facing strikers is: has the union any bargaining strength? Despite the impression given by Margaret Thatcher, it has a great deal. The Tories clearly have a lot on their side. We have seen their power throughout the strike. The police, the press, the courts, the social security regulations, have all been used to bash the miners. And the Tories have been strengthened by the weaknesses within the working class movement, in particular the TUC failing to deliver their promises of solidarity. The scabbing in sections of the coalfield always made winning harder.

But the Tories also have problems. They don't agree about how hard they should hit the miners (for the reasons we give above). There are obviously quite major divisions in tactics on their side. And the strike is taking its toll. It has already cost the government billions of pounds, and there is going to be no let up in the cost for some months at least. The cost of the strike has not helped the government's financial situation. Although the weakness of the pound is attributed to oil prices falling in the main, many commentators also talk about the long term effects of the strike as extremely damaging to the British economy. Some of the ruling class believe, especially as the NUM executive are so willing to settle for a compromise, that the price of maintaining the strike has now become excessive.

They talk of the strike lasting into next summer with some trepidation. So there are problems for the government too. With the vagaries of the stock markets and the international money markets, there can be all sorts of unforeseen blows to the Tories.

The danger is that the returns to work since Christmas can provide an excuse for the area leaderships to settle for less than could be won.

This must not be allowed to happen. The strike is in a very difficult and defensive situation. But it can be held together, and if a retreat is needed it can be an orderly retreat. The way the strike ends isn't simply a matter of tactical differences. It can make a huge difference to the fight to maintain the union for years to come.■

POLITICS OF THE STRIKE

The wrong conclusions

IT WOULD be surprising if the longest major strike in British history, affecting hundreds of thousands of miners, their families and supporters, didn't have a profound effect on the ideas and thinking of many of its participants.

The politics of the strike, as we pointed out in the last *Review* are a key reason for its lack of success. Reliance on the union leaders, a failure to mobilise for mass pickets, the high level of passivity, have all led to difficulty in advancing the strike. Yet it is its very weakness which has helped to reinforce the reformist ideas underpinning the Labour Party—especially the idea of relying on others to achieve things for you.

The failure of the strike to deliver at any of its key stages—through picketing out Notts, through mass pickets of steel and coke works, a lack of solidarity on the part of the TUC, the failure to halt the back to work movement—has taken its toll in terms of ideas.

Already there are signs that many of the supporters of the strike are drawing precisely the wrong conclusions about why the strike has not won after almost a year.

The argument that the strike should only have taken place after a national ballot, has re-emerged. It will undoubtedly gain strength at the end of the strike as the post mortems and recriminations begin. It is connected with a whole series of other arguments which basically say that the strike could not succeed because it was too militant, it went too far in its demands and tactics.

These ideas take the form of attacks on the lack of a ballot; denunciations of mass picketing and 'violence' as a means of winning the strike; the feeling that it was wrong to call for solidarity because other unions won't fight for the miners. Talk of action from other workers, it is argued, was pie in the sky.

There is even a feeling that Scargill himself has gone too far, has isolated himself and the union and should have settled months ago

when he had the chance. Coupled with this are increased illusions in Neil Kinnock, and increased faith in what another Labour government could do.

A few months ago, Kinnock was bitterly denounced and attacked by many miners and their supporters in the Labour Party. Today denunciations are less frequent and what criticisms there are, remain muted. And many people are now praising Kinnock. As the likelihood of a settlement gets closer, the more Kinnock can play the role of peacemaker, the person who wants to get industry back to work, and the miners' friend.

So although Kinnock has done his best to sabotage the strike, and support for it, his standing remains remarkably high.

The sorts of ideas outlined above are held—and always have been held—by many who were at best half hearted about, or at worst secretly opposed to, the strike. But they are increasingly accepted by many good militants, who have fought for victory from day one, and who have backed Scargill consistently.

In the wake of a defeat, that tendency will increase. More people are likely to look to electoralism and Labourism for a solution to the problems of unemployment and the like, than they are towards their own struggles. Such conclusions can lead—and often do lead—to a belief that nothing can change outside parliament, and to a passivity which puts its faith in the actions of those like Kinnock. The far left of the Labour Party will be badly affected by the outcome of the strike. The fortunes of the left improved last year on the coattails of the strike. Now they are likely to come down to earth with a bump. They have two alternatives—to stand firm and face probably increasing isolation, or to move to the right along with Kinnock and the parliamentary party.

A different course

Socialists have spelt out the central arguments about the strike throughout the last year. We have to keep doing so. The key thing is that the strike could have been won. But only if a different course had been taken at a number of crucial points. And when the different stages of the strike occurred, one thing stood out as absolutely central every time: that the trade union bureaucracy failed to build the strike in a way which could have led to victory. This was true at every period of the strike.

All other factors working against the miners have been *secondary* in comparison with this. It was the one factor singled out by Ned Smith, interviewed on his retirement as NCB industrial relations director. It was not the mass policing, or the scabbing in Nottinghamshire that he drew attention to. Rather, he placed the turning point in the strike as the time in late September when the TUC leaders failed to translate words of support into action.

In its very early stages, the strike was hampered not by the failure to call a ballot, but by the failure of some of the area leaders to give a lead in support of the fight against pit closures. Nowhere was this more the case than in Notts. At the beginning the Notts area leadership *led* the call for a ballot, as a

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manoeuvre to stop the strike spreading and so to defuse it. They repeatedly attacked Yorkshire miners who were trying to picket out the Notts men. Yorkshire area leader Jack Taylor complied by calling the pickets off.

It is not surprising then that Chadburn and Richardson found they had created a Frankenstein's monster. But the membership had never had the arguments put to them about the strike. Even though they were eventually persuaded to return to work, a third had nonetheless been out on strike.

For some months the bureaucracy counterposed the need to picket out Notts to the need to begin effective pickets of key economic targets. In particular the picketing of steel plants was discouraged, as area leaders made agreements to let fairly large amounts of exempted coal in. The turning point of the strike came at Orgreave where mass police brutality smashed the picket and led to a wholesale retreat on the question of militant mass picketing. Since then, pickets have often been token, and where organised have been one-off secret affairs, which quite deliberately have not set out to mobilise other local workers who support the miners.

The TUC Congress in September raised the expectations of hundreds of thousands of workers and let them down again almost as quickly. Promises of support in the power stations never materialised—a fact which gave the Tories the green light to push much more onto the offensive. Those workers who took the bluster and rhetoric of the TUC seriously and tried to organise solidarity have often found themselves isolated and sometimes threatened with their own victimisation as a consequence.

Since then the strike has been on a slippery slope—gaining a few propaganda victories, and still commanding massive levels of support round Christmas—but unfortunately getting a number of shoves downhill as well. The failure of power cuts to materialise, the lack of solidarity in the power stations, the NACODS deal with the Coal Board in October, the gradual momentum of the back to work movement, have all taken their toll. Since Christmas the weaknesses of the strike have become even more apparent, and the lack of stomach from the TUC or most area leaders to continue the fight is obvious. Unfortunately most miners have been prepared to accept what their leaders are doing. Only a minority have found themselves drawing conclusions to the contrary—and they tend to be both too late and too weak on the ground to influence events.

Lessons of disputes are always bitterly argued. Unfortunately the analysis put forward here is one that the SWP is virtually alone in pointing to. Most views on the left either reflect the position of the bulk of the area leaderships, of the Labour leadership, and of the Communist Party, that a more moderate, less militant approach should have been taken. Or they take the line of Benn and the bulk of the strike's active supporters, that victory is in sight and that any problem can be overcome by sheer effort of will and a bit more struggle.

The latter view is preferable, because it says that the miners and their supporters have to fight to win and it is behind the strike. But it is not a realistic view at this stage of the strike and can therefore lead to terrible demoralisation when the eventual truth dawns. The other view leads to a shift to the right, to refusing to struggle in case it alienates people.

Unfortunately, both views can feed the sort of politics that Kinnock and the Labour leaders are putting forward.■

PROSPECTS AHEAD

Building from below

WHAT ARE the prospects facing the miners in the months following the strike? They came out almost a year ago believing they would be able to go back victorious, having beaten back pit closures and given the Tories a bloody nose. Now they are facing the fact that the boot may well be on the other foot. The exact details of any settlement which might be forthcoming are unknown. We do not for example know the fate of particular pits. We do not know how bitterly the miners will have to fight to defend their victimised members. But we do know that the employers and management will feel confident to go on the offensive over a range of issues—whether union facilities, productivity, victimisation or safety.

Faced with this prospect, it is important to remember that defeat would not be the end of the struggle. To use the analogy of a defeated army: if it can withdraw, without scattering or collapsing, it can regroup and live to fight another day. The small number of skirmishes which happen in the course of retreat can be used to help rebuild confidence and organisation.

At the end of a dispute it is often hard to imagine anyone wanting to fight again over anything. But time and again working class experience shows that this is not the case and that militants organising in the workplace can make all sorts of gains in the many defensive struggles which arise.

In a much more serious defeat for the working class than anything we have faced in Britain, the workers of Chile were smashed by a bloody right wing army coup.

The democratically elected government was destroyed, tens of thousands of workers were killed and imprisoned. Even today, the level of military and police repression in Chile is very high. But the last few years have seen the revival of struggle—strikes, demonstrations, student revolts—which show that the working class movement is beginning to organise again, despite its

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crushing defeat.

Of course, even with the worst possible scenario, the miners would not face anything on the scale that Chilean workers faced. But these experiences and the lessons of others like them, are important for the miners. If defeated they would be returning with organisation more or less intact, with the feeling that they have been starved back, and that they have fought an unequal fight well. The danger is that demoralisation could lead to a situation where people do not seize the opportunities and chances which exist to try to rebuild, on the grounds that nothing can be done. The months and years ahead could be very important for all those militants who want to rebuild organisation.

And they *will* have the opportunities. Management are under pressure to get the pits working again. They will want to produce as much coal as possible, as quickly as possible. Two factors can help militants to organise. Management will try to cut corners, to impose practices which force through higher productivity, in particular to cut safety procedures. Each and every one of these issues can provide a focus around which those who are serious about holding the union together can agitate, and which can win people towards the union.

Because of the pressure of productivity, management—particularly at a local level—will often be prepared to make concessions. The pressure will be on them to compete with other pit managements in the productivity race. Their jobs will be on the line too. Faced with the prospect of 70 pits closing—perhaps even more—again and again they can be made to concede on issues around which there is a fight. The key will be strong local union organisation.

These defensive battles will come up time and again. In the next few months there will be the focus for agitation round victimisations as well. If there is no national agreement to take back sacked members, there will be a number of fights in individual pits, like Betteshanger in Kent, where the whole of the NUM branch committee have been sacked.

The problem is that those who have been among the most active pickets, and who should be the core of organisation in the pits, may feel that if the strike is lost there won't be much worth fighting for. The role of the tiny number of conscious socialists in arguing with these individuals and pulling them into activity around issues cannot be overstated. The defensive struggles ahead can lay the basis for organisation in the pits—rooted in the workplace, based on small struggles.

Whether or not this happens will depend—and usually has depended historically—on the role of individuals in arguing for it, and in demonstrating that it can be built. Those socialists who have the political understanding of the nature of the employers' offensive, and the period, and can argue on the wider issues will hopefully be at the core of rebuilding in the union in the aftermath of the strike. Revolutionary socialists won't of course be the only ones organising. In particular, some of the left branch officials will be forced to organise. There are already signs of this happening with the Barnsley Forum.

Scargill is clearly closely associated with this limited attempt to rebuild Broad Left organisation separate from the area leadership of Jack Taylor, and to create a base away from the NUM executive. But the pressure even on the Forum will be to move to the right in the period after the strike, when there will be a level of demoralisation.

This will be a pressure on many of the good militants. It can be resisted by attempts to build on the defensive disputes. It can also be combatted by the building of a tiny nucleus of a revolutionary party among a small number of miners who are committed to socialist ideas, as well as to fighting. This can prove to be of overwhelming importance in the years to come. ■

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HISTORY OF A COLONY

FRENCH colony since 1853. Population: 140,000. Capital: Noumea.

1864-97 Penal Colony. Deportation from France of 40,000 convicts, including 3,000 political prisoners after the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. Increase in 'free' settlement and development of ranching force the native Melanesians (Kanaks) onto the infertile highlands.

KANAK resistance to white colonisation: 1878 Kanak revolt followed by repression and creation of native reserves occupying a mere 20 percent of the colony's territory.

1917 last great Kanak revolt.

KANAK population estimated in 1921 as 27,000, compared with 50,000 in 1870. Until 1946 the Kanaks are subject to the 'Aboriginal Law': unpaid labour on white farms; permission needed to leave reserves.

1951 Formation of reformist Caledonian Union—demands equal rights for Kanaks and greater autonomy for the colony.

1957 Law granting Kanaks equal voting rights; Kanak participation in territorial government.

1963 Gaullist government reverses previous reforms. Prime minister Messmer: 'We must seize this last opportunity to create an extra French-speaking country....In the long run, the rise of native nationalism can only be avoided if the non-Pacific peoples are in the majority. It goes without saying that no long-term change in the balance of the population can be obtained without the systematic encouragement of immigration by white women and children...Jobs must be reserved for new settlers in private companies.'

1969 Creation of radical nationalist movements.

1970s Economic boom created by world demand for nickel (99 percent of the island's exports). Massive rise in manufactured imports, export of savings to Australia, Monaco etc, immigration from France, Vietnam, Java and other South Pacific colonies. Most Kanaks continue to practise subsistence agriculture.

POPULATION in 1980: 43 percent Kanaks, 35 percent Europeans, 12 percent Polynesians, 10 percent Vietnamese and others.

1981 Election of Socialist government in France. Murder of Pierre Declercq, white member of Kanak nationalist movement, by the extreme right. Rising level of land occupations and confrontations between Kanaks and white settlers (supported by gendarmes).

1984 Formation of FLNKS (Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front) uniting most nationalist groups. Boycott of territorial elections. Result: 52 percent don't vote (80 percent in the Kanak-dominated east of the island); anti-boycott Kanak group obtains only 4 percent; Gaullists and extreme right win 78 percent of those voting. Election of right wing territorial government.

A costly conflict

UNTIL November last year, few people in France suspected that a major conflict would erupt in the South Pacific colony of New Caledonia, and come to dominate the entire political stage in France itself. Few could even have accurately placed the island—situated 1,500 kilometres north-east of Australia—on the map.

Yet today the subject is a difficult one to avoid, as the colony's rival political leaders vie for attention on the TV screens, and the fascist National Front cover the walls of French cities with appeals to support 'Nouvelle Caledonie Francaise'.

The comparison with Algeria is a fair one—though times have changed since the Algerian uprising in 1954.

Successive French governments waged an eight-year struggle for Algeria, leaving one million Algerian dead, and creating a bitter legacy of racism and right-wing activism.

But when Francois Mitterrand made a dramatic 20,000 kilometre flight to New Caledonia in January, his mission was a more complex one. Committed to the island's self-determination before the 1981 election which brought the Socialists to power, Mitterrand's policy at first consisted of creating a more autonomous territorial government and eliminating some of the more outstanding grievances—by land reform, for example. The island's economy was to be developed—despite the world slump in New Caledonia's principle resource, nickel—and the native Kanaks more fully integrated into the existing economic and political system. The promised referendum on independence was pushed back to 1989—a year *after* the end of Mitterrand's presidential mandate.

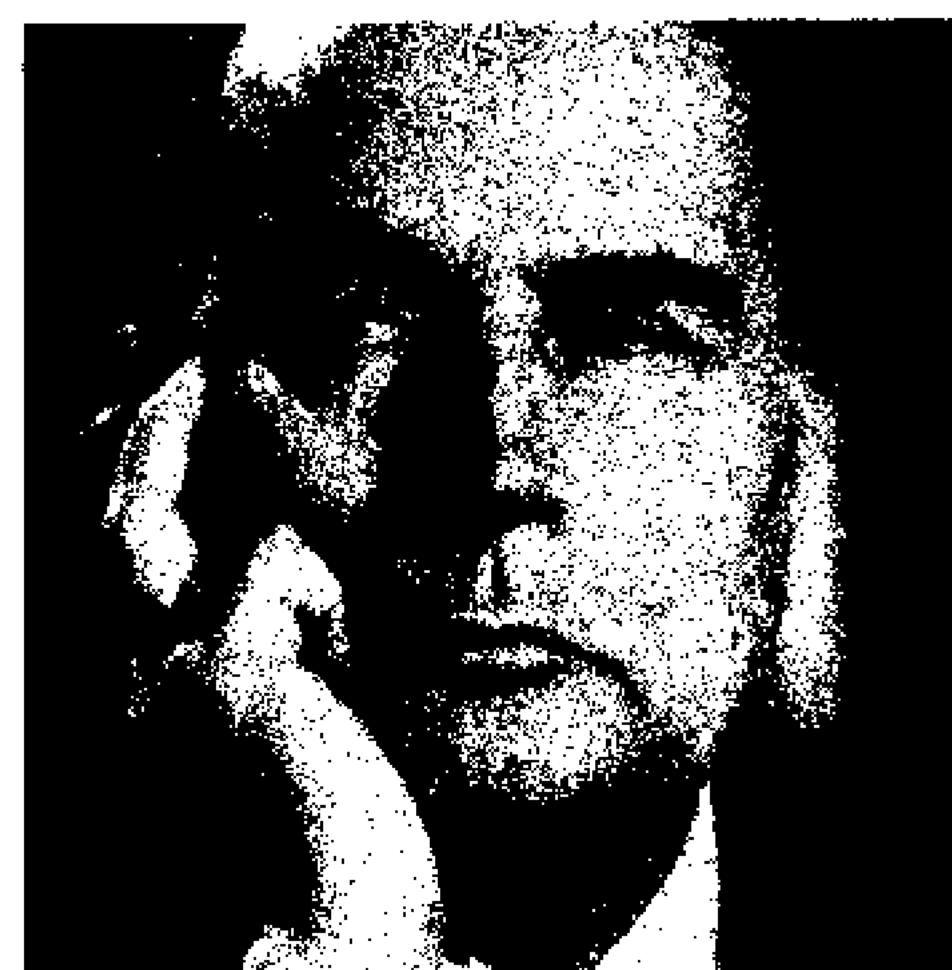
Such a strategy was quite compatible with Mitterrand's defence of French imperialist interests in the South Pacific and elsewhere.

These interests are strategic—maintaining a French military presence in the region which includes the H-bomb testing facilities in French Polynesia—and economic. Although the region is undeveloped, there are important mineral reserves, including the future exploitation of the ocean bed, as well as enormous potential for fishing and tourism. French Polynesia alone, for example, covers two million square kilometres of ocean, while New Caledonia accounts for a quarter of the world's reserves of nickel.

The crisis came into the open in November 1984, when the nationalists of the FLNKS organised a successful boycott of the territorial elections, and went on to proclaim a provisional government, at first in exile in nearby Vanuatu (ex-New Hebrides) and then on 'French' soil in New Caledonia itself.

FLNKS-organised roadblocks, and a series of militant actions such as the burning of white farms and the taking of hostages, created a situation of virtual dual power. The flag of Kanaky was flown publicly, outraging supporters of the right wing pro-French territorial government, who have accused the Socialists of encouraging rebellion and 'communist' sedition.

Mitterrand reacted quickly, by sending Edgar Pisani, an ex-Gaullist politician, as special envoy to Noumea. The Pisani plan was sufficiently vague to attract the initial support of moderate Kanaks—and bring down the roadblocks. The new policy includes the organisation of a referendum in 1985. But—and it is a very big but—the proposal envisages the creation of a Kanak state under French tutelage, in which France would continue to be responsible for external affairs (and even internal law and order), maintain an important naval base and guarantee the rights of French settlers. Noumea and the island's airport would be under more direct French control.



The conflict has been extremely costly to the French state. It has also allowed Australia, one of France's principle imperialist rivals in the region, to increase its influence, by giving extremely guarded support to the moderate Kanaks. Politically it has added to the Socialists' troubles at home, giving the Right another stick to beat the government with, while allowing the CP to polish up its far from untarnished anti-imperialist image.

Thus Mitterrand is anxious to find a quick solution 'acceptable to all the communities in New Caledonia'. But it is hard to imagine the tightrope act working. As events in January showed, the immediate crisis is far from resolved. The killing of a young French settler by Kanaks provoked a semi-insurrectionary situation in Noumea, the largely non-Melanesian capital—a situation reminiscent of the pro-white settler inspired riots in Algiers in the period leading up to Algerian independence. (Considerable numbers of the more recent white settlers are in fact *pied noirs* resettled in New Caledonia after leaving Algeria).

This situation was defused by the news of the cold-blooded murder of Eloi Machoro, minister of security in the Kanak provisional government, by gendarmes. Suddenly European rioters began to fraternise with troops and celebrate the 'removal' of one of

the key figures in the FLNKS.

But the crisis was serious enough for Mitterrand to announce the sending of more troops and the declaration of a state of emergency.

At the time of writing, the imminent return to 'normality', which Mitterrand promised after his return from Noumea in January, has not yet materialised. By 'normality', Mitterrand meant above all the reopening of the country's largest nickel mine—owned by a subsidiary of the state-owned Rothschild group and Elf Aquitaine. But this has been made impossible by the sabotage of vital equipment, while the nationalist trade union is continuing to press such demands as an increase in the number of Kanaks employed at different levels of the job hierarchy.

It is far from clear how the New Caledonian problem will be resolved. Tactically, the nationalists position is not easy. Reduced to a minority in their own country by government-sponsored immigration, largely excluded from the capitalist sector of the economy and geographically isolated in the bush, the Kanaks have some allies in the non-Melanesian population. But, despite their high level of political organisation, the FLNKS seems uncertain to obtain a majority for independence—even on the basis of a neo-colonial 'associated state'. The non-Melanesian working class, enjoying as it does a privileged settler status, overwhelmingly supports the right wing parties.

Pressures for compromise

The New Caledonian right—backed by most of the settlers as well as by a minority of 'assimilated' Kanaks—also enjoys the vociferous support of Gaullist leader Chirac, ex-President Giscard (who accused the Socialists of helping to create a 'Cuba of the Pacific') and fascist leader Le Pen, whose local branch of the National Front is extremely active in New Caledonia itself.

The Kanaks have a lot to lose by an outright military confrontation. Already the FLNKS has lost fourteen dead, including ten in an ambush by a private militia as well as Eloi Machoro, their principle military organiser, at the hands of the French state.

The pressures on the FLNKS leaders to look for a compromise are considerable—although they also face the possibility of a revolt by their own rank and file, as recent 'unauthorised' militant actions demonstrate.

Whatever differences revolutionaries have with the FLNKS—and it is clear that independence alone, in whatever form, will not solve the underlying problems faced by the majority of Kanaks and the non-Melanesian working class—they have a duty not only to demand the Kanaks' right to self-determination, but to actively support their present struggle.■

T Fabrice

LEBANON

Phoney withdrawal

IS THE Lebanon nightmare to begin again? Bombings and assassinations have once more become daily events, and massacres and even full-scale civil war are anticipated. Once again it is possible to discern the hand of Israel behind the current confusion—its plans for withdrawal concealing a cynical determination to keep the Lebanese pot boiling.

Israel's Labour prime minister Shimon Peres is presenting his withdrawal plan as part of a new strategy for Lebanon. It is not. If the three-stage withdrawal is complete, as Peres claims by July, it will leave a 40 kilometre-deep zone in southern Lebanon occupied by the South Lebanon Army (SLA). The SLA is composed of Lebanese collaborators and armed by Israel. It is effectively part of the Israeli army and would leave Israel in occupation of a large part of the south.

Divide and rule

This presence will assist its plans to fragment the country. When the invasion of 1982 failed to install a right wing government in power in Beirut, the Israelis turned to a strategy of supporting rival Lebanese factions in an effort to divide the country into sectarian 'statelets'. It supplied finance and arms to both the fascist Phalange party of the Maronite Christian community and the Muslim Druze. This led to the bloody 'War of the Mountains' in September 1983, which left the Druze, not Israel's first choice as an ally, in control of the central Chouf Mountain region.

Since then the Israelis have attempted to buy friends among the majority Shia Muslim population of the south. Some have been co-opted into the SLA, others installed as local gang leaders. In the major southern city of Tyre the Israelis have backed an infamous Sunni Muslim mafia, while in Sidon, further north, they have encouraged a situation in which the rightists, the Druze, the Sunni and the Shia are preparing to fight for control when Israel leaves.

Israel now hopes that the most vulnerable of the communities in the south—the Christians—flee to the border area for protection. Here they may provide the unreliable SLA with reinforcements. In addition, further fighting between the Phalange and the Druze may cause the final breakup of the government in Lebanon, giving Israel a freer hand to intervene indefinitely in Lebanese affairs.

Israeli strategists have been balancing the cost of the war against the benefits of maintaining a presence in Lebanon. Since the invasion of June 1982 Israel has spent over $3 billion on its occupation. Despite the usual US-aid the sickly Israeli economy cannot bear the burden. Israelis have also become bitter at the high cost in casualties—by January 609 Israelis had been killed in the preceding 18 months.

The current withdrawal plans allow Israel to keep its options open. It will station the SLA in the southern border area of Lebanon and press the UN to place its own forces in a second 'buffer' zone further north. It will then have a strong base in Lebanon for further military adventures, and perhaps to allow the exploitation of the Litani waters—the only major source of water in the region not diverted into the Israeli supply system.

What are socialists to make of the whole ugly mess? In Israel the Peace Now Movement, which raised so many hopes on the left, has effectively collapsed.

In Lebanon there has been determined military opposition to the Israelis but no further development of a political opposition. The militias of the Shia, Sunni and Druze have collaborated with the Communist Party and the Palestinians in a 'National Resistance' which has been responsible for the many attacks on Israeli soldiers that have been an important factor in dictating the withdrawal. But such opposition has, as usual, been within the limits set by traditional sectarian politics, and thanks to Israel's divide and rule strategy, militias that co-operate on one level may find themselves in conflict on other issues.

Despite the fact that some of the Muslim organisations declare themselves 'socialist' the left is weak. The organisation that has proved most successful over the past two years is that of the Druze. It is confusingly named the Progressive Socialist Party. In fact it is the personal property of a clan leader and feudal chief, Walid Jumblatt. The 'leftist' Sunni Muslim Mourabitoun, based in west Beirut, is little more than a local mafia. The Communist Party is an utterly Stalinised and bureaucratic rump which tails the Muslim militias.

The economy

Lebanon's greatest tragedy has been the fragmentation of its working class. By 1975 there were 250,000 workers in manufacturing, construction and transport in a population of just four million. Between 1975 and 1981 civil war and repeated Israeli invasion led to massive destruction in the main industrial areas and economic dislocation of the whole country. The manufacturing workforce declined from 130,000 to 70,000. Then in the invasion of 1982 the Israelis smashed the industrial areas of south and west Beirut and of the southern cities of Tyre and Sidon.

The Lebanese economy is today in deep crisis, with industry its most stricken section. The largest industrial establishments have shut.

But the destruction of the economy has been uneven. Because of the sectarian nature of Lebanese society industry has always been concentrated in the wealthier Christian areas. In 1965, of 1800 establishments employing more than five workers, almost

1,000 were in Beirut, and the majority of these in Christian east Beirut. Most of the rest were in Christian areas of Mount Lebanon and the north. This pattern was not changed before war brought the destruction of industry.

Many skilled workers have emigrated, especially to the countries of the Gulf. Others have returned to families in the country, many are unemployed. Those who remain in industrial employment are concentrated in the Maronite Christian enclave of east Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

Until Lebanon's economy begins to expand there is little chance of the sectarian divide that separates workers being broken. The prospects are bleak.■

Phil Marshall

INDIA

Hindu chauvinism rules

THE overwhelming victory of the Congress (I) in the Indian general election of December 1984 has been greeted with undisguised relief by the international ruling class. Almost without exception they have hailed the 'historic opportunity' that Rajiv Gandhi has created to reshape India. It is total gibberish.

Despite the massive electoral success of the Congress (I) the Indian ruling class remains split into bitterly opposed factions. An overwhelming electoral victory is not unprecedented—they occurred in 1971, 1977 and 1980 and each was followed by bitter factional strife within a couple of years.

The Congress (I) has not suddenly become a united or uncorrupt party—the general opinion of the Indian press was that it won in spite of the nature of many of the candidates and the state-level leadership. The government that Rajiv Gandhi has formed is littered with unsavoury relics of the old regime plus a few of his own clique of technocrats in junior positions.

There are reasons for the electoral victory (400 seats out of 500) but they have little to do with a new era. A technical factor was the very effective Reagan/Thatcher style of campaign run by Rajiv's personal clique. They made extensive use of mass poster campaigns and tens of thousands of videos (as big a craze in India as here) plus the advantage of controlling TV and radio.

Rajiv and the fascists

They also directly involved a number of top film stars as candidates and campaigners. As these people have devoted followings of millions this was fantastically successful.

More fundamentally the opposition is completely bankrupt. These corrupt factions of ruling class politicians are even worse than those of the Congress (I), which is really saying something.

The economy is also in better shape than for some time—inflation down, a limited recovery of industrial production, a remarkable boom in consumer goods. Deprived temporarily of even the economy as an issue the bourgeois opposition parties folded in a miserable heap.

There were two parties which would have been expected to stand against the tide—the neo-fascist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI(M). The BJP was routed, ending up with two seats instead of 35. They were caught by a shift by the Congress (I) which fought the campaign on its most right wing platform ever.

This shift has been taking place for more than two years as Indira Gandhi moved the party from its traditional position as defender of the minorities to supporting Hindu communalism. This was expressed in the campaign as fighting for the 'unity of the nation'—a code word in present circumstances for the domination of minorities by Hindu chauvinism.

This was a disaster for the BJP, which had its electoral support massively undermined. It was a considerable success for the fascist paramilitary organisation the RSS, which for more than five years has been setting up right wing united front organisations with communalist Congress (I) politicians all over India. The fact that many of the attacks on Sikhs after Indira Gandhi's assassination were led by local Congress (I) members was evidence of their success.

In the event considerable numbers of RSS members switched their support from the BJP to the Congress (I) precisely because they saw it as a better vehicle for their political objectives. In other words, a significant section of the local organisation of the Congress (I) in the north has been penetrated by fascists.

It's a remarkable comment on the nature of the opposition that the Congress (I) still managed to pick up two-thirds of the Muslim vote across North India. Everyone knew that the opposition were out and out communalists, whereas there was always the hope (pretty forlorn) that the Congress (I) would return to its 'secular' traditions.

The Communist Party CPI(M) was wiped out almost everywhere except in the state of West Bengal, where it runs the government. Even there, it lost much support in the urban areas although the local Congress (I) is split into two factions who probably hate each other more than they do the CPI(M). The reason why they retained their rural support is simply that agriculture there is based on sharecropping and they have delivered real reforms to the sharecroppers.

In the urban areas they have been just another reformist government making a terrible hash of administering the capitalist crisis and being compelled to attack workers' standards of living. Their strategy is based on the survival of the West Bengal government, so they have no national perspectives worth the name, which explains their collapse elsewhere.

Only in Bombay was there a conscious working class reaction as one of the city's six seats was won by the maverick union leader Datta Samant. He was elected on the votes of textile workers, even though he had led them to a terrible defeat with the loss of 65,000 jobs in the 18 month strike of 1982-83. Samant has set up an organisation called the Workers' Front, which intends to fight the local elections later this year.

Although very militant when it comes to wage struggles, Samant is an opportunist and outright reformist. The significance of his victory is that it shows that many workers in Bombay, the most important industrial centre, still want to fight on class lines.

Left opportunities

This is crucial given the growth of communalism over the past five years. The working class is facing a number of attacks—for the past year the coal industry has been under a MacGregor-type attack from the new coal industry boss, while dozens of textile mills have been closed or replaced by production from power looms employing a few people in workshops on a fifth of the factory wages. The Indian ruling class has the same problem as any other at the present time—profitability can only be secured by lowering the wage rate.

The working class has not been decisively defeated. Some parts of industry are expanding and workers there have the confidence to fight.

The problem for the left is that almost all the groups to the left of the CPI(M) are still dominated by Maoist ideas and do not recognise the central role of the working class in transforming society. Despite much rhetoric about the 'Leading role of the working class', when it comes down to it they all look to a class alliance to make the revolution.

This means that in practice they end up trailing reformists like Samant at the best, or very nasty ruling class politicians like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale at worst.

Samant at this moment represents the workers' will to fight but has no answer to the constant problems that workers' face—even day-to-day ones like what to do with productivity deals. A revolutionary organisation does just that sort of thing and given the fight that's still left in the working class in Bombay and other centres it is possible to build a small revolutioary organisation.

Rajiv has no magic solution to the crisis and in eighteen months the ruling class factions in the Congress (I) will be at each other's throats again. The communalists will certainly be trying to build themselves in such a situation of ruling class crisis and the revolutionaries need to build an organisation in the working class to meet this threat. The problem is that the odds at the moment are against it. ■

Barry Pavier

Neves 'new democracy'

THE election of Tancredo Neves as President of Brazil marks the official end of nearly 21 years of military rule. He will assume office on 15 March as the candidate of the opposition, having triumphed over the government candidate, Paulo Maluf, by the margin of 480 to 180 votes in the electoral college made up of those elected in the 1982 general election. Neves announced:

> 'The whole of my economic policy will be subordinated to the social duty of a return to growth and a creation of jobs...I have come to bring about change. Real, effective, courageous and irreversible change... The national reconstruction implies the return of the working class to political life. Together, we can make this country into a great nation.'

If you think this is almost too good to be true, you would be right. Far from being the candidate of the opposition, the new President of Brazil received the backing of the entire military command, the bankers, the IMF, the leading ministers of the former military regime and even ex-President Geisel, one of the key figures of the years of torture and repression. In 1979 he was the founder of the Popular Party, a front organisation for dissatisfied members of the military regime, who wanted an alternative to the official ruling party, the Social Democrats (PDS).

For the men who really rule Brazil, Neves was the obvious candidate. His ability to deliver the main opposition umbrella group, the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) guaranteed the prospect of a peaceful transition.

Geisel supported Neves

Once Neves had offered sufficient promises that there would be no attempts at bringing the military to book for the crimes of the dictatorship, the way became clear for a large group of key government backers from the North East of Brazil to apparently change sides.

The governors of states such as Bahia and Pernambuco, notorious for a combination of official patronage and intimidation of opponents, suddenly proclaimed themselves on the side of democracy. Neves' bandwagon became irresistible. Maluf, whose name is a byword for corruption in Brazil, was always unpopular with the bankers and the IMF for his right-wing populism and general unreliability. He was cast into the wilderness. The ruling party split, and Neves, the 'conciliator' was given the blessing of all those people who really matter in Brazil, as well as the uninhibited support of most of the left, gathered under the umbrella of the PMDB.

There was one exception. The Workers' Party (PT)—which is itself an umbrella group, including all sorts of elements of the Christian Left, communists, and Trotskyist fragments—took a decision to refrain from backing Neves. The pressure to support him was enormous (three PT congressmen did so anyway) and the party even held a referendum (with a secret ballot) to resolve the issue.

The reasons for abstention were clear. First, the electoral college was a device to stave off direct popular elections until 1987. The system prevented any attempt to even put demands on a presidential candidate. Secondly, it became steadily more obvious that Neves was in fact one of two ruling class candidates—and eventually the favoured one. Despite the rhetoric of his election speeches, the Neves policy will rest primarily on agreeing a form of social contract with the right wing, state-sponsored unions. Whatever this means in the short term, in the long run it can only mean an attack on the wages and conditions of the best organised sectors of the Brazilian working class.

Economic Crisis

There has been a drastic decline in living standards since the 1982 elections. Real wages have been cut by 15 percent. Unemployment—the official figure—rose by 224 percent in 1984. The foreign debt has risen to around $100 billion. Some $12 billion of interest payments fall due this year, roughly equal to Brazil's trade surplus.

But the ruling class has weathered its problems quite well. It has avoided huge upheavals by a combination of 'legal' and illegal repression, ranging from the sequestration of militant unions in Sao Paulo to the murder of strikers and peasant organisers by the police.

At the same time the government made occasional concessions on the wages front, allowing the right wing union leaders to hold onto their supporters, at a time when an opposition movement might have seized control.

This happened in the mid-1970s when a rank and file movement led by Lula (now president of the Workers' Party) won control of the key engineering union in the main industrial suburbs of Sao Paulo, and subsequently in parts of the oil industry and elsewhere.

This movement, which still exists, presents the ruling class with a real dilemma. It cannot be simply ignored. Physical repression is not on the cards. The independent unions have their strongest bases in the key international firms—Volkswagen, Ford, Mercedes, Saab-Scania etc—which are generally willing to make concessions on pay and trade union organisation, because Brazilian wages are still fantastically low by international standards and because productivity is very high.

Inevitably these concessions became targets for workers in other firms—lending greater credibility to independent union organisation and militancy.

However, the problems now posed for socialists in Brazil are even more serious.

Workers Expectations

The PT, and by extension the most militant part of the working class, might easily be isolated. The approach adopted by Neves and PMDB will undoubtedly be to make concessions and do deals with the established labour leaders who still dominate most of the trade union movement. And up till now, Lula and his co-thinkers on the left have always either abstained from struggle within the right wing unions or shown themselves vulnerable to appeals for trade union unity from the top down.

Workers' expectations of Neves are certain to be high. It is equally likely that the new regime will look to some obvious social reforms—for example, housing projects—which will both provide social reforms and improve the quality of life for some. In the meantime, a wage/price pact modelled on the Spanish version of the social contract, the Moncloa Pact, is almost certainly being drawn up even now.

This will present those in the PT—and the large number of rank and file militants outside it—with all the problems of putting clear demands on the Neves government and trying to get its working class supporters to take action to secure such demands.

The potential base for such united front work certainly exists. In the 1982 elections, the PT secured 1,144,000 votes in the state of Sao Paulo, compared to the PMDB's 5,030,000—and in Sao Paulo itself 569,000 compared to the PMDB's 1,929,000. The difficulties are first, the PT is not a cohesive force (let alone a disciplined party) and, secondly, that there is a division between the militant syndicalist approach of the PT-influenced unions and the electoral and propagandist approach of the PT itself.■

Dave Beecham

Solidarity kept alive

THE TRIAL in Torun of four secret policemen charged with the brutal killing of rebel priest Father Popieluszko has highlighted the class divisions in Poland.

Poland's ruling bureaucrats are split into two main factions. The dominant ruling group under General Jaruzelski believe that greater economic links with the West will alleviate the crisis at home. While they squeeze workers for more productivity they hope to channel resistance into harmless official institutions. The traditionalist hardliners are for tougher repression at home and more reliance on ties with the Eastern Bloc countries.

The trial itself has received huge publicity inside Poland. Extensive television reports are shown daily. The aim is to keep the 'death squaddists' in the police apparatus in check and to show workers that Jaruzelski is trying to get rid of the 'rotten apples'.

The harsh economic fact of life the bureaucrats face is the massive international debt. In the middle of January the 17 Western creditor governments agreed to reschedule Poland's debts for 1982-84. Some estimates say this will add $10 billion to the current debt to Western banks of $28 billion.

At the same time Jaruzelski has achieved his ambition of joining the IMF. By next year he will be able to start borrowing from the fund. Already teams of IMF advisers are flying in. Doubtless they will want to put an end to the state of affairs where incomes are currently rising by 24 percent and prices by 16.5 percent (on official estimates).

The murder of Popieluszko has caused a hiccup in relations with the Church. Captain Piotrowski, the most senior of the secret police on trial was in charge of monitoring the activities of radical priests.

State and church

The regime generally has had an improved relationship with the Church hierarchy and has allowed the building of new churches. Rightly it sees the Church as a safety valve for workers' anger. What drove some senior bureaucrat to order Popieluszko's murder was the fact that some priests are preaching sermons which encourage resistance.

Here we should be clear about our attitude to the Church in Poland. Many socialists in Britain believe that the close connection between the Catholicism of Polish workers and their resistance makes that resistance somehow anti-socialist.

The churches allow workers to get together in huge numbers. Radical priests like Father Jankowski of Gdansk regularly address thousands of workers. The mood of resistance encouraged by their sermons can only help workers to organise. What's important isn't the particular religion the workers believe in but the very act of meeting together under otherwise illegal conditions. If the SWP were in Poland we would have to instruct our members to go to church once a week.

There has been no mass strike wave since Solidarity was forced underground in December 1981. It is difficult to get an idea of the frequency of strikes. There are reports of short economic strikes which are settled quickly one way or the other at a local level. Political strikes still occur like the fifteen minute stoppage over Popieluszko's murder by Polmo workers in Krosno last October. Sometimes the police intervene directly. At the PaFaWag plant in Wroclaw, which produces railway carriages, ten workers were dismissed last September. They were reinstated after a strike but sacked again after the police had paid visits to both management and workers.

Solidarity has been kept alive by a core of thousands of militants. They organise on the basis of two types of activity—'self-help' and the production of propaganda.

For example, in the giant Nowa Huta steel plant near Krakow which employs 30,000 workers, the Solidarity underground paper *Tygodnik Mazowsze* stated last year that between 4,000 and 4,500 workers were paying into a clandestine social aid fund.

Collection cards and stamps were organised. Anonymous and group membership was introduced for those who were worried about the illegality. Solidarity papers were read by workers either individually in secret, or in groups openly, depending on the foreman.

Solidarity radio stations broadcast sporadically from various towns. They often use a television frequency. People open their windows and encourage their neighbours to turn on the telly.

Inter-factory committees still exist. These are really meetings between the activists from different plants. For instance one was set up last year for the northern ports of Gdansk, Gdynia, Szczecin and Swinoujscie. It aims to meet every three months. It was the Warsaw inter-factory committee MRKS that sent an open letter to Arthur Scargill last summer asking for his recognition of Solidarity and supporting the British miners strike. Similarly the radio station *We Will Win* broadcast fraternal greetings and a message of solidarity last June from the Underground Provisional Co-ordinating Committee of Solidarity. This is in contrast to the Polish government which has been supplying Britain with coal throughout the strike.

Apart from Lech Walesa the figureheads of the movement are the TKK (Provisional Co-ordinating Committee) which issues periodic calls for action and statements in the press and radio. The leaders from KOR (Committee for Workers Defence) and Solidarity such as Jacek Kuron and Andrzej Gwiazda, who were amnestied last July, are still active in organising resistance.

Puppet unions

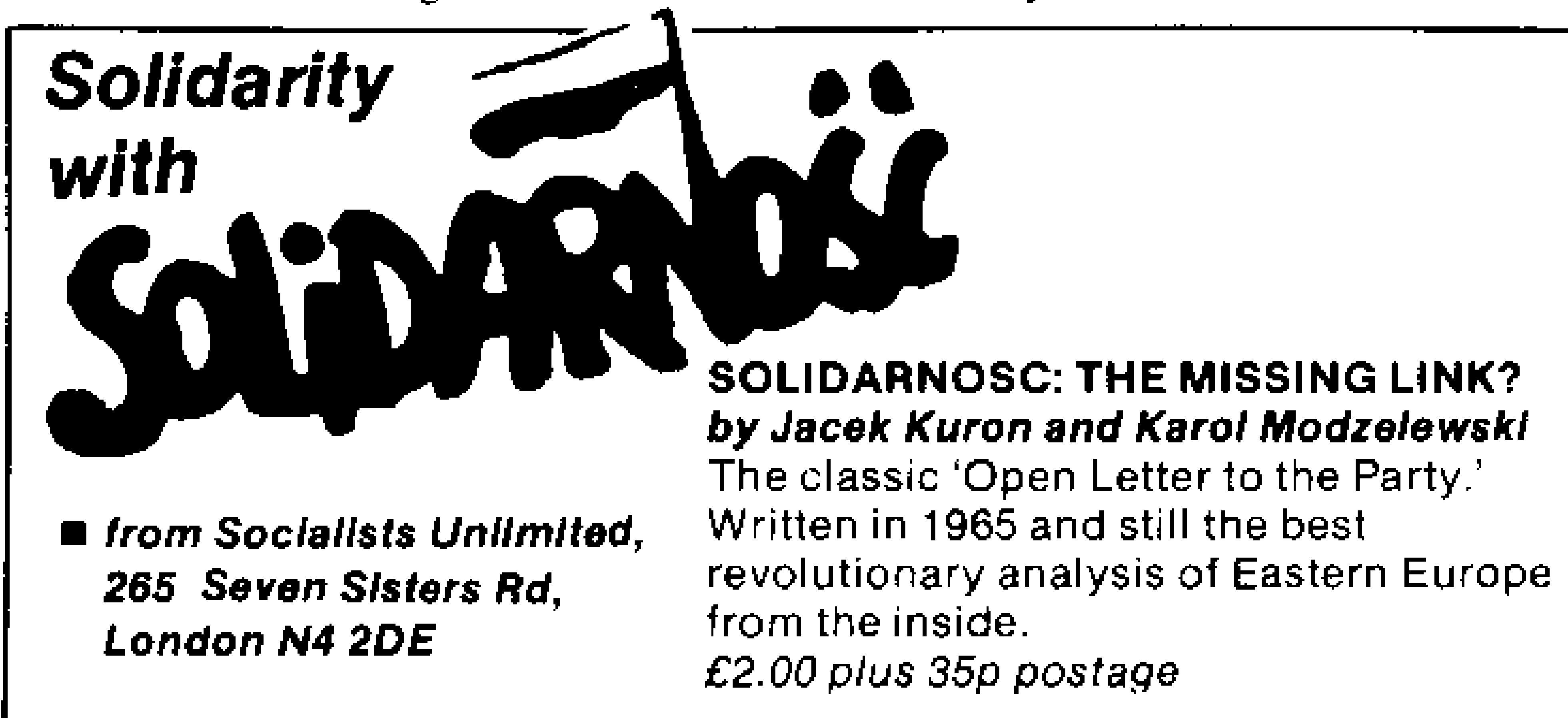
As a counterforce to Solidarity the state set up the ZOZs (factory level unions) two years ago. They are the old official unions of pre-Solidarity days under another name. The government claims 4 million members (out of a total workforce of 12 million).

Whatever the true figure it must be pretty high since all kinds of benefits such as nursery places and holiday provisions accrue to members. Solidarity is officially opposed to these unions. But sometimes, like in Szczecin for example, militants have been active in the ZOZs—quite correctly, since the tactic gives the opportunity to address workers and focus grievances. This tactic needs to be encouraged especially since the ZOZs are supposed to be allowed to negotiate wages and conditions at the end of the year.

Politically only tiny handfuls of people are familiar with revolutionary politics. The statements of leading Solidarity thinkers are characterised by an intellectual dead end but an inexhaustible optimism of the will. Gwiazda said last year that in the 16 months of Solidarity's legal existence he continually stressed the need for independent decentralised workers' organisation since he knew that the regime could not tolerate Solidarity for long. No hint of the possibility of a revolutionary minority leading their workmates to advance beyond the system.

But the regime's insoluble problem is its complete lack of a social base beyond the police and the upper reaches of the bureaucracy. This explains why a Stalinist trained soldier like Jaruzelski can seem liberal to Western pundits. The only solution from their point of view would be a significant economic revival. The stagnation of world capitalism will not allow that to happen. ■

Andy Zebrowski



THE Sun

Scabs, sex and success

RUPERT Murdoch's *Sun* presents a considerable problem for socialists. On the one hand it is viciously anti-trade union, overtly sexist and often racist and yet at the same time it is read by more blacks, more women and more trade union members than any other daily paper. How does it accomplish this conjuring trick?

When socialists look at the *Sun* we almost invariably concentrate our attention on the paper's political commentary, but this in fact misunderstands the way that it works. It is not the *Sun's* vicious Tory populism that attracts its readers. Rather it is the paper's particular brand of escapism, its distinctive view of the world that attracts them and then makes them available as an audience for the paper's offensive against the trade unions and the left.

While the most vicious propaganda has been spewed out throughout the miners' strike, for most of the time the paper has been dominated by 'human interest' stories and sport. It has headlined the theft of Ronnie Kray's wedding suit, the social life of Samantha Fox, the Page 3 Girl of the Year, the marriage of Coronation Street's Julie Goodyear to a millionaire, the Crossroads secrets of Ronnie Allen and Sue Lloyd and even the attempt of a drunken VIP 'to bed' Thatcher.

It is this journalism that pulls in the readers, and the paper's political comments are kept subordinate to it in terms of space and also in terms of the way they are staged. This makes them all the more effective and all the more damaging.

Fun, money, sex

The *Sun* does not report the real world at all. Unemployment, poverty, cuts in education and the health service, racism, women's oppression, mass starvation in Africa, the nuclear arms race are all excluded from its pages. Instead, day after day, the *Sun* presents its distinctive view of the world, a view that completely suppresses the harsh, bleak reality of Thatcher's Britain.

As far as the *Sun* is concerned, Britain under the Tories is a sizzling place of fun, money, glamour, scandal, success, optimism, opportunity and of course, sex. The class nature of society is made invisible and instead we have displayed before us an escapist spectacle of the rich and famous at play.

You too can join their ranks by either sheer luck (*Sun* bingo winners) talent (footballers, snooker players and rock stars) or physical attributes (Page 3 girls). The only time for example, that the *Sun* has had a good word for a striking miner was when Glyn Deere of Askern colliery won £128,000 on the pools. His decision to continue striking and to carry on picketing ('If I left the picket line now I'd feel like a scab') was completely swallowed up by the way that his pools win was used as a vindication of Thatcher's Britain: even striking miners can prosper in this land of opportunity, was the message!

The *Sun*'s world is a world of opportunity and it is up to the individual to make the best of it. Collective endeavour and solidarity, indeed even the most basic elements of social conscience are abolished in favour of the possessive individual who finds fulfilment by always putting No 1 first.

The view lends itself ideally to the task of elevating the scab into a modern folk hero which is probably the *Sun*'s most damaging blow against the working class. Solidarity with your workmates becomes a crime, while scabbing becomes a heroic virtue. Instead of the scab skulking ashamed and despised in the shadows along with the other vermin, he can now step out into the full glare of the *Sun* as a bold champion of individual freedom, of the right to betray your workmates for your own advantage.

There is no actual political debate in the paper. Instead, the *Sun* champions its mythical Britain of promise and opportunity and attacks the trade unions and the left for being its enemies, in Thatcher's words, 'the enemy within'. Britain is a wonderful place and these people want to ruin it. If only the enemy within could be smashed then everything would be alright.

Arthur Scargill and the miners, Benn, Heffer and the Labour Left, the rail unions, teachers, the SWP, even the inoffensive Neil Kinnock are all subjected to campaigns of lies, innuendoes, smears and abuse for threatening to bring down this wonderful nation of ours. Thatcher's role in this pseudo-populist melodrama is to appear as Britain's defender.

The sustained viciousness of the *Sun*'s campaign against the trade unions and the left has to be seen to be believed. Occasionally picking up the paper gives something of its flavour, but only by subjecting yourself to it for a prolonged period can you really appreciate how savage, how vindictive and how cumulative its daily discharge of poison really is.

Throughout the miners' strike the *Sun* has personalised the dispute in an effort to make Arthur Scargill Public Enemy No 1. No effort has been spared to blacken him and to whip up hatred of him. He is often likened to Hitler and his every move, his every word is twisted and turned against him. Scargill's admirable letter to the father of Christopher Hyman, a young imprisoned miner, praising his son as a hero and promising that there will be no settlement without an amnesty for men sacked by the NCB becomes 'SCARGILL'S SHOCK LETTER' that 'proves he backs the men of violence'. The *Sun*'s reporters are like perverted alchemists busy turning gold into lead.

If Scargill helped on old lady across the road, the *Sun* headline would be 'SCARGILL HOLDS UP THE TRAFFIC' and he would be castigated for intimidating motorists. On one occasion, the *Sun*, of all papers, had the nerve to print an editorial attacking Scargill for his spelling!

Class war

The first signs that the strike was in danger brought the *Sun* out in its full splendour with triumphant headlines of 'MAGGIE HAS SCARGILL BY THE THROAT' and 'MAGGIE MOVES IN FOR THE KILL'. Where a Labour paper like the *Mirror* preaches class collaboration, the *Sun* preaches class war. There is no place in the *Sun* for recognition of the tremendous heroic struggle waged by the miners against the NCB, the police, the courts and the media, enduring immense suffering and hardship to save jobs. Instead the miners must be smashed as a 'fearful example', whatever the cost, with the *Sun* acting as cheerleader. 'We should thank the Lord and take the victory as the beginning of a new dawn—no longer under the yoke of trade union tyranny', editorialised the *Sun* positively drooling at the prospect of a Thatcher victory.

In the worst traditions of yellow scab journalism, an intrepid *Sun* reporter, Richard Ellis even claimed to have infiltrated the SWP for 'five terrifying weeks'. In a style obviously borrowed from boys' adventure comics he tried to turn the considerable efforts of our party to assist the miners in their struggle into yet another stick to beat them with. Once again gold is turned into lead.

What are the implications of the *Sun*'s continued success for the class struggle? The paper pedals a fantasy view of Britain from which it then makes its attacks on the left. Its success is a particularly unsavoury consequence of demoralisation.

In this sense, the *Sun* is a jackal newspaper. Like the jackal it is only really dangerous when its victim is already wounded and weakened; restore the victim's strength and vitality and the jackal soon slinks away like the cur that it is. Let's hope that day won't be too long in coming ■

John Newsinger

The Left's dilemma

Sections of the Labour left have been involved in a process of theoretical clarification. Here, *Gareth Jenkins* looks at some recent writings that have been published by major figures on Labour's leftwing.

The more perceptive on the Labour left have recognised for some time that the disastrous collapse of the Labour vote in the 1983 General Election calls for some fundamental rethinking about socialist politics.

The sombre recognition that all is not well on the left is reflected in two books: one, a series of articles by different contributors, entitled *The Future of the Left* and edited by James Curran, (founder-editor of *New Socialist*); the other, two long interviews with Ken Livingstone by Tariq Ali, who himself provides a lengthy introduction.

What nearly all the writers acknowledge is that the Labour Party was not simply knocked off course as the result of exceptional circumstances (such as the Falklands War, the hostility of the media or the ferocity of internal debate). At the back of their minds is the fear that the Labour Party may never again command sufficient support to form a government on its own. Socialism (as they understand it) may therefore disappear from the agenda for power.

But because they see themselves committed to socialist change, they are at pains to resist the obvious right-wing conclusions that flow from this fear—that the party will either have to move to the centre, by dropping any wild left-wing talk, or have to enter a coalition with the Alliance parties. This second conclusion has been pushed by Eurocommunists (who even envisage a coalition including Heathite Tories) and given intellectual credibility by the myth of the 'disappearing working class', an idea largely associated with the CP historian, Eric Hobsbawm.

Much of what is good in Curran's book is the demolition job done on the Hobsbawm thesis by such contributors as Richard Hyman and John Westergaard.

It is obviously the case that as the requirements of capitalism alter, so too does the occupational structure of the working class. A massive expansion in white collar employment—local government, welfare agencies, technology—is one such consequence, though the effect on the social composition of the working class should not be exaggerated (Westergaard points out that the proportion of manual workers among 'economically active' men remained constant at 63% between 1971 and 1981).

It does not follow, however, that these new white collar employees necessarily cease to be as working class in their conditions or expectations as their manual counterparts. Westergaard suggests the distinction is misleading and points out that most white collar jobs are just as routine and subject to management control as blue collar jobs. For the vast majority they are not a route to middle class status.

Benn: is a 'bold socialist programme' enough?

Despite the fact that some white collar jobs involve the same kind of power over other wage earners as middle management has in industry, *in principle* there is no reason why a typist in a borough housing department should identify with the Director of Housing (just because both happen to be in NALGO), anymore than an assembly line worker in a car factory should identify with his personnel manager.

In any case, the shift in occupational composition is a long standing trend and was *more* dramatic in the 60s than in the 70s. If it is the cause of the unpopularity of socialist politics, then it becomes impossible to explain why Labour held office longer in the 60s than in the 70s.

So the decline in support for Labour cannot be ascribed to the idea that its traditional ideology is now a distinctly minority affair. That presupposes some Golden Age (the '45 to '51 government) in which a homogenous working class voted Labour as a whole. In fact, as Gareth Stedman Jones points out, one third of the working class has *never* voted Labour; and in any case the reasons for voting Labour have no intrinsic connection with socialist ideas.

So there is no reason for toning down socialist politics. But the minority appeal of socialist ideas, even in their Labour Party form, must still be faced. It cannot be wished away on the highly unrealistic assumption (sometimes peddled by Benn and the entrist left) that disillusionment with Labour's past record means workers are turning in massive numbers to radical alternatives—or would do if only a 'bold socialist programme' were offered them.

This realism means that occasionally some of the contributors get close to the handle of the solution. For example, like ourselves, they understand that the basis of the Tory victory was in the failure of the Wilson and Callaghan governments to deliver any significant reforms, coupled with their attacks on workers' living standards, and culminating in Denis Healey's adoption of monetarist policies and the Labour leaders' denunciation of the health workers during the 'winter of discontent' of 1978/9.

Perhaps more crucially, some contributors, notably Hyman, recognise that disillusion with Labour was also a consequence of the growing gap between union leaderships and the rank and file, a process accelerated by the spread of bureaucratically imposed closed shop agreements in the 70s.

That element is overstated; the decay of shop steward organisation, that followed on from the greater part played by officials in negotiating and implementing settlements, is more important. But either way, the gap allowed Thatcher to appeal over the heads of trade union leaders and exploit the disaffection of many ordinary members.

This explanation also effectively disposes of

the myth that Thatcherism is some fundamentally new type of 'popular' authoritarianism, demanding a new, broad alliance (Hobsbawm's argument). As Anthony Barnett emphasises in a rumbustious piece, Thatcher is strong because of the weaknesses on our side. A return to the kind of consensus politics which bred those weaknesses is therefore no answer.

But having got close to the handle of the solution, the Labour left fails to grasp it. If rebuilding rank and file confidence is essential, then what are the Labour left's proposals? It is at this point that one is struck at the yawning gap between the best of their analysis and the meagreness of what they propose. Quite often the solution for the Labour Party reads like a school report — must try harder in future — or is couched in terms of vague appeals for a new socialist vision.

Nevertheless, there *are* specific proposals on which the Labour left pin their hopes, and which require examining. The first is the idea of putting together a new coalition as an alternative both to traditional Labourism and to Hobsbawmism.

The argument goes like this. The Labour Party, as Stedman Jones puts it, is one, 'whose appeal was pitched to white male organised workers'. Now, however, new needs have arisen: 'democratic questions', in the words of Stuart Hall, 'which affect us as citizens rather than class subjects, issues of personal and sexual politics which influence the structures of our everyday life.' In consequence, a new social alliance—appealing to the women's movement, blacks, gays, environmentalists, the anti-nuclear movement, the unemployed, and so on—must be put together. In that way a new majority for Labour can be forged.

Now, while it is true that socialists ignore these questions at their peril, it is not true that all these elements necessarily pull in the same direction. Stuart Hall sees the difficulty when he asks:

> 'Could we develop such a programme on the basis of the current division between waged and unwaged? Or without addressing the contradiction between the defence of the working conditions of the employed and the need of the unemployed for jobs? Could we retain the leap-frogging between high and low-paid workers on which the whole economistic trade union strategy of the 1960s and 1970s depended, or attempt to construct a political alliance between the two extremes without disturbing the divisions between black and white or men and women?'

Divisions within the working class are of course a very real obstacle. But what is Stuart Hall implying, if not openly stating? It is, surely, that those who have some power to alter their conditions collectively, because they are organised at the point of production, should make concessions to those who haven't. It is a conviction that ties in with the Labour left's pervasive (if rarely articulated) assumption about trade unions.

And that is that there is something wrong with trade union *struggle* because trade unions are defensive, sectional organisations geared to getting the best out of capitalism rather than overthrowing it.

Now, there is a grain of truth in all this: militancy isn't automatically linked to a socialist perspective (we have all come across the 'good' shop steward who is a racist). But what the Labour left often fail to see is that, while socialist consciousness does not arise spontaneously out of trade union struggle, unless there *is* struggle (even very sectional struggle) socialist ideas stand little chance of wide acceptance.

To come back, then, to Stuart Hall's question. While it is true that 'economistic' struggle in defence of 'privilege' (a dubious concept) will not guarantee that other—very necessary—broader questions of social need are taken up, there is absolutely no way in which they will be merely by socialists asking the 'privileged' to 'moderate' the defence of their sectional interests. All that does is increase disillusion with socialist ideas.

This is precisely what we see when left-wing councillors attack town hall unions as 'anti-socialist', when those unions are forced to fight them and the effects of Tory cuts in local government expenditure because the councillors won't resist such cuts.

The key to putting together the coalition Hall talks about is whether the struggle of those whose power strikes at the heart of capitalism (the extraction of surplus profit) opens up the possibility of more general struggle by all those oppressed by the bourgeois order. We should hardly need reminding that it was the crucial activity of 'privileged' male engineers in St Petersburg which made the Bolshevik revolution possible, and that it was the Bolshevik revolution which made the anti-war struggle successful as well as ensuring that women could realise many of their demands.

The crucial failure of the Labour left in this respect is that, while they are not altogether hostile to struggle at the point of production, they are convinced that another superior way—which supersedes that kind of struggle—is open for the advance of socialist demands. And that is via state institutions, at national and local level. Which brings us to the second concern of the Labour left's thinking: how can these institutions be made to conform to socialist principles?

They take for granted the hostility of the state machine. Experience has shown them something which traditional Labourism preferred to ignore: that being 'in power' confers no *power* to implement even the most modest of demands, least of all when the system is in deep crisis.

They have also learnt something else: that state ownership of industry is not perceived by the mass of ordinary people as any real gain in the quality of life, and that to call it socialism is to bring the term into disrepute (something Thatcher has once again very effectively exploited).

That undoubtedly is an advance on the traditional Labour left view, which simply assumed that utopia would follow from the nationalisation of the means of production. But

Livingstone: soft on Kinnock?

what then follows? Unfortunately, very little.

For the Labour left are extremely reluctant to give up the view that the existing state machine can be used for socialist advance. In Curran's book there are some tortuous and highly obscure attempts to define the state in such a way as to avoid two conclusions. The first is the revolutionary conclusion that the bourgeois state must be smashed and replaced by a workers' state. The second is the reformist conclusion, which they know has proved to be a failure. The first they find crude, and about the second they have a guilty conscience.

But as to what the state is, we are left none the wiser. Nor is it clear whether the practical consequences of their arguments add up to a great deal. So, for example, Held and Keane tell us that we need the 'protective, redistributive and conflict-mediating functions of the state'; at the same time, 'a multiplicity of organisations—whether self-managed enterprises, housing co-operatives, refuges for battered women, independent communications media or health centres—must increase their powers to keep their political 'representatives' under control.'

Tariq Ali: building up the left

How the state can be compelled to be protective or conflict-mediating (socialist policemen?) is not spelled out. Nor is there any indication of how the very desirable 'multiplicity of organisations' can constitute an effective challenge to what capitalism forces the vast majority to put up with: the boss, inadequate council or private housing, the violence of daily life, the monopoly of information and the bureaucratic nature of welfare.

All we are offered is the forlorn hope of 'establishing the sovereignty of Parliament over the state'—which is precisely what other Labour lefts recognise is where every Labour government has come unstuck.

If the state at national level seems a bit remote, then the use of the local state seems to offer new vistas of socialist advance. Massey, Segal and Wainwright attempt to persuade us of this by referring to the experience of left-led Labour authorities. So too does Ken Livingstone in his interviews with Tariq Ali.

With the best will in the world, it has to be said that such experiments as decentralisation of council services, the setting up of ethnic monitoring, women's, and police committees, and the creation of economic policy units, have done virtually nothing to improve the lot of women or blacks, or to halt the increase in unemployment.

Persuading workers to set up co-operatives based on alternative plans, instead of fighting to defend jobs, has often merely delayed redundancies and in the process demoralised the workforce.

According to Tariq Ali, Livingstone is 'the most gifted representative of the new Labour left.' That is probably true. But putting aside all the limitations of using the local state we have just discussed, and the ambiguous attitude that occasionally peeps out when Livingstone is discussing white collar workers, there is one factor that Ali overlooks — and that is Livingstone's softness towards Kinnock.

What is perhaps more astonishing is Ali's own blindness to Livingstone on this. But then Ali is guilty of making much more of the Labour left current around Benn and Livingstone than his often correct analysis of the general situation warrants. One is reminded of how the Fourth International used to build up figures like Mao or Fidel into unconscious marxists. Ali seems to be repeating the same tactic with Livingstone.

Tariq Ali is, of course, in a rather odd position. Technically he's not even a member of the Labour left—the party leadership won't let him in. That in itself speaks volumes about who's really calling the shots inside the Labour Party.

The ambivalence of the Labour left towards the state should not really surprise us. Nor should Livingstone's softness towards Kinnock. Since working class struggle is not of the *essence*, but only an extra-parliamentary activity designed to put pressure where it really counts, you will find yourself forced sooner or later to sacrifice it in order not to interrupt the process of harnessing 'public opinion'.

At the end of the day, the problem lies in the very nature of the Labour Party itself. If the overriding aim—whatever the subsidiary ones—is to get a majority in Parliament, you are bound to see the existing state machine as your major field of operation. And as the pressure mounts to maximise electoral support, you will also be forced to soften your criticism of the centre and even the right.

The tragedy of the Labour left is that however far it wanders away from traditional Labourism to explore radical alternatives (often, as at present, under the impact of working class struggle), it is tied through its inability to sever its links with the Labour Party and bound to be tugged back into line. If working class struggle ebbs, the old parliamentary priorities will reassert themselves as the only practical way forward. The speed of return will be uneven. But the fact that even the hardest of the hard left, like Livingstone, is unwilling to face up to the reality of Kinnock, tells us a lot.

At the end of his introduction, Tariq Ali says: 'Only an unredeemable sectarian could argue that the emergence of this left is a roadblock on the path to socialism.' Sadly, one has to disagree. Of course revolutionaries welcome any break inside the Labour Party with the dreadful consensus policies of the centre and right, and the revival of serious discussion about socialism.

But in the final analysis the idea that radical change can come through parliament, and through the existing state institutions which the Labour Party is wedded to, is a barrier to socialist advance. For that you need something which appears more remote but which is in effect the only practical way forward: an independent revolutionary party.

The Future of the Left,
Ed James Curran
Blackwell, £4.95

Who's Afraid of Margaret Thatcher?
Tariq Ali and Ken Livingstone
Verso, £2.95

Women workers

Victims of the class struggle?

Lindsey German takes a critical look at some arguments about women and socialism which have gained popularity in recent years.

Current arguments inside and around the Communist Party show little sign of abating. Central to those arguments is the role of the working class. The Eurocommunist wing has adopted the mantle of the historian Eric Hobsbawm, who has argued that the traditional working class is no longer a powerful force. Alliances therefore have to be formed with other social forces outside of the working class, and far beyond the ranks of its traditional party, the Labour Party.

Apart from Hobsbawm, one of the most influential proponents of the Eurocommunist argument is the journalist Beatrix Campbell. She attempts to structure a theory which draws from Hobsbawm in its rejection of working class struggle, but which in particular is a massive attack on working class men (especially those in trade unions).

She argues that there has been a change in the balance of forces both inside and outside the working class movement. In particular she uses the experience of the women's movement as an instrument with which to beat the unions, and the female half of the working class as a prop to back up her arguments.

She sees the traditional working class movement not only as a movement in decline, but one which jealously guards its power and privilege over the rest of us in 'the broad socialist movement'. Not only must it be consigned to a position of much less importance, it actually has to be fought. Beatrix Campbell wants to replace it by developing a series of alliances which subjugate traditional industrial workers (who she believes are all white and male) into their rightful place.

These alliances would involve the different movements—women, peace, gays, the movement around the GLC, and other political parties as well. What she spells out is a move away from the Labour Party, not to the left, but towards the right—to the SDP, the Liberals and the anti-Thatcher Tories. This is quite clear in her debate with Ken Livingstone, published in the December *Marxism Today*, when she rejects the 'deeply sectarian project' of wanting to build 'a broad democratic alliance with at its heart the industrial working class, meaning its industrial core (meaning men).'

Instead she favours:

> 'Alliances [which] are political processes which transform the constituent parts in their encounter with each other. They are political dialogues in which the constituent parts become both collective agents for change and also the subjects of change.'

What all the movements who would constitute these alliances have in common is:

> '...that they have been excluded from the means of organisation, the machinery of politics, by the men's movement which has hi-jacked the labour movement. Our problem is that capital has seized the means of production and the men's movement has seized the means of organisation.'

Nowhere is this more true, argues Beatrix Campbell, than in the case of women. And not only have they been excluded from *organisation* by men. Men—and working class men in particular, because they draw most of her fire—are to blame for women's inferior position throughout the structures and institutions of capitalist society.

Women's inequality today, she says, stems from an alliance between capital and patriarchy which has given men material advantages over women dating back to the beginning of the working class movement. This has led to the continued domination of men over women. Male privileges are enshrined in the system. At the centre of this privilege is the family wage. Men' oppose equal pay for women because it undermines the family wage and so threatens their privilege.

At the heart of her arguments lie a set of assumptions that working class men have nothing to gain and a lot to lose from any advances in women's position, let alone women's liberation. Consequently they will resist any improvements in women's lives.

It is certainly true that the family today is at the heart of women's oppression. But it developed not as a conspiracy to maintain a bastion of male chauvinism, but because of the real threat to the working class family in the early decades of the 19th century.

Beatrix Campbell: men must give up their privilege

Capitalism destroyed the old feudal family.

Eric Hobsbawm: turning his back on the working class?

Women were no longer dependent on their husband or father for subsistence, but could earn their own (admittedly pitiful) living on the market. Workers were pulled into the cities, into the factory system and therefore into the wages system. This entailed vast amounts of human disruption and misery—and one of its effects was the break up of the old family. Often little emerged in its place.

Workers feared that the working class family itself could disappear. In this situation, a stable family where children could be cared for properly became something that workers aspired to, as a means of bettering their living conditions and protecting future generations. The move towards what most people think of today as the traditional family coincided with a number of other things.

Firstly the mass working class movement of Chartism had been defeated. Secondly British capitalism was beginning to boom, and British capitalism itself was changing its needs to cope with this expansion. It no longer simply needed an unskilled work force which would work until it dropped, but increasingly needed workers with certain skills and knowledge which the existing working class had little opportunity to attain.

In one respect Beatrix Campbell is right. The interests of the capitalist class and the working class coincided. But men and women workers *both* perceived the change as in their interests. The idea of the 'family wage' as a means of supporting the whole family became accepted in the latter half of the 19th century.

The family wage was meant to cover the cost both of feeding and maintaining the worker, and the cost of his wife and family as well. At least that was the theory. But it was always a myth (a myth which Beatrix Campbell does nothing to dispel).

In reality probably only about ten percent of the working class—skilled workers and artisans—ever received a family wage. The mass of workers like dockers and miners earned very low wages, often on a casual basis. Their children often worked, and their wives would do all sorts of work (often in the home to fit with childcare), to supplement their income and bring it up to a genuine 'family wage'. Today the family wage is even less of a reality—families who have to rely on the man's wage alone are consistently among the poorest.

So much for the major privilege that men are supposed to receive from their 'historic compromise' with capital. Yet this is one of the central arguments put forward as evidence that men have material interest in women's oppression. It just doesn't begin to hold water.

However the argument about the family isn't just historical. If it was only a small minority who received the family wage, it was also this minority who dominated the ideas inside the working class.

This was true on a whole range of questions. They consolidated the craft unions which excluded all women and unskilled men (only challenged in the late 1880s by the new unions which were open to unskilled, immigrants and women on an equal basis). They identified with the expanding British empire, their ideas expressing themselves through nationalism, chauvinism and Orangeism. They accepted bourgeois values of morality and the family. The re-establishment of the family and the ideas which went with it, were a great setback for women.

That period to some extent shaped the working class, in the sense that the dominant ideas of the movement became those of reformism. Although these ideas took many forms they all accepted the idea that society should be transformed through its existing institutions. It is this idea which underpins the unions and the Labour Party today.

Beatrix Campbell wants to accept most of those reformist arguments, but to distance herself from the reformists on the question of women. But the failure to question women's role was not, and is not, separate from the failure to challenge the whole basis of society.

So by locating the problem of women's role in the family in the ideas of 'patriarchy'—in the ideas of men themselves, Beatrix Campbell provides a convenient cover for other reformist ideas. Because the arguments are posed as all men gaining a material benefit from all women, she saves herself from having to make any *political* distinction between different groups of men and their ideas.

Her lack of class analysis and her accomodation to reformism lead her not just to inadequate conclusions but to reactionary ones. Her determination to ditch the 'men's movement' leads her to try to ditch some of the most effective forms of trade union organisation. If men and women workers' interests are opposed then they cannot fight over the same issues or in the same way.

If women are to have more than their existing meagre share, then men will have to give up their 'privileges'.

> 'The biggest obstacle...is not finding the necessary resources, but persuading men to relinquish their privileges. Chiefly this means giving up their privilege to absent themselves from unpaid work and monopolise jobs that are skilled and higher paid. If women are to share domestic labour equally with men, then men will have to increase their time spent on unpaid work. If women are to increase the level of their earnings to the point where they match men's, then men's earnings will inevitably decline in relation to women's. If women are to occupy skilled higher paid jobs in equal numbers with men, there are bound to be fewer of those jobs available to men.'

Her solutions to the problem of male 'privilege' would bring joy to the hearts of many a TUC bureaucrat, because she assumes and relies on the passivity of women workers. She argues for a feminist incomes policy which would restrict men's wages in favour of women. She argues that women are not interested in overtime or higher wages, but predominantly in shorter hours and better conditions. And she believes that traditional forms of struggle are not appropriate to women:

> '...the kinds of jobs women do...hardly lend

themselves to the simple strategem of withdrawal of labour. In some instances, strike action saves resources for employers and alienates consumers.'

The logic of her arguments can be seen in her attitude to strikes. In 1982 she wrote a carping article on the womens page of the *Guardian* (a paper not noted for its sympathetic coverage of strikes) about the hospital workers (then in the middle of a mammoth dispute over pay) and scorning the idea that the miners would support their struggle—which they did. And in her recent book *Wigan Pier Revisited*, published embarrassingly at the beginning of the miners' strike, she argues that 'the socialist movement in Britain has been swept off its feet by the magic of masculinity, muscle and machinery. And in its star system the accolades go to the miners.' 'Miners are men's love objects.' It's hard to tell whether her attitude is more condescending to the miners or to the socialist movement.

None of the arguments about how women can improve their conditions stand up to any scrutiny either. A feminist incomes policy would have the reverse effect to the one she argues. That is for one simple reason—women don't get low wages as a result of men getting higher ones.

On the contrary, when wages in general increase in real terms, so do those of women.

And men and women workers and their wages can only be seen overall as part of the family. It is in this context that we can explain the fact that men on average work far more overtime than women. Women do not have some mystical aversion to working longer hours at work (after all they work very long hours at home). Rather the structure of their work fits in with childcare, and even if it doesn't their rates of pay are usually less than those of men. In the context of the *existing* family, it is therefore logical for the bulk of overtime to be done by the men. Most overtime is worked by married men with young children (a time when the family is notoriously at its poorest). It is a result of the fact that far from most men having a 'family wage', the basic wage of most workers doesn't anywhere near cover the cost of reproduction of the family.

Campbell's proposals amount to more of the same system which has oppressed women: reform of the unions, even though they are 'patriarchal'; giving mothers an independent income; increasing child benefit at the expense of the male wage; reducing working time so that men can help with the housework; state and employer funded childcare. To win these reforms for the majority of working class women would take the sort of political action and revolutionary change that she quite explicitly rejects. So her demands are reduced to those achievable by only a minority of upwardly mobile women. They do nothing to fundamentally alter the balance of wealth and power in capitalist society.

Beatrix Campbell argues what reformists have been arguing for decades. Far from her reforms being radical, they are notable only for their limitations. Her feminism is in the tradition of the early British feminists, who blamed the problems of working class women on working class men, and therefore never attempted to do more than patch up the system.

All the experience of women workers in the last twenty years leads towards a completely different analysis from the one she puts forward. Instead of the working class disappearing, women have become part of the working class as never before. That has changed the structure of the working class in all sorts of ways—but to dismiss women workers as without economic power, or simply hitting at consumers is quite wrong.

Far from finding totally new forms of struggle, women have begun to struggle using the power that they possess as workers—the power to withdraw their labour and so hit their employer economically. This is something Beatrix Campbell disputes:

> 'Women's trade unionism and the expansion of the public service sector demands new modes of militancy, and a critique of the cult of macho militancy which carelessly assumes that what was good for engineering toolroom workers is good for home helps, nurses and school dinner ladies.'

But many of those groups (and teachers, civil servants, clerical workers) have used the 'old modes of militancy' to great effect.

The problem is that the militancy of women over the last 15 years has come up all too often against a brick wall. Negotiation, arbitration, the patronising domination of their disputes by union officials have all at different times been barriers to taking the fight forward. Overcoming the passivity that exists means arguing that the small economic struggles of women workers can lead to much wider political struggle.

In this process do women's interests lie with men? Sometimes it certainly doesn't appear so. There are plenty of examples of male chauvinism inside the working class movement. A recent one is the Fords equal pay dispute, where union leaders used the excuse that men wouldn't back the women, in order to settle for less than could have been won. In those situations women have to fight alone—often against men.

But there are also many examples of class solidarity between the sexes: the miners' wives support, the hospital workers, some of the early equal pay strikes. There is one simple reason why: when workers are forced to fight as part of a class, against the class which exploits them, they tend to overcome the divisions among them.

The history of men and women workers bears this out. When there is an upturn in class struggle—the 1880s with the new unions, the strikes of 1910 to 1914, the late sixties and early seventies—then the needs of the class struggle do unite men and women in fighting.

Far from it being in men's interests to hold that fight back, it will be in the interests of women and men to fight. To pretend that men have some interests in holding back, or that women have to tread a different path, leads to precisely the sorts of alliances that Beatrix Campbell puts forward. And those alliances aren't about 'reforming the men's movement' as she claims. They are about a full retreat from any notion of class struggle, in favour of a particularly rotten sort of reformism.

Keep on keeping on

John Rees interviews the rock band, the Redskins, Martin Hewes, Chris Dean, Nick King.

JR: **A recent article in *Socialist Worker* argued that the band was bound to sell out as it became more successful. But the fate of many of the political bands that came out of punk was to split up rather than sell out.**

CD: The bands that started off with all the big noise politics—like the Pistols and the Clash—all the smash the system stuff, did tend to disappear or virtually disappear. But there are other people—like the Specials, the [illegible]n or Elvis Costello who, if you're looking at their politics, are more explicitly socialist and are still around.

JR: **Was your single *Keep On Keepin' On* a difficult song to write because it's a song which says there have been defeats, that there are problems in the movement and yet it's still worth fighting? Why did you write a song like that when even the best of the Clash songs were kind of Maoist sloganeering, *Sten Guns in Knightsbridge*, and all that, divorced from reality?**

CD: For me, writing that song comes out of the last three years of reading *Socialist Worker* and that means you don't come out with a song which would be flying in the face of everything you see around you, like a song which talked about 'Sten Guns in Knightsbridge'.

JR: **Would the end of the miners' strike leave you out on a limb? Your audience wouldn't make the same connections that they did during the strike and so you'd appear as just another shock-horror, the-enemy-are-your-parents, Sex Pistols type of band.**

[illegible] In that situation we are obviously going [illegible] have to go back to songs which contain more of an argument, more analysis of what's going on. Saying to people, 'there is going to be another fight, we've got to wait [illegible] it's not going to appear overnight.' [illegible] to be more of an analysis of why [illegible] have to stick at it, why people have got to wait and why people have got to prepare for the future.

The problem with the Clash was that it was never 'wait', it was always go out and do [illegible], it's all there, all you have to do is go [illegible] grab it and it's yours. Mainly be-[illegible]y never had any kind of collective experience to look to. It was always the individual experience of people—like how they picked up on the people in Nicaragua, the rebels there. But it was always a rebel thing, individual acts of terrorism or whatever was a very strong theme always running through their songs. It was only at times that they talked about things collectively but it was never in a strong sense, it was never a point that was put to the front.

CD: I think it will mean coming down to small specifics in the same way that the Party will have to. You know, you think back to Laurence Scotts and at the time you thought, 'yeah!'—but actually it was pretty miserable and depressing. But it is a very small mirror image of something that might happen or something like the miners' strike that you can't foresee. But in years like that, before the miners' strike—in the same way as the Party—you look to something which isn't fantastically awesomely, gob-stoppingly mega—like the Barking hospital workers. It'll be a similar thing with the band if the miners are beaten.

JR: **Do you find those songs more difficult to write?**

CD: Of course it's harder. Rock and roll trades on big noise and big issues and everything has got to be big. Obviously something like the miners' strike is perfect for the agit-prop element of rock'n'roll. We will have to try and home in on the little struggles. But, because you aren't writing a pamphlet on the state of the working class in 1985—beaten, demoralised or whatever—it effects what you write but it doesn't completely determine it. And that's a problem if you like. It was part of the criticism in *Socialist Worker* that rock'n'roll is out on a limb and it's very easy to slip away. Inevitably, there are all sorts of things which pull you off. They *are* there. You've got to recognise it. It's ridiculous to say they're not there, because they are. The argument is about whether you can survive all the pulls on you.

JR: **How difficult is it for you to stay in touch?**

MH: I really don't see the point in writing a song which is critical of anything unless you get the point right. You can do that if you are in the Labour Party—very easily—but not if you are a revolutionary; you've got to be right. If we're not in touch, we're not going to be able to do that. But inevitably because of the nature of the job, it still means we are going to be pulled away. It just means more work keeping in touch—making sure that you sit down and read the paper each week; making sure that you see other party members whether it's at branch level or socially; making sure you keep in touch with what the organisation is actually doing and what the state of the class is. If you don't know that, you can't make the criticism.

CD: Well, you can make it ...

MH: But it's wrong.

CD: Yeah, going in another direction altogether. It would be quite easy, mixing in certain lefty circles in rock'n'roll, to think that the miners are still steaming it, it's all the way and the rest of it. You'd come out saying the next single is going to be not just *Keep On Keepin' On* but *Here We Go!* or *Here We Come—We've arrived!* It isn't that we're fantastically clever people—anymore than anyone in the Party is—it's just that you have information; there is some dialogue and discussion with members who are miners, so that you are aware of the reality of the situation. The problem is that it makes for very depressing songs!

JR: **What are you going to do about those pulls on you? If you work at Longbridge you have no choice; you either sit at home and watch *Coronation Street* or you stand up and fight. And what helps you stand up and fight is an organisation which is geared to your situation.**

CD: It's obviously very much divorced from the situation at Longbridge. Here it's all up in the air, arguments over artistic things. No Longbridge worker has to go in and argue about the aesthetics of producing the panel of a car. If you're just knocking out rivets, then you just knock out rivets; there's not any great debate about whether it's a good rivet, will it be a successful rivet, do we have to hype this rivet?

MH: Being a rock star and a revolutionary becomes incompatible when the life of a rock star dictates that you no longer are actually involved in the activities.

JR: **In other words, you live a contradiction.**

CD: There is a bit of a parallel with Paul Foot. You are in a job which squeezes you away but all the time you are trying to scramble back to get ideas to use in that slightly divorced position. There is a criticism which says that you shouldn't do it at all; that if you are a revolutionary the place to be is in a workplace and nowhere else. Rock and roll is trivial so the Redskins are a complete waste of time.

MH: The point is: I'm a musician—it's our medium for putting across revolutionary politics, we haven't got another medium.

CD: I can bring along ten letters which all say 'tell me more about the SWP', or bring letters which say 'I've joined the SWP because of hearing you'. But it is not something that you can quantify in the same way that the branch could say 'We've recruited five people because of taking our ideas into a certain workplace or because of selling the paper or whatever. It isn't that direct.

What was that thing that Trotsky says about art being the wagon behind the army? It's really good. About the theatre groups that used to entertain the troops with agitprop art in the evenings. Trotsky was making a point about art: art follows on, it's not art that changes things but come the night time it spurs people on. I think you can do more than that, but an element of the Redskins is keeping the spirits up. A morale thing—keep your head up.

JR: **Is there a different way of dealing with political issues? For instance, the Jam's *Smithers-Jones*. It isn't a song which stands back and looks at the global balance of class forces and comments on it. It looks at an archetypal white collar worker who you follow through the day, going into work on the train and then he gets the sack and the refrain is: 'You're just like them', just like all the people you are trying to get one up on, that you are**

The Redskins—Nick, Martin and Chris

trying to get above. It looks at a political thing through the eyes of an individual—is that a way of avoiding having to make every song an analysis of the balance of class forces?

NK: That's one way of doing it.

CD: I'm not very good at it—that's the truth.

***JR:* It must be a tough thing to do.**

CD: Not necessarily, I'm just not very adept at doing it.

NK: The main thing to avoid is to keep repeating again and again: 'There's only one way to win ... solidarity, etc, etc,' It's going to wear thin single after single.

MH: Only if it doesn't bear any relation to the way things are changing. But there's only some point in putting out singles that *do* bear relation to what's happening outside. And if that is what is happening, then that's what is happening, then that's what you've got to relate to. You can interpret it in different ways, but ultimately if the fact is that people have got to try and keep fighting, have got to build some small struggle, if that's the way people are fighting, then that's what you've got to relate to.

CD: There are a million and one things which all reflect that basic thing: they are in control and we're not. That's the bottom line. Yes, if you just did songs saying that all the time it would be incredibly boring and people would just switch off. So it's a matter of finding all the manifestations and all the little examples of that and picking on the specifics as song writing material. But they all relate back to that basic thing that there's one class who've got power and one that hasn't.

***JR:* I remember Trevor Griffiths saying that one of the criticisms that was levelled at him was that anything that appeared on prime time television, broken up every 15 minutes by adverts, was seen as simply soap opera. It might be left wing soap, but, no matter what political points you try and make, the form destroyed the content. What about that? Isn't anything you put out on a 3 minute single going to get submerged? People bop to it but the ideas don't get across, end of story.**

CD: The problem you face is not that you can't make any number of points in soap opera or on records, it's just that right wing propaganda sits much more comfortably—you can take it so easy because it's what you get all the time. The problem with left wing propaganda is that it sits oddly. It sits there all right, and it's still valid, but it does sit oddly.

MH: If you're putting propaganda across, you've got to do it well, otherwise, it doesn't stand up. If you don't put your point across well it falls flat on its face, like we did on the Tube, getting a striking miner on. In the studio we got a great reaction but on the TV it looked stupid.

***JR:* To be effective, the left wing have to be far better artists.**

CD: You've got to be A1 plus whether you write, or work for TV, or whatever. There are so many battles to get your stuff out on a record, in a book, on TV.

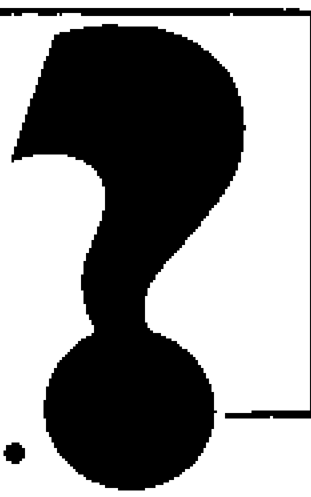
***JR:* Is there a left movement in rock at the moment, in the same way that there was with punk?**

CD: There's no great movement like there was, but the one thing that there has been is the miners' strike. That has pulled in all sorts of bands who didn't start off saying: 'We're political.' If it hadn't been for the miners' strike it would certainly have been much easier for Paul Weller to go down the path of just singing about Italian loafers. Now, because of the miners' strike, he's doing a number of benefits and written that Council Collective Song and that has switched his path quite dramatically. The manifesto for the Style Council, if there was one, never included being a naughty, radical, Bolshevik, rock'n'roll band—I think that was pretty low down on the list.

But somehow the miners' strike has pulled that aspect from out of them. It's pulled people like Bronski Beat, who, no doubt would have been quite happy to sing about being gay—which is good, but not nearly enough—it's pulled them into doing gay benefits for the miners and it's even pulled in bloody Wham! although I'm dubious about that. It's pulled in all sorts of other bands.

If you're asking is there some great left movement, then: no. But the miners' strike has artificially manufactured one for a while.

What do we mean by..



Strategy and tactics

EVEN among experienced revolutionaries the idea of 'changing the line' can leave a bad taste in the mouth. Memories of the feeble shifts and changes of the different Communist Parties to fit in with the needs of Stalin's Russia, combined with the bizarre declarations of some of the smaller revolutionary sects, have helped bury the understanding that 'changing the line' is fundamental to serious revolutionary practice.

In a famous blast in the April Theses, Lenin attacked,

> 'those old Bolsheviks who more than once have played so regrettable a role in the history of our Party by reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality.'

Every attempt by revolutionaries to come to terms with the unexpected complexity of some unforseen or only half expected development leads automatically to confused arguments and periods of readjustment. Lenin saw the history of the Bolshevik Party as a series of sharp arguments, followed by sharp changes in practice as the Bolsheviks tried to adjust to changed circumstances. Writing about the period after the defeat of the 1905 revolution, Lenin noted,

> 'Of all the defeated opposition and revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks effected the most orderly retreat, with the least loss to their army, with its core best preserved, with the least significant splits (in point of depth and incurability), with the least demoralisation, and in the best condition to resume work on the broadest scale and in the most correct and energetic manner. The Bolsheviks achieved this because they ruthlessly exposed and expelled the revolutionary phrase mongers, those who did not wish to understand that one had to retreat, that one had to know how to retreat, and that one had absolutely to learn how to work legally in the most reactionary of parliaments, in the most reactionary of trade union, co-operative and insurance societies and similar organisations.'

Strategy and tactics is about the attempts by revolutionaries to constantly reorganise themselves to face up to the changes in the class struggle. In that sense there is nothing difficult about it. The Party as understood by Lenin is involved in the day to day struggles of workers both in order to win the eventual right to lead the whole of the working class and because the ideas of workers change as a result of their experiences at work, in the union and so on.

Clearly the activity of the Party — the propaganda in its press, the immediate slogans and demands raised by the members — has to reflect the conditions and problems faced by workers and must at the same time take on, develop and challenge the ideas through which workers interpret their situation.

This is straightforward enough. So is the basic notion that workers' consciousness is profoundly affected by changes in the economy. The way in which this works is the first major complication. Trotsky recognised that there is no straightforward relationship between slumps and rising consciousness. He argued that periods of boom can increase confidence to fight, periods of depression can weaken and demoralise. But there are no rules. The opposite can be the case just as well.

Trotsky and Lenin saw the early Congresses of the Third International as a training ground in strategy and tactics. The newly formed mass Communist Parties of Europe — created from the splits of the old mass Social Democratic parties at the end of the First World War — lacked a mature leadership or cadre. Questions which Lenin thought had been resolved years before for the Bolsheviks came up again and again in new forms.

Learning to retreat

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the question of strategy and tactics didn't seem to have much importance. In a short space of time it seemed as if the old order in Europe would succumb to the first great revolutionary wave. The Kaiser abdicated, revolution in Germany established a republic, the Hapsburg monarchy which had controlled most of middle Europe for nearly 400 years collapsed and republics followed in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The need to turn and retreat to keep in tune with the changes in workers' consciousness hardly seemed critical in the enormous explosion of 1919. In 1921 Trotsky explained that in 1919

> 'Many of us expected, some more others less, that the spontaneous onset of the workers would overthrow the bourgeoisie in the near future. And as a matter of fact this onset was truly colossal. The number of casualties was very large. But the bourgeoisie was able to withstand this initial onset and precisely for this reason regained its class self confidence... It became increasingly clear that the working class was in need of a more complex revolutionary strategy...'

The newly formed Communist Parties, formed of hundreds of thousands of young workers who really wanted to fight, now had to learn to retreat, to work with the same reformist and centrist leaders they had so recently abandoned.

At the time of a straight offensive against capitalism the reformist and centrist leaders of the old socialist parties stood in the way of an advancing working class. In the period of partial retreat and defence, from the end of 1920, many thousands of workers looked to the old parties and leaders. Co-operation with these workers against the newly confident and attacking bourgeoisie became necessary and led to the development of the policy of the United Front.

In a short space of time the tactics of the Third International underwent a complete change. There was nothing cynical about this. The principles of the International remained the same. The change in tactics flowed from the need to win the mass of workers to the struggle to overthrow capitalism at a time when the character of the struggle had changed. The working class was being forced back, the capitalist class was on the attack, the old reformist parties had been temporarily strengthened.

Tactics for defence

In Britain the failure of the enormous working class offensive of 1919 and 1920 led to a ruling class offensive, aided by the beginnings of mass unemployment. By 1922 the Communist Party of Great Britain was in the throes of a (completely correct) campaign called Back to the Unions, and Stop the Retreat.

But these changes were not accepted without argument. Lenin explained that the Bolshevik Party had 15 years of experience of the most varied kind to prepare itself for the test of 1917. These new Communist Parties had a year or two. In 1921 Trotsky was defending himself against charges that he was leading the right wing.

Lenin and Trotsky took on the argument that a short sharp offensive against the old capitalist order was not the immediate question and that new tactics for defence had to be developed. For the new Communist Parties this was very hard to accept. The retreat from the notion of immediate insurrection seemed to be a betrayal of principle. In fact it was nothing of the kind. No question of principle was involved.

The essential problem was to accept that a rigid adherence to fundamental principles doesn't mean inflexibility of tactics. Too often revolutionaries confuse tactics and principles, and end up unable to make the necessary shifts and changes to stay in tune with the changes in struggle.

There are unchanging principles, for revolutionary Marxists, which can be summed up as follows. First, the emancipation of the working class can only be the act of the working class itself. Second, the emancipation of the working class means the destruction of the capitalist state machine and its replacement by the institutions of a workers state. Third, the

unevenness within the working class can only be overcome by the creation of a revolutionary party of hundreds of thousands of workers who have broken with the 'prevailing ideas in society'. Fourth, workers' consciousness is transformed through the class struggle and therefore the revolutionary party must itself be involved in and attempting to lead that day to day struggle.

Questions about whether it is correct or not to call for a general strike, or a united front, or a specific publication, or to raise a particular slogan, aren't matters of general principle. Such questions might of course reflect or hide real issues of principle. But the bulk of argument within a revolutionary party is about the applicability of a particular tactic at a particular point in time.

That means starting with the state of the class struggle, accepting that there is no uniform development over time. The struggle goes up and down, workers retreat and advance.

Any attempt to come to terms with the level of confidence and combativity in the working class has to start with an effort to understand the economic circumstances which are forcing workers to fight. Even crude figures of the number of strikes, or days lost, aren't by themselves that helpful. Are the strikes offensive or defensive? Are the workers on the whole winning or losing? In the balance between offensive and defensive strikes (and there is always a balance at some point) is there a shift towards one extreme or the other? How far do the strikes cause workers to generalise — itself a question to do with whether the strikes are on the whole victorious or defeated?

But even a clear understanding about the general features of the class struggle aren't sufficient when it comes to the problem of day to day tactics. Revolutionaries can reach an understanding of the general direction of the class struggle and therefore of the general direction of events without being particularly clear about what it means tactically. Indeed tactics can both flow from the general strategy and at the same time cut across or briefly contradict or appear to contradict that strategy.

There are two reasons for the complications involved with tactics — the first is the unevenness between different groups of workers and therefore the lack of uniformity in how they will fight. The most advanced sections can understand the need to retreat while a less advanced group can go blindly forward. Sometimes being blind helps and unexpected victories turn the struggle round. But equally the history of the working class is riddled with mad adventurism caused by a failure to assess the reality of the struggle.

Size is the key

The lack of uniformity means that to an extent any general strategic analysis of what is possible contains within it a straitjacket effect, unless there is a recognition of the need for the maximum flexibility within the overall approach.

But there is a second problem. No serious revolutionary organisation can solve problems of strategy and tactics unless it recognises that the size of the party is key, not in determining the direction of the struggle most of the time, but in determining what can be done and what should be attempted by the party itself.

Put like that it seems obvious enough. In practice very many of the problems which revolutionary organisations (whether mass parties or small organisations like the SWP) have suffered from come from a misestimation not so much of the level of combativity in the class but of the influence or potential influence of the revolutionary forces. Because something needs to be done objectively in terms of the overall interests of the class, it doesn't follow that we can do it ourselves. In the SWP this often shows itself in a misunderstanding about how it was possible for an organisation as small and lacking in roots as the SWP to launch and sustain the Anti Nazi League.

ANL built in very specific circumstances

One of the earliest and most short lived manifestations of the downturn was the growth of fascist organisations on the fringe of the working class in the mid 1970s. The ANL grew out of our recognition of the need to combat this, but it was only possible for us to sustain such a large, broad organisation, because of very particular and specific circumstances. The essence of the success of the ANL was not the very efficient and impressive technical operation — the posters, leaflets, carnivals etc. Instead the nature of the issue made it possible for us to involve sections of the Labour Left in a way that isn't possible on more contentious issues. The threat of fascism unites across the organisations of the working class. The ANL was never respectable but its clout within the left was considerable. The very successful technical operation was possible because politically such an operation was possible.

Unfortunately sheer hard work, or technical efficiency, or financial resources, don't by themselves mean very much. Instead the base the Party has among organised workers both in terms of numbers and influence affects in a direct and immediate way what tactics are realistic and what aren't.

Over the National Front, the SWP had an influence far greater than its size because of the issue. Most of the time this isn't the case. As *Socialist Worker Review* argues each issue a general Stop the Retreat movement is now required to reverse the successes of the Tory government. For the SWP to see that it is needed is not the same as to be able to launch it. We are not the CPGB of 1922, with the authority of the 3rd International, the Russian Revolution and five years of intensive domestic class struggle behind us.

Instead our options are limited by the level and nature of the class struggle in Britain and by the small size and weak influence of revolutionary forces in Britain. But even within that general framework we shall have to learn to make a further retreat in the coming months in terms of the slogans we raise, the arguments we make and the ways in which we operate. The options aren't very great.

Many groups of revolutionaries over the years have tried to avoid facing the reality around them. In the short periods of rapid advance this is enough of a problem — the capitalist class gives up nothing without a fight, without manoeuvring, without working out how to retreat the better to attack in the future. But when it is necessary to retreat natural reluctance combines with practical difficulties and inexperience. Sharp argument is inevitable and healthy. Indeed effective strategy and tactics isn't possible without frequent vigorous debate. ■

Pete Clark

WORK PLACE NOTES

Peter Porteous worked for eight years at Yarrows shipyard on Clydeside. He talks of his experiences prior to his recent victimisation

A shipyard worker's story

I STARTED working at Yarrows eight years ago.

In some ways it was easier than usual because I'd been active in EETPU trade union work as an SWP member in the previous years and therefore knew quite a few of the best sparks in the yard. They also knew me, so I wasn't going in cold.

At that time the yard was basically run by Labour Party people. The Communist Party had quite a lot of influence, but didn't hold any positions. In the first year it was the Communist Party, through various machinations, who blocked me from becoming a shop steward. The many fights I had with them, however, especially in my department, gave me credibility and eventually made my election possible. It was always possible to argue at the shop meetings about small issues like overtime, and by being seen to be the one who was willing to take the company on over any issue, however small, (something the CP members would never do) the men got to know you. Also important was the constant arguing with individuals about political issues, especially on things like union democracy in the department, but also on more general issues which, as an SWP member you were actually able to carry through with some ability. As it turned out, the issue I became shop steward over was a campaign for a rota night-shift which up until then had been fixed.

The other important factor was selling *Socialist Worker*. I managed to build up quite a large sale—at its height I was selling between 30 and 35. The crucial thing was always to be seen with the paper, to be seen reading the paper, and to talk to guys holding the paper. Also, of course, it was important to try to sell the paper to anyone who agreed with you on the union issues, to dig them out and get them to buy it even if you knew that they'd never come to a meeting or think of joining.

Those guys are still there and it was an important breakthrough because people would see them with the *SW* and that was then recognised. Even if people didn't buy the paper, I'd still talk and argue with them as the ideas would then be around and more people would back you.

Much harder to argue

My election as shop steward coincided with the start of nationalisation. Everyone was for it. We argued at the time that it wouldn't be a panacea for all ills and that it wouldn't really be any different working for the state. The Labour Party and the CP especially were all for it. The main arguments were over parity across the yards. Needless to say, seven years later the gaps are still there with those who were on the highest rates still on them. The one big difference is that about 40,000 jobs have gone.

The whole experience of nationalisation has affected people's attitudes towards it so that now it is much easier for the Tories to come along and say that privatisation is the answer, and much harder for us to argue against it.

Another consequence of nationalisation was the introduction of national bargaining which destroyed overnight the ability of shop stewards to negotiate wage rates and took a lot of power away from the shop stewards' movement. The national officers set up an advisory body with delegates which was so big and powerless that it became obvious that it could do nothing. It was quite an eye-opener to the delegates who saw that even if one yard did call for and get some action, it would crumble through lack of support, like the Rob Caledon dispute.

After the 1979 Blackpool Agreement, which promised to save yards from closure in exchange for voluntary redundancies, wage negotiations got longer and longer. This left the yard open to general political attacks because everyone took a step back, especially when the Tories were voted in.

It got a little better later on as there were various things going on in the yard, especially around the Health and Safety legislation. I became chairman of the Health and Safety Committee and found myself spending a good 80 to 90 percent of my time on union work.

I was also involved at this time in the EETPU Rank and File group. We were having shipyard workers' meetings which were linked with other yards in the area. We also put out bulletins but, to be quite honest, there was no way all this work could have been described as successful. The best meeting we ever had drew 18 people, but in the end we were just talking to ourselves. The bulletins, however, were always well received. *Yarrow Worker* was something people queued up to take.

Later we had a few strikes over disciplinary matters which we tended to win. These were, however, just skirmishes and didn't really affect the workers who saw no tangible results, especially in their pockets. This, along with the constant meetings the stewards had with management, led to a demoralisation and a loss of faith in the shop stewards' movement. It was worse at other yards because Yarrows was at least quite well organised.

From the beginning it was known that I was a member of the SWP. Management knew, as in 1977 I stood as a parliamentary candidate. There was never any overt move by them to do anything about it, but it meant that I had to keep my nose very, very clean, a thing that applies to all militants. The only discipline I got was when I first started, for talking too much. After that I was never caught doing anything. Afterwards, disciplinary actions were always for union matters. Time keeping, the work, sick leave and so on were always perfect. You must never give management the excuse to do you for some-

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM ★ 25

The winter issue of the SWP's quarterly journal

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thing stupid. If they're going to get you, then the stakes must be high. In my case, when it came, they were very high.

Actually, the worst attacks came from the joint shop stewards' committee when the bulletins were coming in. They threatened to suspend me. In the end I had to say that although I agreed with the leaflets, and told the people writing them what was going on, it wasn't actually me who wrote them. Up until nationalisation we were always telling the shop stewards what we should be doing. After, it was much more difficult, especially over local action when everything was being negotiated nationally. So we had to pick on tiny issues which meant that there was less opportunity to criticise the stewards and less point to our bulletins.

Throughout, especially in the difficult periods, we relied heavily on the branch for discussing things through. Now we put in SWP bulletins which are good for getting the ideas into the yard without putting our members inside on the spot.

Resigning as steward

In the last wage round and the Phase 5 deal we mounted a big campaign. I was a steward and argued that we shouldn't accept even if Yarrow had to go it alone. The argument was good and correct, but the thing in the end fell apart and with that the stewards fell apart. If we'd fought, we probably wouldn't have won, but we would have gained something —at least a yard agreement. Instead, months of campaigning led to nothing but demoralisation.

At the final meeting on the deal the shop stewards had decided to recommend it. For me to argue against this at the final mass meeting, I had to resign as shop steward as you can't put a minority position to a meeting as a steward. I did, and at the meeting carried about a third of the workers; but the outcome was a defeat.

It was, I think, the right thing to do at the time, though subsequently I made a mistake. If I'd stood at the next meeting, I would probably have been re-elected as the sparks were solidly behind me. But at the time there was a lot of talk in the SWP about the dangers of the taking of positions leading to bureaucratisation. Along with me being a bit fed up, I decided not to bother. I kept selling papers and kept arguing with people, and decided to see what would happen in general before I restood.

Later, my personal circumstances made me feel that I wouldn't have time to do the job properly, so at the next AGM I didn't stand. This was definitely a mistake because I think that if I'd taken the position then they couldn't have victimised me as they later did. Another reason for making the mistake was that because my enthusiasm had taken a bit of a dive through the lost wage deal and the lack of fight in the workforce, I'd lost touch with the network of comrades and the constant discussion and so lost contact with the theoretical framework from which to make decisions.

By this time the mass meetings had become horrendous affairs. The convenor resigned and was replaced by someone who really couldn't carry any arguments. It's very important for any steward to know how to argue with management. It's no good just saying 'no, no, no'. If you haven't got confidence in what you're saying management can knock away your confidence and you end up messing the members around. This happened with the stewards who then became scared of going to mass meetings because the guys on the floor could shout them down. This was one of the main reasons for the lack of support for the miners on the day of action.

A large SWP meeting inspired me to get stuck into the job of building support for the miners. I set up a miners' support group by digging out all the old CND and ANL lists and so on and getting everyone together. Some of the stewards responded quite well and took on some of the responsibilities. 70 people came to the first meeting at which we raised a lot of money. Every week we raised a few hundred pounds by collections in my department. Every other week we collected around different shops, and there was a collection at the gate which raised £800. All this meant more contact with more people which meant that the paper sale went up again to about 25 after a low of about 12. This along with food collections, raffles, dances and so on raised my enthusiasm.

Since the summer holidays management had been trying it on and we knew that there were going to be little fights. The main issue was washing up time. The convenor and stewards made an awful deal which we decided to oppose. We began campaigning among the departments that we had to do something about it and at least have a mass meeting. This was opposed by the committee so I raised the issue in 'any other business' and got a very good reception with a unanimous vote to return to the old washing up times from that evening.

That night everyone went off at the old time, and the next day, I was hauled up and charged with assault, disobeying orders and a stream of other things. I went to the stewards, the department walked out, and I was sent home. Soon the yard walked out and decided at a mass meeting to stop work until I was reinstated. The result of my hearing was my dismissal.

Picketing was to start on Monday but the stewards hadn't organised anything so in the end there were only the pickets who I'd organised. It was now really clear what a disadvantage it was that I wasn't able to go to the stewards' meetings. Anyway, with the Confederation's advice to call it off the stewards decided to go for another mass meeting, arguing that it would reinforce the strike and frighten management. We argued against this, saying that we should organise a mass picket through leafletting etc, and then have a mass meeting. The stewards went ahead with the meeting with the additional bonus of deciding that I shouldn't be on the picket line. The vote was lost 2:1, and I was out of a job.

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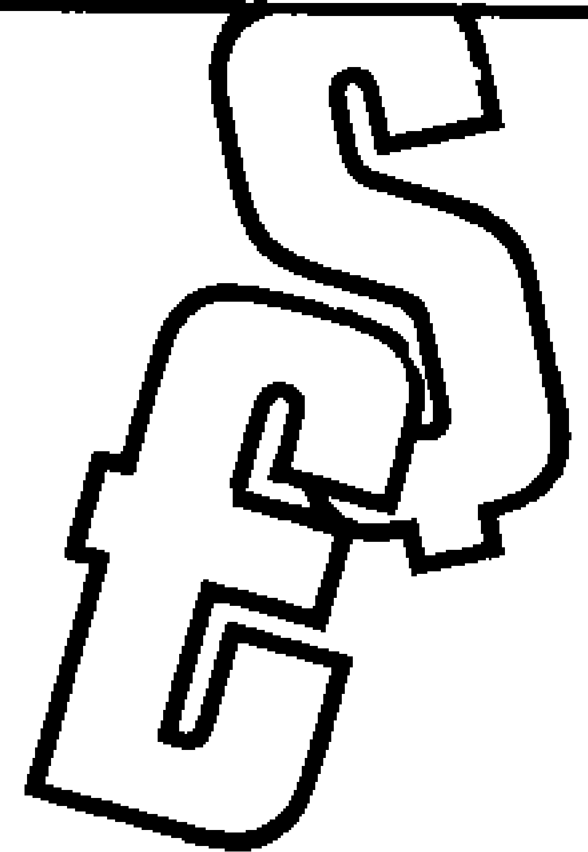

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Uplifting thoughts for the downturn

TIMES are bad; the consolation is they have been worse. In periods of despondency we can comfort ourselves in the knowledge that we will never have to bear what Karl Marx had to endure. He developed the basic principles of socialism in the 1840s. In a letter to F A Sorge written in 1872, he confessed that no British person had yet understood his ideas.

The 30 lean years that followed the 1848 revolutions did not arise because Marx was politically lazy, expressed himself without clarity or was inept. Rather it happened because, to most people, the world seemed to be walking in the opposite direction to Marx.

Capitalism had entered into a long period of rapid expansion, of rising living standards and lessening class tension. In other words, Marx found himself functioning in the most profound and prolonged downturn ever experienced by the socialist movement.

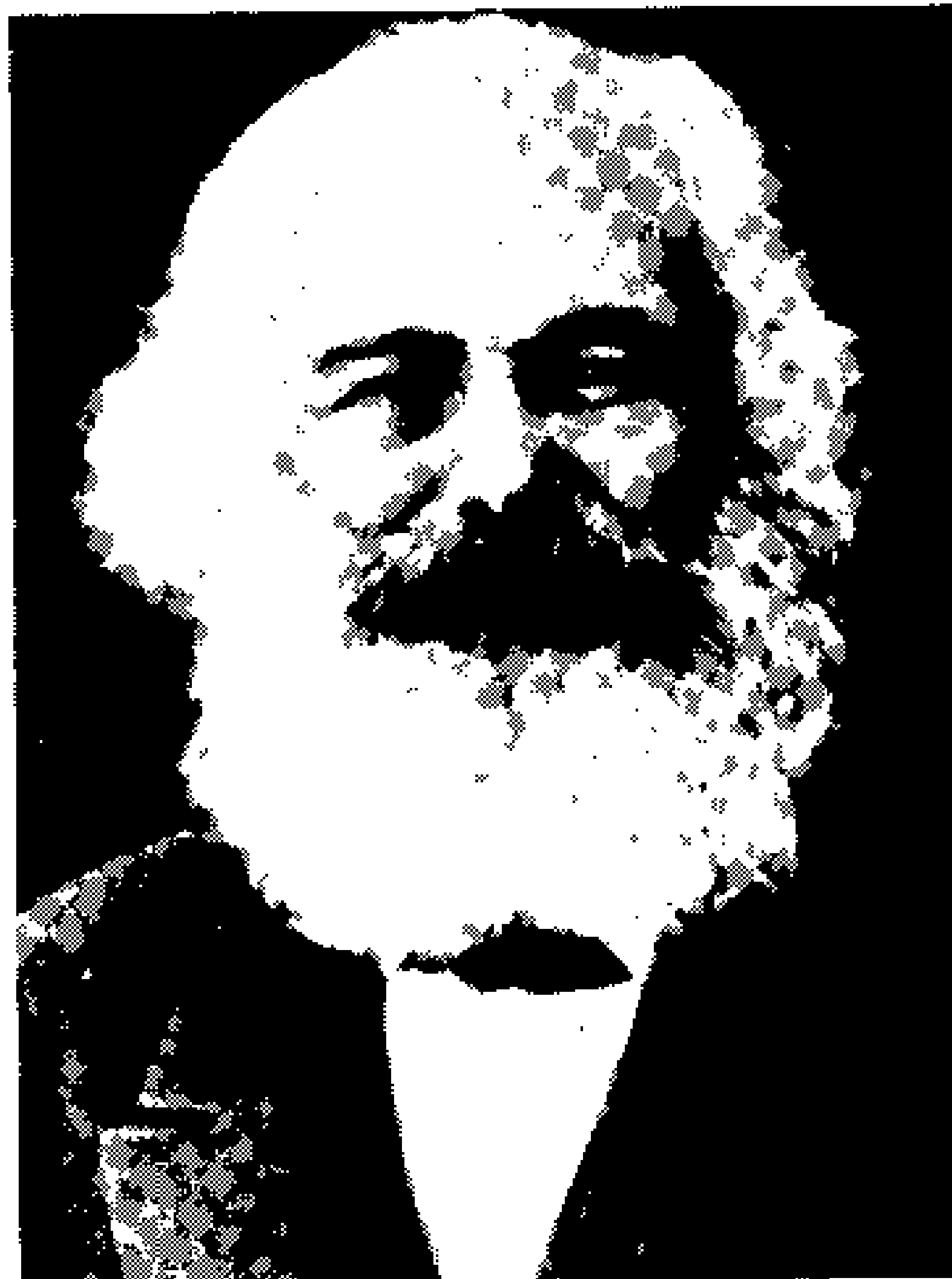
That is why he laboured so hard, spent so many years and ruined his health writing *Das Capital*. In an important sense, his great work is an impressive compliment to capitalism. It is a grudging recognition of its stability and durability. If it had been obvious the collapse of the system was imminent, then it would not have been necessary to go to such extraordinary lengths to prove it possessed inherent inner contradictions. It was the fact that the overwhelming majority of people regarded the existing system as natural, inevitable and everlasting that spurred him on to puncture, at least theoretically, the balloon of overweaning self-confidence.

Ideas and reality

Assuredly, today nobody will have to repeat Marx's Herculean efforts. Now there is almost universal acceptance that capitalism is crisis-ridden. Even those who fondly believe Reagan or Thatcher have the answer to present economic ills, do not consider we are on the threshold of an era of tranquility and progress. The certainty of stability which prevailed in Marx's day has vanished. The system feels unsure of itself, under threat.

This, in my opinion, illustrates a highly significant philosophical truth, one that gives us grounds for optimism: correct ideas do not merely move reality, but reality moves towards correct ideas, thereby giving the ideas an added power. Expressed like that it may seem rather obscure. So let me illustrate it by taking a couple of quotations from Marx, plucked almost at random.

The first is the well-known ending to the *Communist Manifesto* 'Workers of the world unite'. When considered in its historical context, this initially seems to be a wildly impractical utterance. For in 1848, in five of the



six continents, the working class was either infinitesimally small or non-existent. The vast majority of Africans and Asians would not have agreed with the *Manifesto* even if they had possessed the ability (which they did not) to read it. Their experiences and problems found no connection with its pages.

As for the sixth continent—Europe—the position there was only slightly better. Large tracts remained stuck in rural backwardness. Britain, the most economically developed, has correctly been termed 'the first industrial nation'. Yet the Britain of 1848 was hardly promising. Its working class was still small and immature.

The Chartist movement constituted the vanguard of the class. For several years, one of the main preoccupations of this proletarian vanguard had been the Chartist Land Plan, an impractical scheme to turn back the economic clock. It had visions of resettling factory workers back on the land, giving them two acres and a cow. Is it realistic to think a socialist society could be built by people still hankering after private ownership, the dream of returning to a peasant past?

Nevertheless, all this did not and does not invalidate Marx. His thought was essentially dialectical, seeing things in terms of being and becoming. He accurately discerned the trends. What has happened since simply confirms his judgement. There has been the growth of the international economy, enmeshing people throughout the world, making their destiny mutually interdependent. Simultaneously, multinational companies have emerged. As a result, all have become imprisoned in the same exploitive relationships. Consequently, unlike 137 years ago, the same basic problems exist internationally—and can only be solved internationally.

What is equally vital for that solution, a working class has grown up throughout all six continents. This means, for example, that a country like South Korea, which had no working class in 1848, now has one that is bigger than the British working class was in 1848. Today, therefore, Marx's writings have relevance to the predicament of the typical Korean, a wage labourer like most people in other industrialised countries. No longer do they have to remain mysterious and incomprehensible to him; his own liberation depends on a realisation of the truth of the final sentence in the *Manifesto*.

But before the erroneous conclusion is reached that everyone can sit back and leave it all to the red mole of history, burrowing away and undermining capitalism's foundations, let me turn to the second quotation.

Advance and decay

In 1856, the *People's Paper* celebrated its fourth anniversary with a public meeting. James Watson, a veteran Chartist from Newcastle, made the first speech. It was along traditional lines: knowledge is power; the *People's Paper* spreads knowledge; therefore, the *People's Paper* is good.

Sitting next to Watson on the platform was a strange, bearded character, who spoke with a strong foreign accent. A newspaper report described him as 'Dr Carl Marx, the well-known German emigré', and his message was somewhat different. Mercifully Marx did not mention the obscure Hegelian principle of the interpenetration of opposites although it underlay his remarks. He described what he thought were the essential features of existing society:

> 'On the one hand, there have started into life industrial and scientific forces, which no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected. On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors recorded in the latter time of the Roman Empire. In our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary.'

Today, paradoxically, we can understand what Marx meant better than Marx did himself. In 1856 he could not have foreseen the creation of H-bombs, laser weapons, star wars, the restriction of food output while millions starve. Even if, by some magical means, he had predicted these things, none of his audience would have believed him. They would have considered him insane, a prospective inmate for Dr Tuke's lunatic asylum, where Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor had been put. But we, having hindsight, can see that the social system is insane, not Karl Marx. His prophecy looms as an ever-more menacing warning so long as capitalism survives.

But political and ideological forces are operating, sometimes subterraneously, to undermine the established order. Accompanying the growth of a working class throughout the world has gone industrial strife and manifestations of political discontent in places which were unknown or

quiescent 25, 50, 100 years ago. These struggles require socialist theory and practice, and as we have already seen, Marxist theory has gained in power as the world more closely approximates to it. Consequently, when a crisis eventually detonates mass discontent—as it inevitably will—then it will be much more widespread, much more profound than it was after the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia.

Prior to the October Revolution, it is worth recalling there also had been a political downturn. The crushing of the 1905 Revolution had left Russian socialists demoralised and exceedingly weak. Some of them went in for the craze of God-seeking. Most just dropped out of activity. By 1910, in Moscow the Bolsheviks had been reduced to eight members, seven of whom were police spies.

It is interesting to compare the attitudes of Lenin and Trotsky to the downturn. Trotsky was the optimist. He had developed his theory of permanent revolution. This gave him confidence. Irrespective of Tsarism's apparent power and invincibility, his analysis revealed conclusively its downfall was ultimately inevitable. In exile, he always had his bags half-packed, expecting a call to resume his chairmanship of the Petrograd Soviet.

By contrast, Lenin was much more the pessimist. Only a few weeks before the February Revolution of 1917, ironically he told a meeting of young Swiss socialists he did not expect to see socialism in his lifetime. His economic analysis was not as accurate as Trotsky's. Nevertheless, in one respect he was much more correct. He liked to quote the great Russian novelist, Tolstoy, who had once seen a man squatting in a doorway making strange gestures. At first glance he seemed to be a madman. Then on closer inspection, Tolstoy discovered the man was doing a perfectly sensible thing—sharpening a knife on a stone.

To an outsider, the heated arguments, factional struggles, splits that convulsed the Russian left in the 15 years before 1917 must have seemed like a particularly severe form of insanity. Yet, Lenin realised this was a necessary process, the sharpening of the revolutionary knife upon a stone. Without Bolshevism, the mass discontent would eventually be dissipated: Bolshevism was the vital murder weapon that struck the fatal blow to the old system.

Optimism and realism

In my opinion, this has an important lesson for us today. What we must combine is the optimism of Trotsky with the organisational realism of Lenin.

Looking back on 43 years of political activity, I see the socialist movement today has a bigger and harder core but less flesh than it did in my youth. Then a deep-seated anger existed among many sections of the British working class determined, after the sacrifices of the war, not to return to the dole queues and hopelessness of the Thirties. Our message then reached receptive ears. In 1945 I remember meeting an old age pensioner, Dai Thomas of Merthyr, who sold 312 copies of the *Socialist Leader* each week. The Trotskyists, roughly 400 strong, got rid of as many as 20,000 copies of their fortnightly *Socialist Appeal*. Even the most dedicated comrade now would not achieve the same result. The reason is the periphery has shrunk.

However, it would be wrong to look at those 43 years negatively. In various respects, considerable progress has been made. Today there is a much greater store of knowledge and experience. The theoretical level is generally higher. Also, organisationally there has been progress. The Independent Labour Party, the largest body on the left, had a membership in 1945 of less than 3,000. While some of them were revolutionaries, like the group around Reg Groves and Hugo Dewar, at the same time there were many more who believed in the parliamentary road. In fact, the ILP had sunk in the swamp of centrism, equidistant between reform and revolution. As for the Trotskyists, dedicated and good comrades, although wrong on a number of important points, they had a size of less than a tenth of the present day SWP.

So, in these circumstances, I do not consider that there is any reason to be disheartened. As Marx wrote in *Capital:* 'New forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society.' The downturn will not continue forever. And, when the upturn comes, socialists will be better placed than ever before to achieve their objective.■

Raymond Challinor

Charlotte Brontë

A DEVOUT Anglican and a Tory, Charlotte Brontë's greatest hero was the Duke of Wellington. However, despite this, her novels not only reflect but also powerfully attack many aspects of the society she lived in.

Jane Eyre, *Shirley* and *Villette*, her major novels, were all written between 1846 and 1852, at a time when both Britain and Europe were experiencing huge economic and political instability.

Europe was swept by revolution in 1848, while Britain, despite its growing industrial and political power, was still subject to cycles of boom and slump.

Chartism, the first mass working class movement to put forward political demands revived at this time, and as a consequence, fear of popular discontent was strong among the government and middle classes.

It is in *Shirley* that Charlotte Brontë responds most directly to this situation. However, to distance her treatment of it, she goes back to the early years of the century, when the government's 'Orders in Council' had effectively stopped trade, so as to weaken Napoleon's hold on the continent.

This had resulted in mass unemployment and poverty in England, particularly as it coincided with the introduction of new machinery in the factories, which led to 'Luddism', the spontaneous outbreak of machine smashing.

Charlotte Brontë's attitude to Luddism, and, by implication mass working class movements generally, is very ambivalent. On one hand she sees them as essentially passive, and led by 'agitators', dangerous and unstable revolutionaries acting out of self interest, and often linked to Methodism or other non-conformist religious sects.

Thus the crowd of men attacking Moore's mill are 'rioters, a disorganised mob', and their leaders 'strangers; emissaries from the large towns'.

Capitalist inhumanity

To a very large extent she takes refuge in the conspiracy theory, rather than admit to the potentiality of mass action. Thus she can admit that many of the men involved are fundamentally decent and patriotic, but she believes have been misled and, like William Farren, will see the error of their ways and 'will neither be patronised nor misled for no man's pleasure' in the future.

However, she can clearly see both the contradictions and inhumanity inherent in the developing capitalist system. Though she whitewashes the mill owner Robert Moore, in the interests of the romantic elements in the novel, yet she sees him as fundamentally selfish. Take this extract from *Shirley*:

> 'All men, taken singly, are more or less selfish; and taken in bodies they are intensely so. The British merchant is no exception to this: the mercantile classes illustrate it strikingly. These classes think too exclusively of making money.'

Here she uses this to condemn a lack of correct patriotic feeling; but the dilemma which Moore expresses acutely sums up the imperative to make a profit, compete and stay ahead of other manufacturers:

> 'I will convey the best machinery inventors can furnish ... suppose that building was a ruin ... would that stop invention or exhaust science? ... Another and better gig mill would rise on the ruins of this, and perhaps a more enterprising owner come.'

He goes on to point out that, even if the men are partly or completely laid off now, the result of destroying the mill would be more certain starvation for them.

Charlotte Brontë never really comes to terms with the problem, and here she partially blames him as much for being harsh as for anything else. Nevertheless a deep uneasiness remains that men and women, who are as she sees it content to work and live humbly, should be treated inhumanely, and made to suffer by people who call themselves Christians.

Indeed some of her most biting irony and scorn is reserved for attacking those people and institutions whose moral and Christian facades hide exploitation and hypocrisy. Perhaps the most famous is Mr Brocklehurst, the benefactor of Lowood, the charity school where Jane Eyre is sent:

> ' "Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese instead of burnt porridge into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!" '

Meanwhile he is making a fat profit out of starving them; and the irony is heightened by the arrival of his well-dressed daughters.

One of Charlotte Brontë's central concerns is the oppression of women, and Jane Eyre is very typical of the position many women found themselves in at the time, including Charlotte Brontë herself. She had no experience of the conditions in which working class women lived, worked and had children, and her few references to them, such as Grace, William Farren's wife, tend to be patronising.

Where she excelled was in the portrayal of women who lacked the means to support themselves or to get married, (which required money) and were thus obliged by their material position to work—and this almost invariably meant in a school, or as a governess—or to remain totally dependent on relatives.

Master and servant

In these conditions, as Jane, and Lucy Snowe in *Villette* discover, women were powerless and open to all kinds of humiliation. Jane at Thornfield, in what she admits were good conditions, is publicly discussed and insulted:

> ' "Tant pis" said her ladyship. "I hope it may do her good". Then in a lower tone, but still loud enough for me to hear, "I noticed her; I am a judge of physionomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class".'

This develops into a discussion of why tutors and governesses should not be allowed 'the liberty of falling in love with each other' as it is 'disruptive, leading to insolence': Any acknowledgement of them as human beings gives them a dangerous and uncontrollable autonomy. Moreover this vision of the woman, and the governess, poisons relationships, by inevitably introducing the master/servant dimension into them.

Rochester's feeling about Jane for instance are very one-sided, and he is clearly prepared to manipulate and deceive her into 'marrying' him when his wife is still alive—and necessarily to accept his given attitudes to divorce and marriage.

The governess theme, and the continuing debate on the alternatives open to even comparatively privileged women obsesses Charlotte Brontë. The only solutions she can suggest are essentially individual and private, and generally suggest that marriage, if it is not entered into for social or financial purposes, is possibly the best solution open to women at that time, though interestingly, in her last novel *Villette*, she deliberately blocks this on the last page, leaving Lucy alone, but secure.

Nonetheless, she had a very clear understanding of the options open to women at the time: and also of how society operated on them, so that where Jane rebels, Mrs Pryor and Caroline Helstone are victims. Caroline, for example, with no occupation and few marriage prospects turns to acts of charity, and suffers great depression and psychosomatic illness.

Charlotte Brontë's novels present a fascinating view of British society in the early Victorian period, and while not understanding the nature of the exploitation, and how to fight it, give a very serious consideration to the contradictions and inhumanities of the developing capitalist system, and to the position of women in it. ■

Jane Bassett

An attempt to turn the tide

JUST before Christmas mother-of-ten Victoria Gillick won a significant victory in the courts for right wing moralism. Three appeal judges overturned the 1974 government guidelines for doctors which upheld their right to give confidential contraceptive and abortion advice and treatment to under-sixteens without the consent of their parents.

The ruling spells fear and misery for thousands of young women. Already clinics are reporting abandoned appointments and distraught phone calls from girls terrified that doctors will tell tales to their parents. Many of them are caught in intolerable traps of incest and family violence.

One woman in charge of a family planning clinic told the *Guardian:*

> 'I won't tell you what our thoughts about Mrs Gillick have been these last few weeks, except to say that all the staff here have been devastated by the amount of human misery this judgement is causing ... We're all having to work terribly long hours to cope with the deluge of phone calls and visits from badly frightened under-sixteens who feel abandoned and terribly confused.'

Some 17,000 young women under sixteen are on the Pill, possibly one third without parental consent. Since the guidelines for doctors overturned by the Gillick judgement came into force, the conception rate among under-sixteens has fallen dramatically.

The British Medical Association has denounced the ruling. But meanwhile doctors are left to puzzle out the exact meaning of 'advice' and 'emergency'. Some are willing to continue as before. Other clinics are prescribing just one month's supply of the Pill and sending girls away to talk to their parents. One clinic on Merseyside has put a notice in the waiting room which says:

> 'Under Sixteens—Over Sixteens
> Do not be afraid to consult the doctors here. All consultations are private and confidential.'

Brook Advisory Centres in London are continuing to provide a full counselling service, but are not prescribing contraceptives. Their doctors are giving the 'morning after' pill when they believe the girl's circumstances constitute an emergency.

But overall, the inevitable result will be unwanted pregnancies and a rise in the number of under-age abortions.

A shock verdict

The Department of Health and Social Security is appealing against the Gillick judgement and the case will go to the Law Lords within the next couple of months.

The appeal court verdict must come as a shock to many. Three times during the seventies organisations like the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child have sponsored private members' bills aimed at overturning the 1967 Abortion Act. Each time, despite busing in nuns and Catholic schoolchildren to fill out demonstrations, they failed miserably.

In 1982 a bureaucratic manoeuvre tightened up regulations governing abortion clinics so that abortions could not be performed on the same premises as advice was given. But the ruling made little real difference to the availability of abortion.

The National Health Service does not provide an adequate service to meet the needs of all women wanting their pregnancies terminated. The provision varies widely from area to area and the waiting lists are long. But the NHS has never provided an adequate service, whatever the medical need; its inadequacies are not restricted to abortion. Private clinics compensate for NHS failings at not too exorbitant cost.

So, despite the antics of SPUC, in 1985, abortion is as widely available in Britain as it ever has been since the original Abortion Act came into force in 1967. Up to now the vicious proponents of right wing moralism have remained a marginal force.

Moral majority

The situation in the United States is very different. The so-called 'moral majority' has flourished under Ronald Reagan's presidency. It forms a significant part of his popular base.

The day after being sworn in for his second term, Reagan broadcast a special message of encouragement to a group of anti-abortion campaigners as they assembled to march on the supreme court.

These hate-mongers have been hard at work in recent months, bombing more than 30 abortion clinics and harassing women as they arrive for consultations.

In Britain, no real equivalent of the 'moral majority' exists. The Gillick ruling is not the result of any kind of mass pressure. It is essentially a maverick judgement on the part of three geriatrics in the appeal court, which could easily be overturned by their geriatric counterparts in the House of Lords.

The ruling in no way has the approval of the establishment in general. The BMA has spoken out against it, and the DHSS will be arguing in court for a return to the status quo. Even within the cabinet, Thatcher is said to be alone in supporting Gillick.

Common sense—the sense of the ruling class, as Gramsci remarked—has been slow to take on the mantle of the recession. Unemployment has sapped confidence and pushed the political mood rightwards. Thatcherism stands for marriage and family, law, order and Christianity. Yet in many ways morality lingers behind, unwilling to abandon the trappings of liberation acquired over a decade ago. Ideas about sex and relationships which some found shocking in the early seventies are now simply part of life.

New campaigns

The Gillick ruling is the first real attempt to turn the tide by rewriting the law. It will boost the confidence of organisations like SPUC and Life. There are already signs that they have new campaigns in mind.

MPs were recently shown a film called *The Silent Scream* which purports to show via a scanner what happens when an abortion takes place. An emotive commentary claims that the foetus moves about to escape the implements and that its mouth opens to form a 'silent scream'.

Yet neither piece of independent action is possible at such an early age. No doubt anti-abortionists will be trying to get other showings for this miserable and fraudulent trash.

Then there is Enoch Powell's Unborn Child (Protection) Bill which had its first reading at the beginning of February. The Bill focuses on banning embryo research, but many fear it has implications for abortion as well. The coil and 'morning after' pill would also be affected. Sponsors of the Bill include James White, Bernard Braine and Gerard Vaughan—all anti-abortionists from way back. Also the Conservative MP for Gainsborough and Horncastle, Edward Leigh, is currently attempting to reduce still further the current restrictions on abortion.

In other words, the Gillick judgement may signal the beginnings of a new and serious attack on abortion and contraceptive rights. Encouraged by Thatcher, the 'moral majority' might finally be showing its ugly face.

We had better be ready to fight. ■

Jane Ure-Smith

Women's liberation —two traditions

Class struggle and women's liberation—1640 to the present day

Tony Cliff

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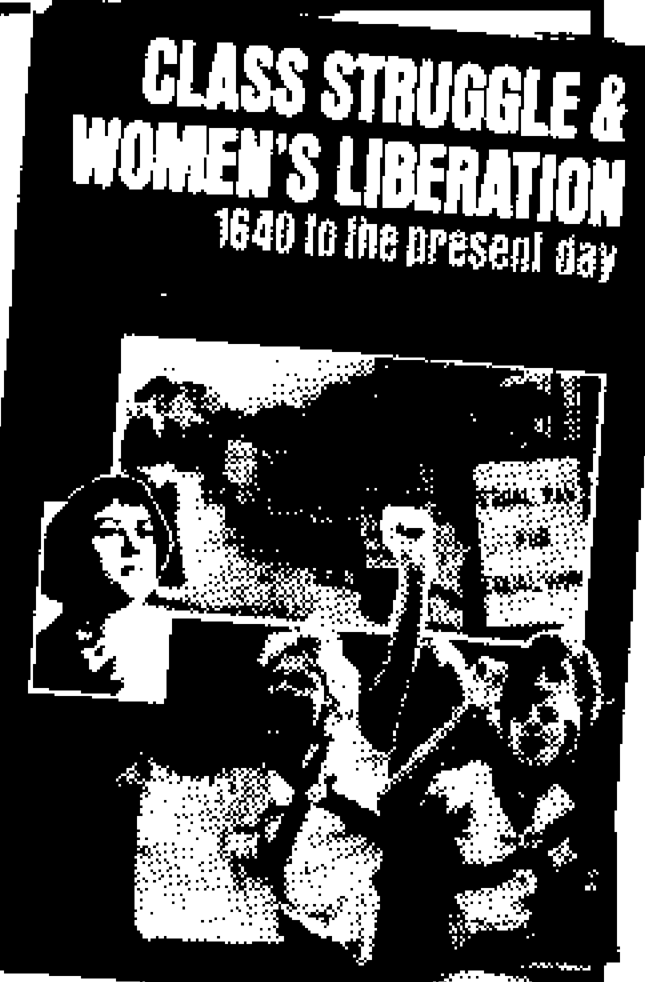

A striker's manual

STRIKE: How to fight, how to win
by John McIlroy
Pluto Press £5.95

SUCCESS they say breeds success. Surely this maxim is never more true than when workers struggle against their employers. Every winning or losing action by workers, whether big or small, contributes to the overall success or failure of the entire working class.

Obviously the bigger the action—like the present miners' strike—the greater the effect. Conversely the smaller the action—like the strike by cleaners at the local hospital in Barking—the smaller the effect.

Ask any trade unionist with an ounce of experience to draw up a balance sheet of success and failure over these last few years, and they'll tell you (if they're honest) how effective the employers and the state have become when confronting organised labour.

In fact, a measure of their success is in the fewer days lost in strikes compared with, say, the seventies. How many strikes have you won lately?

Clearly the more struggles we lose the less confident in ourselves we become, the more we look to others outside (trade union bureaucrats Labour politicians) to do our job for us. And as if to compound our sense of failure we become addicted to these con-men who cajole and connive to make deals or run to ACAS at a time when the employers and their state are in no mood to deal. And like all addicts, as our habit grows so our chance of solving the problems we face diminishes. How can we break out of this Catch-22?

There are two major problems socialists have to deal with; the first is political, the second is organisational. They are separate problems, but in many ways interconnected.

First, the political. Unless and until we are able to win the argument with workers that you can't solve the problems of an ageing capitalism (falling profit rates and low investment leading to rising unemployment by demanning etc) then the employers are going to continue to have it all their own way. On the organisational level, until workers can be persuaded that fighting for your job or striking for higher wages involves more than just walking outside the gate, then again we are in trouble.

This book *Strike* by John McIlroy makes an extremely valuable contribution on the organisational level to professionalise the approach that workers must have when engaging in industrial action. So it is more than welcome.

McIlroy takes for granted that in a class divided society struggles between labour and capital are bound to occur. In a system of winners and losers, you have to take sides—there is no room for neutrals. He sides with the workers. Throughout the history of class struggle workers are potentially the most powerful class yet they have a tendency to lose. How can workers realise their full potential? How can they win?

Strike shows how 'professional' the government and employers have become when confronting the working class. How they make a study of strikes and workers' organisations in order to win. McIlroy's conclusion is that workers have to do the same if they are ever to turn the tables.

There are chapters covering strike organisation; occupations; financing strikes; solidarity; picketing; management tactics; the law. In fact everything we in the SWP are always going on about.

It's not merely a good read, it's a striker's manual. A tool, if you like which placed in the right hands can become a weapon in the class war more powerful than the bomb. But what we have here is a powerful bomb without a delivery system. Somehow *we* must become that delivery system.

We can start by getting this book on branch bookstalls. We must also encourage trade unionists to read it. Branches could have a series of educational meetings around different chapters of the book, inviting trade unionists to take part in the discussion. And the publishers could help by lowering the price!

I have only one small criticism to make. There is no chapter on the role and material base of the sell-out merchants, the trade union bureaucrats. Still I'm willing to bet money that the publishers suggested this be omitted purely on commercial grounds. They probably hope that some sections of the official trade union machine will take bulk orders. However McIlroy's accent is always on workers' Do-It-Yourself, so it's a small criticism.

There you have it. This is an absolutely topical book which uses the experience of workers to pass on all that is good in terms of organisation. All it needs is an audience.

Finally can you imagine sometime in the (hopefully not-too-distant) future when instead of demoralisation and cynicism workers will have regained their confidence to go on the offensive. Such a time only the really old farts can remember from the distant past (I don't remember it myself!). This is the time they call the upturn. Well when that really happens again, then *Strike* can play an important role. It's up to you.■

Eddie Prevost

Esoteric insights

Everyday Life
Agnes Heller
Routledge & Kegan Paul

OSCAR Wilde once said that the Americans and the English were separated by 'the barrier of a common language'. Had Wilde read *Everyday Life*, he might well have come to the conclusion that 'barrier' was an inadequate word to describe the obstacles put in the reader's path by the book's language.

The author, Agnes Heller, is of course not American but Hungarian and the book has been translated from the Hungarian. Perhaps it is the translation that is to blame, but I think not. It is more likely to be the product of that increasingly obtuse and obscure debate within academic Marxism whose only audience is the self-contained and self-congratulatory community of Social Science departments.

We should not expect difficult or unfamiliar subjects to be analysed without the use of specialised terms or concepts. Marx's own writings used a great many of them: surplus value, alienation, capital. Neither should we necessarily expect every writer to explain in every book they write the meaning of the specialised terms of the discipline in which they work (although many original writers manage to do this with no damage to the complexity or sophistication of the ideas which they want to express).

What we do have a right to expect is that whole books which claim to remain 'faithful to the spirit of Marx' do, at least, make the meaning of what they are arguing clear. If this is done then the meaning of specific terms also becomes clear from their context. This book does not and, therefore, risks giving theoretical writing a bad name.

All this should not be too much of a surprise. In a society where the division of labour rules every aspect of life, mental labour is divorced from every other aspect of life and is neatly corralled in academic institutions. But even academic life is not unmoved by the social convulsions outside its walls, or the theories—like Marxism—produced by these struggles. The result is rarified, esoteric, fragmented reflections of the real struggles and real problems.

This is a shame, because these ideas, and indeed this book, can provide interesting theoretical insights which (for better or worse) affect the political activities of groups, individuals and organisations. This was true of the relationship, for instance, between the Althusserian school and the Eurocommunist political current.

A shame in general then, and a shame in the case of this particular book, since its intention is both valuable and, as a serious theoretical project, unusual. It aims to examine the fabric of people's everyday experience of life, those habitual traditional responses of family life, home life, personal and emotional experience. It looks for the interaction between the individual and the social, both for the roots and the means to change social fabric.

This is an enterprise for which Marx gave a structure in his theory of class consciousness and how it changes.

> 'The tireless propaganda carried on by these proletarians, their daily discussions among themselves (in communist clubs), sufficiently prove how little they themselves want to remain "as of old" and how little they in general want people to remain "as of old" ... they know too well that only under changed circumstances will they cease to be "as of old", and they are determined to change these circumstances at the first opportunity. In revolutionary activity the changing of oneself coincides with the changing of circumstances.'

Marx points away from consciousness raising and towards practical activity as the starting point for changed ideas. But this is only a bare outline. Readers of *Socialist Worker Review* will undoubtedly have met miners, miners' wives and girlfriends plus many supporters of the miners whose ideas and patterns of life have been altered by the struggle.

But many will also know that the limitations of the struggle—its defensive nature, lack of rank and file action—has set limits to how systematically and to what degree the ideas of the participants have altered. Similarly, many questions about how the patterns of everyday life reinforce conservative ideas and the limits of lifestyle politics are areas where the book offers only fragmentary insights.

The massive philosophical height from which the book stares down at poor benighted specks of humanity stumbling through our everyday lives, unaware that they can only be fully 'theorised' by the use of a 'specific version of the paradigm of objectification', means that any precise historical analysis is missing. In abandoning the method of Marx, Heller has abandoned Marx's belief 'that the revolution is necessary not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also 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.'

Once that belief has gone, the need to examine the precise conditions under which shifts in class consciousness and patterns of life are changed vanishes and the road to retreat into high abstraction is open, looking at every day life requires the most concrete of concrete analyses. What we have here is a most abstract analysis of a concrete situation. ■

John Rees

Charles Darwin

Looking for a plan

The Great Evolution Mystery
Gordon Rattray Taylor
Abacus £3.95

WHEN Darwin's book *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* appeared in 1859 it provoked a violent reaction. He had gathered detailed evidence to show that evolution had taken place, and that it was not the unfolding of a Divine Plan but a result of chance events.

The reason why his work caused such a fuss was because it was seen by some as striking at the roots of society. Society was based on the oppression of the many by a small privileged class, and it was very convenient to believe that the world was just as God had made it and never changed.

> 'The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate: God made then high and lowly and ordered their estate.'

Darwin's idea was that the history of all life, including humanity, was one of constant upheaval. Changes were shaped not by God, but by the material conditions in which organisms found themselves. This was seen as a threat to ruling class ideology.

Of course ways were found to distort the theory and lessen the threat. 'Survival of the fittest' was used to justify capitalism, and today anything from war to women's oppression is said to be written in our genes. But the theory of evolution is still seen as dangerous by many.

There are two main aspects to the theory. One is that change occurs at all (the fact of evolution). The weight of evidence from fossils alone is enough to win any logical argument with creationists. The other aspect is that the changes are due to chance (the mechanism of evolution). This aspect is much easier to attack, and this book attempts to prove that it is wrong.

Taylor tries to show the unfolding of some directed plan in evolution. I don't know if this was for ideological reasons or simply because it was a comforting thought (Taylor was dying as he wrote the book) but either way he fails.

The modern theory of evolution of adaptation by natural selection can be outlined using the example of the peppered moth. Originally, this moth was commonly white, the information to make white colour being coded by genes. The moth rested on trees with light-coloured bark, and the birds which ate them found them hard to spot. Occasionally there would be a mutation of the genes (a mistake) resulting in a dark body colour, but adults carrying the mutation would be easily spotted and eaten.

With the coming of the industrial revolution the trees' bark became dirty and dark—the moths' environment changed. Now dark moths were less likely to be spotted and eaten, and lived to produce more offspring than the white ones. Since the difference in colour had a genetic basis this was passed on, and gradually dark moths became common.

This is a simplified version but the basic elements are there. Traits are only passed on if they have a genetic basis. Different traits arise by chance, by mutation of genes. A particular trait may be advantageous in one environment and selected for, and disadvantageous in another and selected against.

The moths did not 'decide' to become dark, nor did the darkening of the trees cause the mutation to arise. Because mutations are just random mistakes most are either harmful or insignificant, but a few useful ones arise among billions of individuals and over billions of years.

Taylor's main method of attack on this theory is to come up with hundreds of examples of evolution and express amazement that they could have happened through natural selection. Phrases like 'it strains the imagination', 'credulity fails', 'past belief' and 'the whole thing is utterly improbable' litter the pages. Very often he finds it hard to understand because he doesn't understand evolutionary theory.

One typical example is his inability to understand why, if bacteria are so perfectly adapted to their niches (lifestyles) that they have persisted for billions of years, anything else has bothered to evolve. Evolution proceeds not only by one species supplanting another in a particular niche, but also by a new type being able to exploit a different niche.

Take metal tolerance in plants. Non-tolerant seeds fall on an area of lead mine waste, are poisoned and fail to grow. Some mutations already present in the population allow a few seeds to survive the lead, and they flourish and multiply in a way they were unable to do in competition with the non-tolerant type. You can now end up with two species in two different niches where before there was only one, each free to follow their own different evolutionary path—and not because some seeds decided to become metal tolerant.

Another example is his question: if mammals are superior to reptiles why didn't they take over sooner? And if large body size was advantageous in dinosaurs, why did small mammals evolve? Early mammals weren't 'superior' to dinosaurs but only different, and could exploit the unoccupied niche of small body size due to their particular adaptations. When the dinosaurs disappeared the mammals rapidly evolved large forms, though we were nearly beaten to it by 12 foot high birds.

Taylor's account is littered with mistakes, contradictions and misrepresentations which would take the whole of the *Review* to counter. Having disposed of the theory of natural selection with the 'final crushing proof' that evolution is directed because organisms become more complicated (what about the evolution of parasites?) he then proposes his theory.

This is that there is a flow of information from the environment to the genes. This interacts with self-design on the part of the genes to make useful gene structures, which may be held back until later. Thus when mammals 'decided' to return to water, ichthyosaur genes for flippers were activated (though mammals are not descended from ichthyosaurs).

How all this might work is not suggested, nor is any real evidence given for it. The conclusion is that evolution is proceeding in the direction of perfection according to some internal plan. However we can do away with the unfashionable word 'divine' and call it instead the result of some as yet unexplained law of nature.

The pity of it is that in some ways Taylor has a point. There are large areas of evolutionary theory that still present mysteries: the origin of life, and of species (surprisingly enough!); how the egg becomes the adult; why did sex evolve; how did various large scale extinctions occur? And just how important is natural selection compared to totally random genetic fluctuations?

The details of evolutionary theory are interesting in themselves and the gaps and uncertainties of the theory make it even more exciting. There is plenty of room for books such as Gould's *Ever Since Darwin* which look at some of them. In that sense Taylor's book is fascinating if you can separate the wheat from the chaff.

Taylor also has a point when he says it doesn't do to become too dogmatic and complacent. Evolutionary theory is continually having to be updated, and maybe the heart of it will be found lacking some day. But he has given us no reason to discard material explanations in favour of a mystical one, even if it is dressed up in scientific language. ■

Margaret Willis

The poverty of philosophy

Proletarian Philosophers
Jonathan Ree
Oxford University Press, £15.00

THIS book looks at the development of Marxist education, and more specifically at Marxism and philosophy, in the British working class movement in the early half of this century. A new generation of working class activists were eager to discuss Marxist and syndicalist ideas. A smaller, determined, self-taught minority were prepared to devote hours of study to a philosophy that would provide a guarantee to their politics.

The 'Plebs League' set up after a revolt at the 'official' Ruskin College in 1911, organised Marxist educational classes and used Joseph Dietzgen, a nineteenth century mystical anti-capitalist philosopher, as their core material.

This tradition underwent a decline in the 1920's. The Communist Party was now the main educational source for Marxism and Joe Stalin was the headmaster of that school.

This work covers an area that has been better investigated in greater depth by McIntyre in *A Proletarian Science*, and frankly adds very little to that study.

Jonathan Ree adopts a position not dissimilar to that of the early British Marxist propagandists. He favours a divorce between Marxist education and political practice. He prefers the early CP paper *The Communist* as a more 'intellectual and cultured paper', to the more activist-inclined *Workers Weekly* that replaced it. It is worthwhile noting that the editor said in his autobiography that '*The Communist* was addressed wholly to middle class intellectuals.' That sheds some light on the general tone this book takes towards Marxism, philosophy and education.

Ree wants to dismiss Marxism's contribution to philosophy. He argues that dialectical materialism was either incomprehensible to the working class activists or just a set of dogmas. This is only understandable if you grasp the way Stalinism so distorted Marxism that it became the ideology of a ruling class and was used to justify the barbarities of that regime. For workers wanting to understand the world, Stalinist 'diamat' *was* a set of laws to be learnt like a catechism, and laws that had little or no application to practical activity.

Put very simply, dialectical materialism shows how history is made and people's role in making it. History is a process and a development of contradictions. Capitalism has its own contradictions and creates its own negation in the working class. Stalin, or his philosophical lackeys, went further and garbled this into the 'laws of nature'.

For Ree, any critique of philosophy that uses terms like 'idealism' or 'vulgar materialism' is a sectarian diversion. So he can't explain the political issues behind the marxist debates over philosophy. What is more, by abandoning any commitment to the critical revolutionary dimension of Marxism he falls back on the following view of philosophy:

> 'Philosophy belongs with those distinctive moments when you feel alone in the universe and long for an explicit clear set of principles justifying your values, your beliefs and your existence in a sort of unanswerable cosmic manifesto.'

The less said about this metaphysical nonsense the better. It certainly does a disservice to the fighting spirit of the proletarian philosophers. ■

Stephen Philip

The victim's tale

The Rat Pit
Patrick MacGill
Caliban £3.95

THE Rat Pit is a women's lodging house in Glasgow where 'the unfortunate, the sick and work-weary congregate under the same roof, and forget the troubles of a miserable existence in strong drink, the solace of the sorrowful, or in heavy stupor, the slumber of the toilworn.' But this is not the end of the journey for the main character, Norah Ryan.

Her story begins as a child in Donegal on the north west coast of Ireland. She knits socks for a penny farthing a pair as outwork, a member of a peasant community which is being destroyed by the new social relations being brought about by the expansion of capital. Nor is it solely the community that is destroyed but, almost, each individual: twisted, torn, beaten, morally and physically and scattered away all over the world.

Against this story, representative of what happened to millions in Ireland (and is still happening to millions of other peasants across the world today) appears the other side. The landlord, the factory owner, the professional classes, all described with a burning venom (particularly the Church) that comes from the author's own participation in that violent exodus.

Norah passes from sock knitting through seasonal potato picking in Scotland to factory work and finally to prostitution, all in grinding and brutalising poverty, shared with all her co-workers.

There is no romanticism but neither is it despairing. The author's affection for the main characters, his hate for the exploiters and their agents and his descriptions of personal solidarity and love show that although for capital they may be only units of labour to be used, their humanity is not destroyed.

There are no 'solutions' or even glimmers of one, in the book first published in 1906, and which was written out of the direct personal experience of the author. But these are the workers that only a few years later were participating in the massive, long and determined strike in Ireland, led by Larkin and Connolly just before the first World War.

This is a gripping read that I could hardly put down. If you weren't given one for Christmas, buy one or order it from the library — you won't regret it. ■

Ian Wall

A medieval mystery

The Name of the Rose
Umberto Eco
Picador £2.95

THIS IS the most unlikely best seller of the decade. True, it is a detective novel with lots of gory murders, hidden treasure and a dramatic climax, but it is a detective story set in a Benedictine monastery in 1327. True, it is translated from the Italian into a racy English that is easy to read, but large chunks of it remain in untranslated Latin. True, it has some good jokes, but it also has theological speeches some pages long. True, it is written by a famous writer, but Umberto Eco is famous as a professor of semiotics rather than as a rival to Ed McBain.

In fact it is the input from semiotics that has made the book a smash hit. 'Semiotics?' I hear readers groan, 'What the hell is that?' Well, dear readers, you have practised it all your political life without knowing you were doing it. Semiotics is about working out what signs mean and how they work.

Every time you have had a row about that girlie calendar in the office you have argued about semiotics: the pictures are one sort of sign. Every time you have hissed the right-winger who insists on saying 'Chairman' to the woman running the branch meeting you have been doing the same thing: words are signs, too.

In a detective story the clues are signs: think how Sherlock Holmes works out some incredible biography from the state of someone's shoes. The fascination of this book for many readers is that it is an endless series of clues, not only about whodunnit but also about what the book is about, and about other books and about how books are written and almost everything else.

That lets Eco write not just about solving his mystery but also about the medieval view of precious stones, the history of the papacy, medicinal herbs and heresy, particularly heresy and its links with popular revolt. There is something in it for almost everyone, including most of the readers of this magazine.

Of course, those who like their books nice and simple with goodies and baddies and a clear class line on the last page will probably find this all a bit boring, particularly as they will find it difficult to work out what the book is *about*.

Eco would argue that all books, not just his, are by definition about themselves if they are about anything at all. That is a reactionary position which leads, in the end, to acceptance of the *status quo* because, since you can't read, write, or speak about it with any certainty, you can't hope to change the world the way you wish either. On this account, the best we can do is to say what *we* think the book is about.

What Eco seems to have thought the book was about, at least at one point, was the way in which abstract theoretical speculation, like his brand of semiotics, can lead indirectly to political violence, like the Italian Red Brigades. That is why the detective hero is an English empiricist called de Baskerville who has no truck with such wild continental notions. On the other hand, he may just have been saying that to boost the book to an Anglo-American audience and the real meaning might lie in the disaster that the solution to the crime causes.

What I think it will mean for us is first of all a good read held together by an excellent detective puzzle. But it will also give us insight into how any closed elite, and in particular any ruling class, rots from within and perverts even its own original intentions. Finally, it will tell us something about church and society in the period when the towns were starting to disrupt the fabric of feudal society and something about the motives for popular revolt in that period. All in all, good entertainment. ■

Colin Sparks

Nationalist illusions

Citizens and Comrades: Socialism in a World of Nation States
Brian Jenkins and Gunter Minnerup
Pluto Press £4.95
Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina since the Fall of Saigon
Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley
Verso £6.95

IT HAS become almost a commonplace among left-wing intellectuals that one of Marxism's chief theoretical and political failures has lain in its inability to come to terms with the phenomenon of nationalism.

If it were true that Marxism is unable to account for nationalism, this would indeed be a very serious criticism. We live, as Brian Jenkins and Gunter Minnerup put it, in 'a world of nation states' whose conflicts often override and obscure those of class. The experience of the Falklands War should be enough to remind us of the ideological power of nationalism. Does Marxism really have little to say on the subject?

So the authors of *Comrades and Citizens*, two Labour Party academics, believe. The revolutionary socialist tradition has taken, they argue, too negative a stance towards nationalism, identifying it with essentially bourgeois interests. Marxism has failed 'to recognise the profoundly democratic impulse that lies at the heart of nationalism', and which is reflected today both in the various Third World liberation movements and in the nationalist revivals in the advanced capitalist states (ETA, the IRA, the SNP etc).

In particular Marxists have not drawn a necessary

> 'distinction between the "bourgeois" nature of nationalism as the historico-ideological limitation of a revolutionary democratic programme, and as the articulation of the political and economic interests of the bourgeoisie.'

Nationalism is one version of the impulse towards self-determination constitutive of socialism itself. In the epoch of the great bourgeois revolutions in Europe the bourgeoisie were able to assume the mantle of nationalism. Subsequently, however, 'the economic and political interests of mature capitalism became divorced from the nation and democracy, while the struggle for the emancipation of mankind increasingly shed the historico-ideological limitations of the age of bourgeois revolution.'

Unfortunately, Marxism has failed to recognise what Jenkins and Minnerup regard as the revolutionary potential of nationalism. Marx and Engels, for example, judged 'every political question from the supranational viewpoint of the overriding interests of historical progress'. This 'cosmopolitan' approach was reinforced by the experience of the First World War, which encouraged revolutionary socialists to identify nationalism with capitalism in its most barbarous and destructive forms.

Jenkins and Minnerup want to free nationalism from this association.

> 'For far from being the dark source of most modern evil, the nation state actually represents the pinnacle of human achievement in the field of political emancipation.'

It is the chief instrument through which people can obtain control of their lives, a fundamentally democratic form.

I imagine that many readers' reaction to my report of *Citizens and Comrades* will be that the authors do not use the word 'nationalism' in the normal way. How can the nationalisms implicated in both world wars be regarded as 'one possible expression of the democratic impulse'?

The answer seems to be that there are different forms of nationalism, nice and nasty ones. Jenkins and Minnerup reserve the word 'nationalism' for the movements they like (national liberation struggles etc). The ones they don't, which lack 'the democratic-egalitarian and universalist spirit of [nice] nationalism', are dismissed as 'chauvinism' and 'racism'— *quite* different matters. Nice nationalism turns out, in the exceedingly dull last chapter of the book, to be identical with left Labourism.

It isn't clear whether one is supposed to take these scholastic gyrations as more than rather thin intellectual cover for a retreat by ex-revolutionaries into the Labour Party (Minnerup for one is a former supporter of the 'Fourth International'). The authors offer a perfectly reasonable formal definition of nationalism as

> 'a political movement and ideology dedicated to establishing...a national state which will unite all individuals sharing a particular set of criteria of nationality...under a common regime based on the notion of popular sovereignty'.

Nationalism is thus inseparable from the nation state. But such a state cannot be 'universal'. Its existence depends upon its control of a particular territory and population.

More than that—the nation state exists, not in the singular but in the plural, as one of a *system* of competing nation states. The history of Europe—and now of the world, since the state system has extended itself to the entire globe in the course of the present century—has been one of wars punctuated by armed peace such as the present one.

The internationalism of the great Marxists was not 'rootless cosmopolitanism' (Jenkins and Minnerup to their eternal shame actually use this phrase, coined by Stalin in his campaigns against Jews and Left Oppositionists). It sprang from their understanding that the system of rival states, having emerged in the era of the transition from feudalism to capitalism (roughly 1450-1815), had become bound up with capitalism in its developed imperialist form. The tendency noted by Bukharin for private corporations and the state to form a single national capital is an essential feature of contemporary capitalism. It means that capitalism can be fought only as a world system, by the international working class.

It does not follow, as Bukharin believed during the ultra-left phase of his career, that *all* nationalist movements were therefore irredeemably reactionary. The aspiration by colonial peoples for their own nation state brought them into conflict with the imperialist centres and tended to undermine the overall stability of the system. An anti-imperialist workers' movement consequently has, as Lenin argued, the duty of supporting national liberation struggles.

But such movements, when succesful, assume all the repressive and competitive features of established states. Of nowhere has this been more evident than of Indochina since the final eviction of US imperialism in 1975. The death of two million Cambodians at the hands of Pol Pot and Vietnam's wars with Cambodia and China have blackened the name both of socialism and revolutionary nationalism.

Characteristically, Jenkins and Minnerup include only one anodyne reference to Cambodia—presumably because Pol Pot has been included out of their idiosyncratic view of nationalism. It is a relief to turn to the meticulous and scholarly study of post-1975 Indochina by two Australian socialists, Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley.

Evans and Rowley are not purely neutral observers. Their judgements on the various regional conflicts incline generally towards Vietnam. What is refreshing, however, about their analysis is its cool realism:

> 'Communism did not come to power in Indochina as a party of working-class socialism, but as the radical wing of the nationalist reaction to colonial rule, as a movement of middle-class and peasant nationalism.'

Given that the Indochinese Communist Parties represented 'nationalism painted red', it was hardly surprising that, once in power, they should act as ruthless defenders of their respective national interests, even against each other:

> 'Where the sovereignty of the nation-state is the overriding principle of international politics, its corollary is international anarchy. In such a situation, the basic rules of statecraft are those of power politics. And when Communists win power in the course of nationalist revolutions, it is these rules that regulate relations between them—the security of the state takes precedence over ideological purity.'

As an account of nationalism—as legitimating both the struggle for liberation from outside control *and* domestic repression and military competition—Evans's and Rowley's book is far superior to Jenkins's and Minnerup's.

Evans and Rowley have a far more realistic view of nationalism. But, like Jenkins and Minnerup, they do not believe that it serves class interests: 'state power is actually used to create political communities, and to defend them against external attack, irrespective of the class nature of the state.' In other words, the nation state is a neutral political form, capable of serving socialist as well as capitalist aims.

The source of this revision of the Marxist theory of the state lies in the authors' belief that countries such as Vietnam are in some sense 'post-capitalist societies'. If this belief is true, then it follows that, since nationalism flourishes in the 'Communist' states, pitting them against each other, it cannot be a vehicle of bourgeois interests alone.

Matters, however, assume a very different aspect once we see that the conflicts between nation states, far from being autonomous of the capitalist mode of production, are one of the main mechanisms through which its central imperative of competitive accumulation is enforced on every country. It is the 'international anarchy', whose regional forms in Indochina Evans and Rowley describe, which helps to explain why countries such as Vietnam are not socialist but state capitalist. To understand nationalism is to begin to understand modern capitalism.

Evans and Rowley, in identifying the former with military and territorial rivalries, are at least on the right track. Jenkins's and Minnerup's third-rate theorising condemns them to the world of fantasy rather than that of serious political analysis.■

Alex Callinicos

Insular history

History workshop—a journal of socialist and feminist historians. No. 18
History Workshop £5.95

'CLASS struggle is the key to the interpretation of the educational needs of the workers.' JT Murphy, April 1923. Andy Miles quotes Murphy in his article in the current issue of *History Workshop*. Unfortunately, it is not the class struggle which runs through the contributions to the Journal. This is history with the motor left out—for most of the contributors, workers' lives and struggles are merely the subject matter for their studies.

Miles on 'Workers Education: the Communist Party and the Plebs League in the 1920s' is at least interesting, to anyone with some background knowledge, as a sidelight on his subject. The same may be said of Ian Thackeray on the belief in popish plots under Cromwell and Mick Reed on what he terms a 'peasantry' in 19th century England. Even these essays suffer from an academic insularity—they are rich in sources and references (at times several pages), short on context and dynamic.

Elsewhere, Gareth Steadman Jones tells us that Marx never understood Britain (yawn), and Jack Jones (the bureaucrat) reminisces about 'A Liverpool Socialist Education'. This latter is, amazingly, the only essay to mention workers' collective organisation in any detail, albeit through the rose-tinted spectacles of a retired author of Social Contracts.

Patricia Tsurumi on women in the textile industry in Japan presents some interesting material on the rise of Japanese capitalism in an inconclusive way, while Stuart Cosgrove on 'the Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare' is insubstantial romanticism which belongs in the *Face*. Pieces on the Labour Publishing Company of the inter-war years and on RH Tawney (from a Christian Socialist standpoint) will be of use only to those interested in 'labour history' for its own sake.

Throughout, there is a tendency to build up detail without context, to draw vignettes of proletarian—and pre-proletarian—life for their own sake: and on the other hand to see our history as that of the official institutions of the labour movement, and indeed of previous labour historians.

The first *History Workshop* publication I read was on the Burston school strike. Then, it fired my imagination and I poured over it alongside *Vanguard*, paper of the Schools Action Union. The politics of both may have been dubious, but at least they were about activity. Regrettably, readers of *Socialist Worker Review* will find little in the current *History Workshop* of use or interest—particularly at £5.95. It seems that 'socialist' history has ended up building its very own ivory tower.■

Tim Sneller

Not the model book

Models in Political Economy
Michael Barratt Brown
Penguin £3.95

THIS book covers an enormous number of topics. It tries to deal with several theories about capitalism; with contemporary political and social movements in the west; with social structure in the East and the Third World. It also tries to offer a vision of the future and how to get there. Unfortunately the author is not up to the immense task.

The book is constructed as a series of 'models': a Marxist model, a Keynesian model, a Soviet model, a Chinese model, and so on. As Barratt Brown says, it has become 'fashionable' to talk about models.

He claims that a model is a summary of the essential relationship in a society. One trouble with this is that it means that one term 'model' is used very loosely to cover a variety of quite different things.

The Keynesian model', for instance, is a theoretical attempt to understand the capitalist economy, while the 'Chinese model' is the real, material and empirical, way in which the Chinese economy has evolved since 1949. One 'model' exists in the mind and is used to justify policies, the other is the real experience of Chinese history. They are not the same sort of thing at all. To call both 'models' obscures that.

But even within theory itself, the idea of a model is wrong. Bourgeois economists try to build models of the world in order to picture it more accurately. They try to mirror it in equation. They think that the more equations they use the better their model will be.

Marxists try to do something quite different. We do not believe that the surface appearance of the world is its true reality. We look for the laws of motion underlying the surface.

We begin from abstractions like 'value' and 'exploitation' and move on to more complex concepts like unemployment, slumps and exchange rates. This is the only way to avoid traps like the belief that wages are a fair payment for a day's work, and other surface appearances of capitalist economics.

The book explains classical and Kenysian economics very well and mounts a scathing attack on both the theory and practice of Thatcher's monetarism.

The author's sympathies lie with the left of the Labour Party and he believes that the recession whose effects he documents was caused by Tory policy alone. The fact that the rest of the world went through a recession at the same time has little importance for him.

His discussion of Marxism, while sympathetic, shows just how shallow the thinking of the Labour left is. He makes many errors, for example, on the theory of value, on absolute and relative surplus value and on the rate of profit. His account of the theory of crisis is both confused and confusing.

Most significantly, there is no account of how the working class is created by capital and tries to emancipate itself from capital. This omission looms over the later parts of the book.

The state capitalist countries also give him problems. He has clearly studied them quite closely and quotes masses of facts and figures. He criticises Stalinism in the 1930s, the corruption, repression, even the 'exploitation of resources'. He stresses how it is impossible to achieve socialist abundance starting from the productive base of China or Yugoslavia alone. But at the same time he claims these countries are building socialism.

There is surely something seriously wrong with a book which talks about Polish workers organising unions *and* refers to the building of socialism in Poland.

When Barratt Brown comes to talk about the way forward, he looks to the 'new models':

> 'The strength of the British Labour movement could lie in a new unity forged between trade union committees with Workers' Plans at combine level for socially useful production and associations of tenants, community development groups, women's groups and neighbourhood action groups.'

This is the weakness of the reformist left spelt out in detail. The major problem is not finding more arguments about the necessity of socialism but organising the anger and the aspirations of working class people for a fightback and for the overthrow of capitalism. Tenants' associations, visions of a better world, and all the rest are useful additions, but they are not the main task. That remains the building of a genuine revolutionary workers' party.■

Costas Lapavitsas

In defence of Hill

I WRITE in reply to Norah Carlin's letter (SWR 17) in which she criticises Christoher Hills' Marxism; in fact she maintains that Hill is not even a Marxist!

In order to substantiate this view Ms Carlin has to resort to the rather disreputable academic trick of wresting a few lines from a longish article, quoting them out of context and thereby hanging an interpretation of history on Hill which cannot be supported by an objective study of Hill's recent work. This may be the way to score the odd academic point or two but I would not have thought that socialist debate should be conducted in this fashion.

Ms Carlin says that Hill's recent work 'throws conscious revolutionary politics out of the window'. This is nonsense and I cannot believe that any serious student of Hill's work could say this. Hill's study of the radicals who shifted the New Model Army to the left in the late 1640s and his study of the Millenarian radicals of the Commonwealth show that he recognises both the value and existence of 'conscious revolutionary politics' in the English Revolution.

The point that Hill makes is that none of the revolutionaries who made the English Revolution either wanted, or benefitted from, the society that emerged after their efforts had forced their

equivocating leaders to adopt a more revolutionary stance.

Even in 1980 Hill holds the view that the English Revolution had its roots in the fact that:

> 'The social forces let loose by or accompanying, the rise of Capitalism could no longer be contained within the old political framework...'

In all essentials this view is no different to the view Hill held in 1949, a view Ms Carlin quoted with apparent approval. What Hill does believe, and this could well be where Ms Carlin confuses his position on 'conscious revolutionary politics', is that:

'Few indeed of the rank and file of the New Model Army fought to create a world safe for capitalist farmers and merchants to make profits in.'

In holding this view Hill is not, as Ms Carlin implies, striking out on a revision of Marxist orthodoxy but is following a traditional Marxist interpretation of the English Revolution. Engels, who Ms Carlin will surely accept as a fairly representative Marxist, once said that:

> 'Curiously enough in all three great bourgeois risings the peasantry furnishes the army that has to do the fighting, and the peasantry is just the class that, the victory once gained, is most surely ruined by the economic consequences of that victory. A hundred years after Cromwell the yeomanry had almost disappeared...had it not been for that yeomanry...the bourgeoisie alone would never have fought the matter out to the bitter end...'

The point is clear enough. There were many 'conscious revolutionaries' about in the English Revolution, and Hill has never denied this, but the final outcome of that revolution was not what these people willed. This outcome was determined by the 'structures, fractures and penures of the society' rather than the desires of the many 'conscious revolutionaries' present in mid seventeenth century England.

To state as Hill does that: 'The outcome of the revolution was something which none of the activists had willed' is not to 'throw conscious revolutionary politics right out of the window' nor is it a mechanical view of history.

It is simply recognising, as Marx and Engels recognised years ago, that the problems of causation in history are complex and that Marxist theory gives the historian a liberating creative analytical tool rather than a mechanical formula which can be applied at will to any and all historical problems.■

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How to fight ratecapping

IF RATECAPPING is to be successfully fought it would require massive industrial action on the part of council workers and also non-council workers in the borough. However it is not enough to state what is needed we also have to deal with problems of how to get there.

The first problem, one which Alan Waters and Co in the January *Socialist Worker Review*, seem to have discounted is the attitude of the Labour Councils. We cannot just ignore what the Labour Councils do, because those council workers who want to fight ratecapping as against those who don't, are looking to the Labour Councils to give a lead.

This is really for two main reasons—firstly, most militants don't align themselves politically with us but with the Labour Party. That means that many of those who work for the Labour Councils are likely to have voted Labour, may have canvassed for Labour, and in a few cases are councillors themselves.

Thus the councils are not seen as just like Tory Councils or as 'ordinary employers', but are seen to be there to defend and extend the standards and conditions of workers in the boroughs. In the fight against rate capping, they are seen as allies not enemies. A fact reinforced both by the rhetoric of many left wing councillors and also by the massive propaganda campaign which the ratecapped councils have waged against the Tories' proposals.

The second main reason why many militants look to the Labour Councils, is that the weakness of shopfloor organisations leads to the same kind of reliance on the council to fight for you, as we have seen a reliance on the trade union bureaucracy in numerous disputes (including the miners) over the last few years.

Illegal budget

Formally the rate-capped boroughs are committed to a fight. We have to make it clear what actions they should be taking if they are serious about this commitment. Thus the first thing they should do is make it clear to their supporters that they intend to engage in the building of confrontation that will be necessary to win by taking such measures as:

a) Passing an illegal budget, one which does not balance, but provides for no cuts in jobs or services, no rate rises and no rent increases.

b) Refusing to collect the police precept (as against the GLC and ILEA precepts) and withholding interest payments.

c) Campaigning for industrial action by council employees. Recent events make it highly unlikely that the affected councils will follow such a strategy— as outlined by Gareth Jenkins in December's *Socialist Worker Review*—which puts off a confrontation and fudges the issue.

At the same time, recent decisions—such as not to ask councillors who refuse to break the law to resign, to go into negotiations with Patrick Jenkin, and to follow the Kinnock lead in not breaking the law by Blunkett, Meacher and NUPE official Tom Sawyer—makes any confrontation between the Tories and the councils seem unlikely.

In the event of the councils breaking away, it is important that we are able to show council workers who look to the Labour Councils to fight, that they could have taken on the government. Otherwise we both let them off the hook and reinforce the belief that nothing can be done to take on the Tories.

If the Labour Councils do back away from a fight it will greatly lessen the chances of a fightback from the workforce. The experience of previous campaigns like Lothian and Lambeth, where the council promised to fight and then backed away at the last moment, was to neuter any fightback amongst the workforce. If this experience is repeated, it is unlikely that it will be possible to fight rate-capping 'all at once' through setting a date and everyone coming out. What is more likely is that the fight against ratecapping will begin as individual sections are attacked.

To prepare for this will mean both building up the sectional organisations within the council and at the same time attempting to build up links between sections—for example inviting speakers from different sections and different unions to address section meetings about rate-capping.

The London Bridge policy of 'one out, all out' is very useful in giving a basis from which to argue among council workers. The more sections which adopt such a policy now the easier it will be to win solidarity when the sectional disputes break out.■

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Too sectarian

CHRIS Harman's reivew of Polan's *Lenin and the end of Politics* (SWR 71) makes the suggestion that Polan's anti-working class politics stem inevitably from his former RCP/RCG alignment. While this may well be the case, it seems a very dubious way of characterising these or any other left groupings. Would it be fair to characterise the anti-working class politics of, say, a Gus MacDonald or a Roger Rosewall as the inevitable outcome of IS/SWP politics? We would say that these individuals, like Polan, have sold out to capitalism.

But at what point does that sell-out take place? Chris Harman's review has the effect of suggesting that it takes place immediately an individual or group leave the SWP. Whatever other party they may at first join, their transition into fully-fledged reactionaries is merely a matter of time. During a period when revolutionaries were drifting into the reformist camp it was clearly essential to identify ex-revolutionaries as the bridge to reformism (and beyond). But it must also be said that there are many ex-revolutionaries who are still active socialists, still victimised by their employers for their beliefs.

Clearly we should argue with such individuals about their reformist, centrist, or sectarian politics. We might also point out that their lack of political clarity makes it easier for them to slide towards accommodation with capitalism. But it is not helpful to characterise everyone outside the SWP, even those who were once inside, as all, potentially or actually, in league with capitalism. Much more importantly, we will be unlikely to attract those individuals fresh to left-wing politics, but confused by the different organisations by this method of distinguishing ourselves.

In the present climate we should place our dividing line between those who are prepared to support the miners and those who aren't—and argue our politics with everyone in the pro-miners' camp. Most of whom would no doubt despise such filth as Polan, MacDonald and Rosewall as much as we do. It may well be that the RCP, by campaigning for a ballot are actively undermining the strike and should be excluded from the pro-miners' camp, but their motives cannot simply be lumped together with Polan's motives for denouncing the whole of the left. ■

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The fight for Florence

HOW FAR back does the history of workers' struggles go? Most people would say perhaps 250 years, to the Industrial Revolution or just before it. But the exploitation of workers by capitalist employers was not unknown even in the middle ages, and when it did occur the workers often resisted vigorously, and even came near to making working class revolutions on occasion.

The biggest and, temporarily, the most successful workers' struggle of the middle ages was the revolt of the clothworkers in the Italian city of Florence in 1378. Florence is nowadays a major industrial city, and in the history we are taught at school it usually appears chiefly as the city of the Renaissance that produced famous figures like Leonardo da Vinci and Machiavelli. But a century before the Renaissance Florence was the centre of woollen cloth manufacture, and also of class struggle between cloth workers and their employers.

During the fourteenth century, the free craftsmen of the cloth industry in Florence had been forced into the position of wage earners by the powerful employers' association, the Wool Guild. Manual workers were excluded from membership of the guild and forbidden to purchase raw materials or sell their products to anyone but their employer. While many craftsmen still worked at home, the employers also ran large workshops where the wool was sorted and carded.

The mass of increasingly exploited cloth workers, in both homes and workshops, were known as the Ciompi (pronounced Chompee). They responded to worsening pay and conditions by organising strikes and secret workers' associations. But the penalty for organising cloth workers was death, and a carder called Ciuto Brandini was executed in 1345 for forming an association of workers with their own rules and elected officers.

Manual workers in the cloth industry were banned from forming religious fraternities or even gathering in taverns, in case they might use these occasions to organise.

But the Ciompi got together nevertheless, and a worker interrogated about a secret meeting just before the rising of 1378 said that they discussed the harshness of the Wool Guild's punishments for breach of its rules, low pay in general, and the fact that 'for a piece of work worth twelve shillings they give eight.' (Exploitation was felt as an injustice long before it was analysed by Marx).

In July 1378 the Ciompi, together with craftsmen of other trades and small shopkeepers, rose up and threw out the corrupt and faction-ridden government of the leading Florentine families, and elected a popular commission to carry out reforms. These reforms included three new guilds for workers previously excluded from organising — dyers, tailors and the Ciompi. The city was now to be run by all the 24 guilds rather than the elite few, and this in effect gave the vote in city government to most adult males. The commission suspended all interest payments on the public debt, which had kept many rich Florentines in comfort.

Craftsmen were freed from the restrictions on buying and selling that had maintained the employers' monopoly position. But it was recognised that most workers would still be dependent on the big manufacturers for work. So, a minimum quote of two thousand cloths a month was imposed on each large firm.

A wool carder, Michele di Lando (one of the chroniclers remarked with horror that he was the son of a working woman) led this popular government. But power seems to have turned his head, and the more radical clothworkers accused him of being more interested in becoming a knight and acquiring a suit of armour than in further reforms.

During August, many workshops remained closed, as the employers had left to gather forces elsewhere. The new regime began to levy forced loans (an old grievance) and to disarm the workers who had put it in power. Increasingly dissatisfied, the Ciompi drew together again and launched a last revolt against the moderate leaders of the July revolution. Their leaders this time called themselves the 'Eight Saints of the People of God' and religious ideas probably played an important part.

Heretical ideas such as equality and apostolic poverty had been preached for some time in Florence by groups such as the Franciscan Spirituals. Some of the Spirituals believed in a coming 'Third Age' when property would be abolished and the poor enjoy liberty and equality for a thousand years—a very primitive idea of communism, perhaps, but one that terrified property owners.

But many of the supporters of the July revolution had been small property owners: artisans, shopkeepers, and even wool carders who employed a few others. Meanwhile, many of the exploited wage earners would have been satisfied with the opportunity to acquire small businesses themselves now that buying and selling were free, and participation in city government more open. They, too, feared a more radical revolution.

Behind the Renaissance

The Eight Saints of the Ciompi were defeated and their followers massacred by the reforming government they had helped to put in power—unfortunately not the last time in history that this pattern would occur. As with most unsuccessful revolutions, the repression was much bloodier than the revolution itself. Many Ciompi died, but they had themselves executed only one person—the public hangman, who was strung up by his feet.

The reforming government survived for less than four more years, but in 1382 the full power of the ruling class was restored. Out of this experience, the rich citizens of Florence had learned important lessons. They stopped tearing one another apart in faction fights, concentrated on unity and class power, and learned to sing their own praises in art and literature. So the Italian Renaissance was finally born.

Beneath the magnificent palaces of Renaissance Florence, whole working class quarters were wiped out. Behind the gorgeous paintings commissioned by wealthy patrons lay extortion and misery, for both patrons and painters were involved in moneylending, and in Florence during the Renaissance a worker could have his hand cut off for non-payment of debts. 'The state as a work of art' was the description a nineteenth-century historian gave to the Florentine Republic—the art and the state were both produced by the defeat of the Florentine workers.

Behind ruling class history lies the history of the working class, its defeat as well as its occasional and all too brief victories. ■

Norah Carlin