

# socialist worker Review

February 1986

Issue 84

60p

**IRELAND:**  
'What Britain wants  
here is not a  
resolution to the  
problem. What  
Britain wants is  
victory'

An interview with Sinn Fein



<b>NOTES OF THE MONTH</b>	<b>3</b>
on the Heseltine affair, its repercussions, and prospects in the print	
<b>NIGEL HARRIS</b>	<b>8</b>
on Kampuchea's heart of darkness	
<b>FIGHTING THE WITCH HUNT</b>	<b>9</b>
Gareth Jenkins and Bill Thompson look at <i>Militant's</i> response.	
<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>	<b>10</b>
George Gorton writes on the Chinese situation; and we print Workers' Opposition documents from Poland, with a commentary from Andy Zebrowski.	
<b>FLEXIBILITY AND THE NEW OFFENSIVE</b>	<b>14</b>
What is really happening inside industry and to working class organisation? Dave Beecham explains.	
<b>CLASSROOM STRUGGLE</b>	<b>16</b>
We reprint excerpts from a document on the teachers' dispute discussed at the SWP national committee.	
<hr/>	
<b>IRELAND: INTERVIEW WITH SINN FEIN</b>	<b>17</b>
Pat Stack talks to Sinn Fein's Joe Austin in Belfast about the impact of the Anglo Irish agreement, and what the prospects are for struggle in Ireland.	
<hr/>	
<b>OFF THE SHELF</b>	<b>22</b>
In the first of a new series which examines the ideas in some of the Marxist classics, Ann Rogers looks at <i>The Jewish Question</i> , by Abram Leon.	
<b>FEMINISM AND KINNOCK</b>	<b>24</b>
The convergence of the ideas of feminism and the mainstream Labour Party examined by Sheila McGregor.	
<b>CHANGING COURSE</b>	<b>26</b>
Paul Ahmed looks at the positive aspects of racism awareness courses.	
<b>MARXISM &amp; CULTURE</b>	<b>27</b>
Socialists and art, South African music and Linton Kwesi Johnson.	
<b>REVIEWS</b>	<b>30</b>
on the Greek civil war, communist resistance in Germany in the 1930s, Freud, radio, sexuality.	
<b>LETTERS</b>	<b>34</b>
on Poundswick, Trotsky, nationalism	
<b>1936</b>	<b>36</b>
Our new series looking back fifty years starts with Chris Bambery on the Spanish Popular Front government, whose election began a year which ended in revolution and civil war.	

**Edited by** Lindsey German  
**Assisted by** Jane Basset, Pat Stack, Gareth Jenkins, Andy Zebrowski, Noel Halifax, Dave Beecham, Norah Carlin, Laurence Wong, Rob Ferguson, Bill Thompson, Pete Binns, Simon Terry, Harriet Sherwood, Lindsey Greig, Clare Fermont, Pete Green and Lesley Hoggart

**Production and business** Pat Stack and Liz Abraham  
**Reviews** Colin Sparks

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 E3 3LH.



# NOTES

## of the month

TORIES

## Not her style

THE Heseltine/Westland affair has provoked perhaps the biggest political crisis for the Tory government so far. It has led to the spectacular resignation of one cabinet minister, and the public humiliation and possible eventual resignation of another. It has caused a dramatic slump for Tory support in the opinion polls, at a time when they were beginning to make a recovery.

It has hit particularly hard at the credibility of Margaret Thatcher herself. She is widely regarded, according to the polls, as not having told the truth in the affair, and even many Tories now believe she should resign before the next election.

It was obvious from very early on that the row simmering in public since well before Christmas was not about the future of a medium sized helicopter company. It appears that until fairly recently Leon Brittan as well as Heseltine was in favour of the European deal. Now, despite urgent buying at inflated prices by those who favoured the American deal, the latter has been decisively rejected by Westland shareholders.

The political rows have moved on far beyond those issues to ones of constitutional propriety and collective government.

What is the crisis all about?

A popular version of events is that the rows are all about the style of government

of Margaret Thatcher. She is dictatorial, abrasive, and tries to circumvent cabinet discussion. She has created a government of political pygmies, who are terrified of challenging her. 'To her cabinet, Mrs Thatcher's style is no longer energising but debilitating. Too much of British government has become neurotic,' says *The Economist*.

Other political commentators echo this view. Thatcher has got herself into trouble because she doesn't know how to give way, to be flexible or to work collectively.

Much of this is true. Every cabinet minister who has left her cabinet has complained about her running of the government. And there have been plenty of them.

Michael Heseltine was the sixteenth minister to quit Margaret Thatcher's cabinet since 1979. Leon Brittan has only narrowly avoided becoming the seventeenth—so far.

The moanings of disgruntled ministers also fit with the public perception of Thatcher, if the opinion polls are to be believed. The iron lady image has become the Tories' biggest electoral disadvantage in recent months.

But the theory about Thatcher's style only fits up to a point. After all, there is ample evidence that Thatcher does back down on certain issues. She was, for example, prepared to relent over pit closures in 1981 when faced with a strike. She hasn't had her own way with tax cuts. She has given in over the all-rail channel tunnel in recent weeks.

What is true is that in 1982 during the Falklands war, and during the election campaign of 1983, her 'style' fitted with the political situation. The Tories gained from her 'resolute approach' both electorally and in terms of dealing with some of the wetter ministers.

The 'resolution' hasn't worked so well since then. But this has little to do with

Thatcher rubbing her political opponents up the wrong way. It has everything to do with the continued failure of the system to get itself out of the crisis.

As the *Financial Times* puts it: 'The problem is not that Mrs Thatcher is authoritative but that it is becoming far less easy to understand what she is being authoritative about; what her policies now are, and whether they are working. To paraphrase Lady Bracknell, to lose 15,000 jobs, the confidence of the money market and a senior minister all in the same week looks very like carelessness.'

There lies the root of the government's problems. It desperately needs a success. But the success is not forthcoming. It is still paying the price of victory over the miners in financial terms. And even in political terms, the strike has not had the sort of spin off with other workers that was hoped.

True, the employers are launching a number of offensives against different groups of workers (see the article on flexibility, page 14) and there look like big battles in the print. But most worryingly for the government, real wages continue to increase at a rate quite unacceptable to British capitalism if it is to be made competitive on a world scale.

At the same time, unemployment continues to grow. It is almost double that of the US and Germany, and a good bit higher than France. It is a major political problem for Thatcher. Worse, it hasn't had the effect of holding down the wages of those in work as she had hoped.

That is why there is so much talk of 'style'. Not because anyone who has backed Thatcher for the last seven years cares how nasty she is—the woman has after all been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Argentinians and the starving into submission of miners and their families—but because it isn't working.

To quote the *Financial Times* again: 'It was her personal intervention which torpedoed the widely agreed DES proposal for a broad enquiry to help end the teachers' dispute. Similarly she is now regarded as the main hurdle to British membership of the European Monetary System, despite the shifting view of the Treasury.' In other words, sections of the ruling class want to try a different approach.



# NOTES

## of the month

They understand that many of the monetarist prescriptions applied post-1979 are not working.

What the Westland crisis has pointed up is exactly how little direction the Tory strategy has, and how worried the ruling class are. There seems to be little to show for six Tory years other than economic stagnation and political confusion.

The signs ahead don't look good either. Another crisis looms over the reform of the rating system and the shift of some fairly meagre resources to the inner cities.

Unemployment rising again was unexpected and is not welcome to the Tories. Even a medium sized success doesn't look within the grasp of the government in the near future. ■

### THE THATCHER FACTOR

## Who's strongest now?

ONE outcome of the whole affair has been the increasing hollowness of the claims that Margaret Thatcher's rule is invincible. In fact her grip has begun to look very shaky indeed.

The theory about Thatcher and Thatcherism developed most coherently around the time of the last election and before that during Thatcher's performance in the Falklands war. It was espoused by the Communist Party historian Eric Hobsbawm and was identified with the CP magazine, *Marxism Today*.

The argument goes that Thatcher represents a qualitatively different form of Tory rule from previous governments and

therefore needs new responses—an extremely broad cross-class alliance.

Tied to this view was that Thatcher represented a form of 'authoritarian populism', that her right wing approach coincided with that of a large chunk of ordinary working people, for example round the Falklands war or on the question of riots.

This led to the conclusion that all sorts of ideas which had long been tenets of even reformist thought could no longer be taken for granted and had to be challenged. The theory has provided a useful left cover for all sorts of people who have been moving to the right over the past couple of years.

What is astonishing about the recent crisis is how weak Thatcher actually looks as soon as any real opposition to her develops.

Of course, this particular fight doesn't involve a decisive political challenge to Thatcher. Michael Heseltine has, to all intents and purposes, supported the policy of the Thatcher government at every step of the way. As Minister of Defence he was the enthusiastic persecutor of the Molesworth and Greenham Common protestors. He, like all the rest of Thatcher's cabinet casualties, agreed with the policies which have hit working class people so hard since 1979.

But the in-fighting has pointed up one remarkable fact. Most of the time Thatcher's invincibility has been based on the fact that she has faced little or no opposition. This is particularly true in her second term of office.

After all in 1981 the Tories were doing extremely badly. They were trailing in the opinion polls. They were wary of taking on strong groups of workers, like the miners, for fear of taking on something they couldn't handle. Labour had organised a series of massive protest demonstrations against unemployment. The inner city riots forced the Tories to pay lip service to improving living standards and job opportunities in those areas.

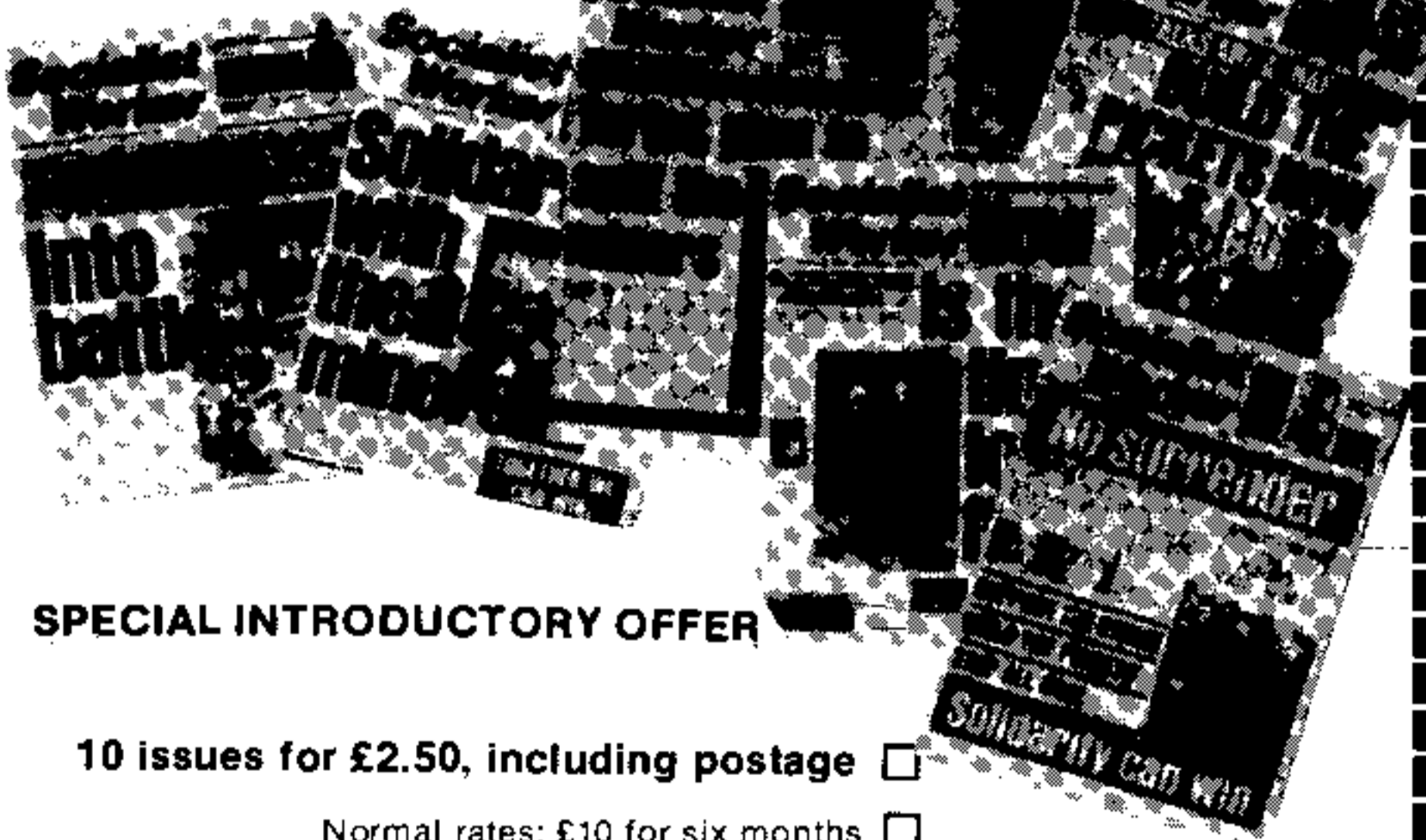
The spin off from the war and the victory over Argentina changed that. But the general mood also moved the Labour Party to the right. Right wing pressure on Labour increased up to 1983 as SDP and Liberals increasingly won ground from them—most spectacularly in Bermondsey in 1983. The rightward drift was accelerated by Labour's humiliating election performance in that year.

Since then many of Kinnock's policies have been merely stealing the clothes of the SDP and the Tory wets.

So Thatcher has received no serious political opposition from Kinnock or mainstream Labour. Instead, Kinnock poses himself as more reasonable, more caring, less dogmatic—but basically committed to broadly similar policies.

The only major opposition of the past two years was the miners' year long strike. Yet the strike was attacked not just by the Tories and SDP, but by Kinnock who feared that it would polarise issues too strongly at a time when Labour didn't want

**Ideas that can win**  
**Buy Socialist Worker**  
**only 25p**



### SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER

10 issues for £2.50, including postage

Normal rates: £10 for six months

£19 for a year

Name .....

Address .....

Money with all orders to: Socialist Worker Circulation, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.  
Cheques/POs payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers. (Write for rates for libraries, institutions and overseas subscriptions.)

to rock the boat. So the miners didn't receive the support of the Labour or union leaders when they should have done.

The real problem for socialists today lies in the low level of workers' struggle in general (the lowest since the 1930s) and the sectionalism which tends to dog those disputes that do arise. This has led to a situation where the only apparent alternatives to Thatcher are the electoral ones of an SDP or right wing Labour government.

It is this which allows Thatcher to achieve so much without organised opposition, even though millions of people are deeply against what she stands for.

The Heseltine affair is already dying down. The government has managed to weather this particular storm. The affair should not be regarded, however, simply as an amusing sideshow for socialists. It has pointed up some of the deep problems that the Tories face. But it has also underlined the weakness of Labour and the unions' response to the crisis that the ruling class finds itself in.

The job of socialists remains trying to build an alternative which is not based on electoral politics. The Heseltine affair shows that Thatcher and 'Thatcherism' are far from invincible, yet despite all the respectability of Kinnock he has not looked at any stage as if he were able (or even willing) to threaten Thatcher.

If the Westland affair had broken at a time of heightened class struggle—precisely the type of struggle that Hobsbawm et al reject—the outcome of the affair could have been far more serious than the government has suffered up till now. ■

## DEMOCRACY

# Double standards

THE WHOLE bizarre affair has also been an object lesson in what the Tories mean by democracy. The word is a favourite of Thatcher and her supporters when it refers to the unions. One of the Tories' major campaigns has been to introduce 'democratic practices' into union affairs. But what they mean is something very far from what socialists mean by it.

The Tories refer to the passive 'democracy' of capitalism, rather than the active participatory democracy of socialism. Much of capital's ability to rule depends on the passivity of the vast bulk of workers.

For these reasons, much of this government's anti-union legislation has been designed to isolate, and make impotent, union activists. Ballots are seen as an important weapon in removing active democracy from trade unionists.

The government has succeeded in persuading large numbers of workers to accept ballots by arguments about democracy,



**The best way to decide on action?**

and the undemocratic nature of the union movement. They've told all sorts of horror stories about union meetings and practices to get their arguments across.

Groups like Aims of Industry have long been exposing 'rigged' union meetings, 'bullying' shop stewards forcing their proposals through meetings, lefties 'packing' meetings, union meetings being organised so that only your supporters know about them. Even though most of these stories had little to do with reality, they have been repeated ad nauseam by Thatcher and other top Tories, in order to help drive through anti-union policies.

How ironic then that the Westland affair shows top management committing virtually every one of these crimes, with the acquiescence and involvement of top Tory ministers. From the beginning the whole affair has been a wonderful example of true Tory democracy.

Imagine the outcry if shop stewards refused to put as a proposal to the workforce a management offer which a large number of workers supported. Yet the equivalent to this is what happened in Westland. Thatcher refused to let the cabinet discuss the European option, and Cuckney refused to let the shareholders vote on any other proposal than the one he and the directors were proposing. So much for full and open democratic discussion.

Clearly Brittan was involved in attempting to threaten British Aerospace chief Lygo into pulling out of the European deal. Every Tory in parliament knew this to be the case, yet when it came to the vote all these great defenders of freedom lined up to back Brittan and Thatcher.

As for the meeting—imagine if a shop steward, scared of losing a vote, cancelled a strike meeting to give him more time to bring in his supporters. The outcry would be huge. If that wasn't enough, imagine that when the meeting did take place lots of workers nobody had ever seen before mysteriously turned up to vote.

All this and more happened with the Westland shareholders' meeting. When it became clear that Cuckney was in for a

# NOTES

## of the month

hiding he postponed the meeting on the basis that the 'room was too small'.

In fact under 500 people turned up to the eventual meeting (including 150 Westland workers bussed in)—a number which could easily have got into the original room.

The real reason was of course that Cuckney wanted the extra three days so that he could get supporters of the Sikorski option to buy up the shares. In those three days the buying and selling, wheeling and dealing was frantic. Unidentified companies and individuals on both sides began to offer large amounts of money for shares (ie votes).

Lord Hanson, one of Thatcher's favourite sons, bought 15 percent of the total shares at 40 percent over the going rate. On the Heseltine side Bristow increased his share holding from 9 percent to 15 percent.

If ever there was a good advert for a postal ballot then these shenanigans were it, yet not one Tory MP or one national newspaper called for one.

In the end all this glowing boardroom democracy ended in stalemate. The workers involved still have their jobs in jeopardy and some unknown consortium may just come along and decide their future.

Capitalist 'democracy' of course is based on how many shares you have, that is, how rich you are. So Bristow can out-vote the entire Westland workforce—so much for worker-shareholders having a say in how their company is run.

Sarah Tisdall and Clive Ponting were prosecuted for leaking secrets. The prosecutions, allegedly in the name of freedom and democracy, were initiated by Heseltine. In recent weeks, he, Brittan, and their respective supporters have been leaking, at about the same rate as the Titanic, every confidential memo, letter and document concerned with the affair. No doubt they have done this in the interests of 'democracy'.

What Westland shows isn't just that their democracy runs in direct contradiction to the interests of workers. It demonstrates that they are pure hypocrites, who have one democracy for us, and one democracy for them. ■



# NOTES of the month

## PRINT

# Sun struck?

AS WE go to press there is the strong possibility of a strike in Fleet Street.

The strike is about the employers' attempts to bust some of the strongest unions in the country. Rupert Murdoch, boss of News International, wants to print his papers with a completely new workforce—one that is unaccustomed to the traditional militancy of Fleet Street.

It will be a strike for the very survival of the traditional print unions. The skilled printers' union, the NGA, heavily relies on its power base and membership in Fleet Street.

The other major print union, SOGAT, though not so dependent on national newspaper membership, receives its major source of strength from there.

If Murdoch succeeds in operating his new printing plant at Wapping, East London, without them it will be the beginning of their end as significant national unions.

Every other national newspaper is waiting for the outcome. If Murdoch wins, the days of negotiations will be over.

The newspaper proprietors will open their new printing plants now being built in East London and staff them with non-union labour, or labour from anywhere else but the printing industry, as Murdoch has done.

Like Murdoch, they will equip them with the latest labour saving technology, and operate the plants with up to 50 percent less labour than they need at present.

The employers are determined to break the massive strength of the unions because they want to ensure an end to the sort of stoppages which meant that in 1985 alone something like 95 million newspapers never made the streets, almost all because of disruption at the point of production.

Most of that disruption was never

immediately sanctioned by the union leadership. It erupted from situations developing on the shop floor.

Or in other instances, like the machine minders' strike at the *Financial Times* in 1984, such was their power that they could tell the officials to take a running jump, stay out for a month, and cost the company a cool £21 million until it conceded every demand.

Murdoch has been in the forefront of the battle for some time. Interviewed in the partly scab printed edition of the *Sunday Times* on 19 January he said:

'We decided early in 1985 that the only way to bring this plant [Wapping] into production was to treat it as a greenfield site and staff it with people outside the existing Fleet Street workforce...'

Since then this is exactly what has happened—with more than a little help from leaders of the electricians' union, the EETPU.

Ever since September, management at Murdoch's new Wapping plant have been taking on and training a scab workforce. Many have been recruited through the Southampton EETPU office, vetted by union officials and then recruited by Wapping management.

The same operation is now going on around the staffing of Murdoch's new printing plant in Glasgow.

The aggression from the employers has provoked a massive vote in favour of strike action at News International. But the response of the print union leaders shows real weakness. They are determined to dodge a confrontation with the anti-union legislation if they possibly can.

They are petrified of being battered and beaten by the courts again.

That's why they've gone along with Murdoch's sham negotiations for so long.

That's why they've done nothing, except complain to the TUC about the EETPU's behaviour, to stop scabs going into Wapping.

Details of the negotiations with Murdoch have been kept away from the membership. Major concessions have been offered, particularly that on single keying—meaning an up to 70 percent cut in pre-print staffing levels—without consulting those directly affected.

The behaviour of the officials in ensuring the printing of what was hopefully the last *Sunday Times* for some time, does not bode well for an all-out strike against Murdoch.

The problem with the officials is that they are already talking in terms of a strike on the lines of the 11 month long *Times* lockout in 1978-9—a lockout that ended in a bad draw for the unions.



There they relied, as they have always done, on the cut-throat nature of competition in the newspaper industry. They waited until newspapers like the *Telegraph* and *Guardian* were clearly mopping up former *Times* readers.

In the meantime they levied all their members on the other national newspapers, and even found jobs on them for striking *Times* workers.

There was little picketing and hardly any mass involvement of *Times* workers.

But the stakes are a great deal higher than they were in 1978. As has already been said, every national newspaper knows that unless they make massive changes now

## socialist worker Review

# SUBSCRIBE

**Socialist Worker Review can be ordered from the address below. Cover price is 60 pence (plus 20p postage) and yearly subscription rates are as follows:**

Britain	£8.00	Europe Airmail	£11.00
Overseas Surface	£9.00	Elsewhere Airmail	£14.50
(Institutions add £7.50)			

**Send a year's Socialist Worker Review starting with the next issue to:**

**Name** .....

**Address** .....

.....

Make cheque/bank draft payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers.  
Return to Socialist Worker Review, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.



Picketing The Times in 1978

they will fall prey to the whole new style of newspaper production being pioneered by Eddie Shah.

The Newspaper Proprietors Association—the national newspaper employers federation—promised Robert Maxwell £400,000 a week during strike action over the *Sporting Life*.

There can be little doubt that, despite Murdoch's history of taking advantage of competitors' industrial problems in the past, he will receive the same cooperation.

And, no matter how much the union leaders may try to dodge the law, there can be no doubt Murdoch will take the first opportunity to use it—with the government and the courts' blessing.

The Wapping plant is clearly geared up to print every one of Murdoch's four titles. He doesn't need to print full runs of them. He knows the demoralising effect of even a few thousand hitting the streets will be enough to seriously set strike action back.

And then the unions will have to seriously consider picketing Wapping and almost certainly come into conflict with the law.

In that event the union leaders will have to consider escalating the action into the whole of Fleet Street—action that could have won the dispute against Eddie Shah in 1983.

Unfortunately there is a strong likelihood they will shy away from such escalation, and hold out for a long haul—a strategy that is unlikely to win against a concerted attack from the employers.

In the face of scab papers being printed and distributed, and little if any likelihood of the unions being able to stop them, the row within the TUC over the electricians' continuing negotiations with Murdoch are likely to take precedence over real action to win.

The only way to stop such a situation developing is for rank and file print

workers to try and gain some form of control over strike action.

The print unions have the power to stop

# NOTES

## of the month

every national newspaper, periodical and magazine in the country. The quicker that power is brought to bear on Murdoch's union busting schemes the quicker the printers can begin to re-establish their position in the industry.

That means any strike in Fleet Street being quickly escalated into the rest of the national newspaper industry, and support being won from railway, lorry and dock workers in the very first days of the action. ■

## Maxwell's hammer

ROBERT Maxwell, owner of Mirror Group Newspapers, has been taking advantage of the situation to go for some of the concessions being offered by the union leaders. He got the green light last September when they dodged a fight over his moving the *Sporting Life* out of Fleet Street.

They ended up signing away 245 jobs, and agreeing to radical changes in working practices—amounting to losses of £60 a week for some workers.

Even before the ink was dry on the agreement he was preparing for another attack. Last November he issued redundancy notices to all 6,000 of his employees.

He made clear he would close all his newspapers down unless the unions agreed to negotiations on saving 4,000 jobs, and even more changes in working practices.

After balloting their members SOGAT brought their 3,500 members out—but only on the demand that Maxwell withdraw the notices. After two days of enthusiastic picketing by a significant minority of workers, Maxwell backed down.

But rather than use the strike to force Maxwell to retreat even more, the leaders meekly sat down and signed away, over the next two weeks, every one of the jobs Maxwell no longer wanted.

Since then Maxwell's management

have gone on the warpath, imposing their long dreamed of control with crude and insulting vigour. Soon after the New Year, rotas were changed, with no forewarning and no agreement whatsoever, for 31 clerical workers.

When they refused to cooperate they were immediately sacked—an unprecedented act. The 400 strong SOGAT clerical chapel almost unanimously voted to come out on unofficial strike. Picketing was quickly organised, and they eventually managed to stop *Sunday People* SOGAT machine minders printing.

But the union leaders were determined to ensure there would be no trouble unless they were firmly in control. They instructed the strikers to return to work. This, plus management's injunctions against the picketing, left the chapel with little choice but to comply.

Now, as a result of the *Sunday People* machine minders' FOC being victimised, they have refused to work and have been sacked. Again, they have been totally abandoned by their officials.

And, because of the utter demoralisation and feeling of isolation among the rest of *Mirror* workers, and particularly the clericals, the machine minders' picket lines have only stopped the odd individual. ■





NIGEL HARRIS

# Heart of darkness

IT TOOK quite a short time for the name Pol Pot to enter the lexicon of political monsters.

The Kampuchean is credited with the deliberate liquidation of Cambodia's middle classes and intelligentsia, with the wholesale destruction of libraries, historical monuments and cultural remains, hospitals and medical services, education; and with the systematic murder or starvation of hundreds of thousands.

Wilfred Burchett, long-time supporter of Peking and an old journalist who ought to know better, faithfully recorded the stories that small children were fed to crocodiles in a farm at Siem Reap. And all this simply from 'ideological commitment'.

The case was never convincing, not because the Kampuchean Communist Party had anything to do with socialism or popular emancipation, but because no social order can be built on such consistent and universal violence.

Most of us learn a wariness of such stories after seeing the headlines in the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail*, where the strangled mixture of violence and terror in the minds of the readers turns a pennyworth of truth into a pound of fantasy. After all, no one made a monster out of President Suharto of Indonesia and his coming to power cost up to a million slaughtered—but then he was eliminating a leftist regime for the west.

The case on Pol Pot (presented in François Ponchaud's *Cambodia Year Zero* and Barron and Paul's *Murder of a Gentle Land*) is about as convincing as Attenborough's dream film, *Gandhi*.

The myth was outdated almost as soon as created. The horrors of Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea seemed invented to conceal the even greater horrors of the US military action in Cambodia (and even more, in Vietnam). If between half and one million were said to have been killed by Pol Pot, just as many or more died in the preceding years of US sponsored management.

But the overthrow of Pol Pot was achieved by Vietnam, close ally of the Soviet Union. Immediately the Washington history writing machine was put into reverse to prove the Vietnamese invaders were monsters and Pol Pot was not so bad after all. The CIA's *Kampuchea: A Democratic Catastrophe* was one contribution to an amazingly swift turn-round.

The change of gear was helped by Pol Pot's open campaign to convince Washington that he was the stoutest defender of democracy in Indo-China and should become a military client of the Pentagon. It was also helped by that

legion of American liberals, yanked rudely to the right by Reagan and Rambo, who had fought against American intervention in Indo-China but now—faced with the endless grey militarism and famine of Vietnam, let alone Pol Pot—have begun to wonder publicly whether US intervention was, after all, so wrong.

However, the myth of Pol Pot is tough. An Oscar winner, *The Killing Fields*, has helped keep it alive (although dangerously introducing the complexity of good and bad Khmer Communists). In Peru, the Sendero Luminoso are accused of being a Latin American version of the Khmer monster. And a transparent effort by the right to whitewash Marcos of the Philippines alleges he must be supported because the Filipino Communist Party are 'Pol-Pot-style' horrors. If Pol Pot did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.

However, there were real horrors. If there is revisionism among the liberals, the left too has to absorb the shock of Pol Pot. Michael Vickery's *Cambodia 1975-82* (South End Press, Boston) is part of the attempt to come to grips with the issues. He seeks as carefully as possible to define what happened, where, when and why, and finds that some appalling things happened but in only a few places and times (mainly 1977). He shows fairly convincingly that, far from being the happy hobbit land portrayed by the western press, traditional Cambodia was pretty horrific. Thus,

'for the rural 80 to 90 percent of the Cambodian people, arbitrary justice, sudden violent death, political oppression, exploitative use of religion and anti-religious reaction, both violent and quiescent, were common facts of life long before the war and revolution of 1970s. The creations of Pol Potism were all there in embryo.'

Second, the economic burdens on the peasantry increased steadily throughout this century (with the first major revolt in 1967-8), producing a strong hostility to the cities. Sihanouk's educational policy, he says, produced a mass of partly educated youth that refused to work in the country and migrated to the city.

Finally, the war broke the social structure, inflicting terrible damage and disorganisation and driving masses of the destitute off the land to the cities. On the other hand, the new Communist Party rulers of 1975 consisted of powerful provincial groups operating in great rivalry with each other; they vested life and death powers in the hands of raw peasant lads. A thousand petty slights, real and

imagined, as well as petty thefts, could be inflicted or avenged in the name of the proletariat.

Furthermore, alongside overblown Phnom Penh (the capital) were the empty lands that needed to be cultivated if Cambodia was to be able to export agricultural goods (and so import most other things); it was 'understandable' that the urban population should be transferred to productive rural labour, but it was done by inexperienced cadres without training or equipment, and soft city hands were destroyed tilling barely fertile soil.

Parts of the case are plausible even though much of it is special pleading and repeats—as if novel—ancient fragments of the conventional 'Third World Studies' case, applicable everywhere.

Vickery says that the Cambodian events were a peasant revolution.

The 'peasant-revolution' tag provides him with a defence of non-peasant Vietnam and China. The Khmer regime failed, he concludes, because 'it turned its back on "Marxist communism" (his unexplained inverted commas) and the economic failure of Democratic Kampuchea confirms the predictions of orthodox Marxism.'

No it doesn't. Vickery is too weak on Marxism to draw any such conclusion.

Nonetheless, this is the beginning of an attempt to penetrate the western fantasy to the real and complex, albeit savage, heart of darkness. It is very long (349 pages), and reading it occasions wonder at the contrast between the author's meticulous industry and the paucity of his theory. But that was the same with most of the opponents of the Vietnam war. Many of them thought the war was about Vietnam itself and the regimes of north and south. When the north took the south, they had time to be disillusioned. In the spring of 1968, *International Socialism* ('Neither Washington nor Moscow—but Vietnam?' *IS* 32) put it this way:

'There is no contradiction between support [for the National Liberation Front (NLF)] and realistic appraisal. We must oppose the terrorism of US intervention in Vietnam, and we must defend unconditionally the right of the Vietnamese to be left free of outside intervention—to do so, in the circumstances, is to offer unconditional support to the NLF. But Ho Chi Minh is not thereby some genial uncle nor the NLF merely the Vietnamese YWCA...when the issue of American power is settled, we know what kind of regime and politics the NLF will then choose—and be forced to choose by the logic of their situation. But that is, for the moment, another fight.' ■



# Fighting the witch hunt

THE collapse of Liverpool council gave Kinnock the green light for a renewed attack on Militant. With indecent haste the Labour Party NEC set up a witch hunting inquiry.

But Kinnock hasn't had it all his own way. When it came to the NEC confirming the expulsion of a Militant Sheffield councillor, there was only a one vote majority. David Blunkett protested that such action would do more harm than good, stirring up trouble where none existed before. Now Labour Left Coordination has put out a statement against the witch hunt.

Does this mean that there won't be a purge? No, but the pace may be slower than it originally seemed.

The Labour Party is a coalition of interests, comprising the trade union bureaucracy, councillors, MPs, and activists in the wards. Although the party as a whole is moving rightwards, the different interests of these groups conflict. The Labour Party moves at a very slow speed (monthly ward meetings, for example) and it becomes clear that the general tendency of the party's politics can be slowed down or resisted as the different groups horse-trade to maintain their positions.

The soft left is a case in point. It is worried that, despite Tory banana skins, Kinnock is not performing very well in the opinion polls. It is worried that too great an obsession with Militant will be counter-productive. ('What is objectionable', wrote Anthony Barnett in January's *New Socialist*, 'about the assault on Militant is its prominence.') It is worried that if the right is really let off the leash, the activists will be demoralised — to the detriment of Labour's canvassing abilities.

That is why Blunkett wanted to protect the Militant Sheffield councillor and why, in an otherwise blistering attack in *Tribune*, Blunkett offered a kind of shield for Militant provided they dropped any attacks on Kinnock.

The coalition of interests also means that, the move to the right notwithstanding, the left—and even *Militant*—can still chalk up some 'victories'. Their supporters can sometimes win prominent positions—as councillors or even prospective parliamentary candidates. It takes a long time for the real world to impinge on the more insulated world of ward meetings or reselection conferences.

What has been the response at grass roots level to the attacks on Militant? In the weeks before Christmas public opposition took concrete shape in two ways.

The first was the circulation of the petition against the witch hunt, taken up by the SWP.

Many thousands have signed the petition—mostly comprising local trade union and labour activists and officials.

The second focus of opposition has been with Militant themselves. At the beginning of December, they held dozens of public meetings all over the country, to rally support for Militant in general and the Liverpool councillors in particular. They also announced in their paper that there would be a mass drive for a Saturday sale of the last issue of the year.

It is clear that the response to these meetings varied. Attendance shows wide fluctuations between different towns. The largest meetings were, not surprisingly, those at which national figures like Derek Hatton were advertised to speak. In Glasgow, for example, the meeting drew 400 people, in Coventry 150, in Manchester and Edinburgh 120 attended. In Sunderland, 80 people turned up.

Other meetings were very small, however: 35 in Birmingham for an all-day rally, 40 in Leeds, 35 in Sheffield and only 20 in Bradford, where the Labour Party recently reselected Militant supporter Pat Wall as its candidate.

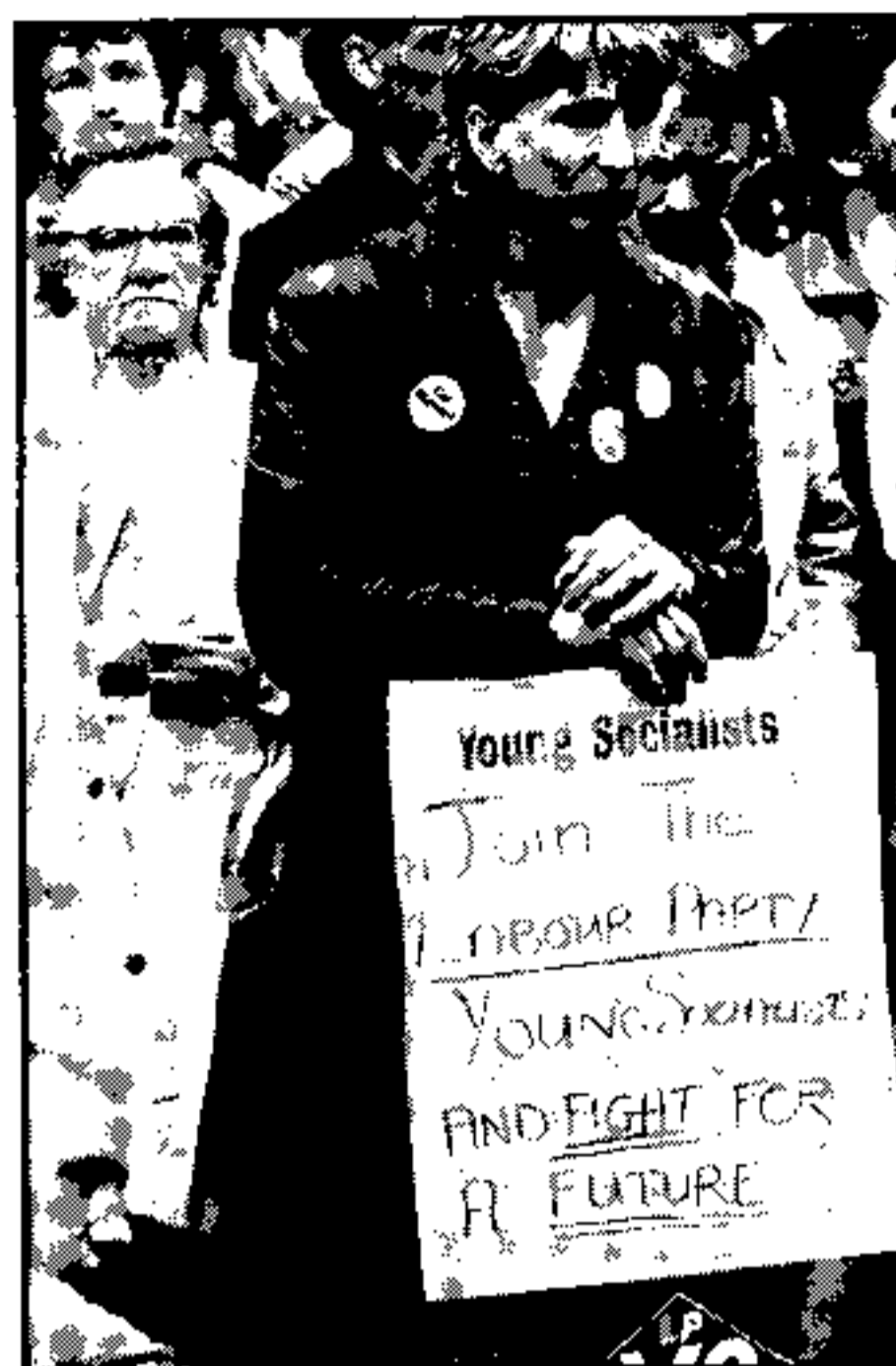
With the occasional exception, then, reports indicate that these meetings were smaller than previous ones on Liverpool.

Why is this? The later, rather messy events in Liverpool will have served to confuse rather than inspire their potential audience. Public meetings are a less than central part of Militant's everyday political routine. Militant can rely on activity inside the round of Labour Party and LPYS meetings to sustain them. They don't have to test their ideas in the outside world quite so immediately as socialists not in the Labour Party have to. Indeed, in Leicester, the public meeting was held on the same night as local ward meetings and that, rather than anything else, may be the reason why only 20 attended.

In terms of content, too, the meetings have shown a wide variation. In Manchester, for example, where Dave Nellist (one of Militant's two MPs) spoke, the general argument was an attack on the Tories, with nothing at all said about Kinnock's role in the collapse of Liverpool, or the witch hunt.

Of most of the other meetings, one thing seems clear, that the 'inevitablism' of Militant's politics (the idea that working class consciousness is inevitably being radicalised), and the triumphalism that accompanies it, are still very prominent.

The defeat in Liverpool is seen as a setback, but only a temporary one. In Stirling, for instance, the speaker, addressing a turn-out of 12 people (of which 6 were SWP members) compared the situation to the situation in 1848 in which 'a spectre is haunting Britain, the spectre of Militant.' In Sheffield, an NUR member and Militant supporter, speaking from the floor, assured the audience that the whole



Which way now?

of the NUR in the district was opposed to the witch hunt.

Increasingly this sort of approach must become more problematic. As Kinnock tightens his grip on the party, the massive growth, the advent of a daily paper, and the succession of victories that Militant supporters have been promised, look more and more remote.

This is a problem, especially for more recent Militant supporters, who have been attracted to them solely on these promises. So a different line of argument seems to be emerging: a much more sober approach, justifying continuing with Labour Party membership despite the obviously unfavourable circumstances. Instead of the apocalyptic vision of inevitable victory, is a perspective of a 'long, hard haul' inside the Labour Party until the Militant line is eventually vindicated.

Information from ex-Militant supporters tend to support the view that education is now, apparently, a major part of all supporters' meetings — much more than it used to be.

A more 'pessimistic' approach has its problems as well, of course. It is much less attractive to potential new supporters. That, and the trimming of Militant's politics (as it occupies much of the space once occupied by the soft left) may well alienate current supporters as well. We cannot expect, however, more than a handful of such people to accept the need to build a socialist alternative outside the Labour Party.

Militant have put great effort into a new round of public meetings at the end of January and beginning of February, specifically against the witch hunt and in defence of Militant. These show that Militant are retaining the core of their support. However, the price of this will probably be a 'fraying at the edges' as some supporters drop out of active politics or join the soft left in the rush to the right. ■  
Gareth Jenkins and Bill Thompson

# China crisis

CHINA is back in the news again. The recently announced fall in the 1985 grain harvest, and the student demonstrations in Peking last December have focussed press attention on the 'open door' policies of Mao's successors. Though the regime and the economy are now far more stable than they were under Mao, there is clear evidence that their economic strategy is in deep trouble.

To take the grain harvest first, the drop of 50 million tons compared to the 1984 harvest is a grave setback to their agricultural policies, which up to now seemed their one real success story.

The 'household responsibility' system, first tried out in selected provinces in 1979 and extended nationwide in 1981, effectively abolished collective agriculture and instead split up the fields among individual peasant families. Though they do not formally own the land, the peasants are allowed to grow whatever they wish on their plots, paying a fixed sum to the state in taxes and keeping everything else to do with as they like. In its first couple of years this led to enormous increases in output, and corresponding rises in the rural standard of living. It is estimated that peasant incomes have trebled in the past four years.

On the basis of this increase in incomes, state investment in agriculture has been cut back to half of what it was in 1978. The assumption made by the state was that the peasants' surpluses would be invested in mechanisation and land improvement. Yet this has not happened—there is now less land under mechanical cultivation than at the start of the system, less land properly irrigated and a drop in the use of pesticides.

The reason for this is simple. While the

money is available, most family plots are far too small for all but the most primitive forms of mechanisation (hand-held motor ploughs, small water-pumps and so on) to be profitable. Instead the surpluses have gone into increased consumption, village workshops and transport to take the produce to market. This lack of investment is undoubtedly one of the main reasons for the drop in the grain harvest.

But the main reason is the opening up of a free market in agriculture, a necessary consequence of the 'household responsibility' system. Told that the state wants them to grow rich, the peasants will go for the crops which are more profitable. For those within a day's travel of a city, this means vegetables and pig-rearing. For others it means cash crops, such as cotton, sugar or oil-bearing plants. All of these are more lucrative than grain because they can be traded on the free market, whereas the price of grain is fixed by law.

This anomaly is a political necessity. Grain accounts for over 90 percent of the protein intake of urban workers. Keeping the price down is thus fundamental to controlling wages and wage demands. The ending of the state monopoly of food sales has led to endemic inflation, despite the large subsidies already paid to keep down food prices. In May the inflation rate reached 9 percent, and though it has come down since then, the effect of the grain shortfall will be to push it higher again.

Nor can the system of price controls be increased, given the near impossibility of enforcing those that do exist. At the start of 1984, the state allowed an increase in the market price of controlled products. It took 10,000 price inspectors in Peking alone to ensure that traders only increased

their prices by the amount allowed!

While the reduced harvest will not cause hunger on anything like the scale of the late 50s or pre-revolutionary China, it must nevertheless cause some hardship and thus limit further the state's room to manoeuvre.

This is not an isolated problem, but rather a symptom of much wider problems inherent to the new economic course taken by Deng Xiaoping since 1978. At the heart of this was the idea that since bureaucratic state control had failed to develop the Chinese economy to the point where it could compete in the world market, this could only be achieved by a combination of reliance on market forces within China, and heavy investment in foreign technology.

The changes in agriculture have been mirrored within industry. Just as control of agricultural production has been largely turned over to the peasantry, so control of much of industry has moved from the central bureaucracy to local managements. Individual factories now have the power to set prices, trade through the market, and reinvest most of their profits as they see fit.

The outcome has been a large increase in economic activity, but not in the directions hoped for by the bureaucracy. Corruption and outright theft apart, the main effect has been to increase local powers as against those of the state. Like the peasantry, individual factory managements have gone for the most profitable form of activity or market, irrespective of what the national plan says they should be doing. Industrial output was planned to rise by 8 percent last year—the real figure was in the region of 18 percent.

The result is a serious energy shortage, continual bottlenecks in production as interlinked parts of industry grow at very different rates, combined with an enormously wasteful duplication of effort as each province or city tries to build its industrial base at the expense of the others.

While capital accumulation—the ultimate goal of all the reforms—seems to have increased, its use is also increasingly out of the control of the state. Planned state investment is now less than half of all industrial investment, and the state finds it ever more difficult to get accurate figures from the factory managements, who have an obvious interest in keeping their hands on as much of the increased profit as possible.

Similar problems are besetting the other plank of the strategy, the importation of foreign technology, crucially in terms of the trading relationship with Japan. While the well-publicised problems of Japanese imports flooding the growing consumer market, as detailed by Nigel Harris in *SWR 81*, are real enough, the imbalance goes much deeper.

Importing foreign technology in the planned quantities poses the question of how to pay for it. The experience of the debt crisis has meant that China finds it very difficult to get loans on the scale needed—except from Japan. And those loans are only available because they are

**A weekend of debate,  
discussion and  
argument**

## MARXISM FOR STUDENTS

**CRISIS ON THE LEFT—  
WHICH WAY FORWARD?**

**14, 15, 16 February (£7 Inclusive) at the University of London Union,  
Mallet Street, WC1**

Organised by the Socialist Worker Student Society  
(More information from SWP, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH)





Picture: S Yanowitz

### **Spinning in factory: helping Chinese capital to accumulate**

underwritten by cheap Chinese exports of oil and coal to Japan. Ninety-five percent dependent on imported energy, Japanese capitalism sees China as an ideal supplier of fuel, particularly as they have been consistently able to drive the price down to below the world average.

Yet those loans are being predominantly used, not to develop China's industrial base, but to open up new fuel reserves for export. Chinese energy needs will be met predominantly by a series of nuclear power stations (hence the recent major deal with GEC).

The absurdity is obvious. No less than 36 percent of all planned state investment in the current five year plan is going on developing oil and coal reserves (and a transport network to link the coalfields and northern ports) to be exported to pay for foreign technology imports. Meanwhile foreign technology has to be imported to provide energy because the existing energy reserves are being exported to pay for foreign technology.

All of the above lies behind the opening up of the most serious divisions yet among the ruling class since Mao's death. At a September meeting of the state leadership an open attack on Deng Xiaoping was launched by a veteran economist, Chen Yun. In a wide-ranging speech, he argued that Deng's reforms had weakened the state and the economy, led to over-dependence on the world market, corrupted the bureaucracy and spread 'decadent Western' influences among youth. The speech was unusually carried in full in the official press, reflecting a widespread disquiet among the bureaucracy.

Yet while Deng's opponents can point out the problems, they can offer no alternative. China is now tied irreversibly into the world economy, taking control out of the hands of the state to an ever greater extent. The absurdities are not in Deng's head, but in the real world.

What the opposition is capable of,

however, is limiting Deng's power by periodically pressing the state machine to reassert its authority over the economy. So last summer saw a restriction of the powers of factory managements to invest profits and make deals abroad without central permission, and a series of import controls on consumer goods. Far from solving the problem, this see-sawing between market forces and state control merely adds to the instability of the system.

The splits inside the ruling class are not fundamental ones. Rather, they reflect the two sides of the contradiction that the Chinese state is caught in—the more the economy grows, the less the state is able to control it. That the splits should be aired so publicly is a sign of the seriousness of that contradiction.

But it is also a sign of weakness, one that can be taken advantage of. The recent student demonstrations were undoubtedly sparked off by Chen Yun's speech. The nationalist, anti-Japanese march by 4,000 Peking students in December (and the less-publicised one in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province, which ended in street fighting) could only have taken place if the students felt sure that they were saying what some of the central leadership were thinking. And given that China's trade is now dominated by Japan to the same extent as it was during the occupation of 1933-45, in a regime essentially founded on a war against that occupation, it must have seemed like a safe issue around which to organise.

What is important, however, is the fact of independent organisation, for the first time since the crushing of the Democracy Wall Movement in 1981. With the vicious repression of 'street crime' that took place in 1984 and early 1985 (mass deportations and public executions), such organisation, even on a safe issue, takes real courage.

And even within the anti-Japanese demonstration other issues, such as student poverty and the lack of democracy, were

being raised. It is too early to say whether such protest will spread greatly, but there has already been a very important (if small) follow-up—the demonstration by students from Xinjiang province in Peking.

The westernmost province of China, Xinjiang is one of the poorest parts of the country and there has been practically no benefits from the new course. Inhabited predominantly by Muslim ethnic minorities, it has been ruled since 1949 by Chinese administrators as though it were a colony. (In 1968, when students demonstrated in the capital city in support of the Cultural Revolution, they were gunned down on the orders of the boss of the province.)

The demonstration centred on two demands: for ethnic minority representation in the provincial government, and for an end to nuclear tests in the region (the first street challenge ever to Chinese nuclear policy). Both are extremely uncomfortable issues for the bureaucracy to face. And while their immediate response will be repression, the fact of the demonstration occurring on the heels of another one means that to all their other headaches is added the rebirth of political opposition from below.

It is important not to over-emphasise the size of such opposition. The rises in living standards since 1978 have created a reservoir of popular support for the new rulers. But it has also given rise to expectations of further rises. As the problems in the economy multiply, sooner or later the ruling class must not only deny those expectations, but also cut into real wages. It is then that the conditions will be ripe for the opposition movement to put down real roots inside the working class. In the meantime the student movement, if it survives, has at least the potential to seriously worry the ruling class. China-watching looks set to become a more fruitful occupation in 1986. ■

George Gorton

# Into the breach

Since the imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981 Solidarnosc has been forced underground. However, sections of the organisation and its supporters have begun to re-examine the experience to understand where Solidarnosc failed last time round and how best to take the struggle forward today.

For some the whole experience means that the state can't be beaten, and therefore accommodation is the only way forward. These 'neo-realists' would be willing to stand for the Polish Diet (parliament), as part of this process of collaboration.

The 'neo-realists' are to the right of the majority of the Solidarnosc leadership, who still support a boycott of the regime but even here there are clear signs of a drift to the right. There is now far more talk of 'society' and 'the nation' and less and less of the working class.

There is, however, also the development of a serious left opposition called 'The Alliance of the Workers Opposition Press'.

Set up in the spring of 1985, it is the most serious attempt to examine the way forward for socialists in Poland since the rise of Solidarnosc.

The organisation comprises the editorial boards of four underground papers: *Front Robotniczy* (Workers Front), *Sprawa Robotnicza* (Workers Cause), *Glosno* (Out Loud) and *Wolny Robotnik* (Free Worker).

*Front Robotniczy* has published extracts from the *Open Letter to the Polish Party*. This was written in 1964 by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski, who at that time were arguing that Poland was a capitalist country. The SWP has published the 'open letter' in the past.

The Workers Opposition now publishes a monthly bulletin called *Przelom* (The Breach) which first came out last year.

The ideas of the Opposition are worth studying in some detail. Here we reproduce the 'Draft Platform of the Workers Opposition', and *Andy Zebrowski* takes a critical look at the organisation and its ideas.

**1 The class struggle.** The political struggle that has been going on in Poland since 1980, which has been generally termed a fight between the society and the regime, is primarily a class struggle.

It is essentially a struggle between the working class, which is subjected to economic exploitation and deprived of all political or economic power, and the bureaucratic state power, which is based on the PZPR [Polish Communist Party], as well as on the military and police machine and the economic and administrative apparatus. Only the working class has the capacity to overthrow the bureaucracy, and it is only thanks to it that the social

groups can liberate themselves from the yoke of the bureaucracy.

**2 Self-management.** The fundamental aim of our struggle is to get the working class to transform itself from an object into a subject. This will only be possible through a system of generalised self-management. Such a system would involve self-management councils in the enterprises, linked together by horizontal and vertical structures on the regional and national scale, as well as institutions of self-management organised on a territorial basis. Self-management, a form of direct political and economic democracy, will thus become the principal factor in organising social and political life.

**3 Political pluralism.** Self-management can only function in conditions of unrestricted political pluralism. It cannot be foreseen today what will be the exact forms of the social organisations and representative bodies set up. We cannot say exactly what will be the role of the free elections to the Diet that we would like to see. But it is clear from the start that the principle of political pluralism has to govern all forms of participation in political life for the society.

**4 The revolutionary struggle.** The transformation of the working class from an object into a subject is only possible through revolutionary changes. The belief in the possibility of a compromise with the bureaucracy is a dangerous illusion that could prove fatal. In fact, there is no way to reconcile the introduction of a system of self-management, that is, the realisation of the interests of the working class, with the domination of the bureaucracy. One course for the antibureaucratic uprising could be a revolutionary general strike turning into an active strike [ie, a takeover of the factories by the workers], supported by actions outside the factories. It is only in such revolutionary conditions that we could expect a part of the army, primarily ordinary soldiers, to join in the uprising of the working class, when they see that the working class forces have a chance of success.

**5 Self-organisation.** A revolutionary goal for the struggle requires a revolutionary strategy, that is, a strategy based on consistently advancing the self-organisation of the working class. Such self-organisation is the common element in all the phases of the development of the workers' struggle, from the present fight for partial objectives to the future struggle for a system of self-management, in which the principle of self-management will find its fullest expression. Every battle, even on the most limited question, bears within it an embryo of the future revolution, inasmuch as it contributes to the self-organisation of the workers. This is why the demands put forward by the workers movement in its

programmatic documents must always take into account three elements:

—They have to correspond to the needs of the working class.

—They have to be in tune with the level of consciousness of the workers at the time.

—They have to make it possible, in the struggle itself and on the basis of its success, to raise the level of self-organisation of the working class and of the other social groups allied with it.

**6 The independence of the workers' movement.** Today, the existence of an independent workers' movement is the main form of self-organisation and the main precondition for the struggle of the working class. The fight against the bureaucracy entered a qualitatively new phase in 1980, when the strikes opened up the way for the formation of Solidarnosc, the first national independent structure representing the workers that we have seen in the history of the bureaucratic system in Poland. Today, building and strengthening workers' organisations in the plants independent from any organisation or institution outside the working class remains the principal task.

**7 Pluralism within the workers' movement.** Pluralism is necessary within the workers' movement in order for it to be able to develop politically. The right of the workers to organise freely in clubs, groups, currents, and political organisations has to be defended. Open politicalisation of the workers' movement, based on clear principles, can only strengthen it. Attempts to smother this process, under the pretext that it 'weakens the union', is 'factional' activity, or 'provocation', on the other hand, can only undermine the movement, or in fact divide it, and they involve all the characteristics of provocation.

**8 Self-determination.** Understanding the class character of social relations in Poland involves rejecting the nationalist imagery that reduces our fight to a struggle against the Soviet Union for independence. The basic dividing line in our nation is not a schematic opposition between patriots and traitors but one of opposing interests among different social groups. This is why national independence, as an effect of the struggle of the working class for social liberation represents from the standpoint of the working class, the full achievement of the indispensable right to self-determination.

**9 International workers' solidarity.** The Polish working class is not isolated in the struggle. It has friends and allies abroad. They are the workers of the entire world. The Polish workers' movement can and must draw on the strength of international workers' solidarity. The differences between East and West cannot hide the fact that the workers of both camps are linked by common interests, by a common struggle for a common end—the transformation of the working class from object into subject—against common enemies. The question of international solidarity is one of close cooperation of the various national contingents of the revolutionary



workers' movement; it is one of interaction between the development of the class struggle, for example, in Poland, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain.

**10 Socialisation.** The indispensable precondition for the liberation of the working class is for it to lay the economic foundations of its liberty, that is, socialisation, outside of the state and in the framework of a system of workers' self-management, of the means of production that are today statised. It is in this way that the working class will obtain the material guarantee of realising its interests, as well as the legitimate interests of the other groups in society. The aim of the revolutionary workers' movement, flowing from the essence of the social relations against which it rebels, is not the reprivatisation of state property or giving it autonomy, but to genuinely socialise it. We regard the taking of political power as a means for the working class to assume economic power.

Joint work by radical worker activists with a view toward forming a workers' opposition to the bureaucracy is essential to draw up a programme for the Polish workers' movement and to gain support for the revolutionary struggle aimed at establishing a system of self-management, a self-managed republic in the full sense of the term. By establishing coordination among the organisations, or in the future by building revolutionary parties, we are not opposing ourselves to the workers' movement in the broad sense. To the contrary, we want the revolutionary current, which is a component of this movement, to be consolidated within its own structures so that it can better contribute to building an independent mass workers' movement. From that flows the basic significance of this platform. That is, the victory of the Polish workers depends in the first instance on adopting a strategy for revolutionary struggle against the bureaucracy. In practice, the advance to social self-management has to be based on a revolutionary political identification by the workers. It involves the workers becoming conscious of their social and economic interests, as well as the independence of the political-organisational institutions of the working class.

This is why it is the responsibility of those who share the ideas expressed in this platform to unite their forces in the struggle for our common cause. ■

IT WOULD be wrong to think of the Workers Opposition as an embryonic revolutionary party. It makes revolutionary sounding propaganda, but is unclear about what is needed to overthrow the system.

It is influenced by the orthodox Trotskyism of the Fourth International, which sees Poland as some form of workers' state. Thus it doesn't see that the only way workers can take power in Poland is through a system of workers' councils usurping the power of the state and smashing it.



The programme starts by rubbishing the concept, dominant in Solidarnosc, that what is going on is a fight between 'society' and the regime. The struggle is a class struggle, it says, and what is needed is independent workers' self organisation, with attention being paid to shopfloor fights for partial objectives.

It also expects a part of the army to join in the uprising of the working class and argues the importance of international solidarity.

All this is encouraging.

But the final aim of the movement is a 'self-managed republic'. This is defined as 'the socialisation, outside of the state and in the framework of a system of workers' self-management, of the means of production that are today statised'.

The trouble with this is that the socialisation of the means of production (workers' control) is not possible while the police and the army still exist.

The use of the term self-management is also a problem. This becomes clear in an article from *Front Robotniczy* of February 1985, which argues for activists to stand for elections to the government controlled workers' councils, which are part of the system of plant management. A comparison in this country would be the election of workers to the board of a company while trade unions were banned.

Clearly, this is a tactical question. But the writer of the article sees it as part of a strategy to 'socialise the Polish state' that will help prepare the workers to take full power in the plants through co-management'.

Thus managing an enterprise is seen as preparing for workers' power.

The self-management idea itself dates back to 1956 when the regime used the state-run workers' councils to diffuse the revolts of that year.

Although the 'Gdansk Agreement', which marked the birth of Solidarnosc in August 1980, mentioned workers' participation, this was included only on the recommendation of the intellectuals advising both the Solidarnosc leadership and the government. For six months the Solidarnosc movement was gaining momentum with workers all over Poland gaining confidence through occupations and strikes. Organisationally, the most important step was the setting up of the

inter-enterprise strike committees, which were real workers' councils totally independent of the state.

The self-management idea grew in popularity among the Solidarnosc leaders in the summer of 1981 when the movement was already in decline. There was no real alternative to it because everyone, including the radicals, accepted the idea of a 'self-limiting revolution'.

Once it was accepted that the forward momentum of workers' actions had to be stopped because of Poland's 'geopolitical situation' (ie being next door to Russia), a new political answer *from the top* had to be found.

It's the *politics* of the Workers Opposition which leads it to believe that this solution is a revolutionary one.

*Wolny Robotnik* printed an interesting article in February last year. It argued for the tactic of 'workers' advocates'—a kind of semi-legal shop steward system. (The elected advocate and all the represented workers would sign statements saying that they were in agreement with the system in case of management or police victimisation.) This seems unrealistic, requiring a high level of confidence and organisation. It is probably best explained by the need to fill a political vacuum with tactical schemes.

There are also militant activists such as Andrzej Slowik, the chairman of Solidarnosc in Lodz, who spent two and a half years in prison. He said last year 'the first task is to build and strengthen the structures in the enterprises...it is only in the plants that the regime can be defeated'.

The trouble with even the best of these ideas is that they concentrate on tactics, on increasing activity, on linking up news and possibly support for workers' struggles. Somehow through this activity the regime will eventually be overthrown.

What is needed is not calls to workers to organise themselves or to become more active. Above all what is necessary is a political revolutionary answer, and a revolutionary political organisation to carry it.

Even a tiny organisation would be a much greater step forward for Polish workers than a thousand new tactics. The development of a serious left current can only aid the process. Whatever our criticisms, socialists should welcome the birth of the Workers Opposition. ■

# Flexibility and the new offensive

LAST summer the main employers' organisation, the CBI, announced that 1985/86 was 'make or break' year. The thrust of their campaign was that employers should cut their pay settlements by 2 percent this year and 2 percent in 1987, using a decline in the inflation rate as the pretext. The consequences of a failure to do this would be the loss of all the ground gained since 1980.

What has happened? Six months later, average earnings are rising by around 7½ percent across the whole of the economy and by 8¾ percent in manufacturing industry, calculated at an annual rate. Wage rates continue to rise inexorably. The government's official estimates of average pay increases in industry have been between 8½ percent and 9¾ percent a year since the middle of 1982. The official figures show that—on average—the amount of money people have to spend, after allowing for price rises, has risen by 2¾ percent in a year.

Wages are going in precisely the opposite direction to that desired by the employers and the government. Even if increases fall back a little in the coming months, employers will still be failing to control their number one problem—labour costs.

But this growth in wages is obviously not the result of workers' militancy. On the contrary, in the second part of 1985 strikes dropped to a new low. Those disputes there have been are almost entirely defensive. Pay disputes are running well below their normal level.

The basis for the continued rise in wages is quite complex. Some of it is simply the way the statistics work (eg the proportion of skilled workers now, compared to a year ago or earlier, is higher—so average earnings have risen). Workers in some industries have pushed up their overtime pay and bonus. Management has not got complete control of wages, and is often concerned with getting the orders out rather than screwing down pay and risking a strike. As capitalism becomes more competitive, workers in particular factories can exert more power.

But beyond these factors, some firms are pushing up pay quite consciously. They are buying productivity, job loss and above all—flexible working. In doing so they are making life more difficult for their rivals and for the Tories. But they are seeking major breakthroughs in terms of changing normal working practices and union organisation.

Flexibility is at the heart of the changes that employers are seeking across a wide range of industries. The aims are clearest in 'process' industries, for example petrochemicals (Shell, Esso, Mobil, Norsk Hydro); and food (Nabisco, Kellogg). But there are also examples in the engineering industry—Caterpillar, Cummins, Babcock. All of these firms have sought to negotiate major advances in flexible working over the past few months and, to a greater or lesser extent, they have succeeded.

The distinctive features of these deals, all negotiated in great detail and at great length, with the fullest involvement of full-time officials and stewards, are broadly as follows:

- 1 A break down of demarcations between different groups of skilled workers.
- 2 A change in sectional organisation.
- 3 Extension of shiftworking.
- 4 Greater management control of overtime.
- 5 Use of subcontractors and/or temporary workers.
- 6 Long-term pay deals.

Beyond these broadly common areas of attack, companies have also sought, and sometimes won:

- 1 A reduction in the number of unions, or a single union.
- 2 Secret ballots and an end to the right of sections to take strike action.
- 3 Flexibility between skilled and semi-skilled workers.
- 4 Flexibility between manual and white-collar workers.

Nothing on this sort of scale has happened since the 1960s—the first wave of productivity bargaining which saw management essentially seeking to tie down stewards' organisation, break unofficial organisation, and secure agreement to higher output from fewer workers.

Today their aims are not all that different. The real difference lies in how much they are getting away with. The agreement at Nabisco in Liverpool, for example, is essentially an 'enabling' deal in which the unions (mainly the GMBATU) give the company the right to do what it wants over a 3-year period. Nabisco has total freedom to introduce new machinery and working methods, freedom to move craftsmen between trades, agreement that no section of a union will strike without a ballot of the whole plant. On top of this the deal involved acceptance of somewhere around 1,500 redundancies, with the company having the right to re-employ workers on a temporary basis.

There is a similar formulation on temporary workers at Caterpillar Tractor in Leicester, where the AUEW also agreed to secret ballots with the 'wording of the questions to be jointly agreed between the parties, either or both of whom may include a statement outlining their individual position.' Catch 22 is that the union can only withdraw from the balloting agreement by holding a ballot.

In other plants unions have been signing away jobs at a rate of knots—and also signing away other unions' bargaining rights. It is by no means only the EETPU which has been up to this game. At the Norsk Hydro chemical works on Humber-side, the TGWU has done a deal which

## THE WESTERN SOVIETS

WORKERS' COUNCILS  
VERSUS  
PARLIAMENT  
1915-1920



Donny Gluckstein

Parliamentary channels have proved incapable of defending workers against mass unemployment and falling living standards — but what is the alternative? East European-style dictatorship certainly has nothing to offer. But history provides another way. In the years 1915-20 workers all over Europe set up their own alternative, their own mass democracy. In Germany, Britain, Italy and Russia workers' councils — or *soviets*, to use their Russian name — challenged the existing order. This book brings together a wealth of information which is more relevant today than ever.

SPECIAL PRE-XTMAS OFFER: £5.00 from SWP branch bookstalls or by post from  
BOOKMARKS,  
265 Seven Sisters Road,  
London N4 2DE.  
(Usual price £5.95)





removes recognition from three unions and brings in flexible working. The TGWU has also accepted the removal of minority unions in Shell—again along with hundreds of jobs going and a massive increase in flexibility.

The price the employers are paying for such changes is (sometimes) quite high—around 30 percent, though not in one go, at both Shell and Nabisco. But a lot of this is clawed back through company control of overtime and the scrapping of bonus schemes. In the end it is usually a case of the carrot biting back.

Now if this was all there was to say about flexibility, things would be fairly grim. True, the price to be paid by other companies tends to go up because of these big increases, but the terms of the deals mentioned above represent a serious setback for the ideas of militant or even independent trade unionism.

It is easy for those in and around the soft left in the Labour Party to point to these agreements and say that they show the 'collapse of the traditional working class' and the development of 'completely new forms of work'—all of which is usually wrapped in mysticism about new alliances and the need for a Labour government at any price. In fact the picture is rather more complicated.

First, the fact this is going on at all is actually a sign of the underlying strength of union organisation. When British Leyland introduced their new working methods back in 1980/81 they presented workers with a 92-page document, held a ballot and forced the changes through. There was no question of negotiation. The impact of this is still there, despite some revival of

genuine stewards' organisation and the continued existence of pockets of resistance.

The amount of sugar on the flexibility pill is in direct relation to the strength of the unions and the fear management has of coming unstuck. In fact there are a number of plants where changes are being introduced gradually, without formal agreements, notably in Unilever factories in the North West. But this is a risk.

For example, Kelloggs in Manchester has gone a long way down the road towards full flexibility, but last year the company attempted to cross the boundary between maintenance and production by having line workers do limited repairs (this degree of flexibility is still very rare). The AUEW at Kelloggs resisted and rather than face a long strike and loss of production the company actually redesigned the machines and accepted the demarcation.

The second point is that even where companies appear to have secured huge advances, it often turns out later that the strength of the old organisation reappears in a new form. One example of this is the maintenance crews at the Mobil Oil refinery in Kent. Demarcation was abolished and teams of workers established. There were no longer separate stewards for the various unions but stewards for each team. But the company failed to rid itself of the militants and now faces, if anything, a potentially stronger sectional organisation.

At the Esso refinery at Fawley, near Southampton, the company introduced flexible working and new shift systems which enabled it to reduce overtime dramatically for 18 months. But when it came to the time for a major plant overhaul, the

overtime shot back up to 20 percent, partly because of a threat to strike if contractors were brought in on overtime.

Another area of control which is being clawed back seems to be training. Despite fancy attempts to revolutionise training, most of it depends on workers teaching other workers how to carry out new tasks. In other words, although craftsmen have to be more flexible between trades, they still have a control over those trades in general. Management attempts at 'dilution'—replacing craftsmen with less skilled workers—have not taken off. In fact one of the results of the investment in new plant and machinery and the demand for more flexibility is an *increase* in skills, not a decrease.

This has interesting results in an engineering factory. For example Cummins Engines agreed a revolutionary deal at its three plants designed to cut costs by 30 percent in three years. The first stages of this deal, involving large pay increases, were exclusively concerned with training and group working, including something like a fortnight off work for each worker. This investment pays off for the company, but it also results in greater sectional confidence.

So what is the overall balance of forces as a result of these new types of deal?

We can see quite clearly that the outcome of the flexibility offensive depends very much on the strength of shopfloor organisation at the factory in question. Caterpillar in Leicester is a very much worse agreement, particularly as it affects union organisation, than the one at Caterpillar in Glasgow. The Glasgow workers not only got more money but also

conceded much less in terms of temporary working and nothing on secret ballots.

The Nabisco deals signed by the GMBATU in Liverpool and the Bakers Union in Leicester are much worse than the TGWU deals in the same company.

The workers at Borg-Warner in South Wales accepted seemingly punitive flexibility conditions tied to a six-year pay agreement (only the first three years' rises are agreed so far). But the terms they accepted—with the alternative of closure—were almost identical to the agreement they were supposed to have accepted two years earlier.

It is definitely not the case that shopfloor organisation is, in general, being smashed or even necessarily weakened by these deals. But it is changing. Team working and group working are much more common. So are quality circles. Stewards' organisation will have to change as well. There needs to be one steward for each team. So far there is little sign of this.

Meanwhile the use of subcontracting is growing, as it is in hospitals and councils. But maintenance or transport subcontracting for a capitalist firm is a bit different to school meals or laundry. Beyond a certain point the extra costs of unreliable subcontractors become too much to bear. Firms move over to a system of permanent contractors, often employing very large numbers. At Esso's refinery, for example, there are up to 1,000 workers employed by Foster Wheeler or Bechtel, all in unions and all in a position to organise effectively.

Even the shift towards temporary workers is, sometimes, not as drastic as it seems. The move to temporary working at Nabisco mainly affects the part of the production workforce which was previously part-time. What it does mean, however, is that union organisation has to develop to cope with temporaries, or permanent casuals. Typically the response of union officials has been that 'it's too much trouble to collect the dues...'

So if union organisation in response to the flexibility offensive is variable, where do the employers stand?

The main point is that they have not gone very far down the road they have to travel. In most cases there has been resistance from workers asked to perform tasks drastically different from normal. The employers have in some cases succeeded in bringing in much greater flexibility by stealth. But as the example of Kelloggs shows, they still risk causing strikes if they cross certain boundaries.

At the same time they are forced to bid up pay rates in order to hold or attract the workers they want, or just to buy the changes. This is a real problem for the ruling class. They are torn between trying to drive down wages to a level where British capitalism can begin to compete with Brazil or Korea, and trying to achieve massive increases in productivity on the basis of new investment and a smaller, much more skilled workforce.

Ideally they would like to do both: to move towards the type of dual market for

labour that exists in Japan. But the huge divisions which exist inside the Japanese working class are not the product of culture or religion. They result from the inheritance of the years of militarism and fascism and the subsequent breaking of the

workers' movement that arose after 1945.

Despite the defeat of the miners and the prolonged downturn in the class struggle, British capitalism is a long, long way from achieving that. ■

Dave Beecham

## TEACHERS

# Classroom struggle

**TEACHERS in the largest and most militant teaching union, the NUT, voted last month for a national one day strike over their pay claim, against the wishes of their national executive.**

**The strength of feeling over the claim exists, but the teachers have been dogged by the sort of tactics followed by the union. The passivity of the dispute raises the possibility of a deal being settled against the wishes of many teachers.**

**We reprint here excerpts from a document which formed the basis for discussion at the recent SWP national committee, which looks at the state of the dispute and what socialists should be doing to up the action.**

TEACHERS have been involved in a pay campaign now for over a year in Scotland and almost a year in England and Wales. The campaign has been characterised by its passivity on the one hand and solid determination on the other.

In an attempt to get a settlement the government has changed the NUT's representation on the Burnham negotiating committee. The problems the two main unions face (the NUT and NAS/UWT) is that teachers have come to enjoy life operating the current sanctions of 'No Cover', a ban on non-teaching duties and so on. In the recent past in England and Wales they have also experienced a greater rank and file control of the dispute through the current action organised by the NUT executive, of a half day's strike per member per month. Clearly the current stalemate cannot continue forever.

At the end of the day there will either be sufficient escalation in the dispute to force more money out of the Tories (widespread, indefinite strike action would be needed to shift the Tories) or the teachers will get worn down and end up accepting a deal in the future that they reject today.

The nature of the current dispute presents socialists with enormous problems on how to intervene. The passive nature of the strike leads to dependence on the bureaucracy. The problem we face is the gap between the current level of the dispute and what is needed to win.

There is a danger that because revolutionaries lack decisive influence and because of the passivity in the dispute people will get bogged down in one particular tactic or end up by abstaining from the struggle altogether.

Teachers need to be involved in doing two things: firstly pushing for any tactic

which leads to escalation of the dispute and which increases the confidence and activity of the rank and file, in order to create the conditions within which it becomes possible to argue for all-out strike action amongst teachers.

The use of 'staggered action' in parts of London and the escalation in Bradford to half a day strike per week in 70 schools are important as the greater involvement of teachers in action will make them more responsive to the arguments about massive escalation, and all-out strike.

Such tactics are important bridges to raising the argument for all-out action, provided we understand them to be bridges and not an end in themselves.

Secondly, socialists need to become the focus for all activist and socialist teachers who want to see an escalation in the dispute. Only by linking up with teachers in other schools will it be possible to conduct a substantial argument both for an escalation locally of the order of Bradford or nationally for all-out strike.

That is why SWP teachers decided a year ago to approach the Socialist Teachers Alliance. However, in many places the STA does not exist as a real force and, where it does, the local STA sometimes appears only interested in elections.

Despite this, in the midst of a national dispute it is vital that there is a means of working with wider layers of militants inside the union. This provides a forum within which to argue for an alternative strategy to that of the bureaucracy. Where this has been achieved successfully, over the past year, many of the arguments SWP teachers have pushed inside the union have been adopted by much wider layers of militants, for example absolute no-cover, boycott of exams, one day's strike per member per week.

Hence the STA locally needs to be pushed into holding open meetings of activists in order to plan initiatives locally and campaign in the union. Where the STA does not exist socialists need to take the initiative in drawing together the militants inside the union in the locality.

In the current period there will inevitably exist a tension between revolutionaries, who believe in rank and file independence, and those who seek a solution in terms of changing the bureaucracy. The existence of the dispute will mean that ideas of concentrating on activity amongst the rank and file should get a greater hearing than would otherwise be the case. ■



# IRELAND

**AS WE go to print by-elections are taking place in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that the Anglo-Irish Accord is a serious attempt by Britain to weaken the grip of Republicanism on sections of the Catholic population. Pat Stack from SWR went to Belfast to interview Joe Austin, a leading member of Sinn Fein, and the Vice-Chairman of its Northern Ireland Executive. Here we reproduce the interview.**



**PS:** Could you tell us what the British hope to get out of the Agreement, what do you think their aim is?

**JA:** The British have spelt out very clearly what they do hope to achieve with the Accord. Simply put that is, number one, isolate and prohibit the growth of Sinn Fein, and isolate, and from the military point of view defeat the IRA.

The British cabinet has said that, Tom King has repeated it, and it has been supported by Garrett Fitzgerald and spokespersons of his government.

It is from their point of view a stick and

carrot strategy and the problem for them is when to use the stick and when not to use the stick—given the British history in Ireland—and when to use the carrot. And what the carrot will represent, how big or small it should be.

**PS:** At the recent Ard Fheis (conference) Gerry Adams spelt out clearly that the accord did present Republicans with enormous difficulties. How far do you think the British can be successful in their strategy?

**JA:** The Accord is causing some concern within the Nationalist community. That

concern is to a large extent centred around the antics of the Loyalists. People are at least slightly confused. When you look at what the Loyalists are doing there's a sort of hope, rather than a belief, that if it's so bad for the Loyalists there must be something in it for the Nationalist community.

I think we're overcoming that difficulty. In a strange sort of way the arrest of seven Sinn Fein councillors, the arrest of nineteen Sinn Fein activists, the raiding of homes, the firing of plastic bullets, the supergrass show trials, all indicate to

people that talk's cheap—it doesn't actually buy a lot of drink.

We would have preferred it if the by-elections were fought on a platform of Nationalist interest. But the reality is they're not. Nevertheless they give us an opportunity to break out of the media stranglehold around the whole Accord.

**PS: Were you surprised by the unanimity of the SDLP leadership in going along with the Accord? There was some talk of Seamus Mallon for instance coming out against it.**

**JA:** No we weren't surprised. The SDLP need to present a Nationalist rump and Mallon has fitted into that sort of category. He's been slotted in there very consciously. It's not a coincidence that he's the person that's seen to attack British repression, even if only on a limited basis. That's vote pulling. The SDLP are very conscious that even within their own ranks there is a substantial Nationalist faction. That faction is better controlled. So you control it by giving it its head slightly—and it's a very controllable head.

**PS: When Gerry Adams warned about the dangers of the Agreement and the difficulties it presents for republicans, do you think it's a bigger initiative than the Sunningdale Agreement in 1974?**

**JA:** Oh yes, this is a substantial effort by the British in collaboration with the Free State (Southern Irish) administration and with political forces who are in support of British involvement. This is the first time these have really come together.

Previous agreements have tended to look after the interests of the British and have only slightly considered the interests of the Free State administration. This is the first major coordinated coming together of those forces with what they consider a blueprint for victory.

**PS How much damage can the Agreement do to the Republican movement?**

**JA:** The damage they hope to do is somewhat different to what they can actually achieve. Sinn Fein and the IRA only reflect an aspiration. We are not the custodians of it. That aspiration is held very strongly within the Nationalist community and within the Irish people. Even if the British were able through repression and coercion to completely disrupt or isolate Sinn Fein that feeling would still be there and it would still grow. As the real nature of the Agreement became more obvious that aspiration would again emerge.

One of the difficulties we are faced with at the moment is that the Accord is written in a very ambiguous fashion. There is a very genuine aspiration within the Nationalist community and the Irish people as a whole for peace. Anything that seems to offer that, people are prepared to look at. Whether people are prepared to stay fascinated by it is doubtful.

I think people are beginning to understand the real nature of the Accord now. There are a number of reasons. People have a healthy disrespect for British cabinets and Free State administrations. Where the Accord is coming from itself makes people suspicious. Some of what's been said

Nationalist people find particularly offensive. For instance, Garrett FitzGerald now proclaims that we can 'hold our head up'. People just laugh at that sort of thing. The major question the Brits have got is, can they almost glide in on the element of confusion? If the confusion can be sustained, I think we could have a difficult time. But the signs at the moment among the Nationalist community are exactly the opposite.

The second part of the strategy is repression. It's already begun and it's going to be carried out at a number of levels. The continual use of the show trials, the whole system of repression has to be sustained by the British. Potentially as dangerous is the ongoing campaign of harassment, particularly of Sinn Fein activists.

**PS: What forms will the response of the Republican movement take to all this? There's certainly been an increase in military activity.**

**JA:** I don't think you can link the military activity of the IRA directly to the Accord. That is linked to the ongoing campaign against British occupation. Sinn Fein resistance to the Accord now is one of explaining and discussing, creating an atmosphere of dialogue around the Accord. The continuation of representation by Sinn Fein at council and assembly level and the continuation of the everyday political activity of Sinn Fein will increase.

We have to explain to as wide an audience as possible what the Accord actually represents—that it isn't an attempt to bring about peace, it isn't an attempt to end the conflict, but it is an attempt to defeat both Sinn Fein and the IRA. As that becomes clear, people can realise fully the implications of the Accord.

There may be some minor concessions. We will take full credit for those concessions, because they will have been forced by the activities of the Republican movement and Britain's desire to isolate the Republican movement. The Brits will want to say, look there is progress and constitutional SDLP nationalism has delivered that progress.

**PS: How do you interpret Fianna Fail's attitude to the Agreement? Do you trust Haughey?**

**JA:** Oh of course not. He is now attacking FitzGerald because of his handling of the whole Accord yet Haughey himself signed a similar Accord which went further in facilitating British occupation than this one. Haughey's a political opportunist. He understands the nature of nationalist aspirations in the South and he's pitched his mark at that. He'd hoped that would bring him through the next general election. He has been slightly embarrassed because FitzGerald's done his homework.

**PS: Coming to the question of Loyalist opposition to the Agreement. Can they do what they did with Sunningdale? Can they bring down this Agreement?**

**JA:** First of all you have to identify what's happening in the Loyalist camp. British imperialism is trying to find new allies for itself in Ireland. The allies are within the

ranks of the SDLP and within the ranks of Fine Gael. To win their support the British have to be seen to placate the political difficulties the SDLP and FitzGerald are in.

What the Loyalists see is Britain moving away from an exclusive relationship with them towards gaining wider allies. There is now a difference between what Britain wants for the North of Ireland, and what the Loyalists want for the North of Ireland.

The Loyalist community are in a very difficult position. It will depend how far Thatcher and her cabinet are prepared to stand firm. I don't believe that they will stand completely firm. I think they'll try to do a cosmetic trick with the Loyalists. It will then become a problem whether the Loyalist leadership has whipped up sufficient hysteria to withstand that cosmetic trick, or whether they'll go to the ultimate.

That would lead them into some sort of physical conflict with sections of the RUC who may well remain loyal to its own leadership, and sections of the British army who will do what they're told. It's hard for the Loyalists to sustain any ongoing campaign of resistance, because they don't have the history of it, and little understanding of why it's happening.

However if it comes to a showdown between their new allies and the old, the Brits will maintain their old allies.

**PS: It appears that Paisley is prepared to make a lot of verbal threats, but there isn't much sign that he's going to deliver anything.**

**JA:** The difficulty for the Loyalists is while they have been involved in sabre rattling they must be aware that when they begin to confront Britain in any shape or form, whatever limited support they would have from right wing elements of British society will be forced into the Thatcher camp. They will be doing their own cause no service at the end of the campaign. They realise that.

It is possible, it has been done in the past, for Paisley, Molyneaux and others like them to take the campaign to a fairly advanced level and then unleash the murder gangs either by encouragement or by direct involvement. That is always a possibility.

**PS: What would it mean to the Nationalist population if the Accord is smashed by the Loyalists, and what would it mean if they fail to smash it—if the Loyalists are defeated?**

**JA:** If the Accord is smashed it will mean another strategy to stabilise British involvement has been thwarted. That's obviously to the benefit of those struggling for self-determination. If it's smashed by the Loyalists there's a two-way trauma effect: they have been forced into conflict with Britain. That experience for them is traumatic insofar as that they begin to realise (or at least they should begin to realise) that what Britain wants out of the North is what is in the interests of Britain, and not what is in the interests of the Loyalists.

The difficulty for the Loyalists is that they don't learn the lessons of history. One way of summing it up is to look at a statement of John McMichael, a leader of the



UDA. He said, 'if the Accord is the price we have to pay to defeat the IRA, so be it'. So there is an element within the Loyalist community who are looking at the Accord and already beginning to wonder, is it the Brits really trying to defeat the IRA? That doesn't augur well for Loyalist unity. You have almost a fragmented situation within the Loyalist political community. It won't become clear which is the dominant partner within that scenario for some time.

**PS:** The British have continually argued that they have no room for manoeuvre because of the Protestant backlash. Wouldn't the Loyalists being swept aside weaken this whole argument?

**JA:** The majority of people here acquainted with politics understand that Britain's claims that they can't do anything because of the Loyalists are very hollow. What Britain wants here is not a resolution to the problem. What Britain wants is victory. I think the Nationalist community would react to the Loyalists being swept aside by pointing out to them what's in the minds of the British. It's not your interests they're looking out for, it's their own interests. There would be a hope that we could build on that, and we would suggest to the Loyalists that they should re-evaluate their political position. That would, however, be more of a hope than an actual reality.

**PS:** For the Accord to work successfully, especially from the SDLP's point of view, sooner or later it will not be good enough just to have Southern acquiescence, there has got to be real co-operation. Can the Accord deliver the power sharing that they talk about?

**JA:** No it can't, and the SDLP are aware of that. If you look at the last SDLP conference Seamus Mallon said that they wouldn't accept a 'dollymixture Accord'—a bit of that, a bit of this, and a bit of the other. In fact that's what they have accepted. The whole talk about minor concessions to the Nationalist community is pure speculation. Since the signing of the Accord we've had the show trials, the use of plastic bullets, strip searching, the harassment of Nationalist youth, the UDR firing on a Nationalist village, the arrest of elected representatives. The UDR—far from being reformed—has received pledges from its Chief of Staff that there would be no major change. This has been re-emphasised by Jack Hermon, the chief constable of the RUC. The aspirations of the Nationalist population have not only been put on the backburner, they've been put into the fire.

Tom King's statement at Strasbourg wasn't an accident and it hasn't been withdrawn. When he says Garrett FitzGerald has now given up the aspiration for a united Ireland he is politically correct. So the SDLP can't deliver the goods, because the goods the SDLP voter wants are fair play, self-determination, the right of Nationalists to be Nationalists, and those run contrary to the state, contrary to the activities and the behaviour of the British security forces.



*The British army: part of the 'storm of repression'*

**PS:** But in the longer term if they can't get power sharing aren't the SDLP in real trouble? What good is a reformist parliamentary party without a parliament?

**JA:** The ability of the SDLP to survive the failure of the Accord is a class question. There is a class of nationalists which stems from petty bourgeois right the way up, who will vote for a Nationalist party of the SDLP type. It might not be called SDLP but it will represent that type of a party. I think that the whole professional class that the SDLP represent will always want a party that will represent their interests.

**PS:** Could you explain Sinn Fein's attitude to the hunger strike taking place? *(Since this interview the hunger strike has been called off)*

**JA:** The background is fairly well known. The people in prison serving life sentences are the victims of paid perjurers. In this case Harry Kirkpatrick quite clearly was recruited by the British security forces, and used in a show trial fashion. There is no (and I use the word justice even within the context of sham British justice in this part of Ireland) justice, nor precedent for the sentences that were passed in terms of legality even in Northern Ireland terms.

Kirkpatrick was a very bad witness. He got numerous issues confused, he gave evidence like a dress rehearsal for a play, he didn't depart from one line, he kept referring to the same catchphrases. So bad was he that the defendants and their legal advisers all believed they were going to be released, and that belief was held across the entire political spectrum. The evidence of these paid informers has been thrown out before because their evidence was so sham and so bad.

When the prisoners were sentenced they

announced that they were going on a hunger strike to win a date for an appeal, and so that they and others awaiting appeal from 'supergrass' trials could be released pending appeal.

While we fully sympathise with their plight and completely support their demands we don't feel that the tactic of hunger strike should be the one to be employed now.

**PS:** Can we now broaden the discussion. Let us start with why do the British stay? When you argue that the interests of the British ruling class and their Loyalist allies within Northern Ireland are diverging then surely that question becomes important?

**JA:** They're diverging because the British are saying we have to develop cooperation with Fine Gael and the SDLP to defeat the IRA. The Loyalists want the IRA defeated. It's an argument about how. The British stay for a number of reasons. Number one is because we represent a serious threat to what in the long term stabilises Britain's interests in Britain, and in Ireland. The establishment of a democratic socialist republic on the doorstep of Britain represents a major threat to the whole capitalist well-being of Britain. FitzGerald, Haughey and other capitalist political figures are of the same political persuasion as Thatcher, Kinnock etc. They're defending their interests, by supporting those of a similar interest in Ireland. In addition, the fact that we can win, the fact that Britain can't defeat the resistance struggle in Ireland must be a comfort to people struggling against the same type of repression.

The fact is also that if Britain was able to defeat the IRA and Sinn Fein and the whole resistance struggle, stabilise





**'A struggle with a military dimension'**

Britain's presence, reach a confederation of any sort that would stabilise the interests of Irish and British capitalism, the British troops would be withdrawn Monday fortnight. But we are the thorn in the side of their plans. We are able to stop that.

**PS:** In many ways the Southern regime, since De Valera even, has managed the interests of not only British capital but indeed European and American capital much better than the North. Particularly in recent years they've been good custodians as far as western capital is concerned.

**JA:** But that's because Sinn Fein is weak in the South.

**PS:** But if that's the obstacle, you can end up saying that Sinn Fein is the obstacle to the British leaving.

**JA:** Sinn Fein is the obstacle to allowing Britain to extend its neo-colonial borders North and South. If you look at the South and the North, yes, the South has been able to enjoy a more stabilised capitalist way of life. That to some extent reflects the need for Sinn Fein to expand, politicise, promote and develop an alternative strategy to capitalism in the South.

**PS:** What is the Republican strategy for driving the British out? Can there be a military solution—a military victory for Republicans?

**JA:** A military victory is not possible, nor is it desirable, because we're not involved in a military struggle. We're involved in a struggle that has a military dimension to it. We're primarily involved in a political struggle to overthrow domination of Ireland by a foreign country. We don't just mean the streets of Belfast occupied by British troops but cultural, social, political and economic domination. The problems of Ireland have been created by imperialist interests supported by capitalist interests North and South.

There are two ways the struggle has to be carried. One is resistance to the military repression of the British imperialists by the IRA. Parallel to that is the political resistance enveloping a wide area of the Irish people. So far that is the political representation of working class people, by working class people. The social and economic resistance that is required isn't something you can merely lecture about. It's something that has to be seen to be in operation. The whole struggle for a socialist republic doesn't begin the day or the hour the last soldier leaves. It begins now in the most positive fashion.

That makes what Sinn Fein in the South do more imperative. We need to organise correctly, become politically relevant and become politically involved in the issues that affect working class people North and South. And move away from the late sixties early seventies hypnotic effect of the war in the North, which we are doing.

**PS:** If you're a young radical worker in the South who wants to fight, who's fighting back against the boss every day, why choose Sinn Fein rather than the Workers' Party—if as you say the hypnotic effect of the war isn't enough?

**JA:** When I referred to that I was deliberately being self-critical. To a large extent it's gone, but I think a lot of the membership of Sinn Fein saw themselves as supporters of the struggle in the North. We have developed the politics that can bring about a change in the South. The Workers' Party are primarily a reformist grouping. On almost every issue that affects working class people in the South, let alone the North, they have taken a reformist position. What has to happen and what is beginning to happen is that Sinn Fein will become politically relevant to people who don't even pay that much concern about the national question. The national question and the class question are two sides of the one coin.

The whole social and economic repression that exists in the South is linked in with the national question. If someone wants to fight back against a closure of a pig factory in Cork, that's sufficient reason why Sinn Fein should be there. Now that is beginning to happen in the South. It's fairly easy for Northern Ireland Republicans to become frustrated with the pace of it, but you can't mirror the two types of struggle and say, it works in Belfast—it should work in Cork. There is serious conversation, discussion and debate within the movement as to what is part of that

process. That debate ranges from direct involvement in strikes, the question of women, youth, gay rights, all of those issues. There's also the discussion around the question of whether to take seats in Leinster House (the Southern parliament).

**PS:** Are there forces beyond the working class of the South and the Nationalist working class in the North that can play a leading role in the struggle?

**JA:** No. We have a very firm base in working class areas and small farming areas North and South. To win substantial support from middle class elements we would have to take up their interests which would mean we would have to stop being socialists. That price we just can't pay.

**PS:** People would say that at various times you paid that price—for example around the abortion referendum.

**JA:** My position was that I was the only male speaker, North or South, who said that we should resist the referendum. I believe now, as I believed then, that we should have involved ourselves in the whole referendum campaign. The referendum let a grouping of people embark on a witch hunt against the most repressed section of the Irish community, women! We have a responsibility to stand with that oppressed section. Very many Republicans did that on a personal basis. We should have done it as an organisation. Having said that I abide by the decision of the Ard Fheis. When you look at the positions we had in the past, quite clearly some of those positions were wrong. We have to base the struggle (and historically this is proven to be the case) in the areas of the people of no property, with the oppressed sections of the Irish community and with those that have a vested interest not only in removing the British, but also providing the alternative which is a democratic socialist republic.

**PS:** Do you believe Protestant workers are a dead duck until the border goes?

**JA:** Yes. The Protestant working class are very much captives of their own history. They have been fed on marginal patronage, they have been almost indoctrinated into a position that anything radical jeopardises the Unionist base. Therefore certainly on all major issues, you have to remove the reason for that illness before you can perfect a cure. The reason for working class division in Ireland isn't colour, isn't religion (although that's the grievance used) but is around the question of British imperialist involvement in Ireland. You have to remove that before you can perfect a cure.

**PS:** In the current economic climate, with the marginal privileges being further squeezed and unemployment amongst Protestants rising rapidly, isn't there the possibility of confrontation between these workers and their employers or the government? Wouldn't such confrontation provide an opportunity to drive a wedge into Loyalism?

**JA:** We have to separate out two issues here. We have a responsibility to continually attempt to bridge working class divisions. That would dictate that



around social and economic issues—despite our differences on major issues like the national question and British involvement—we would have to identify with these struggles.

But that's entirely different to saying, when will the gap between Catholic and Protestant workers be bridged? The gap can only be bridged successfully when the divisions created by British imperialism have been removed.

**PS: You don't believe that major confrontations in the past—for example the outdoor relief campaign in the thirties—could have been used to break fundamentally the sectarian divide?**

**JA:** It would be nice to say yes, but the difficulty is that if you look at the history of the outdoor relief committees you had almost a March-hare situation. You had for a very brief period of time people coming together over a single and very identifiable issue—unemployment and the oppression of the unemployed. The minute that issue was put in its proper context—that unemployment was created in Northern Ireland by British imperialism, supported by Irish capitalism—the very minute that was put, solidarity broke down.

**PS: So the Protestant working class can only become a force for social change after the border's gone?**

**JA:** Yes, at the moment those resources are harnessed. There's a number of examples. There's the whole question of trade union representation in the North of Ireland, where you have working class Loyalists led by people who would find themselves to the right of Thatcher. We refer to them as King Billy socialists.

Even the interests of the working class are subservient to the interests of the Unionist class. We don't have strikes in the Loyalist community despite massive unemployment, nor do we have strikes of those who have employment, because workers get more for the same job in England. None of those issues exist. The reason they don't exist is because the trade union leadership are able to subsume that interest to the interest of 'don't rock the boat, sure it's our government' or 'don't rock the boat because it gives the Republicans or the communists an opportunity'. I don't think you can remove that handcuff until you can remove the reason for the division.

**PS: To move to a different topic, do you believe a Neil Kinnock government would be any different to Thatcher?**

**JA:** The terminology of bipartisanship is gone but Kinnock's position on Ireland isn't that much different to Thatcher's. The history of Labour in office in terms of this part of Ireland—Rees, Concannon, Mason—has been atrocious, scandalous. These men are tantamount to war criminals. While we do believe that there is a progressive section of the Labour movement, we don't believe they're the people represented at Kinnock's level.

**PS: One group in the Labour Party, Militant, say that we are so ultra-left that we**

**demand troops out now when even Sinn Fein don't want that. Could you clear up your attitude on the question?**

**JA:** We want the troops out tomorrow night, there's no question. I don't know how this arises, I've heard it said before. Our position is the right of self-determination for the Irish people, which means a British withdrawal. You can't have self-determination and British occupation. If that can be achieved next week, let's achieve it next week. What we are saying is that we don't honestly believe that next week is going to achieve it. But we want it sooner rather than later.

*Militant's* line on Ireland is terrible. They say, 'well if these people could prove they were socialists, if we could see their cards we would support them'. But even if we weren't a radical organisation, even if our politics were wrong, the Irish people have a right to self-determination. We are not prepared to wait until *Militant* tell us that they checked us out and we're bona fide and that if we take their advice and follow their line and use their terminology and their catchphrases that we will be Okay.

**PS: Does Sinn Fein think that events like the defeat of the miners have any relevance to your struggle here?**

**JA:** Look, if the Labour left in England took control of the Labour Party I would celebrate. If the miners won, hooray! But we can't pitch our struggle where we become dependent on the success of the left or progressive sections in England. The stronger the Labour left is, the more successful working class struggle is in England the better. It's not a question of us being unconcerned. I actually found myself in a position where I should have been canvassing for Danny Morrison during the EEC election but was canvassing instead for the Labour candidate in Brent. So there is an understanding. But we don't believe that major defeats in England represent disasters for us. Our struggle has to continue.

Of course the miners' strike was heart-breaking. I spoke on platforms in England in support of the miners, and welcomed delegations here. It was heartbreaking, it was almost like the hunger strike, but we have to continue our struggle. Our struggle represents a victory for the English left.

**PS: Finally if the border were removed, if you were successful at driving the British out, is there a parliamentary road to socialism?**

**JA:** It depends upon post withdrawal conditions. Almost certainly those conditions would see a coming together of class interests, primarily ruling class interests. You would have some sort of a capitalist class structure. I'm not that sure that they would allow a parliamentary road to socialism.

What has happened even in the two and a half years that we've been involved in electoral intervention has shown elections will never ever be the same in any part of Ireland, particularly the North. Because the accountability that has been brought about by the Sinn Fein councillors being



**'The Protestant working class are very much captives of their own history'**

elected has set demands for the SDLP which even in their terms they can never meet.■

#### — GLOSSARY —

**SDLP** The Social Democratic Labour Party. Moderate Nationalist middle class party. Strong supporters of the Accord.  
**Fine Gael** Capitalist party currently in power in Southern Ireland. Seen as the most pro-British Southern party  
**Fianna Fail** Main opposition party in the South. It is a capitalist party which traditionally has a Republican veneer.  
**The Workers Party** Formerly the political wing of the Official IRA, it is a fast growing reformist party with a large dollop of Stalinism thrown in.  
**Garrett FitzGerald** Prime Minister of Southern Ireland, leader of Fine Gael, and a founder of the Accord.  
**Charlie Haughey** Former Prime Minister, now leader of the opposition Fianna Fail, who are opposing the Accord.  
**Seamus Mallon** Leading figure in the SDLP, traditionally seen as on the more Nationalist wing of the party and close to Fianna Fail, but is supporting the Accord.  
**Eamon De Valera** Started political life as a Republican, later founded Fianna Fail, was both Prime Minister and later President of Southern Ireland, and the major political figure in Irish politics from the 1920s through to his death in 1975.  
**James Molyneux** Leader of the Official Unionist Party which like Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party is opposed to the Accord.  
**Sunningdale** An attempt by the British government to introduce power sharing in 1974. It was smashed by a general strike of Protestant workers.  
**RUC** Royal Ulster Constabulary—Northern Irish police force (overwhelmingly Protestant).  
**UDR** Ulster Defence Regiment—part-time force almost exclusively Protestant, armed and under the command of the British Army.  
**UDA** Extreme right wing Loyalist paramilitary force, legal.

# The Jewish question



BAD history exists about every sphere of human experience. But more bad history has been written about the Jewish question than perhaps anything else.

Those who want to justify racism, or argue that there is an inherent 'religious spirit' in human beings; those who wish to say that ideas can remain unchanged even when material circumstances change have all used the persecution of Judaism as evidence.

Luckily for us this long tradition of mystification and misinformation produced a response which must stand as one of the best works of Marxist history written this century, Abram Leon's *The Jewish Question—A Marxist Interpretation*.

Leon was a Jewish Trotskyist who wrote his masterpiece at the age of 24. This would be astounding enough, but he also wrote it in Nazi occupied Belgium, where he was a leading member of an underground Trotskyist group. It was a dangerous life, which proved to be short. Leon died in Auschwitz in 1944.

He set out to prove that the continued existence of a Jewish culture had nothing whatsoever to do with religion, racial characteristics or any other 'idealist prejudices'. Instead it could be explained by the particular economic roles which the Jews had played first in the ancient world and then under feudalism.

His project is to make concrete Marx's proposition, 'We will not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion but we will look for the secret of the religion in the real Jew.'

In carrying out this task Leon not only provides us with fascinating information about the Jews, he also gives us a practical lesson in the Marxist method. At every stage ideas, religious persecutions and pogroms are explained in terms of the economic development of society.

Leon argues that, back in ancient times, the geographical position of Palestine forced its inhabitants to become traders and merchants. Thus the fame of the Jewish trader was nothing to do with Jewish culture and everything to do with the material condition of Palestine in the ancient world.

In addition, the ancient slave economies such as Rome forbade whole layers of the population from engaging in trade. For example members of the Roman aristocracy were forbidden to own trading ships.

Thus the Jews occupied a position distinct from that of the indigenous population. In an agricultural society they were carrying out a separate and different economic activity—that of trade.

In a society based primarily on production for need—on use values—they

were engaged in the marginal economic activity—the exchange of goods.

This activity of money-lending, or usury, may have been marginal to the dominant mode of production, but it was indispensable. Leon says:

'Only the merchant has the necessary cash for the rich noble wastrel ... When the king has to assemble an army immediately and the normal revenue from taxation is inadequate, he is compelled to go to the man with the cash. When the peasant ... can no longer meet his obligations ... he must borrow his requirements from the usurer. The treasury of the usurer is therefore indispensable to a society based on a natural economy.'

Thus under early feudalism the Jews were different from the mass of Christian agricultural society. But they were not persecuted on any systematic scale. They were too important to society, for society to risk their destruction.

But from within the bosom of feudal society, a new form of production began to appear. It was this economic form which was to deprive Jews of their economic importance to society.

Production for exchange grew up in a number of medieval cities during the 11th century. This development was eventually to undermine the whole of feudal production, for in it was the seed of the capitalist class. Unlike the Jewish traders before these embryo capitalists did not just engage in commercial activity, they also began to take control of production. Leon says:

'The development of native production makes possible the rapid formation of a powerful class of native merchants. Emerging from the artisans, they gain control over them by taking over the distribution of raw materials. Contrary to trade as conducted by the Jews, which is clearly separate from production, native trade is based essentially on industry.'

It was the growth of this merchant class, first in Venice and Flanders, then spreading throughout Europe, that led to the persecution of the Jews. The Jews' former role was usurped and the rising new class found itself in conflict with the Jews. Leon says:

'This native commercial class collided violently with the Jews, occupants of an outmoded economic position inherited from a previous period in historical evolution'

It is from this period that we begin to see pogroms and expulsions of Jews. Spain, France, Britain and many German states all engaged in large scale expulsions of Jews.

The Jews' economic importance died with feudalism, but feudalism was a long time dying. Leon says:

'In the beginning the economic transformation reaches only important urban centres. The seignorial domains are affected very little by this change and the feudal system continues to function there. Consequently the career of Jewish wealth is still not ended.'

Not ended, but different. Expelled from trade, the Jews turned wholly to money-lending. But this in its turn was undermined. For the great merchants, the Medicis in Florence or the Fuggers in Augsburg, began to set up their own banks, banks which did far more than mere money-lending to overstretched aristocrats.

The new banks poured money into the growing industry in the towns, and they reaped the profits. The Jewish money lenders were pushed more and more to the margins: 'The Jew became a petty usurer who lends to the poor.'

As Leon puts it:

'Above all the Jews constitute historically a social group with a specific economic function. They are a class or more precisely a people-class.'

As Leon correctly points out there was nothing unusual about this in the ancient world, based as it was on a rigid division of labour which was written into law. It was common for groups of foreigners to perform economic functions forbidden to the local population.

When Jews dropped their special economic role they frequently dropped the Jewish religion and culture as well. Judaism held together as a distinct culture when the economic role of the Jews remained marginal to the dominant mode of production. Where the economic activity of the Jews was the same as that of the wider society, as in the Jewish farming communities of North Africa or the pastoral tribes of Arabia, they quickly became assimilated.

As Leon says:

'Only the Jewish communities with a clearly defined commercial character ... proved capable of resisting all attempts at assimilation.'

The law of assimilation might be formulated as follows: Wherever the Jews cease to constitute a class they lose, more or less rapidly their ethnical religious and linguistic characteristics; they become assimilated.'

As the Roman empire declined the dominant economic mode of society changed. Ancient slave society gave way to feudalism and production shifted to the great landed estates in the countryside.

'The great proprietors, more and more



reduced to living on the products of their own lands, were interested in replacing slave labour with the colony system which resembled the system of serfdom in the middle ages.'

But the beginnings of the feudal epoch had one important similarity with the Roman Empire as far as the role of the Jews were concerned.

Feudalism, like ancient slave society, was still a mode of production based on use values rather than exchange values. Indeed trade played an even more marginal role in early feudalism than in ancient society. Under the Roman Empire one million Jews lived in, and largely ran the great trading port of Alexandria. Such great centres of trade simply ceased to exist under feudalism.

But the Jews prospered. They did so because they became, not just one of various groups to make their living by trade, but the only significant trading group in the whole feudal world. And the goods which Jewish merchants brought into the feudal west were of great importance to the feudal monarchs. Because of this Jews occupied a privileged place in society.

For a long period they were the only economic link between the East and West. In a society dominated by agricultural production for immediate consumption Jews both brought luxury goods from the Orient and lent the money they made to the rulers of Europe.

This degeneration of the Jew's role gave new reason for anti-semitism. Anti-Jewish pogroms were frequently the attempt of desperate peasants to burn the money-lenders' letters of credit, the only evidence that the peasant owed money.

Pogroms were one outcome of the degeneration of the Jew's role; emigration and assimilation were others. Jews emigrated to the new world as plantation owners and farmers. They then became Christians. By the nineteenth century there were no longer more than a handful of Jews in South America, for example, where there had been large-scale emigration a century before.

In Western Europe Jews began to assimilate. Having no distinct economic role any more the existence of the Jews as a distinct social group was gradually undermined.

But in Eastern Europe especially in Poland a very different process took place. Long after industry began to develop in the West the societies of Eastern Europe remained based on a feudal economy. They represented an area in which Jews could continue to carry out their traditional economic role.

Leon says:

'This situation lasted as long as the social and political organisation in Poland remained static. In the eighteenth century ... Polish feudalism found itself fatally stricken. Along with it the secular position of the Jews in Eastern Europe was shaken to its foundations. The Jewish problem, close to vanishing in the West, flared up



**Jewish stallholders in Western Russia, where Jews were concentrated**

violently in Eastern Europe. The flame, close to extinction in the West, received renewed vitality from the conflagration which arose in the East.'

Jews fleeing from persecution emigrated to Western Europe and America. In the heartlands of capitalism they ceased to occupy a distinct role and were therefore under pressure to assimilate. But they were moving into a system which had discovered the usefulness of racism in dividing the working class.

It was from this tension that Zionism came. Leon makes light work of all those who argue that the idea of a Jewish state was always central to Judaism, saying, 'Why during those 2,000 years have not the Jews really tried to return to this country (Palestine)?' He points out that previous advocates of a return to Palestine had been fiercely persecuted by orthodox Judaism.

The answer, says Leon, lies in the changed position of Jews within wider society.

'In reality just so long as Judaism was incorporated into the feudal system, the "dream of Zion" ... did not correspond to any real interest of Judaism. The Jews of sixteenth century Poland thought as little of returning to Palestine as does the Jewish millionaire in America today.'

Leon argued that even if a Jewish state could be set up it would provide no solution to the Jewish question. He predicted:

'The formation of a Jewish state, that is to say a state placed under the complete domination of English or American imperialism cannot naturally be excluded ... But in what way will the existence of a small Jewish state in Palestine change

anything ... Admitting even that all the Jews in the world were today Palestine citizens, would the policy of Hitler have been any different?'

Leon argued that Zionism was an attempt to solve the Jewish question without getting rid of capitalism. This was to try and turn the clock of history backwards. For 'capitalism destroyed feudal society and with it the function of the Jewish people-class. History doomed this people-class to disappearance.'

By this process capitalism created the Jewish question for without their special economic role Jews were subject to persecution and pogroms. But capitalism proved incapable of solving the Jewish problem. Indeed it made a virtue of its insolubility by using anti-semitism as a weapon to weaken class struggle.

Capitalism lay at the heart of the persecution of the Jews. But it also laid the basis for their liberation. For as Jews ceased to occupy a distinct economic role in society they became bound up with others who were struggling against capitalism.

Leon argues that it is only by carrying through that struggle to its conclusion that the plight of Jews can be overcome. 'When the people of the factories and the fields have finally thrown off the yoke of the capitalists, when a future of unlimited development opens up before liberated humanity, the Jewish masses will be able to make a far from unimportant contribution towards the building of a new world.'

This is a conclusion which can apply not just to the Jews but to all the oppressed groups in the world. It sums up what we mean when we say that socialism means freedom. ■

Ann Rogers

# Kinnock and feminism

*This article is based on the introduction to a discussion on the question of women at the recent SWP conference.*

IN 1975 the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts came into force. If it were possible to achieve women's equality through parliament then, ten years on we should surely see some significant changes in women's position in Britain. The evidence shows otherwise.

After some improvement in women's pay in relation to men's, there has been a steady decline ever since 1977. And in an article in the *Guardian* on 14 January this year Joni Lovenduski pointed out that, in relation to France, Italy and West Germany, Britain has the lowest proportion of women in the legislature, judiciary and senior civil service. In government, only Italy has a smaller proportion of women. And in none of these countries does the proportion rise over 14 percent.

Clearly legislation has made very little difference to the overall position of women. And as the crisis deepens, women end up carrying more of the burden of cuts in social services, poor housing and the like. Now, of all times, the failure of reformism should be plain for all to see.

And yet today reformist ideas are more powerful than ever. To readers of *Socialist Worker Review* this may not come as any surprise. After all, if the defeat of the miners' strike has resulted in an overall shift to the right in the Labour Party and the trade unions, then it would be surprising if women were immune to the same developments.

In recent years more and more women have joined the Labour Party and concentrated on setting up women's caucuses, campaigning for more women MPs. Inside the unions there is increasing support for reserved places for women and positive

discrimination as the means of overcoming discrimination in general.

Certain feminist ideas which have



**Campbell: covering for Kinnock**

developed in recent years now coincide with much that Kinnock is also arguing.

Several years ago, Anna Coote and Bea Campbell outlined a strategy for feminists in their book *Sweet Freedom*. They argued not only that women should join the Labour Party but for a redistribution of pay and jobs from working class men to women.

The starting point for such feminists is their belief that working class men somehow gain from women's oppression. In a recent issue of *Marxism Today* Anna Coote writes:

'At one level, they [men] benefit from women's subordination. If women had

more power, more opportunities, more pay, more time, more choice, men would have less.'

The argument then goes that men have used the trade unions in the past as bastions of male power to exclude women. They have used the unions to control the Labour Party in the interests of men. Working class struggle in the shape of flying pickets, mass pickets or confrontations with the police are characterised as 'male' forms of struggle, inimical to the interests of women.

Bea Campbell argues that such methods of struggle are macho and typify the very worst of a dreadful anti-women, male-dominated working class movement. Small wonder she reserves her greatest venom for the miners and those prepared to take militant action.

Instead, the techniques developed by the Greenham Common peace campaigners and in the current teachers' dispute are held up as a model. Passivity from union members combined with occasional one day strikes is preferred to mass picketing.

If that analysis is compared with Kinnock's current strategy inside the Labour Party, in its barest essentials it is identical. The working class must renounce class struggle as a means of fighting the Tories and concentrate on electing a Labour government which will then implement an incomes policy.

Kinnock was renowned a year ago for his hostility to the miners' use of mass pickets and battles with the police both on picket lines and in the mining villages. His current crusade against supporters of *Militant* is motivated by his determination to smash any attempts to fight the Tories by means other than through the ballot box. He wants workers to be passive except on polling day.

Although the starting points for the feminists and Kinnock are different, their views converge on hostility to workers' own struggles and the need for their passivity. Just as Kinnock is using the most serious defeat for the working class for 50 years to break the left in the Labour Party, feminists like Coote and Campbell are also arguing that traditional methods of working class struggle are wrong because they are hostile to women.

These arguments give left cover to those who want to attack socialists. They can say they are doing so in the interests of women. Opposing strike action becomes a way of attacking male dominance and supporting feminism! Derek Hatton becomes a symbol for the traditional macho, male chauvinist left and Kinnock is wonderful for taking them on.

A second crucial point of convergence in the ideas of the feminists and Kinnock is over incomes policy. Under the 1974-9 Labour government, the left inside the trade unions sold incomes policy to the working class. In the name of the Social Contract the Labour government was able to achieve something which has eluded the current Tory government—a cut in workers' real wages.

**INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM ★ 30**  
**AUTUMN 85**

**WHERE IS THE LABOUR PARTY HEADING?**

Gareth Jenkins looks at where Kinnock is taking the Labour Party and what it will mean for the 'hard left'.

★ Dave McNally on Chris Harman's History of the Crisis ★ Ian Birchall on the terminal decline of the Communist Party ★ Sheila McGregor on John Molyneux and women's oppression ★ a reply from 'Marxism Today' to Alex Callinicos ★

**£1.95**





**Miners' wives: backbone of the 'macho' miners' strike**

Jack Jones, then left wing leader of the powerful Transport and General Workers Union, convinced workers to accept the Social Contract on the basis of creating equality inside society. The argument was simple: if high paid workers restrained their pay demands, then low paid workers would get more. Jones did not argue it in terms of high paid male workers benefiting at the expense of low paid women workers, but the logic was the same. High paid workers were the reason for low paid workers receiving low pay.

The Social Contract was accepted for several years and led to real wages declining in relation to prices. The low paid suffered disproportionately more from the Social Contract. That is why it finally crumbled in the 1979 'winter of discontent' in struggles by the low paid battling to raise their living standards.

Women workers—who the feminists are arguing today would benefit most from incomes policy—were part of breaking the Social Contract precisely because they did not benefit from it. In fact the reverse is the case. When high paid workers fight and win wage increases it leads to two things: wages are raised for everyone and confidence inside the working class increases.

The success of the miners in 1972 encouraged low paid hospital workers and civil servants to fight.

This argument is crucial for socialists. If the blame for the low paid can be pinned on the higher paid and not on the ruling class,

the basis for solidarity amongst workers is undermined. Every time a group of relatively high paid workers has fought for higher wages in the past, the ruling class has always used that argument in an attempt to turn the rest of the working class against them.

A recent editorial in the *Mirror* was a diatribe against highly paid print workers. Robert Maxwell was allegedly doing all workers a service by breaking their union organisation and lowering their wages. Yet women clerical workers and compositors in the general print benefit in wages today because of the existence of highly paid print workers.

Once again, as Kinnock sets about selling incomes policy to the trade union movement, the feminists' arguments that equality for women can best be achieved by shifting resources from men to women inside the working class will provide left cover for a policy which will lead to all workers' wages being cut. Every trade union official will try to undermine militants wanting to fight for higher wages by accusing them of being macho and sexist. They can argue that to accept incomes policy is to be anti-sexist and further the interests of women workers.

It is small wonder that the right wing in the Labour Party can accommodate many feminist ideas. They represent little fundamental threat, even if certain demands for more women's representation and women MPs may prove irritating at

times.

The defeat of the miners' strike is clearly the most important factor in explaining the move to the right which has taken place inside the Labour Party and why feminist arguments will get a resonance today which they did not when they were first formulated. But feminism is not only shaped by developments in wider society, it also contributes to the shaping of those ideas. Today, feminist ideas in many ways will strengthen Kinnock and the emergence of the right.

Despite this, feminism remains a contradictory phenomenon, as the roots of feminist ideas lie in the genuine aspirations of thousands, if not millions, of women for equality. Feminists who today look to Kinnock to provide the solution tomorrow may be sadly disillusioned and find themselves pushed into opposition to the Labour Party leadership on a whole range of issues.

It will take a resurgence of class struggle before revolutionary ideas of women's liberation based on the power of the working class will find a mass audience. When such struggle develops on such a massive scale that revolution becomes a real alternative to the Labour Party and reformism, then there will be millions of working class women who will agree with us that socialist revolution is the only road to women's liberation. ■

Sheila McGregor

# Changing course

RACISM awareness courses are a relatively new phenomenon. They were born out of equal opportunities, and are a by-product of the race relations industry.

What are the courses for?

They are an attempt by employers (mainly local authorities, but also big corporations) to be seen as anti-racist in a racist society.

Such courses, even at their best, have severe limitations. Racism is after all not something that can be separated out from society and the exploitation of workers within society. Racism has grown as a product of class society, and remains a powerful weapon for dividing and weakening the working class. To finally eradicate racism, capitalism itself must be smashed by the self-activity of workers.

So where do racialism awareness courses fit in to the struggle against racism, and what should the attitude of socialists be towards them?

Whatever their limitations, racism awareness courses are an attempt to foster anti-racism. Socialists should welcome them as such.

Black workers who suffer from racism do not automatically understand the nature or the cause of their oppression. The courses offer black workers the opportunity to discuss the issue and identify themselves as a group with a degree of cohesion.

For example, a few weeks ago in Haringey following abusive, racist and physical attacks on the housing staff by some tenants, a number of meetings took place. At one meeting the supervisor gave the management's response which was that despite any degree of abuse from tenants, the workers had a contractual obligation to see to and help all tenants.

The workers demanded to know if they were expected to continue dealing with a tenant who had not only been overtly racist but also boasted her membership of the National Front. The supervisor's reply was 'yes of course; just because someone is a member of the NF it doesn't make her a racist.'

This shocked all the workers particularly because the supervisor happened to be black!

In this incident one of the first demands made by the workers was for a racism awareness course to be organised.

The courses are often run by academics who have made their careers on the issue. These professionals travel around the country leading seminars on the subject in one workplace after another. In some cases the courses are run by the local management themselves. The attendants can also vary; the courses can be available to black groups of workers, white workers or mixed groups.



*Last year's strike against racists in Islington Council's housing department*

However, while the composition of the groups may change there remains a central political theme. The politics and ideas forwarded through these sessions are those expounded by liberalism and black nationalism.

These ideas can be full of misconceptions about racism. Racism is portrayed as innate, a white problem, only against blacks and so on.

The solutions by and large presented are two-fold. Firstly, it is argued that racism is a white problem where whites have always been racist against blacks and will always remain so, the only possible change is in the degree of white racism. White people supposedly cannot fight racism but only be less racist and play a more sympathetic and supportive role.

Secondly, racism places black people at the bottom of the pile with very few blacks at the top. The enhancement of the black community is seen to be possible only by the rise of black individuals to positions of power and management.

When the courses are organised and run by the management, they can provide the perfect opportunity for unity amongst workers—even in difficult circumstances.

For example, a few months ago on a two week induction course with the Inner London Education Authority new recruits were being given the virtues of team work. Team work meant blurring the distinction between management and workers (one happy family), a very useful way of

management diverting workers from thinking of their own class interest.

In this instance management were succeeding in duping the workers until the session on racism and sexism awareness took place. This revealed management's hypocrisy and thereafter most of the workers showed a respectable distrust for the management. It also provided an excellent ground for building on the shop floor.

The gains from these courses reveal themselves when there is a dispute around such issues. For on the one hand they heighten workers' expectations and on the other management's lack of seriousness is exposed when struggles arise. The Islington workers' strike in 1985 against the active racist Vi Howell is an example of this. The strength of feelings shown by the strikers against the Labour council was heightened because of the council's declared position as anti-racist employers.

The council had anti-racist policies and statements as well as organising racism awareness courses. The strike exposed the council's unwillingness and impotence in taking effective disciplinary action against a known racist who was actively involved in harrasing black workers.

The strike showed the limitations of racism awareness courses but also how to fight effectively against racism—by black and white workers taking action together against their bosses and racists.

There are other positive reasons for socialists to participate in awareness courses regardless of their shortcomings. Although the courses are organised around a particular topic the discussions invariably extend to wider issues.

The discussions being on overtly political issues provide revolutionaries with tailor made arenas to offer socialist ideas in contrast to the generally misconcieved liberal notions of racism. The arguments can take place openly with an opportunity to expose the hypocrisy of the system and the employers who profess to be anti-racist but with little or no intention of putting it into practice.

It is rare (if ever) that employers allow their workers facilities for discussion—particularly if they happen to be socialists. This makes awareness courses an exception especially as the sessions usually take place during work time. It means then that revolutionaries are effectively paid by employers to put socialist ideas across to other workers.

In the final analysis racism awareness courses are a cosmetic exercise by employers to be seen as anti-racist rather than a mechanism for fighting effectively against racism. On their own the courses can at best only examine the manifestations of racism rather than the cause. Nevertheless socialists should not abstain but actively participate to fight for socialist ideas, using the courses to strengthen work place organisation. Finally, however negatively they may be viewed, racism awareness courses are certainly better than Paki-bashing. ■

Paul Ahmed



# Art for our sake

IT IS easy to treat culture as something outside the normal area of political concern, to which we don't have to apply the same criteria and analytical rigour we would apply to other areas. The other extreme to this is the whole academic field, involving some claiming to be Marxist, which specialises in cultural analysis and critique.

The danger with these two approaches is that culture can be seen either as of little importance to the working class and the revolutionary struggle—and therefore only deserving of crude and cursory analysis—or as something demanding study, but separate from the everyday class struggle. Both are contrary to the approach of Marx and Engels.

They read past and contemporary world literature in several languages, and actively encouraged particular writers, such as the German poet, Heine. Lenin, himself a lover of music and poetry, followed them in believing that the roots of art 'should be deeply implanted in the very thick of the labouring masses... It must unite and elevate their feelings, thoughts and will.' This turn of phrase doesn't exactly resonate around Marxist circles these days.

The seriousness with which the great revolutionaries have treated culture derives, not just from their 'bourgeois' education, but from their understanding of historical materialism and how literature, art, music, develop as an integral part of society's wider development.

All forms of culture only develop on the basis of new productive forces, relations of production and class conflicts. A new culture is not clutched out of the air, and it will embody the ideas, values and sentiments of that class which has gained control of material production, and, as a result, the production and distribution of ideas as well.

However, just as capitalism breeds internal material contradictions, so there are contradictions in the production of art. The basic nature of capitalist economy is hostile to the development of human potential. The products of human activity are expressed as exchange values. Through selling our labour power—including artistic labour power—we are reduced to commodities.

But the material conditions which create dehumanisation and alienation also create resistance and criticism. Most writers, painters, musicians, actors, seeking to understand reality in capitalism, will be expressing not only the ideology of the capitalist class, drummed into them since birth, but also the contradiction this creates with their individual needs and aspirations, and the needs of the majority of the population.

For Trotsky, this meant that the artist is

an ally of the revolution, and he observed that every new tendency in art began with rebellion. Culture in bourgeois society expresses the ideas and values of that society. But it is not *confined* to that. It is not simply ideology or propaganda.

Also the fact that most artists are from the middle class is neither here nor there. The important question is: whose class interests does a particular artistic work serve? That cannot be answered by applying the criteria you can apply to a newspaper editorial, a TV documentary, or an agitational leaflet. They all derive from class society, but artistic production has its own distinctive features.

For Marx and Engels, the literature of true worth offers 'realism'—a full representation of social conditions, forces, and conflicts. Engels stressed that 'the author does not have to serve the reader on a platter the future historical resolution of the social conflicts he describes.'

Art can *recreate* reality and its contradictions in different ways, and appeal to our understanding, and mood and feelings. Shakespeare was not a radical. However, he expressed a society in transition towards capitalism, and, in a panoramic way, reflecting different material and spiritual conflicts of interest. In the process, he expressed feelings and attitudes to universal experience—love, death, betrayal, ambition—and with technical skill and passion, so that his work is still able to affect us.

Marx believed the best art can surmount its class basis and the predominant class consciousness within it, and offer us perceptions of lasting significance. Nevertheless, he also believed all art should be subjected to criticism from the point of view of the revolutionary class and its party. A full *appreciation* of art, though, could not be achieved through a purely intellectual approach.

In a famous speech on culture, Trotsky emphasised that Marxist methods could trace the sources of art and encourage progressive tendencies, but it couldn't do more—art had to make its own way, and by its own means. For all these reasons, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky embraced all the past culture of the world, despite their political opposition to many of the views expressed in it.

Why, then, do many 'Marxists' frequently present a very opposed view? The answer lies, primarily, in the legacy of Stalinism.

In the heady days after the Russian revolution, the school of 'proletarian culture' developed—the 'proletcult'. Its adherents took an iconoclastic attitude to past culture. It was bourgeois, therefore irrelevant, therefore should be ditched and make way for a new proletarian culture



## MARXISM & CULTURE

built on the ashes of the old. All those today who insist that only 'working class culture' or 'popular culture' is relevant drop into this tradition.

Lenin and Trotsky, while welcoming and encouraging new art forms, and refusing to turn personal preferences into political prescription (a lesson for us all!), nevertheless roundly condemned the *politics* of proletcult.

Bourgeois culture was developing within feudal society because the bourgeois had wealth, property, and influence, but even that culture did not reach its high point until the 19th century. There is no parallel with the working class within capitalism. Also, unlike feudal and bourgeois class rule, the rule of the proletariat will be relatively shortlived because it aims to bring the *abolition* of class rule.

When conditions develop within which new culture can flourish, the proletariat will be dissolving itself 'into a socialist community and will free itself from its class characteristics and thus cease to be a proletariat'. So—'proletarian culture' is a contradiction in terms. A new class cannot create a new culture in months from scratch, *but only on the basis of expropriating from bourgeois control all the past culture, analysing it, reworking it, building on it.*

Proletcult took on a new lease of life under Stalin's Five Year Plan. His 'proletarian culture' was the product of the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution and the notion of 'socialism in one country', that is a distortion of Marxism. Stalin sent out directives on how to create in all fields of art. He opposed and feared what did not *directly serve* the interests of the bureaucracy. Schools of thought and artistic forms were stamped out. Critical appraisals and reappraisals and changes to textbooks and street names followed thick and fast. The order of the day was that culture should be socialist in content and national in form!

Such directives produced what Trotsky called 'an epoch of mediocrities, laureates, and toadies', precisely because art must not only be viewed differently from ideology and propaganda pure and simple, but it is

created through different means as well. Writing, painting, composing, acting and so on, at the most inspiring, derive from a person's whole experience and development—art is not created through purely conscious, intellectual processes. The effort to find a true expression of the individual's real relationship to the world will be stultified by dictat or creating to rote.

Just as new cultures take time to develop organically out of fundamental material changes, so an artist's means of expression, the form and content of his/her work, can only change for the better once their own experiences, including social conditions, have been properly assimilated and absorbed. To encourage people to create to order, to create only for the propaganda 'interests' of the party and the class kills creativity and damages all our interests in the long run. The crude Stalinist view which sees cultural works as different forms of propaganda is still with us in our debates.

So what points can revolutionary socialists make about culture?

We should defend all past world culture, which is not elitist in itself, but has been made so by its control and presentation by the ruling class. All such culture should be expropriated and made accessible to all.

While defending the old, new progressive work should be encouraged, even if it doesn't have 'the correct line' or 'artistic excellence', but neither should its qualities be overstated. Trotsky emphasised the importance of a completely free revolutionary art. In the case of divisive forces after the revolution, however, 'the poisonous, disintegrating tendencies in art', Trotsky was no liberal. He argued for a watchful, revolutionary censorship.

A revolutionary party should encourage the development of artistic appreciation and general, artistic and scientific literacy, together with criticism of art from the Marxist viewpoint.

The arts are now part of an international multi-million pound entertainment and communications industry. We should recognise that artistic and technical practitioners are employed workers in it and need support and direction in struggles against their private and public managements, as do any other workers.

Culture is a class issue, and crude and mechanical or remote and academic analysis of it is the enemy of progress. We should encourage the availability of all that is exciting and elevating in the world's culture—within the various types of music, dance, art and drama. We should not restrict our attention to specific examples of mass popular culture, like the Redskins or *Brookside*, because these are most easily accessible.

As Trotsky said in *Culture and Socialism*: 'Art is one of the ways in which man finds his bearing in the world.'

We have a role to play in assisting that endeavour. ■

John Gillett

## SOUTH AFRICAN MUSIC



Hugh Masekela

# Beat of the struggle

SOUTH AFRICA has a tradition of black jazz musicians whose music draws on African music and American jazz.

Two such musicians getting known in Britain now are Abdullah Ibrahim (formerly known as Dollar Brand) and Hugh Masekela. Both started playing jazz in the late 1950s. Hugh Masekela grew up in Witbank, a mining town 200 miles east of Johannesburg, among mineworkers conscripted from right across southern Africa. The African musical forms which combined to become Kwela and Mbaganga, the music of the townships, were a big influence on him. Black American jazz was also an influence on both Ibrahim and Masekela.

In the late fifties, many musicians gained a living of sorts from jazz. Ibrahim, a pianist, and Masekela, a trumpet player, both played with the Jazz Epistles, the first black South African band to record an LP. But the Group Areas Act began to make life much harder for musicians. It stopped them being able to move around and survive on the edges of the system. Earlier even the odd white musician who was drawn to African music and jazz, could play with black musicians. With the Act this was no longer possible.

The Sharpeville massacre was a turning point. Gatherings of more than ten people were now banned. Musicians had great trouble in playing live legally. Many of them left South Africa, including Ibrahim and Masekela.

Ibrahim returned in 1976 and organised a jazz festival that broke apartheid laws. Already unpopular for refusing to appear on apartheid TV, he left again. The events

in Soweto in 1976 had a big effect on him. When he left South Africa he increasingly spoke out in support of the ANC and armed struggle. He now describes himself as a cultural freedom fighter and many of the tracks on his records refer to aspects of life in South Africa.

Masekela is less vocal in his support for the ANC but says he will not go back to South Africa while apartheid exists. After 20 years in America he returned to Africa in 1980. He lived first in Zimbabwe, then in Botswana, only 20 miles from the South African border. When he played a homecoming concert with the South African singer Miriam Makeba in Lesotho, over 35,000 blacks—mostly from South Africa—flocked to see him.

He has released two LPs since his return to Africa. One track on his latest, *Waiting for the Rain*, is a song called 'Stimela' (coal train), about the migrant workers he grew up among.

These are two of the better known musicians who made a 'tactical retreat' (as Ibrahim calls it). But many thousands remain behind, unwilling or unable to leave.

Most musicians in South Africa are unable to be overtly political. Black radio stations are heavily censored. But many musicians live and work in the townships and can play there to purely black audiences. The LP *Soweto* on Rough Trade is a collection of recordings of bands in Soweto, many recorded illegally. Others available are groups like the Mohotella Queens or Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

South African music is vibrant and pulsating with life, reflecting the spirit of



people fighting for change. It may not be openly political at all times, but neither is it apolitical.

In the aftermath of Soweto, the ANC decided to use the power and energy of music as a propaganda weapon. In Angola they formed a group called Amandla who use music, dance and theatre to show the history of black struggle and mobilise support.

In October last year Amandla toured Britain for the first time. Drawing on South African jazz, the guitar based music of Soweto and many other forms they told the story of South Africa. Sketches showed pre-colonial life, the adoption of the Freedom Charter, Nelson Mandela in court, Soweto and the armed struggle. The music and presentation were magnificent.

The show ended with a medley of traditional dances—a really exciting, joyful experience. This was the music of people demanding respect, freedom and solidarity.

Amandla successfully combine music and politics. Even if the rest of black South African music doesn't do so quite so openly, it still puts most white pop music to shame.

Most such music contains politics that stretch no further than saying consume, consume, consume. But the resistance to apartheid has led to a number of records

which begin to break this mould. The Special AKA's hit 'Free Nelson Mandela' started the trend. Then Communist Party member Robert Wyatt released 'Winds of Change' as a fundraiser for SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement.

In the US, Artists United against Apartheid recorded an LP and single called *Sun City*. Sun City is the entertainment centre of South Africa, set up for the benefit of rich whites. The record attacks those like Queen, Elton John and Shirley Bassey who have played there. Featured on the record are a wide range of American artists from Bob Dylan to Bruce Springsteen to Miles Davis. In the US these big names have ensured much air play. But some radio stations in the South have stopped playing it after racist threats. The proceeds go to a UN fund for South African political prisoners.

Back in Britain the Redskins tried to release a single as a fund raiser for the ANC and a black trade union. Their record company, London, refused to release it and they've had to put it out on an independent label.

Buy these records and support the struggle. Though if you really want to listen to music of passion that reflects the fightback, search out some black South African music. ■

Russ Escritt

to campaign for the arrested black and white rioters and insisted on holding blacks-only meetings, passing up the chance to build black and white unity against the police.

Similarly, their stance on the miners' strike was, in political terms, abstentionist. *Race Today* did not recognise the strike as the most significant political struggle of recent years and did not throw itself into organising support.

*Race Today* and LKJ gain much of their inspiration from the ex-Trotskyist C L R James. In 1945 he wrote:

'The movements which seek to "drive the Jew out of Harlem" have a valid base. They are the reactions of the resentful Negro seeking economic relief and some salve for his humiliated racial pride. That these sentiments can be exploited by fanatical idiots, Negro anti-semites or self-seeking Negro businessmen does not alter their fundamentally progressive basis.'

It is agreement with this analysis that paralyses *Race Today* even on day-to-day race issues.

In his defence of the dialectic in Marxism against Stalinism in the thirties C L R James mistakenly insisted upon the inevitability not only of class struggle but also of the victory of socialism. This led to a neglect of the building of political organisation, *Race Today* continues in this tradition. Its supporters content themselves with merely applauding the riots whilst, in practice, ignoring the struggles that involve black workers on strike.

In *Reggae fi Peach*, LKJ does not mention that Blair Peach, killed in Southall in 1979, was an SWP member, but says, 'Blair Peach was not an Englishman/He came from New Zealand.' I remain convinced that this is the justification for the tribute. Would Johnson et al have taken such interests if a white English-born SWP member had fallen victim to the SPG? After all, he did describe the SWP at that time as being 'the worst kind of liberal racists'.

Johnson makes wide use of patois. Simply put, LKJ believes that this assertion of West Indian culture is a radical political act in itself. (This perspective earned him a ticking off on television from C L R James when they discussed the subject with the late Jamaican dub poet Michael Smith).

In *Independent Intavenshun* LKJ says, 'The SWP can't set mi free.' We don't claim to have the power to set anyone free. That will only come through the unity and self-activity of the working class, black and white. That unity is not inevitable and neither is the victory of the oppressed and exploited over our rulers. Both have to be fought for. But will that struggle be aided by LKJ taking up his cultural fellowship at Warwick University and concentrating on academic matters at the new centre for Caribbean Studies?

He condemns the 'black petty booshwah', but fails to see that he has been captured by them. ■

Chris Glenn

LINTON KWESI JOHNSON

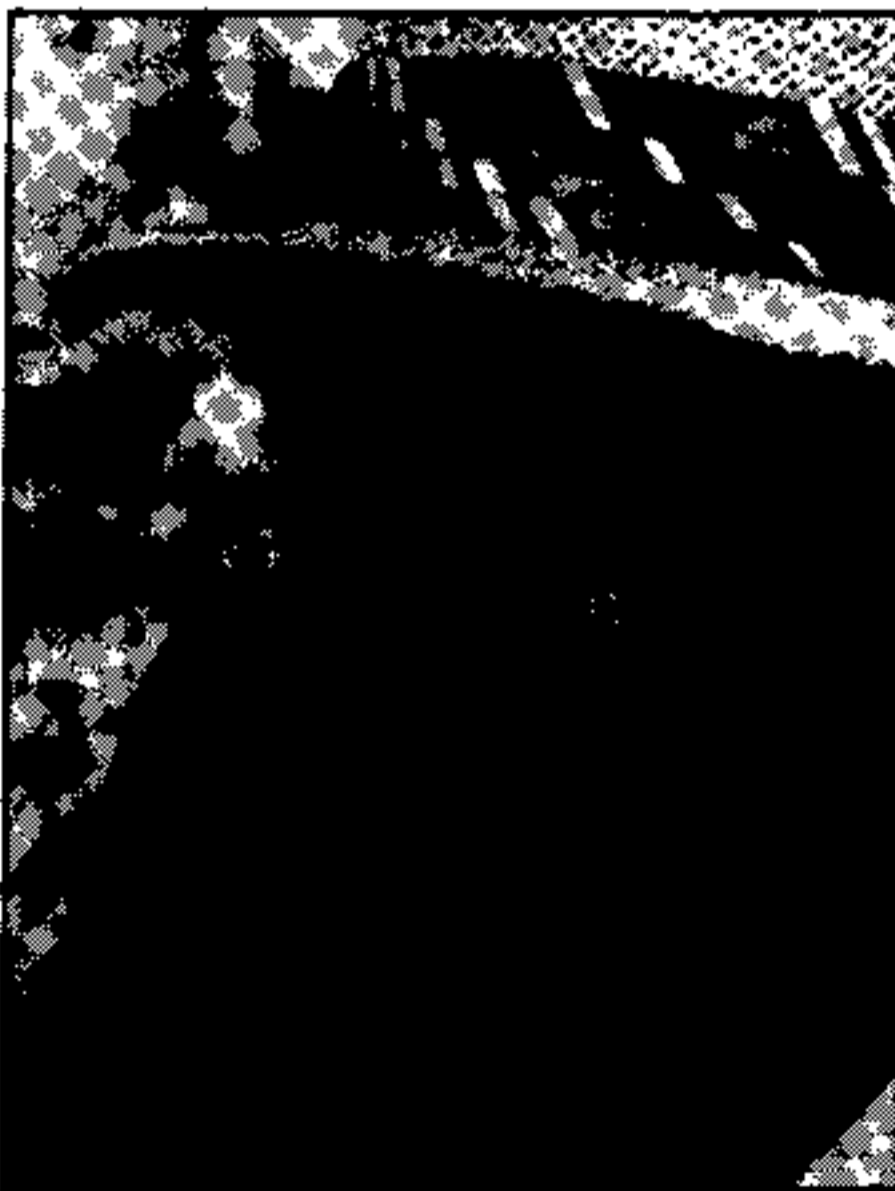
## The patois poet

RECENTLY Linton Kwesi Johnson, the black poet who combines his words with reggae, announced his intention to quit music to concentrate on his activities within the community.

LKJ deserves attention. He is a spokesman who articulates a particular perspective for change within the black community and, because of his reputation, he is able to gain publicity for his ideas. And he is the only person to have both committed to vinyl a tribute to a Socialist Workers Party member, *Reggae fi Peach*, and given us a mention in another poem, *Independent Intavenshun*.

Reggae records have often been used to transmit information about important events and religious and political ideas. There is little unusual about LKJ's use of reggae as a propaganda tool. But what is different about LKJ's content is that it is a complete break from what he calls 'the rasta trap' that has ensnared virtually every other reggae artist. He rejects rastafarianism and wishes to involve blacks in activity in the here and now.

Politically he aligns himself with the magazine *Race Today*, which he has claimed is also a political organisation that leads mass movements. Formally *Race Today* has some similar political positions to the SWP. It recognises that only the smashing of the state will enable blacks to



Johnson: black petty booshwah?

gain freedom and equality and is fully aware of the reactionary nature of the emergent black middle class (whom LKJ castigates in *The black petty booshwah*).

But what LKJ and *Race Today* are most renowned for is their insistence on the self-organisation of the black working class, politically separate from white workers. What this has meant in practice was shown after the 1981 Brixton riots. They refused

## Alles of the right

### British Intervention in Greece

Heinz Richter

Merlin £22.50

### How and Why the People's Liberation Struggle of Greece met with Defeat

Svetozar Vukmanovic (General Tempo)

Merlin £6.50

IT IS 40 years since the Greek Civil War began in earnest—which explains why Merlin have just brought out these two books.

This much neglected area of Greek history is worth attention, not out of nostalgia but because of the important lessons that the tragic experience of the Greek Communists can teach us all.

Towards the end of 1944 the Axis powers were in full retreat. The KKE (Greek Communist Party) had formed a National Liberation Front, EAM. Its armed wing, ELAS, had forced the Italians to surrender and restricted the Germans to barracks. Greece was being liberated without any help from outside.

ELAS controlled four fifths of the country. The old bourgeois politicians had been collaborators, or simply fled. The only political organisation with mass support, and in a position to take power, was ELAS.

Churchill had agreed with Stalin at the Yalta Conference that Greece would be in the British sphere of influence. Nonetheless, he still feared Russian domination. Communism was for him a greater danger than fascism, so troops were diverted from the Italian and German fronts and sent to Athens.

Churchill was determined that ELAS would not only be kept from power, but denied any share of it. He was against a republic and wanted to restore the monarchy.

The Greek king's great contribution to democracy had been to bring the fascist dictator Metaxas to power. Only the invasion by the Axis powers ended this vicious anti-working class government.

The communists—rather than fight the invasion by 50,000 British troops—tried to get a compromise. Initial instructions were not to fire on the British. The majority of ELAS units were kept out of Athens. ELAS were not defeated. They surrendered—a point on which both authors agree.

They also agree that the setback did not have to be fatal. ELAS was still intact. But ELAS continued to seek compromise. In February they signed the Varkiza agreement. The Communists kept to their side of the agreement, disarming their supporters, releasing fascist hostages, and recognising the authority of the pro-

royalist provisional government.

In return the government released fascist collaborators and joined in a wave of terror against the left. Right wing bandits and often government troops destroyed left presses. Resistance fighters were imprisoned and executed on trumped up charges.

By the time the first elections came in 1946 many of the left had fled their homes, and were unable to vote. Of the 50 percent who did vote many were intimidated into voting for right wingers. Women were not allowed to vote, and there were no left candidates as they refused to accept the rigged election conditions.

Richter's book deals with this period in detail, and documents Britain's filthy role extremely well.

He demonstrates that the Labour government of 1945 continued where Churchill left off. He quotes Ernest Bevin (Labour's foreign secretary) at a United Nations debate with the Russians: 'I think the speech we have just heard...points not to the necessity of withdrawing British troops, but to the imperative necessity of putting more there.'

With the right wing in full control of the army and courts, and no help from Stalin's Russia, the KKE had their backs to the

### '...the Labour government of 1945 continued where Churchill left off'

wall. It was now a fight for survival that launched the civil war in August 1946. The left, weakened by their mistakes since 1944, were forced to fight against insurmountable odds.

Criticism from the British Labour left, now appalled at the atrocities in Greece (mass arrests, torture, imprisonment and executions), began to build up against Bevin's policies. Bevin claimed he was following party conference policies, but was saved the embarrassment of prolonged debate as by early 1947 Britain could no longer afford to finance its 'protectorate'. Fortunately for him he was able to pass his bloody responsibilities over to the USA.

The war continued until 1949. By then 150,000 were to die. Thousands of others were to become non-beings, living abroad until only recently, when Papandreou's government gave them amnesty.

Richter's book is a serious in-depth study from February 1945 to August 1946. It is invaluable to those specialising in Greece, but not to those who would like to know the full story from 1941 to 1949.

Unfortunately the second book does not fulfil this need either. Vukmanovic

(General Tempo) played a major role in the liberation of Yugoslavia and its subsequent break from Russia. He also visited Greece several times during the second world war.

This would appear to make him well qualified to explain the defeat of the Greek revolution. Unfortunately the opposite is the case.

The reason for that is the date of the book's first appearance, 1949. I can't help wondering what kind of book Tempo would have written in 1948. For then, though he and Tito had broken with Stalin, they still spoke of Russia's peace loving role in the world.

It wasn't until the following year that the row really hotted up. As the split between Stalin and Tito intensified, the latter began to attack Russian hegemonism and the dividing of Europe between imperial powers.

That the Greek Communists accepted the conclusions of Stalin's deal at Yalta with disastrous results is something we can agree on with Tempo. We can also accept his argument that outside help was not necessary for the left to win the civil war. The Greeks could have had a successful revolution on their own. But in spite of these truths there are immense problems with the book.

Again and again the author accuses the KKE of concentrating too much on the towns and underestimating the peasantry.

He goes on to argue the need for a rural guerilla war. All this is nonsense. There is no reason why the Greek resistance shouldn't have taken power in 1944. As for concentrating too much on the towns, that is to ignore the mass support the KKE and the resistance had amongst workers.

It was a general strike in Athens that forced Hitler to repeal his draconian labour laws, and increase food rations. At the same time, in conjunction with support in cities and towns, the KKE-led ELAS had almost total control in the countryside. ELAS and its political front, EAM, had by the end of the war two million members (out of a population of 7.5 million). In the end it was the popular front politics, the belief that a democratic government had to be formed jointly with bourgeois parties, that led to the defeats.

There is no doubt that the closing of the Yugoslav border in 1949 was the last nail in the Greek left's coffin. Vukmanovic shrugs it off completely. Of course the Greek left was already defeated and KKE claims that Tito was to blame for their defeat are nonsense. But, if Yugoslavia was a socialist country as claimed, why shut the door to those fighting the Greek right?

The phoney Marxist rhetoric of the book is an attempt to portray Tito and his fellow bureaucrats as revolutionaries in the tradition of Lenin. Tito achieved national liberation, but the aim was not socialism based on the self-emancipation of the working class.

The forerunners of the Socialist Workers Party explained it well at the time:



'The dependence of the Titoist party on a ruling bureaucracy will condemn it to the twists and turns of foreign policy, the inculcation of half truths etc, which the experience of the Comintern headed by the CPSU is a grim warning.'

In the year that was written (1950) Tito first supported China in the Korean war, and then switched to supporting United Nations intervention. In practice that meant supporting the USA.

The book is a clever propaganda job by a Tito supporter.

If you want to read the full story of the Greek Civil War buy a copy of *The Kapetanios—Partisans and Civil War in Greece 1943 to 1949*. There may be a few faults with this book by Dominique Eudes, but it is by far the best single volume available on the subject. If you want to dig deeper, at £22.50 and 550 pages long, a library is the best place to obtain Richter's magnum opus. ■

Andy Strouthous

## Stalinist heroism

Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany

Allan Merson

Lawrence and Wishart, £15

THE Nazi victory in Germany in 1933 was the greatest defeat the working class movement has ever suffered. The world's oldest social democratic party and its second biggest Communist party, with 13 million votes between them, capitulated without a fight as Hitler took power. He was able to destroy in a matter of weeks basic forms of economic and political organisation that had taken more than 60 years to build.

But the defeat of the parties did not mean the end of the struggle for many of the best militants.

This book tells how tens of thousands of Communists continued to fight for their beliefs under the most difficult of circumstances. It is a story, above all, of the most amazing courage and self sacrifice.

The figures alone tell that. Of 300,000 party members in 1932, an estimated 150,000 were arrested and persecuted. More than 25,000 died at the hands of the Nazis, as a result of murder, execution or their treatment in concentration camps.

By the early years of the war, nearly all the surviving activists had already been through the concentration camps at least once. Yet they continued to organise and to agitate, distributing illegal papers, holding Marxist education classes, plotting sabotage of the war effort, attempting to rebuild a nationally centralised party. This was at a time when death sentences were being freely handed out for even the most trivial expressions of political criticism of the Nazi regime: in 1944 there were 5,764 such executions in civil prisons and many

thousands more by military courts.

But the scale of the repression was more than just testimony to the courage of those who put up resistance. It was also an indication of a fact about the Nazi regime that is all too easily ignored. It was a capitalist regime, and therefore could never avoid worrying about a revolt by those whose labour kept its factories going and fed its war effort.

Merson—basing himself on the researches of Tim Mason—shows that the very military strategies of the Nazi regime had their roots in fear of working class discontent. The memory of the way the hardship involved in a war of attrition had driven workers to revolt in 1918 led Hitler to adopt the blitzkrieg strategy of World War Two. The aim was, through short, sharp wars, to grab the resources of other countries, and so to finance further warfare without too great an attack on living standards. So it was only after the defeat at Stalingrad, in 1942, that the mass of German workers suffered real material hardship.

This did not mean that the German working class supported the Hitler regime. All the evidence, whether from Social Democrat, Communist or Gestapo sources, indicates that the attitude of the majority of workers ranged from outright opposition to a resigned, sullen, hostile cynicism. As Merson sums up the evidence:

'The working class remained dissatisfied and alienated from the regime. The Nazis had succeeded by terror and reprisals in neutralising the working class, no more.'

The problem for any revolutionary opposition to the Nazis was how to relate to this mood of workers in the aftermath of a defeat which had frightened the great majority of the class from active political involvement.

Merson suggests that there was no realistic chance of winning wide numbers of workers to active opposition until the regime's military adventures led to crippling military defeat—that is until its 11th or 12th year.



Group hanging of twelve Edelweiss Pirates, Cologne-Ehrenfeld, 1944, for joining the underground in sabotage, arms raids and anti-Nazi activities

material on the period from East German and pro-Western sources. But he seems abysmally ignorant about non-Stalinist revolutionary accounts.

So, for example, he writes that in 1930-32, 'the problems facing the movement called for a theorist of the calibre of Lenin, but, with the possible exception of Gramsci, who was in prison, the Third International now lacked such a theorist.'

You get the impression that the author has not read any of the several hundred pages Trotsky wrote on the rise of German Nazism. And he seems equally ignorant of the writings of other critics of the Stalinist analysis, like the theorist of the 'right opposition' of the German Communist Party, Thalheimer.

This is partly a reflection of another failing. Merson seems to have no real understanding of the degree to which Stalinism destroyed the capacity for independent thinking in the individual Communist Parties, with those challenging the 'social-fascist' line facing expulsion and political ostracism (Gramsci was faced with this from fellow Communists in the same prison as himself).

Nor does he understand how mediocre some of those raised to positions of leadership by Stalin were: this applied, above all, to Thaelmann, the leader of the German Communist Party, whose personal courage was not matched by any great degree of political insight (unlike many of those he had purged—people like Brandler, Thalheimer, Frölich, and so on, who all understood the craziness of the 'social fascist' line).

But despite the softness towards Stalinism, the book remains a fascinating read. ■

Chris Harman

## The dreams of children

The Freud Scenario  
Jean-Paul Sartre  
Verso £16.95

ONE OF my students recently compared the late Jean-Paul Sartre to Jim Reeves: both have produced a string of major works since their deaths. Since Sartre died in 1980 six substantial volumes have appeared; the *Freud Scenario*—a film script which was never used—is the most recent in English and the most exciting. It tells of Freud's early years, when he was still developing and perfecting his theories.

The encounter between Sartre and Freud raises issues of prime importance. The core of Sartre's philosophy is freedom: we choose our own lives, consciously; any attempt to push our responsibility off onto external or 'unconscious forces' is rejected as 'bad faith'. Freud, by contrast, was a



determinist. 'Nothing', he declares in Sartre's script, 'is accidental'. Every slip of the tongue, every nervous gesture has a cause, a cause which lies out of our control in a part of the mind inaccessible to consciousness.

The positions are starkly juxtaposed; the philosophical—and political—implications are profound. Sartre sums this up in the vivid image with which the film opens. An old woman, blind and paralysed, is being carried round a hospital on a stretcher. But the medical personnel will not accept her into any of the wards. For she is suffering from hysteria, and medical opinion of the time judged that victims of hysteria were not ill but malingering, 'putting on an act'.

With acute irony Sartre is here exploring the contradictions of his own position. For the logic of the philosophy of individual freedom can lead straight to the pathological Toryism of a Tebbit—the unemployed are to blame for their own fate. Yet Sartre cannot renounce freedom; for if we are not free to choose, then we abandon all hope of revolt, of changing the world. It was in an attempt to resolve this dilemma that Sartre, in the fifties, tested his own philosophy against the work of Marx and Freud.

Marx's solution is expressed in the famous: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.' Human freedom is real, but located in concrete historical circumstances. Only collective action can change the world.

For Freud the problem remains within the individual skull, and as a result has no solution. But Sartre is always at his best when he is asking questions, not answering them, and his treatment of Freud points above all to the thinker's unresolved paradoxes. As Sartre shows, knowledge of others is inseparable from knowledge of oneself. Freud is looking for a therapy to cure patients, but we are constantly reminded how much he has in common with those patients. Freud has his own neurotic habits—a recurring phallic cigar—and above all he is hung up about his father. The climax of the scenario is Freud's slow, reluctant discovery that he himself has an Oedipus complex. Yet however much Freud invokes deter-

mination to deal with his patients, he believes passionately and incorrigibly in his own freedom. How, then, can his patients be mere objects?

Moreover, Sartre shows that the question of freedom cannot be detached from the question of oppression. The principle of individual responsibility could make sense only in a world of freedom and equality. Freud's life, however, is rooted in a complex tissue of oppressions. We see the rigid hierarchy of the medical profession, the crude domination of doctors over patients. The poverty of Freud's family is vividly portrayed—Sartre actually gives Freud (the great discoverer of childhood sexuality) the line: 'Poor people have no youth.'

Above all, Sartre focusses on sexism and racism. He shows us Freud the victim of racism, the Jew in a city where anti-Semitic pamphlets are sold openly on the street. But he also shows us Freud the dominating male, whose reluctance to recognise female sexuality is mirrored in his authoritarian and uncomprehending attitude to his own wife.

The two themes come together in one of the film's most effective scenes. Freud gives a lecture in which he argues that sexual assault on daughters by fathers is commonplace; at the end he is mobbed by angry doctors chanting: 'Filthy yid! Back to the ghetto!' Later Freud backs off from this theory, and claims that the daughters subconsciously want to be raped by their fathers. But Sartre leaves us wondering if Freud wasn't right first time round.

This account only scratches the surface of an amazingly rich text. Ironies and paradoxes constantly provoke thought, while dream images are skilfully and subtly interwoven with the narrative. Above all, the film is supremely optimistic. Freud stands for the spirit of scientific truth; around him, 'Vienna is rotten! Everywhere hypocrisy, perversion, neurosis!' Yet Freud greets persecution with the comment: 'All this proves to me that we are on the right track.' (He thus echoes Sartre's own comment years before, when he was being simultaneously denounced in Washington and Moscow.)

As we read of Freud's lone struggle we remember that Sartre was writing at a time when the French left was hopelessly isolated in the worst days of the Algerian war. The great determinist is thus transmitted into a symbol of freedom.

So why, you may ask, was the movie never actually made? Why do we have to read it in an impossibly expensive hard-back instead of seeing it on our Christmas TV screens alongside *Moonraker* and *Son of Lassie*? Sartre in fact abandoned the script after hostility and demands for changes from the American director, John Huston, who originally commissioned it. Admittedly Sartre's script was on the long side—something like seven hours. (Sartre did have problems writing to length—a couple of years as a hack on *Socialist*



*Worker Review* would have done him a world of good). But other long films have been made—for instance Bertolucci's trashy and pretentious *1900*.

In the end Sartre's scenario was just too good and too honest for a cinema industry founded on power, corruption and lies. ■

Ian Birchall

## A doubtful ally

Sexuality and its Discontents

Jeffrey Weeks

RKP £6.95

THERE is a level of confusion and degeneration in the women's and gay movements which ten years ago would have been difficult to imagine. Attacks from those like Gillick and Powell, the raid on 'Gay's the Word' bookshop, *Sun* outrages over AIDS are met with barely a squeak.

When the government stops the GLC grant to the London Lesbian and Gay Centre there is a meeting of 300—not to discuss that, but to debate whether bisexuals and lesbian sado-masochists should be allowed to meet there. On the questions of pornography, paedophilia, prostitution and promiscuity, confusion reigns.

The appearance of a book by one of the early activists of the gay movement and member of the gay left ought to be of interest and help to clarify the confusion.

The book, he says, is the third part of an unplanned trilogy. His first was *A History of the Development of Homosexuality*, the second *A History of Sexuality under Capitalism*.

He starts by redefining the concepts he used in the earlier works, and then goes on to describe the radical movements of the sixties and seventies. But the description isn't in the voices of the activists, it is described in a perplexing and dry academic style, full of quotations from similar aspiring academics.

He then looks at the 'new right' and its offensive. The problem is that to me the 'new' right doesn't look very different from the old right except that White and Corrie provoked a fightback, Powell and Gillick haven't. It is that which needs to be explained.

The second part of the book is an account of the work of sexologists—a strange form of science which invented sex as a subject. Weeks then goes on to look at biologists and sociologists—in short a round-up of how the branches of academia have looked at sex. These parts are useful because he attacks the idea of a static human nature determined by urges, instincts and drives. But again, the account is strangely unhistorical. There is no explanation of why certain ideas emerged where and when they did.

The third section is a description of the ideas of Freud and the 'post-Freudian' school—Lacan, Foucault and Co. The description is so full of quotes and references to writers that it is almost unreadable.

Weeks attempts to separate a sexual theory and a sexual politics, and work through the terrains of the body, the mind and the social to a multifaced complexity—the result is confusion.

The fourth section is a defence of the idea of a 'community of discontents' against straight society. Missing is even a hint that this community has smashed itself on the rock of class time and time again, or that the ideas and movements have a history determined by events outside their own 'discourse'.

Against these 'new communities' are counterposed the 'old left' though Weeks never says what the old left is—right wing reformists in the Labour Party, Stalinist trade union officials, or what? The phrase is just used to counterpose against his idea of 'community'. There is almost no mention of the rich tradition of struggles around sexual politics from the workers' movement when on the offensive. Typical of the book is that Kollontai gets one mention on the last page.

Above all there is no recognition that the complexities he describes can be solved by workers' collective action. He even seems to have forgotten his own earlier writings and that social being determines consciousness.

At the end, even his own question remains unanswered—why is sex so important? Because he can't tell the difference between people making history and the conditions within which they do it, he ends up explaining the social by the sexual.

In the fight against the right, including that inside the movements, Weeks is on our side. In the struggle for socialism, however, I fear we will find him a doubtful ally. ■

John Lindsay

## Rocking the boat

Rebel Radio

John Hind and Stephen Mosco

Pluto £3.95

ONCE upon a time there were the swinging sixties. Readers under thirty may find it hard to believe, but through full employment and rising working class living standards there was money to spend on clothes, cosmetics and records. The 'youth market' had arrived on the scene.

This was partly reflected on television by programmes like 'Ready, Steady, Go'. But on radio it was stifled. Britain had the BBC's Light Programme, Third Programme, and Home Service—pop music

hardly got a look in.

Then along came the pirates. These sea-based pirates gave a huge boost to the record industry. The most successful, Radio London, operated a US-style top 40 playlist, hitherto unknown in this country.

The BBC, then as now run by an Oxbridge elite, succumbed to the pressure. In 1967 Radios 1, 2, 3 and 4 were born. Radio 1 took over from the pirates, with a top 40 playlist surrounded by prattle from idiot egomaniac DJs like Jimmy Saville and Tony Blackburn.

By the 1980s things were little different. Only John Peel was providing stimulating output. A string of commercial local stations had opened up around the country, but their programming was largely derivative and stale. Out of this tedium grew the second wave of pirates, this time on land.

These pirate stations are the subject matter of this book. Largely London-based, the best of them were innovative and creative, like Dread Broadcasting Corporation, the reggae station run by Afro-Caribbean youth. DBC not only played great music, it devised a highly original presentational style.

And there was Keith Allen's Breakfast Pirate Radio. With the motto 'Tune in or fuck off' this very funny station's main aim was to cause outrage by filling the airwaves with obscenities and grossly irreverent material.

But the early pirates, who gave people access to the airwaves, were gradually superseded by a different type of station. Playing safe, with uncontentious material and conventional DJ presentation, not only reduced the chances of raids and loss of equipment, it also meant that profits could be made from advertising. Hind and Mosco claim that one pirate made as much as £60,000 from adverts in the space of a few months.

Those who did not play safe were quickly shut down. Our Radio, a ramshackle 'beyond-the-fragments'-type station was rapidly harassed out of existence after broadcasting an interview with Sinn Fein's Danny Morrison. And Radio Arthur, a pro-NUM pirate which broadcast on Radio Trent's frequency in Nottinghamshire during the strike, only escaped detection through operating irregularly and for a few minutes at a time.

This book's strengths are in the detail given about the pirate stations. But it is terribly weak in some areas—a very sketchy history of pirate radio, a hopelessly inadequate look at radio abroad (which does not even mention pirate radio), and a total lack of any kind of political analysis.

If you are interested in the media, and particularly in radio, this book is worth a read. But try to borrow someone else's copy, as you probably will not need to read it twice.

As for so-called 'rebel radio', roll on Radio Rosa Luxemburg! ■

Peter Allen

## The Poundswick puzzle

'LOST in the Blackboard Jungle' showed our confusion over Poundswick but was short on analysis.

Teachers contribute to the raising of working class kids. Our contribution can be lumped in with wages and other welfare services like health and social security, the sum total being what it costs the capitalists to keep up the supply of workers. So it is in our interests when workers fight back. A general rise in living standards means more cash for teaching.

But the social wage is controlled by the capitalist state. It is like being made to shop at the company store. The ruling class have the money to go private. But for working class kids to get an education you have to take what the state dishes out. We teachers are expected to uphold the status quo and turn out potential workers who are not only able but also willing to be exploited. This is the cop side of being a teacher.

As socialists we stand up for our position as part of the working class against the moderate professionals who justify the cop role with talk of standards all dressed up in education jargon. They see the authorities as allies in dealing with their clients, the pupils. We say they are bosses to be organised against.

So when Poundswick happened we called for strike action in support of our fellow workers. The comrades still insist this was right. But was it? In Islington we demanded the sack for racists and were opposed by people who invoked trade union principles. At Poundswick the teachers opted for the cop role, scabbed on the victimised kids and it was us who became trade unionists first and socialists last to demand action in their support.

We should have opposed the strike calls and supported the victimised pupils.

With hindsight it is easy to see that we got it wrong. We failed to realise that the crucial issue was between the teacher's role as worker or cop, taking up the sectional issue of teachers against the authority instead. That was missing from the article and helped to make the wider discussion vague and inconclusive.

We need to pursue the issues raised in the article with more

clarity and precision. The riots, school kids' strikes, racism in school, the wages deadlock all raise questions for socialist teachers. Teacher militancy in the last year and our joining the Socialist Teachers Alliance have increased the audience for our ideas on education. Unless we want to stay lost in the blackboard jungle, we'd better have the debate and sort those ideas out. ■

Mike Stanton  
Barrow-in-Furness

## The kids are alright

SEVERAL factors seem to have contributed to confusion over the Poundswick dispute.

Firstly, it's a dispute typical of a period of workers' retreat—bitter and defensive. Secondly, many working class people have a gut reaction to teachers and the education system in general—hatred. This may be commendable but it can blind one to the merits of those teachers who hate the system and want to fight it. Thirdly, a lack of organised socialists on the ground resulted in a failure to come up with a comprehensive analysis of just what was taking place at Poundswick.

Tom Delargy (January *SWR*) suggests that the solution to all this confusion would have been a solid intervention on the teachers' side supporting their call for the pupils' expulsion. I think he's trying to salve our consciences when he says that expulsion wouldn't really mean expulsion at all. In my experience it remains a stigma.

That is not the major point but it raises the issue of just why we're interested in the first place. Our job is not to ensure that school pupils have a nice cosy academic career. But the same goes for the teachers. They are living a contradiction. Other workers' conditions contain contradictions but there is a qualitative difference between the checkout girl or bus conductor demanding money, and someone who has a licence to dish out his or her interpretation of discipline (including acts of physical torture) on children and young adults under the guise of education.

What of the actual facts? Obviously the graffiti existed, and was offensive to the teachers named. The racist and sexist references make it all the more disturbing for socialists. There is also a suggestion that the boys involved represent a hard core

nasty element abusing both teachers and pupils. But things are not always so cut and dried.

Coincidentally, I was expelled from school. One of the stated reasons was that I decorated my English folder with drawings of the devil. Not a very socialist form of rebellion but then there wasn't much in the way of socialist stimulus around and in these circumstances any weapon will do. In those days I regarded all teaching staff as the enemy.

Fred Engels used to say that children need discipline otherwise they'll only end up as wildweeds. What he meant was not the discipline of the rod or dole queue, but of genuine activity in the formation of their own personalities and lives—something which cannot take place within the present education system. Only participation in the dismantling of the true oppressor—the capitalist system—can provide an ultimate outlet for a child's frustrations or a teacher's.

For my tuppence worth I don't support any call for expulsion, suspension, detention, a Special Unit or any other punitive measure. The boys involved are now marked and have even less chance of a 'successful' life than the other unfortunates at Poundswick—which is a degree short of a dog's chance.

The education system is a cornerstone of the capitalist order, is fundamentally anti-working class and as such is anathema to socialists. With the destruction of capitalism will come the destruction of 'education' and good riddance to the pair of them. ■

Davy Malcolm  
Stratford  
London

## Spare the rod

TOM Delargy's letter in last month's *Review* defended the right of teachers to organise against their employers to remove pupils they feel they cannot teach'. Who does he think those pupils are? In my small FE College, not far from Tottenham, it would mean the same students who rioted on the streets—the ones who will no longer 'respect' authority, sit like stuffed dummies in the classroom, or feel grateful for the education which is preparing most of them, not very well, for the dole queue, or the average job which demands less skill than driving a car.

Who does he think we should support if those same students demand the expulsion of racist

teachers (like the principal at Waltham College), or organise to demand elementary rights to union facilities, or appeals against the arbitrary and prejudiced discipline of teachers?

The problem with Poundswick was not that we 'played in to the hands of the right' by refusing to side with the teachers, but quite the opposite—that we supported uncritically a dispute, without, at first, challenging the often viciously right-wing law and order lobby amongst teachers.

The point is not to moralise, but to understand clearly in order to organise effectively. New teachers are thrown into a 'blackboard jungle', with overlarge classes, a shortage of resources, and students who know perfectly well that most of them are being taught not to 'succeed' but to 'fail' (because, regardless of what the teacher does, that's how the exam system is loaded). Individual teachers do have to survive—and students trained for years in an atmosphere of fear and repression will have no mercy on those who are 'soft'. What you can do will be limited and will depend above all on the strength of union organisation in the school.

Ten years ago I knew many teachers who thought they could change the world through educating working-class kids properly. Now those who have survived are often so cynical that they share the same 'contempt' for their students that pervades the average school or college staff room. If revolutionary socialists are to challenge that, they have to be to the fore in fighting for better wages and conditions for teachers. But they also have to be clear about just what role they are being paid by capitalism to perform.

Teachers, like social workers and policemen, are agents of the state. Their job is to perpetuate the class relations of capitalist society. That means, as even liberal sociology has recognised, that over 60 percent of school students leave school, convinced that they are too stupid to share in the running of anything, let alone society. Even those who succeed, the entrants into higher education, do so only by learning to regurgitate parrot-fashion what they've been taught, as befits the future lackeys of the ruling-class.

As the downturn continues, and especially if the current teachers' dispute is defeated, situations like Poundswick will arise more frequently. In my college the Tottenham riots have reinforced a paranoid, implicitly racist in some cases, demand for more 'security'. The same right-wing Labour Party member who tore up the 'Stop the Witch Hunt' petition, is demanding an 'all-out



strike' if any teacher is assaulted.

We have to call for the views of students themselves to be heard in such situations. We have to attack the racism and authoritarianism of the law and order lobby. We have to try and turn the frustrations and anger of both teachers and students against a common enemy. In the current climate that may mean, as Delargy fears that we lose the vote to the right. But expelling students without a proper hearing, bringing back the cane or any other 'law and order' measure will not solve the problem either.

Under no circumstances can revolutionaries support attacks on the working class youth whose anger today contains the seeds of the overthrow of the system in the future. ■

Pete Green  
North London

## Just an excuse

BEING a school student, I read the article on Poundswick in January *SWR* with some interest. I feel that neither side can be given whole-hearted support, as reactionary elements exist on both sides of the dispute. However, I feel that the teachers under the 'Save our Standards' banner are the more firmly reactionary.

Their reaction to the graffiti itself is an example. Irene Davies said: 'It was racist, but it was the sexual part of it that really got people.' The teachers most eager to act against the kids were not objecting to the racism or the sexism, but to the rudeness of the graffiti. They used it as an excuse to clamp down on all trouble makers. The issues of racism and sexism were peripheral to them.

The slogans were reactionary, but it should be the duty of socialist teachers to educate kids out of their reactionary beliefs. To line up with people saying 'kick these kids out of the school' is to say that nothing can be done with kids who show reactionary tendencies, which is not the case.

Both kids and teachers are oppressed under the education system, but the teachers are actively engaged every school day in oppressing the kids.

The way most teachers treat kids, referring disciplinary cases to a higher authority and so on, means most kids don't make the distinction between 'workers' and 'management' in schools. So when they rebel against the system, they will often pick up the wrong targets to rebel against. Added to this there are often

reactionary beliefs at home which kids will pick up. Acting out of hand to condemn these kids, and lining up with solidly reactionary teachers can only harm socialist teachers in the future. ■

Daniel Birchall  
Enfield

## Trotsky's scant success

CHRIS BAMBERY (January *SWR*) disputes my statement that 'you would have had a right wing government in France and Spain in 1936 had there not been a popular front' (December *SWR*). The fact is, however, that the rise of labour unrest by the summer of 1935, to which he refers, was not sufficient to secure anything like the majority necessary for a Socialist-Communist government.

In the first round of the 1936 elections the Socialists and Communists combined received only 29.37 percent of the votes in France resulting in their obtaining 218 out of 618 parliamentary seats, and merely 99 out of 453 seats in Spain. Only their alliance with the Radical and left republican parties in the Popular Front prevented the continuation in office of governments of the still strong right and centre-right.

Writing on France 1936 in *International Socialism 56* Richard Kirkwood recognised: 'Between them the workers' parties and the Radicals had a "natural majority"... The right's only hope was to split off the Radicals.'

Few historians would disagree with him that 'the Popular Front both responded to and encouraged a rising wave of class struggle'.

The Communist Party played a leading role in securing the maximum gains for the working people from these struggles in a non-revolutionary situation, in which they also sought to consolidate unity against the fascist threat.

If, unlike Trotsky, Chris thinks the fascist danger had receded in France by the summer of 1936, he can hardly dispute its overwhelming reality in Spain after Franco, backed militarily by Hitler and Mussolini, had launched the civil war.

There is no space here seriously to examine whether the Popular Front strategy of the Communists or Trotsky's call for soviet revolution and support for the 1937 Barcelona rising behind republican lines stood the better chance of preventing Franco's victory. (It would be crude in the

extreme to assume that, because Popular Front governments did not ultimately succeed in achieving the desired objectives, Trotsky's alternative would have produced better results.) I would refer readers to my essay, 'Trotsky and the People's Front' in Jim Fryth's *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1985).

I discuss there Trotsky's curious claim (repeated by Chris) that an alliance between the workers and the petty bourgeoisie opposed to fascism presupposed fighting the republican parties which the majority of them supported.

This is open to the same objection as Trotsky had made to the pre-1933 policy of the German Communist Party of unrealistically calling for a united front of the working class without and against the leaders of the Social Democratic Party. Certainly all the attempts to build alliances with the peasantry in this way by the Communist Parties before 1935 (continued verbally by Trotsky's heirs over the last 50 years) have brought scant success.

Finally, the fact that Thorez and Dimitrov were loyal followers of Stalin—which I have never disputed—does not mean that they took no independent initiative in developing the people's front strategy, about which Stalin was initially hesitant.

Unlike Chris Bambery, Trotsky recognised (in private) the specific contribution of the French Communists to the formulation of this strategy in accordance with national needs and urged C L R James (Johnson) to appreciate that 'the French Communist Party is not only an agency of Moscow but a national organisation'. ■

Monty Johnstone

## Speaking personally

I WAS mystified by Martin Driscoll's letter (January *SWR*) accusing me of chauvinism. Having carefully reread my piece on the *Rainbow Warrior* affair (October *SWR*) I am even more mystified.

I claimed that the affair showed a degree of anti-British feeling in sections of the French population. My immediate reason for noting this was that in listening to various phone-in programmes on French radio and reading the French papers I had noticed the recurrence of the following line of argument:

'France has legitimate national interests in the South Pacific (New Caledonia, the Mururoa test site). The English-speaking Commonwealth countries in the Pacific (Australia, New Zealand) are hostile to the French presence in the region. Britain supports them in this and Greenpeace (based in Canada) is probably a tool of the British secret services.'

Admittedly the evidence is rather impressionistic, and I can't supply comrade Driscoll with statistical information as to exactly how many French people believe these propositions, but I thought that the fact that such arguments were in circulation was of some significance.

2 I am certainly convinced (by thirty years of reading French books and newspapers and visiting France) that anti-British feeling does exist in sections of the French population.

3 I did not claim that the French cannot distinguish between Canadians, British and New Zealanders. I noted a tendency to consider that the various English-speaking countries have certain common interests that may be in opposition to the French 'national interest'.

4 The political point of mentioning this question at all was to argue that the *Rainbow Warrior* affair might not be as harmful to the Mitterrand government as most people at the time were predicting. In this I think I have been proved right. Six months after this act of gross international terrorism (organised by a so-called 'socialist' government) the affair is largely forgotten, and Mitterrand, Fabius and the rest of the gang (except for the scapegoat Henu) are all still in office.

5 I did not draw the cartoon that accompanied my article. However, it seems absolutely clear to me that this was a *satire* of national stereotypes. If comrade Driscoll cannot grasp humour of this sort perhaps he should stick to reading the *Sun*.

6 Finally, I would point out that in my original article I passed no judgment on French anti-British feeling—I simply noted its existence. How that makes me a 'chauvinist' I fail to see.

Politically, of course, hostility on the part of the citizens of one imperialist country towards those of another is something that must be opposed. But speaking personally as one who happens to have been born an inhabitant of the oldest and most vicious imperialist power in the world, I must add that my gut feeling is that anyone who hates Brits can't be all bad.

Ian Birchall  
Enfield

# Popular delusions

IN FEBRUARY 1936 the Spanish Popular Front swept into government.

The vicious right wing regime which had held office for two years termed the 'biennio negro'—the black years—was removed amidst popular jubilation.

Some 30,000 leftwingers were in jail. Another 70,000 had been victimised from their jobs. Their fate excited the massive crowd on the streets of Madrid.

The jubilation seemed to echo the mass enthusiasm five years earlier which followed the abdication of King Alfonso and the setting up of a republic.

The Popular Front's victory had not been easy. In the southern province of Andalusia and other rural regions the major landlords had traditionally rigged the vote.

Glass vases were used as ballot boxes so the peasants' votes could be checked. The notorious paramilitary police, the Guardia Civil, prevented supporters of the left voting. If things still didn't go the landlords' way the polling stations were simply closed.

In the major cities of Madrid and Barcelona the Guardia Civil, backed by civilian fascists, had begun a reign of terror on the streets.

But the issue of amnesty for the jailed and victimised leftwingers provoked a massive response among the working class and the poor peasantry.

They had suffered in the wake of an attempted rising to prevent the right from taking office two years before.

The Socialist Party had promised a general strike and threatened insurrection. In the event, only in the northern mining region of Asturias did the rising take place. There workers seized power. But isolated, they were defeated by the army led by one General Franco.

On May Day in 1935 a one day general strike had taken place in defiance of the right wing government.

Government repression seemed to open the road to fascism. Spain seemed set to follow Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy.

That threat had two effects on the left.

Within the Socialist Party, which had 200,000 members, there was a strong radicalisation. The leader of its left wing, the veteran Largo Caballero, announced his conversion to the ideas of Lenin.

The Young Socialists entered formal discussions with the Communist Party and the supporters of Leon Trotsky.

The Socialist Party seemed effectively split between the right led by Indalecio Prieto and Caballero, now dubbed 'the Spanish Lenin'.

But at the same time repression also led to a strong feeling that the left must unite.

In 1934 the Socialist Party, sections of

the mass anarchist trade union the CNT, the Communist Party and the semi-Trotskyist POUM had formed the Workers Alliance.

But in the run up to the elections the Communists, in line with the strategy coming from Stalin in Moscow, proposed the formation of the Popular Front. This would group the left with those liberal and centrist middle class parties which were opposed to the right wing regime.

When the right became embroiled in a financial scandal and were forced to call elections for February 1936, negotiations began to form a Popular Front.

Caballero and the left wing of the Socialists verbally opposed such an alliance with the middle class parties. But the prospect of a say in government meant they too entered the negotiations.

The POUM, breaking openly from Trotsky, joined in too. They agreed that in such an alliance the left would have to make major concessions in order to secure agreement but argued they had to follow the Socialist Party in order to influence its supporters.

The middle class politicians, the Socialist Party right wing and the Communist Party were clear that in order to secure middle class support the Popular Front had to rule out radical demands.



**Caballero: the Spanish Lenin?**

When agreement was secured it was spelt out that the different parties could not openly criticise each other. This was effectively a muzzle on the Socialist Party left and the POUM.

The leader of the Popular Front was to be the former minister Azana.

The anarchists stayed out of the new alliance. But they too were desperate to see the right removed from office. Breaking with their principles, they urged their supporters to enter a vote for the Popular Front.

The Popular Front could not avoid promising amnesty for those jailed or victimised but on everything else it stopped short of radical change.

A few thousand landlords owned two thirds of Spain's available land. Thousands of peasants were landless and near starvation. But in reply to their demand for land the Popular Front only promised to implement agrarian reforms passed by the right.

In Morocco, Spain's North African colony, for two decades the population had fought for independence. But the Popular Front promised Morocco would stay Spanish.

Lastly, it reassured the officer corps in the army it would implement no changes. Yet the officer corps was notoriously right wing and rumours of a coup were already everywhere.

All of this was justified by the need to win middle class support.

In the event the Popular Front won a fairly narrow majority of the vote—although it had a majority of over 150 seats in parliament.

But amongst the middle classes it was clear that despite the promises of the Popular Front there was a massive move to the right.

In 1931 the middle classes had welcomed the setting up of the republic. Now the right had been beaten they began to look elsewhere.

General Franco, army chief of staff, had already offered to mount a coup to keep the Popular Front from office. The right wing politicians turned down the offer. But Franco and other generals began plotting a rising.

But the new Popular Front government turned a blind eye to this. It merely switched Franco to another post.

Again and again it spelt out there would be no radical change. Even on the issue of amnesty it seemed to prevaricate.

But the working class and the peasantry had other ideas.

In Madrid and other cities in the days after the election victory, massive crowds forced their way into the prisons and freed jailed leftwingers.

Workers began striking to demand the return of those victimised and the sacking of those scabs who had taken their jobs.

On the land, especially in the southern provinces, peasants began seizing land.

By the summer Madrid was in the grip of a virtual general strike as workers demanded higher wages and violence swept rural areas as landlords fought peasants.

The Spanish middle class increasingly grew frantic sensing that revolution was beginning. One army officer recalls being set upon by well dressed ladies in Madrid demanding a coup.

Fascist gangs and the Guardia Civil began gunning down leading leftwingers.

Spain was dividing along clear class lines.

By the summer, talk of an uprising by the army was commonplace. The only people who closed their eyes to this were the Popular Front government. ■

**Chris Bambery**